

New York City Subway World Series: The Return of an Autumn Love Affair

An Essay

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The first New York City (Subway) World Series since 1956 is only days away. Let the overkill begin! Within moments of the Yankees clinching the pennant late last Tuesday evening, local television viewers were witnesses to an avalanche of newsreel video footage showing Elvis, Marilyn, Ike, Howdy Doody and Davy Crockett coonskin caps. I suppose this was to serve as a subtle reminder there really existed a 1950s New York City, complete with sock-hops, drive-in movies, egg creams, and yes, three beloved New York baseball teams that went about their craft on hot summer days at the hallowed Yankee Stadium, and sadly, the long demolished sacred ballparks of Ebbets Field and the Polo Grounds.

Employees in manufacturing plants throughout the tri-state area have been busy working overtime hours assembling, packaging and shipping Yankee and Met merchandise with team logos on thousands of official and knock-off World Series products. Before this column ever reaches print, souvenirs will already have been hawked to a great many rabid fans, who are more than willing to climb over each other for the likes of buying a bobbing-head Mike Piazza doll, complete with a neatly trimmed goatee.

Tourists and non-baseball enthusiasts visiting the great metropolis should be somewhat understanding of the mass hysteria that must be endured for the remainder of this month. These folks should instead look upon this as a minor intrusion for their being privy to a rather special love affair, a Dickens tale that is about to be played out live in the neighborhood villages known as the Bronx and Queens. Anticipation for baseball romantics will soon intensify with the influx of fans arriving by mass transit for each game from the neighboring boroughs, including New Jersey and Connecticut. The reverberating echoes from the noisy tunnels and the accompanying sound of screeching brakes heard in the distance will provide an aura of urban excitement for the crowds who huddle on the station platforms waiting to hop on the Number 4 and 7 subways to the stadiums. It is a New York experience like no other.

New York baseball fans are a passionate bunch. Crack through that street attitude and you will not find a more nostalgic people, proud of their team's history and confident in their future. The baseball aristocrats that were once Mickey, Whitey and Yogi, now wear crowns that spell Derek, Bernie and Andy. The "Boys of Summer," that once answered to Jackie, Duke, Campy and Gil, are now revered as the "Amazins," with the likes of Mike, Timo, Franco and Edgardo.

There is every indication that New York baseball fans will embellish the October 2000 classic, like none before. They will argue, without reservation, that the coming together of the Yankees and Mets in this first World Series of the new millennium was no fluke or stroke of luck. It was rather a pre-ordained right that could include none other than these two teams, and quite simply, was a matter of destiny.

When this World Series is recalled in the year 2020, you can bet the ranch that an additional 200,000 non-ticket holders will somehow swear that they were bona fide paying customers, having sat in field level box seats directly behind home plate, not missing a single spectacular inning. Who is to argue with a New Yorker anyway, or for that matter, with his or her aunts, uncles and cousins from New Jersey and Connecticut?

The outcome of the Series will not end the saga, but rather only serve to raise new arguments. The old voices debating “Who is better, Mantle or Mays” have now given way to “Jeter or Piazza.” Future battles will be waged and there will be new scores to settle between our two teams, but there is something momentous about this first reunion in forty-four years, so much so, that we may not see its likes again for a very long time.

Let the drama, excitement and heroics, complete with all the hype go forward. Isn't this what baseball in the big town is all about? A parade up Broadway will certainly follow in the weeks ahead to honor the future champs. And for this writer that would be a wonderful tribute, especially if the team happens to be the New York Yankees. Regardless, here's to the winners!

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