

NOT SO BRAVE

Hate hurler balks at ride on No. 7

By **MICHAEL O'KEEFFE**
in Montreal
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in New York

DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITERS

After all his boasts and bravado, John Rocker apparently is punking out.

The reviled Atlanta Braves reliever will not ride the No. 7 train to Shea Stadium this week, as he vowed days ago, an Atlanta Braves official said last night.

"It's our understanding John will not ride the 7 train," said Braves spokesman Jim Shults.

Seems like Rocker just can't take the heat, even though he said he looked forward to riding the train so he could come face to face with New Yorkers he had ma-

igned in a Sports Illustrated interview last year.

"Everybody seems to be on the same page on this," said Pat Courtney, a spokesman for Major League Baseball. "We'd prefer he not take the train."

Rocker didn't play in the Braves' 7-3 victory over the Expos in Montreal last night. After the game, he dressed without talking to his teammates in the Braves' locker room.



John Rocker

When a reporter asked for a few words, Rocker looked angry and said a forceful "No."

A high-ranking NYPD source said cops have also been told Rocker won't ride the rails.

But police aren't taking Rocker's reported reversal for granted: They are still gearing up for a huge security effort should the pitcher change his mind yet again.

"He has a very unpredictable personality," a police source said.

Rocker was to arrive in the Big Apple early today with his Atlanta Braves teammates.

Major League Baseball and Braves officials have tried to talk Rocker out of taking the ride. But they said they couldn't

force him to take a seat on the team bus.

"We haven't told him he can't," said Shults.

Police officials said cops would surround Rocker if he hops on the train, to prevent any trouble. Officers would be stationed at each stop along the No. 7 route from Times Square to Shea Stadium. Some 500 more cops will guard the south-paw at Shea.

A black plywood roof has been erected over the Braves' bullpen. Beer sales will be limited to two at a time, down from the usual four.

Rocker ignited a firestorm of outrage when he denounced a broad cross-section of New Yorkers to a Sports Illustrated reporter.

Taking the train to Queens in big, bad John's shirt

John Rocker's boast to ride the No. 7 train to Shea Stadium was fading yesterday. But in case the Loudmouth from the South is still thinking about taking the trip, we have a sneak preview of how he'll be received.

The Daily News dispatched a reporter deep into the wilds of New York City, wearing a John Rocker jersey — complete with his uniform number, 49 — and an Atlanta Braves cap.

It didn't take long for New Yorkers to weigh in:

By **BILL EGBERT**
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

"What are ya doin' wearing a Rocker jersey in New York? You're a moron. You're gonna get yourself killed!"

I had walked all of three feet when that first comment came whizzing by from a van parked across the street.

This was outside Madison Square Garden, where I had just purchased a John Rocker jersey from Cosby's Sporting Goods.

They normally don't carry them in stock.

And when they found out I had been assigned to wear it on the No. 7 train, just to see what would happen, they had one simple request: Please pay in advance.

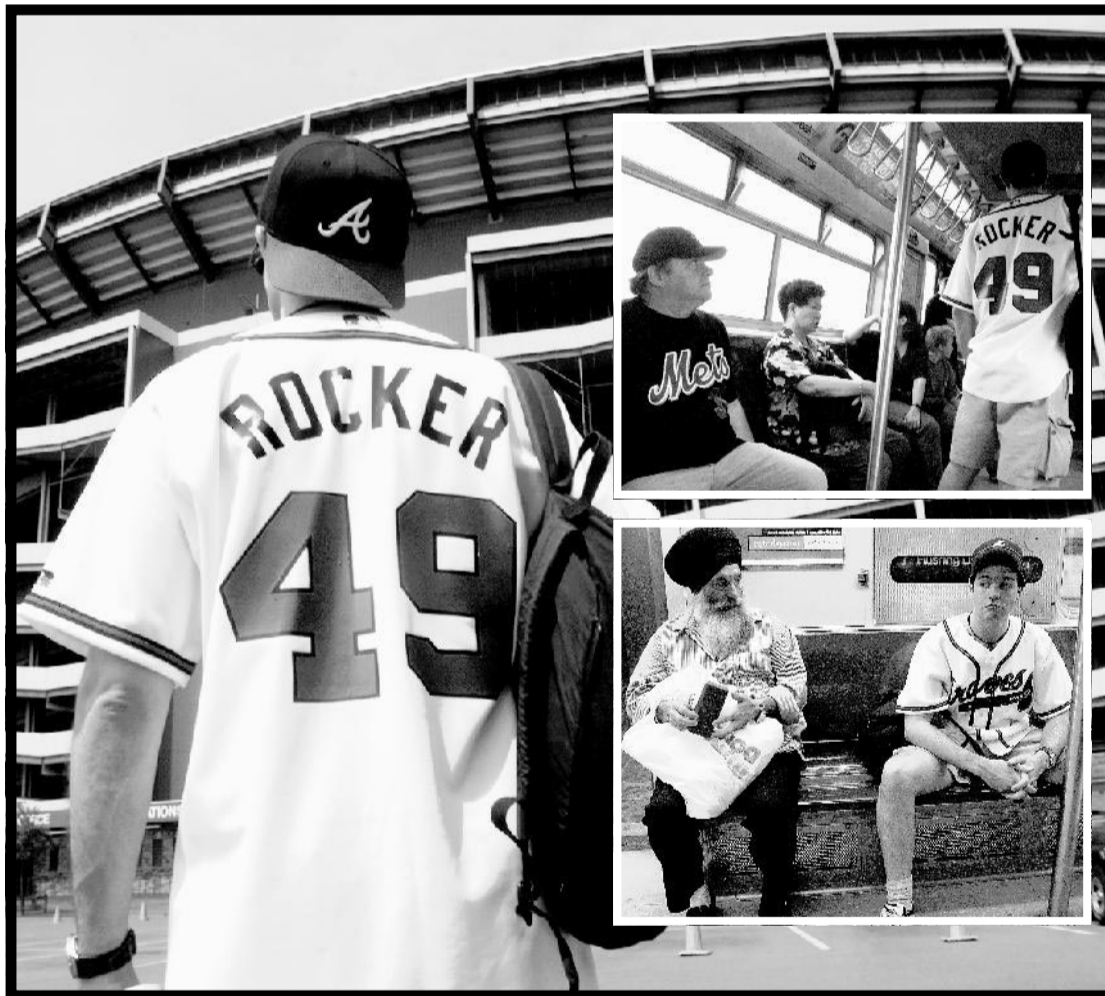
Had I known what I was in for, I wouldn't have paid at all.

One guy sauntered up to me on the way to the train, munching a kabob and shaking his head.

"You got a lotta nerve wearing that," he said, with more respect than disgust. "I mean, New Yorkers are good people, but with the reputation we have around the world. . . . Well, I just gotta say you're brave to wear that jersey."

Snickering at his unintended pun, I went into the Times Square station thanking my stars that this job has health benefits.

On the train, I noticed some wide-eyed, Marx Brothers-style double-takes and more than a few glares, but the rule of sub-



MIKE ALBANS DAILY NEWS

JERSEY EYESORE Daily News reporter Bill Egbert bravely rides the 7 train to Shea Stadium yesterday clad in a John Rocker uniform shirt. On his trip he was shunned by some straphangers (inset, top), sized up by another (inset, above) and the target of insults by still more.

ways, elevators and elementary school yards — "Don't talk to strangers" — seemed to prevent any open confrontations.

As we neared Ground Zero in Flushing, however, and the train started filling up with bona fide game-day Mets fans, the atmosphere grew decidedly more tense.

The amused looks turned to sneers, and the stony glares became snide comments — to bud-

dies, dates and even total strangers, all now suddenly united with a common loathing: me.

"Look at that guy," one man whispered to his pal. "He's crazy," he said, scratching the Mets logo stretched across his belly.

"You know the guy who owns his team?" muttered one guy to his posse. "Well, his ex-wife's a Commie."

"Are you looking for abuse?" asked one lady helpfully.

"I hope you like beer," said a kid, "because you may get some thrown at you tonight."

People started pointing me out from the other end of the train like I was the Elephant Man. Mothers interposed themselves between me and their children, as if my Rocker jersey looked as suspicious as a dirty raincoat. A ripple of amazed murmurs spread through the car after each stop packed in

more New Yorkers taking the 7 train out to Shea.

Near the stadium itself, what began as an amusing experiment became a genuinely frightening experience.

"Tomorrow, buddy! Tomorrow!" a guy shouted at me from across the platform. "You're gonna get hit with batteries."

I remembered the flyers passed around Shea in April declaring June 30 "John Rocker Battery Day": "All fans attending the game will get New York Mets batteries to be thrown to Mr. Rocker. Batteries are provided by the No. 7 train riders, so buy your ticket early," the unauthorized flyers read.

As I walked from the station toward Shea, I started hearing even more hostile comments — not muttered anymore but now shouted unabashedly.

"Batteries are waiting!" somebody yelled behind me.

I turned and around and saw a tidal wave of blue and orange crashing over me — a mob of people all looking at me, shouting "Go home!" and "Die! Die! Die!" at the top of their lungs.

One guy who had seen me on the train threw a glare so hateful that the fact that he was wearing a huge, foam rubber Mad Hatter hat actually made him seem more threatening, not less.

"I cannot believe you came out here with that jersey on," he said.

Suddenly, I agreed with him. I was standing right outside Shea Stadium, 30 minutes before a game — against the Marlins, not the Braves, so everyone knew I was alone — surrounded by hyped-up Mets faithful, wearing the jersey of a guy who went out of his way to insult practically every man, woman and child in a 20-mile radius.

And now I was getting all the bile that bonehead Brave stirred up poured all over me.

I felt very alone, and very hated — all for what I was wearing.

It was like the world was full of John Rockers, and I was a kid with purple hair.