

## Roberts made steal of century for Red Sox

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As Red Sox manager Terry Francona met the press before World Series Game 4, he looked around the room and said:

"You know what? If Dave Roberts doesn't steal that base, we're home now watching this on TV."

Yes, that's how close the Red Sox came to having their season end in Game 4 of the American League Championship Series. Down 0-3 in the series and trailing 4-3 in Game 4, the Red Sox rallied in the last of the ninth to tie the score. They did it with a leadoff walk to Kevin Millar by New York closer Mariano Rivera, the steal by pinch runner Roberts and a base hit by Bill Mueller.

By the way, Roberts was safe by an eyelash. Catcher Jorge Posada of the New York Yankees made a perfect peg, but Roberts' speed made the difference.

The Sox went on to win when David Ortiz hit a two-run homer in the 12th inning. That proved to be a tide-turner of the first rank. From there, the Red Sox then battled through another grinder in Game 5 - this one covering 14 innings and nearly six hours - before Ortiz delivered again, this time with a game-winning single.

Again in that game, the Red Sox came very close to losing it. The Yankees had Ruben Sierra on first base in the top of the ninth when Tony Clark looped a drive down the right field line. It took one bounce into the stands for a ground-rule double. If the ball had stayed in play, Sierra would have been able to score. Because of the ground rule, he had to hold at third, and the Sox got out of the inning.

So now they were down 3-2 in the series, but they had Curt Schilling emerging as the Game 6 starter just when it seemed that he would not pitch again because of an injury to a tendon in his right ankle. The injury had limited his ineffectiveness in Game 1, and forced the Sox to scratch him as the Game 5 starter.

However, with the travel day off before Game 6 at New York, Dr. William Morgan of the Red Sox medical staff was able to devise a surgical procedure which would enable him to, in effect, create a barrier to hold the tendon in place. Schilling called it "an absolute last-ditch effort that worked."

With blood sometimes seeping through his sock where the tendon area had been stitched, Schilling gave a true-warrior performance, going seven innings as the Red Sox won 4-2 on a three-run homer by Mark Bellhorn. Until this game, Bellhorn had been in such a strikeout-strewn slump that he was dropped to No. 9 in the order even as Francona fended off critics who believed that Bellhorn should be benched.

"Tonight we saw an illustration of the awesome character of Curt Schilling," Francona said after the game.

So there was the series, tied up and right where it had been a year ago - Game 7 before a hostile Yankee Stadium crowd. This time, there was no down-to-the-wire drama. This time, the Red Sox got two homers from Johnny Damon - the second a grand slam - and a one-hit pitching job over six innings by Derek Lowe.

When "New York, New York" played over the Yankee Stadium loudspeakers, the Red Sox celebrated on the field. They had won the 11th pennant in franchise history, and were on their way to a World Series for the first time since 1986.

The ALCS had opened in a bad way for the Bosox. With Schilling shelled in Game 1, the Sox fell behind 8-0 against Mike Mussina, then suddenly rallied after he had thrown a no-hitter at them for 6 2/3 innings. They pulled to within 8-7, but Bernie Williams beat them back with a two-run double and the Yankees won 10-7.

Pedro Martinez pitched well in Game 2, but Jon Lieber picked that night to stone the Sox lineup. John Olerud's two-run homer opened it up slightly for the Yankees and they went on to win 3-1.

New York came to Fenway for Game 3, and it was not a pretty sight. The Yankees rattled 22 hits in a 19-8 victory, but the game would have long-range effect for the Sox carrying into the World Series.

With the bullpen getting battered, Tim Wakefield volunteered to give up his scheduled Game 5 start and work in relief. He threw 3 1/3 innings, taking one for the team and enabling Francona to realign his rotation as give some rest to his relief corps.

"What Tim Wakefield did for us was huge. It shows exactly the kind of teammate he is," Francona said.

The new rotation gave Lowe a chance to return to starting, and he went on to give standout performances in Games 4 and 7, leading to another gem in Game 4 of the World Series.