



Reflections of a River Rat:

Millions of reasons to hate the Yankees

By Jim Holleran

The New York Yankees rallied in the last inning of the last game of the season on Sunday to eke out a berth in the wild card playoffs. The Cleveland Indians quietly went home for the winter. When the Boston Red Sox subsequently eliminated the Yankees, it cemented my opinion — Gosh, I hate the Yankees.

Hate is a strong word, but other four-letter words like golf were already taken. Perhaps a better choice of verbs would be dislike, maybe even loathe.

Regardless of my word selection, the feeling persists, not just for the Yankees, but for the New York Mets, Los Angeles Dodgers, Chicago White Sox and Cubs, and the Boston Red Sox. They reside in Major League Baseball's largest markets and hold a tremendous financial advantage over the small-market clubs such as Cleveland, Cincinnati and Detroit.

You can liken the Yankees or Mets to the rich kids in your neighborhood. They grew up with the clothes, car and house you dreamt about owning, but your parents couldn't afford. Maybe those advantages created opportunities or opened doors for them that you couldn't experience. But you consoled yourself with the notion that despite their money, you still competed with dignity, wits and limited resources. If they bragged, you ignored them while you seethed inside.

That analogy embodies life for my beloved Indians, soon to be the Guardians. They've always been the poor kids on the block and the Yankees have always been flashing their bankroll.

As a boy, I was on the other side of this love-hate relationship with the Yankees. I fell hard for the Yankees as a 10-year-old in 1967. On a sun-kissed Sunday afternoon, you could sit in the backyard amid a river breeze while Phil Rizzuto called the Yankees games on radio. It seemed every Yankee who hit a ball to the left-field warning track excited Rizzuto enough to exclaim, "Deep to left, it's way back there." Then his voice would fall an octave as he announced, "It died on the warning track." What a huckleberry (his favorite jab).



Ther Yankees played like huckleberries too. Powerless second baseman Horace Clark led the regulars with a .272 average. Mickey Mantle, just a year shy of retirement, was the top deep threat with 22 homers and a mere 55 runs batted in. New York finished ninth in a 10-team American League, 20 games behind the Red Sox and Triple Crown winner Carl

Yastrzemski.

But the Yankees were the traditional, storied New York team. Forget the '69 Amazin' Mets. You rooted for New York teams— the Giants, Knicks and the Yankees, even though they never finished higher than second in the AL East during your high school years. They finally blossomed in 1977, beating the Dodgers in the World Series. I remember calling two of my mentors, Pat and Nancy Crosby, just before midnight Oct. 18 after several beverages at Buffalo State. I must have resembled New York Giants announcer Russ Hodges after Bobby Thomson's pennant-winning homer. "The Yankees win the Series. The Yankees win the series." They advised me to enjoy the title but go lay down.

Within three years, I had transitioned to the Cleveland side of the equation. It was familiar ground. The Indians dominated radio and TV, but routinely finished sixth in a seven-team division. They hadn't won a World Series since 1948.

Before I left Cleveland in the summer of '84 -- and this is where the loathing began -- the Indians signed a local TV deal for a lofty \$1 million annually. With

baseball free agency in full swing, I reasoned my Tribe was going to have some cash to throw at free agents. While I recovered from my naivete, the rich got richer in New York. The Yankees reached a 10-year deal at \$50 million a year, and teams were allowed to keep all the local TV revenue. Cleveland couldn't compete with New York.

It seemed there always has been a talent pipeline to New York:

1973: Craig Nettles, traded to New York, emerged from journeyman third baseman into Yankees solid glove with power. He hit 250 homers in 11 seasons in New York.

1974: Chris Chambliss was another average first baseman who became a clutch player in New York and helped the Yankees break an 11-season playoff drought.

2008: CC Sabathia was the reigning Cy Young Award winner from 2007 when the Indians realized they couldn't win a bidding war. After a brief stop in Milwaukee, CC grabbed a seven-year, \$166M deal with the Yanks.

2021: Corey Kluber won two Cy Youngs in Cleveland before the penny-pinching Indians traded his \$17.5M contract to Texas. He pitched one inning, underwent elbow surgery, then signed this season with the Yankees for \$11M. He threw a no-hitter.

The Indians couldn't afford several other stars who found homes around MLB:

1990: Joe Carter was too expensive for Cleveland's taste so he was shipped to San Diego for one season, then Toronto. The Blue Jays gave him \$25M for four years, and he led them to World Series titles in '92 and '93.

2001: Manny Ramirez rejected a seven-year, \$119M offer from Cleveland and signed for eight years for \$160M with Boston, helping the Red Sox snap their 86-year Series drought in 2004.

2009: Cliff Lee won the Cy Young Award in 2008 with a 22-3 record, then was dealt to the Philadelphia Phillies. His next contract lasted 5 years for \$120 million.

2018: Michael Brantley, an All-star outfielder, jumps to Houston for two years and \$32M.

2019: Edwin Encarnacion was supposed to make a difference after the Indians World Series miss in 2016. They paid \$60M over three years, but after 70 homers in two seasons they dumped his salary off on Seattle.



2021: Francisco Lindor informed Cleveland that its \$270M ceiling offer didn't meet his floor request of \$320M. The All-Star shortstop bolted for the New York Mets for a 10-year, \$341M deal.

2021: Carlos Santana took his first baseman's glove to Kansas City for two years and \$17.5M.

Meanwhile, for the playoff drive the Yankees picked up the \$16.5M deal of the Cubs' Anthony Rizzo and the \$6M deal of Texas Rangers slugger Joey Gallo. He already had turned down a 5-year extension averaging \$16.8 million annually. That's on top of the Giancarlo Stanton deal for seven years and \$218M and Gerrit Cole's nine-year, \$324 M contract. It makes Aaron Judge's one-year deal worth \$1.175M seem paltry.

In this age, the 30 MLB teams use a complicated revenue sharing plan. However, the scale that big-market teams retain far exceeds the cash that the small-market clubs receive.

Experts agree there is a correlation between market size and player acquisition. Small-market teams like Milwaukee, Tampa Bay and Cleveland will always ride a young core of emerging stars into World Series contention, but they can't compete over the long haul. Their TV markets and local revenues can't compete with the scope of the metropolises.

Examine the five highest-paid players in MLB, who deserve every nickel they can pry loose from greedy owners:

\$45.3M for Lindor of the Mets.

\$39M for pitcher Trevor Bauer of the Dodgers.

\$38.5M for outfielder Mike Trout of the Los Angeles Angels.

\$36.5M for pitcher Gerrit Cole of the Yankees.

They all went to the highest bidder among the major markets.

When the Los Angeles Dodgers won the Mookie Betts sweepstakes two years ago, they pried him loose from Boston for \$365M for 12 years. You won't find him listed under highest annual salaries because he deferred \$115M beyond the life of this megadeal.

However, you will find the Dodgers at the top of the payroll rankings at \$194.8M annually, followed by the Yankees' \$179M and the Mets' \$166.9M. You'll find the Indians on that list too, last at \$23.55M.

Still, I'll be waiting for the Guardians first pitch against Kansas City on March 31 in small-market Cleveland.

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