

Schilling of Red Sox retires with 'zero regrets'

By HOWARD ULMAN
AP SPORTS WRITER

Curt Schilling retired from baseball Monday, ending a career in which he won World Series titles with the Boston Red Sox and Arizona Diamondbacks and was one of the game's most dominant pitchers and grittiest competitors.

The 42-year-old right-hander said on his blog he's leaving after 23 years with "zero regrets." Schilling missed all of last season with a shoulder injury after signing a one-year, \$8 million contract.

"The things I was allowed to experience, the people I was able to call friends, teammates, mentors, coaches and opponents, the travel, all of it, are far more than anything I ever thought possible in my lifetime," he wrote.

Schilling had surgery last June and had said he might come back in the middle of this season though he was not under contract. He made no reference to his injury on his blog.

He was co-MVP of the 2001 World Series with Randy Johnson while in Arizona. Schilling also won World Series titles with Boston in 2004 and 2007.

"Curt had a great career and made a profound impact on the Red Sox, helping to restore the Red Sox' status as a championship organization," general manager

Theo Epstein said in an e-mail to The Associated Press. "He was consistently dominant, and never more so than when it mattered most. Not only for what he did — but for when and how he did it — Curt deserves to be remembered with the all-time greats."

Schilling came to Boston for the 2004 season and helped the team win its first World Series in 86 years, pitching Game 2 of a sweep of the St. Louis Cardinals after a surgical procedure to suture a loose tendon in his right ankle and with blood seeping through his sock. The sock is now in the Baseball Hall of Fame.

He was drafted by the Red Sox in the second round in 1986 but was traded to the Baltimore Orioles before playing for the big league club. He pitched for Baltimore, Houston, Philadelphia and Arizona before being wooed to the Red Sox by Epstein.

Schilling, one of the sport's hard

throwers, finishes his career with 3,116 strikeouts, 14th most in baseball history, a 216-146 record and a 3.46 ERA.

He was even better in the postseason, with an 11-2 record,

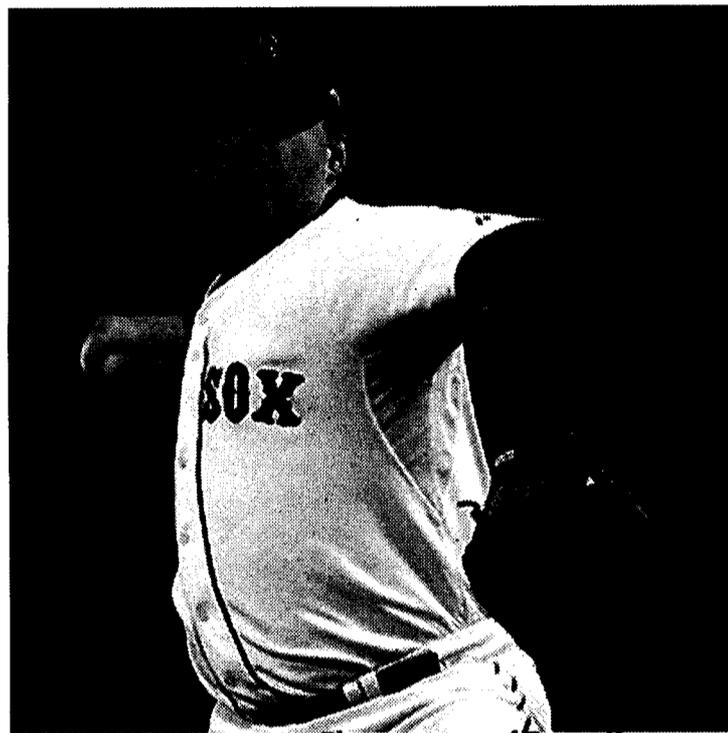


Photo courtesy of Fannation.com

the best of any pitcher with at least 10 decisions, and 2.23 ERA in 19 career starts.

"The game always gave me far more than I ever gave it," Schilling wrote on his blog. "All of those things, every single one of those

memories is enveloped with fan sights and sounds for me."

Schilling was 9-8 with a 3.87 ERA in 2007, when he spent seven weeks on the disabled list with shoulder tendinitis.

In the final game of his career, he won Game 2 of Boston's 2007 World Series sweep of the Colorado Rockies, 2-1. Schilling allowed one run on four hits in 5 1-3 innings and was relieved by Hideki Okajima after walking Todd Helton on a full count.

Schilling's shoulder injury came to light early the following February when he disclosed

on his blog that he and the team disagreed about the best way to treat it. He preferred surgery while the team wanted him to rehabilitate it in hopes of having him pitch in 2008.

He eventually had surgery on

June 23 to repair his right biceps tendon and labrum. Dr. Craig Morgan, the surgeon, said the operation kept Schilling on target to pitch by the middle of this season if he decided to return.

Schilling was known for his outspokenness.

In March 2005, he testified at a congressional hearing concerning steroids. In July 2007, he said on HBO's "Costas Now" that the refusals of Barry Bonds and Mark McGwire to address speculation about steroids use were tantamount to admissions.

Last September, he criticized former teammate Manny Ramirez during a radio appearance.

"He was very kind, and well-mannered, but there were spurts and times when you didn't know who he was," Schilling said. "You know, he was always kind and nice for the most part, but he'd show up the next day and say, 'I'm through with this team, I want out now.'"

On Monday, Schilling announced he was out of baseball.

"The game was here long before I was, and will be here long after I am gone," he wrote. "The only thing I hope I did was never put in question my love for the game, or my passion to be counted on when it mattered most. I did everything I could to win every time I was handed the ball."

Steelers to open season against Titans

By BARRY WILNER
AP FOOTBALL WRITER

The Steelers get their opening-night showcase as Super Bowl champions. The oldest rivalry in football has a first-week renewal in prime time. An old AFL-style doubleheader closes out the weekend.

That's how the NFL will begin the 2009 season, starting with as juicy a matchup as possible: Pittsburgh hosting the Tennessee Titans, who merely had the league's best record in 2008 and who beat the Steelers 31-14 at Heinz Field in the 15th game of the season.

Opening kickoff is Thursday night, Sept. 10 on NBC, which also gets the 178th meeting between the Bears and Packers, in Green Bay on Sunday night, Sept. 13.

For those surprised that the Cowboys, who open their palatial new stadium this season, are not

featured in a night game in Week 1, well, baseball got in the way. So Dallas, the NFL's biggest TV draw, which is moving to Arlington, Texas, near the Rangers' ballpark — the Rangers are home that weekend — will have to wait until the second week, when the Cowboys are expected to host the Sunday nighter.

"We have the chance to get on the national game the second weekend with not being able to get on the first weekend," Cowboys vice president Stephen Jones said Monday at the owners meetings. "We're having to work with the league on some things."

The Cowboys and Lions get to keep their traditional Thanksgiving hosting slots.

The Lions go back to meeting the Packers that day, a matchup that occurred every year from 1951-63 and will happen for the 19th time. The Raiders will be at the Cowboys following that, and the NFL Network night game will

feature the New York Giants at Denver.

"The Thanksgiving game is a tradition and we're proud to have it and to continue it in the new stadium," Jones said. "It's very important to us."

Commissioner Roger Goodell acknowledged there continues to be discussions about rotating the Thanksgiving afternoon contests.

"We did not feel it was appropriate at this time," he said, adding the league's competition and broadcast committees were looking into the matter.

The Monday night doubleheader on ESPN on Sept. 14 will feature Buffalo, with Terrell Owens, at New England, with the Patriots hope, a returning Tom Brady. That game will be followed by San Diego at Oakland — all original AFL franchises.

While the AFL began play in 1960 and is not 50 years old until 2010, the NFL has chosen to observe the 50th season of play by

those franchises. The celebration of that league, which merged with the NFL in 1966 and began play as one entity in 1970, begins with the Sept. 14 doubleheader.

Goodell said he was hopeful a proposal for an expansion of the regular season to either 17 or 18 games could be presented to the owners at the May league meetings in Fort Lauderdale. The league is considering dropping one or two preseason games and extending the regular schedule, but remaining within the current 20-game format, although not likely before 2011.

To do so will involve discussions with the players union and the league's media partners. Of course, the collective bargaining agreement with the players expires after the 2010 season, so a longer schedule is just one of many issues in getting a deal done with the NFLPA.

"I haven't made a decision on whether we'll have a 17-game

or 18-game season. We'll have a good feeling on it when we come out of these meetings," Goodell said. "We have to sit down with our partners and go through negotiations. We think our content continues to be more valuable to our partners."

Goodell also mentioned possibly creating a developmental league: "I would like to explore that in the next negotiations."

He noted that nearly three-quarters of the teams did not raise ticket prices this year, and that the NFL has been hit by the economic downturn. The league trimmed its staff by 15 percent and many teams have laid off employees — even as free agents reap millions in guaranteed salary.

"It's definitely hitting us on our revenue side," he said of the economy. "The risk become greater in that kind of a climate and your revenues become challenged. There's a lot of uncertainty out there."