



The Raphael Report

**Observations on marketing,
advertising, sales and
promotions
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June 2004

Number 61

Great Idea People We Have Known, Admired, Read About . . . and Copied

In recent issues of The Raphael Report, we wrote about great idea people we have known, including Stanley Marcus of Neiman-Marcus, Bill Gove, Feargal Quinn, Sid Freidman and Reese Palley. Here's another . . .

Bill Veeck

"There's nothing wrong with stealing other people's ideas. And anyone who doesn't is presumptuous. Because there simply aren't that many new ideas. You simply take something used somewhere else and adopt it for your own use." – Bill Veeck

Bill Veeck was a non-traditional promoter in the most traditional of sports, baseball. At one time or another he was the owner of the Cleveland Indians, Saint Louis Browns and Chicago White Sox – all losing teams.

He knew he had to create something different to bring customers back to his near empty stadiums. He succeeded with doing non-traditional promotions that not only brought them back – but also pleased them. Among his dramatic innovations:

- He was the first owner to sign an African-American player, Larry Doby, to play in the American league. He received 20,000 letters, mostly violent and obscene. Veeck answered each one congratulating each correspondent on being wise and fortunate enough to have chosen parents of the correct color.
- He was the first to have an exploding scoreboard.
- He was the first to have players' names printed on the back of their uniforms.
- He was the first owner to stand at the gate to greet customers as they arrived and as they left at EVERY game. He never sat in the owner's box, but rather with the fans asking, "What do you like? What don't you like?"
- He was the first to have the crowd in the grandstand call the plays. Veeck provided huge hand-held billboards saying, "Yes" or "No" which fans held aloft to direct the player to hit, steal, bunt...whatever. (The team won that night!)

But with all these novel, different, daring and crowd-pleasing events, one stands out above the rest for its impact on baseball history.

It was 1951 when more than 18,000 fans witnessed a scene immediately teletyped, announced and broadcast to the rest of the world and made sports history: The Day That Bill Veeck Sent a Midget Up to Bat.

It was the American League's fiftieth anniversary and Veeck promised fans that came to the

game they would experience a secret moment never to be forgotten.

He called a booking agent who found tiny Eddie Gaedel in Chicago. He was three feet, seven inches tall and weighed sixty-five pounds suited up.

Veeck told Eddie what he had in mind. Gaedel would be a big league ballplayer (well, at least for a day) appearing before thousands of people. Could he do it?

Gaedel was an actor and loved the one-day, one-time, once-in-a-lifetime job. Veeck showed him how to crouch at the plate narrowing the strike zone to one and half inches!

Gaedel mastered the crouch and then began to swing his imaginary bat at the imaginary ball. Veeck was astonished. What was Eddie doing? He was not supposed to swing. He was supposed to wait! Four balls. And then walk dramatically to first base.

Veeck advised Gaedel, "Eddie I'm going to be up on the roof with a high powered rifle watching every move you make. If you so much as look as if you're going to swing, I'm going to shoot you dead." Eddie stopped swinging.

The day of the double header game the stadium was packed. Eddie's uniform was borrowed from a small seven-year-old and Veeck had the number "1/8" sewn on the back.

The game had Veeck's usual assortment of excitement: antique cars, a bicycle built for four, jugglers, clowns and musicians marching through the stands. But where was the "special" event Veeck promised the crowd?

The second game started. As the Browns came up for their half of the first inning, little Eddie Gaedel suddenly emerged from the dugout waving three tiny warm up bats. The announcer's voice echoed over the stadium, "For the Browns, number one-eighth – Eddie Gaedel!"

The audience was first amazed, then unbelieving, then their rising sound became overwhelming as the crowd realized what was happening.

The home plate umpire, Hurley, took one look at Gaedel and stalked over to Browns manager, Zack Taylor, demanding an explanation. Taylor coolly handed him a copy of Eddie's contract and a copy of the telegram sent to league headquarters listing Eddie on the official roster.

Bedlam! Photographers swarmed around home plate. The audience was in a constant roar. The Detroit pitcher and catcher laughed, thinking this was a one of those Veeck gimmicks and Eddie would soon disappear.

Not so. Bill had promised Eddie his moment in history.

Faced with the authentic papers, Harley shooed away the photographers and bawled out the classic call, "Play Ball!"

The Detroit pitcher didn't know what to do. Finally his catcher went down on both knees to offer a target.

Veeck was still worried. Would Eddie, caught up in the excitement, forget Veeck's instructions and swing at the ball?

No. Eddie, the actor, did as directed. He crouched down, took four balls and trotted to first base. He waited for the pinch runner, patted him on the rump and trotted across the field in slow motion, tipping his hat to the roaring crowd.

Baseball turned its wrath on Veeck, threatening to censor the moment out of written baseball history. Veeck struck back saying if Gaedel's name was cut out of the official records, so must the game. And would baseball, traditional, sanctimonious baseball say that a game played in front of 18,000 witnesses never happened? The league backed back down. Eddie's name remains a one-day, one time, official playing appearance in baseball records.

When Gaedel died, he had a front-page obituary in *The New York Times*.

Bill Veeck died in 1985. Sadly, they never used his suggested epitaph: "He Helped the Little Man."