



Home run

Screenvision teams up with Major League Baseball to take Yankees fans in to the ballgame

A PIECE OF BASEBALL HISTORY COMES TO THE MOVIES

Screenvision president and CEO Matthew Kearney (center), Yankee general manager Brian Cashman (left) and manager Joe Girardi (right) bask in the glory of the World Series Trophy

If you've ventured into the Bronx to watch the New York Yankees, you know it's hard to beat the enthusiasm of Yankees fans. They are a diverse mob who cheer and heckle with equal passion, an essential part of what is arguably the greatest franchise in modern sports.

Full disclosure: I've been a Yankees fan since the age of 11. My first baseball game was at Shea Stadium, the decrepit former home of the New York Mets, but I never experienced the true power of baseball until I saw the Yankees. While I grew up closer to Veteran's Stadium, the former home of the Philadelphia Phillies, I knew from an early age that I never wanted to subject myself to the pain of rooting for a Philadelphia team. Only disappointment lies down that path.

I realize that in some circles being a Yankees fan puts me on the same shaky moral ground as a Satan worshipper. So be it. I'm not an obsessive fan, but I still think that the 2004 American League Championship Series, in which the Boston Red Sox came back from 3-0 deficit to trump the Yankees, was rigged. Good luck trying to convince me otherwise.

So I jumped at the opportunity to attend Screenvision's premiere of the official Yankees World Series Film at the Ziegfeld Theater in Manhattan. The Yankees versus Phillies 2008 World Series is a memorable one for those in the Tri-State area because

it pitted two beloved franchises—and passionate fans on both sides—against each other. Even though the Phillies sauntered into the World Series as the defending champions, there wasn't a single moment in the Series in which I doubted that the Yankees would win their 27th championship. After all, Philadelphia teams choke like it's their job.

The premiere took place on Monday, November 16th in front of a completely full auditorium. As any exhibitor will note, it's very rare to see a movie theater packed on a Monday night.

Screenvision played a vital role in putting the event together. Their goal is providing quality alternative programming during off-peak hours and that goal was accomplished with complete success.

"The moviegoing attendance on a normal Monday night would be like 20 to 40 people per screen," says Matthew Kearney, President & CEO of Screenvision. "We've been able to boost the economics of the industry."

But it wasn't just a movie that packed patrons into the theater that night. The presence of some legendary Yankees personalities and the actual World Series trophy helped boost interest. Current Yankees manager Joe Girardi and general manager Brian Cashman were welcomed with a standing ovation. Beloved Yankees

broadcaster John Sterling unleashed his famous "Yankees Win! THEEEEE Yankees Win!" call to get everyone in the right mood. Sterling's fellow broadcasters Michael Kay and Suzyn Waldman also warmed up the crowd. Kay played to the Gothamites at hand when he glanced around the theater and said, "I hope no Mets fans got in!" Those Yankees personalities were met with the same level of enthusiasm as if George Lucas and Harrison Ford were introducing a *Star Wars* film. The energy in the room was infectious.

The film itself couldn't have played any better. Key moments such as Johnny Damon's daring base-running in Game 4 and the first appearance of Phillies pitcher—and infamous Yankees foe—Pedro Martinez were met with boisterous cheers and jeers. In a room full of Yankees fans nothing is sacred. The legendary moment when Jackie Robinson stole home was played during a pre-show commercial and one fan yelled, "He was out!" Only a Yankees fan would heckle a call half a century old.

The film screened at 20 locations in the Tri-State area, an increase over the four locations that played the official documentary of the 2007 Championship run of the Phillies.

"I think we're beginning to show that the movie theater is a great environment for sports events," says Kearney.

"I'm encouraged that we're going to continue to build on our relationship with Major League Baseball," adds Darryl Shaffer, executive vice president, exhibitor relations for Screenvision. "I'm excited about other opportunities in the sports arena moving forward."

In the New Year, Screenvision will increase its live broadcasting capabilities to around 300 locations, which opens the door for all kind of new possibilities in alternative programming. The capability was already put to use this past summer for Mets at the Movies, which also boasted sold-out crowds at the Ziegfeld.

"We'll be working with more and more teams," says Schaffer, "because regional sports have a very targetable fan base, those events have done really well."

Here's hoping that the Yankees are once again the stars of next year's World Series event.

Pub. Note: the opinions expressed are not necessarily those of BOXOFFICE Media or its publisher, a lifelong Mets' fan.