The Story
For years, StopWaste and the Oakland Coliseum Complex had worked together, making slow, steady progress. But it wasn’t until champion George Valerga came onto the scene as the Maintenance Director that major gains were made to reduce waste and conserve natural resources. Valerga wanted the Complex to be the greenest sporting venue in the country—and StopWaste was more than happy to help. The Coliseum has since become the first major league sporting venue to use compostable cups instead of plastic. The partnership between StopWaste and the Complex has also led to several front-page articles in major newspapers.

Challenges
The Complex hoped to establish the best recycling program in the big leagues, but knew the challenges were many, starting with the resistance by thousands of fun-loving sports fans to learning where to put their empty beer cups. That makes the hand-sorting of recyclables from the garbage labor-intensive and time-consuming. The job becomes even more challenging when the facility needs to be cleaned out between tightly scheduled events. In addition, informal recyclers were cutting into revenues by taking high-value bottles and cans out of recycling, and the high turnover rate among the cleanup crews complicated training efforts. Finally, the cardboard bin was often so contaminated that the recycler would haul it away as trash and charge 10 times more.
Compostable Cups
At a game between the A’s and the Yankees in May 2005, the McAfee Coliseum became the first major league sporting venue to sell drinks in cornstarch-based compostable cups. The staff separates the cups and other compostables from the trash, and then sends them to a composting facility. This keeps hundreds of thousands of cups a year from going into crowded landfills. When the cups are purchased in such large volumes, their cost can be comparable to that of their plastic counterparts. And using compostable cups saves money on waste disposal fees, while helping the environment by reducing the use of petroleum-based plastic products.

Post-game Efficiency
Once a game or concert is over, the Coliseum focuses on recycling the waste left by the fans in the stands. High levels of contamination make this waste very difficult to recycle. StopWaste Partnership and Norcal Waste Services of Alameda County, the Complex’s compost vendor, provide essential training to the cleanup crews. The crews hand-sort everything left in the stands into three streams: bottle and can recycling, compostables, and garbage. Post-consumer food waste, paper food packaging, and compostable cups are collected for composting. StopWaste also provided $20,000 in grants for recycling start-up costs such as purchasing additional recycling bins. Beverage containers left in the parking lot after tailgate parties, and those cleaned out from the stands after the event, are recycled.

Behind the Scenes
The greening of the Complex doesn’t stop there. Grass clippings, landscape trimmings, and food waste from caterers’ kitchens are collected for composting. Switching to a lockable 30-cubic-yard storage container minimizes scavenging of high-value bottles and cans. Educating vendors and cleanup crews about cardboard recycling reduces contamination and increases participation.

The bottom line:
- $40,000 a year disposal cost savings
- Diversion of 400 tons of recyclables
- $20,000 in grant funding from StopWaste
- Prevents the purchase of 3 tons of plastic cups a year

Visit www.StopWaste.Org/Partnership or call 1-877-STOPWASTE.