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Baseball Eclipsed: No Longer America's Pastime

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Abstract

This paper will discuss the reasons for the decline in Major League Baseball (MLB) attendance levels and what might be done to stop this decline. It will also introduce an idea that the decline in attendance might not be as much of an issue as fans might perceive it to be. Along with being a super fan of a team, marketing and promotion play a big role in game-to-game attendance. Various ways that marketing is used and might be used better to gain interest for baseball are talked about in this paper. The argument made is that baseball has lost its fan base because it has failed to stay up with our fast-paced society. If baseball wants to recapture the market, modifications to the game need to be made. After all, baseball has been coined "America's Pastime", but what it meant for baseball to be America's Pastime in the early years has drastically changed in how we view baseball today. Baseball has been around for hundreds of years and is loved by sports fans but seems to have shifted in more recent years. This analysis of attendance factors and marketing strategies will bring to light current American society's values affecting baseball's luster and attempt to show how MLB can shift their focus to bring back baseball as America's Pastime. Modifications to prices, adding promotions, and overall showcasing a more fan friendly/fan centered experience would help to bring fans back to the stadium.

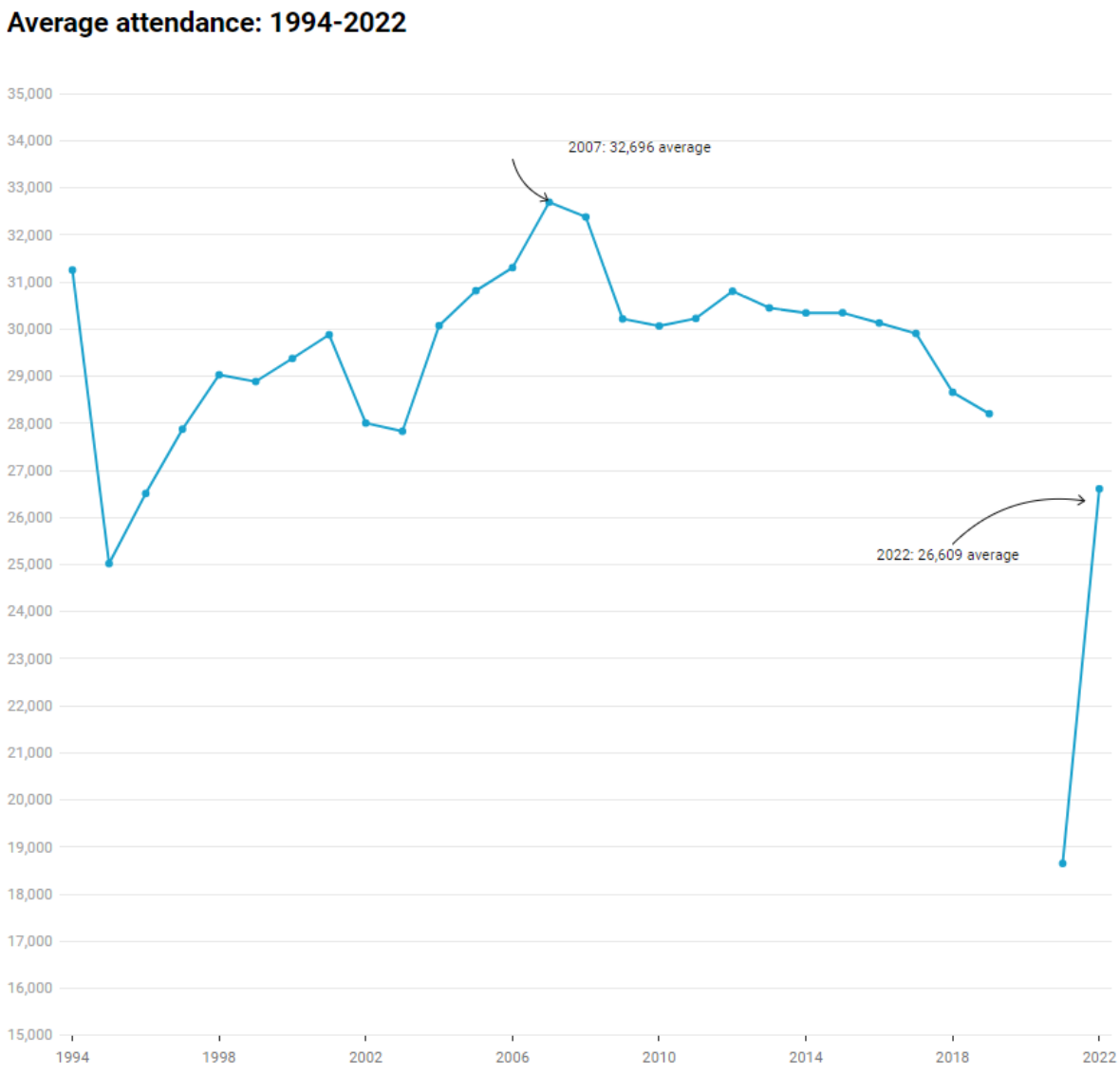
Introduction

Baseball's popularity has increased and decreased over the time of the game's history, and currently appears to be in decline. Baseball has evolved tremendously from when it was created. Different rules, associations, ballparks, and how the game itself is played have been created to bring interest and fine-tune what is known as baseball. The issue at hand is the decreasing popularity of baseball and why exactly baseball is seemingly becoming just a past time instead of what was once our pastime. While baseball has always been a slow game compared to other athletic events, it was not always a bad thing because of how American culture and society operated. It is no secret that society has changed since the mid-19th Century. With the emergence of technology and access to information, society has become a fast-paced environment concerned with wanting more. A luxury we have is access to information right at our fingertips without having to leave the comfort of our own home, something that looked very different during the time of baseball's creation. Society in the 19th Century was much different in the way that everyday life was conducted. There were no internet, smartphones, or computers for people to use and find out the most recent information about politics, sports, latest fashion, or any other of their interests. 19th Century communities relied on newspapers, flyers, and word of mouth to get information around which was a limiting factor in the timeliness of getting news and how much information was absorbed and provided. Moving into the early 20th Century, Americans were given the radio as another source of gathering news and information, but even that luxury is far from where society has advanced to today. This information overload and the constant on the go lifestyle that society has placed at its core has made baseball seem like an even slower game that doesn't fit in with the status quo of our growing culture and current generations.

Baseball is a game of wit, physical strength, and high effort that has a methodical way of presenting itself. In today's game there are teams known for having power hitters, teams known for playing "small ball" which results in contact and bunting, teams that thrive off hard throwers, and teams that thrive off of crafty and funky pitchers (Baseball HOF, n.d.). The differences in team dynamics and how teams choose to play "their brand of baseball" makes the game of baseball fascinating to its most loyal fans. These types of fascinating strategies and differences among teams does not present itself the same way to the much broader fans of the game. While baseball is a game that requires a high level of physical and mental skill that perplexes viewers, most fans tend to look past this element of the game which has led to the decline in attendance and overall interest of baseball. The appreciation for the game itself has been lost in what baseball can do for the fans and the experiences it creates for its fans. This issue that has affected baseballs' attendance and overall interest is not a bad thing in general because it is a product of changing society and culture, but it is a problem that Major League Baseball needs to address.

Since 2007, MLB game attendance has dropped on average 1% each year (MLB 2022). While a 1% decrease in attendance over one or two years does not seem at first to be detrimental, the constant decrease over a 12-year period, 2007 to 2019, and an accelerated decrease in the last 3 years, 2019 to 2022, has led to a 20% decrease in attendance (The Score 2022). There are specific years such as 2019-2021 that can be listed as outliers in the data due to COVID-19 and restrictions that affected how the MLB was allowed to operate in terms of having games and whether they were even allowed to have fans and eventually to what capacity fans were allowed. While COVID-19 played a tremendous role in the decrease of fans attending games, there has been a steady decrease from 2007 on, even taking 2020 out of the overall measure. From 2021

to 2022 there was an increase in attendance, but that was likely to happen with the restrictions that were set on stadium capacities in 2021. There have been other years where baseball has seen decreases in attendance that were related to other specific events such as World Wars, the Great Depression and Recession, and things like player versus association strikes, but those decreases in attendance are tied very closely to those events. Excluding the COVID-19 years, economic struggle, war times, and disgruntled players from the data because of the obvious and specific reason for decline in attendance leads to the question of this paper: what went on and has been going on for the last fifteen plus years to lead to this great attendance decline?



(Figure 1. 2022 figures updated to September 11, 2022 (Baseball Reference))

The average attendance levels of each year from 1994-2022 are shown in Figure 1. While the early years showed much larger spikes in attendance levels from high to low, the most recent years from 2007-2022 on the graph show the gradual decline of attendance levels. In 2012 average fan attendance was up 1.8% from 2011 with 30,895 fans and an average capacity of stadiums at 71.3% (Forbes 2012). Looking at the 2007-2022 attendance levels, 2012 was the only year that seemed to provide some positive light for the MLB with reference to attendance,

but in the years following 2012 the trend decreased again. What factors have affected this decline and what can the MLB do to reverse the decline in the way of marketing, changing the way the game is played, and in bringing back a positive societal view on baseball?

History of Baseball

To understand where baseball is viewed today in our society, it is important to understand the history of baseball and why it is considered "America's Pastime". There are records of a baseball-like game being played in England from the 1700's. The games that the cities in England were playing eventually led to what we have today in America called baseball. The first records of baseball being played in the United States came from the 1800's. Baseball became widely popular among clerks and artisans who were looking for a way to get away from their work and gain a higher social standing. Many ball clubs that were formed were composed of clerks, low-rung white-collar workers, artisans, and high-rung blue-collar workers, who used baseball as a social environment to bring each other together. Baseball started out as something that was meant for fun and ultimately an escape from everyday life. The initial clubs made their own rules for the game and would even get together outside of playing games to put together dances and celebrations for the members involved. As baseball became more popular among Americans it started to evolve into what we know as baseball today.

The 1850s and 1860s were a pivotal time for baseball and the emergence of what was known as "professional baseball". Baseball started to pick up in the late 1850's with different ball clubs starting to play each other in what they called matches instead of friendly games or social games (Rader, 2018, 14). This new emerging game of baseball was on a roll when the Civil War started. Even though the war had started, many accounts show that the soldiers would take time to involve themselves with sports when fighting was not going on. While there were many

sports and activities played during the war between soldiers, baseball remained a game that the soldiers flocked to in their free time. The fact that baseball was not lost during the war led to its rocketing popularity and creation after the war. During the war a businessman, William H. Cammeyer, decided to construct a ball field that would allow for teams to come play and allow an experience for fans to watch that they had not had before. His idea behind creating this facility for baseball players and fans was to have an annual source of income that he was not getting from using his pond as a skating rink in the winter (Our Game, 2011). This development of a stadium was something that had not been done before. Earlier facilities that made their way into the game of baseball allowed a limited number of fans based on their connection to the ball club, but they were ultimately used to keep troublesome spectators out and to outline the dimensions of the playing field. William had another idea behind the use of a baseball facility that would lead to a growing body of spectators and growing experience for those who loved the game but were not lucky or skilled enough to make it onto a team to play. While baseball had a business component with respect to clubs creating dues for players to join for uniforms and such, the creation of the stadium and professional baseball completely changed the original game of baseball.

Baseball has been affected by changes to the game that allowed for baseball writers to attribute names to certain time periods of what baseball was like during the time: the Dead Ball Era (1901-1919), the Live Ball Era (1920-1941), the Integration Era (1942-1960), the Expansion Era (1961-1976), the Free Agency Era (1977-1993), and the Long Ball/Steroid Era (1994-2005) (The Sport Journal, 2018). While the pace of play, teams, and structure of the game have stayed consistent throughout the years, there were factors that affected baseball's play style and how the game was viewed. Some of the factors included the ball material being changed, rules added or

changed, the distance between the pitcher's mound and home plate being changed, and players were able to negotiate their contracts (free agency created). All these changes affected some facets of the game, whether offensive domination, defensive and pitching domination, or the ability for teams to pick up or trade players. These changes play a big role in how the MLB operates today and how they seek to make similar changes to attempt to level the playing field between offense and defense and it has furthered into more rights for players. Changes in MLB today still occur with things like the construction of the baseball, mound distance and height, and with associations that deal with player complaints and rights. To baseball lovers, this should raise interest in the game just for the fact of constant change being needed to create more obstacles for elite players to overcome, as they have always found a way to do and continue to get better at. Unfortunately, with the majority of baseball fans, as we have seen throughout the years of professional baseball, the simple fascination with the mental and physical skill involved in the game is not enough to build interest for watching the game.

An interesting way to define the eras besides what happened on the baseball field, would be to define them based on marketing strategies used over the years of baseball. In the late 1800s, baseball was hard to follow if you were not at the game, but it was not impossible due to the telegram. Local bars, saloons, and newspaper offices would get information such as the scores sent to them by telegram, and they would post them on a bulletin board for those interested to see (Society for American Baseball Research, 2021). There would even be bulletin board viewing parties of large crowds for games such as the World Series. While this was not an advertising strategy proposed by the MLB itself, it indirectly marketed baseball by creating interest in what was happening in the game with respect to the score, fan emotions, errors, and pitching changes. This was important for the game of baseball because while fans were not at the game, it kept

them engaged and excited to get updates about whatever game was being played and created more fans. This era from the late 1800s to the early 1900s before the introduction of radio broadcasts could be named the "Telegraph Era".

The second era of marketing in baseball could be called the "Radio Era". In 1921, a local Pittsburgh station broadcasted a play-by-play of the Phillies and Pirates (Society for American Baseball Research, 2021). This opened opportunities for another broadcast by the same Pittsburgh station and another New Jersey station to broadcast the 1921 World Series. The introduction of the radio put in motion the ability to get baseball information and baseball news out to American citizens, growing an interest and passion in the hearts of Americans. Many teams were not happy with the introduction of the radio because they relied on ticket sales for their revenue, and it led to cities that had two teams banning broadcasts of road games to not interfere with the ticket sales of the other team's home games (Society for American Baseball Research, 2021). The "Radio Era" was a scary time for most teams because of the fear of lost sales, but it should have built hope for the game of baseball. The ability to broadcast games to areas where access to stadiums was limited or nonexistent helped to grow the overall popularity of baseball. Some owners, however, saw the radio was a means to advertise their team and their products. One owner and entrepreneur, William Wrigley, saw the radio as a way to advertise his club, the Chicago Cubs, and his sugary gum (Society for American Baseball Research, 2021). Wrigley was not biased to which stations could carry Cubs games because of the potential for growing interest in his team and product with more people being able to hear about them. Finally in 1934, the baseball commissioner blessed the sale of broadcast rights to the World Series as the property of the teams involved. Ultimately, this decision from the commissioner opened the door for other teams to benefit from the advertising and marketing that could be done

on broadcasts during that time and helped to kickstart how teams' market today.

The next era could be called the "Television Era". This "era" took longer to catch on than radio broadcasting did because of the number of families that had radios compared to the number of Americans with televisions. Another reason for the slow emergence of broadcasting games on television was the struggle with getting a good picture of the field and the game going on. In May of 1939, the first game was televised and offered to a few households in the New York area (Smith, n.d.). Curt Smith, writer of "TV Brought Baseball to Fans Who Had Never Seen a Game", said this about the first televised game, "W2XBS used a single camera fifty feet from home plate –"woefully lacking," said The New York Times. One camera at one site "does not see the complete field. Baseball by television calls for three or four cameras." At least the viewer didn't suffer long. The 10-inning game took just two hours and 15 minutes." This shows the struggle with watching baseball on the TV in the early years of televising games. It wasn't until 1951 that baserunner cameras, close-up cameras, and center field cameras were introduced in television broadcasts. The introduction of the television broadcast made experiencing the game outside of the stadium something that Americans were excited about and it increased the fan base throughout the country.

In The Hardball Times publication of the article "Ten Times We Changed the Way We Watch Baseball" by Dave Studeman writes that MLB teams did not take advantage of television as much as they should have until cable TV forced them too. Cable TV became more popular in 1977 and increasingly grew in popularity so much that in 1987 over 50% of homes had cable TV (Studeman, 2005). In the years from 1990-93, CBS paid $1.04 billion in exclusive television rights and ESPN paid $400 million in 1989 to televise games (Smith, n.d.). This was a huge revenue boost for the MLB and laid the ground for advertising and marketing for MLB. With

the increasing popularity of television and being paid for rights to televise games, MLB was realizing their free advertising help and their new source of income. This “era” has grown significantly since the introduction of television broadcasting and has only continued to make MLB even more profitable as the years have gone on. It would be fair to say that the “Television Era” is an era that is still prevalent today, only it has increased in avenues of app streaming coverage.

Baseball has changed in terms of eras with the types of baseball seen and from a business standpoint in baseball changing the way it has been marketed. From the start of baseball to the modern-day game of baseball, there have been many changes not just in the way the game has been played, but also how the game has been used and viewed by players and fans. The game of baseball started out as a game between pals, something to pass the time and get away from the everyday struggles of life. As referenced on page 17 in “Playing for Keeps: A History of Early Baseball" by Warren Goldstein, one ball club’s constitution stated, “the objects of the Club shall be to ‘improve, foster and perpetuate the American game of Base Ball,’ and advance morally, socially, and physically, the interests of its members.” This view of the game of baseball was in the interest of baseball as a social game which perpetuated itself among social clubs or groups. With the construction of stadiums and professional ball clubs, these original ideals still influenced those involved with respect to social aspects of the game, but baseball quickly added a component of “getting down to business”. Competition on the field became more prevalent and off-field competition to see who could make a living bridging the gap between players and fans was introduced. Fans were and still are immersed in the experience provided by watching the game of baseball. While businessmen jumped to capture the emerging market brought on by the creation of stadiums and ball clubs for their own monetary gain, they failed to create a way

for fans to continuously gain something from baseball. As talked about in the introduction, society is ever growing and ever advancing, failing to keep up with that constant evolution is what has plagued baseball from the beginning and has led to the decrease in attendance that has presented itself since the early 21st Century. In the early years of baseball, fine tuning the structure of baseball and how it was played, ie. changing from pitchers throwing underhand to overhand, kept fans interested and excited to see how those things affected the game. Although MLB has increased its experimentation with changes to the game in independent leagues and minor league baseball recently, using that as a primary factor in increasing interest and attendance will not yield as great of results as it did in the early days. After looking at the ways baseball was broadcasted throughout the years, it seems that MLB needs to focus on their broadcasting strategies not just as a way to increase revenue, but as a way to increase the popularity of baseball in future generations.

Literature Review

This section will look through five different articles published by Baseball Prospectus; a website devoted to statistical analysis of baseball records. The articles are written by three different writers to describe their opinions on the decline of baseball attendance and their observation and analysis of variables affecting the decline in attendance.

The first article " Moonshot: Tanking Is Responsible for a Big Chunk of MLB's Attendance Problems" by Robert Arthur, describes how baseball teams that are tanking (intentionally becoming less competitive to take advantage of league rules that benefit losing teams) and noncompetitive teams have an impact on the decline in attendance. Arthur studies the 2015-2018 MLB seasons and concludes that 35 percent of baseball's attendance decline from 2015-2018 is associated with less competitive baseball games (Robert Arthur, 2019). The 35

percent was gathered from a model Arthur created that substituted the playoff odds of 2018 with the playoff odds in 2015 while keeping everything else about 2015 constant. His data estimated that around 1.4 million fewer fans would be expected if the 2015 season had playoff odds like 2018. This would go to show how important having a competitive team and a playoff worthy team is to the fans. Arthur ends the article by saying that millions of fans not coming to games might not be a big deal to MLB, but he says, "baseball fans are not just born — often they are made by exposure to the ballpark and the playoff hunt. And with fewer opportunities for that to happen, what looks like an attendance dip over the last few seasons may eventually become an attendance crisis in the years to come." (Robert Arthur, 2019). A true baseball fan would have to agree with him on his statement that fewer opportunities for fans to be exposed to the ballpark and playoff hunt might eventually lead to an attendance crisis. If fans are concerned with competition and teams are unable to produce a competitive playoff team, then fans are going to stay away from the ballpark and ultimately less fans are likely to be built.

The next article, "MLB Attendance, Alternatives, and the Idea of Choice" by Shawn Brody, starts off by explaining that even though the attendance is declining, MLB is making more overall and making more with per-fan revenue at the gate (Shawn Brody, 2020). This article poses that attendance is not something MLB is concerned about, maximizing revenue seems to be more important. Brody notes that MLB teams are risk-averse and that they wouldn't pursue revenue maximization strategies at the cost of driving fans away if it made the fans not want to consume their product at all (Shawn Brody, 2020). The reason he says this is because the alternative for not attending the game, but still consuming MLB products, is television and digital viewership. Brody built two models, a simple linear regression, and a simple linear mixed effects model, to show the relationship between average local Regional Sports Network

viewership in households and two independent variables (change in gate revenue per attendee and change in total attendance). He concludes from his model that there isn't a causal relationship with the variables. He does say, however, that the models show an increase in average local Regional Sports Network viewership is related to an increase in gate revenue per fan numbers and that increases in average local Regional Sports Network viewership is related to a decrease in total attendance (Shawn Brody, 2020). This just shows that increased prices create a need for alternative channels for viewing games.

The last part of Brody's article seems to explain how MLB is attempting to create a luxury experience in the stadium that is pushing poorer and middle-class fans away from the stadium. This has been done, according to Brody, through wealthier fans paying higher prices that results in increasing gate revenues. This final point leads to the issue behind falling attendance, and it has little to do with the fans, but everything to do with the teams having every bit of power (Shawn Brody, 2020). This idea is established on the premise that MLB teams are implementing strategies to create luxury entertainment that is pushing the lower classes of fans away from the action. MLB teams can increase their revenue by charging higher prices that wealthy fans are willing to pay, decreasing their variable costs (less concession staff, less cleaning staff, less ticket staff, etc.), which means that having more fans in the stadium is not a concern for MLB. MLB focusing on their own profit is damaging to baseball because it leads to the question of what will happen to the younger fans when they reach the age of the current average MLB fan in respect to their love for the game and how that translates to younger generations, namely their children.

The next two articles are written by Rob Mains, "What Really Happened With Attendance in 2021" and "What Really Happened With Attendance in 2022". The focus of these two articles is simply outlining the issue of declining attendance in 2021 and 2022 through statistical

evidence that shows the change in attendance from 2019 to 2021 and from 2021 to 2022. The data Mains included was the date of each team's opening home date, number of games, overall attendance, and average attendance over the two years being analyzed and then he shows the percent change between the two years.

	2021				2019			
Team	**Opened**	**Dates**	**Attend**	**Avg**	**Dates**	**Attend**	**Avg**	**Change**
White Sox	Jun 25	41	1,142,508	27,866	41	914,683	22,309	+24.9%
Padres	Jun 17	46	1,686,234	36,657	43	1,324,700	30,807	+19.0%
Rangers	Apr 1	81	2,110,258	26,053	81	2,132,994	26,333	-1.1%
Braves	May 7	65	2,095,325	32,236	61	2,060,038	33,771	-4.5%
Dodgers	Jun 15	48	2,277,131	47,440	47	2,365,832	50,337	-5.8%
Marlins	Jul 5	45	438,561	9,746	37	397,591	10,746	-9.3%
Reds	Jun 2	55	1,184,169	21,530	52	1,245,749	23,957	-10.1%
Mariners	Jul 2	41	839,951	20,487	38	867,039	22,817	-10.2%
Royals	May 31	56	923,174	16,485	53	1,025,213	19,344	-14.8%
Giants	Jun 25	47	1,351,206	28,749	44	1,499,477	34,079	-15.6%
Rays	Jul 5	41	491,795	11,995	35	499,266	14,265	-15.9%
Tigers	Jun 8	53	886,548	16,727	49	978,840	19,976	-16.3%
Nationals	Jun 11	53	1,216,808	22,959	51	1,424,761	27,936	-17.8%
Rockies	Jun 28	40	1,236,883	30,922	43	1,647,638	38,317	-19.3%
Cubs	Jun 11	50	1,578,277	31,566	46	1,801,150	39,155	-19.4%
Red Sox	May 29	53	1,553,921	29,319	56	2,056,000	36,714	-20.1%
Brewers	Jun 25	43	1,295,018	30,117	42	1,584,214	37,719	-20.2%
Mets	Jun 11	54	1,354,889	25,091	50	1,596,291	31,926	-21.4%
Yankees	Jun 18	48	1,575,916	32,832	44	1,889,505	42,943	-23.5%
Astros	May 25	57	1,610,158	28,248	56	2,070,873	36,980	-23.6%
Cardinals	Jun 14	50	1,635,368	32,707	48	2,083,287	43,402	-24.6%
Pirates	Jul 1	44	584,242	13,278	45	829,865	18,441	-28.0%
Indians	Jun 2	53	917,665	17,314	51	1,244,743	24,407	-29.1%
Phillies	Jun 4	54	1,238,454	22,934	50	1,630,143	32,603	-29.7%
Orioles	Jun 1	55	606,988	11,036	52	856,816	16,477	-33.0%
Twins	Jul 5	41	828,828	20,215	41	1,306,684	31,870	-36.6%

Angels	Jun 17	48	1,115,750	23,245	44	1,657,664	37,674	-38.3%
A's	Jun 29	38	470,010	12,369	38	853,360	22,457	-44.9%
D'backs	May 25	63	855,985	13,587	57	1,511,178	26,512	-48.8%

(Table 1. List of attendance in 2021 compared to 2019, by team, at full capacity in order of percent change (Mains, 2021))

He concludes from the data in the "What Really Happened With Attendance in 2021" article that some teams saw decreases in attendance by design with the new model of trying to increase profits rather than increasing attendance. He notes that the pandemic during 2019 and 2021 had a big effect on attendance numbers with decreased occupancy regulations and just how COVID-19 affected many people's mindsets on what they feel is safe for them to do (Rob Mains, 2021). In the "What Really Happened With Attendance in 2022" article, Mains shows the relationship between all of the team's opening home game dates, number of home games, overall attendance, and average attendance in 2022 and 2021 and he shows the percent change between the two years.

		2022			**2021**			
Team	**Opened**	**Dates**	**Attend**	**Avg**	**Dates**	**Attend**	**Avg**	**Change**
Mariners	Jul 02	42	1,387,356	33,032	41	839,951	20,487	61.2%
Orioles	Jun 01	55	971,707	17,667	55	606,988	11,036	60.1%
D'backs	May 25	58	1,173,615	20,235	63	855,985	13,587	48.9%
Mets	Jun 11	53	1,816,384	34,271	54	1,354,889	25,091	36.6%
Pirates	Jul 01	43	750,344	17,450	44	584,242	13,278	31.4%
Yankees	Jun 18	44	1,888,928	42,930	48	1,575,916	32,832	30.8%

Cardinals	Jun 14	50	2,112,749	42,255	50	1,635,368	32,707	29.2%
Angels	Jun 17	46	1,342,214	29,179	48	1,115,750	23,245	25.5%
Phillies	Jun 04	53	1,517,194	28,626	54	1,238,454	22,934	24.8%
Twins	Jul 05	38	929,517	24,461	41	828,828	20,215	21.0%
Braves	May 07	67	2,611,310	38,975	65	2,095,325	32,236	20.9%
Tigers	Jun 08	52	1,044,371	20,084	53	886,548	16,727	20.1%
Nationals	Jun 11	53	1,441,199	27,192	53	1,216,808	22,959	18.4%
Astros	May 25	62	2,065,595	33,316	57	1,610,158	28,248	17.9%
Rays	Jul 05	39	543,185	13,928	41	491,795	11,995	16.1%
Marlins	Jul 05	46	505,435	10,988	45	438,561	9,746	12.7%
Red Sox	May 29	58	1,909,397	32,921	53	1,553,921	29,319	12.3%
Giants	Jun 25	47	1,440,149	30,641	47	1,351,206	28,749	6.6%
Rockies	Jun 28	42	1,382,230	32,910	40	1,236,883	30,922	6.4%
Guardians	Jun 02	56	1,015,526	18,134	53	917,665	17,314	4.7%
Brewers	Jun 25	48	1,504,628	31,346	43	1,295,018	30,117	4.1%
Cubs	Jun 11	50	1,629,217	32,584	50	1,578,277	31,566	3.2%
Padres	Jun 17	51	1,891,402	37,086	46	1,686,234	36,657	1.2%
Dodgers	Jun 15	53	2,516,977	47,490	48	2,277,131	47,440	0.1%
Royals	May 31	57	914,153	16,038	56	923,174	16,485	-2.7%
Rangers	Apr 01	81	2,011,381	24,832	81	2,110,258	26,053	-4.7%
White Sox	Jun 25	46	1,186,207	25,787	41	1,142,508	27,866	-7.5%
A’s	Jun 29	43	486,990	11,325	38	470,010	12,369	-8.4%
Reds	Jun 02	53	949,349	17,912	55	1,184,169	21,530	-16.8%

(Table 2. List of attendance in 2022 compared to 2011, by team, starting on the day restrictions were lifted in 2021 in order of percent change (Mains, 2022))

He concludes again that some teams didn't experience a high percent change over the two years by the design to increase revenue by charging fewer fans more money. His conclusion is that the attendance significantly increased for most clubs in 2022 from 2021 numbers and that even though 2022 numbers were lower than 2019 numbers, uncertainty created by the lockout and an easy fight to the finish postseason could have affected those numbers (Rob Mains, 2022).

The final article, also written by Rob Mains, "Flu-Like Symptoms: Baseball Attendance and Short-Term Profits", gets into why baseball's declining attendance might not be an issue for the owners. He lists the usual reasons that are usually attributed to the decline in attendance with long games, not enough action, etc., but he questions whether the ownership is concerned with the declining attendance. Mains says that there is more to a team's bottom line than attendance. He references the Arizona Diamondbacks who were losing attendance, but raising their ticket prices (Rob Mains, 2019). It makes sense that while attendance might be going down, the owners are able to raise prices of tickets, parking, food, memorabilia, and so on to cover those costs and ultimately raise revenue without hurting the wealthier market that is able to come to the games. In the way Shawn Brody explained the staffing costs and other operational costs would go down, Mains reiterates the same points in his article. Mains put together a hypothetical analysis of revenue and costs per game that the Diamondbacks might run into and then made another analysis based on that data to show that increases in revenue and increasing fixed and variable costs would exist but less attendance means those costs, despite inflation, would go down because there would be less people to tailor your goods and services too, resulting in a nearly 5% increase in profit (Rob Mains, 2019). This analysis was purely hypothetical regarding

the numbers used, but it gives insight into what the owners might be looking at and why they are not necessarily concerned with the decreases in attendance. All of that being said, this only covers the bottom-line information that owners look at, it doesn't include the money gained from broadcasting, licensing, and investments in properties and real estate.

Mains finishes his article by asking this question, "Does declining attendance augur declining popularity in the future?". This is a great question to ask because it includes the future generations that will be affected by changes with the MLB. If there is declining attendance, does it mean that the popularity amongst future unborn generations and children now will be declining? As Mains said, one would like to think that this is not the case with the ability to view games on various platforms, but it leads one to wonder about the effects of not getting the stadium experience that builds a lot of fans' love for baseball.

Baseball's Decline

Despite civil war, world wars, depressions, recessions, and failing to appease the players, baseball has continued to exist. Although it has struggled over the years to keep fans coming back and bring new fans in, baseball has remained a game that people are able to relate to and use to escape the struggles of everyday life. Baseball is a way for families and friends to interact through playing catch, playing pickup games in parks or backyards, and it creates friendly rivalries between fans of different teams. The culture surrounding baseball will continue to incorporate itself into the daily lives of Americans. This is good news for baseball because it will always be around as a sport and hobby, but it doesn't have the same effect for the MLB as an organization. From 2007 to 2022, MLB stadium attendance levels have experienced a 20% drop. Even though baseball remains a fun activity for fans to gather around and play or watch at any level, there is a problem with how Americans have come to view Major League Baseball.

Decreases in stadium attendance have been attributed to inflation leading to higher prices at stadiums, factors making it a "boring" game, and team performance, just to name a few. These factors are legitimate in explaining MLB's struggle with filling the stadium, but is this a MLB problem or a problem with our society's evolving lifestyle?

Cost of Attending 1.1

According to Statista (2022), inflation in the U.S. has fluctuated around 1% and 4% since 2007, with the exception of 2009 (-0.4%), 2015 (0.1%), and 2021 (4.7%), until 2022 (8.3%) with the highest inflation rate seen in the 2007-2022 period that baseball attendance has been dwindling. Making the argument that inflation has affected MLB's attendance rate could be proven true for the most recent years where inflation has been at its highest, but looking at prior years with the same connection between inflation and attendance rate wouldn't provide the same conclusion.

In 2022, the average cost of a family of four to attend a MLB game when choosing the lowest priced seats, buying four hot dogs, two beers, two sodas, and paying for parking was $204.76 (FanCostIndex, 2022). This is on average with the experience for a family of four being cheaper or more expensive at different stadiums as seen in Figure 2 below. Even though prices are rising, studies such as, "Ticket Prices, Concessions and Attendance at Professional Sporting Events", written by Dennis Coates and Brad R. Humphreys confirms that demand for tickets is price inelastic (Coates and Humphreys, 162, 2007). Price inelasticity means that the demand for the tickets stays relatively the same whether the price goes up or down. This means that while inflation might be affecting fan spending within the stadium at team shops and concessions, fans are still willing to spend money on tickets to the game. It is reasonable to say that the increase of average price of an experience at the ballpark between 2007-2022 paired with the large number

of games to choose from has affected fans' willingness to spend money at games. However, the limited data to show how much price has affected the decline in MLB attendance leads to the belief that inflation and prices contribute very little to MLB's declining attendance.

Cost for a family to go to a baseball game

Total cost for 4 tickets, 4 hot dogs, 2 beers, 2 sodas, and parking (2022)

Team	Ticket	Beer	Soda	Hot dog	Parking	Total*
Boston Red Sox	$61.71	$9.50	$5.50	$6.00	$23.53	$324.37
Chicago Cubs	$56.83	$10.49	$5.99	$6.49	$26.61	$312.85
New York Yankees	$61.59	$6.00	$3.00	$3.00	$26.50	$302.86
Houston Astros	$58.61	$7.50	$5.50	$6.00	$9.30	$293.74
Washington Nationals	$48.95	$9.95	$5.75	$6.95	$24.30	$279.30
Los Angeles Dodgers	$50.19	$6.75	$6.50	$6.75	$11.67	$265.93
San Francisco Giants	$39.04	$9.00	$6.50	$7.50	$28.20	$245.36
Texas Rangers	$37.94	$8.00	$6.50	$6.75	$20.55	$228.31
Chicago White Sox	$34.43	$10.75	$6.00	$5.00	$23.57	$214.79
St. Louis Cardinals	$36.40	$5.00	$6.50	$5.25	$18.60	$208.20
Philadelphia Phillies	$36.06	$9.99	$5.00	$3.00	$20.94	$207.16
Oakland Athletics	$32.56	$7.00	$5.50	$6.00	$25.00	$204.24
New York Mets	$28.73	$12.00	$5.75	$6.70	$20.25	$197.47
Milwaukee Brewers	$31.29	$9.00	$6.00	$6.75	$13.74	$195.90
Atlanta Braves	$34.76	$5.00	$5.95	$3.50	$19.00	$193.94
Kansas City Royals	$35.16	$5.50	$3.00	$4.00	$20.00	$193.64
Seattle Mariners	$35.22	$5.00	$3.00	$3.00	$17.61	$186.49
Los Angeles Angels	$32.03	$4.50	$5.75	$6.00	$10.00	$182.62
Toronto Blue Jays	$32.03	$4.33	$5.50	$4.72	$12.20	$178.86
San Diego Padres	$27.44	$5.00	$6.50	$7.50	$14.00	$176.76
Minnesota Twins	$32.65	$5.00	$2.00	$4.00	$10.29	$170.89
Cleveland Guardians	$30.53	$5.00	$3.75	$4.50	$12.75	$170.37
Baltimore Orioles	$30.10	$10.00	$2.50	$3.00	$10.66	$168.06
Detroit Tigers	$26.84	$5.00	$5.00	$5.50	$9.40	$158.76
Cincinnati Reds	$24.25	$6.49	$6.49	$5.99	$10.48	$157.40
Tampa Bay Rays	$26.13	$5.00	$5.00	$5.00	$12.50	$157.02
Colorado Rockies	$25.51	$3.00	$5.00	$6.00	$12.88	$154.92
Pittsburgh Pirates	$25.46	$6.50	$4.50	$4.00	$10.41	$150.25
Miami Marlins	$23.27	$5.00	$3.00	$3.00	$15.00	$136.08
Arizona Diamondbacks	$22.12	$4.99	$2.99	$2.00	$13.90	$126.34
Average	**$35.93**	**$6.87**	**$5.00**	**$5.13**	**$16.79**	**$204.76**

* TOTAL = Total cost for a family of 4 / parking = average of the lowest-priced spots
DATA: FanCostIndex (Team Marketing Report), 2022; data adjusted for cheapest option

theHUSTLE

(Figure 2. Average cost for a family of four to attend a MLB game by stadium from highest to lowest (Hustle, 2022))

As discussed in the literature review section, this increase in pricing could very well be a strategy imposed by owners of the team to create a luxury experience and overall increase profits with less expenses associated with fewer attendees. It is not a great feeling to think that the owners are more concerned with making money than they are with providing a great fan

experience, but it does make sense. After all, owning a team is a part of the entertainment industry and running a team is the same as running a business, so the idea that owners are trying to maximize profit while decreasing costs and expenses of operation is reasonable and not far-fetched. Of course, the owners are not going to come out and express their lack of concern with fan wellbeing, but that doesn't mean they are going to be reluctant in doing things to fatten their own pockets at the expense of losing fan attendance.

Pace of Play 1.2

Since 2007, average MLB game length has increased by only twelve minutes, with an average of three hours and three minutes per game (Statista, 2022). To many modern viewers, baseball games are said to take too long. They believe that the games are boring and include unnecessary parts of the game that contribute to how long the game lasts. More aspects to the game have been added such as time for TV commercials and radio broadcasting commercials. The parts of the game that viewers see as boring or taking too long include pitching changes, mound visits, warm-up pitches in between innings, play reviews, and most importantly the lack of action. Baseball is not a sport of constant action like football, basketball, or hockey. There are innings in which a ball might never be batted in play or where a pitcher strikes out the side. There might be an inning where only one or two hits are gotten, but that is soon forgotten after the third out has been recorded. On top of baseball not having constant action during the inning, the time in between innings where teams switch from offense to defense adds to the lull. Teams have added events like on field games while each team warms up in between innings, but it's still not enough to keep fans locked in on the game. This type of game doesn't appeal to Americans as much as it used to because of the constant "on the go" of modern-day American society. A poll or survey of Americans' thoughts on the length of games and how they view the game in general would be

useful information to the commissioner of MLB and MLB as a whole. However, many studies that try to capture fan bias towards baseball's decline have a survey size of around 1,000 participants, a very small sample size of baseball fans. The idea that American society has sped up so much that baseball's slow nature does not fit the status quo is hard to quantify, but further research and studies focused on what the fans think could be beneficial to solving the decrease in attendance.

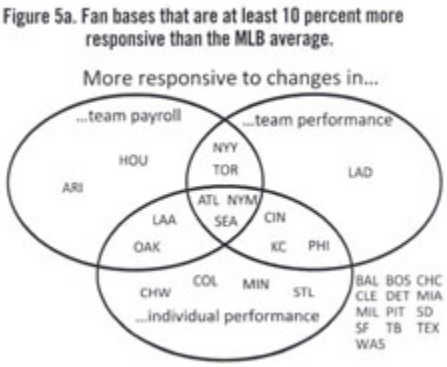
Changing Society

With Americans constantly doing more work with jobs that require longer workdays and even doing work at home to catch up on things they didn't get to do during the workday, they have less time for leisure activities. When they do have time for leisure, fitting a three-hour baseball game into their non-stop schedule seems impossible and is less intriguing. Because of the long, slow pace of baseball, people feel like they are wasting time and losing out on time to get work done. Even when they can get to games, the lack of constant action is far from the norm of the everyday American whose life is filled with action. "We'd hear from creative professionals in what seemed to be dream jobs who were crumbling under ever-expanding to-do lists; from bus drivers, hospital technicians, construction workers, doctors, and lawyers who shame-facedly whispered that no matter how hard they tried to keep up with the extra hours and extra tasks, they just couldn't hold it together. (And don't even ask about family time.)". This quote in the article, "All Work and No Pay: The Great Speedup" (2011) written by Clara Jefferey and Monika Bauerlein published in *Mother Jones Magazine*, encapsulates what Americans are dealing with in their day-to-day work life and shows the non-stop nature of American society. America proudly promotes itself as the most productive nation in the world, doing more and more each year at the expense of their sanity like mentioned in the quote above.

Baseball's structure and way of game has not changed much from the early days of baseball with nine innings of play, three outs per inning, and equal offensive and defensive opportunities for teams. While the structure of the game is what makes baseball the game it is, MLB has failed to adjust and run a tight ship with efficient parameters that speed the game up to adjust to the American lifestyle. Speeding the game up during and in between innings will make the "actionless" parts of the game go by faster. But is speeding the game up to adjust to the constant flow of American lifestyle what needs to be done? Baseball is a methodical game that uses strategy. Batters step out of the batter's box to mess with the pitcher's timing and pitchers hold the ball longer to mess with the batter's timing. These strategies or "rituals" are ones that baseball outsiders say take the longest and make baseball games last too long (NY Times, 2014). Again, these things make baseball the game that it is and always has been. While the length of games has increased from an average two and a half hours in 1950 to over three hours in 2022, it is a result of baseball players who have upheld the "rituals" that have been incorporated into the game (NY Times, 2014). The problem with the decrease in attendance due to how long baseball games take is not a problem with baseball itself, but a problem with American society trying to speed everything up. As Mark C. Taylor put it in his article, "Should We Put Baseball on Speed?" baseball has a languid, meditative pace built into its DNA (NY Times, 2014). American society has forgotten the traditional aspects of baseball that made it a game of deliberation and patience, leading to baseball's downfall. Unfortunately, due to America's obsession with instant gratification and wanting more now, the fear is that baseball will be the one forced to change at the expense of its traditional gameplay.

Team Performance 1.3

Does MLB team performance affect attendance levels and if so, how can teams improve performance to increase attendance? The correlation between team performance in terms of wins and attendance was looked at in a study, "What do your fans want? Attendance correlations with performance, ticket prices, and payroll factors", posted in the Baseball Research Journal written by Ben Langhorst. In this study he looked at how team performance, individual performance, payroll factors, and ticket prices affected attendance. It was concluded that these factors varied in effect throughout MLB organizations (Langhorst, 2014). Fans in Los Angeles were more responsive to changes in team performance than other fan bases. Fan attendance in Houston and Arizona was affected more by team payroll while Colorado, Chicago, Minnesota, and St. Louis saw changes in attendance associated higher with individual performance (Langhorst, Figure 5a, 2014).



(Figure 3. Venn Diagram showing factors affecting attendance by team from 1970-2012 (Langhorst, 2014))

Looking at the data collected by Langhorst in this study shows that team performance has an effect on certain team attendance, although it is not a factor affecting every MLB team. The data is important to review because even though performance is not a team-wide factor in attendance decrease, it still influences the league average attendance that has been decreasing and opens more doors to show what influences a fan's decision to attend a game. This study

shows that fans across the league have different reasons for attending. Team management and owners must do a better job at researching the variables impacting their attendance and work in those areas to appeal to their fans. While team performance was not a factor affecting attendance for every team, it has an effect on the league-wide attendance decrease seen. To be able to increase a team's performance, owners must find the best prospects to add to their roster and try to incentivize the best players to play for them. Getting the best players and increasing player payrolls can be difficult to accomplish for teams that have smaller revenues which leads to the revenue sharing problem.

Revenue Sharing Problem

MLB is composed of 30 teams from different areas of the country. Each team has owners and general managers who are responsible for funding and building the team through stadium operations and building the team with the players they feel will bring success to the team. MLB teams are required to operate in certain ways that are universal throughout the league. The issue is that locations for each team vary in socioeconomic status which leads to differing amounts of financial capabilities. Each team has the choice to offer players a high salary to encourage the best players to come play for them, but not every team has the resources to pay high salaries to players and continue to thrive as a program. There are teams that have a very high budget that can pay multiple players high salaries and still have money to keep the program running. The New York Yankees will always be at the top of the market in MLB because of the size of the city they're in and the market that they attract, providing them with higher revenue. Then there are teams called small-market teams who don't produce as much revenue because of their location and population near the stadium; for example, the Seattle Mariners located in Seattle, Washington with a population of 733,919 compared to New York City's 8,467,513 (USCB,

2021). This creates a struggle for them to get the best players while still having money for team and stadium operations. This has been an issue from the beginning of professional baseball with what is seen as an unfair advantage to teams that have more financial resources that are able to pay players more, leading to superstar players wanting to play for those clubs (The Georgetown Voice, 2020). Players are going to go where they are offered the most money and if a small market team has little to offer compared to the higher market ball clubs, they lose the fight to get the best players. Baseball fans love going to games and supporting their teams, but they are more reluctant to spend money going to games if their team has little chance of winning. MLB has a revenue sharing problem which has contributed, along with other factors, to the decrease in interest and attendance because of the lack of competitive balance it has created.

Strategies to Increase Attendance

As identified in section 1.2, American lifestyle has had a lot to do with the decrease in attendance of MLB games. It is not hard to understand that American society has changed very much with respect to what is expected in everyday life. Another important piece to the decreasing attendance issue that was looked at in earlier sections is the role that the owners play in the decrease. In the following sections, strategies for increasing attendance that MLB is implementing already will be discussed and proposals for what MLB should do will also be discussed. In terms of the owners' strategies for fattening their pockets at the risk of losing attendees, further research needs to be conducted to understand the owners' true thoughts on whether they see the decrease in attendance as a problem or a benefit. A section about perceived ideas about the decreasing attendance will be included, as well.

Dynamic Ticket Pricing (DTP) 2.1

The first strategy that will be looked at is the MLB dynamic ticket pricing strategy. Dynamic ticket pricing is the change in ticket prices over different days based on demand. MLB teams use dynamic pricing on single-season tickets days before and even hours before games in accordance with demand for a game. This tactic was implemented in MLB in 2008 with the San Francisco Giants (Dittmer and Carbaugh, 44, 2014). Before dynamic pricing became easier and more popular in MLB, teams would set ticket prices before the season. Tickets were priced based on the seat value, i.e., where the seat was located on the field. This tactic was easy for teams to price seats based on the view and experience the seat gave the fan. For those teams to use dynamic pricing before computer systems gave them an easier ability to change prices on the fly, they would have to manually change prices which was a high cost in terms of requiring a lot of expensive work to be done. Teams realized the value in charging more for higher demand games which resulted in variable ticket pricing methods for games that held a higher value. These higher value games would be against a league rival or against teams that were projected to be league leaders, but this pricing method was still done before the season started. After automated computer systems and programs were created to change these prices and record data on previous games, more teams implemented dynamic pricing (Dittmer and Carbaugh, 51, 2014). This invention would allow teams to look at previous year demand and previous game demand and create a dynamic pricing model to maximize profit per game . Dynamic ticket pricing benefits teams, but it might benefit consumers more.

The main idea of dynamic ticket pricing is for teams to have the ability to change ticket prices in real time depending on demand to increase revenue. While this model benefits the teams, it also benefits the fans. With the creation of dynamic ticket pricing came the fight to keep up with secondary markets. Secondary markets like StubHub allow fans to buy and sell tickets from

other fans. The problem with the secondary markets is that large market teams don't like secondary markets selling their tickets so cheap that the prices stadium's charge seem like price gouging (Bleacher Report, 2012). Sellers are allowed to sell tickets at whatever price they feel is necessary. While this can hurt teams ticket revenue, it is a good way to still fill the stadium and offers fans the opportunity to find good tickets for cheaper prices. Teams using dynamic ticket pricing can monitor StubHub's prices and adjust theirs accordingly to not lose out on the extra ticket sales. While teams using dynamic ticket pricing has been a tactic more to keep up with the secondary market competition, it helps to answer the problem of rising ticket prices. While ticket prices have gone up, teams won't be able to keep season ticket holders coming back, an organization's bread and butter of ticket sales. If they raise ticket prices too high that season ticket holders using secondary markets to sell their tickets must charge less than the face value of the ticket, then those season ticket holders are going to think twice about buying those tickets again. Even though dynamic ticket pricing won't stop the attendance decline altogether, it does allow for MLB to make prices that will gain them revenue on "premium" seats while offering seats for those fans with a lower budget.

Changing the Game 2.2

Firstly, the MLB season is seen as long and drawn out with a total of 162 regular season games. The number of games affects the amount of people that go to games and ultimately how often they will go. If families were to go to 17 MLB games, a NFL full schedule (only 10% of a MLB full schedule), using the data from section 1.1, they would spend $3,480.92 in total. While money is becoming a bigger issue with rising costs, the length of the season could provide a reason why fans are less likely to fill a stadium on a Wednesday night due to the wide variety of games available for them to attend throughout the season. No changes to the length of the season

have been introduced yet and there are no signs of that change coming anytime soon. Some changes that have been made, however, are the changes in the rules of baseball.

These rules changes have been implemented to shorten the average game time and increase the amount of action during games. Rule changes that have occurred include a pitch clock, a between inning time limit, banning the shift, and increasing the size of bases. The pitch clock is a 15 second timer without runners on base and a 20 second timer with runners on base (Castrovince, 2023). This rule was implemented in MLB after it was tried in MiLB. MiLB's test run of this rule showed an average game time decrease of about 26 minutes and increased the stolen base rate and stolen base success rate (Castrovince, 2023). Implementing this in MLB will hopefully yield similar results. The second rule change was a two minute and fifteen second break in between innings to limit the amount of down time between innings and get back to the action at a faster pace. The third rule change is a limit on the shift that teams were using to cut down on the amount of hits and increase their chances of success. This rule makes it so that a minimum of four infielders must be in the infield with two infielders on either side of second base (Castrovince, 2023). The reason behind this rule was to increase batting average of balls put in play and to allow infielders to showcase their athleticism and to restore traditional outcomes of balls put in play, according to MLB.com. The final rule implemented was the base size increase. This rule was implemented to potentially increase stolen base success rate, but also decrease the likelihood of injuries caused by collisions. Another effect is that the bigger bases could potentially decrease the likelihood of sliding over the bag causing players to lose contact with the base (Castrovince, 2023).

These rule changes have come in light of fans complaining about the length of the game and the lack of action driven by the three true outcomes (homerun, walk, or strikeout) during the

game. These rule changes have been tried and tested in independent leagues and minor leagues to test the effects on game length and action potential. Other rules are being experimented with in the other leagues such as using robotic umpires and these rules or changes to the structure of the game could potentially make their way into MLB in the future.

Promotions/Marketing Strategies 2.3

Marketing and promotion are a big part in any business gaining support and increasing popularity. Those strategies are just as important to MLB as a business, also. MLB does not have a problem with marketing and getting information about games, teams, and news to fans. Through newspaper, radio advertisements, television commercials and channels, and apps tailored to MLB information, MLB can keep fans up to date with the latest and most relevant information. The area they are lacking in is the promotional aspect of marketing.

Everyone loves a deal, or a free gift included in their experience of whatever they are doing. Promotional strategies such as giving away bobbleheads or any sort of memorabilia at the entrance gates to ballparks, free jersey giveaways, chances to win a meet and greet with a player or the team, and many other strategies should be used by MLB teams and MLB as a whole. Giving away memorabilia at gate entry not only entices fans to attend games, but it gives fans an experience that they won't forget and something that can be passed down from generation to generation. Promotions such as giveaways are something that MLB teams would be paying for, but it brings people into the stadium and creates the possibility of higher spending when the fans enter the stadium and can increase the likelihood of fans coming back to the stadium. Promotional strategies are meant to be used for increasing excitement and making those who are spending money on a product or service feel appreciated and feel like they are getting a good deal. Things like jersey giveaways and the possibility to meet their favorite player or the entire

team are strategies that would cost ball clubs very little, but that have a possibility of increasing profit due to higher fan involvement.

Is Attendance Decline a Real Problem

Attendance decline within MLB stadiums has been seen as an issue MLB needs to address and fix. Through the research and commentary on this topic, the possibility of profitability for owners and teams with the attendance decline has been brought to light. As discussed in the literature review section, many ballclubs can increase their revenue and profits with having less people in the stands due to decreased expenses and the ability to raise prices at the stadium that fans still coming to the game are willing and able to pay. Based on the owners' views of how attendance decline can benefit them, the issue now does not seem to be attendance decline but how the attendance decline will affect future generations' view and involvement with baseball.

Future research into baseball's popularity with newer generations should be conducted to analyze the effects of the attendance decline. With the modern information available and the fact that baseball still has a large following, attendance decline does not seem to have a direct correlation to baseball's popularity. Baseball might not be viewed in society as it was in the early stages and creation of the game, but it is still viewed highly and hearing the phrase "Baseball is America's pastime" is not uncommon today. The idea of baseball being America's pastime is a strong idea held by many older folks today who were alive during the "booming" of baseball in the 1900's and that has trickled down to generations of individuals today who still view baseball highly despite not filling the stadiums like before. There are reasons why baseball fans are unwilling to attend a baseball game in person that go beyond a disinterest in the game itself as discussed earlier. There are also many strategies that MLB and the ball clubs themselves can implement and have started to introduce to combat the issue of declining attendance.

However, as alluded to above, the declining attendance has not given owners the fear of baseball losing its popularity within society and for that reason major changes to get people back into the stadiums have not been put into action quite yet. This does not mean that the declining attendance won't affect future generations and how popular baseball is, but based on the current data declining attendance is not a tell-tale sign of baseball's slow death.

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