

Married to the 'enemy': Sox-Yankee couples

'Diamonds are forever' takes on extra meaning for couples rooting for rival baseball teams.

By Ron Scherer, Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor / October 15, 2004

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Every night when José Ceballos gives his little daughters their bath, he sings them the New York Yankees song - and now the girls know the words. But his wife, Kelly, just returned from Boston to their home in Washington with brand-new Red Sox hats for the girls.

"We try to be open-minded," says José.

"We try not to hurl insults at each other in front of the children," says Kelly.

"I have won the children over," says José proudly.

"I have to learn a Red Sox song," says his wife, unwilling to cede the children's allegiance.

Yes, love is fickle. Cupid sometimes can't tell Yankee pin stripes from Red Sox uniforms.

The moonstruck get married, have children, manage in-laws, and, this time of year, ride an emotional roller coaster as the two teams slug it out. They continue their rivalry Friday night in Boston with the Yankees ahead two games to none.

The tension sometimes results in someone sleeping on the couch, a lot of smirking after one team beats the other, and family feuds that make the Bush-Kerry race seem like a Sunday school class.

Take the McClennan family of Framingham, Mass. Mark McClennan has been one of the Red Sox faithful his entire life; Maggie, his wife, has been a Yankee since she was old enough to start reading on her father's knee.

"The first word she learned to read when she was growing up was 'Thurman Munson,' says Mr. McClennan, referring to the former Yankees catcher. When New York wins, he says, "I get lots of taunting from the in-laws." But he's thinking about getting the last laugh: His son, due in December, may be named "Pedro Martinez McClennan."

"Probably not, but I am teasing them about it," he says.

Advice columnist April Masini of AskApril.com says couples need to remember it's only a sports game and it shouldn't be taken so personally. But if that doesn't work, Ms. Masini, a Yankees fan, adds, "Hide the knives, and if the spouse is getting too emotional, change the channel and hide the remote."

In fact, in the interest of family harmony, some loyalists have thought about switching

sides, though many can't go through with it. That's what happened to Yankee fan Bob Cembrola, whose wife, Mary, and three children are Sox fans. Last year, one of his daughters wouldn't talk to him for a week after the Yankees beat the Red Sox in the emotion-packed seventh game of the American League Championship Series.

"I love my wife and kids, and I'd love to see them happy," says Mr. Cembrola, whose family lives in Grafton, Mass. "I said I would root for the Red Sox, but I couldn't do it. Instinct took over."

Indeed, for many Sox-Yankees families, last year's game is still a sore spot. After Aaron Boone's winning home run, Red Sox fan Kristen McGuire slept in the guest bedroom in Newington, Conn., "because I couldn't stand to be in the same bed as a Yankees fan," she says. "I love and hate this time of year!"

In fact, many Red Sox wives complain that their Yankee-loving husbands just don't understand their woe. After the Red Sox loss last year, Mrs. Ceballos says it took days to get over it. "My husband says, 'Hey, I don't play for the Yankees,' " she recalls. "He couldn't understand how angry I was at him."

This summer, Stephanie Stirrup found a T-shirt on Martha's Vineyard that said something like, "I only hate two things: the Yankees and people who root for the Yankees."

Recently, she started going through the closet to try to find the shirt. It was gone because her husband threw it out. "It's not funny. I like the shirt," she says.

After Tuesday night's loss, which sent her to bed in tears, she decided he would have dinner with his Yankee friends on Wednesday night. "I'm not cooking for him," she says.

To try to avoid these types of bruised feelings, some Sox-Yankees couples hope to keep the rivalry at the stadium. That's the case with Justin Rubinstein and his girlfriend, Lauren Glucksman, a Yankees fan, who went to the last Sox-Yankees game of the regular season. "Afterwards we went home, and everything is good," he says. Well, except for the Yankees cup that Mr. Rubinstein refused to drink from. It now resides in Ms. Glucksman's apartment. "I know better than to give it to him," she says.

Yet for many families, the rivalry has already taken on something of a mania in the home. In Havertown, Pa., Brendan Dunn says he wants to name his son, due in February, Trotman - after the Red Sox right fielder Trot Nixon.

Young Trot won't even have to travel to see Fenway Park. Mr. Dunn, a physical-education teacher, has built a replica in his basement, including a Pesky's Pole and Green Monster. "I would have built the bleachers above the wall, but my wife wanted to keep the dining room," he moans.

Dunn's enthusiasm - if they have a second son, he's thinking of naming him Varitek, after the Sox catcher - has turned his wife, Karen, into a Yankees fan "in the hopes that he comes to his senses when the Red Sox lose," she says. "I'm desperate to protect my child from a lifetime of teasing, considering he/she will spend the majority of their life in Philly and no one here will even know who Trot Nixon is!"

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