

Why the Miami Marlins Could See a Historic Attendance Plunge

Written by Maury Brown
Monday, 06 May 2013 13:31



Today on *Baseball Prospectus*, I delve into the Miami Marlins self-inflicted attendance woes (see [Bizball: The Marlins Sinking Attendance](#)). The early decline could rate as historic by the end of the season as they could challenge the then Tampa Bay Devil Rays as the worst attendance decline in the second year of a new ballpark. As I write for BP:

In poll after poll, column after column, Jeffrey Loria is ranked as the worst owner in all of North American professional sports.

Loria is bad for fans, but he treats himself and the partners in the club well. He and club president David Samson were able to bamboozle politicians and taxpayers in Miami-Dade County to the tune of \$500 million for a brand-spanking-new ballpark on the former site of the Orange Bowl. They opened up last season in that freshly minted stadium after being the darlings of the 2011 Baseball Winter Meetings, at which they signed SS [Jose Reyes](#) to a six-year, \$106 million deal, starter [Mark Buehrle](#)

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to a four-year, \$58 million contract; and closer

[Heath Bell](#)

to a three-year, \$27 million deal with an option for 2015. All told, the Marlins splurged \$191 million at the meetings, and it could have been more, as it looked for bit like they were going after

[Albert Pujols](#)

. Imagine that.

In mid-November of last year, the club promptly moved Reyes (2013: \$10M, 2014: \$16M, 2015: \$22M, 2016: \$22M, 2017: \$22M, 2018: \$22M club option with \$4M buyout), [Josh Johnson](#) (2013: \$13.75M), Buehrle (2013: \$11M, 2014: \$18M, 2015: \$19M plus a \$4M deferred signing bonus),

[John Buck](#)

(2013: \$6M), and

[Emilio Bonifacio](#)

(who is arbitration eligible this year), and \$4 million (or potentially more) in cash to the Blue Jays for

[Yunel Escobar](#)

,

[Henderson Alvarez](#)

,

[Adeiny Hechavarria](#)

,

[Jeff Mathis](#)

, minor-league pitchers

[Justin Nicolino](#)

and

[Anthony Desclafani](#)

, and minor-league outfielder

[Jake Marisnick](#)

. All told, the Marlins stripped \$163.75 million off the books, and the baseball world screamed “fire sale” at a club that at one point was featured on Showtime’s “The Franchise” and had

[Ozzie Guillen](#)

as its manager. Loria had done what Loria had always done before: make rash decisions, all of which soil any chance of creating goodwill in the community. And the Marlins, in their best Stuart Smalley, looked at themselves in the mirror and said, “Doggone it, people like me.”

With that as the backdrop, I made some predictions before the season started on Twitter that weren’t that much of a leap to make. [I said](#) the Marlins wouldn’t sell out a single game this season (since Opening Day wasn’t a sellout, chances are good they won’t get one going forward), [and added](#) that they would see largest drop in attendance for a second-year ballpark among all MLB stadiums built in the last 25 years.

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As of today, the decline would be 31 percent below what the club ended with last season. But, they are currently averaging 18,864. As of May 5 of last season, they were averaging 30,681, down 11,817 from the previous year, or a decline of 39 percent.

So, it's very possible the Marlins could end worse than the Rays. It's early, and anything could happen, but odds are good the Marlins aren't going to get any better in the standings and Loria certainly didn't make any extra friends in the offseason.

Below shows every new ballpark built under the Selig tenure. It shows the average attendance prior to the new ballpark opening in the old ballpark; average attendance in the first year of the new ballpark; the winning percentage in the first year of the ballpark; average attendance in the second year of the new ballpark, and finally; the percentage of increase or decrease from the opening year in the new ballpark. As of now, the Marlins are averaging just 92 more per game than their last year in Sun Life Stadium that they shared with the Miami Dolphins, was never designed for baseball, and had no roof.

Club

Ballpark

Year Opened

Yr Prior Attendance

Yr. 1 Avg

Winning % (Yr 1)

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Yr. 2 Attendance

% (+/-) Yr 1 to Yr 2

Notes

White Sox

U.S. Cellular Field

1991

25,029

36,224

.537

32,697

-10%

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Orioles

Oriole Park

1992

31,515

44,047

.549

45,000

2%

Indians

Jacobs Field

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1994

26,888

39,121

.584

39,483

1%

Rangers

Ballpark in Arlington

1994

27,711

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39,733

.456

27,582

-31%

First place in AL West before work stoppage

Rockies

Coors Field

1995

N/A

47,084

.535

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48,037

2%

NL WC

Braves

Turner Field

1996

35,818

42,771

.593

41,492

-3%

Won NL East

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Rays

Tropicana Field

1998

N/A

30,942

.389

19,294

-38%

Dbacks

Bank One Ballpark

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1998

N/A

44,571

.401

37,280

-16%

Mariners *

Safeco Field

1999

32,735

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36,004

.488

43,300

20%

Giants

Pacbell

2000

25,659

40,973

.599

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40,888

0%

Won NL West

Tigers

Comerica Park

2000

25,018

30,106

.488

23,720

-21%

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Astros

Enron Field

2000

33,000

37,730

.444

35,855

-5%

Brewers

Miller Park

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2001

19,427

34,704

.420

24,311

-30%

Pirates

PNC Park

2001

21,591

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30,430

.383

22,312

-27%

Reds

Great American Ballpark

2003

22,911

29,077

.426

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37,244

28%

Phillies

Citizens Bank Park

2004

27,901

40,125

.531

32,905

-18%

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Padres

PETCO Park

2004

25,063

37,244

.537

35,429

-5%

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Cardinals

Busch III

2006

43,691

42,589

.516

43,854

3%

Won WS

Nationals

Nationals Park

2008

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23,998

29,005

.366

22,435

-23%

Yankees

Yankee Stadium

2009

53,070

45,918

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.636

46,491

1%

Won WS

Mets

CitiField

2009

49,902

39,118

.432

31,602

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-19%

Twins

Target Field

2010

29,466

39,798

.580

39,113

-2%

Won AL Central

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Marlins **

Marlins Park

2012

18,772

27,400

.426

18,864

-31%

2013 thru 16 games

* *Not full season*

** *Current (5/6/13)*



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Maury Brown is the Founder and President of the [Business of Sports Network](#) , which includes The Biz of Baseball, The Biz of Football, The Biz of Basketball and The Biz of Hockey. He [writes for Baseball Prospectus](#)

and is a [contributor to Forbes](#)

.

He is available as a freelance writer

.

[Brown's full bio is here.](#)

He looks forward to your comments via email and can be [contacted here](#)

.

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