

Bronx Cheers

Some fans quit Yankees-hating for the city's sake. But not all.

By Bill Jensen

TO UPDATE a well-worn baseball truism, rooting for the Yankees is like rooting for Bill Gates. The team from the Bronx has won the most championships and is among the top money-earners in all of professional sports. Its players are mythologized in movies, marry Hollywood starlets and hawk everything from credit cards to coffeemakers on story-high billboards and TV commercials. Because of all that winning and attention, hating the Yankees has become the second great American pastime. And (with all due respect to Boston Red Sox loyalists), no one hates the Yankees more than Mets fans.

There are the oldtimers, fans of the Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Giants, who used to go to war with Yankees fans around Philco television sets on city street corners. And there are the kids, who learned to despise the Yanks the moment the Bombers' star pitcher, Roger Clemens, threw a slab of jagged wood at their hero, Mike Piazza, in last year's World Series, then rubbed it in by helping his team beat the Mets for yet another championship.

After Sept. 11, however, New Yorkers have banded together as never before. Strangers strike up conversations with you in restaurants, hold doors for you at the mall, let you into their lane without making an obscene gesture on the parkway. But the next week, as the Yankees battle back from a two-game deficit against the Arizona Diamondbacks in the World Series, will be the test of how much New York has truly changed since the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

Some Mets fans are willing to honor a cease-fire and throw their weight behind an enemy that doesn't seem all that evil anymore.

Tara Maier recites the reluctant mantra being echoed around town. "I'm not rooting for the Yankees, I'm rooting for New York," says the 21-year-old waitress from Lindenhurst.

"Mets fans are buying the Yankee hats with the flag [stitched on the side, in response to the attacks] to feel patriotic," says Michael Daleo, manager of the baseball cap store, Lids, in the Smith Haven Mall. "I'm a Mets fan, and I'm gonna root for the Yankees. I'm not gonna wear a hat, but I'm gonna root for the Yankees."

"I'm an Islander fan; I hate the Rangers. I'm a Jets fan; I hate the Giants," says Greg Giblin, 25, a Hofstra Law School graduate and a die-hard Mets fan. "But in baseball, you can't have any animosity for a team in a different league. I guess I'm rooting for the Yankees. And I guess it has something to do with Sept. 11."

But many Mets fans are not going to let one act by a group of madmen reverse a lifetime of baseball loyalty.

The day after the Yankees clinched their World Series appearance, Steve Frohnhoefer, a magazine editor from Williston Park,

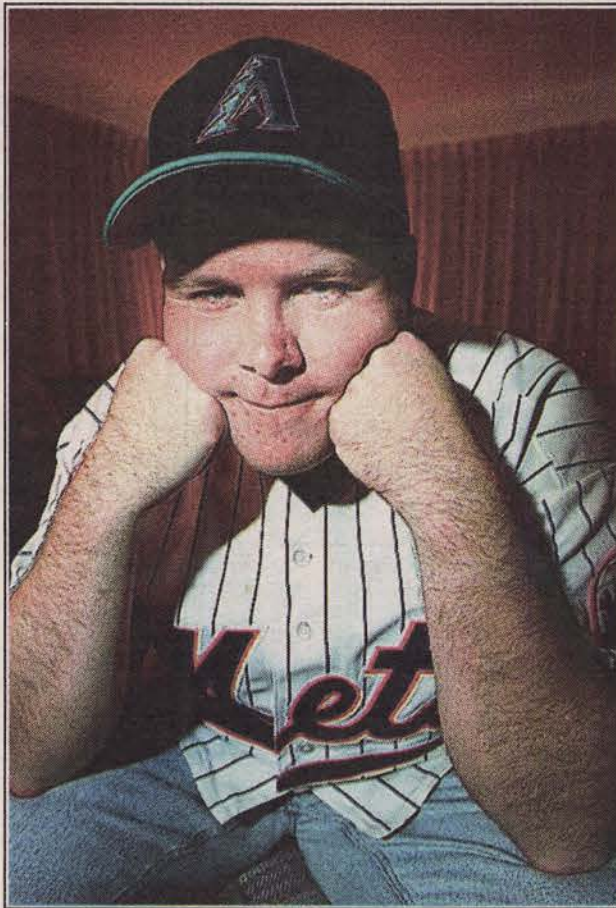


Photo by Joseph Sullivan

Mets fan Steve Frohnhoefer, at left, says that for him, continuing to despise the Yankees is part of getting back to a normal life.

Michael Daleo, who runs a cap store, is a Mets fan who says he'll root for the Yankees in the wake of Sept. 11 — but he won't wear their hat.

went out and bought an Arizona Diamondbacks hat.

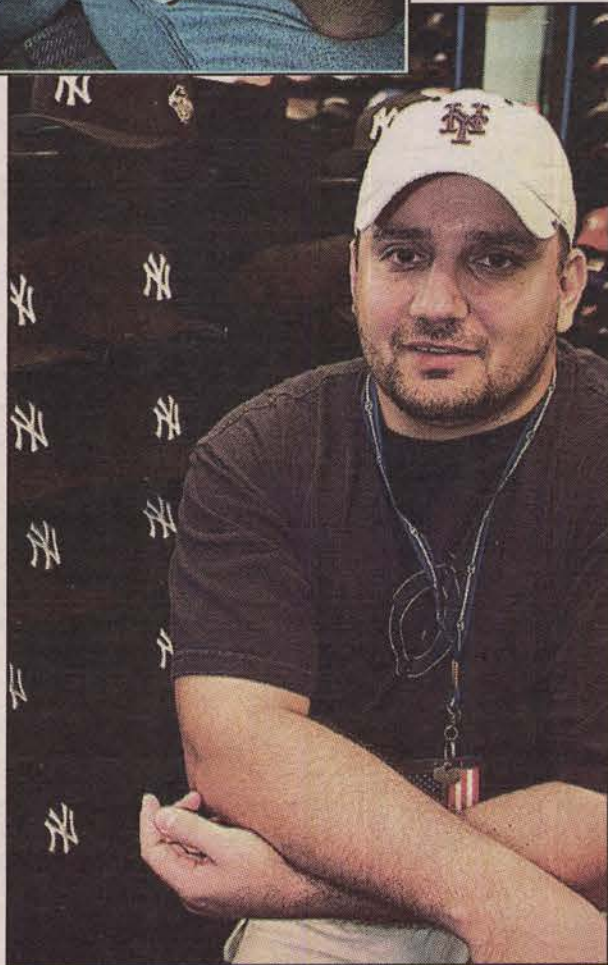
"We have to move on, and part of that, an important part, is sports," says Frohnhoefer, 25. "The World Series is about baseball, not humanity. Part of being a Mets fan is to despise the Yankees. And any Met fan that tells you any different is not a true Met fan."

Frohnhoefer shakes his head in disgust.

"Anyone who says it's good for America if the Yankees win is full of —."

"I'm all against the Yankees," says Brian McKeon, 13, an eighth-grader at John F. Kennedy Middle School in Port Jefferson Station. "Because of Clemens and how he hit Piazza and threw the bat at him last year. If they would win it for New York, that'd be OK. But that's it though, nothing else."

"The Yankees are always run-



Newsday Photo / Dick Kraus

ning their mouths off," says Kevin Grant, 20, a student from Port Jefferson Station. "If it were the other way around, Yankees fans wouldn't root for the Mets."

When asked whether Mets fans should band together just this one time and help the Yankees bring a championship to New York, Grant smirks.

"We still got other sports." ■

Bill Jensen is a freelance writer.