

The Most Loyal Fans in Baseball

Contributed by Brand Keys
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With the traditional cry, 'play ball,' Major League Baseball opens its 2015 season today, accompanied by the release of the 23rd annual Brand Keys, Inc., Sports Fan Loyalty survey.

Just like Joe DiMaggio said, “You always get a special kick on opening day, no matter how many you go through. You look forward to it like a birthday party when you're a kid. You think something wonderful is going to happen.” And for some teams something wonderful does happen — high levels of emotional engagement and fan loyalty.

Brand Keys Sports Fan Loyalty Index was designed to help professional sports team management identify precise fan loyalty rankings in their home and national markets, by providing metrics that correlate very highly with game viewership and purchase of licensed merchandise. Via interviews with 250 self-declared fans in each team’s local catchment area, the survey provides insights that enable league and team management to identify areas, particularly emotional ones, that need strategic brand coaching.

2015 Major League Baseball top 5 and bottom 5 Team standings:

Top 5 Teams — 2015 2014 Rankings

1. St. Louis Cardinals (#1)
2. San Francisco Giants (#5)
3. Los Angeles Dodgers (#6)
- 4 Detroit Tigers (#6)
5. Washington Nationals (#8)

Cellar Dwellers 2014 Rankings

30. Houston Astros (#30)
29. Arizona Diamondbacks (#21)
28. Colorado Rockies (#26)
27. New York Mets (#22)
26. Texas Rangers (#19)

The Sports Fan Loyalty Index, which measures all teams in the four major professional leagues, provides an apples-to-apples comparison of the emotional intensity with which fans support their home team versus corresponding values for fans of other teams in that market.

“Everybody loves a winner, but it's important to note that win/loss ratios only govern about 20% of fan loyalty,” said Robert Passikoff, president, Brand Keys. “Losing may have little to recommend it, but as it turns out ultimately there are more leveragable things than the final score — three other emotionally-based things, in fact, have to be taken into account when calculating the loyalty score for a team:

Pure Entertainment

How well a team does. But even more important than a win-loss ratio, how exciting is their play? Think St. Louis Cardinals or the Pittsburgh Pirates (#13, up from #23 last year).

Authenticity

How well they play as a team —offensively or defensively. A new stadium and, often, new managers, can help lift this driver. Look at the Detroit Tigers.

Fan Bonding

Are players respected and admired? Like Buster Posy of the Giants or the Dodgersâ€™ Clayton Kershaw.

History and Tradition

Is the game and the team part of community rituals, institutions, and beliefs? No matter how you feel personally, the Yankees (#7, down from #6 last year) have the highest rating when it comes to History and Tradition and, for what itâ€™s worth, thatâ€™s what keeps the Cubs (#16) going!

Again, because overall league and team rankings correlate very highly with viewership and merchandise sales, and since rankings can be influenced depending upon how loyalty drivers are managed, it's critical that team marketers do accurate scouting regarding the strategic ball they intend to pitch to fans. Bobble heads and foam fingers only go so far.

â€œAll teams can benefit from increased fan loyalty levels, but as baseball is traditionally called America's 'National Pastime,' there should be a real emotional connection for the fans,â€• added Brand Keysâ€™ Passikoff. And it's worth remembering what Hall of Fame pitcher Bob Feller said, â€œEvery day is a new opportunity. You can build on yesterday's success or put its failures behind and start over again. That's the way life is, with a new game every day, and that's the way baseball is.â€•

That's also the way it is when you have emotional metrics, and that's the way fan loyalty works for sports teams. You can build on successes and put failures behind you.