

Memorabilia

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Steiner and Yankees sign exclusive memorabilia deal

BY DOUG DROTMAN

Somebody had to do it first and for anyone following baseball and the collectibles industry, the smart money would have been on the New York Yankees and Steiner Sports Marketing. And now, with the creation of Yankees-Steiner Collectibles, George Steinbrenner and Brandon Steiner are partners in the collectibles industry.

The unprecedented ground-breaking partnership was announced on a frigid Dec. 20 afternoon at Yankee Stadium. The company showcased the A-Team: the manager, Joe Torre; the captain, Derek Jeter; and the closer, Mariano Rivera. The entire New York press corps took the bait and packed the Stadium Club.

"We picked Steiner because, in our opinion, they are the best," said Randy Levine, president of the Yankees. "This venture is being backed by the New York Yankees from our principal owner, George Steinbrenner, to manager Joe Torre and to our players, like Derek Jeter and Mariano Rivera."

The multi-year partnership aims to provide fans with access to Yankees memorabilia and its players. Yankees-Steiner Collectibles will market a wide range of products, which will include game-used bases, bats, balls, player jerseys, caps and lineup cards. Many of these objects will be signed by players.

Yankees-Steiner Collectibles will not just develop collectibles with memorabilia. Thanks to the tight ship that The Boss runs in the Bronx, over the past 15 years, the Yankees have saved a wealth of memorabilia, stored in a few rooms in the bowels of the Stadium. As a result, Yankees-Steiner Collectibles begins with an imposing inventory featuring thousands of historical artifacts from Yankees greats like Don Mattingly and Paul O'Neill to the not-so-greats like Mark Whiten and Randy Velarde.

"The amount and quality of the merchandise they had was spectacular," said Brandon Steiner, chairman of Steiner Sports Marketing. "It took us a month to remove and catalog all of the items from the stadium. There is a lot of history with this organization and we take it very seriously."

The partnership is actually a stand-alone company utilizing the people and resources of the two powerhouses. As a result, they will offer much more than just traditional collectibles and memorabilia. The true power of Yankees-Steiner Collectibles will be the ability to

The Boss raids the Yankee Stadium archives for thousands of bats and hundreds of jerseys, pants and equipment from last two decades



For the Yankees, the partnership was more about control and authenticity than fun.

"We have substantial memorabilia and collectibles at our disposal," said Levine. "Previously these items had gone unnoticed or found their way into the marketplace through unsavory people or auction houses. We had no control over the situation and more importantly, fans had no way to authenticate what they received."

To ensure authenticity, the memorabilia will be authenticated by tamper-proof holograms with the Yankees-Steiner Collectibles logo in addition to the newly created Major League Baseball approved hologram. Future artifacts sold through the partnership will also be authenticated by on-site auditors from Deloitte and Touche as part of MLB's Authentication Program.

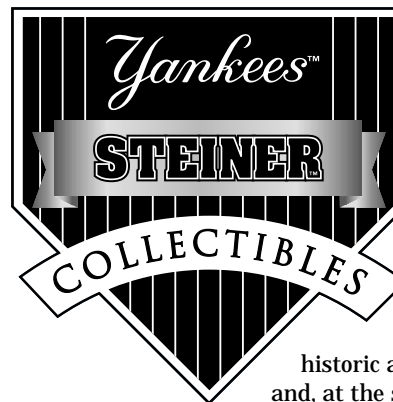
HEAVY HITTERS – (left to right) Yankees President Randy Levine, COO Lonny Trost and Brandon Steiner pose with Mariano Rivera, manager Joe Torre and Derek Jeter on the occasion of the historic signing.

BY THE NUMBERS

What Steiner Gets

- 3,000-4,000 bats
- 100-plus batting helmets and caps
- 300-plus pairs of pants from last 15 years
- Jerseys, bases, homeplates, etc.
- Hundreds of items to come

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"I am very excited that fans are going to be able to acquire authentic Yankees memorabilia for which there has always been such a huge demand," said Lonny Trost, chief operating officer of the Yankees. "Steiner Sports Marketing has worked hard and with great integrity for many years in building credibility as a high-profile sports marketing company. I have complete confidence that they can do justice to the

historic and emotional value of these collectibles and, at the same time, assist fans in acquiring them through an ethical and efficient process."

Yankees-Steiner Collectibles will also be a boon for Yankees players. Although the deal provides the company with the rights to the memorabilia, it does not include autographs and access to players. If a Yankee hits three home runs in a game, breaks a record or throws a no-hitter, he can expect a call from Yankees-Steiner Collectibles with a lucrative endorsement deal. Players who already have marketing deals with Steiner, including Jeter, Rivera and Jorge Posada, will continue those relationships.

Although the deal does not lock up exclusivity of all Yankees players, it does ensure exclusivity between the Yankees and Steiner. All official Yankees memorabilia will be marketed and issued through the joint venture.

market unique, first-hand experiences with players, such as the chance to have a photograph taken with a player and then acquire the jersey worn by the player for the photo. In instances where fans have tickets for a specific game, they will also have the opportunity to pre-order a game ball.

And when a special moment happens at Yankee Stadium, like a no-hitter, record-breaking accomplishment, great catch, clutch hit or classic comeback, memorabilia from those moments will be immediately available to fans.

"We're going to have some fun with this. That is what the collectibles business is all about," said Steiner. "Derek Jeter has always told me that no matter what you do, you have to have fun. That is one of our driving forces."

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did you know?

Leaps And Bounds – Steiner growth has been nothing less than remarkable over the last 17 years:

- 1987: Started company as a marketing provider for sports bars, and sold closed-circuit fights to bars and restaurants
- 1991: Opened first real office in Manhattan and represented Super Bowl MVP Ottis Anderson
- 1993: Started collectibles company
- 1994: Signed Mark Messier and Phil Rizzuto to exclusive memorabilia and marketing deals
- 1998: Acquired first warehouse space, signed 12 Yankees to exclusive deals for autographs, including Jeter, Rivera, Torre and others
- 1999: Opened first Hall of Heroes store
- 2000: Moved to New Rochelle, N.Y., purchased by Omnicom
- 2001: Received first MLB license, opened first Last Licks ice cream/collectibles shop
- 2002: Debut of sports photo/plaque line
- 2003: Joined MLB authentication program
- 2004: Announced major marketing and memorabilia partnership with New York Yankees

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To keep distribution of the product under control, Yankees-Steiner Collectibles will only be distributed through a handful of outlets including: Yankees Clubhouse Shops; the Yankees' official Web site (www.yankees.com); SteinerSports.com; and MLB.com.

The partnership will also have the promotional power of the Yankees to promote the products including stadium signage, marketing support, and mailings to season-ticket holders, plus support and exposure from the YES Network and other media outlets.

Sean Mahoney, a lifelong Yankees fan and nine-year veteran of Steiner Sports, has been tabbed to manage the program. The Yankees will lend support from a variety of staffers, from Trost to Debbie Tymon in marketing, to assistant equipment manager Lou Cucuzza. Although Mahoney and his team have the primary responsibility of driving product development and marketing, he is quick to point out that the Yankees have already had tremendous input on product ideas.

"They know the available resources so well," explains Mahoney. "They have a pretty good idea already as to how the product will work and have already come up with some ideas that we would not have thought of, such as locker room chairs from the 2004 ALCS and turf from the field."

The stage for this deal was set during the past decade as Steiner Sports leveraged its New York roots by developing a relationship with the Yankees and many of the key players. The projects generated revenue for Steiner and the players and also helped benefit charities that were close to the hearts of the players.

"It has been very rewarding to work with Derek Jeter and the Turn 2 Foundation, Joe Torre and Rudolph Giuliani for the 9-11 Scholarship Fund and helping needy people in Panama on behalf of Mariano Rivera," said Steiner.

Just as Steiner's previous work with the Yankees set the stage for this partnership, the launch of the company provides Yankees-Steiner Collectibles with a foundation to work on similar arrangements with other professional sports franchises.

One item on display at the press conference symbolic of where the future might take Yankees-Steiner Collectibles, was homeplate from Game Seven of the 2004 ALCS. But in an ironic twist, the base was signed by members of the World Champion Boston Red Sox. ♦

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