



Editorial: All-star effort / The Pirates should speak up about sweatshops

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Would you mind if that Pittsburgh Pirates shirt you bought last week was sewn by a 14-year-old girl in Bangladesh during her 12th hour of labor in a factory that pays her in pocket change and certainly no overtime?

Polls have shown that most Americans do mind. And certainly Pittsburghers, with their long tradition of improving labor conditions through collective bargaining, are even more likely to balk at their hometown team's shirts being manufactured in sweatshops.

Major League Baseball, not the Pirates, signs the contracts with the companies that sell the stuff bearing team logos and arranges for its manufacture. The Pittsburgh Anti-Sweatshop Community Alliance has asked the Pirates to ask Major League Baseball to take the same measures that hundreds of universities across the country have to ensure that merchandise sporting their names isn't made by people trapped in grotesque working conditions.

The Pirates have responded by asking Major League Baseball to take a look at the issue of sweatshops -- not to resolve it, just mull it. Major League Baseball has assured the alliance that the players' uniforms and caps are made in the United States and that it requires companies contracting for manufacture of fan merchandise, almost always overseas, to "comply with all applicable labor laws."

Is it fine, then, if the local labor laws in Bangladesh allow 14-year-olds to work 12 hours for pennies without overtime?

Nearly 160 universities, including Duquesne, Penn State and Carnegie Mellon, deal with this by including a code of conduct for labor conditions in their contracts with these companies and by joining an organization that investigates workers' complaints.

It's not perfect. The group checks only a few of the thousands of factories around the world. Still, it's some policing.

The alliance plans to conduct a sweatshop information "carnival" on July 11, the day of the All-Star Game in Pittsburgh. The Pirates should head it off by asking Major League Baseball to make a real

attempt at enforcement. It's not too much to ask.

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