

## The Call:

I guess it won't happen this spring either. I guess I'll be staying put after all. I guess this will be just one more in a long string of mid-February disappointments, a string of consecutive downers that's been running since 1957. That's fifty years! Some kind of a record, I'm sure. I check the phone messages frequently. I'm diligent about my email. We stop at the mailbox down by the road every afternoon. Nothing. Nothing at all.

I thought maybe this year. You know, the team has had trouble with A-Rod. The fans are on his case about another poor performance in last year's playoffs. Insiders say he and Jeter aren't as tight as they used to be. He made twenty-some errors in '06. He's got that enormous contract. The handwriting was on the wall, you might say. Nope.

My disappointment all started with Andy Carey who was pretty darn solid through the middle 50's. Good glove, solid bat. He was not spectacular. But on a team with Mickey and Yogi and Elston and Billy and Whitey and Moose he didn't need to be. I was only seven or eight at the time and I might have been expecting too much. I can't remember whether we had a phone or not. I paid more attention to the mail in those days. So I'd go look to see if a letter with the Yankees logo was waiting for me. Either the team wasn't contacting me or my parents were hiding the offers.

Then the real trouble started. For the next eight years Cletis Boyer played third base for the Yankees. Clete was, most likely, the best fielding third baseman I have ever seen. He lived in the dirt at third. You couldn't bunt on Clete, you couldn't get the ball between him and the bag and going to his left there was no one better. And his arm, forget about it, a cannon.

So OK, I waited him out. I was 18 when Clete left the Yankees. Perfect. They have to call now. They can get me right out of high school. I won't gouge them on my bonus and I'm a great team guy. But NO. Of all the dumb luck, the U.S. sponsored a war in Viet Nam and it messed everything up. Go figure.

In 1973 when things were getting back to normal, except for Watergate and Impeachments and stuff, a guy named Graig Nettles showed up and kept the job for ten freaking years.

Graig was almost the equal of Clete in the field and a much better hitter. I have never struck fear into any pitcher's heart. Graig was big trouble. Another spring. No call.

It's one thing to get beat out by the like of Nettles and Boyer but how about all those years with Pagliarulo and Boone and who knows who? Enough is enough. A guy could get a complex.

You might be getting the idea by now that, every spring, I expect a call from my team. You're right. I do. The call will invite me to Spring Training with a shot at the third base job for the New York Yankees. Every spring with renewed hope and a remarkably positive attitude I figure that this will be the year for me. Every spring I get out my glove, oil it up, put on my trusty spikes (I still prefer the metal ones, they sound so cool on concrete) start my stretching and.....nothing.

It looks like 2007 will be the same. Oh, I know, there are still a couple of weeks to go in Ft. Lauderdale and someone might come up lame. You never know. And there's always the expanded roster going into the post season. But my skills are fading a bit. Experience and moxy can only go so far. I think another five or ten years and I'll have to reassess the situation. Until then I intend to follow the baseball news, stay in shape, keep my chin up and be ready when they call.

Hold on. I gotta' go. There's a guy at the door with an envelope. Keep your fingers crossed. This could be it.