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No longer a field of schemes

Yankees see Red, put a quick end to potential curse

April 15, 2008 **BY CAROL SLEZAK**
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At first the New York Yankees scoffed, calling it a "tall tale."

"It would take more than a Red Sox T-shirt to put a curse on the Yankees," team spokesman Howard Rubenstein told the New York Post.

But deep down, the Yankees were shivering. A reverse 'Curse of the Bambino' was nothing to mess with. Why, the Babe haunted the Red Sox franchise for 84 years! So the Yankees went to the trouble of digging through two feet of concrete to unearth a Boston Red Sox jersey that a Red Sox fan had buried in the foundation of their new stadium. So much for tall tales.

Even now, they protest. Too much?

"It's a bunch of bull---," Yankees boss Hank Steinbrenner told the Post, which broke this hard-hitting story.

But Steinbrenner also said he hopes Gino Castignoli, the 46-year-old Red Sox-loving, Yankees-hating construction worker who buried a David Ortiz jersey, gets "the s---" kicked out of him by his coworkers.

"So, then, why is he making such a big stink about it?" Castignoli responded. "If it's no big deal, why not let it lay?"

Why not, indeed. And here I thought Cubs fans were the only people who truly believed in curses, jinxes and the like. (You don't think there's a billy goat buried beneath Wrigley Field, do you? Naw.)

Jersey nothing like a goat

"The Yankees have given lie to their statement by going to the effort and expense of drilling that thing out," said Phillips Stevens Jr., an anthropology professor at SUNY-Buffalo. "But whatever it cost them, anybody will tell you it was far less then the cost of the psychological toll on the Yankees if they had left it in there once its existence was known. They could not leave it there. That would be unthinkable."

The cost has been estimated at \$50,000. That's a lot of money to you and me, but maybe not so much to the Yankees, whose new stadium, which is scheduled to open next season, comes with a price tag of \$1.3 billion. And, like Stevens said, a jinx can take a mighty toll on the psyche. Just ask Cubs manager Lou Piniella, who, try as he might, can't help thinking about those "Cubbie Occurrences."

"Athletes are superstitious in general," Stevens said. "And there are more superstitions, and importance attached to superstitions, by baseball players than by other athletes."

Still, it's tough to envision how a buried Ortiz jersey could doom the Yankees. It's just a jersey. It's not like a billy goat with an angry owner casting a curse on the franchise.

"Most magic involves symbols, which not only stand for something else but take the place of the thing they represent," Stevens said. "The Red Sox jersey, even if it was bought in a department store, was a symbol of that hated team placed in the very foundation of its new home. That's a classic example of a jinx. It could not be tolerated."

A jinx should not be confused with a curse. Both fall under the heading of magic, but curses involve words.

"You've got that 'Curse of the Billy Goat' in Chicago," said Stevens, who went to grad school at Northwestern and considered himself a Cubs fan when he lived here.

As if we could forget. The Yankees are breathing easier after getting rid of the jersey. But is it really that easy to end a jinx? Apparently so -- unless a curse was attached to it.

"It could be that [Castignoli] also spoke something to that jersey," Stevens said. "If he did, that's evidence of a curse, as well. But they're drilling out the surrounding concrete and pouring in new concrete, aren't they? [They're] hopeful they removed all traces of whatever else was attached to that jersey."

But the Yankees said they didn't believe in this kind of stuff. The Cubs say the same. But who knows what thoughts lurk in the back of their minds?

"Magic," Stevens said, "is absolutely universal and apparently timeless, as well."

Speaking of timeless, the Ortiz jersey spent about eight months buried beneath Yankee Stadium. The billy goat curse first reared its bleating head in 1945, and the Cubs haven't been back to the World Series since. There's timeless, and there's eternity.

Don't bother to complain

The Yankees would like to see Castignoli charged with a crime, if indeed he committed one, and are considering suing him for damages. But in a way, Castignoli has performed a public service. Not only has he provided several days worth of entertainment, he indirectly has contributed to a worthy cause because the Yankees donated the Ortiz jersey to a Boston charity. All things considered, the Yankees don't have much cause to complain. Let them be held hostage by a darn goat for 63 years. Then they can complain.

"Curses have a life, just like anything else," Stevens said. "I'd say the billy goat curse has petered out by now. It's lost its energy."

You mean the curse is over? Quick, somebody tell the Cubs!

[The Yankees Laugh At Curses. Just Kidding, They Dug Up That Red Sox Jersey Buried At Their New Stadium.](#)

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