

Place: There's No Place Like Home!

Proper management of facilities and services at the home field can provide a competitive advantage both for attracting fans and then for the team who gets to play in front of a good home crowd. However, management sometimes has difficulty consistently getting good play from their employees and keeping the place in proper shape. A new stadium or arena can make things better in the short term, but won't save bad management and a bad team (see right). Managing sports venues can be difficult for at least three reasons.



Miller Park

Milwaukee's attendance dropped from 81.7% of capacity to 57.2% in its second year in its new place.

First, the longer you work at a place, the more difficult it is to remember what it is like to be a customer. You can get accustomed to the cranky worker at the gate, not notice the paint peeling in the hallways, and ignore the mildewed tiles that ominously droop down from the restroom ceilings waiting for an unsuspecting fan. This is unfortunate since, in today's tort-ridden climate, some fan is apt to sue you and the organization for mental anguish and suffering resulting from the foam tile dropping at an inopportune time.

Second, owners and managers are less likely to receive or even see the same service that the average Joe does. A good deal of time and effort may be (appropriately) expended in serving the needs and wants of those individuals and corporate sponsors who lease suites and sit in the expensive box seats, but unless management purposely observes and controls all aspects of customer service, it is difficult for them to get the same picture the typical fan is getting. Fortunately, secret shoppers, customer surveys, service contests and other means may be used to deal with the lack of direct oversight by management.

Third, fans are stupid. Not all fans. Just some fans. You have a situation at sporting events that is often a recipe for disaster, sometimes minor and sometimes major. At the major disaster level, you have an important rivalry game wherein a large crowd of people who mutually hate another crowd of people are simultaneously completely consumed by the love for their team and the mass quantity of alcoholic beverages of their choice. It is a foregone conclusion that the referee or umpire will blow a crucial call, causing each crowd of fans to behave in ways that the video of this behavior is repeated over and over again on Sportscenter or at least on the "You've Gotta See This" sports program¹. Unfortunately, on a more minor yet frequent level, you have these same kinds of individuals behaving in ways that require them to be personally escorted from the game.



Fans getting a bit out of hand at soccer game.

These three areas of difficulty presented above represent three critical aspects of sports marketing that hit close to home: facility management, service management and fan management. The following sections outline issues primarily from a marketing perspective (i.e., what should be done to satisfy fans' needs and wants), but also seeks to offer concrete managerial actions to meet fans' needs.

Facility Management



Managing the place is particularly important in **sportscapes** (i.e., all of the built and managed environment that the fan sees when attending a sporting event), because fans spend hours in the place. In fact, the more time fans spend in the place, the more important is the facility itself in determining fan attendance. The sportscape has the most influence on fans' feelings and behavior in baseball (70-82 home games), followed by basketball and hockey (40+ home games), and football (6-8 home games). The point is that

¹ This is a Fox Sports program that mainly features 17-year old skateboarders knowing ahead of time that they are doing something incredibly stupid, otherwise they wouldn't have their buddies videotaping it.

the more hours that season ticket holders (or frequent fans) are paying to be in the place, the better the place has to be.

Because management becomes accustomed to the physical environment and the people with which they work everyday, it is important to be aware of the focal points that affect fans' perceptions of the place. Research on stadiums shows that the ten factors² below influence how (dis)pleasurable fans feel the place is. These feelings, of course, influence their willingness to stay in the stadium, spend money while in the stadium, and to return to the stadium in the future.

1. Parking access (ease of entry, ample parking, convenience, ease of exit)
2. Architectural design and appearance (attractive & interesting structural design; exterior appearance; landscaping)
3. Interior décor (color schemes, wall décor, lighting, ambience)
4. Facility layout (visibility, ease of going wherever you want to go)
5. Wayfinding signage (to seats, restrooms, services & exits; wayfinding markers)
6. Facility space (enough space in restrooms, walkways, concessions, and seating areas to accommodate fans)
7. Seat comfort (knee room, elbow room, seat space & comfort, unobstructed view)
8. Equipment quality (functionally and aesthetically pleasing; in good order & repair)
9. Scoreboards & Sound Systems (quality of information: exciting, interesting, timely, & complete; sound quality: volume & clarity)
10. Cleanliness (restrooms, walkways, concessions, seating areas)
11. Perceived crowding (feeling restricted, cramped, stuffy, & constrained due to facility layout, wayfinding signage, and space)

Multiple-use. Too often in the past, management has focused on the sports facility as merely a place to play a game. Today, it is more often a place that people go for entertainment throughout the year, as sports facility owners seek to hold events in the facility for social groups, weddings, birthdays, bar mitzvahs, multiple sports, concerts, and hopefully—rodeos and monster truck shows. In any case (except perhaps rodeos), the attractiveness of the facility as a meeting place will influence the likelihood that others will want to spend time in the facility. Obviously, availability of customer services (i.e., food service & catering) are also important, but this is covered in the next section on service management. Overall, however, investments aimed at enhancing facility quality can be offset with increased usage both in-season and out-of-season.

The sections below walk you through each aspect of the sportscape, noting its influence on fans and what management can do to manage each aspect of the sportscape.

Parking Access. When properly designed and managed, parking access (ingress and egress) may almost go unnoticed by some fans as long as it does not hinder them from achieving their goals (i.e., to get to the game and then go elsewhere). However, improperly designed and managed, parking issues can have a significant effect on attendance and influence how long folks want to stay at the game before trying to beat the traffic.

Since management personnel are never the ones trying to leave right after the game, traffic issues may not get enough attention until people complain. The problem is that people have difficulty letting management know about the problem because they are already out of the building. Further, most people will complain, but they won't take the time to complain to management. They'll complain to other people who happen to be in earshot and just decide not to come back. Or, if they do come back, they'll be sure to leave early. Again, the less time they are in the facility, the less chance they have to spend money.

² This is like the Big 10 Conference, which actually has 11 team members. Actually, #11 in the list is a consequence of some of the other factors and is not a structural component of the built environment.

Five things that organizations can do to facilitate parking access include:

1. *Employ enough personnel* to direct fans to open parking when entering and to educate and direct fans to the most expedient exit routes.
2. *Add routes* that give fans more entrance & exit choices. It is important that management carefully evaluate physical routes and barriers that may inhibit proper traffic flow. If adding additional entrances/exits will save fans 10-20 minutes, it is probably worth the investment in logistic infrastructure (roads).
3. *Arrange traffic light management* with local police. Sometimes the problem isn't in the parking lot—it could be problems down the road where traffic lights stall the free movement of traffic.
4. *Offer entertainment* before and/or after the game that encourages fans to come early and stay later. Having a concert or some other post-game entertainment allows the crowd to not have to disperse all at the same time.
5. *Provide shuttle service* from a more distant parking lot—for free, by getting a sponsor who gets personal contact with the fans on the way to the facility. The sponsor can pass out samples or coupons and provide other brand/product information while also gaining the positive association with the team in the minds and hearts of fans.

Architectural design. The first broad impression that fans get of a place is from the exterior of the place and its general architectural design. HOK, the leading sports architectural design firm, has made its reputation based upon stadium designs that catch the emotion of the sport. Although most of us won't be deciding which architectural firm to use to build a stadium or arena or what the design will be, it is interesting to note that attractive stadium designs include mostly older stadiums (Wrigley Field or Fenway Park) and new stadiums that look like the old ones (Camden Yards, Pac Bell Park and nearly all new minor league parks). Stadiums that aren't very popular, even if they are new, are those that look more like modern amusement parks, such as what was Chicago's New Comiskey Park (and is now U.S. Cellular Park). In fact, recognizing these problems, this field has undergone major renovations less than a dozen years after it was built. Visit the link below to see the improvements that should help, but probably still won't compare favorably with the Friendly Confines (Wrigley Field): http://chicago.whitesox.mlb.com/NASApp/mlb/cws/ballpark/cws_ballpark_cellularfield.jsp

While you may read many editorials complaining about the rash of new stadiums and arenas and the drain on taxpayers, the fact of the matter is that facilities of all types (not just sports) require frequent renovation or entirely new facilities to maintain its competitiveness. On the extreme, one can observe the frequency and expense with which casinos in Las Vegas renovate and rebuild in order to remain competitive. On the other end of the spectrum are government buildings housing the Department of Motor Vehicle Registration, which may explain why nearly all DMV employees are so depressed that they take it out on you when you wait until the last day of the month to renew your license. Virtually all categories of public facilities go through cycles



Texas Tech's Jones Stadium prior to recent renovation.

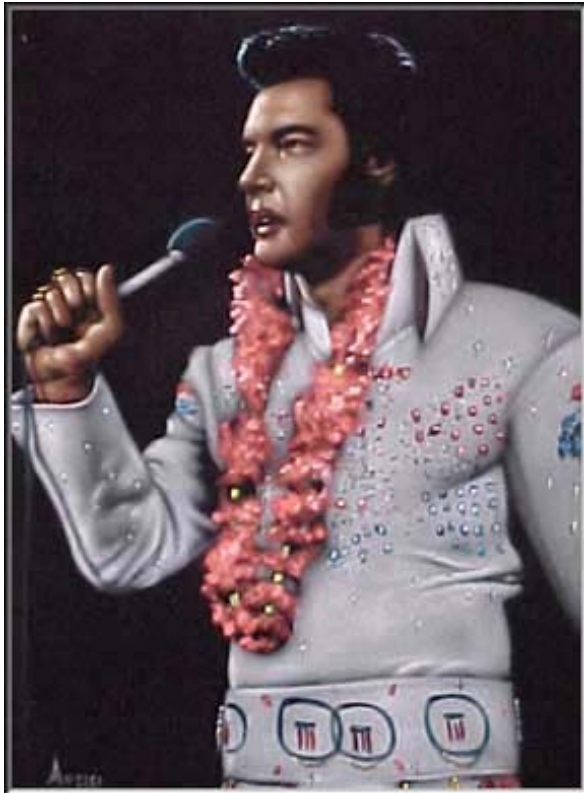
wherein expensive renovation or rebuilding is required. The fact of the matter is that many public sports facilities were built decades ago and are in need of replacement. Furthermore, with the need to augment revenue through multiple uses, owners (whether public or private) must have facilities that can accommodate more than just a sporting event.

Interior décor. One of the most common sports facility interior design concepts of the 1970s and 1980s was to rely upon the clever color scheme of gray [concrete] walls and facades on gray [concrete] steps and walkways to create the perception that these are the same people who must design our prisons, only with less attention to detail and style (at the stadiums). Even today, you can frequently encounter sportscares that rely upon this time-tested color scheme that makes fans feel like they want to leave as soon as (a) the game is

decided, (b) they stop serving beer, and/or (c) they recover from walking around the seemingly endless winding walkways to their seats in the upper deck.

Fix it up. Some organizations with older facilities have improved the interior décor and built or maintained fan attendance. In St. Louis, the Cardinals painted the outfield façade walls in team colors, hung colorful banners, redesigned seating and concessions (viz., outfield concessions and seating area overlooking the field), replaced astroturf with real grass and installed decorative centerfield landscaping, among other things, to deal

with the concrete dome (circa 1970s) nature of their stadium. During the same time, working with a facility and downtown location similar to the Cardinals, the Cincinnati Reds did virtually nothing to Riverfront Stadium, seeing fan attendance drop and remain relatively low even when the team performed well. The key issue here is that management must periodically assess the relative attractiveness of the interior décor of the facility and seek ways to improve it, just as the White Sox did in 2002-3. In particular, if management is a bunch of guys, it is also a good idea to gain insight from someone



who doesn't decorate their own home with velvet pictures of Elvis or dogs playing poker.

Layout and Wayfinding signage. A frequent problem encountered by new fans visiting a stadium is finding their way around. Again, management already knows where to go, so they often overlook the fact that the layout of the facility can be confusing and that clear wayfinding signage is needed.

Visualization and Markers. An important advantage of most of the new stadiums is that they are designed so that fans can *see through* the facility to be able to **visualize** where they are, where they want to go, and what's going on on the field. For example, fans at some stadiums can search for seats, stand in line for concessions or enter restrooms from the field side rather than facing an exterior wall. If fans can see where they are with respect to the field, finding locations in the facility is far easier than without the visual reference point. Further, better interior designs often provide **wayfinding markers** that may include landmarks (e.g., sculptures, displays, etc.), differentiated wall design (e.g., wall colors, pictures, etc.) or differentiated facilities (e.g., concessions with different storefronts) to enable fans to separate one part of the large facility from another. An

Fan's E-Opinion of Pro Player Stadium in Miami

http://www.epinions.com/content_50730536580

Having grown up in Miami, my family had Dolphins tickets for more than a decade. We enjoyed our experience at the Orange Bowl, but hated when they moved to what was then Joe Robbie Stadium.

I have very few compliments for Pro Player, a.k.a. JRS. When I used to go to the Orange Bowl, there was not much official parking. However, the local Cuban neighborhood made it very easy and inexpensive to park in their driveways and yards. Also, the Orange Bowl is near downtown. If they could only put a baseball stadium downtown!

Getting to JRS requires a long drive, but it is right off an expressway. The long drive is the easy part. Getting into the stadium parking lot is a nightmare that can take up to an hour to go a half mile or less. The staff has little control over who parks where, despite colored passes. They have only about 14,000 spaces for 73,000 people. I was very irritated to learn that despite having nine season tickets, I needed ten to get two passes.

Once inside you go to your seats. When we were in the OB, we had seats on the 35 yardline lower level, but due to Joe Robbie's arbitrary seating policy, we were now in the corner of the end zone, but thankfully in row 3 in front of the cheerleaders! You really do not have any good sightlines in this stadium. Even sitting on the sidelines, you are very far back from even the team's sidelines. Plus, the sun creates bad shadows during certain times of the day, leaving you with bad sunburns.

The food is atrocious and pricey, enough said. This is true even in the club seating area. Would you like a \$5 mini-Perrier bottle? However, if you sit in the club seating area, you have cover from the rain, and cold or hot air blowing down on you depending on the time of year.

Since the Dolphins play in basically a stone stadium, the Dolphins crowd cannot drown out the QB like they did in the OB. I like to think of JRS as a crappy country club, if that is possible.

I still love the Dolphins, but I hate JRS, now Pro Player.

Recommended: No
Parking Availability: What A Nightmare
Seat Location: Lower Level

important disadvantage of many older facilities constructed with a large quantity of concrete blocks or similar materials with no visualization is that fans can easily become lost or disoriented. For example, in some facilities, the upper deck level looks exactly the same as the lower deck level, each of which looks exactly like the adjoining seat sections, making it difficult to determine where you are. Making it worse, some of these same facilities use identical seat section numbers on different levels (e.g., you can find a Section 203 on both the lower level and the upper level).

If the facility lacks visualization, a new stadium or remodeling (removing walls) will help. Obviously, the less extensive and less expensive alternative is to add wayfinding markers and signage.

Signage. Lacking effective interior layout and design, **wayfinding signage** becomes critical in helping fans find seats, services and exits.

“You-Are-Here” signs are useful in larger facilities. However, these signs can cause more confusion than they are worth if they are not properly positioned from the viewer’s perspective. For example, some of these signs are placed with respect to North-South-East-West, but the fan is not standing at a position facing north when looking at the sign.

Seat sections should be clearly marked with signs visible from a distance, as from signs extended from the wall or ceiling. Merely marking the seat sections on the wall makes it difficult for the individual to see, particularly in crowded situations where fans may be blocking the signage. Further, some stadiums error by placing seat section numbers on the back wall of the sections—which is fine until people actually sit in the back row seats and block the numbers. The point is that management must view things from the fans’ perspective and consider situations that occur when the stadium is occupied and new fans are attending.

After fans find their seats, they will likely seek directions to food service, restrooms, shops, and other services (such as first aid, ticket offices for future sales, etc.). In the case of food service and restrooms, it can be particularly useful if directions are available communicating alternative locations (viz., “Expanded restrooms are also located behind the 1st and 3rd baselines and outfield bleachers.”).

Finally, exits should be clearly marked, but fans also would benefit from knowing the best ways to exit. Announcements and informational pamphlets can communicate some of this information. However, having personnel available to answer questions and direct fans as they exit is also an important responsibility of attendants and security personnel.

Facility Space and Perceived Crowding. The amount of space available given the number of people in that space has a direct psychological and physiological effect on fans. **Perceived crowding** in its strictest sense refers to the negative psychological reaction that an individual has when the number of people in a given space exceeds an acceptable comfort level for that individual. While an effective visually-open layout and clear wayfinding signage can alleviate space problems, the lack of space available for fans to easily navigate the facility in a timely manner leads to feelings of frustration. For anyone but *maybe* the most committed fan, cramped walkways, stuffy concession areas with long lines, and long narrow rows of seats leads to negative affective responses (read: they don’t like it) and ultimately to exit (read: they leave and don’t come back). It is no surprise that some fan segments are particularly disadvantaged at sporting events due to the lack of equitable restroom space. To combat this problem, the new American Airlines Center in Dallas has nearly 9,832 stalls in the women’s restroom to accommodate fans. Unfortunately, the men’s restrooms are now located outside the arena.

Crowding is a two-edged sword in the sportscape. On the one hand, the team wants a large crowd. The large crowd means greater excitement in the stands, more revenue to the organization, and home field advantage for the team. On the other hand, a large crowd without ample space will lead some to exit early and not return due

to perceived crowding. Like Yogi Berra once said, “No one goes there anymore. It’s too crowded.” So, the key is to be able to draw a large crowd that is comfortable despite the large crowd. In addition to improving layouts to have a more open feeling and providing clear signage to properly distribute the crowds, two constructive ways to improving space include smaller (new) venues and making space.

Smaller venues. Interestingly, to combat such crowding problems, nearly all new baseball stadiums over the past decade actually seat fewer fans than their predecessors. Rather than cram more people into uncomfortable spaces, they have chosen to make cozier facilities for fewer—but more satisfied—fans. Having 40,000 relatively good seats (including suites) compared to 60,000 seats of which only 20,000 are decent seats (as in some old stadiums) allows the organization to charge higher prices for the better value afforded by the seats. Further, new facilities have purposely brought fans even closer to the action, placing prime seats closer to the playing field and placing even the cheap seats in relatively good view of the event. This also leads to greater risks of fan injury, as we will discuss later.

Make space. Some facilities have attempted to deal with cramped facilities by removing seats and expanding the width and number of aisles and walkways. Other venues with limited attendance have shifted pricing policies to encourage or allow fans to get closer to the action (and out of the cramped upper level seats). Some teams offer seat upgrades for a small fee (e.g., \$1) that move fans to unused lower level seats after the beginning of the game. Others have changed prices such that lower level (better) seats are available at what were formerly upper level seat prices.

In addition to the benefit in reducing negative responses to cramped spaces, providing spacious areas to allow fans to easily navigate the venue is likely to have a positive affect on food service revenues. Difficulty in exiting the seating section due to long, narrow rows hinders fans’ willingness to obtain food and drinks—as they are unlikely to enjoy whacking the knees of everyone on the way to the food service areas. Also, if fans know that the food service line is also apt to be crowded, they will be less likely to want to miss 15-30 minutes of the game just to get food. Even if food vendors are available in the stands, poor layout and space makes service difficult (viz., passing food & change down a row of 20 people).

Seat Comfort, Equipment Quality, Scoreboards & Sound Systems. The most important aspect of seats, equipment and scoreboards is that they function properly. You can have the highest quality seats, service equipment (e.g., including things like air conditioning), scoreboards and sound systems in the country, but if they do not work they are little good at the time. Fans are likely to attribute the malfunctioning to management. Why? Because it is management’s job to make sure that someone prior to every game always examines and immediately fixes everything, including:

1. seats (ticketed and toiled)
2. video displays and monitors around facility
3. electronic signage and sponsorboards
4. scoreboards (all boards, all functions)
5. sound system volume (adjusted for expected crowd level)
6. roof leaks, retractable—if available (viz., Miller Park’s leaked in downpour in first year)
7. light fixtures
8. stadium/arena lights
9. glass panels & windows
10. railings (aisle, walkway, etc.)
11. self-service machines

Fans do not care if you announce or put a sign up to say that it is broken. The point is that you should have realized that with enough lead time to get it fixed. This means that replacements must be stocked and that technicians are contracted to provide ready repair.

Scoreboards & Sound Systems. The quality of the scoreboard & sound system limits or affords opportunities to entertain and inform fans. Since most sports organizations should be able to obtain decent systems through sponsorship deals, the only reason for lousy scoreboards is likely to be because someone has not effectively presented a package deal to the appropriate sponsor(s).

Given that the capable systems are available, management must take the fans' perspective as to what they want to see on the scoreboard (assuming it is working). What fans want are:

1. Complete team and player stats: Real sports fans eat up statistics about players and teams. Why else would Jerry Seinfeld say, "I'd read the sports page if my hair was on fire."? It's because, at least guys, would rather miss the birth of their firstborn than to miss a day reading the sports page. Knowing this, scoreboards should be managed to provide complete up-to-the-minute stats on the team and player. I think it is safe to say that teams cannot supply too much player information. Ok, there are a few players that we know a bit too much about. But, mostly, it's a good idea to provide as much information as possible so that fans feel like they really know a great deal about each player and build attachment and identification.
2. Emotion-driven entertainment: While highly identified fans want plenty of stats, fans of all identification levels are likely to enjoy video entertainment that sparks emotion. Fans come to the game for the emotion (excitement, pleasure, relaxation). Showing movie clips and playing songs related to the sport has become a staple at most venues. The key is in maintaining *continuity* while also providing *variety*. A good [local] example of this is the "Happy Dance" video played at Baylor Baseball games, but some of the funny video clips played with the music change from game to game. Fans want to know what to expect, but they don't want to be bored either.
3. Replays: Duh.

Cleanliness. Keeping a facility clean is much like maintaining seats and equipment. Individuals must be assigned to clean every aspect of the facility before, during, and after the event. Since cleanliness is entirely up to the personnel managing the place, fans will make attributions regarding management if the place is not clean:

1. Lack of organizational skills & attention to detail
2. Lack of concern for fans' needs
3. Lack of finances (due to poor attendance) to pay janitorial staff

None of these assumptions about management are beneficial. Part of the problem at the major league level is that this (janitorial) work may be contracted with a unionized service supplier, as well as some of the food service. Consequently, management has no direct control over the quality of service except when they sign the contract. So, it is critical that (a) such suppliers are very carefully evaluated, and (b) the contract be written in a way that allows for control mechanisms [read: cancellation of contract].

To the extent that management does have direct control over these services, personnel should be assigned to complete cleaning assignments at every customer contact point (halls, aisles, restrooms, etc.). A few easy ways to alleviate some of the burden is to enlist the fans' help by:

1. Informing fans of the need to keep "their stadium" clean, via signs & announcements.
2. Supplying ample garbage disposal units (trash cans). Most fans will throw stuff away if there is a repository close by. If not, they will simply reposit it below their seat or in the aisle.
3. Conducting mid-game clean-up by having attendants pass through each section with trash bags asking for and collecting all trash.



The result of Union Work

Coming next week: On Wednesday (4-23), we'll have Kristine Mansour talk to us about ticketing and group sales. She works with the EDS Byron Nelson Classic. Following that, we'll finish this chapter with more thoughts & directives concerning food service management and fan safety & security.