

Brewers seeing rising attendance in 2021 season

Posted on Wednesday, Jul 14, 2021

After a tough year for the business side of the Milwaukee Brewers, the team is seeing rising attendance as the 2021 season progresses.

“The good news is, the numbers and our attendance are escalating,” said Rick Schlesinger, president of business operations for the Brewers. “We actually are ahead of all the metrics that I used three months ago when I reported to ownership what I project for our fiscal situation for '21. All of the metrics we're seeing are better, which is great.”

Schlesinger was the featured speaker during yesterday's meeting of the Milwaukee Rotary Club, where he discussed some of the challenges last year posed for the team. The Brewers had a shortened 60-game season last year with no in-person fans, and the lack of a crowd impacted both the players and the team's bottom line.

“Especially for a team like the Brewers, where we are so heavily dependent on attendance and people buying tickets, buying beer, T-shirts and parking ... for us to lose that entire bucket of revenue was obviously pretty detrimental to our organization,” he said.

While some players were able to play at a high level, Schlesinger said many others struggled without the background noise of the crowds and typical fan engagement. The stadium had to pump in artificial crowd noise, in part because players were able to hear every word the opposing team's members were saying. He said that created an “eerie sort of experience” in the stadium and contributed to “a very strange

season.”

Before this year’s season began, Brewers leadership was dealing with “a lot of uncertainty” about the potential for in-person attendance, as well as health-focused protocols and restrictions. A lot of selling typically takes place during the off-season, both for sponsorships and group ticket sales, so that uncertainty made it “a much more difficult proposition for us,” he said.

Still, Schlesinger noted very few season ticket holders asked for refunds, despite all the difficulties with last year’s season.

Earlier this year, the Brewers’ opening day event was able to admit 25 percent capacity and sold out with around 10,000 people. That was the lowest opening day attendance in the team’s history, but Schlesinger said leadership has been focused on “safely and effectively” getting to a higher number of in-person fans.

As the pandemic has waned, ticket sales were increased to 50 percent capacity for a time. And near the end of last month, the team announced home games would have 100 percent capacity for attendance once again.

“That’s 43 home games at full capacity, so basically half of a season,” he said. “When you only have half the games where you can sell as many tickets as you have, [that] makes it a challenge. The good news is people are embracing the opportunity to come to games.”

Meanwhile, the team’s leadership is keeping an eye on the rapidly shifting television market.

Changing consumer preferences could impact the Brewers' viewership revenues. As many viewers are moving away from cable and satellite television and toward online streaming, Schlesinger said the team's overall television viewership is declining both in Wisconsin and more broadly.

"Obviously, we have to figure out how to replace those lost viewers," he said. "A lot of people are going to streaming services; we have to figure out how to reach those people."

Watch a video of the Rotary Club meeting
here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5Uj-9Z_Y_4

See the Brewers 2021 schedule
here: <http://www.mlb.com/brewers/schedule/2021-07>

-By Alex Moe