

A version of this article appeared in print on June 24, 2010, on page B13 of the New York edition.

His Pinstripes Have Faded, but Same Torre Awaits Yankees

By TYLER KEPNER

Published: June 23, 2010



ANAHEIM, Calif. — Joe Torre had a flashback during the seventh inning Tuesday night at Angel Stadium. His Los Angeles Dodgers were losing — again — when his left fielder, Garret Anderson, misplayed a ball in the corner during the Angels' go-ahead rally.

“I thought that was pretty ironic,” Torre said later, laughing softly in the visiting manager’s office. “He didn’t do that against me in the playoffs, I can tell you that.”

Eight years before, as an Angel, Anderson had sprinted to that same corner to rob Derek Jeter of an extra-base hit, a play Torre has always believed was pivotal to the Yankees’ first-round knockout that October. Anderson was in his prime then, and now he is fading, struggling to hit .200. But he was Torre’s No. 5 hitter on Tuesday.

These are not easy days for Torre’s Dodgers, who play host to the Yankees for three games this weekend in Torre’s first reunion with the team he guided for 12 seasons. The Dodgers had lost 8 of 10 games before Wednesday, falling from first place to third in the National League West, at 38-32. Their starting pitching is a work in progress, and their lineup needs power.

“Since I’ve known him, this is his best year managing,” said Larry Bowa, who has been Torre’s third-base coach the last five seasons, including two with the Yankees. “We’ve got a lot of guys that aren’t hitting. He just keeps it together. He makes

everyone think they're important, whether they're 0-6 or 6-0, and he never complains. You'll never see a quote in the paper, 'We can't win with this.' Joe does the best with what he's got."

The Dodgers' payroll is just over \$100 million, although about \$15 million goes to former players. With the Yankees, Torre sometimes had a roster paid twice as much. The Dodgers badly need a No. 1 starter, such as Cliff Lee of Seattle, but there is no assurance that ownership, beset by the costly divorce of Frank and Jamie McCourt, would authorize an expensive trade.

Torre pointed to midseason deals the last two seasons that brought Ronnie Belliard, Casey Blake, Vicente Padilla, George Sherrill and Manny Ramirez, and he said he is hopeful reinforcements will come.

"In the two years I've been here, we have been able to do that," Torre said, "and I'm anticipating we will again before the end of next month."

Budget concerns were never a question with the Yankees, although the payroll carried expectations that sometimes seemed suffocating. In the end, Torre's stormy departure from the Yankees after 2007 was probably inevitable, considering the fundamental difference he had with ownership — and many fans — on what determined success.

"I just wanted to see if the managing part could be fun again, because in New York, it stopped being fun," said Torre, who accepted a three-year, \$13 million offer from the Dodgers in November 2007 after rejecting the Yankees' one-year deal for a guaranteed \$5 million.

"I was sort of torn," he said. "The pressure's one thing. There's always going to be pressure, I don't care where you manage. But I had trouble characterizing not getting to the World Series as failure. Disappointment, yeah, but not failure. Only because I always base my opinion on players and teams on how hard they try. They worked hard."

Torre's Yankees reached the playoffs in all of his seasons, winning the World Series in four of his first five. Yet the journey always seemed paramount to Torre, who reflected fondly on the night the Yankees clinched the 2007 wild card. He teared up as he toasted the players in the clubhouse, and only Jeter's Champagne blast kept him from breaking down.

The affection, especially among Torre's veterans, was mutual.

"He's special in my life," Jorge Posada said this week. "He was like a father figure for me. He was a guy who took care of me like his own child."

The Yankees missed the playoffs in their first season under Joe Girardi, but won last year's World Series by beating the Philadelphia Phillies, who defeated Torre's Dodgers in the National League Championship Series for the second fall in a row. Torre, who sent text messages to most of his old players after the final out of the Series, had relished the prospect of facing the Yankees.

"I kidded my club when we fell behind three games to one," he said. "I said to them: 'Guys, get me to the World Series. I'll put up with everything I have to put up with. Trust me, I'll handle that part. You get us there.' You try to just relieve some tension at that point."

Torre often references his Yankee years with the Dodgers' players, mostly talking about the comebacks against Atlanta in the 1996 World Series, and against Oakland in the 2001 division series. He retains Bowa and the hitting coach Don Mattingly from his last Yankees staff, and has one ex-Yankee, reliever Jeff Weaver, on his roster.

"He's pretty much the same," Weaver said. "A few of the rules and such have changed — music in the clubhouse, long hair. But I can't really say anything with his personality has changed much. If things are successful, why change?"

He is the same Torre — a cup of **Bigelow green tea** before batting practice, a box of Hammond's pretzels in his office, the familiar No. 6 on his back. The Yankees have not reissued his number, although they have not formally retired it and memorably snubbed Torre during the final-game ceremony at the old Yankee Stadium.

Torre rankled some Yankees the next spring with his memoir, "The Yankee Years," written with Tom Verducci. Torre said he is still puzzled by the uproar from the book, saying he mainly elaborated on Verducci's reporting, and that he was obligated to cover the good and bad of his tenure.

"I was very proud of the way Tommy put that thing together," Torre said. "But as far as closure, for me, it was the greatest 12 years in my professional life, I don't think

there's any question. I have friends over there, and I will continue to have friends over there, and I don't think anything more has to be done."

Someday Torre will go to the new stadium, he said, but he does not know when. Before the old one came down, friends asked if he wanted any keepsakes.

"I said, 'No, my memories are great,' " Torre said. "I had been fired three times and all of a sudden you have the Yankee job? Crazy. This is nuts, man. And to go out there and win four World Series in five years? I can't be more blessed than that."

Ben Shpigel contributed reporting from Phoenix.