



As I contemplated the Red Sox run of eight straight wins against the Yankees to start the 2009 season - the first time that's happened since 1912 – it got me thinking about how much of success in sports, on and off the field, can be attributed to luck, money or management.

Luck – a foul ball by inches, a puck banging off a crossbar, a non-call foul, a catch off a helmet - can affect the outcome of individual sporting contests. But given a larger universe, it stands to reason that luck will even out.

The Red Sox have been hugely successful since the John Henry/Tom Werner/Larry Lucchino/Theo Epstein regime took control of the franchise prior to the 2002 season. They've won two World Series, more than any other team in MLB. They've made the playoffs in five of the past six years. Fenway Park has sold out for a record six plus seasons.

Of course, it helps that the Red Sox have resources, i.e., money, at their disposal that few MLB teams can match. But money doesn't guarantee success. The Yankees generate more revenue than the Red Sox and their player payroll has exceeded Boston's by approximately 50% during this decade. And yet the Yankees have played second fiddle to their arch rivals. The Red Sox have simply drafted better, traded better, planned better, hired better and marketed better than the Yankees during that time.

In contrast to the Red Sox, the Yankees seem rudderless. Since George Steinbrenner handed off the reins to his two sons, Hank and Hal, the team speaks with many voices. Hal supposedly runs the business side of the operation. Hank runs his mouth. Randy Levine pontificates freely - and often - on any topic. Brian Cashman is the general manager but any move requires approval from above. Lonnie Trost is the president, although why he's considered necessary is a mystery.

## Successful Sports Franchises Money, Luck or Management

Written by Jordan Kobritz  
Friday, 26 June 2009 02:22

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We can look to other sports for examples of success and failure, neither of which is solely related to a budget. The NFL, NBA and NHL have a salary cap and a salary floor, which means teams essentially spend similar amounts on payroll. Yet some teams are more successful than others, suggesting that management has more to do with success than money.

In the NFL, the Detroit Lions and New England Patriots are polar opposites. Robert Kraft has owned the Patriots for the past 14 years and during that time the team has won 65% of its games, been to the playoffs ten times, and won three Super Bowls in five appearances. During the same period, the Lions, owned by William Clay Ford, have won only 36% of their games, capped by a futile record of 0-16 in 2008. It should be noted that in the four years prior to Kraft's purchase of the Patriots, the team was worse than the Lions, winning only 22% of its games and finishing last in the league in both attendance and revenue.

The NHL Chicago Blackhawks turned around a moribund franchise in the past two years after long-time owner Bill Wirtz died and left the team to his son, Rocky. The younger Wirtz distanced himself from his father almost immediately, hiring sports marketer John McDonough from the Chicago Cubs and putting Blackhawks' home games on television, something the elder Wirtz refused to consider. The team went from the second lowest attendance in the league two years ago to the highest this season. On the ice, the team made it to the Western Conference finals for the first time since 1995.

In the NBA, the Los Angeles Clippers have been owned by Donald Sterling since 1981. In the past 28 years, the team has drafted poorly, signed free agents who didn't pan out, and won only 34% of their games. During the same period, the Jerry Buss owned Lakers have won almost twice as many games, resulting in 14 conference titles and eight NBA titles. Luck? Money? Likely, neither.

Given a choice between good management and deep pockets, I'll take the management. The Yankees have the money, but thanks to John Henry et al, the Red Sox and their fans are the ones basking in success.



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