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Minor League Baseball PR Guidelines: Techniques For First Year Class A Teams

**By
John Sadak**

A Thesis

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Masters of Arts Degree
Of
The Graduate School
At
Rowan University
4/23/03**

Approved by _____ **Professor**

Date Approved 5-07-03

MINI-ABSTRACT

John Sadak

**Minor League Baseball PR Guidelines: Techniques For First Year Class A Teams 2003,
Dr. Don Bagin, Graduate Program in Public Relations, Rowan University**

The purpose of this thesis was to accumulate information on the various public relations practices, methods and procedures utilized by the 60 Class A Minor League Baseball teams and to determine the extent of common public relations elements. These elements were then combined into a public relations manual for first-year Minor League Baseball teams. Although the 60 teams are located in different markets, survey and interview results led the author to conclude that some current practices are common among them.

ABSTRACT

John Sadak

**Minor League Baseball PR Guidelines: Techniques For First Year Class A Teams 2003,
Dr. Don Bagin, Graduate Program in Public Relations, Rowan University**

The purpose of this thesis was to accumulate information relative to the various public relations practices, methods and procedures utilized by the 60 Class A Minor League Baseball teams and to determine the extent of common public relations elements. Although the 60 teams are located in different markets, results of interviews and surveys of the teams led the author to conclude that some current practices are common among them.

Phone interviews were conducted with four practitioners to determine a preliminary list of items important to a Minor League Baseball promotional campaign. From that list a survey was created and mailed out to all 60 Class A Minor League Baseball teams. Within the survey, each team was asked to rank ten aspects of a Minor League Baseball promotion in terms of weighted importance to determine areas of focus for the manual. More in-depth open-ended questions followed allowing practitioners to further explore areas mentioned in the ranking section or those left out by the author.

Through the mentioned research, it was determined that each team uses similar techniques to communicate with its various audiences. Each team stresses the family entertainment and relative low-cost of the sport itself as the main focuses of their annual public relations campaigns. And each team, though not on the same monetary scale as the

Major League clubs, has firmly cemented a foundation of fans to make Minor League Baseball a major deal in their markets.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To John, Jayne and Robert Sadak, my family, thank you for your never-ending support.

Your love and patience have helped me greatly through times of need.

To my professors, thank you for your wisdom, your humor and your sincere interest in my development. You inspired me to do better through your everyday example of focus and determination. Especially to Dr. Bagin for seeing potential in my writing and my person. Your aid to my academics, friendly demeanor and beyond-the-call actions mean more to me than you know.

To Rob, a.k.a. GFR, for always making sure that no matter how much I may have wavered in self-discipline, you always centered me home.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the on and off-field success of all current and future Minor League Baseball teams. The time the front office staffs spent with me sharing what has made them successful turned what first looked as a daunting task into an unforgettable experience. For without their insight, this research would not have been possible.

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Abstract

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Chapter One

Introduction

“Baseball fans helped Minor League Baseball celebrate its 100th season in a big way as attendance for regular season games in 2001 soared over the 38.8 million mark. That’s an increase of more than one million fans over the 2000 season and the second highest total in history.”¹ Not since the post-World War II boom had so many fans attended Minor League Baseball games.

With ticket, concession and merchandise prices surging upward for the Major League draw, Minor League Baseball has seen a second life. A more grass-roots approach with big time looking stadiums has the fans flocking to the ballparks of the Major League’s little brothers. While MLB contemplates contraction, Minor League Baseball is set on expansion.

Minor League Baseball perhaps isn’t an entirely appropriate term. “Minor” League teams are responsible for a great deal of money. The upper echelon Minor League teams playing on the “AAA” level are worth between \$8 and \$12 million.

¹ (2001) MinorLeagueBaseball.com Attendance hits 38.8 Million, Second Highest Ever. Retrieved November 20, 2001 from the World Wide Web:
http://www.MinorLeagueBaseball.com/pagetemplate/3col_gray_hdr.asp?pageid=1463

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Even the bottom run “Rookie” level squads are worth between \$650,000 and \$1.1 million.²

To understand where Minor League Baseball is, it is best to look at where they came from. The National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues, Inc. (NAPBL), Minor League Baseball’s official corporate identity, began in 1901 with seven leagues represented. Their first season of play in 1902 sported 14 leagues with 96 clubs. Growth continued through the early part of the 20th century with some bumps along the way, including two World Wars and the terrible Depression of the ‘30s.³

The game reached its greatest numbers in the aftermath of World War II. During the height of the war, in 1943, there were only 66 teams operating in 10 leagues. A few years later, seemingly every town in America had its own Minor League team. In 1947, there were 52 leagues and 388 teams, which jumped to 58 and 438 a year later and 59 leagues with 448 teams in the peak year of 1949.

Those three years (1947-49) produced regular season attendance ranging from 37-million to 39-million fans, all-time records for the industry. The good old days were not to last forever. In the ‘50s, the advent of television brought Major League Baseball to the nation. Shortly thereafter Major League Baseball expanded, taking in many of the most successful Minor League cities. Those two factors cut deeply into Minor League prosperity.

² (2001) MinorLeagueBaseball.com FAQ. Retrieved November 23, 2001 from the World Wide Web: http://www.MinorLeagueBaseball.com/pagetemplate/1content_anniversary.asp?pageid=379

³ (2001) Minor League Baseball.com Minor League Baseball – From the Beginning. Retrieved November 23, 2001 from the World Wide Web: http://www.MinorLeagueBaseball.com/pagetemplate/1content_anni_anni_hdr.asp?pageid=369

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A resurgence took root in the mid-'80s with an emphasis on reasonably priced family entertainment, along with a construction boom of new and renovated stadiums.

Minor League Baseball moved from attendance totals around 15-million fans in the mid-'80s to the 30-35 million range through the 1990s, surpassing 37-million for the 2000 season.

Purpose of Study

The primary purpose of this research project was to develop a handbook for novice PR practitioners that will acquaint them with their first year on the job with a Minor League Baseball team. The handbook examines the professional relationship that exists between practitioners and their publics. The researcher analyzed the problems and necessary duties of current practitioners and directors of public relations working in Minor League Baseball.

Need for the Study

With the large amounts of money involved with Minor League Baseball, every area of the industry needs to work well. The first year for a franchise can be a make or break proposition. That especially holds true with clubs playing in brand new ballparks. At no other point will the newness of the team, its facilities and the sport itself in the local area be as alluring. Public relations directors and practitioners need to have a compact checklist of the necessary items they must go through. The

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practitioners also need to have reference of some problems they might encounter and how to deal with them.

Many practitioners working with first-year Minor League teams do not have a wealth of experience to draw from. With that in mind, a handbook could prove quite useful.

Former Tidemont Tides' and Atlanta Crackers' PR Director Jim Murray thinks the study would provide timely, needed information granted the recent rebirth of Minor League Baseball. "There is a renaissance in the field right now. It would be great to have some form of a handbook when walking into Minor League Baseball public relations. It would be invaluable to have tangible, witness accounts integrated into something like that. You'd be in good shape."⁴

Wilmington Blue Rocks' GM Chris Kemple stated, "I think a manual would be a tremendous help. Each city is going to have different dynamics, but if a template or blueprint were available. If there were a list of some things other teams have done in the past that have proven to be successful is something I would have loved to have."⁵

The market for Minor League Baseball has been growing rapidly in recent years. And first-year organizations are enjoying success like few before. In 2001 the 482,206 fans that flocked to GPU Energy Park in Lakewood, NJ accomplished a rather large feat. The Lakewood BlueClaws set the New Jersey state record for attendance at a Minor League Baseball game in their first year of existence. The BlueClaws season-long attendance numbers also set the South Atlantic League's

⁴ (2001) Interview Jim Murray, December 2001

⁵ (2001) Phone Interview Chris Kemple, December 2001

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record, ranked third in all of Class A and cracked all of Minor League Baseball's top twenty. With the early potential for huge success, practitioners need a structured format with which to engineer their efforts.⁶

The objectives of the project were accomplished by answering the following questions:

- What are the necessary PR steps all first year teams must follow before a season?
- How do practitioners follow through on those steps?
- Once in season, what must first-year teams do to continue promoting the sport and team to receive more coverage or a larger fan base?

Limitations

This study examined only Class A and Class A Advanced teams associated with the NAPBL. These teams all are affiliates of Major League Baseball teams. Rookie, Short Season A, Class AA, AAA and independent league squads/those not associated with NAPBL bring different spins on problems and resources. It is recommended that separate studies be done on those teams and leagues.

This study will provided the basis for a handbook only for first-year teams. This includes teams just created and those moving to new locations. It will not look specifically at how to change or improve existing teams.

⁶ (2001) LakewoodBlueClaws.com FAQ. Retrieved November 27, 2001 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.lakewoodblueclaws.com/>

Terms

Class A Level – Competitive teams, play in smaller to mid-sized markets, worth \$2.5 to \$5 million. Some major league teams, such as the Devil Rays, have both A and "Advanced A" clubs playing in two different leagues.

Class AA Level – Very competitive teams, play in mid-level markets, worth \$5.5 to \$8 million. Players are more experienced at this level (average age is 23) and more likely to jump from here to the majors. AA teams may include former major leaguers who are there temporarily to recover from an injury or work out a performance problem before returning to the big club.

Class AAA Level – Most competitive teams play in the largest markets, worth from \$8 to \$12 million. This is the step just below the major leagues and the quality of the baseball at this level is very close to what you might see at a major league game.

GM – General Manager

Independent League – Teams not playing on the major league level that are not associated with the NAPBL.

Lakewood BlueClaws – Class A Minor League Baseball team from Lakewood, NJ.

MLB – Major League Baseball

Minor League Baseball – Collection of teams associated with NAPBL

NAPBL – National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues

PR – public relations

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Rookie Level – Lowest competitive level of Minor League Baseball; teams are worth \$650,000 to \$1.1 million. This level is usually young players just out of high school or college, with an average age of 19.

Short Season A – Teams vary in level of competition, play fewer games than Class A teams, worth \$1.8 million and up.

Wilmington Blue Rocks – Class A Minor League Baseball team from Wilmington, DE

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Literature relating to this thesis was quite difficult to find. There has never been any formal study conducted on Minor League Baseball public relations practices. A thorough search through scholarly materials, mainstream books and Internet web pages returned nothing related to public relations techniques for Minor League Baseball.

An information search via computer of current literature on professional sports and public relations was conducted at the Rowan University Library. Article searches were conducted on Lexis-Nexus, ABI-INFORM and Webspirs at the Rowan University Library and Amazon.com. Keywords used to locate relevant materials were public relations, minor league, baseball and National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues.

Keywords used to locate information on the Internet and World Wide Web through DogPile.com, Snap.com, Yahoo.com and Metacrawler.com were public relations, minor league, baseball and National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues. The researcher, to obtain readily accessible information on the public relations efforts, visited the web sites posted by many of the 60 Class A teams.

All front office personnel contacted for the survey cited a complete lack of any similar study in modern Minor League Baseball history. Wilmington Blue Rocks' Director of Broadcasting and Media Relations Steve Lenox says, "I don't know of

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any such study that's ever been done."⁷ Likewise, Lakewood BlueClaws PR Director Neil Solondz also cited the lack of any such scholarly inquiry saying, "There's never been any such study that I'm aware of. It'd be a first to me."⁸

Since the current resurgence of Minor League Baseball is just that, so incredibly current, there are no studies on PR techniques in Minor League Baseball. The lack of secondary research findings all the more fuels the need for this study. With so many fans attending the every expanding world of Minor League Baseball without a first-year public relations formula, one wonders how many more might attend if all new teams started on the same foot.

⁷ (2001) Steve Lenox, Phone Interview, December 2001

⁸ (2001) Neil Solondz, Phone Interview, December 2001

Chapter 3

Methodology

Four sources were used to compile research for this thesis: 1) the database at Rowan University Library; 2) the Internet and World Wide Web; 3) in-depth interviews in person and through telephone; and 4) mailed out survey on the design of PR plan.

Literature Search

An information search via computer of current literature on professional sports and public relations was conducted at the Rowan University Library. Article searches were conducted on Lexis-Nexus, ABI-INFORM and Webspirs at the Rowan University Library and Amazon.com. Keywords used to locate relevant materials were public relations, minor league, baseball and National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues.

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Because of the scarcity of information written on the field of sports public relations, specifically in regards to Minor League Baseball, the author conducted primary research through interviews and surveys conducted via telephone and mail with public relations practitioners from many of the Class A teams.

From November 2001 to January 2002 this researcher arranged for and conducted interviews on the phone and in person with four working and experienced PR practitioners. Those interviews also allowed for the creation of a survey which was mailed to practitioners in an attempt to list a priority sheet of those tasks deemed most important or necessary. The survey also asked about specific activities' usefulness and frequency with each specific organization.

With the aid of advisor Dr. Don Bagin, those results were then arranged together and put into a handbook format for the first-year Minor League Baseball team's PR practitioner.

Chapter Four

Findings

The results of the author's survey are pertinent to this study in that they help readers understand the various practices implemented by each team studied. The survey was created with the aid of thesis advisor Dr. Don Bagin and mailed to GMs and PR Directors of all 60 Class A Minor League Baseball teams in March 2002. The questions were developed from interviews conducted with front office personnel from the Lakewood BlueClaws and Wilmington Blue Rocks along with the author's public relations knowledge and sports journalism experience. Results were received and tabulated between April and June 2002 from 45 Class A teams. The survey itself can be found in the Bibliography.

When asked what piece of advice he would give to a new team's public relations department who wanted to build a good relationship with its audiences, Wilmington Blue Rocks GM Chris Kemple stated, "You really have to establish a relationship with the community, especially the kids."⁹

Rankings

The survey results mirrored that statement markedly. Recipients were asked to first evaluate the importance of ten different Minor League Baseball promotional

⁹ (2001) Chris Kemple, Phone Interview, 2001

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aspects. The list often was created from preliminary interviews with BlueClaws and Blue Rocks personnel along with website research on the techniques used by most Minor League Baseball teams.

The rankings were categorized into five different “tiers” by the author. The author grouped each tier by 9% differences in scoring. The 9% drop-offs took place at each individual tier to create an arithmetically descending series of sets as shown in the numbers themselves and graphically. The tiers were created to provide groupings for PR directors to look at when developing a PR plan. The groupings can be used in budget allocation and overall creative influence. The following is the prioritized list compiled from the results with an author created tier system:

Tier System – 9% Deviation From High Number (5) Down Creates New Tier

Tier One

- 1) Promoting your team as “family entertainment”
- 2) Establishing a relationship with the local media
- 3) Promoting the relative “low-cost” of Minor League Baseball

Tier Two

- 4) Creating/promoting a team mascot
- 5) Establishing a relationship with the local Chamber of Commerce

Tier Three

- 6) Obtaining a local radio broadcasting contract
- 7) Promoting your affiliation with a major league team

Tier Four

- 8) Promoting the number of new jobs your team will create

Tier Five

- 9) Promoting your affiliation with other Minor League Baseball teams
- 10) Obtaining a local TV contract

Family entertainment was the clear-cut number one. Those surveyed ranked each promotional aspect on a scale of:

Very Important (Value = 5)

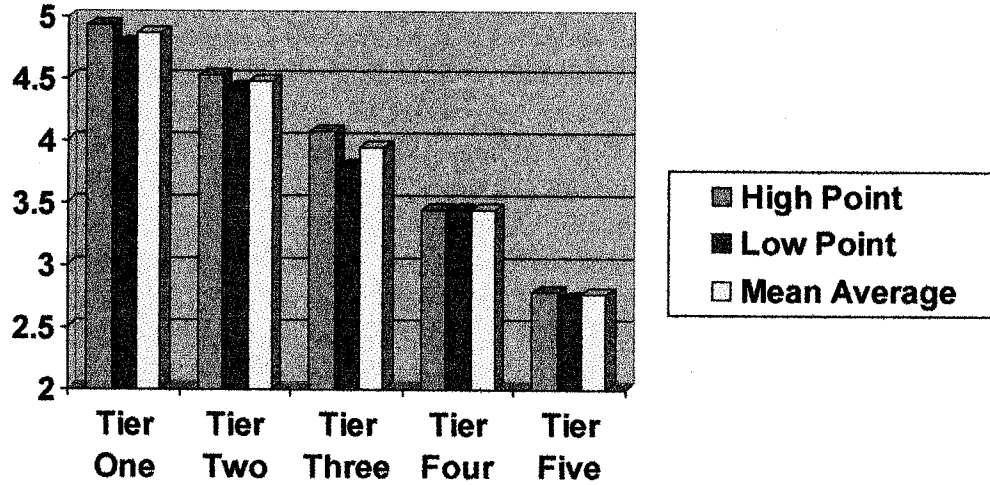
Important (Value = 4)

Neutral (Value = 3)

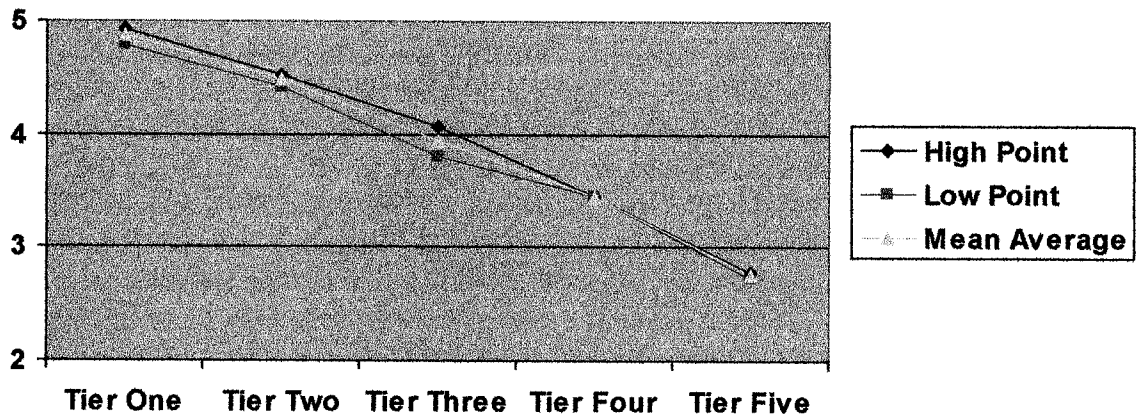
Unimportant (Value = 2)

Very Unimportant (Value = 1)

Tier Differences



Both graphs here illustrate the steady arithmetically declining ratings of each tier. The high points and low points follow incredibly closely with the mean average of each tier. The tiers allow for PR Directors to allocate appropriate funds, time and creative influences when creating and/or implementing their PR plans.



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The mean importance average for “Promoting your team as ‘family entertainment’” was an astonishing 4.93. Of the 45 responses, only three were not “Very Important” and all three were still “Important.” A slight drop-off took place between number one and two with a mean average of 4.89 for “Establishing a relationship with the local media.” Similar then was the drop-off to the third ranked promotional aspect, “Promoting the relative ‘low-cost’ of Minor League Baseball,” which garnered a 4.78 mean average. None of the top three responses contained a single response below “Important.”

The second tier of prioritized responses begins with number four, “Creating/promoting a team mascot,” which checked in at a 4.53 mean average response. Number four also marked the first “Neutral” level responses with three. Number five “Establishing a relationship with the local Chamber of Commerce” still held in the second tier with a 4.42 mean average. Interestingly, number five contained fewer (2) “Neutral” responses than number four, but also featured the first “Very Unimportant” ranking.

The third tier in ranked responses took a rather large dip with number six “Obtaining a local radio broadcasting contract” holding a 4.07 mean average. While no Minor League Baseball personnel ranked number six as “Very Unimportant” it still showed rather less importance to most than the top two tiers. “Promoting your affiliation with a major league team” picked up a 3.8 mean average response as the seventh ranked answer. Once again, as with the radio contract aspect, not one response contained a single “Very Unimportant.”

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Number eight “Promoting the number of new jobs you will create” contains an in-between response creating its own fourth tier with a 3.44 mean average. Also, the new jobs aspect had the first “Very Unimportant” response since number five establishing a relationship with the Chamber of Commerce.

The fifth and final tier contains the only mean averages below 3.0. Number nine “Promoting your affiliation with other Minor League Baseball teams” shows a 2.78 mean average. It also contained five “Very Unimportant” responses along with only one “Very Important” ranking. Oddly, number ten “Obtaining a local TV contract” showed more (2) “Very Important” rankings but a survey high eight “Very Unimportant” rankings for a 2.73 mean average.

Other aspects

An open-ended section allowed respondents to list other aspects of a Minor League Baseball promotion the author may have missed. A total of nineteen different responses were made to: “Please name and describe in brief detail two other aspects of a Minor League Baseball promotion that are important.” Many of these responses were identical to already listed aspects ranked in the opening section.

Promotions

Thirty-one percent of the forty-five respondents indicated the general area of game promotions as an important aspect. This was the most frequently mentioned

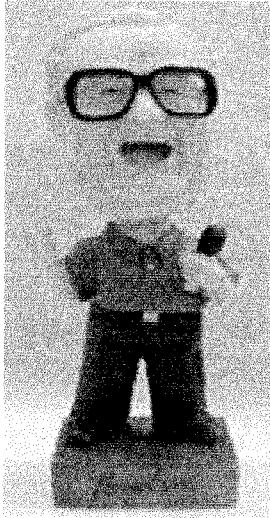
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“other aspect” noted by those surveyed. Specifically, they stated repeatedly promotional materials used in giveaways must have a long shelf-life. According to one GM, “if you buy a bunch of items that are time sensitive in any way, you better make sure you use them all or you’ll have one big pile of expensive garbage. You need to watch out for your sponsors.”

In other words, getting a sponsor to pay for 10,000 4th of July t-shirts could be rather wasteful. Most Class A teams don’t draw near the 10,000 person mark. Also, once the holiday has come and gone, who wants a 4th of July t-shirt in August? The timeliness which made it such a neat promotion on game-day likewise creates a very short lifetime of promotional effectiveness. With that in mind, practitioners must remain wary of promotions too time-sensitive not only for their effectiveness but also for the team’s professional appearance to sponsors. A sponsor does not want to hear any of their money’s efforts were wasted due to surplus. If a sponsor spent \$5,000 for 5,000 beanie babies, they don’t want 1,000 beanie babies lying around unused. Those beanie babies represent \$1,000 of the sponsor’s money lying around unused.

Another sentiment echoed through many responses pointed out the “perceived value” aspect of a promotional giveaway. “Perceived value” is a catch-phrase used quite often to explain how promotional items work. The fan/customer views for instance a bobble-head doll to be worth the same as or more than the price of admission alone.

Customer Views



Above:

A Bobblehead Doll - Is Worth More Than/The Same As – Cost Of Admission

With that, the game becomes an ancillary enjoyment seemingly for free. This also can allow for greater purchases in number and cost made through concessions and merchandising once the patron enters the ballpark.

Many of those surveyed recommended using sponsors to front all/most of the cost and allow their logo/slogan etc. to also be placed on the item. A good deal of others stated group discounts are an absolute must within the promotional capacity. Nearly all greatly emphasized the need to be as creative as possible and to not have fear trying new things.

Community Activity

The next most common open-ended aspect noted fell under the general umbrella of community activity. While 24% of those surveyed mentioned community activity, more was written about this in quantity of each response than any other aspect noted. Some specific areas seen in nearly all of the eleven answers mentioning community activity involved player appearances. Most respondents indicated this works especially well with player appearances involving neighborhood children. Schools are the easiest way to reach young area residents through community service such as a reading program or drug education.

While reaching children is easiest through local schools, several GMs specifically noted the importance of involving area sports leagues, especially Little Leagues in appearances. The costs of appearances are minimal, local press coverage is usually easy to obtain and impressed children will quite often then drag their parents to the ballpark.

Many respondents mentioning player appearances greatly emphasized the importance of getting media coverage. Some GMs went as far to say that without press coverage the overall effectiveness of appearances is minimal. Also, several stated players themselves are either not always necessary or only effective when used in a complimentary fashion. Many GMs have had success using only a team mascot appearance at local schools and live exclusively by it.

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Still under the Community Activity umbrella lies team affiliations with non-profits/charities. Using percentages of specific merchandise or gate revenue to donate to local charities carries a great deal of weight. It can entice those unaware or unappreciative of the team to the park at least once/prompt a one-time merchandise purchase.

While individual players on the Class A level sport a very high turnover rate, a successful franchise is generally in the area to stay. Of course the more success a team has financially, the greater the likelihood of staying longer and becoming a community fixture. The two very much work hand-in-hand. Displaying care for events and groups relevant to the local community through shared money or even volunteering by players/team personnel has often worked to endear franchises to their communities.

Not Just Baseball

Twenty percent of the respondents pointed to the other entertainment Minor League Baseball involves as a major aspect to promote. Teams should try to sell the other activities and parts of the Minor League Baseball experience that go on during games through advertisements, word-of-mouth mentions and all media coverage. In-game field related promotions work especially well in this regard. Specific examples range from scoreboard trivia to timed runs around the diamond with young fans for prizes.

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A great many of those surveyed heavily indicated the game itself is almost secondary to the atmosphere and other parts of Minor League Baseball. Several mentioned using interactive experiences off the field but in the park: radar guns to test fan pitch speed, giant inflated fun houses and other games quite similar if not identical to those found on a boardwalk/in an amusement park.

Many squads also use entertainment on the field but out of play. For instance, many squads use the team mascot dancing on the field with players or umpires. Sometimes the clubs will create on-field skits between innings with the mascot and players or umpires. Other teams outsource individual performers for single games.

One of the biggest impact entertainers of the sort these days is Myron Noodleman, who was mentioned in a great many responses. Noodleman is a character greatly resembling the comedic antics of a younger Jerry Lewis who works the crowd face-to-face and through a larger on-field pre-arranged set of dancing and interactive scenes with players and umpires.

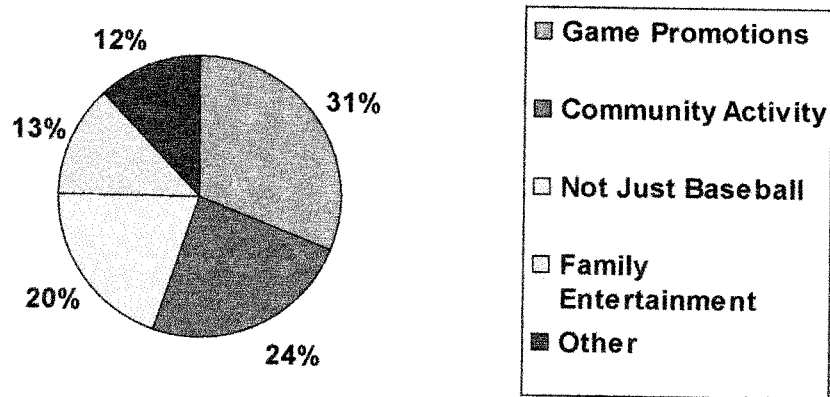
Another act mentioned was the ZOOperstars, a traveling troupe of giant animals with names that play off contemporary sports stars such as Cow Ripken, Jr. and Harry Canary. These all display the family entertainment aspect so many heavily weighed as a promotional aspect.

Thirteen percent of respondents reinforced the already mentioned family entertainment aspect to Minor League Baseball. Those GMs stated you cannot overvalue how integral the “entire family can enjoy” idea is to a Minor League Baseball team’s promotional campaign. All other responses were mentioned by only one respondent each. These mentions included:

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- Survey fans to see what they like
- Cross-market with other businesses in the area
- Build a season ticket base and take care of them
- Form an advisory panel to generate ideas
- Train players to be fan-friendly/personable
- Make sure you have a good team
- Be sure your marketing plan includes a large advertising budget
- Conduct events in the stadium but not on game days like concerts, flea markets etc. to make extra money
- Create one set promotional style/theme for the entire season and stick with it
- Must have nice facility
- Internet website for stats/player bios/community appearance listings etc.

Below is a graphical representation of the open ended response distribution:



Promoting Individual Players/Coaches

The next section of the survey dealt with a highly debatable topic. Should Class A baseball teams promote individual players and/or coaches? With such high turnover, the best players quite rarely stay for long periods of time. Those players that do stick with a specific team in Class A baseball for any appreciable length of time quite often are quite average to below average in ability.

The responses favored promoting individual players/coaches by a count of 30 to 15. Nearly half of those who favored such a promotion specifically stated teams should only do so with top prospects. These players should be high draft picks expected to make major impact throughout all levels of the organization in a short period of time. Some did mention making a push for players from the local area.

A great deal of others said they didn't necessarily agree with promoting individual players but were approving of promoting the manager. Such respondents said this is highly encouraged when the manager is from the area or a high profile name. High profile name meaning he is a former major leaguer himself whether in the playing or coaching capacity.

A much smaller number of those surveyed pointed to MLB players on rehab, players with unusual/catchy names, fan favorites and those on record setting paces/that accomplish exceptional feats as good candidates to promote individually.

As far as mediums and methods through which to promote the individuals on a club, three main areas arose. Nearly all responses mentioned have weekly media sessions to inform newspapers, radio stations and in some cases TV stations of the

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latest team happenings. This provides an excellent avenue to promote feature stories on the individuals you're looking to promote. Also, they can become the unofficial spokespeople for the team itself.

Along with media sessions, many GMs pointed to appearances by individuals as a way to promote them. Using the same high profile or local player/manager at most of if not all appearances reinforces a strong link between the team and the individual. With proper technique, it comes more so a link between the team/individual and the community. This also allows for even greater press coverage and feature story opportunities that can help to sell the sport itself and the specific team.

A smaller but still significant number of respondents mentioned using giveaways with the image or name of the individual. Some specific examples included posters, baseball cards, pocket/magnet schedules, game programs and the team's internet website.

Of the fifteen respondents that said Class A teams should not promote individual players/coaches, the overwhelming reason was the obvious one. Most stated that since the best players are not with the team for an entire season, let alone more than one, it's silly to waste time and money promoting those who could be gone at any moment. Some also mentioned they've found fans simply don't care about individual players at all.

Other Areas To Promote

Another open-ended question prompted those surveyed to mention the other areas that should be promoted most heavily. "Affordability" led the way here with 13 respondents indicating it's the area to promote the heaviest. "The experience" ranked second with 10 respondents. They further explained "the experience" incorporating fan friendliness and unique promotions. The outdoor summer fun aspect also was mentioned by 10 respondents.

Items Not Mentioned

One final open ended question requested "anything else about conducting public relations for a Minor League Baseball team you consider very important that was not mentioned in this survey?" Several quite specific points were made here that readers should note:

- Always be professional in every regard (ex. dress, word choice, timeliness)
- Make sure to call local media with post-game scores and stats after every game -- home and away
- Attempt to hit fans 30-45 minutes away; those closer will know who you are, make the extra effort to further extend
- Be accessible to all media; make sure to include your home phone and if applicable cell phone on all releases
- Create on-line e-mail updates/newsletters to send out to all subscribing fans

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- Emphasize the facilities if in a really nice/new stadium
- Build relationships with all team personnel; every person associated with the baseball club is part of the greater team that is the organization
- Incorporate telemarketing for ticket plans, especially to corporations and offer discounts
- Advertise as much as possible within budget restraints; determine the main community media outlets and advertise there
- Make sure to get kids involved with the players; the sport is sold on building relationships with area youngsters

Chapter 5

Conclusions

Based on the results of the surveys and interviews conducted, the author drew the following conclusions. The most important aspects of successful Minor League Baseball PR are promoting the team as “family entertainment” and establishing a relationship with the local media. From those general points all other parts of Minor League Baseball promotion flow. It is essential for all Class A Minor League Baseball teams to give a strong initial push and regular maintenance of those two aspects for bottom-line results.

Bottom-line results do not require play-by-play broadcasting of every game at the Class A level. More people attend the games for the experience rather than for the games themselves. While play-by-play broadcasting can and often does help to enhance a squad’s professional feel, I think a team can be successful without broadcasting all games.

However, these results all work exclusively with Class A Minor League Baseball teams. Professional teams playing at higher levels of Minor League Baseball or independent of the NAPBL bring different resources and market factors. I highly recommend further studies on proper public relations for teams on the Minor League Baseball Class AA, Class AAA and the independent league levels. Many of those teams involve more money made and spent. Studies on each of those areas could provide some interesting data not only to the practitioners within them, but also

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possibly show practitioners on the Class A level some ideas previously unused on the Class A level.

Overall I was quite surprised at the variety within Class A Minor League Baseball. Preferences on very specific techniques, such as promoting individual players, went to both extremes. In large part I attribute the differences between GMs to the lack of large scale research previously conducted. While teams are sometimes in similar locations and may compete for fan base they're all in the same game of Minor League Baseball. I would think it's in the best interests of all teams for more information sharing and pooling of research efforts.

Yet while Minor League Baseball can find small ways to improve, I feel it still stands heads and shoulders above all other minor league sports in this country. As professional sports continue to dominate a large part of American culture and finance, slowly minor league teams in other sports pick up steam.

Specifically, I think basketball could greatly benefit from using a baseball like system in developing young talent. With corruption and ethical dilemmas facing the college game, more and more high school graduates and college underclassmen are leaving early to turn professional. However, their bodies and minds are not yet fully developed to face the rigors of NBA life. Similar problems would certainly face baseball without their current development system. A Minor League Baseball system could be the answer for basketball and a large cash cow as well.

Provided Minor League Baseball maintains focus on what makes it successful currently, I think it will continue and expand upon its current success for years to come.

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Minor League Baseball Survey

1. For the following questions please evaluate the importance of these aspects of a Minor League Baseball promotion. (Check the one you agree with most.)

a. Obtaining a local radio broadcasting contract

- Very important
- Important
- Neutral
- Unimportant
- Very unimportant

b. Promoting your affiliation with a major league team.

- Very important
- Important
- Neutral
- Unimportant
- Very unimportant

c. Creating/promoting a team mascot.

- Very important
- Important
- Neutral
- Unimportant
- Very unimportant

d. Promoting the relative "low-cost" of minor-league baseball.

- Very important
- Important
- Neutral
- Unimportant
- Very unimportant

e. Establishing a relationship with the local media.

- Very important
- Important
- Neutral
- Unimportant
- Very unimportant

f. Promoting your team as "family entertainment."

- Very important
- Important
- Neutral
- Unimportant
- Very unimportant

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g. Obtaining a local TV contract.

- Very important
- Important
- Neutral
- Unimportant
- Very unimportant

h. Establishing a relationship with the local Chamber of Commerce.

- Very important
- Important
- Neutral
- Unimportant
- Very unimportant

i. Promoting your affiliation with other minor-league teams.

- Very important
- Important
- Neutral
- Unimportant
- Very unimportant

j. Promoting the number of new jobs the team will create.

- Very important
- Important
- Neutral
- Unimportant
- Very unimportant

2. Please name and describe in brief detail two other aspects of a Minor League Baseball promotion that are important.

3. Should a Minor League Baseball team promote individual players/coaches?

Yes/NO (circle one) [If yes, go to #4, if no, go to #5]

4. When and how should teams go about promoting individual players/coaches?

[Skip to question #7]

5. Why should teams not promote individual players/coaches?

6. What else should teams promote most heavily?

7. Is there anything else about conducting public relations for a Minor League Baseball team you consider very important that was not mentioned in this survey?

**Minor League Baseball PR Guidelines:
Techniques For First Year Class A Teams**

By

John Sadak

Dr. Don Bagin

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Introduction

Greetings and welcome to the world of Minor League Baseball public relations. The following is a researched collection of information intended for first year Class A Minor League Baseball teams. Some of the information contained in this handbook may indeed work with other levels of Minor League Baseball or other areas of minor league sports. However, the research done to create this handbook quite specifically looked only at Class A and Class A Advanced teams associated with the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues, Inc.

Findings

The survey used in primary research for this handbook was created with the aid of Dr. Don Bagin and mailed to GMs and PR Directors of all 60 Class A Minor League Baseball teams in March 2002. The questions were developed from interviews conducted with front office personnel from the Lakewood BlueClaws and Wilmington Blue Rocks, former Minor League Baseball and Philadelphia Eagles' PR Director Jim Murray along with the author's public relations knowledge and sports journalism experience. Results were received and tabulated between April and June 2002 from 45 Class A teams.

When asked what piece of advice he would give to a new team's public relations department who wanted to build a good relationship with its audiences, Wilmington Blue

Rocks GM Chris Kemple stated, "You really have to establish a relationship with the community, especially the kids."¹

Rankings

The survey results mirrored that statement markedly. Recipients were asked to first evaluate the importance of ten different Minor League Baseball promotional aspects. The list of ten was created from preliminary interviews with BlueClaws and Blue Rocks personnel along with website research on the techniques used by most Minor League Baseball teams.

The rankings were categorized into five different "tiers" by the author. The author grouped each tier by 9% differences in scoring. The 9% drop-offs took place at each individual tier to create an arithmetically descending series of sets as shown in the numbers themselves and graphically. The tiers were created to provide groupings for PR directors to look at when developing a PR plan. The groupings can be used in budget allocation and overall creative influence. The following is the prioritized list compiled from the results with an author-created tier system:

¹ (2001) Chris Kemple, Phone Interview, 2001

Tier System – 9% Deviation From High Number (5) Down Creates New Tier

Tier One

- 1) Promoting your team as “family entertainment”
- 2) Establishing a relationship with the local media
- 3) Promoting the relative “low-cost” of Minor League Baseball

Tier Two

- 4) Creating/promoting a team mascot
- 5) Establishing a relationship with the local Chamber of Commerce

Tier Three

- 6) Obtaining a local radio broadcasting contract
- 7) Promoting your affiliation with a major league team

Tier Four

- 8) Promoting the number of new jobs your team will create

Tier Five

9) Promoting your affiliation with other Minor League Baseball teams

10) Obtaining a local TV contract

Family entertainment was the clear-cut number one. Those surveyed ranked each promotional aspect on a scale of:

Very Important (Value = 5)

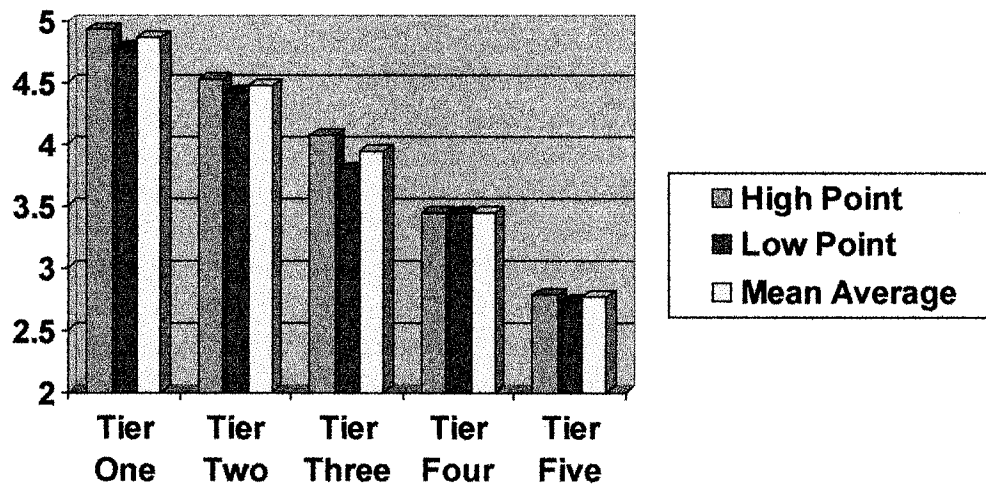
Important (Value = 4)

Neutral (Value = 3)

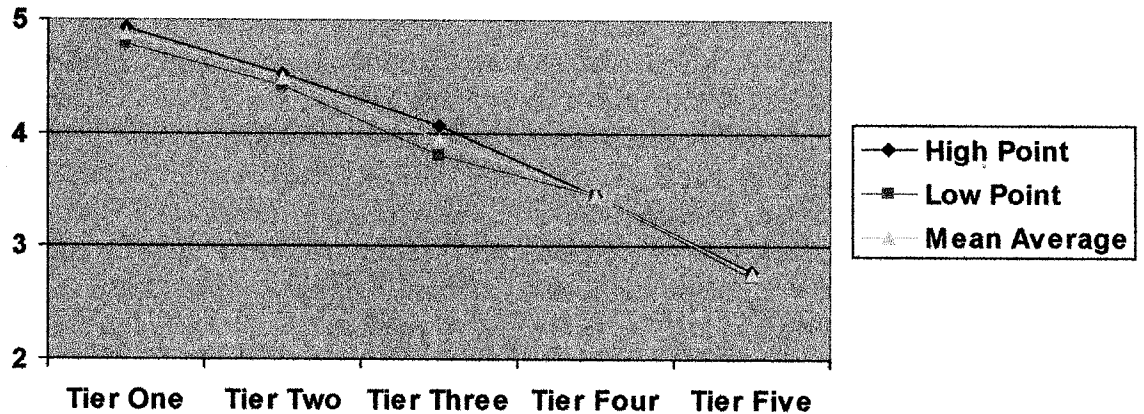
Unimportant (Value = 2)

Very Unimportant (Value = 1)

Tier Differences



Both graphs here illustrate the steady arithmetically declining ratings of each tier. The high points and low points follow incredibly closely with the mean average of each tier. The tiers allow for PR Directors to allocate appropriate funds, time and creative influences when creating and/or implementing their PR plans.



The mean importance average for “Promoting your team as ‘family entertainment’” was an astonishing 4.93. Of the 45 responses, only three were not “Very Important” and all three were still “Important.” A slight drop-off took place between number one and two with a mean average of 4.89 for “Establishing a relationship with the local media.” Similar then was the drop-off to the third ranked promotional aspect, “Promoting the relative ‘low-cost’ of Minor League Baseball,” which garnered a 4.78 mean average. None of the top three responses contained a single response below “Important.”

The second tier of prioritized responses begins with number four, “Creating/promoting a team mascot,” which checked in at a 4.53 mean average response. Number four also marked the first “Neutral” level responses with three. Number five

“Establishing a relationship with the local Chamber of Commerce” still held in the second tier with a 4.42 mean average. Interestingly, number five contained fewer (2) “Neutral” responses than number four, but also featured the first “Very Unimportant” ranking.

The third tier in ranked responses took a rather large dip with number six “Obtaining a local radio broadcasting contract” holding a 4.07 mean average. While no Minor League Baseball personnel ranked number six as “Very Unimportant,” it still showed rather less importance to most than the top two tiers. “Promoting your affiliation with a major league team” picked up a 3.8 mean average response as the seventh ranked answer. Once again, as with the radio contract aspect, not one response contained a single “Very Unimportant.”

Number eight “Promoting the number of new jobs you will create” contains an in-between response creating its own fourth tier with a 3.44 mean average. Also, the new jobs aspect had the first “Very Unimportant” response since number five establishing a relationship with the Chamber of Commerce.

The fifth and final tier contains the only mean averages below 3.0. Number nine “Promoting your affiliation with other Minor League Baseball teams” shows a 2.78 mean average. It also contained five “Very Unimportant” responses along with only one “Very Important” ranking. Oddly, number ten “Obtaining a local TV contract” showed more (2) “Very Important” rankings but a survey-high eight “Very Unimportant” rankings for a 2.73 mean average.

Other aspects

An open-ended section allowed respondents to list other aspects of a Minor League Baseball promotion the author may have missed. A total of nineteen different responses were made to: "Please name and describe in brief detail two other aspects of a Minor League Baseball promotion that are important." Many of these responses were identical to already listed aspects ranked in the opening section.

Promotions

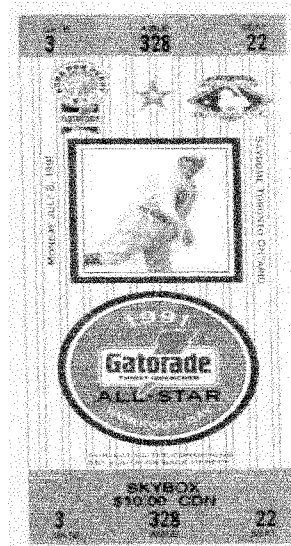
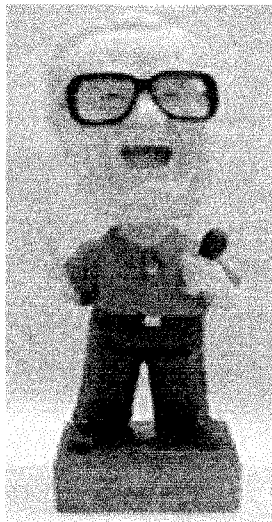
Thirty-one percent of the forty-five respondents indicated the general area of game promotions as an important aspect. This was the most frequently mentioned "other aspect" noted by those surveyed. Specifically, they stated repeatedly promotional materials used in giveaways must have a long shelf-life. According to one GM, "if you buy a bunch of items that are time sensitive in any way, you better make sure you use them all or you'll have one big pile of expensive garbage. You need to watch out for your sponsors."

In other words, getting a sponsor to pay for 10,000 4th of July t-shirts could be rather wasteful. Most Class A teams don't draw near the 10,000 person mark. Also, once the holiday has come and gone, who wants a 4th of July t-shirt in August? The timeliness that made it such a neat promotion on game-day likewise creates a very short lifetime of promotional effectiveness. With that in mind, practitioners must remain wary of promotions too time-sensitive not only for their effectiveness but also for the team's

professional appearance to sponsors. A sponsor does not want to hear any of their money's efforts were wasted due to surplus. If a sponsor spent \$5,000 for 5,000 beanie babies, they don't want 1,000 beanie babies lying around unused. Those beanie babies represent \$1,000 of the sponsor's money lying around unused.

Another sentiment echoed through many responses pointed out the "perceived value" aspect of a promotional giveaway. "Perceived value" is a catch-phrase used quite often to explain how promotional items work. The fan/customer views for instance a bobble-head doll to be worth the same as or more than the price of admission alone.

Customer Views



Above:

A Bobblehead Doll - Is Worth More Than/The Same As – Cost Of Admission

With that, the game becomes an ancillary enjoyment seemingly for free. This also can allow for greater purchases in number and cost made through concessions and merchandising once the patron enters the ballpark.

Many of those surveyed recommended using sponsors to front all/most of the cost and allow their logo/slogan etc. to also be placed on the item. A good deal of others stated group discounts are an absolute must within the promotional capacity. Nearly all greatly emphasized the need to maximize creativity and don't fear trying new things.

Community Activity

The next most common open-ended aspect noted fell under the general umbrella of community activity. While 24% of those surveyed mentioned community activity, more was written about this in quantity of each response than any other aspect noted. Some specific areas seen in nearly all of the eleven answers mentioning community activity involved player appearances. Most respondents indicated this works especially well with player appearances involving neighborhood children. Schools are the easiest way to reach young area residents through community service such as a reading program or drug education.

While reaching children is easiest through local schools, several GMs specifically noted the importance of involving area sports leagues, especially Little Leagues in appearances. The costs of appearances are minimal, local press coverage is usually easy to obtain and impressed children will quite often then drag their parents to the ballpark.

Many respondents mentioning player appearances greatly emphasized the importance of getting media coverage. Some GMs went as far to say that without press coverage the overall effectiveness of appearances is minimal. Also, several stated players themselves are either not always necessary or only effective when used in a complimentary fashion. Many GMs have had success using only a team mascot appearance at local schools and live exclusively by it.

Still under the Community Activity umbrella lies team affiliations with non-profits/charities. Using percentages of specific merchandise or gate revenue to donate to local charities carries a great deal of weight. It can entice those unaware or unappreciative of the team to the park at least once/prompt a one-time merchandise purchase.

While individual players on the Class A level sport a very high turnover rate, a successful franchise is generally in the area to stay. Of course the more success a team has financially, the greater the likelihood of staying longer and becoming a community fixture. The two very much work hand-in-hand. Displaying care for events and groups relevant to the local community through shared money or even volunteering by players/team personnel has often worked to endear franchises to their communities.

Not Just Baseball

Twenty percent of the respondents pointed to the other entertainment Minor League Baseball involves as a major aspect to promote. Teams should try to sell the other activities and parts of the Minor League Baseball experience that go on during games

through advertisements, word-of-mouth mentions and all media coverage. In-game field related promotions work especially well in this regard. Specific examples range from scoreboard trivia to timed runs around the diamond with young fans for prizes.

A great many of those surveyed heavily indicated the game itself is almost secondary to the atmosphere and other parts of Minor League Baseball. Several mentioned using interactive experiences off the field but in the park: radar guns to test fan pitch speed, giant inflated fun houses and other games quite similar if not identical to those found on a boardwalk/in an amusement park.

Many squads also use entertainment on the field but out of play. For instance, many squads use the team mascot dancing on the field with players or umpires. Sometimes the clubs will create on-field skits between innings with the mascot and players or umpires. Other teams outsource individual performers for single games.

One of the biggest impact entertainers of the sort these days is Myron Noodleman, who was mentioned in a great many responses. Noodleman is a character greatly resembling the comedic antics of a younger Jerry Lewis who works the crowd face-to-face and through a larger on-field pre-arranged set of dancing and interactive scenes with players and umpires.

Another act mentioned was the ZOOperstars, a traveling troupe of giant animals with names that play off contemporary sports stars such as Cow Ripken, Jr. and Harry Canary. These all display the family entertainment aspect so many heavily weighed as a promotional aspect.

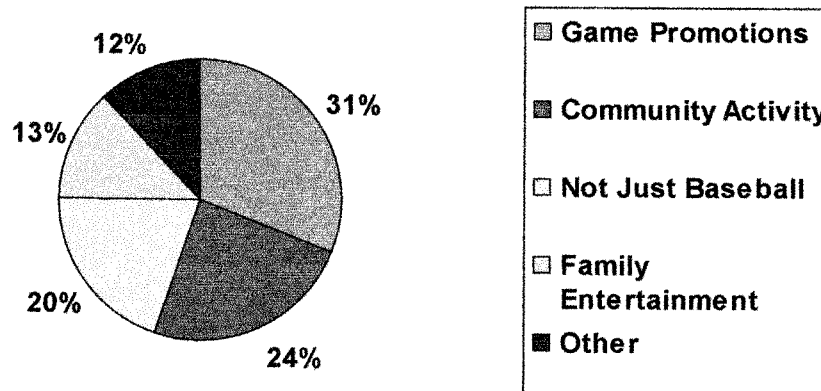
Thirteen percent of respondents reinforced the already mentioned family entertainment aspect to Minor League Baseball. Those GMs stated you cannot overvalue

how integral the “entire family can enjoy” idea is to a Minor League Baseball team’s promotional campaign. All other responses were mentioned by only one respondent each.

These mentions included:

- Survey fans to see what they like
- Cross-market with other businesses in the area
- Build a season ticket base and take care of them
- Form an advisory panel to generate ideas
- Train players to be fan-friendly/personable
- Make sure you have a good team
- Be sure your marketing plan includes a large advertising budget
- Conduct events in the stadium but not on game days like concerts, flea markets etc. to make extra money
- Create one set promotional style/theme for the entire season and stick with it
- Must have nice facility
- Internet website for stats/player bios/community appearance listings etc.

Below is a graphical representation of the open ended response distribution:



Promoting Individual Players/Coaches

The next section of the survey dealt with a highly debatable topic. Should Class A baseball teams promote individual players and/or coaches? With such high turnover, the best players quite rarely stay for long periods of time. Those players that do stick with a specific team in Class A baseball for any appreciable length of time quite often are quite average to below average in ability.

The responses favored promoting individual players/coaches by a count of 30 to 15. Nearly half of those who favored such a promotion specifically stated teams should only do so with top prospects. These players should be high draft picks expected to make major impact throughout all levels of the organization in a short period of time. Some did mention making a push for players from the local area.

A great deal of others said they didn't necessarily agree with promoting individual players but were approving of promoting the manager. Such respondents said this is highly encouraged when the manager is from the area or a high profile name. People fitting into this category are usually former major leaguers in the playing or coaching capacity.

A much smaller number of those surveyed pointed to MLB players on rehab, players with unusual/catchy names, fan favorites and those on record setting paces/that accomplish exceptional feats as good candidates to promote individually.

As far as mediums and methods through which to promote the individuals on a club, three main areas arose. Nearly all responses mentioned have weekly media sessions to inform newspapers, radio stations and in some cases TV stations of the latest team

happenings. This provides an excellent avenue to promote feature stories on the individuals you're looking to promote. Also, they can become the unofficial spokespeople for the team itself.

Along with media sessions, many GMs pointed to appearances by individuals as a way to promote them. Using the same high profile or local player/manager at most of if not all appearances reinforces a strong link between the team and the individual. With proper technique, it comes more so a link between the team/individual and the community. This also allows for even greater press coverage and feature story opportunities that can help to sell the sport itself and the specific team.

A smaller but still significant number of respondents mentioned using giveaways with the image or name of the individual. Some specific examples included posters, baseball cards, pocket/magnet schedules, game programs and the team's internet website.

Of the fifteen respondents that said Class A teams should not promote individual players/coaches, the overwhelming reason was the obvious one. Most stated that since the best players are not with the team for an entire season, let alone more than one, it's silly to waste time and money promoting those who could be gone at any moment. Some also mentioned they've found fans simply don't care about individual players at all.

Other Areas To Promote

Another open-ended question prompted those surveyed to mention the other areas that should be promoted most heavily. "Affordability" led the way here with 13 respondents indicating it's the area to promote the heaviest. "The experience" ranked

second with 10 respondents. They further explained “the experience” incorporating fan friendliness and unique promotions. The outdoor summer fun aspect also was mentioned by 10 respondents.

Items Not Mentioned

One final open ended question requested “anything else about conducting public relations for a Minor League Baseball team you consider very important that was not mentioned in this survey?” Several quite specific points were made here that readers should note:

- Always be professional in every regard (ex. dress, word choice, timeliness)
- Make sure to call local media with post-game scores and stats after every game -- home and away
- Attempt to hit fans 30-45 minutes away; those closer will know who you are, make the extra effort to further extend
- Be accessible to all media; make sure to include your home phone and if applicable cell phone on all releases
- Create on-line e-mail updates/newsletters to send out to all subscribing fans
- Emphasize the facilities if in a really nice/new stadium
- Build relationships with all team personnel; every person associated with the baseball club is part of the greater team that is the organization
- Incorporate telemarketing for ticket plans, especially to corporations and offer discounts

- Advertise as much as possible within budget restraints; determine the main community media outlets and advertise there
- Make sure to get kids involved with the players; the sport is sold on building relationships with area youngsters

Conclusion

Thank you for your interest in *Minor League Baseball PR Guidelines: Techniques For First Year Class A Teams*. Hopefully you found the material interesting and useful in your practices. Best of luck to your teams, your careers and beyond.