

Baseball behaving better

Yankee Stadium is no better or worse than other sporting venues when it comes to fans using gay slurs—go to a game and you usually hear people heckle an outfielder by saying he's "a faggot" or that he "goes both ways—men and boys." Go to a hockey or football game and you'll hear similar taunts.

Stephen Cohen, a government employee in his mid 30s from Clifton, N.J., is a heavy-duty Yankees fan—who even frequents gay sports Web sites to talk about his passion—and also goes to games in hockey, soccer, and other professional sports with his partner of two years. Thus, he knows that hearing that kind of language is the price you pay if you want to go to a sporting event. "Usually I'll just turn around and shake my head," he says.

But Cohen's days of hearing perhaps the most



notable example of gay slurs at Yankee Stadium are coming to an end. In 1996 the team began the tradition of playing the Village People hit "YMCA" between the fifth and sixth innings. Shortly afterward, fans in the rowdy bleachers began the tradition of singing out a fan of the opposing team, surrounding them, and singing new lyrics: "Why are you gay? I saw you sucking that D-I-C-K," and so forth.

That ribald tradition ended on June 14 during a game against Pittsburgh. This reporter was present in the stands when security officials and police offi-

cers—who usually laughed along with the rest of the fans when the song was sung—suddenly swooped in and escorted the people leading the tune out of the stadium. New rules, the cops said. (Calls to the Yankee organization to clarify the "new rules" were not returned.)

Fans complained loudly and bitterly. "What is this, a police state?" some asked. But after a few games they accepted it as the way things were. Gay fans have even noted another positive side effect: Since the police clamped down on "Why Are You Gay," fans are much less likely to yell gay slurs at outfielders for fear of being ejected.

Cohen, who can't get to many games at Yankee Stadium, is just hearing about the new policy. "Wow," he says. "Wow. If the Yankees did that, I would be very proud. And if they lead, other teams will follow." —Michael Giltz