

A monkey off Theo's back

By [Jeff Passan](#), Yahoo! Sports

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The most expensive gorilla suit in the world hangs in the window of Ace Ticket in Brookline, Mass.

When Jim Holzman plunked down \$11,000 for it at a January charity event in Boston, he was buying publicity for his broker business, sure, but more than that, he thought it was a down payment on good karma, if such things are for sale.

"Peter Gammons was on stage," Holzman said last week, "and he said if anybody bids \$5,000, he guarantees Theo will come back to the Red Sox. I was in then."

Theo is Theo Epstein, the second most famous person from Brookline – the first was named John Fitzgerald Kennedy – and he was the [Boston Red Sox's](#) general manager until Halloween last year, when he walked away from the team's offices in a King Kong costume.

For the next 80 days, Boston was paralyzed with fear that Theo was gone, and it illustrated the essence of Epstein: Not that the Red Sox hired him at 28 years old in 2002 to shepherd their franchise and not that two years later he brought them their first championship in 86 seasons and not that he might actually leave his dream job, but what he commanded by being himself.

By the time Epstein returned, he had maintained the unmitigated adoration of a city while securing the power of one of sports' renowned franchises in what the business world might have deemed a reverse takeover. And here he is, less than six months later, atop the org chart of the first-place team in the cutthroat American League East, ahead of the rival [New York Yankees](#), against whom the Red Sox begin a three-game series at Fenway Park tonight.

"After it passed \$10,000, it was going to take something," Holzman said. "Jon Papelbon is up on stage, and he said, 'C'mon, man, I'll give you the sweater off my back.' He took the sweater off, threw it across the room, hit me in the face. I knew I had to go \$11,000."

Holzman laughed.

"Theo's back," he said, "and I'd like to think we did our little part."

Jeff Passan is Yahoo! Sports' national baseball writer. Send him a [question or comment](#) for potential use in a future column or webcast.