

The 'Bronx Zoo' awaits Orioles

New York: Thousands of Yankee faithful camp overnight for playoff tickets, taking potshots at the Orioles, Charm City and Steinbrenner.

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NEW YORK -- Floating on a cloud of otherworldly odors, thousands of vengeful, unwashed New Yorkers circled Yankee Stadium yesterday -- drinking beer for breakfast and cursing the Orioles as they waited to snap up 16,000 tickets for their showdown with Crabtown. "It was a long, but relatively peaceful night," said Lt. Mike Trainor, leaning on a fire department paramedic wagon outside the expanding moat of trash, bottles and mangled lawn furniture around the House That Ruth Built. "There's been no trauma injuries that I know of."

Alas, the faithful were too busy venting their rage at the little burg by the Chesapeake Bay.

"Burn it! Burn it! Burn it!" the crowd roared, holding an Orioles hat aloft to the beckoning flames of a dozen lighters.

"Sweep! Sweep! Sweep!" the arsonists cheered, and the familiar orange bird of Baltimore went heavenward in a cloud of gray smoke.

"Tell the fans back in Baltimore not to wear their hats if they come up here!" shouted Kevin Blanco, 26, an otherwise respectable elementary school teacher from Northport, N.Y. "Tell them everything they heard about New York is true! We'll be waiting for them!"

Camden Yards it was not.

Nary a cappuccino cup was to be found anywhere in the landfill that once was 161st Street. And what little gentility might still reside in the hearts of New Yorkers withered on a balmy Bronx day as fans pondered the simple joy of abusing Roberto Alomar for spitting in an umpire's face two weeks ago.

In a statement Saturday, umpire John Hirschbeck formally forgave the Orioles second baseman for his salivary indiscretion after a bad strike call and accusing him of falling down on the job since the death of his son.

Not so fast, say the surly New Yorkers.

"Oh, man, he ain't heard anything yet," said Fernando Willems, a 33-year-old truck driver from Flushing in Queens. "There's a lot of Hispanic people here, and we took it

real personal, what Alomar did. He knows what it means to spit in a man's face and talk about his family that way. He knows it and we know it.

“Cleveland was nothing compared to what he's gonna get here. This is the Bronx, man. It's gonna be real bad for him.”

And what, pray tell, do they have in mind?

“Oh, we'll be throwing stuff at him every time he comes out of the dugout,” said Alistair Roche, 19, a freshman at Fordham University whose Catholic training failed to overcome his Bronx upbringing.

“If a Yankee would have done that, George Steinbrenner would have fired him!” Roche said.

It was the nicest thing anybody said all day about the Yankees owner.

The mob cursed Steinbrenner with vigor -- mostly for selling out the seats to the Yanks' series with the now-vanquished Texas Rangers through ticket agents, thereby depriving fans of the pleasure of wallowing in beer-soaked sleeping bags overnight at the stadium box office.

If that wasn't bad enough, when Steinbrenner finally relented and made seats available for the Orioles series to begin tomorrow night, fans were incensed that he would only let them buy four at a time after they had wallowed in beer-soaked sleeping bags overnight.

On top of that, he left only 16,000 tickets open for them -- when any idiot could see that half the city was camped outside the stadium, ringing its poured concrete walls for blocks in every direction, jostling and cursing and drinking toasts to the possibility that Cal Ripken, the Orioles shortstop, might break his ankle.

“They had us penned in at the park over there like cattle,” recalled Trish Curtin, 31, a bedraggled bartender from Brooklyn, who spent the night in a tent on a littered patch of greensward east of the stadium and three blocks from the box office.

“Then, at like 9 a.m., the cops came and started moving people toward the gates, and everybody was sleeping, and all the sudden people started screaming and yelling and climbing over the fence. People just walked right over my tent,” she said.

“Move it!” bellowed Officer Marty Diamond, a bull-necked 10-year man with the New York Police Department, as he herded rabid, red-eyed fans through the box office queue. “You want your tickets? Yes, I'm talking to you! Then move it! You're next!”

“No incidents to report,” he said with a smile a moment later. “By New York standards, a very calm crowd.”

With that, a clutch of wobbly Yankees fans toppled over in unison and crashed through a police barrier behind him, cursing venomously at no one in particular under a banner that said, ``NY -- the Capital of the World."

``It's like an instinct thing," said John Robinson, a 26-year-old communications technician from Nyack, N.Y., dragging his empty cooler, an armload of wet blankets and a fistful of tickets away from the fray after 15 hours in line.

``Everybody in the jungle wants to get the gazelle, and then you get it and you feel good. Now, we can go to sleep for a couple days. God help those crab cakes from Baltimore when they get here."