

All-Star Baseball Game

Giant Plastic Baseballs Boost All-Star Game, Tourism and Charities in Atlanta

"Atlanta - It's an All-Star Ball"

Thirty-one, six-foot molded plastic baseballs are at the heart of a special promotion titled "Atlanta – It's An All-Star Ball", launched by the host committee of the annual All-Star Baseball Game. One ball has been designated for each of the thirty teams in the major leagues – plus one ball for the All-Star game itself.

The balls have been decorated by volunteer groups, with each of the balls being done up in designs representative of the team to which it is assigned. All are now on display in the Monument Plaza entrance of Turner Field, where the game was played on July 11. Players of visiting teams will be asked to autograph the ball representing their team when they are in Atlanta during the regular season. Members of this year's All-Star teams have, of course, autographed the All-Star ball.

An additional 469 balls have been prepared and are being offered to businesses and organizations for a \$5,000 donation. These units will also be decorated – but in whatever manner the owner wishes and by artists of his choice. These additional balls are being displayed at sites of the donor's choice, throughout the Atlanta area – and will be auctioned off at the end of the baseball season, along with the 31 "team" balls. Proceeds will go to local sports and arts-related non-profit organizations.



The 6 ft. balls are vacuum formed via a deep draw of 30 in. for each hemisphere – then assembled with an in side plastic supporting disk plus a steel plate – and are displayed on separately formed black plastic pedestals. Total weight of each ball when assembled is on the order of 250 lbs.

Vacuum-formed Balls Are Realistic – And Paintable

"Execution of the promotion required a great deal of thought," admits committee member and President of Creative Marketing Strategies in Atlanta, John Bevilacqua. The balls had to be durable, vandal-resistant and reasonably transportable. "They had to be UV-resistant and eminently weather resistant, too, since they were going to be displayed outdoors throughout the season," adds Creative Marketing's technical advisor, Rick Gluekert "And, since each was to be painted and decorated – they had to have a surface which could accept and retain paints -- not always an easy thing when it comes to certain plastics."



Yankees' Manager Joe Torre autographs one of 500 "All-Star Balls" thermoformed of KYDEX sheet.

It was also important that the balls be able to resist the damaging impacts likely if fans got too rambunctious. They also had to be scratch and abrasion resistant to shrug off both the casual rough handling of those fans -- and the occasional attempt to "kidnap" a ball...sure to be regarded as the perfect souvenir by some.

"A lot of other factors came into play," notes Gluekert. "As we planned the promotion, it became apparent that the balls also had to be reasonably transportable. After all, a six-foot sphere can be pretty difficult to get into an elevator.

Kleerdex Company, LLC

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So they had to be light...and able to be disassembled into two matching hemispheres. Yet those two halves had to meet without any visible line – and they had to look like baseballs complete with "seams" and a hide like surface. To make them less than attractive to souvenir hunters, we added a steel plate in the base and offered a means for each ball to be firmly anchored in place." "We worked with the Fabrication Division of Piedmont Plastics, Inc. in Charlotte, NC," Bevilaqua continues. "Once they heard the full extent of our requirements, they suggested that the most feasible way to create the balls would be vacuum forming in two, matching deep-drawn hemispheres."

Big Question: Which Plastic?

"Once we had agreed upon the probable technique," says Piedmont Sales Engineer, Scott Johnson, "we started to evaluate possible materials. At first, a polycarbonate material seemed like a good bet, as our customer was initially interested in a back-lighted product. However, this requirement was eventually abandoned for various reasons. With the translucent element removed, the combined requirements of paintability, tensile strength, impact resistance, weatherability and a deep draw of over 30 inches with an under-cut flange on one of the two hemispheres pointed us toward KYDEX® thermoplastic sheet."

"We knew KYDEX," Johnson goes on, "and were familiar with its ability to achieve good material distribution throughout in deep draw applications. As we investigated their different material options, we selected KYDEX® 510 for the body of the ball (impact resistance of 801 J/m, 23°C (15 ft.-lbs./in, 73°F) according to the ASTM D-790 tests, modulus rating of 2.48 MPa (360 psi) (x10/3), tensile strength of 0.42 MPa (6.10 psi) (x10/3), and R-scale Rockwell Hardness rating of 94). A leading factor in this decision was that the 510 grade has a clear, weatherable cap – vital when you consider both the highs and lows of Atlanta weather and the abuse we had to expect these balls to encounter. Another critical element was that KYDEX® 510 could be obtained in sheets that were as large as 74" square. We needed that kind of size to get the draw depth and final dimensions we had planned for. Thus, our final decision was to use KYDEX® 510 for the body of the ball, KYDEX® 550 for the separately molded black base or "display stand" for the balls and KYDEX® T for a support disk inside the balls."



Thermoformed baseball halves await secondary operations at Piedmont Plastics, Burlington, NC

Five hundred giant balls later, the promotion is off and rolling. Paintbrushes and other art "equipment" are hard at work all over the Atlanta area. And the culmination of the promotion is in sight. From September 1 through September 30, some of the balls will be offered for sale on Priceline Perfect Yardsale —a subsidiary of Priceline.com – a corporate sponsor of the promotion. The balance will be offered for sale at a Gala Black Tie Fundraiser, shortly thereafter, in October. And the proceeds will be divided among sports/arts beneficiaries in the Atlanta area. Expectations? "A similar fund raising promotion in Chicago raised over \$3 million with only 350 objects used," John Bevilaqua muses. "I think we can do better."

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