

JAY FELDMAN

There Ain't Enough Mustard

YOU PROBABLY READ about that little fracas at Yankee Stadium the other night, where some of the fans got all excited and tore up a concession stand. I guess a dozen guys spent the night in the can, but fortunately there was no serious injuries—just a few busted noses, and like that.

But if you noticed in all the stories in the papers and on TV, nobody could say for sure who or what started the fuss in the first place. So that's what I'm here to tell you—'cause it was me.

I should start by saying right away that I am not a violent person. My motto has always been, "Live and let live," and I like to keep a low profile, if you know what I mean. Oh, sure, I been in a few scrapes—who hasn't? Like the time on the subway in the morning rush hour when that very tall guy in the mohair overcoat was reading *The Wall Street Journal* on my head. But even then, I politely asked him two times to kindly remove his paper from my head before I got physical. And there was that other time with the City health inspector, but he definitely asked for it. And maybe a few other incidents when I was younger, but not for a long time now. I've mellowed, as my kids would say.

I admit I can have a temper. See, the thing I learned early is that when you're five-foot-one-half-inch, you better be able to take care of yourself, 'cause a lot of guys are gonna try and push you around, and if you don't let 'em know where to get off, you're gonna wind

up as a doormat, if you know what I mean.

When I was a young man, I grew a mustache. It grew real slow, and it took about three or four months before it got to looking half decent. So, these friends of mine, they were gonna play a little joke on me, see, so they jumped me and held me down while one guy shaved off half the mustache. I don't have to tell you, I was pretty burned up. So this guy gets finished shaving half my mustache off, and all of a sudden the rest of 'em realize they can't let go of me or someone's gonna get his head handed to him. So, here's five guys, all bigger than me, sitting on top of me, and looking at each other, trying to figure out what to do next. I'm not saying a word, but they could see the steam coming out of my ears. Finally someone says, "Hy...uh, Hymie...uh, listen, don't get sore. We're sorry. We shouldn't have done it. Please don't do anything crazy, OK? Awright?...Listen, we're gonna let you up. OK, when I say 'three,' everyone let go. One...two...three." And then, let me tell you, you never saw five guys scatter so fast in your life. And you can be sure they never pulled anything like that again.

But one thing I can honestly say, and I swear this is true: I never went anywhere *looking* for trouble. Sure, I never backed down to no one, but I never went looking—you can ask anyone who knows me. And that's the difference between me and a guy like Billy Martin. You gotta understand the distinction here. A guy like Martin, he's always looking for trouble; me, I'm always trying to stay invisible. I never had a chip on my shoulder, I never had a big mouth, and I always minded my own business—unless someone tried to push me around. And then I took care of myself. And that's the truth.

I also want to go on record here as saying I'm strongly opposed to all the fan violence they have in the ballparks these days. I think it's terrible. This little incident I'm talking about, though, was a whole different kettle of fish, as I'm about to tell you.

See, my kids wanted to take me to a ballgame to celebrate my retirement, which took place last month. I decided a long time ago that I wasn't gonna be one of these guys that drops dead on the job, if you know what I mean, so the day I hit sixty-two, that was it. Goodbye and good luck. See ya later.

I used to be a big baseball fan, but I ain't been to a game in quite a few years. I'll catch a game on TV or radio, and of course, I still read the sports page. But that's about it any more.

I was a Brooklyn fan, and after they left for the coast, I kinda lost interest. I followed the Mets for a while when they came in, but it got to be too big of a schlep to get out there to Shea, so I gave that up. I never did like the Yankees much, and particularly since this shmuck Steinberger took over. I mean the guy just plain rubs me the wrong way. For one thing, when it comes to baseball, he don't know shit from Shinola. Tantrums he knows from. Royal proclamations he knows from. But baseball? Nuttin'. Zero. Zilch. He knows as much about baseball as Harold Cosell knows. The two of them would probably get along just fine.

The other thing that soured me on baseball is the crybabies they got playing the game now. Guys that won't play if they got a little boo-boo on their pinky finger. Guys that won't cross the street unless they get paid for it. The hell with 'em. I'd rather go down to the neighborhood park and watch five-year-olds play.

But this time, my kids really wanted to take me to the Stadium. My younger son Andy is a lawyer who works for a bigshot that buys a season box for a tax write-off. The kind of a guy who goes to a ballgame in a three-piece suit and leaves after a couple of innings. You know the type—hates baseball. Anyway, Andy notices that nobody's using the tickets for this particular twi-night double-header, so he grabs 'em, and him and his older brother Jerry worked on me till I said OK.

I love a twi-night. Always have. You go to the park, it's daylight; you see six, seven hours of baseball, and you never realize that it's gotten dark because of the lights and because you're so involved in the action—it's like going to another land, if you know what I mean—but when you leave the ballpark it's night time. And you never saw it happen 'cause you've been in that other country the whole time.

So I let the boys talk me into it. I even dug out my old Brooklyn Dodgers cap for the occasion.

Driving up to the Stadium, I have to admit that I got pretty

JAY FELDMAN

excited. And walking from the car, I was really getting caught up in it, you know, it'd been such a long time since I'd been to a ballgame. And when we got inside and I caught sight of the field, I felt like a little kid again, if you know what I mean. The white lines on the green grass always did it to me.

The seats, it turns out, are right behind the third-base dugout. Hey, going in style. You gotta remember that I'm a guy who always sat in the bleachers with the lumpken proletariat.

Man, was that ballpark packed! Which figured, of course, since the Yanks were playing the California Angels, and Reggie Jackson is always a good bet to fill the house.

On the way down to our seats, I hear some kid saying, "Whyncha go back where ya belong, ya freak! Go back to Boston!" I look down, and here's this brat looking up at me. And the little pissant looks me right in the eye and says it again: "Go back to Boston, ya bum!" Boston? What the hey? And then I notice he's looking at my cap—the little creep can't even tell the difference between Brooklyn and Boston. I tell you, we're living in strange times.

So we get seated, and I'm all tingling, you know, from the field and the crowd and everything. It'd been so long, but it was like just yesterday. Richard Merrill comes out to sing "The Star Spangled Banner," and buddy, I heard it like I never heard it before. I always did suspect that the national anthem was really about baseball.

Jo-osé, can you see,
By the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hailed,
At the twi-night's last inning,
Whose sport stripes and bright stars,
Through the Berra-less fight,
And the ramparts we watched,
Were so gallantly screaming.
And the rockets' red glare,
The bombs bursting in air,
Babe Ruth through the night,

104

There Ain't Enough Mustard

That our flag was still there.
José, does tha-hat star spangled
Ba-ha-na-her ye-het wa-have,
O'er the la-hand of the freeeeee,
And the home of the Braves—PLAY BALL!

A couple of rows behind us there's a guy who's got a thing for Reggie Jackson. Now, Reggie ain't my favorite player either, but this guy had a real thing. Every time Reggie comes in from right field, this guy has something to say, and with one of those voices that could stop traffic on Times Square. "REGGIE, YA COULDN'T SHINE TED WILLIAMS' SHOES," or "REGGIE, YA COULDN'T CARRY JACKIE ROBINSON'S JOCKSTRAP," and stuff like that. Reggie struck out his first three times up, and this bigmouth was having a ball. Every time Reggie comes back to the dugout, he's checking the stands to see where this guy is sitting. In the eighth inning, Reggie comes up with the score tied and the bases loaded and belts one into the third deck in right field, and stands there at the plate watching the ball disappear into the crowd. I was reminded of that remark some ballplayer made a few years ago when a reporter asked him if he thought Reggie was a hot dog. "Is Reggie a hot dog?" the man said. "Let me put it this way: there ain't enough mustard in this world to cover Reggie Jackson." So Reggie circles the bases real slow, and on his way back to the bench, he stops and looks up at this bigmouth who's been giving him the business, and points right at him and sneers and spits between his front teeth.

By the end of the first game, we're all good and hungry, so I offer to go and get some eats for all of us. When I get up to the concession stand, though, it's mobbed. I mean there's a crowd like New Year's Eve on Times Square. And no lines, just pushing and shoving. I never did like that sort of thing, but when you live in New York, you get used to it, I guess. So I waded into the crowd, and after ten minutes, I've worked my way up to the front.

Behind the counter is this moose of a college kid—like about

105

six-foot-three and 250 pounds. At first I figure I'll be polite and wait for him to look at me, but soon I realize that if I don't speak up, I'm gonna be here all night.

So I say simply, "Six hot dogs, please," but the moose doesn't hear me and serves someone else instead. OK, so after he's done, I try again: "Six hot dogs." Again he doesn't hear—or else he's ignoring me. Now why should he ignore me? Must be he didn't hear me, what with all the noise and him being two heads taller than me, so after he's free, I speak up once more. And once more he waits on someone else. So, now I'm sure he's giving me the old brush-off, and I take a quarter out of my pocket and start tapping on the counter with it. This gets his attention. He looks down at me. "Listen, shrimp," he says, "why don't you bang with your head?"

Now, "shrimp" is a form of address that I've never taken kindly to, especially from a big guy. The last fella that called me "shrimp"—and I'm talking like thirty years ago—ended up apologizing to me. So I probably don't have to tell you that I'm getting pretty hot. My first impulse is to go over the counter and rearrange this jerk's face. Instead, I count to ten, and say loud and clear, "SIX HOT DOGS!"

The moose looks down and says—and you can tell he thinks he's real clever—"Why don't you go back to Boston, Pops?" There it is again! Insult to injury! Another snotnose who don't even know the difference between Brooklyn and Boston! This kid needs to be taught a lesson. He's definitely got it coming to him.

Right in front of me on the counter is one of those giant-size mustard containers—like about two gallons worth. I'm fuming, but very calmly and slowly, I unscrew the plunger-top and lay it on the counter, and wait for my chance.

The moose is filling an order—his back is turned to me. When he turns around, his hands are full of hot dogs, and he leans forward to pass the order across the counter, at which moment I reach up with one hand, grab his jacket at the collar, yank him towards me and turn over the mustard container on his head. Then I pull him up over the counter and, holding him by the lapels, I yell in his mustard-covered face, "It's Brooklyn, not Boston, you ignoramus! And next time you think about calling someone a shrimp,

you better think twice!" And with that, I push him back over the other side of the counter.

And whaddya know, but sitting right there on the counter in front of me is the hot dogs the moose dropped when I grabbed him. And would you believe it, there's six of 'em. So I gather up the hot dogs, and when I turn around to go back to my seat, the scene is like one of those western movies where everyone in the saloon is swinging at somebody. I'm telling you, it's a regular brawl, a brouhaha.

A guy could get hurt in a mob scene like that, so quickly and carefully, I pick my way through the uproar and head down to our box. On my way, I notice that everybody's rubber-necking towards the top of the section, trying to figure out what all the commotion is about.

"Hey, just in time, Pop," says Andy when I reach my seat. "The second game's gonna start right away. What took you so long? We were starting to worry about you."

"Big crowd," I say, passing out the hot dogs.

"What the hell's going on up there?" asks Jerry. "Sounds like a riot."

I shrug my shoulders. "Who knows. I didn't see nuttin'."

"Hey, Pop, you forgot to put mustard on these hot dogs."

As far as the rest goes, you probably know as much as I do—I read about it in the papers, same as you. The concession stand got torn up pretty good, I guess, and they threw a few guys in the cooler for the night. Otherwise, no big deal. The moose that I gave the mustard facial must have been too embarrassed to admit that a sixty-two year old shrimp got the best of him, 'cause when the cops tried to sort the whole thing out, nobody could say for sure how it started.

Which is just as well with me. I don't need publicity. I like to keep a low profile. I ain't no hot dog, if you know what I mean.