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Daniel Mears / The Detroit News

Fan Ken Parker waves one of the rally towels that were given out at the home opener. A study says the Tigers' giveaways lack originality.

## Tigers' giveaway grade: D

Lack of variety sees winner on field fall in UDM study's marketing standings

Eric Morath / The Detroit News

Advertisement

**DETROIT** -- On the field, they're champs. But when it comes to giving out fan freebies, the Tigers are a bit chintzy, at least according to a University of Detroit-Mercy report.

While other teams are giving away iPods, serving dinners on the diamond and holding "Build-A-Pierogy" nights this season, Detroit's Major League Baseball club sticks to the more standard magnet schedules, floppy hats and post-game fireworks.

Their lack of originality earned the Tigers the third-lowest grade in the majors -- a "D" -- in sports marketing professor Mike Bernacchi's

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13th annual analysis of baseball promotions.

Bernacchi didn't assign letter grades last year, but put the Tigers in the middle of the pack, helped by the giveaway of 16 Chevys.

The Pittsburgh Pirates and the Florida Marlins -- both losers on the field last season -- earned A-plusses. Both teams will hold more than 125 promotions this season for just 81 home games.

The Boston Red Sox received an incomplete because they don't release a preseason promotions schedule.

"With the Pirates, I think they're committed to not winning the pennant this year, or any of the next 25, so they have to have great promos to get people in the ballpark," Bernacchi said.

The Pirates' pierogy night, ladies club and gospel fest caught his eye.

Though the Tigers' staple promotions -- kids running the bases and weekend fireworks -- may not be original, they are among the most popular in baseball, said Eric Smallwood, vice president of Front Row Marketing Services, a sports marketing firm.

"It looks to me like the Tigers are right in line with the better promotions in baseball," he said. "Putting them at the cellar seems wacky."

Tigers officials were surprised at the results of the rankings, saying ESPN and Sports Illustrated recently ranked the club among the leagues' best fan experiences.

Bernacchi defines a promotion as any giveaway or themed event intended to attract fans to the game.

He grades each team on quantity, quality and creativity of promotions listed on schedules released before the season starts.

**Full marks for variety**

Though the Tigers' 56 scheduled promotions is in the middle of Major League clubs in terms of number, what sinks them is that more than half of those are one of two events: after-game fireworks and Kids Run the Bases.

Bernacchi only awards quality and creativity points the first time a promotion is held. So a team that does something different every night, like the Pirates, is likely to do much better.

Bernacchi said the Tigers don't step outside of the box to produce "Wow" promotions. He notes that Atlanta this season is having a Motown night when the Tigers visit the Braves, yet no such musical tribute is planned in Detroit.

"Really creative promotions try to satisfy fans by zooming in on their target market," he said. "I love that in Minnesota they're giving away




**Steve Perez / The Detroit News**

A marketing exec defends such Tigers promos as fireworks. [See full image](#)

**Who makes the grade?**

University of Detroit-Mercy Professor Mike Bernacchi grades Major League Baseball team promotions based on quantity, quality and creativity. Click on each team to see its promotional schedule.

Team	Grade	Promotions
<a href="#">Pittsburgh Pirates</a>	A+	157
<a href="#">Florida Marlins</a>	A+	127
<a href="#">Tampa Bay Devil Rays</a>	A	74
<a href="#">Houston Astros</a>	A	132
<a href="#">Seattle Mariners</a>	A	101
<a href="#">Chicago Cubs</a>	B+	62
<a href="#">Cleveland Indians</a>	B+	84
<a href="#">Minnesota Twins</a>	B+	82
<a href="#">San Diego Padres</a>	B	61
<a href="#">Atlanta Braves</a>	B	116
<a href="#">Kansas City Royals</a>	B	113
<a href="#">Philadelphia Phillies</a>	B-	64
<a href="#">San Francisco Giants</a>	B-	44
<a href="#">Arizona Diamondbacks</a>	C+	54
<a href="#">Oakland A's</a>	C+	47
<a href="#">Los Angeles Dodgers</a>	C	38
<a href="#">Los Angeles Angles</a>	C	36
<a href="#">New York Mets</a>	C	41
<a href="#">Colorado Rockies</a>	C	44
<a href="#">Milwaukee Brewers</a>	C	41
<a href="#">Texas Rangers</a>	C	84
<a href="#">Toronto Blue Jays</a>	C	43
<a href="#">New York Yankees</a>	C-	38

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fishing lures."

Bernacchi, whose annual report appears in his spunky newsletter, Under the Mike-roscope, admits the grades are largely the qualitative judgments of him and his co-researcher, Mike Barone, a UDM graduate student.

"Our goal is to create an overall family-friendly experience," said Tigers spokesman Rob Matwick. "Promotions are a part of that, but so is the carousel, the Ferris wheel and in-game giveaways," like hot dog row.

Matwick also said he expect the Tigers to add promotions and special nights as the season progresses.

**Pistons buck winners' trend**

The Tigers say they aim for quality over quantity when it goes to handouts to the fans.

Smallwood said that's a smart strategy because a quickly tattering T-shirt or cheap-looking trinket could leave a fan feeling ripped off -- a big negative for the sponsor whose name is attached.

Pepsi, Budweiser and McDonald's are among the big names backing Tigers promotions this season.

The Tigers say General Motors and Chevrolet remain a key sponsor, but chose not to give away cars this season.

The sponsors' financial support boosts the team's bottom line, as well as puts smiles on fans faces.

Freebies also encourage fans to show up early, which can increase business at concession stands but hurt merchandise sales if fans are satisfied with the free keepsake.

Winning teams, not surprisingly, rely less on promotions and more on performance on the field to fill seats, according to Bernacchi's analysis.

The New York Yankees, for example, with only 38 promotions, got a C minus. The World Series champion St. Louis Cardinals got a D with its 38 promotions.

One local team that bucks that trend is the Detroit Pistons. Despite four consecutive conference finals appearances, the Pistons handed out an item -- a jersey, a bobble head, a poster -- at every home game this season.

Palace Sports and Entertainment President Tom Wilson said the giveaways are not intended to draw fans to specific games but rather increase the quality of the Piston's brand and the fan's experience.

"When you sell out 175 consecutive games, they're not coming for the T-shirt," he said. "It's

<a href="#">Cincinnati Reds</a>	C-	74
<a href="#">St. Louis Cardinals</a>	D	38
<a href="#">Chicago White Sox</a>	D	45
<a href="#">Detroit Tigers</a>	D	56
<a href="#">Baltimore Orioles</a>	D-	31
<a href="#">Washington Nationals</a>	F	17

**Ballpark bonus**

Tigers fans will get more than the game on the following dates. More promotions may be added as the season progresses:

Date	Item
4/20	'06 AL Champ replica rings
4/21	2007 magnet schedule
4/22	Tigers calendar
4/22	Kids run the bases
4/28	On-field clinic (pregame)
4/29	Tigers pin album
4/29	Kids run the bases
5/18	Friday fireworks
5/19	2007 World Series rally towel
5/20	Kids run the bases
5/25	Friday fireworks
5/26	Gary Sheffield replica baseball glove
5/26	On-field clinic (pregame)
5/26	Saturday fireworks
5/27	Floppy hat
5/27	Kids run the bases
6/8	Friday fireworks
6/10	Kids run the bases
6/29	Friday fireworks
6/30	Justin Verlander '06 AL ROY baseball
7/1	Magglio Ordonez bobblehead
7/1	On-field photo day
7/1	Kids run the bases
7/4	Fourth of July fireworks spectacular
7/6	Friday fireworks
7/7	Saturday fireworks
7/8	Kids run the bases
7/20	Friday fireworks
7/21	13th Annual Negro League Tribute Game
7/21	Saturday fireworks
7/22	2006 AL champs cap
7/22	Kids run the bases

something more subtle your son or daughter has a Chauncey Billups jersey, and every time they wear the jersey you remember that it was a great night, even if you don't remember if we won or lost."

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8/3	Friday fireworks
8/4	Saturday fireworks
8/5	Carlos Guillen bobblehead
8/5	Kids run the bases
8/10	Friday fireworks
8/11	Tigers youth cap
8/12	Joel Zumaya T-shirt
8/12	Kids run the bases
8/24	Friday fireworks
8/25	Saturday fireworks
8/26	Kids run the bases
9/7	Friday fireworks
9/8	Saturday fireworks
9/9	Duffel bag
9/9	Kids run the bases
9/21	Fan appreciation weekend
9/21	Friday fireworks
9/22	Fan appreciation weekend
9/22	Saturday fireworks
9/23	Fan appreciation weekend
9/23	Shirt off our back



**Brandy Baker / The Detroit News**  
 Alec Seipenko, 8, awaits a rally with his towel. Letting kids run the bases is another traditional fan park perk the Tigers offer. [See full image](#)

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