

**Veteran hot dog vendor Art Wilkosky holds up a package of buns before throwing them into the air and catching them, part of his trademark pitch to potential customers at Tiger Stadium. Below, vendors sell to fans behind home plate at Tiger Stadium.**



# Selling the goods — ballpark style



## Vendors go for 'home runs'

By William Coutant  
staff writer

The sun is shining, a slight breeze drifts into the baseball stadium and the smell of hot dogs floats up into the stands. What a way to spend a summer afternoon.

"Hot dogs. Get your hot dogs," comes the vendor's cry through the muffled chatter of the fans.

You order one and watch as the vendor, dressed in blue, sticks the two-pronged fork in his gleaming metal case, pulls out a piping-hot wiener, deftly slips it into its bun and puts just enough mustard on, almost in one motion. It's enough to make you hungry. You include a tip as you pay, and bite into your dog.

The vendor's already gone, looking for another customer. And on a good day, the crowd is there to be plenty of customers. And the vendor? There's about 100 on a good day and up to 200 on opening day at Tiger Stadium.

"A good salesman can make \$50 to \$100 a day," said Charles Stevens, a vendor since he moved to Detroit four years ago. "But it's also a release. If you like sports and the excitement, it's a good job."

And many of the vendors at Tiger Stadium have spent a few campaigns at the corner of Michigan and Trumbull.

"I'VE SEEN players come and go," said John Taylor of Roseville, a vendor at Tiger Stadium for the past 43 years. "They're not good players. But you can't talk to 'em as much because of all the restrictions."

Taylor started vending at age 17 because he couldn't get a factory job.

"I was too young to work in the shop," he said. "So I worked after school here."

Taylor later landed a shop job, and worked there for 28 years. The shop closed, but he still had a job pushing hot dogs at baseball games. And like a philosophical urban cowboy, Taylor knows the name of the game: "You've got to move them dogs."

For native Detroit Art Wilkosky, his love affair with the Tigers began in 1938 when he came to a game with other school schoolboys.

"I was Hank Greenberg, Mickey Cochrane and Schoolboy Howe," said the white-haired Detroit native. "It's a fun job. This is my retirement."

"It's a good job," said Taylor. "You get your exercise. And if you're nice to people, they're nice to you."

Other vendors agree: The fans at the old ball park are courteous.

"I've never been shortchanged," Stevens said. "The fans are real good. You don't have to worry about it."

AND FOR vendors with enough seniority to work the box seats sections, the clientele can include some famous people.

"We have regular customers," said Wilkosky. "I've served hot dogs to lots of celebrities. I've served the highest to the lowest."

Wilkosky, a former salesman for J.L. Hudson's, said selling is his calling, whether it be men's suits or hot dogs. And he has his own style, throwing up a package of hot dog buns in the air.

"It's a way to get their attention," he said.

Vending food is not an automatic way to make money. Most of the vendors who've been working Tiger stadium sell hot dogs. Another big seller is malt cups, an ice cream treat.

Since vendors get to choose what they'll sell and where by

seniority, new vendors sometimes have a harder item to sell.

"Ice cream's been the best for me," said newcomer Cornell Turner of Detroit. "Cookies have been the hardest. I guess that's because we don't give milk with them."

Sometimes a product can be especially appealing, like a cold Coke on a hot July day or a hot dog on a nippy September night.

And what does a vendor do when the unusual occurs, like a baseball lands in his case of hot dogs?

"WITH ALL those hands going into my hot dogs, there was nothing I could do but stand back and watch," said John Chieffo of Detroit.

Chieffo, like many vendors, also vending at Joe Louis Arena or other events. He's quick to reject a hot dog from one of the three commissaries in the stadium if it's broken.

Fully loaded with hot dogs, buns, mustard, hot water and the coils, which keep the wiener hot and add an appealing aroma, a hot vendor is carrying more than 50 pounds. Experienced vendors will keep their cases on a railing while looking for customers, or like pretzel vendor Olva Newman, carry the case on top of her head.

And although location is important, the box seats aren't necessarily the best place for vending at every game.

Stevens, who prefers to sell ice cream, said school groups, which often sit in the upper deck or outlying sections, can be his best customers.

Many vendors, like Newman, work year-round, selling at Michigan Stadium or at conceris as well as Tiger Stadium. But vendors also include school teachers and other professionals, who have found a way to enjoy baseball and make some extra money.

Now, back to that hot dog and the baseball game.

### THE LINGO OF VENDING

Vending is a game within a game. Like baseball, there are errors, saves and strikeouts. Here are some familiar baseball terms as they apply to vending:

#### SAVE...

Vendor Charles Stevens had to work the upper deck on a day when the crowd was small. But two large groups of school children came to the park and gave Stevens plenty of business. "I did all right," he said.

#### ERROR:

Jerry Williams was doing a hopping business with malt cups in the lower grandstand, but he took a bad hop with a case of the cold treats on top of his head and dropped one. No harm done.

#### A GOOD PITCH:

Art Wilkosky has found an out pitch when hot dog sales are slow. He throws a package of buns in the air to catch the eye, and appetite, of fans.



John Taylor (left) shows a deft hand as he serves up a hot dog near the Detroit Tigers dugout before the game. Young fans, however, were more interested in Cecil Fielder than Taylor's wares. Olva Newman (below) serves up a pretzel to Diane Steeg of Belleville, while friend John Frawley of Canton (behind Steeg) enjoys the game.



Staff photos by Jim Jagdfield