

For the Love of the Snack

I have to admit the concept was a little strange to me...

At Kiwanis Miracle League, teams play ball for two innings, everybody scores and every game ends in a tie.

Mindboggling.

You see, I grew up in a town where dreams go to die and hope never springs eternal.

Except on the baseball diamond. And we played baseball for blood...for our township, for pride.

Not keep score? Are you kidding me? What is the point?

So my first day volunteering at Kiwanis Miracle League field began with utter confusion as to just what this thing was all about. They had me working the concession stand.

Now, those who know me will immediately recognize the sheer absurdity of that situation. Picture Charlie Sheen with a job at Medicap Pharmacy and you get the idea... (Winning...)

I immediately spotted a potential problem. The concession stand had gotten 3 new boxes of candy bars, three different types of candy, none of which had wrapper representation on the "items we offer" corkboard.

I knew I had to act fast, but I wasn't fast enough as fellow Kiwanian and concession stand veteran Todd Ashby quickly purchased a king sized 3

Musketeers bar, one of the rogue candies that had yet to earn a place on the corkboard. He quickly devoured it until only the wrapper remained.

I sprung into action. There were only two new bars left and I didn't want to get stuck with something nasty. Luckily for me, one box was the familiar orange of a Kit Kat.

A "king sized" Kit Kat no less...

For those of you in the know, a king sized Kit Kat is roughly the size of a Buick hubcap, give or take. I didn't want to eat this whole thing at 10 am in the morning but I am a giver. I felt I owed it to the good patrons of Kiwanis Miracle League field to let them know what a tremendous bargain a king sized Kit Kat bar is for just a buck. I would have to take one for the team...

I hoovered my hubcap and made sure the wrapper was placed prominently on the corkboard.

With that crisis averted, I began working the concession stand. It was quiet at first, a hot dog here, a cup of coffee there, nothing even a rookie like me couldn't handle. I was told to prepare for the mad rush between games. Players are given a free drink ticket to exchange at the stand and they will "swarm" the stand like cheetahs on a gazelle.

We were supposed to make sure that we collected all the tickets in exchange for their beverages and make sure the players didn't abscond with anything other than a free drink.

A daunting task to be sure, protecting the bags of chips and box of Airheads that were lying casually on the concession stand counter. We were the last line of defense and I was taking my deployment seriously.

Sure enough, as the Orioles and the Mets finished game one in a 28-28 tie, the players began to exchange their free tickets gleefully. We handled the first wave flawlessly and defended the chips admirably.

But then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw him...

Dressed in black, moving with catlike swiftness and the precision of a neurosurgeon he struck, grabbing a can of Diet Coke and disappearing into the mass of orange and blue jerseys of the first game's players.

That is what gave him away. The colors he wore were those of the "hated" Yankees, who were playing the Florida Marlins in the SECOND game. Obviously it was the NEW YORK Yankees that stirred such malevolent distaste inside me but that mattered not at this point.

It wasn't his TIME to get his free drink. His team hadn't played yet and already he was trying to refresh himself with an ice cold can of Diet Coke.

He must be stopped at all costs. Yankees MUST play by the rules. If not in the major leagues like every other franchise, at least I can enforce my sense of justice in my corner of the world. Yankees in all walks of life must learn they can't just take whatever free agent or free beverage whenever they want...

I got caught up in another rush of customers so I was unable to vault the counter and chase after the "perp" Jack Bauer style who had just "procured" a beverage before his appointed time.

Good thing too, as I had a near metric ton of Kit Kat bar still sitting in my stomach which prevented me with moving with my usual grace and agility of a jungle cat.

A short time later, a sweet older lady approached our counter with a look of consternation on her face and an apology on her lips.

"I am SO sorry, Michael took this and he wasn't supposed to..." she offered sheepishly.

So, my arch nemesis was named Michael...fitting...I tried to muster a smile of absolution as I quickly grabbed the "ill gotten booty" from her hand.

“No harm done,” I offered as I quickly placed the can of Diet Coke back into the cooler.

Mid way through the second game, we had a steady stream of customers ordering hot dogs, hamburgers and popcorn.

I swear I turned my back for just a second, to order a walking taco without sour cream to our gal in the back who was slaving over the crock pot of taco meat when Michael struck again.

He knew better than to attack MY counter and his target was the second window next to me manned by fellow a Kiwanian named Larry. Larry was slow taking his free drinks off the counter and it cost him. Michael reached for a Sprite this time and was gone in a blur of black Yankee jersey.

Before I could open my mouth to object, Larry had reached for his wallet, placed a dollar and a quarter into the register to pay for Michael’s indiscretion. I was stunned. Larry, even though he was further rewarding the bad behavior of a “Yankee”, was truly a giver.

He began to chuckle as the same sweet lady brought the soda back to the counter from which it came.

“Sorry, Michael gets a little excited...” she explained.

“Take it,” Larry said. “It’s paid for...”

Confused, Michael’s handler accepted the Sprite and backed away from the concession stand.

The game raged on. The Florida Marlins were pummeling the Yankees but somehow the Bronx Bombers came back to tie the game in the second. It ended in a 21 -21 tie.

Soon, the Marlins and the Yankees descended on the concession stand with pure joy in their hearts and free tickets in their hands. Excitement was everywhere and Marlins and Yankees mingled together in perfect harmony, all with a single solitary objective, the free beverage and possibly a snack.

It was then and only then did a wave of enlightenment hit me. I finally got it. I finally understood what this was all about. To these players, the score didn't matter. It didn't matter whether they vanquished their rivals and obtained bragging rights for the rest of the season.

For them, they did not play for the love of the game; they played *for the love of the snack*.

And when you think about it, isn't that what life all boils down to anyway?

My playing days are long over and life has become a series of obstacles, trials and tribulations. But through it all, I play for the love of the snack. I will do many things as long as there is food involved at the end.

I know I am not alone here...

When you get to be my age, you can get through anything as long as there is a snack associated with it.

My time at Kiwanis Miracle League revealed a revelation about myself, about life in general.

In all future endeavors, if I want to put joy and bliss back into my life, I need to be like these kids and play *for the love of the snack*.

If you are struggling in today's economy, dealing with the stress and strain of the rat race, try changing the game a little.

Stop worrying about the score.

Stop measuring yourself in terms of winning and losing, victory or defeat.

Start playing the game *for the love of the snack*.

Like these players at Kiwanis Miracle League, joy and happiness is sure to follow you for the rest of your days.

It took the smiling, ninja-like Michael to reveal that simple truth to me and put life into clear perspective.

It took Michael, and the wonderful woman who “had his back” to put me in my place and reveal how silly and petty I have been trying to keep score all these years.

Damn Yankee...