

Clemens needs to pitch with pride



ON Memorial Day, Roger Clemens gave the 11,310 fans and the 40 newspaper reporters packed into

PNC Field six scoreless innings of baseball and the thrill of seeing one of the all-time greats pitch.

In fact, Clemens, making the third and final minor league pitching assignment on his journey back to Yankee Stadium, gave Northeastern Pennsylvanians everything they could hope for except the answer to a simple question: "Why has he decided to come out of retirement for the fourth time in what is sure to be a Hall of Fame career?"

As one of the writers at his post-game press conference, I asked "the Rocket" that question, and, to my surprise, he couldn't give me a straight answer. Instead, he expressed his respect for Yankee owner George Steinbrenner and Manager Joe Torre and his "expectation to win" for New York.

It was a mercenary response.

But it's difficult to believe that a 44-year-old who insists that "family" is his number one priority would return to the grind of Major League Baseball for any other reason except "money." Even the financial motive would be more palatable if Clemens didn't insist on a double standard.

But his boorish demands for pitching just four months of the season, special travel arrangements, and not having to be with the Yankees full time along with his annual on-and-off "retirements" fly in the face of the game's time-honored traditions of

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"teamwork" and "fair play."

Perhaps Clemens really is acting out of mercy, because he's genuinely devoted to the Yankees for two world championship rings. There's no question he can help its sorely depleted pitching staff.

Clemens also will serve as a valuable mentor to the younger players who have been called up from Triple-A Scranton/Wilkes-Barre, including 21-year-old Phil Hughes, who's already being hailed as "the Baby Rocket."

In fact, Clemens insists that "teaching" has become "just as important as pitching" for him. Then, again, he might have come out of retirement to pitch for the record books, though it's difficult to identify his goal.

During a 23-year career with the Boston Red Sox, Toronto Blue Jays, New York Yankees and Houston Astros, Clemens won seven Cy Young Awards – two more than any other pitcher – and is the oldest hurler to achieve that feat, at age 42 in 2004.

Those and other impressive credentials have earned the veteran hurler a well-deserved reputation as one of the best pitchers of all time. So what does he have to prove?

It's difficult to ignore the financial incentive the Yankees have offered Clemens. He would have a better chance to play for a world champion in Boston, but he turned down the Red Sox's \$10

million offer.

But when the money-rich, pitching-poor Yankees came calling with an \$18 million paycheck for just four months work, "the Rocket" was quick to "pocket" it.

Even if he ends up on the disabled list, that contract translates into approximately \$750,000 per start, and about \$7,500 for each pitch he throws, if he makes 100 deliveries every time he takes the mound. Whenever these facts are brought to light, he dismisses them as "negative."

While the baseball experts insist that any other pitcher would not be given the same opportunity as Clemens, baseball has a historical tendency to shoot itself in the foot in such controversial matters.

Thirty years ago, few would have predicted that madcap free agency would make multimillionaires out of sub-.300 hitters and pitchers with below .500 winning percentages. Those are now common realities.

What will they say 10 years from now when aging pitchers routinely receive multi-million-dollar contracts to pitch half a season and on their own terms?

Such "innovations" are destroying the integrity of baseball.

If the "pioneers" like Roger Clemens don't respect themselves, then Major League Baseball has a responsibility to make sure they respect the game.

Sorry, Roger, for being so "negative."

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