

They're dirty and grass-stained but not rusty

By NANCY ARMOUR
AP Sports Columnist

CHICAGO — The White Sox wear every smidge of dirt that comes near them and pick up grass stains easier than lint.

But they're obviously immune to rust.

If Chicago was sluggish from its lengthy layoff before Game 1 of the World Series, it didn't show Saturday night. Playing their unique brand of Ozzie Ball to perfection, the White Sox mixed another solid outing by a starter with sound fundamentals, a couple of home runs and the dazzling return of their bullpen for a 5-3 win over the Houston Astros.

"Everybody came ready to play, and we should. This is the World Series," Jermaine Dye said. "We told everybody to just go out there, have fun and keep doing

what we've been doing all year."

The White Sox have done far more sitting than hitting lately. After playing what seemed like every day after the All-Star break, they've had only eight games in the last 19 days. In case anyone forgot, they beat the Los Angeles Angels last Sunday to clinch the AL pennant.

While St. Louis was taking the Astros to six games, drawing the NL championship series out until Wednesday night, the White Sox were lounging. Manager Ozzie Guillen could have brought his team in for busy work, but he gave them Monday and Tuesday off instead. Sure you've got the biggest games of your life coming up, but what the heck, go play for a couple of days.

As he's shown time and again this summer, though, there's a definite method to Guillen's madness.

When his players showed up for work Wednesday, they were as loose as if it was spring training. The rest of Chicago might have been worrying about rust and layoffs and whether the bullpen remembered how to pitch, but the White Sox couldn't be bothered. They played simulated games, took extended batting practice and trusted it would be enough.

It was. When the White Sox took the field for their first World Series game in 46 years, they were ready to play. It was the Astros who looked like they'd needed an earlier wakeup call.

"We hadn't played in so long, I just wanted to get out there and play," A.J. Pierzynski said. "This is fun time. It's the World Series. What else can you ask for?"

Three more victories and their first title since 1917 sounds pretty good.

When general manager Kenny

Williams reshaped his team last winter, he wasn't simply trying to replace power hitters with small ballers. He was looking for good clubhouse guys, blue-collar players who would hustle, grind and play with the enthusiasm of a Little Leaguer.

Guys who wouldn't be thrown by playing 21 straight days as they did in late August and early September. Or by taking an off-season-like break in the middle of the playoffs, and having to face Roger Clemens and his seven Cy Young awards when they returned.

Dye set the tone early, fouling off four pitches before sending

No. 9 over the right-field fence in the first inning, and the White Sox chased Clemens after two. They turned singles into scores with hit-and-runs and heads-up baserunning, and Joe Crede put them ahead for good with a homer in the fourth.

Then Guillen turned the game over to his bullpen in the eighth inning, and that's when everyone held their breaths. If anyone was going to be off, it was the bullpen. Neal Cotts was the only reliever to pitch in the ALCS, and he threw a whopping seven pitches in Game 1 — 11 days ago.

When Cotts gave up a single to Lance Berkman, putting runners

at the corners, it looked as if all that rest was going to catch up to the White Sox.

Oh, no.

Cotts made Morgan Ensberg and Mike Lamb look silly with strikeouts, and big ol' Bobby Jenks finished it off in blazing fashion, striking out three of the four batters he faced with pitches that hit the 100-mph mark.

"Pitching in the World Series, Game 1, that opportunity alone will fire anybody up," Jenks said.

When he fanned Adam Everett to end it, Jenks thrust his arms in the air and his teammates sprinted toward the dugout.

And there's still no sign of rust



Photo courtesy of chicago.whitesox.mlb.com

The winners of Game 1, the Chicago White Sox celebrate their victory over the Houston Astros. The White Sox have previously won 14 of the last 17 World Series.

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