

# Hard work leads to biz home run

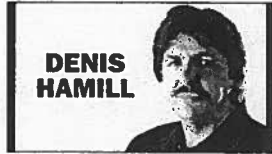
**T**ODAY, AT AGE 39, he owns the \$10 million-a-year sports collectible and marketing firm called Steiner Sports on W. 27th St. in Manhattan.

But growing up in the Kings Highway section of Brooklyn, Brandon Steiner's first job was delivering fruits and vegetables. Then he took on a paper route. Then he started getting up at 4:30 a.m. to bake bagels before heading for class at John Dewey High School, where he was the class treasurer.

"My parents were divorced and my father wasn't around much before he died when I was young," Steiner says as he sits surrounded by some 5,000 items officially signed by a roster of more than 500 athletes of today's fame and yesterday's glory. He claims the memorabilia collection is the largest in the nation.

"We grew up working poor on Kings Highway near Ocean Parkway, over a butcher, in an upper-middle class neighborhood with a lot of Syrian Jews, Italians, some Irish, a real crossroads," he said. "But we didn't have much. We knew hunger. I always said I saw the light at a young age — the light in the refrigerator. But the hunger gives you ambition. And my mother was an amazing woman. She had a great mind for business."

Steiner's mother, who passed away a few years ago, was a travel agent and a hair colorist, and also ran an auto-



DENIS HAMILL

parts business — always hustling to make an extra buck for her two sons.

"My mother was ahead of her time, and she taught me that you could do anything by never being intimidated," Steiner says. "In the street, I did what I had to do, too. I took my money from my paper route or the bagel factory and would invest in firecrackers. Other kids would sell them for me, and I would pay them in fireworks. Hey, I was a poor street kid, trying to keep up with my rich friends. I played sports all day long, very competitive. I went to at least 25 Yankee games a year, spending \$1.50 for bleacher seats. I also loved the Rangers."

At Dewey High, Steiner discovered Shakespeare, and excelled in math and accounting.

"Anything to do with business just came naturally to me," he says.

His mother helped select a college and put together a fi-

nancial-aid package that allowed him to soar through Syracuse University, where he majored in accounting and personal and industrial relations.

In the summers, he worked with his mother as a travel agent, selling honeymoon packages and European vacations. "My mother taught me the power of recommendation and persuasion, and how to win the trust of people," he says.

After he graduated from Syracuse, Steiner went to work for the Hyatt Hotel chain, where he received three promotions in two years. "At Hyatt, I learned how corporate America makes money," he said.

He parlayed that experience success at a string of

sports bars, including the Sporting Club, where he met his first sports celebrities.

"Then I really lucked out," he says. "I landed a job as an assistant general manager for the Hard Rock Cafe, where I saw how an international multi-million-dollar theme restaurant was run. I also learned how important the power of celebrity was. The Hard Rock was hot, and I made friends with guys like Darryl Strawberry, Ron Darling, Keith Hernandez, just by making sure they got a good table. And I just started hanging out with all these athletes. Soon corporate people, rich millionaires, were approaching me to see if I could get one of my athlete friends to come to conventions, motivational

seminars, parties, bar mitzvahs, school commencements. At first, I put these people together as favors."

Then in 1987, with an investment of \$4,000, Steiner opened his sports marketing company. He bought a computer and compiled a database of 3,500 athletes from every imaginable sport, currently playing and retired, and started matching athletes to products and corporations.

"Whenever I set up a meeting between an athlete and a corporate head, I'd send an autographed baseball, basketball, football, puck, jersey, a few days ahead of time, to set a tone. Soon, they were asking for tons of this stuff for their clients, kids and friends. So I started signing up the athletes for autographed memorabilia. People like Muhammad Ali, Mark Messier, Joe Namath, Joe Torre, Darryl Strawberry."

He also conceived the "Sports Fantasy" package, which includes tickets to a game and meeting a fan's favorite athletes.

"Today, I have a \$10 million-a-year business," Steiner says. "I get to take my kids to any games they want. But it scares me that they might have it too easy. They'll never know the hunger, never see the light in the refrigerator. I'm glad for them in one way, but looking back, I wouldn't change growing up poor in Brooklyn for anything."



SUSAN WATTS DAILY NEWS

PITCHMAN Brandon Steiner heads up Steiner Sports.