

# Where Have You Gone, Joe DiMaggio?

By Peter Bodo

"...The old Yankees were first of all organization men. The new Yankees are rich, rebellious, egocentric, black, and explosive..."

"There's a lot more noise here now, a lot more kidding around. Before, we were a reserved, quiet group. We have a different type of player now," said Roy White, the last of the quiet Yankees, a dignified, soft-spoken man who broke in with the baseball club in 1965, the year the most glamorous dynasty in American sports crumbled. He sat before a row of lockers bulging with platform shoes, blow-driers, exotic creams and lotions, S-E-X cologne, exotic shampoos, albedo shirts advertising the charms of Art Deco women, bubble gum, tobacco, and Afro-Sheen.

"The big argument now is that we're entertainers; people are interested in our salaries, and in what we do off the field. I don't like that sort of attention. Entertainment is planned, but when we go on the field, it's spontaneous, the game happens. There's nothing planned about it, and we're still under the same pressures as ballplayers years ago. But I wouldn't say I'm uncomfortable. There have been a lot of changes over the last few years, particularly since Steinbrenner has taken over. It's been surprising, but it's been good."

The old Yankees dominated baseball from 1949 through 1964, an aloof and arrogant collection of talents who were whittled to perfect dimensions and pressed neatly into the proper cavities by club owner George Weiss. The club offered immortality, and the price was conformity. It was no choice at all for the fair-haired heroes and rubes who considered Yankeehood the highest state of athletic grace. At heart, the

classic sports hero was an organization man, and the Yankees were first and foremost organization men.

Today, with a new season beginning Thursday, all that has changed. Ballplayers have climbed out of the hayloft and won their freedom; they are no longer willing to die for the cause of the front office. "The little-boy fantasies have dissolved," says Ken Holtzman, a Yankee pitcher. "We are not robots anymore." The transition has been perhaps hardest on the Yankees—the conservative, image-conscious, blue-blooded Yankees.

The new Yankees, last season's American League champions, are no longer reluctant to allow a black player to wear their pinstripes. The old Yankees were notoriously slow to integrate their club, and did so only grudgingly. The only black player of any stature during the dynasty was Elston Howard, and it is impossible to say how much sooner he might have become a star if he had been white. Unlike the Mets, who are the laughing-stock of black ballplayers because of their insistence upon retaining a virtually bleached club, the new Yankees will have one of the best outfielders in baseball, consisting of three blacks: Roy White, Mickey Rivers, and Reggie Jackson. The team's silken second baseman, Willie Randolph, is also black and a typical New York hero who grew up playing ball on the cracked pavement and ravaged playgrounds of Canarsie. And it was the Yankees' black first baseman, Chris Chambliss,

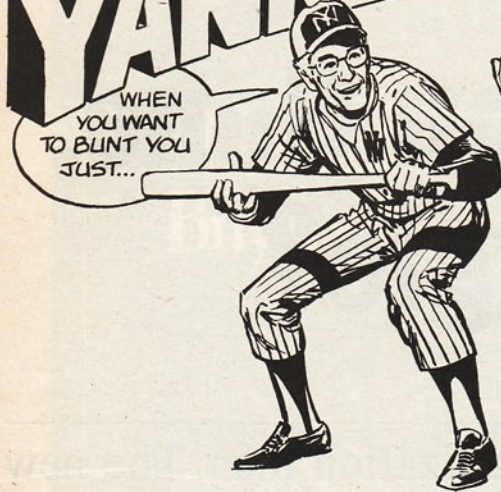
who hit the pennant-winning home run last year. "This isn't the old Yankees," laughs Dock Ellis, a vibrant, controversial pitcher who is fond of flattering his right ear with a gold earring. "Nobody's gonna mistake Mickey [Rivers] for Mickey Mantle, or Reggie Jackson for Babe Ruth. And I sure ain't no Don Larsen. We could never be the old Yankees. We got too many niggers on this club for that."

The black Yankees are extremely conscious of the changing complexion of the team without making it a matter of public debate, or allowing it to interfere with that often illusory, always fragile quality known as team unity. Since the beginning of spring training, press reports have speculated upon the likelihood of dissension on a club laden with major-league egos serving major-league talents. The team has been formed with judicious training and heavy spending, but remains by and large a puzzle which has yet to be assembled. Nobody quite knows what personality will emerge from this team, but every player understands that the club will be resented, hunted, and subjected to the highest critical standards. "We will be the little foxes that everybody wants to outthink and kill" is how Ellis put it.

When I visited the Yankees at their Fort Lauderdale spring-training base, I expected to find them defensive and uncertain, squirming under the pressure that is already beginning to bake the back of their collective neck. Surprisingly, the Yankees were an open



# NOT THE SAME OLD YANKEES



“... Munson bears a need to be admired, looked to for leadership. When he reached that point, the club hired a superstar ...”

ball club, responsive and frank, despite the fact that it is a team slightly uneasy in its own company, resembling a wedding reception dominated by too many distant relations.

The Yankees' fortunes in 1977 may very well hinge upon the personalities of two men, provided that the rest of the team plays up to potential. They are Thurman Munson, the team captain and the American League's Most Valuable Player in 1976, and Reggie Jackson, the newly acquired free agent who is probably the most electrifying hitter in the game today. Each is a brilliant player, as well as a sensitive psyche disposed to demanding his pound of flesh, and fully prepared to carve it from the most tender portion of a detractor's anatomy. They are men of big egos, and a number of sportswriters have predicted that those egos will clash. But without those egos, each of them might still be in Podunk, playing softball for the local tavern. What will be important about their egos is less a matter of size than flexibility, but this much has already been shown: The new Yankees will never be accused of camouflaging their personalities behind the corporate facade.

Thurman Munson crossed the clubhouse, wearing baggy cotton long johns

cut off above the knee, and blue leggings fastened to high white sweat socks with three turns of adhesive tape. He selected a hard-boiled egg from the foil-lined tray, and examined it carefully, as if he expected a fabulous insect to erupt from the pale oval. Munson salted the egg heavily, broke it in two, and pushed a half in his mouth, olive-colored particles of the yolk clinging to a mustache that helps give his countenance the perpetually dour expression of a walrus.

“Hey, Thurm, you comin' to the party?” Rivers shouted across the room.

Munson chewed the dry egg.

“Thurm, I'm talkin' to you! You comin', Thurm?”

The Yankee catcher swallowed hard and answered, “Do I gotta bring a hostage?”

“You jus' bring yo'self, Thurm. . . .”

Munson laughed at his own joke. “Do I gotta bring a hostage? I thought you had to bring a hostage these days. . . .” He drifted back to his locker and flopped heavily on the hard wooden bench before it. Munson is completely at home in a locker room, comfortable with the racial and genital humor, satisfied with his role as the Yankee team leader and resident “red ass,” a term commonly used to describe the kind of moody, cantankerous athlete whose

day-to-day brilliance is often obscured by a pose suggesting that his very presence on a team is a matter over which he has little choice, and which causes him profound pain.

There is very little about Munson that suggests the qualities of an athlete—he is a stump of a man who in street clothes might very easily be mistaken for a paunchy, gruff fan. Munson is bottom-heavy, his hips flared wide to accommodate massive thighs that give him the low center of gravity so invaluable to a catcher. His shape suggests a bowling pin, and he moves with a waddle. Ellis calls him “the little nigger” because of his protuberant rump.

“I'm unconventional,” Munson said. “I'm a bit awkward, so my mistakes show up more. I'm not flashy.”

This deceptive ungainliness has caused Munson a great deal of anguish, and he spent his first six years in the major leagues fighting for the recognition he deserves. Since he is the kind of fellow whose idea of a good time is insulting a stranger and then reveling in his discomfort, Munson's efforts at self-promotion have often served to alienate rather than convince.

Gene Michael, a former teammate, put it best when he called Munson “the most selfish team ballplayer in the





league." He is without doubt the Yankee dynamo, but still enough of a hayseed to function smoothly through the daily drudgeries of a life spent passing from the lobby of one Holiday Inn to another, showering with 25 other men, crouching day after scorching day in the dust behind home plate in the claustrophobic gear of his trade, the ball blistering and lacerating his fingers and the bat stinging his palms and jarring his elbows.

In his caustic persona, Munson also bears a deep desire to be admired and looked to for leadership.

"I like to be appreciated," Munson acknowledged, "but I like to be left alone too. I like to be recognized, but I don't want to be hounded. All players overrate themselves and think they're getting a raw deal. That was kind of my problem in the first six years. But in the last two seasons, it's changed some. Sure I have an ego, but for me that's a feeling, I guess, of self-gratification. I feel like I've fulfilled my potential in the last two seasons. I used to go into a shell because a lot of the time I don't understand the press. They write about what you say, not what you do. So everybody wrote that I was a crybaby, when I just wanted them to write about what I'd done on the field. It's different now; things are coming around. Hell, I'm not envious of anyone. Why should I be?"

Yet the spirit of the poor relation is still easily kindled in Munson, the son of a truck driver. His attitude toward money is reverential; he dresses

badly and invests well, stuffing his money into things a little more productive than the mattress, a little less risky than movie production. While this has no bearing on his abilities in the game, it is significant that the first clash between Munson and Yankee management was over money, shortly after Jackson signed his lucrative five-year contract. Munson claimed that Steinbrenner had promised to renegotiate his contract if the Yankees won the pennant in 1976, and personally guaranteed that Munson would be the highest-paid Yankee besides Catfish Hunter.

Early in the year, Munson discovered that Jackson's total annual salary of \$332,000 still exceeded his own, due to a complicated deferred-payment scheme. Outraged, he considered buying out his contract, or demanding that he be traded, before the matter was finally resolved. Overtly, the matter engendered no conflict between Jackson and Munson, but it probably served to put the aggrieved catcher on the defensive, and may have added credence to any suspicion Munson entertained upon realizing that just when he had finally filled out his pin-striped uniform and gained ascendancy as the Yankee captain, the club secured the services of a man who may be no greater as a player, but whose star certainly shines with a far more brilliant light.

Reggie Jackson carefully squeezed a dollop of white cream from a bottle of Musk hand-and-body lotion into his hand, and began to massage it into

his other arm with painstaking care. A porcine fellow wearing the uniform of a Little League umpire sat on the bench alongside Jackson, his round face crimson from exposure to a star, his hand extending a tape recorder toward Jackson's face.

"Reggie, I understand ya collect cars. . . ."

Jackson nodded, and recited the names of a dozen vintage automobiles which he keeps garaged in his Tempe, Arizona, business headquarters.

"I didn't hear you say a Mercedes, Reggie. I drive a Mercedes, a real honey. I thought maybe ya had a Mercedes or two, ya know, wonada classic models."

Jackson closed the cap on his lotion, wiped the top, and placed it carefully on the uppermost shelf of his locker. He took a container of Johnson's baby powder down and began to dust his thighs and midsection.

"A Mercedes," he said. "Yeah, I bought my attorney a Mercedes. . . ." The man laughed nervously. "What didja get 'im, a 450?"

"450 SL."

"Yeah, ha-ha, that's what I got, 450 SL."

"I'd like to have a nice Cadillac Eldorado convertible," Jackson said, pulling pale-green boxer shorts over his dark olive skin. "Not that I like the car that much, but it's a good sound investment." He sat down and looked his interviewer square in the eye. "The one I like best is my Corniche. It gives me a lot of freedom when I drive it."





“...Reggie Jackson must now prove his contention that ‘if I played in New York, they would name a candy bar after me’...”

He paused, measuring his words. “You don’t buy a car like that with a \$500 down payment. You have to work for it. You have to strive to get to a certain position so you can afford it. . . . It’s a comforting type of feeling, to be able to drive it. It’s hard work, a certain kind of accomplishment. The car is a beautiful car in itself; it’s a nice ride, it gives you a great feeling, but to be able to drive that kind of a car you have to make so many sacrifices, put in so much time. It shows that you have reached a certain standard, a certain level, in life-style and living. You’ve come from someplace.”

The interviewer sat rapt; when Jackson finished speaking he asked the man if he knew what a Corniche was.

“No, I’m afraid not, Reggie, ha-ha, I’m afraid I don’t. . . .”

“It’s the top of the line Rolls-Royce. . . .”

Jackson is a star—a controversial, intense, deeply ambitious man who has mastered the art of celebrity. He is both perceptive and informal as a television commentator, but he can also translate the enormous power harnessed in his body into his words and gestures. When he senses gravity in a topic, or feels as if he is under pressure, he can make whomever he is speaking with break out in sweat. And Jack-

son is under great pressure these days.

He has been considered disruptive by a number of baseball people who do not like young men in uniform to speak their mind. Jackson is conscious of this and deeply embittered by it. “People always want to create some minuses for me,” he said, after satisfying his first interviewer. “They don’t like to say that I’m a great ballplayer. It’s like wherever I go it’s always what I can’t do. What I won’t do. How I will hurt, or disrupt. . . .”

That reputation developed in Oakland, where he helped the brilliant, enigmatic A’s to three World Series titles, won an MVP award and the American League home-run title twice, and helped the flamboyant club become legendary for its dissension and clubhouse fistfights. The A’s were larger than life, a condition which suited Jackson temperamentally. He was traded to Baltimore last year, refused to play for the offered wage for a part of the early season, and ultimately became a free agent, finally signing with the Yankees. He has his detractors, yet the fact remains that he plays with proud intensity, symbolized by his swing, a smooth but savage explosion.

Jackson knows that he has arrived at the reckoning point of his career and must now prove his contention that

“if I played in New York, they would name a candy bar after me.” Thus, while he has been characteristically gracious with the press, his quiescence has been disturbing, his concentration so intense that when he picks up a bat one half-expects him to snap it in two.

“I know the great names of the old Yankees, what this club always meant in terms of power and overall excellence. I don’t have illusions. I don’t want to bring them down to my level, but to play up to theirs.” Yet at the same time, Jackson is ambivalent about wearing the Yankee pinstripes, because he is far too much of an individualist, far too much the contemporary star. “What are you supposed to say when they ask you about putting on ‘the old pinstripes,’ or about Yankee pride or the stadium? There’s only one answer you can really give to that, so the question doesn’t mean anything. The Yankee image? Well, it isn’t really all that appealing to me.”

Jackson does not possess the ideal temperament for a team sport; his needs are those of a star, and while he believes the Yankees can only win if he is “a cog in the wheel,” he will not sacrifice self-expression, or alter his own priorities for any team image.

“It would be nice to become the Yankees’ first black superstar,” Jackson



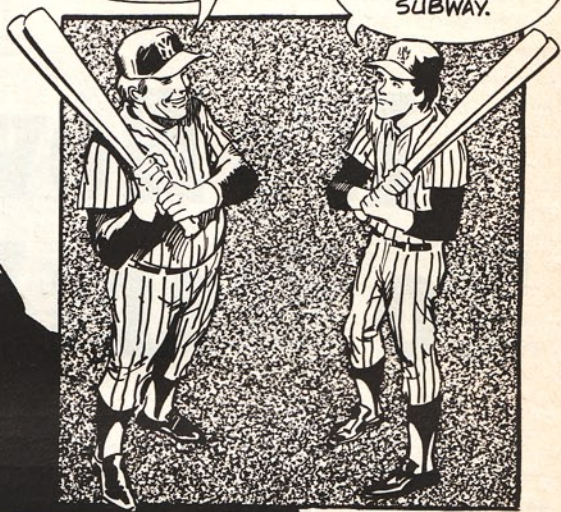
SOMETIMES WHEN THEY START DIGGING IN, YA GOTTA STICK IT IN THEIR EAR.



I WONDER IF MAYBE I SHOULD HAVE MY OTHER EAR PIERCED?!

Y'KNOW, MY SHARE FROM THE '56 SERIES PUT ME THROUGH COLLEGE.

MY SHARE FROM LAST YEAR COULDN'T GET ME A RIDE ON THE SUBWAY.



reflected, leaning against the batting cage, squinting in the sun. "The old Yankees were an all-white team; the front office was racist and bigoted. They didn't want no black superstars. I'm not knocking the players; the players had nothing to do with it. The Yankees were what the Mets are today, lily-white. It isn't comfortable to say, but somebody has to say it."

Jackson has been deeply hurt by the insinuations and charges of black activists who have been openly critical of his dating white women, his traveling in primarily white circles. He has donated both time and money to poor youth, and racial critics fail to perceive that Jackson's ego resists limitations of color. He is a man who strives toward perfection, period.

"I told Reggie that he can bring the city out of debt," said Ellis. "I told him he can get his candy bar. It's all on him. I hope he can do it. I know he can do it." The biggest problems Jackson will have to face are those of adjustment and acceptance.

"The toughest thing for me will be to fit in socially. This club has a lot of leaders, guys like Munson and Hunter. My job is to fit my personality to theirs, not for them to fit in with me."

This is true for the whole club in a larger sense, the sense that they will have to find some base of communication despite the high turnover of players, the transitional nature of the franchise. It is disconcerting to scan the list of players who have not signed contracts. The party line maintains that

once a player takes the field, squabbles with management are forgotten. This is patent nonsense in most cases. "You know what it takes to win," said Ellis. "It takes egos and money. We may not have the money part straight, but we sure got the egos."

Those egos are as diverse as they are large. Crucial to the Yankees' hopes this year will be the behavior of Mickey Rivers, the temperamental outfielder who has angered manager Billy Martin by his tendency to sulk, for reasons, refreshingly enough, which have nothing to do with his salary. Rivers feels that Martin has tried to alter his playing style, and has also let some unspecified problems unrelated to baseball affect his play. Less refreshing is the case of Graig Nettles, last year's American League home-run champion. The Yankee third baseman has been trying to renegotiate his three-year, \$390,000 contract and feels that his placid character and manner have encouraged Steinbrenner to turn a deaf ear toward his problems. "It seems like the guys who make money on this club are the flamboyant, controversial guys. Maybe I should pull something controversial."

The pride of the new Yankees is as thorny as the pride of the old, only it is the pride of individuals, perhaps still lacking the kind of charitable pride that can knit a team together. That pride will have to develop in the crucible, while they are prey to all the giant-killing instincts of teams with lesser talent, or more experience in molding it. They are in a number of ways the ball club

of the future, given the increasing freedom demanded by the players, their increasing preoccupation with money, the increasingly frantic shuffling of talent by owners who need to make a winner to make a budget. They are everything the old Yankees were not, the flagship of baseball's future. It will be a heavy burden for them to carry.

Munson and Jackson, initially cool to each other when training camp opened, later began circling each other, sniffing the air, trying to pick out signals of compatibility or antagonism. They were sitting in the dugout one morning, chatting with Tony Kubek, a former Yankee, while the batting cage was being wheeled into place.

"I got more hits in my first seven years in baseball than any catcher," Munson said to Kubek, swinging a bat idly, releasing a lazy gob of spit now and then.

"More than Berra?" asked Jackson. "Yeah, more than anybody."

"Yeah, but if we were on the old Yankee club, we'd both be sittin' the pines," Jackson suggested. "The bench." "How the f--k do you know?"

"You bet we would," Jackson insisted.

"How the f--k do you know?"

"You'd be sittin' there cursin', threaten' to punch Casey [Stengel] in the mouth."

"How the f--k do you know?"

The cage was in place. The conversation ended with the anxious clatter of their spikes on the cement steps of the dugout. It was time to hit.