

And the winners are . . .



Lou Piniella had 97 reasons to smile last season, each of them Cubs victories.

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The Chicago Baseball Museum awards for the 2008 major league season:

- Team of the Year: Cubs. This was their most dominant team in the modern era, one whose 97 victories were the most since the 1945 season, when the National League pennant-winners won 98 games in a 154-game schedule. The North Siders led the National League in runs, total bases, on-base percentage and slugging percentage and outscored their opponents by 184 runs. They also had the lowest opponent batting average and allowed the fewest hits of any team.

As for the postseason . . . There was a postseason? What postseason?

- Hitter of the Year: **Carlos Quentin**, White Sox. The outfielder started the season as relative unknown and finished it second in home runs (36) and slugging percentage (.571) and fourth in on-base percentage (.394) among American League hitters.

The only person who could get Quentin out was himself, it turned out, as a self-induced right wrist injury might have cost him the Most Valuable Player Award in the stretch run. (Memo to MVP voters: On what basis did Quentin finish behind Minnesota Twins first baseman Justin Morneau, who faded badly (3-of-30) with the division title at stake in the final days of the season?)

- Pitcher of the Year: **Ryan Dempster**, Cubs. His transition from the bullpen to the rotation couldn't have been more seamless, as he ranked among the league leaders in victories (17), starts (33) and strikeouts (187). He was more than a pitcher, though. His 19 sacrifice bunts led the league, and he was charged with one error in 52 chances.

- Defensive Player of the Year: **Orlando Cabrera**, White Sox. In a year when there were few defensive standouts locally, Cabrera was a rather easy choice here, as he excelled across the board. Among American League shortstops, he ranked first in range and zone ratings and fourth in fielding percentage.

- Unsung Player of the Year: **Mark DeRosa**, Cubs. In game situations, DeRosa was DeMan throughout the season. He hit .322 with a runner(s) in scoring position and .375 after the ninth inning. In the postseason -- yes, there was a postseason -- his three extra-base hits and four RBI led the team. He also played four positions on a semi-regular basis.

- Rookie of the Year: **Alexei Ramirez**, White Sox, and **Geovany Soto**, Cubs. Both sides of town had an impact rookie in the same season for one of the few times ever. Ramirez (.290 batting average, 21 homers, 77 RBI) and Soto (.285, 23, 86) produced very similar numbers, which made this race too close to call.

- Manager/Executive of the Year: **Lou Piniella**, Cubs. A top priority on the Lou-do list was increased accountability for players, coaches and manager alike. As a result, few Cubs teams played to their potential in the regular season like this one.

- Performance of the Year: **John Danks**, White Sox. In a rare one-game tiebreaker for the Central Division title, the left-hander blanked the Twins on two hits in eight innings. (See Baseblogs: Danks for the Memories.)

Runner-up: Cubs pitcher **Carlos Zambrano** and his no-hitter against the Brewers in Milwaukee.

- Game of the Year: Sept. 30, White Sox 1, Minnesota Twins 0. For sheer drama and intensity, the playoff play-in game at U.S. Cellular Field was one for the ages. Years from now, hundreds of thousands will say they were there.