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Ticket Operations History and Background

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this chapter, students will understand the discipline of ticket operations, how the need for ticket operations developed, and how the discipline satisfies the needs of spectators in sports and entertainment.

KEY TERMS

amphitheater, Colosseum, customers, Olympic Games, ticket history, ticket markets, ticket operations

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

History credits a variety of cultures with originating sport, including the Chinese, Egyptians, Babylonians, and the Greeks (College Sports Scholarships, 2001; Graham, Goldblatt & Delpy, 1995; Mint Museum of Art, 2001). Examples include horse racing, traced to central Asia as early as 4500 B.C.; bowling, identified in Egyptian tombs as early as 3200 B.C.; and wrestling, documented in China as early as 2697 B.C. (Shuai jiao, 2008), and around 2600 B.C. in Khajafi, Iraq, near Baghdad. A Mesoamerican sport/religious ritual called the Ballgame is promoted as the first team sport in history (“Mint Museum,” 2001), with origins as early as 3500 B.C.

No one knows for sure when the first ticket in history was issued. It is logical to assume that ticketing was introduced as a result of the effects of supply and demand. When the demand for attending a religious event, theatrical production, or sporting event exceeded the supply of seating, the need to create a system for limiting attendance was likely born. However, the implementation of ticketing may be more cynical. Assigning exclusivity to different socio-economic classes of people is documented throughout history (Masteralexis, Barr, & Hums, 2009; Pearson, 1973). It is possible that ticketing originated as a way to separate the wealthy or important from the common or less fortunate within the population.

The oldest known sports arena is the site of the ancient Olympic Games in Olympia, Greece. However, research differs as to when the ancient Olympic stadium was actually constructed. It is possible that some sort of primitive ticketing system was in use during the ancient Olympic Games. At the opening of the Ancient Olympic Games in 776 B.C., no seating was available for fans. Other than judges, those watching the games stood in the sun all day, without shelter, if they wanted to take in the action (Ryan, 1996; Swaddling, 1999). The date of the ancient Olympic stadium's construction is estimated at 350 B.C. (Swaddling). Seating capacity for the ancient stadium is estimated at 45,000-50,000 (Kieran & Daley, 1973). However, there is no archeological evidence to indicate that any sort of primitive ticketing system was used. Seating in the stadium may have been open to everyone without the use of assigned seat locations.

Some historians suggest that ticketing and assigned seats were invented in Rome (Ryan, 1996). Archeological evidence suggests that the earliest use of a ticket to gain entrance to a facility was documented in Rome in the first century (Tessera, 2008). In addition, most archaeologists agree that the first amphitheater, likely made of wood, was built in Rome (Pearson, 1973). Other ticketing language, such as sight lines, defined as the quality of a spectator's view at an event, was first used in early Roman amphitheaters (Pearson, 1973). Therefore, significant scientific and historical evidence exists to support the link between Roman innovation and the establishment of the field of ticket operations. As the number of spectators increased from hundreds in amphitheaters to thousands in the Roman Colosseum in approximately 80 A.D., it is logical to assume that functional ticketing practices were necessary in order to provide for efficient traffic flow and to successfully manage large crowds.

From a practical perspective, anything can be used as a ticket as long as the availability of the item can be controlled and not easily reproduced. For example, in ancient Rome, tessera were used to gain access to events at amphitheaters and arenas including the Colosseum (Tessera, 2008). The word tessera is a broadly defined term as applied to ancient Rome. Tessera included many different items, including pottery shards, colored stones, glass, ceramic, and mosaic tiles, as well as pieces of marble and limestone cut into small cubes (Futrell, 2006; Tessera, 2008). As applied to use as a ticket to gain entrance to amphitheaters and arenas, the word tessera likely refers to either small ceramic tiles or pottery shards.

At the Colosseum, arguably one of the best-designed facilities in history, 80 arches and staircases called *vomitoria* were used to efficiently allow traffic flow in and out of the building (Oxford Dictionaries, 2011; Pearson, 1973). At least 66 of these arches were numbered. Arches, landings, and staircases in the Colosseum were all identified with Roman numerals (Pearson, 1973; Quennell, 1971; Ryan, 1996). Tickets were labeled with the arch number and staircase (*vomitoria*) closest to the seat location, as well as the section (*maenianum*), subsection (*cunens*), row number (*ordo*), and seat number (*locus*). This allowed spectators to enter and depart the facility at the ideal arch and locate their seat in a timely and efficient manner (Futrell, 2006; Tessera, 2008). Experts estimate the seating capacity of the Colosseum at anywhere

from 45,000 to 87,000 (Futrell, 2006; Kohne, Ewigleben, & Jackson, 2000; Pepe, 2008; Quennell, 1971). Reports also indicate that the Colosseum could be filled or emptied of full capacity quickly, perhaps in as little as 3-15 minutes (Pearson, 1973; Pepe, 2008; Ryan, 1996). If true, this statement is a testament to the brilliant planning and design of the ancient facility. Evidence may also indicate the concept of Will Call, a location where tickets may be picked up in advance of an event, was in place at the Colosseum (Ryan, 1996).

The Colosseum was also years ahead of its time in regard to safety. A safe environment for fans is a basic requirement for successful ticket sales. The Colosseum used archers on catwalks and nets above certain sections of the facility to protect dignitaries and spectators from animals. These safeguards were in addition to the 10-foot wall with railings around the perimeter of the arena floor (Pearson, 1973). Another interesting Colosseum fact is that there is no written evidence to suggest any riots ever occurred at the facility. One could argue that such written evidence would make Roman authorities look weak. That may be the case. Spectators may have behaved well due to fear of a violent response by Roman soldiers, or perhaps adequate security staff was provided by the government to portray a strong security presence to deter inappropriate behavior. No ancient written code of conduct or policies for fan behavior have ever been discovered. Regardless, from a crowd control perspective, events at the Colosseum appear to have been managed with diligence and efficiency.

ORIGINS OF TICKETING IN THE UNITED STATES

Although specific references to tickets and ticketing are absent, and some disagree as to which sport was the professional forerunner in America, it is clear that the first sport for which admission was charged in the United States was horse racing (Adelman, 1986; Masteralexis, Barr, & Hums, 2009). The earliest known racetrack existed in Long Island, New York, as early as 1665 (Driscoll, 2008).

On May 27, 1823, at the Union Course in Long Island, New York, an estimated 50,000 fans gathered to watch a horse race (Adelman, 1986). Although attendance figures during a 50-year period from 1820-1870 were thought to be exaggerated, the fact that fans were said to have overflowed the seating capacity of the facility and were forced to stand along the track is a sign that it was a well-attended event (Adelman, 1986). Although racetracks in that period were not fully enclosed, premium seating and bleacher seats were exclusive. Though not officially documented, it is logical to conclude that some sort of admission fee or membership was charged to gain access to premium seating (Adelman, 1986).

The Union Course was renovated in 1829 and was financially ahead of its time by incorporating a groundbreaking innovation into the upgraded facility. New proprietor Cadwallader R. Colden decided to fully enclose the entire track and force any spectator that wanted to attend a race to pay an entrance fee. This was done to generate additional revenue to offset the facility upgrade, pay off existing debt, and increase purses, or prize amounts, to attract the finest horses in the region. Higher-profile horses would result in more fans interested in coming to the track. Attendance fees ranged from a quarter for

general admission with no assigned seat to \$3.00 for a four-horse carriage (Adelman, 1986). Although not specifically referenced, the separate fee for the four-horse carriage also may indicate another innovation considered standard today, premium facility parking. Colden's plan may have been innovative, but fans did not respond well. Since admission was previously charged only for those fans interested in the best seat locations, not everyone attending the event, less affluent fans decided to stay home rather than pay for standing room or less than optimal seating (Adelman, 1986).

By 1845, horseracing was in need of reform. A lack of standardized rules resulted in favoritism, partisanship, and corruption that affected the perceived character of the sport. Subsequently, attendance started dwindling and the popularity of horseracing sharply declined (Adelman, 1986; Driscoll, 2008; Parker, 1996). Harness racing had long been in the shadow of the thoroughbreds. However, as the popularity of horseracing decreased and the perception of prestige began to wear off, race fans and the media looked to harness racing as an affordable alternative wherein anyone that owned a horse could now be a jockey.

NASCAR Hall of Fame legend Richard Petty once said, "There is no doubt about precisely when folks began racing each other in automobiles. It was the day they built the second automobile" (Goldberg & Wincer, 2004). Though average middle class Americans did not have the resources to own thoroughbred racehorses in the mid-1800s, the preferred method of transportation for the middle class was a horse and buggy. If we apply Richard Petty's philosophy to the horse and buggy, harness racing likely began shortly after the second buggy was constructed. In fact, Masteralexis, Barr, and Hums (2009) suggest that harness racing was "an early precursor of stock car racing" (p. 9). Harness racing was the sport of the people because the same horse that was used for work during the day could be used to race in the evening (Adelman, 1986; Masteralexis, Barr, & Hums, 2009). In fact, harness racing was without doubt the first successfully commercialized sport and by the mid-1850s was the leading spectator sport in America (Adelman, 1986). However, in the period leading up to the Civil War, a new sport, baseball, was also attracting large numbers of fans and challenging harness racing in terms of popularity.

Baseball is considered the oldest organized "team" sport in America. The earliest known reference to baseball in the United States is a 1791 bylaw in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Known as the "Broken Window Bylaw," the document was uncovered in an 1869 book about the history of Pittsfield by historian John Thorn. The bylaw reads as follows: "...for the Preservation of the Windows in the New Meeting House ... no Person, an Inhabitant of said Town, shall be permitted to play at any Game called Wicket, Cricket, Baseball, Batball, Football, Cat, Fives or any other Game or Games with Balls within the Distance of Eighty Yards from said Meeting House" ("Pittsfield's," 2006, para. 3).

Baseball expanded rapidly in the Northeast and Midwest parts of the United States in the 1800s. "By 1858, trains were being run to the Fashion Race Course on Long Island to witness games. It was there that 4,000 spectators watched the New York All-Stars defeat Brooklyn two games out of three. The owner of the fields charged each

At a legal Meeting of the Inhabitants of the Town of
 Pittsfield qualified to vote in Town Meetings, ~~or otherwise~~
 holden on Monday the 5th day of Sept. 1791 -
 It is ~~ordered~~, The following Bye Law, for the Preservation
 of the Meadows in the New Meeting House in
 said Town - viz,

Be it ordained by the said Inhabitants that
 no Person an Inhabitant of said Town shall be
 permitted to play at any Game called Cricket
 Cricket, Ruff ball, Bat ball, Foot ball, Cat,
 Tives, or any other Game or Games with a Ball
 within the Distance of Eighty Yards from said
 Meeting House - And every Person who shall play
 at any of the said Games or other Games with a Ball
 within the Distance aforesaid, shall for every Instance
 thereof, forfeit the Sum of five Shillings to be recovered
 by Action of Debt brought before any Justice of the
 Peace to the Use of the Person who shall sue and
 prosecute therefor -

And be it further ordained that in every Instance
 where any Minor shall be guilty of a Breach of this
 Law, his Parent, Master, Mistress, or Guardian shall
 forfeit the Libel Sum to be recovered in Maner, and
 to the Use aforesaid -

Original 1791 Bylaws.

Courtesy of the Berkshire Athenaeum.

50 cents admission—the first time spectators paid to watch the game” (Burns, 1994). However, since the contest in 1858 was an all-star game, it is possible that the first paid admission to a baseball game actually occurred in 1857 (Light, 1997).

Union Grounds, constructed in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, New York, across the East River from Manhattan, is credited as being the first fully enclosed baseball park in America (A&E, 1996; Lowry, 1992; Ross & Dyte, 2010b). The facility was built by William Cammeyer and opened on May 15, 1862 (Lowry, 1992). Although it is known that admission was charged to watch baseball games prior to the opening of Union Grounds, just as at the Union Course horse racing facility before it, Union Grounds represents the first time a baseball park was totally enclosed in order to ensure that all fans paid an admission price. According to A&E (1996), “That very act of enclosing the park is really the beginning of pro sports in America.” Such a statement



Earliest known baseball ticket.

Courtesy of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

is debatable since Union Course was said to have accomplished the same feat more than three decades earlier. However, the opening of the fully enclosed Union Grounds in 1862 was surely the beginning of professional team sports in the United States.

An early ballpark constructed in Brooklyn, New York, to rival Union Grounds was Capitoline Grounds (Ross & Dyte, 2010a). Capitoline Grounds was on the same street as Union Grounds, Marcy Avenue, and was in use from 1864 until 1880 (Lowry, 1992). The Atlantic Club, also referred to as the Brooklyn Atlantics and the Atlantic Base Ball Club, of the National Association of Base Ball Players was the first tenant. The Atlantic Club used the facility from 1864 until 1871 (Lowry, 1992; The Capitoline Grounds, n.d.). The first baseball game at Capitoline Grounds was played on May 5, 1864, between the Atlantic Club and a group of nine players from a variety of Brooklyn baseball clubs. The earliest known ticket to a baseball game is housed at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, New York. The ticket is from a July 1, 1869, Cincinnati Red Stockings game played at Union Grounds, also known as Lincoln Park Grounds, in Cincinnati, Ohio. Admission to the game was fifty cents.

TICKET OPERATIONS DEFINED

According to Reese (2004), ticket operations is a twofold process of granting access to events and servicing fans. More specifically, Johnson and Reese (2011) define sport ticketing as “the discipline of granting access and serving those who have purchased a ticket to a sporting event.” (p. 1,556)

TYPES OF MARKETS: PRIMARY AND SECONDARY

The primary ticket market continues to be the main focus for NFL teams (i.e., season ticketing, advance and onsite single game sales, and group ticketing), but the growing need for secondary markets is undeniable. One important function a secondary market partner can provide a team is the ability for season ticket holders to resell unwanted seats. Many teams allow season ticket holders to post individual game tickets for resale on a team-approved and authorized website. This provides a safe and secure way to sell tickets and gives the buyer peace of mind that tickets are authentic. Ticketmaster was already providing primary ticket services to most NFL teams, but in December of 2007 the NFL selected Ticketmaster as their official online secondary ticket exchange

provider and offered “TicketExchange” to the teams. This new agreement allowed Ticketmaster to compete in a growing new business category. The Denver Broncos Football Club reached a secondary market partnership with Ticketmaster a year earlier (October of 2006) and was already offering this added value service to season ticket holders and fans.

TYPES OF CUSTOMERS

Season Ticket Accounts

Reese (2004) and Johnson and Reese (2011) identify season ticket holders as the financial foundation of any sport organization since they purchase tickets for an entire season. The first known references to season tickets were in baseball during the late 1870s. The first reference appeared in the *Morning Herald* of Titusville, Pennsylvania, which referred to the White Stockings, now the Chicago Cubs, having 150 honorary members for the 1870 season. According to the article, each paid \$10.00 for the year and received a season ticket (“Chicago Cubs,” 2010; Morris, 2006). In 1871, The Cleveland Forest Citys announced two season ticket price levels—\$10.00 for the possessor with a lady and carriage, or \$6.00 for the ticket bearer alone (“Cleveland,” 2010; Morris, 2006).

Mini Plans

Mini plans, also referred to as multi-game plans, are a valuable ticketing option since many fans either cannot attend all games or cannot afford tickets for the entire season (Johnson & Reese, 2011). Mini plans may be constructed in a variety of ways based on the type of sport, number of home games, etc., in order to maximize revenue.

Premium Seating

Premium seating typically refers to luxury suites and club seats. These seating options have become one of the primary sources of revenue for sport organizations (Reese & Johnson, 2011). Both suites and club seats may be sold on a season or individual games basis. Both seating options offer more amenities than general season tickets, including improved sight lines, upscale food and beverages, private concourses and restrooms, and convenient parking, to name a few (Johnson & Reese, 2011).

Individual Game Tickets

According to Reese (2004) and Johnson and Reese (2011), any seat locations that remain after completion of season ticket sales and the seat improvement/upgrade process are offered to fans on an individual game basis.

Group Tickets

Group tickets are individual game tickets that have been packaged to attract groups of people such as youth sports leagues, churches, and local businesses. Group packages may also include themes such as certain dress, costumes, etc., to gain entrance at a discount. Amenities such as concerts, fireworks, etc., are also used to attract groups (Johnson & Reese, 2011).

TICKET OPERATIONS FUNCTIONS

In order to properly serve ticket customers, there are a variety of different functions routinely provided in a professional ticketing environment. These functions include, but are not limited to: facility relocations, season ticket transfers, the opportunity to upgrade seat locations, the ability to be placed on a season ticket waiting list in locations where demand exceeds supply, the use of ticket lotteries for post-season tickets, ticket forwarding, ticket replacement, and the ability for season ticket holders and guests to pick up tickets at a Will Call.

Facility Relocations

Each facility relocation is unique, so several factors are taken into consideration: architectural features, seating capacity, introduction of increased premium seating, and season ticket holder base, for example. The Denver Broncos were the first modern day professional football team to relocate approximately 72,000 season ticket holder seats into a new stadium with approximately the exact same capacity, in this case around 76,000 seats. This necessitated a very small margin of error, as each piece had to fit into the overall puzzle. Most new NFL stadiums have a larger seating capacity than their predecessors. Relocation into INVESCO Field at Mile High (the new stadium) from Mile High Stadium (the former stadium) was affected by architectural design and other design characteristics of the new stadium, including a Club Level and an increased number of luxury suites. The primary goal of the Denver Broncos' new stadium relocation was to relocate season ticket holders to the most similar area/location in the new stadium to their seats at Mile High Stadium. Final determination regarding the relocation of season ticket holders took into account the following:

- Desire of current season ticket holders to upgrade to Club Level seating (Club Seating did not exist at Mile High Stadium)
- Current seat location of the season ticket account holders and the availability of seats in their preferred areas
- Relative priority numbers of season ticket holders
- The location of seating for disabled patrons and the needs of disabled patrons
- Seating capacity of approximately 76,000—all seats in the new stadium have seat backs and cup holders (Mile High Stadium had several thousand bleacher seats)

The final determining factor was a questionnaire each season ticket holder was given the opportunity to complete in order to include more specific information relative to his/her specific situation (i.e., seats in separate locations, aisle seating, ADA [disability] seating, sitting next to other account holders, etc.).

Season Ticket Transfer Policy

Season ticket transfer policies vary by team in the NFL. For many organizations season ticket accounts are nontransferable with a few exceptions. If the account is held in

a business name the account in its entirety can be transferred to a business affiliate, partnership, corporation, or LLC. The other transfer exception is to an immediate family member, defined as parent, spouse, child, or sibling.

Season Ticket Holder Seat Improvements

Seat improvement requests from account holders are accepted and based on account priority number and seat availability. Account priority numbers are assigned when the account is first established with the organization. The priority number may be a numerical number or the date and time the account was established. Season ticket holders requesting a seating location change are queued by priority number and given the opportunity to exchange seat locations based on availability (Reese, 2004).

Season Ticket Waiting List

Season ticket account holders are the life blood for professional teams (Reese, 2004). In the NFL monies generated by season ticket holders (reserved and premium seating) rank as a top three revenue stream for most if not all teams. Some teams are fortunate enough to have several thousand, if not tens of thousands, in queue to purchase season tickets. Each season after the seat improvement process is complete, tickets teams will begin contacting those first in line on the waiting list for the opportunity to purchase season tickets. More often than not, the only seats available are all located in the upper level of the facility.

Ticket Lotteries

Ticket lotteries usually only occur when ticket demand will outweigh ticket supply. Lotteries are typically held for high-profile events for which tickets are scarce, such as post-season events. If a team participates in a post-season contest for which there is more ticket demand than supply, a lottery is typically held to distribute tickets in a fair manner based on account priority. All season ticket account holders are automatically eligible and entered into the lottery. The lottery is “weighted” so that season ticket account holders with the lower priority numbers (those with the highest seniority) have a greater opportunity to be selected. The timing of lotteries, if they are needed, is determined by the respective governing body in conjunction with the sport organization.

Ticket Forwarding

Ticket forwarding is sometimes offered by a sport organization as a season ticket holder amenity. It allows the season ticket holder to cancel an original “hard ticket” and forward a virtual ticket to another fan. The virtual ticket cancels the original barcode and generates a new barcode. The new ticket is formatted as a printable file and may be printed at the respective ticket office or even on a home or office printer to be presented for admission at the facility.

Stolen and Lost/Destroyed Tickets (Duplicate Tickets)

To accommodate season ticket holders, if tickets are stolen, destroyed or lost, the season ticket account holder of record can notify a sport organization and request

duplicate tickets. Duplicate tickets must be picked up in person with a valid photo identification.

Will Call

Will Call is an important fan amenity for any stadium, arena, or event facility. Will Call is viewed as an important customer service “touch point” and opportunity for face-to-face direct fan interaction. Tickets for any event hosted at a facility can usually be left at one central Will Call location. An envelope will be filled out for each person picking up tickets at Will Call. Individuals picking up tickets at Will Call must present a valid photo identification and will be asked to sign for the envelope. Individuals leaving tickets at Will Call assume all risk of loss or incorrect ticket redistribution.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Tickets of various types have been used throughout history for a variety of purposes. Whether to provide exclusivity, limit attendance, manage traffic flow, or generate revenue, tickets have been a steadfast part of sport event experiences for centuries. Their presence provides a constant historical reminder of where sport has been. Ticketing has also come a long way since pottery shards and tessera were used to gain access to ancient facilities. Many modern sports facilities now register driver’s licenses or credit cards to provide a “ticketless” system for fans to access facilities. In the years to come, it will be interesting to see how the discipline of ticket operations continues to evolve.

LEARNING ACTIVITY

In this activity, your task is to select your favorite professional sports team and do some research on season ticket sales. Many teams offer media guides for sale or for free on their respective websites. You should attempt to answer the following questions:

1. In what year was the team established?
2. How many season ticket holders (or total seats) has the team had for each year since inception?
3. What percent of total facility capacity is comprised of season ticket holders as compared to seats offered for sale individually?
4. Do season ticket holders receive a per-game discount as compared to seat locations offered on a per-game basis?

Answering these questions may provide an interesting perspective on the financial stability of the sport organization. Generally, the more season ticket holders an organization has, the more financial secure it becomes.