

## Captioning for the Big Leagues

By Jennifer M. Bonfilio, RMR-CBC-CCP

I became a captioner for the deaf and hard of hearing quite by accident. I was a court reporter for 16 years and enjoyed the freedom it offered me. I made a good living, and it enabled me to travel all over my home state of New Jersey as well as the country and even abroad a couple of times.

But then I got bored. I heard a young deaf man speak at a convention about CART in the classroom. CART stands for Communication Access Realtime Translation. A CART provider captures the spoken word via a stenograph machine, which is connected to a computer loaded with specialized software that translates the steno into English instantaneously. I decided that was what I wanted to do. It would take me a few years to break into CART, but finally, one day, an email landed in my inbox. A young deaf woman was seeking a CART provider for the fall semester at Princeton University. I jumped at the chance and landed the job. I provided CART for her for four years. As graduation neared, I wondered what I would do next. I loved providing CART but did not know where to find others who required my services. I decided to train to become a broadcast captioner to supplement my income until I could build my CART business up.

I moved to Pittsburgh and trained at one of the largest captioning companies in the country. I began captioning television programming such as “World News Tonight with Peter Jennings,” CNN “Headline News,” and “Jenny Jones.” I loved it. All of a sudden, CART took a back seat to my new career. Eventually, I moved back to New Jersey and set up a captioning studio in my home, where I captioned for the next eight years a variety of programming – from local news to entertainment shows to sports. Working from home was awesome. Again, I made a good living and really enjoyed my work. The greatest satisfaction for me in doing this type of work is knowing I am enabling people with hearing loss access to live television programming they otherwise would not have access to, but I missed the interaction with my end users. I began providing CART again for a number of clients, while continuing to cover my broadcast assignments.

One day while attending a convention, I was chatting with a colleague who was captioning on-site for an NFL football team. I was fascinated. I decided I would do that one day. Almost a year would pass, as I researched the opportunities of sports stadium captioning, before my dream job would become a reality. Again, through the wonders of email, I received an email that had been forwarded a few times to numerous people. The bottom line – the New York Yankees were seeking an on-site captioner for the upcoming season. Although I had contemplated the idea for nearly a year – and came up with reason after reason why it would not be a good idea, namely 72 reasons, the number of miles from

my home to the Bronx – I was not going to let this opportunity pass me by. I contacted the Yankees, submitted a bid proposal, and got the job.

The adjustment of working from home to commuting nearly 150 miles a day was challenging. The long hours at the stadium left me exhausted. But it was well worth it. It is truly a dream job, the challenge and content of sports captioning coupled with the exhilaration and satisfaction of “performing” live in front of 50,000 people rekindled a spark within me. On top of it all, I was honored to be a part of the Yankees’ goal of making the stadium completely accessible to all people with disabilities. My hope is all stadiums and arenas across the country will follow suit and come to the same realization the New York Yankees did – it is simply the right thing to do. Fans should contact their local stadiums and arenas and inquire whether captioning is available. If it is, be sure to express your appreciation for their efforts and, if not, request that it be made available.

On April 2, 2009, The New York Yankees alongside the Department of Justice held a press conference to unveil the new stadium’s accessibility for people with disabilities. The full press release can be viewed by copying and pasting the following link into your web browser:

[http://newyork.yankees.mlb.com/news/press\\_releases/press\\_release.jsp?ymd=20090414&content\\_id=4266540&vkey=pr\\_nyy&fext=.jsp&c\\_id=nyy](http://newyork.yankees.mlb.com/news/press_releases/press_release.jsp?ymd=20090414&content_id=4266540&vkey=pr_nyy&fext=.jsp&c_id=nyy)

On game day, I arrived at the stadium five hours before game time. Yankee Stadium opened its doors three hours before game time and began running announcements and video clips shortly after the gates opened up until the first pitch. This gave me about two hours to prepare for the day. I was positioned in a booth behind home plate which I shared with the P.A. announcer and one other person. When the game was in play, I usually did not have to caption anything. All player introductions were accompanied by video graphics. All of my captioning took place between innings and in the middle of each inning as the teams changed sides. I captioned pre-taped video clips, live music, audience participation spots, reports from within stadium restaurants and concession areas. Baseball can be unpredictable with rain delays and extra innings, but I was there until the last out was made to caption the traditional closing music – what else? – Frank Sinatra’s “New York, New York,” which runs on a loop until the stadium cleared out.

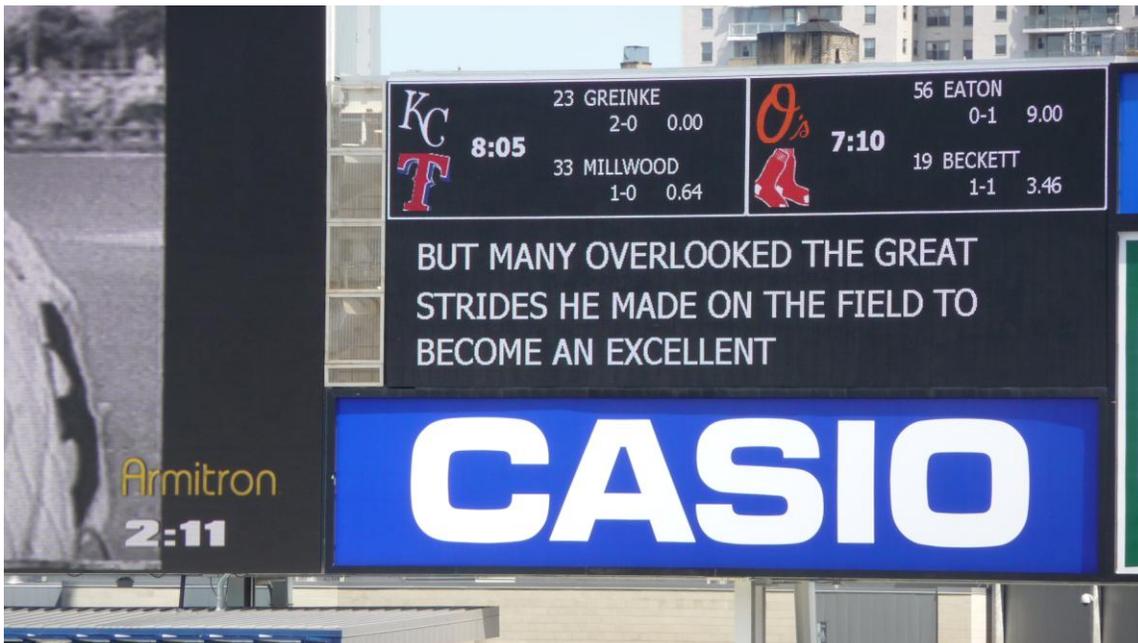
The New York Post ran an article in the April 19, 2009, issue referencing the captions as they related to the booing of a former Yankee, Carl Pavano, who played for the Cleveland Indians.

To view the article, click on the following link:

[http://www.nypost.com/p/news/regional/item\\_O8c1uBeWw1eyMNpV9UkDKP;jsessionid=18CDAD226708E46272A6D066B22EACEF](http://www.nypost.com/p/news/regional/item_O8c1uBeWw1eyMNpV9UkDKP;jsessionid=18CDAD226708E46272A6D066B22EACEF)



The next series of photos were taken from the booth from which I produced the captions:





Jennifer's captions on the Daktronics board adjacent to the video board in center field on Opening Day, April 16, 2009



Jennifer captioning a live game from a booth behind home plate at the new Yankee Stadium

*Jennifer M. Bonfilio, RMR-CBC-CCP, is the President of Operations of Coast 2 Coast Captioning, located in Hamilton Twp., NJ, and can be reached via email at [jboufilio@c2ccaptioning.com](mailto:jboufilio@c2ccaptioning.com). For more information on services offered by Coast 2 Coast Captioning, visit its web site at [www.c2ccaptioning.com](http://www.c2ccaptioning.com).*