GOTHAM HAS DOMINATED US IN CULTURE AND FINANCE (DON’T GET US STARTED ON BASEBALL). AND NOW IT’S CHASING THE THING WE DO BEST. CAN WE TURN OUR LUCK AROUND BEFORE IT’S TOO LATE? By NEIL SWIDGEY
NEW YORK VS. BOSTON THE END-GAME

By NEIL SWIDEY
SO LONG, SUCKERS!

If you groaned when you learned the subject of this story, I have a confession for you. So did I.

Trust me when I tell you I have even less interest in writing a stale story about the Red Sox-Yankees rivalry than you have in reading one. That’s especially true this year, when the Opening Day orgasm of self-congratulation over Fenway’s centennial has been followed by the team’s basement dwelling in the standings and lineups cobbled together with enough unfamiliar names to make fans worry they’d accidentally driven to Pawtucket.

But after I stopped groaning, I realized that wasn’t the story my editors were looking for at all. Instead, they wanted the answer to a basic question about the rivalry between Boston and New York: Where did all this nonsense begin? I knew the roots of squabbling between these sibling cities stretched back a lot further than baseball. But as a history buff who has lived in Massachusetts my whole life, with the exception of a three-year sentence in New York, I was embarrassed to admit I couldn’t offer anything better than that.

That realization triggered more questions in my mind. If Boston was once the undisputed hub of the New World (though, let’s be serious, never the universe), when, exactly, did New York win? At what point did Gotham’s ascendancy create an unbridgeable gap?

Beneath this trivia from Boston’s past there are weighty questions lurking about our present and future. For as much as the rivalry seems hopelessly lopsided, I knew there had to be a few areas of actual parity between branch-town Boston and the metropolis 200 miles to our south. So I began hunting for the turf that both sides are fighting over today and aggressively angling for advantage with when it comes to tomorrow.
My journey for answers would take me down into the dusty bowels of library archives and into a gondola high above the East River. It would take me to Roosevelt Island and a decrepit hospital that offers priceless views of the United Nations and the Chrysler Building. It would take me into an MIT auditorium where a professor’s insider cracks about a computer platform—“I’d be remiss if I didn’t dump on Hadoop”—prompted big, knowing laughs from the crowd of laptop-tappers that contrasted with the bewildered look playing over my face. And, yes, my journey would take me, briefly, to Fenway Park, to nosebleed bleacher seats inhabited by a pair of New York characters so memorable you’ll simultaneously want to grab a beer with them and hope your paths never cross.

If the sibling metaphor for the two cities endures and if we’re being honest, New York has to inhabit the role of the strapping guy with a mean outstretched to hold his annoying little brother at bay by the neck, ignoring the pipsqueak’s squawking while scanning the room for more interesting people to hang out with. In what universe could a city of 8.2 million preoccupied souls be expected to fixate on Boston, an outpost of just 625,000, making it smaller than Charlotte, Columbus, and even hollowed-out Detroit?

That’s a hard reality for us to face in Boston, especially on weekends like this one, when the Sox face off against the Yankees and we assume that New Yorkers, like us, have been thinking about little besides the rivalry since our last encounter. The whole relationship reminds me of that years-long stretch when David Letterman devoted endless airtime to wondering why Oprah loathed him. Then one day, her proxy, Dr. Phil, came on the show and broke it to Letterman that she almost never mentioned him. “You wouldn’t worry so much what people think of you,” the cleaned-up doctor drawled, “if you knew how seldom people to hang out with. In what universe could a city of 8.2 million preoccupied souls be expected to fixate on Boston, an outpost of just 625,000, making it smaller than Charlotte, Columbus, and even hollowed-out Detroit?

Still, while New Yorkers are hardly obsessed with Bostonians, they do look over their shoulders more often than they would care to admit. That’s because every time Boston has been written off, left for dead as the petrified province of Puritans, this city has managed to claw its way back to challenge New York—not for overall hegemony, of course, but for dominance in one important realm or another.

Consider this current example. We Bostonians take pride in our identity as College Town, USA, the egghead capital of the nation, anchored by Harvard and MIT and fortified with a host of other competitive universities that would dominate their regions if they were located anywhere but here. On that score, New York has nothing on us, right? Actually, that’s wrong. When I ask Mayor Michael Bloomberg to reflect on this Boston-area advantage, the data-driven Medford native returns a hard volley through his aide: “New York has more college students than Boston has people.”

And here’s the sobering part of Bloomberg’s huffy dismissal: He’s right. While Boston can claim the highest percentage of college students in the country, when you look at the raw numbers, it isn’t even close. New York has 664,114 college students, according to a 2010 Census study, well more than Boston has people.

Yet beneath Bloomberg’s bluster there is evidence of a strand of genuine rivalry. After all, if Boston’s higher-education presence poses so little threat to New York, why is Bloomberg, in the urban-development equivalent of a Steinbrenner maneuver, now dumping so much money into something this region already has? According to his plan, that decrepit hospital on Roosevelt Island will soon be torn down to make way for a new tech-focused graduate school that, in many ways, will be built in the image of MIT.

Not only did this rivalry exist before there was a club known as the Red Sox, or even a sport known as baseball, it existed before there was a thing known as Boston or New York.

In 1627, just seven years after the Mayflower landed in Plymouth, the Pilgrim settlers received a visitor from New Amsterdam, the new Dutch settlement on Manhattan. The messenger bore a rundle of sugar and two Holland cheeses. It was a peace offering intended to smooth over a land-claim dispute that the heads of the two colonies had been contesting in writing. Conflicts were all but inevitable: The Dutch were adventurous travelers in search of beaver and otter, and like the New Yorkers who would follow them, aggressive traders; the Pilgrims were a proud bunch. The jostling with the Dutch continued after the Puritans established the future Boston on Shawmut Peninsula in 1630, and even after Britain conquered the Netherlands in 1664 and absorbed the territory we now know as New York.

As they grew as ports, Boston and New York continued to reflect the profoundly different styles of their founders. The Puritans were a homogeneous lot who distrusted outsiders, stressed prudence and probity, and generally avoided doing any business on Tuesday that might prove embarrassing in the church pew on Sunday. (You can still find traces of the best of that Puritan rectitude in Boston businesses like Fidelity.)

The Dutch, meanwhile, had a dodgier business reputation but were a tolerant gang who didn’t give a hoot about where you went to church, so long as you had money in your pocket that could make its way into theirs.

Through most of the 1700s, Boston dominated in commerce and influence, remaining the largest city in the Colonies. “As long as the Atlantic was our front yard, we did well in Boston,” says William Fowler, a Northeastern University professor and former director of the Massachusetts Historical Society. “We
By the early 1840s, Massachusetts had built 1,200 miles of railroad to New York’s 12. By connecting to other lines, Boston would become “the first true railroad hub in the world.”

Boston would become what Eric Jaffe calls in his book *The King’s Best Highway*, “the first true railroad hub in the world.” During a dark period of threatened obsolescence, Boston had engineered a Lazarus moment.

Suddenly, New Yorkers were the ones feeling threatened. In declining an invitation from Massachusetts to attend the opening of a railroad line in 1851, the governor of New York wrote, “We have seen you invading our soil, filling our valleys, boring our mountains at some points, leveling them at others, and turning your steam engines loose upon us to run up and down, roaming at large throughout our borders… I must warn you to pause and take breath before making fresh tracks upon our territory.”

Yet New York quickly caught up, as it tends to. Even before the Civil War, Fowler says, “New York’s economic advantage had become insurmountable.” In turn, Bostonians, as they had before and would again, focused on more discrete areas in which they might dominate. The Brahmin elite built civic institutions that highlighted the sophistication and intellectual substance that the city had long cultivated as the “Athens of America”: libraries, social clubs, lecture societies, literary magazines such as *The Atlantic Monthly*, hospitals, and museums. It is a piece of local pride that the Dream Team of writers who called Boston home during this period—Emerson, Longfellow, Holmes, and Hawthorne—continues to dominate high school reading lists today.

Even in this advantage, however, Boston eventually had to bow to the magnet pull of New York’s resources. In 1888, one of the most noted writers of his time, William Dean Howells, moved from Boston for New York. That, says Kenneth Jackson, a Columbia history professor and former president of the New-York Historical Society, became a sort of cultural tipping point. There was simply too much action—and money—in New York for even the Boston Athenians to resist. By 1900, Jackson points out, New York had become the second largest city in the world, behind only London, and nearly half of the millionaires in the United
States lived there.

By the dawn of the 20th century, it was clear that Boston was no longer able to pose meaningful competition with New York, which had turned its wary eyes to rapidly growing Chicago. And that's when Boston found a new outlet for its old rivalry: the baseball diamond.

A HOUSE DIVIDED CAN STILL STAND  Kate and Paul Balog manage to make their marriage work, despite warring sports allegiances.

K, HERE'S THE ONLY THING I want to know about the Sox-Yankees rivalry: Do they care about it half as much as we do?

Not long ago, I find myself idling at a red light in a leafy Boston suburb behind a guy in a gleaming convertible Volvo. The top is down, so I get a good look at him. He's on the phone, robustly gesturing with his free hand. He's wearing a nice watch and a nice shirt. If I had to guess, I'd peg him as some kind of executive. When the light changes and he pulls away, I see his Mass. license plate: BEAT-NY. Somehow I have trouble imagining a businessman in Scarsdale with BEAT-BOS tags on his Benz.

I know the April 20 extravaganza marking Fenway's actual 100th anniversary is not the right time to go looking for answers. Too august a day. Then again, it's oddly reassuring to be watching on TV and hear the boos cascade through the crowd when the announcer intones, “It was 100 years ago, on this very date, at this very hour, on this very field that the Boston Red Sox were preparing to play Fenway Park’s first major league game, against the New York Highlanders who, one year later, became the New York Yankees.” Yankees-hating doesn’t know from august. It's somehow equally reassuring to see the New York Post’s headline the morning after the Yankees’ 6-2 romp: “100 Years of Ass Kicking.” (This is usually the part of the story where I’d have to mention that the New York Times Co. is a part owner of the Sox, but the big bosses recently sold their shares. They still own the Globe, though.)

Instead, I choose to visit during Game 2 of the series. On the Green Line ride to the afternoon face-off, I spot a big guy sitting with his arm around a woman. He's wearing a Yankees T-shirt. She's wearing a Red Sox jersey. I sit down next to them and ask, “So how does this work?”

Pretty well, as it turns out. Paul and Kate Balog live with their two kids in Rocky Hill, Connecticut, which sits on that state's dividing line between Red Sox Nation and Yankees Country. Local cable there comes with both NESN and the YES networks. When I ask Paul if New Yorkers take the rivalry as seriously as Bostonians, the 42-year-old says Yankees fans aren't rude to Kurt, Pete says, but he's not so lucky — a woman once yelled at him, “I should spit on you!” He and Kurt also attend a game at Yankee Stadium every season. When he calls the parks to line up handicapped-accessible seats, he says, the Red Sox are always a lot more accommodating.

Through the fifth inning, the Sox fans seem to be treating the pin stripes in the stands more as curiosities than threats. It's easy to do that when you're up 9-0. But then the Yankees get on the board in the sixth and build up explosive momentum in the seventh, and suddenly the future feels as predictable as the bah-bah-bah chorus in “Sweet Caroline.”

I decide to take in this gathering storm of ugliness from the worst seats in the house. I climb the stairs in section 37 of the bleachers, heading for the last row. The afternoon heat has been displaced by a cool wind, which makes the media badge hanging around my neck flap in the air. Then I hear a loud, aggrieved voice: “Media? What the eff are you doing up here?” (Of course, he doesn't actually say eff but rather the 100-proof version of the expletive.) I turn to see a beefy guy wearing a chin-strap beard, a New York Giants cap, and an outrageous shirt emblazoned with images of Mariano Rivera on the front and back.

His name is Frankie Pomilla. He's 32 and works in construction. He tells me he's from the Bronx, though I knew that as soon as he began talking. He'd driven to Boston that morning with his buddy Phil Alberga, the guy sitting next to him wearing a Jeter T and Yankees hat. When I ask Frankie why he's wearing a Giants cap, he laughs. “Just in case anybody here wants to forget what happened in the Super Bowl.”

It's unlikely anyone could miss Frankie's Yankees bona fides. He flicks his left pinkie in my face to reveal a tattoo with the team's NY logo. Tattoos,
Frankie’s had a few. There’s a giant skull on his left forearm, and his right arm is fully sleeved with images of menacing clouds, Saint Francis, Jesus, and Marlon Brando. After we’ve been talking for a while, he turns to his buddy and asks, “Should we show them to him?” Phil shrugs. Then Frankie pulls down his lower lip to reveal two words permanently inked inside. Eff you. Phil follows suit, to show off his companion tattoo. Eff off. (Again, picture the 100-proof version.)

I notice the ring of empty seats around them, an odd sight for a game that was an authentic, non-asterisked Fenway sellout. Frankie confirms that he had something to do with that. “One guy came up to me and said, ‘I don’t like you cursing in front of my kid’ ” and then took off. “I said, ‘Eff you! He’s hearing it in school already.’”

In the seventh, when Mark Teixeira follows up an earlier solo homer and a Nick Swisher grand slam with a three-run blast, Frankie and Phil spring up. Banging on the empty seats in front of them, they begin chanting, “Let’s go, Yankees!” A doughy guy in an Ortiz shirt a few rows in front of them turns around and gives them the finger.

You can see the ecstasy flash in their eyes. “Eff you!” Frankie yells.

The Sox fan offers up another pegged finger. “You’re just mad you blew a effin’ lead,” Phil shouts. “Come up here!”

The doughy guy’s girlfriend wisely intervenes, wrapping an arm around her man to pull him back down into his seat. He registers a mild protest but mainly looks relieved.

Frankie looks disappointed. For more than a decade, he’s been coming to Fenway at least once a year to take in a Yankees-Sox showdown. More than a few of those game days ended with the police pulling him aside, but Frankie says the fights have become a lot less common. “Since the Red Sox won in 2004,” he says, “Boston fans have become soft.”

I ask if they plan to stay over. “Nah,” Frankie says, “four hours up, four hours back. If we lose, we go straight home. If we win, we go and party.”

As Bobby Valentine heads out to the mound during the eighth to make yet another pitching change, he’s greeted by the loudest boos of the day, courtesy of his team’s own fans. With his rapidly whitening hair and still-dark eyebrows, Valentine looks like a walking black and white cookie. He appears to have aged eight years in eight innings. The Yankees have turned a 9-0 deficit into a 12-9 lead, and they’re hardly done. But many Sox fans have seen enough.

“Look at all the Red Sox fans leaving!” Phil says, jabbing his pointer in the air.

**ENEMIES AMONG US**

Superfans (top)
Phil Alberga, left, and Frankie Pomilla during the Yankees 15-9 rout of the Sox on April 21; (above) the view from the field.

**When I ask Frankie why he’s wearing a Giants cap, he laughs. “Just in case anybody here wants to forget what happened in the Super Bowl.”**
Huttenlocher is the vice provost and founding dean of Cornell University’s new tech graduate school planned for Roosevelt Island, the narrow band of land that sits in the East River, just outside Manhattan and just under the Queensboro Bridge. Construction on that campus, on the 10 acres now occupied by the tired Goldwater Hospital campus, will begin in two years, with a planned opening in 2017. By 2037, the goal is 2 million-plus square feet of campus buildings hosting 280 faculty members and 2,500 students.

But the timetable for this CornellNYC Tech enterprise—a partnership between Cornell and the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology—is even more aggressive than that, since the new grad school will begin offering classes this fall. Huttenlocher isn’t bothering to unpack because he’s soon moving to space that Google is donating to the school in its Eighth Avenue building, also home to its largest office outside of the Mountain View, California, headquarters.

The Google gift is fitting, since Huttenlocher’s charge is to help New York close the yawning tech-sector gap between it and Silicon Valley. To do that, New York first must get past Boston, which has long been the Avis of the tech sector, perpetually second to the Bay Area’s Hertz.

Boston is already feeling the heat. In the first quarter of this year, according to Dow Jones, Silicon Valley captured about a third of all venture capital investment, while Boston snared 17 percent. Right on its heels, though, was New York City, with 15 percent. Statewide comparisons for venture capital investments in Massachusetts and New York over the past five quarters, compiled by industry tracker CB Insights, show that New York has already closed much of Massachusetts’s long-established lead, and has even passed the Bay State in the category of total new Internet companies funded.

Of course, given the difference in population, New York City should be posting figures that are more than 10 times Boston’s. Still, the trend line is a clear and worrisome one for Boston. In going hard after new tech business, New York is summoning its inner Dutchman. Once again, it’s a city on the make.

Why the push? For starters, there is a shortage of engineers in New York. (Who knew New York could have a shortage of anything except space and quiet?) Huttenlocher, who served as the computer science dean at Cornell’s main campus in Ithaca before being tapped for the Roosevelt Island job, says that even in these recessionary times, Cornell’s computer science majors have their pick of job offers—many from California—with starting salaries of $80,000 to $100,000.

There’s also the strong sense that Bloomberg, who we know dabbled a bit in finance before entering politics, realizes his city’s economy has become way too reliant on Wall Street, and the outlook for those jobs has become dimmer. So this appears to be Bloomberg’s play for the future, and one in which his decision to pony up the city-owned land on Roosevelt Island and $100 million for infrastructure improvements may well prove, like so many of his investments, to have been a wise one.

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So this appears to be Bloomberg’s play for the future, and one in which his decision to pony up the city-owned land on Roosevelt Island and $100 million for infrastructure improvements may well prove, like so many of his investments, to have been a wise one.

Stanford, with its Silicon Valley imprimatur, appeared to be the odds-on favorite. But relations between that university and the Bloomberg administration soured, creating an opening for Cornell. It didn’t hurt that Cornell is also an Ivy League school with a highly respected computer science program and that it had just received a $350 million donation from its own superstar investor, Charles Feeney, the quirky billionaire co-founder of Duty Free Shoppers who is known for wearing a $15 watch and flying coach.

Huttenlocher says that what he and Bloomberg’s team most want to create in New York is an “ecosystem” in which higher ed and the high-tech industry work together, fostering innovation. That’s what they have in Palo Alto, and it’s what we have in the Boston/Cambridge/Route 128 belt. Huttenlocher understands the competition particularly well. He logged time working in California and spent part of his childhood in the Boston area, as well as most of the '80s, when he was earning his master’s and PhD from MIT.

When you walk around Roosevelt Island today, amid the knee-high grass and the peeling paint of that sad, ailing hospital, it’s hard to picture this place ever competing with the brain-fueled
dynamism of shiny Kendall Square. Then again, it wasn’t that long ago that Kendall Square, having seen its hopes for becoming a NASA center die with President Kennedy in Dallas, looked like a wasteland. Besides, Roosevelt Island has a lot going for it, including easy subway access on the F train to a metropolis throbbing with both commerce and nightlife.

A less convenient, though more scenic, route to the island from Manhattan is the red gondola-style tram that runs parallel to the Queensboro Bridge. On the morning I ride it, a throng of excited preschoolers on a field trip crowds one side, pressing faces against the glass as the tram sways in the wind while drifting from the high-rises of midtown. I can’t help but wonder how much ground this Roosevelt Island campus, and New York, will have managed to cover by the time these preschoolers hit grad school.

In his office, Huttenlocher had told me that he saw MIT’s Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory (CSAIL) as an important model of excellence for what he was trying to build. So a few weeks after our meeting, I attend CSAIL’s annual meeting at MIT’s palace of forced architectural funkiness, the Stata Center.

Representatives from 40 tech and engineering powerhouse companies such as Cisco and Lockheed Martin sit in an auditorium, listening to MIT researchers serve as tour guides for the future. The focus of this session is “big data,” a growth area for Boston involving the storage and analysis of massive amounts of digital information. One presenter (the guy who dumped on that thing called Hadoop) predicts that all insurance companies will eventually tie premiums to driving-behavior data they receive from wireless devices planted in our cars. Another speaker explains that for effective treatment, heart patients will need to be monitored by EKG for hours or even days, rather than minutes. The MIT team showcases its latest and greatest ways of making all this unwieldy data somehow wieldy.

By supporting CSAIL financially and otherwise as industry partners, these companies get access to the brightest minds that can help them see around corners and perhaps eventually build their market share. They also get fascinating insights into how the world is really working—and, in some cases, not working. In his talk, veteran MIT computer science professor John Guttag offers this tidbit from his new research in the medical field: At one hospital he visited, “about a third of the lab tests are never picked up by the physicians who ordered them.”

Later, I catch up to Guttag in his office to hear more. It’s not that the doctors are lazy or purposefully wasteful, he says. It’s more that they suffer from information overload. Based on the vast amount of data that is now available but too “messy” to allow for sound interpretation, Guttag offers a surprising prediction: “Computer science is going to have more of an impact on medicine in the next two decades than biology.”

Guttag, a 63-year-old native New Yorker, has spent the last three decades at MIT, and he admits that he worries about this region’s tech future. “Boston has a lesson to learn from the computer business,” he says, invoking the ghost of Digital Equipment Corp., the once-leading computer maker that was overtaken by smaller, more agile rivals. With Digital and Wang Laboratories, he says, “we went from dominant to also-ran to nonexistent.” And he sees a similar threat from Bloomberg country. After all, New York isn’t trying simply to copy Boston’s model; it needs to improve on it for a shot at catching Silicon Valley.

“New York can’t be ignored,” he says. While that city is full of up-and-comers itching to make their mark in venture capital, he says, many in Boston’s community have reached the middle or late stages of their careers and are “not as driven as they once were.” Boston’s venture capital gang sounds a bit like the Brahmins of Boston’s past, agents of the establishment interested in maintaining their place rather than agents of disruption looking to remake the landscape.

One other troubling echo of Boston’s past: a lack of diversity. In this case, we’re not talking about the anti-outsider homogeneity of the Puritans, but rather the homogeneity of Boston’s tech sector. Boston has gone all in on biotech and other life sciences. Guttag and Huttenlocher both say the city could come to regret this over-reliance, just as New York has come to question its all-in bet on finance.

Although Boston still holds a slight advantage in some important tech areas, it’s all beginning to feel like one of those excruciating baseball seasons where Sox fans high-five each other from April through July, only to see the Yankees overtake them in August.

Back in New York, Huttenlocher had stressed to me that the tech relationship with Boston doesn’t necessarily have to go the way of the baseball rivalry. “What we’re doing in New York could help Boston in high tech,” he says, “by creating a critical mass in this corridor to compete with the Bay Area.”

Just imagine it: Boston and New York working together to defeat a common enemy.

What are the chances? Well, Oprah did eventually ease herself into Letterman’s guest chair. Still, some forces are bigger than celebrity egos. Boston and New York teaming up? I wouldn’t wager a rundown of sugar on it.

**NEW YORK VS. BOSTON**

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