

I don't care what you may have heard, but A-Rod's no playoff fraud



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Sports Commentary

Another October has come, and so has another first-round playoff exit for the New York Yankees. This means, of course, another round of stories condemning Alex Rodriguez as a playoff choker. Frankly, this routine is getting very tiresome, given that those claiming that A-Rod is worthless in October are completely wrong.

That's not to say that Rodriguez has been very good in recent playoff memory. His 1-14 performance (without a walk) in last year's loss to Detroit was embarrassing, but it's not like he was the only Yankee who disappointed at the plate: Gary Sheffield went 1-12, Jason Giambi was 1-8, and Robinson Cano was 2-15. The Yankees as a team were bad against the Tigers last year—that's why they lost.

But even with an improved performance against the Cleveland Indians this time around, Rodriguez is still being vilified in the media. A-Rod went 4-15 with two walks and a homer, and posted a respectable .820 on-base plus slugging percentage (OPS).

Hardly all-star numbers, to be sure,

but again, the Yankees as a whole weren't very good against the Tribe. Derek Jeter was 3-17 and hit into three double plays. Hideki Matsui was 2-11. Jorge Posada was 2-15. For the second straight year, the Yankees offence lost as a team, and this time around, A-Rod was one of the guys keeping them in it.

Still, FOX Sports called A-Rod's homer in the seventh as they lost to Cleveland on Monday "worthless," and *Newsday* called it "too little, too late," as though it were Rodriguez's fault that the rest of the Yankees weren't on base when he blasted one out.

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It's true the guy's had a couple of horrid series—2005 and 2006 were particularly bad. But he also has a career .844 OPS in the post-season, with 7 homeruns and 17 RBIs in 39 games, and was outstanding in 2004, putting up a 1.213 OPS in the AL Divisional Series and .894 in the ALCS. He was just as good in his previous post-season appearance in 2000 as a member of the Seattle Mariners.

The important thing to remember when looking at any individual series statistically is that it produces a tiny sample size, one that isn't indicative

of how good a player is. Players sometimes struggle for stretches; it happens. Rodriguez had an 0-30 stretch in May this season, and it certainly didn't hurt him in the long run.

In fact, Rodriguez is the only reason the Yankees even made the playoffs this season. He hit 54 homers, drove in 156 runners, and scored 143 times, becoming the first player since Roger Maris to lead the league in all three categories. He created 166—17 per cent—of the Yankees' 968 runs, and he was worth 11 more wins to the Yankees than a replacement player would have been.

No matter how you look at it, A-Rod is the best hitter in baseball. He's easy to hate because of the \$25 million he makes per year—a number that isn't even enough for him as he seeks a richer contract extension this off-season and will opt out of his current contract if the Yankees don't give it to him—and his poor sportsmanship on the field (his 2004 karate chop of Bronson Arroyo and his yelling "Mine" behind Howie Clark earlier this year being just two examples). But he's also supremely talented and could end up owning every worthwhile career hitting record before his is over. And if the Yankees are dumb enough to listen to the critics and let him go this winter, whoever signs him will become an immediate World Series contender—despite how often the papers tell you that he's a playoff choker.

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