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Fashion plates

Brewers garb a hit with female fan base

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Kim Woelfel slid back hanger after hanger of pajama bottoms, flipped through the sweat pants and pored over the display of yoga pants before heading to the counter with her arms full.

She could have been shopping at any mall or boutique. But she was in the Fan Zone at Miller Park.

Appealing to fans such as Woelfel, 41, is one of the reasons the Brewers expanded their selection of women's wear this year. Another factor: team owner Mark Attanasio.

"From his first days as owner, we talked about our retail," said Rick Schlesinger, the Brewers executive vice president for business operations. "Personally, he and his family wear a lot of the stuff."

But perhaps the best reason to pitch to women is having an exciting team that's drawing national attention - especially a young team populated with attractive single men.

The name of the game being played in the Fan Zone is branding, and retailers are smart to include women in the mix, said Donna Reamy, associate professor in fashion design and merchandising at Virginia Commonwealth University. It may have taken a while, but there are now women's fashions for every sport, including a line dedicated to female NASCAR fans.

"They know women are just as much a fan as men are . . .," Reamy said. "Women are demanding this type of look, and they want it to be a more feminine look."

Woelfel finds the Fan Zone too crowded for shopping during home stands. After all, attendance is up 30%, and workers in the Fan Zone have to restock the inventory three or four times a game.

Shopping during the team's recent West Coast swing, she only had to share the store with a handful of fellow female shoppers.

She had her pick of looks, including three styles of yoga pants (\$30) in navy and gray, as well as gray, orange or blue tank tops emblazoned with the Brewers logo. If she was so inclined, Woelfel could dress herself in Brewers-related fashion from head to toe, starting with 14-carat gold earrings or sterling silver earrings in post (\$100) and drop (\$105) styles and working her way down to sparkly pink flip-flops (\$25).

"This is the most inventory we've ever had for women as far as variety goes," said John Taylor, director of retail operations and sports service at Miller Park.

Unless you're looking for a J.J. Hardy player shirt. They don't hang around for long, Taylor said. The shortstop is popular with young female fans between 12 and 30 years old, many of whom pose for photos with Hardy's image in the Fan Zone.

Manufacturers such as Antiqua offer logo apparel that is cut to a woman's body. New Era Cap Company expanded its line of baseball caps to women by offering them in styles as varied as "foxhole camouflage" and the Brewers retro ball-and-glove logo in satin.

This year's version of the satin ball-and-glove logo was so popular that New Era added sparkly bling to the 2008 version, said Kathy Schwab, Brewers' senior director of marketing.

"It's about time," said Paula Duffy, the co-host of a radio sports show in Washington, D.C., who runs the Web site *www.incidentalcontact.com*. She suggests that the push for sports logo apparel cut for women started in the last five to seven years. At the time, Tiger Woods was the rage, business was done on the golf course, and women were flocking to the greens in record numbers. She was among them.

Nike began with a line of women's golf clothing cut to fit the female form and then began catering to athletic women with a line of athletic wear for yoga and Pilates. Other companies, spurred by technology and athletes' needs, began manufacturing apparel that would look fashionable and stay fresh in any situation - another innovation that women appreciated.

"All of a sudden the major leagues and the licensees of the major leagues jumped on the bandwagon," said Duffy, who has spotted team-logo thongs at a kiosk at a Los Angeles Lakers basketball game.

"Now it's down to bathing suits and onesies," she said. "I swear to God there is toddler wear."

Oh, yes, there is: Pink and blue baby sets with a cap, bib and onesie decorated with the Brewers' name are \$50.

Hey, might as well get them while they're young.

The team even has a \$30 maternity logo shirt celebrating the "future fan." Taylor said Tony Gwynn Jr.'s wife is one of the six players' wives who are pregnant, and she has one.

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