Attendance at Sports Events

a. Until 1993, American League attendance was counted as the number of tickets sold, while National League attendance was measured by the number of people in the park. After 1993, both leagues counted attendance as the number of tickets sold.


In the entertainment industry, there is fierce competition for consumers’ leisure time and dollars. Entertainment spending, as a share of total expenditures, has increased over the past 10 years. Of the entertainment budget, the fraction spent on fees and admissions declined from the mid-1980s until 1992, but has recently rebounded.

One component of the entertainment industry, professional team sports, has fared remarkably well over the past 20 years. The National Basketball Association has increased its average per-game attendance from about 10,000 fans in 1980 to more than 17,000 in 1997. Over the same period, Major League Baseball also experienced large increases in attendance, from approximately 20,000 fans per game to just under 30,000. The National Football League, however, has posted only modest gains.

The impact of strikes, though initially large, is only temporary. The baseball strikes of 1981 and 1994–95 decreased attendance per game in those years, but the numbers quickly rebounded in later seasons. The same is true of the 1987 football strike, when attendance per game dropped about 10%.

A contributing factor in baseball fans’ increased attendance is the boom in new stadium construction. By 2005, fewer than half of baseball teams will be playing in parks built before 1989. Many of the older stadiums have become obsolete. They still have playing fields and seats for the fans, of course, but they lack newer stadiums’ luxury boxes, easy access to concessions, better sight lines, and fans’ closeness to the field. In general, technology has made the new stadiums far more “fan friendly.”