Boys of Summer Become Men of Fall

By Adam Gauthier

The last weekend in September spells the end of another Major League Baseball season.

The top teams in the American and National Leagues are resting their veteran players before the playoffs begin by letting the minor leaguer call-ups play out the remaining two weeks of the season.

This has been a yearly ritual over the past few seasons for teams such as the New York Yankees and Atlanta Braves but the 2000 season has been a little more interesting.

The defending World Series Champion Yankees have not ran away with the American League East Division this year. The Boston Red Sox and the Toronto Blue Jays have each stayed very close with each team on top of the division at more than one point over the summer.

Last week, the Yankees went through their worst stretch of games of the season being swept by the Blue Jays in a three game set and losing a series to the last place Tampa Bay Devil Rays. This allowed Boston and Toronto to come within three games of the Yankees but both teams were unable to keep up.

After their sweep of New York, Toronto lost three out of four to Tampa Bay which eliminated them from the American League Wild Card race which they were battling for with the Seattle Mariners, Cleveland Indians, Boston Red Sox and Oakland A's (who are the leaders in the AL West by a half game over Oakland).

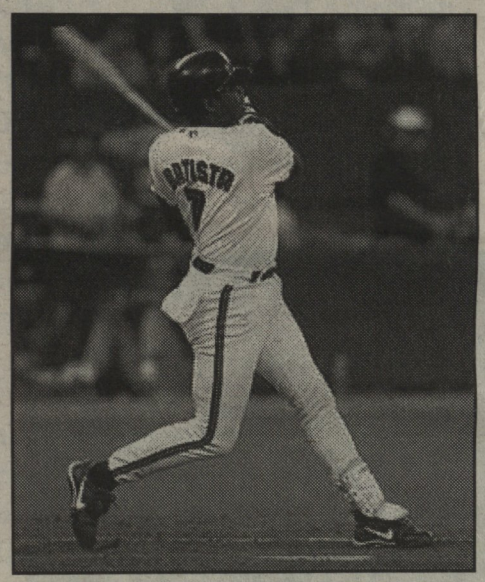
Toronto and Boston's only chance of making the playoffs was to win its final five games and for the Yankees to lose their final games which did not happen for either team.

Toronto got embarrassed by losing to the Baltimore Orioles 23-1 last Thursday which officially eliminated them from playoff contention.

On Friday, Boston was officially eliminated in an 8-6 loss to the "incomparable" Tampa Bay Devil Rays who have been the epitome of spoiler during the last week of the season. Also on Friday, the Yankees lost 13-2 to Baltimore but were still able to pop open the champagne bottles when they learned that they will be going to the playoffs for the fifth season in a row.

Meanwhile, in the National League things were not so dramatic.

The Atlanta Braves won the



National League East division title and are going to the playoffs for their ninth season in a row. It would have been their tenth if not for the 1994 player's strike.

The St. Louis Cardinals won the Central by eleven games over the Cincinnati Reds and the San Francisco Giants won the West by eleven games over Arizona.

The New York Mets, who finished second behind the Braves in the East claimed the National League Wild Card.

The 2000 season did not see the drama that the past few seasons have such as the home run race between Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa.

Individual achievement was overshadowed by team achievement.

The Chicago White Sox, who have not made the playoffs since 1993, won the American League Central and the best record in the American League with a 93-66 record going into last Saturday.

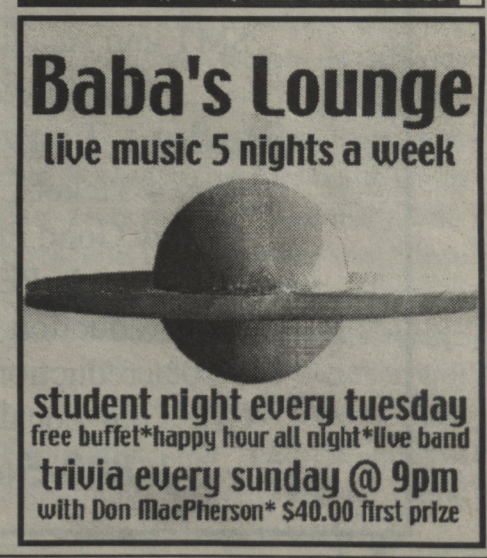
This years playoff teams look very competitive and well matched. For the past few years the Yankees have been the team to beat with their all-around team play but this year the look vulnerable.

The White Sox look very strong although they don't have one clear cut superstar after their designated hitter Frank Thomas.

It's a flip between Oakland, Seattle and Cleveland, literally. Two of these teams will make the playoffs while the other will have to reflect on the season that wasn't. Cleveland and Oakland will both play a hard-hitting, tough defensive game while the Mariners will rely on their pitching and defense to help them advance.

The Atlanta Braves will undoubtedly look to their pitching and hitting to get them back to the World Series.

The Cardinals will also look to their pitching and a healthy Mark McGwire who has been injured for much of the season.

The Giants, who have the best record in all of baseball, will rely on their overall team effort over the past 162 games to get them to the Promised Land.

Finally the Mets will look to their defense and heavy hitters to advance them far into the playoffs.❑