

## Aramark suit brings sobering changes

By DON MURET

Staff writer

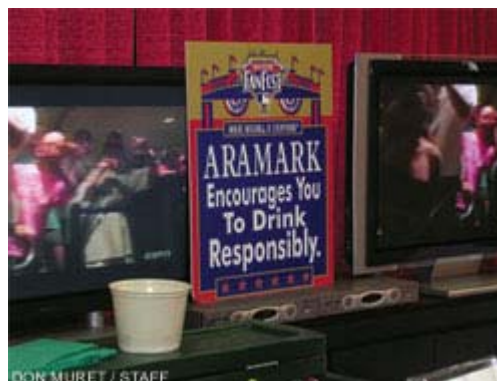
Published January 23, 2006 : Page 01

Tom Olson has been in the concessions business 27 years, starting as a porter stocking stands for Milwaukee Brewers games at County Stadium and rising through the ranks at Delaware North Sportservice to his job as general manager at Miller Park.

Though his heavy-lifting days are over, the burden of selling beer hasn't gotten lighter.

"It's not fun serving alcohol anymore; you have to manage it every minute of the day," Olson said. "Between the undercover [agents], and our own spotters, there can't be any mistakes or you're going to suffer the consequences."

The industry saw those consequences a year ago this month, when a \$105 million judgment was levied against fellow concessionaire Aramark last January in a 1999 case involving a drunken fan who attended a New York Giants game at Giants Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J., and later caused a crash that paralyzed a 2-year-old girl. The case is now going through the appeal process.



Officials for Aramark, the nation's biggest sports concessionaire, won't comment on the case, but the ripples from the size of the judgment extended beyond the company. Concessions executives at the time said it would move them to rethink their business practices regarding alcohol.

But one year later, the biggest change has been the number of industry workers going through alcohol training, a total that rose almost 50 percent from 2004 to 2005. In other areas, such as rules regarding alcohol sales and security, interviews with concessionaires, facilities and teams indicate more adjustments than wholesale changes.

Many stressed that the topic has always been a chief concern. "This didn't all of a sudden become an issue," said Glenn Mon, SMG's senior vice president of arenas and stadiums.

Olson, whose ballpark was featured in hidden video on NBC's "Dateline" in November that showed Sportservice workers selling more than the two-beers-a-person limit, said, "Between the Aramark case and 'Dateline,' things have changed dramatically."

"We're just more diligent in what we do," added Sportservice President Rick Abramson.

An estimated 25,000 people from the major league, minor league and collegiate levels participated last year in alcohol education programs from **TEAM Coalition, or Techniques for Effective Alcohol Management**, said its executive director, Jill Pepper. The number compares with about 17,000 in 2004, Pepper said.

TEAM, a nonprofit that trains people who in turn instruct the teams, facilities and concessionaires, was formed in 1985 by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the four major leagues and the NCAA. Teams, facilities, concessionaires and in some instances the country's three biggest breweries, Anheuser-Busch, Miller and Coors, pay the costs for their employees to complete the two- to four-hour classes. TEAM-certified trainers taught just under 1,000 sessions in 2005 with an average of 25 employees a session, Pepper said. Teams, facilities and concessionaires spend an average of \$11,000 a year to train their employees, she said. That number can jump to as much as \$75,000 because of the expense of paying employees their regular wages for the training time.

"Training your staff is the strongest demonstration of commitment to alcohol management a facility can make because it takes the most time, effort and dedication," she said. "It's something you can grab onto and [show the public] how much we care."

TEAM is just starting to track the number of nonprofit workers, those that volunteer to staff a concession stand to raise funds for their organization. Nonprofit workers were some of those caught in the sting at Miller Park, and they pass the course by answering 21 questions correctly on the 30-question exam taken by people serving alcohol. They accounted for about 3,500 of the 18,000 concessions employees taking the test, or about 20 percent, Pepper said.



Ovations Food Services staff receive training at the Rose Garden arena in Portland.

The distinction is important. Volunteer nonprofit workers, who work not for wages but for a cut of sales to go to their organizations, can make up 80 percent of a stadium concessionaire's work force, said Ken Young, president of Ovations Food Services. The number of nonprofits a concessionaire uses (the percentage is lower for arenas) depends on union agreements, finding enough work for hourly wage employees during slower periods and the degree of difficulty in finding volunteer groups, he said. The problem is that nonprofits experience "ongoing turnover" in their groups working concessions, and volunteers starting to work after the season has started may not have completed training for serving alcohol and are unfamiliar with the rules, Young said. "It's not the same 15 people working every game; they could have an inventory of 50 to 100 people," he said.

Beyond training, many organizations have tinkered with their own rules for selling beer and alcohol, examining whether they can reduce the chances of booze-fueled incidents while keeping in mind the revenue that those sales represent.

For example, the Baltimore Ravens sat down with Aramark, Baltimore police and Safe Management, the stadium's security firm, after the Aramark decision and decided to

make changes for the 2005 season. Aramark reduced the maximum number of beers per sale from four to two, and cut off beer sales at halftime instead of the end of the third quarter for the team's three night games at M&T Bank Stadium, said Roy Sommerhof, the team's facility manager.

Boston Culinary Group eliminated 150 to 200 beer vendors roaming the concourses at Dolphins Stadium for the 2005 NFL season and instead increased points of sale at portable beer stands to make up for their absence, said Eric Meeks, Boston Culinary's on-site GM at the stadium.

"Beer sales on the concourse can be monitored more closely by management, supervisors and spotters as well as security," said Sal Ferrulo, Boston Culinary senior vice president.

Breakdowns for revenue from beer sales weren't available, but concession per caps increased \$2 for Dolphins games in 2005, and Boston Culinary Group didn't experience a significant reduction in revenue from getting rid of the roaming vendors, Meeks said. Sportservice reduced beer cup sizes and the number of beers that can be bought at one time "almost across the board" from four to two at the 36 North American stadiums and arenas it serves, Abramson said. Having rules isn't always enough, though; Aramark had sales limits in place in the case that produced the lawsuit, as did Sportservice when workers were caught in the "Dateline" sting. So to make sure the rules are followed, concessionaires go undercover.

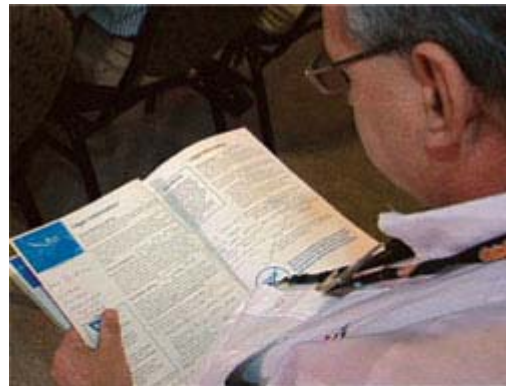
Boston Culinary Group is expanding what company officials call its "secret shopper" program to the firm's 25 arena and stadium accounts beyond south Florida in the wake of the Aramark ruling, Meeks said. "We recognized that it's a good idea," he added.

The initiative started three years ago at Dolphins Stadium. The concessionaire hires outsiders, earning \$100 a game, to test workers' enforcement of the two-beer limit during NFL games, and they file written reports detailing their experiences, Meeks said.

A Levy Restaurants representative was unavailable to comment on any changes in that concessionaire's alcohol policies.

Teams and facilities are doing a better job of communicating the message to fans within the venues to drink responsibly, posting signs at concession stands and publishing public service announcements in game programs, Pepper said.

But Chuck Hurley, Dallas-based CEO of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, said simply posting the message "Don't Drink and Drive, Be Responsible" throughout the stadium doesn't mean much after people start drinking at sports events.



Baltimore Orioles ushers and guest services workers in TEAM training

"The thing that stadiums seem to concentrate on saying is what we know to be the least effective," Hurley said. "The smart way to say it is, 'Those of you who choose to drink should find a safe way home or we'll have the highway patrol help you out.'"

At McAfee Coliseum in Oakland, where MADD, the Oakland Police Department and the California Highway Patrol combined efforts four years ago on a display outside Raiders and A's games that includes the smashed car of a drunken-driving victim, the message is a simple one, said Mark Kaufman, SMG's on-site stadium manager: "You drink, you drive, you lose."

At the Ravens' facility, Aramark deployed an "alcohol management team" that wore bright shirts and walked around the stadium to help identify fans that needed to "pull back on consumption," Sommerhof said.

Safe Management distributed "warning cards" to patrons they felt had too much to drink and posed a risk to others, and were told they would be ejected if they were involved in a further incident, Sommerhof said.

The number of incidents involving alcohol-induced behavior decreased by "at least 50 percent" in 2005, he said.

Aggressive security comes at a cost: For example, SMG pays up to \$90,000 for each Raiders game for blanket police presence in a market where off-duty cops can earn \$70 an hour for overtime pay, Kaufman said.

The New Jersey State Police, operating at the stadium central to the Aramark case, used federal aid this past NFL season to pay for increased patrols on the highways near Giants Stadium, said Lt. Rich Palumbo.

Police and stadium security monitored fans as they passed through the stadium gates and warned those who appeared intoxicated that they would be watched throughout the game and that they shouldn't drive home, Palumbo said.

The New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority had discussed establishing DUI checkpoints around Giants Stadium before the NFL season started but decided against it after talking to the state police and the Giants and New York Jets, the stadium's tenants.

The additional state troopers made about six arrests during the season, and Palumbo acknowledged that much more needs to be done to combat problem drinking during NFL games.

"It's almost like turning the Queen Mary in the ocean," said Palumbo said. "The wheel's turning hard to the left, but the ship won't turn right away."