

# players

By Mike Reynolds

## Looking Ahead

**L**ike any good baseball manager, Brandon Steiner is thinking a couple of innings ahead.

The skipper of New York City-headquartered Steiner Sports Marketing, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary, still sees Major League Baseball having to overcome a slow start out of the gate in the minds and

to mount a comeback isn't particularly favorable at the moment. "There's consumer interest in the Olympics, with estimated sales of \$1 billion. That's a lot of dollars that won't be coming baseball's way," he notes. "Since the last time there was a major baseball work stoppage hockey, college, and motor sports have all come onto the scene. Right

pered the sport. "There's been no buzz about the [Arizona] Diamondbacks and what's the other team's name? I don't even know," Steiner ponders. [Answer: the Tampa Bay Devil Rays] "It certainly hasn't helped that there is no one from a marketing standpoint to add some creativity, to develop some."

"Today's decision-makers all grew up with the game. My 10th grader loves playing soccer and hockey, but I'm paying for the tickets and I'm not going to the soccer game. It will be another five to 10 years down the road before the people that love and grew up with soccer will be in decision-making roles for corporations about what sports to associate with."

From a television standpoint, Steiner believes that baseball has connected with "In The Zone" and an array of promos for the game's stars, courtesy of Fox during its rookie season. "You know, ESPN is going to do the right thing, and Fox is definitely headed in the right direction with the kids show. There's a lot of Fox player promos and that should help push things forward. Now, all I hope is that Fox takes a few more risks with its game coverage than it did with [the NHL.]"

Despite its early-season deficit at the retail level, Steiner's scouting report has MLB poised for a comeback in the late innings. "There's some nice stuff out there.

But I firmly believe that once the pennant races heat up, the retailers that are proactive, the ones that carry some items that no one else has, will do a good business during the back-to-school season," says Steiner, adding that the big payoff with the sport will likely come in 1997.

### VITAL STATISTICS

Age: 37

Born: Brooklyn, NY

Resides: Scarsdale, NY

Marital Status: Wife: Mara; children: Crosby and Nicole

Education: Degrees in accounting, personnel and industrial relations, Syracuse University

Position: Founder, president of Steiner Sports Marketing, New York City

Hobbies: "Playing with the kids as much as possible."

Basketball, collecting trains, cars, and sports memorabilia.



wallets of fans/consumers following the labor unrest that shut down our national pastime in 1994 and delayed the start of the 1995 season.

"Inside the business, baseball is back in the race," says Steiner, whose clients include the 1986 Super Bowl Champion New York Giants, New York Rangers captain Mark Messier and The Scooter himself, Phil Rizzuto. "That said, there's no question baseball has lost a lot of market share. Their claims or disclaims notwithstanding, baseball's licensees have lost shelf space."

Moreover, Steiner says the environment for baseball

now, it's not all that easy to jump-start baseball sales."

Nevertheless, Steiner has been encouraged, to some extent, by a number of the steps baseball has taken to mend fences and lift its profile. "The Mets players were on a traveling caravan to sell tickets back in spring training and Cincinnati is putting fans on the field with the players," he says. "I think the players/owners realized they needed to become a little more fan friendly."

Conversely, the lack of a marketing director [at press time, MLB had still not hired anyone for this position] and focus has ham-

Fortunately, some companies like Nike and Reebok have elected to tie and push the game on their own. "Nike is very hot on Griffey. He's making a big impact with kids," he says. "What they need is to get a Coca-Cola more involved with the game and youth."

Although he acknowledges, as many do, that baseball may have lost a whole generation of fans, Steiner doesn't see that as the equivalent of staring down the gun of a Randy Johnson fastball with an 0-2 count and two outs in the bottom of the ninth—at least not immediately.