

The Steinbrenner I Knew



Moore, Fuchs and Steinbrenner – USOC Board Meeting, San Diego (4/12/96)

Much has been written and much, much more will be written about George M. Steinbrenner III. Born July 4, 1930 (my junior by 11 months) in Rocky River, Ohio, educated at Culver Military Academy and Williams College, and glorified and vilified as the Principal Owner of the New York Yankees, “The Boss” had many passions, friends, and detractors. He was rough, ruthless and sentimental. General George Patton was his role model. He was belligerent, seldom subtle, but consistently loyal and giving. Much of his life was chronicled by Bill Madden in his “Steinbrenner: The Last Lion of Baseball”. However, while I can still remember much of it, this is **The Steinbrenner I Knew**.

Our fathers, his at MIT and mine at Penn State were two of the best collegiate high and low hurdlers in the 1923-1925 era. Both George and I treasured our copies of the IC4A reports on their records over those years. George and I competed against each other only once: in the 4x120 yard high hurdle shuttle relay at the Penn Relays in 1951. Many years later, George would tease me about only knowing me from the back of my track shorts. George was passionate about all sports and was a regular spectator at the annual Penn Relays. My father and I were honored to win the first Steinbrenner Family Heritage Award in 2001, to recognize a parent/child that excelled in the Penn Relays.

George was also passionate about thoroughbred horse racing. Probably his best, Bellamy Road, was favored to win the Kentucky Derby in 2004. He finished 7th. A year later, my son’s first entry in the Kentucky Derby, Pollard’s Vision, trained by Todd Pletcher, was second at the mile post and finished 17th. It was ironic that Steinbrenner’s Position Limit

(also trained by Todd Pletcher) broke her maiden at Belmont the day after George died. It was ironic too that July 13th, the day we lost “The Boss”, was the day Baseball’s All-Star game was played.

George’s role in the United States Olympic Committee is legendary. His Olympic Overview Commission, representing two years of work, probably saved that organization in terms of governance and support for athletes. George was responsible for my joining the USOC Board of Directors in 1990. Ten years later, I became Chair of the USOC’s Bid City Task Force and George was a steady confidante; his advice was always pertinent and confidential. George was a regular spectator at most Olympic Games, demonstrating his love for this magical international competition and especially, for his relationship to the athletes who he treated almost like his children. The photo shown here is of George with Donna de Varona at Xerox’s special celebration of the *100 Golden Olympians*, which was such a special part of the 1996 Games in Atlanta and in which I was honored to be included.



The Steinbrenner I knew did not include his original 1973 New York Yankees purchase from CBS for less than 10 million dollars (that was a deal!), his 1990 suspension by baseball commissioner Fay Vincent, his love/hate relationship with Billy Martin, or even his 7 World Series Championships. Rather, I got to watch ballgames with George, mostly in his private box, filled with the most wonderful New York Yankees memorabilia and old friends. While I was frequently invited to his box, more often than not George chose to watch the game alone in another private cubicle. After all, winning was everything!

My favorite baseball visit with George was at Legends Field in Tampa (now Steinbrenner Field), just the two of us. I went away loaded with Yankee “stuff” and a very memorable afternoon of what makes George tick. This insight is reinforced by several luncheons together in Manhattan, shared with Jim Fuchs, my roommate in the 1952 Olympics. It was always fun when George was host; the whole restaurant would stop.

The last time I saw George, I think in August 2005, he invited fellow 1952 Olympians Jim Fuchs, Harrison Dillard and Lindy Remigino for a game to celebrate my 76th birthday. George’s health and memory were failing, but he perked up immediately when he started talking about the Olympics. Throughout our visit, George stayed glued to his television, alternating between the Yankee game and his horse that was running that day.

In 1982, Steinbrenner attended the funeral of a New York fireman killed in the line of duty. He was struck to find the officer had four boys with hopes of getting an education, much more difficult since their father died. How would these young men get that college education? In typical Steinbrenner fashion, this led to the founding of the Silver Shield

Foundation, which my dear friend Jim Fuchs still leads. Silver Shield provides financial support for the college education of children whose parents have lost their lives in the line of duty of the NYC Police and Fire Departments by establishing annuities at the time of the officer's death. Over the years, other protection units have been included in this program. George would contribute the proceeds from Yankee games to support the annual donations of Silver Shield members. George's generosity knew no bounds. I've watched him work with kids and secretly help those in need, almost always behind the scenes. There is a Steinbrenner track at MIT in his father's honor.

The best speech I ever heard George give was in Genesee County Community College, in about 1975. I had persuaded him to come to Batavia, NY to speak to the Eagle Scouts. He arrived in his private plane in the middle of a typical Buffalo snowstorm. He dutifully survived the usual press interviews and "rubber chicken" dinner (all the while glaring at me), but when it came time for him to speak, his demeanor changed as he spoke of "his passion for baseball" and then turned his attention to "the parents" and finally, to the "Eagle Scouts" (of which he was one). Speaking without a note, he was spellbinding! The snow didn't stop that night and George was marooned for at least another day.

As a testimony to my special friendship with George, or to his forgiveness, he agreed to another speaking engagement twenty years later. In 1995, Steinbrenner agreed to speak to the first Cornell-Penn Trustees Cup dinner in New York. A year earlier, I had agreed to serve as the Director of Athletics at Cornell University. As a kid living in the Philadelphia area, I had attended many Cornell-Penn football games on Thanksgiving Day; it was a big deal. Now as AD, I was determined to rival the legend of the annual Harvard-Yale football classic. So Steve Bilsky, Penn's AD, and I created the Trustees Cup and black tie dinner to kickoff our respective football seasons. The two University presidents agreed to attend, along with both football teams, and our dream was launched. By now, Fay Vincent had reinstated George, and he was back "running" the Yankees. Cornell's own Dick Schaap had just written a scathing piece on George in his latest book, so that ruled him out as an emcee. George was on his best behavior and when called on to speak, shared his experience as a football coach in the Big Ten, waxed eloquently about the values of an Ivy League education and its enviable student-athlete experience. And then, turned to Judith Rodin and Hunter Rawlings, pointing his finger and said "Now don't you two foul it up." That's the Steinbrenner I knew and will remember forever.

CHM
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