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Mr. Toddy Hardy, Event Manager
Tampa Bay Rays
One Tropicana Drive
St. Petersburg, FL 33705

Dear Mr. Hardy:

Re: Treatment of fans by Rays staff during Rays games at Tropicana Field

I have some questions for you related to how fans are treated when they attend Rays games at Tropicana Field, especially treatment by your Rays security officers. I have attended so many Rays games over the years including the championship games in 2008 where we won the American League East division title and we had a chance to play in the World Series, only to lose to the Philadelphia Phillies. As you probably know already, we won the American League East division title last year and we went back to the playoffs in the hope that we go to the World Series for a second attempt, only to have this attempt stifled by the Texas Rangers.

Despite a great 2009 and 2010 season for the Rays, attendance numbers have not been promising. The only time you have sold out games is when the New York Yankees as well as the Boston Red Sox are in town, not to mention the 25,000 tickets that were given away at the Rays' last home game of the 2010 season against the Baltimore Orioles after Evan Longoria went public about the low attendance numbers at another game the day before. I can understand, however, that weekday attendance is low due to the fact that people have to work the next day and that a majority of Rays fans live in Tampa. Are you trying to use trespass warnings against people to arbitrarily deflate the attendance numbers in order to justify leaving Tropicana Field before 2027?

I have heard a lot of reports from various sources including comments to media outlets such as Bay News 9 that your security officers mistreat fans, including making up excuses to have fans banned for life. Since the events of 11 September 2001 and the changes that had to be made as far as ballpark security is concerned, I have seen the attitude of many of your security officers as an "us against the fans" attitude. This has been an issue when Vincent Naimoli was the original owner of the Rays and is still an issue now that the Rays are under the ownership of Stuart Sternberg. Are your security officers instructed to be courteous and professional or to be rude and abusive when dealing with fans?

Fans are reminded of the rules of conduct within Tropicana Field before even entering the security check. As for that Manatee Sheriff's deputy that you banned for life for not obeying instructions to turn out the offensive T-shirt, would your security staff have intercepted it at the outside security check before entering Tropicana Field? If your security staff cannot effectively intercept prohibited items being brought into Tropicana Field (including fans wearing T-shirts that contain offensive messages) then why have the security checks in the first place?

While we're on the subject of the Manatee Sheriff's deputy that you banned from Tropicana Field for life, when you found out that the offender was a law enforcement officer why did you not let it go when the Internal Affairs Division of the Manatee County Sheriff's Office did an investigation into the deputy's off-duty conduct? The punishment that the deputy received was relevant to the infraction as far as the sheriff's office is concerned. However, I believe your banning the deputy for life was very extreme.

In the statement that you gave to the Manatee County Sheriff's Office Internal Affairs Division, a copy that was publicly made available by Bay News 9, you mentioned that you have a few people banned from Tropicana Field for life. In another incident where a 19 year old man was caught going onto the field during play, you more than likely banned this person for life as well. Is that statement as to how many people you ban from Tropicana Field for life that you made to Internal Affairs true or did you hide the facts by hiding the actual numbers?

On the subject of Tropicana Field, it is not owned by the Tampa Bay Rays – instead, it is owned by the City of St. Petersburg and the Tampa Bay Rays have a lease that commits the Rays to Tropicana Field until 2027. In other words, the Tampa Bay Rays do not own Tropicana Field, period. Instead, Tropicana Field is leased to the Rays and your relationship with the City of St. Petersburg is that of a landlord and tenant, much like when someone rents an apartment the owner of the complex is the landlord and the renter is the tenant. Does your status as a lessee give you the right to ban anyone for life from Tropicana Field just like if the Rays owned Tropicana Field? My understanding is that lessees enjoy the right of quiet enjoyment of the leased premises, subject to certain reasonable restrictions that may be imposed by the landlord from time to time.

Overall, why do you or your security staff like banning people from Tropicana Field for life, even for minor transgressions of your fan rules of conduct that is prominently posted on the premises, announced as part of pre-game ceremonies, and posted on your website? Do your security personnel evenhandedly enforce the fan rules of conduct, meaning that it applies to everyone attending a Rays game at Tropicana Field?

Anyone who has been banned for life will have a document that you or your security staff direct the St. Petersburg Police Department – working in an off duty capacity as Tropicana Field security with the power of arrest as law enforcement officers – called a trespass warning. People that have been issued trespass warnings are often humiliated as they are akin to being booked into the Pinellas County Jail. In Florida, a trespass warning is equivalent to a conviction for trespassing without the benefit of due process and trial in that a record akin to a criminal record is created on the person. Why do I say this? A police officer can find out by way of the laptop computer or via radio within a few seconds whether a person has had a trespass warning issued against the person or not.

Finally, Mr. Hardy, if you want to ban someone from Tropicana Field for a minor transgression of the ballpark rules of fan conduct, I believe it should not exceed the remainder of the season in question as well as the next season if the incident occurs close to the end of the regular season. To be honest and frank with you, banning a person for life – especially for a minor incident – is like sentencing a person to life in Florida State Prison for disorderly conduct as well as trespassing after warning.

I await your response to my open letter to you which I have posted both on my blog as well as this PDF version that I have posted on my website at EdwardRingwald.com on my Florida trespassing laws topic.

GO RAYS!

Edward Ringwald