**Opening day brings excitement**

Boston Red Sox should be team to beat

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By Josh Hall

It's the most wonderful time of the year.

No, not Christmas, opening day.

Starting March 31, Major League Baseball is back for millions of people around the country to enjoy.

Joe Dimaggio once said: "You always get a special kick on opening day, no matter how many you go through. You look forward to it like a birthday party when you're a kid. You think something wonderful is going to happen."

Pete Rose said, "It's like Christmas, except it's warmer."

Teams like the Washington Nationals, Houston Astros, Arizona Diamondbacks, Kansas City Royals, and Seattle Mariners all have the chance to be in first place in their respected divisions.

So after six months who will be left standing? The odds are that it will be the Boston Red Sox.

The Red Sox added two All-Stars in Adrian Gonzalez and Carl Crawford in the off-season. The Sox won 89 games in 2010 even after they were plagued with injuries.

The American League East division can't get any tougher, however. Not with the Sox, New York Yankees, Tampa Bay Rays, Toronto Blue Jays, and Baltimore Orioles.

Even the team that is supposed to finish last in the division (Orioles) have a promising outlook for 2011.

After picking up shortstop J.J. Hardy, Mark Reynolds, and Vladimir Guerrero, the Orioles have a shot at finishing above .500 for the first time in 13 years. Not to mention, they have one of the best managers in the game in Buck Showalter.

The St. Louis Cardinals will face an up-hill battle after losing ace pitcher Adam Wainwright to Tommy John's Surgery. The Cards might also have some distractions in the clubhouse with Albert Pujols' impending free agency.

It's likely that the Cincinnati Reds, Milwaukee Brewers, and Chicago Cubs will all make for pretty tough division in the National League Central.

The poor Royals might be the worst team in baseball this season. Kansas City has the best farm system in the game, but it will take time for its players to mature. The Royals might be similar to the 2008 Tampa Bay Rays three years from now.

The Philadelphia Phillies have the best starting rotation hands down. Cliff Lee, Roy Halladay, Cole Hamels and Roy Oswalt all have the potential to win 15 games apiece.

The question for the Phillies is: can they stay healthy? If so, I expect them to come out of the NL East with no problems.

Whether you are a fan of the best team, or the worst team (like I am), none of that matters on opening day.

I hope you all enjoy this season of baseball as much as I will.