



BIG BRONX BOMBER

The New York Yankees' giant Giancarlo Stanton steps up to the plate

Text by KEITH GORDON

Baseball has always been a game that has not only taken numbers seriously, but elevated them to exalted levels. Statistics have long been an integral part of the sport, even before the "sabermetric" revolution led by pioneering names like Bill James and Billy Beane. And they've taken analysis to new levels of complexity and influence, placing computer scientists and mathematicians next to traditional scouts and baseball experts in the decision-making process.

But even in a sport dominated by big numbers, few figures stand out like the 13-year, \$325 million contract signed by Giancarlo Stanton with the Miami Marlins back in 2014. Not only did it reset the market for elite players with the enormous dollar amount involved, it provided a level of security and stability that Stanton deeply desired at the time. "There's no renegotiating," Stanton tells *Maxim*. "There's no 'What if? Where am I going to play next year? Am I going to play somewhere next year?' That I [didn't] have to do that with my contract is a benefit, and I'm glad I was able to do that of course."

Stanton has proven himself one of baseball's most prolific power hitters, eclipsing 300 career home runs before the age of 30 and earning himself one of professional sports' largest contracts.

But he had also committed himself to a franchise that has seen more ups and downs than most, especially as the Marlins failed to develop a championship-quality roster around their young and extremely expensive superstar. So it was perhaps inevitable, at least to many fans, that when it came time for the Marlins to move on, it was the New York Yankees that would trade for the young slugger and his pricey contract. The deal was consummated in December 2017 and the following spring Stanton found himself playing under the bright lights of Yankee Stadium, with all the pressure and media attention that comes with stepping up to the plate in New York.

Stanton grew up far from the lights of the Big Apple, in Southern California, where he was a three-sport star, even being offered an opportunity to play both football and baseball at USC. One doesn't need 20/20 hindsight to see that he made a wise choice in sticking to the latter. Stanton blossomed into one of the youngest, and most talented players in baseball, being called up to the majors

and experience a more exciting side of the sport, albeit with the pressure that comes with playing for the most visible, and perhaps most despised, team in the game. He responded with an impactful 38 home runs and 100 RBIs, helping the Yankees back to the playoffs.

It also exposed him to one of baseball's bitterest rivalries, between the Yankees and Red Sox. Having experienced it firsthand he explains, "It's a cool experience.... Some say that, 'Oh, it's just another game.' But, it feels better when we beat them, and it's cool to be in it and see the weight of how the country loves this matchup. And not only our cities, but everyone always tunes in and checks [out] those games. So it's cool. It's kind of like when Barcelona and Madrid play.... Even if you're not a fan, you're going to see who won."

Asked about the switch to the Big Apple, Stanton admits "It's just different. We as players have a lot we put on ourselves for our accomplishments that we want. But to have a city and fans like this, it's different... the media and all that. That's why [the players] stick

the new "Bash Brothers", the truth is they're only a part of a comprehensive rebuild by the Yankees, which the franchise hopes will combine to produce the next dynastic stretch of titles for the team. "You're never really sure about going to a new place, how a team's chemistry is going to be," Stanton says. "But everyone's great... We feed off of each other and help each other, of course, on the field. And then, go hang out and relax when we're not doing our work."

Following the long grind of a season, Stanton is quick to grab his passport and explore the globe. "It's such a controlled schedule that I try to get out and enjoy my vacation time, just seeing the world really, seeing the different perspectives, seeing something new," he explains. "I really like Barcelona. Spain in general. I took a trip to Egypt to see the pyramids. That was a really cool experience.... I want to go to Africa and Singapore and do Asia and all that."

But the baseball life is not all comfort and luxury, and Stanton points out the biggest



by the Marlins in 2010 at the age of 20.

Over the course of the next eight seasons, he would smash 267 home runs for the franchise, cementing his place as one of the top sluggers in the sport. Hitting 59 home runs and contributing 132 RBIs during the 2017 season showed that Stanton's tunnel vision had clearly paid off, and it helped lead him to both the National League MVP as well as, eventually, New York. Stanton now had both protection in the lineup, and a chance to expe-

together, to help get to the ultimate goal."

And if the 6'7", 245 lb. Stanton needs someone to have his back, it helps that he's joined in the Yankee lineup by one of the few players who can match his size, power and fan appeal, the 6'7", 282 lb. bruiser Aaron Judge. "We're good friends. He's fun, man. [It's] something cool to watch [for] someone with not so many years in the league, how advanced he is."

While it's tempting to refer to the duo as

misconception that the public often possesses when it comes to the sport. "I'd say it's what it takes mentally and physically to be your best every single day. Having only two or three to four days off a month.... Sometimes you don't sleep right for whatever reason, [but] that doesn't matter. There's still going to be a game. Sometimes you may be sick. Doesn't matter. Still going to be a game. And you got to go out there hitting balls coming at over a 100 miles an hour."

Following his move to the Yankees, Stanton was the center of attention upon his return to Miami, competing against the franchise with which he had started his career and developed into one of baseball's most magnetic superstars.