

Ravens fans rally 'round their flag

In reprise of 2000-2001 frenzy, one store owner foresees his place turning into a 'real nuthouse'

By Laura Barnhardt
Sun reporter

January 8, 2007



In the Baltimore Sports and Novelty store in Owings Mills, you can buy Ravens caps. Ravens clocks. Ravens lamps and Ravens mailbox covers. And for infant fans, Ravens onesies.

Lynn Grossman found a T-shirt. But what the 58-year-old retired government worker really needed was a flag.

Specifically, one on a short, white plastic pole with a clip to attach to a window on her red Ford Escort.

"I like showing my team support," said Grossman, pulling one of the flags from a display. "It's exciting. It's Ravens fever."

She barely had the words out of her mouth before the next customer was in line holding a flag.

The purple-and-black rectangles aren't much bigger than a piece of notebook paper. They cost less than a large pizza. And, as fans hope for a second Super Bowl appearance, the flags that first appeared en masse six years ago have made their return -- whipping around the Beltway, sprouting up in driveways and selling almost as fast as owner Jeffrey Katzen can put them out.

Since the Ravens clinched their playoff berth, Katzen estimates he has sold more than six dozen flags. In less than two hours Friday, he sold a half-dozen. By today, Katzen figures his Reisterstown Road store will be a "real nuthouse."

The larger sporting goods stores are seeing similar mania.

"The car flags are always very popular, especially ... the further teams get into the playoffs," said Derrick Morgan, spokesman for Modell's Sporting Goods. "We've seen a spike in all our Ravens memorabilia. It's very obvious the fan base is behind the team."

Ravens support is probably nowhere more obvious than it is in Katzen's small, cluttered store in the St. Thomas Shopping Center.

Katzen stands behind a glass display case, surrounded by shelves and racks full of sweat shirts, jackets and just about every other kind of clothing and houseware item on which a Ravens logo can be applied. The flags, though, are among the most popular items.

Katzen gets his supply from two distributors, one in New York and the other in Florida. Efforts to reach those companies were unsuccessful.

A fan himself, Katzen doesn't put a Ravens flag on his car, he said, "Because I wouldn't want to disappoint a customer by not having it to sell."

Kenny Zeiler, a 52-year-old facilities manager from Perry Hall, had three flags in his arms. Two will go on his wife's sport utility

vehicle. And one is destined for his pickup truck. He let his Ravens flag wave in 2000 until it fell apart.

"I see more and more flags every day," he said, waiting to pay. "If I could wear a team jersey to work every day, I would."

"Where do you work? Pittsburgh?" Katzen said jokingly. He finished the sale.

Katzen turned his Pikesville clothing store into a sports store before the 2001 Super Bowl frenzy. He moved to the shopping center near the Owings Mills Metro station in 2002.

"People live and breathe this stuff," the 45-year-old store owner said. "The Ravens -- it's a religion."

Julie Cooper nodded her head. She said she "converted" three former Redskins fans, and got them Ravens hats from Katzen's store for Christmas.

On this rainy afternoon, she's loaded up with a T-shirt for a former Steelers fan and a fleece blanket that Katzen found for her in the storage room. She also bought two flags for her husband's gold Infiniti.

"I have two flags from 2000," said Cooper. "They're around here somewhere. They'll turn up when I'm not looking for them, like everything else."

Now, she said, is the time to show off Ravens pride.

"My son and husband are big-time fans," said Cooper, a 45-year-old nurse from Owings Mills.

Her 19-year-old son is so into the Ravens that he's threatening not to return to Cornell University on Jan. 21 when the semester resumes if the Ravens are still in the playoffs.

"I'm nervous about it," she said. "My husband just says to accept it -- that it has to be based on the Ravens. That's that."

Stan Smith stood in line behind her with a pendant and, of course, a flag.

A 41-year-old real estate agent from Randallstown, Smith had been looking "all over" for a car flag.

"I should've known to come here first," he said.

It will soon be waving on his Saturn Ion.

"If you want something Ravens, you've got to grab it as soon as you see it," said Smith, who describes himself as a true fan, recalling how he bought his son a Ravens jersey as soon as he found out that his wife was having a boy. He said he stood in the rain for an hour and a half to have his picture taken with [Todd Heap](#).

In his travels, Smith said he has noticed more flags popping up on cars as the home team gets closer to a Super Bowl.

"I saw one guy the other day with four flags on his car-- one coming out of each window," he said. "He looked like the president."

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