

A Comparison of Major League Baseball Attendance to Population and Selected Economic Factors, 1915-1970

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What is more American than baseball, except maybe hot dogs, apple pie and Fords? There is no question of the devotion of many to the game; however, there is a need to determine the degree to which baseball attendance is generated by the intrinsic interest in the sport and the extent general economic conditions influence baseball attendance. Is the desire to see major league baseball so deeply ingrained in the fiber of the American being that attendance figures are not influenced by economic conditions, or is baseball merely a business after all?

This paper compares major league baseball attendance with population and selected economic factors at five year intervals from 1915 to 1970. Major league attendance includes attendance at all regular season games in both the National and American Leagues. Population is the population of the United States using the decade census figures and mid-decade estimates. The economic factors used were the Gross National Product, per capita income, and retail trade income all based on 1970 market values. Comparisons were made with the raw data and rate of change of baseball attendance and each factor using the Spearman Rank Order method.

Summary of Results

Major league baseball attendance, and the selected economic factors of GNP, retail trade and per capita income correlated at the .01 level of significance. Likewise baseball attendance correlated at the .01 level with the population. As the economy and population of the United States grew, baseball attendance also grew.

There was no statistical significance correlation between the rate of change of baseball attendance and the GNP, retail trade or population. However the rate of change of baseball attendance and per capita income correlated at the .05 level. Baseball attendance seemed to be less sensitive to the rate of economic and population growth, other than on a micro-economic level.

Major league baseball seems to be a growth industry. The statistically significant correlation at the .01 level between baseball attendance, the population, and the selected economic factors of GNP, retail trade, and per capita income indicate that as the population and economy of the United States have expanded so has baseball attendance. However the lack of statistically significant correlations between the rate of change of baseball attendance, the population and economic factors except for per capita income indicate that forces other than the nation's economy influence the growth rate of baseball attendance. Political and social factors such as the euphoric consumerism and the changing style of baseball in the

1920's, the increased working hours and travel restrictions of World War II and the development of television in the early 1950's all were mitigating factors in the relationship between baseball and the economy. Yet as the economy grew so did baseball attendance, just not at the same rate.