

New era in Chicago a subject of debate

The Cubs' reins on the Windy City shortened by White Sox title

I-CUBS FANFEST

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There was a time before ivy was in.

A time before the 1969 Chicago Cubs, then Ryne Sandberg and Harry Caray turned "The Friendly Confines" and "Wrigleyville" into catchphrases.

The year was 1959, and shortstop Luis Aparicio's American League champion Chicago White Sox ruled the city, much as they hope to again after their 2005 World Series title.

"They're still my team," said Aparicio, 71, who was one of the Hall of Fame headliners appearing at Iowa Cubs Fan Fest on Saturday at the Knapp Center in Des Moines.

For fellow FanFest invites Tony La Russa and Tom Seaver, the White Sox's first title in 88 years was also a welcome sight.

"It's great for baseball, it's great for the city of Chicago," said Seaver, who finished his Hall of Fame career with the White Sox in 1984-85. "It's great for all the guys that wore that uniform."

La Russa, this year's featured speaker at the annual Fan Fest luncheon, managed the White Sox to a division title in 1983 and remains friends with owner Jerry Reinsdorf.

"Ecstatic," La Russa said when asked how he felt about his old team winning it all. "The thing is, when they were there it was a real family feeling, from the guy that ran the stadium to the ones running the eating facilities. And many of them are still there."

Not everybody shares his enthusiasm for the White Sox's championship.

"I kind of like the Cubs being the No. 1 game in town," said Fan Fest attendee Thomas Timp, 37, of Dubuque. "And that's changing."

Opinions were mixed among the hundreds of Cubs fans at Fan Fest as to whether the White Sox are a threat to the Cubs' stranglehold on fan support in the region.

"Ask me that question next year," said Ralph Christian, 61, of Des Moines. "I don't really think so, but people

tend to forget that before (ex-manager Leo Durocher) came along in the late 1960s, there was talk of the Cubs leaving town.

"You'd go to Wrigley Field and there would only be a couple hundred fans in the stands."

Fan support aside, the White Sox are the undisputed kings where it matters most -on the field -and offseason acquisitions like slugger Jim Thome and budding stars such as pitcher Brandon McCarthy are a good bet to keep them there in 2006.

"They are going to be tough again," said Aparicio, who, like current manager Ozzie Guillen, is from Venezuela.

"They have a real young team, and they are still hungry."

Ryan Sweeney of Cedar Rapids, rated the White Sox's No. 2 prospect behind fellow outfielder Brian Anderson by Baseball America before last season, could soon be a part of the world champions.

"Hopefully I start out this year at triple-A (Charlotte) and maybe get a call-up," said Sweeney, who hit .298 with a .357 on-base percentage last year for double-A Birmingham.

The White Sox shipped center fielder Aaron Rowand to Philadelphia in the deal for Thome, leaving a spot in the outfield alongside Scott Podsednik and Jermaine Dye.

Anderson is expected to compete for the spot, and Sweeney can't wait to get into the mix of such a winning atmosphere.

"The whole situation of winning the World Series and trying to do it again is awesome," he said.

Unless you're a Cubs fan.