

# Jewish writers recall stadium memories

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Yankee Stadium — or *The Yankee Stadium*, as it used to be called — hosted its final game on Sept. 21. It was an emotional affair, with much pomp and celebration with the Yankees beating the visiting Baltimore Orioles, 7-3.

There are two schools of thought when it comes to the demolition of baseball's grand cathedral, which first opened its gates in 1923. The first is somewhat mournful over the loss of tradition and memories of past glories; the second holds that the *real* Stadium was the one *before* renovations were made in 1974, so this is no big deal.

Several authors marked the transition by publishing coffee table books this year (even though the "final page" had yet to be written). Harvey Frommer has written seven titles on the Bronx Bombers, including his latest, *Remembering Yankee Stadium: An Oral and Narrative History of the House That Ruth Built* (Harry N. Abrams), a marvelous compendium of interviews, photographs, and stories evoking the tradition and history of sports' most successful franchise.

"It was a labor of love," said Frommer from his home in Lyme, NH — deep in the heart of "Red Sox Nation." "It was very enjoyable. If you look through the "Voices" [section], I got batboys...talking about their time at Yankee Stadium. I was able to get authors like Roger Kahn and Leigh Montville, [who] provided a unique perspective."

Through his website, Frommersports.com, he also sought the sentiments of the man in the street. "I could have done two or three books, that's how much material I had."

*Remembering Yankee Stadium* would seem to lack just one thing: It does not have an "official" stamp of approval, either from the Yankees or Major League Baseball. But Frommer wouldn't have it any other way. "If you get that endorsement, it's an excellent thing, but you pay a price," he said. "They control the book; they vet what you write. So I could not have gotten Jim Bouton interviewed in the book, and other people who had some negatives to say or controversial commentary."

Bouton, who pitched for the team in the 1960s, became persona non grata to the baseball establishment after writing *Ball Four*, a watershed book in sports genre.

Frommer, who also wrote *Growing Up Jew-*

*ish in America: An Oral History* and *It Happened in the Catskills*, decided to do his new Yankees book almost 10 years ago, when rumors about a new location began to spread. First the team was relocating to northern New Jersey, then it was the West Side of Manhattan. Ultimately, they're literally moving next door to their current spot.

Kahn, who penned the classic *Boys of Summer*, suggested it was time for a new venue, describing the old structure as "a tried old lady." On the other hand, Bouton has said that New York taxpayers were getting ripped off. Frommer said his position was "somewhere in the middle," while admitting that recent events have turned him off in many ways. "The old ballpark site was supposed to be a museum and a high school and other things, and now from what I can gather...it's going to be turned into a parking lot."

## "Things change."

Closer to home, Maury Allen, the veteran sportswriter for *The New York Post* and *Sports Illustrated*, recently released his book of *Yankees World Series Memories* (Sports Publishing).

"I thought the Yankees would be in the playoffs and this would be a perfectly timed book to describe what it was like in all these other World Series," said Allen, who moved to Cedar Grove a couple of years ago. "But they went down the drain." The best laid plans...

"I wanted to really do it from my own standpoint rather than the sort of historic or players' standpoint," said Allen, who rated each Fall Classic for its drama and excitement instead of chronological order. Judging by the feedback he's already received, there are a lot of fans who beg to differ with his assessments. "Everybody has an opinion. That's what sports are about. That's why it's fun."

First on his list was the Yankees-Dodgers subway series of 1947; he recalled eating salami sandwiches while waiting for the tickets to go on sale. "That Series seemed to have drama every at bat every day," made all the more intense by the interborough rivalry.

Allen grew up in the Bensonhurst section

of Brooklyn. He caught the baseball bug from his father, a coffee salesman, who took him to his first game at Ebbets Field as a young boy. Although he said he was probably more excited by munching on a couple of hot dogs

viewed for an upcoming documentary about Jews and baseball. The project is being written by former *New York Times*' sportswriter Ira Berkow and directed by Peter Miller.

While the Dodgers and New York Giants actively sought a Jewish player as a way to increase their fan base, the Yankees made no such concession. "The Yankees were run by George Weiss, and George Weiss was probably the most racist and anti-Semitic guy that was involved in public life," Allen said. Weiss made no secret that he didn't want African-American players on the team, and Allen said he felt that way about Jews as well.

Allen said he was looking forward to the impending changes. "New stadium, new press box, new facilities, easier to get into, easier to park..."

"I think that's the way of the world. Things change.... It's time for a new stadium. I think after they play 10 games [at the new ballpark], people will forget the old Yankee Stadium."

Because of the history behind the House That Ruth Built, people tend to forget that the Mets' home since 1964 is closing down as well this year. "Shea was sort of outdated 10 minutes after it opened up," Allen said. "Yankee Stadium was at least a beautiful place."

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Harvey Frommer Photo courtesy Harvey Frommer



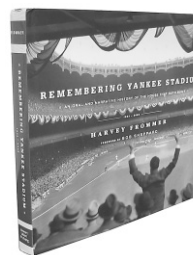
Maury Allen Photo courtesy Maury Allen

and a soda than the play of the field, Allen marveled at "the environment, the people screaming. It sounded like my family living room."

Allen had to excuse himself from the original appointment because he was being inter-

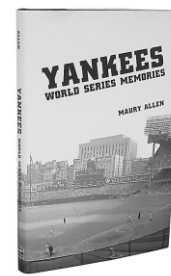
Yankee books by Harvey Frommer include:

- *Remembering Yankee Stadium: An Oral and Narrative History of the House That Ruth Built*
- *The New York Yankee Encyclopedia*
- *A Yankee Century*
- *Red Sox and Yankees: The Greatest Rivalry*
- *Yankee Century and Beyond*
- *Five O'Clock Lightning*
- *New York City Baseball: The Last Golden Age, 1947-1957*



Yankee books by Maury Allen include:

- *Yankees World Series Memories*
- *Memories of the Mick*
- *Ron Guidry: Louisiana Lightning*
- *Roger Maris: A Man for All Seasons*
- *Mr. October: The Reggie Jackson Story*
- *Damn Yankee: The Billy Martin Story*
- *Where Have You Gone, Joe DiMaggio?*



## Jewish Yankees: An oxymoron?

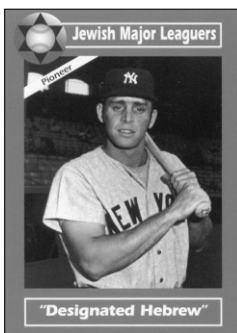
If you can't get a minyan in New York, where can you get one?

Confining our geographic region to the Bronx, there were only seven Jewish ballplayers who wore Yankee pinstripes. By comparison, 12 played for the New York Giants and seven for the Brooklyn Dodgers; Goody Rosen spent time on both National League rosters.

• **Ron Blomberg** debuted as a 20-year-old in 1969, going hitless in six late-season at bats. He returned in 1971 and two years later became Major League Baseball's first designated hitter, a fact he cashed in on with his autobiography, *Designated Hebrew*. In 400 games over seven injury-plagued seasons as a Yankee (he finished his career with the

Chicago White Sox in 1978), Blomberg batted .302 with 355 hits, 47 home runs, and 202 runs batted in.

• **Phil Cooney** (born Cohen) technically was never a member of the "Yankees." He played in just one game for the Highlanders — as the team was called then — in 1905, going hitless in three at bats.



Ron Blomberg Photo courtesy JewishMajorLeaguers.org

• **Ken Holtzman** played parts of three seasons (1976-78) with the Yankees, winning 12 of 22 decisions, striking out 58 batters in 238 1/3 innings, and posting a 4.65 earned run average. Overall, Holtzman — who, like Blomberg, managed in the inaugural season of the Israel Baseball League — won 174 games, lost 150, and struck out 1,601 batters in 2,867.1 innings in 15 big league campaigns.

• **Herb Karpel**, a native of Brooklyn, pitched in one game for the 1946 team.

• **Jimmy Reese** (born Soloman) was a second baseman from 1930-31, batting .286 with six home runs and 44 RBI in 142 games. After one more season in the majors with the St. Louis Cardinals, Reese retired as an active

player but remained in the game in several capacities. In 1973, he became a coach for the California Angels and remained active with the American League team until his death at age 92. He was designated by the International Jewish Sports Hall of Fame as a "Pillar of Achievement."

• **Lefty Weinert** played the last of his nine-year major-league career with the Yankees (1931), winning two and losing two in 17 games.

• **Guy Zinn** played two of his four big league seasons with the Yankees from 1911-12. The outfielder played in 117 games with 109 hits in 428 at bats (.255), six homers, and 56 RBI. He also played for the Boston Braves and Baltimore Terrapins of the Federal League.