

Take Me Out to the Ballgame

By Josh Simons
Brooklyn Daily Eagle

(With all the hoopla surrounding last weekend's Subway Series and last night's All-Star Game in Atlanta, Eagle staff writer 16-year-old Josh Simons gives baseball fans what he views as a viable and economically-wise alternative to the pro game.)

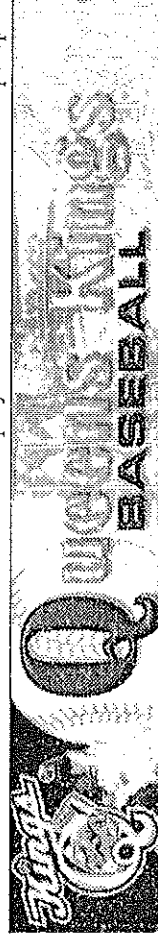
JAMAICA — For those of you who wish to see young, hardworking athletes play the game of baseball without the dreaded influence of money that pollutes today's game, there is hope for you in the friendly confines of 13 minor league baseball parks that comprise the New York Penn League.

The Queens Kings are a Single-A affiliate of the Toronto Blue Jays, currently playing their home games at The Ballpark at St. Johns University.

Next year, the Kings are expected to move into a sparkling new minor league complex built on the Steeplechase site in Coney Island, where ownership of the club will be turned over to the New York Mets.

The weekend before last, the Staten Island Yankees, Single-A affiliate of the NY Yankees, visited the Kings for the second game of a three-game semi-Subway Series.

The Single-A level is designed to give young players out of college and high school a chance to play and enhance their skills before joining the major league club.



Oftentimes, there are four minor league levels a player must go through before making it to the majors. Single A is the second of the four levels and therefore often features second-year players.

While Major League Baseball games force kids to arrive at least an hour early to get autographs from the players, minor league games allow children to be on the field minutes before game time talking to the players. In fact, some kids are even picked to stand on the field during the national anthem.

Of course, not everyone who attends a game can be characterized as a diehard baseball fan, but for those of you who fit that category, fear not. There is plenty of entertainment between innings and around the park to hold your attention.

In one event during the Yankees' 9-6 victory over the Kings that evening, a fan was picked to go onto the field where she was given the choice of receiving a \$20 gift certificate to AppleBee's or to take a

mystery item in a closed box. Curiosity killed the cat and did not do much to help this particular fan after she chose the box and went home with a bag of peanuts.

Other fan-friendly contests include, "Name That Player," trivia and raffles.

But the best part about the NY Penn League is the inexpensive price for up-close seating. A seat in the fourth row of a Yankees or Mets game might cost you \$40 or \$50.

Compare that to only \$10 to get a good look at the young athletes working hard to improve themselves so they can reach the majors.

Most of the younger fans agree that minor league baseball is more appealing and enjoyable for them.

"I like it because it's more friendly and they play nice baseball," nine-year-old Jason Simon said. His brother Andrew, 6, added, "I like it because it's easier to get balls."

As their father Barry put it, "(Minor League baseball is) kid-friendly, inexpensive family entertainment where you see good upcoming players before anyone knows about them."

Barry and his family attend many minor league games all over the tri-state region. Barry described going to a New Jersey Cardinals game comparing it to the movie 'Field of Dreams' as he and his family "literally (drove) through corn fields" to get there. His family has seen players such as former Yankees prospect

Eric Milton (now a successful lefthander with the Minnesota Twins) and current Yankees farm hand Nick Johnson, a first baseman.

Barry enjoys all the interaction between the fans and coaches. He described a time when a hitting coach for a team talked to his kids for 20 minutes before a game. "They'll remember it for a lifetime," he recounted.

Another appeal to the NY Penn League games is the positive attitude fans show the players. When a player is thrown out at first, he might actually be cheered because he hustled. How often does that happen at a professional game?

Catcher Guillermo Quiroz noted, "It's exciting to get in the game and it's great and fun for the fans."

If you're a fan who loves good baseball, then the minor leagues are for you.

For reservations and more information about the Queens Kings, call 718-990-2700.