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## Speed dating in the stands

### Baseball becomes backdrop to finding new love

By Rushmie Kalke TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

**WESTBORO**— As winter gives way to spring, a man's thoughts begin to turn toward the promise of new love — and to the start of baseball season.

This combination is the perfect backdrop to bring together singles looking for romance, said Paula F. Pogorzelski, executive director of A Match Made in 7, a speed dating and networking company in Westboro. The company has teamed up with minor-league teams in New England to offer speed dating events during weeknight games.

Traditional speed dating is often held at restaurants or bars where participants chat with someone for seven minutes or other timed intervals before moving on to meet someone new. If both people mark on their scorecards they want to get to know each other better, the company coordinates the swapping of information. At the baseball games, singles will have the opportunity to talk for a full inning before meeting someone else.

Spending a whole inning with a stranger could be challenging, but that is part of the adventure, and the game can be a conversation starter, Ms. Pogorzelski said. The idea of bringing speed dating to a sporting event that appeals to both men and women evolved at a business expo last fall. She met executives with the Worcester Tornadoes and they discussed adapting the usual speed dating format to the structure of baseball games.

Joseph A. Izzo, the Tornadoes' assistant general manager of sales and marketing, said they are excited about hosting an event. "(Couples will) meet at the ballpark and then they'll be back to have their wedding here in two years. And maybe in two years they'll have their baby at the ballpark," he said with a laugh. "We are looking to cultivate fans for life."

The Brockton Rox and four Connecticut teams are also scheduled to hold events at their stadiums. More information on dates and tickets can be found at [www.amatchmadein7.com](http://www.amatchmadein7.com). People who hit it off at a certain spot tend to come back, so the events can increase the fan base and boost ticket sales for teams, Ms. Pogorzelski said.

The inning changes will occur discreetly so daters won't feel like they are part of the entertainment and other fans won't be disturbed by the event, she said.

The company was formed last year because Ms. Pogorzelski saw an opportunity for the suburban demographic. Speed



Paula F. Pogorzelski of Grafton, executive director of A Match Made in 7, is shown at Hanover Insurance Park at Fitton Field in Worcester, where the Worcester Tornadoes play. Ms. Pogorzelski's company collaborated with the Tornadoes and other minor league baseball teams to offer speed dating at night games. (T&G Staff/BETTY JENEWIN)

dating isn't a new concept, and big cities such as Boston are often hubs for mingling events. There is even a new reality television series called "Sox Appeal," to air on NESN in July, that has a fan going out on three blind dates during the game while the cameras roll.

But for people living outside the city, such venues can be difficult to get to because of jobs, commutes and family obligations, Ms. Pogorzelski said. Being single and having worked in sales and marketing jobs all over New England, she felt she knew the area and what might appeal to people wanting to date. Her business caters to singles between 25 and 55, and the dating events are in Central Massachusetts.

"If you are lucky enough to meet someone in Boston, it could be a logistical nightmare. Now you can meet people locally. ... I know all the options that are out there. I asked 'What could I take out of those things so I could provide the good and eliminate the bad?' " said Ms. Pogorzelski, 55.

Participants are asked to abide by certain rules during the events to protect privacy and maintain a safe environment, such as not giving out last names, addresses or phone numbers. She doesn't make any promises on finding love but does guarantee the opportunity to meet new people.

"Maybe at first when you meet someone there is nothing compelling, but if you don't give the person a chance you'll never know," she said.

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