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The Effect of Competition in the Sports Market on the Popularity of Baseball

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The Effect of Competition in the Sports Market on the Popularity of Baseball

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Senior Research Project

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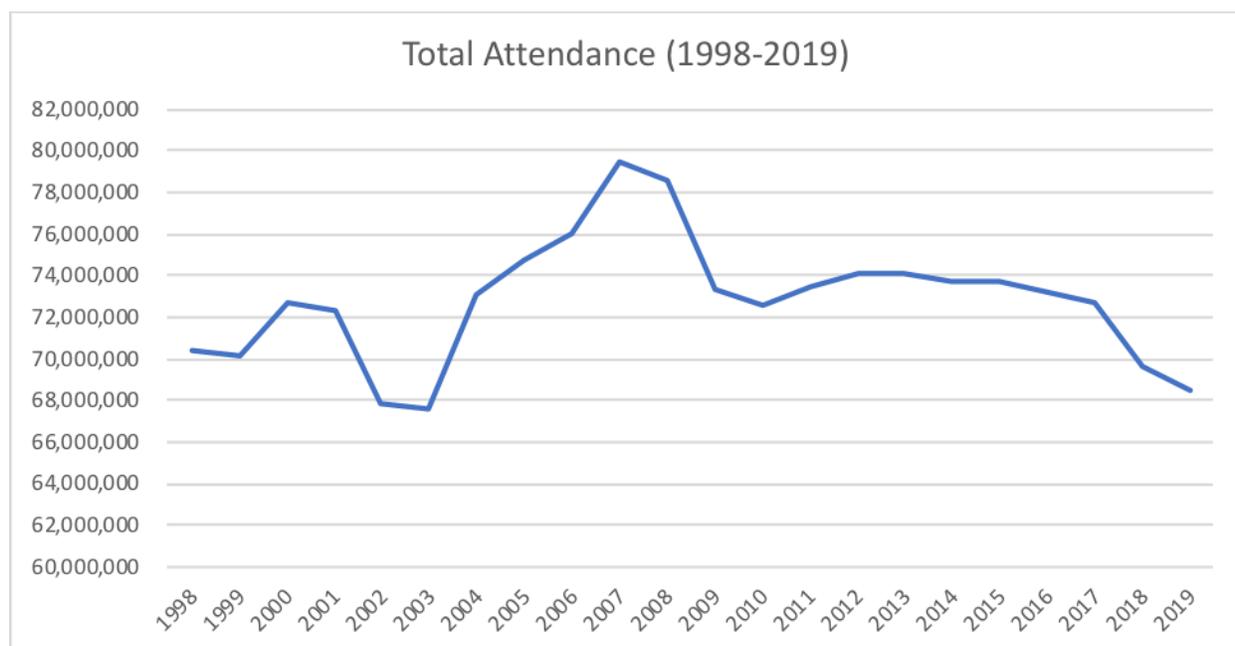
Abstract

This paper will discuss why Major League Baseball (MLB) has declined in popularity in the United States since the 1990s. Issues regarding the increased competition with the development of different sports leagues along with antitrust in payroll drew the most interest. Various forms of marketing, including media and competitive marketing, will be covered along with different variations of economics in the sports world. The research will follow the development of Major League Baseball through the second half of the 20th century, along with an analysis between the MLB, National Basketball Association (NBA) and National Football League (NFL) in the 21st century in regard to payroll and media marketing. Studies done on this topic include competitive balance and attendance in the MLB discussing a variety of factors within the sport itself, such as team market size and the compression of baseball talent. The goal is to prove that there is a correlation between the increased competition in the sports market and the decrease in popularity in the MLB.

Introduction

Why has baseball decreased in popularity overall in the United States since the late 1990s? As the iconic baseball movie, *Field of Dreams*, said in reference to trying to convince an Iowa corn farmer to build a baseball field on his property, “if you build it, [they] will come.” However, that solution is not necessarily true if applied to Major League Baseball (MLB). The MLB is deemed to be “America’s pastime” as it was a large part of American culture from its birth in the late 1800s through its glory years of expansion in the 1970s. The game’s slow-paced action paired well with the culture of the 1900s in the United States, as the urgency for quick information and fast technology was not at the forefront of society as it is today. While the game of baseball has attempted to adapt with rule changes with the intent of speeding up the game, such as limiting pitching mound visits and creating pitching clocks, the game is still seen as being slow (Verducci 2017).

Figure 1: Baseball Attendance, 1998-2019 (Brown 2015)



Ever since 2007, two years removed from the most recent franchise to move cities in the MLB, the overall attendance has decreased from 79,503,175 fans to 68,494,752 in 2019 (Brown 2019). In 2018, the MLB saw total attendance drop below 70 million for the first time since the 2003 season (Attentuck & Draper 2019). While there were years between 2007 and 2019 that saw one to two percent increase in attendance, there were also years that saw decreases as large as four and six percent (Brown 2019). Along with the decrease in overall attendance, the MLB has seen the worst television ratings for its championship, the World Series. The 2019 season saw the second worst rated and viewed World Series since they started being measured in 1973 (“Major League Baseball Miscellaneous”). Ever since 2007, no World Series has broken the top 30 in regard to viewership or rating, with the exception of the 2016 series featuring the Chicago Cubs breaking their 108-year World Series drought (“Major League Baseball Miscellaneous”).

In the past, the MLB has seen decreases in overall attendance, but they were correlated to major events in the United States, such as the Great Recession and World War II, or player disputes and strikes. The ticket market for baseball, the increased cost to attend a game and the decreased desire in choosing this form of entertainment do play factors in the MLB’s attraction to their fans (Brown 2019). These provide short term incentives to choose another form of entertainment over attending a baseball game. However, factors involving longer term problems, such as the overall competition between Major League Baseball and other professional sports leagues, the economic implications of the antitrust exemption for baseball, and the way in which the game is marketed have not been taken into account as largely as other short-term economic solutions have. How do these components impact the popularity and outreach of Major League Baseball to the United States?

Literature Review

This thesis discusses a combination of qualitative and quantitative research in order to explore the factors that have caused Major League Baseball (MLB) to decrease in popularity in regard to attendance and television ratings. Even with this recent decrease in popularity, the MLB is still making a profit regarding the league's overall revenue. In 2018, the league set a new record in revenues of 10.3 billion dollars, making it the sixteenth consecutive season in which their revenue record was broken (Calcaterra 2019). However, their revenue increase was not as dramatic in the past, as the contribution from attendance was trending in the opposite direction, being as it was the fourth consecutive year that attendance decreased (Brown 2019). Surprisingly, the revenue increase would mainly be due to the MLB's reliance on products that have little or nothing to do with the product being put on the field by each team, but from advertisements and sponsored partnerships (Calcaterra 2019). This shows that the MLB is losing potential revenue due to its lack in focus of trying to put out a competitive product on the field in order to peak fan interest.

John Charles Bradbury composed a study to find the explanation to labor's declining share of revenue in the MLB, as there is a gap between players wages and the league's recent revenue increase. While discussing a variety of factors that would potentially impact the decline in revenue share to labor, the most prominent factors included the union influence through collective bargaining and the returns on non-player inputs, such as merchandise and food sales. Collective bargaining agreements look to improve competitive balance throughout the league. As winning teams increase their revenue, they have to make contributions to losing teams in order to create a balance within leagues, which is usually done through revenue-sharing plans in luxury taxes on high-payroll teams (Bradbury 2019). This disincentivizes winning teams to put a

successful, competitive product on the field and actively try to purchase high price players. The most recent Collective Bargaining Agreement of 2012 increased revenue sharing to 34 percent while adjusting the enforcement of the luxury tax, contributing to the strong correlation found between collective bargaining and player's share of revenue (Bradbury 2019). While the MLB has been thriving as a product, there is still room to grow in regard to taking advantage of the players on the field in increasing attendance, as there is potential revenue to be made off of marketing their skills and on field product.

The role of non-player inputs is prevalent through the consumption of physical capital and new non-player input. Physical capital includes revenue generated off of concessions, ticket sales, advertisements and sponsorship. New non-player input includes the creation of media platforms, such as MLB Advanced Media (MLBAM) and MLB.tv, which increased league revenue through expanding the distribution of its present labor product (Bradbury 2019). The use of non-player inputs allows the MLB to extend its revenue not by investing any more capital back into the labor, but by increasing the availability of entertainment and products for the consumers (Bradbury 2019). This shows that there is value in marketing the players to the public, as all of the non-player products have been based around either organizations willing to have their brands correlated to a team or fans willing to watch and follow their team. Creating a better connection from the players to the consumers has helped increase the MLB's revenue through these non-player products.

The value of players can be represented by the amount of money they receive from endorsements. Athletes have always been a significant piece in advertisements, as it is estimated that 15 to 25 percent of all advertisements in the United States feature celebrities or athletes (Ding, et al 2010). If an athlete receives more money in certain endorsements, it could show the

positive correlation between the endorser's view of the athlete and the return expected to be collected. A study done by Daniel Rasher et al discussed the components that drove endorsement earnings for superstar athletes, trying to find relevant predictors to the topic. Their results included that a Positive Q score, which measures the familiarity and appeal of a celebrity, was worth between three quarters to one million dollars for each unit of their scale (Rasher, et al 2017). This shows that familiarity with the athletes and a positive likeness had positive effects on the amount of money profited through endorsements. Along with that, the study finds a strong correlation between exposure and earnings, driving nearly \$800,000 in additional endorsement earnings for each point increase of their scale (Rasher, et al 2017). These results depict the revenue benefits that other brands and companies take from the exposure of these athletes in their respective sports. The overall impact that their exposure has to consumers could be utilized differently by the MLB in a sense, as there is proven to be a market for endorsing athletes with products and brands.

Another study discussing the presence of athletes endorsing products through their social media accounts, determining the differences in how often Twitter posts of athletes' endorsers were retweeted. The study, done by Cork and Eddy, used a variety of athletes from different sports and levels of Twitter popularity when determining their sample, giving them a wide range of potential endorsements and consumers to adhere to. The research found that a significant interaction effect does exist between levels of high interactivity and high vividness characteristics (Cork, et al 2017). The ability for fans and followers to interact with athletes, who are deemed to be celebrities that can support a product, increases the potential for positive feedback on endorsements. Along with that, the study reveals that there is a correlation between the congruence of the product when athletes use a call to action (Cork, et al 2017). This

importance of interaction with consumers, even with merely hyperlinks within a tweet or hashtags, increases the feedback and reach of the campaign at hand. These results can be translated again to how the MLB can utilize their own athletes through individual marketing on social media in order to increase their popularity and success in promotions.

Along with the observation of the revenue stream in the MLB and the impact of athletes with endorsement deals, there have also been studies done in other professional sports leagues analyzing the process and effects of franchise relocation. Cole Ryan Osborn and Steve Shih-Chia Chen observed the most recent franchise relocations and determined the key indicators that go into determining a new city for a team. Franchise relocation takes into account information such as the national television market, host city's population, arena capacity and income per capita when determining the value of moving (Chen, et al 2017) Franchises are not likely to move if they are happy with their location, fan base and revenue stream. When examining the conditional probability of cities to host a new National Football League (NFL) team, indicators would include the existing number of other professional franchises, the city's distance to other closest franchises and the Monday Night Football television ratings (Bruggink, et al 2007). While there are other factors, such as antitrust litigations and receiving the consensus approval by team owners, the overall process requires an extensive amount of research and information in order to convince the team owners to allow for the relocation to go through (Chen, et al 2017).

The action of relocating a franchise puts forth a certain risk in regard to the revenue of not only the individual franchise, but the professional sports league as a whole. In paper by Dennis Carlton et al, they analyzed the restrictions in the National Hockey League, discussing the effects of franchise relocation to entire hockey league. There is a recognized difference between antitrust laws in different sports, as there have been issues and inconsistencies coming from the

activities of the league regarding franchise relocation (Carlton et al 2004). The National Hockey League is more likely to approve of a move, allowing for a larger number of results from the study. It found that a team that relocation cities, while they do draw fewer fans to away games within the first year, the attendance picked up in the years to come, balancing out the potential losses in the initial year (Carlton et al 2004).

Regarding the MLB, the league thrived during its expansion era from 1961 to 1998, as attendance consistently increased as new teams were introduced consistently. Each of the 1962, 1969, 1977, 1993 and 1998 seasons saw an abnormal increase in overall attendance, as each year saw the introduction of at least two expansion or relocated franchises (“Major League Baseball Miscellaneous”). The discussion of franchise relocation can also be extended to disputing the role of the antitrust exemption that MLB has in regard to its ability to rule on franchise relocation nowadays. The point of the antitrust laws in regard to franchise relocation is to reassure that cities will have their image bolstered and that there will be a significant economic benefit with the presence of that franchise (Carlton et al 2004). Along with that, this discussion on franchise relocation in the antitrust exemption can be expanded to the topic of players’ salaries covered by the exemption.

Another factor to discuss when defining the success of increasing attendance and overall popularity of a franchise are the factors that impact a person’s decision to attend certain sporting events. In *Handbook on the Economics of Sports*, a chapter covers how the economic theory of supply and demand contributes to creating a competitive market for not only teams, but other entertainment industries of spectator sports. The desire for a fan to attend a game is influenced by the uncertainty of the event, the partisanship to the team and complementary products to the game, along with the suspense of the game itself (Andreff, et al 79). This allows organizations to

charge higher ticket prices to games, which can be linked to attendance demand and broadcast revenue, as long as the organization believes the tickets still be sold out even with the increase of the price (Andreff, et al 80). The demand directly affects the increase in the price of the product, however, the supply usually cannot increase for sporting events, as stadiums cannot increase their number of seats or standing room areas. This microeconomic model relates to the price difference at the professional baseball level in comparison to its competition with other sports leagues in its own market. With a larger supply of games in baseball, their incentive to purchase tickets for the same price in comparison to a basketball game, with lower supply, may negatively impact the interest and demand of a consumer. Higher prices lead to a larger presence of tickets in either the secondary market or scalping, which is an unofficial market for tickets (Andreff, et al 82). This process is extremely prevalent in all major sports leagues, especially the NFL, which has the least amount of games out of all professional sports leagues in the United States.

The chapter also covers the desirability of attending a sporting event based upon the actual scheduling of the game in comparison to other professional leagues. For example, a rugby league in England played in the harsh weather conditions of their winters with fierce competition. However, as the competition level rose in the 1990s, the league radically changed to become a summer sport because of the competition with the Premier League and increasing popularity of other football leagues (Andreff, et al 88). Competition between leagues that could adhere to a similar audience could lead to a decrease in attendance or the displacement of game times in order to match with televised broadcasts. As there was an overlap between the rugby league and its competition, there is also an overlap in seasons with the MLB, the NFL and the NBA. As the MLB season wraps up the regular season in September, the NFL season has its opening weeks. Then, on the other side, as the MLB season reaches its stride in the summer, the

History of Baseball

Professional baseball has been a staple in United States history ever since its creation as the National League of Professional Baseball Clubs in 1876 ("National League of Baseball is Founded" 2009). As the league has been around for over 140 years, the game has evolved greatly throughout that time, accompanied with the development of the country. The MLB's development can be broken up into three time periods: the dead ball era, the golden era and the modern era. The dead ball era starts around 1900 to 1919, ending when Babe Ruth began his power surge. The golden era is the transition from the dead ball era to the modern era from 1920 to 1980, going from post-World War I to the expansion of the league after World War II. Lastly, the modern era is from 1980 to the present day, highlighted by the steroid culture, MLB player strikes and the evolution of baseball culture to what it is today. The evolution of baseball has lined up with the development of the country through these eras, making its title as "America's Pastime" appropriate.

The deadball era started in 1900, a few years before the first World Series and the championship era of baseball began. Up to this point, the game of baseball was still making major changes to as it developed, including the governing of pitching, the implementation of fielding gloves and the evolution of defense that decreased the number of runs scored (Gordon 2018). However, during the early 1900s, the offensive numbers dropped drastically, highly attributed to the properties of the baseball (thus "deadball"). In order to balance the game and limit the advantages pitching held at the time, certain adjustments were made. As the core of the baseball to cork was changed and limits were put on the deception and doctoring of the baseballs, this era ended in 1920 (Gordon 2018).

The change from the deadball era to the golden era was the largest cultural shift within the game of baseball at the time, as offense started to become more prominent. This transition was highlighted by the trade bringing baseball legend Babe Ruth to the New York Yankees from the Boston Red Sox in 1920 (Kelly). In his final two seasons with the Red Sox, Ruth hit 40 home runs total showing an increase in his power numbers. In his 15 seasons with the Yankees, Ruth hit over 30 home runs in a season 13 times, highlighting the change that came along with the adjustments to the rules allowing pitchers to have less of an advantage (Tapp 2012). This era also saw the emergence of the All-Star game, increasing the exposure and excitement to the stars of the game (Tapp 2012), and the Baseball Hall of Fame, inducting the best players starting with legends like Ty Cobb, Honus Wagner and Ruth (“1936 - 1939”). The change during this era helped increase the popularity of baseball to the public up to World War II, which saw over 500 players serve.

The transition after World War II included the league expanding both geographically and culturally, as teams started to move west and began integrating African American athletes into the sport. These factors are all encompassed under the golden era of baseball. World War II could be defined as a race war, as the Nazis had their own racial justification for war. Their focalization on race opened the opportunity for baseball to begin a cultural change of integrating race (Kelly 2005). Up until the late 1940s, the Negro League had been the prime professional baseball league for African American players to continue their journey in the game (Peterson 2018). However, Brooklyn Dodgers’ president Branch Rickey forced the cultural change of integrating the MLB by signing Jackie Robinson in 1946, making him the first African American to play in the majors when he reached that level the following year (Peterson 2018). After much backlash, this started the inclusion of many other African American players, effectively changing

the culture of professional baseball and adding to the fanbase of the MLB. Other stars, such as Willie Mays, Hank Aaron, Ernie Banks and Satchel Paige, took their talents to the MLB, eventually leading to the bankruptcy of Negro League (Kelly 2005). This cultural change in baseball introduced more talent into the league, increasing its popularity nationwide.

The integration of the MLB was shortly followed by the beginning of the expansion era of the league. Starting in 1953, teams started to move west and expand, starting with the Boston Braves moving to Milwaukee (Lokker 2019). This move was later followed by the Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Giants moving to Los Angeles and San Francisco, respectively (Lokker 2019). Other franchises followed in relocating, expanding the coverage of teams nationwide. In 1962, the league expanded from 18 to 20 teams, opening a market in Texas with the Houston Colt .45s. Then, in 1969, the league made its largest change as it expanded to 24 teams, creating a new format of divisions and opening the league to future expansion teams. At this point, there were six teams on the west coast and one in Canada, covering quadrants of North America that had not been covered by a professional sport to this point (“Major League Baseball Miscellaneous”). The league continued to expand until 1998 when it reached 30 teams, covering all four quadrants of the United States as well as Canada (Lokker 2019). Throughout this time of change, attendance greatly increased, going from around 15,000 fans per game in the early 1970s to over 30,000 fans per game in 1993 (“Major League Baseball Miscellaneous”). The expansion era greatly increased the influence of the game nationwide, introduced new cities to the stars of the game and influenced the cities to become avid fan bases of their teams.

The golden era of baseball gave way to the modern era of baseball near the end of the expansion of the game nationwide. The modern era is highlighted by the 1994-1995 MLB player strike, the rise of the steroid era and the culture of the three-outcome hitter. The MLB strike

called a stoppage to baseball activity from August 12, 1994 to April 2, 1995. The spotlight of the strike was based around the concept of creating a salary cap for teams, as smaller teams had trouble competing with larger teams in regard to contract sizes (Calcaterra 2019). The MLB's final offer to the players included a record in guaranteed salary and benefits but created issues with salary arbitration and free agency. The offer was rejected, as Donald Fehr, the executive director of the Major League Baseball Players Association, believed a salary cap purely saved the owners with no benefit to the players (Justice 1994). The strike cut out the playoffs of the 1994 season, robbing the fans and teams of their potential run through October and hitting the league financially. As the strike rolled into 1995, issues with replacement players led to Major League Baseball being sued in federal court on March 27, 1995, in which they were found guilty of violating labor laws. With the league not being allowed to play the season with replacement players, the players, with their leverage, agreed to play (Calcaterra 2019). Notable long-term consequences include its impact on the Montreal Expos, as the 1994 season was their best chance at being World Series contenders. After the strike, the lower payroll forced them to sell off their highest paid stars, which the Expos would never recover from as they were eventually bought by the league and moved to become the Washington Nationals (MacDonald 2004).

Short term impacts of the strike included lower attendance in 1995, but that changed within a few years due to the massive offensive outburst that was a part of the steroid era in baseball. The steroid era led to an increase in home runs, contributing to the popularity of the game and its evolution into the rise of "superstars." During this era, hitters such as Mark McGwire, Sammy Sosa and Barry Bonds led the way in setting records for home runs in a season. From 1961 to 1994, the 40-home run mark was only reached by 14 hitters, which drastically changed in 1997 when McGwire and Sosa totaled 70 and 66 home runs, respectively.

McGwire's record of 70 home runs in a season stood until 2001, when Bonds broke the record with 73 ("The Steroids Era" 2012). While there were many questions about the legitimacy of these players in their relationship to steroids, the surge continued into the 2000s. Other players, such as Alex Rodriguez, Manny Ramirez and David Ortiz, who all reached at least 500 career home runs, were linked with performance enhancing drugs (PED) usage ("The Steroids Era" 2012). However, this power surge did lead to an increase in popularity after the fall off that followed the 1994-1995 strike ("The Steroids Era" 2012). The culture of this offensive explosion also led to the game evolving to value the stardom of players and their potential monetary gains. Team's started to pay top dollar for players who could produce these explosive numbers. Alex Rodriguez signed a \$252 million-dollar deal with the Texas Rangers in 2000 and later a \$275 million-dollar contract with the New York Yankees set the bar for large contracts for star players. As of 2020, 19 separate players, both pitchers and position players, have signed contracts valued over \$200 million dollars after Rodriguez's first contract ("MLB's \$200 million contracts" 2020). The game evolved in this era towards the culture of the game valuing stardom and monetary gains, which impacted the pace of play and interests of the fans as a whole.

The culture of surrounding baseball has developed throughout the years. In the early 1900s, the game was getting its feet wet within the American culture, focusing on developing the rules and format of the sport. After that, the goal was increasing the outreach of the game, which included expanding geographically throughout the country and reaching out to a wider range of fans. From that expansion of baseball until now, the game has developed from being generally team focused to be more superstar and player focused, highlighting their personal feats and accomplishments, as the fans' interest shifted to seeing the extremes of the game: strikeouts and home runs. This shift has made the players even more important to the development of the game,

as their individual accomplishments are under a new light with more large contracts being handed out to players. Teams have the potential to grasp and manage the importance of players, utilizing them to promote not only their team's popularity, but the league as a whole.

Methods

This is a qualitative study that will consist of a literature review for three different factors that could correlate to Major League Baseball's (MLB) loss in popularity since the late 1990s. The three factors that will be discussed are increased competition between other professional sports leagues, specifically the National Basketball Association (NBA) and the National Football League (NFL), in the United States, the differences in marketing styles of MLB in comparison to the NBA and the NFL, and the roll that antitrust laws and exemption have played throughout the development of the league. These factors were chosen because they are all topics that have not been fully researched in the context of the MLB and its decreasing popularity. The increased competition with other professional sports leagues began to rise when the NBA started in 1949, bringing along a different wave of culture to America's society. The NFL's competition, while it began in 1920, did not become relevant in the United States until the Super Bowl era began in the 1966-1967 season. The differences in marketing styles is based around the styles of promotions for each league, as the NBA and NFL are more player focused, while the MLB is team focused. Factors, such as draft size, athlete endorsement and retention of players, play a large role in how each league markets themselves. Lastly, the roll of antitrust laws is also different from league to league. The NBA and NFL are covered by the Sherman Antitrust Act, while the MLB has an antitrust exemption.

The competition section will start with research about the progression of both the NFL and NBA since their inaugural years. This will include not only cultural impact, but their attendance, media popularity and television coverage starting in the 1990s. All of these factors will then be discussed in the context of the MLB and its progression during the same time period as the NFL and NBA. The goal of this section is to find ways other professional sports leagues have created a product that has increased their attendance and popularity at a higher rate than the MLB recently. The marketing section will discuss the different styles of marketing surrounding the promotional styles of each league, trying to find comparative differences between the MLB and its competition, the NFL and NBA. The first topic to be covered are factors that affect the way that each league promotes itself. This will include the round and length of each league's amateur drafts, the style in which teams are built in regard to player development and free agency, and the retention of players at the highest level. Through these assessments, a conclusion will be made based around the ideal that the style of marketing used by the NBA and NFL, which is mainly player centered, is more productive than the team centered style of the MLB, and how the MLB could benefit from adjusting their marketing style.

The economics section will discuss the role the antitrust exemption has played in the MLB. The research will begin by covering the Sherman Antitrust Act, the Federal Baseball v National League court case and the Flood v Kuhn court case, providing background on MLB's historical ability to have an antitrust exemption. This will lead into a description of the direct differences between the NBA salary cap and MLB luxury tax, emphasizing the limitations of the luxury tax in comparison. Lastly, the research on court cases resulting in the antitrust exemption for baseball not applying to the NFL and NBA will be covered with the intent of proving that both of those leagues are prosperous without the presence of the exemption. Through examining

the topics from a wide variety of literature and research, an assessment will be made of how the MLB can use the findings of this review to either better understand their decrease in popularity or potential solutions that could benefit the league in the long run.

Marketing Section

The conception of marketing in baseball is that the league does not do an adequate job to promote their players. As Colorado Rockies outfielder Charlie Blackmon said in an interview, “I want to see more players selling Wheaties, more players have online content of behind-the-scenes stuff they do in their free time, stuff like that” (Kilgore 2018). The MLB’s marketing system tends to circulate in promotions around a team-oriented atmosphere, as Rob Manfred, the Commissioner of the MLB, believes that players are responsible for marketing themselves. There are potential difficulties through the draft size and turnover of the sport, along with the failure for teams to get airtime outside of their local areas. On the other hand, NFL and NBA teams have a more player focused marketing strategy, as more players reach that superstar status. The benefits that these other sports leagues get from their marketing strategy includes consumers being able to identify individual players to teams as their exposure increases. The MLB should invest in increasing the endorsement of the players, in order to influence fans and amateur players to attend games.

MLB’s team-oriented promotions

The MLB commissioner is in charge of negotiating marketing and broadcasting agreements for the league. However, in 2018, Manfred made a comment that players are responsible for marketing themselves (Newman 2018). Other MLB players have recognized the

intent of Manfred and have not been happy, as they do not see as much value in promoting the team or the attraction of the parks and uniforms. Adam Ottavino, a pitcher for the New York Yankees, highlights the importance of how a player driven marketing strategy can influence younger athletes. He points out that kids need to connect with an individual professional athlete to idolize in order to influence their potential love for the game (Newman 2018). Being able to connect with a player includes increasing the athlete's recognizability, which has been very poor in the United States. In the 2019 ESPN World Fame 100, which takes into account an athlete's search score on Google, endorsement deals and social media followers, the only baseball player that shows up on the list is Bryce Harper at 99 ("2019 World Fame 100"). This shows not only the small amount of recognizability of MLB athletes, but also their lack of endorsement deals and social media following. The opposite is prevalent for professional baseball players in Venezuela, who are seen as "heroes" in the words of former Colorado Rockies outfielder Carlos Gonzalez, a Venezuelan native (Newman 2018). Venezuelan baseball players, such as Miguel Cabrera, Jose Altuve, Felix Hernandez and Gonzalez, are famous throughout the country, with brand deals and stardom that has not translated exactly to the culture of the United States (Newman 2018). Overall, baseball players are not as recognizable within the United States, which makes sense based on the intent of Manfred.

One potential issue to advertising individual athletes in baseball would be the player turnover from the amateur drafts. The pure size and length of the MLB draft causes difficulties for player turnover from first round draft picks to stars at the highest level. Each year, over 1,200 players are drafted in the June amateur draft throughout the 40 rounds. However, from 1981 to 2010, only around 17.6 percent of all players drafted ever reached the Major League level (Cooper 2019). This translates to roughly 211 players from each year's draft reaching the highest

level at one point or another in their career, whether it be for one day, one month or 20 years. On the other hand, many first or second round draft picks in the NFL and NBA end up on the professional team's roster immediately, if not significant playing time or starting roles. In the MLB, the percentage of drafted players reaching the Major Leagues rapidly decreases as the round they were drafted in goes down. From 1981 to 2010, 73 percent of first round picks reach the Major League level, which drops off dramatically to around 50 percent for second round picks and 40 percent for third round picks (Cooper 2019). However, even if players make it to the league, there is a small chance of them having any success. Very rarely do 100 draftees reach a 0.1 career WAR (Cooper 2019), which stands for wins above replacement, summarizing a player's contribution in one statistic (Slowinski 2010). There are only 36 instances of teams drafting at least three "impact players" (worth at least 10 WAR in their career) in a certain draft, making it very rare to come across a high amount of talent per draft (Associated Press 2019). The lack of turnover creates a problem for consumers in following players from amateur status to the highest professional level.

Another potential issue would be the fact that baseball fails to get significant airtime outside of a team's allocated local areas. According to the New York Times, discussing the ratings of active sports personalities, "91 percent of Americans have heard of LeBron James, 88 percent have heard of Tom Brady, but only 43 percent have heard of Mike Trout" (Love 2019). This can only be explained through the lack of broadcasting time that Mike Trout's games receive. One hundred percent of counties air at least 25 percent of Tom Brady's games along with 98 percent of counties airing LeBron James's games. However, only one percent of counties air at least 25 percent of Mike Trout's games, all mainly located in southern California and Nevada (Love 2019). The issue is that baseball teams do not get exposure outside of their local

markets. Along with that, there are restrictions to getting access to watching a person's local team through the league's blackout restrictions. Each MLB team has blackout region including their home state stadium and spanning an average of five states (Chiwaya 2019). As streaming television has revolutionized the way people watch their favorite shows, baseball's streaming service, MLB.tv, does not allow fans to watch teams within their local blackout area (Chiwaya 2019). This restricts fans even in their own teams' territory from enjoying their games, which could potentially limit their individual exposure no matter if their team is home or away.

However, in 2019, 12 of the 29 United States-based Major League teams were the most popular prime-time broadcast in their market (Love 2019). Even with the restrictions, a little under half of the United States-based teams, excluding the Toronto Blue Jays, had success within their local market. Teams have a relatively large amount of popularity within their local market, but the MLB still struggles with increasing their national exposure due to the lack of coverage outside of that.

NBA's and NFL's focus on player promotion

The NBA and NFL market their leagues and organizations with a strategy that is much more player focused than MLB's approach. Through this style of promotion, there is a higher recognizability of athletes in the NBA and NFL. In the 2019 ESPN World Fame 100, in which Bryce Harper was the only baseball player on the list ranked at 99, LeBron James was listed at second place and Tom Brady was ranked at 31, as they were both the highest out of NBA and NFL players respectively. In total, there are 15 NBA players on the list along with eight NFL players ("2019 World Fame 100"). The only sport with more players on that list were international soccer players, as this is an international poll. The NBA players, in particular, are highly marketable and can be utilized very well through the work they have put in to increase

their value. In a survey distributed to marketing and brand executives, agencies and business professors, they determined that LeBron James and Stephen Curry were the two most marketable players due to their endorsements, high jersey sales and high performance (Chupita 2017). James openly discusses many controversial social issues, while Curry increased his presence in the technology market to widen his persona (Chupita 2017). Their endeavors, along with their performance and activities within the parameters of the NBA, allow the NBA to utilize their likeness in order to promote their league. That is why players like them have such high recognizability, while Mike Trout is not by comparison. According to the Q score, which is “a firm that measures consumer appeal to personalities,” Mike Trout’s score is 22, meaning he is not highly regarded by consumers (Baer 2018). The recognizability of players highly contributes to the ability to market them as faces of the sport in comparison to marketing teams.

Players in the NBA and NFL have great success in building their own personal brands, along with promoting their endorsed products. LeBron James built his personal brand from his high school days when he transitioned from St. Vincent-St. Mary High School in Akron, Ohio to the hometown Cleveland Cavaliers (Van Riper 2014). His brand of being the young prodigy of basketball transitioned to be a national champion with the Miami Heat, winning his first two championships and his third and fourth Most Valuable Player (MVP) awards (Van Riper 2014). His personal brand has developed through his transitions throughout the league, as he would later return to Cleveland to win another championship then sign with the Los Angeles Lakers. Another NBA player who has had a large impact on the league would be Michael Jordan, who has had much success building his endorsements and his own brand. The Jordan Brand line, through his endorsement with Nike starting in 1984, started with just his “Air Jordan” shoe igniting the sneaker market (White 2019). Now, the Jordan Brand is one of Nike’s top sellers as

it accounted for nearly 2.9 billion dollars of the company's revenue in the 2018 fiscal year (White 2019). The ability for the line to grow is surrounded by Michael Jordan's playing success, as he is claimed to be the best player of his time, and his marketability. In the terms of the NFL, Odell Beckham Jr., wide receiver for the Cleveland Browns, is a player that constantly promotes his personal brand and endorsements, who possesses a large platform on social media. He has over 14 million followers on Instagram (Badenhausen 2019). Beckham's activity on his Instagram account, along with his use of the YouTube platform, gives him a prime opportunity to reach out to his fan base and increasing his likeability. His 66 million interactions, including likes, comments and shares, through the first half of 2019 are higher than any other NFL player and top 15 for all athletes (Badenhausen 2019). All three of these players' successes are not only reflected by their performance on the field, but their promotions and development of their "likeness" off the field to the public.

A benefit that the NFL and NBA have over the MLB would be a drastically smaller size of their amateur draft. The NBA draft only consists of two rounds while the NFL draft is seven rounds (Meltzer 2017). As explained earlier with the MLB draft, the later players were drafted led to a decrease to their potential to reach the Major League level (Cooper 2019). With there being less rounds in the NFL and NBA, there would be a lower chance of players being drafted and not playing at the highest level. Along with that, there are fewer "minor league" teams and spots outside of the highest professional teams in the NBA and NFL. The NFL only has practice squads as an extension of their teams, in which players are paid weekly and free to sign with other teams (Nogle 2018). On the other hand, the NBA has the G league, which consists of almost one team per NBA team (Dewald 2018). Both the practice squads and the G league look to promote and blossom untapped potential, allowing players who are not as fine-tuned to

develop their skills. Overall, the lesser draft and organization sizes allows for a lower chance of player turnover due to those factors, not taking into account injuries, off field issues and suspensions.

How baseball would benefit

There are many benefits to the game of baseball through promoting and helping players build their own brands. The first benefit would be creating a connection to the consumer on an emotional level. When consumers identify with an athlete, they are more likely to feel an emotional attachment to the athlete and team they are one. If the athlete is utilized appropriately, an organization can promote products that are associated with the athlete (Carlson, et al 2013). Another study analyzed the effects of human brands on the cognitive identification of the consumer, it discussed how consumers view “athletes as human brands with unique personalities” that could have a positive impact on consumer retail spending (Carlson, et al 2013). The study concluded that consumers were more likely to identify with players that are both prestigious and distinctive (Carlson, et al 2013). This matches the traits of social identity theory, which states that people seek to differentiate themselves in social contexts, making them likely to affiliate with situations that enhance their perceived self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner). People have tendencies to favor athletes and celebrities in which they can draw personal connections with, especially in social situations. The study also found that both athlete’s identity had a significant positive impact on the number of games that fans watch due to the increased interest and attachment towards specific players (Carlson, et al 2013). While no significant correlation was found between player attachment and team-retailed merchandise (Carlson, et al 2013), identifying positively with individual athletes proves to have a positive impact on drawing the attention of the fans to either watch or attend games.

However, increasing the endorsement of the athletes could increase the potential for consumers to purchase team products or attend games as well. In a study discussing the impact of celebrity athlete endorsements on purchasing habits, the research presented the results of the attitudes of respondents related to celebrity endorsement promotions (Dugalić, et al 2016). The study measured the consumer's attitudes by using the Likert scale, which is a questionnaire system designed to measure people's attitudes (Jamieson 2017). The researchers found that celebrity endorsements had the greatest impact on attitude of respondents, attraction to promotions and identifying the brand. The results from the Likert scale were significant, as 61.81 percent of the respondents responded as being attracted to promotions involving celebrities and 63.43 percent said that the celebrity endorsements helped them identify with a brand (Dugalić, et al 2016). The impact an athlete or celebrity can have on individual consumers is shown, as a majority of the respondents replied that way. It exemplifies the power that the individual's personalities and attitudes have in regard to impacting a brand they represent, which would include the team or organization the athlete is a part of. These factors contribute to the buying power of consumers and their attendance of sporting events. The style of promotions that the athletes take part in, such as brand endorsements, could impact their influence as well (Dugalić, et al 2016). The conclusion of this study correlates back to how baseball could utilize player endorsements to increase a team's overall attendance.

Lastly, baseball could benefit through influencing the development of amateur participation in baseball by increasing the value of their professional players. A study discusses how success in professional sports can increase the demand for amateur sport participation, expressing the importance of "role models" for youth participants. A role model is defined as a cognitive construction based on attributes in social roles that an individual perceives similar to

him or herself and wants to increase the perceived similarities by emulating those attributes (Gibson 2004). The study found that the availability and relevance of the role models as well as similarity to the role models are the main predictors of their motivational effect (Mutter 2014). The German soccer team used in the study found that the average starting age of the highly influenced players were around 11 years old, showing the impact that sports success could have on younger athletes in comparison to older athletes (Mutter 2014). Along with that, nearly seven percent of males and five percent of females reported the influence of role models had a major impact on their sports participation (Mutter 2014). The findings of this study imply that increased success and awareness of role models to youth increase their willingness to play the sport, which could be translated to their desire to watch. Increasing the promotion of high skilled individual athletes in sports does correlate to influencing amateur athletes and fans in impacting their desire to participate in the sports. Having a role model and promoting through them can adhere to a younger audience, positively influencing their decision making in following the sport.

Conclusion

Overall, MLB would benefit from a more player centric promotional basis in comparison to their team centered marketing. The league's marketing tactics are built around the intent of commissioner Manfred, as he finds the parks and teams as the main attractions. The league does have challenges in making these adjustments through their draft size and television restrictions within an organization's market. The NBA and NFL's focus on player promotions has shown to be beneficial to the development of the game through the use of their players. Utilizing the recognizability of the players, their personal brands and endorsements, along with the turnover of players in their leagues respectively allowed both leagues to positively benefit from their

likeness. Increasing the value of players in promoting teams in the league will allow consumers to identify with the athletes, increase the athlete's endorsements and have a positive impact on their influence on amateur athletes, which could lead to an increase in attendance, viewership and team-related purchases. Overall, while baseball does have its challenges, the league should consider an approach based around promoting their players more than their team-based promotions.

Antitrust Section

Major League Baseball is the only major sport in the United States that is exempt from the antitrust laws. The antitrust laws are intended to promote fair competition and eliminate anticompetitive agreements from the marketplace. The issue within the MLB would be the future need to create economic equality throughout the league in regard to competitive salaries and the moving of franchises to relocate. The league's use of the antitrust laws and their contribution to the league's diminishing popularity must be analyzed from its roots. The three most prominent court cases to discuss in regard to MLB would be the Sherman Antitrust Act (1890), *Federal Baseball Club v National League* (1922) and *Flood v Kuhn* (1972), as all of these cases reflect the scope of MLB's antitrust exemption. They influence the structure of the league's luxury tax, which can be compared to the salary cap of the NBA. This comparison shows how without the antitrust exemption, it could create a more competitive balance within salaries. Lastly, it is important to discuss how the NBA and NFL are not allowed to be exempt from the antitrust laws, but still continue to be successful competitively.

Cases and their implications

The cases that directly impact MLB's exemption from the antitrust laws include the Sherman Antitrust Act, *Federal Baseball Club v National League* and *Flood v Kuhn*. The first case to discuss and analyze would be the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890. The act was named after Senator John Sherman, who was an expert on commerce regulation (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). The act is defined as a "federal statute which prohibits activities that restrict interstate commerce and competition in the marketplace" ("Sherman Antitrust Act."). This means that it allows full and free competition in interstate and foreign commerce. One provision of the act includes making it illegal to monopolize any part of trade or commerce within the United States (*Encyclopedia Britannica*), implying that in a sports league setting, one organization cannot continuously outbid another organization for all of the talent without restrictions. In 1920, the US Supreme Court included the "rule of reason interpretation," implying that not every contract or combination restraining trade would be deemed unlawful under the Sherman Antitrust Act (*Encyclopedia Britannica*), allowing for leeway in making decisions surrounding fair competition. When applied to the MLB's antitrust exemption, a plaintiff is tasked with the burden of proof and must demonstrate how the league's exemption creates competitive imbalance within its structure. This rule, added to the act in 1920, allowed the game of baseball to open a case over its relationship to the relatively new laws under the Sherman Antitrust Act, allowing for the league to eventually translate the act into their own benefit.

In 1922, the *Federal Baseball Club of Baltimore, Inc. v. National League of Professional Baseball Clubs* case, also known as the Federal Baseball Rulings, acted on whether the game of baseball could be covered underneath the Sherman Antitrust Act. In 1914, the Federal Baseball League looked to challenge the American League and National League competitively, which

were the original professional leagues of baseball at the time. While the league originally tried to avoid competing directly with the Major League's before 1913, the election of James Gilmore, a financial backer of a Federal League team and a businessman, led to the league's direct competition with Major Leagues (Alito 2009). The Federal Baseball League competed for ticket prices and players, however relatively unsuccessful due to the monopoly that the Major Leagues had essentially created over the game of baseball (*Baseball Reference*). The Major Leagues successfully outbid for players the Federal League was attempting to poach, leading to them bringing in the majority of the potential fan base. The Baltimore owners of the league set forth in an antitrust lawsuit against the Major Leagues, "claiming that they had conspired to form a monopoly on baseball by destroying the Federal League" (*Baseball Reference*). Baltimore originally won a verdict worth \$80,000 from the Supreme Court, stating that the acts were outside of the antitrust laws (Alito 2009). However, when the case was appealed, the Court of Appeals reversed the verdict because it deemed that it did not constitute forms of interstate commerce. The case found that the game was defined as trade, not entertainment, as the traveling of players from state to state were incidental to the game and not essential in nature (*Baseball Reference*). The appeal of the original ruling led to the Federal Baseball League's fallout, as many of the teams either sold out or were offered deals within the Major Leagues (Alito 2009), as well as the application of the Federal Baseball Ruling to other court cases in the later on.

The Flood v Kuhn case in 1972 was directly influenced by the results of the Federal Baseball Ruling. Curtis Flood, an outfielder for the St. Louis Cardinals, was traded to the Philadelphia Phillies after 12 seasons with the Cardinals. However, he was not notified of the trade until after it was finalized by both clubs. He proceeded to complain to the Commissioner of Baseball, Bowie Kuhn, and requested to become a free agent, which was denied ("Flood v.

Kuhn” a.). Flood brought this antitrust suit to the District Court after being refused the right to create his own contract with a team, which is not permitted under the reserves system (“Flood v. Kuhn” a.). The case of Flood v Kuhn found that professional baseball and its reserve clause were immune to antitrust laws at the state and federal level, as antitrust violations were consistently rejected through the case of Federal Baseball v National League (“Flood v. Kuhn” b.). All of the justices that voted in favor referenced the Federal Baseball Ruling, along with Toolson v New York Yankees, which also used the Federal Baseball Ruling to uphold baseball’s antitrust exemption (“Toolson v. New York Yankees”). However, in 1998, the Curt Flood Act was passed, repealing a portion of baseball’s antitrust exemption. It declared that the antitrust laws apply to the employment of baseball players to play at the Major League level to the same extent the laws apply to any other professional sport (Hatch 1998). This made free agency a more prominent factor in the MLB, giving more players freedom than what was determined in the Flood v Kuhn case.

Luxury taxes and salary caps

As explained earlier, the reason for having an antitrust act is to ensure a competitive balance within an industry in order to avoid its monopolization. One way to monopolize would be through controlling the competition of salaries and payrolls, which is not covered for the MLB under the Federal Baseball Ruling. Creating a competitive balance in payroll is shown to have a positive effect on increasing competition through the salary cap system the NBA imposes. The NBA salary cap is the NBA’s collective bargaining agreement, setting a soft cap with three different mid-level exceptions depending on a team’s salary level (“NBA Salary Cap” 2019). In this system, the salaries of each individual player are based upon the fact that players receive a certain percentage of the NBA’s revenue, as the minimum and maximum contracts adjust

annually (Miller 2018). According to “Reflections on Salary Shares and Salary Caps,” the NBA salary shares consistently increased from the 1995-1996 season to the 2006-2007 season as the overall revenue of the NBA increased (Zimbalist 2010). The maximum first year salaries increase from 25 percent (zero to six years of service) to 35 percent (over ten years of service) of the cap (Miller 2018). This gives teams around the league a fair chance to sign players with competitive salaries from different locations, as multiple teams can compete through offering the maximum pay. The main purpose of the salary cap is to prevent high-paying teams from signing and stealing quality free agents from other teams, allowing lower-paying teams to stay under the cap while still having an improved chance to win (Staudohar 1998).

The MLB’s alternative to having a salary cap would be its luxury tax, also known as the competitive balance tax. The MLB luxury tax is the league’s way of penalizing teams for spending too much on salaries each year as part of the Collective Bargaining Agreement (“What Is A Competitive Balance Tax?”). Under the new agreement, the maximum payroll increases from 2017 to 2021, going from 195 million dollars to \$210 million dollars (“What Is A Competitive Balance Tax?”). This allows for a team’s increased potential to avoid the penalties associated with their payroll capacity each year. The penalties for exceeding the tax include a continuously increasing tax, which starts at 20 percent tax on all overages, going to 50 percent for three or more years (“What Is A Competitive Balance Tax?”). Another penalty includes having their highest selection in the Rule 4 Draft moved back ten places for clubs 40 million dollars above the threshold (“What Is A Competitive Balance Tax?”).

Even with these penalties, high-paying teams still consistently go over the tax limit in order to put the best product on the field, showing the tax does not entirely do its due diligence to the league. The New York Yankees paid the penalty every year from 2003 to 2017, while the

Los Angeles Dodgers exceeded the maximum from 2013 to 2017 (Axisa 2018). Throughout this timeframe, each team possessed multiple nine figure athletes, putting their payroll well above the maximum in order to put the product they want on the field. While the Yankees did pay over 340 million dollars in luxury taxes throughout that time (Axisa 2018), it did not stop them from taking advantage of a loophole in order to decrease their future taxes. By going under the luxury tax in 2018, the Yankees were allowed to reset their luxury tax rate from 50 to 20 percent, allowing their excessive spending to not have as large an effect on the team's income (Tayler 2013). As eight teams have exceeded the luxury tax, along with five being repeated offenders, the effectiveness of the tax is questioned whether or not adjustments need to be made in order to further limit these multiple offenders or diminish the loopholes.

The point of the luxury cap was to create an alternative to the salary cap, with the main difference being the max contract system. Max contract increase competition through making players more versatile in where they decide to sign. It creates an incentive to sign distinct lengths of contracts for the players in order to take advantage of their salary window of opportunity. Along with that, it incentivizes players to stay within their organization when offered a maximum contract, as players receive a higher maximum contract from the team they most recently played for (Miller 2018). The maximum contracts also create a level field for teams competing for an individual player, as teams cannot exceed a certain price when looking to retain a player or pick up a free agent. MLB should look into fixing a harder salary cap, or even a soft salary cap, as the NBA's system works more effectively with teams of different payrolls in keeping a competitive balance. During the 2010s, 29 of the 30 NBA teams appeared in the postseason (Miller 2018), while in the MLB, the Yankees appeared in the postseason eight out of ten years and the Dodgers appeared in seven. With the playoff field being more selective in

baseball, teams that exploit the loopholes of the luxury tax and continue to overspend on their talent are the teams that consistently find themselves in the postseason. While a cap on individual player contracts in the MLB could be difficult, due to the fact that positions in baseball greatly vary in significance in comparison that of basketball, other aspects of the NBA salary cap could be used to improve the luxury tax in the MLB if it were not for the antitrust exemption.

Other court cases with the antitrust laws and their impacts

MLB's antitrust law case in 1922 is not the only case in professional team sports to be brought to the District Court and Supreme Court. Both the NBA and NFL have presented cases attempting to explain how the Sherman Antitrust Act applied to their sport. In 1971, *Haywood v. National Basketball Association* was brought to the Supreme Court in question of the legality of the NBA's college player draft under the Sherman Antitrust Act ("Haywood v. National Basketball Ass'n"). The original rule of the NBA required the athlete must wait four years after high school graduation before entering the NBA draft, implying that the athlete would go to college during that time. The challenge was that the rule was a restraint on trade and therefore illegal under the Sherman Antitrust Act ("Haywood v. National Basketball Ass'n"), as the game of basketball is deemed as a trade (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). In referencing the Federal Baseball Ruling as an exception to the antitrust law's ruling on the definition of trade, the court ruled that a player did not have to wait four years after high school graduation before entering the NBA draft ("Haywood v. National Basketball Ass'n"). While the NBA's draft rules has changed since 1971, as eligible players must be age 19 during the calendar year of the draft (McCann 2019), this case did open a larger amount of talent to flow directly into the league as opposed to the American Basketball Association (ABA). The ruling demonstrates that the antitrust laws can be

utilized in order to benefit the players more while increasing the talent going directly to the NBA.

The NFL's relationship with the antitrust law is prevalent through the *Radovich v National Football League* (1957) case. In this case, the NFL was being sued for alleged monopolization and control of the game of football through the scheduling of games to destroy a competitive league and adding a standard of control through contracts not allowing a person to sign with another club with the written consent of the previous club ("*Radovich v. National Football League*" 1957). At the time, the NFL has multiple competing leagues within the United States, unlike the MLB when *Toolson v New York Yankees* was tried five years earlier. The ruling on this case found that the NFL was not subject to the antitrust exemption established for baseball under the Federal Baseball Ruling and *Toolson v New York Yankees*, as those specific rulings were purely limited to the parameters of professional organized baseball ("*Radovich v. National Football League*" 1957). Along with that, the ruling stated that "the volume of interstate business involved in organized professional football places it within the provisions of the Antitrust Acts" ("*Radovich v. National Football League*" 1957), further denying the NFL's tie to the MLB's antitrust exemption. After this case, it was determined that any antitrust violation by the NFL are dispelled with a competitive entity, losing leverage in the NFL and the American Football League (AFL) at the time (Bell 1991). This ideal came forth due to the fact that the NFL was deemed to be subject to antitrust laws as found in *Radovich v National Football League*.

Even with there being multiple court case determining that the NBA and NFL are not exempt from the antitrust laws, teams in each of the leagues have still been successful without the antitrust exemptions of the MLB. The Dallas Cowboys are the most valuable franchise in all of sports in the world, valued at 5.5 billion dollars in 2019, along with 25 other NFL teams

ranked within the top 50, in comparison to only nine MLB teams (Badenhausen 2019). This raises questions to why MLB teams need to stick with the antitrust exemption, even when other franchises that do not rely on it continue to have financial success. Along with that, the antitrust laws have a correlation to the ability of franchises to relocate. Since 1961, only four MLB franchises have relocated, in comparison to 15 NBA franchises and nine NFL franchises (Pollard 2016). With the higher number of total team locations, it allows for a greater chance to increase their revenue for certain franchises in small or diminishing markets. MLB owners have used closed-door meetings to decide their relocation tactics, which would be considered a “conspiracy” and a violation of the antitrust laws if it were not for their exemption (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). Without the antitrust exemptions, teams like the Oakland Athletics could have moved with MLB’s approval to a more prosperous market (Pollard 2016). This suggests that there are more prosperous markets available for MLB teams that are denied access from them because of the antitrust laws, prohibiting the increase of a franchise’s overall value.

Conclusion

The MLB being exempt from the antitrust laws creates issues in regard to a competitive balance with salaries and moving franchises to more prosperous locations. The luxury tax system put in place by the league could be greatly improved through the use of a soft cap, as explained through the NBA’s salary cap, or a hard cap. Other professional team sports leagues in the United States have greatly succeeded without the potential benefits of an antitrust exemption, as many teams have shown they can flourish financially while abiding to the antitrust laws. Through voiding the antitrust exemption in the game of baseball, the league could create a fairer market for teams in regard to salaries, along with drawing in a larger and wider variety of fans through the moving of franchises to more financially sustainable locations.

Competition Section

The game of baseball has been in the United States dating back to the mid 1800s, followed by the creation of the National League of Professional Baseball Clubs in 1876 ("National League of Baseball is Founded" 2009). From the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, baseball stood alone as the main team sport in the United States, earning its name as "America's pastime." However, the competition of other leagues and sports rose to popularity throughout the twentieth century. Both professional football and basketball were introduced to the country to an extent at the very end of the nineteenth century. It took until 1920 for a major professional football league to come to fruition (Klein 2014) and, later down the road, the NBA formed in 1946 ("NBA is Born" 2009). Each league progressed through their development to create a product that would compete with "America's pastime" later in the twentieth century to the present. There are many developments in professional football, basketball and baseball that led to the increase in competition within the leagues, overall affecting the popularity of "America's pastime."

NFL's progression of development

The NFL was founded in 1920 in Canton, Ohio, going through many developments to get to the point the league is at today (Klein 2014). The NFL was the main professional football league until 1960 when the American Football League (AFL) was created and became a worthy competitor of the NFL ("NFL and AFL Announce Merger" 2009). The NFL hoped that the AFL would not be a significant competitor, until an AFL team ended up signing highly touted quarterback Joe Namath, the league reached over one million attendees to games and the commissioner acquired a television contract with NBC ("NFL and AFL Announce Merger" 2009). The two leagues signed a merger agreement in 1966, bringing all of the teams together to

create two divisions that would compete in the “Super Bowl” beginning in 1967. While the NFC, formerly the NFL teams, dominated the first two Super Bowls against the AFC, formerly the AFL, a victory by Namath and the New York Jets showed a sign of balance in the newly formed league (“NFL and AFL Announce Merger” 2009). The growing popularity of the league, especially with the popularity of the Super Bowl, firmly established professional football as an entertainment rival to baseball. The league continued to grow its popularity in America establishing Monday Night Football in 1970 and signing a massive television deal with NBC, FOX and CBS (Badenhausen 2011). The London and Mexico games, started by the league in 2007, have increased the viewership of the NFL well outside of the United States, as league research found that there are more than 15 million fans in the United Kingdom (Farmer 2019). The NFL has developed greatly to increase its viewership, allowing them to compete with other professional sports leagues today, including the MLB, as they challenge its culture.

The change in popular culture towards the concussion issues have led to adjustments being made by the NFL in reaction to it. The league has a history of denying the correlation between football and long-term head injuries, more specifically Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy, or CTE (“The NFL Tried to Intimidate” 2017). The movie “Concussion” shed a light on the issue, depicting the story of Dr. Bennet Omalu’s discovery of CTE in football (Benson 2017). Popular culture has created an environment where players are the victims in the scenario, putting the blame on the NFL for potentially covering up these findings earlier for their own gain. Popular culture assisted in the desensitization of fans and viewers to the dangers of this game, with television being the prime suspect (Simpson-Wood, et al 2018). However, the NFL has taken steps to towards protecting players from potential head injuries in response to pop culture. One aspect would be the NFL adding rules to adjust to concussion guidelines. The

league introduced new concussion protocols in 2016, including teams being subjected to heavy fines and loss of draft picks for not taking a player out of games after sustaining a concussion (Belson 2016). Other adjustments were made to helmets, pads and protective gear in order to lower injury rates. New technology has been implemented into the development of helmets, being deemed “the most substantial innovation in the construction of helmets in decades” (Aciman 2017). Even though no helmet can prevent concussions entirely, the new helmets have the potential to “save lives,” as they are deemed the safest helmets ever (Aciman 2017). This shows the NFL’s response to the change in popular culture against the high head injury rates through creating rules and redesigning their protective gear in order to move in a positive direction.

NBA’s progression of development

The NBA was formed in 1949, merging the two rival professional basketball leagues at the time, the National Basketball League (NBL) and the Basketball Association of America (BAA) (“NBA is Born” 2009). The two leagues competed in different markets, as the larger market NBL started to absorb teams from the smaller market BAA league, leading to a merger being agreed upon in order to sustain the attraction of professional basketball (“NBA is Born” 2009). The league’s success was up and down from the 1950s to 1980s, transforming the game to make the pace of play faster in order to retain viewership (“NBA is Born” 2009). By the 1980s, the league was full of money-losing franchises, low attendance and declining television ratings until the new NBA commissioner David Stern stepped in (“National Basketball Association”). The actions and use of marketing tactics in the league under Stern increased its popularity after the NBA’s poor performance continued into the early 1980s. Stern emphasized marketing star players, which worked out well for him as a few rising stars became a part of the league when he

began his role as commissioner. Players, like Michael Jordan, Larry Bird and Magic Johnson, were highlighted in his marketing schemes in order to continually build the attractiveness of the league ("National Basketball Association" 2009). Along with that, the NBA signed very profitable cable and television contracts with networks including ABC, NBC ESPN, TNT and TBS, with the largest during Stern's era being an eight-year contract worth 7.44 billion dollars (Harper 2012). These deals helped build the viewership towards the super stars that Stern had advertised, increasing their platform to impact the culture of the NBA. The league greatly developed since the mid 1980s to form the image they have today in popular culture.

As mentioned earlier, the NBA succeeded in developing under Stern, increasing their player promotion and correlating their game to popular culture. Stern emphasized player promotion, especially in the late 1980s and 1990s, with Bird, Jordan and many other players being put into the spotlight. Stern also promoted international players to grow their overseas popularity. Stern instituted some overseas tours for the leagues and teams, while later holding the first overseas regular season game in Japan in 1990 (Draper 2020). Players like Drazen Petrovic, Vlade Divac and Sarunas Marciulionis opened the door for international viewership when they joined the NBA from Eastern Europe (Draper 2020). Another way the game developed would be through the implementation of rules meant to make the game "fun." The three-point line was introduced in 1980 (Forgrave 2018), presenting a style of game where players ran up and down the court, shooting long range shots and increasing the overall number of points in a game (French 2018). This allows players to adopt different ways to play the game, whether they want to play with an "old-school" or "new-school" style. Another way the NBA related to popular culture would be through the dress code system imposed in 2005 and the negative feedback to it by the players in the league (Astramskas 2018). Stern was not pleased with the dress of players,

so he made the code to reflect a more professional league. Stars, like Allen Iverson and Paul Pierce, saw the dress code as a target towards black players, as many players of the day were adopting the hip-hop style (Astramskas 2018). However, players eventually accepted the dress code allowing their dress to reflect popular culture within the parameters of the code. Overall, the NBA's ability to conform and adapt to society creates a league that is marketable throughout different generations.

Largest differences between other leagues and the MLB

The culture of baseball, unlike basketball and football, has not transitioned as smoothly to today's popular culture of fast paced play and style. These struggles are prevalent through the need of older baseball players to hang on to what made the game so great as "America's pastime," as they still have a significant voice in the sport through social media or announcing games. The evolution of the game to becoming more technology and information driven has upset them, complaining that "launch angle" and the amount of home runs are destroying the art of the game (Nightengale 2019). For example, Pittsburgh Pirates broadcaster John Wehner trashed Cincinnati Reds player Derek Dietrich for his flair and celebration after hitting home runs in games. On air, Wehner said that he "can't stand him" and that his dead grandfather (old minor league pitching coach in the Pirates organization) was "rolling in his grave" when Dietrich would celebrate after a home run (Bressner 2019). The flair and temperament at which Dietrich plays is a minor example of the new wave of culture being brought to the sport, as a higher percentage of Latino, African American and Dominican players are in the MLB (Anzil 2019). The worldwide influence of the game allows for baseball to improve its cultural values from what it represented in its older days, incorporating more stories and styles of play.

In an attempt to combat this, MLB's social media accounts implemented the "Let the Kids Play" marketing campaign, encouraging players to show their emotions to adhere to younger fans and help grow the game's popularity (Snyder 2019). The campaign, which includes vibrant players like Tim Anderson, 2018 All-Star MVP Alex Bregman and 2018 MVP Christian Yelich, allows a platform for players that enjoy showing their emotions and playing with their heart on their sleeves. However, even players today still show their frustration with the emotions shown in the game, causing there to be trouble with the league lining up its marketing with the viewpoints of some of its players (Snyder 2019). There is still a battle between the new style of playing with emotion and the old style of acting like "you have been there before," leading to extra tension on the field prominent through players getting thrown at after "pimping" home runs (Snyder 2019). Overall, the struggles to connect the older parts of the game to its newer components create problems in making the sport itself marketable to its entire audience.

Along with the style of play, the culture issue of the game is prevalent through the pace of play of the game, which varies greatly from other professional sports as it requires more patience. The total dead time during games increased from 2007 to 2017, going from 104.9 minutes to 117.8 minutes per game even with the total number of pitches per year being very similar throughout those years (Verducci 2017). The number of pitches per plate appearance, plate appearances per game and total extra-inning games all stay within the same range over this time period, making none of those glaring factors ("Major League Baseball Miscellaneous"). Hitters and pitchers are taking more time between pitches in preparation for at bats that are increasingly ending in either a strikeout or home run (Verducci 2017). This also leads to the games themselves being longer, with the average length of a game increasing from two hours and 55 minutes in 2007 to three hours and ten minutes in 2019 ("Major League Baseball

Miscellaneous”). The MLB has implemented rules in recent years to attempt to make the game move along faster, but so far, there has been little success. A few rules imposed before 2020 include only allowing six mound visits per team per game (total reduced to five in 2020) and reducing inning breaks to two minutes long (Dybas 2019). Along with that, the league introduced a three-batter minimum for pitchers going into place in 2020 with the goal of limiting pitching changes in order to speed up the game (Dybas 2019). Other professional sports leagues have been successful in speeding up their game in order to draw the attention of their fans. However, some of these new rules have received negative feedback from players and coaches, making this transition to speed up the game even more difficult for the league.

Lastly, the overall number of games in baseball make filling the seats for everyone difficult, as each game is not as significant as in other sports and not as necessary to watch. The MLB regular season consists of 162 games, in comparison to 82 NBA games and 16 NFL games, making each MLB game statistically less important in the grand scheme compared to the other two major sports. Chicago Cubs first baseman Anthony Rizzo has made it clear that he believes the season should be shorter, as many northern and midwestern teams start their seasons with near or below freezing temperatures (Kolar 2018). Rizzo says it is not desirable to sit through a baseball game in consistent sub-freezing temperatures when those games are not postponed (Kolar 2018). Many other teams suffer the problems of fans turning out for early season games when the weather is not desirable, especially in places like Denver and Kansas City, who have had large winter storms hit their areas in the past at the beginning of the baseball season. Along with an early start, the inconvenient start of games could affect the attendance in comparison to the NBA and NFL. The NFL only plays on Sunday with evening games on Thursday and Monday, being out of the way of the normal work week. The NBA generally has evening games

during the week and day games on the weekend. The MLB, on the other hand, has a varying schedule including day games during the week which draw lower attendance than other games. This plays a large role in their continuing dropping attendance, as it the MLB's attendance by 1.62 percent in 2019 (Brown 2019). While the NFL and NBA have both seen small decreases, neither have been as comparable as the MLB (McClung 2019). Overall, the number of games, while vital to the style of the season, has its downside in regard to getting the maximum attendance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the challenges presented through the increased presence of other popular sports leagues have led to a wider variety of options to viewers. NFL's popular culture has adjusted relatively fluidly with society in regard to their concussion issues. NBA's realization of the importance of promoting stars and adhering to popular culture helped them transition under commissioner Stern. MLB's issues with competition include issued with the transition of the culture of the game, the "pace of play" and overall number of games. The league's lack of development in the culture of the game, along with a few other factors, have contributed to their potential decrease in popularity with the increase in presence of the NBA and NFL.

Discussion and Future Research

While the MLB's revenue has consistently increased, there is a still room to grow when it comes to marketing the athletes. The importance that the individual athletes play in the overall popularity of other sports leagues is hard to deny, which the MLB has not fully tapped in to as their promotions are more team-based. As mentioned throughout the research, the league would benefit from promoting a more player friendly league, like the NFL and NBA both do in their

own way successfully. The MLB and teams within the league individually could market a more player friendly league by increasing their social media presence, as well as encouraging the players to show off their personalities more on and off the field. Along with that, an adjustment to the culture from not necessarily purely anti-team, but more individual oriented will enhance the achievements of players and draw a new fanbase. The league could also promote the individual economically through the use of a soft salary cap, which would endorse a league that still values the players' skills monetarily but creates a more competitive balance for smaller market teams to acquire players.

The MLB should look to leverage their social media presence surrounding the individual players and encourage player interactions on and off the field. There is a such a large untapped source of player marketing that the league has not dove into yet. As Trevor Bauer, a pitcher for the Cincinnati Reds, said in a video he posted on the Momentum YouTube channel discussing the issues with the MLB, "you [Rob Manfred] have more players in baseball than any other league with much more diverse backgrounds, worldwide, more so than any of the other major American sports" (*Trevor Bauer GOES OFF 2020*). Over twenty different countries and territories outside of the United States were represented on the 2019 Opening Day rosters ("MLB rosters feature 251 international players" 2019), proving Bauer's point true with the untapped potential of the league's ability to show off its diversity. The league and teams could capitalize on this through various social media and broadcast campaigns, giving these unique players a platform and create connections with the fans. This could include mic'd up appearances for players either before or during the games that could be used on broadcasts, as well as social media posts. Another way the league could capitalize on them would be giving the fans some insight into their individual lives, either through "day in the life" videos or light-hearted

interviews that allow the player to show off their personalities and have some fun. This could include playing video games, such as “MLB the Show,” or having dinner with other players and having regular conversations. The “Starting 9” podcast from Barstool Sports exemplifies this tactic, bringing on players and baseball personalities to talk about different aspects of their life along with baseball while doing different activities from wiffle ball to Top Golf. Relaying this style to individual teams would be vital in creating a marketing format that promotes the players individual personalities and lifestyles.

Going hand-in-hand with promoting their personalities would be transitioning the culture of the league to favor the individuals within the team. There can still be a team aspect within the game, as the player must cooperate in order for the organization to reap the benefit of a championship but promoting a player-driven league would benefit each team individually. With the average age of the baseball fan being 57, in comparison to the NBA’s 42 and the NFL’s 50 (Knight 2018), the culture that surrounded the older era of baseball continues to force itself within the changing game. The style of baseball that relies on “small ball” and uniformity within the team has decreased in popularity, as fans want to see the dramatics of sports and players show off their style. In order to maximize this social change, teams should look to promote the flair and swagger that each player presents even more. This provides more value to their accomplishments and increases the attention they get, which grows the audience’s attention towards the team in the end. Another suggestion would be to relax the uniform rules that the league has about accessories, such as cleats or bats. Players cleats are limited to black, white, gray and other team designated colors, not providing a wide range for players to design them (Witrado 2018). Lifting small restrictions that do not interfere with the integrity of the game or the important part of the uniforms, such as jersey style, allows the players to show their

individual swagger without exhausting any effort of the team. Overall, loosening the reigns that the older culture has on the game will allow today's players to take steps in advancing the game in their own way.

Along with marketing and cultural adjustments, including a soft salary cap as opposed to a hard salary cap would better the success of the team as well as the individual. A salary cap would be beneficial along with the luxury tax system the MLB has now because it increases the penalty for exceeded the cap and structures player contracts that can make small market teams more competitive when it comes to negotiations. The system the NBA has includes a soft cap along with a luxury tax, allowing teams to exceed the maximum in order to retain a player that is already on the team (Miller 2018). In regard to individual salaries, the NBA has a system that incentivizes longevity and awards within the league to determine the maximum contract players can receive. Implementing this soft cap into the MLB would give more control to the players in determining where they want to play if multiple teams want to offer the same maximum contract. Along with that, it would give smaller market teams the opportunity to offer competitive contracts to players whose prices may have been originally out of a team's budget. This system would be better than implementing a hard cap because the hard cap would decrease the flexibility of teams to offer contracts, as there would be a firm maximum that teams could not exceed. This would limit the bargaining power of teams and players within these strict parameters. In the context of baseball, it would also devalue the many different positions and roles present within a single roster or organization, as there is a gray area between different position titles. Essentially, the implementation of a soft salary cap along with the luxury tax would allow for small market teams to be more competitive when going for high price players,

putting players in the driver's seat when it comes to making contract decisions as opposed to the price of the contracts.

In summary, adjustments that could be made within baseball include promoting the players on social media to allow fans to learn more about them individually, changing the culture of the game to be more player oriented and including a soft salary cap to increase competition between teams in signing players. With the decline in baseball viewership and attendance, the league must look into ways to increase its overall popularity, as it has to compete with other popular professional sports in North America. The style of marketing and promotions the MLB has for its athletes is not up to par with the various social media outlets at hand nowadays. As the league has done throughout its existence, it needs to continue to evolve and change with the culture the United States has now. The game's ability to do that in the past is why it is called "America's Pastime," so now it is time to see if the MLB is up to challenge of continuing to evolve.

Future research on this topic would be directly surround the marketing aspect of the baseball. As mentioned earlier, there has not been much quantitative research done on this topic within the parameter of professional sports, let alone baseball. In order to break this barrier, it would be worth going in depth on the value of certain athletes, such as measuring their net worth or production on the field. After gathering this information, we could compare it to their value to the individual teams and the league, whether it be how this affects team's revenue or viewership. Comparing these findings to that of other sports leagues would be valuable information to see how far baseball is behind in their marketing tactics.

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