



BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY

ANDY PETTITTE DOESN'T LIKE LOSING— THAT'S WHY HE DOESN'T DO IT

BY GRANT GLICKSON

ANDY PETTITTE DOES NOT LIKE TO LOSE. HE WON 21 GAMES IN THE REGULAR SEASON, PITCHED THE CLINCHER OF THE AMERICAN LEAGUE PENNANT RACE AND WAS THE PITCHER OF RECORD IN THE PIVOTAL GAME OF THE WORLD SERIES LAST OCTOBER, SHUTTING OUT THE DEFENDING WORLD SERIES CHAMPION BRAVES.

But when the ballots were tallied this past November, Pettitte placed second in the Cy Young Award race, six votes behind Toronto ace Pat Hentgen. To Pettitte, a perfectionist and devout Christian, finishing as a bridesmaid is about as sacreligious as missing church on Sunday. So here's a fair warning to American League batters: Pettitte will be back this season, stronger than ever. If there's one thing he proved this past season, he *never* loses two in a row.

"Not getting the Cy Young Award is probably the best thing that ever happened to the Yankees, because Andy Pettitte will be twice as determined next year," says Wayne Graham, his former coach at San Jacinto Junior College (Roger Clemens's alma mater) in Texas. "He's going to be out there physically, not verbally, trying to prove that they were wrong."

If a magician shuffled the Yankees high-

profile pitchers like a deck of cards in spring training of '96, not even David Copperfield would have drawn Pettitte as the ace. After all, there was David Cone, the league's richest hired gun; Jimmy Key, one of the game's best left-handers; Kenny Rogers, the Yankees' latest millionaire, and Doc Gooden, the apple of New York's eye for nearly a decade over in Flushing Meadows with the Mets.

But a career-threatening injury to Cone, a slow comeback by Key, a difficult transition year for Rogers and Gooden's tired arm, all left Pettitte holding the ball in just about every critical game in the Yankees championship season. The 6-5, 235-pound southpaw delivered.

"I think what helped him is that nobody really paid attention to him early," says manager Joe Torre. "His teammates let him go about his business. I thought that was the best thing that ever happened to him."

The 24-year-old Pettitte responded with an All-Star campaign, posting a 21-8 record with a 3.87 earned run average and 162 strikeouts and 72 walks in 221 innings. His 13-3 mark after Yankee setbacks earned him stopper status and ace billing in the American League Championship Series opener and

Game One of the World Series.

"If I would have won the Cy Young Award it would have been great," Pettitte says. "But it was still a great year for me. I'm so happy with what I did this year and what the team accomplished. Who knows? If I got everything [last] year—the All-Star Game, 20 wins, the World Series and the Cy Young—maybe I wouldn't strive to accomplish something like this in the future."

Pettitte keeps batters guessing by using a cut and sinking fastball, a nasty curveball, a dead-fish changeup and pinpoint control. His tricky pickoff move, a category in which he has led the American League over the last two years with 12 and 11 respectively, has helped him snuff out big innings.

In a 1-0 Yankee victory in Game Five of the World Series in Atlanta, Pettitte picked off Chipper Jones in the fifth inning. In the next frame, the fielding-challenged Pettitte helped himself with an outstanding defensive play by leaping off the mound to field a Mark Lemke sacrifice bunt, and firing to Charlie Hayes to force John Smoltz in a close play at third.

"I wanted to get the out at third, because I figured that it was a crucial part of the

“I’LL KNOW MYSELF TO WIN.”

game,” says Pettitte, who rebounded one last time in '96 after getting rocked for seven runs in a crushing 12-1 loss in Game One of the World Series. “It might have been stupid, but I barehanded it and fired it to third.”

If Pettitte continues to progress at the rate of his first two seasons, his name will someday be mentioned in the same breath as legendary Yankee lefties Whitey Ford, Lefty Gomez and Ron Guidry. In his rookie season, Pettitte was 12-9 with a 4.17 ERA. His freshman victory total, second in the majors to the Los Angeles Dodger Hideo Nomo's 13, was the most wins by any Yankee rookie since Stan Bahnsen went 17-12 in '68.

On April 9, '96, Pettitte became the youngest pitcher to start Opening Day for the Yankees since James (Hippo) Vaughn in '10. In blizzard-like conditions against the Royals, Pettitte snatched up victory No.1 on his way to becoming the first pitcher to win 20 games for the Yankees since Guidry went 22-6 in '85. The man they called “Louisiana Lightning” won a Cy Young Award when the Yankees last won the World Series in '78.

“His story kind of resembles mine,” says Guidry in a thick, Southern drawl. “He had a

fairly good rookie season, and then in his second year he led his team to a World Series championship and should have won the Cy Young Award.

"It is ironic that we are both left-handers from Louisiana, but he resides in Texas and I have to draw the line there. Being from Louisiana, I know that the people in the state are proud of the fact that a native boy is doing well. And whenever he decides to come back here, there are awards and rewards waiting for him."

In New York, Pettitte shared a float with Cone, Rogers and Gooden in a ticker-tape parade that future Hall-of-Famer Wade Boggs called "the greatest sports spectacle in history."

With a World Series ring and with the key to New York City close to his heart, Pettitte returned home to Deer Park, TX, and another hero's welcome. Billboards all over town read, "Congratulations, Andy." He was given the key to yet another city and received a standing ovation from 10,000 fans when he flipped a coin before a high school football game.

"I think that he's a little embarrassed about all the hype that has been brought upon him," says Steve Maas, his former high school coach. "He's kind of shy, and he really feels uncomfortable with all the attention."

Well, needless to say, he'd better get used to it. Of course, it may be difficult for him off the field. But on the field, it's a whole other story. Sometimes he can get *too* involved.

Harnessing his intensity has never come easy to Pettitte, and he's thrown his fair share of temper tantrums on his way up through the ranks. From the time he cried after a lackadaisical loss as a six-year-old quarterback on a Baton Rouge flag football team to throwing his glove around in high school to the days he punched the dugout wall (with his non-pitching hand) after bad outings at Yankee Stadium, Pettitte has never accepted failure at any level.

"Andy wants to win the game as much as any player I've ever seen," says Graham, who is now the coach at Rice U. "It's not so much his personal performance, it's his personal performance as related to winning the game. He feels very responsible to his teammates, and when he doesn't win the game, he's pretty hard on himself. I worked hard in teaching him to control himself emotionally."

Near the end of Game Five of the World Series, Pettitte used a white towel to cover his face and emotions when he couldn't bear to watch the final two outs of the most important game of his young career.

"I'm a perfectionist," says Pettitte, who pitched 8 1/3 scoreless innings in Game Five. "If I make one bad pitch, I'll get mad at myself. Whatever I do, I love to win. I don't care what sport I'm playing, I'll kill myself to win." ■

