

March 21, 2023

Commissioner Robert Manfred  
Major League Baseball  
1271 6th Ave  
New York, NY 10020

Dear Commissioner Manfred:

There's a time and place for everything.

And the time and place for commercials on the radio during baseball broadcasts is before the game, after the game and between innings.

There is no place for commercials during the actual broadcast of the game.

We call on you to prohibit in-game ads, as they are known in the advertising business.

It is clear in their voices that baseball announcers are being driven to distraction by the proliferation of ads they are required to read as the game is being played.

We recently conducted a survey of all thirty broadcasts on one day last year – April 9, 2022 – when all thirty teams played.

And what we found was disturbing – a total of 847 in-game ads – or an average of 28.2 ads per game per team.

In 2012, we conducted a similar survey of in game ads for a New York Yankees broadcast and found 22 in game ads in one game. But our survey for the game last year found that the number had more than doubled for a Yankees game to more than 50.

The three worst offenders in our recent survey – the Chicago Cubs (60), the Colorado Rockies (53) and the New York Yankees (51) – each had more than 50 in-game ads in the game.

We read that you were a Yankee fan growing up in upstate New York.

We remember listening with pleasure to Mel Allen's radio broadcasts of the New York Yankee games.

The commercials were reserved for the commercial breaks – between half innings.

Now, the commercials have become a significant part of the broadcast.

They disrupt the flow and excitement of the game broadcast, irritate the listeners to no end, and undermine your responsibilities as a guardian of the national pastime. You're a Yankee fan. Try listening to a radio broadcast some day and let me know what you think.

The Yankees force their announcers – John Sterling and Suzyn Waldman – to read more than 50 ads per game.

Pitching matchups, double plays, home runs, pitch counts, rallies, calls to the bullpen, the umpire alignment, a pitch that paints the corners, the game time temperature, even the national anthem – were sponsored in 2012 by car dealers, insurance companies, junk food outlets, among others.

Any Yankee fan who listens to the radio broadcast this year will know the ads sometimes better than the players themselves.

What Yankee fan doesn't know that the Yankee Radio Network is Driven by Jeep, that the 15th out of the game and the call to the bullpen are brought to you by Geico, that home runs are brought to you by Kia, that Sterling and Waldman are announcing from the Provident Bank broadcast booth?

The unrestrained corporate commercial creep into baseball games continues unabated, not only on radio broadcasts but also on the playing field.

What's next, uniforms pasted with ads?

Wait, that's already happening.

A number of teams have already struck sponsorship deals with major corporations.

This year, the Houston Astros will be walking billboards for Occidental Petroleum. The world champions will be required to wear an Oxy patch every game of the year. The Red Sox have a similar deal with MassMutual, the San Diego Padres with Motorola.

By allowing ads to spread into the radio broadcast booth and now onto the field, you are damaging the integrity of the game. Do you wish to associate teams with the multiple dark sides of these large corporations?

Clearly, this is not in the best interests of baseball.

Hunter Felt, in a recent report in *The Guardian*, said that "maybe the mere presence of the patches themselves will end up being more offensive to baseball fans than whatever corporate entity they happen to represent" – until that is, crimes or frauds are perpetrated.

"In any given situation, it's a net-negative when advertisements start popping up where they didn't exist before," he wrote. "And keep in mind that these ads will appear in baseball, a sport which is particularly obsessed with nostalgia for a supposedly more innocent past, when athletes played for the love of the game rather than big money."

"In that context, the rise of uniform advertisements could end up being more disruptive than the league has calculated. Aesthetics are uniquely important in baseball, and any change that makes the game 'feel' different can be perceived as a threat."

Our guess is you are hoping that this corporate creep into the radio booth and onto the field will be overshadowed by the institution of the new pitch clock rule and the elimination of certain defensive shifts.

Don't count on it.

Baseball fans are historically finicky. Step over the line once too often, and who knows – baseball fans could start turning off the game or the advertisers or both.

As advertising agencies have known for years, the more ads jammed into a set time period, the less response to each ad by listeners – that is, if they don't tune out altogether.

Please take a look at the new comprehensive survey we have compiled (attached) and give us a call to discuss steps you might take to reign in this ever expanding corporate advertising surge.

Finally, why don't you poll your radio broadcast fans and see what they think?

Sincerely,

Ken Reed, League of Fans  
(720) 635-3925

Ralph Nader  
PO Box 19367  
Washington, D.C. 20045  
Phone: (202) 387-8034

cc:

Consumer Federation of America  
Consumers League  
Public Citizen  
Congressman W. Gregory Steube (R-Florida)  
Congressman Jeff Duncan (R-South Carolina)  
Jessica Rosenworcel, Chair, Federal Communications Commission  
Senator Maria Cantwell (D-Washington)  
Senator Roger Wicker (R-Mississippi)

**Most in-game ads to least in-game ads from  
15 games (30 game broadcasts) on April 9, 2022.**

Cubs, CHC-WSCR: 60 ads  
Rockies, COL-KOA: 53 ads  
Yankees, NYY-WFAN: 51 ads  
Mets, NYM-WCBS 880: 49 ads  
Reds, CIN-WLW: 43 ads  
Brewers, MIL-WTMJ: 41 ads  
Nationals, WSH-WJFK: 41 ads  
White Sox, CWS-WMVP: 41 ads  
Red Sox, BOS-WEEI: 39 ads  
Giants, SF-KNBR: 39 ads  
Blue Jays, TOR-SN590: 37 ads  
Rangers, TEX-KRLD: 35 ads  
Mariners, SEA-KIRO: 31 ads  
Guardians, CLE-WTAM: 31 ads  
Marlins, MIA-FOX940AM: 31 ads  
Padres, SD-KWFN: 25 ads  
Cardinals, STL-KMOX: 23 ads  
Angels, LAA-KLAA: 23 ads  
Dodgers, LAD-570: 19 ads  
Tigers, DET-WXYT-FM: 18 ads  
Orioles, BAL-98 Rock: 17 ads  
Pirates, PIT-KDKA: 16 ads  
Rays, TB-WDAE: 14 ads  
Braves, ATL-680 AM: 14 ads  
Diamondbacks, AZ-98. 14 ads  
Astros, HOU-KBME: 12 ads  
Twins, MIN-TIBN: 11 ads  
Phillies, PHI-WIP: 8 ads  
Royals, KC-KCSP: 6 ads  
A's, OAK-A'S CAST: 5 ads