

Solid hits in game of marketing MLB



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It is a time-honored tradition as old as the national pastime itself — the tossing of the first angst. Specifically, the question is asked: “What can baseball do to market itself?” While all of us, the teams, minor and major leagues, could always do more, a number are doing any number of creative campaigns, strategies and tactics.

Of course, we in baseball always have to face the various double standards. People complain that baseball players aren’t accessible and don’t give autographs. Not to put down the other sports, but how many kids receive pregame autographs prior to a professional basketball, hockey or football game? Look along the dugout at any game, and you will see baseball players signing. Maybe not every player, every game, maybe not the superstar, but they are signing.

Another fabulous double standard is the complaint about baseball prices. Again, look at the other sports. Take a family of four to one of the other professional sports and take out a second mortgage. Every team in baseball has an affordable seat, nearly every team has a \$1 or \$2 night and most have family pack nights with tickets and concessions included.

Another one on the double standard hit parade: Baseball teams don’t do anything for their fans. The Oakland A’s started flying full-season-ticket subscribers for a weekend at spring training, a practice adopted by the Toronto Blue Jays and other teams. That doesn’t include the various ticket exchange programs, unique merchandise giveaways and other front-of-the-line perks teams offer. Baltimore allows season-ticket holders into the stadium a half-hour before the public and, on photo day, has a special area for them.

Don’t start with the ratings rant! Last season’s playoffs ratings were outstanding. Several teams experienced ratings growth last season. Two teams of note, Seattle and Boston, market themselves with the idea of building television ratings. While the All-Star Game has experienced

ratings erosion the last two decades, it isn’t any worse than the ratings erosion of the network’s newscasts or prime-time programming. The Major League Baseball All-Star Game garners a better rating than the other sports’ exhibitions.

Then there is the tired complaint that the teams aren’t promoting themselves creatively. There have been tons of promotions that bring a smile to the face and a buzz to the landscape, but one stands out. In Kansas City, the Royals hooked up with Krispy Kreme doughnuts and offered “a dozen donuts for a dozen hits.” When the Royals had 12 hits, your Royals ticket was good for 12 sugar pucks. The Royals players had a tote board in the clubhouse that kept track of what player had the most “Krispy Kreme hits.”

Even at the league level, the garden-variety cynic would be wrong. “I Live for This” has been an excellent campaign, promoting a number of the newer stars as well as a number of Asian, Hispanic and African-American players. Baseball doesn’t take chances? What would you call the buying of ad time during the post-Super Bowl episode of “Survivor”?

Unique advertising at the club level? Look at St. Louis capturing fan passion, or the Houston superhero-themed campaigns. Several clubs (Anaheim, Detroit, Minnesota, Oakland, Seattle, Toronto to name a few) have outstanding humorous, compelling, impactful television ads.

Unique advertising and marketing efforts of several clubs have been missed in the writing of this article. To those clubs, accept an apology with this caveat: The fact that there are so many unique programs and promotions being done at the club and league level is a comment on the marketing itself. The same is true for community service efforts — it would take another issue of this publication to describe what is being done at that level.

Why the angst? Why the comparisons? Probably it is a good sign. People care about the game of baseball and want to see it grow. This season, once again, they will see marketing that hits singles as well as home runs.

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