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Deep Ravens Playoff Run Equals Deeper Pockets for Sports Shop

Jeffrey Katzen, owner of Baltimore Sports and Novelty in Owings Mills, says a Ravens Super Bowl run would be huge for business.

By [Alexander Pyles](#) | [Email the author](#) | 6:00 am

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There exists a [Ravens](#) novelty T-shirt that features an image of All-Pro middle linebacker Ray Lewis and the phrase “organized chaos,” referring to the unpredictable formations of the dominant defense that has been the team’s signature since Super Bowl XXXV.

The T-shirt could also refer to the purple paradise of [Baltimore Sports and Novelty](#), the mostly-Ravens clothing and merchandise store in the St. Thomas Shopping Center in [Owings Mills](#).

Racks of team merchandise overflow into walkways. Jerseys hang literally from ceiling to floor along the walls. Each crevice of the store is filled with Ravens, [Orioles](#) or [Maryland Terrapins](#) novelty items, including Ray Lewis action figures and bottles of team-branded hand sanitizer.

Employees working the floor move almost non-stop to unpack and fold newly arrived t-shirts – Monday they were gray AFC North Division Title shirts – and glance confusedly at each other as they try to figure out where old piles are and where new ones ought to be started.

All the while, Jeffrey Katzen stands behind a counter in a pile of bags and receipts, returning phone calls to customers who are seeking rare pieces of Ravens merchandise.

More often than not, [Katzen can help](#).

The store, which celebrates its 10th anniversary in April, is in the midst of a January boom. With the Ravens [set to play](#) the [Houston Texans](#) in the divisional round of the [AFC playoffs](#) Sunday at 1 p.m., Katzen said the last two weeks have been busy.

If he's right, the next few days will be even busier.

"It's a good thing you didn't come on Thursday," Katzen said as he trudged off to locate another customer's request, this time a purple hat. Fans will be getting ready Thursday for Purple Friday -- when many [wear team apparel to work](#) -- and the first home playoff weekend in Baltimore since 2007, he said.

They're going to want new gear to wear.

"A home game is big because people go to the game and go to the bars around the stadium to watch the game," said Katzen, a [Pikesville](#)-area resident. "People are excited when it's a big game."

That excitement has been reflected in the lines that formed through the narrow, non-linear aisles of the store in the last few weeks. Katzen's business has more than doubled since the Ravens secured a home playoff game by beating the [Cincinnati Bengals](#) in the regular season finale on New Year's Day.

Normally, Katzen runs his store with just one other part-time employee and weekend help from his brother, who minds the shop during home games when Katzen perches himself in a seat at M&T Bank Stadium.

Now, he has two returned-from-college part-timers helping keep the store organized, albeit chaotically.

"I enjoy meeting the people and interacting with customers," said Trisha Repsher, 24, who also recruited her boyfriend, Mark Renehan, 21, to help out during the playoff push. Renehan, from Finksburg, is on winter break from [Goucher College](#).

The store's purple-clad employees seem to know how to make everyone feel united by a common bond.

"They know what you like," said Rhonda Andrews, Katzen's only regular employee, referring to customer's impressions of the store's workers. Andrews drives to the store from [Westminster](#) every day because she enjoys meeting the people who come in -- especially when those people are Ravens players.

All-Pro defensive tackle Haloti Ngata comes in about the same time each year, and Pro Bowl running back Ray Rice has been in the shop twice in the last two weeks, Andrews said.

The players can get all the merchandise they need directly from the team, but they come to Katzen's store because it's like home.

"They come in, and we respect that they're normal people, too," Andrews said. "If they come in, they know they can just shop."

With no sign on the St. Thomas marquee along Reisterstown Road, the store depends on its reputation to keep customers lining up. Most of Baltimore Sports and Novelty's business is made up of returning customers and word-of-mouth referrals.

When a new customer walks in, the staff can usually tell.

"They come in and go, 'Oh my gosh,'" Andrews said. "It's overwhelming."

Katzen said he needs those new customers to help this week finish strong. A Ravens win Sunday, advancing the team to the AFC Championship Game, would be a tremendous boon.

The store is only now making up for time lost due to the summertime [NFL lockout](#). According to Katzen, people weren't buying new merchandise with the season in doubt.

Also, now that [training camp will no longer be held publicly](#) at [McDaniel](#) College, Katzen has permanently lost the business of autograph-seekers who in past years bought helmets, footballs or other memorabilia in preparation for a trek to Westminster.

And as the Orioles appear unlikely to break their string of 14 consecutive losing seasons this year, he can't count on baseball to carry him through the lean summer months.

The Ravens' playoff run this year should serve to "fill the crevices for when it's quiet," Katzen said. How fully filled those gaps are will depend on how far the Ravens advance.

Should the team win this weekend, next weekend and then advance to the Super Bowl, Katzen said he may even be inclined to open his doors in the middle of the night to start selling championship merchandise.

"We've had people lined up 10 people deep when we opened [in the past]," Katzen said. "There will be a line out the door."

Katzen won't mind staying up late, he said. Who could sleep after such a big Ravens win?

"Depends how tired I am," he said. [Email me updates about this story.](#)

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