

"Always have to be at pickup. You miss pickup, you've got trouble," he says.

One guy, clutching a tall boy of mango-flavored beer, is trying to get to the next level. He drifts alongside as Jeter moves to the table covered with balls and begins signing, barely looking down as his pen flies across their surfaces.

"So you probably have time on your hands...since that whole Marlins thing," the guy says, referring to Jeter's decision early last year to vacate his position as CEO and a partial owner of the Miami Marlins. But it's like trying to strike a match on a bar of soap. Jeter just smiles as two workers swoop in, place an acrylic box over each ball, seal the cartons, and stack them carefully into a large blue suitcase, which is quickly spirited away. "I've got lots going on," he says. "Too much."

The guy gives up. A generation of sports-writers sympathizes. Complaining about Jeter's locked-down interview style has become a journalistic genre all its own. For 20 years he was a relentless frustrator of New York back pages, unwilling to stir even the tiniest bit of muck. He has never been sullen or standoffish, as he points out, but neither has he felt the need to be one *ista* more informative than he has carefully decided to be. In his playing days, his stated policy was to answer every question once and then never revisit it. It is not a position he has felt compelled to revise in retirement. Last year, when he released his seven-part ESPN docuseries, *The Captain*, the project was so authorized a biography that it practically came with a notary stamp; its credits included Jeter's agent, his agency, Major League Baseball, and *The Players' Tribune*, the media company Jeter founded specifically to create an end run around traditional sports journalism. The project could be seen as a seven-hour attempt to say everything he's willing to say about his career once, and then never have to address any of it again.

On a podium at the meet-and-greet sits the World Series trophy, primed for a photo op. Jeter catches sight of the thing, and you can almost see a Gollum-like glimmer in his eye as he drifts over to peer at it.

This is only the third baseball game that Jeter has been to this season. The others were the All-Star Game and a game at Yankee Stadium commemorating his induction into the National Baseball Hall of Fame. His abrupt resignation in Miami came after four seasons there; he says he needed a break.

A line forms to take photos. Jeter takes his position next to the trophy; a handler makes sure his head isn't covering the Capital One logo behind him.

"Do I really have to pose with all these Phillies fans?" he jokes.

I asked Jeter whether he wished he was on the field. "Playing? I No!" he'd said. "I played 20 years! There hasn't been a day I've missed playing the game."

"You don't have to smile," says his handler.

But smile he does, until the last person has come through, some of them barely daring to look him in the eye. This is, of course, a business obligation, and, as with everything Jeter, there's a deliberateness to all his gestures, a bit of Dale Carnegie. But he is nevertheless endearing, and, frankly, it's a little confusing. Because, right up until the unfortunate, complicating circumstance of meeting the man, I would have told you, without hesitation, that I hated Derek Jeter.

"Such a strong word!" he says, when I tell him so. "I never looked at it as people hated me as a person. They don't know me. And I think if they knew me, they wouldn't hate me. They just strongly disliked the team I played for."

Oh, but I beg to differ. *To dislike* implies a real, personal, human animus. That's way more serious than the beautiful, unencumbered, irresponsible hatred that is one of the great joys of sports, just as is unquestioning, unconditional love.

It comes almost as a relief when I finally catch the faintest glimpse of the Imperial Stormtrooper that I thought I knew from years of watching him play.

"Are you a baseball fan?" he asks.

"I'm a Mets fan," I tell him.

He waits a beat. Gives a little *chuck*. "Mets were pretty optimistic this year," he says.

"Yes," I say, as evenly as possible. The Mets led the National League East for nearly the entire season before characteristically stalling down the stretch and being summarily ousted in the playoffs. "Yes, they were."

"Well," says Derek Jeter, "it's a long season." I swear I can see a twinkle in his eye.

Monster.

NOT LONG AFTER the game in Philadelphia—the Series wrapped now; the long, dark winter begun—Jeter and I meet again,

for lunch in New York. He's wearing loose blue pants and a long-sleeve T-shirt, both bearing the logo of Greatness Wins, the athleticwear company he recently started with the founder of Untuckit shirts, along with Misty Copeland and Wayne Gretzky—an intriguing squad of crime fighters if ever there was one. He looks as crisp and comfortable as he did in the suit, his stubble so unimpressed with the last time I saw him that its length might be measured by caliper.

New Yorkers at lunch are a cooler bunch than Philadelphians at a game, but there's still a ripple of energy as we pass through the dining room. Jeter takes a seat at a corner table, back to the wall, facing out.

His eyes flit around the room. "I see everything when I'm out," he says. To demonstrate, he lowers his voice and points out a prominent gossip-media personality, whom he asks me not to name, eating across the room. At another table, a businessman lifts his phone in a way that could be either checking a text or taking a surreptitious photo. "I see it all," Jeter says.

One narrative has it that growing up a biracial academic and athletic star in 1980s Kalamazoo prepared Jeter for the scrutiny of playing in New York. He stood out. "You get stares. You get looks. You get people laughing and whispering and pointing," he says. "You walk into a room when you're five or six years old, and everybody's staring at you." If it left Jeter accustomed to handling attention, it also helped to instill his famous guardedness.

"Maybe it's a character flaw, but it takes me a long time to trust people," he says.

Is it a character flaw? I ask.

"Well, it's gotten me to this point," he says. "You can't turn off and on who you are, right? I've just always had trust issues."

Our lunch is at the steak house in his financial-district hotel. Jeter orders a filet mignon, butterfied, medium, side of mushrooms. He sold his last apartment in New York even before he retired, renting for the final two years of his contract. In truth,

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jacket \$2,250
pants \$1,150
Valentino
shirt \$395
Boglioli
bow tie \$195
Ralph Lauren
Purple Label
watch \$11,800
Omega



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