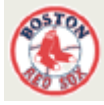


## After 86 years of failure and misery, could the Red Sox now make it back-to-back?



**2. Boston Red Sox:** “And the Boston Red Sox are 2004 World Champions.” Who in their wildest dreams would’ve thought it could happen? After 86 years of ultimate futility, this franchise finally, and I mean finally, reached the ultimate pinnacle of the sport. By overcoming an 0-3 deficit to the NY Yankees in the ALCS, Boston showed something that had been missing for all those years - resiliency.

RH Curt Schilling showed his relentlessness and courage in the sixth game of the American League Championship Series; pitching with a blood soaked sock to force a game seven. Schill’s first year impact as the new ace of the Bo-Sox rotation allowed Boston to part ways with Pedro Martinez, a stable of this franchise for the last six or seven seasons. My biggest question is how healthy can Schilling be in 2005? And are Matt Clement, Wade Miller (won’t pitch until likely May) and David Wells three good enough starters to get it done without him? Bronson Arroyo and Tim Wakefield must do it again; pitch in any type of scenario when called upon, whether it be regular season or postseason. Manager Terry Francona certainly hopes that the guy who won a Major League best 21 regular season games in 2004 can be able to give them just as much this coming season.

Boston’s lineup proved just how dangerous they are in the postseason. David Ortiz is as clutch as they come, delivering on the big stage in less than 24 hours twice vs. New York. Manny Ramirez (.308AVG. 43HR 130RBI), the 2004 World Series MVP, became the first ever \$100 million dollar player to win a championship in the game of baseball. Boston’s midseason problems were catching the ball and the additions of Orlando Cabrera, Dave Roberts and Doug Mientkiewicz turned out to be great one’s. Roberts and Cabrera are gone, but in comes ex-Cardinals shortstop Edgar Renteria, who has been arguably the best in the game at his position since 2003. They upgraded from Nomar to Cabrera and now upgrade even more with Renteria, a force with the bat as well as the glove. It was very vital the Red Sox were versatile and the parts were interchangeable if need be. In my opinion, Francona will have an even tougher task this year keeping this bunch of ‘idiots’ (as they’ve called themselves) motivated. Many of the lovable characters are back, but staying healthy and determined to repeat is another thing.

How they make up for the small pieces like Pokey Reese with Ramon Vazquez ought to be fascinating. Jay Payton had trouble going from Coors Field to Petco Park, more of a pitchers ball park. Does he find a comfortable median at Fenway and can he handle getting considerably fewer at-bats? Kevin Youkilis and Hanley Ramirez are two players with rather bright futures and they probably feel hungry to get in games. Bill Mueller, Mark Bellhorn, Johnny Damon, Kevin Millar and Trot Nixon are stupendous contributors that deserve more recognition than they currently receive. Expect nothing less out of those guys in 2005 and the seasons beyond.

Arroyo and Wakefield are capable starters early on in the year; together they won 22 games and struck out 258 batters. Later in the year, provided the majority of the gang

is healthy, they will likely go to the bullpen. Remember how dreadful Boston's relievers were about two or three years ago? No longer, as Keith Foulke has turned out to be better than advertised; placing himself in the company of the game's best closers. Leading up to Foulke they've got quality, experienced men in L Alan Embree and R Mike Timlin.



**The Boston Red Sox ended a long drought that lasted 86 years. Going for consecutive championships will be a lot harder not because Boston is not as talented, but because the Yanks got better.**

**Best Move:** Boston's best move in last year's off-season was bringing in a proven commodity possibly destined for the Hall-of-Fame in Curt Schilling. This off-season their biggest move, if you ask me, was retaining catcher Jason Varitek. He's the true leader of this team, and without him they would not have gone where they did. Varitek is unquestionably one of the game's top five switch hitters.

**Bottom Line:** The Red Sox personnel looks great on paper once again. Whether that personnel is able to hold up through injuries, rough times and mid-season slumps remains to be seen. Most of all, after 86 years of misery, do you really think this team can repeat? Not unless you're a believer, a Bo-Sox believer.

**Projected Order:** CF Johnny Damon  
RF Trot Nixon  
LF Manny Ramirez  
DH David Ortiz  
SS Edgar Renteria  
1B Kevin Millar  
C Jason Varitek  
3B Bill Mueller  
2B Mark Bellhorn

**Projected Staff:** R Curt Schilling  
L David Wells  
R Matt Clement  
R Wade Miller  
R Bronson Arroyo/Tim Wakefield

*Pick: 2<sup>nd</sup> in the AL East; Wild Card Red Sox don't repeat with early exit.*