

St. Louis man beaten at Vet

700-level thugs dragged him from seat and pummeled him

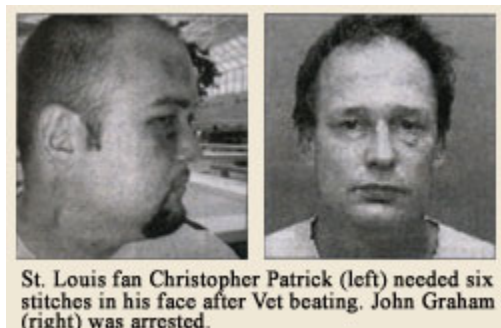


BY DANA DiFILIPPO
Of the Daily News Staff
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It was Chris Patrick's first trip to Philadelphia.

Sunday was his 28th birthday, and a friend had given the St. Louis resident tickets to Sunday's Eagles game against the Rams at Veteran's Stadium.

After a Saturday spent savoring the city's sights, he donned his blue Rams jersey Sunday and headed to the game with his girlfriend and other friends.



But soon the good impression he'd developed of Philadelphia would soon be as smashed as his face.

After hours of good-natured ribbing with Eagles fans, tensions flared when the game tied in the fourth quarter. After an Eagles fan threw a bottle at his girlfriend, several men attacked Patrick, pummeling him so badly that he needed six stitches under his right eye.

"Anybody should be allowed to go to a football game and wear whatever jersey they want and not worry about leaving the game with stitches," said his sister, Jennifer Patrick, whom he visited in Baltimore before coming to Philadelphia.

Chris Patrick met up with friends in Philadelphia Saturday, stopping at Pat's Steaks and other city staples.



Yesterday, Patrick's sister said her brother was too groggy from painkillers and lack of sleep to comment on his attack.

But Cpl. Jim Pauley, a police spokesman, said it occurred at 7:30 p.m. in the stadium's 711 section.

After the bottle was thrown, an argument ensued. Patrick told investigators that at least two fans then pulled him back a few rows and began punching him, landing at least 12 blows.

A police officer on patrol nearby quickly nabbed John Graham, 40 of Lancaster, Pa., and charged him with aggravated assault and related offenses, Pauley said. Police are seeking at least one other assailant.

Patrick was treated at Methodist Hospital and released, Pauley said. He later was evaluated at Wills Eye Hospital, where doctors will determine whether he suffered lasting damage, said his attorney, [Tom Kline](#).

Kline, who has represented victims in several highly publicized accidents, such as last year's [Penn's Landing pier collapse](#), said Patrick's attack indicates a serious security problem at the Vet.

"The Eagles have a responsibility to make sure that the Vet is a safe place for families, children, Philadelphians and out-of-towners to come and enjoy a football game," Kline said.

"This incident sheds light on a continuing problem at the Vet and a continuing disincentive for an awful lot of loyal fans from going to see the Eagles play. This is literally and figuratively a black eye for the city."

Eagles President Joe Banner defended security measures, saying, "The overwhelming number of Eagles fans at the Vet conduct themselves in a proper respectful manner."

The number of incidents and complaints has declined, Banner said. The team didn't release figures for such incidents.

The team has beefed up its security force, using uniformed and undercover police, Banner said. Some plainclothes officers even don the jerseys and colors of opposing teams, he added.

The club implemented Eagles court in 1997 "to create a deterrent for those who want to be disruptive," he said.

"These steps have resulted in dramatically improved behavior and fan experience at Veterans Stadium."

One police supervisor acknowledged that attacks such as Patrick's aren't common.

"A lot of the problems there are minor problems," said Sgt. Gary Neill, of South Detectives. "The spectator is ejected from the stadium and might receive a summary citation, and that usually handles the problem."

But Patrick's scrape wasn't the only incident to mar Sunday's game.

Eighteen fans were ejected from the stadium for bad behavior, and seven were arrested, including a Holmesburg man who allegedly threw a bottle at a police officer in the 600 level.

Steve Paynter, 22, of Aldine Street near Jackson, was charged with aggravated assault, riot and related charges, Neill said.

Patrick, a construction worker, flew back to St. Louis yesterday with a busted face, a bruised ego and the uncertainty of how his injuries would affect his ability to work. Still, he got the last laugh. His beloved Rams won Sunday's game, 20-17, in overtime.