

Start Me Up

The usual repertoire of musical selections at sporting events can use some updating



BOB LATHAM

It's autumn. Kids are back at school, and school sports of the outdoor and indoor varieties are in full swing. Having attended a number of high school sporting events, I have noticed that they provide not only an opportunity for budding athletes to blossom but also an opportunity for those in other areas that support sports events to hone their skills, such as the students working the public address system.

Perhaps I was sensitized to this craft at the London Olympics, where the stadium PA people did an exceptional job, most artfully at the beach volleyball venue. Not only did the venue announcers keep the atmosphere upbeat and fun, they managed after each point to play five-second clips of songs that were—as they had to be—instantly recognizable. So, to the future generation of stadium and arena audio personnel, I offer some do's, don'ts and other unsolicited advice.

At many schools you may see some variation of the theme pioneered by the Chicago Bulls dynasty of the 1990s: the introduction of the opposing team in a voice sufficiently subdued for NPR, then blasting "Sirius" by the Alan Parsons Project and turning into an over-caffeinated TV pitchman to introduce the home team. Yes, it's fun to humble the opposing team while glorifying the home team, but this technique is getting a little clichéd in pro basketball (indeed, "Sirius" did not even originate with the Bulls; it was used by pro wrestler Ricky Steamboat in the 1980s). You may not be able to get away with what Will Ferrell did in New Orleans this year when he announced the starting lineups for a Hornets home game against the Bulls (example: he introduced the Bulls' Carlos Boozer by saying, "He still lives with his mother"), but nevertheless I encourage you to innovate rather than replicate.

You, of course, have the usual catalog of songs played at sporting events to choose from: Queen's "We Are the Champions" and "We Will Rock You," the Ramones' "Blitzkrieg Bop" ("Hey, ho, let's go") and the Rolling Stones' "Start Me Up" among them. I wonder if when Keith Richards came up with the opening guitar riff of "Start Me Up" he realized that it would be the ideal segue into the dropping of a puck at a hockey game, though I suspect the only ice he had in mind was floating in his vodka. But if you decide to play another familiar sports arena staple, Gary Glitter's "Rock

and Roll, Part Two," make sure your principal isn't familiar with how creepy Gary Glitter actually is. I've been forced before to note the irony of a man convicted of child pornography and child sexual abuse having his signature song played at schools. You may want to leave this one off the playlist, with the hope that it might be retired permanently. Instead, be the person who finds a new, more contemporary hard-driving instrumental to take its place.

I am actually a fan of the more modern trend of finding a song whose lyrics have nothing to do with sports but which, for often mystical reasons, catches on with the home crowd and becomes a theme song. Fans at Fenway Park singing "Sweet Caroline" in the eighth inning of Red Sox games falls into this category. It does help a theme song in getting traction when it is associated with ending a World Series drought of 86 years, as the Red Sox did in 2004. What doesn't help for another team that has used the song in recent years—Penn State football—are the lyrics "reaching out, touchin' me, touchin' you." Penn State recently announced that it would no longer play the song, though denied that the decision had anything to do with the lyrics. Right.

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In the same category as the Red Sox adopting "Sweet Caroline" is the Chicago Blackhawks adopting "Chelsea Dagger" by the Fratellis during the 2008–2009 season and then ending a 49-year

Stanley Cup drought the next year, which made the lyrics "do-do-do-do-do-do-do-do-do-do-do" more meaningful (not that they weren't already, of course). If you decide to play this song, it's best not to tell your principal it is an ode to a stripper. But since "Chelsea Dagger" has already been taken (and was taken by several U.K. soccer clubs before Blackhawks fans adopted it), see if you can catch lightning in a bottle by finding a totally random song that resonates with your home crowd. You can then enjoy your legacy when you come back for your 10-year high school reunion and people are still singing it. ■

Bob Latham is a partner at the law firm Jackson Walker, L.L.P., and an International Rugby Board member. His new book titled "Winners & Losers: Rants, Riffs and Reflections on the World of Sports," is available in the Media Zone at SportsTravelMagazine.com.