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## Mets' players 'superheroes' to fans

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One night after the Dark Knight saved Gotham by defeating a lineup of his rogues gallery, Thor was asked to follow suit and smash his hammer Sunday night on the same opponents. No, this isn't some strange comic book mash-up story line – it's how Mets fans refer to an increasing number of their players: as superheroes.

The nicknames fans have bestowed on some of the team's most popular players have become a part of the team's character, fans say, and the players' "super human" powers have been showcased throughout this improbable run to the postseason.

It started after Sports Illustrated ran a cover story in May 2013 declaring Matt Harvey, who started Saturday night in Game 1 of the National League Championship Series, "The Dark Knight of Gotham."

David Wright was nicknamed "Captain America" after his heroics in the 2013 World Baseball Classic. That same year fans began referring to last night's Game 2 starter Noah Syndergaard as Thor, referring to his long blonde locks and last name – not to mention a wicked curve ball that comes down with the force of the character's hammer, Mjolnir.

Considering the Mets were nearly named The Avengers when they were brought into the National League, the story seems to write itself.

"I think the nicknames are cool, it kind of gives the team an identity," Kevin Meberg, 16 of Wall Township, said outside Citi Field on Sunday night dressed in a Mets jersey and Viking helmet. "Thor is my favorite – I like how much Syndergaard has embraced it. The height, the name, it all just fits the character."

Mets fans have run with the monikers. In fact, the way hundreds of fans dressed for Harvey's and Syndergaard's starts this weekend, Citi Field could have been mistaken for New York Comic Con.

"Superheroes are back in fashion and so are the Mets," Ron Mercado, a Connecticut resident, said after pushing back his long blonde wig on Sunday. "The Mets are a team of superheroes and we are here to cheer them on."

When Harvey took the mound and dominated the Cubs for 7.2 innings on Saturday, thousands of fans in Citi Field wore Batman masks – some of which were even painted orange and blue. There were even a few capes that flapped in the October wind.

Similarly, on Sunday night as Syndergaard squared off against Jake Arrieta, fans sported large Viking helmets, flowing blonde wigs and brandished hammers. The hammer has come to represent the moment he strikes someone out.

"From the first time Syndergaard pitched, you knew Thor was the right nickname," said Natalie Zerial, 31, of New York, wearing a Viking helmet. "This team, especially with its pitchers, has had a hero after hero after hero."

The players have embraced the nicknames as well. Harvey has "Dark Knight" carved into his bats and has a Batman symbol above his locker. Syndergaard has dressed as Thor for Halloween and even tweets with the nickname in mind after games – referencing Odin and other nods to the fans. The team also had some lighthearted hazing of their rookies after clinching the division by making them dress in superhero-themed underwear.

The way the Mets' season has been peppered with improbable comebacks, gritty performances and ups and downs, it isn't a stretch to think their season was a Marvel or D.C. comic, fans said. Starting with the elation following an 11-game winning streak, the



CHRIS PEDOTA /STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Kevin McBerg of Wall Township dressed as Thor before heading into the Mets game on Sunday, Oct. 18, 2015.

disappointment of midseason, the non-trade of Wilmer Flores, the sweeps of the Nationals and the clinching of the NL East and NLDS, Mets fans have had a roller coaster of emotions this season.

“It’s a fun thing to do,” Matt Dobrin, 34, of Long Island, said of dressing in a Vikings helmet and wig in honor of Thor. “Whenever someone can throw 100 miles per hour, it’s an event. This franchise has gone through some hard times, and we’ve been waiting for a group of players to change that direction. We have that now, especially with the pitching.”

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