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ANALYSIS OF FAN MOTIVATION FACTORS IN A SUMMER COLLEGIATE BASEBALL LEAGUE

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Abstract

The purpose of this pilot study was to investigate the factors motivating season ticket holders and multi-game pack purchasers to attend summer collegiate baseball games. The Sport Fan Motivation Scale (Wann, Schrader, & Wilson, 1999) was slightly modified in this study to determine fan attendance motives at summer collegiate baseball games. The participants of this study (n = 70) were season ticket holders and multi-game pack purchasers of the St. Cloud Rox baseball organization, a summer collegiate baseball team in the Northwood's League. Results revealed that sport marketers may want to focus a majority of their attention to entertainment, considering the top three sport motivation factors were entertainment related. In addition, T-tests revealed statistical significance between gender and age in sport fan motives. Implications discussed in this paper may aid sport marketers and other stakeholders in planning and implementing marketing strategies within similar venues to increase attendance and season ticket sales.

Introduction

Summer collegiate baseball leagues are designed to further develop the best athletes in college baseball to enhance their skills and prepare them for professional leagues. There are several summer collegiate baseball leagues across the United States with most beginning their seasons in early June and end in the middle of August. These leagues prepare players to develop the stamina of playing long seasons similar to the major leagues and utilizing wood bats as opposed to aluminum bats used in the NCAA. In particular, the Northwoods League prepares players for professional baseball by playing 72 games in 75 days in minor league caliber stadiums (Kannenber, 2019). Additionally, a significant number of Major League Baseball players have gone through the summer collegiate system (Grunebaum, 2012). The Northwoods League has put 231 of their alumni in Major League Baseball (Northwoods League, 2019). The minor league baseball format combined with high quality talent has allowed the Northwoods League to become a profitable business.

There has been a noteworthy amount of research done on sport fan motivation across different levels of baseball (Bernthal & Graham, 2003; Boyd & Krehbiel 2003; Lee, 2009; McDonald & Rascher, 2000; Robinson, Trail, Dick, & Gillentine, 2005; Sloan, 1989; Wann, Schrader, & Wilson, 1999; Wiid & Cant, 2015). While a considerable amount of research on National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) baseball fan motivation and minor league baseball fan motivation exist in the body of literature (Bernthal & Graham, 2003; Lachowetz, 2009; Paul, Toma, & Weinbach, 2008), a premier summer collegiate baseball league, like the Northwoods

League, fan motivation is one area that remains relatively unexplored. The Northwoods League has grown from a 5-team league with 70,000 fans in attendance in 1994, to 20-team league with 1,177,903 fans in attendance in 2018 (Northwoods League, 2018).

Teams such as the St. Cloud Rox and Madison Mallards are collegiate summer baseball teams that play in the Northwoods League. In 2018, the St. Cloud Rox had a total attendance of 54,665 fans for an average of 1,562 per game. The St. Cloud Rox averaged more fans than 24 Affiliated Minor League Baseball Teams (Ballpark Digest Editors, 2019). The Madison Mallards had 205,324 fans for an average of 6,039 per game (Northwoods League Attendance, 2018). To put these numbers into perspective, the St. Cloud Rox would be in the Top 50 and the Madison Mallards would be in the top 5 for NCAA Division I baseball for average home attendance. Moreover, the Madison Mallards would be in the top 25 for average attendance in all of Affiliated Minor League Baseball. This increase of fan attendance in the league combined with their minor league baseball business model merits a closer examination of fan motivation factors.

Fan Motivation

There are multiple factors that influence fans from a wide range of sports to attend sporting events. Several researchers have investigated factors that motivate spectators to attend sporting events (e.g. Correia & Esteves, 2007; Funk, Ridinger & Moorman, 2004; Kahle, Kambara & Rose, 1996; Mahony, Nakazawa, Funk, James & Gladden, 2002; Robinson et al., 2005; Sloan, 1989; et al.; Trail, Fink & Anderson, 2003; Wann, Grieve, Zapalac & Pease, 2008; Won & Kitamura, 2007). The main body of research on this topic began in 1987, when Sloan, Bates, Davis, and Schweiger presented a sport consumer motivation measure, the Sports Need for Achievement and Power Scale (SNAPS). They examined the achievement measures, moods, and support for a team of 379 male and female college football fans. The study found that fans “pleased” feelings increased with a win and dropped with a loss. It also found that an individual’s need to achieve may somehow motivate the desire to attend a sports contest. The results implied that individual differences in fans’ need for achievement predict fan’s pregame and postgame positive moods and identification with a team, which may be good indicators of fan’s attraction to the sport’s event.

Sloan (1989) later presented an analysis of the SNAPS to encompass nearly all sport fan motives into one of five theories: achievement seeking, stress and stimulation, catharsis and aggression, salubrious effects, and entertainment. These sport motives included social and psychological needs of sport fans, reinforcing the idea that sports provide pleasurable characteristics to the spectator. Wann (1995) applied similar ideas when creating the Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS), a 23-item, Likert scale instrument that measures eight hypothesized sport fan motives including the following: eustress, self-esteem, escape, entertainment, economic, aesthetic, group affiliation, and family. Eustress, in particular, is the positive form of stress that stimulates spectators during sporting events. To summarize, both Sloan (1989) and Wann (1995) suggested that some fans are motivated by enhancing their self-esteem and escaping their life troubles through sports.

Wann et al. (1999) utilized the SFMS to examine the differences in the eight sport fan motivation characteristics in fans of different sport types, more specifically between fans of team sports versus fans of individual sports, and fans of aggressive sports versus nonaggressive sports. They found (a) individual sport fans had higher levels of aesthetic motivation versus team sport fans that were more motivated by self-esteem enhancement and eustress and (b) that fans of

non-aggressive sports were also motivated by aesthetics versus fans of aggressive sports whom were found to be more motivated by economic concerns.

Berenthal and Graham (2003) utilized the SFMS to determine sport fan attendance motivation of minor league baseball fans versus collegiate baseball fans. The results found that minor league baseball fans were significantly more motivated by added entertainment (e.g., in-game contests, mascots, sound effects) than college baseball fans. Minor league baseball fans were also more motivated by value and overall cost of attending a game over collegiate baseball fans, though the cost to attend either was not significantly different. Collegiate baseball fans considered items related to the game of baseball (e.g., quality of play, rivalries, allegiance to home team) to be relatively more important than minor league baseball fans. Wiid and Cant (2015) applied the SFMS in their research on differences in rugby and soccer fans' motivation. They found that similar to minor league and collegiate baseball, fans of rugby and soccer are motivated by entertainment.

Minor league baseball has taken full advantage of the benefits that promotional and in-game entertainment has to offer. The game of baseball has almost become a sideshow to the off-the-wall promotional antics that take place in minor league baseball stadiums. A study conducted with a minor league baseball team from the South Atlantic League examined the determinants of fan attendance (Paul et al., 2008). The study included variables such as: team geographic, time and day of game, economic factors, win percentages, average runs scored, double-header games, and promotions. However, the researchers found that the influential factors in attendance were promotions and other forms of entertainment during the game or following the game, such as fireworks, concerts, and giveaways. Another study on minor league baseball, in the International League, examined the most effective promotions in relations to increasing attendance and found high value promotions, giveaways, and fireworks increased attendance the most (Howell, Klenosky, & McEvoy, 2015).

Season-Ticket Holder Retention

The most dependable customer for a sport organization is the season-ticket holder. Season ticket holders also represent the most active and behaviorally committed group of sports consumers (McDonald, Karg, & Vocino, 2012). Season ticket holders evaluate and consume products differently than single game purchasers, so it is important to examine and identify them differently for marketing and sales purposes. Sport organizations that focus their attention on game day attendance place greater emphasis on season ticket holder sales (Reese & Bennett, 2013).

Pan (1997) focused on five constructs of perceived motives in renewing season ticket packages for Division I NCAA Men's basketball. The five variables were identified as 1) athletic event, 2) economic factors, 3) social factors, 4) schedule, and 5) team success. Among the five variables, economic factors were identified to have the most important role in the decision of purchasing season tickets followed by athletic event and team success. Pan also found that fans under the age of 40 viewed social factors as a viable motive when purchasing season tickets.

A similar study by Pan and Baker (2005) investigated season-ticket renewal in NCAA Division I football with a nearly identical theoretical framework and methodology as the previously mentioned study on Division I NCAA Men's Basketball. The motive variables changed slightly, and were identified as 1) team performance, 2) economic factors, 3) game competitiveness, 4) athletic event, and 5) social factors. The results revealed team success to be the most important

factor when renewing season tickets, followed by game competitiveness and social factors respectively. The differing results in these similar studies suggest each sport has different motives when purchasing or renewing season tickets.

Reese and Bennett (2013) focused their study on sport fan satisfaction of the season ticket holder sales strategy, purchasing process, pricing, utilization programs that increase product consumption, and variables affecting repurchase intentions in minor league baseball. They also researched the satisfaction of the season ticket holders and non-season ticket holders based on the previously mentioned variables. Their findings revealed the importance for marketers to aim for and maintain high levels of season ticket holder satisfaction. Variables such as: timeliness of service, satisfying needs, experience relative to other options, knowledge of representative, and value all affected a season ticket holder's intention to retain tickets. The demographics in this study were notable, because season ticket holders had a greater annual household income (\$87,000), over non-season ticket holders (\$57,000). However, this could be attributed to age as season ticket holders were on average 45.5 and non-season ticket holders averaged 33 years old. Household income and age are two of many factors that sport marketers should consider when developing strategies to increase season ticket renewals.

McDonald, Karg, and Leckie (2014) researched the major barriers of retaining current season ticket holders and identified who was most at risk of opting out of season tickets. They surveyed over 10,000 season ticket holders from five professional teams in the Australian Football League and found that the most predictive variables for not renewing were: usage, self-assessment, tenure and satisfaction. They found that the sport season ticket holder that fell in the usage variable for non-renewal resulted from uncontrollable factors such as changes of work or housing relocation that led the customer to search for alternate forms of entertainment.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors motivating season ticket holders and multi-game pack purchasers to attend summer collegiate baseball games. The Sport Fan Motivation Scale (Wann et al., 1999) was used in this study to determine the motives behind fan attendance at summer collegiate baseball games. The information gathered from this study may assist other summer collegiate baseball teams and leagues with their marketing strategies to increase game attendance and possibly season ticket sales.

Methodology

Participants

The participants of this pilot study were 70 season ticket holders and multi-game pack purchasers of the St. Cloud Rox baseball organization, a summer collegiate baseball team in the Northwood's League, during the 2017 season. There were 36 home games during the season, not including playoff games, and a multi-game pack purchaser acquired tickets to 10 or more of those games. The age range of the participants was 75+ (0%) 74-65 (9%), 64-55 (29%), 54-45 (26%), 35-44 (24%), 34-25 (7%), 24-18 (0%), and did not disclose (5%). Of the 70 participants, males accounted for 54%, females accounted for 39%, and 7% chose not to respond. Nearly all of the participants (94%) identified themselves as Caucasian, and 6% chose not to disclose.

Instrumentation

The Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS) was utilized to assess factors motivating season ticket holders to renew their tickets (Wann et al., 1999). The scale was slightly modified in the economic variable for the purpose of this study due to the legality of gambling on collegiate athletes. The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of the SFMS was .96. Nunnally and Bernstein's (1994) recommended alpha value of .70 was used to assess the internal consistency of the instrument. After the demographic questions were answered, participants were asked to select their agreement to each of the 20 statements from the SFMS on a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree) to questions like

"I enjoy summer collegiate baseball because of the entertainment value", "One of the main reasons that I watch, read, and/or discuss summer collegiate baseball is that doing so makes me feel good when my team wins" and "One of the main reasons that I watch, read, and/or discuss summer collegiate baseball is I am the kind of person who likes to be with other people" (see Table 1).

Table 1: Top 10 Sport Motivation Factors

Motivations	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I enjoy summer collegiate baseball because of the entertainment value.	4.43	.56
I enjoy watching, reading, and/or discussing summer collegiate baseball simply because it is a good time.	4.35	.88
To me, summer collegiate baseball spectating is simply a form of recreation.	4.13	.52
I like to watch, read, and/or discuss summer collegiate baseball because doing so gives me an opportunity to be with my family.	4.05	.74
One of the main reasons that I watch, read, and/or discuss summer collegiate baseball is that doing so makes me feel good when my team wins.	4.00	.78
One of the main reasons that I watch, read, and/or discuss summer collegiate baseball is that I enjoy the beauty and grace of the sport.	3.91	.81
One of the main reasons that I watch, read, and/or discuss summer collegiate baseball is that I get pumped up when I am watching my favorite teams.	3.85	.80
I like to watch, read, and/or discuss summer collegiate baseball because doing so gives me an opportunity to be with my spouse or significant other.	3.83	.74
One of the main reasons that I watch, read, and/or discuss summer collegiate baseball is I am the kind of person who likes to be with other people.	3.48	1.01
I like the stimulation I get from watching summer collegiate baseball.	3.48	.85

Note. All values represent means and standard deviations of the top ten sport fan motivations.

Procedures

Approval was first obtained from the university institutional review board to conduct this study. Next, permission was obtained from the St. Cloud Rox general manager who provided the researchers with emails of their 150 season ticket holders and multi-game pack purchasers. E-mail solicitations were sent to 150 season ticket holders and multi-game pack purchasers to participate in a five-minute online fan motivation survey via QuestionPro. The e-mail invitation included information about the purpose of the study and communicated that their participation was voluntary. The researchers assured the participants that their identity would remain anonymous. No identifying information was collected from the participants. The survey was completed by 70 individuals for a 47% response rate.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (percentages, means, ranges, and standard deviations) were utilized to describe the demographic characteristics of the participants. Means and standard deviations were also utilized to compare variables influencing sport fan motives. T-tests were also conducted to determine significant differences in sport fan motives by gender and age.

Results

A total of 70 completed surveys were used for data analysis for a return rate of 47%. As shown in Table 1, the top five sports motivation factors for collegiate summer baseball are 1) I enjoy summer collegiate baseball because of the entertainment value ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.56$); 2) I enjoy watching, reading, and/or discussing summer collegiate baseball ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.88$); 3) To me, summer collegiate baseball spectating is simply a form of recreation ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 0.52$); 4) I like to watch, read, and/or discuss summer collegiate baseball because doing so gives me an opportunity to be with my family ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.74$); 5) One of the main reasons that I watch, read, and/or discuss summer collegiate baseball is that doing so makes me feel good when my team wins ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.78$). Of these five motivational factors, the top three are directly related to entertainment.

As shown in Table 2, the bottom five sport motivation factors for summer collegiate baseball were 1) I enjoy watching summer collegiate baseball because it increases my self-esteem ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 0.88$); 2) To me, my favorite summer collegiate baseball team's successes are my successes and their losses are my losses ($M = 2.65$, $SD = 0.93$); 3) One of the main reasons that I watch, read, and/or discuss summer collegiate baseball because most of my friends are fans ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 0.96$); 4) One of the main reasons that I watch, read, and/or discuss summer collegiate baseball is that doing so gives me the opportunity to temporarily escape life's problems ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.08$); 5) One of the main reasons that I watch, read, and/or discuss summer collegiate baseball is for the artistic value ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 0.90$). Of these bottom five motivational factors, the bottom two are directly related to self-esteem.

Table 2: Bottom 10 Sport Motivation Factors

Motivations	M	SD
I enjoy watching summer collegiate baseball games because to me the sport is a form of art.	3.31	1.06
One of the main reasons that I watch, read, and/or discuss summer collegiate baseball is that I enjoy being physiologically around by the competition.	3.28	.91
I enjoy watching summer collegiate baseball more when I am with a large group of people.	3.24	.96
To me, watching, reading, and/or discussing summer collegiate baseball is like daydreaming because it takes me away from life's hassles.	3.20	1.04
One of the main reasons that I watch, read, and/or discuss summer collegiate baseball is that doing so allows me to forget about my problems.	3.12	1.05
One of the main reasons that I watch, read, and/or discuss summer collegiate baseball is for the artistic value.	3.09	.90
One of the main reasons that I watch, read, and/or discuss summer collegiate baseball is that doing so gives me the opportunity to temporarily escape life's problems.	3.07	1.08
One of the main reasons that I watch, read, and/or discuss summer collegiate baseball is because most of my friends are fans.	2.89	.96
To me, my favorite summer collegiate baseball team's successes are my successes and their losses are my losses.	2.65	.93
I enjoy watching summer collegiate baseball because it increases my self-esteem.	2.45	.88

Note. All values represent means and standard deviations of the bottom 10 sport motivation factors.

Of the 20 Sport Fan Motivation factors, T-test results showed that there is a statistically significant difference on one factor: To me, summer collegiate baseball spectating is simply a form of recreation. The mean score of female fans ($M=4.46$, $SD=0.49$) was significantly higher than the mean score of male fans ($M=3.97$, $SD=0.49$); $t = -3.05$, $p < 0.05$.

Of the 20 Sport Fan Motivation factors, T-test results showed statistically significant difference between age on one factor: I like to watch, read, and/or discuss summer collegiate baseball because doing so gives me an opportunity to be with my family. The mean score of under 45-year-old fans ($M=4.64$, $SD=0.49$) was significantly higher than the mean score of the over 45-year-old fans ($M=3.74$, $SD=0.66$); $t = 5.60$, $p < 0.05$.

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this pilot study was to investigate the factors motivating season ticket holders and multi-game pack purchasers to attend summer collegiate baseball games. We found that the most important motivating factor for ticket holders and multi-game purchasers when spectating collegiate summer baseball was entertainment. This finding aligns with similar studies that have also found entertainment to be the highest motivational factor when attending other sporting events (Bernthal & Graham, 2003; Howell et al., 2015; Paul et al., 2008; Ross & James, 2004). It may be considered that the importance of entertainment at sporting events is greater than ever. Consumers have the opportunity to spend their entertainment dollars at more places than ever before, so creating the desired atmosphere for fans at summer collegiate baseball games is vital.

Spending time with family, another distinctive finding from our pilot study, was listed as a top-5 motivational factor. This finding compares to Lachowetz's (2009) study on Minor League Baseball that found being with family was the highest motivating factor for attending games. Like the recommendations mentioned in Lachowetz's study, we also recommend that sport marketers (a) target parents between the ages of 20-40 that have young children and (b) capitalize on family-fun atmospheres and family targeted prices because, "I like to watch, read, and/or discuss summer collegiate baseball because doing so gives me an opportunity to be with my family," was our fourth highest motivational factor in this study.

In our T-test results we found significant statistical difference between gender on one factor: To me, summer collegiate baseball spectating is simply a form of recreation. Other studies have also found gender differences in sport fan motives (e.g., Koch & Wann, 2016; Mumcu, Lough, & Barnes, 2016; Ross & James 2004;) highlighting the difference of female fans placing a greater emphasis on both entertainment and social aspects of attending sporting events with peers, family, and friends. Given this gender difference finding, we recommend that summer collegiate baseball leagues design and provide spaces within their stadiums that allow for socialization. Instead of offering only traditional seating, stadiums should create and/or designate spaces that encourage social interaction and engagement (e.g., having space on the outfields, party decks, playground equipment for children). An example of this is the Arizona's Diamondbacks major league stadium that includes an intentional designed "Raising Cane's Sandlot", a family-focused destination that promotes a healthy and active lifestyle with a variety of fun and exciting activities for fans of all ages and features a kids 3 years and older playground, toddler playground, batting cage, and a stage where their mascot entertains fans.

From a sales promotion's perspective, marketers should sell discounted packages geared towards women by offering a "Ladies Night" and a "Family Night" highlighting the social aspects

of the package (e.g., party decks and spaces for children) and/or other incentives such as a discount if they attend the game with other female friends to leverage word of mouth marketing. Part of the package deal could also include pre-ordered food and beverages where servers come to the fans at their location at preferred designated times where hospitality is a focal point. This could especially be helpful to female fans with children as well as elderly and disabled fans.

The second least important motivating factor when attending summer collegiate baseball was: To me, my favorite summer collegiate baseball team's successes are my successes and their losses are my losses. This finding also compares with a study where team win percentages did not have a significant effect on attendance (Paul et al, 2008). Since fan attendance is no longer just about the outcome of the game, but rather, is about the experience. Therefore, sport marketers should avoid creating marketing plans solely based on their team's win/loss record. Rather, they should focus on including promotions, entertainment, and experiential components that encourage fan engagement and align with their sport team's subculture to broaden the game appeal.

To summarize, sport marketers should focus the majority of their attention towards entertainment factors because the top three factors were all entertainment related: 1) I enjoy summer collegiate baseball because of the entertainment value; 2) I enjoy watching, reading, and/or discussing summer collegiate baseball; 3) to me, summer collegiate baseball spectating is simply a form of recreation. There are countless opportunities to entertain fans at games through on field promotions, giveaways, fireworks, etc. Although fireworks and giveaways are costly promotions, the increase in paid attendance at these games may make the cost of the promotion worthwhile. Providing hospitality, having planned activities, and designating spaces to allow fans to mingle and spend time with family and friends will also help fans to have a good time regardless of the outcome of the game.

Limitations and Future Recommendations

While this pilot study was rigorously conducted, the findings are limited by the study sample size based on 70 fans from only one team in the Northwoods League. Researching another summer collegiate league like the Cape Cod Baseball League would be beneficial to potentially make inferences across two summer collegiate baseball leagues. Additionally, the absence of random sampling may have affected the representativeness of the sample. Future research should expand the size and breadth of the sample by surveying more fans from all teams in the Northwoods League to provide a broader scope of data and could examine the potential differences between markets. Also, surveys could be sent out to all tickets purchasers and expand beyond season ticket holders and mini-pack purchasers. Furthermore, qualitative data could be collected at the event exploring participants' views of the important factors motivating them to attend summer collegiate baseball games. Additional regional and national studies could investigate motivational factors of other summer collegiate baseball leagues including gender and age differences beyond the Northwoods League.

Conclusion

In summary, this study aimed to investigate the factors motivating season ticket holders and multi-game pack purchasers to attend summer collegiate baseball games. The findings of the research revealed that the top three sport motivation factors were entertainment related. Information gleaned from this study may assist sport marketers and other stakeholders in increasing their game attendance and season ticket and multi-game pack sales by focusing a

majority of their attention to entertainment. In particular, sport marketers can utilize these results to focus their promotions around family-oriented entertainment to create a positive effect on attendance.

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