Roger Clemens Takes His Heater—and Newfound Assortment of ‘Stuff’—to Toronto

By Rick Weinberg

The number is jeopardizing the deal. Not the numbers, mind you, but the number.

The contract numbers of Roger Clemens’ new blockbuster free-agent deal with the Toronto Blue Jays had already been worked out between the Hendricks brothers—Clemens’ representatives—and Paul Beeston, the Blue Jays’ CEO. The snag involves a uniform number. The Rocket wants number 21 on the back of his new Blue Jays uniform, the same digits he wore during his 13 brilliant seasons with the Boston Red Sox.

But Blue Jays designated hitter Carlos Delgado happens to wear 21, and although Beeston assures Clemens the number will be his, Rocket isn’t comfortable with swiping it off his future teammate’s back without first talking to him.

“Clemens adds softly, “So what’s Carlos’ feeling about 21? He says he’ll do it. He told me he’s excited about you coming, that having you in Toronto means more to him than the number.”

Clemens flashes a warm smile. “Great. But before the press conference, I still want to talk to him privately and ask him for it myself.”

Several hours later, Clemens and his entourage are whisked from the airport to SkyDome, where a mass of reporters awaits the historic news conference. “Is Carlos here?” Clemens asks a Blue Jays official. “He’s on his way,” he’s told.

“Then let’s wait.”

The Blue Jays’ public-relations staff is in stunned silence, having to hold up the news conference while Clemens waits in the Jays’ executive offices for Delgado. Finally, with bodies frantically rushing back and forth, Delgado arrives.

“Carlos,” Clemens says, embracing his new teammate before pulling him into a private executive office. “I know how much the number means to you. Are you sure you want me to have it?”

“Yes,” Delgado replies, smiling. “We always hated facing you. Now we have you. That’s what’s important.”

They chat for several minutes about the Jays’ new look and their quest to win a World Series together. They embrace. Blue Jays executives breathe a