



News item: A New York Times/CBS News poll finds that fans who follow baseball closely say it matters to them if Major League Baseball players use performance-enhancing drugs.

News item: Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig announced that spring training attendance in 2008 set an all-time record, up 4% from last year. The commissioner also predicted that the sport will draw between 80 and 81 million fans this year, up from 79.5 million last year.

Are baseball fans talking one way with their mouths and another way with their pocketbooks? It would appear that way.

What really matters to baseball fans, apparently, is the game - at any price. And that price is trending up. According to *Team Marketing Report*, MLB ticket prices increased an average of 10.9 percent this year. The Boston Red Sox, the only two-time World Series winner in this decade, lead the majors in average ticket price at \$48.80, up 10.1 percent over last year. And the Sox are virtually guaranteed to sell out the entire 81-game season for the fifth year in a row.

Second on the list are the Chicago Cubs, who haven't won the World Series in 100 years, at \$42.49, up 23.9 percent over last year. The Yankees have the third-highest average ticket price at \$36.58, up a whopping 26.1 percent, the highest increase in MLB. The Mets are fourth at \$34.05, an increase of 20.5 percent over last year.

If you think those ticket prices are high, wait till next year. Both the Yankees and the Mets will be moving into new stadiums and the ticket prices are sure to provide the average fan with sticker shock. For example, tickets in the Legend section of the new Yankee Stadium will start

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Written by Jordan I. Kobritz
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at \$500 each, with front-row seats fetching a cool \$2,500, up from \$1,000 per seat this year. Even if you're tempted, you're out of luck. Those seats are already sold out.

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Baseball fans aren't the only ones who give lip service to athletes' use of performance-enhancing drugs. A recent national poll by the Sacred Heart University Polling Institute found that Americans believe that 34% of professional athletes use PED's. And fans still flock to sporting events.

We are a society that consumes all manner of drugs – from childhood to old age. If our sports heroes and entertainers do likewise, why should we be critical? What counts is the show. Fans are willing to voice concern to the media or a pollster. But when it comes to shelling out their hard-earned dollars, or dedicating large blocks of time to sports, those same fans are all too happy to step up to the plate.

Even with daily reports that the U.S. economy may be suffering from a recession, history suggests that fans will continue to shell out ever-increasing sums of money to obtain their sports fix. During the last economic downturn, which ended in 2002, attendance at most sporting events stayed stable or increased. However, according to Team Marketing Report, the average increase in ticket prices, especially in football and baseball, was scaled back. Put another way, while ticket prices didn't go down, they didn't increase as fast as they had in prior years.

Of more concern to owners and stadium operators is the potential loss in sponsorships and stadium naming rights as a result of the uncertainty in the business and financial markets. Corporations that have been hit hard in the current economy may feel constrained to ante up for high-dollar suites and sponsorships. But those decisions seem unrelated to the issue of athletes and performance-enhancing drugs.

MLB owners and players recently agreed to strengthen drug testing for the third time. The agreement includes additional drug tests and more independence for the program administrator. But the new agreement also grants amnesty to all the players named in the Mitchell Report.

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The message being sent to the fans is that although the sport is willing to address the illegal use of PED's, if a player gets caught, there are no consequences. That's the same inconsistent message the fans are sending back. And baseball is celebrating all the way to the bank.

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