



FUNNY NOSE GLASSES LIVE ON!

Former Mariner Tom Paciorek was the key player in one of the most memorable Mariners commercials of all time.

By Mike Gastineau

Tom Paciorek harbors no delusions about his career with the Mariners.

The truth is, he accomplished quite a lot in four years. He played in over 400 games and made the All-Star team in 1981 when he finished second to the A's Carney Lansford in the AL batting race. All that aside, Paciorek is well aware of how he's remembered by many Mariners fans and, in fact, he's quite proud of it.

"They better think of funny nose glasses," he laughed, "because that's my one claim to fame."

They do and he's right. Paciorek's name still conjures up one of the most memorable TV commercials and subsequent promotions in Mariners history.

Former manager Rene Lachemann dons a pair of funny nose glasses before a game in the Kingdome.

This was a case of an idea going viral back in the days when that meant getting the flu.

Looking for A Hit

Seattle was struggling to get fans to the Kingdome and, according to Paciorek, after a player appearance in the frozen foods section at a Fred Meyer store didn't go well, "someone said let's try funny commercials instead."

That someone was Seattle broadcaster Pat Cashman who had just been hired at KING-TV. The Mariners asked the station to create ads promoting various giveaway nights and that became Cashman's job.

He suggested to Jeff Odenwald (Seattle's marketing director in 1981) that they produce funny commercials

and, rather than hire actors, use the actual players.

"Everyone does that now," Cashman said. "But at the time it felt like an original idea."

Today, Mariners TV ads are shot over several days during Spring Training with the appropriate budget and support staff to make it all work, but in 1981 Cashman had to come up with ideas that could be executed quickly.

"We had 15 minutes tops with these guys," he recalled. "The scenes had to be short and we had to get it done in one or two takes. When we needed something quick, Tom was our guy."

For an upcoming game, the Mariners were going to give every kid

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a team jacket for free and Paciorek was asked to do an ad promoting the giveaway.

“They told me we were making a commercial for jacket day, handed me a pair of funny nose glasses and said, ‘Here’s your prop.’”

The resulting 30 seconds was a piece of comedy gold. Paciorek begins the ad by enthusiastically informing fans of the details of “Mariners Funny Nose Glasses Night.”

He’s then interrupted by Cashman’s voice from off camera. In a tone that might be called droll exasperation, Cashman informs Paciorek that the giveaway is for jackets, not funny glasses. Paciorek then asks what he is supposed to do with 30,000 pairs of funny nose glasses.

“They told me we were making a commercial for jacket day, handed me a pair of funny nose glasses and said, ‘Here’s your prop.’”

—Tom Paciorek

“That’s your problem, Tom,” Cashman replies with the final line of the ad.

Cashman says they shot a couple of alternate endings but went with the first idea, primarily due to Paciorek. “He had a great ease on camera. The shrug he gives at the end is so funny.”

That should have been the end of it, a simple ad with a funny little gag. The ad didn’t even run that often, but when it did fans bought the whole concept to the point that the Mariners office started receiving calls asking when “Mariners Funny Nose Glasses Night” was taking place. Then Paciorek wore his pair of funny nose glasses onto the field during the game on August 23 when the jackets were given away.

“People were clamoring!” he said. “They wanted those funny nose glasses. We took a team picture at the end of the year with everyone wearing funny nose glasses, which is my favorite team picture of all time.”

Simply Funny

Jim Copacino of Copacino+Fujikado has handled the creative side of the Mariners TV ads for 20 years and has



Mariners fans sporting funny nose glasses on June 8, 2017.

great respect for what Cashman created with Paciorek.

“Pat’s early work set the table for us to do what we do,” Copacino said. “It was a seminal ad in the sense that it was so offbeat, funny and successful that it set the precedent for the Mariners being creative when it came to marketing the team.”

Copacino pointed out that in 1981 baseball was still a little stuffy when it came to promoting itself. “This was a promotion in the spirit of minor league baseball and I think teams noticed that and started having fun with their ads.”

In fact, the minor leagues are where Cashman’s attitude regarding baseball came from. He grew up in Bend, Oregon, and one of his first jobs was as the PA announcer for the Bend Rainbows.

“I did fake commercials and all kind of crazy stuff. I’d point people out in the stands. More than most sports, baseball is uniquely suited for humor.”

“Mariners Funny Nose Glasses Night” was scheduled for the following season. In addition to an entire stadium of fans wearing funny nose glasses the event is memorable for two other reasons. It happened two nights after Gaylord Perry’s 300th career win, and infamously outdrew the future Hall of Famer’s milestone by almost 10,000 fans. In addition, the guy who got the entire thing rolling wasn’t there for the payoff.

Paciorek’s best season was in 1981 and he was looking for a raise. Seattle

owner George Argyros had other ideas and traded Paciorek to the White Sox in December.

“I always teased George that he didn’t have to trade me,” Paciorek said. “He could have paid me off the money he made on that one night.”

The Mariners revived the idea this season as 5,000 fans were given funny nose glasses on June 8. Vice President of Marketing Kevin Martinez thinks there’s a simple reason this simple idea still resonates 36 years later.

“When a player endorses something it really works,” Martinez said. “Like Buhner Buzz Cut Night, or the King’s Court. The quirkiest and more unique something is, the better chance that it becomes legendary and takes on a life of its own.”

This May, Paciorek threw out the first pitch at a Mariners game and, of course, wore funny nose glasses to do it. He says he makes a point of checking out the Mariners commercials every year and finds them funny and innovative. Copacino and Martinez spend a lot of time each year planning and writing them, but anyone who’s ever worked on a creative project would likely agree with Copacino’s perspective.

“Sometimes the best ideas just fall out of the sky.”

Mike Gastineau is a freelance writer based in Seattle. He spent over 20 years hosting a local radio show, and is the author of two books.