

JOEL KURTZMAN

The Transcendent We

There is *we*, the subject of this issue of *Briefings*, and then there is the *we* that's even bigger. You might call the bigger *we* ethereal, transcendent, awesome, rare, indescribable, cool. ☀ Don't get me wrong, the feeling of *we* is very comforting. Why else would people put up on YouTube all those pictures of puppies and kitties snuggling together on sofas and beds? We go where the warmth is.

BUT there are several different kinds of *we*. There's *we* — as in, “we are Manchester United,” or “we are the Oakland Raiders,” or “we are the proud employees of Dunder Mifflin,” indicating that “we” are part of a pretty awesome group that's separate from other groups. Much of sports is like that. We feel good because we are part of *this* team and not *that* one. That other team — that's the one we hate.

But there is more. Something bigger. I saw that demonstrated a few weeks ago at — of all places — Fenway Park, the stadium where the Boston Red Sox play. Even more odd, the game was the last for Derek Jeter, captain of the New York Yankees. These two teams have a 100-year-old rivalry, and Jeter chose to retire on Red Sox turf. That's a little like Russian President Vladimir Putin inviting U.S. President Barack Obama to one of his judo tournaments.

But here is what made things different. Jeter is a much beloved man — a hero of the game in most fans' eyes. Jeter is known for his sportsmanship, his fairness and objectivity, his love of his team and his interest in people. He's a ballplayer to be sure, but he's also a philanthropist, and a role model. He's the guy who jumps out of nowhere to shake the other team's hand when they do something really magical. Jeter is a class act *par excellence*.

So there he was at Boston's Fenway with 34,500 fans in the stadium, many from New York, undergoing a ceremony to thank him for, well, playing. There were dignitaries from politics and sports, entertainment and other fields. They sang, read poetry and hugged him a lot.

But what became clear was what they were celebrating. Instead of Jeter's accom-

plishments as a player, they were celebrating his accomplishments as a human being — the values he embodied.

That made the ceremony different. Instead of focusing on a team, it focused on the game. Instead of a city, it was the country. Instead of divisions, it was about unity. Instead of differences, the ceremony focused on commonalities.

When the last hand was shaken and the last cheer let out, it was clear that there were two sides to this drama. On the one hand, Red Sox saluted their New York rivals on Red Sox turf. On the other, New Yorkers saluted their longtime opponents right where they lived.

You can't have a game without teams. But in this case, the opponents knew they were part of something much bigger — that higher *we*.

This is the secret sauce of *we* that is hardly ever talked about. It's a kind of transcendence that comes not from dwelling on one closely knit group's hard-fought, hard-earned superiority over another, but by understanding that each team is in it together. There are no winners without losers. There is no us without them, no me without you. You could feel that in the air at Jeter's last game.

But then, when the ceremonies stopped and the game began, and as the Yankees took to the field, there was a pitch, a disagreement about a call and the game's first boo. Hey, even though this was one of those cosmic moments, baseball's still a game. ▀



Joel Kurtzman is author of the new book *Unleashing the Second American Century*.

▶ kurtzmandgroup.com

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Additional copies: briefings@kornferry.com
 Briefings / 1900 Avenue of the Stars, Suite 2600
 Los Angeles, CA 90067

Advertising: Stacy Levyn +1 (310) 556-8502
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