SPORTS

Marlins toast of the town

MIAMI (AP) — The loudest cheers from the tens of thousands of Marlins fans lined up to celebrate their World Series champions came when team owner Jeffrey Loria made

a simple promise: The team won't be broken up. With that declaration Tuesday, six years of malcontent and mistrust between South Florida baseball fans and the

Marlins vanished.

"This is not 1997. This is 2003. We are not dismantling. Thank you," said Loria, who hoisted the World Series trophy as he was ferried in a convertible through the streaming

ticker tape and jersey-clad fans.

Keeping the team intact means manager Jack McKeon will be back next year. He agreed to a one-year extension, Loria

announced during the celebration. "I have some good news and a little bad news. The good news is Jack is coming back," Loria

said. "The bad news is there's no bad news." McKeon, 72, took over when manager Jeff Torborg was fired in May and engineered the Marlins' turnaround from

last place team to World Series champions. "I always had no doubt I was coming back," said McK-

eon, who refused to formally announce his intentions during the season. When Florida won the title in 1997, the celebration was

tempered as fans braced for cost cutting by then-owner H. Wayne Huizenga. The result was a last-place finish in 1998 and a steady decline in attendance, which lasted until this year's surprising playoff run. "In 1997 we were on top of the world," said Danny Parra,

a sales representative who brought his two sons to Tuesday's rally. "In '98, we hit rock bottom. I think everybody knows they won't be able to keep everybody, but if they keep a nucleus intact, we'll be happy."

Leaning from windows along the start of the parade route, fans threw clumps of ticker tape while some commuter trains were plastered with signs declaring: "We love the Marlins."

A victory drive through the city's Little Havana neighborhood followed. City workers shredded two tonnes of paper to serve as ticker tape while banners and balloons streamed off office buildings along the route festooned with freshly painted team and World Series logos.

Later Tuesday, a boat parade and a second rally were held in Fort Lauderdale for the Marlins, who beat the New York Yankees 2-0 in Game 6 on Saturday night.

The Marlins won the World Series with a modest \$54-million US payroll, and yet still were projected to lose millions this season — in part because they lease stadium rights from Huizenga and do not have the same sources of revenue that other teams enjoy.

Officials had predicted that at least 100,000 people would attend the daylong celebration in Miami. Police officers declined to release an official estimate Tuesday.

Jays ink outfielder

TORONTO (CP) — Outfielder Frank Catalanotto chose the security of a contract now with the Toronto Blue Jays over an uncertain future.

The 29-year-old agreed to a one-year, \$2.3-million US deal with Jays' GM J.P. Ricciardi on Tuesday for what in baseball money was a minimal raise of \$100,000.

"The money issue, it really wasn't the biggest issue even though I thought I might get a little more money, but I think coming back with this team and playing with the Blue Jays, I had a lot of fun last year, so that was more the issue," Catalanotto said in a conference call.

"I just wanted to be on this team again."

Catalanotto's deal comes a day after the Jays signed veteran catcher Greg Myers to a one-year, \$900,000 contract.

Catalanotto hit .299 with a career-high 13 home runs and 59 RBIs for the Jays in 2003. He also set career highs in runs (83), doubles (34) and extra-base hits (53).

Catalanotto was eligible for salary arbitration — at five years, 171 days of major league service with Detroit, Texas and Toronto, he was one day short of free agency.

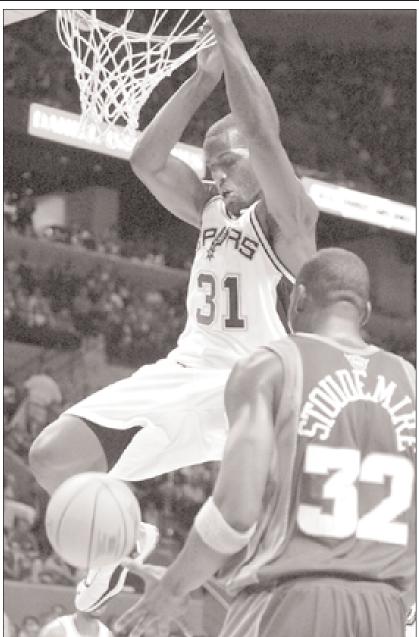
But while he thought he could make \$3 million or more in arbitration, he wasn't sure the Jays would offer it.

"If you get non-tendered then you go out into that free agent market, then it's the unknown," he said. "You don't know what you're going to get."

Cancelled game costly

ST. JOHN'S. Nfld. (CP) — Last week's cancelled NBA exhibition game between Cleveland and Toronto cost local organizers \$353,000 but the Raptors have agreed to help cover the costs.

Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment, which owns the Raptors, has waived \$184,000 in appearance fees and other expenses. That means St. John's Sports and Entertainment, the board that operates Mile One Stadium, is obligated to cover \$169,000. The game was cancelled due to water on the floor. Mile One Stadium was forced to refund the \$87 ticket price each of the nearly 8,000 fans paid to see the NBA stars.

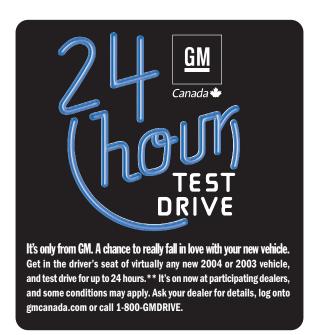


RIM ROCKER -- Malik Rose of the defending NBA champion San Antonio Spurs cashes in over Phoenix Suns forward Amare Stoudemire Tuesday night in San Antonio. On opening night of the 2003-2004 season, the Spurs edged the Suns 83-82.

2003 FINAL CLEAROUT

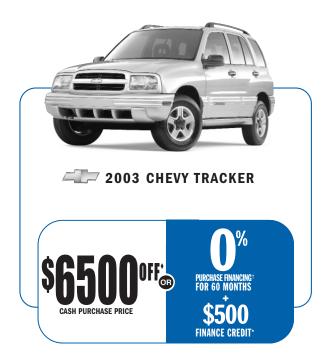














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