



## ***Eyewitness Hoekstra expands 'Disco Demolition' landscape in book***

*By George Castle, CBM Historian  
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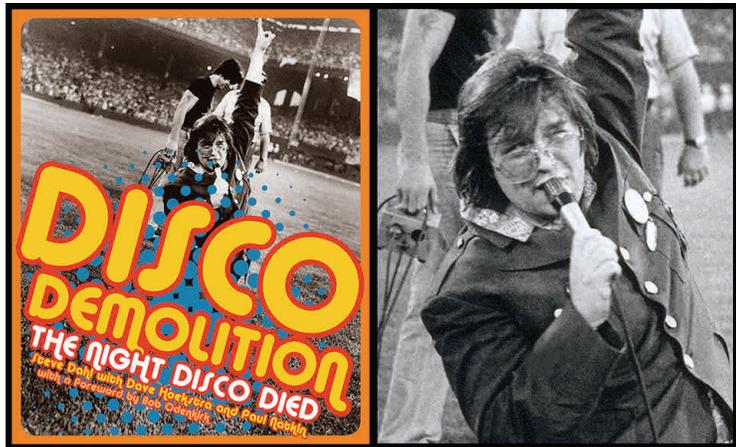
When you write a book, the best source is yourself as eyewitness.

So Dave Hoekstra had an edge on other potential authors when, on behalf of “official” author Steve Dahl, he penned the “Disco Demolition: The Night Disco Died” released to correspond with the 37<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the greatest Chicago baseball promotion gone wrong on July 12, 1979.

Up to 70,000 fans crammed into old Comiskey Park, lured by up-and-coming deejay Dahl’s promotion to blow up disco records in between games of a White Sox-Detroit Tigers Thursday twi-night doubleheader. Admission was 98 cents, corresponding with Dahl station WLUP’s 97.9 FM frequency, and a disco record for possible destruction.

“I went because I loved baseball and I like rock ‘n roll,” said Hoekstra. “I wanted to see a doubleheader. I was dating a White Sox fan (a North Side woman named Miller). I brought my Rod Stewart ‘Do You Think I’m Sexy?’ (record). I went there to kind of defend rock ‘n roll and watch a doubleheader. When everything broke loose, we just walked out.”

The entire night represented Hoekstra’s renaissance-man interests that have marked his distinctive career. Born in Berwyn and raised in Naperville, he grew up with twin loves of baseball and music that he chronicled in a decades-long career as a featured Chicago Sun-Times writer. Departed from the paper as has much of its best talent, Hoekstra now hosts an eclectic two-hour Saturday night pop culture-based show on WGN-Radio.



**The book cover of the new Disco Demolition book (left). Steve Dahl was in top form (right) as he exhorted the crowd that night at old Comiskey Park. Dahl photo credit Paul Natkin.**

His skill as a writer exploring fresh angles dictated expanding the book. Hoekstra would do more just a chronicle of how Chicago youth virtually rioted, tore up the field and made the Veeck family's final big promotion its best-known, even if it got wildly out of control, requiring Chicago police on horseback to finally calm the mob.

Numerous retrospectives on Disco Demolition have been crafted through the decades, from a documentary to photo exhibits by rock 'n roll photographer Paul Natkin. Copious videotape is available via YouTube.

Dahl asked Hoekstra to write the book. Although Dahl's name is on the cover as author "with Dave Hoekstra and Paul Natkin", Hoekstra did the guts of the book.

"We had a couple of meetings with Steve and the publisher," Hoekstra said. "What I wanted to do was move the needle off Steve himself and kind of tell a sociological story. One of the important things to know is about Chicago neighborhoods. How do Chicago neighborhoods define the teams? I wanted to cast a wider net than just Steve Dahl and Disco Demolition."

### **Cubs fan with a soft spot for South Side**

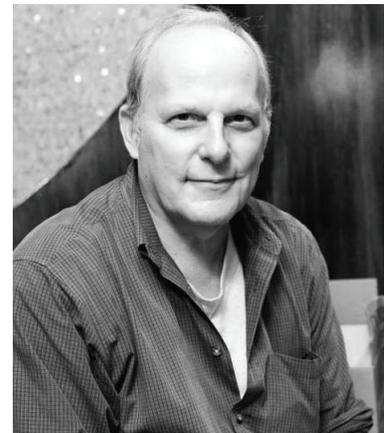
Again, Hoekstra's own background helped. Although the 1969 Cubs won his youthful heart to the North Siders, he had his own South Side connections that start the flavor going for the book.

"My dad worked in the stockyards," he said. "The first ballgame he took me to was Sox and Yankees in 1965."

Working in the Chicago music scene and how it dovetailed with the much-reviled disco phenomenon on the late 1970s, Hoekstra profiled Disco Demolition as an extension of the gritty South Side. He profiled the neighborhood surrounding old Comiskey Park.

"I get into Bridgeport," he said. "I was one of the last people to talk to (barkeep) Jack Schaller for a project like this before he died. I took (ex-Sox and Cubs pitcher) Steve Trout over to Schaller's Pump. It was important to talk about how disco music birthed house music. House is one of the most important musical exports in Chicago right now just right beneath the blues."

Trout was interviewed along with 1979 Sox teammates Ken Kravec, Ed Farmer and Thad Bosley, who later crafted his own music career. The longtime racist Bridgeport psyche was detailed with a story of how Bosley, living in the west suburbs at Sox GM Roland Hemond's behest, took a wrong turn trying to get onto the Dan Ryan Expressway. He ended up among a bunch of Bridgeport toughs who did not like an African-American in their midst after dark. Fortunately for Bosley, one of the toughs recognized him as a Sox player, told his buddies Bosley was all right and gave him quick directions to escape.



**Dave Hoekstra's seventh book expands on more than just the play-by-play of Disco Demolition.**

Hoekstra did not get ahold of Hemond and Sox color announcer Jimmy Piersall in his All-Star cast of interviewees. Unfortunately, Sox owner Bill Veeck, announcer Harry Caray and sports columnist Bill Gleason all are long gone. A memorable TV interview preserved was Caray and Gleason in the Sox TV booth pontificating on the crazy scene unfolding before them on the field.

Not present at Disco Demolition, but literally waiting in the wings 400 miles to the west to begin his Hall of Fame career was then-Iowa manager Tony La Russa. He was less than three weeks away from being appointed Sox manager at the tender age of 34. Always possessing the ability to look at baseball and culture from several layers, La Russa lends his wisdom to Hoekstra's narrative.

Perhaps the key chapter in the book features the memories of Mike Veeck, Bill Veeck's son and the Sox promotions director who conceived of Disco Demolition. Although it garnered so much publicity, the conservative baseball establishment that had long abhorred Bill Veeck now blackballed a second generation. When the elder Veeck sold the team to Jerry Reinsdorf and Eddie Einhorn early in 1981, Mike Veeck was out in the cold in the game.

### **Mike Veeck out in cold in baseball**

In an excerpt from "Disco Demolition," Mike Veeck recalled how his father took the blame for the riot and torn-up field, while he himself bore the long-term consequences:

*"I'm the one who triggered it. My old man did what a good leader does. He took the heat. For ten years it was very painful for me. Steve Dahl's career took off. I couldn't get a job in baseball. I was red hot with soccer clubs because they like riots, and every radio station in the world wanted me as a promo director. I went to hang drywall in Florida. I got divorced. I never wanted to hear the phone ring again.*

*"Why do you think I disappeared at the bottom of a bottle for ten years? I drank two bottles of VO a day, Extra Calvert was my favorite, not the Lord Calvert. My Dad was the only person in the ballpark who understood exactly how I felt. We weren't the greatest father and son, in terms of Ward Cleaver. But professional to professional there was nobody better, and he knew this was one that got away—from everybody. I know the event stung my Dad."*

*Veeck sat in the open air patio at U.S. Cellular Field as we talked. Members of the Cincinnati Reds were running laps. Yes, the Reds who beat the White Sox in the 1919 World Series, rigged by gamblers. The series is on record. It was worse than Disco Demolition.*



**Mike Veeck, now a veteran independent-baseball operator, still has a promotional bent after being frozen out of the game for years due to Disco Demolition. Photo credit [North Charleston](#).**

*“I never talk like this, you know this,” Veeck said. “I invented skyboxes. I was on fire in 1979. I was twenty-eight and every day was an idea. I never thought I would be judged on one promotion. These private party areas that are the background of sports marketing? They were invented here.”*

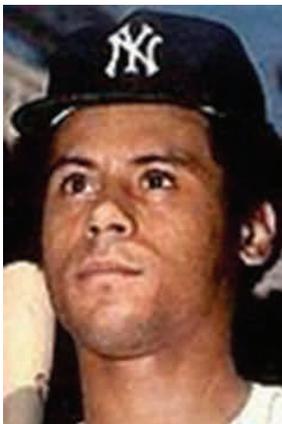
Fortunately, the Veecks always got second chances. Mike Veeck went on to management and ownership of independent-league baseball teams with comedian Bill Murray as an associate. He recycled the idea decades later, blowing up Justin Bieber records in Charleston, S.C.

Adding to the Hoekstra interviewee list was an All-Star cast from the music world. Harry Wayne Casey, frontman of disco pioneer KC and the Sunshine Band, gave his perspective along with Dennis DeYoung, Chaka Kahn, Rick Nielsen, Jim Peterik and Nile Rodgers.

One disco rioter with whom Hoekstra spoke was present-day Chicago Tribune baseball columnist Paul Sullivan. Attending the game on break from his journalism-major days at the University of Missouri, Sullivan has written on several occasions about his sliding into bases during the fans’ surge and taking a bottle of booze into the visitor’s dug-out, where it was confiscated by a Tigers coach.

### **Odenkirk writes forward**

Hoekstra also landed a hot 21<sup>st</sup> century performer to pen the book’s forward. Actor Bob Odenkirk, a fellow Naperville product, really disappears into character as a slimy attorney in the popular cable series “Better Call Saul.” He was great as a milquetoast small-town police chief in “Fargo,” another great cable offering. But in “Disco Demolition,” Odenkirk savages the likes of Bob Hope and Dean Martin before he praised Dahl as an anti-disco leader:



**Outfielder Rusty Torres played in all three 1970s events in which fans stormed the field and the home team had to forfeit a game.**

*“Disco music and the culture around it really rose to the occasion. The over-processed sound! The lyrics! The mirrors! The mirror balls! A drug of self-obsession best imbibed off a mirror—what a duo! The seventies needed someone to officially ridicule it, and in Chicago, Steve was the man for the job.”*

Leave it to Hoekstra to find a Twilight Zone-style twist to Disco Demolition. As only a true baseball lover could compute, he figured that Sox outfielder Rusty Torres, in the lineup for the first game of the doubleheader, had witnessed such a spectacle previously.

Torres was a Yankees rookie in the lineup when fans flooded RFK Stadium’s field with two outs in the ninth in the Senators’ last game in Washington, D.C. on Sept. 30, 1971, before moving to Texas. The Nats were leading 7-5 when the crowd burst forth, but still had to forfeit when the field could not be cleared.

Torres also was a pinch-hitter for the Indians for Municipal Stadium's 10-Cent Beer Night on June 4, 1974, forfeited to the visiting Texas Rangers after Clevelanders attacked outfielder Jeff Burroughs and umpires.

Hoekstra had a good excuse for not tying Torres' memories of all three events together.

"He's in prison now," said the author.

That can only happen to someone connect with "The Night Disco Died."