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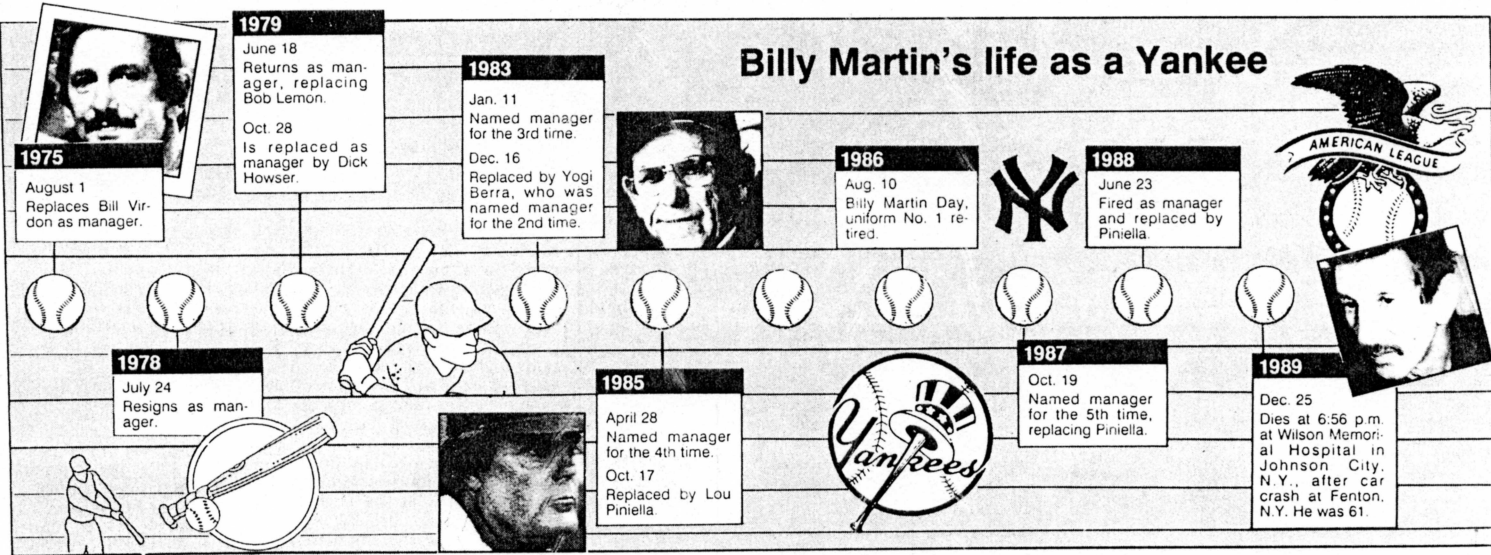
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Billy Martin's life as a Yankee



All in a dream: George in the Yankees' dugout

Steinbrenner rolls dice and up pops Billyball Bucky-style

By John LaVine

SPECIAL TO THE SENTINEL

"Yeah, yeah, I now that this Stump Merrill fellow has earned the shot — but we're talking *New York*. Big bucks. Big headlines," New York Yankees owner George Steinbrenner growled into the phone, just days before relieving Bucky Dent from the managerial post.

"You talked me out of hiring Davey Johnson, but I left an urgent message for Reggie Jackson to call me. He'll put us back in the headlines. ... Managerial experience? Reggie's a proven winner. And besides, we've still got millions of those REGGIE candy bars that we can thaw out.

"OK, OK. I'll think about trolling for wins with Stump. Good night."

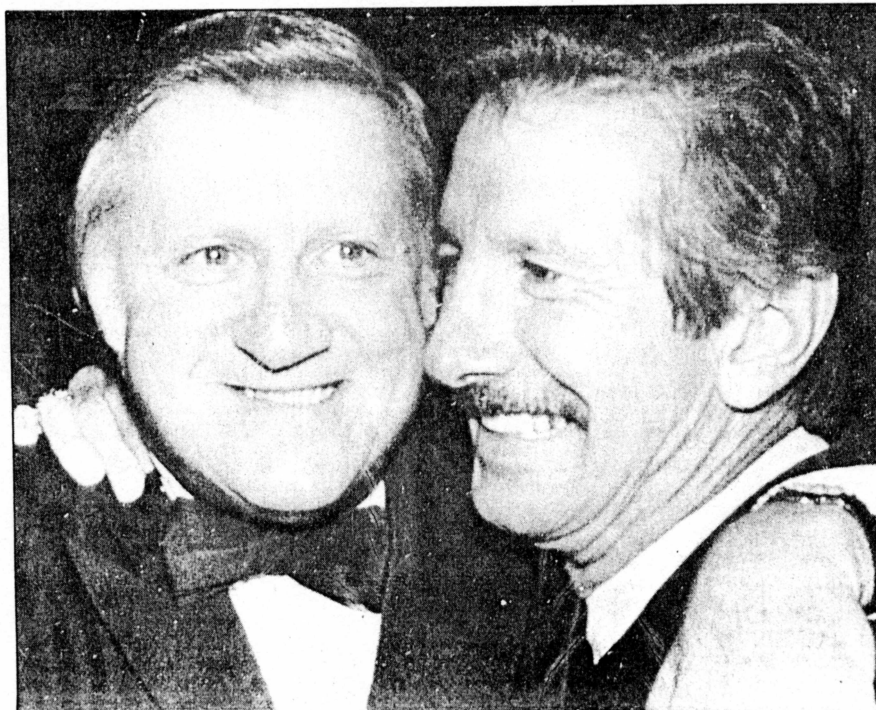
George thought about Bucky Dent as he punched his pillow and looked over at his bedside glossy of Billy Martin.

Out loud he lamented, "If only you were still in my bullpen. We were the only two who could motivate and discipline. If only I had your inside knowledge."

George fell asleep and dreamed of better days at Yankee Stadium:

Having assumed the Yanks' managerial role, he strode through the dugout, a "\$" on his uniform where a number should have been.

George proficiently called all of the hit-and-run-of-the-mill shots. But in tough spots, he secretly still relied on Billy Martin's strategical savvy. He had taken all of Billy's



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Steinbrenner (left), Martin in better days: Their stormy relationship made for juicy headlines.

game situation decisions and moves and shipped them to the STRAT-O-MATIC baseball board game company in Brooklyn.

Martin's wizardry had been run through their computers and sent to George in a personalized version of STRAT-O-MARTIN, complete with player cards, dice and Martin's

moves for every situation.

In crucial situations, George would pick up the phone and call Bucky Dent, who was fulfilling his contract by sitting in George's car, rolling dice and coming up with plays that Billy would have engineered.

It led to some ridiculous moves.

Mattingly had to bunt with the bases loaded. The recalled Deion Sanders was pulled from center field to pitch to Carlton Fisk. The third basemen — all of them — had to wear mitts on both hands!

And damned if it didn't work! Scored in early June as one of the game's better Class AAA teams, the

Viewpoint

Yankees rose to snatch the division title.

A lot of die-hards insisted New York would have avenged the 1976 World Series drubbing by the Cincinnati Reds in 1990 but for the final move.

Bucky pleaded with George to ignore the STRAT-O-MARTIN, but George would have none of that and told Bucky to follow it to the letter. Then, Commissioner Fay Vincent had to award the championship to Cincinnati by forfeit ... after Bucky sacrificed himself, dutifully punching out the home-plate umpire after a controversial call, just as Billy would have.

George stepped out onto the field as 60,000 riotous fans swarmed over the barricades. His eyes locked with the burning glare of the enraged commissioner. Vincent was placing a call on his portable phone. He motioned for George to pick it up in the dugout. George's head throbbled and throat ached as he heard the ringing phone.

He was wrenched awake by the ringing of his bedside phone. The sheets were sopping with sweat. He fumbled with the receiver and in an Elmer Fudd-like voice, he mumbled, "Huwwo."

His secretary told him Reggie Jackson was on the line for him.

Clearing his thoughts, he directed, "Have Mr. Stump Merrill fly in today. Draw up a contract for him. Go ahead and put Reggie through to me.

"Hi, Reg ... sure it's important that you get to New York. After all, we've got the old-timers game coming up, and I wouldn't want you to miss it."

John LaVine is a freelance writer who lives in Tampa.

Ask the editor

Sound Offs let readers speak out

What leads you to use a Sound Off poll for a sports question, as you did this week

Letters to the sports editor

Schmitz is clueless

Okay, *Orlando Sentinel*, this time you have really ticked me off. Not only is your sports section always a day late and a dollar short with regard to the Orlando Lions, but you continue to allow Brian Schmitz on the payroll.

After reading his June 9 column, I was left with the impression that not only doesn't he like soccer, but he thinks the only reason a red-blooded American boy would take up the

Letters policy

Letters should be brief and on a single topic. They must be signed and include the writer's full name (typed or printed), address and phone number.

The address: Dear Sports Editor, The Orlando Sentinel, P.O. Box 2833, Orlando, Fla., 32802-2833.

minority anymore.

Mark Dillon
Altamonte Springs

Religious bigotry is wrong

Mr. Black (June 17) attacked Orlando Magic and SunRays owner Pat Williams not because of the way he runs his teams, but because he is a born-again Christian. If this letter had been directed against a minority, it would be