

Pedro pitches in ALS fight

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Sox great on hill to support friend

By KAT HASENAUER CORNETTA

As Pedro Martinez warmed up in the bullpen at St. Peter's Field in advance of last night's Old-time Baseball Game, the crowd hung on his every move with awe.

"Let's get the radar gun!" yelled a boy pressing his face up against the chain-link fence.

"They aren't going to be able to hit that," called out another fan.

Martinez grinned the entire time, digging into the dirt and getting back into competitive mode.

The Hall of Famer found himself back on the mound for a great cause: NESN cameraman John Martin, who is battling ALS. This 24th edition of Abbot Financial Management Oldtime Baseball Game raised funds for the John Martin Fund and the ALS Therapy Development Institute.

For Martinez, the decision to play was easy. Martin's devotion to his job created a strong rapport between him and the players he covered.

"This is a guy that was always recording the stuff we didn't want to be recorded," said Martinez. "You saw him around the corner, recording. He was always right behind us. And he is a great guy."

The bond between the two was so strong that Martinez drove Martin to the field. As he approached Martin's house, Martinez found himself with something he didn't experience much on the mound: Nerves.

"I didn't know what I was going to find," said Martinez. "As soon as I looked out the window, I saw that big bright smile."

The smile didn't leave Martin's face all night, not even when throngs of reporters surrounded him as he got out of Pedro's car, not even when he spoke about his plight. Even though it didn't seem possible, that smile got even bigger as dozens of "angels in the outfield," players from the South End Little League Martin's worked with for over 30 years, ran toward the pitcher's mound pregame with a \$10,000 check.

Martin is approaching his fight with ALS with the same attitude Martinez used toward batters.

"I'm not going to sit around and boo-hoo about it," said Martin. "Anyone who knows me knows I'm not going to. We're fighting, we're working hard and we're doing the best we can."

After Martin and Martinez arrived, both donned old-time woolen Red Sox uniforms. "Now I know how Babe felt!" Martinez bellowed.

After the pregame pomp and circumstance, Martinez shook hands with former Sox teammate and WEEI host Lou Merloni and took the mound. That competitive spirit came flooding back.

"Once you get to the mound, everything comes back," said Martinez.

He struck out the first three batters he faced, and added a couple of breaking balls and cutters in his second and final inning of work. In between, Martinez even took an at bat, hitting a pop up.

Returning to the field was just one of the night's highlights for Martinez. Spending time with his old friend Martin was the other.

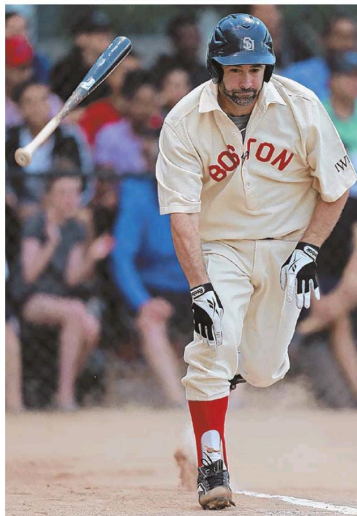
"You would never know he is going through what he is going through," said Martinez. "We can only imagine."

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A GRAND NIGHT: Pedro Martinez (above) was the main attraction at last night's annual Old-time Baseball Game, which benefited former NESN cameraman John Martin (right) in his battle with ALS, but there was plenty more to see at St. Peter's Field. Below, Lou Merloni flips his bat on the way to first. Below right, Gordie Gronkowski goofs off with some fans.

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