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Season Seat Holder Retention in Minor League Baseball

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Season Seat Holder Retention in Minor League Baseball

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, here is the paper's first paragraph: In minor league (AAA) baseball the amount of season tickets sold for the season can account for at least fifteen percent of total paid attendance for the. With this in mind a sport manager may wonder what brings season ticket buyers back season after season, and what can be done to measure this occurrence. An added question for front office staff members is, do these reasons coincide with a team's marketing strategy to maximize the amount of fans who buy season tickets? To analyze this occurrence I looked into exactly what behavior fans exhibit and their motivation to purchase. Lee (2003) stated areas such as price of tickets, game experience, promotions/giveaways, stadium features, and the teams involved are among the few reasons tickets may be purchased. To assess this topic I answered the following research question regarding minor league baseball: 1) What factors motivate season ticket holders to renew their seats each season?

Document Type

Undergraduate Project

Professor's Name

Katharine Burakowski

Subject Categories

Sports Management

Season Seat Holder Retention in Minor League Baseball

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Introduction

In minor league (AAA) baseball the amount of season tickets sold for the season can account for at least fifteen percent of total paid attendance for the. With this in mind a sport manager may wonder what brings season ticket buyers back season after season, and what can be done to measure this occurrence. An added question for front office staff members is, do these reasons coincide with a team's marketing strategy to maximize the amount of fans who buy season tickets? To analyze this occurrence I looked into exactly what behavior fans exhibit and their motivation to purchase. Lee (2003) stated areas such as price of tickets, game experience, promotions/giveaways, stadium features, and the teams involved are among the few reasons tickets may be purchased. To assess this topic I answered the following research question regarding minor league baseball:

- 1) What factors motivate season ticket holders to renew their seats each season?

To accurately determine the motivation behind fan behavior, the results were analyzed and interpreted according to the Sport Fan Motivation Scale (Wann 1999). The information gained from this research will assist minor league baseball teams in developing the best strategy to market their season ticket packages, thereby maximizing their profit in this area. In addition to the benefit to sport team managers this research will give a better insight to the academic community as to what motivates fans to attend sporting events. This information will allow a deeper understanding regarding consumer behavior as well as the applicable motivational factors in attending professional sporting events as a season ticket holder.

Literature Review

Prior research on the specific topic of season seat holder retention in sport has been discussed twice before by (David, Trent, Eric & Scott, 1997; David & John, 2005) in which the researchers analyzed collegiate basketball and football to determine the motivation process behind fans purchasing season tickets. In the David et al. (1997) study the results concluded there were five constructs of perceived motives that influence the decision to buy a season ticket package. The factors that were identified as the most vital were concerns in athletic event, economic factors, schedule, social factors, and team success.. Out of the five factors the authors identified economic factors, athletic event, and team success as the most vital in determining why fans purchase season tickets. To go even further the authors found that economic factors were the most important of the three. The authors found through their analysis that these three factors were the most vital because there was little difference amongst demographic variables. To further explain economic factors were defined as concession and parking prices, state of the local economy, and the price of season tickets. Athletic event relates to the excitement a fan feels and the overall atmosphere of the sport event. From these findings David et al. (1997) stated “athletic administrators can enhance and improve their current business plan in order to attract more people to become season ticket holders” (p. 462).

In the subsequent David et al. (2005) study about collegiate football season ticket holder retention it was found that the most important factor for purchasing season packages was the team’s on-field performance rather than the economic factors found previously in the David et al. (1997) research study. The differing results suggested that every sport has its’ own motivating factors when fans decide to purchase season tickets In both studies the researchers concluded the

benefit of this knowledge was to have a better understanding of sport specific fan behavior and ensure the business/marketing plan maximizes this purchasing behavior.

In order to assess the reasons behind what motivates fans to purchase season tickets I looked at fan behavior and what exactly motivates fans. One study previously done to measure fan behavior was Lee (2003) that surveyed 745 fans that were in attendance at baseball and soccer games at a professional sport level during the 2001-2002 season. Its purpose was to show what affected fan attendance overall. This study concluded that the biggest influence on fan attendance was the overall team performance. Other factors included stadium amenities, concessions, availability of parking, promotions, game day giveaways, and restroom cleanliness. The factors that negatively affected fan attendance were more personal reasons, such as financial reasons, weather conditions, and whether families had time in their schedule to attend games. In addition, these results also concluded all of the factors listed above were influential in a customer's decision and desire to attend future events. Lee (2003) stated "the professional sport organizations and sport marketing agencies may find additional support for using sport marketing and planning as a tool to maintain customers and boost attendance" (p.38).

Dhurup, (2010) conducted his research on which motivational variables affected attendance for Australian rugby matches. This study used cross-section surveys and face-to-face interviews in order to gather helpful information regarding the motivational factors of why fans attended rugby matches. There were 216 questionnaires administered with a response of 180 obtained. There were a total of seven factors of fan motivation obtained from the responses of the questionnaire. Those factors included social, physical skill, achievement, aesthetics, escape, drama, and knowledge of the game. The study concluded that the physical skills of the players were the most important motivator in fan attendance. Dhurup stated management could attract

more fans to attend if they are properly identified by which factors mean the most to them (p.216).

Bernthal (2003) addressed different fan motivational factors within different levels of play in the same sport such as minor league baseball and collegiate baseball. Value was found to be more of an important factor among fans in minor league baseball versus collegiate baseball. Collegiate baseball fans did not consider ticket price and the overall cost of attending games to be important motivating factors while minor league baseball fans did. Minor league baseball fans were significantly more motivated to attend games based on promotions, game day give-aways and in-game entertainment than collegiate fans. Bernthal states, "While community was a stronger motivator for collegiate versus minor league fans, it nonetheless played a large role in motivating both groups of fans to attend baseball games"(p.235)

Wann (1999) examined the eight motives behind fan motivation. Those eight motives are eustress, self-esteem, escape, entertainment, economic, aesthetic, group affiliation, and family (Wann 1999). Eustress is defined as a positive form of stress that stimulates and energizes an individual. Spectators that are motivated by eustress tend to enjoy the excitement and anxiety that goes along with sport spectating (Wann 1999). There are certain fans that are motivated by self-esteem simply because being a fan helps fans create and maintain a positive self-concept (Wann 1999). Team success also helps in self-esteem because the fan gains a feeling of achievement and accomplishment. A third motive for fans is escape. Some fans view sport spectating as a way to forget about problems in their life or cure boredom. Others view it as a pastime similar to watching television or movies (Wann 1999). These fans are grouped under the entertainment factor. The fifth factor behind fan motivation is economic. These fans stay involved with the sport for the gambling opportunities (Wann 1999). There are also fans that are

more motivated by the performance of sports itself. This is considered to be the aesthetic factor. Group affiliation refers to a fans desire to be with other people (Wann 1999). They see it as a way to share the experience with other fans of the same team. This way, they can become attached with something larger, such as other fans or even the community. This can also relate to the eighth motive of family. Wann (1999) came to three sets of conclusions. The first set of conclusions involved gender differences. Males had higher levels of eustress and self-esteem motivating factors whereas females had a higher family motivating factor. The second set of conclusions involved the relationship between age and sport motivation. This study found no correlation between the two. A third set of conclusions involved the relationship between Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS scores and a degree of sport fandom. It showed that a person who was motivated by one of the factors viewed themselves as sports fans (Lee 2003)

Based on the review of the above literature I have concluded there are five common factors such as team performance, economic factors, aesthetics, social factors, and escape that contribute to a sport fan's motivation to attend sporting events. Of these factors the two which appear the most and I believed to be the most important are aesthetics and social factors. The remaining factors in order of importance are team performance, economic factors and finally escape. These factors will give a greater insight as to the motivation of minor league baseball season ticket renewal and how team executives can use this knowledge to increase season ticket attendance.

Framework

Conceptual

This research study was developed through the researchers experience during an internship with an AAA baseball team in the 2012 season. It became apparent that people continued to pour into the stadium even though the team has not been competitive in several seasons and this made the researcher wonder why this was occurring for a minor league baseball team. To try and understand this behavior the study was narrowed down to season ticket holders and what was behind their decisions to renew ticket packages. After review of previous literature the researcher decided to use the SFMS developed by Wann (1999.) This scale measures eight factors which motivate sport fans to become spectators of sport on any talent level. The eight motivating factors are defined by Wann (1999) as follows:

1. Eustress is defined as a positive form of stress that stimulates and energizes an individual. Individuals motivated by Eustress enjoy the excitement and anxieties that often accompany sport spectating. (p.115)
2. Self-esteem is enhanced through sport fan ship which helps many individuals create and maintain a positive self-concept. When a fan's team is successful, he or she gains a feeling of achievement and accomplishment. (p.115)
3. Escape is a motive for fans to forget about life and its' troubles through sport
4. Entertainment motivates fans to spectate sport as they see sport in the same way as watching movies or TV
5. Economic concerns cause individuals to become and stay involved with sport spectating because of the opportunities to gamble on the events (p.115)

6. Aesthetic value of athletic events attracts fans to the beauty and grace found in athletic performances. (p.115)
7. Group Affiliation reflects a fans desire to be with other people and share the experience. He or she can become attached to and identify with something larger than the self (p.115)
8. Family is a fans desire to be with their family. (p.115)

Theoretical

Through the literature review of this study it was discovered that numerous theories have been used to understand what motivates fans to purchase tickets to sporting events. This study specifically used the Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS) developed and validated by Wann (1995) and Wann (1999). This scale was developed to take the multiple theories and explain the eight common motivating factors which exist when fans decide to become spectators of sport. The SFMS consists of 23 likert scale questions which requires the participant to answer on a scale of one to eight, one defined as not describing the participant at all, and eight defined as very descriptive of the participant. Wann (1999) validated the SFMS as non-sport specific to be used across multiple sports and demographics. It is for this reasoning the researcher decided to use this questionnaire in order to determine the motivating factors behind season ticket renewal in the International League North of Minor League Baseball.

Methodology

Research Tradition

The research conducted in this study is defined as exploratory research because the specific motivation of minor league baseball season ticket holders to renew has not been researched and identified previously in the academic community. The research was completed through an

interpretivist research tradition to gain a deeper understanding of the motivating factors which caused minor league baseball season ticket holders to renew their tickets from the 2012 season.

Research Design

The results were obtained by administering a mix-methods questionnaire in which season ticket holders answered 21 likert scale questions to measure the eight motivational factors of the SFMS created by Wann (1999), which can be seen in Appendix A. The questionnaire also contained two quantitative questions regarding demographic information. A coding system was used in the analysis of the questionnaire to determine the frequency of occurrence for each motivating factor and the responses to the demographic questions. Each question of the SFMS used a five choice likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Participants

The questionnaire link in Qualtrics was sent to 1678 season seat holders for the sole participating team of the IL North. An email was sent to the participants informing them of the request for their participation along with the date the questionnaire would be closed. The researcher received 296 responses for a 17.6% response rate, which was 7.4% below the anticipated 25% response rate.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected the researcher used SPSS frequency tests and paired-sample t-tests. The tests were only performed on 102 of the responses due to incomplete results or the participants indicating they were a multi-game pack holder rather than a season ticket holder. Upon further review the researcher realized due to their own error, the motivating factor of

Eustress only contained one question and was omitted from analysis because of reduced reliability of results.

Results

Demographics

The participants were asked two demographic questions about their gender and age. Each question received 102 responses and the results are as shown in frequency Table 1 and Table 2 below. The data revealed that 73.5% of respondents were male and the majority was in the 50-64 age range.

Table 1

Gender characteristics

Gender			
Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	75	73.5	73.5
Female	27	26.5	100.0
Total	102	100.0	

Table 2

Age characteristics

Age			
Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
18-34	5	4.9	4.9
35-49	21	20.6	25.5
50-64	46	45.1	70.6
65+	30	29.4	100.0
Total	102	100.0	

Motivating Factors

After analyzing the responses received for the seven useable factors that results are shown in Table 3 below. The analysis revealed that based on the mean response the entertainment motive is the most important factor for the respondents while the economic motive is the least important. From the literature review the results are as expected because the researcher expected aesthetics and family needs (social factor) to be of greater importance.

Table 3*Descriptive statistics of factors*

Factor	N	Mean Response	Std. Deviation	Variance
Entertainment	306	4.40	0.626	0.391
Aesthetic	306	3.75	0.980	0.961
Family Needs	204	3.58	1.186	1.408
Escape	306	3.08	1.012	1.023
Esteem	306	3.03	1.098	1.205
Group Affiliation	306	2.91	1.134	1.286
Economic	408	1.23	0.589	0.347

Note: N varies due to number of questions asked regarding the applicable factor

It is noticeable there is a numerical difference between the mean responses but the researcher wanted to check for statistical significance before making a conclusion on which factors were most important for the respondents. For the purpose of this analysis the researcher decided to only include factors which had a mean response of 3.00 or greater. A value of 3.00 represents a neutral feeling and the researcher wanted to evaluate factors which revealed some form of opinion. Even further the cutoff for analysis was then set to 3.50 to exclude the escape and esteem factors because of their close proximity to 3.00. The researcher believed that even though the mean responses for these two factors were above 3.00, they were not high enough to show any true opinion from the respondents. This left the factors of entertainment, aesthetic, and

family needs as the factors to be analyzed for statistical significance between the mean responses. In order to determine this difference paired sample t-tests were run for entertainment vs. aesthetics, entertainment vs. family needs, and aesthetics vs. family needs. The analysis was performed using $\alpha = 0.05$ and significance was indicated when $p < 0.05$. Table 4 represents the findings of the analyses.

Table 4

Paired sample t-tests to determine significance

Paired Samples Test									
Pair	Paired Differences						t	df	ρ (2-tailed)
	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Entertainment vs. Aesthetic	.647	306	1.083	.062	.525	.769	10.449	305	.000
Entertainment vs. Family Needs	.833	204	1.232	.086	.663	1.003	9.658	203	.000
Aesthetic vs. Family Needs	.162	204	1.531	.107	-.050	.373	1.509	203	.133

The paired sample t-test of entertainment vs. aesthetic revealed a p value less than 0.05 indicating a statistical difference between the pair. The magnitude of this statistical difference between the means is unknown, but it is concluded that entertainment is a more important factor than aesthetic. For the pair of entertainment vs. family the p value was also less than 0.05 indicating that the entertainment factors is more important than the family needs factor. The

aesthetic vs. family needs analysis showed no statistical difference between the means as the p value was greater than 0.05.

Discussion

Findings

Through the collection and analyzing of data it was found for this particular team the entertainment factor is statistically different and therefore is reported as the number one motivating factor for season ticket holders. Aesthetic and family needs show no statistical difference and therefore it can only be concluded they are the 2nd and 3rd motivating factors in no particular order. The finding of this information answers the research question proposed of what factors motivate season ticket holders to renew their seats each season? With this information now available to the participating team, their marketing plan can be examined to ensure they are properly targeting fans with advertisements relating to the entertainment of attending a game. This information will also aid the sales team on how they can pitch to prospective season ticket holders and even group sales as well.

Limitations

Only one team chose to participate meaning results cannot be applied to all teams in the IL North because of insufficient data to make a universal conclusion on the motivating factors for this division. A second limitation for this study was the deletion of the eustress factor due to only receiving responses from one question because of researcher error when creating the questionnaire in Qualtrics. A third limitation was time to collect data was limited because of the academic constraints placed on the researcher to complete the study by a specified date. This limitation impacted the length of time participants had the opportunity to complete the

questionnaire. The last limitation which the study faced was the timing in relation to the beginning of the AAA baseball season which may have significantly contributed to the lack of participating teams thereby limiting responses and data available to the researcher.

Delimitations

To ensure results were consistent the researcher decided to only focus on teams within close geographical proximity to limit the difference in weather patterns throughout the entire AAA season which could have affected the motivation to purchase season tickets. Also the researcher decided to only survey AAA teams within this geographical region because the quality of play is consistent and deemed higher than AA or A baseball. By deciding to only survey AAA fans the researcher was able to control for the difference in entertainment based on quality of the players.

Future research

Future researchers should seek to collect responses from each team in a division to not only increase the population and sample size, but to allow for a universal conclusion as to what motivates season ticket renewal for those teams. Future research should also include multiple divisions which can lead to an overall conclusion as to what season ticket holders of AAA baseball are motivated by. It may also be beneficial to measure each level of play in professional baseball including MLB to determine if a pattern exists throughout the entire sport. There should also be studies of other professional sports to see if any differences exist between the types of sport.

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Appendix A

Season ticket retention in MiLB Consent Form

Purpose and Description: The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of why fans of minor league baseball renew their season tickets from one season to the next. You were selected to take this survey because you were identified as a season ticket holder for a minor league baseball team at the AAA level. The results of this study could influence a team's marketing decisions in the future. The complete survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

While the risks involved in completing this survey are very minimal, they include the possibility of being seen taking this survey, and possible undue judgments being placed on you based on your season-ticket purchase habits. Responses to this survey will be kept completely confidential, names will not be recorded, and responses will not be used individually in the presentation of results.

Participation in this survey is completely voluntary. You may decide at any point during the survey to terminate your participation, and there will be no negative consequences.

By reading through this statement, and continuing on to the survey, you are indicating you are at least 18 years old, and give me permission to use your responses in my analysis of this topic. Your participation is greatly appreciated and will be very insightful in this research. You may print this form if you wish to keep for your own records.

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed below. If you have questions you do not feel comfortable asking the researcher, you may contact Dr. Katharine Burakowski or you may contact the Office of Academic Affairs at (585) 385-8034.

Project Title: Motivating factors relating to season ticket renewal in Minor League Baseball

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Do you agree with the terms listed above?

- Yes
- No

Appendix A

Are you a first time season ticket holder for the 2013 season?

- Yes
- No

One of the main reasons I purchase season tickets is doing so gives me the opportunity to temporarily escape life's problems.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

One of the main reasons I purchase season tickets is so I can bet on the outcome of the games.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

One of the main reasons I purchase season tickets is I get pumped up when I attend the games.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

One of the main reasons I purchase season tickets is for the artistic value of baseball.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Appendix A

One of the main reasons I purchase season tickets is because of the beauty and grace of baseball.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

One of the main reasons I purchase season tickets is so I can bet on the outcome of the games.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Baseball is only enjoyable if I can bet on the outcome.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

One of the main reasons I purchase season tickets is doing so makes me feel good when my team wins.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

One of the main reasons I purchase season tickets is going to the games to forget about my problems.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Appendix A

Making wagers is the most enjoyable aspect of baseball.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

One of the main reasons I purchase season tickets is because most of my friends purchase them as well.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I enjoy watching baseball games because to me it is a form of art.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

One of the main reasons I purchase season tickets is because it is like daydreaming so I can get away from life's hassles.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

One of the main reasons I purchase season tickets is so I can be around other people while at the games.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Appendix A

I enjoy attending baseball games because of the entertainment value it provides.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I enjoy attending baseball games more when I am with a large group of people.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I enjoy attending baseball games because it makes me feel better about myself.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

One of the main reasons I purchase season tickets is so I can bet on the outcome of the games.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I enjoy attending baseball games simply because it is a good time.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Appendix A

To me, attending baseball games is a form of recreation.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

To me, my favorite team's successes are my successes and their losses are my losses.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

One of the main reasons I purchase season tickets is so I can attend the games and be with my significant other.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

One of the main reasons I purchase season tickets is so I can attend the games with my family.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Appendix A

Please select your appropriate age range.

- 18-24
- 25-30
- 31-36
- 37-42
- 43-48
- 49-54
- 55-60
- 61-65
- Over 65

Please select your gender.

- Male
- Female