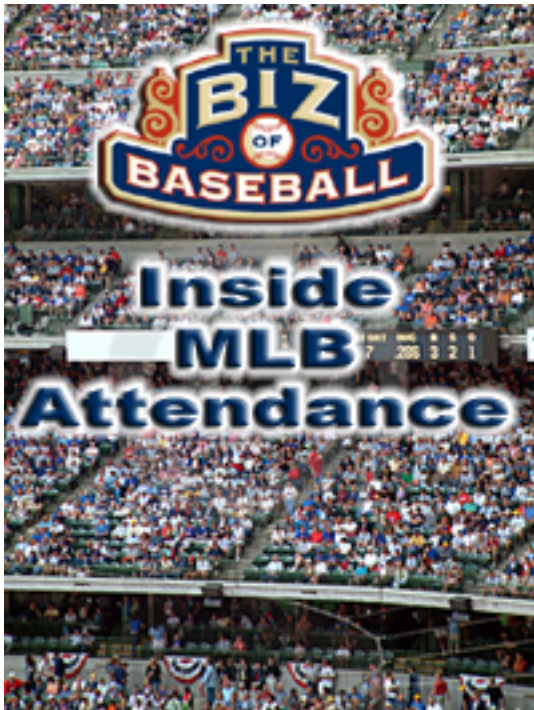


How Performance in 2012 Caused an Attendance Downturn for the Red Sox

Written by Maury Brown

Tuesday, 03 September 2013 12:36



Unless there is catastrophe, a glance at the AL East standings shows the Boston Red Sox either winning the division or being an AL Wild Card team. A trip to the postseason for Red Sox seems a pretty sure bet (as of publication the club has a 98.5% chance of making it), and yet, attendance is down. Questions abound, columns get written, and for some the consensus is, "The Red Sox have lost their fan base."

[According](#) to *The Republican*, the Red Sox are set to see attendance drop 7 percent from last year. But, within the story reveals something that is not only an affect on the Red Sox, but most every club in Major League Baseball: the performance in one or more seasons prior can impact attendance before a single game is played.

"We are pleased with the trend lines and the direction that attendance is heading in," Red Sox president Larry Lucchino said Friday at Fenway Park. "It's understandable that there would be some drop off after the collapse of 2011 and the disappointment of 2012. But I'd rather accentuate the positive: there's a buzz about this team, there's a buzz about Fenway Park again this year. Our ratings are up, our attendance is very strong. We're like fourth or fifth in the league in baseball. While it's off from historic highs, it's still robust."

[....]

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"You're always concerned," [Red Sox chief operating officer Sam] Kennedy said. "Our expectations here are very lofty. We would love to be in a sell-out environment every single night. But we recognize we're not. We'll probably have 25, 26 sell outs this year, and I think there's a natural lag you have. We actually had good attendance last year. Ironically, in 2012, with a 69-win season, and that was because we had a lot of people buy in the winter and this year we had the downturn because of last year."

"I think it's a residual effect from a slower offseason. We've closed the gap. (We'll) probably finish somewhere around 7 percent behind last year, which equates to a couple hundred thousand, maybe as many as 200,000 tickets behind. Hopefully fans will start to come back. They've come back. It's not as if a crowd of 33,000 — most teams in baseball would be thrilled with that."

This is why the Giants currently see the third-highest attendance in the league yet sit with a .445 winning percentage and 21 games behind the Dodgers for first place. It's why the Blue Jays see the largest jump in attendance from last year (currently up a whopping 21 percent) while 63-75, 18.5 games behind first place Boston and last place with 10 game separating them and the second-to-last Yankees.

Back to the Red Sox, as the club execs mention, you can't get back the attendance at the beginning of the season and you can't make up the full-season equivalents in ticket sales that were reached mostly in Nov-Jan. This is what happens when MLB's attendance model is now tied so tightly to season ticket sales.

This is also why we can make some predictions for attendance next season, now. Red Sox attendance will bounce back (although how far is really going to need to be answered by how far they go into the postseason), and the Blue Jays, Giants, Angels, and Brewers will see drops. How significant the drops will be will be tied to any potential high-profile free agent signings. For the Angels, this seems like something that won't happen given the Pujols and Hamilton signings in the last couple of seasons. The Blue Jays have to ask whether fans will be less enthusiastic after the bevy of players they took on, most notably with the trades to the Marlins. It's possible that they could see a 10 percent drop in attendance based on the bounce they got this year; a

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case of normalizing the attendance curve.

And while the Red Sox will be up, the other club that's likely to see a significant bounce will be the Pirates.

So, the attendance decline in Beantown is a story because, well.... It's the Red Sox. But, the reality is, the club most certainly expected the drop, even if they'd rather avoid it. The front office in Boston is likely already well geared up for season ticket sales... for the 2014 season.



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