

Thursday, March 17, 2011

Unforgettable Season

Unforgettable Season

The year began like any other year in spring training. Everyone was eager to get started. Optimism was enjoyed by all teams knowing that the reality of the season will temper this feeling for many, at some point. This team was different in some way. The reason was not clear at the time but we all knew that something was definitely different about the players. The names were the same but the shadow of failure somehow was not hovering, waiting to drop what was in the past the misery of defeat. It was hard to tell if it was confidence or the players did not care because they knew what the end result would be.

The season started and unfortunately I did not break camp with the team due to an eye injury that occurred during run down drills. As you can imagine, this was enough to drench any optimism I may have had for a productive season and maybe my career. I did survive and fully recovered from the injury. I rejoined the team in May and by that time the team was off and running, winning game after game which was a good thing and they were doing it without me. I was happy for the team but this was truly an ego buster. Common sense should have told me that I would not come in and continue being the everyday player that I was accustomed to being. I became a part-time player- a role player, playing mostly against left hand pitchers. I wasn't happy about the situation but there was nothing I could do about it other than complain, which I did.

The season continued to roll along without a hitch. We won game after game, series after series. Some, in past years, we truly would have lost. We became the toast of New York and the envy of baseball. We had it all, pitching, power, speed and arrogance. We were the amazing Mets to some and pond scum to others. We cruised into the NLCS against the Houston Astros, a very good team. In fact, they were so good that this matchup, in my opinion, was one of the greatest series I had ever been in including the '86 World Series. We went toe to toe for five games and then came game six which ranks at the top of my list for all time great games. Through lead changes, let downs and momentum swings, many of us wanted that game just to end. Physically and emotionally neither team had much left. However; each team had its own motivation to keep fighting. The Astros wanted to dethrone the powerful and arrogant New York Mets. The Mets did not want a game seven because of a pitcher name Mike Scott. We eventually won the game but it took 16 innings. The thinking was that since we had won this series, the next series would be a piece of cake. We were wrong.

After a dramatic game six victory in the NLCS, we entered the World Series against the Boston Red Sox at home and quickly lost the first two games. All of a sudden the old feeling that once plagued the New York Mets and its fans found its way into our thoughts. After a bold move by the manager, David Johnson and not having practice before the next three games which were to be played in Boston, we won the first two but lost the third. The confidence returned just as quickly as it had left a few days before. We were headed back to New York for Games 6 and 7.

By the way the season started for us, no one could predict that the events of game six would have such a profound effect on this seemingly unbeatable team. The Mets were down two runs going into the bottom of 9th inning facing what would be the power arms of the Red Sox bullpen. The feeling of “what a waste” clouded the minds of every Mets fan and player, at least of those who dare to admit it. After two outs in the 9th and no one on, things began to change. There was one hit, and then another, followed by yet another and just that fast we became the aggressor with a level of confidence that filled every seat in the stadium. In typical ‘86 Mets fashion, we found a way to overcome claiming victory out of what seemed to be obvious defeat. It was on to game 7 with confidence not even a rainout could tamper.

Game 7 started as many of the Mets games had- down by a few runs early. Just like everyone had come to expect, the mighty Mets came back, snatching victory from the hands of a dejected Red Sox team. Looking into their dugout, their faces said it all. “The Mets did it to us again”. The Mets ended an unforgettable season with a World Series victory.

-Mookie Wilson