

World Series Hangover

11-7-2016

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Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "World Series Hangover" (2016). *On Sport and Society*. 630.
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/630>

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE - World Series Hangover
November 7, 2016

Are you feeling a sense of loss? Has a slight sadness settled into your baseball psyche? Are these feelings part of a strange undertone in your celebration of the Cubs World Series victory? If you suffer from any of these symptoms, let me welcome you to the new world of the Chicago Cubs. The curse has ended. Long live the Lovable Losers!

It has been an odd end to the baseball season for me. I have been out of the country for much of the League Championships and nearly all of the World Series. In addition about half of that time I had what can only be described as very limited internet access.

I have had this experience before but never with this paucity of internet communication. In 1997, 2002, and 2011 I was out of the country during the playoffs and World Series. In 1997 I was in Russia and traveling during the final few games. I relied on the Voice of America for small bits of news and when I heard that the Florida Marlins had won the World Series I was certain I had misheard the report or someone at the VOA was messing with baseball fans in exile.

This fall my experiences of the past few weeks were close to those of 1997. I kept trying to find scores and sometimes heard them from tourists in the street. It was instructive to learn how little the general population and media in Italy cared about Cubs, Dodgers, Indians, or Blue Jays.

World Series, indeed!

When I made travel plans in mid-summer I failed to notice that I would be away during the World Series. As October approached my anxiety increased as it was now possible that I would be missing the Cubs run to a World Championship. Early in October I tried to accept this reality with the knowledge that if the Series went seven games, I would see game seven. It was small consolation, but consolation nonetheless.

Italy was lovely in the last few weeks of October as we escaped the heat and humidity of Florida. Along the Amalfi Coast and then on to Venice, the Cubs were on my mind. By the time we left the Amalfi Coast the Cubs were headed to Cleveland for their first World Series appearance since 1945. Anticipation, angst, and the horrible thought that the Cubs might win it all while I was out of touch filled the air.

Venice was beautiful and the Cubs were struggling. When they went down three games to one it was almost a relief. A Hurricane preceded our departure from Florida and earthquakes signaled the end of our stay in Italy. It seemed as if I would not miss the end of the curse. The Series would likely be over before I was back in Florida.

So on Tuesday with the Cubs facing elimination for the second consecutive game I boarded a flight back to the World Series. Arriving Tuesday night I got into the car at the airport and it was the sixth or seventh inning and the Cubs were rolling. There would be a game seven and I would see it. Was this is a good thing? I was no longer sure.

Where was Steve Bartman at this moment? How many black cats had run across the field and cast a shadow on the Cubs dugout over the previous days and nights? Was that a herd of goats on

Waveland Avenue? What bizarre happening was lurking in the shadows? And what was Joe Maddon doing pitching Chapman with a multi-run lead in the 7th inning? Jet Lag on top of a 22 hour travel day can cause some strange activity in the brain.

Wednesday night rolled in and I was ready for whatever this game threw at me. Or was I?

It all started so well with Fowler's home run. The Cubs seemed to be in great shape and Kyle Hendricks was dominating the Indians. Certainly something would go wrong. Soon it did. Steve Bartman, impersonating Joe Maddon, or was it simply Maddon assuming the role of Bartman decided that it was time for a pitching change in the fifth inning. Violating his own dictum that he would not bring in Lester except to start an inning, he brought him in and disaster struck immediately with a wild pitch. The Indians were back in the game. Lester survived and subsequently pitched well and David Ross hit a reassuring home run.

Then again Maddon/Bartman did what he said he would not do as he brought in Chapman in the middle of an inning. Worn out from needless overwork in Game Six, Chapman was without his electric fastball. It was sad to watch and when Rajai Davis hit a line drive home run to tie the Game, Cub fans everywhere clutched their chests and had multiple flashbacks of goats, cats, and Barts.

We know that it went on into the tenth inning and the rains came between the 9th and 10th innings. Those who believe in this sort of thing saw a redemptive washing and rainbows, at least in retrospect.

Personally I sat in utter disbelief compounded by the continuing fog of jet lag. Had all this really happened? Indeed it had. No longer are the Cubs the Lovable Losers. They are a new National League powerhouse, or so it seems.

It was the best game seven since 1991 when the Twins beat the Braves, 1-0. It allowed Joe Maddon to avoid being flayed by the media, both social and otherwise, and retain his reputation as a quirky baseball genius.

When Ferguson Jenkins opened the first spring training game with the cry "THIS IS THE YEAR," there were doubters like me in the crowd of Cub fanatics. As it turned out, he was prophetic.

It is no longer necessary to wait until next year.

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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