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## The Curse expires

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE  
The Curse expires  
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You knew that if it ever happened it would have to be in spectacular fashion. Something as intractable as "The Curse of the Bambino" would not fall by some common or mundane means. It could only end by a fierce assault on history.

Certainly the last ten days in the life of the 2004 Boston Red Sox qualify as spectacular. Down to the mighty New York Yankees three games to none, facing elimination once again, the Sox turned baseball history on its head to become the only team in the history of the World Series and post-season baseball to win a seven-game series after losing the first three games.

This backdoor sweep of the Yankees defied all odds, defied experts, and defied anything within the realm of realistic probability. Winning two games in Boston and then two more in Yankee Stadium was difficult enough, but to be within three outs of elimination twice, to win in extra innings twice, and to have to go through Mariano Rivera twice, was more than anyone in their right mind could expect. Clearly no one was in their right mind but rather they were elevated to some paranormal state.

That elevation was in large part inspired by the pitching of Curt Schilling who made some measure of medical history by having his ankle stitched up, and I would assume shot up, to make it possible for him to take the mound within an acceptable level of pain. This performance alone could have inspired anyone, and he did it twice, once against the Yankees and in an encore against the Cardinals. Further propelling the Sox beyond earth's orbit were the heroics of Ortiz, Bellhorn, Damon, Wakefield, and seemingly every man on the 25-man roster during the course of these ten days that shook New England.

After burying the Yankees, who must still be in a state of shock, the Red Sox turned their attention to the Cardinals. Once again a devastating combination of pitching and timely hitting produced a sweep, this time of the conventional variety. The Sox dominated from end to end in this series, scoring early and often and never once trailing in a game to the Redbirds. The powerful Cardinal lineup was silenced after game one, and in a fate-defying gesture the Red Sox committed four errors in each of the first two games without it costing them a run. One can only regard this as some sort of redemptive act in honor of Bill Buckner.

To end the season with eight straight wins is one thing, but to do it against the two teams with the best records in their respective leagues is another. The end came during an eclipse of the moon an event that will be regarded forevermore in New England as an omen of abundant blessings from the Lord. The Puritan Divines would have loved this. Those congregational churches that dot the New England landscape should be jammed tight with Red Sox fans this Thanksgiving Day for never before have God's blessings come in such abundance to the land of John Winthrop and John Cotton.

For Red Sox fans it is the end of a long nightmare of miscues, near misses, and tragic endings. For most Red Sox fans it is the end of a lifetime of frustration. One would guess that there are not many of the Bosox faithful who have the details of the Babe Ruth 1918 World Series pitching performances etched in their memories, but no doubt we will hear from a few.

Pedro Martinez talked about what a great Christmas present this would be for Red Sox fans. Others talked about the various forms of redemption that this victory brings for all those who suffered for so long as objects of the taunts coming from the Yankee Imperium. When asked if he could die happy now, Johnny Pesky, echoing the voices of countless Red Sox fans everywhere, answered with a resounding, yes. It should be added that he has no immediate plans for departure.

The most remarkable comments of all came from a caller to a national radio sports talk show. She talked about how important this win is, in fact how important all Red Sox wins are, and how this one belongs to all those generations of Sox fans who have waited so long for this day. She said that on this coming weekend thousands of the Red Sox faithful will make their way to cemeteries across New England to lay Red Sox memorabilia on the graves of fathers and grandfathers who are no longer here to share the celebration. She closed by saying, "This is the greatest day, ever," and she said it with a passion and conviction seldom heard about anything these days.

This weekend when the celebrations finally end with a parade that is expected to draw upwards of five million people to the city of Boston, what will the Red Sox fans do? They have been defined by their suffering. They have been defined by the serial tragedy surrounding this franchise. They wallowed in their pain. The whining of Sox fans at times could be both deafening and finger-nail-on-the-chalkboard irritating. Now what will they talk about? How will they redefine themselves? Neo-Yanks? What will they now live and wait for in their heart of hearts?

They humiliated the Yankees who are now a major trivia notation in baseball: Name the only team to have blown a 3-0 lead in post-season history. Then the Red Sox went on to win the World Series in devastating fashion over the St. Louis Cardinals. If indeed this is the greatest day, ever, all else will be anti-climax. No future World Series win will ever be as sweet as this one, the one that ended the Curse, that redefined all of New England baseball.

All one can say is that I hope Cub fans never have an encounter with this level of angst.

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.

