

Pirates Move to the Head of the Class

Written by Steve Rackow

Saturday, 03 April 2010 10:02 - Last Updated Sunday, 04 April 2010 06:19

The sigh of relief emanating from Pittsburgh's hard-luck fans, anxious for months that their collective hearts would once again be broken, could literally be felt as a rush of breeze beginning in Forbes Field and blasting outward to the edges of the city on Oct. 6, 1937, as the Pirates rallied in the late innings to win Game 6 of the World Series, 8-7, and oust perennial AL power Detroit. The Tigers had bested the Red Sox in 6 games in the LCS, while the Pirates took care of the NY Giants in 5.

Playoff heroics frequently feature some of the biggest individual stars in the game, and fans are often left marveling at the specifics of a trade-deadline deal that brought over this key player or that vital piece to the puzzle, but individuals weren't the featured part of this group.

This Pirates squad relied on contributions from their entire roster.

Of the five Pirates who batted above .300 in the playoffs (Chet Morgan .412, George Stumpf .375, Willard Brown .348, Hal Trotsky .333, and Billy Werber .319), only Willard Brown managed that feat in the regular season (.306), and no pitcher won more than 2 games in the entire playoffs.

You want some individual heroics? Than I will give to you a guy with 2 ABs in the Series, Earle Brucker. You know, the back-up catcher? Only got 140 AB this season, and most of those came when starting catcher Frankie Hayes was injured.

What do you mean you never heard of him?

Earle didn't mope or complain about his lack of playing time, he made the most of it.

In his
only 2 plates appearances
of the playoffs, not one, but
both were walk-off homeruns in the World Series, including the Series-ending blast in Game 6!

Good luck living up to those expectations next time he strolls to the plate in the Series!

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The resiliency that the Pirates showed in even making the Series can go a long way to changing perception of the franchise. A true small-market team, Pittsburgh has struggled throughout their existence to be competitive.

This was only like the sixth time in 37 seasons that the Pirates have posted a winning record, and this wasn't just the first time they won the World Series, this was the first time they even *made the playoffs*

But what an incredible team effort they put forth this season!

First, they had to overcome their history of failure. This was more than just an abstract "curse" that needed to be broken, continued failure has a tangible cost.

Less than 900,000 fans (!) came through the gates in 1935, and total 1936 *revenue* topped out at \$51 million.

Contrast that with the recent \$80 million-plus *payrolls* of divisional opponents Chicago and Cincinnati.

Repeated high draft picks only go so far if they move on to greener (and more successful) pastures the first chance they get.

Second, they had to overcome their tough division. First Cincinnati, for years the team to beat in the NL West, and now the Cubs, NL World Series representatives the last two seasons and the team with (far and away) the most wins in MLB over the last 3 seasons.

On Monday, Sep. 6, the Cubs were 5 games back entering the final 2 weeks of the season that would culminate with a showdown with the upstart Pirates.

They proceeded to tear through the competition, going 8-1 heading into that final series.

Surely good enough to close the gap enough to give them a chance head-to-head, right?

Sorry, but no.

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The Pirates won 12 of 14 leading up to that weekend, carrying a 4-game lead into the 3-game series, clinching and snuffing out the Cubs last hope.

The team that has won at least 96 games each of the last 3 years couldn't even get out of their own division.

Third, how 'bout some injuries. Injuries tend to define seasons, and usually in the negative, but the Pirates can now look back with pride at how they willed themselves to succeed in spite of a raft of injuries to top players. Stan Hack, their leader in most offensive categories and third in NL MVP voting, got knocked out for 3 months, including the entire playoffs.

Johnny Vander Meer, PIT's first round pick, who finished fourth in NL Joe Wood voting and second in NL ROY voting, was 13-6 when he went down for 14 months.

Leon Day SP (18-8), Gene Bremmer SP (18-8), George Stumpf RF (.298), Frankie Hayes C (.269), and Chet Laabs CF (.265) all went down *for at least a month*

Billy Werber SS (.286) was also out for 3 weeks.

In spite of this, they managed to keep it together, perhaps even using these obstacles to rally together as a team.

So now that success has found the Pirates after so many years, what is to become of them? The spike in attendance and revenue that the playoff run has had for the franchise can give them financial tools they have lacked in the past, but they will be short lived unless success on the field is continued. One-hit wonder, or the dawning of a new dynasty? It remains to be seen.

Congratulations to the reigning BOY champs, the 1937 Pittsburgh Pirates!