



# From the Bullpen

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### CURSES, FOILED AGAIN

Shattered again. No, I'm not talking about Underbelly's hopes for a breakout Upper Division finish year in the Hot Stove League; or Itchie's fantasies about new follicle growth; or Shamu's dream of a 24/7 food buffet bar in the master bedroom; or even about the dreams of Cub and Red Sox fans alike that 2003 might be the year that they break their respective chokeholds on the mantles of lovable loser in their respective leagues. No, I'm talking about something much more important — B.T. and my hopes of seeing an October Classic at Wrigley Field in Chicago. Shattered.

All the stars seemed to be in alignment. The Cubs stormed through Atlanta like General Sherman's infantry and kicked the stuffing out of the winningest team in the National League this season (with 101 wins), the Atlanta Braves, to get to the National League Championship Series. The Cubs bested the Fish in Miami in Game 4 of the NLCS to take an (seemingly) insurmountable 3-games-to-1 lead over the Marlins, with the Cubs' three best pitchers, Zambrano, Prior and Wood, in line to clinch. Even if Zambrano couldn't get the W at Joe Robbie, the Cubs had the final two games at home and the twin towers, Prior and Wood, to nail shut the pine box on the Marlins.

Over in the Junior Circuit, the Beantowners made a miracle comeback against the pitching-filthy Athletics, erasing an aught-to-two deficit to win their first round match-up by 3-games-to-2 over the A's, to earn the right to play the hated Yankees, who after losing their first game against the Twins at home, decided it was time to flex their muscles and steamrolled the Identicals from up north.

And so it came down to these four teams: The Bronx Bombers, winners of 26 world titles; the Red Sox, whose forefathers (Boston Pilgrims) won the first ever World Series, and who were looking to break the Curse of the Bambino; the Cubs, those lovable losers who were seeking the chance for their first World Series title in 95 years and their first appearance in 58; and the Marlins, who greased in as the wild card team just as they did in 1997, but whose baseball pedigree is otherwise nonexistent.

Although I am not usually a McBlunderish "half-empty" kind of guy, as soon as the LCS match-ups were

in ink, I uttered the prophetic words, *"Of course, you know that it'll be the Yankees and the Marlins in the World Series."* I said this not because I thought that the Yankees and the Marlins were necessarily the best remaining teams, but because everyone and their Great Uncle Nordberg desperately wanted the Red Sox and the Cubs to meet in the World Series, B.T. and yours truly included. In fact, I would venture to say that other than Screech and Mouse, our HSL strange bedfellows who both are long-time Highlander fanatics, everyone in the Hot Stove League must have been rooting in earnest for a Baby Bears-Beantowners matchup.

I wasn't even thinking of the tandem curses — in fact, I hadn't even heard about the Billy Goat Curse on the Cubs until reading about it in the paper the week before last — when I uttered my dismal forecast, but was merely counting on Murphy's Law to prevent me from experiencing the most classic of October Classics.

After my prediction was made, what occurred next was a painful but classic tease from the Baseball Gods. In the AL, the Red Sox managed to win Game 1 at Yankee Stadium, and then received a kiss from Mother Nature as rain forced a postponement of Game 4 and allowed Grady to shuffle his rotation and have Wakefield start Game 4, which allowed the Red Sox to tie the series at two games apiece. Over in the National League, the Cubs defied (temporarily) their history by racing to a 3-games-to-1 lead over the apparently overmatched Marlins. It was on this cast that the bobber went down and the hook was set.

Knowing that there was no way that the youthful and pitching-short Marlins could beat Zambrano at home and then Prior and Wood at Wrigley, I acted quickly and decisively to make air travel arrangements to Chicago on October 22, where I would surely be watching the Cubs in Game 4 of the World Series, hopefully against the Red Sox. But hey, I was even willing to take in a Cubs-Yankees World Series game. The arrangements worked out beautifully, as I already was planning on traveling in an easterly direction that day for a deposition in Nashville on the following day, and my slight detour through the Second City couldn't have worked out slicker.

I then got B.T.'s ear and was able to persuade him that he needed to spend October 22 in Chicago with me, watching the Cubs in the World Series, since this opportunity might not knock again for another 58 years or so. It wasn't a hard sell with the Chiefs C.E.O., and plans were quickly made for him to join me in Shytown.

As I say, all of the stars were in alignment. And then, faster and harder than Pedro slamming Zim's face into the Fen's turf, our hopes and dreams were shattered by the Curse. Or Curses. In a surreal end to their seasons, both the Cubs and the Red Sox were a mere five outs away from going to the World Series, and each with seemingly untouchable three-run leads — the Cubs in Game 6 with Prior pitching, and the Red Sox in Game 7 with Popeye-conqueror Pedro on the mound — when the Baseball Gods intervened and turned almost-certain victory into painful and jaw-dropping defeat. Don't try to tell me there's no curse, I seen it with my own eyes.

Unbelievable.

That's it for this issue. Back to HSL business next week.

Skipper

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