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MediaTalk; Hey, Cliff Clavin, This Time Sam Malone's the Smart One

By JONATHAN FUERBRINGER

There once was a time when one of the (im)potent symbols of the luckless Red Sox Nation spent his time at a bar called Cheers. Sam "Mayday" Malone, a fictional former Boston pitcher ruined by drink, tended the bar he owned, chased his waitress, and probably placed some bets on his old team.

Now Ted Danson, the actor who portrayed Sam Malone, is making Red Sox fans proud for a different reason: as a result of Boston's World Series victory last week, Mr. Danson won the first bet ever decided at Long Bets (longbets.org), an online prediction site that focuses on scores that may not be settled for 45 years, if ever.

The Web site, which is popular among the Silicon Valley digerati, is a spinoff from the Long Now Foundation in San Francisco, whose aim is to foster long-term thinking and stimulate discussion about the future. Members make predictions, typically about topics like immigration or artificial intelligence, and other members challenge them, accompanied by a minimum wager of \$200. Unlike most betting parlors, however, these contests are rarely about sports. Alexander Rose, executive director of the Long Bets Foundation, said all the predictions had "some social or scientific value."

The Red Sox bet slipped in because Michael Elliot, the editor of Time Asia, argued that the United States soccer team would win the World Cup before the Red Sox won the World Series. In an argument posted on the site, he said his larger point was that immigration and technology would improve the quality of American soccer, but that the curse of the Bambino was "one of those mystical truths that are beyond the reach of human intervention."

Mr. Danson's counter was also scientific. "Statistically, scoring goals is harder than hitting a home run and in the World Cup you have the whole WORLD against you," he wrote. In baseball, he argued, "the Red Sox only really have to beat the Yankees."

Mr. Danson, who was not available to comment, now gets to donate \$2,000 (they each bet \$1,000, but winners receive bragging rights but no cash, according to the site's rules), plus interest accumulated since the wager was made in February 2002, to a charity of his choice. Mr. Elliot, a self-described Yankee fan, said in an e-mail response, "I feel sorta proud to be the first to have lost, actually!"

If Chicago Cubs fans are so inclined, there is now room for a bet on which century that team will end its World Series winless streak. JONATHAN FUERBRINGER

Correction: November 5, 2004, Friday An article in Business Day on Monday about Long Bets, a Web site that focuses on long-term predictions, misspelled the surname of the editor at Time Asia who lost a \$1,000 bet to the actor Ted Danson after predicting that the United States soccer team would win the World Cup before the Boston Red Sox won the World Series. He is Michael Elliott, not Elliot.