

# La Russa forecast: Cards, Cubs will manage well in '06

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Only 23 days until pitchers and catchers report.

And despite some offseason discontent among both St. Louis and Chicago Cubs fans that their teams did not do enough in the offseason to either offset defections or, in the Cubs' case, close the gap on the NL Central champion Cardinals, there may be cause for optimism.

No less an authority than St. Louis' Tony La Russa, the third winningest manager of all time, doesn't buy into the pessimism.

"We focus on what we have, not what we're missing," La Russa said of the Cardinals, whose offseason losses include starter Matt Morris, second baseman Mark Grudzielanek and outfielders Reggie Sanders and Larry Walker.

"I don't know how bad we can be with (catcher) Yadier Molina, Albert (Pujols), David Eckstein, Scott Rolen and Jim Edmonds. That's five of your starting eight right there who are pretty solid."

The Cardinals are sure to get a boost with the anticipated return to good health of third baseman Rolen from shoulder surgery, but La Russa knows that is not what ultimately will determine his team's success.

"It comes down to pitching," he said. "I've been here 10 years, and every year that we've competed, we've pitched well. The years we haven't pitched well, we haven't won."

In addition to Morris, the Cardinals' offseason losses include traded lefty Ray King and ex-Iowa Hawkeye and retired Cedar Rapids native Cal Eldred from the bullpen.

Troubled starter Sidney Ponson and reliever Braden Loper are among the offseason pitching additions.

There were few players, ex-players or officials at FanFest at Drake to speak for the Cubs, but La Russa was impressed Chicago added lefty Scott Eyre and set-up man Bob Howry to its bullpen.

"I think the Cubs made really good moves," he said.

## **Tough job**

Keynote speaker Tony La Russa made light of the fact that he and West Des Moines' Tim McClelland were at the same head table at this weekend's FanFest luncheon.

McClelland, considered one of the majors' best umpires, was the crew chief for this past October's National League Championship Series between St. Louis and Houston, when another umpire ejected La Russa for arguing balls and strikes.

Last year's baseball postseason was filled with controversial calls, perhaps not unusual in an era when umpires are faced with increased scrutiny brought on by media focus and modern technology.

"It seems like they have a camera for every player," McClelland said. "And they've got (the cameras) slowed down to fractions of inches."

McClelland said all the new ballparks are aesthetically beautiful, but tougher to umpire in than many of the older ones.

"They have so many nooks and crannies and tough angles," he said.