

# 4 keys to Yanks' offense

## This menacing lineup can do even better than 2007

By Kyle Stack  
Special to amNewYork

The Yankees had a menacing offense last year, leading the American League last season in plate appearances, hits, runs scored, home runs, batting average, on-base percentage and slugging percentage.

That offense could be even better in 2008.

Reigning AL MVP Alex Rodriguez could hardly do better than his onslaught of last year. Hitting .314, A-Rod smacked 54 home runs and knocked in 156 RBIs.

In December, The Yankees accepted that it would cost a reported \$275 million for a 10-year contract to keep A-Rod in the Bronx.

But rather than rest on A-Rod's broad shoulders, the Yankee offense improves notably when the rest of the lineup produces consistently around him.

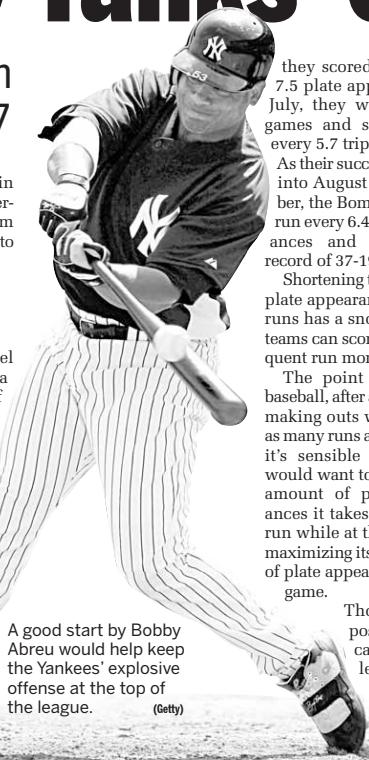
As the Yankees begin their final season at hitter-friendly Yankee Stadium tonight, here are four keys to priming their offense:

### Reduce average plate appearances against runs scored

It's not exactly a novel theory that teams have a better chance of winning if they score more runs.

However, the correlation between winning and the number of plate appearances per run scored warrants some emphasis.

As the Yankees struggled to a 38-40 record through the first three months of last season,



A good start by Bobby Abreu would help keep the Yankees' explosive offense at the top of the league. (Getty)

they scored a run every 7.5 plate appearances. In July, they won 20 of 29 games and scored a run every 5.7 trips to the plate. As their success continued into August and September, the Bombers scored a run every 6.4 plate appearances and compiled a record of 37-19.

Shortening the number of plate appearances between runs has a snowball effect; teams can score each subsequent run more quickly.

The point of offensive baseball, after all, is to avoid making outs while scoring as many runs as possible. So it's sensible that a team would want to decrease the amount of plate appearances it takes to score one run while at the same time maximizing its total amount of plate appearances in one game.

Those are two positive statistical trends that lead teams to wins.

### Hope Bobby Abreu

### and Robinson Cano avoid early-year slumps

The on-base presences of two Yankees lefty hitters are particularly important.

Despite A-Rod's early season heroics, the Bombers' offense was inept early last year, with an on-base percentage hovering around .350 the first two months as Bobby Abreu (.314) and Robinson Cano (.300) reached base at dismal rates.

As their percentages increased, so did the productivity of the offense, which eventually scored an MLB-best 963 runs. After the All-Star break, for example, Cano hit .343 with 57 RBIs.

Since Abreu primarily batted third and Cano batted seventh or eighth, the hitters operated on either side of the heart of the order.

Abreu's difficulty getting on base in the spring reduced the scoring opportunities for the four-through-six hitters, while Cano didn't drive in heart-of-the-order hitters such as Rodriguez, Hideki Matsui and Jorge Posada when those sluggers got on base.



Cano

### Take advantage of hitter-friendly venues in April

The Yanks play 31 of their first 36 games in ballparks that ranked in the top-10 offensively in 2007 — including the one in the Bronx.

Although the Yankees scored 72 fewer runs in 44 more plate appearances on the road than at home last season, the friendly confines of the stadiums at which they play in April should encourage offensive productivity early.

### Find a power source at first base

Doug Mientkiewicz and Andy Phillips accounted for 60 percent of the Yankees' first-base at bats last season, yet they produced a paltry seven home runs and 19 doubles at a traditionally power-reliant position.

Now that both players have moved on, Jason Giambi, Shelley Duncan and Wilson Betemit have an opportunity to pick up the slack.

The power-hitting vibes in that position's on-deck circle are good: Giambi walked 37 home runs just two seasons ago, Duncan socked seven homers in 74 at bats last season and Betemit has averaged 16 home runs the last two seasons in limited playing time.



Giambi

## Briefs

### COLLEGE BASKETBALL

#### ■ WKU coach Horn opts for S. Carolina

A Western Kentucky University spokesman says basketball coach Darrin Horn plans to leave to coach at South Carolina. University spokesman Bob Edwards says Horn told the school's



Horn

president yesterday he had accepted an offer from the Gamecocks to replace Dave Odom, who retired at the end of the season. The 35-year-old Horn took Western Kentucky to the NCAA tournament regional semifinals this season. He is 111-48 in five seasons at his alma mater.

### SOCCER

#### ■ Mexico fires Sanchez after disappointments

Hugo Sanchez was fired as coach of Mexico's soccer team yesterday, two weeks after El Tri was eliminated from Olympic qualifying.



Sanchez

The Mexican soccer federation fired Sanchez 16 months after he took the job amid promises of regional titles and an Olympic medal. The failure to qualify for Beijing is particularly stinging for Mexican players of this generation, who won the Under-17 World Cup in Peru in 2005 and reached the quarterfinals at the Under-20 World Cup in Canada last year. Also tarnishing Sanchez's 33-game coaching tenure was Mexico's loss last year to the United States in the CONCACAF Gold Cup final.

### MLB

#### ■ Zambrano leaves Cubs game with cramp

Chicago Cubs ace Carlos Zambrano left yesterday's opener against the Milwaukee Brewers in the seventh inning with a cramp in his right forearm, right after making a pickoff throw to second base. Milwaukee's Bill Hall hit a one-out double in the seventh, moments after Zambrano made a catch of Ryan Braun's pop up near the mound and had his feet cut out from under him by Cubs first baseman Derrek Lee, who was sliding. Zambrano was not injured on that play. But minutes later, he picked Hall off second base and then grabbed at his right arm. (AP)



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