

SPORTS

Alcohol's Two Minute Warning

By L. Kurt Wildman
Pride Sports Columnist

Like having a cold one delivered to you in the V.I.P. section? Think downing a couple "wobbly pops" with your buddies in the bleachers is synonymous with a good time? Well, you'd better not expect... Did I say elect? I mean you'd better organize a resistance movement to oppose me because my militant sports *junta* is planning an assault on the status quo in professional sports.

Once I take my rightful place as Grand Wizard (I know, I know, that title is already taken) Omnipotent Sports Overlord, I intend to impose a New World Order for Sports. And you'd better act quickly because my first decree will ban all alcohol consumption and sales at every sporting venue.

My benevolent totalitarianism is absolutely essential. Too many people have proven they can't handle the privilege of booting it up.

Football rowdies have ruined the spectator experience. Too many are fueling up on their favourite ale at tailgate parties before the game, then topping up the tank with draught throughout the game. And inebriated hockey fanatics are sparking violence in the stands and occasionally mingling with the players, adding more violence to an already violent game.

Under my dictatorship, the parking lot and concession stands will be bone dry. The "Beer Man" will slip away into permanent retirement.

Don't bother voicing your dissent. Remember, this won't be a democracy. Sniveling about rights and emphasizing personal responsibility will not convince me that my atrocity is unnecessary.

Just ask university administrators. The dangers of alcohol abuse, specifically bingeing (five or more drinks on the same occasion at least once in a thirty-day period), have become acute across campuses and particularly at sporting events. In response, stringent alcohol policies for football and other sports activities are virtually universal at NCAA schools. By 1996, all schools in the Big 12 Conference, historically a football powerhouse, had a no-alcohol policy at their games.

The destructive effects of alcohol within North America's cultural, social, and economic environment are undeniable. The cost to society staggers you like being blind-sided by Warren Sapp.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, an arm of the U.S. National Institutes of Health ("NIH"), in 1992, the economic cost to America from alcohol abuse and alcoholism was an estimated \$148 billion. The total estimated spending for health care services was \$18.8 billion for alcohol problems and the medical consequences of alcohol

consumption. People have been paying a price in criminal victimization.

A 1998 U. S. Department of Justice report, *Alcohol and Crime: An analysis of National Data on the Prevalence of Alcohol Involvement in Crime*, concludes that nearly four in 10 violent crimes involve use of alcohol, about four in 10 fatal motor vehicle accidents are alcohol-involved, and about four in 10 offenders (regardless of whether they are on probation, in local jail or state prison) self-report that they were using alcohol at the time of the offence. Two-thirds of victims who suffered violence by an intimate (a current or former spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend) reported that alcohol had been a factor.

With alcohol flowing within, sports facilities cannot divorce themselves from the negative effects seen in the broader community. Instead, they represent a unique challenge.

In support of this assertion, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse in its 1991 Presentation to Ontario's Liquor Licence Board ("LLBO") stated, "Sporting events represent a special type of drinking venue. There is clearly a higher propensity to alcohol-related problems, particularly alcohol-related aggressive behaviour and impaired driving. Sporting events are disproportionately attended by young males, who have the highest rates of drinking. In many instances, the emotion of the event itself can contribute to what has been termed a "consumption-intensive environment."

The alcohol-induced anecdotes continue to mount: fighting and road rage outside Cincinnati's Paul Brown Stadium after baseball and football games; shameless Comiskey Park and Wrigley Field patrons publicly urinating in Chicago's 1st and 44th wards; stupefied University of Maryland fans celebrating the 2002 NCAA Basketball Championship with a raging ten-foot bonfire, fighting, and taunting police, who responded with tear gas and pepper spray; nuisances on the PGA golf tour, benefiting from inexpensive tickets and free-flowing beer, embarrassing sponsors and disrupting players with their behaviour, even hurling racist comments at golfer Esteban Toledo, a native Mexican; drunken Philadelphia fans going so wild a few weeks ago at a Monday night football game that they had to be coated with a cloud of pepper spray so thick it affected the innocent and halted the game.

Now, as a fair-minded, despotically heaped, I am not deaf to arguments, which contradict my agenda. Clearly, alcohol use at sporting events may have cultural significance as part of the comradery and revelry among fans. Also, some European research on soccer hooligans shows that some people will act as though they are drunk, even when they are secretly given placebo beers without alcohol. Related research suggests that alcohol bans at stadiums could lead to increased drinking prior to arrival or the substitution of other drugs, like ecstasy for alcohol.

But, illegal ecstasy is hardly a perfect substitute for perfectly legal beer, even if you assume beer guzzlers who catch wreck on brews at the game have a taste for other drugs. For the cretins who might try to get extra-hammered before arriving at the game, I have one word: breathalyzer. Under my regime, a friendly, neighbourhood-screening device will be ready to greet you at the turnstiles, check your blood-alcohol level and, if necessary, keep your drunk ass out.

And don't start moaning about all that unreasonable search and seizure and privacy nonsense. I don't hear you complaining too much about the digital video surveillance, retinal scans and face-recognition technology that the sports powers have planned for our present free and democratic society.

Remember that the Grand Wizard Omnipotent won't be running a democracy. So prepare yourselves, you imbibing infidels. My cause is righteous and my motives pure. The time to decide is now. Either you are with me, or... **PRIDE**

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