



Clemens proved he could still “bring it” by fanning 20 Tigers—tying his own major-league mark—in his last win in a Red Sox uniform.

sigh of relief. The news conference finally can begin.

Clemens watches as Delgado walks away, down the hallway. Suddenly, Delgado unleashes a scream. “Yes! We got the Rocket! We’re going back to the World Series!”

Clemens a Blue Jay? The Rocket in blue, not red? How could the greatest Red Sox pitcher of this era—a three-time Cy Young Award winner with four ERA titles, three strikeout crowns and an MVP award—leave Boston? First the Babe and now this.

“Believe me, I never wanted to leave Boston,” Clemens says during a workout in an exercise room at a hotel in Palm Desert, Calif. “[Red Sox GM] Dan Duquette could have taken the decision out of my hands. He could’ve signed me last year in spring training. I was set to sign, but I never really had a good feeling about it.”

Don’t be misled by Clemens’ 10-13 record in ’96. He was tremendous, leading the American League in strikeouts for the third time, posting the seventh-best earned-run average (3.63) and finishing second in opponents batting average against (.237).

He also shocked the world by striking out 20 batters—while walking none—against Detroit last Sept. 18, tying his own major-league record established 10 years earlier. That 4-0 victory over the Tigers, Clemens’ last in a Red Sox uniform, tied him with Cy Young for the most wins (192) and most shutouts (38) in Red Sox history.

“Isn’t that ironic?” Clemens says of tying Young’s records. “When I first came to Boston, I wanted to leave as the greatest pitcher in Red Sox history. I wanted to leave with number 21 hanging on the right-field facade in Fenway, next to Carl Yastrzemski and Ted Williams. I wanted to be the first pitcher in Red Sox history to have a number up there. I dreamed of that.”

He also dreamed of being on the mound for the final out of the Red Sox’s first World Series championship since 1918, a dream that went unfulfilled.

“There were times I actually visualized myself punching a guy out to end the Series and the place exploding,” he says. “I thought about that every year since ’86.”

He pauses for a moment, clearly emotional while reminiscing.

“There’s nothing like pitching in

“The difference in my pitching the last few years vs. 1986 or ’88 is that I’m not just a thrower. I’ve learned to ‘pitch.’ When I don’t have my good stuff, I’m still gonna beat you.”

Boston,” he says. “I’ll always remember driving to Fenway, seeing station wagons packed with kids, seeing cars with license plates from Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont. When the kids saw me through the window, they would point and yell, ‘Hey, Rog, we’re coming to see you tonight.’ That was probably the only game those kids were going to see that season, and they were coming to see me. That meant so much, and I spilled everything out for them. I wanted them to walk away from the only game they’ll probably see with a great feeling. I wanted them to walk away saying, ‘Man, we saw Rocket throw a five-hit shutout and punch out 12!’”

So instead of Cape Cod and Marblehead, fans will be coming from East York and Forest Hill. Clemens will give them the same thing he gave Red Sox fans: his heart, his guts, his passion. This is a man who routinely would throw 150 pitches over eight innings just to save the bullpen for the next night’s starter. This is a man who would pitch through tendinitis because, he would say, “at 70 percent I’m still better than most guys.” This is a man who was seen walking up hills near his home at midnight, stretching out a pulled groin muscle. He cares deeply about his family, his teammates, the fans—and about winning.

“There are some things Dan [Duquette] didn’t take into consideration as much as he should have,” Clemens says. “My dedication to conditioning, my connection with the fans. I’ve never pitched for just me. When I pitched for the Red Sox, I pitched for Mrs. Yawkey and John Harrington [general partners]. I pitched to make them proud, to make the fans proud. And I’ll do that