

The Ticket Sales Combine Lands In Pittsburgh

DARREN ROVELL, SPORTSBIZ, SPORTS, CNBC, CNBC.COM, BLOG, SPORTS BUSINESS

Posted By: Darren Rovell | Sports Business Reporter

cnbc.com | 03 Aug 2009 | 04:17 PM ET



It's hard to sell a ticket these days, but it's even harder to sell a Pirates ticket.

It's not only the record, but it's also the amount of players they've traded away over the last two months.

But at least 35 people will pay for the right to challenge themselves to see how many tickets they can sell to Bucs fans or anyone walking the concourses at PNC Park this weekend. If they're good at doing it, odds are they'll be added to the ticket sales staff immediately.

It's called the **Sports Sales Combine** and it just might be the next great idea in sports marketing.

As the economy has dampened, teams need more leads to generate the same amount of ticket sales they did in the past. And not only are they looking for people, they're looking for the right people.

How do you pick the right people? You give them a challenge, you teach them how to sell tickets and you scout them.

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The program is the brainchild of Bill Sutton, who ran the NBA job fair for seven years and Dick Irwin, director of the University of Memphis' Bureau of Sport & Leisure Commerce.

"I always dreamed about having a ticket sales workshop like the NFL combine," said Sutton, the associate director of the DeVos Sport Business Management Program at UCF and principal of Bill Sutton & Associates.

For a \$395 fee, those looking for a job in ticket sales are shown how the ticket world works and how to pitch perspective buyers. They then go out on their own and try their hand at it. Those teaching them are also scouting them. Not only are the Pirates looking to hire, so too are the Cleveland Indians, the Cleveland Cavaliers, Madison Square Garden, the Chicago Fire and the New Jersey Nets.

After they watch the candidates work, they pick who they want to interview. Having 48 hours to watch someone increases the chances for the teams of making a good hire, Sutton said, as he learned last year when the Sports Sales Combine did its first event with the Atlanta Hawks and the Thrashers.

"A candidate who I wouldn't even think about interviewing sold \$4,500 in tickets," Sutton said. *"That person was dynamite. There was this other candidate who I thought was a can't miss and after two rejections, got discouraged and couldn't deal with it."*

For the host team, the whole idea is a no brainer. In Atlanta, \$17,000 worth of tickets were sold and the teams found some great new people. Sutton said that 13 of the 50 people from the Atlanta event were hired within a month and 19 eventually got jobs in the ticketing business.

Sutton said he believes that at least 20 jobs will be available from this weekend's event.

Some fans might not be happy with the Pirates recent trades, but for someone who is looking to get into the ticket business, saying they were able to sell Pirates tickets in this environment might just be the best hands on training anyone could ask for.

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