

Con Ed takes Islanders out to the ball game

■ More than 2,000 youngsters enjoy Staten Island Night at Yankee Stadium

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At Yankee Stadium, Staten Islanders ruled the stands.

More than 2,000 of the Island's youth from more than 20 non-profit organizations filled the left-field bleachers during Friday night's Yankee game in celebration of Staten Island Night at Yankee Stadium.

The kids, along with 400 adult chaperones and other Islanders attended the Yankees-Tampa Bay Devil Rays game as part of Con Edison's Hall of Fame baseball program.

The program provides free tickets to the Staten Island community for one Yankee game annually and to community-based non-profit organizations for as many as seven games each season. During Friday's game, the bleacher seats not given to the kids and their chaperones were allotted to any Islander on a first come, first serve basis.

During an on-field ceremony before the game, Jerry Cammarata, Commissioner of the city Department of Youth and Community Development, along with Rory Harris, a sixth-grader at St. Paul's School, New Brighton, who was chosen Con Edison's "Yankee Kid," proclaimed June 29 as "Staten Island Night at Yankee Stadium." The proclamation was presented to Saddle Smith, a vice president of Con Edison on Staten Island.

"Our children are our most important natural resource," Ms. Smith said. "We want to give children who wouldn't normally have the opportunity to watch a major league game the chance to see the league's best in action," she said.

Rory, who was nominated as a Yankee Kid based on his leadership, scholarship and sportsmanship, was excited about his honor.

"It's cool. It was exciting, but I was a little nervous," said the West Brighton resident.



As part of an on-field ceremony, Jerry Cammarata, left, Commissioner of the city Department of Youth and Community Development; Rory Harris, who was selected as the Staten Island Yankee Kid, and Saddle Smith, from Con Ed, proclaim Friday as Staten Island Night at Yankee Stadium.

"I'm real proud, and so is his mom," said Rory's dad, Joseph Harris. He explained how his son came to win the contest two years in a row. "He's got an A average, he's an altar server, he's in the church choir, he helps at a food pantry. He's an overall good kid."

A bunch of overall good kids were having an overall good time as they enjoyed the game which ended in a Yankee victory.

"We're having the best time," said Jill Arrabito, 15, of New Dorp.

"I like the Yankees. They're the best team to ever play," said Joseph Gorman, 12, of Grant City. "I'm a 100 percent Yankee fan. They're the best in the world." Gorman and his friend, Robert Casey, received autographed balls during the game.

"It's their first Yankee game," said Thomas Delahanty of New Dorp, speaking about his two children, Jennifer, 10, and Thomas, Jr., 8. "Roger Clemens is pitching a shut out. It's the way we like it," he said. "It's awesome," Jennifer agreed.

Also in the crowd was Paul Ambrosino, of Richmond, who was celebrating turning 12 with his friends Anthony Careccia, 12, Steven Gardella, 11; and Giuseppe Conte, 12; all of Dongan Hills. "It's a great birthday present," he said. "They're having a great time,"

said Paul's mother, Susan Ambrosino.

"I came all the way from Staten Island to watch the Yankees, and I'm very happy to be here," said Benny Gjonbalaj, 11, of Silver Lake. "I want to see Derek Jeter hit a home run. I want to meet Jorge Posada because I'm a catcher, too, and he's my idol."

"One of the reasons why we have run this program for the last 34 years is because of our commitment to the youth of our city," said Mark Irving, a spokesman for Con Edison. "I believe competitive sports are character building, and they add to kids' understanding of the importance of being good citizens. It helps them understand the spirit of good sportsmanship and healthy competition," he said.

Among the organizations with members who attended the game were: Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Services Organization; the Police Athletic League; the Boy Scouts; Mission of the Immaculate Virgin at Mount Loretto; Boy's Hope; Project Hospitality; United Activities Unlimited; St. Theresa's R.C. Church, Castleton Corners; New York Foundling Hospital; Staten Island Mental Health Society; 120th precinct; and the New York City Department of Youth and Community Services.