

**MORE ON THE POSTSEASON:** Wild-card previews; team capsules; daily schedule; and a closer look at how the Nationals made it this far

**Expanded coverage, E4-6**



**NEW DEAL:** The last time Washington baseball fans got to enjoy a major league postseason, FDR was a first-year president.

**Full story, E2**

# PLAYOFF PREVIEW

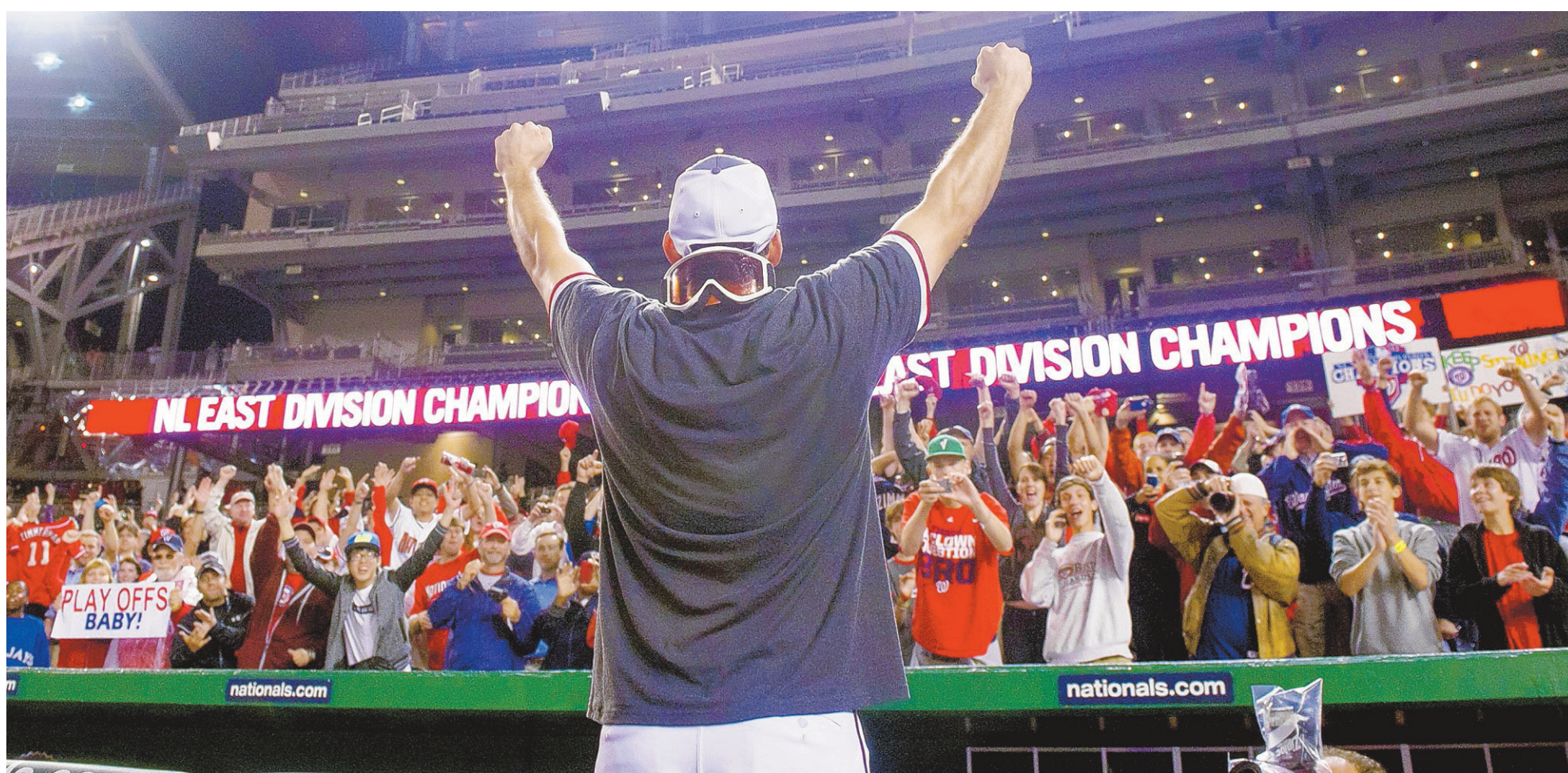
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2012

The Washington Times

washingtontimes.com/sports SECTION E

**“Even when the team was bad, he never broke character. He stayed himself. He kind of hovered above it. You can see why he made it through it OK, and why he played so well on such bad teams. It’s just who he is. He’s just a really good player with a really good mindset. Sure it wore on him. It had to. But it didn’t affect him.”**

— Jayson Werth



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREW HARNIK/THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Third baseman Ryan Zimmerman exults before the Nationals Park faithful Monday after Washington clinched the National League East title. Zimmerman, who made his major league debut in 2005, has stuck with the organization through a slew of losing seasons. “Losing all those games, you kind of learn why you were losing and what you did wrong,” Zimmerman said.

## UNBREAKABLE

Over the years, Zimmerman’s spirit persisted

By AMANDA COMAK  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

**R**yan Zimmerman draped his arms over the railing of the dugout. He looked to his left, and then to his right, at the frenzied fans dancing in the aisles at Nationals Park. Behind him, his teammates continued dispensing the hugs and high-fives that began with fervor seconds earlier.

He let the pandemonium wash over him. He let the words displayed on the center field scoreboard sink in.

The Washington Nationals — his Washington Nationals from the very moment he was drafted — were the National League East champions.

“The odds were in my favor that I was going to win at some point here, right?” Zimmerman said later, soaked from head to toe in celebratory beer and champagne.

Three seasons ago, Zimmerman’s team lost 103 games. The year before that, it lost 102. The Nationals were not just doormats but often laughingstocks, with Zimmerman as the light they hoped would someday guide them out



of those dark days.

Before the 2012 season began, Zimmerman had witnessed 573 of the Nationals’ 640 losses. He spent his formative years in the major leagues around plenty of players who saw winning as a lower priority than filling their coffers and were beaten down by years of mediocrity or worse.

And yet there he was Monday, the

man those closest to him say is largely unchanged from the day he reached the majors in September 2005 as a baby-faced 20-year-old, enjoying the moment he’d only seen in his vague visions of the future.

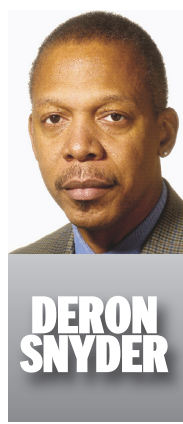
“It was, without question, the most satisfied and content he’s ever been in

» see **SPiRiT** | E5



THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Zimmerman debuted for the Nationals in September 2005 as a baby-faced 20-year-old. Seven years later, he will finally make his playoff debut when Washington plays its postseason opener Sunday.



**DERON SNYDER**

## Nats actually had quick rise to postseason

**T**he Nationals played seven forgettable, regrettable seasons in Washington before establishing themselves among the majors’ best teams this year. It seems like only yesterday that they compiled back-to-back 100-loss campaigns, while finishing last in the NL East five times in their first six seasons in D.C. There were times when you wondered if the

Nats ever would field a winner.

D.C. baseball fans were elated to have a team again but still scarred from the Washington Senators experience, Parts I and II. The Expos ended the District’s 33-year streak without Major League Baseball when MLB relocated them from Montreal in 2005, but the clock on playoff-free baseball kept ticking, hitting 78 years entering this

season.

Now the countdown has stopped and the Nats have arrived, sending waves of relief and joy through the city. Although the pace might have felt torturous, D.C. actually reached this point quicker than most cities that received new or relocated teams in MLB’s Expansion Era (post-1960).

“I was just thrilled to get a team in

2005,” said Steve Buckhantz, a native Washingtonian and longtime sports broadcaster who has called Wizards games for 15 seasons. Buckhantz remembers being taken out of elementary school by his grandfather to go watch Senators games on Opening Day.

“When I hear people say we haven’t

» see **SNYDER** | E4



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS

President Franklin D. Roosevelt threw out the ceremonial first pitch at Griffith Stadium before Game 3 of the 1933 World Series between Washington and the New York Giants as Senators manager Joe Cronin (third from right) and New York counterpart Bill Terry (second from right) looked on. The Fall Classic was a national obsession, as evidenced by a scoreboard outside a building in Norfolk, Va., that tracked the developments of Game 1. The Giants won the World Series 4-1, and it would be 79 years before Washington would experience postseason baseball again.

# A trip back in time

## D.C. was different place the last time Washington played in the postseason

By NATHAN FENNO  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

On the last day, hope and desperation swirled through Washington like the October breeze that forced men to don double-breasted top-coats and tug down their fedoras under bright sun.

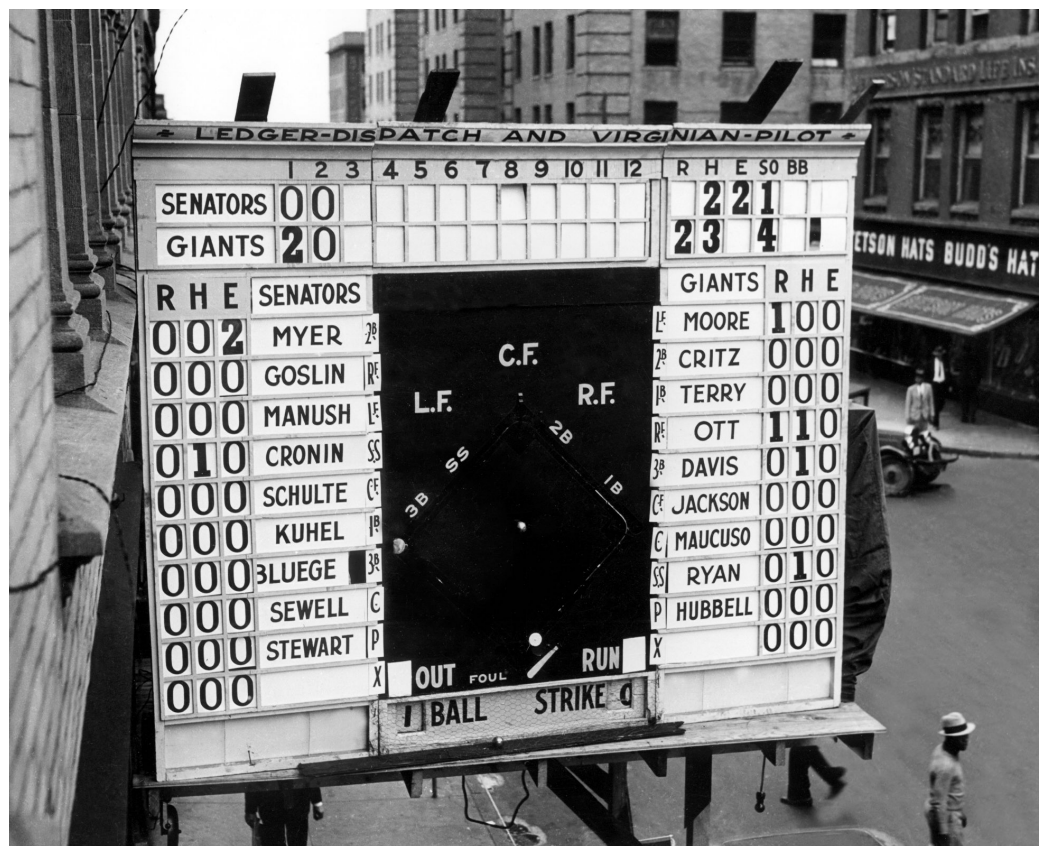
Past the Navy Yard, where 7,000 men in a double line four blocks long camped out at 10 p.m. a few days earlier to apply for 500 jobs as laborers. Pay started at 43 cents per hour when nearly a quarter of the country sat unemployed. Nearby, in the forgotten grit off South Capitol Street, where a celebration drenched in beer and shaving cream would rage almost 79 years later, sat Schindler Peanut Products and Isadore Kobler's grocery and an undertaker's office, interspersed with a lumberyard, coal yard and Standard Oil's fuel plant.

Through the pages of the city's six daily newspapers that preached recovery and spoke of the Great Depression in the past tense: "We're doing our part ... Gathering momentum with each succeeding day ... America is going places again." Advertisements for porterhouse steaks and ankle-length coats made of 48 seal pelts and 11-tube radios that snatched broadcasts from Europe reclined next to tales of work camps in the Midwest to house a million homeless and men drinking poison or shooting their families, then themselves after losing jobs.

"A new hope," Rev. James E. Freeman, the bishop of Washington, wrote, "is evident in the hearts of the people."

And across town, amid the scatter of Stadium Lunch and vacant storefronts and the Home Plate Filling Station, the hope and desperation swept up against James W. Craig. Off Georgia Avenue, a few steps from U Street to the south on land that would become Howard University Hospital decades later, the guardian of the gate for employees and players at Griffith Stadium had a mission.

Down three games to one to the New York Giants in the World Series, the Washington Senators were in a fix Oct. 7, 1933. That didn't stop boys from donning white coats to try and sneak past Craig. No luck. A man showed up



with two bottles of liniment he insisted Senators trainer Mike Martin sent for. Not true. Another hefted a wash basin, allegedly on order from the Senators' clubhouse. Craig turned him away, too.

★★★

In the outfield stands, a U.S. Army band played "Shuffle Off to Buffalo." American flags fluttered from the second level of grandstands. But on the last day a Major League Baseball postseason game would be played in Washington for almost eight decades, only the temporary wedge-shaped bleachers in center field that held around 800 fans for \$1.10 each were full.

Scalpers unloaded tickets bearing Senators owner Clark Griffith's facsimile signature at a loss. Three bucks for a box seat, the price of two dinners in front of Maxim Lowe's Famous Shoreham Orchestra at the tony Shoreham Hotel overlooking Rock Creek Park.

"This will go down in the annals of scalping," one reporter wrote in the Washington Herald, "as one of the greatest tragedies ever to befall the gentle guild which earns its coffee and cakes buying low and selling high."

Three hundred and fifty policemen eyed the crowd. Prohibition would end in December.

Concern about the nation's whiskey supply — 18 million gallons — loomed. Would there be enough? Three-point-two-percent beer, the only alcohol 26-year-old Senators manager and shortstop Joe Cronin drank, already was legal. Pabst Blue Ribbon insisted its brew "soothes jaded nerves, develops fresh energy and helps build a sound, healthy body." But Griffith Stadium remained as dry as the afternoon. That was a good thing for home plate umpire Charley Moran.

After a close call at first base the night before, Moran ejected Senators outfielder Heinie Manush in the sixth inning of the Giants' eventual 11-inning win. The first ejection in World Series history enraged Manush and the crowd. Soda bottles showered the field. Manush had to be restrained from attacking Moran, compared to a battleship pursuing a tugboat. Manush succeeded in snapping the umpire's black bow tie back against his throat.

From the stands, a "well-known gambler" shouted at Moran: "We'll get you for that!"

And a woman of "unmistakable culture, breeding and fashion" sitting near President Franklin Delano Roosevelt added: "Oh, kill the umpire!"

So, a phalanx of grumbling officers protected Moran as the 28,454 fans (extra stands increased capacity to 35,743) waited for the

Senators and President Roosevelt to emerge. Regarded as a good-luck charm after throwing out the first pitch in Game 3, the president told 100 members of the Baseball Writers Association of America visiting him in the White House's Red Parlor the day before that he would attend Game 5. Then the president threw an arm around Babe Ruth, on hand along with Walter Johnson, and recalled when Ruth upstaged a campaign stop in Binghamton, N.Y., in 1920. No one knew which team the New York-born president supported, but the Senators figured they needed all the help they could muster.

★★★

The police kept busy. Pickpockets relieved Edgar Greever of \$90 and George Wyncoop of \$53 in the stands. Capt. William E. Holmes' first precinct men shut down 11th and Pennsylvania Avenue as fans gathered by the electronic scoreboard on the side of the Washington Star building with 11 loudspeakers for the National Broadcasting Company's play-by-play. And the police arrested a man named Robert Alexander, his home separated from Griffith Stadium by a brisk walk.

Two days earlier, Lawrence Zimmerman took his son, Lawrence Jr., to Game 3. His 37-year-old wife, Louise, stayed at their bakery on 17th Street. As she worked alone in the front room, Alexander came in and demanded money at knifepoint. She refused. So, Alexander jumped the counter and slashed her throat.

A baker in back of the shop, Rudolph Wehner, hit Alexander in the arm with a rolling pin and chased him into the street along with John Reynolds, a cab driver. In Alexander's haste to exit, he lost a shoe. That helped police catch him, as Louise Zimmerman lay in Emergency Hospital breathing from a metal tube in her throat.

Katsuji Debuchi, the Japanese ambassador and baseball aficionado, arrived at Griffith Stadium with a pair of field glasses. Sen. James Hamilton Lewis and Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, baseball's first commissioner came, too. The blue pigeon that spent much of Game 3 pecking its way through the infield, undisturbed by shouts or baseball, showed up. Some Giants regarded the pigeon as a "bird of ill omen."

Red-capped ushers, with nothing else to do, swung Giants bats in front of their dugout. Then, an hour before the 1:15 p.m. first pitch, the flag, bunting and green cushions were removed from the president's box. The game

» see FLASHBACK | E5

**In the outfield stands, a U.S. Army band played "Shuffle Off to Buffalo." American flags fluttered from the second level of grandstands. But on the last day a Major League Baseball postseason game would be played in Washington for almost eight decades, only the temporary wedge-shaped bleachers in center field that held around 800 fans for \$1.10 each were full.**



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## SPIRIT

From page E1

my time knowing him," said Brodie Van Wageningen, Zimmerman's agent.

His even-keeled demeanor finally gave way to pure joy. He'd never let the losing beat him. He'd never let himself fall victim to those around him with lower aspirations.

"A few years ago, I even heard a few guys say the only times they're happy are on the first and 15th of every month," said left-hander Ross Detwiler, who made his major league debut with the Nationals in 2007. "I'm going out there and trying my hardest, and you've got a guy who doesn't care about anything but a paycheck? Those people obviously broke.

"I'm glad Zim never got to that point."

## Never too high, never too low

When the Nationals' regular season ended Wednesday, Zimmerman appeared in his 990th major league game.

As a member of a team awaiting its Division Series opponent, he will fall just shy of reaching 1,000 games without a playoff appearance.

Former National Adam Dunn is the active leader in that department at 1,721 games.

So for figures such as Zimmerman, who spend much of their careers as the best player on a bad team, the line they walk is a thin one. Submit to the losing and be labeled a "losing player," or hope the day will come when the current shifts. Keeping one's head above the fray becomes a Herculean task.

"It's frustrating when you're losing," said outfielder Nick Markakis, whose Baltimore Orioles are playoff-bound for the first time in 15 years. "But we play baseball for a living, and it's great to be able to do what we love doing and get paid for it. You want to win, and losing's tough. ... Whether you're up or down, you still have to keep your composure and be the same person."

Zimmerman, who even his fiancée, Heather Downen, said rarely breaks from his steady demeanor, is not unlike many of his hometown Nationals teammates: When he arrived, he was stunned by some of the players that surrounded him.

He remembers once witnessing

a jovial scene in the showers after a loss and asking a reporter, "Aren't you supposed to care for 10 minutes that we lost again?"

"At the beginning, you're in the big leagues so it doesn't really matter," Zimmerman said. "You're just excited to be there. But then, as you get older and you get going, some of my friends have been to the playoffs and been on winning teams and you're like, 'Well, hopefully, you know? Hopefully, one day I'll get there.'"

"You start to want that more and more, and the happiness from being in the big leagues and being able to play rubs off a little bit. You're happy when you do things for your career, you take that next step, become a better player, but after that, ultimately everyone wants a team that wins."

But as the Nationals went through this season, frequently reaching new high-water marks, teammates never saw a change in Zimmerman.

Even as he struggled through some of the most trying weeks of his career, when inflammation in his right AC joint made his shoulder ache and robbed his bat of strength, he never snapped.

His approach, which everyone uses the words "never too high" and "never too low" to describe, was the same as it had been for the previous seven years.

"Zim doesn't really wear his heart on his sleeve," said shortstop Ian Desmond,

one of the few players whose tenure predates Zimmerman's in the organization. "He's not only the face of the franchise, but he's like the heartbeat. ... He's the same guy all the time. You can't ever tell if he's upset, if he's frustrated, if he's happy, if he's sad. It's just Zim."

"Even when the team was bad, he never broke character," said right fielder Jayson Werth. "He stayed himself. He kind of hovered above it. You can see why he made it through it OK, and why he played so well on such bad teams. It's just who he is. He's just a really good player with a really good mindset. Sure it wore

on him. It had to. But it didn't affect him."

## At a crossroads

There were times, though, when Zimmerman wondered if he'd ever get to celebrate the way he did Monday night. Or, if he did, it would be in the District.

"That was such a cool moment for him," said Downen, a Washington

the Nationals were at a crossroads at that point in time," Van Wageningen said, pointing to conversations that fall with ownership and general manager Mike Rizzo that reassured Zimmerman.

"They were coming off of another difficult season, another losing season, and one of the productive, veteran, high-paid major league players was up for free agency and signed elsewhere. Ryan had to really look around and begin to question whether or not this franchise was going to go down a positive road or whether it was going to continue to repeat the status quo."

Two days after Dunn joined the Chicago White Sox, the Nationals signed Werth. They won 80 games in 2011 with a largely homegrown roster. They traded for pitcher Gio Gonzalez in the winter. In February, Zimmerman agreed to a six-year, \$100 million contract extension that could keep him in a Nationals uniform through 2020.

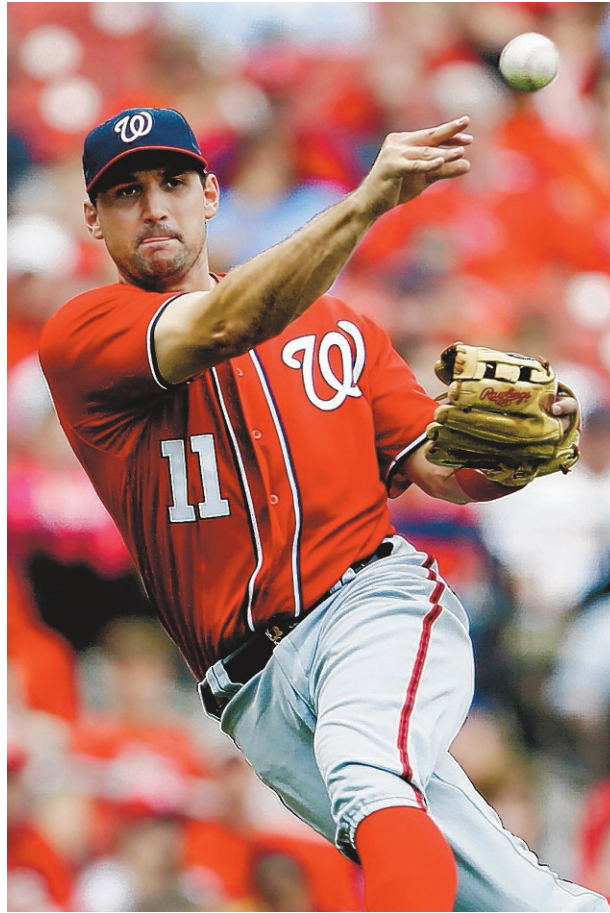
In April, he proposed to Downen and they set a January wedding date. In September, the Nationals, a team now filled with players who truly believed they were good enough to be the best, clinched the first playoff berth for a D.C. team since the 1948 Homestead Grays.

October brings new possibilities

"This year has been so surreal," Downen said. "I feel like sometimes this isn't happening, or I'm in 'The Truman Show' and I'm like, 'Is this all being set up?' Because this has been the most perfect year. Everything has been happening exactly the way you envision it to happen in your best possible expectations."

## Savoring the experience

Examining the reasons why Zimmerman became an exception, and not the rule, during all of the losing years, often leads one back to the same truth: It's the person he is that enabled the Nationals to build



ASSOCIATED PRESS

"You're happy when you do things for your career, you take that next step, become a better player, but after that, ultimately everyone wants a team that wins," said longtime Nationals third baseman Ryan Zimmerman.

native who's known Zimmerman since 2006. "He's worked so hard and every year he'd just get kind of disappointed."

Zimmerman never publicly questioned the Nationals' plans or their path to this point, but there were times he evaluated the situation and knew he'd have to decide whether to continue to be a part of it.

When Dunn left as a free agent after the 2010 season, which featured 93 losses, Zimmerman pondered his future.

"I think from Ryan's perspective

plate, the Senators dumped a pile of bats in front of the dugout. Each player used the first one he touched.

That couldn't help the Senators as the game slipped into the 10th inning. The 24-year-old Ott, already with 176 career home runs, came up with two men out. Reliever Jack Russell, summoned after starter General Crowder fizzled, threw low, sweeping curveballs. Ott hammered one to center field.

"The triple detonation," Grantland Rice wrote, "that sounded like the death knell of doom to 28,000 fans came in the 10th inning."

The ball nicked center fielder Fred Schulte's glove as he stabbed for it, then tumbled head-first over the fence and into the stands. Umpire Charles Pfirman initially called a ground-rule double. Ott remained at second base as the Giants protested, the umpires, including the reviled Moran, met and changed the ruling to a home run.

In the bottom of the 10th, Manush retreated to the clubhouse after he lined out to second for the inning's second out. A radio blasted play-by-play. Cronin singled. Schulte walked. Up came first baseman Joe Kuehl, trailing 4-3.

"Strike three. Kuehl is out!" the radio screamed. "The Giants win."

"Turn that thing off," Manush barked to a clubhouse attendant.

The Giants whooped and snake-danced and player-manager Bill Terry shouted: "What do you think of that?" as they clattered to their clubhouse. The Griffmen, the Griffs, the Good Ship Griff, the Nats, the Capitol Clubmen were finished, felled by the mighty Gothamites.

Griffith, the Sage of 16th Street to local scribes, strode through the Senators' quiet clubhouse straight to Cronin. They shook hands.

"There's a bigger and better season coming," Cronin said.

"We'll be there again before long," Griffith said, "and it's going to be a different story."

The next day Cronin hid out in a downtown movie theater with a hat pulled low as radio man Walter Winchell crowed about his marital possibilities. The Maryland State Police fined outfielder Goose Goslin \$11.45 for not staying inside the white lines on Baltimore-Washington Boulevard. A cartoon pictured a hapless Crowder pulling the rest of the Senators away from the pennant. And the Washington Star mourned: "all was wrong with the world. There was no sunshine, no happiness anywhere."

Almost 79 years later, the last day's sunshine returned.

● Sources for this story include the archives of *EveryWeek Magazine*, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *Pittsburgh Press*, *Washington Daily News*, *Washington Herald*, *Washington Star* and *Washington Times*, the *Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library*, *National Archives*, *1933 Washington City Directory*, *The Social List of Washington, 1933 ed.*, *Hopkins and Baist Atlas, 1931-32 ed.*, *Omni Shoreham Hotel: A brief history*, *BaseballAlmanac.com* and *BaseballLibrary.com*.

## FLASHBACK

From page E2

was never among his 14 appointments that day, dominated instead by a White House conference to find a solution to Pennsylvania's violent coal strike.

While the Senators sat in their clubhouse, the president dedicated a statue to labor icon Samuel Gompers at 10th and Massachusetts Avenue. The president's 1,050-word speech hinted at the country's deep-seated problems. He railed against workers who were "hotheads who think results can be attained by noise or violence" and employers who "prefer government by a privileged class."

Small help-wanted sections choked among the mess of hopeful advertisements touting "prosperity month" in that day's newspapers. Pastry cook. Salesman at Economy Fish Market. Two wide-awake men to sell beer. Tenor and bass soloists for a church choir. Cafe cashier in exchange for two meals per day.

Everything filtered through race. Jewish. White. Colored. Filipino. Irish. Domestic help. Apartments. The vacant waitress job at 5522 Connecticut Avenue. White only.

Preparations for fox hunting season commenced in Warrenton. At the Geneva disarmament conference, diplomat Henry Morgenthau Sr. predicted war in Europe within a year. Nazi Germany refused to join the League of Nations in ensuring equal rights for Jews. Dr. A.A. Stockdale readied to deliver his sermon at the National Congregational Church the next evening on "the devil's playground in Washington."

White House Coffee. Four pounds of Jonathan apples for 19 cents. Little Orphan Annie comic strips. Congress beer. Cigarettes to keep husbands from yelling at wives. Cigarettes to steady the nerves of air mail pilots. Cigarettes for 99 cents per carton. Ash cans and electric banjo clocks and spending our way out of the depression.

★★★

As Cronin, batting cleanup, popped out to Mel Ott on the first pitch of the second inning, the president lunched with Clark Howell, the corruption-chasing, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and publisher of the *Atlanta Constitution*.

Cronin lived by himself at Wardman Park Hotel. Autograph and photo requests were awkward. He didn't smoke or stay out late. He didn't like to speak about himself, allowing, "I'm just a young fellow playing shortstop." Women swooned over the youngster from San Francisco who once wanted to be a quarterback. The anxiety during spring training in Biloxi, Miss., over Cronin's appointment as manager transformed to plaudits as "baseball's boy wonder."

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**MAY 6:** Nationals right fielder Jayson Werth grimaced after breaking his left wrist in a Sunday night loss to Philadelphia. Werth would be sidelined for three months. The game also featured Phillies left-hander Cole Hamels intentionally hitting rookie Bryce Harper, and Harper subsequently stealing home.

# One superb season

## Early injuries didn't deter run to NL East title

**April 12: Nats blow late lead before pulling out wild win vs. Reds** — The Nationals opened the season 10-3 with plenty of victories such as their April 12 home opener, with superb starting pitching and just enough runs. A wild-pitch walk-off resulted in a 3-2 victory.

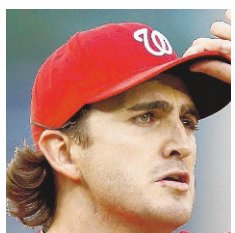
**April 28: Nationals call up Bryce Harper** — Earlier than they expected and because of injuries ravaging the middle of their order, the Nationals called up their phenom from Triple-A for his major league debut. Harper went 1 for 3 in a 4-3 loss to the Dodgers.

**May 6: Bryce Harper steals home, Jayson Werth breaks wrist, Cole Hamels is "Fake Tough"** — Phillies left-hander Cole Hamels hit Bryce Harper with a pitch, Harper stole home, Hamels admitted it was a purpose pitch, GM Mike Rizzo called him "Fake Tough." Jayson Werth also broke his wrist and would miss the next three months.

**May 12: Wilson Ramos tears ACL, is lost for season and becomes seventh of nine projected Opening Day starters to be injured** — Michael Morse, Jayson Werth, Ramos, Ian Desmond, Ryan Zimmerman, Drew Storen, all spend time on the disabled list.

**June 8: Harper, Strasburg have game for the ages at Fenway in Nats win** — Harper goes 3 for 5 with HR, 3 RBI; Strasburg strikes out 13 in 7-4 win to start a 6-0 road trip through Boston and Toronto.

**July 10: Harper, Gonzalez, Strasburg, Desmond give Nationals four players on All-Star team and help secure home field in World Series for National League** — Ian Desmond did not attend game, nursing a sore oblique, but Gonzalez, Strasburg and Harper played a small role in the NL's 8-0 win.



Lannan

**July 21: Back from Syracuse, Lannan gives Nats huge pick me up** — With their lead in the NL East down to just 1½ games, John Lannan works 7 innings in a 5-2 victory over the Braves in his first start of the season.

The Nationals proceeded to go 8-1 in their next nine games.

**Aug. 7: Roger Bernadina makes game-saving catch in Houston** — Bernadina gives his entrant into the catch of the year race with a grab that ended the game and secured a Nationals victory.

**Aug. 15: Nationals finish 8-2 road trip by taking 5 of 6 in season series vs. Giants** — The Nationals have the best road record in the majors and their dominant, three-city West Coast swing is a big reason why.



ANDREW HARNIK/THE WASHINGTON TIMES

**OCTOBER 1:** The party was on after a loss by Atlanta in Pittsburgh gave the Nats the NL East title.



**APRIL 28:** Injuries to the middle of the order forced general manager Mike Rizzo to call up outfielder Bryce Harper from Triple A Syracuse earlier than planned. The 19-year-old phenom went 1 for 3 in a 4-3 loss to the Dodgers in his debut and has never looked back.

**Sept. 8: Nationals shut down Stephen Strasburg** — Feeling fatigue and media hype had taken its toll, the Nationals shut down their ace one start earlier than planned.

**Sept. 20: Nationals clinch first playoff berth in D.C. since 1933** — The Nationals clinched at least a wild-card spot with a 4-1 win over the Dodgers. It's the first playoff berth for a D.C. baseball team in 79 years.

**Sept. 22: Gio Gonzalez becomes the Nationals' first 20-game winner** — Gonzalez falls flat on his face on one pitch, but he tosses seven innings and allows no earned runs to win his 20th game and continue to make his

case for the NL Cy Young Award.

**Oct. 1: Nationals clinch NL East title** — In the middle of the ninth inning of a 2-0 loss to the Phillies, the Nats get word that a Braves loss at Pittsburgh has made Washington the NL East champion.

— Amanda Comak

**SEPTEMBER 22:** Gio Gonzalez acknowledges the crowd at Nationals Park after beating the Brewers for his 20th win of the season.



## NL TEAM CAPSULES

### WASHINGTON NATIONALS

**Credentials:** 98-64, East champs

**Last postseason appearance:** 1981, lost to Dodgers 3-2 in NLCS

**Best postseason finish:** NLCS (1981)

**Manager:** Davey Johnson (23-23 postseason record)

**Player to watch:** SS Ian Desmond

**Pitcher to watch:** LHP Gio Gonzalez

**The skinny:** The Nats have been consistent from Opening Day, posting a winning record each month and holding at least a share of the NL East lead for all but 10 days in a six-month season. Desmond is but one standout in a potent lineup also highlighted by Bryce Harper, a resurgent Jayson Werth, MVP candidate Adam LaRoche and veteran Ryan Zimmerman, but it's the arms that make the difference. Even without Stephen Strasburg, the Nats' rotation should be formidable in October.



### CINCINNATI REDS

**Credentials:** 97-65, Central champs

**Last postseason appearance:** 2010, lost 3-0 to Phillies in NLDS

**Best postseason finish:** World Series champs (1919, 1940, 1975, 1976, 1990)

**Manager:** Dusty Baker (18-21 postseason record)

**Player to watch:** 1B Joey Votto

**Pitcher to watch:** RHP Johnny Cueto

**The skinny:** Division champs for the second time in three years, the Reds will start with trying to win a postseason game this time after being swept by the Phillies in the 2010 Division Series. Baker has been sidelined with health problems but is back for the playoffs to lead Votto, Brandon Phillips, Jay Bruce and the rest of the Redlegs. Cy Young candidate Johnny Cueto leads a rotation deep enough that the fourth starter, Homer Bailey, pitched a no-hitter last week. And don't forget the dominant Aroldis Chapman throwing 100-plus mph to finish games.



### SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS

**Credentials:** 94-68, West champs

**Last postseason appearance:** 2010, beat Rangers 4-1 in World Series

**Best postseason finish:** World Series champs (1905, 1921, 1922, 1933, 1954, 2010)

**Manager:** Bruce Bochy (12-15 postseason record)

**Player to watch:** C Buster Posey

**Pitcher to watch:** RHP Matt Cain

**The skinny:** The Giants have plenty of new faces since winning it all in 2010, but Posey remains the key. His return after missing most of last season with an injury has sparked an offense that gets it done mostly in drips and drabs (only Posey, with 24, has more than 12 homers). Cain sets the tone for the pitching staff, and he, lefty Madison Bumgarner and Pirates castoff Ryan Vogelsong have compensated for Tim Lincecum's decline. Sergio Romo and Santiago Casilla have shared closer duties this year, with Romo getting the call lately.



### ATLANTA BRAVES

**Credentials:** 94-68, Wild card

**Last postseason appearance:** 2010, lost 3-1 to Giants in NLDS

**Best postseason finish:** World Series champs (1914, 1957, 1995)

**Manager:** Fredi Gonzalez (no postseason appearances)

**Player to watch:** 3B Chipper Jones

**Pitcher to watch:** RHP Kris Medlen

**The skinny:** Shaking off the collapse of last September, the Braves earned a wild-card matchup against the team that kept them home for last October, the Cardinals. Jones has been a surprise standout along the way, proving he still has plenty to offer even in the midst of his farewell tour around the majors. Medlen has been a revelation since moving to the rotation, as the Braves have won 23 consecutive games he has started heading into Friday's game. And once any of Atlanta's starters gives the ball to closer Craig Kimbrel, it's usually game over for the opposition.



### ST. LOUIS CARDINALS

**Credentials:** 88-74, Wild card

**Last postseason appearance:** 2011, beat Rangers 4-3 in World Series

**Best postseason finish:** World Series champs (11 times, most recently in 2011)

**Manager:** Mike Matheny (no postseason appearances)

**Player to watch:** LF Matt Holliday

**Pitcher to watch:** RHP Kyle Lohse

**The skinny:** The defending champs were the last team to secure a playoff berth, but they're in. Pitching leads the way for the post-Pujols Cardinals, with everyone in the rotation sporting a sub-4.00 ERA and the shutdown duo of Mitchell Boggs and Jason Motte anchoring the bullpen. Holliday and Carlos Beltran lead an experienced lineup that has gotten the job done for rookie manager Matheny as the former catcher has stepped in for the retired Tony La Russa.

