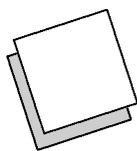


An executive summary for managers and executive readers can be found at the end of this article



# Holy cow! Wait 'til next year! A closer look at the brand loyalty of Chicago Cubs baseball fans

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**Abstract** This study examined several factors related to the brand loyalty exhibited by fans of the Chicago Cubs major league baseball team. A total of 371 patrons of a restaurant located in Wrigleyville were surveyed prior to Cubs games at Wrigley Field. Working from a tripartite model of brand loyalty, it was predicted that, compared to less loyal fans, die-hard (extremely loyal) Cubs fans would demonstrate different attitudes and behaviors regarding the Chicago Cubs. Several hypotheses were developed and tested using descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, and ANOVA procedures. Significant differences between the two fan groups were found in the areas of brand loyalty, baseball knowledge, childhood exposure to Cubs' games, frequency of Cubs' game attendance, and likelihood of purchasing Cubs paraphernalia. A variety of managerial implications are drawn from the results and future research suggestions are provided.

## Introduction

A quick perusal of the van parked in the driveway provides a more than subtle hint that the homeowner is a Chicago Cubs fan: the Georgia license plate reads "CUBVAN". Once inside the home, the visitor is inundated with further evidence of the owner's devotion to her favorite major league baseball team. Indeed, to walk into Eileen's home is to walk into a veritable shrine to the Chicago Cubs. On one wall a Harry Carey poster resides next to a framed official Cubs program signed by Ernie Banks. An adjacent wall is dominated by a Chicago Cubs pennant, beneath which hangs a replica of the Wrigley Field mast head, which proudly proclaims the Cubs as the 1984 National League East "champs". A "Wrigley Field" sign tucked above a doorway invites guests into a lower level restroom bedecked with Chicago Cubs wall paper complete with pinstripes, framed pictures of Wrigley Field, and towels and wash cloths adorned with the Chicago Cubs logo. Perhaps Eileen's allegiance to the team is best summed up by a placard which recognizes her as "a certified member in good standing, since 1967, in the Die-Hard Cub Fan Club".

From computers to hamburgers, marketing organizations the world over spend billions of dollars a year (Anschuetz, 1997) in attempts to develop and

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A veritable shrine to the  
Chicago Cubs

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**Select the product that outperforms the competition**

maintain consumer loyalty on par with the team allegiance and devotion demonstrated by Eileen. Such efforts on the part of marketers to develop brand loyalty in their consumers is understandable when one considers the following: experts estimate that it may be five times more expensive for a firm to attract a new customer than it is to keep an existing customer (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995) and that a brand loyal customer may be nine times as profitable as a disloyal one (Light, 1994). However, despite marketers' efforts, brand loyalty to consumer goods appears to be waning (Anschuetz, 1997; Shimp, 1997). In a world of increasing parity within product categories, consumers tend to rely on sale prices, promotions, and other marketing efforts, rather than on brand name, to decide between competing product alternatives. In essence, unlike Eileen, consumers who are "die-hard" fans of specific brands seem to be few and far between.

All else being equal, if a consumer has a choice between two competing brands, one of which is of superior quality and/or performance, that consumer could reasonably be expected to select the product that outperforms the competition. Such an expectation is supported by the results of a study conducted by Sebastian and Bristow (2000). In a study involving college students and their brand loyalty across six different product categories, the researchers found that for blue jeans, soft drinks, tennis shoes, and delivery pizza, participants exhibited significantly less brand loyalty for inferior/low quality products. More importantly, for the present research, the study also revealed that students' brand loyalty scores were not negatively impacted for professional sports teams exhibiting low quality or inferior performance.

Stemming from the work of Sebastian and Bristow (2000), the query which served as the starting point of this research is: "What are some of the factors that lead consumers to be loyal to sports teams yet disloyal to consumer products?" A subsequent question, and the focal point of the current study is, "If consumers are disloyal to inferior products, why are they not disloyal to professional sports teams with losing records?"

The behaviors and decorating scheme of Eileen in the introduction of this paper clearly illustrate the phenomenon of interest in the current study. Consider if you will the history of baseball's Chicago Cubs and the following statistics gleaned from the *Chicago Cubs 1999 Information Guide*. Beginning in 1876, the team has compiled a win loss/record of 9,358 and 8,790 for a winning percentage of 0.516. Since 1903, the Cubs have had five more losing seasons than winning seasons. In the past two decades the team has managed only five winning seasons. In 1999, the Cubs finished 30 games out of first place in their division with a record of 67 wins and 95 losses while the World Champion New York Yankees and the runner-up Atlanta Braves compiled regular season records of 98 and 64 and 103 and 59 respectively. Finally, as evidenced by the fans wearing T-shirts emblazoned with: "Ninety Years of Suffering Is Long Enough," the Chicago Cubs haven't won a World Series title since 1908", a fact celebrated by another favorite Cubs' T-shirt which reads: "Chicago Cubs – World Champions 1908".

**A record indicative of inferior performance**

Clearly, relative to many other major league baseball teams, that is, relative to comparable alternative products from which fans could choose, the Chicago Cubs have a record indicative of inferior performance. Accordingly, the keen observer might reasonably expect fan loyalty to the team to wane. However, such does not appear to be the case. During each of the Cubs' winning seasons since 1903, the average attendance at beautiful Wrigley

### Comparison between the Chicago Cubs and the Minnesota Twins

Field was 1,027,901 fans per year, compared to 1,099,467 fans during losing seasons. In the last ten winning seasons, stretching back to 1969, the Cubs have averaged slightly over 1.9 million fans per year. In each of their last ten losing seasons, going back to 1986, the team has drawn an average of 2.17 million fans. In essence, like Eileen, millions of sports fans are remaining loyal to the Chicago Cubs despite a somewhat painful performance history.

Perhaps a comparison between the Chicago Cubs and the Minnesota Twins baseball teams best captures the essence of the phenomenon studied in this research. In 1999, the Cubs, with a record of 67 wins and 95 losses, drew nearly 3 million fans to the friendly confines of Wrigley Field. Conversely, the Minnesota Twins, a team which, much like the Cubs compiled a season record of 63 wins and 97 losses and which finished 33 games out of first place, drew slightly over 1 million fans to the Teflon-roofed Metrodome. Despite similar inferior performance records in the 1999 season, despite the fact that both teams finished last in their respective divisions, and despite the fact that ticket prices for each club are similar (Cubs tickets range from \$6-\$25; Twins tickets range from \$4-\$21), the Cubs and the Twins experienced vastly different fan behavior. In short, fans of the Minnesota Twins, as consumers of a product exhibiting inferior performance, behaved in a predictable manner and failed to consistently fill the Metrodome to capacity. The Minnesota Twins experienced a decline in fan loyalty. Chicago Cubs fans, on the other hand, behaved in what may be construed as a less conventional or rational manner and, despite the poor performance of their team, demonstrated strong brand loyalty to the team and routinely filled the seats at Wrigley Field. The important comparison between the two teams is not one of the sheer number of fans attending games, which could be accounted for, at least in part, by significant differences in the markets in which the franchises are based (i.e. Chicago has a population of some 6.5 million people compared to Minneapolis/St. Paul with 3.3 million). It is also important to keep in mind that Chicago has another major league baseball team, the Chicago White Sox, and that it is rare for native Chicagoans to be fans of both teams. Thus, the two market sizes are arguably equivalent assuming an equal distribution of Cubs and Sox fans in the Chicago market.

The more important comparison is one based on the observed trend in fan attendance – a decline for the more recently successful Minnesota team and an ongoing increase in attendance for the historically sub-par Chicago Cubs. This enigmatic behavior of Cubs fans prompted the researchers to ask, “What is it about Chicago Cubs baseball fans that compels them to remain brand loyal to their team?” The remainder of this manuscript presents a study designed to investigate that question.

### Shortcomings with the measurement of brand loyalty

#### Hypothesis development

Consistent with basic social psychological research (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993), the brand loyalty literature has, over the years, evolved to include both behavioral and attitudinal components and to incorporate a tripartite model of customer loyalty. Initially, researchers tended to focus on the behaviors of consumers to identify and measure brand loyalty. That early work emphasized the consistency, sequence, proportion and/or probability of a consumer purchasing one brand over alternative choices (i.e. Cunningham, 1966; Kahn *et al.*, 1986; Massey *et al.*, 1970). Recognizing a variety of shortcomings associated with the measurement of brand loyalty via only behaviors (buying not because of loyalty but rather due to convenience, price, availability), some scholars argued that consumers’ loyalty to a

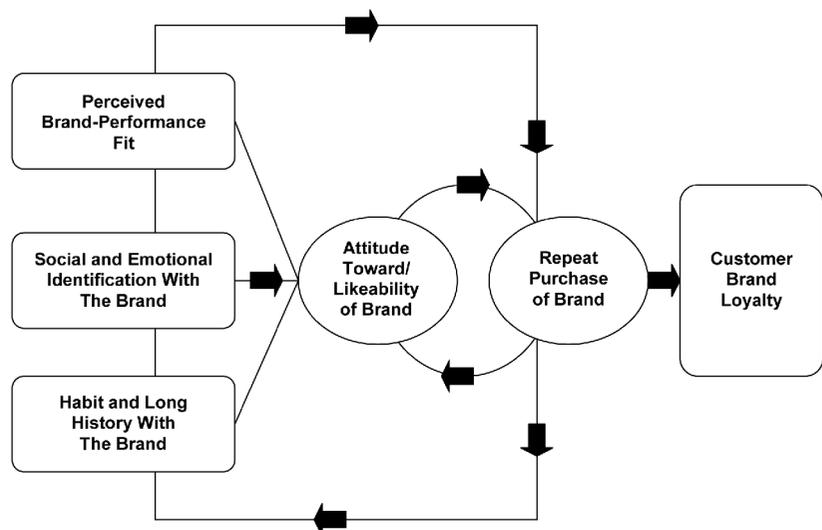
## Fundamental components

product or service included both behavioral and attitudinal components (Day, 1969; Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978; Dick and Basu, 1994). Working from this perspective, researchers have acknowledged that brand loyal consumers must hold a strong positive attitude towards the brand. That is, as illustrated in Figure 1, customers who are loyal to a brand must exhibit an overall liking for the product or service (Sheth *et al.*, 1999; Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978) that translates into repeat purchase of that product or service. As such, the authors of this manuscript set out to assess the degree to which die-hard Chicago Cubs fans found their favorite team to be likeable. It was predicted, as discussed later, that die-hard fans would higher overall liking for the Cubs than would less loyal fans.

Figure 1 also depicts three fundamental components that, according to Sheth *et al.* (1999), contribute to a consumer's brand loyalty:

- (1) perceived brand performance fit;
- (2) social and emotional identification with the brand; and
- (3) habit and long history with the brand.

The first component suggests that brand loyal consumers are not only concerned with the overall performance of a brand, but also how well the exhibited performance meets or exceeds that consumer's expectations regarding performance of the brand. The second component of the brand loyalty model builds on the idea that, over time, some brands develop or acquire social images with which consumers may identify and to which those consumers may become emotionally attached. The third and final component of brand loyalty, habit and history with the brand, is based in part on the concept of intergenerational influence by family members. For example, a consumer who, as a child, saw his/her parents consistently purchase Kenmore appliances, might be expected to accept his/her parents' history of using that brand as evidence of the superiority, dependability, or value of the Kenmore brand and, ultimately, those children, as adults, are likely to be "loyal" to the Kenmore brand of appliances.



Source: Adapted from Dick and Basu (1994); Sheth *et al.* (1999)

Figure 1. A tripartite model of consumer brand loyalty

## Consumer brand loyalty

Working from this model of brand loyalty, the following hypotheses were developed and tested. The first two hypotheses are related to the investigation of the attitudinal component of brand loyalty (*H2* is a combination of attitudinal and behavioral components) while *H3* and *H4* address the behavioral and social and emotional identification with the brand components of the construct.

*H1*: Die-hard Cubs fans will consider the Chicago Cubs to be more likeable than will other Cubs fans.

*H2*: Greater numbers of die-hard Cubs fans will report having watched/listened to Cubs games during their childhood than will other Cubs fans.

*H3*: Die-hard Cubs fans will attend Chicago Cubs baseball games more frequently than will less loyal Cubs fans.

*H4*: Die-hard Cubs fans will be more likely to purchase Chicago Cubs paraphernalia than will less loyal Cubs fans.

Although our next hypothesis (*H5*) at first glance might be considered a simple procedural check, the hypothesis was developed in order to allow the researchers to empirically test the tie between the behavioral and attitudinal components of consumer brand loyalty. That is, if, as proposed in the tripartite model of brand loyalty, likeability of/attitude toward the brand, plus habit and long history with the brand are related to repeat purchase of the brand and ultimately to consumer brand loyalty, then a fan who exhibits a positive attitude towards and has a history of association with and exhibits repeat purchase behavior for a sports team should score highly on a measure of brand loyalty.

*H5*: Die-hard Cubs fans will score higher on a measure of brand loyalty than will less loyal fans.

The remaining hypotheses were developed in order to more fully examine additional factors predicted to be associated with or related to sports fans' loyalty to inferior teams.

*H6*: Die-hard Cubs fans will score higher on a measure of baseball knowledge/expertise than will less loyal fans.

*H7*: Die-hard Cubs fans will score higher on a measure of nostalgia than will less loyal fans.

*H8*: Die-hard Cubs fans will score lower on a measure of competitiveness than will less loyal fans.

*H9*: Compared to less loyal fans, die-hard Cub fans will be more likely to remain fans if Wrigley Field were to be replaced with a new ball park.

## Data collection

### The study

The data were collected from patrons at a restaurant/bar located across the street from Wrigley Field. Prior to data collection, the researchers met with the owner of the restaurant, and after presenting an outline of the research program, received the owner's consent to administer surveys to patrons of his establishment. Data collection began shortly after the business opened and was generally stopped approximately 45 minutes prior to the first pitch at home games at Wrigley Field.

Data were collected during three different home stands of the Cubs. The first data were collected in late May/early June before games against the St Louis Cardinals and San Diego Padres. The second phase of data collection

## Representative sample

occurred during the Kansas City Royals series in July. The final set of surveys was collected in late July/early August during the New York Mets series.

The authors approached customers, identified themselves and their institutional affiliation, summarized the purpose of the study, and determined if the individuals were Cub fans and interested in completing the survey. Individuals who were obviously not Cubs fans, such as those adorned in New York Mets clothing, were the only individuals intentionally excluded from the study. Every other effort was made to get a representative sample of this convenience population. Due to the patrons' positive and, in many cases, enthusiastic responses to the researchers' requests for participation (the researchers were, in fact, occasionally approached by individuals who asked to be included in the research), systematic response data were not collected. A highly conservative and admittedly impressionistic response rate estimate would be 85 percent. The final sample consisted of 371 respondents. It should be noted that while the authors attempted to obtain a representative sample of the customers in the establishment, the final demographic profile of study participants might not be representative of the entire population of Chicago Cubs fans nor of the population of the greater Chicago area.

## Three-page questionnaire

The participants were asked to complete a three-page questionnaire which included previously developed measures of nostalgia (Holbrook, 1993), loyalty proneness (Lichtenstein *et al.*, 1990), product expertise (Mishra *et al.*, 1993), and desire to win/competitiveness (Corfman, 1991) as well as a number of questions which were specifically developed for the purposes of this study.

## Results

The results of the nine hypotheses tested in the study are presented in Table I. The data in the study were analyzed using descriptive statistics, ANOVA and cross-tabulation procedures. To test all the hypotheses, a "die-hard Cub fan" index was developed. The two items, which were

Research hypothesis	Test results
<i>H1</i> : Die-hard Cubs fans will consider the Chicago Cubs team members to be more likeable than will less loyal Cubs fans	Not supported
<i>H2</i> : Greater numbers of die-hard Cubs fans will report having watched/listened to Cubs games during their childhood than will less loyal Cubs fans	Supported
<i>H3</i> : Die-hard Cubs fans will attend Chicago Cubs baseball games more frequently than will less loyal Cubs fans	Supported
<i>H4</i> : Die-hard Cubs fans will be more likely to purchase Chicago Cubs paraphernalia than will less loyal Cubs fans	Supported
<i>H5</i> : Die-hard Cubs fans will score higher on a measure of brand loyalty than will less loyal fans.	Supported
<i>H6</i> : Die-hard Cubs fans will score higher on a measure of baseball knowledge/expertise than will less loyal fans	Supported
<i>H7</i> : Die-hard Cubs fans will score higher on a measure of nostalgia than will less loyal fans	Not supported
<i>H8</i> : Die-hard Cubs fans will score lower on a measure of competitiveness than will less loyal fans	Not supported
<i>H9</i> : Compared to less loyal fans, die-hard Cubs fans will be more likely to remain fans if Wrigley Field were to be replaced with a new ball park	Supported

Table I. Summary of research hypotheses and test results

**More reliable assessment of fans**

separated on the survey instrument by several survey items, used to develop this index were:

- (1) "How would you characterize your loyalty to the Chicago Cubs?"  
\_\_\_ not at all loyal \_\_\_ less loyal than most Cubs fans, \_\_\_ more loyal than most, \_\_\_ diehard.
- (2) "Do you consider yourself to be a loyal Chicago Cubs fan?"  
\_\_\_ no, \_\_\_ yes.

The two-question sequence was used in order to protect against potential measurement error and to obtain a more reliable assessment of fans who considered themselves to be extremely loyal to the Chicago Cubs baseball team. Respondents who indicated they were *both* die-hard fans on the first item *and* loyal fans on the second were characterized as die-hard Cubs fans. All told, 134 individuals were identified as die-hard fans in this fashion. The remaining 237 participants were identified as less loyal fans. All analyses compared the responses of these two groups of fans.

*H1:* Die-hard Cubs fans will consider the Chicago Cubs to be more likeable than will other Cubs fans.

*Results: hypothesis not supported.* As seen in Figure 1, an integral part of the brand loyalty phenomenon is for consumers to hold positive attitudes toward his/her preferred brand (i.e. Day, 1969; Exter, 1986). Several authors (i.e. Sheth *et al.*, 1999; Dick and Basu, 1994; Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978) have noted that an acceptable method for assessing attitudinal brand loyalty is to ask consumers how much they like a brand. Accordingly, the authors of this manuscript predicted that die-hard fans would rate the Cubs as a more likeable team than would less loyal fans. In order to test that prediction, Cubs fans were asked the following question: "How likeable is the Chicago Cubs baseball team compared to other teams?" Fans responded on a six-point scale with end point labels of very unlikeable (1) and very likeable (6). Table II presents the results of the cross tabulation and chi-square analysis used to investigate *H1*. The analyses revealed that slightly more than 87 percent of the die-hard fans rated the likeability of the Cubs as likeable to very likeable, while 80 percent of the less loyal fans rated the likeability of the team comparably. Not only was the difference in likeability scores between the two groups statistically insignificant at the 0.05 level ( $p < 0.107$ ), the results also showed that fewer than 10 percent of the respondents considered the team to be to any degree unlikeable. Such findings can only be interpreted positively when viewed from the perspective of Cubs' management: Cubs fans like their team! The implication for marketing managers of other professional sports teams is also clear: it is possible to have fans admire and enjoy a team that has not recently won a world championship or posted a winning season year after year.

*H2:* Greater numbers of die-hard Cubs fans will report having watched/ listened to Cubs games during their childhood than will other Cubs fans.

**Childhood association with brands**

*Results: hypotheses supported.* The brand loyalty literature suggests that a consumer who is loyal to a specific brand of good or service, in addition to holding positive attitudes toward that brand, should engage in buyer behavior to support those attitudes (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978; Dick and Basu, 1994). Thus, a brand loyal consumer, one who exhibits attitudinal brand loyalty for a product, could reasonably be expected to consistently select, purchase, and consume that specific brand of product. Such consistency could stem from childhood association with that brand and/or from inter-generational

Research hypothesis	Source	SS	df	MS	F	p <
<i>ANOVA results, research hypotheses 1, 5, 6, 7 and 8</i>						
H1: Die-hard Cubs fans will consider the Chicago Cubs to be more likeable than will other Cubs fans	Between	5.259	1	5.259	2.617	0.107
	Within	741.452	369	2.009		
	Total	746.712	370			
H5: Die-hard Cubs fans will score higher on a measure of brand loyalty than will less loyal fans	Between	299.19	1	299.19	16.25	0.000
	Within	6,794.44	369	18.41		
	Total	7,093.63	370			
H6: Die-hard Cubs fans will score higher on a measure of baseball knowledge than will less loyal fans	Between	1,109.14	1	1,109.14	58.53	0.000
	Within	7,004.38	369	19.98		
	Total	8,113.52	370			
H7: Die-hard Cubs fans will score higher on a measure of nostalgia than will less loyal fans	Between	1.11	1	1.11	0.045	0.833
	Within	9,051.29	364	24.86		
	Total	9,052.40	365			
H8: Die-hard Cubs fans will score lower on a measure of competitiveness than will less loyal fans	Between	52.41	1	52.41	5.70	0.017
	Within	3,390.42	369	9.18		
	Total	3,442.83	370			

Research hypothesis	Pearson chi-square	df	Sig.
<i>Chi-square test results, research hypotheses 2, 3, 4 and 9</i>			
H2: During their childhood, greater numbers of die-hard Cubs fans will report having watched/listened to Cubs games than will less loyal fans	23.392	1	0.000
H3: Die-hard Cubs fans will report having attended Chicago Cubs baseball games more frequently than will less loyal fans	12.368	5	0.030
H4: Die-hard Cubs fans will be more likely to purchase Chicago Cubs paraphernalia than will less loyal fans	7.422	2	0.024
H9: Compared to less loyal fans, die-hard Cubs fans will be more likely to remain fans if Wrigley Field were to be replaced with a new ball park	9.046	1	0.002

Table II. ANOVA and chi-square test results

association (i.e. watching/listening to parents associate with the brand). Accordingly, the authors predicted that, as compared to less loyal fans, greater numbers of die-hard Cubs fans would report having watched and/or listened to the Chicago Cubs baseball games during their childhood. Such a prediction is consistent with severity of initiation effects (i.e. Aronson and Mills, 1959; Gerard and Mathewson, 1966), which suggests that the more a person voluntarily suffers to join a group (or achieve some end), the more positively the individual will evaluate the group or end. People, especially intelligent and psychologically healthy ones, do not suffer to join, or identify themselves with, inferior or worthless groups. Instead, they join or identify with good, valuable, or worthwhile groups. From the perspective of Cubs

## Partial explanation

fans, years and years of watching/listening to the Cubs lose surely constitutes suffering. Thus, these painful experiences endured during childhood may get justified by these presumably normal individuals (children being initiated into the group or fan club – the famous Chicago writer Mike Royko wrote that: “It’s a cruel dad who raises his son to be a Cubs fan”!!) in a variety of ways:

- by evaluating the Cubs as likeable (attitudinal);
- perennially believing (cognitive) that the Cubs will be better than last year (“Wait ’till next year” is a favorite slogan of Cubs fans);
- identifying oneself strongly with the team (social-emotional – becoming a diehard fan); and
- continuing to watch them on TV and in person (behavioral).

Severity of initiation (or more broadly, effort justification, or more theoretically, reduction of cognitive dissonance) thus provides a partial explanation for why following a losing team leads to even greater liking of, identification with, and continued support of that team (Harmon-Jones and Mills, 1999).

Returning to Table II, we see that cross-tabulation and chi-square analyses revealed a significant difference between the two groups ( $p < 0.000$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.25$ ). Indeed, as kids, die-hard fans were indeed more likely to have watched or listened to the Cubs games (90.3 percent) than were other, less loyal Cubs fans (67.9 percent). Those findings were interpreted as support for *H2*.

While the following two hypotheses may seem to be tautologies, the authors felt it important to include the hypotheses for two reasons:

- (1) to empirically test the behavioral component of brand loyalty; and
- (2) to explore the social and emotional identification with the brand element of brand loyalty as suggested by Sheth *et al.* (1999).

## Social self identity

In a manner consistent with the work of Belk (1988) on one’s possessions as important contributors to and reflections of one’s self identity, the authors of this manuscript contend that a fan’s social and/or emotional identification with the Cubs, and ultimately, part of that fan’s social self-identity, could manifest itself in behaviors such as attending Cubs games and purchasing related paraphernalia (i.e. jerseys, hats, pennants).

*H3*: Die-hard Cubs fans will attend Chicago Cubs baseball games more frequently than will less loyal Cubs fans.

*Results: hypothesis supported.* The authors predicted that, given the brand loyalty relationship between positive attitudes towards a brand and subsequent consumption of that brand, die-hard fans would attend Cubs games more frequently than would less loyal fans. The cross-tabulation and chi-square analyses in Table II show that *H3* was supported ( $p < 0.024$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.15$ ). The results showed that, as expected, while some 33 percent of die-hard fans attended Cubs games less than once a month, nearly 80 percent of less loyal fans attended the games so infrequently. Conversely, approximately 20 percent of the die-hard Cubs fans attended games once a week while slightly more than 13 percent of the less loyal fans did so.

*H4*: Die-hard Cubs fans will be more likely to purchase Chicago Cubs paraphernalia than will less loyal Cubs fans.

## Reflection of self

*Results: hypothesis supported.* As in the formation of *H2* and *H3*, the attitudinal/behavioral relationship of the brand loyalty phenomenon and the notion of fans using the products they purchase as a reflection of the self (Belk, 1988) served as the basis for the development of *H4*. That is, a consumer with strong brand loyalty scores could be expected to engage in behaviors that would be consistent with their positive attitudes toward and the likeability of the team. Accordingly, it was predicted that die-hard Cubs fans would be more likely to purchase products related to the Chicago Cubs (i.e. jerseys, hats, souvenirs) than would less loyal fans. Once again, as seen in Table II, cross-tabulation procedure and chi-square analysis provided support for that prediction ( $p < 0.024$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.14$ ). The statistical analyses revealed that 95 percent of the die-hard fan respondents reported having purchased Cubs related products for themselves or others, compared to some 85 percent of less loyal fans who had done so. Again, although the differences observed were statistically significant, from a managerial perspective perhaps the more interesting and important finding is that Cub fans in general are purchasing Chicago Cubs paraphernalia.

As stated earlier in the article our next hypothesis (*H5*) might be considered to be little more than a procedural check. However, given the proposed relationship between fans' attitudes towards, history with, supporting behaviors and brand loyalty, the authors felt compelled to empirically assess brand loyalty via a global brand loyalty scale. Accordingly, the following hypothesis was developed:

*H5:* Die-hard Cubs fans will score higher on a measure of brand loyalty than will less loyal fans.

*Results: hypothesis supported.* The basis for this hypothesis was rooted in the earlier work of Sebastian and Bristow (2000) and Sheth *et al.* (1999). Sebastian and Bristow discovered that consumers *would not* remain loyal to a variety of inferior or low quality consumer goods (i.e. blue jeans, tennis shoes, delivery pizza) but *would* remain loyal to a professional sports team that, compared to alternative teams, performed poorly. The brand loyalty concepts of habit and long history with the brand and brand-performance fit with customer expectations, proposed by Sheth *et al.* (1999), provide further foundation for this hypothesis. As discussed earlier, it was predicted that die-hard Cub fans would report having had, during their childhood, watched and/or listened to more television and/or radio broadcasts of Chicago Cubs baseball games than did less loyal fans.

## Brand loyalty

Accordingly, given the relatively substandard performance of the team during the past century, and the relationship between brand-performance fit and brand loyalty, die-hard Cubs fans were predicted to score higher on a global (i.e. non-product specific) measure of brand loyalty than would less loyal fans. This prediction is consistent with the authors' intuitive notion, based upon observations and reflections, that die-hard Cub fans are, for whatever reasons, more loyal to a variety of people, relationships, and/or brands than are less loyal Cubs fans or possibly even fans of other clubs.

In order to test hypothesis *H5*, a brand loyalty index was created for each participant by combining his/her score on each of the five loyalty proneness items (Lichtenstein *et al.*, 1990). Prior to developing the loyalty index, as recommended by Churchill *et al.* (1974), the authors investigated the internal reliability of the overall measure. The resultant Cronbach alpha (0.81) indicated that the scale items adequately captured a single construct (Churchill, 1979). Subsequently, the authors used analysis of variance

## Brand loyalty factors

(ANOVA) to test hypothesis *H1*. As shown in Table II, the ANOVA procedure revealed that, as predicted, die-hard Cubs fans did indeed exhibit greater brand loyalty ( $m = 21.93$ ), in general, than did less loyal fans ( $m = 20.06$ ).

When the idea of brand-performance fit and history with the brand are combined, further understanding of the above hypothesis that die-hard Cubs fans would exhibit greater levels of brand loyalty is generated. For example, as discussed earlier, brand loyalty is not based solely on the performance of a product but rather is a combination of that performance and the consumer's expectations. The Minnesota Vikings of the National Football League provide a compelling example of this combination of brand loyalty factors. Since their inaugural season in 1969, the Vikings have consistently tantalized their fans with exciting and generally successful regular seasons. Initially powered by strong defenses (fans will recall the vaunted Purple People Eaters with Alan Page and Jim Marshall), and more recently relying on record setting offensive juggernauts, the team has made it to four Superbowls, has reached the playoffs seven out of the last eight years, amassed a regular season record of 15-1 during the 1998 season (only to lose in the playoffs when the team's place kicker, who had been perfect all season long, missed a last second field goal to send the game into overtime). In the 2000 season, the Vikings once again dashed the hopes and dreams of their fans when they were crushed – by a score of 41-0 – in the NFC Championship game. As any seasoned fan can readily attest, they have never actually *won* a Superbowl. In short, the Vikings have a history, although much abbreviated in comparison, somewhat similar to that of the Chicago Cubs baseball team: raise the fans' hopes and expectations to dizzying heights and then, again and again, dash those hopes and expectations to the ground. Much like the Chicago Cubs, the Minnesota Vikings continue to have a loyal and dedicated fan base across the country. Neither team has reached the pinnacle of success in their respective sports, but each has a history of performance. As revealed by observation and discussion, the fans of both teams have, over the years, come to expect that the performance of each team will once again fall short of perfection. It may be then that, much like fans of the Minnesota Vikings, die-hard Cubs fans have revised their performance expectations to fit the historical performance of their beloved team.

*H6*: Die-hard Cubs fans will score higher on a measure of baseball knowledge/expertise than will less loyal fans.

## Greater levels of product knowledge/expertise

*Results: hypothesis supported.* It was hypothesized that, due to their predicted greater brand loyalty to the Chicago Cubs and to greater enduring involvement with the club, and due to associated behaviors (i.e. watching the Cubs during childhood, attending more games, buying paraphernalia) die-hard Cubs fans would be significantly more knowledgeable of the game of baseball than would less loyal fans. In short, the authors assert that a fan who is loyal to a specific team could be expected to have a high level of enduring/ongoing involvement with that team – that is, such fans could be expected to watch and/or listen to televised or radio broadcast games, attend games, and follow the game statistics as reported in the sports section of his/her favorite newspaper. Due to their greater involvement with and exposure to the team, its history and performance, those fans could be anticipated to exhibit greater levels of product knowledge/expertise. Such a relationship between involvement and knowledge is consistent with the work

Significantly higher  
baseball knowledge/  
expertise

of Beatty *et al.* (1988) who found that product involvement is a key determinant of brand loyalty.

The four-item product expertise scale (Mishra *et al.*, 1993) was adapted and used to assess respondents' self-professed level of knowledge regarding baseball. Analysis revealed a scale Cronbach alpha of 0.88, providing evidence of the internal reliability of the adapted scale items. Table II shows that, as predicted, die-hard Cubs fans demonstrated significantly higher baseball knowledge/expertise ( $m = 20.64$ ) than did less loyal fans ( $m = 17.04$ ).

*H7*: Die-hard Cubs fans will score higher on a measure of nostalgia than will less loyal fans.

*Results: hypothesis not supported.* This hypothesis was an outgrowth of *H2*, suggesting that die-hard Cubs fans would have a long history with the team, and of the long and storied history of the Chicago Cubs organization. Nostalgia has been loosely defined as "a longing for the past, a yearning for yesterday, or a fondness for possessions and activities associated with days of yore" (Holbrook, 1993). Further, as espoused by Lowenthal (1985) and to some degree by Hobsbawm (1983), nostalgia may be focused not on a consumer's personal experiences from an earlier time in her/his own lifetime, but on memories of a historical era or time before that person's birth. Those conceptualizations of nostalgia, coupled with the habit and long history with the brand component of the tri-partite model of consumer brand loyalty, suggested to the authors of this manuscript that nostalgia should be positively related to consumer brand loyalty. More specifically, if, as predicted, die-hard fans reported that during childhood they watched/listened to the Cubs more frequently than did less loyal fans, that increase in history with the brand should lead to greater brand loyalty. Further, as suggested in the writings of Belk (1988), our history is an integral part of who we are and how we see ourselves (p. 149). As such, if, as predicted, die-hard Cubs reported a long history with the brand, and exhibited a tendency to engage in related behaviors (attending games, buying paraphernalia), a relationship between brand loyalty and nostalgia proneness might be expected.

The Cubs organization

In addition to the proposed relationship between history with a brand and social/emotional identity with a brand and brand loyalty, several facts about the Cubs organization led to the development of *H7*. For example, the Cubs are one of the eight original charter members of the National League and the only major league team that has operated continuously in the same city. One might say that they play baseball the "old-fashioned" way. All of their home games are played on grass in what will soon be the oldest standing major league ball park, complete with ivy-covered walls. The Cubs play a disproportionately large number of day games; in 1999 season, 64 of their 81 home games, or nearly 80 percent, were played during the day. In comparison, 55 of their away games, or nearly 68 percent, were evening or night games. The Cubs were the last major league franchise to install lights and play at night – August 8, 1988. In general, the Cubs seem associated with a simpler, earlier time. And most importantly, perhaps, given their proposed propensity to have a long history with the brand (i.e. watching/listening to Cubs games during childhood), to have high involvement with and knowledge of the game of baseball, and to view the Cubs as very likeable, die-hard Cubs fans could be expected to have a sense of appreciation for the past.

To test this hypothesis the nostalgia scores of die-hard Cubs fans were compared with those of the rest of the sample. As with the testing of *H1*, all respondent scores on six items from the nostalgia proneness scale (Holbrook, 1993) were summed for this analysis. The internal reliability analysis for the scale yielded a Cronbach alpha of 0.73, which was consistent with those reported by Holbrook in the original scale development work (0.78; 0.73). Table II shows that the one-way analysis of variance on the nostalgia index showed no significant difference between die-hard ( $m = 20.03$ ) and less loyal ( $m = 20.15$ ) fan nostalgia scores.

In retrospect the lack of support for *H7* may not be all that surprising. A key element in the development of the hypothesis was the habit and long history with the brand component of consumer brand loyalty. When one thinks about the die-hard fan's history with the Chicago Cubs an interesting image emerges: a history of consistently poor performance (i.e. the Cubs last won the World Series in 1908 and last participated in a World Series in 1945). As defined by Holbrook (1993) and others, people with nostalgic tendencies tend to long for persons, things, and or people of the past. Unfortunately, from the perspective of a Cubs fan, those days of yore were, based on performance, nothing for which a Cubs fan would be likely to yearn. Rather, die-hard Cubs fans might be more likely to yearn for the promises of next season.

#### Unexpected findings

Another plausible explanation for the unexpected findings may be due to the nostalgia proneness measure used in the study. Holbrook's nostalgia proneness scale was developed as a global measure of one's propensity to feel nostalgic across a variety of consumer behavior contexts. It may be that a more context or product specific measure of nostalgia, that is, a measure more directly related to the Chicago Cubs, might have provided support for *H7*. Future researchers are encouraged to further explore these possibilities.

*H8*: Die-hard Cubs fans will score lower on a measure of competitiveness than will less loyal Cubs fans.

#### Inferior level of product performance

*Results: hypothesis not supported.* *H8* was developed as an outgrowth of *H5* and *H6* and of the on-field performance of the Chicago Cubs during the past century. As stated in *H5*, the authors predicted that die-hard Cub fans would score higher on a measure of brand loyalty than would less loyal fans. In *H6* it was predicted that die-hard fans would exhibit higher scores on a product/baseball expertise scale. That is, the authors expected to find that the most loyal Cub fans were also very knowledgeable baseball fans. Those same fans could then be expected to be very cognizant of the less than stellar performance of the Cubs during the past century. Such fans are likely all too aware of the facts: the Cubs have experienced only ten winning campaigns out of the last 30 seasons; during the last 100 years the Cubs have experienced slightly more losing than winning seasons; the last time the Cubs won the World Series was in 1908; in 1999, the club finished in the divisional cellar, 30 games out of first place, and in 2000, the team was again last in the division – again finishing 30 games out of first place with a record of 65 wins and 97 losses. In short, compared to several alternative products/teams, the Chicago Cubs have consistently demonstrated an inferior level of product performance.

Given that combination of strong brand loyalty, high product knowledge, and inferior product performance, the authors of this manuscript posed the following questions: "How might a loyal, knowledgeable fan reconcile the fact that her/his beloved Cubs are not a good team?" In an attempt to answer

**Unofficial credo – “Wait ‘til next year!”**

that query, the authors developed the following line of reasoning. First, die-hard Cub fans would be unlikely to sever their ties to the team. That is, despite the past performance of the team and the fans’ knowledge of that performance, fan attendance at Cubs games in Wrigley field is increasing. Thus, it does not appear that die-hard Cub fans are changing their positive attitude towards the Cubs organization.

A more plausible answer to the question, an answer that is consistent with the perceived brand performance fit component of consumer brand loyalty, might come in the form of revised expectations of product performance. For example, some might argue that the unofficial credo of Chicago Cubs fans is, “Wait ‘til next year!” Indeed, Cubs fans have been waiting since 1908 for their team to win another World Series title. And yet, year after year, Cub fans continue to pack Wrigley. What might account for this unexpected consumer behavior? The authors assert that, after years of being disappointed by the likeable Cubs, die-hard fans, while hoping for a World Series win, have come to expect, or at least not be surprised by, another disappointing season from the club. Such a revision of expectations regarding on-field performance might effectively serve to allow Cub fans to maintain their positive attitude/brand loyalty towards a product of pedestrian quality. If indeed such a lowering of performance expectations has occurred on the part of die-hard Cub fans, the authors suggest that such a phenomenon might manifest itself in the form of lower levels of competitiveness on the part of those fans.

**“Loveable losers”**

An alternative rationale for this hypothesis exists. This rationale suggests that individuals who are low in competitiveness do not receive vicarious gratification or pain from the performance of others. Winning or losing is simply not that important to these individuals; thus, they neither bask in reflected glory nor cut themselves off from reflected failure (Cialdini *et al.*, 1976; Cialdini and Richardson, 1980; Snyder *et al.*, 1986). These relatively noncompetitive individuals have no problem following “loveable losers” compared to their more competitive counterparts who do experience vicariously the “agony of defeat” or “the thrill of victory”. In short, self-selection processes are at work.

In order to investigate hypothesis H8, the desire to win (DW) scale developed by Corfman (1991) was used to assess participant competitiveness scores. The three-item DW scale has a proven internal reliability with a reported Cronbach alpha of 0.82 and was developed “as a way in which to measure the degree to which a person describes him/herself as being competitive and as having a strong desire to win” (Bruner and Hensel, 1996). As noted above, the authors predicted that in an attempt to manage a possible imbalance between positive attitude toward and brand loyalty to a product/team with inferior performance record, compared to readily available alternative products/teams, or self-selection processes, Cubs fans would exhibit lower competitiveness scores than would less loyal fans. Table II shows that cross tabulation procedures and chi-square analyses revealed that hypothesis H8 was not supported. Contrary to what was predicted, die-hard fans exhibited significantly higher levels of competitiveness than did their counterparts in the study. Could this unexpected finding be due to another, more subtle element of the competitive nature of extremely loyal sports fans? Could it be, perhaps, that such fans, in an attempt to appease their competitive nature in some way other than basking in the glory of the favorite team’s successes (an activity that is precluded by the team’s dismal performance), compete to be the most

## High brand loyalty

loyal of fans despite the inferiority of the team? Such a question is worthy of further investigation.

Or, perhaps, the more competitive a fan is, the more likely she/he is to cheer for an underdog. Such a fan might readily view the competition as being tougher, the victories sweeter, and the positive affect experienced greater. On the other hand, if that same fan's favorite team loses, the negative affect may be minimal since expectations of victory were weak. Such speculations are worthy of further investigation.

*H9:* Compared to less loyal fans, die-hard Cub fans will be more likely to remain fans if Wrigley Field were to be replaced with a new ball park.

*Results: hypothesis supported.* Given the predicted high brand loyalty and nostalgia proneness scores of die-hard Cub fans, the authors predicted that, even if Wrigley Field were to be torn down and replaced with a newer, more state-of-the-art stadium, such fans would remain devoted to the Chicago Cubs. The hypothesis was tested using the cross-tabulation and chi-square procedures. Table II shows that the hypothesis was supported ( $p < 0.002$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.16$ ). As predicted, 81 percent of the die-hard Cubs fans surveyed, compared to 63 percent of other fans, indicated that with or without the friendly confines of Wrigley, they would remain loyal to the Cubs. While this specific finding may be troubling to some Cub fans and possibly to Cubs management, it may offer promise to other sports marketing management teams who are in turn troubled by the task of introducing and successfully marketing new ball parks, stadiums, or arenas to existing fans. A related and perhaps more important question for those marketing managers might address the type of new stadium to be constructed. Conventional wisdom might suggest that fans would support ball parks that are traditional, nostalgic, and reminiscent of days gone by – such as Jacobs Field in Cleveland, Camden Yards in Baltimore – rather than neo style parks like Comiskey Field in Chicago and the Metrodome in Minneapolis. However, the nostalgia findings in this study suggest that further research in this area is necessary.

### Managerial implications and future research

The sports industry is a huge player in today's business world – representing the 11th largest industry in the USA. Professional sports in the USA alone are drawing millions and millions of fans every year: in 1998, over 70,000,000 fans attended major league baseball games; in 1999 nearly 16,000,000 people bought tickets to National Football League games; during the 1997-1998 season, some 22,000,000 fans attended NBA games while another 2,000,000 attended WNBA games. In short, professional sport is big business! Now more than ever before, sports business managers are adopting the marketing concept and the related "voice of the customer" idea from total quality management and are focusing on satisfying the fan, while at the same time meeting the organization's objectives.

## Customer-team relationship

Given such a customer orientation, and the many billions of dollars at stake, marketing managers in the sports industry today are faced with the daunting challenge of better understanding the customer/team relationship. In virtually all professional sports, whether it be baseball, basketball, football, hockey, or soccer, some fans cheer for and support winning teams, while other fans root for teams with losing records: baseball's New York Yankees and Minnesota Twins; basketball's Utah Jazz and Vancouver Grizzlies; football's Saint Louis Rams and the new Cleveland Browns. A key question facing sports marketing managers is how to develop, maintain, or grow fan loyalty to

## Initial insights

sports teams with losing records and/or a history of sub-optimal performance.

This article reports the findings of a study designed to provide initial insights to that and other questions related to fan loyalty to professional sports teams. A survey of fans of the Chicago Cubs major league baseball team provided interesting and, sometimes, surprising answers to a series of questions focusing on various elements of fan loyalty. Perhaps, from a sports marketing manager's perspective, the most important finding in the study was that, even for professional sports teams with a history of losing, there is hope. As evidenced by the zealous and impassioned fans of the Chicago Cubs, a club with a storied history of classy players and almost legendary fan disappointments, it is possible for teams far removed from a world championship to enjoy strong fan support and loyalty.

The results of this study indicated, among other things, that die-hard (extremely loyal) Cub fans were generally more brand loyal, as children watched or listened to more Cub games, attended Cubs games more frequently, and were more likely to purchase Cubs paraphernalia than were less loyal fans. The results also showed that regardless of their level of loyalty to the club, Cubs fans found their favorite team to be very likeable. Those findings suggest that marketing managers for sports teams like the Minnesota Twins, a team with a shorter and less colorful history than the Chicago Cubs but with more recent successes (the Twins won the World Series titles in 1987 and 1991 while the Cubs last World Championship was in 1908), and a team whose fans have, like Cubs fans, suffered through several recent losing seasons, can take heart in the fact that it is possible to maintain the loyalty of the club's fans. Furthermore, despite the on-the-field struggles of the team, those marketing managers may have the opportunity to instill loyalty in a new generation of fans. For example, the researchers found that die-hard Cubs fans reported having watched and/or listened to more Cubs games in their youth than did less loyal fans. The message to sports marketers appears clear: develop marketing strategies designed to get children involved with the team. The challenge for marketing managers will be not only to make a trip to the ballpark a family friendly experience but to also provide memorable experiences for sons and daughters as they sit in the stands with mom and dad. Not every stadium can be Wrigley Field and not every player can be Ernie Banks, but every team can have its history and every fan can have his/her favorite player and every team, whether winning world championships or struggling to post a winning season, can work to develop a team and an organization that fans find likeable. The challenge for marketing managers and marketing researchers is to develop strategies designed to achieve those goals.

## Differences in fan behavior

In addition to providing marketing insights, the current study raised a series of interesting questions and avenues for further research. For instance, several comparisons have been made between the Chicago Cubs and the Minnesota Twins. The teams had similar records during the 1999 and 2000 baseball seasons, years in which both teams finished in the divisional cellar. However, while Cubs fans consistently filled Wrigley Field to capacity, the Metrodome was routinely strikingly empty. What accounts for the differences in fan behavior? Are Cubs fans significantly more loyal than Twins fans? And if so, why are they more loyal? An interesting next step in the research process would be to investigate those two questions.

The authors of this manuscript also encourage other researchers to extend this study to other professional sports. Will NFL fans maintain their

“dog-pound” loyalty to the new Cleveland Browns? If so, what are the factors related to that loyalty? How might the Dallas Mavericks of the NBA develop fan loyalty on a par with that enjoyed by the Dallas Cowboys? What strategies might marketing managers of teams in the WNBA employ to develop strong fan loyalty to the fledgling league? What is the relationship between fan loyalty and the performance of college athletic teams? The authors of this paper hope that this work will stimulate additional research designed to answer those and other questions.

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*This summary has been provided to allow managers and executives a rapid appreciation of the content of this article. Those with a particular interest in the topic covered may then read the article in toto to take advantage of the more comprehensive description of the research undertaken and its results to get the full benefit of the material present*

## **Executive summary and implications for managers and executives**

### ***Creating “die hard” fans – harder than it looks***

*The loyalty of sports fans is a subject of great sociological interest. Not only because sport is a massive industry but also because the behaviour of fans presents a fascinating insight into human behaviour and especially loyalty. The big question – why sports fans are so loyal – remains to be answered in a way that makes it transferable to other activities.*

*In some ways the loyalty of fans to their team is dysfunctional. There are few, if any, other areas of life where such degrees of almost tribal loyalty remain. So what if the team is a flop – we still carry on supporting the side. Indeed, the fan seems to become even more dedicated at times of sporting failure.*

### ***Being a fan is about belonging***

*Bristow and Sebastian examine why so many people continue to support the Chicago Cubs despite that club’s somewhat less than glorious record. For those readers who do not understand baseball may I provide a second reference point for the position of the Chicago Cubs – Manchester City Football Club in the UK.*

*This is the “other club” of the city (I almost said second club but I value my life too much) and the relative failure compared with Chicago White Sox or Manchester United seems almost to provide sustenance to the fans. We may not win all the trophies but we’re the real Chicago (or Manchester) club. The fans belong to something special – something other people really don’t understand. Supporters of other clubs are fickle – fair weather supporters. As soon as the other club starts doing badly those fans will drift away.*

*But why is it that other teams lack this obsessive loyalty in the face of failure? When other teams drop down the league their attendances drop. In marketing terms this makes sense since the product (performance on the field) is plainly of poorer quality. But for some clubs their support seems to defy such basic rules. Support for the Cubs seems to rise in the bad years. For Manchester City, over 30,000 fans turned up to watch the club at every home game when they were in the second division – playing sides more used to crowds of 4,000 or 5,000.*

### ***Why this exceptional degree of loyalty?***

*Loyalty is a difficult thing to pin down. But some clubs seem to have it cracked. For those facing the challenge of promoting sports clubs answering this question is something of a Holy Grail. Are there any specific marketing actions that can create the sort of loyalty that we see with the Chicago Cubs and Manchester City? It is hard to see anything in particular except to observe that the support for these clubs is obviously about more than what the fans see on the field.*

*Moreover, the creation of the loyal fan base is a very long-term strategy. Bristow and Sebastian suggest that involving children is a key element of the successful loyalty strategy for a sports team. Keighley Cougars Rugby League Club built up a loyal base of fans over a period of years by allowing children into matches for free. The result was a whole cadre of local youngsters who had been – as the club put it – “Cougarised”. The club may not be the greatest side (far from it in truth) but it has got a good crowd for home matches and this has enabled the team to firstly survive and latterly thrive.*

*The second element of this strategy is making the match day experience better for fans and especially for families. Thus the pre-match entertainment and the entertainment in the intervals must enhance the experience – even when the team is not winning. Some sports have been better at attracting families than others and within those sports some clubs are better at serving those families than others. The introduction of family enclosures – shielding youngsters from the rowdier, more vulgar elements of a mostly male crowd – makes the sports fixture more appealing to parents and increases the numbers of youngsters going to the game.*

*Finally, clubs need to build on their outreach work in the local community. Often this activity is portrayed in terms of “social work” but it is also a vital marketing tool. It is not just the benefit of having well known sports people putting across, for example, an anti-drugs message, we also get exposure to and contact with young people. The players become real people rather than distant figures. And the young fan feels privileged because he/she has met the batting superstar.*

*Clubs need to recognise that success on the field is only part of the story. A club can enjoy a long period of success but still fail to build the loyal support it deserves. England’s Wimbledon Football Club climbed from non-league soccer to the Premier Division but failed to attract the levels of support enjoyed by the big clubs. Clubs must pay close attention to the actual and psychological links between their supporters and the club. But it has taken a century or more of history to build the fan base of the Chicago Cubs and Manchester City. Do not expect your loyalty strategies to work all that much faster!*

*(A précis of the article “Holy cow! Wait ’til next year! A closer look at the brand loyalty of Chicago Cubs baseball fans”. Supplied by Marketing Consultants for MCB University Press.)*