

Clemens' Mother Throws Strike For COPD Awareness

(NAPS)—New York Yankee fans have a reputation for being a tough crowd. But on Tuesday, August 26, the emotional armor of 38,000 Yankee supporters melted away when they watched New York pitcher Andy Pettitte escort 72-year-old Bess Clemens off a golf cart and onto the field. She was being given the honor of throwing out the ceremonial first pitch that night at Yankee Stadium to help raise awareness for COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease), a lung disease caused primarily by smoking that is better known as chronic bronchitis or emphysema. Bess Clemens was diagnosed with emphysema in 1993.

She wound up and threw a perfect strike. And once the ball hit Jorge Posada's catcher's glove, another Yankee approached from the dugout. It was number 22, her son, Roger Clemens who was scheduled to pitch that evening. She threw her arms around him and the tears poured down her cheeks. Both Posada and Pettitte's eyes welled up with tears. On this night, there was crying in baseball.

Before showing the crowd her fastball, Bess Clemens was presented with the first annual "Raising COPD Awareness Award" as part of COPD Day at Yankee Stadium. COPD is the fourth leading fatal illness in the United States and the only one of the top 10 illnesses on the rise, claiming 119,000 lives in 2000. According to



the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 24 million Americans have COPD, but only 10 million have been diagnosed with the lung disease. Signs and symptoms of COPD, which patients may begin experiencing in their mid-40s, include chronic cough, excess mucus production and shortness of breath after mild exertion. There is no cure for COPD, but treatments are available to help patients breathe easier.

Prior to the game, free lung tests were provided to people at risk for COPD. During the event, an estimated 2,500 people passed through the tent with 750 pre-screened and 225 lung tests conducted by 10 respiratory therapists from the American Association of Respiratory Care. The lung tests determined lung function so the people who were tested could provide that information to their physician.

For a lung test, each person was required to take a deep

breath and exhale as hard and fast as possible into a device called a spirometer. The testing was supervised by Dr. William Bailey, director of the Lung Health Center, professor of medicine and eminent scholar chair in pulmonary diseases at the University of Alabama-Birmingham and co-chair of the U.S. COPD Coalition.

"COPD Day at Yankee Stadium was established to offer a free lung test to those who have the signs and symptoms of COPD and would like to find out the condition of their lungs," Bailey said. "But it also was established to help educate people of all ages about COPD and the long-term effects smoking can have on a person's lungs."

COPD Day at Yankee Stadium was developed with the U.S. COPD Coalition, American Lung Association of the City of New York and the New York Yankees. The program was sponsored by Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc. and Pfizer Inc.

