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Sent: Fri, 23 Oct 2009 17:35:08 -0400
From: Eric Schwerin <eschwerin@senecaga.com>
To: hbiden@rosemontseneca.com, rwalker@rosemontseneca.com, Mike Muldoon <mmuldoon@senecaga.com>, John McGrail <[REDACTED]>, "Person, Fran" <fran_person@ovp.eop.gov>, Missy Owens <[REDACTED]>, Beaub <[REDACTED]>, Alan Hoffman <[REDACTED]>, "Person, Frances" <"/o=eop/ou=first administrative group/cn=recipients/cn=frances_person">, Beaub <"/o=eop/ou=first administrative group/cn=recipients/cn=beaub">
Bcc: "Person, Fran" <"/o=eop/ou=first administrative group/cn=recipients/cn=frances_person">
Subject: What's not to like about Philly?

What's not to like about Philly?

By Gene Wojciechowski
ESPN.com

PHILADELPHIA -- Now that the [Philadelphia Phillies](#) have put the finishing touches on the [Los Angeles Dodgers](#) and Mr. Shower Loofah, [Manny Ramirez](#), it's time to turn our attention to the upcoming World Series.

Assuming the [New York Yankees](#) will do what the Phillies did -- win their league championship playoff in five games (six, tops) -- we're going to have a New Jersey Turnpike series. No way are the Yankees going to need a barf bag against the other L.A. (sort of) team, the Angels. If they do, the Steinbrenners will send manager [Joe Girardi](#) to go live with Balloon Boy's parents.

Anyway, the Yankees will be favored to win the World Series. They've been favored to win it all since [Derek Jeter](#) pulled into the team's spring training parking lot in Tampa about nine months ago. The Yankees have the most expensive baseball ballpark. They have the priciest baseball roster. They have the biggest baseball expectations.

"The Yankees are hot," said Phillies manager Charlie Manuel.

And the Phillies? The Phillies have the 2008 World Series trophy. They'd like to add the 2009 World Series trophy to their collection. And all they have to do is beat a team with homefield advantage and at least three future Hall of Famers.

"Let me tell you," said Manuel, to the Citizens Bank Park sellout crowd after the Phillies 10-4 victory Wednesday night, "we got one more step and we gonna get it."

I'm not rooting for the Phillies (I'll let John Kruk do the secret cheering), but I can see why you could. In fact, I can see why you should.



Manuel

Reason No. 1 -- Manuel

He talks like a hick from the sticks. He looks like a guy who repairs tractor axles for a living. But the Phillies don't have any problems translating that thick, western Virginia accent and those country boy sayings of his (Like this one about the impossibility of pitching perfection: "I've got an old saying: 'That Louisville will find you.'").

Huh? Oh -- Louisville, as in Louisville bat. Got it.

Manuel wasn't immediately embraced in this city -- not that he cared. He grinded away, won last year's World Series while managing with a heavy heart (his mom had just died), and now has the best postseason record among active managers with at least 20 games of playoff experience. In the last two postseasons, he's a combined 18-5.

"As I'm sitting here, I know we can win the World Series again," said Manuel. Dodgers manager Joe Torre congratulated Manuel in a stadium corridor not far from the Phillies clubhouse. Torre, who won four World Series with the Yankees, knows what Manuel has done.

"Getting to the World Series two years in a row is not easy to do," said Torre.

Reason No. 2 -- Pinstripe Overload

The Yankees have made a mind-numbing 48 postseason appearances. They've won 26 World Series titles and 39 pennants. They need another trophy like [Mark Teixeira](#) needs another vowel.

Meanwhile, you can fit the Phillies' World Series hardware (two since 1883) into George Steinbrenner's Altoids tin.

Reason No. 3 -- The Philly Phanatic

The Yankees think God invented pinstripes. The Phanatic will lovingly and appropriately mock them.

Reason No. 4 -- Wallet Size

If you want to root for a franchise that probably spent more money on its 1,400 video monitors at new Yankee Stadium than the [Florida Marlins](#) did on their entire payroll, then the Yankees are your team. Their \$201-million-plus player payroll (and that's *down* from a season ago) once again leads the majors.

The Phillies aren't exactly doing their roster on the cheap, but they're still spending about \$88 million less than the Yankees.



Hudson

Reason No. 5 -- Girlfriend Sightings

Citizens Bank Park is a Kate Hudson-free venue.

Reason No. 6 -- Overdog vs. Underdog

[Mariano Rivera](#) blows a save as often as [Roger Clemens](#) tells the truth about his performance enhancer use. Rivera is the surest thing since sunrises.

The Phillies' [Brad Lidge](#)? The leading cause of gnawed fingernails.

Lidge blew more saves than any closer in the big leagues this year. He might have blown more saves than anybody in the *Little Leagues* this year.

For a while there, he was human lighter fluid.

Nothing against The Sandman, but I'm rooting for The Semi-Flawed One. Lidge has been through baseball reliever hell this season. Wouldn't it be amazing if Lidge, not the amazing Rivera, put the Yanks to sleep?

Reason No. 7 -- City Envy

New York is The City That Never Sleeps.

Philadelphia is The City That Has An Inferiority Complex About The City That Never Sleeps.

New York and Philly are separated by a turnpike, about 100 miles and attitude. New Yorkers consider Philadelphia a really nice imitation of Cleveland -- and Philadelphians know it too. Nothing would give this city more pleasure than watching the Phillies slice and dice the Big Apple into baseball submission.



Kalas

Reason No. 8 -- This One's For Harry

Beloved. Adored. Revered. Respected. Remembered. Every single day.

There's a reason why the Phillies keep Harry Kalas' sportcoat and a pair of his loafers in their dugout each game and wear a patch with his initials on their unis. The legendary play-by-play man, who died earlier this season, was, as our Jayson Stark so eloquently wrote at the time, "the soundtrack of Philadelphia Phillies baseball."

If the Phillies beat the Yankees, Manuel ought to spray champagne on Harry's jacket. For old time's sake.

Reason No. 9 -- Watchability

The Phillies hit four home runs in Wednesday night's NLCS clincher against the Dodgers. They've hit 14 homers during this postseason and outscored L.A., 35-16, in the NLCS. No team has scored more runs during these playoffs than Philly.

They hit 224 dingers during the regular season, trailing only the Yankees (244). The Yankees were first in the big leagues in RBIs, runs and total bases. The Phillies were first in the NL in all those categories. They're the closest thing to an AL lineup playing in the other league. Plus, they stole 119 bases.

"They kept coming at us," said Torre.

The Phillies' pitching will undergo serious strain against the Yankees' lineup, but ...

"Right now, for the National League, we're outstanding and we can stay after you and we can put up a big number on you anytime during the game," said Manuel. "And that makes us a real good team."

Think this Phillies-Yankees thing might be fun?

Reason No. 10 -- Two-peats

No team has won back-to-back World Series since ... the Yankees. In fact, the Yanks went three-peat from 1998-1999-2000.

And no National League team has gone back-to-back since the 1975-76 [Cincinnati Reds](#).

Be nice to see someone new make a run at dynasty status.

Reason No. 11 -- Confessions

Admitted PED users on the Yankees: two. Admitted PED users on the Phillies: zero.

Reason No. 12 -- Start Spreading The News

The Yankees play Frank Sinatra's "New York, New York" on the stadium P.A. system after a win.

The Phillies play Sinatra's "High Hopes" -- sung by Kalas -- after a win. One is a self-back pat. The other seems more, well, genuine.



Howard

Reason No. 13 -- Ryan Howard

A-Rod is, at last, having a postseason to remember, not forget. But Howard has RBIs and hits in eight of his first nine playoff games this October (he went 0-for-2 Wednesday evening with two walks and a run scored). And Howard, who has led or shared the majors lead in regular season RBIs three of the last four seasons, does all of this in a quiet, understated way -- and usually against a huge defensive shift to the right side of the infield.

It wasn't much of a surprise, but Howard was named the NLCS MVP (.333, two home runs, eight RBIs).

Reason No. 14 -- Home Address

New Yankee Stadium is drop-dead gorgeous. This is indisputable. But you need to make A-Rod money to afford a seat in the place. It wasn't built for the people, but for the corporate suites.

Citizens Bank Park has the Liberty Bell, but not all the whistles. It is the anti-corporate park. Working stiff with working stiff paychecks can actually afford to go to a game. And unlike new Yankee Stadium, there aren't empty luxury couches behind home plate.

Reason No. 15 -- City of Love?

It's hard not to like these Phillies. I'm not saying the Yankees aren't likeable. They are, in sort of a regal way. After all, they're the Yankees.

But Philadelphia is crazy about this team -- and that doesn't happen very often. Remember, this city's sports motto is brutally consistent: "Philadelphia. We Hate Everybody."

But not these Phillies. The city bear hugs them. If the most cynical sports fans on the planet are heads over cleats about these guys, then they must be worth the effort.

Said Phillies reliever [Ryan Madson](#): "I think we're just ordinary guys that just do extraordinary things."

Now we find out if they can do those things against the extraordinary Yankees.

Gene Wojciechowski is the senior national columnist for ESPN.com. You can contact him at gene.wojciechowski@espn3.com. Hear Gene's podcasts and ESPN Radio appearances by [clicking here](#).

Eric D. Schwerin
Rosemont Seneca Partners, LLC
1010 Wisconsin Ave., NW
Suite 705
Washington, DC 20007
(202) 333-1880
eschwerin@rosemontseneca.com

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