



Homemaking: He's conceding his concession stand duty

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By Peter McKay

Last week, I suffered the ultimate indignity in a life in which each week is a headlong race to the bottom.

My wife had signed up to "man" the concession stand at our son's soccer game months earlier. It's something every mom on the team has to do at one point during the season. It involves making hot dogs, nachos and sloppy Joes, mixing up cups of powdered hot chocolate, and helping little kids figure out exactly which kind of candy will combine with which kind of soda to make them leave the game holding their stomach like they've been shot in the gut.

A week before her shift, my wife came up with a scheduling conflict. On the way home from work, she mentioned that she had to be somewhere else Tuesday night and I'd have to fill in for her. Not really listening (an ongoing problem), I just nodded that I'd take care of whatever it was she was supposed to do.

When Tuesday rolled around, my wife turned to me and reminded me that I'd agreed to fill in for her.

I stared for a long, long moment, trying to figure out whether it was worse to simply agree or to admit that I had no idea what I had agreed to do. Finally, I made an executive decision.

"Fill in ... for what?"

She frowned at me.

"You know very well that you agreed to work the concession stand at the soccer game!" she said.

I couldn't be sure, but this didn't sound like me.

"That is not a 'Dad' thing. That's a 'Mom' thing!"

It was true. In years and years of going to soccer games and getting hot chocolate

and sloppy Joes, and sometimes candy and soda, I had never once seen a dad behind the counter. It was as if she'd asked me to fill in for her at a quilting bee or a candle party.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not a chauvinist. Like every guy in my neighborhood, I do all kinds of "Mom" jobs without complaining. I do dishes, I vacuum and iron, I make a mean fish sticks and rice dinner. I even do laundry. (That last one was a lie. I haven't done laundry since 1993. It's something I'm kind of proud of.)

But, like every other guy in the neighborhood, I don't do these things in front of other dads, so I put my foot down and refused. For about two minutes.

When I arrived at the concession stand, the other moms looked a little uncomfortable at the last-minute substitution. One asked if I could cook. I could have mentioned my skill with fish sticks, but I just shrugged. The head mom walked me through the detailed directions for all the items. I picked up about half of it, then gave up.

As I stood behind the counter, trying to look positive, I watched as kids came up, stopped short, and looked nervously at the man behind the counter. Some took a step back and shuffled over to the line where one of the genuine moms was waiting.

Then a couple of dads I knew walked up. One just stared.

"What's the deal?" he asked. "What are you doing back there?"

"I'm working the stand," I said. "I agreed to this without listening to what I agreed to do."

They looked at each other, then at me.

"And you couldn't get out of it?" the other asked.

I shook my head. They glanced at each other and stifled a snicker. It was as if they'd caught me wearing a little black dress and pearls, twirling a handbag on my arm.

I expected them to commiserate with me, be mad at me for betraying my gender or even make fun of me. Instead, they just placed their orders, waited for me to make them sloppy Joes, then walked back toward the stands -- where they laughed their butts off.

I stood behind the counter feeling smaller and smaller by the minute. I didn't have long, though, because I needed to help a 7-year-old pick out a soda pop, a bag of sugar candy and a chocolate bar.

As the kid walked away, loaded up with enough gut fuel to bend a linebacker in half, I sighed. Somehow, I was the one who felt gutshot.

Homemaking is a column about the people, projects and pride that make a house a home. Peter McKay, a Ben Avon resident, is a nationally syndicated columnist with Creators Syndicate. To see past columns, go to post-gazette.com.

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