

OCTOBER 2024

## Clever Positioning: Savannah Bananas Violate Every Rule of Baseball, Business

My son Drew and I attended the **Savannah Bananas'** final home game on Sunday, September 29, in Savannah, Georgia.

"When our one feasibility study was done, we were told we shouldn't do Banana Ball. We should stay with just regular, traditional baseball. Every survey and every study said, 'Stick with what you're doing.' The reality is that's the easy way out. You should think differently. **THINK BIG!**"

Those are the words of **Jesse Cole**, founder/owner of the **Savannah Bananas**, the exhibition baseball team in Savannah, Georgia, that began as a summer collegiate baseball team.

You will either say, "**I've read about these guys, and they're awesome,**" or your thoughts will be, "**What the heck is that?!**"

In 2015, Jesse and his wife Emily bought the defunct minor league baseball team in Savannah. For over 90 years, teams played, attracted sparse crowds, and failed in the city.

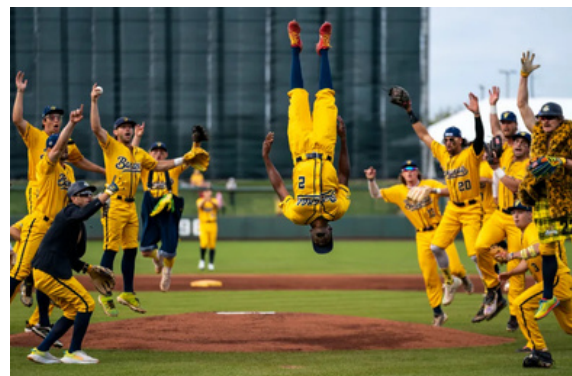
Jesse and Emily made a quality decision to make a **bold** difference.

They held a "**Name the Team Contest**" on February 25, 2016, and the winning name astounded everyone and embarrassed many: **The Savannah BANANAS**.

While many locals thought it was a joke, the name captured widespread attention locally, regionally, and nationwide and was even featured on **CBS**, **NBC**, and **Sports Illustrated**. The team logo was named **SportsCenter's Logo of the Year**.

After winning their Coastal Plain League title three out of their years, Jesse announced a massive transformation: **Banana Ball** – a version of baseball that would shock the world.

Suddenly, his team looked like the [Harlem Globetrotters](#) had started a baseball team.



The games would be more fast-paced, entertaining, and fun than conventional baseball (a two-hour limit). Opening night 2022 was a rousing success. **Fans loved their innovations, including:**

- **All-inclusive food** in the ticket price
- **A senior-citizen cheerleader team** (the ladies are known as the **Savannah Nanas**, and the men are the **Savannah Man-nanas**)
- **Acrobatic plays on the field**
  1. The third baseman fields a ground ball, performs a cartwheel, and then fires the ball to first base for the out
  2. The pitcher jumps on a trampoline on the pitcher's mound and pitches between bounces from mid-air
  3. **Another player pitches atop his set of stilts** and later plays first base – “the tallest player ever”
- The first Banana Baby (think back to the **Lion King** hoisting the baby lion for his pride to see and celebrate)
- Dancing baseball players

## **Wait! DANCING** baseball players?

Jesse explains that the players could not have been less eager to dance. Here's a business lesson for all of us!

**“It was a cultural risk.** Only four guys agreed to dance in the first game, and the crowd loved them. They became our most popular players. Four more players joined in the next game, and the crowd embraced them. In the third game, EVERYBODY danced, and the crowd went wild.”

And not just the players. **The umpire moonwalks** and dances after a strikeout. **The first base coach created his own break dance routines, as well.**

**ESPN reports, “The Savannah Bananas Baseball Team is Creating ‘The Greatest Show in Sports.’”**



Consider these metrics. The Savannah Bananas:

- Have **SIX TIMES more social media followers** than the New York Yankees.
- Have achieved over **300 million views** on TikTok
- Have **sold out over 270 consecutive games**
- Host their docuseries, Banana Ball, on ESPN+
- Have played numerous times on YouTube and are the subject of Netflix programming
- Have attracted former **Major League All-Stars** to join the Bananas at various times including former Boston Red Sox New York Yankees, and Arizona Diamondbacks

Your first thought must be, "I bet they sell a lot of in-stadium advertising with the outfield signs and game programs."

**Not quite.** The Savannah Bananas turn down all stadium advertising because they want the emphasis to be exclusively on the Banana Ball experience.

Drew and I enjoyed the season finale from the front row immediately behind home plate. What an incredible first-game experience!

**But wait... there's more!**

On Thursday evening, October 3, the Savannah Bananas announced their 2025 Tour schedule, which will take the team to **18 Major League Baseball parks**, **three massive football stadiums**, and **30 home games**.

The Bananas played before **ONE MILLION FANS** this year and will play before **TWO MILLION FANS** next year. In addition, the team is adding a giant video board at its home field for 2025.

They are adding a new team for 2025 (making a total of four for the year: **The Savannah Bananas, the Firefighters, the Party Animals, and now the Texas Tailgaters**) and will form a six-team league for 2026 because interest in and fanaticism for Banana Ball continues to grow!

**And, yes, there is even MORE!** Just a week ago, the Savannah Bananas **took 2,500 fans on a Caribbean cruise** where the players and staff interacted nonstop with their fans, making them even more personable and memorable.



As you consider who is different and how their efforts have been worth the risk...

- **Walt Disney** was constantly rejected by his business partner/brother Roy and all the bankers, who said a theme park such as Disneyland was a terrible idea
- Vari (yes, the VariDesk!) CEO **Jason McCann** wondered how well his variable-position sit/stand desk would catch on
- **Elon Musk** overcame all sorts of doubt with his concept of the electric car **Tesla** and **SpaceX**, and, in the process, he became the world's wealthiest human being
- **Mattress Mack (Jim McIngvale)** in Houston was bold enough to jump up and down on a mattress claiming, "Gallery Furniture saves you money," and grew to become the largest single-point furniture store in America when others said he was crazy - **Who's laughing now?**

## So, what are the business lessons the Savannah Bananas teach us?

1. We need to create **FANS** instead of customers. Customers are transactional and will leave you for a better price; fans are **loyal and forgiving**, and, in the long run, they will help you gain even more fans.
2. Think bigger and bolder **without placing any limitations** on your brainstorming.
3. Start asking the difficult questions that expand your vision, such as "**What if?**" instead of easy questions that can hamstring you, such as, "Why should we not do this?"
4. You must be **distinctively different from your competition** to stand out in an already crowded sector.
5. **You may initially feel uncomfortable standing** out as different, but your hard-won success will make it all worthwhile.



By the way, I understand what it means to be **uncomfortable**. When I helped launch a new radio station, **KJNE-FM**, in Waco (now KBRQ "The Bear," 102.5 FM), I dressed in a Coca-Cola route salesman's uniform to help convince the Coca-Cola area manager to place our radio station's logo atop 12 million cans of Coke, Sprite, etc. The result?

**Being branded on those cans helped us become #3 in our first 14 weeks of existence and #1 in only 15 months.**

Please email me how you have taken a risk to be different in your business.



Waco Tribune-Herald

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Tuesday,

**KJNE-FM new #1 in Waco Radio Ratings**  
By Mike Copeland

KJNE-FM, the upstart radio station known as "The Best Country in the City," is Waco's favorite music station according to the Spring 1985 Arbitron ratings that were recently released.

Of the 72 rated audience segments, the new country station, which launched 16 months ago, ranked #1 in 68 of the 72 rated dayparts.

The morning show features the always personable Jane & Jay duo, who thrive on engaging audience members with contests, which have sent listeners to concerts across

the nation and Hawaiian Islands. KJNE launched 16 million cans and related fl spring.

Station manager Fletcher calls: "cross-count blends tradition such as Rand Please see R/

In the meantime, **let's all GO BANANAS**

## Business Wisdom from the Savannah Bananas

The most potent words your fans will ever say start **with "You wouldn't believe..."**

- **You wouldn't believe** the biscuits and gravy this restaurant serves
- **You wouldn't believe** how friendly the hotel front desk people were
- **You wouldn't believe** how the players run up into the stands to give a yellow rose to anyone celebrating a birthday
- **You wouldn't believe** how that first base coach break dances during the game
- **You wouldn't believe** that the one admission ticket bought ALL the hot dogs, burgers, chips, and cookies I could eat and all the soft drinks I could drink

What **"You wouldn't believe..."** statements are your FANS saying about you and your company?

What would you like them to say?

**"Please call me at 817-205-2334 and I'll help get you there!"**

