

Yankees expect changes in offseason

By Ben Walker
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — The Florida dugout was littered with champagne bottles, beer cans, cigars and a discarded box of Kodak film. A snapshot of the winning side, for sure.

"I don't believe we won," said Marlins catcher Ivan Rodriguez, who kissed home plate when it was all over. "But we did it."

Well into the wee hours Sunday, long after manager Jack McKeon and his team left Yankee Stadium to celebrate their World Series championship elsewhere, the cleanup would begin.

Pretty soon, look for the New York Yankees to start cleaning house, too.

"A lot of people are upset," center fielder Bernie Williams said. "There's going to be a lot of changes."

Bench coach Don Zimmer sounds adamant that he's leaving. Hitting coach Rick Down might lose his job. General manager Brian Cashman? Pitcher Jeff Weaver? Third baseman Aaron Boone? All-Star second baseman Alfonso Soriano?

It's all possible in owner George Steinbrenner's world. Especially after such an upset, finished off by Josh Beckett and low-budget Florida 2-0 in Game 6 on Saturday night.

"I just think to get this far, and accomplish as much as we have, we should feel better about this thing than we do. But unfortunately, because of somebody's attitude, we're considered failures," pitching coach Mel Stottlemyre said.

Who knows? Maybe even the security people who let the Marlins stroll through a gate in left-center field to toast their title in Monument Park will be in jeopardy.

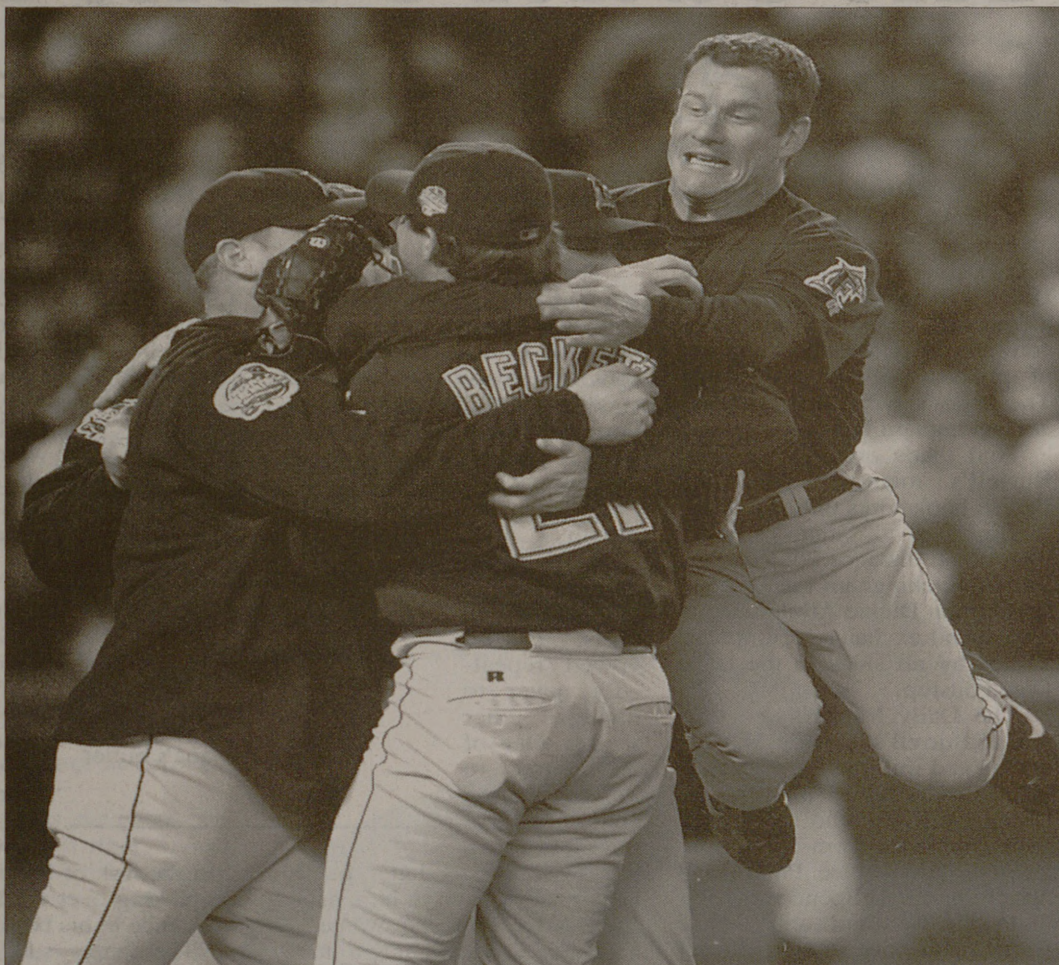
"Of course I was disappointed, but we will be meeting soon to make whatever changes are needed to bring back a stronger, better team for New York and our fans," Steinbrenner said in a statement Sunday. "You can count on it."

One thing is not likely to undergo a major shake-up: the Marlins.

When they last won the World Series in 1997, the Marlins underwent a startling makeover, jettisoning stars such as Gary Sheffield, Moises Alou, Al Leiter and more. The result was an embarrassing 108 losses in 1998 that made them the laughingstock of baseball.

But out of that wreck, then-GM Dave Dombrowski and the Marlins were already building for the future.

The terrible record left Florida with a high draft choice, and Beckett was the overall No. 2



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The Florida Marlins celebrate their second world championship in six years after a 2-0 win over the Yankees at Yankee Stadium Saturday night. The Marlins won their first title in 1997.

pick in June 1999. Miguel Cabrera signed the next month as a 16-year-old free agent.

First baseman Derrek Lee, starter Brad Penny and reliever Braden Loper also joined the Marlins in trades for the likes of Kevin Brown, Matt Mantei and Edgar Renteria.

And slowly, they began to get better. Not that anyone expected them to make it this far so quickly.

It certainly didn't look good in mid-May when manager Jeff Torborg was fired. At the time, the 72-year-old McKeon was at home in North Carolina, watching his grandson play college ball.

McKeon went to speak with Marlins owner Jeffrey Loria, thinking it was just a general chat about baseball. McKeon insisted he didn't know it was a job interview — in fact, at the end of their conversation, he called his future boss "Jerry."

By late May, the Marlins were in last place

with a 19-29 record.

"I took this job with the idea that I can turn this club around and make it a winner," McKeon said Saturday night. "I had no idea we would get to the World Series, and I had no idea that we would win the World Series."

By Sunday, the business of baseball was underway. Marlins pitchers Ugueth Urbina and Rick Helling filed for free agency, as did Yankees catcher John Flaherty.

In the coming weeks, the 2004 season will begin to take shape. Chances are, the Yankees will be favored to win the World Series while the surprising, wild-card Marlins will be forecast to finish behind Atlanta in the NL East.

"I guess it's kind of strange to say, but I still think we got the best team in the league," said Andy Pettitte, outpitched by Beckett in Game 6. "But we didn't win. Obviously, we're not the best team because we didn't win."

"There'll be changes, I'm sure," he said.

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Cowboys

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after having a rough outing last week at Nebraska. Terrence Murphy led A&M receivers with six catches and 98 yards.

This loss was the Aggies' second in a row and leaves them in a struggle for last place of the Big 12 South with Baylor. The Aggies will try to end the streak next week at home against Kansas.

Patience

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experience, getting better and making tough, hard-nosed runs. For a redshirt freshman, he's done some really good things."

Despite Lewis' success, however, A&M's offense was again riddled by inconsistency and an inability to score inside the opponent's red zone. The Aggies were able to gain 367 yards on offense, but only converted that into 10 points.

"We struggled when we got inside the 20," Franchione said. "We need to capitalize on every opportunity. If we don't, we make it hard on ourselves."

The win improved Oklahoma State to 6-1 and kept the Cowboys in control of their own destiny in the Big 12 South.

How the times have changed. The last time the Cowboys rolled into College Station, they were held to 199 yards and seven points in front of stands decked in red, white and blue. On that day two years ago, a confident Aggie squad feared overlooking a meager opponent.

The shoe is now on the other foot. This time it was Oklahoma State hoping not to overlook A&M before taking on No. 1 Oklahoma next week.

At 3-5, A&M is in danger of turning in its first losing season since 1982. This is not how Aggie fans envisioned the beginning of the Franchione era.

For now, those fans will have to be patient as A&M endures another rebuilding season. It takes time for a coach to implement a new system and attitude. If losses like this continue for much longer, however, patience may quickly run out.

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