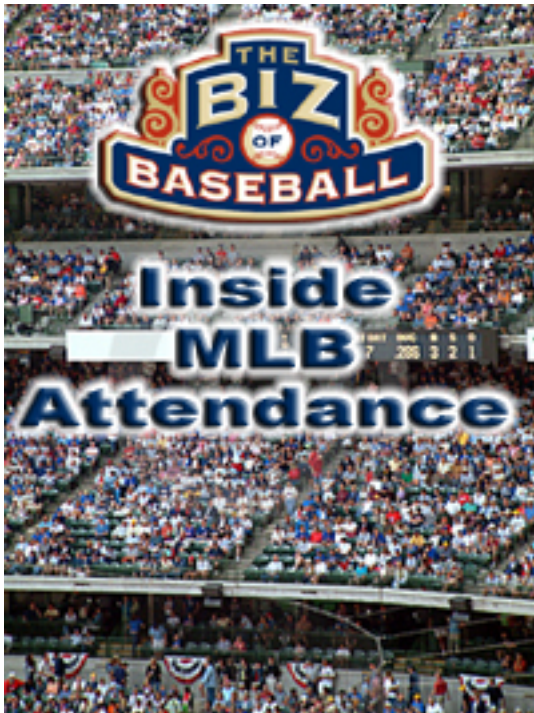


Is Daily Interleague More Popular Than Intraleague in MLB?

Written by Maury Brown
Monday, 03 June 2013 10:51



Since it became a regular facet of Major League Baseball in 1997, the question has been, does interleague play in Major League Baseball have a higher level of popularity than traditional intraleague play? The question has always been difficult to answer as the league had pegged a short series of interleague games in May followed by a longer stretch in June. Prior to 2005, all interleague play occurred in June prior to the All-Star Game, so factors such as weather, weekend play, school being out, and key match-ups were difficult to match-up with attendance across the rest of the season.

This season that all changed. With the Houston Astros moving into the AL West, and the league looking for a balanced schedule, “daily” interleague play was added to the schedule. There would still be “rival” play—those stretches of games in May and June that feature predominantly local and regional match-ups, but as soon as the season started, at least one interleague series would take place alongside intraleague play.

Beginning on April 1 of 2013, the Los Angeles Angels played the Reds in Cincinnati on Opening Day, and paid attendance numbers started racking up.

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Leading up to the first set of rival interleague games that started on Memorial Day (May 27), a total of 57 interleague games were sprinkled amongst intraleague play. Those games saw an average paid attendance of 29,479 compared to an average of 28,896 for intraleague play. The data shows that interleague at the beginning of the season leading up to Memorial Day was averaging 583 more in paid attendance per game than intraleague, an increase of 2 percent. So, there is slightly more interest in interleague than intraleague play in the first year of having interleague play on a daily basis.

What has skewed the numbers in prior years still holds true in 2013: the time set aside for “rival interleague” play is more popular than traditional intraleague, and also more popular than daily interleague.

A total of 58 interleague games were played from Monday, May 27 (Memorial Day) to Thursday, May 30 (the schedule had 60 games slated, but there were two rainouts). Those games that saw local and regional rivalries such as the Orioles against the Nationals, Mets vs Yankees, and Angels vs. the Dodgers drew an average of 30,876 or an increase of 1,980 per game more than intraleague and more than 1,397 more than daily interleague.

The numbers skew further toward rival interleague when just looking at May when rival interleague occurs. Daily interleague in May saw an average 27,591 or an average of 3,286 less than interleague during rival week. The numbers need to be tempered with knowing that there were some series that didn't scream box office seller. The Indians were in Philadelphia, the Rays in Colorado, the Mariners in Pittsburgh, and the Padres were in Tampa Bay. Still, rival week continues to see the Mariners and Padres match-up, even though few see the pairing as “rivalry” based on history or locations of the markets.

All this is looking at paid attendance data till the end of May. We're not into summer yet, the real pennant races don't even begin to become clear until after the All-Star break, and differing daily interleague and intraleague data will provide more context by the end of the 2013 regular season. But, if the early numbers hold throughout, MLB will have a compelling case to make that interleague—at least in 2013—is more popular than intraleague play. We'll look at this again at the All-Star break.
