

SEASONED TICKET HOLDER

Winter ball took on a new meaning for this Mets fan

BY KATE ROGIN

Two days before the Super Bowl my sports buddy, Glen, and I took the subway to Shea Stadium. We had an appointment to buy New York Mets season tickets.

New York had been socked with its worst snowstorm in three years. As we trudged through the muck surrounding Shea, I couldn't help but feel the disconnection that comes from being someplace out of season.

Last year I watched most of the Mets' games on television, and late in the season an address to write to for ticket information began flashing periodically across the screen. So I wrote and at the end of December got my reply describing the various ticket plans available.

The letter from the Mets also explained how much this indulgence would cost me and which plans included eligibility to buy tickets for postseason games "... should the Mets participate." I also received an appointment form. I asked a longtime season-ticket holder I know why the whole thing wasn't done by mail, and he told me that they actually show you the seats you are buying. I just couldn't believe it. They show you your seats, live and in person.

On the appointed day about 15 people were waiting outside a door that had a sign that read SEASON TICKETS. Apparently, the salespeople were still out to lunch, so we stood in the hallway in our winter coats and tried to stay warm. I thought about why I was there and why I was there with Glen.

Everyone needs a sports buddy—someone to answer you when you say, "How 'bout that homer of Strawberry's?" or "How 'bout those Giants/Jets/Rangers/Knicks/Mets?" If Glen and I aren't at a sporting event together, we are on the phone between quarters,

periods, halves and, especially, innings. In September we went to Philadelphia and saw the Mets fail to clinch the National League East title. We went to two National League playoff games. We even went to see Columbia play (sort of) football.

I also need a sports buddy during the rough spots. And if Game 6 of the Series wasn't a rough spot, I don't know what is. Glen got me through those agonizing moments with Mookie at bat. He kept saying, "Don't worry. Don't worry." And as the impossible unfolded, he said,



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"I told you. I told you." That I find something in sports I don't find in everyday life was the reason I was at Shea that day at all. And Glen's faith that everything will turn out right was why I was there with him.

As we stepped into the "office" I realized I was in the locker room. The locker room! I had read somewhere (incorrectly, it seems) that the locker of first baseman Keith Hernandez, my favorite player, was the first one inside the door. But on the left or the right? I looked for No. 17, but the numbers had been removed. Which one was it? I am the same age as the Mets franchise and

therefore much too old to do what I did next, but I couldn't help myself. This was my team. Hoping no one would notice, I casually ran my fingers along the mesh wiring of the lockers on both the left and the right. Glen leaned over and whispered in my ear, "It's the visitors' locker room."

As the salespeople explained the various season-ticket plans, my mind wandered. I was a zombie as we were herded into the elevators to go up to look at our seats. I felt as if I were sleepwalking, until we stepped out into the stadium. The field was covered with snow, and the seats were empty except for the snow and ice that had settled on them. We were on the third base side of the stadium, and our section choices on that side and the corresponding sections on the first base side were described to us by the saleswoman. We decided on the first base side. "It's going to be a great summer," Glen said.

We went back down to the locker room to select our exact seats (Mezzanine, Section 23, Row G, Seats 1 and 2, Night Plan, \$408). The tickets were in my name, and Glen and I agreed I would make out a will leaving him the tickets, just in case. I signed the final piece of paper. The tickets were mine (ours, I corrected myself). I suddenly felt at peace. I had Mets season tickets. I felt privileged. I had bought into the Dream. Glen and I couldn't stop grinning.

I will never forget that day with my sports buddy out at Shea Stadium. And when someone mentions winter ball I will no longer think of bats swung under palm trees in Santo Domingo or Mexicali. I will think of the Shea field as it was that day, covered with snow.

We walked back up the subway stairs, where we passed a vendor selling New York Giants Super Bowl T-shirts. But all I could think of was the sign I had seen hanging on the wall of the locker room: ONLY 73 DAYS TO OPENING DAY. ■

When Kate Rogin isn't at Shea watching her team, she writes in her New York apartment.