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2005 WORLD SERIES CHAMPIONS

8 WAYS OF LOOKING AT A CHAMPION

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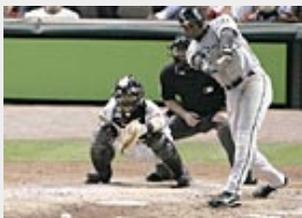
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By Benjamin Ortiz, instructor of journalism, literature and writing in the communications department at Harry S. Truman College
Published October 30, 2005

8. The CTA Red Line is Chicago's one degree of separation, connecting North Side and South, lakeshore condos to yesterday's stockyards, Wrigleyville to the Wild 100s. Cubs and Sox.

But from Red Line to redline, a rapid-transit trek is just as likely to reinforce the six degrees of segregation that still divide the town's civic and sports loyalties.

I'm talking about the good old "Us versus Them" mentality that continues to define baseball fandom in the Second City, even after so many years of mutually assured misery.

Even after a World Series Championship!

As a Sox fan whose interest was first sparked by disgust for Wrigleyville mayhem, I thought of riding the "L" to escape North Sider neglect of the best thing going these days in baseball. I bitterly recalled the Cubbies turning many rides home from work into pure CTA chaos.

And Cubs fans' fondness for public drunken purge-fiestas has been documented elsewhere, so I won't relive those nightmares.

I wanted to watch the playoffs in a fan-friendly atmosphere, with my people. Sox people. Surely, things must be better for real baseball fans in Bridgeport!

Still, the idea of finding a gritty, authentic South Side saloon with the help of Google Earth just didn't sit right. Instead I decided to hold it down in my native Rogers Park, and so build a vanguard of North Shore Soxistas.

After all, the Good Guys themselves had to celebrate on enemy territory, as they clinched every playoff series away from Sweet Home.

I started the Series in Andersonville, thrilling to the underwhelming anticlimax of a single firecracker on Clark Street that set off car alarms with a concussive whimper.

I ended up at the Red Line Tap, a pub that hugs the elevated track at 7006 N. Glenwood Ave.

This was where I saw the Cubs choke against the Marlins, by the way, but on Game 3 night I no longer envied the South Side's company. From pool table to barstool, it was all about the Sox.

That's when I felt a renewed yearning for citywide unity, for a true experience of collective consciousness on par with the Bulls dynasty that turned the whole world on to our city. Could it be that an MLB championship, a revived Bulls squad and a .500 Bears team would bring back the glory? It's a brave new post-'roid world of playoff basketball, competitive football and championship baseball!

But before we get carried away and throw hockey in there too, remember that the whole world was not watching this World Series. We might have a globalized set of Sox, but not everyone has joined the bandwagon. In fact, fewer Americans were watching the Series this year.

Stalking the North Side in search of true baseball goodwill, I've found only the same old divisions.

At best, some Cubs fans are bitterly renouncing the lovable losers in favor of likeable winners. And then there are the "bi-Soxuals,"



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the swing fans who probably will pay to see the Cubs again next season before they go anywhere near the Cell, for reasons that have little to do with actual baseball.

In other words, Sox fans will only dig in deeper with their anti-Cub sentiment, and vice versa. And there won't necessarily be any Sox dynasty or global Sox furor or Sox riots, like the Bulls created. Nope, just a few people switching affinities yet bearing mirror-image grudges.

And for all the wrong reasons, at that.

That's why I'm just enjoying it while it lasts, along with everyone else who will hold on to the memories of lucky-call heroics, pitching duels, and a 5 hour, 41 minute grind-out of a game we'll never forget. And now, on to historic ticker-tape parades and downtown mobs that show Chicago how to celebrate but not devastate!

Some day, Chicago will look upon the scrum of Sox versus Cubs and laugh.

But for now, we taste a tiny, forgotten sense of community. It's that feeling you get showing off downtown to visitors and pointing out the "SOX PRIDE" displays radiating from our world-class architecture.

It's the pride of being first place, even though we call ourselves Second.

As coverage closed and the Red Line bartender yelled last call, scattered high-fives missed the mark with tipsy gracelessness and go-go-go glory. After all, it's been a while since we've had reasons to cheer.

The cameras showed raucous crowds at Jimbo's and United Center rallies, closing with Michael Jordan's statue clad in a Sox jersey. I ran outside to hoot and holler but found only silence.

And then, from farther north, a cascade of fireworks shimmering off the raindrops and neon.

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