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## New Yankee stands to cash in on endorsements

By Laura Petrecca, USA TODAY

His trademark hair and beard are shorn, but marketing experts say that won't cut short Johnny Damon's chances of endorsement bucks as a New York Yankee.



Johnny Damon as a Yankee, left, and with the Red Sox.

By Julie Jacobson, AP/ Winslow Townson, AP

The once-scruffy Damon could be in prime position to catch significant deals as a pinstriped center fielder. He's a nationally known player — helping to lead the Boston Red Sox to a World Series victory — and has proved his mettle as a product endorser for the likes of Puma, DHL, Gillette and Dunkin' Donuts.

Now, playing in the center of the media universe, he'll have the opportunity to cash in even more, industry observers say. Jim Andrews, editorial director of the *IEG Sponsorship Report*, says that Damon's jump to the "biggest media market certainly moves him up the desirability scale."

And his fielding position certainly helps: "A center fielder for the Yankees gets a lot of exposure. That position was played by Mickey Mantle and Joe DiMaggio," says Terry Lefton, editor-at-large for the *Sports Business Journal*.

Damon is extremely comfortable mixing with fans, not just schmoozing with marketing executives, says Peter Caparis, who recently worked with Damon to secure endorsement deals. "You couldn't not be relaxed in his presence," he says.

This week, sport marketers are speculating on which advertisers will sign Damon now that he's officially a Yankee. Those guesses range from train and shuttle flights from Boston to the Big Apple (such as Amtrak and Delta) and grooming products to even local car dealers. "He likes cars and motorcycles, so a local dealership maybe," Caparis says. "But it would have to be a brand that's hip."

Damon will face competition from superstar teammates, such as Derek Jeter and Alex Rodriguez. "Fighting for marketing shelf space alongside Jeter and A-Rod may prove problematic if, over time, Damon is merely perceived as just another all-star player added to Steinbrenner's stable," says David Carter of The Sports Business Group.

Damon's agent says he'll hold his own. "Though he joins an already star-studded Yankee team, Johnny's personality, looks and, most of all, his hustling, all-out style of play will earn the respect of the New York fans, and certainly the eye of advertisers," says Steve Fortunato, vice president of Impact Sports Marketing, a Newport Beach, Calif., agency that represents Damon.

Early signs from marketers seem encouraging. Even though he's no longer in Boston, Canton, Mass.-based Dunkin' Donuts isn't ruling out renewing the deal that ended with the 2005 season. "We have a significant number of stores in the New York area," spokesman Andrew Mastrangelo says.

Lefton says it'll come down to: "How much does he want to do? He might want to come in and just play baseball."

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