

Is this the Golden Age of Chicago baseball?

In wake of its most memorable season in 101 years, a Crosstown World Series is unthinkable no longer.



Managers Ozzie Guillen and Lou Piniella may meet in October yet.

*Posted by Paul Ladewski
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Down and out because of the Cubs sudden fade? Disappointed that the White Sox are a four-gone conclusion?

Cheer up, Chicago fans. Here's something that can't help but turn your frown upside down -- you just witnessed the greatest local season in modern baseball history.

The White Sox and especially the Cubs may have fallen short of hopes and expectations at the finish line, but in the big picture, the last six months qualify as a three-run home run if not a grand slam. The Cubs (97) and White Sox (90) combined for 187 regular-and postseason victories, their best total in 101 years. The last time Chicago witnessed this much success on the field, the first-place Cubs (111) and third-place White Sox (87) numbered 198 victories between them in the 1907 campaign.

In fact, the future appears to be so bright on both sides of town that it's reasonable to believe that Chicago is well into its second golden age of baseball already.

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The first great era of Chicago baseball was the 1906-1919 period, which saw the two local clubs combine for eight pennants and four World Series championships in 14 seasons. They also met for the first and only time in the Fall Classic in that span. Because the major leagues have nearly doubled in size from 16 teams to 30 since then, it may be awhile before that kind of dominance is realized here again.

To be sure, both teams have work to do this winter. The Cubs may have to replace any combination of **Ryan Dempster**, **Jim Edmonds** and **Kerry Wood**. The White Sox are expected to lose free agents **Orlando Cabrera** and **Joe Crede** and possibly **Juan Uribe**, who comprised the left side of their infield. At the same time, given the economics of the Major League Baseball business plan, the Cubs and White Sox have what it takes to be a perennial contender for years to come. Which is to say, market and payroll, the most important components in the success formula.

The significance of market and payroll size has rarely been more pronounced than this season. Of the eight playoff teams, a half-dozen are based in cities among top six markets in the country. The Milwaukee Brewers and Tampa Bay Rays are the only exceptions, and in the case of the Tampa-St. Petersburg area, it ranks a respectable 13th overall, according to the latest Nielsen ratings. What's more, if the New York Mets had won one more game, then they quite possibly would have supplanted the Brewers as a wild-card qualifier.

As for payroll, five of the eight biggest spenders received postseason invitations, according to figures released by Major League Baseball earlier this season. Only the baby Rays have a payroll that ranks in the bottom half of the big leagues, and at a mere \$44 million (29th overall), they're clearly the exception.

The good news for Chicago and its fans is, only New York and Los Angeles have larger market sizes. And in terms of payroll, only the two New York teams spent more money on talent than the Cubs and White Sox this season. The Yankees (\$209 million) finished on top once again, while the Mets (\$138 million) were No. 4 overall. The White Sox (\$121 million) and Cubs (\$119 million) were fifth and seventh, respectively, and that doesn't figure to change much if at all next season.

What it means is, while short-term phenomenas will have their moments, only a select few teams such as the Cubs and White Sox have what it takes to sustain success over a period of time. In other words, local baseball fans shouldn't only dream to witness a Crosstown World Series at least once in their lifetimes. They should expect it to happen.

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