

# Nationals postseason vets look to repeat success

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the one Baerga got in Cleveland. But Bowden has made some shrewd moves to bring productive veterans to Washington.

"We've got players who have been good players other places - people like Vinny Castilla and Jose Guillen - who have never been stars," Baerga said. "But they're doing the job here."

Washington also possesses impressive postseason pedigrees.

Hernandez was the MVP of the '97 World Series as a Florida Marlin. Third baseman Castilla has been part of four playoff clubs. Shortstop Cristian Guzman played on three straight Minnesota Twins playoff squads from 2002-2004. Outfielder Guillen, first baseman Nick Johnson, second baseman Junior Spivey, utility man Wil Cordero and right-hander Esteban Loaiza also boast postseason experience.

Johnson grew up in a New York Yankees organization where winning was an expectation.

While the Nationals haven't developed the cocky

swagger that carried the Yankees to six World Series - and four titles - since 1996, Johnson has noticed a more assured demeanor among his teammates.

"When we go out on the field, we're confident. We've got guys who have done it before, who have been in those situations. Hopefully, if we're in it later in the schedule, we won't panic," said Johnson, a World Series participant with the Yankees in 2003.

Perhaps no one is more familiar with quick turn-arounds than manager Frank Robinson

In 1989, Robinson skippered a Baltimore Orioles club that had gone 54-107 - including an 0-21 start - the previous season. Robinson engineered a 32 1/2-game improvement and kept the Orioles in the pennant race until the final weekend of the campaign.

"(Washington) is a completely different club than I've ever managed before, on and off the field," Robinson said. "There's just a different mixture here, a different attitude, a different approach here. It's been

more successful from the start of the season until now than any club I've ever managed."

While Robinson won't draw comparisons between the 1989 Orioles and 2005 Nationals on the field, he believes the fan frenzy around both teams is similar.

The Nationals, who drew sparse crowds at Montreal's Olympic Stadium in recent years, are averaging 32,402 fans through 36 home dates. They've already surpassed 1 million fans at RFK Stadium, and their 26 home wins are the most in the NL.

"People take it for granted sometimes and they underestimate it, but it makes a difference," he said. "You see the people in the stands, No. 1, and you hear them. It makes you feel like you can overcome any obstacle that happens out there on the field."

Washington's loss Sunday ended a 12-game winning streak at home, one victory short of matching a franchise record. The Nationals have won eight straight home series.

# Rice promotes N.Y. Olympic bid

By Anne Gearan  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON - U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is offering herself as a personal ambassador for New York's bid to host the 2012 Olympics.

Rice will be scheduled to appear with New York Gov. George Pataki and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg at a rally on the steps of City Hall on Tuesday. It is a send-off rally for New York's emissaries to the International Olympic Committee, which is to choose a host city July 6 at a meeting in Singapore.

"New York is an internationally recognized symbol of unity, hope and opportunity and Secretary Rice believes it is the perfect place for the Olympics," Rice senior adviser Jim Wilkinson said Friday.

The committee working on New York's bid had asked Rice to make a personal pitch for New York at the Singapore meeting, and at one point Rice had agreed. When she was forced to cancel for scheduling reasons, she agreed to Tuesday's appearance.

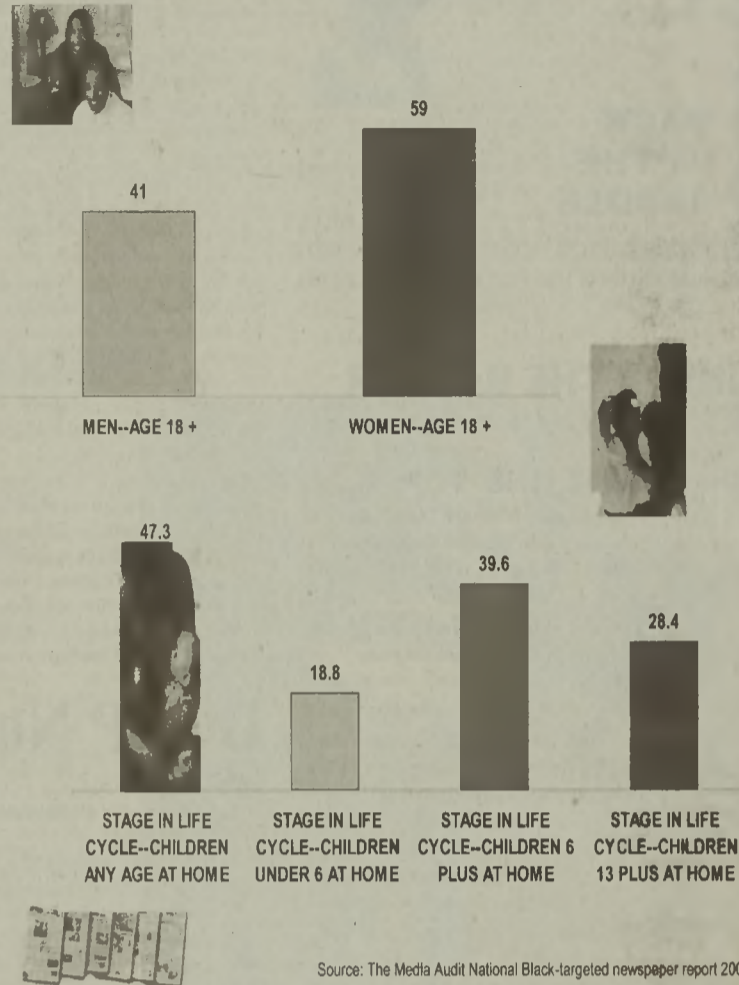
"She was extremely disappointed not to go to Singapore to do the bid herself," Wilkinson said.

French President Jacques Chirac and British Prime Minister Tony Blair will travel to Singapore for the meeting. New York is competing against Paris, London, Madrid and Moscow to host the games.

"There's no question that having the Olympics in New York would showcase the very best of the United States," Wilkinson said. "That's part of her job."

While in New York, Rice will also meet with U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

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