Fun(d)raising at Football Games

-- Vikas Argod

"*At least ten. Shouldn't be a big deal,"* I told myself when I was signing the contract for managing a food stand during the 2007 Penn State Football season. In fact, I was relieved when Eric agreed to allow a minimum of ten volunteers per stand, giving me some slack from the earlier figure of fifteen. Reasons for not finding volunteers on a Saturday morning are many: Friday-night parties, weekend hikings, and, of course, assignment deadlines. Exceptions can be made a few times, but can it be made to seven Saturdays? I was restless the day I signed the contract, but phone calls to KC, Ashu, and others brought some solace. People were positive and they sounded reliable. Typically, new Indian graduate students are enthusiastic about football games because they hear a lot about it at orientation. Whenever I met new faces, I remembered to tell them some football facts. It would be descriptions of tailgate parties or importance of homecoming week or the big ten conference.

My first email requesting the Indian *junta* to volunteer for 2007's first home game against Florida International got many responses: a total of 26 a day before the game. I reached the stand 8A early and got a shock! Cindy, our stall manager and trusted supervisor, was absent. The stand had to be managed without her. I got another shock when only 13 – out of the 26 who responded – students actually turned up at the stall. I regretted turning down few volunteers for the lack of tickets. I learnt a lesson!

I noted several important things from the first game. First, preparation time of hotdogs and pretzels is about 10 minutes and the break time is not more than 15 minutes. This is not a trivial fact and can disturb the order-supply equilibrium badly. Second, demand keeps increasing till half time and then decreases abruptly. This may not be true, however, if the match is taking interesting turns and, more importantly, if Penn State is winning in a nail-biting game. Third, if water sales are high, sales of hotdogs will be less. The more we drink, the less we tend to eat. Finally, students do not spend too much money during the game. There is no point in asking one precious volunteer to stand near the student gate and sell water bottles. It is a waste of resource. I hope prospective food stand organizers will take note of my observations.

These observations helped me a lot in subsequent games. The next one with Notre Dame was the biggest home game of the season. Twenty-three volunteers, $7,000 sales, practically zero wastage, and a perfect account of inventory and cash were the highlights of this game. From subsequent games, assignments, term exams, and deadlines caused a downward trend in the number of *new* volunteers. I took refuge in my 'emergency volunteer list' and somehow managed to get 15 people. I expected good sales because Penn state was playing against Buffalo after 107 years. But the game turned to be the least profitable of the season. 'Beat Iowa' was the new slogan I started using in my mails for the next game and it worked! Sixteen volunteers showed up and we made decent sales. However, the idea of selling coffee did not work well on a hot day. People kept saying, '*a bottle of cold water, please'*.

I like it when they give special names to any game. It creates some excitement among people who are new to this football season. That is why it was not at all hard to get 15 people for the 'homecoming game' against Wisconsin. We started selling hot chocolates, but later it followed the trend of coffee sales in the last game. The much awaited Lions vs. Buckeyes was our next game. Getting volunteers was not that difficult. However, Penn State losing the match caused sales to go below our expectations. The last game against Purdue witnessed a high flux of

volunteers and we made good sales. Thus ended the Football season of 2007. Cumulative profits were $4,130.88 with the help of 119 volunteers.

I would like to end this article with some interesting snippets of the 2007 Football season. Harisha came to all the games and stood near the gate to distribute the tickets. The mystery of Maya selling literally anything at lightning speed by hawking in the stands remained unexplored. He had mastered it. Manu filled the food stall with his cheerful songs! Venkat's camera helped in digitizing the moments but only Archana's camera could catch 'Joe Paterno on the field' clearly. Even after going to Beaver for all the seven home games and detailed explanations from Ashu, Vikas didn't have any idea about touchdown or any other rules of American football. Thanks are due to Prasanna and Shankar for efficiently managing the cash counters during the initial games. I miss those days. But even before this feeling ends, I can see Beaver Stadium getting ready for the next kick off! See you all there soon.