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Praying & rooting for N.Y. at City Hall

Rally for Yankees near towers site

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There was pep at yesterday's pre-World Series Yankee pep rally at City Hall, but there was also prayer.

"We are a city that can never, ever be put down," Edward Cardinal Egan said in a benediction delivered from a platform on the City Hall steps, which until Sept. 11 were literally in the shadow of the World Trade Center.

Turning from tragedy to baseball, Egan added a less reverential invocation: "Lord, may we dare ask that Moose and Rocket teach them a lesson out in Arizona."

Those words drew laughter from the somewhat subdued crowd of more than 500 fans clustered on City Hall plaza.

Ground Zero, where more than 5,000 lives were lost, is just blocks away. The balmy air at the rally was pungent with the odor of still-burning fires caused by the terror attack six weeks ago. Nevertheless, the fans were buoyed by rah-rah speeches from self-proclaimed No. 1 Yankees Fan Mayor Giuliani, Yankees manager Joe Torre and leftfielder Chuck Knoblauch.

Giuliani told the fans that while the sorrow and pain of the World Trade Center catastrophe will always be remembered, "now we have to make sure that we keep our heads up very, very high and we march forward with our lives."

For the pep rally, the black mourning bunting that went up soon after the terror attack was removed from the facade of City Hall and replaced with red, white and blue bunting and a sign congratulating the Yankees for winning another American League pennant.

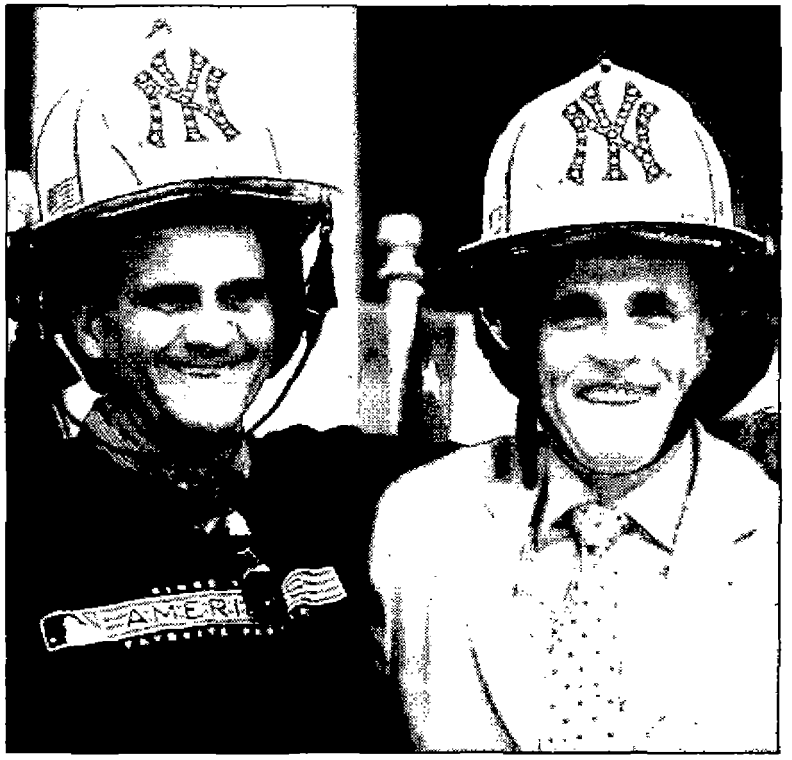
Torre said his Yankees had been rocked by the "devastating blow" of the terror attack, but were motivated to get into the World Series by "the inspiration and toughness New Yorkers have shown through this whole rebuilding, healing, mourning, suffering and just fighting back attitude."

Knoblauch also drew cheers by telling the fans, "We couldn't do it without you guys . . . and hopefully we can . . . give it back to you with another world championship."

Game One of the World Series will be played Saturday in Phoenix.

Longtime Yankee fan Carolyn Thompson of the Bronx said she wants to see the Yankees get another ticker tape parade up Broadway, despite the Trade Center tragedy.

Giuliani fueled speculation that there will be such a parade if the Yanks win by telling the fans to root hard if "you all want to be back here in just about a week."



TODD MAISEL DAILY NEWS

HAILING HEROES Yankees logos adorn fire helmets worn by Yankee manager Joe Torre (l.) and Mayor Giuliani at City Hall rally yesterday.

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