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Rehired `Crunch' vendor will give fans some food - Boston Herald (MA) - August 11, 1998 - page 1
August 11, 1998 | Boston Herald (MA) | JILL RADSKEN

The Red Sox, who just kicked the tar out of the American League West, won't be the only ones making a triumphant return to Fenway Park tonight.

Vendor Dave Kerpen, better known as "The Crunch and Munch guy" for his zany antics in the aisles of the FleetCenter, will be back in uniform for the first time since last summer.

"I'm going to hold my head high and sell some snacks," said the 21-year-old Boston University graduate.

Though Kerpen's signature product at the FleetCenter had been the toffee-coated peanut and popcorn mix, he sold Coca-Cola at Fenway Park. Until last July, that is, when he was fired.

The controversy stemmed from a high-powered, between-innings balancing act at the July 22 game - several Cokes on his head at one time. Fans cheered and threw money. One woman, plunked in the face, complained about the rowdiness. Kerpen was terminated.

In her written ruling that Kerpen be reinstated, arbitrator Susan Brown laid blame with Aramark food service officials, who claimed to be unaware of its vendors' antics.

"Publicity in various media, displays on the giant video screen, and just common water-cooler chit chat make it likely that, if true, Aramark management officials are the only residents of Greater Boston who do not know," she wrote.

But Brown didn't totally buy Kerpen's act. His balancing-act behavior was, according to Brown, "clearly inappropriate ... because it showed a marked lack of good judgment." He received no back pay.

Debbie Albert, a spokeswoman for Aramark, would not say if Kerpen would still be allowed to sell Coke, or if he would be asked to tone down his over-the-top act.

"We'll abide by the ruling of the arbitrator," she said.

But Kerpen, who now works at Merrimack Estate and Business Planning in North Andover, hopes he can "come to a mutual agreement in a way to entertain" with Aramark.

"Where there's creativity, there are new ideas in store," said Kerpen, who said he won't balance Cokes any more, but sees potential in a juggling video he got from his mom. "I understand sales are the (priority), but the crowd does really respond."

Anticipating tonight's game, Kerpen has prepared new material, including his own lyrics to the pop song "All My Life" ("All my life I prayed for a drink like Coke"). But the product - be it Coke or Crackerjacks - is not important.

"I've been resting my voice for four months and I'm ready to go," he said.

Photo Caption: BACK TO WORK: Dave Kerpen, above, `the Crunch and Munch guy,' cheers yesterday after being rehired at Fenway Park. He's also peddled at the FleetCenter, below. Staff photos by Michael Seamans, above; and Jutin Ide

CITATION (AGLC STYLE)

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