

# Regrettable Professional Sports Promotions

Sports fans have never needed any extra incentive to go see their favorite team compete live. Often the spirit of competition, home town pride and family bonding experiences are reason enough to take your buddies out to the ball game. Too often however, team management believes that they need to offer "promotions" or hold "give-aways" in order to fill the seats that don't already hold die hard fans. Some of these promotions can be fun. After all, who doesn't enjoy a free bobble-head doll for the car dashboard? Unfortunately, some of these promotions that stadiums hold have been terrible ideas and met with utter disregard or, worse, lead to riots and trashing. Below are arguably some of the worst stadium promotions of all time:

## ***10 cent Beer Night: Cleveland Indians***

When I first saw this I bet I had the same reaction that you're having right now: "10 cent beers! That's awesome! Why is that on the li—OK yeah that's a terrible idea..."

If there's one thing people love, it's getting absolutely tanked at sporting events. Beer and baseball, in particular, have gone hand in hand since the game's inception.

The only thing stopping most fans from going from nicely buzzed to Gary Busey is the fact that stadium beers will run you anywhere from \$8 to \$25, depending on the size and make. When a fan is able to get 10 beers for a dollar, you're asking for trouble.



The Indians made this mistake in a game against the Texas Rangers in 1974 and the result was fighting in the stands, injuries to umpires, a naked male fan sprinting on the field, and one fan full of liquid courage even managing to snag the hat off of Rangers OF Jeff Burroughs' head.

This strategy might work for a fun night at the frat house, but at a ballpark a little bit of forethought would have revealed this idea as tragically illogical. Management would have done well to realize that that sports fans tend to get rowdy, drunk people tend get rowdy, and drunk sports fans tend to get really rowdy. Fans jumped onto the field to meet the players, flashed the cameras and mooned the bullpen. Later, when the game was tied and the people were even more intoxicated, the fans threw rocks, batteries, golf balls, chairs and various trash onto the field. There even came a point in all the mayhem that a group of attendees stole the glove off of the Rangers right fielder. After this single debacle, the American League president abrogated any similar promotions in the future, claiming "There was no question that beer played a great part in the affair."

Eventually the inevitable happened and the Indians were forced to forfeit the game.

## ***Disco Demolition Night: Chicago White Sox***

When you talk about bad promotions, you have to talk about Disco Demolition Night in 1979. The White Sox promotions team apparently decided that their doubleheader that day was the perfect time to eliminate disco from the city of Chicago.

Fans were encouraged to bring in any disco memorabilia they could and it would be destroyed throughout the games.

While a few awesome fans brought in platform shoes with goldfish in them, most people brought in disco records (if you're under 25-years-old, this is a record). The records quickly turned into projectile frisbees and the fans naturally started launching them onto the field.

The concept was a noble one: At Comiskey Park on Thursday, July 12, 1979, the Chicago White Sox and the Detroit Tigers were set to go head to head. In a poorly anticipated event organized by White Sox management, fans were encouraged to bring disco records they no longer wanted to the stadium in exchange for admission. During a break, the records were set to be thrown into a crate and blown up in center field.

White Sox management hoped that the event would draw about 5,000 people. Instead, a raucous crowd of 75,000 flooded the stadium, cramming it beyond capacity. The crowd drank, smoked lots of marijuana and quickly got the idea to start throwing their thousands of records like Frisbees down at the field. This act quickly turned into fans storming the field, throwing beer and firecrackers from the stands, and resulting in the last forfeit of a game in the American League. "They would slice around you and stick in the ground," Rusty Staub, a player for the Tigers, said. "It wasn't just one, it was many. Oh, God almighty, I've never seen anything so dangerous in my life. I begged the guys to put on their batting helmets."

The big problem happened between games, however, when fans stormed the field and set an impromptu fire in the middle of center field. Held between a double header, this inventive idea called for fans to bring a disco record to the game for a reduced ticket price. The White Sox organization would then gather all the records and explode them in a display between the two games. The trouble initially began when the expected 12,000 people turnout ballooned into almost 90,000 and ended with an explosion that was bigger than expected. It tore through the outfield wall, allowing streams of fans to rush the field.

The second game was cancelled due to "unplayable field conditions" and also "lunatic fans from the 70s on various illegal substances."

### ***Halfway to St. Patrick's Day: Chicago White Sox***

St. Patrick's Day seems like the perfect holiday to celebrate at a baseball stadium. Unfortunately since the holiday falls in mid-march, teams are always in Arizona or Florida for spring training. The Chicago White Sox and the geniuses on the promotional staff found an easy way around that one. On September 8, 2006 the White Sox celebrated "Halfway to St. Patrick's Day...Night."

The fans (21 and older, of course) were given snazzy green White Sox hats courtesy of Miller Lite and the White Sox themselves donned green pinstriped jerseys.

I know everyone is looking for an excuse to drink, but this is a little bit of a stretch. What makes it even more pathetic is that this has become a yearly tradition in Chicago.

### ***Anti-Doping Night: Vero Beach Devil Rays***

This one almost verges on clever but ultimately ends up in the realm of the stupid.

The Vero Beach Devil Rays planned to hold an "Olympic Night" on August 7, 2008 in honor of the Beijing Summer Games that were being held at the same time.

In preparation, however, the minor league team held "Anti-Doping Night" two days before that to "ensure their Olympic competition will be a fair, clean event for all participants, and discourage the use of drugs or steroids in any form."

This promotion served a second purpose, of course, as steroid talk was running rampant throughout Major League Baseball.

The best part was the giveaway: the first 200 fans received free urine sample cups. I wish I was making that up.

### ***Ball Night: Los Angeles Dodgers***

In theory, giving each fan a free baseball is a great idea. Every fan comes to the ballpark hoping to catch a foul ball, so why not just give them one when they walk through the gate? Unfortunately when your team is playing poorly, a free baseball can turn into a free missile to launch at opposing players.

That's exactly what happened at Dodger Stadium in 1995. The Dodgers were forced to forfeit their game against the St. Louis Cardinals when fans began launching a barrage of baseballs onto the field for the third time.

The scene was Dodgers stadium on August 8th, 1995. All attendees of a game against the Cardinals received a free regulation size (and weight) baseball. The day was known as "Ball Day" and what should have been a fun day where both father and son leave with a neat souvenir turned into one of the worst displays of sportsmanship ever witnessed. In the bottom of the ninth inning, Raul Mondesi struck out. Rather than taking his lumps and acting like a stand up role model, he and another player exploded on the umpire, arguing the call so indignantly that they were ejected from the game. This upset caused the angry crowd to throw over 2000 of the souvenir balls onto the field. The team had to be ushered into the dugout for safety, resulting in an incredibly rare major league forfeit. It was the first forfeit in the National League in 40 years and, ironically, not one fan went home with a baseball on "Ball Night."

### ***Hard Hat Night: Chicago Blackhawks***

As will be the case in many of these hastily conceived notions, when you combined free objects with a sporting event, you can expect trouble to ensue. The first several thousand people to show up for the game received a free Blackhawks hardhat to wear during the event. Early in the game, Jonathan Toews tipped the puck into the goal for his first career hat trick, resulting in a massive heaving of those helmets onto the ice. After so many fans wasted their souvenirs on this display of excitement, the goal was actually called back on a technicality. As the game progressed and fans drank more, the components for yet another massive hurling of those remaining helmets began to come together. Finally in the third, Jonathan

Toews scored the same hat trick, legitimately this time, and down came the helmets. The stadium likely received back three-quarters of the helmets they gave out that night.

### ***Cash Drop Night: West Michigan Whitecaps***

The idiocy of event managers knows no bigger than the one who planned Cash Drop Night. Honestly, what do you expect is going to happen when you drop \$1000 dollars onto the middle of a field? Luckily, only two 7-year-olds were injured, They were knocked down and trampled but only received minor injuries.

### ***All You Can Eat Seats! : Los Angeles Dodgers***

In a world fast becoming larger by the day, and I'm talking the average size of a person here, the Dodgers all you can eat seat promotion was bound to attract it's fans. For \$20-\$40 bucks, fans could sit and eat on stadium food to their hearts content and boy did they eat. They ate to the point that many people have vomited in the section and many more have complained of a horrific odor in the section as the innings progress. Despite this, the section remains in use and is a huge draw.

### ***All you Can Eat: Reading, Pa., Phillies minor league baseball team***

Another health conscious promotion allows people to receive all the cheeseburgers, pizza, soda, funnel cakes, ice cream, French fries, hot dogs and pizza they could eat, from 5 p.m. through the seventh-inning stretch for just \$10. This promotion has produced no ill will that I can find but is just another step in the wrong direction for humanity.

### ***Weather Curriculum Book Day: Cleveland Indians***

This event is a head scratchier because in it, all you receive is a Weather Education Day 2 w/ Weather Curriculum Book In this day and age of poor attendance, I fail to see how this giveaway will draw in the fans.

### ***Indian Fleece Blanket Day: Cleveland Indians***

The Cleveland Indians Logo has been an area of controversy for many years. Simply put, the Native Americans don't like it. So what does the Indians do for their 100 year celebration? They give away a fleece blanket that features the team's history of logos, many of which feature the Indian stereotype; red skin, feather headdress, hook nose and exaggerated goofy grin.

### ***“LeBron James NBA Championship Replica Ring Giveaway”***

The Peoria Chiefs, the Class A affiliate of the Chicago Cubs, joined the list of LeBron James' bashers when it staged a “LeBron James NBA Championship Replica Ring Giveaway” after the Dallas Mavericks defeated the Miami Heat for the NBA title.

There was no ring, of course.

The Chiefs claimed to explore the possibility of skipping the fourth inning to mirror James' disappearing act in the fourth quarters against Dallas.

### ***Ted Williams Popsicle Night***

After the story broke in 2002 about the son of the great Boston slugger having his father's body cryogenically frozen in Arizona, the Bisbee-Douglas Copper Kings gave popsicles to the first 500 fans in a 2003 game.

### ***Salute to Indoor Plumbing Night***

The West Virginia Power had this idea to close the regular bathrooms and have fans use portable toilets to aid in the appreciation of indoor plumbing. The Health Department nixed it. But the promotion went on, complete with a version of a team's regular Hamburger Helper skillet toss.

“We took some brownies and mushed them up and made them look like poo,” promotions director Kristin Call told the Washington Post. “It was a poo toss that night.”

## ***Michael Jordan Impostor Night***

It wasn't billed that way. The Utah Flash of the NBA Developmental League promoted a one-on-one grudge match between Michael Jordan and former Jazz player Byron Russell.

Jordan had trash-talked Russell at Jordan's Hall of Fame induction. Russell challenged him to a game of one-on-one with the winner's pot (\$100,000) going to charity.

Except Jordan never responded and Flash owner Brandt Anderson continued the charade anyway by trotting out a Jordan look-alike. You can guess how that went over. Anderson had to refund people's money.

The best of minor league promotions are funny. At the very least they should do no harm.

(And, of course, since I'm from Cleveland and it's my list, at least one should poke at LeBron James)

## ***1K Backwards Race***

The Charleston RiverDogs raised money for charity by holding a backwards race around the warning track (three laps). Who could be expected to cover .62 miles without an aid station? The RiverDogs set up a beer "hydration" stand at the halfway point. Prizes were awarded to the most leisurely competitor and the one with the biggest beer belly.

## ***Salute to Cows***

The minor-league baseball Wisconsin Timber Rattlers staged several contests, including a mooing competition. A lucky fan received a year's supply of cheese curds. The video board headshots of Timber Rattlers' players? Yep. All sported milk mustaches.

## ***Billy Donovan Night***

The Fort Myers Miracle had fun with University of Florida basketball coach Billy Donovan leaving the school to coach the Orlando Magic, then reversing his decision. The Miracle served waffles. Fans could get their ticket money back if they didn't feel sufficiently entertained, but only after negotiating a deal with a local lawyer that included having to make a free throw. Somebody named Billy Donovan was asked to throw out the first pitch but changed his mind and didn't show.

## ***Rod Blagojevich Prison Jersey Night***

This one came from the world of minor league hockey. The Las Vegas Wranglers wore gray and black prison striped jerseys with "ILLGOV" on them. The opponent, the Bakersfield Condors, wore orange prison garb. There were bars on the penalty box. My favorite part: The referees wore blue prison guard uniforms.

Footnote: In a 2006 game, the Wranglers held Dick Cheney Hunting Vest Night.

## ***50th Anniversary Salute to Bubble Wrap***

The Lowell (Ma.) Spinners handed out squares of Bubble Wrap and asked fans to simultaneously pop it in the third inning. The 3,692 squares of popped Bubble Wrap wasn't recognized as a world record, but Guinness did recognize the Spinners-sponsored world's largest game of "Duck, Duck, Goose" held in 2004 when 432 people participated.

## ***Circle of Life Weekend***

Quad Cities covered birth (a night for expectant mothers), school (a one-year scholarship to the University of Iowa), marriage (an all-expenses paid wedding) and death (an all-expenses paid funeral) in one long weekend of baseball.

There were on-site Lamaze classes and concession stands stocked with things pregnant ladies crave.

"We want our fans to know that cradle to grave the River Bandits have you covered," Quad Cities owner Dave Heller said in a press release.

## ***Backstabbers Night***

The Augusta (Ga.) GreenJackets held a LeBron James roast 10 days after he announced via "The Decision" on ESPN that he was leaving the area where he grew up to join the Miami Heat.

Anyone with a Ohio driver's license got in free. They got a seat in a section staffed by a grief counselor.

James was inducted in the Backstabbers Hall of Fame, joining Brutus, Judas, Benedict Arnold, football coach Nick Saban and others.

## ***Redundancy Night***

The Altoona Curve has paid tribute over the years to Brett Favre's retirement pledges, Pittsburgh Steelers' Super Bowl wins, vagabond coach Larry Brown's introductory press conferences and the string of non-title seasons for Cleveland sports teams.

Identical twins get in free. So do people from New York, NY, Jersey City, NJ, Kansas City, KS and Virginia Beach, Va. And people with similar sounding first and last names. "That goes for you, Dave Davies," the press release reads.

Everything is announced twice, including players coming up to bat.

## ***Spam Carving Night***

The Reading Phillies raise money for charity with a competition for closet spam carvers (you know who you are).

Knives and toothpicks are supplied, though contestants can bring their own carving tools. (We pause here to consider a team on a long losing streak watching fans file into the park hoisting knives and chainsaws.)

A 2009 entry — Demon Dog — looks like an alien Schnauzer.

The team's press release says "exposure to elements will quickly transform Spam's appealing pink-tinged luster to a distressingly monochrome shade of brown."

Don't get them wrong. It looks like a Rodin sculpture compared to what the West Virginia Power have cooking in their skillet.

## ***Awful Night***

The Altoona Curve give an awful promotional item (a noisemaker for instance) to the first 1,000 fans.

Awful Nights — yes, plural — have included bottomless cups, music from David Hasselhoff and William Shatner, a helium balloon toss, a Dry Water Slide Contest, a non-celebrity autograph session and clips from Ben Affleck movies.

There is a fireworks display. On the video board.

In a 2004 game, the Curve players got in the spirit of the evening by giving up five runs in the top of the ninth and losing to the Akron Aeros.

Not on purpose apparently.