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No World Series: Revisit 1991

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This should have been the week that the 1994 World Series came to an end. Instead we can all read on a daily basis that the only baseball action is off the field with general managers and managers being fired and hired, players released, and the two sides in the labor dispute seldom even meeting with one another.

For those who miss this distinctive event of Autumn in America, I want to go back and reconstruct the 1991 playoffs and World Series from commentaries I did at the time. This will take us through the National League playoffs between the Braves and Pirates, the American League playoffs between the Twins and Blue Jays, and then that extraordinary 1991 World Series between the Twins and Braves, easily the greatest World Series of my lifetime.

The achievement of the Braves in the playoffs was truly amazing. To leave Atlanta on Monday afternoon down three games to two, and have to win two in Pittsburgh was a major task. The Pirates needed only one victory, they couldn't even get one run. The pitching of Steve Avery and John Schmoltz was magnificent as they shut out the best hitting team in the National League. Game Six was one of the best games I have ever seen, and Steve Avery was as good as you'll see. In this Championship Series the Braves shut out the Pirates three times, with Avery doing it twice.

I can not remember seeing a pitcher who was so much fun to watch, since Dwight Gooden's rookie year, and Frank Viola's magical year leading the Twins to the 1987 World Championship. For three years now Braves people have been saying that Steve Avery would become their ace. Last year he arrived in the majors and was an unimpressive 3-11. This year he went 18-8, and in the last six weeks there was not a more dominating pitcher in the game. He is a left-handed surgeon who can throw at 98 miles per hour. At age 21 he either has the maturity of a thirty year old, or he is such an innocent he doesn't know enough to be nervous.

In their playoff with the Blue Jays the Twins played excellent aggressive baseball. Good starting pitching, timely hitting, a magnificent bullpen, contributions both offensively and defensively from up and down the lineup. This is how teams win pennants. Crank up your homer hankies fellow Twins fans, the gods of baseball can be quite fickle.

If last spring you had gone to Las Vegas you would have found the two longest shots to win the World Series were the Braves and the Twins. Now one of them will. What a hell of a quinella.

And then came the Series itself-----

As for the World Series that ended last Sunday night there may never have been a more exciting Series in the history of the Fall Classic. Two teams that no one thought would be there, battled fiercely for seven games, to decide the World Championship in the tenth inning of the seventh game, 1-0. Jack Morris, pitching for the third time in the short series worked the entire ten innings, and in the process turned in one of the greatest pitching performances in World Series history. He certainly deserved the MVP award.

Three games went to extra innings and four games were decided on the last pitch. The drama and tension were excruciating. The heroes were numerous, and there were plenty of candidates for goat as well.

Kirby Puckett is one of the most exciting players on the field today. His round wide-body look, the intensity with which he plays, and the obvious delight he takes in the game, all make him a pleasure to watch. His performance in Game Six with a single, triple, game saving catch, and game winning home run in the 11th inning made him a leading candidate for MVP. As Peter Gammons pointed out the other day Puckett is the only current superstar who has not been booed in his own ballpark.

The eighth inning of the seventh game was one of the most amazing innings in World Series history. With no score in the game the Braves loaded the bases in the top half of the inning, and then with one out Sid Bream hit into a double play. Then in the bottom half of the inning the Twins loaded the bases with one out as the Braves pitched around Kirby Puckett. Kent Hrbek then hit into a double play. By that time in the game every pitch was critical, and the pressure was unbelievable.

As a longtime Twins fan and a longtime Braves fan I couldn't have asked for a better outcome. I have a feeling we'll be seeing many of these players in the national spotlight again.

Well maybe we will, but if we do, we'll have to wait 'til next year. But if you want to read about that 1991 World Series check your local paper on Saturday.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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