

DEADLINE ASSIGNMENT:

“Beer-less Bar Talk”

By Henry Hargitai

“McHale! I’m at Sal’s! It’s right across from Landsdowne!” Jim Morehead, 58, yells into his phone. McHale is late, he was busy at work. His tardiness angers Morehead almost as much as Sal’s Pizza running out of beer before 6:00 p.m.

The Fall Classic coming to Fenway means Landsdowne St. is packed, not just crowded. It means Sal’s runs out of beer at 6:00, not 11:00.

And since there’s a lot of people, no beer, and another two hours until first pitch, there’s only one way to fill the void: conversation.

“All, but I wasn’t able to make it to 1918,” is what John Barrett, 78, told me when I asked him which of the Red Sox World Series he’d been in attendance for. The Rockport, Massachusetts native has been a season ticket holder for over twenty years and was there to witness the Red Sox climb atop the baseball world in 2004, 2007 and 2013.

He sits in Sal’s wearing a leather Red Sox jacket and a cap, slowly eating his pizza as the October baseball buzz zooms around him.

He’s seen it all. He was there when they told Ted Williams to sit out the final game of the season to preserve his batting title, and he remembers Ted Williams saying “Hell fucking no.” He was also there when Carl Yastrzemski needed to go 6/8 to win the triple crown, and says Fenway Park had never been louder.

He was also there last night when Yastrzemski threw out the first pitch in front of a sold-out Fenway Park for game one.

“This is the best Red Sox team I’ve ever seen,” Barrett says. Morehead hears this from across the table.

The two have never met. But Morehead, like Barrett, has been to every Red Sox World Series and is having a hard time with the idea of the 2018 Red Sox being the best.

“2004 had a much better bullpen, not to mention that bloody sock guy,” Morehead says. He adds that their one-two punch of Curt Schilling and Pedro Martinez was far better than the current duo of Chris Sale and David Price. “Price has a history of cracking in the playoffs. Pedro was ice-cold.”

“But Pedro had 57,000 people asking him who his daddy was,” Barrett fired back.

This is when it dawned on me: The only thing more confrontational than Red Sox fans filled with beer is, well, Red Sox fans *not* filled with beer.

One says the 2004 team is the best. The other says this 2018 is the best. Both were there for all of them, so I ask a question in hopes to bring them back together.

And it works.

“2013 was the most special,” they both say.

Well, because of the marathon, right?

For Morehead, this is exactly why it was the most special. He recalls the tragedy that was the Boston Marathon but says Jonny Gomes placing the iconic Boston Strong jersey on the marathon finish line etched that 2013 World Series victory in his mind forever.

For Barrett, however, the 2013 team was special because of an unlikely celebrity. Steve Horgan, or, Officer Horgan, is the Boston Police officer who gained national attention after he was photographed celebrating a Red Sox home run while Tigers' outfielder Torii Hunter came crashing over the right field fence.

“My son was with me at the World Series that year, and he was able to get onto the field after they won,” he explains before taking out his phone to show me a picture of his son standing with Officer Horgan, both with their arms pumped in the air. “It was real. It was special.”

It's almost 7:30 now, and Morehead turns his head towards the door. He searches deep into the crowd as if he were searching for the bar's missing beer. But it's not that. There's still no beer. He waves his arms frantically, and a figure in the distance waves back.

It's McHale.

He's tardy, so they catch him up. He agrees 2013 was the most special but says the 1986 team had the most talent, despite not winning it.

“That asshole Buckner let it all slip away. But man, that team was loaded,” Mchale says.

“Buckner is an asshole to you, but a hero to me,” I tell him.

“How old are you?”

“Old enough,” I say.

“I'm surprised you even know who Bill Buckner is.”

“Of course, my mom was at the game.”

“No shit? Anyway, next round is on me. Junior, what's your drink?”

I really had thought my question about the most special World Series had brought the men together. But the look on McHale's face when we informed him the bar had run out of beer and the ensuing laughter may have actually been the most special.

After our laughter pierced the night, the three men said it was starting to look like the Sox were on their way to the top again.

"It'd be great if we swept them. But I almost hope they don't so they have a chance to win it at Fenway," Barrett said.

"Oh, they'll be back here," I replied.

Barrett takes a look around the bar, soaking in the World Series energy, knowing how special nights like these really are. He points up at the Sal's Pizza logo.

"And so will we," he says.