

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



930 Generation Z and Baseball – Not a Love Affair

Are you a baseball fan? It's the best time of the year if you are, especially if your team is in the postseason playoffs, with the World Series set to start in about 10 days. What if I told you that the game of baseball — as we know it — may not be with us much longer? I'm Jerry Roberts, and what if I told you the reason for that is Generation Z? That revelation is coming next, on The Extra Point.

It was the game every American grew up with, including those who lived in U.S. territories like Guam. Everybody knew what the game was about. If you didn't play it, you had a family member or friend who did. Girls learned the game by watching their brothers play, and millions of them have played in school or work softball leagues.

If you take a poll here for the favorite Major League Baseball teams for islanders, you'll get a lot of them mentioned, but the two largest fan bases here are the San Francisco Giants and the Los Angeles Dodgers. Those two teams, the two winningest clubs in baseball this year, just completed a playoff series which the Dodgers won.

The quality of play has been very high this year, and you'd think the game is in great shape. Team owners and executives try to give that impression, but the website frontofficesports.com paints a different picture. Baseball has a big problem, and it is called Generation Z.

The most popular sports in America, across all generations, are football, baseball, basketball, and hockey, in that order. However, when you look at Generation Z alone, ages 6-24, baseball is in trouble.

Gen Z is approximately 34 million people strong, the largest of the generations, and they see things differently. Football nudges basketball with an approval rating of 47% to

44%. The next two are soccer and boxing, which edges out baseball, which is number five at 30.8%. Right behind baseball is mixed martial arts.

Do you ever wonder why fast-food brands spend so much money marketing to kids? Because if you can attract a child to your brand in the early years, there is a great chance they will be with you for decades to come, will introduce their kids to the brand, and the cycle renews itself.

For any number of reasons, baseball has lost a major segment of the largest population group, and millions upon millions will now never be attracted to the game. I began digging for reasons.

Gen Z doesn't care as much for the sports stars in baseball, as they might for other sports. There is less hero worship, like many of us had when we were kids. Gen Z folks are more likely to go ga-ga over a Tik-Tok or Instagram influencer, than they are a star pitcher or homerun hitter.

For decades, kids could play baseball all day and never think for a moment how long the games lasted. Today, baseball executives want to shorten games because surveys among Gen Z and Millennial fans indicate displeasure with the length.

High ticket and food prices are an issue, but owners have been giving out massive contracts over the past decade, and somebody has to pay for them. Network TV deals take care of much of that, but prices continue to escalate.

Umpires making so many bad calls are also a negative, and that seems to be getting worse.

(Con't.)

All those are negatives, like the length of games, but the biggest problem baseball might have is what allows their bank accounts to overflow — the length of its season, 162 games, which runs from early April through the beginning of October. Then, another five weeks to crown a World Series champion. Many in the younger generations would prefer fewer games.

Last year, due to the pandemic, the baseball season lasted 60 games, and then the playoffs. It blazed right by. Football is 17 games, basketball is 82. There are those who are advocating a shorter baseball season as absolutely necessary if they're ever to attract Gen Z.

Baseball will survive, but in what form? Will it be an 80- or 100-game season? Seven-inning games? Robot umpires? Will team revenues plunge, requiring player contracts to do likewise? If baseball evolves into something that no longer resembles the game you grew up with, in order to attract and appease Gen Z fans, will you still follow it?

Generation Z will bring massive changes to the workplace, as will the generation to follow them, many of whom will find artificial intelligence in their lives from birth.

Change is okay. It can force us to grow and be better. That's a positive. It's also better to get ahead of the changes, before they are forced upon us. That's what baseball is trying to do right now. Hopefully, they won't strike out.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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