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## SPORTS

### Can we put a bug in your ear?

By NANCY NILES, Sports Editor

Sunday, July 16, 2006

Smart phones, check.

Smart cars, check.

Smart Bugs, huh?

No, they're not some scientifically engineered insects designed to scarf up those two pesky mosquitoes Noah let on the Arc. Smart Bugs are the wave of the future for sports fans.

They're electronic listening devices designed to give fans the best of two worlds and they're spreading like wild fire.

Introduced in 2003, Smart Bugs have been used at dozens of sporting events around the world, thanks to the marketing genius of Jefferson resident and Smart Bug sales representative Charlie Chitwood, owner of Chitwood Sports Media and also the voice of Marshall High School baseball on KMHT.

Many Marshall baseball fans listen to the game on the radio. Easy to do when it's a home game and at baseball games it's nearly a necessity for those who like to keep a stat book as well. But it becomes a problem when the games are out of town, especially if you've become a fan of your local broadcaster or can't find the game on a local station where you are.

Never fear, Smart Bugs are here. And dozens of Marshall baseball fans jumped on the Smart Bug bandwagon, buying up the cell-phone sized devices to listen to the Marshall broadcast at all the out-of-town games. The wired-up die-hards were rarely seen without a Smart Bug clipped to their belt and a cord dangling from their ear.

[WHERE TO FIND BUGS]

The Smart Bugs are becoming such a must-have item for fans, athletic directors all across the state are getting in on a slice of the action. Schools can buy the devices in bulk and sell them as part of season ticket packages, or rent them to fans on a per-game basis.

Former Jefferson ISD athletic director Buddy Griffin knew about the Bugs and, after moving over to Italy ISD, wasted no time in striking a deal with Chitwood.

East Texas Baptist University uses the system and Marshall athletic director Rodney Southern has also expressed keen interest in the Smart Bugs for this coming school year after seeing nearly a quarter of Marshall's baseball audience tuning in to Chitwood's broadcast in the Bug's first season in use at Marshall High School sporting events, according to Chitwood.

Originally, the Smart Bugs were sold by Chitwood with part of the proceeds going to the Marshall Baseball Booster Club. Eventually, the booster club took over sales of the receivers themselves. But their potential use at all Marshall sporting events prompted Southern's interest, he said.

At roughly \$20 per unit for a single-frequency receiver, a fan could use the Smart Bug for an entire school year including football, basketball and baseball/softball seasons.

Jefferson, Hughes Springs and Henderson ISDs have also expressed interest along with colleges such as LeTourneau and the University of Texas at Tyler.

Other potential contracts in the works include a proposal with the University Interscholastic League (UIL) to have the Smart Bugs available for rent at state tournaments. But their use in the market in conjunction with local broadcasts is only one aspect of the Smart Bug vision. The company is actively working to promote their use nationally and internationally as well.

"They are designed to enhance the fan experience at sporting events from gymnastics and equestrian events up to football, basketball, baseball and softball," Chitwood said. "These are the best pieces of radio technology to come along in the 14 years I've been calling games."

The U.S. Bobsled and Skeleton Federation, canoe, kayak and fencing organizations have also expressed interest in the system so that fans in attendance can listen to broadcasts normally reserved for television audiences.

The Bugs have already been successfully implemented at the 2006 Cotton Bowl as well as the 2005 Houston Bowl, soccer championships, American Quarter Horse World Finals, the 2005 Breeders' Cup at Belmont Park and the 2005 Aztec Bowl in Mexico, the Long Beach Aquatics Festival, U.S. Figure Skating Championships, LPGA events, Professional Bull Riders events, U.S. Track and Field Championships, NHL and AHL games as well as parades, church services, conventions and other prominent national and international events.

The Smart Bug Corp. has recently concluded a licensing agreement with the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics and is working on putting close to 40,000 receivers in the stands at the University of Nebraska.

#### [THE SKINNY ON THE BUGS]

Smart Bug Corporation bought the invention from a pair of physicists and brought it to Southlake, where, along with the help of sports and sales representatives, the mainstream use of the Bugs has exploded in the last year.

The potential uses of the Smart Bugs are nearly endless, but their application in sports and ease of use has seen immediate results.

Here's how they work: Broadcasters, using patented frequency technology, take a transmitter with them on the road. As they call the game, the signal goes out to the Smart Bugs, which are tuned to the frequency of the broadcast. No need to find the station, its preset.

They are equipped with a volume control, ear bud, and spring loaded belt clip. Since the broadcast is heard only through the ear piece, they do not interfere with or distract other spectators, however Smart Bug users maybe the unwitting recipients of fan-envy from their grandstand neighbors.

Fans can also receive special broadcaster content available only to Smart Bug users, such as the 90-minute preview shows done each of the three days leading up to last year's Aztec Bowl.

"People bought (the Smart Bugs) so they could hear the game on Sunday and 10 minutes into our pre-game show on Saturday, two dads came up and said give us all your Smart Bugs and we'll go sell them. And they did," Chitwood said with a chuckle. "So better than half the American audience down there had Smart Bugs."

Some Smart Bugs are programmed to allow the user to switch between two games. In prep sports, for example, a fan can listen to their favorite school's baseball and softball games at the same time simply by switching channels. Receivers are available in up to three frequencies for those ADD folks who are capable of tracking three games simultaneously. The multiple frequencies also allow for games to be broadcast in up to three languages at once.

A no-brainer for the Olympics, says Chitwood.

"It's a natural for the Olympics," Chitwood said. "Specifically because of the multi-channel features. The official languages of the Olympics are French and English but they're getting ready to be in Beijing (China). With a three-channel receiver you can be there and hear any of the two official languages or Mandarin. So with this, people can hear it all."

The biggest problem with the Olympics is the fact that so many attend the games but miss out on the play-by-play, analysis, color commentary and interviews that those who stay at home in front of the tube get. After all, no one watches a sporting event on television with no sound.

#### [WHERE THE BUGS WILL POP UP NEXT]

With so many possible uses for the Smart Bugs, Chitwood said he's hesitant to speculate on what direction the company may take next, but cites conventions as the largest untapped market.

"When the Episcopal Diocese of Texas has its annual convention, you've got a thousand delegates in one big room and I dare say the bulk of them are 50-and-over and a lot of them are probably 65-and-over. And they might not hear real well," Chitwood said as an example of the Smart Bugs possible uses. "This is a way to put the sound right in their ears so they don't miss a thing if they are way in the back of the room or just have trouble hearing period."

Sports-wise, Chitwood said the potential is boundless.

"It's hard to say we've tapped into everything because we haven't," Chitwood admitted. "We're really just getting out there."

"This last basketball season at ETBU is the first time that the (Smart Bugs) have been in use anywhere for the mainstream sports season and everywhere ETBU went, the Smart Bug was fired up and people were listening," Chitwood said. "I can't foresee doing any more ball games without the Smart Bug being a part of it."

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