

CORPORATE AMERICA

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Originally Published in The Storyteller, June 2008

“Welcome to Edison Field,” the announcer’s voice blared over the stadium’s loudspeakers, “home of the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim, for opening day of the 2008 season.”

Max Hunt led his wide-eyed eight-year-old grandson by the hand through the stadium tunnel. Max stepped solemnly to the top of the field-level stairs and gazed in awe like he was on holy ground. He took a deep breath and savored the nostalgic scent of the peanuts and hot dogs.

It was a beautiful spring afternoon, the April sun was shining on the freshly-mowed outfield, and the grounds crew was refreshing the infield dirt with their drag mats after infield practice. The seats were packed with excited fans clad in Angels red. Anticipation was high for the new season after some key free-agent acquisitions.

Max and his grandson took in the bright lights of the ballpark and the buzz of the crowd as they hustled down the stadium stairs, past the foam finger vendor, and to their seats three rows up just behind home plate. The soft cushioned seats were a welcome change from the hard wooden benches Max had fidgeted on when he saw his first professional baseball game with his father.

“We made it just in time buddy.” Max flashed a proud smile. “I’ve been waiting for years to take my grandson to his first big league game, and there’s nothing like opening day.”

The two were decked out in matching Angels caps, jerseys, and jackets for the occasion. The boy tilted his head back to see the field from under the brim of his oversized cap that made his ears stick out like Dopey from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. His baseball glove was already poised to catch the first foul ball of the season.

“I took your dad to his first big league game here in 1970,” Max said with a reverent tone usually reserved for holy places. “The California Angels, that’s what they were called back then, beat the Washington Senators 3-2. Tom Murphy pitched for the Angels and Casey Cox pitched for the Senators. The stadium has gone through some modifications since then, and the team names have changed a few times, but the grand old game of baseball is still the same.” Max waved over the hot dog vendor and bought two Angel Dogs with everything.

“Opening day of the 2008 campaign,” the announcer continued, “features a classic rivalry between the Exxon Mobile Texas Rangers and your Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim, sponsored by Chevrolet.” Chevy ads flashed on the video screens running along the first- and third-base lines. And placards advertising the latest Chevrolet models blanketed the outfield fence alongside billboards from Dell Computers, Motorola, Safeway, Allstate, Best Buy, and a dozen other Fortune 500 companies.

Max's smile dimmed.

The announcer introduced the visiting team to lackluster applause by a few scattered Rangers fans, which were drowned out by the vendors hawking “Cracker Jacks!”, “Bud Light!” and “Rally Monkeys!” But when the first Angels starter appeared at the edge of the dugout in his crisp white and red uniform, forty thousand fans leapt from their seats and raised a deafening roar that shook the stadium.

“INNN-TROOO-DUCING,” the announcer raised his voice to a fever pitch, “the starting American Express First Baseman for your Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim, Casey Kotchman!” Casey dashed from the dugout, took his position on the third-base line, and tipped his hat to the frenzied crowd. Stitched on the back of his ball cap was a small Chevy logo.

Max stared in disbelief at the field as the announcer introduced the “Google Second Basemen – Howie Kendrick!” Howie acknowledged the cheers and trotted next to Casey.

“The General Electric Third Basemen – the electric Chone Figgins!” The speedy infielder smiled and jogged to his place on the third base line.

“Please welcome the starting Bank of America Short Stop – Eric Aybar!”

“Playing right field, and sponsored by Verizon Wireless – Vladimir ‘Super Vlad’ Guerrero!”

Max shifted in his seat and looked down at his grandson who was fully engrossed in the experience.

“In center field, brought to you by Dow Chemical – Torii Hunter.”

“The Costco Left Fielder – Garrett Anderson.”

“Protecting home plate, the Home Depot Catcher – Mike Napoli.”

“And your UPS starting pitcher, making the delivery home – Big John Lackey.”

“Now in his 9th year as head coach for the Angels, Mike Scioscia, sponsored by Coca-Cola, who reminds you to ‘have a Coke and smile.’ And here are the rest of your Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim.”

“Scioscia,” Max mumbled to himself, “how could you let this happen?”

When the coach and the rest of the team had joined the starters along the line, the announcer continued, “Now please stand for the Microsoft National Anthem.”

All of the players and spectators removed their caps and turned toward center field, except Max who stood dumbfounded with his mouth agape. Old glory was waving in the light April breeze. The Jumbotron above the right-field pavilion projected a close-up of the Stars and Stripes as Brittany Spears bellowed the Star Spangled Banner. Stitched along the bottom of the flag, below the last red stripe, the white embroidery read:

“Brought to you by Wal-Mart.”

Max turned away in disgust and took his grandson by the hand. “I can’t take it anymore. Come on,” he said to the confused boy. “Let’s get out of here Nike.”

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