

Cuban tries hand as DQ manager

COPPELL, Texas (AP) — Trying desperately to perfect the curly tip on a soft-serve cone, Mark Cuban licked the remains of another failed effort from his fingertips and handed the messy treat to an excited 3-year-old boy. One lick later, the kid dropped it.

That was about the only thing that went wrong Wednesday when the billionaire owner of the Dallas Mavericks worked two hours behind a Dairy Queen counter, making good on a promise to manage the fast-food restaurant.

The company's offer came in response to Cuban's assertion that he would not hire Ed Rush, the NBA's head of officiating, "to manage a Dairy Queen."

The league fined Cuban

"It's not everyday you see a billionaire serving burgers."

— Tony Newpower customer

\$500,000 for the comment, a record for an individual. For about \$650,000, Cuban could've bought a startup DQ franchise.

So, after doing the job himself, does he still think Rush could not do it?

"It depends on how he treats the customers. That's the hard part," Cuban said.

"Part of the point I was trying to make with the NBA is that you have to understand your customers and learn to get better as a business."

Cuban, fined more than \$1 million by the NBA in the two years since he bought the team, praised his boss-for-a-day, store owner Parrish Chapman, and took another shot at the league.

"I'd love to send Parrish up to the NBA to have him give them a lesson in exactly how to communicate," Cuban said. "When anybody needed to interact with Parrish, he was right there to answer the ques-

tions. That's the way you run a business. If Parrish just went up there and just took a look, we'd be a lot better off."

Cuban's presence created a carnival atmosphere at the suburban Dairy Queen and drew more than 1,000 people, many waiting close to an hour to place their order. The crush was so big the restaurant ran out of ice. "It was worth the wait," Tony Newpower said. "It's not often you see a billionaire serving burgers."

Wearing a navy denim shirt, a manager's name tag and carrying a pencil in his right shirt pocket, Cuban actually spent more time signing autographs than taking orders.

But he did take his temporary job seriously. He arrived at 6 a.m., after flying home from a Mavericks game in Atlanta, and began training by 6:30.

Kim Skeffington, a regional field consultant whose duties include working with new managers, spent about two hours teaching him the finer points of curling soft serves and mixing a frozen dessert.

James Kelly, who waited about two hours to be first in line, ordered a strawberry version of the dessert — which Skeffington made — then had Cuban sign a novelty \$1 million bill.

Cuban's first cone for a customer looked squished on top.

"Be patient with me, please. I'm new at this," he said with a wink and a smile. "It might not be pretty, but it works."

Lured by a "Mark Cuban Here Today" sign, customers were treated to inflatable play areas for children, portable basketball hoops for kids and adults and more than a dozen TV and radio stations broadcasting live. One station even sent its helicopter.

The line snaked around the building and up the street, with cars filling several vacant fields. Order was maintained even though only a few customers were allowed in at a time. It probably helped that the store gave away free ice cream bars.

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