

IN BUSINESS

# A Dream Team: Ice Cream and Sports

Bar Where Fans Hoist a Spoon Is Set to Expand



At Last Licks in Scarsdale, ice cream is eaten from a cup in the shape of a batting helmet, left. Jon Deutsch is co-owner of the shop, where sports memorabilia is sold along with ice cream and candy, and where television sets are tuned to sports events. A close-up of autographed baseballs.



By LYNNE AMES

SCARSDALE

**A** HOCKEY game was on the television and the crowd at Last Licks here was hoisting a few — ice cream sodas, that is. Described by its owners, Jon Deutsch and Brandon Steiner, as a “sports bar for kids,” this ice cream-cum-sports memorabilia shop in the Golden Horseshoe Shopping Center here has become a favorite destination for the under-18 crowd and their parents. Children from toddlers to teenagers gather around its tables (which are autographed by the likes of the New York Yankees manager Joe Torre and the shortstop Derek Jeter), eat ice cream, frozen yogurt and candy, visit — everyone seems to know one another — and watch the two television sets affixed to the walls, which are perpetually tuned to sports events and news.

This is a particularly busy time for the business. A second Last Licks is about to open on Main Street in Armonk in March, and there are the Winter Olympics. “I really like ice skating,” Lindsay Rokito, 5, said between spoonfuls of Sedutto’s Cookies ‘n Cream.

Actually, the store has been drawing big crowds year round. Business, Mr. Deutsch said, has more than doubled since the conversion to a sports motif in November 2000 from a plain vanilla ice cream establishment. Scarsdale and New Rochelle — the shop straddles the border — support dozens of teams for kids who play baseball, softball, basketball, soccer and hockey. As in many suburban towns, interest in sports — participatory and spectator — verges on the obsessive. Soccer moms and softball dads compete with their children for space at Last Licks’ five tables, especially on those days when a famous athlete is due to show up for an autograph session.

“There’s a really warm, special atmosphere — ice cream and sports are a great mix,” Benjamin Luzzo said. A photographer with a portfolio that includes pictures of the former New York Yankees pitcher Whitey Ford and the former New York Mets outfielder Mookie Wilson at the store, Mr. Luzzo added: “Ice cream is a great equalizer. A sports celebrity comes in; the kids are in awe of him. Then he orders a cone and orders some cones for the kids and before

you know it, everyone is talking and joking around together.”

Mr. Deutsch, 28, comes from a retailing family. His grandfather, Marty Rother, opened Big Top, a local chain of toy and stationary stores. Mr. Deutsch remembers childhood romps through the aisles, entranced with the variety of merchandise.

After college and a brief, unhappy stint in the administrative offices of a large hospital, Mr. Deutsch heard that the Golden Horseshoe’s ice cream store was for sale. “I put together money from my bar mitzvah,” he said, “borrowed some from my grandfather and made a down payment.” He said he paid less than \$100,000 for the store. For three years, he operated it as the Scoop Shop, selling Sedutto ice cream, a variety of frozen yogurts and candy including Gummi Worms, malted milk balls and dozens of other varieties, but only dessert-type food, no pizza or sandwiches.

The turning point came when he and Mr. Steiner got together at a fund-raising carnival at the Quaker Ridge Elementary School. Mr. Steiner, 42, is chairman of Steiner Sports, a merchandising company based in New Rochelle. He had been a consultant for Mickey Mantle’s, the Sporting Club and other sports bars in Manhattan, and had built up relationships with dozens of professional athletes. Impressed with Mr. Deutsch’s easygoing manner with youngsters, he turned to his young son at the carnival and said, “I think I’ve got an unusual idea.” Then he approached Mr. Deutsch about turning the Scoop Shop into a sports-based operation.

“When I stumbled on Jon, I knew I’d met

someone special,” said Mr. Steiner. “And I’d been wanting to share my sports contacts.”

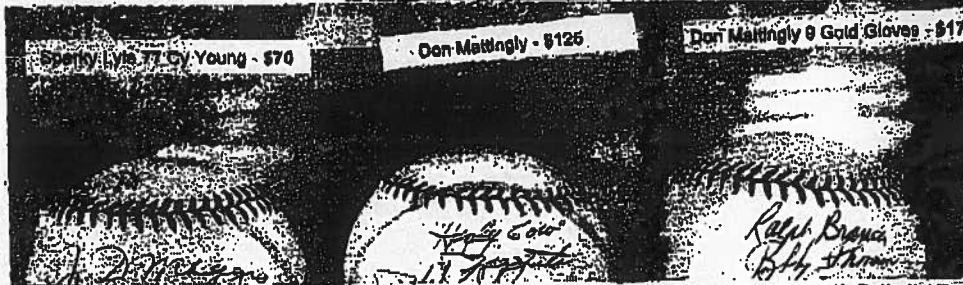
Last Licks incorporates a sports theme into every aspect of its business. The name itself refers to the final turn in a game or series: before the 2001 World Series, Mr. Torre autographed a tabletop with the message, “To Last Licks — I’m not sure when we will be getting ours.” The shop’s logo is a smiling mouth and a tongue licking a cone in which the scoop of ice cream is patterned like a baseball. Among the menu items: a Lickey Mantle sundae, a Cookie-Dough Maggio (as in Joe Dimaggio) sundae and a Scooper Bowl sundae.

Prices for the ice cream are average for the area and the product, Mr. Deutsch said.

The 1,320-square-foot space is filled with baseball cards, miniature bats, helmets that can double as ice cream dishes, life-size cutouts of sports stars, autographed balls, shoes, T-shirts and head gear used in baseball, football, basketball, and board games with sports themes.

In addition to pictures of pro athletes, the tabletops are covered with laminated photographs of loyal clientele. Centrally placed behind the counter is a carnival-type wheel, which customers spin to win anything from a free serving of ice cream to a meeting with a sports celebrity. This, Mr. Deutsch said, is a favorite with the children and grown-ups. “We’ve had whole teams come in after games and line up to use the wheel.” The store’s name is an acronym: Learning, Interest, Creativity, Knowledge and Sportsmanship, which is on the store’s fliers.

On a recent day, Scott Baken, 43, a



Photographs by Chris Maynard for The New York Times

lawyer from Scarsdale, was in the store with his daughter, Sasha, 8, and son, Ben, 10. Despite frigid temperatures, Ben was dressed in running shorts, a T-shirt and a thin-looking windbreaker. “I’m an athlete,” he said, explaining his attire. Mr. Baken said that Mr. Steiner had been his son’s coach in Little League, and spoke of the “family feel” of the place.

“Scarsdale is very big on sports,” he said, adding that there are leagues with travel teams that are developed according to players’ abilities, and there are recreational leagues where everyone is accepted on a team regardless of ability. The important thing, he said, is to play fairly and have fun.

“The kids come in here after a game, and then they meet members of the opposing team, and they get friendly with them over ice cream,” he said.

Ben spooned up coffee ice cream and hot fudge, grinned, and said he plays baseball, basketball and soccer. Sasha said she ice skates. Then she pointed to the multicolored sprinkles on her vanilla ice cream. “See these? Everywhere else they’re called sprinkles,” she said, “but here they call them jeters. Where else would you find that?”

Last Licks, at 1074-76 Wilmet Road, Scarsdale, is open Sundays through Thursdays, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Fridays and Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. After Memorial Day weekend, the shop is open an hour later on weeknights and weekends. Phone: (914) 725-5932.