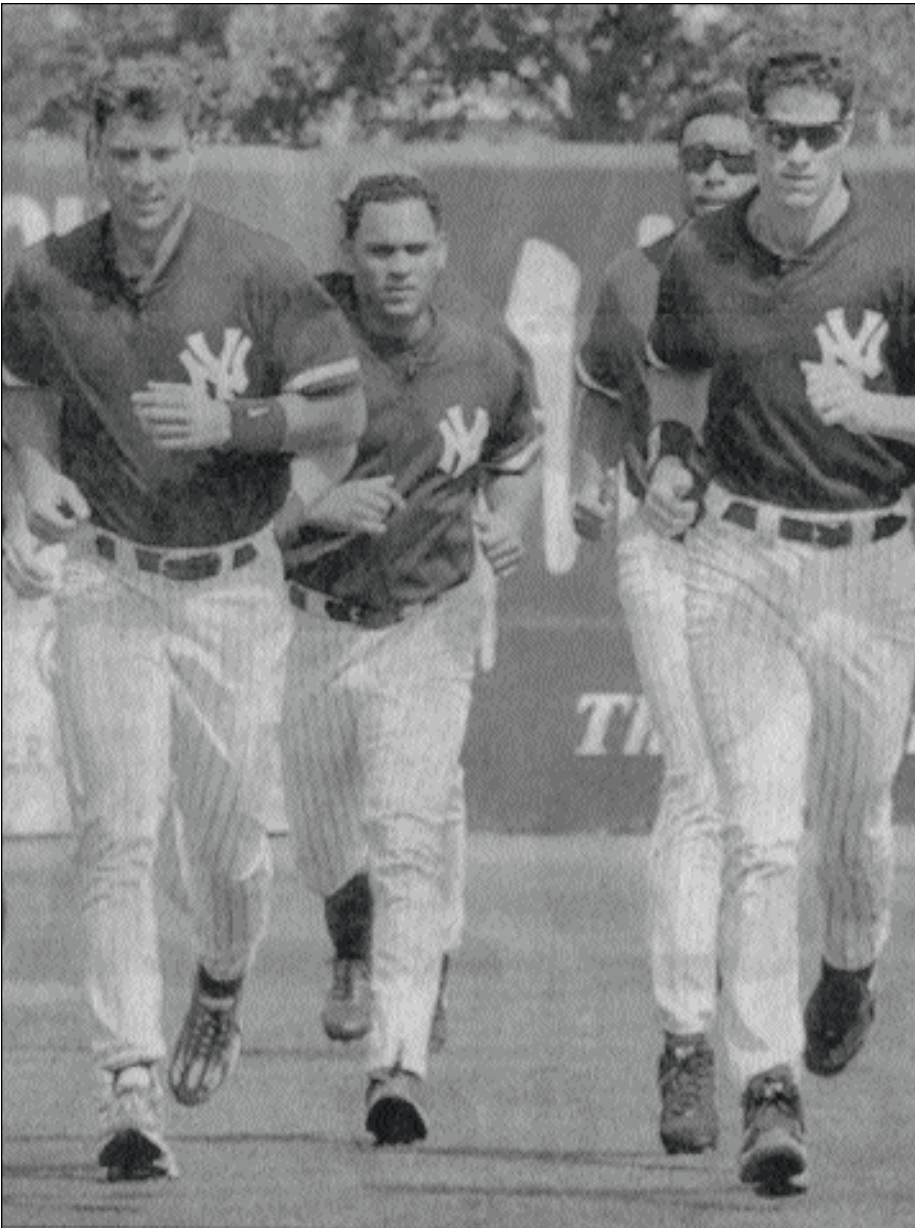




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SPORTS EDITOR

# Title: Undecided...

## Inside: The Reason for Life



PETER MONSEES: THE BERGEN RECORD

First baseman Tino Martínez, 33, running laps with right-fielder Paul O'Neill, 38

Once again, as baseball season rolls around, I find myself sitting at the computer, typing away, deleting, typing again, deleting again, trying to come up with the most clever title for the start of the season.

First I try to upstage the M.C. Hammer remake of "Tell Me Have You Seen Her?" with "The Yankees Have Mussina," but that doesn't seem right. Then I try to play around with a possible Subway Series Part II idea, by writing "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly," until I realize that there's no third team, and which would be which anyway?

How about starting it off by insulting Alex Rodriguez's contract? I can call him "pAy-Rod" instead of A-rod. That sounds cute, but there's no Bronx flavor to that one. And people think coming up with term paper titles are tough.

Imagine.... I could spend almost as much time thinking of the title for my article as I do the article itself. I want to draw your attention by coming up with something catchy, but I don't want to go overboard or you might just think of it as a "kiddie" article. I also don't want to go into too much detail because then I might lose some of my potential readers. What's a sports journalist to do?

Okay, let me think. Well, let's see if I can think of something that happened during the off-season. The Yankees signed starting pitcher Mike Mussina away from the Baltimore Orioles, but as I said, I tried that one.

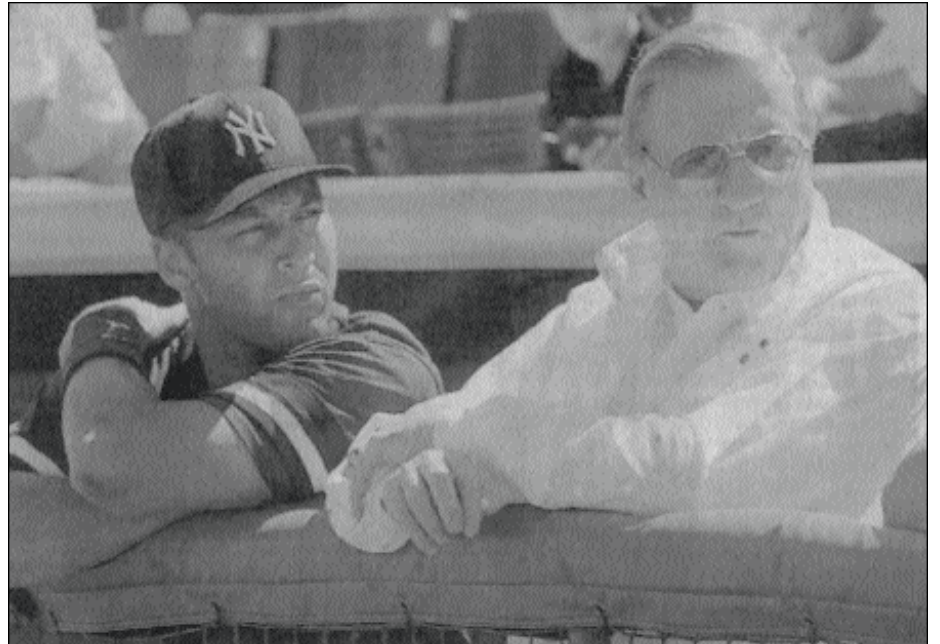
The Yanks also lost relief pitcher Jeff Nelson to the suddenly-strong-pitching Seattle Mariners, but what can I say about that: "Yanks lose Full-Nelson?" No!

Derek Jeter is starting the season on the shelf, so how about "Jeter extends shelf life?" Close, but NO again!

Or I can try the whole Doc Gooden retirement thing. Maybe I can tie it into Jeter's injury like, "Gooden retires to play Doc with Derek." That might catch your attention, but maybe in the wrong way.

Hmmm... this is really tough! Well, let's switch tracks now. What's doing with the other half of the Subway Series: the Amazin' Mets. Let's see, they lost ace Mike Hampton to the Colorado Rockies, and replaced him with Oakland's Kevin Appier, so 'It Appiers like Mike's gone Hamping in the Rocky Mountains.' A little long.

No title so far I guess, but I'll keep working. Well, what else happened during this off-season? The Texas Rangers have become the best hitting and highest pay-



Yankee Derek Jeter and George Steinbrenner

PETER MONSEES: THE BERGEN RECORD

rolled team not making it to the playoffs in major league history. The additions of A-Rod, Andres Galarraga, Ken Caminiti, and Randy Velarde only help Ivan Rodriguez, as he will not be pitched around this season, but their lack of pitching will cost them a playoff spot. We all hope A-Rod enjoys the \$252 million deal he signed, which keeps him and his team out of title contention until the contract expires, rather than opting for a more reasonable offer from Seattle and returning there to a very strong team.

Speaking of Seattle, the loss of A-Rod does hurt them, but don't count them out just yet. They won the bidding war for the rights to try to sign Japanese star Ichiro Suzuki, and were able to complete the deal that brought him over. He will replace Jay Buhner in right field, and will become the Mariners' leadoff hitter, the position that was manned by Rickey Henderson last season. Also, they signed Jeff Nelson away from the Yankees, which helps bolster their already solid pitching staff. Get ready to see some 1-0 games come October if Seattle reaches the post-season.

Another potential contender are the Oakland Athletics. Fresh from coming away with last season's AL West division crown, Oakland made themselves that much scarier with the acquisition of hitting guru Johnny Damon. Last season's MVP award winner, Jason Giambi, is ready to again lead his troops into battle this season. My only question: Has all the ink in his arms slowed his bat speed, or will it help put any extra oomph into his swing?

The Cleveland Indians got some much needed run support and veteran leadership by signing Juan Gonzalez this off-season, but the defection of Manny Ramirez to the Boston Red Sox hurts them more than Gonzalez helps.

As for the Sox, don't look for them to beat the Yanks out for the division, but they may make some noise this season as a wild-card team.

How about over in the NL? The Braves took a hit with the loss of Galarraga, and



THOMAS FRANKLIN: THE BERGEN RECORD

The Yanks celebrating after winning the World Series.

coming close to signing A-Rod doesn't count for anything. At best, they'll be as good as last season.

The only other contender in the NL are the St. Louis Cardinals, who also took a hit when they lost power hitter Fernando Tatis and pitcher Pat Hentgen. McGwire and Edmonds will do their parts in making the team believe they can do it, but it will take strong pitching and at least one other big bat for them to beat the Braves again, or do any damage to the Mets.

So there you have it. A lot happened this off-season, and I can't even think of a title for this piece. I thought for sure that something would have snuck into my brain and forced me to throw it onto the paper. Maybe not every article needs a title, and maybe "no title" is actually a title for an article. Maybe everyone will be so curious that they will have to read it, right up until the end, just to see what comes next. Well, this is almost the end. Are you curious to read what comes next? It's the answer to the questions we all ask each day as to why we press on in life. The answer is... Opening Day!