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## 'You can't put a price tag on it': How Long Island Knicks fans are spending big during Finals run

By Newsday Staff

Noah Angeles recently spent \$3,000 on three tickets to Saturday night's Game 5 of the NBA Finals in San Antonio, where the Knicks could clinch their first championship since 1973.

It is only one of many Knicks-related purchases for Angeles, 43, of Bellerose, who has also paid for watch parties, team merchandise and Knicks-themed lawn signs featuring players Jalen Brunson and Josh Hart during the team's playoff run.

For fans like Angeles who have waited decades for a moment like this, the cost is easy to justify.

"We're going to drop money on this," he said. "Because it's healing for our soul."

From playoff tickets and jerseys to watch parties, train rides, themed desserts and bar tabs, Long Islanders are spending money in ways both large and small to participate in the Knicks' first NBA Finals appearance in more than two decades.

Some are shelling out thousands for tickets. Others are buying jerseys for their children, hosting watch parties or making trips into New York City to soak up the atmosphere. Across Long Island, businesses say the excitement has translated into a surge in sales.

Sports business experts say that kind of spending is common during rare sports moments, particularly when a long-suffering fan base suddenly finds itself on the verge of a championship.

After rallying from a late deficit to win Game 4 on Wednesday night, the Knicks took a 3-1 lead over the San Antonio Spurs and could end the series with a victory on Saturday.

Events like the Knicks' Finals run can unleash a "pent-up fandom" that drives supporters to spend more than they normally would on merchandise, tickets, watch parties and nights out, said Patrick Rishe, director of the sports business program at Washington University in St. Louis.

"When you've got the weight of futility on your shoulders as a fan, and now, all of a sudden, here's an opportunity to have something to be excited about, to celebrate ... it comes out in positive ways like going out and spending," Rishe said.

The spending is often less about the purchase itself than what it represents, experts said.

"Sports is one of the only things that truly brings people together and it's memorable," said Sarbjit Singh, an associate professor in the sport management department at Farmingdale State College. "It's a special moment, and with sports you never know if you'll ever get that chance again."

On Thursday, less than 24 hours after the Knicks' dramatic Game 4 comeback, shoppers browsed the Knicks

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section at Dick's Sporting Goods in Melville, looking for hats, jerseys and other team gear ahead of Saturday night's game.

Among them was Andrew Peredo, 42, of Huntington, who was buying \$100 jerseys for his sons, ages 4 and 6.

Peredo estimates he has spent nearly \$1,000 during the Knicks' playoff run on jerseys, other merchandise, and food and drinks at bars and restaurants showing the games.

The spending at Dick's, he said, was about sharing the experience with his children.

"They saw me wearing a jersey, and they don't have a jersey," Peredo said. "I don't want to rob them of childhood memories."

Local businesses cash in

At The Spread in Lindenhurst, co-owner Shawn Fenton said weekday sales during Knicks games have been five to seven times higher than normal. The sports bar has drawn hundreds of fans to outdoor watch parties featuring inflatable projector screens rented from The Big Bounce Theory in Bohemia.

"It's been overwhelming at times," Fenton said. "But it's been incredibly rewarding and fun as both a Knicks fan and as a business owner."

Some businesses have even adjusted their operations to capitalize on the moment.

At Spiro's Lounge in Rocky Point, a steak and seafood restaurant not typically known as a sports destination, management relaxed its dress code on game nights, added sports-bar fare and introduced a \$59.99 "Courtside Party Pack."

The restaurant has seen roughly a 35% increase in dine-in sales and a 40% increase in takeout sales during the Finals run, general manager Jay Ozdemir said.

"It's a once-in-a-50-year opportunity for people to enjoy something like this," Ozdemir said.

But the spending boom has extended well beyond sporting goods stores and bars.

Buttercooky Bakery & Cafe in Huntington has been selling nearly 15,000 Knicks-colored rainbow cookies a day, priced at \$28.95 per pound, owner Francesco Borgognone said.

Over the past few weeks, customers have been buying themed desserts for watch parties, including one customer who ordered 5,000 cookies for a gathering.

"The Knicks being in the playoffs and the championship has been phenomenal for business," Borgognone said.

Economists say unexpected cultural moments like the Knicks' Finals run can create spending that businesses

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never budgeted for.

Local businesses likely didn't expect to see the increased spending, making it the kind of pleasant surprise most owners dream of, said Steven Kent, chief economist for the Long Island Association.

"They build their expenses and revenue forecasts based on the normal, so this is extra and above what anybody was really thinking of," Kent said.

The rush of Knicksmania has been a lifeline for some businesses.

Abe Kaplan, owner of The Big Bounce Theory, which rents screens, inflatables and arcade games for events, has supplied the large outdoor screens used for Knicks watch parties at The Spread in Lindenhurst. He said the recent surge in community and backyard watch parties couldn't have come soon enough.

A tough winter and heavy snowfall wiped out many opportunities for the seasonal business, leaving it trying to make up lost ground. Over the past two weeks, requests for large screens, basketball-themed inflatables and even NBA Jam arcade machines for both commercial and home events have generated between \$10,000 and \$15,000 in sales, Kaplan said. Large-screen rentals cost between \$1,000 and \$2,000, depending on size.

"Is it going to put us back to where we were last year? No," Kaplan said. "But it is definitely helping."

Some businesses have seen demand as an opportunity for charitable giving.

At Signarama, a sign-making business in Huntington Station, customers have been picking up Knicks-themed lawn signs and player cutouts in exchange for donations to Helping Hand Rescue Mission local a faith-based community outreach center.

The promotion had generated about \$2,000 in donations by midweek.

"This has been madness," said Signarama executive assistant Krystal Chocianowski.

Not everyone is buying in

Not every Long Islander has been swept up in Knicks mania.

Jerry Werner, who works at Bay Shore Liquors, said sales are up at least 50% on game days, with customers increasingly seeking Knicks-branded liquor products. But Werner said he remains largely indifferent to the team's playoff run.

Others are taking a similarly measured approach.

Michelle Jackson, 52, of Deer Park, said she supports the Knicks out of New York pride but has no plans to buy decorations, special food or merchandise.

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For lifelong fans like Angeles, however, the spending is about much more than the game itself.

Angeles said decades of Knicks heartbreak have made this Finals run feel especially meaningful.

"We cried when Patrick Ewing missed that finger roll. We cried when Michael Jordan would knock us out of the playoffs," Angeles said. "For us, this is a once-in-a-lifetime thing. And you can't put a price tag on it."

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