

## Baseball teams with more international players draw more fans, profits

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Ticket revenue increases by roughly half of a million dollars for each international player added to a Major League Baseball team, showing a sharp swing in fan favoritism for internationally diverse teams, a new study shows.

University of Michigan research also suggests that owners' profits could increase by recruiting more international players.

Researchers looked at the makeup of MLB teams from 1985-2005 and found that in the early years, fans showed a prejudice against international players, but over time there was a significant shift and the prejudice today is against teams without international players, said Jason Winfree, assistant professor of sport management and lead author of the paper. Winfree's co-author was his former student, Scott Tainsky, currently at the University of Illinois.

The preference peaked in 2000 when each international player added approximately \$595,632 to ticket sales, the study showed. The average MLB team that season showed 10.8 foreign-born players on its roster and garnered an average of \$6 million in additional revenue, the paper said.

That season, some teams fielded as many as 14 and as few as seven international players, the paper said. This translated into a \$4 million difference in revenue among teams with the most and least number of international players.

"It looks like where there use to be this discrimination against foreign players it's basically reversed," Winfree said. Much of the literature on fan discrimination focuses on race, but this study differs because it focuses on the native country.

The data also showed that the demographics of the team's home city played no role in the popularity of international players, nor did the player's country of birth matter. Since 2000, the fan preference for international players has declined slightly, but not enough to note—and the change is still a net positive, Winfree said.

The study only looked at revenue from ticket sales but if the same effect happens on television, the revenue increases would be even greater.

"The one thing that I thought was kind of interesting is it seemed like American sports are trying to get more international players and a more international audience, but in Europe and even in Canada they seem to be trying to get more domestic players," Winfree said, referring to policies that limit the number of foreign-born players in certain sports, such as football in Canada or soccer in Europe.

This may explain partly why American fans like international players - because they're still a novelty, Winfree said.

"In Canada they have restrictions on foreign players (in football) because if they didn't they wouldn't have any Canadian players," Winfree said.

"If you have a few foreign players they are an attraction to fans, but if you have a majority of foreign players it seems to be a problem."

The paper suggests owners would be wise to think about ways to expand into other countries, or to expand their international roster.

The paper, "[Discrimination](#) and Demand: The Effect of International

"Players on Attendance in Major League Baseball" is set to appear in the March issue of the journal *Social Science Quarterly*.

Provided by University of Michigan

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