

# Advertising Age<sup>®</sup>

## Element 79's Swan Song for Gatorade Is Pure Gold

### Last Spot Is a Hyperbolic Mix of Cheeky Stunt and Verisimilitude

Posted by [Bob Garfield](#) on 06.09.08

The broad efficacy of Gatorade is arguable. The electrolytes in it obviously are useful for replenishing salts lost in heavy exercise. That's very different, though, from the brand's positioning: To see the ads, this Day-Glo bug juice is a magical elixir or some sort of performance-enhancing drug.

But let's not sweat the details, shall we?

**Title:** Ball Girl

**Marketer:** Gatorade



**Agency:** Element 79, Chicago



The hyperbole, cheek by jowl with verisimilitude, is the heart of the joke. Which equally enlivens the tagline: 'Never underestimate the power of superior hydration.'

The swill is useful for athletes under heavy exertion, and does no harm to anyone else, so Gatorade is within its rights to market itself as a must-have accessory on the court, on the field, in the gym and so on.

Which heavy marketing exercise **Element 79**, Chicago, has accomplished brilliantly for a long time. How the "Is it in you?" agency lost the business is one of those ad-industry mysteries, leaving us most curious to see **Element 79's** swan song. This has finally materialized. And bravo.

The spot is titled "Ball Girl," and is about one of those teens who sit in a folding chair between the box seats and the baselines at professional baseball games. Their job is to field the balls dribbled foul and return them to the home dugout or hand them to an appreciative fan. Typically, this involves bending over awkwardly

and watching the ball skitter off the heel of her mitt, often right back into the field of play. Then they skitter after it.

The idea of speeding up the game by relieving players of clean-up duty is thus rendered irrelevant, but the girls do tend to look adorable in shorts.

The commercial takes us to a Triple A game between the Tacoma Rainiers and Fresno Grizzlies (televised because ... well ... Fresno). In the action, the Tacoma batter yanks a hanging curveball deep down the left field line. The ball curls foul into the corner and the Fresno leftfielder doesn't even make a move on it. But then appears the ball girl, who climbs up the wall in two bounds -- Jet Li-style -- and spins for a leaping catch. Here's some of the play-by-play:

" ... Driven down the leftfield line, and this ball is gonna be ... ohhh, it's caught! It's not Jake Wald ... it's the ball girl! Jake Wald in left field can't believe it! And look ... she shows him up; she sort of tosses him the ball, saying 'Take that, Jake, I don't see you making the effort.' Alfonzo the catcher, he can't believe it. Let's look at that replay. Oh, my! What an amazing play!"

It's certainly an amazing fabrication of an amazing play. The ball girl is a stuntwoman who was lifted by cables as she planted her feet against the wall, a sequence cut into actual game footage and enhanced with a bit of CGI and a perfectly natural-sounding announcer track. This guy is the quintessential play-by-play man, very much like Bob Carpenter of the Washington Nationals, especially with his postscript as the ball girl resumes her folding chair with the bottle of Gatorade at her feet.

" ... and look at her, sitting there, saying, 'No big deal.'"

As seamless as the leaping effect is, it's not like the Nike Ronaldinho viral that makes you wonder if maybe it's real. This is clearly a stunt, but no less delightful for it. The hyperbole, cheek by jowl with verisimilitude, is the heart of the joke. Which equally enlivens the tagline: "Never underestimate the power of superior hydration."

Of course, Gatorade's whole pitch is to overestimate the power of situationally superior hydration, but in this context the puffery comes with the charming wink.

The new agency will be asked to overcome bottled-water mania to improve sagging fortunes, but if **Element 79** couldn't use advertising like magical elixir, you have to wonder about TBWA/Chiat/Day: Is it in them?