



A DAY IN THE LIFE

FRIENDS AND STRANGERS have often asked me what a typical vending day was like. Some variation of this is what I told them.

At the old stadium, if a game started at 7 p.m., I was required to be at the ballpark at 5, giving the company time to assign me an item to sell and a station from where to get that item. The stations were spread out on different levels, so the employees could cover various sections without running into one another.

Once I got to the ballpark, I would show my badge and then fill out a card, writing down my name, company ID number, and social security number. On the back of the card, I would also jot down the product I would prefer to sell and the section I would like to work in, such as "Field

4-Beer" or "Upper 12-Hot Dogs." It was important to put a lot of choices down, since seniority (the company ID number signifies seniority; number one had the highest) dictated whose choices would get satisfied first. If my number had been ~~eighty~~⁸⁰, for instance, all of the people with a lower number would get their choices granted before mine.

-Almost all of the vendors with more seniority than me had scorecard gates at the entranceways to the ballpark, since time had taken a toll on their bodies and their days in the seats were over. Each time I came in to work during those last few years, I tended to get my first choice until eventually my shoulder, knees, and all the rest gave way and ~~my~~ days in the seats were over, too.

Many factors went into my choices. For instance, during the summer, the left side was the sunniest, so choosing that side of the field (the even-numbered stations) was best to sell cold items like soda, water, or ice cream. However, I can recall many excruciatingly hot 100-degree days when I opted for the odd-numbered right field side, just to maintain my stamina. Still hot, just not insufferable. Also, in scorching weather, I saw a lot of ice cream melt in my bin, making it a tough sell. And, depending on who was my checker in the station that day, returning the melted product could often be a major hassle.

Prior to getting into the union in the mid-seventies, it wasn't quite so simple to get a day's work. The foreman, a rather dumpy, thinly haired man named Ralph, would ask all the vendors to stand across the street from the employee entrance and, at his whim, would call people over by name. Then, he would hand them a card to fill out;

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~~and~~ at that point, they knew they would be working on that particular day. Since fan attendance was not very strong and the vendor's union hadn't even existed at that time, there was no such thing as guaranteed work.

Those ~~whothat~~ sucked up to Ralph quickly became his favorites. I was not one of them, but one day, he was looking at me and indicated with his finger that I should step over to him. I hadn't worked in a number of days so I thought, "*Great, I'm getting in.*"

-When I got across the street he said, "What's your name again?"

I told him, he nodded in acknowledgement and then pointed at me to go back across the street, which I sheepishly did. I didn't work that day. *Ugh.* ~~While After~~ enduring those frustrating early years at the stadium, trying to salvage a day's work, I never would have thought I'd last as long as I ultimately did.

After filling out my card and handing it in to who~~ever~~ was in charge that year, I went downstairs to the linen room to get a uniform, a pair of white pants, and a standardized company shirt. Bishop was there when I started, but, over time, there were at least a dozen different employees running the linen room and handing me my clothes. Every vendor was required to wear this uniform, along with a company hat, which was assigned at the start of the season.

-When I first started, the hat had "Canteen" emblazoned on it. ~~Then~~, after a corporate merger, it was "Volume Services," and ~~later then~~ the company changed its name to "Centerplate." In the new stadium, with a different corporation in charge, it is the plain, navy-blue, standardized Yankee hat, with the famed, interlocking N-

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Y. An apron to hold change, which was also given out at the beginning of the season, was optional.

Often, the linen room ran out of sizes, because the company, whatever they were called, saved money by not laundering the pants on a daily basis. Latecomers often got stuck with pants three, four, or more sizes too large. I hated when it happened to me, but I admit, it was funny seeing other vendors in those hip-hop-style pants, especially when they forgot a belt and were forced to use string or rope to keep a ~~fifty-four~~54-inch pair of pants from sliding down to their ankles. If I couldn't find enough string to fit around my waist, the trick was to simply ~~running~~ whatever I had through the two loopholes right above the zipper. Six inches of string or rope was enough to pull tight enough to tie and prevent an accident.

Once into uniform, the next hour was free time to hang out. This was when the powers that be were sorting through the cards, to figure out who would be working where and selling what.

-The stations were Field 4, Main 19, Main 20, Loge left, Loge right, Upper 1, Upper 12, Upper 19, Upper 28, and the bleachers. The numbers signify the sections where these stations ~~at~~were located, with the uppers having four stations, since it had the most seats.



The Yanks warm up before the gates open

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During the hour wait is when vendors had the opportunity to have a bite to eat, schmooze with friends, play cards, read, write, do homework, flirt, etc. Sometimes, we would hang out in the locker room or the bleachers and watch batting practice. Each year would bring some new female vendors who might attract a bit of attention, at least until May or June, when everyone sorted out who's who and what's what.

Occasionally, during this break, I would go to the upper deck and jog through the empty stands before the gates opened and the fans came in. I would hear the chatter during batting practice while running within the sections from one foul pole to the other. Jim "Catfish" Hunter, aggressive competitor that he was, threw a ball up there one time, trying to hit me just for kicks. Fortunately, he missed. I remember yelling down at him, questioning what the hell he was thinking, and he seemed to guiltily sulk off into the outfield, realizing he was wrong.

Nevertheless, I scooted out of the seats before anyone from management found out that I, a low-on-the-totem-pole vendor, ~~had~~~~was~~ yel~~ed~~~~ing~~ at a Yankee.

For many, vending is a second job, so this down-time was a good opportunity to catch up on business, make phone calls, or do some paper-work. Over the years, I have known vendors who have been students (high school, college, grad school), teachers, principals, accountants, med students, architects, financial analysts, cops, actors, and even a comedian or two. I later learned that Tom Hanks ~~was~~~~had~~~~been~~ a vendor in Oakland before he became the Tom Hanks we know now. One of my fellow vendors installed video games ~~in~~~~to~~ laundromats, and another was an electrician who fixed audio equipment on the side. Unfortunately, he tended to get a little backed up, so I could give him a broken radio in April and ~~I~~ might not get it back until after the ~~A~~~~ll~~~~S~~~~t~~~~a~~~~r~~ break in July.

The vending corps is a cross section of gritty, hard-working civilian life. One vendor, who lived a little more than an hour north of the stadium, worked as a corrections officer in a state prison. He woke up at 5, got to the prison at 6:15, was there until 2:30, drove down and got a quick bite to eat, worked a night game until 9:30, and then checked out and drove the ~~sixty~~~~60~~ miles back home. When the Yanks had afternoon games, ~~was~~~~when~~ he took a vacation day, which is a very common stratagem amongst vendors who have second jobs. My prison guard colleague was one hard-working individual, and I doubt he would have been able to put his kids through college or buy a house if it weren't for his vending job to augment his pay.

Years ago, there was a vendor who had a high position with the IRS, and he often told me ~~about~~~~e~~ his off-season

adventures hunting tax felons around the globe. One winter, he spent three full months in Thailand, covertly tracking down a scofflaw. When I saw him the following opening day and asked him about his pursuit during the off-season, he told me he'd "got his man."

Once the call sheet had been completed, a list was posted ~~of where~~ for the vendors ~~to find out where they~~ were to be stationed for the game. This was known as "call time." Someone would stand in front of the day's vending corps, some days numbering as many as 125-150 vendors, and yell out the stations, the products, and the names, such as:

FIELD 4:

BEER - Jackson, Francis, M. McNamara, J. McNamara.

HOT DOGS - Schein, Edwards, Smith.

PEANUTS - Lee, Columbia, Gomez.

SODA - McKay, Schmidt.

ICE CREAM - Gomer, Gottfried.

Once ~~I knew~~ where and what I'd be selling, the next trip was to the money room to get a price badge. If, during a prior game, I had sold soda and today I was selling ice cream, I'd simply exchange one badge for another. If my item today ~~was~~ priced at \$3.50, I would get a few rolls of quarters, perhaps fifty singles, and some fives and tens, in order to make change. When I first started, a can of beer sold for ~~sixty-five~~65 cents, so I needed to get rolls of nickels and dimes, as well. One season, ice cream sold for the ridiculous price of ~~thirty-two~~32 cents.

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Needless to say, making change that summer was a big, fat, pain in the ass.

The standard items to vend are peanuts, hot dogs, beer, soda, and Crackers licks. Other products I have hawked (vendors have often been referred to as “hawkers”) include pizza, pretzels, knishes, egg rolls, ice cream (sandwiches, cones, cups, bars, and sundaes), freeze pops, frozen lemonade, cotton candy, Sun-Dew orange drink (that didn’t sell), licorice (even worse), and M&M’s (in the heat of summer—fuggetaboutit). Without seniority, you might get one of these lesser items and become frustrated as fans yelled, “Hey, Good & Plenty guy! Get outta the way!!!”

Every so often, we would be selling different brands of beer, dependent upon which distributor gave our parent company the best deal during the off-season. Through the years, I sold Bud, Bud Light, Heineken, Corona, various Millers, including Miller Genuine Draft, Beck’s, New Amsterdam, Red Dog, Foster’s, and even the alcoholic product called Mike’s Hard Lemonade.

Let’s assume I had been assigned peanuts today in Main 20. After getting my price badge and some change, I’d go up to the station, which was on the main level between the visiting dugout and the left-field foul pole. Approximately fifteen minutes before the start of the game, is when I started to vend.

Different products sold better at different times. While the new ballpark has a whole range of items for the fans to eat, the limited choices at the old stadium brought some predictable selling patterns for the vendors. Peanuts usually were pretty consistent sellers throughout the game, as was beer, whereas hot dogs tended to get busy only during the first few innings. The reason for was that

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~~was~~ many people got to the ballpark with the idea of having a few dogs as their dinner. ~~But~~Therefore, however, by the second or third inning, hot dogs ~~had~~ become a dead item.

Ice cream, which didn't sell too briskly at the start of the game, became popular around the third or fourth inning, since the fans had had their meal and were looking to satisfy their sweet tooth or get a "second wind" from the sugar rush. The new stadium offers ice cream stands throughout the ballpark, but back then, the ice cream vendors would often put off going out until the top of the second inning, because they knew the variables for when their item would sell best. Obviously, when it is very hot, new stadium or old, ice cream, soda, and water sell consistently throughout the whole game.

Once getting up to Main 20, I would see who was the porter handling the nuts that night. When I needed a box, he'd get it from the back of the commissary for me. Before walking out the door, I would see someone standing behind a tall desk. This is the checker (Mr. Keeghan was my checker once in a while), who marked down on a card that I had taken a box of peanuts. It was, and still is, this person's responsibility that every one of the peanut boxes in the commissary, sometimes as many as fifty or more, ~~was~~ accounted for at the end of the night.

Peanuts are a tradition at the ballpark; a fun item to sell, as they can be tossed, and the fans take great delight in catching the bag. Once I had sold my box, I would head back to the station, break down the carton by folding and flattening it so it ~~could~~ be discarded easily, and then I would walk over to the other side of the tall desk, where a banker was there to take my money. If a bag of peanuts

was \$4 and there are 36 bags in a box, I handed \$144 to the banker. He would then initial my card as “paid,” and I would be free to get another box and repeat the process.

Since it got extremely hectic in the station, I always waited ~~forte~~ ~~be~~ confirmation~~d~~ that the figure I’d handed over was correct and that I’d been properly credited. A lot of money gets counted during the course of a game, and honest mistakes happen. That’s ~~is~~ why I was to state my name and how many units I had sold when I walked out the door. Calling out “Zully, 2-1,” ~~which gave~~ ~~ing~~ my name, what box I was about to go out on, and how many I had paid for (out on my second, paid for one) became standard procedure.

Often, when it got busy, the banker might let me pay after every two boxes, so I might be saying “Zully, 4-2,” so it was a good idea to keep everyone honest by making that announcement and not have a problem at the end of the night when I was checking out. At least once a ~~homestand~~ ~~d~~, discrepancies occurred regarding whether someone paid for the correct amount of trays. These standoffs between checkers, bankers, and vendors got, let us say, quite testy, since a day’s pay could be on the line.

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