

Camden Yards vendors will have to move for Grand Prix

By Steve Kilar, *The Baltimore Sun*, August 26, 2011

For a dozen years, Bill Kohlhepp has sold hot dogs off the grill and soda to hungry baseball and football fans downtown. His tent is in an ideal spot to grab the attention of spectators streaming toward Camden Yards and M&T Bank Stadium: on the pedestrian island of a busy intersection northwest of Oriole Park. Now that spot, between Russell Street and Washington Boulevard, is also right along the two-mile race track for the Baltimore Grand Prix.

And as the Grand Prix draws near and barriers and grandstands are erected, Kohlhepp says he's watched the advantages of his location evaporate. During the races over Labor Day weekend, vendors will have to move far from the action on the race course. In the meantime, they complain Grand Prix preparations have limited pedestrian access to their stands during the potentially lucrative weekend Orioles series against the New York Yankees.

The situation has infuriated the city's licensed vendors, who have complained about their treatment before the city panel that regulates them, arguing that they should be able to keep their regular spots. The Grand Prix will control vending on the streets that are closed for the races.

"At the last meeting, I looked at the vendor board guys and said, 'I know when I'm being thrown a bone with no meat on it,'" said Kohlhepp, who pays about \$375 per year for a licensed spot on public space.

Grand Prix supporters argue that the city has worked hard to find a place for the vendors. City Councilman William H. Cole IV, who represents the area and was an early proponent of the race, says even with the move, the Grand Prix will wind up helping the vendors.

"If this was a normal Labor Day weekend, the Orioles rarely play that weekend," Cole said. "It's three days they wouldn't have had any business."

Grand Prix organizers set aside high-traffic areas outside the race zone for the city's vendors, said Pete Collier, the event's chief operating officer. Moving vendors out of their normal locations was necessary because the areas where sellers congregate for ballgames will be unsafe during the race, he said.

"It wasn't to hurt them," Collier said. Moving the licensed vendors out of the track area will actually allow them to sell their goods with less competition, he said.

The first of more than 2,200 concrete race walls was erected in the last week of July, eventually snaking throughout the Inner Harbor. Each wall is 12 feet long and topped with a thick-wire fence. For more than a week, two lines of these walls have separated Kohlhepp's stand from fans across the street at the stadium.

Friday night, during the first game of the Orioles-Yankees weekend series, fans walking down the west side of Russell Street could not even see Kohlhepp's stand. The concrete barriers, grandstands and chain-link fences on both sides of the street completely block the vendors from view.

"We play the hand we're dealt," said Eric Hartka, who was running the grill and has worked for Kohlhepp for more than two years. He said that they were selling their fair share of sausages and sandwiches Friday night, but that things were a bit slower than normal. "Whether it's that there's a hurricane coming or it's the [Grand Prix] stands, I don't know."