SPECIAL EDITION

REACH-NYC Congratulates / New York Yankee Derek Jeter
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Derek Jeter, New York Yankee.

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With homer, Jeter joins 3,000-hit club

Captain becomes first player to reach milestone in Yanks uniform

By Bryan Hoch / MLB.com

NEW YORK -- It was a few springs ago that Derek Jeter leafed through the history of the only team he ever wanted to play for, noting that the Yankees had never seen a player log a 3,000th hit in their uniform.

Jeter didn't stand up that day and declare he would rewrite the annals of the game's most storied franchise, adhering to his mantra of never looking too far ahead. That statement would wait until Saturday.

At exactly 2 p.m. ET, Jeter announced himself as the 28th member of the 3,000-hit club in style, belting a third-inning home run off left-hander David Price. Jeter collected a hit in all five at-bats, including the game-winner, in New York's 5-4 victory over the Rays at Yankee Stadium.

"It means a lot," Jeter said. "It's a number that has meant a lot in the history of the game, because not too many people have done it before. To be the only Yankee to do it ... to be the only Yankee to do anything is pretty special."

Jeter became just the second player in Major League history to log his 3,000th hit with a homer, joining Wade Boggs, who did it on Aug. 7, 1999, while playing for Tampa Bay.

Already a five-time World Series champion, 12-time All-Star and five-time Gold Glove Award winner, Jeter has preached the value of consistency since his first games swinging a bat. No accomplishment represents that quality more than this one.

"The best thing for him is how he prepares himself, day in and day out," said Yankees closer Mariano Rivera. "He has done it for years. I am happy for him. He deserves it. And I hope he has another thousand or two more."

Yankees managing general partner Hal Steinbrenner released a statement congratulating Jeter, complimenting his "relentless, team-first attitude" and saying it was "only fitting" that the hit came against an American League East rival.

At street level, you might have believed that every borough of New York was cheering for Jeter, an acknowledgement that Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg made in touting Jeter as "one of New York's icons, because he represents what is best in the spirit of our city."

The Yankees have had other 3,000-hit men pass through, with Boggs, Rickey Henderson, Paul Waner and Dave Winfield making stops in the Bronx, but they logged the milestone with other teams. And no player had recorded his 3,000th at Yankee Stadium, old or new.

That changed on Saturday. After singing in his first at-bat, the captain worked the count full before tagging a 78-mph Price curveball over the left-field wall, highlighting a sun-splashed afternoon that should have been renamed Derek Jeter Day.

"I don't think you can script it any better -- this is already movie-ready," manager Joe Girardi said. "I think we were all kind of like, 'Wow, he really knows how to do it.'"

"Hopefully, he can play himself in his own movie," said the Rays' Johnny Damon, once Jeter's teammate.
Incredibly, Jeter said that his eighth-inning RBI single off Joel Peralta carried less pressure than the home run off Price, which guaranteed his place on one of the game’s most treasured pedestals.

"To be honest with you, I was pretty relieved," Jeter said.

After tracking the ball into the bleachers, Jeter rounded the bases at usual speed, acknowledged by several Rays who applauded and tipped their caps.

"I didn't really care if he got it off me, as long as he didn't drive in a run or score a run, and he did all those things in that one at-bat," Price said. "Good for him."

Those in the Yankees' dugout, which had swelled to capacity up the runway, vaulted past railings to greet Jeter. Members of the bullpen dashed through the outfield to take part.

Jorge Posada, Jeter’s best friend on the club, was the first to greet him after his cleats touched home plate. Posada said that he had been caught in the moment.

"That was obviously very spontaneous," Posada said. "Everybody ran out there and gave him a big hug. I told him I was proud of him. I got a little emotional because I was so happy for him."

With play interrupted for four minutes, Jeter acknowledged the wildly cheering crowd, raising his fists for a curtain call most unlike any in the Stadium’s history.

"I actually felt bad that the game had to stop," Jeter said. "It’s almost like, 'I’m sorry. Hopefully, we can get this thing moving again.'"

Jeter took a moment to offer silent thanks to a private suite hosting his father, Charles, as well as his girlfriend, actress Minka Kelly.

"Obviously, your family and friends are the ones that are closest to you," Jeter said. "You appreciate them and all their support over the years."

Members of the 3,000-hit club quickly welcomed Jeter. Boggs, who once manned third base to Jeter's right, said the Yankees' captain had reached an honor "where he can stake his flag in the mountain and call it his own."

"Reaching the 3,000-hit mark is another piece of the legacy that Derek has created," Boggs continued, calling him a future Hall of Famer.

Fellow Cooperstown inductee Yogi Berra, who retired 850 hits shy of 3,000 but teases Jeter about his five more World Series rings, was more succinct: "I want to give him a big hug. It’s an absolute wonderful accomplishment."

It took Jeter 2,362 games and 9,604 at-bats to reach 3,000 hits -- seventh fastest and 10th fastest in Major League history, respectively.

In the Yankees' clubhouse, head athletic trainer Gene Monahan -- who has helped mask countless Jeter injuries to keep him hitting over the years -- marveled at the shortstop’s inner drive.

"He knows how to take care of himself and keep himself under control," Monahan said. "It's a tribute."

Jeter joined Craig Biggio as the only players in history to record five hits on the day of reaching 3,000. Jeter’s five-hit game was also the first in the history of the new Yankee Stadium.
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"Only a guy like Derek Jeter," said Alex Rodriguez, "can have a day and a moment and a hit like he had today."

The homer was retrieved by 23-year-old Christian Lopez of Highland Mills, N.Y., who said that he didn't have to think twice about returning the prized souvenir.

"Mr. Jeter deserved it," Lopez said. "I'm not going to take it away from him."

Having logged career hit No. 1 on May 30, 1995, off the Mariners' Tim Belcher, Jeter saw his ongoing journey toward 3,000 get placed on hold for three weeks last month by a right calf strain.

Jeter said that might have been a blessing in disguise because -- sequestered at the Yankees' training facility in Tampa, Fla. -- it permitted him to work on staying back on the ball, as he did with the homer off Price.

Still, Jeter acknowledged that the pressure had been mounting, especially as cameras began following him more frequently for an upcoming documentary.

Jeter had started swinging at bad pitches of late and was disappointed by Friday's postponement, giving him just two more games to log the milestone at home before an eight-day road trip.

"I've been lying to you guys, saying I wasn't nervous and there was no pressure," Jeter said, grinning. "There was a lot of pressure to do it here."

But, as Posada said, those are the situations in which Jeter has always seemed to thrive.

This time, fans got another highlight for the reels, to be added in with the flip play, the Mr. November home run, the dive into the seats and all the rest.

"I didn't want to hit a slow roller to third base and have it be replayed forever," Jeter said.

The figure he cut after the final out of the afternoon was a classic out of the Jeter playbook, pounding his glove with his pants clouded by dirt and a half-grin, half-smirk painted across his face.

Jeter had performed exceptionally, but his most important statistics still seemed to be the final score, saying it would have been awkward to celebrate after a loss.

"After I hit the home run, I really tried not to think about 3,000 hits anymore and tried to focus on how we could win this game," Jeter said. "If we didn't win, that definitely would have put a damper on things."

Bryan Hoch is a reporter for MLB.com. Follow him on Twitter @bryanhoch. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.

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