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Teams give nod to more personality-driven giveaways

A bauble for fans

Puget Sound Business Journal (Seattle) - July 7, 2006 by [Jeff Meisner](#) Staff writer

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Back in the Kingdome days, the **Seattle Mariners** gave away the standard promotional items to boost attendance -- caps, miniature bats, T-shirts, refrigerator magnets and seat cushions carrying the team logo.

But as pro sports ticket prices have risen, so have fan expectations. Today, it takes gifts such as bobblehead dolls that bank on player appeal, and niche events such as "Stitch 'n Pitch" and "Frogstock," to keep fans coming back.

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"There's no question that in-stadium promotions have evolved from simple giveaways to highly sought-after collectibles," said Steve Avanesian, vice president of sales and strategic alliances at Bensussen Deutsch & Associates Inc., the Woodinville-based maker of numerous bobbleheads for the Mariners. "They capture the essence of the players at a particular moment in time."

Giveaway events like the Ichiro Suzuki and Richie Sexson bobblehead nights this season can be big draws. In both cases, the first 25,000 fans through the gates received a wobbly-

headed figurine of the featured player.

On April 20, attendance at Safeco for a Mariners game against the Texas Rangers was 17,917. The next night -- a Friday and an Ichiro Bobblehead Night -- nearly twice that many fans, 35,237, watched the Mariners take on the Detroit Tigers.

Similar turnouts occurred for Adrian Beltre A-Train Night and Richie Sexson Bobblehead Night: 32,998 and 35,556, respectively.

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In the minor leagues, where promotions play an even larger role in a team's business, giveaways bring in a higher-than-average number of fans.

"In minor league baseball, we have no control over which players are put on the roster," said **Tacoma Rainiers** General Manager Dave Lewis. "So we build our business around the peripherals of the game -- entertainment and promotions."

On July 1 at Cheney Stadium, the Rainiers gave away bobbleheads depicting Mariners' 20-year-old pitching phenom Felix Hernandez to the first 1,400 children through the gates. Attendance that night was 5,061, a 19 percent increase over the team's 4,245 average.

Lewis said that the Rainiers, a Triple-A affiliate of the Mariners, are actually moving away from bobbleheads and other novelties.

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