

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1700 Another Way to Look at Diversity

Almost 75 years ago, a man stepped into the batters box in a baseball game in St. Louis, took four pitches, and caused a new rule to be immediately enacted. Not just that, but he fueled the 1700th edition of this commentary. I'm Jerry Roberts, and I'll have the story, next on the Extra Point.

Eddie Gaedel is a name that resonates in baseball lore, not for a lengthy career but for a single, unforgettable moment. On August 19, 1951, Gaedel made history when he stepped onto the field as a pinch hitter for the St. Louis Browns.

If you're saying, "No, Jerry, it's the St. Louis Cardinals," here's a little baseball history. The Cardinals were formed in 1882 as the St. Louis Brown Stockings, then became the Cardinals in 1900. Another group came along in 1902 and launched a team, taking the original name, shortening it to Browns. The team left St. Louis in 1953 and are now known as the Baltimore Orioles. Okay, back to Eddie Gaedel.

Though the term has been ushered out of our language over the years, Eddie was then called a "midget." At the peak of his adult height, he stood just 3 feet 7 inches tall.

He did not have a traditional childhood that included baseball, as he didn't have the opportunity to participate in organized youth leagues like other kids.

Gaedel's later entry into professional baseball was largely due to the promotional strategies of a man named Bill Veeck, perhaps the ultimate promoter in the history of American sports.

Veeck signed Gaedel to play for the Browns, outfitting him with a special uniform that had the number 1/8 on the back, a playful nod to his height, which captured the imagination of fans.

It was a publicity stunt, but it had an impact

when Gaedel went to bat. Playing against the Detroit Tigers, Gaedel walked on four straight pitches that missed the strike zone. You can't fault the pitcher, as Gaedel's strike zone was outrageously narrow. Gaedel went to first base and was replaced by a pinch runner, bringing an end to the event, and his baseball career.

Baseball authorities swiftly responded to this unconventional tactic by implementing a rule that banned players of extremely short stature from the game. The league established a minimum height requirement, aiming to maintain a standard of competitiveness and integrity in baseball.

Gaedel's legacy raises important lessons for organizations beyond baseball. His story shows how unique attributes can be leveraged for competitive advantage.

Organizations can learn to identify and harness distinctive qualities within their teams, thus promoting a culture that celebrates diversity and creativity.

The diversity here was Veeck's veering off from "normal and acceptable" practice, going into an area where nobody had gone before. He found a guy with a unique attribute, one that his competition would have no answer for.

What can we learn? By recognizing and using specific strengths of individuals, businesses — and this includes civilian government businesses and military businesses — can create innovative solutions and strategies.

Maybe this is teaching critical thinking skills to everybody in the organization, empowering everybody to bring their unique perspectives to problem-solving; or encouraging different and unconventional ideas that challenge the status quo.

In today's rapidly changing landscape, it's the ability to adapt and offer creative solutions that sets us apart from our competitors. (Con't.)

By continually looking for advantages, whether they are obvious or you have to dig for them, promoting individuality, or encouraging bold ideas can push us far ahead of where we are.

Eddie Gaedel's moment in baseball reminds us that sometimes the most unconventional approaches can yield the most memorable results, paving the way for new possibilities in any field.

The true diversity that yields the best results is based on diversity of thought and approach.

What could you do where you work that is different and unconventional?

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3FM, the Ray Gibson Show, and First Hawaiian Bank, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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