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Yanks still the champs in city

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A cold wind blew into the city yesterday, adding to the sting Yankee fans were feeling in the first post-postseason in four years without a World Series championship to celebrate.

Amid their sorrow, most pinstripe boosters were pleased with the hometown sluggers' gutsy performance against the Arizona Diamondbacks.

"The Yankees gave us a lot of joy in this time of crisis," said Charles Andujar, 41, a hotel waiter from Washington Heights. "They gave us something to cheer about. This is only a step back."

At Yankee Stadium yesterday, a handful of fans gathered outside the players' parking lot. It was a low-key show of support compared with the past three years', when thousands showed up for a glimpse of the latest glittering trophy.

"Wind, rain, hot and cold, cloudy, any kind of weather, we're here for them," said Sorya Alvarez, 41, of Manhattan, who was among the die-hards at the Bronx ballpark yesterday. "We're here for their glories and their losses. We're true fans."

'They're a dynasty'

Alvarez's husband, Ray Gonzalez, 42, took the day off from his job as a doorman so he could cheer the team one last time this year.

"They'll be back new and improved, and take it back all over again next year," Gonzalez said. "They're a dynasty."

Mayor Giuliani, who took a red-eye flight from Phoenix to New York after the Game 7 loss, tried to sound upbeat at a City Hall news conference. The mayor offered to throw a city celebration for the Bombers but was still awaiting a response from team officials last night.

"My view is there's no difference really in terms of the achievement when you get to a World Series," he said.

"The Yankees gave us an absolutely indescribable and great October at a time in which we needed a great October, and, for that they're champions in my book," he added.

But at Stan's Sports World on River Ave. in the Bronx, manager Steven Martucci wasn't nearly as chipper.

"It's like a morgue around here," he said, as he folded T-shirts in the nearly empty store. "If the Yankees had won the championship, this place would have been mobbed."

At the Yankee Tavern on E. 161st St., an easy throw from the Stadium, owner Joe Bastone frowned on any end-of-an-era talk.

He already was talking about reworking the Bombers' pitching rotation for next season and thinking about free-agent sluggers who might look good in pinstripes.

"It was the end of a good run because we didn't win," Bastone said. "But we were still two or three outs from winning the World Series.

"A lot of people say that in the last two years we got lucky, but I think we had the better team."

Saying goodbye

Dimas Lopez, 22, of the Bronx was rushing up to the Stadium to try to catch Yankee veteran Paul O'Neill, who is set to retire.

"He deserves another World Series ring. This is his last year. It's sad," Lopez said. "The Yankees always won with him."

As Red Cross worker Jim Waybright dashed to the players' parking lot, he passed a "Go Yanks" sign flapping under the el as a No. 4 train clickety-clacked by.

"I'm amazed at how New York has come back since Sept. 11," said Waybright, 58, of Williamstown, Pa. "It's been a terrible time, but the city came back and the Yankees will, too."

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