

THE WORLD SERIES

Fueled by Rocket, Yankees complete 4-0 sweep

By Ben Walker
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Roger Clemens had waited too long not to savor every moment of this glorious night.

With the final out of the World Series, he bolted for the mound and, flanked by two of his sons, grabbed manager Joe Torre in a bear hug and found it hard to let go.

Then, while his New York Yankees teammates were still dousing each other with champagne, Clemens sprinted back out to the field, climbed on the dugout roof and ran up and down, slapping every outstretched hand in the front row.

The Rocket had landed. The ring was his.

Clemens pitched the Yankees to their second straight World Series sweep, shutting down the Atlanta Braves 4-1 Wednesday night and

ending his quest for the one and only prize that eluded him.

"This must be what it's like to be a Yankee," Clemens said. "This is what everybody said it was all about."

With raucous fans waving yellow, plastic brooms all over the ballpark and Clemens bouncing around on the mound, the Yankees won their record 25th championship and third in four seasons.

Game 4 marked New York's 12th Series victory in a row, matching the mark set by its Murderers' Row teams.

All his life, Clemens had hoped for this chance and, at last, he commanded the October stage. Showing the form that earned him five Cy Young Awards and 247 wins in 16 seasons, he shut out Atlanta into the eighth to outduel John Smoltz.

Brought to the Bronx this spring

from Toronto in a trade for David Wells that many Yankees fans disliked, Clemens walked off the mound to rousing cheers, tipping his cap and holding both hands high to acknowledge the ovation.

"It seemed like a perfect setup," Torre said. "I couldn't see it not happening tonight, not with the way his career had gone."

Clemens recalled seeing his teammates get their 1998 World Series rings in April, and being a bit envious.

"I was sitting there watching them receive them. They said, 'We're going to get you one,'" he said.

They sure did.

Mariano Rivera, who had two saves and a win in the Series, was selected MVP.

"Everybody talked about last year, but this is unbelievable, back-to-back," he said.

Owner George Steinbrenner's

team finished off a week in which it simply overwhelmed the club that had best record in the majors. Along the way, the Yankees also:

— Became baseball's first repeat champion since Toronto in 1992-93.

— Posted the first set of consecutive Series sweeps since the Yankees in 1938-39. New York beat San Diego four straight last year, capping off a record 125-win season.

— Completed an incredible run in which they won 18 of 19 post-season games. The only loss came when Clemens was beaten by Pedro Martinez at Fenway Park 11 days earlier.

— Overcame a year of adversity, from manager Joe Torre's prostate cancer in spring training to the death of outfielder Paul O'Neill's father early Wednesday. Scott Brosius and Luis Sojo also lost their fathers, Hall of Famers

Joe DiMaggio and Catfish Hunter died and Darryl Strawberry was beset by health and legal problems.

And, in the last game of the 20th century, their all-century team pitcher ended all debate about which club was most dominant this decade.

"Having to validate what we did last year, one of those freak years where you win everything and everything turns out well," Torre said, "then all of a sudden we zipped through the postseason."

For Atlanta, the loss was its record-tying eighth straight in the Series, a string that began in 1996 against the Yankees.

"I think they think in their minds that they had a tremendous year with all the ballclub went through," Braves manager Bobby Cox said. "They're disappointed just like I am."

Now with Beavers, Erickson back at WSU

By Nicholas K. Geranios
The Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. — It's been more than a decade since Dennis Erickson stalked the football sidelines in the Palouse.

In 1988, Erickson coached Washington State to its first bowl victory in 72 years, then left for college football's promised land at Miami. Saturday, he brings his Oregon State team to Pullman to play Washington State.

Although Erickson has returned to the Palouse on pleasure trips, this time it's different.

"Going back now, it's a job and it's business," Erickson said. "As far as going back and playing in Martin Stadium, had I left there two or three years ago, it might be a big deal. But that's been 11 years ago that I left."

Erickson is a legend in pea and lentil country. He helped build the University of Idaho into a football power from 1982-85, posting a 32-15 record in four seasons. Current Idaho coach Chris Tormey was an assistant under Erickson for two years.

After a season at Wyoming, Erickson became head coach at WSU, located eight miles from the Idaho campus. He posted his only losing season as a college coach, 3-7-1 in 1987. Then the Cougars went 9-3 and beat Houston in the 1988 Aloha Bowl. It was the team's first bowl victory since the 1916 Rose Bowl.

Erickson left before the 1989 season for Miami, where he won a couple of national championships. He was succeeded in Pullman by Mike Price, a long-time friend.

"We're very good friends," Erickson said of Price. "We've exchanged ideas over the years, our families are very close and he's a guy I respect very much."

"But when you compete, you compete harder against brothers and friends than you do against other people," Erickson added.

Erickson and Price are both products of Everett High School, where they were both successful quarterbacks.

"He was a year ahead of me, so we both played on the same team," Erickson said.

Both were young assistants at Washington State in 1970 under

Jim Sweeney.

When Price was head coach at Weber State, he faced Erickson's Idaho teams four times. Each coach won two.

Price also plays up their friendship, and downplays any personal rivalry.

"I want to win the game and so does he," Price said. "But it's the Cougars versus the Beavers. It's not the Snohomish County coaching cup at stake."

Erickson hired Price's son, Eric, as a graduate assistant at Miami in 1992-93, coaching wide receivers. Eric Price is now WSU's quarterbacks coach.

The friendship of the two head coaches extends beyond the football field.

"I like to hang out with Dennis," Price said. "He's a better golfer than I am, but I'm a better fisherman than he is."

Ironically, Price and Erickson are now coaching the two lowest-profile programs in the Pac-10. Oregon State and Washington State are both small-town universities, in isolated rural areas, where it can be difficult to recruit urban talent.

They play in small stadiums, far from media centers.

"The difference is, they (WSU) have won and gone to bowl games and went to the Rose Bowl game in the last couple of years and we haven't gone in 20 years," Erickson said.

Erickson doesn't expect a lot of heckling from Cougar fans with long memories.

"I've got more friends than enemies in that area," he said.

But people still angry at his abrupt departure from WSU "probably have a right to be," Erickson said.

"I was there two years and decided to leave to go to Miami and have an opportunity to win a couple of national championships," he said.

"Probably the timing wasn't right after being there only two years, but like anybody in any business, if you have an opportunity, you've got to try to take advantage of it," he said.

Price doesn't think there should be any sore feelings.

"He did a great job at Idaho and Washington State," Price said. "I think he's improved every program he's been in."

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