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## Remarkable Baseball Season Ends

Richard C. Crepeau  
University of Central Florida, [richard.crepeau@ucf.edu](mailto:richard.crepeau@ucf.edu)

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A remarkable baseball season came to a raucous close this past weekend casting several shadows over what should be glowing memories as we swing headlong into playoff baseball and the World Series. Any number of great stories, great achievements, and satisfying moments marked this season of record breaking hitting and home runs, and the Texas Rangers/Washington Senators finally reached post-season play.

Barry Bonds not only became the second player to join the forty-forty club, hitting forty home runs and stealing forty bases, he also set the National League record for walks in a season going over 150, and drove in 129 runs on a losing team. Across the Bay Mark McGuire and the A's hit home runs at a record pace and McGuire finished with 52 in his partial season.

Ken Camaniti of San Diego hit 40 home runs, batted .326, drove in 130 runs, and played sparkling defense to become a heavy favorite for MVP. In the American League the choice is less clear as front-runner Alex Rodriguez is not on a playoff team while Juan Gonzalez and Albert Belle are.

Cy Young is a bit more clear. Kevin Brown or John Schmoltz should win the National League, while Andy Pettitte seems to be a lock in the American League.

There were many more individual batting achievements in this year of the juiced ball, juiced ballparks, or just plain bad pitching. There were fewer individual achievements on the pitching side but three stand out: David Cone's comeback from the blood clot in his shoulder continues on a remarkable pace as the playoffs begin; Hideo Nomo's no-hitter in the hitters paradise at Coors Field Denver is a shocker; while Roger Clemens after a very bad start finished strong and tied his own record for most strikeouts in a game, twenty, against Detroit.

On the managerial side two veterans showed that they still remain among the best. Tony LaRussa took his American League computer-driven-mind to the National League and led the St. Louis/Oakland Cardinals to a divisional title with the same formulas and stratagems that he had applied so successfully on the southside of Chicago and in the Bay area.

In New York Joe Torre showed again why, in a game where day to day strategy is highly overrated, he remains one of the truly

great managers of people. In 1982 in Atlanta Torre calmly led the Braves through a thirteen game winning streak to start the season, then in August through something like 20 losses in 21 games in a free-fall that saw them lose in every way known to man. There are not many managers who could have held a team together under these circumstances, and that is why Joe Torre is the perfect manager for the Yankees of New York where the paranormal is the order of the day and the owner from hell still holds sway.

Despite all these achievements the game managed to finish the season under a cloud. First, what looked like a great wild-card race between the Dodgers and Padres ended with a game on Sunday, the main object of which was to save your pitching staff for the playoffs. The unintended consequences of this ill-concieved playoff system produced a dreadful finish and it could have been much worse.

The regular season ended under a second cloud as the collective bargaining agreement has still not been achieved, and now the plans for inter-league play next year will likely be postponed. Jerry Reinsdorf apparently continues to believe that the only thing baseball has to fear is Fehr himself, as Jerry continues his personal vendetta against Donald Fehr and the players union.

If that wasn't enough along came the Alomar incident which everyone will find easy to remember. Nothing could justify either the spitting or the comments about the umpire's personal tragedy. Clearly the punishment handed out by the unknown American League president was a joke. However some reports indicate that a suspension for actions in the regular season cannot, or at least never have been, carried into the post-season.

One of the things I learned as an umpire from my father was that in certain circumstances you need to be able to walk away and close your ears. When John Hirschbeck blew the call he needed to close off the criticism rather than confront it. Alomar had gone back to the dugout and Hirschbeck needed to ignore the shouting and get on with the game. He was unable to do that and tossed a major player in a close and extremely important game. That is when Alomar went beserk and committed his dispicable act.

The case has been mishandled at every turn since, by the same major league leadership that never seems to know what it's doing.

What a week and what a year in Major League Baseball.

One final football note: the boys down at Houlihans, formerly the Tampa Bay Bucs, are now 0-5. This week they play "open date" and are a ten-point dog. My guess is they can't cover.

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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