

NEW YORKERS AT ISRAEL'S FLASH POINT BY CRAIG HOROWITZ

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NEW YORK

How shortstop
Derek Jeter
brought
glamour back
to Yankees
baseball

The Natural

By James Kaplan

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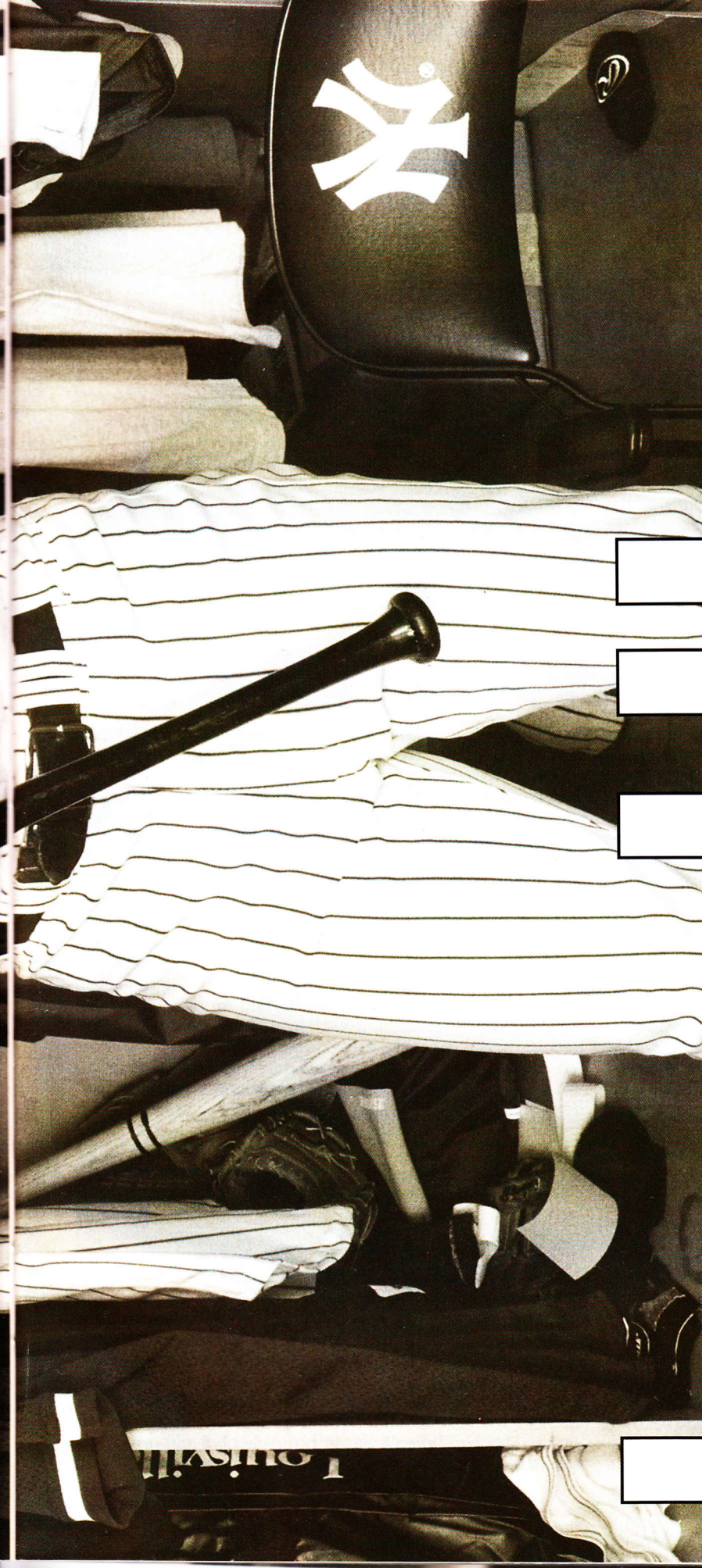
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LOCAL HERO

Last season, shortstop Derek Jeter emerged as the hottest rookie the Yankees have had since Mantle. The kid from Kalamazoo has Steinbrenner smiling and teenage girls swooning—but can he become a superstar? BY JAMES KAPLAN

PHOTOGRAPHED BY JESSE FROHMAN

DEREK JETER IS SIX FEET THREE INCHES TALL AND 195 pounds, broad at the shoulders, narrow at the hips. Praxiteles would have been impressed. The smooth café-au-lait skin of his long, broad face is sunburned red. His kinky brown hair is cut rook-ic-cop style, buzzed around the sides, short on top. A heavy gold chain hangs on his thick sun-tanned neck. Jeter is in a batting cage on a practice field in Tampa, on a winter morning long before the start of the season. Amid the mingled aromas of cut grass and Flexall, as teammates and coaches banter and traffic streams along the highway beyond the outfield, he stands in the cage, wearing a blue-on-white New York Yankees T-shirt and baggy gray shorts over dark-blue compression shorts, holding his bat high behind his head and facing the practice pitcher, who's behind a safety net on the mound.

"Can you stand a little heat?" the pitcher asks. "I'm really wild today."

"Today?" Jeter says.

There's a slight, innocent sneer in his white, lopsided smile, a draw-poker challenge to his long-lashed, green-eyed stare. It's the look of a very young man regarding the beckoning world with caution and a certain ironic distance. It is also the look of a young man holding a handful of aces. In the cage, his eyes fixed on the red seams of the Rawlings cork-centered baseball as the practice pitcher releases it, his lanky body jittering as he prepares to swing, he resembles a Thoroughbred colt in the starting gate, itching to *get at it*.

Jeter sets as the pitcher throws, then takes a smooth whistling cut and cracks the ball high, high, out over the left-field fence, toward the weekday-morning traffic. He hits the ball out toward the cars three times in succession: three pitches, three homers.

"Who!" says Tino Martinez, the Yankees' first-baseman. "You could start today."

Martinez, the star brought in from Seattle to replace Don Mattingly, is a disarmingly modest, pleasant-looking young man with massive forearms. He looks like pure capability. At bat, he is a proven commodity. And yet his stance has none of Jeter's electricity. One's eyes wander away from Tino Martinez when he stands in the cage. Derek Jeter attracts attention wherever he goes. After batting practice, he leans on the chain-link fence, chatting with two white-shoed grannies.

"These are my girls," the shortstop says, in his rich, boyish baritone.

The grannies giggle. "We've been following him from the beginning," one says.

IT HASN'T BEEN SO LONG. JETER SIGNED WITH THE YANKEES ON JUNE 27, 1992, the day after his 18th birthday, and—partly because the team badly needed a shortstop, and partly because Jeter had the whiff of stardom about him—came along amazingly quickly in the minors. Notwithstanding the Yankees' reputation for squandering their own homegrown talent—George Steinbrenner is notoriously impatient with rookies—Joe Torre brought Jeter up for full-time work less than four years after he signed.

And then lightning struck: The young shortstop batted .314, knocked in 78 runs, and was chosen American League Rookie of the Year; the Yankees won the Series. Whatever any of them might have told you, the women who threw handwritten marriage proposals to Jeter during the Yankees' October victory parade through Manhattan weren't merely inspired by his youth and good looks. His athletic prowess was an important part of the picture, as was his World Series ring. Jeter was in the right place at the right time, with the right stuff. But is it the stuff of superstardom?

Derek Jeter hit a famous home run in the playoffs against Baltimore last October, the ball that was grabbed away from out-



Everyone expected he would hit decently—it was Jeter's dependable glove that was the real surprise last year.

fielder Tony Tarasco by a boy in the stands. The homer added to the ten that Jeter hit in his glorious first season, a number that, as the euphoric haze of the world championship wears off, takes on a certain sobering quality. On the day he signed with the Yankees in 1992, Derek Jeter weighed 159 pounds—"in my shoes," he says. The Yankees listed him at 175. A hundred and fifty-nine pounds is not an impressive figure, especially in this era of power-hitting shortstops, an era for which iron man Cal Ripken Jr.—six feet four and 220 pounds; twenty-plus home runs per year for eleven years running—has set the standard. Through weight-training, Jeter has bulked up to 195, but he wants to weigh more. "I'm *weak*," he told me, that morning in Tampa. "I need to get stronger."

It struck me then as a curious statement: He looked not even remotely weak. But it was clear that somehow, in the merciless arena of top-flight major-league baseball, as well as in the hard light of his own high ambition, Derek Jeter felt . . . challenged.

It was and is, after all, the beginning of his second season under the most demanding boss in baseball, on a team under palpable pressure to repeat a nearly impossible feat, in the most vociferously critical sports marketplace in the world. To make matters worse, Jeter is slated to bat leadoff—which means he will have to learn to be patient at the plate and take more walks. He'll also be anchoring a slightly iffy infield, a fact that will put pressure on him to improve upon last year's total of 22 errors. As early as January, New York's army of sportswriters was starting to natter about Jeter, polishing up old battle-axes like "sophomore jinx" and "sophomore slump."

But no one demands more of Jeter than Jeter himself. "I don't set my sights low," he says. "I didn't go into my my first year saying 'If I hit .250, I'll be satisfied.' I set goals for myself, but I don't tell people. When I was in high school, I told myself, 'I want to be High School Player of the Year.'" And he got it—de-



spite the fact that, coming from the snow belt town of Kalamazoo, Michigan, he was up against Florida and California players who got to practice year-round. "In '94," he says, "I told myself I wanted to be Minor League Player of the Year." He got it.

What's he telling himself about 1997? Jeter shakes his head: He doesn't tell people. And yet however he has set his sights, Alex Rodriguez has to be standing square in the middle of them.

Rodriguez is the Seattle Mariners' phenomenal—and phenomenally young—shortstop. He's only 21, and he would have won Rookie of the Year honors by a landslide last season if he hadn't played for half of 1995 and so been ineligible. Rodriguez batted .358 in 1996 and hit 36 home runs. He, too, will be facing enormous pressure this season. Still, Alex Rodriguez has one thing that Derek Jeter doesn't have: a shoe deal with Nike.

IT IS A TRUISM IN OUR TIME THAT IT IS NO longer enough for a superlative professional athlete simply to be a superlative athlete. A multiyear, multi-million-dollar contract is part of the brass ring, but the other essential element is product endorsements. Michael Jordan has shown that the money a player can make from endorsing products can dwarf that player's salary, no matter how

large the salary is. Many other athletes in various sports—football, tennis, golf, hockey, track and field—have followed Jordan's lead, and prospered mightily. But the one sport whose players have largely been left out of the money is, ironically, the one that was once known as the national pastime.

"Baseball players don't wear shoes that people see, the sport has had terrible labor problems, and in general it hasn't marketed itself well," says sports agent Adam Katz, who represents several top players, including Mo Vaughn, Sammy Sosa, and ex-Yankee John Wetteland. "How many baseball players have good national ads? Ken Griffey [Jr.], Alex Rodriguez, Barry Bonds, Ripken, Frank Thomas. Maybe one or two others. Now think about the basketball players that have national ads. Or the football players—and you don't even see their faces."

Things are slowly changing. Some baseball agents have been starting to get shoe contracts for their clients. Scott Boras, who represents Alex Rodriguez, landed the Nike deal for his client by overcoming the company's initial hesitation: "I pointed out

world championships multiple times; all are the best at what they do. When you talk about icons in baseball, Ken Griffey is the going rate. He hits homers, scores runs, and is a Gold Glove player."

For the moment, Jeter's image—in New York, a market larger than local but smaller than national—couldn't be stronger. "He's extremely bright, articulate, handsome, and he's a good guy," Adam Katz says. "Plus he's a very fine player, he plays in the center of the diamond, and he's in New York. All the things are there to create marketing opportunities, and he's on the way."

But is he? Some marketing insiders mutter ominously that he may be being undersold. Jeter and his agent, Casey Close of IMG, recently signed a shoe-endorsement deal with Fila—two weeks before the Yankees closed a \$95 million, ten-year marketing deal with Adidas, under which Jeter almost certainly would have made far more. Are Jeter's relatively lowball endorsements for New York companies like Nobody Beats the Wiz giving the market at large the wrong impression—that he's strictly a local hero? "It's hard to get a young player who's not making that much money to turn things down," says Scott Boras. "Jeter did a thing for Pepsi; we turned it down. They wanted Derek and Alex to hawk things in a catalogue. We require a long-term, major endorsement campaign as opposed to print ads; we didn't want to lose all other drink endorsements for a one-year deal."

According to some marketing insiders, Jeter has a two-year window in which to establish a national presence. Much depends on the Yankees' fortunes. "Unless you're a brilliant player, the sun doesn't rise again," one agent says. Will Derek Jeter's sun shine for more than two years? Are he and his management being shortsighted, or are they merely getting what they can while they can?

A FRIDAY AFTERNOON AT THE END OF JANUARY: DEREK JETER IS IN the fourth-floor formalwear salon of the Giorgio Armani store on Madison Avenue, trying on tuxedos. On highly unfamiliar turf, amid the beige walls and minimalist décor and salespeople in black, as the sound system plays neo-disco, Jeter stands before a full-length mirror, regarding himself. His mouth is slightly open: He is fully concentrated on the black-and-white-garbed figure before him.

Jeter's face in the spotless Armani mirror is slightly off-kilter, and fully open. It is not the face he presents to the importunate press or his importunate fans. Just for a moment, it is possible to imagine, watching Derek Jeter watch himself, that deep inside, he is delighted with what he sees.

And yet this is something it would never do to admit, not even quite to oneself, in a world of men such as professional baseball, in a historical organization like the New York Yankees,

Even before the spring, New York sportswriters started to natter about Jeter, polishing up old battle-axes like "sophomore jinx."

to them that the type of shoes they're selling with Michael Jordan's name on them are not the shoes Michael Jordan is actually wearing. Baseball players only wear spikes during the game. That's not the sell. Michael Jordan is not selling something he wears, Michael Jordan is selling *something*."

Image and charisma are what Boras is talking about, the sweet intangibles that can make any athlete wildly rich—especially if the athlete is a big winner. "The standout figures in endorsements in the last fifteen years have been Joe Montana, Magic Johnson, and Michael Jordan," Boras says. "All have won

in a sport where looks must be backed up by performance. It's all very well for Cecil Fielder to pipe up—as he did two weeks earlier when Jeter strode through the locker room of the Yankee Training Center in Tampa—"You not like us regular people; you a star." This was funny and affectionate, yet it also contained a barb, and a challenge. Big Daddy Fielder may not look like Derek Jeter, but he is the rock of the Yankees batting order, pulling down \$7.2 mil this year (to Jeter's second-year \$540,000).

It's true that not since the early days of Mickey Mantle have the Yankees possessed a young player of Jeter's traffic-stopping

charisma, not to mention potentially national marketability. But on a World Championship team notable for being greater than the sum of its parts, Derek Jeter's uniqueness is merely part of the big picture. It is a bright flash that may, or may not, pan out. No modern team has ever pulled together the way the '96 Yankees, under Joe Torre's spectacularly graceful leadership, did. It is hard to imagine a less fruitful climate for self-admiration.

So grant Derek Jeter a moment of furtive, well-deserved narcissism: In any case, it passes quickly. In a blink, he becomes a big, bored boy, restive under the attentive ministrations of an Armani salesman named Jeremy, an angular and elegant young man with, perhaps, a dim awareness of who Derek Jeter is, and given to statements like "There are two schools of thought on cummerbunds." Jeter, who seems to have limited interest in cummerbunds, is staring suspiciously down at the patent-leather shoes on his feet. The shoes have bows on them. "This shoe—*no bueno*," he says.

He's talking to his buddy Jorge Posada, the Yankees' new backup catcher. Posada, too, is a very young man, from San Juan, with a sweet, big-nosed, jug-eared face that makes him resemble a friendly mouse in a cartoon. Posada is lolling in an armchair in jeans and a black leather jacket, doing nothing more than watch his famous friend try on tuxes. Jeter keeps ducking sideways and darting glances down the hall to the

all the more so at this moment, since Jeter is on his way to a sold-out event called the Yankee Fan Fest at the Coliseum.

On the other hand, he is also—here and there, now and then—a 22-year-old private citizen. Who, by the way, rents an Upper East Side apartment during the season, one of only two Yankees—David Cone being the other—to make his home in Manhattan. Did the notoriously control-hungry Yankees have any concerns about their marquee rookie's living in the big city? The official line is that they did not. Still, one wonders. For his part, Jeter is crazy about Manhattan. "I love to walk down the street, feel the energy," he says. It is possible to sense certain tensions among the various factions who feel they have a claim on Jeter: the Yankees, a notably un-self-effacing organization; the no less self-important International Management Group, of Cleveland, which serves as Jeter's agent, manager, and career guide; and even Derek Jeter himself.

Not to mention, in ever greater measure, the equally unretiring New York press. In the fabulous November following the Yankees' World Series victory parade through Manhattan, the rookie shortstop celebrated the Yankee win and his new fame with Posada and another buddy from minor-league days around town. He went to China Club, he went to Roxy; he flared his nostrils and drank in the adulation. But he didn't touch a drop of alcohol, let alone anything stronger. Safe in the fraternity of

Jeter has the Jock Walk: a shouldery swagger that says more about youth and athletic self-confidence than about personal arrogance.

women's formal department, where several pretty girls appear to be being outfitted for a wedding, and then, when the girls vanish around a corner, back at himself in the mirror, where fleeting self-approval has metamorphosed into irony. Jeter shakes his head at his reflection. It's time, Jeremy announces, to decide on shirts. There are four different kinds. . . . Jeter tells Jeremy he'll take one of each. Armani can deliver them—along with tuxedo, belt and cummerbund, socks and bow-less shoes—to his hotel room tomorrow night, well ahead of time for the New York Baseball Writers' Dinner on Sunday, where Jeter will be honored as American League Rookie of the Year.

BACK IN HIS STREET CLOTHES (TAN CORDUROYS, beige knit fisherman's shirt, belted black leather coat), he goes downstairs, where he and Posada meet the Yankee driver at the door, then cross Madison Avenue mid-block. Jeter has the Jock Walk: a shouldery swagger that, in his case, says more about youth and athletic self-confidence than about personal arrogance. Nevertheless, it is not an inconspicuous walk. The nature of his fame in New York at this moment is that in surprise venues—places where Jeter just pops up, unexpected—it takes approximately 1.8 seconds before he is recognized, with a delighted smile, by a single passerby, and then roughly 1.3 seconds until, by a mysterious process akin to the behavior of schools of fish or flocks of birds, the recognition begins to spread among strangers on the street. Fortunately for Jeter, by the time this starts to happen on Madison he's safely ensconced inside a white Plymouth minivan, its sliding door closing with a loud Detroit *whunk*.

"They say to me, 'I don't want him on the street—don't let him walk around on the street,'" the driver says. Jeter shakes his head. Posada grins his mouse grin.

A moment of clarification. *They*, of course, are the New York Yankees, who are sensibly protective of their young superstar,

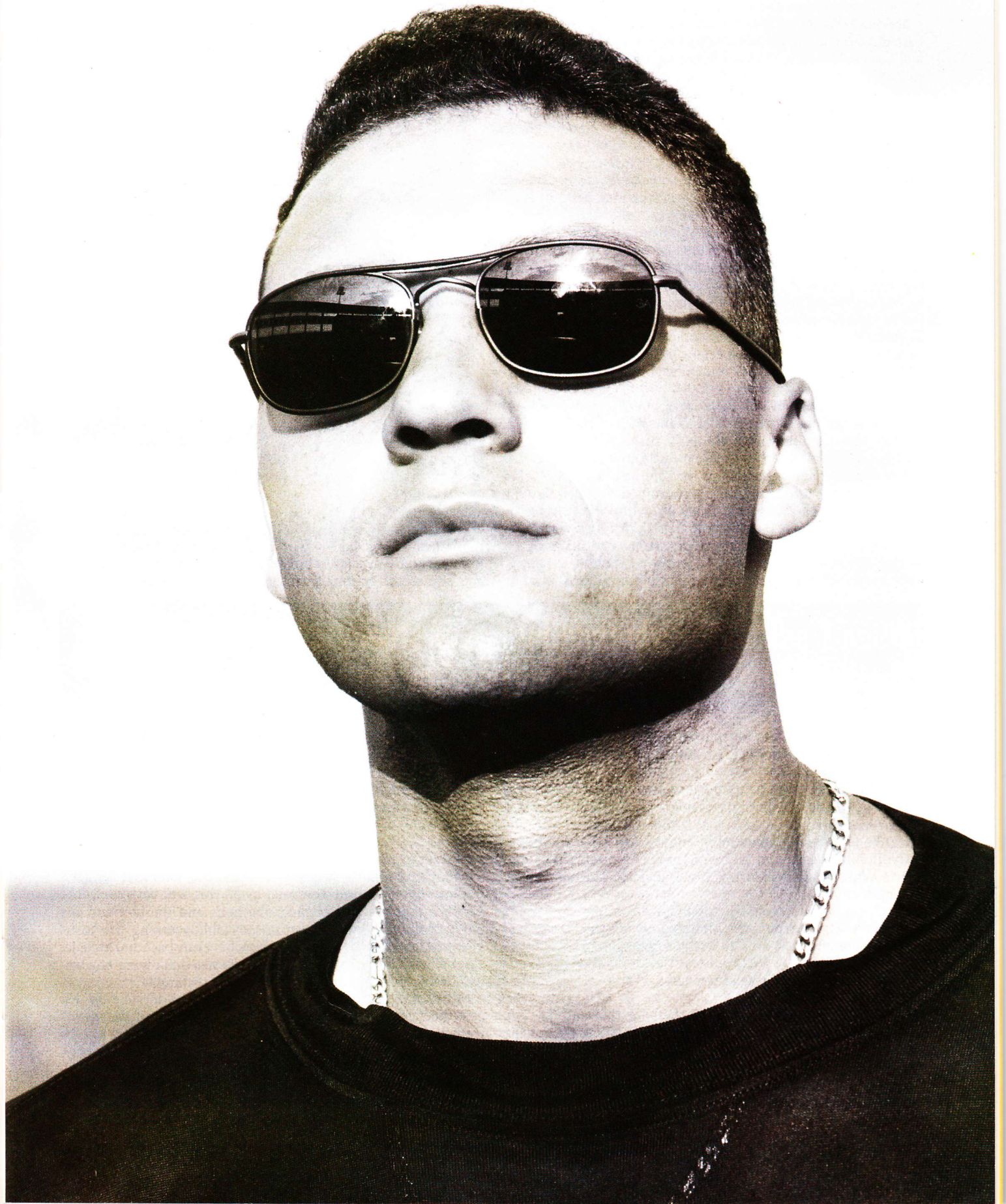
his pals, he enjoyed the smiles and adoring stares of beautiful women, but capitalized on his triumph—if at all—minimally. Derek Jeter's November was heady—he owned Manhattan—but its truth is considerably less Dionysian than was made out by the tabloid press, which took the irresistible clay of a large, quite handsome, quite young, and galvanically talented newcomer and evoked shades of Mantle and Martin in their youth.

"Listen," Jeter says. "During the season, I play baseball every day—that's all I do. During the off-season, when I go out, I have fun. But people make up a lot of stuff about what I'm doing when I go out. I've been at this place till this hour, that place till that hour, and I wasn't even there. Still," he says, smiling again, "New York's a lot of fun. I wouldn't want to play anywhere else."

Fun actual and imagined. Now the Yankee van driver joshes Jeter about Tyra Banks, and Jeter shakes his head. "Tyra Banks," he says. "Tyra Banks is [an] IMG [client], and I'm IMG. So I go to a Knicks game with my father, and Tyra Banks is in the seat next to mine. The next day all the papers have me goin' around with Tyra Banks, and they don't even mention my father." He shakes his head again. "That's the only time I've ever been with Tyra Banks."

More significant is that he was with his father. Jeter is extremely close to his parents and younger sister—he still calls home to Kalamazoo every night. It is a very tightly knit family, an interracial family (Jeter's father is black, his mother Irish-American), with a strong drive toward sobriety and achievement. Charles Jeter, who has a doctorate in social work, is a drug-and-alcohol counselor in Kalamazoo; his wife, Dorothy, is an accountant. Derek grew up in an atmosphere that was both loving and rigorous: Even as he was distinguishing himself as a baseball prodigy, bringing scouts and agents swarming into Kalamazoo, his parents demanded that he keep regular hours and a high grade-point average.

His upbringing certainly accounts for Jeter's extraordinary levelheadedness; at the same time, it has prevented him from



growing up too fast. His first year in the minor leagues, playing rookie-league ball for Tampa, was almost ruined by a severe bout of homesickness. "I was miserable," he says, unashamedly. "I had never been away from home except to stay over at my grandmother's house." He lost his confidence at the plate—he batted .202—and in the field. "I'd never struggled playing baseball before," he says. "I didn't know anybody—it was about as bad as it could be."

The van turns down Eighth Avenue. "Gonna be a mob scene over there," the driver says.

"It's Friday, twelve o'clock," Jeter says. "Aren't kids in school?"

"Derek! Derek Jeter!" Posada squeals, like a schoolgirl.

Jeter narrows his eyelids and puffs air out his nose. The van swings into the Coliseum's garage, and the men get out. Even the jaded security guys look excited to see the shortstop. Jeter walks into the Yankee lounge, a big, blank, windowless room with fluorescent lights, a few chairs and couches, a table along the wall containing a ten-foot sandwich. The room is slowly filling with Yankees old and new: Joe Girardi, Paul O'Neill, Bobby Murcer, Mel Stottlemyre. The air is choppy with charisma. Joe Torre radiates toughness and command, but also gives off a palpable sweetness: It's an odd, compelling mixture. He walks by Jeter, smiling as if at an especially pleasing son. "I had something to tell you, but I can't remember," he says, looking puzzled. "It must be my age."

Derek Jeter goes out into the main room of the Coliseum. At the rear of the big room, parallel to the wall, is a long row of folding tables, behind which will sit the players. In front of each man is a long, cordoned aisle, like a cattle chute, in which fans will line up for autographs. This, in sum, is the Fan Fest. For five hours a day, for three days in a row, the fans churn through the chutes; the players shake hands and write their names on various objects. It is a process both dehumanizing and strangely touching. An autograph is an odd artifact, both significant and meaningless, a memento of a transaction charged (but finally empty) for one party and cool and empty for the other.

When I ask Jeter whether he has a steady girl these days, he shakes his head glumly. "I need one," he says. "I need some help."

And, in these boom times for sports memorabilia, with fake signatures flooding the market, an autograph is even financially ambiguous.

Jeter sits down, and the floodgates open. The line before him is bulging, roiling, clamoring, extending all the way to the back of the room and out the door. It is, by far, the biggest line in the place. The lines are graphic representations of fame and popularity: Bobby Murcer and Mel Stottlemyre face modest queues; Bernie Williams's is somewhat larger. Jorge Posada sits before an empty aisle.

The P.A. system blares audio highlights from the '96 Series's final moments, interspersed with Eddie Layton fight songs and hortatory commercials for Fan Fest participants:

"The one! The only! Joe! Pepitone!!"

A perfunctory smattering of applause.

"Johnny. . . Blanchard!" Nothing.

All the emotion in the room, all the adulation and passion, seems to have funneled into Derek Jeter's line. It's as though the Coliseum had been lifted and tilted and everyone had fallen over to one side: giggling girls and gawking boys and blushing middle-aged men and lecherously staring women, pushing forward, clamoring for their Instamatic moment, congratulating in New York voices:

Der-ek!

Great yee-uh, man.

Great season.

You the man.

Jeter! Look this way!

Jee-ter!

Derek!

A tough female security guard stands by the table, overseeing each transaction. "One item only!" she barks. "Quickly! Quickly!"

Behind the table Jeter sits (his body looking powerful even in a folding chair), smiling a small, mildly ironic smile, and signing, signing, signing. He signs bats, balls, photographs, programs, seat cushions, Wheaties boxes, home plates—even what appears to be a seat back from Yankee Stadium. He writes his loopy signature in blue or black marker (on light-colored objects), in gold or silver marker (on dark-colored objects). The fans have one almost invariable request: "Could you put 'Rookie of the Year'?" they ask. "Could you write 'R.O.Y., '96'?" This is part of the juju: the talisman must be complete.

"Next up!" the guard barks.

A woman plops an infant on the counter. Jeter stands up and puts his face next to the baby's for the Instamatic, giving a tight-lipped almost-smile (his full grins are strictly private affairs).

"You the father! You the father!" a fan yells. The almost-smile vanishes.

A pretty, busty, Hispanic-looking young woman with a tight green blouse edges in, gazing meaningfully at the shortstop, smiling helplessly. She hands Jeter an orange envelope. He glances at her; she backs off into the mob. He puts the envelope, which is marked PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL in flowing script, on the counter.

Now something catches Jeter's eye: a girl in the front of the crowd, maybe 12, staring at him and weeping. She's wearing a pinstriped Yankee jersey with a large 2 on it, Jeter's number. She's a skinny little creature, all quivering lips and puffy eyes, and she seems genuinely miserable. Jeter gestures to a male

guard. "Bring her back," he says.

The girl is brought behind the counter. She can't take her eyes off Jeter, and she can't stop weeping. "Thank you so much," she keeps telling him.

"What's your name?" he asks.

"Danielle." She shakes her head helplessly. "I waited *three hours* to see you outside," she says, sobbing. "My friends told me I'd never meet you."

"They're at school—where you should be," Jeter tells her. He's smiling slightly, a little bemused by all this, but very cool, too. And the fans are still coming, the lame and the halt and the unlovely, faces filled with an unspeakable yearning. He turns away to sign a few balls, then swivels his chair back to Danielle. "You all right?" he asks her. "You sure you don't want any water? Some brownies or sandwiches or something?"

She shakes her head over and over, still staring at him. He goes back to signing balls and photos. "I could die now," Danielle says.

Now a guy puts two baseballs on the counter, glancing back furtively at the guard. Jeter signs both balls.

"Thanks, man," the guy says. "Have a great year."

Jeter turns to me. "He'll be booin' me if I go oh-for-two, right?" he says.





With just ten home runs last year—too few for the upper crust of shortstops—Jeter bulked up over the winter.

lege boys in the big city. Their seats are in row WW, remarkably far back from the giant stage. Jeter bought the tickets himself. The striking fact of the matter is that, for the moment, nobody—least of all Jeter himself—appears to be working Derek Jeter's reputation in the world at large. IMG can get him good seats at Knicks games, but that appears to be the sum of it. Would he ever mention his name over the phone to get a good restaurant table? "Never," Jeter says, firmly. "I'm not that type. I just go, and whatever happens, happens."

The show, heavily amped and choreographed, has an overblown, distanced feeling, as if it's taking place in a 747 hangar. Toni Braxton—a little like Whitney Houston with less range and more midriff—poses and pouts, her image projected on two giant screens on either side of the stage. But Jeter is pleased. He's a big Braxton fan; he's also very fond of Mariah Carey. One senses he has boyish crushes. Since he and a longtime hometown girlfriend broke up a year and a half ago, he's dated sporadically, but doesn't seem much interested in working his reputation in this respect either. When I ask, later, whether he has a steady girl these days, he shakes his head glumly. "I need one," he says. "I need some help."

During intermission and before Kenny G's set, there's a diffuse little security-controlled party in a dim downstairs lounge of the theater: the rumor is that Toni Braxton may show up. Jeter stands around, a bottle of Evian in his hand, talking to Dwight Gooden (also drinking water) and a couple of guys who work for the Yankees. Gooden, in a fancy white Nehru-collared shirt, looks strong and healthy, but he also has a wary, chastened air, as though being clean and sober beats the alternative, but isn't the most fun in the world. Neither is this party. Braxton never appears. Jeter and his friends go back upstairs, sit out a little of Kenny G's tootling, then exit between numbers and get back into the white stretch. Jeter's off to meet up again with his parents, who've just taken in *Beauty and the Beast*. Later, he and his two pals go to a club to sip sodas and listen to hip-hop music. They return to their hotel alone.

AT THE END OF THE LONG AFTERNOON, JETER AND POSADA GET back in a Yankee van to return to their hotel, which is on Central Park South, less than a quarter-mile away. As soon as the van is out of the Coliseum and into 58th Street traffic, the driver turns to Jeter. "I'm sorry to inconvenience you, but could you sign a couple of pictures?" he asks.

Jeter does an infinitesimal double-take. "No problem," he says. The driver instantly produces a silver marker; Jeter signs the photos. The driver thanks him, then brings out two baseballs.

SATURDAY. YESTERDAY AFTERNOON, JUST BEFORE dropping Jeter off at his hotel, the van driver told a quick, nasty anecdote about a well-known former Yankee, also attending the Fan Fest, being so drunk the night before that he had to be carried into his hotel and deposited in the bathtub. (Why the bathtub?) In any case, it was not only a tale out of school but one out of the Yankee past, and, a year and a half after Mickey Mantle's death, one that failed to amuse: Jeter did not react.

The Yankee present, Derek Jeter—style, is significantly different. Tonight, after another hard afternoon at the Fan Fest, Jeter is going out on the town. This remarkably chaste event may be taken as a replay, in miniature and with slight variations, of last November. After he finishes signing autographs, Jeter returns to his hotel, showers and changes, and meets his parents and sister for dinner. Next, he and Jorge Posada and former minor-league roommate Sean Twitty—his companions of November—take a long white stretch limo (sprung for by Jeter) to a Toni Braxton-Kenny G concert at Radio City. They get out of the car and gawk around a little. When the crowd starts to gawk back at Jeter, he and his friends walk into the theater.

Jeter and his buddies look avid, excited—like three big col-

NEXT EVENING: THE BASEBALL WRITERS' DINNER, AT THE SHERATON. In his Armani tux, Jeter sits on the dais along with three dozen or so other luminaries of the present and past. The after-dinner speeches are by turns windy, funny, painfully inarticulate, haltingly sincere, and—in the case of Mrs. Jackie Robinson, who's here to note the fiftieth anniversary of her late husband's breaking the color line in baseball—eloquent. When it comes time for Derek Jeter to receive his award, he stands, with no visible piece of paper in his hand, and looks out at the audience. I remember now that in the Yankees' meeting room at the Fan Fest, he turned down a P.R. person's offer of a pre-written, shtick-laced script. "Naw, man," he said. "I can't say that stuff."

"I just want to say," Jeter tells the audience now, "that one of the main rewards of winning this award is the opportunity to sit up here next to a woman like Mrs. Robinson."

Who is this guy? Clean, graceful, polite, magnetic, and hugely talented: Is he too good to be true? Or is he good enough at all? Is he strong enough to carry on the athletic traditions of DiMaggio and Mantle, or is he just a passing gleam in the eye of a hero-starved city? The city expects much. Derek Jeter seems almost purposefully oblivious of this. "I think pressure is what you put on yourself," he says. "Nobody else can put pressure on you—no matter what the media says."

Perhaps. But the fact remains that if four young Yankees—Bernie Williams, Andy Pettitte, Mariano Rivera, and Jeter—live up to expectations, a new New York dynasty may be in the making. And—no pressure, Derek—but wouldn't that be fine? ■