



With the first full month of the 2007 season in the books, it's not too early to look at how clubs are doing in terms of ticket sales. By taking a look at April's sales, we can get an idea of how last season's wins and losses might impact off-season sales, as well as how any player acquisitions or stadium developments roll into the overall.

Using data from the *Sports Business Journal*, *ESPN*, and *MLB.com*, I'll be digging into how clubs are doing in terms of ticket sales, starting today with the NL East. Needless to say, sales have not been good for the majority of the division with three clubs (Braves, Nationals, and Marlins) having sales in the bottom third of the league, while the Phillies and Mets are holding their own in the top ten.

How is the National League East faring in terms of ticket sales? Select [Read More](#) for details.

Mets:

- **League rank: 4th**
- **NL East rank: 1st**
- **Dates in 2007 through April 30: 12**
- **Number of rainouts: 1**
- **Total tickets sold: 534,300**
- **Average: 44,525**
- **Percentage of Stadium Capacity: 77.60%**
- **Number of dates this time in '06: 11**
- **'06 average at this point: 39,479**
- **Difference from '06 to '07: 12.80%**
- **Max sold: 56,227**
- **Min sold: 32,154**

Magic Tickets: The NL East for April '07

Written by Maury Brown
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- **Number of games sold to +90% of capacity: 4**
- **Number of games sold to -50% of capacity: 0**

The Mets came off a strong 2006 season where they won the division by 12 games over the Phillies, sweeping the Dodgers in three games, and missing the World Series by one game when they lost the NLCS to the Cardinals 4-3. The winning translated into a 2006 paid attendance of 3,379,551 (3rd in the league), and when coupled with Yankees losing two years straight in the AL Division Series, the Mets seem to have picked up some market share in New York, which played slingshot in the off-season ticket sales department.

In the off-season, they raised ticket prices across the board. Ticket prices for seats in the inner loge boxes went up by \$7 (\$52-\$82), as did those in inner field boxes (\$47-\$77). Prices for the outfield field and loge boxes swelled by \$4 (\$36-\$54), while those for the loge reserved (\$30-\$48) and the best seats in the upper reserved section went up by \$3 (\$25). The smallest increase was \$2, in the mezzanine reserved and upper box (\$21-35). The increases seemed to barely impact sales—if at all.

By January, new business sales for Season Tickets were up more than double from '06's same date sales. Continuing full Season Tickets holders in both 2007 and 2008 will have priority in purchasing Season Tickets at Citi Field, the Mets' new home scheduled to open in 2009, which explains some of the Mets 12.8% increase as fans look to get seating in the new stadium early.

The Mets also enjoyed going 15-9 in April, which bolstered their place in the standings ending April a half game out of first, and kept added to the strong '06 showing.

When adding in the ground breaking for a new ballpark, a lucrative naming rights deal with Citi Group which will bring in \$20 million annually, the Mets should easily be able to open their pocketbooks and work to sustain player payroll at more than competitive levels. With plans for redeveloping Willets Point into an entertainment district over the coming years, Citi Field will most likely become more of a tourist destination point than Shea was, thus keeping revenues up. If the Mets continue to perform well, look for ticket sales to parallel.

Phillies:

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- **League rank: 9th**
- **NL East rank: 2nd**
- **Dates in 2007 through April 30: 12**
- **Number of rainouts: 2 (with one made up on 4/23)**
- **Total tickets sold: 412,296**
- **Average: 34,358**
- **Percentage of Stadium Capacity: 78.70%**
- **Number of dates this time in '06: 15**
- **'06 average at this point: 25,999**
- **Difference from '06 to '07: 32.20%**
- **Max sold: 45,107**
- **Min sold: 23,526**
- **Number of games sold to +90% of capacity: 4**
- **Number of games sold to -50% of capacity: 0**

Ticket sales and attendance for the Phillies has been, if anything, surprising. The 32.20% jump from the year prior has been almost exclusively a result of the off-season acquisitions of players such as Freddie Garcia, and the performance of Chase Utley in '06. By Feb. 21st, 150,000 individual game tickets had been sold, on top of an increase of 1,200 season ticket sales by that time.

The play on the field now that the season has started might impact matters down the line. By April 7th, they were already 3 games out of first with a 1-4 record, and came out of April with a better, but far from stellar, 11-14 record (.440). If the Phillies don't improve, the excitement from April may soon wear off.

Braves:

- **League rank: 21st**
- **NL East rank: 3rd**
- **Dates in 2007 through April 30: 11**
- **Number of rainouts: 0**
- **Total tickets sold: 314,121**
- **Average: 28,556**
- **Percentage of Stadium Capacity: 57.60%**
- **Number of dates this time in '06: 9**
- **'06 average at this point: 37,280**
- **Difference from '06 to '07: -23.40%**

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- **Max sold: 51,014**
- **Min sold: 15,631**
- **Number of games sold to +90% of capacity: 1**
- **Number of games sold to -50% of capacity: 4**

The Braves missed the playoffs for the first time in 11 years last season, and that may be just part of the reason for the decline in ticket sales for the Braves. With the sale of the Braves from Time Warner to Liberty Media raising questions about how the new owners will invest in the team on the field, as well as how the franchise will be run, the future is uncertain for the Braves.

But, as with other years in the past, John Schuerholz seems to be getting more out of the Braves than the fans seem to think possible. They came out of the gate winning 7 of their first 8 games by running through the Nationals and Marlins. At the end of April the Braves enjoyed a half game lead in the NL East.

Maybe the nicest way to explain the downturn in ticket sales is apathy. Short of a major free agent acquisition, or better yet, a run very deep into the playoffs, fans seem to be taking a "wait and see" stance with the Braves... again.

Nationals:

- **League rank: 23rd**
- **NL East rank: 4th**
- **Dates in 2007 through April 30: 14**
- **Number of rainouts: 1**
- **Total tickets sold: 298,887**
- **Average: 21,349**
- **Percentage of Stadium Capacity: 46.40%**
- **Number of dates this time in '06: 9**
- **'06 average at this point: 25,294**
- **Difference from '06 to '07: -15.60%**
- **Max sold: 40,389**
- **Min sold: 16,017**
- **Number of games sold to +90% of capacity: 0**
- **Number of games sold to -50% of capacity: 11**

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After going through the gyrations of landing a permanent ownership group last season, the Nationals are going through a purging process and rebuilding a development system that had been slashed and burned by MLB and prior Expos owner Jeffery Loria. With that, the newness somewhat diminishing from the return of MLB to DC, and the team playing in the outdated RFK Stadium, attendance for the Nationals has swooned, dropping 15.6% from 2006. The Nationals rank highest in the number of games below 50% of capacity, and the only club in the NL East not to have at least one game at +90% of capacity, but given RFK's configuration, reaching the +90% is more difficult than other ballparks. Still, the below -50% is telling. With the team a possible contender for losing 100+ games, the rest of the season has to be looked at as loss.

What will be interesting is seeing if advance sales of season tickets into the new Nationals stadium (on schedule to open in 2008) impacts the total number of tickets sold toward the end of the 2007 season. Look for the Nationals to work from a clean slate in 2008, and with that, prime the pump for future years, as opposed to looking at 2007 as anything more than a "planning year."

Marlins:

- **League rank: 26th**
- **NL East rank: 5th**
- **Dates in 2007 through April 30: 14**
- **Number of rainouts: 0 (one game completed over two days due to weather)**
- **Total tickets sold: 254,940**
- **Average: 18,210**
- **Percentage of Stadium Capacity: 51.00%**
- **Number of dates this time in '06: 9**
- **'06 average at this point: 14,050**
- **Difference from '06 to '07: 29.60%**
- **Max sold: 40,397**
- **Min sold: 10,883**
- **Number of games sold to +90% of capacity: 2**
- **Number of games sold to -50% of capacity: 9**

The Marlins nearly became the Cinderella last season by making a push to reach the Wild Card with a team that can best be described as "replacement level". Except for Dontrelle Willis and Miguel Cabrera, the roster was considered to be nothing more than "AAA".

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The work of NL Manager of the Year Joe Girardi allowed the Marlins to overachieve posting a 78-84 season. While a .481 winning percentage doesn't seem much to celebrate, talk of losing 100+ games last season seemed not only unreasonable, it seemed nearly a given.

The feel-good story that was the Marlins turned into ticket sales this past off-season. Too bad poor front office management and a strong willed Joe Girardi couldn't get along as Loria and Co. fired Girardi in the off-season, possibly impacting how the club is (yet again) viewed by the fans. However, Girardi's replacement Fredi Gonzalez took a more matured Marlins roster to one game under .500 at the end of April, thus giving at least a glimmer of hope that the Marlins may try to make a run at the Wild Card again this season, and thus possibly helping sales.

One thing that won't be working in the Marlins favor (again) is the lack of a new stadium. Once again, state funding failed to come through, and with that, the Marlins won't be able to give fans something to want to invest in now, to gain the best seats in a new stadium for the future. Looks like it's back to the drawing board for those working on funding for 2008.

Maury Brown is the founder and president of [The Biz of Baseball](#) and a contributor to [Baseball Prospectus](#). He can be contacted [here](#).