

Yankees, merchants, city head for payoffs

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end up in Mr. Steinbrenner's wallet through the sale of tickets, souvenirs and other concessions. That is sure to give ammunition to politicians and others who say the city should not build a new Yankee stadium on Manhattan's West Side, something Mr. Steinbrenner desperately wants.

In an effort to counter that opposition, the owner and his advisers are in the awkward position of bad-mouthing the current stadium at the same time that fans are streaming to the Bronx in record numbers.

"We're only ninth overall in attendance in major-league baseball," says Lonny Trost, executive vice president of the Yankees, "which is pretty sad when you have the best record this century."

Howard Rubenstein, the owner's spokesman, says, "Mr. Steinbrenner feels that with possibly the best team ever in baseball, it should be drawing bigger crowds during the week, and those teams with modernized or new stadiums are out-drawing him dramatically."

Whatever the fate of the stadium, there is no doubt that the success of the team on the field is producing Yankee mania throughout the city.

Television ratings are going through the roof. At WPIX-Channel 11, the Yankees are attracting a whopping 6.8 rating. That's the best rating in a decade and is making the

station competitive with network affiliates in prime time, which are filled with summer reruns.

"If the Yankees are doing a 6 or 7, that's a big number in the summer," says Peggy Green, executive vice president of Zenith Media Services Inc., a media buyer. "If I had a choice of a rerun or a Yankee game when they're doing well, I'd take the Yankee game."

Madison Square Garden Network, which shows the bulk of the Yankee games, has also seen a surge in viewership. MSG's Yankee ratings this year are 3.9—a 60% increase over last year and the best ever since the network began showing Yankee games in 1989. Cable traditionally has lower ratings than broadcast stations like Channel 11.

With greater viewership, MSG and WPIX have raised ad rates, though executives at both stations declined to say by how much.

Soaring ratings for WABC

Yankee games have also been a boon to WABC radio, which broadcasts the games. Its audience at night, when most games are played, has more than doubled because of the Yankees, helping it become the city's top-rated AM radio station during the spring rating period. As a result, it has raised its ad rates 30% to 40% during the pregame and postgame shows.

Demand for player endorsements and appearances has increased with the Yankees' success. Most corporations interested in hiring baseball stars to hawk their goods wait until after the World Series to ink deals. But pressure for personal appearances has grown along with the Yanks' win totals.

"We get daily calls," says Casey Close, agent for shortstop Derek Jeter. "Whether on behalf of a company to speak or to visit somebody at a hospital, it's nonstop."

Retailers are also benefiting from the Yankees' record season. Brandon Steiner, a sports marketer, recently bought a sports memorabilia store in the Roosevelt Field Mall on Long Island. He says sales have increased by 30% in just the last two months.

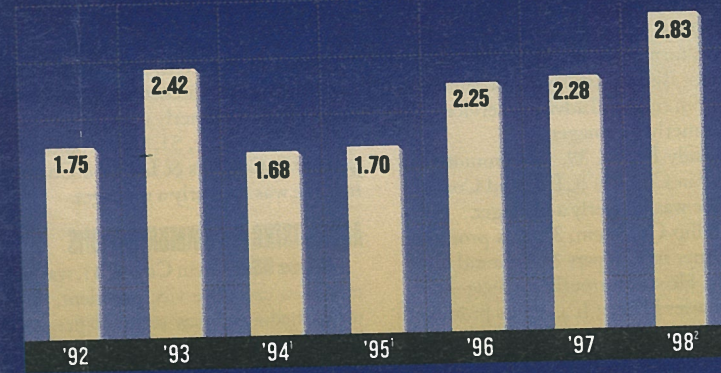
"We're selling a ton of Yankee stuff," he says. "We're making a strong move to buy everything and anything Yankee. People feel something special is coming. This may be the best team ever, and they're saying, 'I've got to get a piece of this.'"

Fans are also pouring into bars and restaurants to watch the games over dinner and drinks.

The Sporting Club in TriBeCa normally closes for two weeks every summer as the investment bankers who work nearby take summer vacations. Not this year. "We have 10 to 15 more people come in every night to watch the Yankees," says

Yankees Attendance

In millions



1-Seasons shortened by strike. 2-Projection.

SOURCE: TEAM MARKETING REPORT

JENNIFER MCNAMARA

General Manager William Torres. "We're going to stay open."

Bigger gains in 1999

The Official All-Star Cafe in Times Square is piggybacking several promotions on the team's success. In the next week alone, the restaurant has scheduled the presentation of the Subway Series trophy to the Yankees, a benefit auction for the charity run by shortstop Derek Jeter, and a party in conjunction with the Yankees' Old-Timers Game on Saturday.

Even with these economic boosts, the biggest payoff for a successful team, experts say, comes the following year, when fans, advertisers and sponsors hope the team repeats its success.

For the Yankees, that could translate not only into higher attendance, but more lucrative sponsorship agreements and, most important of all, higher fees for the rights to televise its games.

The Yankees' \$486 million contract with MSG, which expires after the 2000 season, was once derided as a boondoggle. Given the team's success, Mr. Steinbrenner could very well use it as a base with MSG or another network.

"They would find themselves in the best position in terms of negotiating leverage for new media contracts or sponsorship agreements because the team's popularity is at a peak," says Steven Matt, a sports evaluation expert with Arthur Andersen. ■