

## Forgotten Hero

(Ex-Met player turned NYPD, Stanley Jefferson)

**By WAYNE COFFEY**  
DAILY NEWS SPORTS WRITER |  
MAR 09, 2007 AT 8:34 PM

Four flights up in Co-Op City, at the end of a hallway in Building 26, the big man sits in a big brown recliner, boxed in by four walls and demons and an emptiness that doesn't end. If only it did. If only it were finite, measurable, like the outfields of Yankee Stadium and Shea Stadium, or the other big-league parks he once called home.

Then Stanley Jefferson might be able to know exactly what he's dealing with. Then he might be able to go outside, go to work, maybe share the things he still believes he has to give, and begin to pick up the shards of a life that sometimes seems broken beyond recognition.

It is early in a late-winter afternoon. In Florida the Mets and Yankees are playing their first spring-training games, the sense of renewal as palpable as the palm trees. In Building 26 in the Bronx, the feeling is different, and has been ever since Sept. 11, 2001. Stanley Jefferson, former big-league ballplayer and former New York City police officer, and one of the greatest schoolboy players the city has ever produced, has the remote in his hand, and his beloved Yorkshire terrier, Rocky, on his lap. His wife, Christie, is off at her job at a social-services agency in Westchester. The apartment is crammed with a sectional sofa and a desk and exercise machines that sit unused. Against one wall is a big fish tank. All the fish are dead. Against another is a big-screen television, where Jefferson plays his video games, and watches his comedies, laugh tracks sounding as days pass into weeks, and weeks into months.

"Raymond," "Family Guy," "Two and a Half Men," Stanley Jefferson likes them all.

# DAILY NEWS

"They keep my spirits up, rather than crying or brooding," he says. A faint smile crosses his broad, goateed face. The spirits do not stay up for long.

Fifteen years after his baseball career ended with a ruptured Achilles, two years after his police career ended when the department declared him unfit for duty, 44-year-old Stanley Jefferson, former shield No. 14299 and former uniform No. 13, wrangles with the NYPD over his disability benefit, and with a much more debilitating enemy: the ravages of post-traumatic stress disorder. It is a condition that the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, a division of the U.S. Dept. of Veteran Affairs, defines as "an anxiety disorder that can occur following the experience or witnessing of a traumatic event." For Jefferson, it has spawned everything from agoraphobia to panic attacks to immobilizing depression to recurring nightmares - one in which he is tormented by a ball of fire reminiscent of the explosion he witnessed when the second plane flew into the second tower a few minutes after 9 a.m. on 9/11, another in which he desperately tries to save a people in peril, but never manages to reach them.

Once, in 1983, Jefferson was a first-round draft choice of the Mets (taken one slot after the Red Sox selected a pitcher named Clemens), a blindingly fast, 5-11, 175-pound center fielder out of Truman High School, and Bethune-Cookman College in Daytona Beach. He still might be the fastest player the organization has ever had. He was clocked running a 4.27 40 on a wet track during his Met tryout, and was timed at 3.0 from home to first in college. He had some 120 steals in his first three minor-league seasons, and hit an inside-the-park grand slam. Now he is 255 pounds and speeding nowhere.

He leaves the apartment about only twice a week, and even then it's only if he feels safe, if he's meeting someone close to him, such as Steve Bradstetter, 40, a Long Island businessman who is perhaps his closest friend.

"I have no life," Jefferson says, in a flat, baritone voice. "I've screwed up a lot of days." He pauses. He wrings his hands, something he does often. "I always thought this was something that would pass. I thought I could overcome anything, because that's just my athletic mentality. I'm ashamed because I never thought that something like this could happen to me."

# DAILY NEWS

Says Christie, his wife of three years, "This is not the man I married."

\* \* \*

Even by the sculpted body standards of professional sports, Stanley Jefferson's physique - ropes of lean muscle on top of thick sprinter's legs - always stood out. When you saw him in motion, it stood out even more. Willie Daniels, 44, a childhood friend of Jefferson's from Co-Op City, played Little League with him, the two of them coached by Everod Jefferson, Stanley's father. They went to Truman High together and then to Bethune-Cookman. Daniels still marvels at the time Jefferson beat out a two-hopper to first against the University of Miami. In one college season, Jefferson stole 67 of 68 bases, getting caught only when his spikes got stuck on a wet track.

"I played with Devon White, Shawon Dunston, Walt Weiss, a lot of guys. Stanley is one of the best pure athletes I've ever seen," Daniels says.

The Mets did not disagree. Two years after he made his pro debut in the Single-A New York-Penn League and was the league's rookie of the year, Jefferson was one of the sensations of the club's training camp. The year was 1986, and seven months before Mookie Wilson and Bill Buckner would become odd baseball bedfellows, Davey Johnson was likening the 23-year-old Jefferson to Chili Davis. Steve Schryver, director of minor-league operations, saw him as a young Bake McBride. Jefferson hit .500 in the spring, and if not for GM Frank Cashen's reluctance to rush him, he probably would've made the team.

"How can you not love his future?" Rusty Staub said then. "You look at his skills and think 'leadoff man.' You think about 100 runs a season." Nor was he just a weapon at the top of the order. "If the ball is in the ballpark, Stanley Jefferson will catch it," said Joe McIlvaine, the future GM, envisioning Jefferson spending years alongside Darryl Strawberry.

Jefferson wound up fighting injuries most of the '86 season in Tidewater, struggling with a chronic wrist problem and a hamstring pull. Still, he got a September call-up, and picked up his first big-league hit off the Padres' Dave LaPoint. It was supposed to be just the beginning, before the performance of Lenny Dykstra and the lure of a star left fielder

# DAILY NEWS

induced the Mets to make Jefferson a key part of a winter deal that brought Kevin McReynolds to Flushing. Fourteen games wound up being the entirety of Jefferson's Met career.

Jefferson showed patches of promise in San Diego, stealing 34 bases in hitting eight homers and seven triples in 116 games, before a late-season slump left him with a .230 average. A natural righty who was converted into a switch-hitter by the Mets after he was drafted, Jefferson struggled from the left side, and wound up having trouble on his natural side, too. He had a run-in with manager Larry Bowa, and soon found himself on a journeyman's carousel, doing bits of time with the Yankees, Orioles, Indians and Reds before he tore his Achilles tendon while playing winter ball in Puerto Rico after the 1991 season. He says he had tendinitis for years, but played through it. It wouldn't be the last time Jefferson would ignore pain, try to push through it.

"Physically, athletically, I had all the tools. I didn't live up to those lofty expectations," Jefferson says.

With baseball behind him, Jefferson went to work as a warehouse manager of a lighting company in Mt. Vernon, then spent a couple of years coaching in the minor leagues with the Mets and an independent team in Butte, Mont. His larger goal, though, was to become a New York City police officer. "I always wanted to be a cop, a detective," Jefferson says. He took the exam, went through a battery of psychological and physical tests and was sworn in on Dec. 8, 1997. "He was the perfect package for what you look for in a police officer," says Eric Josey, one of his instructors in the Police Academy. Jefferson graduated in the spring of 1998, posed for a graduation picture with Mayor Giuliani and Commissioner Safir, then was assigned to the 14th Pct., Midtown South.

"I would always tell him, 'You got to live your dream twice,'" Willie Daniels says. "Most people don't even get to live their dream once."

For almost four years, police work was all Jefferson hoped it would be. Another Labor Day came and went. Kids went back to school. It was a dazzlingly beautiful late-summer morning. It was a Tuesday.

# DAILY NEWS

\* \* \*

Stanley Jefferson reported for work at 7:05 a.m. on Sept. 11, having flown all night on a red-eye after a family wedding in Seattle. Two hours later, in squad car 1726, he and his partner, Ed Kinloch, were at 6th Ave. and 38th St. They were eating breakfast. Jefferson, his muscled body built up to 210 pounds by regular trips to the gym, was having his usual bowl of oatmeal. A voice on the radio came on. It told of an explosion at the World Trade Center. They started heading downtown before being ordered to stop at Union Square. Jefferson and Kinloch got out of the car. Jefferson looked downtown and got his first glimpse of the remains of the first tower. He saw people jumping. He saw people waving towels, and more smoke than he'd ever seen in his life. He was still trying to fathom it when he watched the second plane rip right through the second tower. There was a ball of fire. It took a second or two for the sound of the horrific explosion to reach 14th St. Jefferson and Kinloch looked at each other.

"Oh, bleep," Kinloch said. "Did you see that?"

"We've got a problem here," Jefferson said.

They were told to stay around 14th St. Jefferson and Kinloch did what they could to help and direct people, and comfort them. "There was a lot of crying, a lot of hugging," Jefferson says. "You try to stay focused and do your job and not get caught up in people's emotions, but it's hard." A series of bomb threats followed. Jefferson worked until 9 p.m., and was back at Midtown South at 4 a.m., on the 12th. On Thursday and Friday, the 13th and 14th, Jefferson was at Ground Zero, according to his memo book. "World Trade Detail," he wrote. Each day, Jefferson worked a 12-hour shift - from 4 a.m. to 4 p.m., on the pile, on the bucket brigade, putting body parts in bags, the carnage seemingly endless, the beeping of the empty oxygen packs of departed firefighters a shrill symphony that never stopped. The packs and other equipment, most of it with burnt flesh attached, were thrown into a makeshift tent.

"It was the smell of death in there, a smell you never forget," Kinloch says.

# DAILY NEWS

Jefferson spent a number of other shifts around Ground Zero in the ensuing weeks, and by the end of the year, began to suffer from coughing spells and nightmares. He didn't think much of it at first, until his symptoms worsened in the spring of 2002, not long after he was transferred to the Internal Affairs Bureau (IAB), a move that he hoped would lead to a rapid promotion to detective. He started to experience periodic panic attacks, in which he would sweat profusely and feel his heart pounding as if it were a jackhammer. He also had trouble sleeping. While preparing reports for his IAB work, Jefferson says he began typing the same paragraph over and over.

"I didn't know what was happening," he says. He did his best not to think about it, hoping it would go away.

"I was in complete denial," Jefferson says. "I wanted to be a detective, period. I just wanted to fake it until I could make it."

Bradstetter began to wonder what was going on with his friend. He and Jefferson used to play golf all the time, but now Jefferson had no interest in it. He stopped working out, began gaining weight and found it harder and harder to leave the apartment. First, Jefferson would make excuses to Bradstetter. Later he opened up, just a little.

"I don't know what's wrong with me," Jefferson told him.

Jefferson's agoraphobia got progressively worse, and so did the panic attacks. His personal datebook shows 41 sick days in the first few months of 2003. Then, in March, days after he underwent an angiogram to correct a 30% blockage in his heart, Jefferson's mother died suddenly, and the combination of grief and the ongoing aftershocks of 9/11 sent him spiraling downward.

\* \* \*

To say that Jefferson feels betrayed by the police department he dreamed of being a part of is to grossly understate it. He believes that in his time of greatest need, he was treated with all the sensitivity of a pine-tar rag.

# DAILY NEWS

Perhaps the first major issue he had came down on June 23, 2003, just when his problems were deepening. Jefferson had a doctor's appointment and told his immediate supervisor, Sgt. Michael Dowd, about it when his shift started. A short time before Jefferson had to leave, Dowd requested that he finish up a case he was working on. Jefferson reminded him of his appointment. Dowd insisted that Jefferson do the work, and Jefferson refused to comply. In an incident report to Capt. Michael O'Keefe, Dowd said Jefferson was profane and belligerent, screaming, "Who the bleep do you think you are talking to?"

Jefferson, in a counter-complaint, says that Dowd was upset because he wanted to leave to play golf. Jefferson subsequently filed a discrimination lawsuit in federal court, a case that he settled out of court for \$50,000 last year.

Five days after the dispute with Dowd, Jefferson suffered a panic attack as he drove from Co-Op City to the IAB office on Hudson Street. His vision was blurry, his heart pounding. Sweat was pouring out of him. He pulled over and went to the Lenox Hill Emergency Room. Jefferson's bouts with panic - and fears he was having a heart attack - had made him such a regular at the ER in Our Lady of Mercy Hospital in Pelham that one technician gently told him he needed to stop coming. Now here he was in an ER again. He was terrified. He privately wondered when his troubles were going to end, and if he were going insane. He says his department superiors continually ignored his pleas - and the counsel of his therapist - to reduce his caseload and shift him from investigative to administrative work, an opinion that is backed up by Sgt. John Paolucci, another IAB officer who supported Jefferson in a letter to the department Medical Board.

"No consideration for his predicament was afforded him," Paolucci wrote, adding that the whole culture of the department tends to make anyone who is incapacitated an outcast. "Most will doubt the veracity of your illness and compassion is out of the question."

Police officials declined to address any specifics relating to Jefferson's case.

Not even 48 hours after his visit to Lenox Hill, Jefferson, of his own volition, went to the NYPD's Psychological Evaluation Unit in Queens. He had a two-hour intake meeting with a department therapist, Christie at his side. His two handguns were taken from him that day,



# DAILY NEWS

and have never been returned, Jefferson being deemed unfit for police work. He was transferred to the VIPER unit - the lowest level of police work, involving the monitoring of surveillance cameras. "It's the land of broken toys - where they send anyone with charges pending or a problem that makes them unable to work," Jefferson says.

On Nov. 8, 2004, the NYPD moved to place him on Ordinary Disability Retirement (ODR), based on a diagnosis of the department Medical Board of "major depressive disorder."

Jefferson later applied for Accidental Disability Retirement (ADR), on the grounds that his condition was triggered by his Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome in the wake of 9/11 - a diagnosis made separately by a social worker and a psychiatrist who have treated Jefferson.

The ODR amounts to \$1,400 monthly. An ADR - granted to officers mentally or physically incapacitated in the line of duty - would provide Jefferson with just under \$4,000 monthly, tax-free. The Medical Board and the Pension Board, citing reports by psychiatrists, social workers and an examination of Jefferson, said his mother's death and his heart problems were major triggers of his condition, and also mentioned the depressed feelings he had when his first wife and two daughters left him, in 1991. The Boards asserted that there was insufficient evidence to support a connection to 9/11 and Jefferson's problems - a finding upheld in State Supreme Court in Manhattan last October.

Said Carolyn Wolpert, deputy chief of the pensions division of the city law department, "The city is grateful to Stanley Jefferson for his almost eight years of service as a police officer. Due to medical issues, the Police Pension Fund retired Officer Jefferson with ordinary disability benefits . . . The New York County Supreme Court found that there was credible medical evidence to support the determination that the officer's disability was not caused by his World Trade Center assignment." Jeffrey L. Goldberg, a Lake Success, L.I.-based attorney representing Jefferson, is planning on filing a second application for ADR benefits for Jefferson. Only nine officers who responded to the World Trade Center attacks have been granted accidental disability benefits for psychological reasons, according to a police source. Goldberg believes it is all but a de facto administration policy. "Mayor Bloomberg considers accidental disability retirement a free lunch for a police officer like Stanley Jefferson," Goldberg says. "This is no free lunch. This is the real-life consequence



# DAILY NEWS

of an officer responding to a tragedy and an emergency. Stanley Jefferson is a hero. He should be aided, not discarded. Hopefully, the city will recognize that and support him as he tries to recover from a terribly serious medical condition."

\* \* \*

Last week was a good one for Stanley Jefferson. He made it to Goldberg's office, after canceling a series of previous appointments. His daughters, Nicole, 21, and Brittany, 19, came to visit from Virginia. He went for coffee at a bookstore near Co-Op City, and opened up about every aspect of his six-year ordeal: his shame, his vulnerability, his embarrassment over having such a hard time walking out of Building 26, being in the world.

"I know people can't understand it. I can't understand," he says. He talks about the medications he takes to ease his anxiety and his depression, and about the drinking binges - Grey Goose and cranberry - he used to go on to escape his pain. "It's what got me outside," Jefferson says. It also got him into full-blown rages, and a Westchester County treatment center last fall. He didn't want to talk when he got there, before he began to see that his therapist was right: the silent suffering was nothing but fuel for the demons.

"I can't let pride get in the way," Jefferson says.

Adds wife Christie, "I keep telling him he's got to forget all the machismo right now, and realize he's not the only one who has gone through this in his life, and work on taking care of himself." Steve Bradstetter, Jefferson's friend, will always be grateful to Jefferson for the way he responded when Bradstetter's mother died. It was February of 2000, and Jefferson accompanied Bradstetter on a drive to Massachusetts. "It was about the toughest circumstance I've ever had to deal with, and he was there for me," Bradstetter says. "He was like, 'We'll talk, we'll laugh, we'll try to make sense of it all.'"

Stanley Jefferson is a very different person than he was then. He is sad and often distant. When he and Bradstetter arrange to meet at a Dunkin' Donuts or a diner, Jefferson waits in

# DAILY NEWS

the car until he sees Bradstetter pull up. Only then does he feel safe enough to get out. Sometimes Bradstetter will see his friend start wringing his hands, see the beads of sweat running down his temple, his leg jiggling as it were stuck in full throttle. Bradstetter doesn't know what to say. "It's like his whole body is taken over by whatever issues he's dealing with." He offers what comfort he can. He knows the real Stanley is still in there.

Tomorrow afternoon, Stanley Jefferson is supposed to go to Dobbs Ferry to meet with Bill Sullivan, the Mercy College baseball coach. Jefferson finished his degree at Mercy while he was on the force. Sullivan has gotten to know him and like him, and would love to have him help out as a volunteer assistant.

"He would be such an asset for our program," Sullivan says.

From his big brown chair on the fourth floor, Jefferson looks out a window, toward his terrace and a barren Co-Op City courtyard. He talks about the things he has to share in the world, how maybe he can work with kids. He says helping out at Mercy would be a great start. Jefferson knows he can't cure his illness, but he can face it, and battle it. The towers may be down forever, and his days of getting to first in three seconds may be behind him. But who says the rebuilding of a life can't begin anew? Who says a 44-year-old man can't get back to first and second and third, and all the way back home, no matter how long it takes?

The big man leans back in his chair.