THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

THE SPORTING SCENE

In the Bronx, "Irabu" spells bliss in any language.

No one got bitten. Stately, plump Hideki Irabu, feet together on the mound, chewing gum clamped down, mind-set unknown, heaved a sigh, leaned and bowed, cricked his left leg, and threw a called strike to the Tigers' first-inning leadoff man, Brian Hunter, ending a sports prehype possibly unmatched since last month's heavyweight debacle in Las Vegas, and beginning a pleasurable evening's work that matched all expectation. "I wouldn't sell this night for anything," the newest and strangest Yankee celebrity declared (through an interpreter) after the game ended—a financial evaluation not to be taken lightly, coming as it did from a rookie who had signed on for $12.8 million (for four years), and who had enjoyed a full-scale City Hall photo op with Mayor Giuliani before ever throwing (or witnessing) a single pitch to a major-league batter. Before long, he had thrown ninety-eight of them, sixty-one for strikes (good for nine strikeouts in six and two-thirds innings), and was allowed to take his seat, pelted by happy sounds issuing from 51,901—no, 103,802—tonsils, minus surgery, with the Yankees ahead, 10–2 (it was 10–3 in the end), in an interhemispherical laugher. Just possibly, baseball's new era had begun.

After the Yanks helpfully batted around in two successive innings, peeling away all tension, the players and the ecstatic Stadium multitudes were free to give full attention to the other event of the evening, which was international communication. Around the Stadium, fans had been putting down rows of "K"s—a scorecard "K" for each Irabu whiff—on the Stadium facings, but with Japanese variations: a pair of ideograms for "strikeout" in Japanese, a terser "K," in the katakana phonetic alphabet, behind the loge level in short left. On the opposite, Yankee side, John DeSomma and Steve Palladino, a couple of fans from New Jersey, were hanging up cards marked 伊, one by one, under the impression that they meant "strikeout"—they'd cribbed from a headline in the Bergen *Record* that morning—but they were politely tipped off by some nearby Japanese-born rooters that it was the "I" from "Irabu." "Whatever," opined a gent in the next row. "It's the thought that counts."

Up in the press box, I was struck dumb by an exotic forestry of Japanese appearing on the word-processor screen of a neighbor scribe, Mr. Yoshinori Nakai, of the Mainichi newspaper chain, and in a pause he told me that the Irabu story wasn't going to be easy for his readers back home to swallow, since the twenty-eight-year-old pitcher had turned his back on his old team, the Chibe Lotte Marines, while stubbornly (or prudently) insisting on signing only with the Yankees. "This is a story for the younger generation," he said. "Others have . . ." He paused.

"Mixed feelings?" I suggested.

"Ah, yes, 'mixed feelings'! Thank you."

In the Yankee clubhouse later, Derek Jeter, the dashing shortstop, was talking to three female Japanese reporters. "Hideki had a lot of composure out there," he said.

" 'Compo-sure,' " said one of the young women carefully.

"You got it," Jeter said, and the women laughed, bending over with happiness.

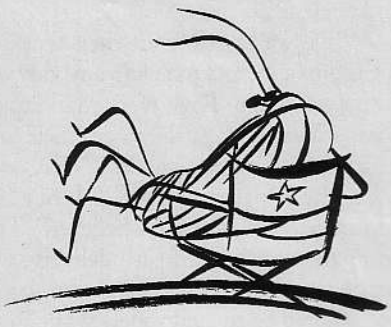
When the Yankees came off the field after the postgame handshakings and fist-bumpings, Manager Joe Torre cut in front of Irabu, and, with careful mime, tipped his cap toward the fans. Irabu, a quick study, caught on and tipped his—and won a last, full-throated roar of appreciation. —ROGER ANGELL

THE PICTURES

Star treatment for "Men in Black" 's six-legged extras.

THE villain in the movie "Men in Black" is a giant cockroach from another galaxy. The film, consistent with movies dating back to "Them" (1954), takes a fairly traditional approach to insect villainy. "Bugs thrive on carnage," "Men in Black" 's Agent K (Tommy Lee Jones) says in one scene. "They consume, infest, and destroy. They live off the death and decay of other species." Though the film may demonize roaches, the director, Barry Sonnenfeld, wants to make it clear that he and his crew went to great pains to show respect for the living roaches on the set. "We always had to have people there from the American Humane Association," Sonnenfeld said recently from a poolside phone at the Hotel Bel Air. "In each shot we had to tell them how many roaches we were using. So if we had eighty roaches coming out of a Dumpster they would actually count—'We're still missing three, guys'—and we'd be shooting at ten thousand dollars an hour, looking for three roaches."

Needless to say, when Agent J (Will Smith) crushes a number of roaches underfoot late in the movie, those are stunt doubles. "Mustard packs," Sonnenfeld said. "You're allowed to step on mustard packs because at the moment there's no mustard-defamation league. We also had hundreds

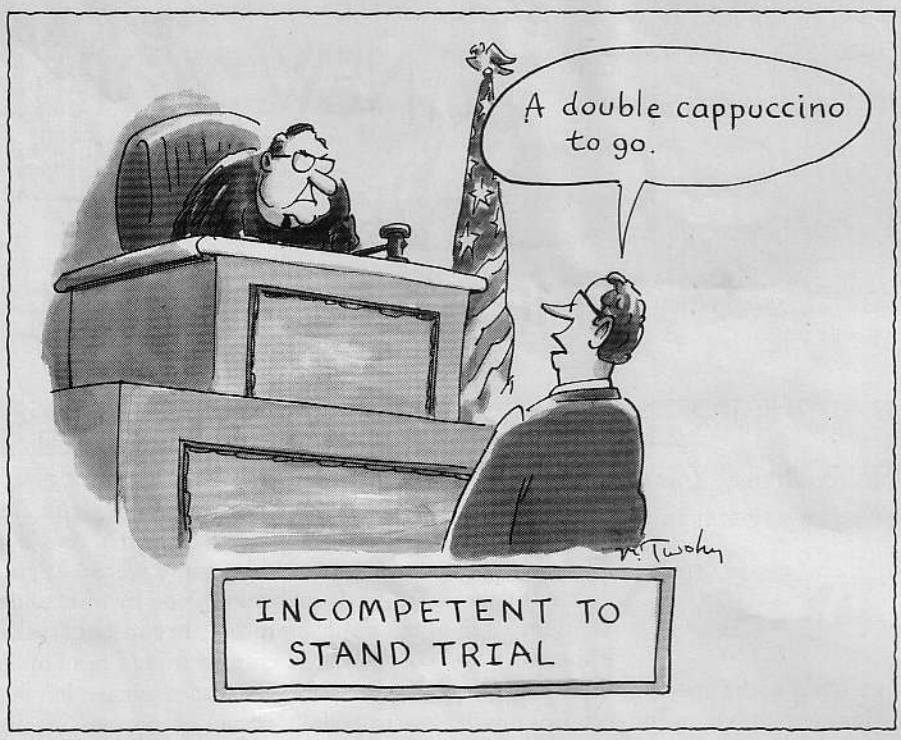


ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

of little rubber roaches, which you're also allowed to step on. But you'd never, ever step on a real roach. If Will accidentally did step on one, we'd all go, 'Oh man, I'm sorry.' The bug wranglers would say, 'Well, just make sure you don't do it again.'

"The Humane Association's attitude is that it can't draw the line anywhere," the director continued. "If it says, 'Well, we're not worried about roaches,' then someone else will say, 'You let those guys kill those roaches, why can't we kill rats?' And the next thing you know, they're killing dogs and horses and stuff."

There's one thing still puzzling Sonnenfeld. "What's weird," he said, "is that in case any roaches did get lost, at the end of the shooting day we were allowed to fumigate the stage." —DAVID SHENK



POSTPARTUM DEPT.

A different kind of mommy track in Central Park.

ON the Upper East Side, a couple of dozen mostly new moms, still young enough to be addicted to their teenisms, take their babies in strollers and gather in Central Park for a fifty-minute exercise class called Strollercize. The babies are, like, you know, four weeks old, ten weeks old, one year, whatever. Some of them are still wearing the pink or blue hats they got in the hospital. Others wear Baby Gap porkpies or too cutesy oversized baseball caps on sidewise, and one has on a seventy-dollar Tartine et Chocolat handmade job. Most of the moms had entered the competitive workplace, stayed awhile, and then took maternity leave of it. Today, in class, their purpose is to shape up, lose poundage, bolster leg muscles, tone skin, appear interested in having sex again. The moms, looking somewhat underjoyous, have loaded their babies up on milk and are counting on them to keep quiet until the end of class.

While waiting to start their workout, the moms are eager to talk to anybody who seems to listen. They were marketplace competitive, but now they focus their competitive skills on one another. They compare their pregnancies. ("I had incontinence you wouldn't believe.") They compare who had an easy delivery; who pushed more; who had an epidural; who got ignored or treated rudely while in the hospital corridor awaiting delivery; whose obstetrician cared; who got only what she needed as presents; who got prestigious presents; who got lucky with a nanny; who has the Peg Perego stroller ("It's the sturdiest"); who has the Emmaljunga stroller ("It's the most indestructible and carries a week's supply of groceries underneath").

A baby cries. Its mom talks to it in unctuous mommy singsong: "Oh, yes, it's so-o-o *rough* being a baby, isn't it? Poor little baby, I know it's so-o-o *rough* being a baby."

The baby, not satisfied, screams. The mom plops a pacifier in its mouth.

The moms are lining up, looking to the leadership of Elizabeth Trindade, the Strollercize originator, a dark-haired woman, hard-muscled, super-confident. A no-nonsense drill sergeant.

"Warmups," Elizabeth barks. "Arm up and overhead. Other arm up, up, and over." She shows how. She is a mom of three. She has lost fourteen pounds since her now two-month-old was born. ("I started right away, and I mean immediately, pulling in the gut, right in the hospital.") One of Elizabeth's instructors is Mariah Seminara, a leggy blond ex-Californian, wearing a cap with her ponytail hanging out of the hole behind. She wears—"as a kick," she says—a Western Samoan T-shirt that says "*Suasusu o le Tina: :Pui puia le Pepe mai le manava Tata*"—which basically means "Breastfeed your baby." She's newly married and childless. Unlike the moms, she is noticeably high-spirited and carefree. The moms watch her with admiration.

The moms do warmups. March in place! Legs up! They still talk while moving. One-upmanship is in the air.

"I never give my baby a pacifier."

"This pacifier is different—it's a teething ring, with fingers. It smells like vanilla. They *love* it."

Some moms are bloated. Elizabeth and Mariah regard them sympathetically but without tolerance for their bulges. Jog in place. Kick your rear. Kick your butt. Belly button in. Hands up. Get that heart rate up. Stomach in. Carrying the baby made you bend over. Straighten up. Up!

The moms run, pushing the strollers. They still talk. But now they're telling one another how good they were in their jobs, how much their bosses needed them, before the baby. They were cable-television producers, lawyers, financial analysts, violinists. They tell how their jobs were special. Only a kindergarten teacher feels otherwise; she says she definitely will *not* be a