

He's Got Your Beer, Right Here, and Some Laughs



Uli Seit for The New York Times

Steve Lazarus hones his stand-up routine at Yankee Stadium, where he has worked since 1977.

By JOE BRESCIA
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The new Yankee Stadium has no shortage of star power — on the field, in Monument Park where the great Yankees are immortalized and among those old Yankees who appear on special occasions, like [Yogi Berra](#).

But while his name may not be familiar to many, [Steve Lazarus](#) is as much a fixture among some fans as the famous facade that has been re-created in the new ballpark.

For 32 years Mr. Lazarus, 51, has worked and performed at Yankee Stadium, where he has hustled as much as [Phil Rizzuto](#), showed off his arm as much as Whitey Ford and been as reliable as [Derek Jeter](#).

Mr. Lazarus has done his thing in the stands as a vendor, rushing ice cream to fans before it gets too soft, tossing bags of peanuts across several rows, selling hot dogs that were actually hot and cold beer that was actually cold.

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And along the way he also has become well-known for passing out jokes: “Our oldest vendor is 83 and he got suspended: He tested positive for Maalox.” On his days off and in the off-season, Mr. Lazarus’s sense of humor has also translated into a paycheck, because when he is not working at the stadium he is appearing on the stages of comedy clubs, mostly in the suburbs in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

But while the audiences at the clubs can certainly be critical, Mr. Lazarus points out that fans at Yankee Stadium are not shy when it comes to expressing their opinions.

“Yankee fans are the toughest,” he said. “They don’t give anyone a chance. They yell, ‘You stink! Get off the field!’

“I said, ‘Come on. Let the guy finish singing the national anthem.’ ”

Mr. Lazarus, who was born and lives in the Bronx, said his journey to becoming a vendor started when his father took him to his first Yankee game, Old Timers’ Day in 1965.

“I was 7 and the vendors were nice to me,” he said. “They always had something funny to say. The beer man would come over to sell my dad a beer and he’d look at me. ‘You have I.D.?’

“Then he would say: ‘You can’t have a beer. You have to drive your dad home.’ ”

As he and his father went to more games, Mr. Lazarus realized the vendors enjoyed a big perk. “They got to go to all the games for free,” he said. “And back then, many games were not on TV, so that was a big deal. And they were popular with all the fans.”

Mr. Lazarus came to realize that someone who could not make it on the field could still be at the ballpark for every game. “If I could not be a player, I thought, the heck with being a fireman or policeman, I want to be a vendor,” he said.

As it happened, Mr. Lazarus said, his father was a bookie, and one of his clients was in charge of the vendors. His first day at work was at the 1977 All-Star Game. Then came the excitement of the Yankees winning the World Series that October and again the following year.

Later, in the 1980s, the Yankees hit a dry spell that no amount of beer could quench. There were years of losing and empty seats.

“I had to step up my material to get fans’ attention,” he said. “Fans were paying more attention to me than what was going on on the field.” Here’s a taste of his schtick: “My dad is a lousy gambler. I once overheard him betting against the Harlem Globetrotters!”

Tedd Derian, a retired limousine driver who is a regular at Yankee games, said: “Steve’s very entertaining. His act is a little extra thrown in with the game. He’s quick coming up with lines. I don’t know how he does it while he’s running around. He’s a real hustler.”

Mr. Lazarus has written a self-published book, “The Pope and Me at Yankee Stadium,” about his life as a vendor and comedian. The title refers to the two times he worked at the stadium when the pope was the star attraction.

“No, I wasn’t selling beer,” Mr. Lazarus said. “But maybe even stranger, I was selling Hebrew National hot dogs.”

Mr. Lazarus worries that the many food options available at the new stadium may threaten the livelihood of vendors. “You can see the game anywhere you eat,” he said. “In the old place, nobody wanted to leave their seats and miss the action.”

But at least on opening day, Mr. Lazarus and his beer were in high demand. “Beer here!” he shouted, as he worked on the main level behind third base.

A man in a Yankee cap and a blue jersey with No. 2 on the back waved a \$20 bill. A boy in a Yankee cap and pinstriped shirt sat to his left. Mr. Lazarus nodded at the man, rushed over and passed a bottle toward them.

“You have I.D.?” he asked the younger fan. The boy and the man laughed.