

Dynamic Duo

The Yankees' Spanish-language broadcast team is among the best in the business

By Nathan Maciborski

In baseball, preparation is essential. And no one knows it better than Beto Villa.

Villa and Francisco Rivera make up the Yankees' Spanish-language broadcast team, having worked together full-time since 2005. Every game day, Villa arrives at Yankee Stadium at least three hours before the first pitch armed with everything he needs — scissors, glue sticks, highlighters, pens, statistical reports, index cards, the newspaper, his all-important hand sanitizer — and begins preparing for the game.

He fills out the day's starting lineup on a custom-made scorecard that he designed himself and pastes the box score he clipped from the newspaper onto the previous day's scorecard. He organizes his stat sheets by order of importance for easy reference during the broadcast. He even has lists of every major league player by country of birth and who the first players to crack the bigs from those countries were.

"I figure to be a good broadcaster, you not only have to be able to do the play-by-play, [but] you [also] have to know the business, you have to know the rules of the game, you have to follow the statistics, [and] you have to know the history of the team that you are broadcasting," Villa said. "You have to be very well prepared."

Born in Venezuela on Feb. 7, 1947, Villa saw many of his childhood heroes, such as Chico Carrasquel, find success in the big leagues. When legendary baseball commentator Juan Vene offered to take Villa under his wing, he jumped at the chance, making his broadcasting debut on July 22, 1980.

His relationship with the Yankees began in 1996, when he was a backup broadcaster for the SAP (second audio programming) system. When the team decided to launch a Spanish-language radio broadcast the following season, it tabbed Villa to lead the way. Currently, both the English and Spanish broadcasts are produced by WCBS Newsradio 880.

At the same time, Rivera was hosting one of the most popular Spanish sports talk shows in the country, WADO Deportivo, every night from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m. and broadcasting Phillies games in Spanish on the weekends. Like many people from Puerto Rico, Rivera grew up a fan of Roberto Clemente and the Pittsburgh Pirates, but he admired players from all teams.

"One of my heroes was Luis Arroyo, who pitched in the 1960s as a reliever for the Yankees," Rivera said. "And



VILLA [L] AND RIVERA

Horace Clarke used to play in Puerto Rico a lot; I remember him, too. Everybody knew and knows the Yankees."

Rivera and Villa's paths crossed in 2003, when Rivera had the opportunity to call the Yankees' postseason games for

ESPN. Rivera accepted an offer from WCBS Newsradio 880 to become a full-time broadcaster in 2005, and the two have worked side by side ever since.

“We work together like everybody else — like family,” Rivera said. “We may have our disagreements and little arguments, but once we grab the microphones, it’s all business.”

Villa and Rivera’s broadcasts of all 162 regular-season games can be heard on *La Que Buena* 92.7 (WQBU-FM), a Univision-owned station and on television by hitting the SAP button. Rivera does mostly commentary, although his passion lies in doing play-by-play, which he handles during the middle innings.

“Basically, my thinking is that I try to make the audience see everything,” Rivera said. “If there is a ground ball hit, but a hard one, I like to call it that way. If there’s a throw to first, but it’s a low throw, I like to say ‘a low throw.’ I try to make whoever is listening visualize everything as much as possible.”

Villa’s style is deeply rooted in providing accurate information — he edits the statistics and information on www.latinobaseball.com when he’s not on air — and unearthing statistical gems.

“We just found out that Victor Davalillo was the first Venezuelan to hit a home run in the old Yankee Stadium,” Villa said. “And Victor Martinez was the first Venezuelan to hit a homer here in the new Stadium. What a coincidence that another Victor with the Cleveland Indians was the first!”

But Villa also seeks to illuminate the importance of what’s occurring on the field at a given moment.

“[I try to convey] all the information, but also the emotion of what’s happening,” Villa said. “If we have

the tying run on second base, I’ll say, ‘This is a big moment for us. There’s a tremendous pitcher on the mound, and we’ve got to defeat this pitcher now. I think he’s vulnerable. This is the time.’ You give the information, maybe how many pitches he’s thrown, but also, what are the possibilities? You have to show the listeners that something is going to happen.”



Both Villa and Rivera lead lives away from the broadcast booth, which helps broaden their perspectives. Rivera, a long-time Jersey City, New Jersey, resident who received a bachelor’s degree in Spanish literature from Rutgers University and graduated from Miguel Angel Torres School of Communications in Manhattan, works for the Urban League of Hudson County,

inspecting the homes of people who are licensed to take care of children. Villa is a cancer survivor who will sprinkle bits of pop culture and world history into his broadcasts.

“We are human, you know?” Villa said. “The audience loves a little break from information all the time. Sometimes I’ll go to a restaurant to eat and people start talking about something we said and they add something to it.”

Now in their fifth season together, Villa and Rivera have become an integral part of the Yankees organization.

“I told these players that they are like my family,” Villa said. “Carlos Silva — he is our main producer — people say to him, ‘Beto gets so emotional when the Yankees hit a homer.’ But the guys thank me, especially those guys who understand Spanish. I have to be objective sometimes; it’s not good to be everything pro-Yankees all the time. But I enjoy it because you always want them to do well, no question about it.”

