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Kids fill stands for rare weekday Majors game

Wed, June 17, 2009

School-focused marketing plan a hit

By **MORRIS DALLA COSTA**, FREE PRESS SPORTS COLUMNIST

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The concession lineups were long, there was constant activity in the stands and it seemed like an endless procession of elementary school kids was running the bases.

"I'd do it again, absolutely," Scott Dart, co-owner of the London Majors of the Intercounty Baseball League, said following his first lunch day at Labatt Park for school pupils.

About 1,500 of them came from six schools in the city, descending on the downtown ballpark for a 7-3 London Majors win over the Mississauga Twins.

The game started at 11 a.m. There was no admission charge for the pupils but judging by number of kids eating hotdogs, nachos, popcorn and freezies, the day would probably turn out profitable even without ticket sales.

"It's not a huge moneymaker," Dart said. "It isn't about that. It's more a celebration of baseball. A group went on a tour of the Roy McKay Clubhouse.

"The (Toronto Blue) Jays do it. I think they call it a businessman's lunch. We marketed it as our school getaway day and we are hoping that the kids had a good time and at some point, they want to come back and bring their parents with them."

Dart called it a good first attempt.

"We learned some things," he said.

"We learned we can't afford to have 150 in line at the concession stand. We'll figure out how to deal with that."

Baseball isn't the only sport that uses an early day game to promote itself.

The Toronto Lynx of the United Soccer League Premier Development League played a game in Toronto against FC London at 11 a.m.

Dart contacted schools in the local public board by e-mail. He didn't get the kind of response that he'd wanted so he starting contacting individual schools.

At Jeanne Sauve, which Dart's son attends, principal Deb Wrack liked the idea and contacted other

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schools.

The Majors even put on a lunch special for the schools, offering a hotdog and juice box for \$2.50.

"One school pre-ordered 200 of them," Dart said. "This is a win-win situation. School is sort of wrapping up right now and it's a nice day out.

"(We) have worked very hard to make it a family-centric event but we still need to expand our fan base for those who do want beer in the park."

The Majors are close to getting the go-ahead to sell beer at the park. A health inspector was scheduled to visit the park yesterday.

"If all goes well, we'll move on to the next step and should hear an announcement anytime," Dart said.

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SPORTS NEWS

Halladay, Downs to join Janssen on DL

The Toronto Blue Jays will place ace Roy Halladay and closer Scott Downs on the disabled list Thursday, a day after right shoulder inflammation forced starter Casey Janssen to the 15-day DL.

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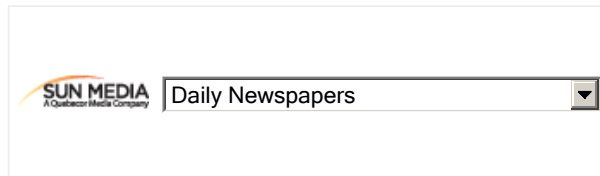
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