



AKRON RUBBERDUCKS **LET THEM PLAY INITIATIVE + FAMILY NIGHT**

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SM 217: BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

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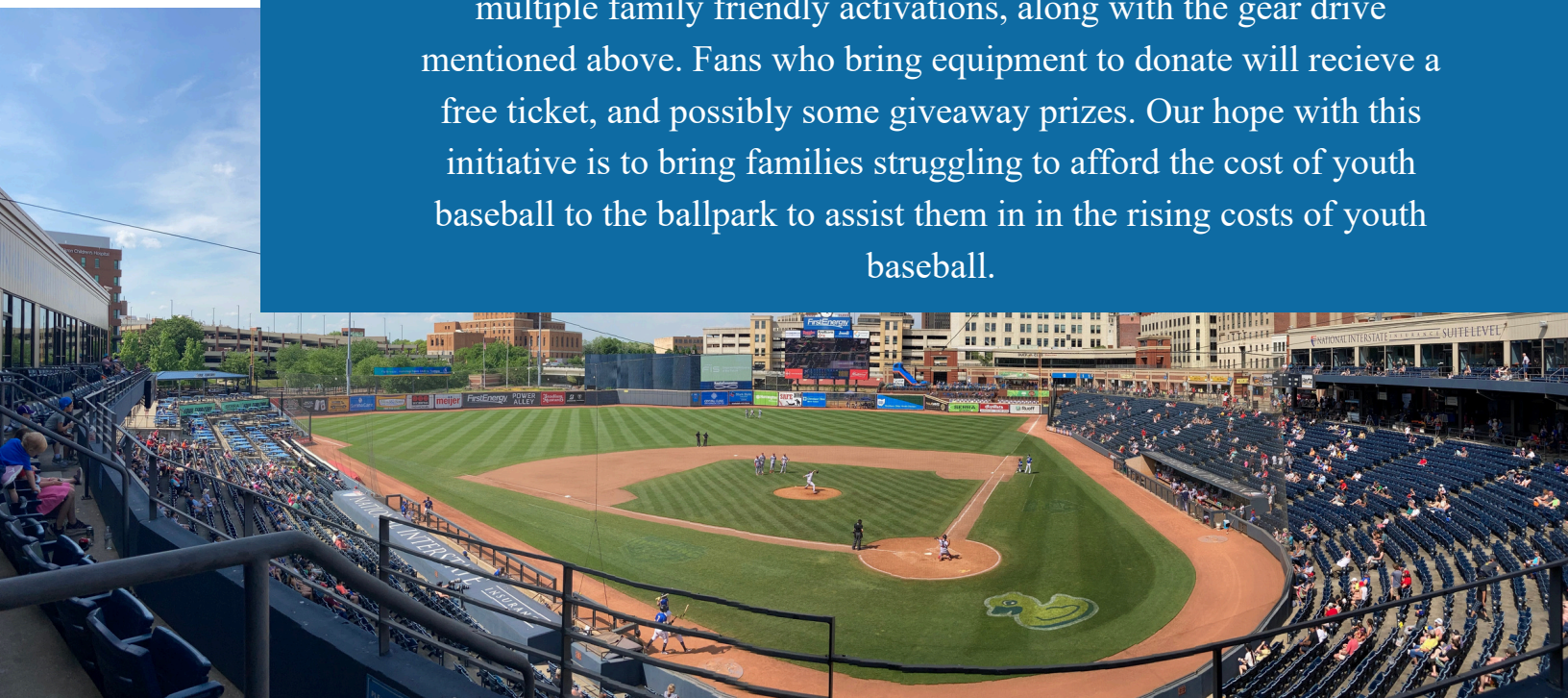
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Youth Sports participation has been falling for years for many different reasons, however, in baseball, there is one specific area that causes many families to struggle. Youth baseball costs have been rising for years, leaving many lower-income families unable to afford to put their kids through the youth baseball system. To address this, we propose the Let Them Play Initiative. With this initiative, we will help provide gear and equipment to lower income families in the Akron area to allow them to put their kids through the game they love. We hope to offset costs enough with the free gear to allow families to comfortably afford all the other expenses in youth baseball that are not equipment based.

To address this problem we have a few different steps. First, we will partner with the Akron RubberDucks, a minor league baseball team, and host a family night at their ballpark. We will invite different youth baseball organizations in the Akron area, and families in the Akron area struggling with the costs of youth baseball. We will have multiple family friendly activations, along with the gear drive mentioned above. Fans who bring equipment to donate will receive a free ticket, and possibly some giveaway prizes. Our hope with this initiative is to bring families struggling to afford the cost of youth baseball to the ballpark to assist them in the rising costs of youth baseball.



BACKGROUND

Target Audience: Bryan Lobban and the Akron Rubber Ducks

Our intended audience is Bryan Lobban. As the director of corporate partnerships and special events, our theme night activations best fall under his scope. Presenting to him requires a unique attention to detail, as events and partnerships require special attention to ensure every party is happy and events run smoothly. Brian is responsible for managing and developing revenue-generating partnerships for the RubberDucks, as well as running in-stadium events.



- 01 Connects youth sports accessibility to tangible fan development outcomes
- 02 Demonstrates clear logistics, roles, and risk mitigation so he does not inherit operational burden
- 03 Shows alignment with RubberDucks' brand values and partnership goals
- 04 Proves that community-driven activations can result in attendance growth, sponsor interest, and positive PR

BACKGROUND

Across minor league baseball and the broader sports landscape, organizations are expected to demonstrate community impact, increase fan engagement, and strengthen local ties. When access to youth sports declines, the long-term fan pipeline weakens—affecting attendance, brand loyalty, and community relevance. Teams that invest in lowering these barriers cultivate stronger, more committed fan bases and position themselves as leaders in social responsibility.



Future fan development

Kids who play sports are significantly more likely to attend and remain lifelong supporters.



Community credibility

Demonstrating authentic investment in local families reinforces organizational values.



Revenue stability and brand positioning

Social-impact activations attract partners who are increasingly prioritizing CSR-driven initiatives. Connecting the RubberDucks brand to youth empowerment enhances both short- and long-term visibility.

PROBLEM STATEMENT



The cost of youth sport participation has become unsustainable

Lack of Inclusivity

Youth sports should be accessible to every child, yet the current cost structure disproportionately affects lower-income families and children of color, limiting their ability to participate. With outdated or unsafe facilities, lack of transportation options, and the pressure of competitive travel teams, many youth are forced out of baseball altogether. As participation declines, the long-term diversity and growth of the sport are at risk.

Time and Commitment

To get their kids to practice or games, parents must either have a car or another form of transportation, like a carpool. Now parents have to incur the costs of gas money or transit tickets, which can add to a considerable extra expense. Some may feel that the sport just isn't for them or that they won't be welcomed, because they haven't seen people like them represented on the field, or haven't grown up around baseball. And for kids who start later, it can be intimidating to join a team where everyone else already has years of experience.

“Only 31% of children living below the federal poverty level are participating in sports”

6% Decline
Drop in core
team sports
participation
from 2019–2022

Lack of Accessibility

Families with lower incomes may need to rely on scholarships or discounts on their children's participation, but are often still spending more than \$3,000 a year if their kid plays in a travel league. The longer this disparity is fed, the longer lasting the impact will be, with a huge advantage for more privileged children in having the chance to play in college, go pro, and make a career out of their sport. In some communities, there just aren't enough local baseball programs. In less wealthy neighborhoods, children may not have access to updated or safe facilities, essential for play. Fields could be run down, lack seating for spectators, or not have the necessary amenities required by leagues, like bathrooms. Kids who want to play might not have a team nearby, or their families might not have reliable transportation to get to practices or games.

COST OF YOUTH SPORT



10.5% of annual
income → child's
participation



\$3,000–\$7,000
Average annual cost
families spend on youth
baseball



Baseball specifically requires a lot of unique gear, from bats, to helmets and gloves. A starter kit can cost anywhere from \$150-\$300, while a more competitive kit can be closer to \$500, forcing families to spend hundreds of dollars just to get their kids started. On top of that, there may be league fees, travel costs, and tournament expenses, which make it even harder for many kids to stay involved. For families already balancing a budget, these costs can easily become a deal-breaker. Parents are spending an estimated \$3-7000 on youth baseball a year, an amount most families cannot afford to part with. A 2024 study found that parents of competitive youth athletes are required to allocate around 10.5% of their gross income to their child's sport, accounting for gear, travel, and practice.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

THE LET THEM PLAY INITIATIVE

PART ONE:



To play their part in combating the troubling disparities that have taken shape in youth sport, we propose that the RubberDucks establish the Let Them Play Initiative, an organization that will ensure that every aspiring athlete gets an equal chance to live out their dreams. This initiative will establish multiple methods to funnel high-quality gear and equipment into underfunded youth sports programs across Northeast Ohio, allowing the RubberDucks to give back to their community while helping to strengthen the future of sport.

FAMILY NIGHT



To help the RubberDucks gain attendance and to help the Let Them Play Initiative gain visibility we will propose a family night the night of the gear drive. This family night will help drive foot traffic to the game, bring in more people to possibly donate, and hopefully attract low income families and teams to the gear drive to offset their expenses for equipment.

FAMILY NIGHT

KEY ASPECTS

Gear Donation Drive



Attendees to RubberDucks games will be encouraged to bring their used gear to the ballpark to place in a donation box. These items will be redistributed to youth athletic programs in the surrounding area, supplying them with ample equipment that will not incur any additional costs on their families. Several aspects of this drive will add value and entertainment for fans. Perhaps the most essential will be the exchange of free game tickets to fans who provide donations, adding a reward of sorts for this charitable act. There will also be a competition made out of donations, with each of the RubberDucks' four mascots representing a different category of equipment. The standings for each mascot will be displayed on the video board throughout the game, and provide an entertainment aspect that keeps fans' minds on the donation drive and the initiative as a whole.

RubberDuck Giveaway



Fans who bring their used gear to donate will be eligible to receive our custom made RubberDucks. We appreciate the kindness of people who are willing to support our gear drive and we believe we have a great deal for RubberDuck and Guardians fans. We will have many different options of RubberDucks, including current RubberDuck players, current Guardians' players, and Guardians legends. There will be a tier system for this giveaway, for more gear you donate, you will have the opportunity to receive more collectable RubberDucks.



Let Them Eat

The young fans and athletes that are aided by the Let Them Play Initiative and celebrated at Family Night will have the chance to play an important role in the stadium experience, as they will be presented with various family-friendly concession options that they can choose to put on the menu for the evening. Being trusted with such an integral part of the stadium operations will build the youth fans' emotional attachment to the team, and cause them to reciprocate the team's display of affection toward them through continued loyalty.

IMPACT ON RUBBERDUCKS

This initiative will not only drastically improve access for youth sports teams in low income areas, but will also create multiple new revenue streams for the RubberDucks organization, and transform the gameday experience.



1

The increased levels of fan engagement through the Family Nights' various activities will energize the crowd at 7 17 Credit Union Park. We expect that this sentiment will greatly increase demand for RubberDucks tickets, and increase the volume of sales for single-game tickets, packages, and PSLs. With the team's average game attendance in 2025 lagging behind stadium capacity, the excitement brought by the Let Them Play Initiative will help draw much larger crowds to the ballpark.

2

The various interactive stadium activations that are part of the Family Night experience provide ample opportunities for partnerships with both local and national brands, through both naming rights and more extensive partnerships. Sponsorships can drive large amounts of revenue growth for sports teams, and multiple partnerships that engage fans occurring simultaneously can bring to unprecedented amounts of revenue to the Rubberducks.

3

The RubberDucks offer untapped potential for a Minor League atmosphere infused with the tremendous passion and loyalty of sports fans in the greater Cleveland area. A concerted effort to enhance the fan experience by doing good for the youth of their community is a fantastic way to create this, strengthening loyalty among fans by providing them reasons to frequently return to the ballpark, and build the next generation of young RubberDuck fans.

IMPACT ON AKRON'S YOUTH

1 When we talk about impact, it comes down to three simple things. The first is **access**. No matter a kid's personal situation or background, every kid should get the chance to play. Our initiative is helping remove the tough barriers piece by piece to make sure all kids have the chance to play.



2 Additionally, the kids in Akron will feel a sense of **belonging** during the game. Instead of being a spectator in the stands, these kids will see themselves as a valued part of their community, because they are! Our family night will make sure that every person there will feel part of something special.

3 Finally, every single kid in Akron who attends these nights will leave feeling **inspired**. All of the small details we created will create lasting moments that could spark a lifelong connection to the game of baseball, and that is what this initiative is all about! Let's make sure the kids feel inspired to keep playing



To show the potential impact of our initiative, we took a look at Leveling the Playing Field, a national nonprofit that donates sports gear to many youth programs around the country.

\$20M

Dollars of Equipment Distributed

2,000+

Programs Impacted

100,000+

Children Impacted

So far, this nonprofit has given out over \$20 million in equipment to 2,000+ programs, and 90% of those programs used their savings for coaching, fees, traveling, etc.



This is the kind of real and measurable impact we want to bring to Akron.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Our team found a major challenge in Akron: youth baseball has become increasingly difficult for families to participate in because of financial barriers. As our presentation highlighted on page 5, the costs of gear, travel, and participation can reach into the thousands of dollars, putting kids who want to play at a tough disadvantage. We also found national data proving that **only 31%** of children below the federal poverty line participate in sports, which is a widespread gap.



BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
OF NORTHEAST OHIO

To turn this issue around, we created the Let Them Play Initiative, a program designed to help every kid in Akron have an equal opportunity to participate in baseball. Our proposal has four connected components.

1

Family Night: A themed baseball game with free (or discounted) tickets for families that gives them an accessible way to experience a RubberDucks game.

2

Gear Donation Program: We will be collecting new and or used baseball equipment to support underfunded teams and families who aren't able to afford the cost of participation.



3

Mascot Showdown: To make donating fun and interactive for the families at the game, there will be a live leaderboard updating in real time, with which RubberDuck mascot is in the lead for donations.

4

Community Partnerships: We plan on working with Akron Public Schools, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Northeast Ohio, Dick's Sporting Goods, Play It Again Sports, and the LeBron James Family Foundation to promote, collect, and store equipment.



Risks

While our proposal has a high reward, we did recognize potential risks: **low community engagement, limited gear donations, and logistical challenges.** These risks shaped our recommendations and overall strategy.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings and off of our proposed initiative, we recommend that the Akron RubberDucks proceed with the following steps:

1

Prioritize the Gear Donation Program as the core of the initiative: To fix the main barrier (cost), the gear drive must be executed correctly.

2

Formalize Community Partnerships: This initiative depends on our local network. Each different partner plays an important and different role.

3

Address Risks with Clear Plans: To avoid the risks identified on page 13, use our partners to your advantage, and don't be afraid to delegate! They are here to help.

4

Track Success Metrics to Sustain long-term: We recommend tracking the following to guide future improvements: number of families served, sponsor contributions, number of gear items donated, types of gear items collected, family night attendance increases, etc.

Conclusion

The Let Them Play Initiative offers a meaningful and real chance for the RubberDucks to break down barriers in sport for the Akron youth, while strengthening their community ties at the same time. By launching our family night, the gear donation program, our several local partnerships, and making operational strategies, the Akron RubberDucks *can and will* make a noticable difference in the lives of Akron's youth!

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