

To Sauk Trails Optimist Club

From Jim Mills, Neillsville Optimist Club
Harlem Ambassador Event Committee Chairperson

On September 23, 2007 the Neillsville Optimist Club was host to the Harlem Ambassadors. The Harlem Ambassadors were a very professional Organization to work with. They send a packet of information that gives you step-by-step directions for holding a successful event. Also there is an event contact person from the Ambassador's home office who checks in with your club's event coordinator on a regular basis. Their guidelines for the event work very well. We basically followed the event guide and everything worked out great.

Our club contacted area businesses and organizations to sponsor a player or honorary coach spot for \$200. This gave us \$4800 to off set the costs of the event. This is probably the part of this event that takes the most effort on your club's part. We had 5-committee members work on this part of the event planning. We got a list of business and organizations that are members of the Neillsville Chamber of commerce. We also contacted other organizations such as the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Neillsville Gun Club, etc.... We had an initial list of 30 businesses that we thought were more likely to sponsor a player. After we contacted everyone on that list we had to go to the secondary list to fill 2 spots. We offered each sponsor 4 Free VIP Tickets. When they came with more people than 4 in their party we seated them all together in the VIP seating, which was in the first 3 rows. We were very pleased by the response from the community.

The business/organization could name their own player or the club would have a list of available players that either the business could chose from or the club would chose. This is an area that you want to be sure to fully explain to the sponsor and make sure they understand. We had one business where one person at the business told us to select the player and later another person at the business was upset because they did not get to choose the player. We had 20 player spots and 4 honorary coaches (one for each quarter). Of the 20 players we had 15 chosen by the sponsor and we filled in the other 5. The 4 honorary coaches were split, 2 chosen by sponsors and the other 2 we picked. We had the mayor, county sheriff, one of our members and the local Catholic priest as the coaches. They do not really coach too much. The best coaching part was Father Pace, at the start of the fourth quarter, having his team kneel while he prayed with them. We were behind by about 20 points at the time so we needed all the help we could get.

Another moneymaker at the event was selling food. If you hold the event after 5:00 pm you get people to eat. We had a simple menu and we made sure to rotate the help so they could all get a chance to watch part of the program.

We had about 25 people working at the event. We purchased high-vis yellow t-shirts that had Optimist Staff on the back for all of the workers. We plan to use these at future

Optimist events. We also had the same color shirts with numbers on the back and sponsors names on the front for all the players.

Our ticket prices were \$4 and \$6 in advance and \$6 and \$8 at the door. If you sell out 1000 tickets you are going to make at least \$4000 - \$5000. You can advertise that there are a limited number of tickets available and that advanced purchase is recommended. After paying for everything we made a little over \$2000, selling about 500 tickets, almost all in advance.

One thing that we will do the next time we host the Ambassadors (and we will do this again) is to reserve a date between when the high school football season ends and the basketball season begins, a narrow window. Also the game will be on a Friday night so that on the day before (Thursday) we can schedule the Ambassadors to hold a school program for each of the three levels of school. This will get the students involved and we will sell more tickets at the gate. With a school program you will want to get other organizations like a booster club, parent organization, SAAD to help sponsor the cost of that program.

In the end it was a wonderful way to make some money for our club. We are a small club in a small community. The real benefit of this event was the interaction between the community and the Ambassadors. We had adults who would never have thought that they would be out on the gym floor boogie-ooggie-ooggieing. The kids were really involved, from tiny tots all the way up to high schoolers. The money is nice but the experience was better.

If you need any additional information please contact me. The Harlem Ambassadors put on a great show. Their organization is first class and I would recommend them to anyone.

Sincerely, Jim Mills, Neillsville Optimist