

# 'Baseball Widow' Finds the Diamond Is Rough

By Lisa St. John

The All-Star break got me thinking. I used to be the focus of attention in my house, the driving force, before opening day, before Hideki Matsui came on board.

While my daughter is away this summer, I live with my husband and three sons. There are enough balls, bats, gloves, cleats and testosterone to fill a bus. Even the female cat watches ESPN. Nobody is hotter than the Yankees. In my home, if you live in Queens, you are guilty by association of being a Mets fan and thereby subject to grave ridicule.

When my husband is not working down on Wall Street, he is busy fondling yellow pads where rosters are created and manipulated daily for his summer baseball team. When he is not coaching said baseball team five days a week, he attends our 15-year-old's games the other two nights of the week, not including doubleheaders on Sun-



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days. When he wanted to build a batting cage in our backyard, I suggested a Japanese garden instead, and he looked like a sulky 4-year-old. When my older son is not working, he is managing his online fantasy-baseball team. After he graduates from college, he tells me, he's considering a career as a ticket agent, so he can keep the family in free, or at least discounted, tickets.\*

For me, away games are misnomers. Washing multiple uniforms for multiple teams with three sock colors and sizes is a domestic nightmare. When not at baseball camp or on the field or in the yard playing whiffle ball, my guys are parked in front of the "YES" channel, where I exist only as a blur in shadow, coming back into focus briefly at commercial interludes when they need a cold drink. (In my fantasy life I disconnect all five televisions in my house.)

Recently my 11-year-old suggested that the Yankee organization rethink giving its players one day off a week. "After all," he said, "the season is only so long." I wonder if it is possible to be addicted to baseball and if a 12-step program is available.

My sons fight over the sports section, which I find strewn in every bathroom in my house. (At least they're reading.) Family dinners consist of rich dialogue where my young men defend their favorite players with a wealth of statistics that boggles my mind and belies their math grades. How is it possible

for them to forget being asked to take out the garbage yet pluck at will from memory a game situation, in detail, that took place years ago?

I try to broaden my male offsprings' interests by interjecting current events or the latest sports biographies into the discussion. But the talk around the table is one-note, as if my family has filters on their ears from spring training until the fall classic. The conversation always steals back to what player will be, or should be, retiring; which Yank currently has the most extra-base hits; and if there's ever a lull, the euphoric recap of the previous game or the anticipation of the next, and what pitcher will be on the mound.

I love baseball, I tell them. I want to be involved in their lives and pride myself on being a hands-on mother — to the point of endangering my life last summer by catching my 14-year-old's fast balls and walking around the entire month of July with bruises the size of peaches on my calves. I remind them I played third base and right field in high school. They roll their eyes at each other. Then the discussion turns back to Joe Torre's choice for his fifth pitcher in the Yankees' starting rotation.

For my 11-year-old's birthday, his father got four tickets to Yankee stadium. My son told me, as gently as he could, that I could look for him on TV behind the batter's box. And I used to be the apple of his eye. But who can compete with Alfonso Soriano, especially with his numbers?