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For Series, 'Human Yankee Cartwheel' Spins No More



By JAMES BARRON

The Yankees are in the World Series, but something is missing. That sledgehammer of a voice, wielded in ways that never failed to get attention: a “Yo! Mr. Steinbrenner!” or a “Gatorade man! Move!” That exuberantly loyal look: a Yankee cap on game day, or maybe full pinstripes.

A World Series without Penny Crone on television from Yankee Stadium?

In one word, yes. Ms. Crone, 62, the television reporter a critic once called “the human Yankee cartwheel,” is no longer on television, where she made a career of making the hysteria even more deliciously hysterical. She was dropped by WNYW-TV at the end of 2005.

She is not doing cartwheels, either. She broke her left leg in a fall several weeks ago on 57th Street. She has been watching the series on the wide-screen television in her Midtown apartment, her leg on a couch.

The Yankees’ absence from the World Series in recent years means that this is the team’s first appearance since 1996 that has not been blessed by Ms. Crone and her singular brand of in-your-

face reporting. She is not one of those shy persons Garrison Keillor is always talking about on public radio. As a journalist, she personified pushiness, asking the questions other reporters did not.

Early in Derek Jeter's career, she took a look at him in street clothes, and wondered about the fit of his slacks.

"I walked right up to Derek Jeter and I said, 'Derek, why don't you wear tighter pants?'" she recalled. "And what did Derek say? Not too much. He looked at me like I was nuts."

So where is she now? With the real estate company Prudential Douglas Elliman. She recently was cited for a Chairman's Circle Gold Award for 2008, a sign that she had vaulted into the top 5 percent of Prudential brokers after doing more than \$15 million worth of deals. That award sits between two Emmys on a table beside her living room couch.

Her secret? Well, no one is saying she has mastered the art of the soft sell.

Steven L. James, the president of Douglas Elliman's Manhattan brokerage, described her as an "unbelievable bundle of energy with this bigger-than-life personality" and said he knew "within 10 seconds" that he was going to hire her.

"But at the same time," he said, "I thought, I'm out of my mind."

"She takes no hostages," Mr. James added. "That was one of my worries, but I watched her on a complicated deal where her personality just couldn't be at the forefront, and she did it. She actually pulled it off. She took the back seat, the quiet role, which I'm sure was very unfamiliar terrain for her."

As Ms. Crone watched Game 1 on Wednesday night, she said she had found a line of work where people do not react like the fans at Yankee Stadium.

"I mean," she said, "they don't walk in their apartments and go, 'Yesssss! I love this place!'"

There is excitement in showing pricey co-ops and condos, even in a recession, Ms. Crone said, adding that "getting the deal done is a real turn-on."

But, she said, “it ain’t like going out to Yankee Stadium, not just the World Series but any game.” Ms. Crone explained her love for the Yankees by noting that she was “five generations Manhattan.”

Never mind that George Steinbrenner once asked if she were a streetwalker.

And “Gatorade man”? She yelled that at someone who walked into the stadium with a large barrel of — well, you know. He was blocking her shot, which ruins everything in television news. The man turned out to be Willie Randolph, a Yankees coach at the time and later the manager of the Mets.

Those were not the only classic moments in her 15 years at WNYW-TV. (She left Channel 5 for WCBS-TV in 2002, only to return in 2005.)

There was the day she went to a bagel factory and the anchor introduced her as “an industrial accident waiting to happen.”

There was the day she covered a cheerleading team by outfitting herself like the people she was covering, with a pleated skirt that was on the short side, a long blond wig and pompoms.

And there was the time she interviewed Yogi Berra and called him “Yogi Bear.”

She has an explanation for that.

“My husband told me that Yogi Berra was named after Yogi Bear,” she said, “so I thought his name was Yogi Bear. So we’re sitting in his living room, me on one side, Yogi Berra on the other, the fireplace, and I said, ‘Good evening, Mr. Bear.’ ”

Game 1 dragged on, and her 23-year-old son, Travis Forney, wandered in from the kitchen, declaring that the Phillies were off to “a quality start.” Yankee stalwart that she is, she countered that giving up two runs was a lousy start, a concept so distressing it brought silence to the couch.

“Yeah, speechless,” Mr. Forney said. “It’s tough to get her to do.”