

Segmenting minor league baseball spectators by family status

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It has been acknowledged that fans and spectators can be classified into different groups by factors such as fan identification (Wann & Branscomb, 1993), gender (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002), and motivation (Wann, 1995) and so on. The groups divided by these meaningful factors are likely to demonstrate their unique characteristics, which would provide valuable information for sports marketers when they approach to these different groups.

Minor League Baseball has grown significantly in the recent years (MilB.com, 2012), and one of the main reason for its growth is its ability to provide affordable family entertainment. The typical scenes of minor baseball are certainly different with that of major league baseball in terms of the level of competition and stadium atmosphere. In minor baseball games, there are plenty of other things going on around a stadium such as in-field activities, theme nights and fireworks. There has been some studies investigated minor league sport fans (e.g. James and Ross, 2002; Zhang, Pease, Smith, Lee, Lam, & Jambor, 1997), but they have not considered the family status (i.e., whether spectators have children or not). Considering this unique setting of minor league baseball and its reputation as a family entertainment, this study looked into how the family status of spectators influence on the perceived importance of 1) game-related factors and 2) non-game related factors of minor league baseball games.

The data were collected from a double A independent minor league team. An online survey was sent out via email to total of 1340 people who are in the database of the team and 371 people (27.6%) completed the survey. Questions of team identification, family status (single or married with no child, married with child) and perceived importance of game-related and non-game related factors were asked. Team identification was measured using team attachment of the Point of Attachment (PAI) by Trail, Robinson, Dick and Gillentine (2003). Perceived importance of game-related and non-game related dimensions was measured using a seven-point likert scale ranging from unimportant to important. Game related factors include game quality, start player, and winning. Non-game related dimension includes stadium quality, concession quality, promotions, and ticket price. In addition, comments were solicited in regard to the desirable improvements.

Among 371 respondents, the majority of respondents were Caucasian (96%), male (69%) with the mean age of 45.6. In terms of family status, 163 (44%) were singles or married with no child, and 202 (54.4%) were married with child(ren). The mean scores were calculated for game-related ($M = 4.26$), non-game related ($M = 5.41$), and

team identification ($M = 4.70$). Two univariate analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) were conducted with independent variable of family status and a covariate of team identification and dependent variables of perceived importance of game-related or non-game related respectively.

The results showed that there was no main effect for family status (singles or family with no child $M = 4.18$; family with children $M = 4.31$) on game-related dimension ($F(1,361) = .83, p < .36$). However, a main effect was found for family status (singles or family with no child $M = 5.27$; family with children $M = 5.54$) on non-game related dimension ($F(1,361) = 7.30, p < .007$).

The results of this study showed an interesting picture on minor league baseball spectators. As indicated in the mean score, non-game related dimension such as concession quality and various promotions are more important for the respondents of minor league baseball games than game-related factors. This is also reflected by respondents' comments on the improvements which they want to see. The top three comments were 1) upgrade stadium and seating ($n = 50, 14.48\%$), 2) more promotions and giveaways ($n = 39, 10.46\%$), and 3) better concessions ($n = 33, 8.85\%$). There were other comments (e.g., beer promotion, more fireworks), but none of the comments were related to game itself. More importantly, the study showed that when spectators watch games with child(ren), the non-game related factors become even more important.

In this study, more than half of the respondents were family with child(ren). Although we cannot assume that this is the case for every minor league baseball game, families with children certainly represent a big portion of the minor league baseball spectators especially if the number of children is added into the calculation. Considering the importance of non-game related factors is critical especially for the families with children, sport marketers and owners of minor baseball league need to pay more attention and spend their budget around these items to attract more people in their stadiums.

References

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