

# Yankees, Nets agree to merge

By Ronald Blum  
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — The New York Yankees and the NBA's New Jersey Nets have signed a letter of intent to merge the two teams into one company.

However, the teams' current management will remain in place, with George Steinbrenner running the Yankees and Lewis Katz running the Nets, the teams announced today.

The deal, which creates a holding company called YankeeNets, will enable the Yankees to gain better leverage in selling their local broadcast rights. Their \$486 million, 12-year contract with Cablevision Systems Corp.'s Madison Square Garden Network expires after the 2000 season, and Cablevision also controls Fox Sports New York, the only other sports cable network in the New York area.

With the Yankees and Nets united, they will have 12-month programming and will be able to

approach The Walt Disney Co.'s ESPN or Time Warner Inc. about starting a new regional sports channel.

"If presented with opportunities that make good business sense, we'll definitely pursue," ESPN spokesman Chris LaPlaca said.

On the field and on the court, the deal is not expected to change anything.

"I would venture should you go around the room, 98 percent of the players won't know what you're talking about," Yankees pitcher David Cone said in the team's spring training clubhouse in Tampa, Fla. "By and large, most players worry about their manager."

Steinbrenner, whose group purchased the Yankees in 1973 from CBS Inc., had spent much of 1998 discussing a possible sale of a large interest in the Yankees to Cablevision, with prices of \$650 million to \$1 billion mentioned. But those talks broke off after

Steinbrenner insisted he maintain control of the Yankees' operations.

The Nets' current contract with Fox Sports New York runs through the 2001-02 season. Cablevision, which owns the NBA's New York Knicks and the NHL's New York Rangers, also owns the TV rights to those two teams as well as baseball's New York Mets and the NHL's New York Islanders and New Jersey Devils.

Tishman Speyer Properties Inc., the landlord of Rockefeller Center, and the investment bank Allen & Co. Inc., will own part of the Yankees' and Nets' new parent company. Entertainer Bill Cosby also is involved; he is chairman of the Community Youth Organization, a trust to benefit urban area youth that currently is the Nets' largest shareholder, with a 35-40 percent share.

The deal is subject to approval of owners in major league baseball and the NBA.

# Ripken, Belle disagree on whether streak lasts

By David Ginsburg  
The Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Cal Ripken is convinced his record run of playing in 2,632 consecutive games will one day be broken.

Albert Belle, whose current string of 334 successive games is the most among active players, is just as certain that Ripken's streak will never be topped.

Ripken shattered Lou Gehrig's seemingly unbreakable record of 2,130 straight games in September 1995, then added 501 successive starts before voluntarily ending his run by sitting out the Baltimore Orioles' final home game last season.

That left Belle, who signed

with the Orioles as a free agent in December, as baseball's reigning "iron man."

"I was surprised when Cal ended the streak last year," Belle said Thursday. "It was fun while it lasted. I remember the excitement of seeing him break the record a few years ago when I was in Chicago."

By playing in every Orioles game from May 30, 1982, to Sept. 20, 1998, Ripken raised the bar of longevity to a seemingly impossible-to-beat number.

If Belle played in every game for 14 more seasons, he would still come up short.

"That means I'll be playing past when I'm 40 years old," Belle, 32, said. "I figure I have only eight or nine years left."

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## Horoscope by Frances Drake

For Friday, Feb. 26, 1999

### ARIES

(March 21 to April 19)

Try to work with your handicaps instead of denying or rebelling against them. You manage to impress even yourself in a professional capacity.

### TAURUS

(April 20 to May 20)

Don't let your extraordinary powers of persuasion go to waste. You have the potential to make or break an important project; just be sure you're batting for the right team.

### GEMINI

(May 21 to June 20)

Others may not be in your groove of overproductivity right now, but try not to let your impatience become too glaringly obvious. You have enough energy for all.

### CANCER

(June 21 to July 22)

Someone else's emotional drama is likely to take you on an ugly roller coaster ride. Realize that you have to pay the admission ticket to get in the gate.

### LEO

(July 23 to Aug. 22)

A good book or movie may be all that's needed to improve a sour mood. Don't take on more projects than you can handle — your schedule is going to get busy enough as it is.

### VIRGO

(Aug. 23 to Sept. 22)

Someone close to you reveals a secret that you never suspected. Try not to let that drop of your jaw be too obvious — they need your support more than you realize.

### LIBRA

(Sept. 23 to Oct. 22)

The more flexible you are, the smoother everything will run and the

more choices you ultimately will have. Make time to listen to a friend in need.

### SCORPIO

(Oct. 23 to Nov. 21)

The rationale of a perplexing system will soon make itself apparent. In the meantime, you'll have to find ways to content yourself with acting as a minor cog.

### SAGITTARIUS

(Nov. 22 to Dec. 21)

The burden of making everything all right seems to have fallen on you, shoulders. You impress everyone with your endless reserves of patience and good humor.

### CAPRICORN

(Dec. 22 to Jan. 19)

Don't let your internal music be toned down by the demands of others. Someone special is waiting anxiously to hear your unique brand of song.

### AQUARIUS

(Jan. 20 to Feb. 18)

You have one of those moments when your mask slips off and people can see who you really are. Don't blush — they'll only love you more than ever before.

### PISCES

(Feb. 19 to March 20)

While you're under no obligation to help anyone other than yourself, you'll feel far better if you act selflessly. Your good deeds come back to you tenfold. YOU BORN TODAY Warm-hearted, kind, and active in your community, you win respect and admiration wherever you go. You are a social animal who shines most brightly when surrounded by a crowd. Unfortunately, you are often unreasonably hard on yourself.

Birthdate of: Michael Bolton, rock musician; Johnny Cash, actor/musician; Sandie Shaw, rock musician.

## Dilbert

