

Commentary: Sam Mellinger

# Royals Eager To Include Fans In Moment

BY SAM MELLINGER

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(Kansas City, Mo.)

By now, you have probably heard about Eric Hosmer and a bunch of his teammates using social media to invite friends to a bar downtown. You probably heard about the champagne being sprayed and that Hosmer — how cool is this? — bought drinks for everyone there.

But in the middle of that epic party after making the American League Championship Series, there was something else that tells a small but awesome story about a team and a town. The Royals star grabbed a bottle of champagne and handed it to a new friend of his, a salesman for a construction company. Hosmer told his friend to spray the crowd.

"You're a part of this as much as we are," Hosmer told him.

Hosmer's friend is Tim Grimes. He's 28 years old, a lifelong Royals fan, and recently diagnosed with stage IV cancer. Doctors have given Grimes around a year to live, and ever since the Royals heard about him, they've adopted him as one of their own. Grimes has been invited to watch batting practice on the field, sat in the Buck O'Neil seat, and watched Sunday night's clincher from the team president's Crown Seats.

This story is about more than just Grimes, and more than the way the team embraced SungWoo Lee, the fan from South Korea whose visit to Kansas City coincided with the team's rise up the standings. This is a story about a group of baseball players accomplishing more than almost any of them ever have before, and their fundamental



Kansas City Royals' Salvador Perez celebrates on the dugout roof after the team's 8-3 win over the Los Angeles Angels during Sunday's ALDS baseball game to win the division on October 5, 2014 at Kauffman Stadium in Kansas City, Mo.

understanding that this is about something so much bigger than making and advancing in the playoffs.

The story of starved fans who've waited through a 29-year playoff drought for this moment could grate on the players. They could take it as a slight, as something that has nothing to do with them but yet is overshadowing their greatest professional moments. Instead, there seems to be a genuine appreciation for the opportunity to be part of something so special.

This group could be doing the same things in Detroit or Anaheim or New York or Chicago and it would be all

about them, all about baseball. Doing it in Kansas City makes it all about something else, which this group truly seems to embrace.

When James Shields walked to the mound at the beginning of the wild-card game against Oakland, he felt the ground shake. Literally, the grass and dirt beneath him shook, like an earthquake, from all the fan noise. Players from the A's and Angels have told friends with the Royals they've never experienced anything like the crowd noise at these Kauffman Stadium playoff games. Every stadium is loud this time of year, but not every stadium creates earthquakes.

The appreciation can be told in a hundred ways. With most teams, if you ask the men inside whom their success makes them happiest for they talk about players, teammates, scouts, executives, the manager, the owner, people on the inside. Someone is being vindicated, or someone is achieving success a long time coming after years of hard times. The Royals have guys like that, too. Dayton Moore, most obviously, but also Ned Yost and David Glass and Alex Gordon and Billy Butler and Mike Moustakas and on and on and on.

But talk to the men on the inside, and their answers are almost always the same. They are happy for the fans. Twenty-nine years is too long to wait. Being able to change that history is seen as an honor, and if you get to talking to some of them about what it all means they will tell you they're getting goose bumps.

"Best atmosphere I've ever played in front of," Shields said after Sunday night's game.

In Chicago, when the Royals first clinched a playoff spot, they partied in their clubhouse for a few minutes until word circulated that hundreds and maybe thousands of their fans were still celebrating in the stands. That's when the clubhouse

emptied, the players ran through a tunnel out to the field and began high-fiving and laughing and taking selfies with their fans.

They did the same thing after the wild card win against the A's, and again Sunday night after sweeping the Angels. They're experienced with this now, in a beautifully bizarre way, and eager to do it again.

It doesn't always work like this, you know. It might only work with fans whose faith has been tested through more bad times than they deserve, and with fans who are mostly local, mostly passionate, and can rattle off names like Runelvys Hernandez and Emil Brown and Mark Quinn as far back as their memories can go.

Those are the types of things that can push a playoff run from fun to historic, from the nice escape that sports provide to something that feels more like a perspective changer. More fans showed up at Kauffman Stadium this year than any season since 1991, and the team is expecting even more next year. Game 2 in Anaheim was the highest rated baseball game on record in Kansas City, and that will probably be broken in the ALCS.

Everything that this group accomplishes will, in some ways, be told in the context of a sorry 29 years of franchise history and the fans who've waited through it all for this payoff.

This is the right group to do it, too, because they are embracing the change like an honor, making sure in ways public and otherwise to make their fans feel as much a part of this as they are.

Sam Mellinger is a columnist for The Kansas City Star.

## College Football

# Iowa State Unable To Overcome Calls; A.D. Reprimanded For Criticism Of Refs

AMES, Iowa (AP) — Iowa State seems to have a knack of getting tangled up with close calls that generate frustration, controversy and, in the latest case, some sharp criticism by the athletic director.

The Cyclones have brought much of it upon themselves because they haven't been able to overcome whatever has gone against them. In three recent games that included disputed calls, the Cyclones lost all three — two of them by less than a touchdown.

"We've just got to respond to stuff like that," offensive lineman Jake Campos said Monday. "There's been a lot of plays in film we're watching when we're one block away or one cut away. We're like, we're so close. There's a lot of plays we could just wide open. We've just got to get the little tiny things cleaned up and those things will start breaking for us."

The latest flare-up occurred during and after Saturday's 37-20 loss to No. 16 Oklahoma State.

With the score tied at 6, the officials ruled that Oklahoma State's Desmond Roland was stopped short of the goal line at the end of the first half. The play was reviewed and the replay official reversed the call, giving the Cowboys a 13-6 lead.

Frustrated by that decision and some earlier calls, athletic director Jamie Pollard lashed out at Big 12 officiating after the game and said the Cyclones "have been on the short end of the stick" time and time again.

The Big 12 responded Monday with a public reprimand and a \$25,000 fine for Pollard, with league commissioner Bob Bowlsby saying

his rant was "irresponsible and completely baseless."

Iowa State also has taken issue with a catch by Kansas State's Tyler Lockett along the sideline earlier this year — the replay official and replay communicator were suspended for one game for failing to review the play — and a play in last year's game with Texas when the Longhorns' Johnathan Gray was ruled down while ISU linebacker Jeremiah George was running the other way with the ball. In both cases, the opponent scored on the next play.

In the Oklahoma State game, the Cyclones could have avoided any controversy if they had simply fielded a kickoff. Instead, OSU recovered at the Iowa State 11 and Roland scored five plays later. Then the Cyclones allowed Tyreek Hill to return the second-half kickoff 97 yards for a touchdown and the Cowboys dominated the game from then on.

"Our special teams didn't have the best day," kicker Cole Netten said.

The offense didn't, either.

"You can say whatever you want about the call on Saturday, whatever it is, it should or shouldn't have been a touchdown. I don't think it won or lost the game by any means," quarterback Sam Richardson said. "We shot ourselves in the foot too many times as an offense. We didn't give ourselves a chance to win that game, honestly."

In the Kansas State game, Lockett's catch came late in the first half with Iowa State leading 28-13. The Wildcats rushed to the line of scrimmage after the play and quarterback Jake Waters scored to cut the lead to 28-20.

With plenty of opportunities to increase the lead in the second half, the Cyclones went scoreless and lost 32-28.

The Cyclones also had their chances against Texas last year. They had second-and-goal at the Texas 4 late in the game and a touchdown could have put it out of reach. But they ended up kicking a field goal and Texas

went on the decisive drive that produced a 31-30 victory.

Also in that game, Iowa State gave up a 44-yard Hail Mary touchdown pass on the final play of the first half.

Richardson said the Cyclones have to figure out a way to overcome such setbacks.

"You can't fret about it, you can't think about it at all," he said. "You've just got to play the play in front of you."

Iowa State coach Paul Rhoads declined to comment on the specifics of Pollard's remarks. But he did welcome the support.

"I am privileged to have a boss that is that passionate about this athletic department and this university that he was willing to stand up and say the things that he did," Rhoads said. "I benefit from that as the leader of this program and certainly our coaching staff does as well."

## Police Used Stun Gun On Vikings DT

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Police officers used a chemical spray and stun gun to arrest Vikings defensive tackle Tom Johnson after he refused to leave a downtown restaurant after closing time, according to a Minneapolis police report released Monday.

Johnson, listed at 6-foot-3 and 288 pounds, was arrested before 3 a.m. on Sunday after security officials and police repeatedly told him to leave Seven steakhouse. He was charged with misdemeanor counts of trespassing and disorderly conduct and released from the Hennepin County jail after posting \$78 bond.

According to the police report, the 30-year-old Johnson was repeatedly told to leave the building and he refused. When he resisted officers, they used a chemical irritant on him and forced him outside. Once

outside, he was uncooperative and police used a stun gun on him.

The Vikings have said the team is investigating and will have additional comment when appropriate. Johnson has an unlisted number and it was not immediately clear if he had an attorney. He told the *Star Tribune* on Monday: "We're going to put out a statement. I don't know if any of that (police account) is accurate."

It's Johnson's first season with the Vikings after three years with New Orleans. Back in May, he was charged with fourth-degree driving while impaired. He has pleaded not guilty in that case and a pre-trial hearing is set for later this month in Hennepin County.

He's scheduled to be arraigned on the disorderly conduct and trespassing charges on Oct. 17.



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