

From Xekogame.com: Xeko in the News

Lemur teams with LeBron in promotion Latest venture of Cavs owner: Animal trading card game

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Emily Hamlin
Plain Dealer Reporter

The hairy-eared dwarf lemur has some big shoes to fill.

As Cavs owner Dan Gilbert's latest investment, the little guy is following up the size- 16, multimillion-dollar earning power of LeBron James.

Lucky for the lemur, LBJ is lending some help.

Gilbert is the main investor in a new children's trading card game called Xeko (pronounced ZEE-ko), which features real animals from the island of Madagascar and falls into the hands of young Cavs fans this Sunday.

Neither Gilbert nor the game's developer -- Seattle- based Matter Group LLC -- would disclose the amount of the investment, but Gilbert said it was "in the seven-figure range."

To win the game, players must gather the right cards to complete Madagascar's ecosystem.

Think of it as Pokemon with a purpose.

But if you want to be among the first to start collecting the colorful cartoonish characters, skip the toy store. Pack up the kids and head to The Q.

Gilbert and Matter Group are giving Cavs fans a sneak peek at this Sunday's 1 p.m. game with the Los Angeles Lakers. Fans 13 and under will get a free pack of Xeko trading cards and an opportunity to learn how to play at stations around the arena.

The game launches to the rest of the world on Earth Day, April 22.

When Matter Group President Amy Tucker and Gilbert began discussing where to launch Xeko, it didn't take them long to agree: The Q was a slam dunk.

"It's brilliant," Tucker said.

Weekend games usually attract more kids than games during the week, and Sunday's game against Kobe Bryant and his California crew is sold out.

"With 20,000 people in the seats to see Kobe and LeBron, it's the perfect opportunity," said Gilbert, owner of Quicken Loans, the online mortgage company whose logo glows outside the arena.

An NBA superstar, a broad fan base and a high-tech arena make the Cavs powerful salesmen, said Hamp Howell, president of Sports Facilities Marketing Group in Cleveland.

"Even without directly endorsing the product, there's power in just the association," Howell said.

Marketing analysts and team representatives believe Gilbert is one of the first owners to use a sporting event to launch a new product.

Howell said owners typically use games to advertise other interests that are already on the market.

Mike Ilitch, owner of the Detroit Red Wings and the Detroit Tigers, uses games to promote his other companies, including Little Caesars Pizza and Olympia Entertainment. Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban plugs his HDTV network, HDNet.

"It's common sense," Cuban said in an e-mail.

Although it's tempting to invest in a lot of different ventures, Gilbert said he limits himself to four or five so he can offer more than just the green stuff. His other ventures include 1-800-Contacts, a contact lens company, and Red Envelope, an online and catalog gift retailer.

He took an active interest in Xeko's development, Tucker said, suggesting improvements, offering his business contacts and even taking the game home to test on his kids.

"Money is the same anywhere you get it, but if you can combine that investment with experience, then you're really giving that company something unique," Gilbert said.

In this case, that something unique is an arena full of 20,000 potential customers.

But don't expect to get bombarded with products every time you go see the Cavs.

"We'll only do it when it makes sense, probably only a handful of times," Gilbert said.

In moderation, cross-promotions can strengthen both businesses, he said. So how can Xeko help the Cavs?

"Fun stuff gets kids excited, stirs them up a bit," Gilbert said. "We're hoping that'll make them cheer a little louder and help us win."

Two points for the lemur.

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter:
ehamlin@plaind.com, 216-999-4152