

# Here we go again with the bad rep

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TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2000



It won't matter that the alleged assailant is from Lancaster.

It won't matter that on the same day he allegedly beat the hell out of a Rams fan at the Eagles opening game, Philadelphians were being courteous and helpful to tourists all over town.

All that matters is that, once again, Philly sports fans reinforced their reputations as brawling barbarians and undermined the rehabilitation of our city's image.

"Some cities can afford to absorb certain stories better than other cities — and this is the kind of story we can't afford to be horrified as well because of the reputation of Philadelphia sports fans that's out there," said the region's top tourism official, Meryl Levitz.

On Sunday, a hapless out-of-towner with the temerity, the *audacity* to wear a Rams jersey to the Eagles-Rams game was given Philadelphia-style sports hospitality.

After a plastic bottle was tossed, hitting his girlfriend, 28-year-old Chris Patrick, of St. Louis -- who was in the Rams jersey — exchanged words with Eagles fans sitting in the 700 level, police said.

And then, Patrick told police, he was hoisted out of his seat, dragged two aisles up and set upon by several ferocious fans.

He required stitches under his right eye and was also treated at Wills Eye Hospital.

John Graham, 40, of Lancaster, was arrested and charged with aggravated assault and related offenses. Another fan involved in the attack is being sought, and police are investigating whether more fans may have been involved.

## **Philadelphia: The City Where You Have To Watch Your Back?**

Eagles president Joe Banner said yesterday he regretted Sunday's incident, but said the team has "made significant strides" in controlling fan behavior.

"The number of incidents, the number of complaints, has been lowered across the board," he said in a statement.

But Municipal Judge Seamus McCaffrey, the flamboyant, outspoken judge who founded stadium court to deal with the Eagles rowdies, expressed disappointment yesterday with its limited use.

Fewer and fewer cases have been coming before the court — only four cases were processed on Sunday, he said, hardly justifying the presence of a fully staffed courtroom — although fans continue to be ejected for disorderly conduct.

"The point is, we have a court that has national recognition and we're sitting there with a handful of arrests and there's people getting thrown out and not locked up," he said.

The whole purpose of arresting fans and charging them with a summary offense, rather than just ejecting them from the game, was to send a strong message that such behavior won't be tolerated, McCaffrey said.

"If it continues this way, I'm not so sure we're going to keep doing it."

That would be a damn shame and another smear on the city's image, considering the national acclaim the court has received.

Meanwhile, I'm sure there are those of you who think anyone who wears an opposing team's jersey to the Vet and sits in the 700 level deserves what they get.

Perhaps Patrick was lulled into believing he was actually in a civilized city, having spent the weekend enjoying our fine food and popular sites.

After all, as Levitz pointed out, the city's reputation has soared recently, as its amenities and ambiance have been discovered.

But it seems this town will always be cursed with Neanderthal nitwits who indulge in stadium rage and set the city back at the same time.

While there are stories everywhere of people who are more fanatics than fans -- consider the parents who get tossed out of Little League games, Levitz said -- Philadelphia can't fully shed its negative image when incidents like this reinforce the stereotype.

"When something like this happens they shouldn't happen, no matter what," Levitz said, "You say 'OK, here we go again.'"