

# The Chi Sox spring training report

by Mike Riley

It's time to brush off the mothballs and grab your glove 'cause baseball is back! It's official, winter is over and spring has arrived. Just when you thought the baseball season was over, the Boys of Summer have begun to assemble in the sunny reaches of Arizona and Florida to shape up for a brand new season.

The 1992 season ended with a spectacular finale giving Canada its first World Series. The Toronto Blue Jays shook off their reputation as chokers and captured the biggest prize in baseball rocking the country from one coast to the other. Maybe next time Atlanta!

It's hard to believe that it was just over four months ago that the Jay's won the ultimate prize. The face of baseball has gone through a many changes since that momentous date, with new teams being added and old teams being reshuffled. Now, every team begins with a clean slate pushing to better their records with refreshed bodies and determined souls; the honeymoon is definitely over.

As the machinery of Major League Baseball begins to turn again, this column will offer an inside look on the upcoming season and the teams that will compete in the rat races of baseball: The Pennant Race, the League Championship and the eventual nailbiting World Series. The team I would like to look at this week

is the Chicago White Sox. When I was in Florida over the break, I was lucky enough to see the White Sox in their first full squad workout of spring training in the beautiful city of Sarasota.

I've been to spring training before, but it was nothing like what I was about to experience. The Sarasota Sports Complex was a buzz with activity. With no less than two hundred people and three t.v. networks, the White Sox training facility was nothing short of a carnival atmosphere. From eight year old kids with a rookie card to professional card dealers with box sets, ever Tom, Dick, and Harry was jockeying for position to get an autograph. Crowds of people would rush to one of the four baseball diamonds where Bo Jackson was working out, then, when bored, would scurry off to another to catch a glimpse of rookie sensation Frank Thomas. Grab a hotdog and a program and it's like you're at the real thing, minus the beer of course.

The White Sox have more than a few impressive names on their roster: George Bell, Tim Lincecum, Frank Thomas, Steve Sax, Carlton Fisk, Jack McDowell, Bobby Thigpen, and perhaps Bo Jackson. The 1992 season was quite a disappointing one for the White Sox; many predicted them to take the American League and perhaps the whole shooting match if they didn't suffer from so many injuries and a less than average pitching

staff. However, the 1993 season is one of renewed confidence with a legitimate shot at the World Series. The question is, how will Bo Jackson fit into this equation? Decimated by replacement hip surgery two years ago, Bo's once great status on the field is very limited. The only position Bo can play is first base and DH, which are locked up by Frank Thomas and George Bell respectively. While watching warm-ups I noticed how awkward Bo looked running the bases. Running on his tiptoes with still a significant gait in his step, Bo is a mere fraction of what he used to be. In the batting box, he was picky and selective of pitches, and when he did connect, they were grounders.

No other professional athlete has ever witnessed the rise and fall of success like Bo Jackson. Bo knows. Nobody in history can compare to the feats that Bo has accomplished, conquering Professional Football and Baseball, and tops in his field! Not enough credit can go to this athlete who is perhaps the greatest of our time. Others will come and go but Bo will remain legendary. The fact remains that Bo is not the man he was. The new and improved Bionic Bo is a testament to his fierce competitiveness, but courage may not be enough to make the team this year.

The Chicago White Sox do have many bright spots that will make up for the loss of Bo, should he not make

the team. One of them is Frank Thomas who rocked the world with his rookie debut last year. In the American League last year, Thomas had the best on-base percentage, the most doubles and walks, was second in runs and third in RBI's and batting average. When I watched him in the batting cage, it was hard to believe that he only had 24 homeruns last year. One after another, Thomas spanked baseballs over the 380 foot marker, bouncing them off the White Sox clubhouse.

## new and improved Bionic Bo

Although George Bell was not at the first day of spring training, his presence will surely be felt during the regular season. Last year Bell batted a respectable .255 and hit 25 homeruns and 112 RBI's. The speed of Lance Johnson and Tim Lincecum (41 and 45 SB) will also add to the offensive spark. With Robin Ventura anchoring third base, Ozzie Guillen or Craig Grebeck on shortstop, and defensive catcher Ron Karkovise behind the plate, the White Sox have a secure infield that will frustrate any batter. It is hoped baseball oldtimer Carlton Fisk will also contribute to the offensive and defensive cause after an injury riddled 1992. The White Sox are looking to their pitchers for improved performances

over last year. Jack McDowell stood out last year with 20 wins and a 3.18 ERA. Late season closer Roberto Hernandez shone with seven wins, 12 saves, and a 1.65 ERA. The 2.30 combined ERA of Leach and Radinsky also provided wins but the highlight list ends there. The 1992 season saw lackluster performances by pitchers Kirk McCaskill, Alex Fernandez, Greg Hibbard, and Charlie Hough who combined for 118 starts and an ERA of 4.19. Young pitcher Wilson Alvarez was unable to live up to expectations as was closer Bobby Thigpen, who had a 4.75 ERA by the end of the year.

The 1993 Chicago White Sox are expecting big things this year with Bobby Thigpen. Before last year's poor season, Thigpen had 87 saves in his previous two years. He is a proven closer and could contribute to a deadly pitching staff with consistent performances by McDowell, McCaskill, Alvarez, and Hernandez. With the off-season acquisition of Dave Stieb, the Sox are hoping this aging ex-Jay can add a little experience to their young lineup. Besides the addition of Stieb, the team will be very much like last years with a renewed sense of optimism. No matter which way you look at it, the 1993 Chicago White Sox are a very well rounded team. Look for them to take the American League West and maybe more...  
NEXT WEEK: The World Champion Toronto Blue Jays!

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