

OCTOBER 8, 2015, 11:46 PM

LAST UPDATED: THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2015, 11:55 PM

## When Mets are on base, their fans are on social media

BY ANDREW WYRICH

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When the Mets take the field Friday night to start their first playoff series in nine years, Rory D'Lasnow will be surrounded by screens. As the action unfolds on television, D'Lasnow, of Hackensack, will have one eye on his phone, absorbing — and contributing to — a never-ending conversation about his favorite team as it unfolds on Twitter.

D'Lasnow, 26, is among a new breed of sports fans for whom simply watching their team play isn't enough.

"My whole feed is Mets stuff; there is just such a massive amount of information out there," D'Lasnow said. "It doesn't feel like a complete experience without it now. Following along on Twitter during a game makes it so much better; you can see what other fans are saying and how they are reacting."

As D'Lasnow knows, he has plenty of company. Klear, a social-media analytics firm based in Tel Aviv, Israel, found that Mets fans generated 760,000 posts to Twitter, Facebook and Instagram — more than the supporters of any other Major League Baseball franchise — between July 14 and Aug. 13.

It's worth noting that the survey was less than scientific. The Mets and the Yankees, whose fans finished a distant second with 566,000 posts, share the country's largest metropolitan area and media market, perhaps giving them an unfair advantage. Also, the study covered a period that included the trade deadline and a series of related events — notably the aborted-at-the-last-minute swap of Mets infielder Wilmer Flores for Carlos Gomez of the Milwaukee Brewers, a made-for-Twitter debacle that unfolded in real time during a game on July 29; and the acquisition of Yoenis Cespedes from Detroit — that had Mets fans buzzing.

Even so, there was something in the air last month when the team clinched its first postseason appearance since 2006, when Twitter was in its infancy and Facebook was open only to users with a valid college email address. This time, fans instinctively took to their phones and tablets in droves — posting, sharing, liking and retweeting as if they were letting out a collective, triumphant cheer after years of watching their team wallow at the bottom of the NL East standings.

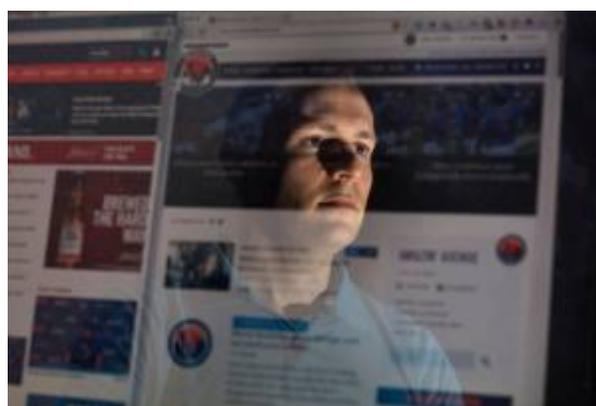
It's in "the DNA of Mets fans" to dish and grouse about their team, said Matt Cerrone, the founder of MetsBlog.com. As the team floundered year after year and as moments of heartbreak far outnumbered moments of triumph, Mets fans became conditioned to "wait till next year," clinging to the hope that better days were to come. When the product on the field is a dud, Cerrone said, Mets fans fixate on things like the impact of a player's injury, trade rumors and the team's financial state. Social media, he said, have given them an outlet for all of this.

Greg Prince, a co-founder of FaithAndFearInFlushing.com, said the frenzied use of social media at all hours is a "logical progression" of Mets fandom.



MICHAEL KARAS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Rory D'Lasnow of Hackensack says his whole Twitter feed is about the Mets.



MICHAEL KARAS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Eric Simon, who runs AmazinAvenue.com, a very popular Mets website, is shown at his home office reflected in a computer monitor showing AmazinAvenue.com (right) and the Mets website (left) on the screen.

From the moment the team was founded, Mets fans have had a “different” connection to their franchise, Prince said. The Mets were created to fill the void that the beloved Giants and Dodgers left when they decamped for California after the 1957 season, which explains the immediate and intense connection that many original fans established with the expansion team. In the 1960s, Mets fans helped start Banner Day, when fans paraded through Shea Stadium with homemade banners showing their support for the “lovable losers.” Today, Prince said, they show their passion in pixels.

“There is almost this sense that this team was for ‘us,’ and I somehow think that got into the DNA,” Prince said. “Now you come into the age of social media, and it’s almost like we are having a nightly board meeting to discuss the state of our team. I think we all feel a real genuine stake in this team, maybe more so than fans of other teams.”

That sense of belonging translates well to the digital world, Prince said.

“Mets fans are always looking for some sort of outlet,” he said, “and I think we’ve wound up where we wound up – which is short, 140-character bursts and just this desire to be heard.”

Whether they’re obsessive, overly emotional, reactionary or simply hyper-focused on the finer details of their team’s performance, the passion Mets fans exhibit online has not been lost on the team itself, said Will Carafello, the team’s social media director.

To capitalize on that enthusiasm, the team has spread across nearly every conceivable social media platform as a way of reaching and interacting with fans; even Mr. and Mrs. Met have their own social media accounts.

“We try to be everywhere, knowing our fans use multiple social media platforms in order to engage with us,” Carafello said. “I couldn’t tell you why they are so passionate, but we have a good history, fun players and personalities ... and this is a platform where they can reach out and touch our team and our players.”

Twitter seems to have become the favored digital megaphone for many Mets fans. A community has coalesced around the hashtag #MetsTwitter, which fans use to share in-the-moment reactions that can swing from elation to agony in the span of a single pitch.

“#MetsTwitter is kind of like one giant Mets therapy group,” D’Lasnow said. “You almost find solace in the fact that there are other fans out there who might be freaking out like you. It’s like the voice in the back of your head – typical Mets fans paranoia – that is always there, but you don’t want to let out.”

Having a traditionally passionate fan base in a large media market like New York City almost certainly was a factor in the team’s topping the Klear survey. Teams in many other large media markets, such as Philadelphia, Boston and Los Angeles, also made the top 10. Curiously, however, neither team in the hyper-connected San Francisco Bay Area, near Silicon Valley, made the cut.

“In the New York metro area, we like to boast, banter and throw around ideas,” said Ivan Wei, 24, of Fair Lawn. “We’re all proud to be fans, and there are just so many of us out there talking about the team online. It’s in real time, it’s the quickest way to get information that you want to know.”

Eric Simon of Wyckoff, who founded the popular site [AmazinAvenue.com](http://AmazinAvenue.com), offers ordinary fans a digital soapbox in the form of “Fan Shots” where they can write opinion or analytical pieces, or post funny news or enter contests.

“A driving force of Amazin’ Avenue was that community is a central part of the framework of our site from the very beginning,” Simon said. “The elements of the site were always important, but it was always critical that the community be its own thing. People can make the site their own.”

But Prince of [FaithAndFearInFlushing.com](http://FaithAndFearInFlushing.com) said that no degree of online engagement or success on the field is likely to fundamentally alter the DNA of Mets fans.

“One thing I’ve learned about Mets fans is there is a sense of, it can never be absolutely perfect,” he said, laughing. “If the Mets won every game for the rest of the year and then swept their way to a world championship, the first words out of anyone’s mouth when it was over would be, ‘Oh, my God, are they not going to re-sign Cespedes?’”

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