

Oakland A's: Home run leader Josh Willingham unlikely to return, agent says

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The agent for A's left fielder Josh Willingham gave the strongest indication yet Monday that the slugger won't re-sign with the team.

"My best guess is he will probably sign a three-year deal, and probably not with Oakland," agent Matt Sosnick told this newspaper. "I just don't think that's the position the A's are in right now."

Willingham, 32, who led the A's with 29 homers and 98 RBIs in 2011, is eligible for free agency for the first time and is considered the top left fielder available should he hit the open market. Teams have until Thursday to negotiate exclusively with their own free agents, after which players can sign with any team.

A's general manager Billy Beane didn't deny that he's likely to lose his most dangerous hitter. He reiterated the A's will hold off on decisions to re-sign their own free agents until they hear from Major League Baseball whether they can build a stadium in San Jose. MLB commissioner Bud Selig has sat on that decision for more than 2½ years, and though there are no signs of an upcoming announcement, Beane remains optimistic of getting word soon.

The A's other four free agents are outfielders Coco Crisp and David DeJesus, designated hitter Hideki Matsui and right-hander Rich Harden.

"It doesn't mean we wouldn't circle back at some point (and negotiate with those players)," Beane said. "But as of right now, we're in wait-and-see mode."

Losing Willingham would leave a huge void for a team that ranked 12th out of 14 American League teams in runs scored. His 98 RBIs were the most by an Athletic since Frank Thomas had 114 in 2006.

Sosnick said he expects Willingham to sign with a team closer to his home in Florence, Ala., because the travel back and forth to Oakland was difficult for Willingham's wife, Ginger, and their two young sons.

"Ultimately money will talk," Sosnick said. "But I think all things being equal, they would choose to (sign with a team) in the South or Midwest."

Oakland Tribune editorial: Tony LaRussa, a job well done

Oakland Tribune editorial

Tony La Russa retired from baseball on Monday as a champion. It was a classy move by a classy guy.

To most of the country now, he's known as the manager who led the St. Louis Cardinals from 10½ games back in late August to capture a playoff spot on the final day of the season, and then cap it off by a winning a championship showdown last week that featured one of the most exciting World Series games in baseball history.

But we in the East Bay know him as one of ours, a resident of Contra Costa who has given back to the community in countless ways, most notably the Walnut Creek-based Animal Rescue Foundation. We remember him as the manager who led our team, the Oakland A's, to three straight American League pennants in 1988-90 and the World Series title in 1989.

His ticket to Cooperstown is assured. The manager with the most wins in modern day, and the third-most all time, has a seat waiting for him. He has been a brilliant leader, tactician and motivator during his 33-year career piloting just three teams, the Chicago White Sox, the A's and the Cardinals.

After this amazing season, no one would have questioned the 67-year-old if he had decided to stay. "I think this just feels like it's time to end it," he said as he ruled out returning to managing again.

We know this won't be the last we hear from La Russa. His brilliant mind and deep sense of community ensure he will return in some capacity, whether it's to a place in the upper echelons of baseball; leading the private, nonprofit, animal welfare organization he and his wife started; or, as he said, "maybe open a book store."

For now, Tony, congratulations on an amazing season and a fantastic career -- and welcome home.

Monte Poole: Loyalty a common thread throughout Tony La Russa's managerial career

By Monte Poole, Bay Area News Group

The game was over, the A's had won, and Tony La Russa had concluded his postgame news conference, after which reporters began filing out of his small office.

"Got a minute?" the manager said, glancing toward me.

I spun and turned back inside, preparing for the fury to come.

This was 1995 and he wanted to discuss a column I'd written a few days earlier in which I asserted, among other things, that the 1988-90 A's, it could be argued, had underachieved. They made three consecutive World Series, winning one.

La Russa wanted to know how I could say such a thing. Didn't I understand what they accomplished? Do I know how hard it is to make it to the World Series?

A fourth-year columnist at the time, I reminded Tony that his team was considered the best each year, and losing two of three opens the argument for underachievement.

"I hear what you're saying," he concluded after a couple of minutes.

"But I don't see it that way."

No fury, no tantrum, just a simmering difference of opinion, surely based on perspective, with Tony typically loyal to his cause, fighting for what he believed.

When La Russa announced his retirement from baseball Monday, three days after his St. Louis Cardinals prevailed over the Texas Rangers in a seven-game series rich with classic moments, a reporter asked about the timing. Going out on top, eh?

La Russa, 67, insisted it was coincidental, that he made his decision in August, when the Cardinals appeared destined to miss the playoffs.

This was not, Tony implied, a matter of his ego advising him to go out a winner.

We all should take him at his word, whether we're inclined to or not, for it's pointless to dispute. I learned that when Tony says something, no matter how you hear it, or how it may sound, he means it. It's best to presume his words accurately convey accurate intent.

It goes back to loyalty, I think.

La Russa staunchly and publicly defended Mark McGwire when nobody else would. He kept the same pitching coach, Dave Duncan, for 29 years, from Chicago to Oakland to St. Louis. Cardinals first-base coach Dave McKay has been beside La Russa since 1986.

When Tony persuaded former A's trainer Barry Weinberg to leave the Bay Area for the Midwest in '96, one thought came to my mind: La Russa's wife, Elaine, wouldn't make that move, for she and their daughters had fallen in love with the Bay Area.

La Russa is fortunate to have had the opportunity to offset an unimpressive playing career (career average: .199) by compiling conceivably the most complete managerial career in modern-day baseball.

His first job, at 34, with the White Sox, came in a city where any move is dissected and every motive is questioned by discerning fans and media.

He next, midway through the 1986 season, came to Oakland, where he spent a decade leading generally distinctive, quality clubs, as his family made the East Bay its permanent home.

And La Russa was blessed to finish his managerial career with 16 seasons in baseball-crazy St. Louis, each February leaving his home to work in a region that respects and reveres the game as much as he does.

He may have tried to ignore those thoughts of retirement, for he is, after all, a baseball man, living for the nuance and subterfuge and tiny details others might miss. This was his 33rd season on the job, and there was nothing else he would rather do -- ever.

But his gut had sent a message. It was time to go.

So there he was, this four-time Manager of the Year and future Hall of Famer, sitting before the assembled media, saying goodbye. He leaves with three World Series titles, two in St. Louis and one in Oakland. He also won six pennants, three in each place.

Knowing his appreciation of baseball history, it was reasonable to presume Tony's No. 3 ranking on the all-time wins list, where his 2,728 victories are 35 behind second-place John McGraw, might be enough to keep him on the job.

"I'm aware of the history of the game," he told the gathering at Busch Stadium. "But I would not be happy with myself if the reason I came back was to move up one spot."

Tony is a severe individual, notorious for having a tight grip on his feelings or beliefs. He always was true to his internal voice, no matter what you or I or Einstein might have said. There was little room for reconsideration, maybe less for negotiation.

He does not negotiate with his own gut. Reconsideration is out of the question.

So he'll change his lifestyle. He'll return to the family's Alamo home and become reacquainted with his wife and his daughters, knowing baseball will go on without him.

Dave Stewart, Dennis Eckersley salute La Russa

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

Dave Stewart thinks the world of Tony La Russa and called him and Dave Duncan "maybe the best manager-pitching coach combination in history," but Stewart hasn't gotten over a decision La Russa made in Game 1 of the 1988 World Series.

Pulling Stewart for closer Dennis Eckersley in the ninth inning.

We know the rest of the story: Eckersley tossing a back-door slider to a weak-kneed Kirk Gibson, resulting in one of history's most dramatic home runs and a 5-4 Dodgers victory that jump-started L.A. to the Series title.

"If Tony and I go out to dinner 10 times, it's going to come up in conversation 10 times," Stewart said Monday, shortly after La Russa announced his retirement after managing for 33 years. "It comes down to me saying he should have left me in and him saying he did the right thing. It's actually one of our better conversations."

La Russa exited on top after his third world championship, second in St. Louis. The other was with the 1989 A's, who swept the Giants in between tear-jerking World Series losses to the Dodgers and Reds. On the all-time list of winningest managers, La Russa is third behind Connie Mack and John McGraw with 798 of his 2,728 wins coming with Oakland.

La Russa would have moved ahead of McGraw early next season, but what's the sense? No reason to stick for all the wrong reasons. La Russa is 67, and his legacy as an iconic manager was set long before Texas' David Murphy flied to left fielder Allen Craig to end Friday's Game 7 at Busch Stadium.

La Russa will go down as an innovator (every bullpen in the majors is touched with his fingerprints), motivator (talent alone doesn't overcome a 10 1/2-game deficit on Aug. 25) and fierce competitor (nobody in the game likes losing less).

And, of course ...

"A winner," Stewart said. "He was a very prepared manager, and that put him in position to be better than the guy across from him. We thought of him at the time as a players' manager, and it seemed his guys in St. Louis felt the same way, from what I heard from (David) Freese, (Albert) Pujols and (Chris) Carpenter."

In Oakland, La Russa was the leader of a team that was big and brash, and nobody represented his intense persona better than Stewart, who converted from journeyman to four-time 20-game winner on La Russa's watch.

On July 7, 1986, La Russa managed his first A's game, having replaced Jackie Moore and inherited a team that was 21 games under .500. He needed a starter that night in Boston, so from the bullpen he pulled Stewart, who had bounced around with the Dodgers, Rangers and Phillies and signed a minor-league deal with the A's six weeks earlier.

On national television, Stewart out-pitched Roger Clemens in what would become a trend (nobody upstaged Clemens like Stewart), and La Russa was on his way to turning the A's into three-time pennant winners.

"He told me I never stopped competing or stopped trying, and that's why he started me that first game against Boston," Stewart said. "Before Tony came in, I wasn't very trusting of the organization, and I got to the point of questioning why I ever signed there. Tony came along and gave me an opportunity."

Stewart's career soared under La Russa and Duncan, who encouraged him to throw his forkball. Eckersley enjoyed a re-emergence after they turned him into a one-inning closer, a revolutionary move that accompanied La Russa's record-setting number of pitching changes.

"I didn't know it was revolutionary. I was just part of the whole, and you couldn't put it together without everything. We were just a powerhouse," Eckersley said. "I was fortunate I hooked up with Tony. I didn't know it at the time, but I feel blessed I was connected with him. I'm biased, but I think he was the greatest manager ever."

Accompanying a deep staff anchored by Stewart and Eckersley was a feared lineup of men with something to prove (Carney Lansford, Rickey Henderson, Dave Henderson and Dave Parker) and gifted - and in some cases tainted - youth (Jose Canseco, Mark McGwire, Terry Steinbach and Walt Weiss).

Stewart envisions La Russa working in a front office, saying, "There are some GMs in the game today who don't have what Tony has in one pinkie. His next move could be to help build a championship team. He's got such a brilliant mind."

Even if he pulled Stewart for Eckersley in the opener of the '88 Series.

Drumbeat: Dennis Eckersley says he's happy for Tony La Russa

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser 10/31/2011 12:20pm

Tony La Russa turned Dennis Eckersley from a struggling starter on the downside of his career into a Hall of Fame closer, and Eckersley loves La Russa to bits, so he's thrilled to see his former manager retire while at the pinnacle of the game.

"I think it's awesome, I really do," Eckersley told me by phone this morning. "I'm so happy for him. To walk away from the game like that, it doesn't get any better. Tony has given the game his heart and soul."

La Russa's use of Eckersley set the standard for the modern-day closer, but Eckersley said, "I didn't know it was revolutionary. I was just part of the whole, and you couldn't put it together without everything. We were just a powerhouse."

"I was fortunate I hooked up with Tony. I didn't know it at the time, but I feel blessed I was connected with him. I'm biased, but I think he was the greatest manager ever. A great manager, a great friend, a great human being."

A's equipment manager Steve Vucinich told me that Reggie Jackson, on his way out of the game during La Russa's first spring with the A's (he'd taken over in midseason the year before) told Vucinich that he was highly impressed with the talk La Russa gave the team that spring.

Keep in mind that Jackson played for some of the greatest managers of all time, including Billy Martin and Earl Weaver, and this is what he said of La Russa in 1987: "Tony said things I've never heard a manager say before."

"That all adds into the Tony La Russa legacy," Vucinich said. "Smart, but with street smarts, too. He's one of the smartest people I've ever met."

Former A's owner Wally Haas said that as long as his family owned the A's, they didn't want anyone but La Russa to manage the team. "I think he's as good as anyone in the game," Haas told me. "We were fortunate to have him as long as we did. He's going out on top, and what an incredible career."

Cardinals assistant hitting coach Mike Aldrete, who is expected to be named the A's hitting coach this week, told me he has an interesting perspective because he played both for and against La Russa, and he coached for and against him. And from the very moment he got to Oakland as a player, Aldrete said, he watched everything La Russa did.

So La Russa's retirement left him conflicted. "I had him for three years in Oakland, four years here, so I'm not feeling cheated," Aldrete said. "But I also feel like, 'You can't leave now! I still have so much to learn! Where are you going?'"

There is some possibility that La Russa's retirement could impact Aldrete's future. The Cardinals are just coming off a championship and they valued the work Aldrete has done there and there is always the potential that with La Russa stepping down, there could be chances for other coaches to move up. However, Aldrete has worked with A's manager Bob Melvin before and he's from Monterey, attended Stanford and played for the A's and the Giants, so the Bay Area is likely to be an equally attractive prospect.

Former A's players cherish time under La Russa

Retired manager spent 10 of his 33 seasons with Oakland

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- His preparation impeccable and his intentions unquestionable, Tony La Russa's quest for victory never wavered.

"The man had the same approach and attitude toward every game, whether it was the first game of the season, a game in the middle of July or if it was in October," La Russa's former student and current Oakland infield coach Mike Gallego said. "It was amazing to see a man at guard every moment. You'd think you'd see him relax at some point. The man never did. He never did until that last out was made, and it would only last for a second before he started preparing for the next game."

At last, La Russa can relax for longer than a second, as the third-winningest manager of all-time announced his retirement on Monday after 33 seasons of managing in the big leagues.

The 67-year-old Bay Area resident managed the A's for 10 seasons from 1986-95, leading the green and gold to three consecutive World Series (1988-90) and winning one in 1989. Most assuredly a future Hall of Famer, La Russa went on to bring two championships to St. Louis, the most recent coming just three days ago -- making him the only manager to win the World Series in three decades.

Which was Tony La Russa's best managing job?

- 1989 A's (Defeated SF, 4-0, in WS)
- 2002 Cardinals (97 wins; endured Darryl Kile's death)
- 2006 Cardinals (Beat DET, 4-1, in WS)
- 2011 Cardinals (Beat TEX, 4-3, in WS)

"It doesn't surprise me with Tony wanting to go out on top," former A's catcher Terry Steinbach said. "As a manager, he was phenomenal. Just tremendous to play for. We had great success under his tutelage in Oakland."

"What a classic way for a manager of his stature to retire -- on top," Gallego said. "His historical managing career is obviously off the charts and impressive, but just to say that you had an opportunity to work for him or to play under him is something I know I'll always be proud of and something I'll always cherish, especially as a rookie coming in and learning from one of the best."

Gallego was one of several players La Russa transformed into important pieces -- a nod to his knack for using his entire roster wisely, most notably the bullpen. La Russa stood at the forefront of creating what has become known as the specialized bullpen, and his use of Dennis Eckersley seemingly set the standard for the modern-day closer.

Steinbach witnessed this first-hand and could only smile and reminisce when watching La Russa make a pitching change during this year's World Series.

LARGE AND IN CHARGE

Tony La Russa is one of just nine managers in Major League history with three World Series championships

Manager	Titles	Years
Joe McCarthy	7	24
Casey Stengel	7	25
Connie Mack	5	53
Walter Alston	4	23
Joe Torre	4	29
Miller Huggins	3	17
Sparky Anderson	3	26
Tony La Russa	3	33
John McGraw	3	33

"I think it was his best managing I've seen from him, including me playing for him," he said. "I thought the way he utilized the bullpen was outstanding. He was one of the best at doing that, with the closer, with the setup men. He wasn't afraid to use one guy to get one hitter out."

Said 1989 World Series MVP Dave Stewart: "He was prepared more than anybody to win games, to have one step on the other guy. And one of the most important things for a manager is having a good rapport with your players and understanding what buttons to push, and he was always a very, very good communicator with the guys."

As a result, La Russa established an admirable ability to develop simultaneous relationships in the game: player-manager and friends.

"I think, with him retiring, the game lost a tremendous manager and a great person," Steinbach said. "He didn't do any of it for his glory. He would say, 'Think about it. I can't run, hit, throw or catch anymore. The only thing I can do is make sure you guys are ready to play, which means crossing the T's and dotting the I's.' He had the utmost respect for the game and his players."

"He's been at it for a long, long time, and he's obviously one of the game's best, in my opinion, to ever hold that position," Stewart said. "In the time that I've been watching the game, there have been some great managers, but Tony's name is certainly at the top."

Leading Off: Steroid Era tarnishes La Russa's legacy

Victor Contreras, Sacramento Bee

Much-deserved accolades washed over Tony La Russa on Monday, when the 67-year-old retired after 33 seasons as a major league manager.

His résumé includes three world championships (one with the A's and two with St. Louis) and 2,728 regular-season victories (third behind Connie Mack and John McGraw). He's only the second manager, with Leo Durocher, to win at least 500 games with three teams (White Sox, A's and Cardinals).

La Russa did much for baseball, but he could have done more.

Instead of telling us what he knew and saw during the Steroid Era – particularly while managing the A's – La Russa turned a blind eye.

La Russa did nothing and said nothing while Jose Canseco and Mark McGwire became freaks of nature. Both came up through the A's system as big, strong kids. But they were lean.

Within years, they looked like Popeye and Bluto stuffed into baseball uniforms, hitting monstrous homers with lumber that looked like toothpicks in their hands. Instead of being a responsible manager and saying something, La Russa watched over his clubhouse like Sergeant Schultz: "I know nuuthing!"

In five years, La Russa will be inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y. Eventually, he'll be joined by Albert Pujols, perhaps the greatest – and cleanest – player he ever managed.

As for McGwire and Canseco, two players who greatly helped La Russa reach the heights he did, they will be left out for juicing. And La Russa saw it all.

What to watch

College football, Northern Illinois at Toledo, 4 p.m., ESPN2: Extra points if you know Northern Illinois'

mascot.

Today's poll

How does Tony La Russa rank as a manager?

- The best ever
- One of best
- Good but not great

Vote above or leave your comments in the comments field; or go to www.sacbee.com/sports

Monday's results

Should coach Hue Jackson be fired if the Raiders miss the playoffs this season? • Yes: 13% • No: 87%

Total votes: 385

Tony La Russa's impact on baseball is undeniable

Glenn Dickey, San Francisco Examiner

Tony La Russa is simply the best manager I've known, and his final act was his best: Taking a team that was 10½ games out in the wild card race to a triumph in the World Series. Can't top that.

La Russa also had a powerful influence on the way the game is played. With the A's in the '80s, he pioneered the idea of having one reliever for the seventh inning, another for the eighth and a closer who came in at the start of the ninth inning.

The game hasn't been the same since. The traditionalists, many of them in the media, deplore the fact that few pitchers throw complete games now, but other managers saw that La Russa's style was more efficient than the old one.

And, Tony went even beyond that in the recent World Series with the way he managed his bullpen brilliantly to overcome the Texas Rangers.

When La Russa came to Oakland in midseason 1986, the A's were floundering. Billy Martin had self-destructed. Steve Boros and Jackie Martin were nice guys but overmatched as managers.

With general manager Sandy Alderson making astute trades, most notably the ones for pitcher Bob Welch and getting Rickey Henderson back from the Yankees in 1989, La Russa went to work putting a team together. He and pitching coach Dave Duncan resurrected the careers of Dave Stewart, Dennis Eckersley and Rick Honeycutt. Stewart had been 0-6 the year before he came to the A's but he became their big-game pitcher. Eckersley and Honeycutt were both considered to be washed up, but La Russa and Duncan reasoned that they could be effective in more limited roles. Honeycutt became the seventh-inning pitcher and Eckersley became a dynamic force as the closer, winning both the Cy Young and MVP awards one year.

As the A's added power hitters Jose Canseco and Mark McGwire through the draft, they had a three-year stretch during which they won 104, 99 and 103 games in the regular season.

Many writers disliked La Russa because he did not suffer fools gladly. He often commented to me that some writers "want me to write their stories for them" by asking open-ended questions like, "What do you think of your team, Tony?"

In contrast, I had a great rapport with La Russa because I asked specific questions and, in turn, often got lengthy answers. It was like taking a course in Baseball 1A.

At that time, the A's were in the forefront of the computer revolution, using the new statistics being developed by Bill James and his followers, to be more efficient on the field and in evaluating prospects. It was a mind-blowing time for those of us who were open to new ideas and not rooted in the past.

When the A's had to go to a youth movement in the '90s, Alderson advised Tony to leave. La Russa was all about winning, not developing players, and he continued to win in St. Louis.

His style was unique among managers I've known, as intense as a football coach. It was obviously a successful one, and I feel privileged to have known him.

Making his mark

Tony La Russa's career numbers as a manager:

2,365 wins (third all-time)

6 World Series appearances

3 World Series titles

3 Manager of the Year awards

Tony La Russa retires as Cardinals manager

After guiding the Cardinals to a World Series title, he walks away after 33 years as manager, the last 16 in St. Louis. He won 2,728 games, third-best all time, and three World Series championships.

By Dylan Hernandez, Los Angeles Times

Tony La Russa, who revolutionized how bullpens are used and introduced the idea of batting the pitcher eighth, again has done something no manager before him has done: He has retired a champion.

La Russa, 67, stepped down as the manager of the St. Louis Cardinals on Monday, becoming the first manager to retire immediately after winning the World Series.

He managed the Cardinals, Oakland Athletics and Chicago White Sox over a 33-year career during which he compiled a 2,728-2,365 record. His win total ranks third all time and is the highest of any manager in the last 100 years. He won three World Series titles, the first in 1989 with the A's and the second with the Cardinals in 2006.

"He's one of the best," former Dodgers manager Tom Lasorda said Monday.

La Russa will be eligible to join Lasorda in the Hall of Fame in 2014.

La Russa said that the decision to retire was made long before the Cardinals won the World Series and that he informed the team's front office of his intentions in late August. He said it was only a coincidence that the Cardinals happened to be 101/2 games out of the wild-card spot at the time.

"This one just feels like it's time to end it," he said at a Monday morning news conference in St. Louis, where he managed for the last 16 years.

The way the Cardinals overcame a season-ending injury to pitcher Adam Wainwright, charged into the postseason and reversed a three-games-to-two deficit in the World Series against the Texas Rangers was widely viewed as a byproduct of the attitude La Russa instilled in his teams. La Russa's teams played with an edge that many described as arrogance.

Dodgers Manager Don Mattingly said that when he played for the New York Yankees in the late 1980s and early 1990s, La Russa's powerhouse teams in Oakland left a distinct impression on him.

"The thing about Tony's teams, there was a constant push even when they were way ahead," Mattingly said. "They played with an intensity and purpose."

The Yankees fielded mediocre teams at the time.

"It was easy for a team like the A's to take us lightly," Mattingly said. "But his teams didn't. His teams came in and stomped you."

Last fall, as Mattingly prepared to manage his first season with the Dodgers, he said he wanted them to have the kind of mentality La Russa's Oakland teams had.

La Russa's ace in Oakland, Dave Stewart, said that mentality was a direct reflection of the manager.

"What made him really, really good were his preparation and the intensity he brought to the game," Stewart said. "What he brought to the dugout would manifest itself in each and every player."

How La Russa was able to get 25 players to share his mentality remains something of a mystery to Stewart.

"The truth is, you'd have to be there," Stewart said. "You'd have to be in his space to understand."

A late bloomer who had unspectacular seasons with the Dodgers, Rangers and Philadelphia Phillies before moving to Oakland, Stewart said La Russa knew how to motivate him.

Because Stewart wanted to be recognized as one of baseball's best pitchers, La Russa would often go out of his way to make sure Stewart would go head to head against the likes of Roger Clemens and Jack Morris.

"A great players' manager," Stewart said.

That ability to galvanize his team was tested in the World Series this year, when bizarre pitching changes cost the Cardinals Game 5. (La Russa later claimed crowd noise and a malfunctioning bullpen phone resulted in miscommunications.)

Twice, the Cardinals were a strike away from losing Game 6 and, by extension, the series. Both times, they came back. They won in 11 innings and went on to win Game 7.

The Game 5 gaffe was ironic, in that La Russa's greatest legacy might be the sweeping changes he introduced in bullpen management.

Although the idea of a closer dates to the 1970s, La Russa is credited with utilizing a series of specialists to serve as a bridge between the starting pitcher and ninth-inning man. The aim was to create as many favorable pitching matchups as possible.

La Russa is why Arthur Rhodes, whose sole purpose is to face left-handed hitters, was pitching in a World Series game this year at age 42. La Russa is also why there are as many pitching changes as there are today and why games frequently take longer than four hours to complete.

The impact of La Russa's departure on the Cardinals remains uncertain. He has a close relationship with Albert Pujols, the Cardinals' star first baseman who is a free agent and seeking a nine-figure deal.

La Russa said he informed Cardinals players of his retirement after the team's victory parade Sunday.

General Manager John Mozeliak said at the news conference Monday that he didn't think the news would determine whether Pujols returns to the team or signs elsewhere.

"He probably understood that Tony is not going to manage forever," Mozeliak said.