

Pass the brat and cheer for Green Bay's game plan

CHICAGO

Here is some advice for those brooding fans in Cleveland and Los Angeles, whose football teams have been carried off by unscrupulous franchise owners. And for those of us in Chicago who waste time worrying about what Michael "The Weenie" McCaskey might do with the Bears.

Forget it. Do as I have done and become an out-of-town fan of America's Team.

No, I'm not talking about the Dallas Cowboys, who falsely claim to be America's Team. The truth is, Dallas became nationally popular only because they hired higher-class hussies to jiggle and bounce for the networks.

If there is one team that truly deserves to be called America's Team, it is in the most unlikely community to have a major league sports franchise of any kind.

Yes, I'm talking about little Green Bay, Wis., and its Packers.

Consider this: Los Angeles, the nation's second-biggest city, has recently lost two NFL teams.

Yet there has never been even a hint that the Packers would leave Green Bay, a city with fewer residents than L.A. has rioters.

You don't hear the owners of the Green Bay team whining that they are not rich enough or trying to shake down the local taxpayers for new goodies that will make them even richer.



MIKE
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That's because the Packer franchise is owned by the kind of people who should own every football franchise.

Basically, it is owned by the people of Green Bay. And it

would be almost impossible for the team to go anywhere else because no one individual owns a big enough piece to do it.

As Phil Pionek, executive assistant to the team president, explains the setup:

"There are 1,898 stockholders representing 4,634 shares. A good majority are Wisconsin residents. Most shareholders

own one share. The bylaws indicate that no one shareholder can hold 200 shares.

"There are no dividends, no interest, no special season ticket privileges. Stockholders meet once a year at the annual meeting, and they elect the board of directors. It's a 45-person board, 15 elected each year.

"The board elects the executive committee and they operate the daily functions. It is seven people: the president, vice president, secretary, treasurer and three members at large. The president-CEO is the only person who is compensated. Everyone else sits gratis."

Isn't that sensible? It means that the Packers are truly Green Bay's team, the way the Rams and Raiders weren't L.A.'s team; and the Cardinals weren't Chicago's team or St. Louis' team and might not remain Phoenix's team; and the Browns weren't really Cleveland's team; and the Colts weren't really a Texas team or Baltimore's team; and the Raiders weren't Oakland's team when they moved to L.A., and stopped being L.A.'s team when they crept back to Oakland.

Who can keep track of all these comings and goings?

But you can keep track of the Packers because they have been in the same location since 1919, although most of the country doesn't know where Green Bay is. Even people in Green Bay aren't all sure where it is, but they don't have to know, since they are already there.

Those of us in Chicago sometimes poke affectionate fun at our rustic neighbors to the north.

We tease them for wearing red long underwear to weddings and other formal events — as an outer garment.

We call them cheeseheads and chuckle at the way they chomp their bratwurst, drink their brandy-beer boilermakers, and happily thump their distended tummies. The men, too.

But while Chicagoans worry about the Bears moving to Gary, where the players might be mugged on their way to the locker room, the Green Bay fans are free of such concerns.

This is the way it should be in every football-crazed city. They should own the

teams, not some prissy bookkeeper like McCaskey, a double-talking hustler like the guy who dumped Cleveland, the blowhard who took the Colts to Indianapolis, or the other megabuck strap-sniffers whose loyalty is comparable to that of a leech.

If the 1,898 Packers stockholders can renounce greed, envy, gluttony, the works of Satan, and other vulgar cravings, why can't it be done in other cities? The Packers have managed to win championships with their homespun system. At the very least, they always field teams that are just as capable of twanging an opponent's tendons and crunching his cartilage as anyone else's.

So until they get another team in Cleveland (maybe the Cleveland Bears) and L.A. (maybe the L.A. Cardinals), the fans of these cities should join me in eating a big brat, burping a big burp and cheering on America's Team.

You will become not only an honorary cheesehead but an even greater honor — an honorary Packerhead.

Anyone for a bumper sticker?

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