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The Effects of Beer Sales on Attendance at Collegiate Football Games

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Abstract

Collegiate sports have become increasingly popular in recent years with college football seeing, arguably, the greatest rise in popularity. This has led to an increased number of Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) bowl games, which now culminate in a college football playoff. Universities are constantly developing new and innovative ways to increase revenue. One potential solution receiving increased consideration is the option of selling beer throughout stadiums. Previous research has separately focused on aspects of beer consumption and factors that influence collegiate sport attendance, but not in the same study. Thus far, studies focusing specifically on the topic of how beer sales affect attendance have been lacking. The purpose of this study is to examine whether or not the sale of beer inside FBS collegiate stadiums affects attendance. Our results indicate there is a negative correlation between beer availability and attendance. No significant difference was found as to whether or not stadium location, on or off-campus, affects attendance figures.

The Effects of Beer Sales on Attendance at Collegiate Football Games

Collegiate sports have become increasingly popular in recent years with college football seeing, arguably, the greatest rise in popularity. This has led to an increased number of Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) bowl games, which now culminate in a college football playoff. Even as college football continues to grow, universities are finding it difficult to keep their attendance rates steady (Solomon, 2015). Attendance rates at the FBS level have been decreasing since 2008. Further, the conferences that make up what is known as the Power Five, the Big Ten (B10), Big Twelve (B12), Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Southeastern Conference (SEC), and the Pacific Twelve (PAC-12), have collectively seen a decrease in attendance since 2008. Similarly, student attendance rates at the FBS level have seen a 7.1% drop since 2009 (Cohen, 2014).

Universities are constantly developing new and innovative ways to increase attendance. Changes include making Wi-Fi accessible in stadiums, readily available and more efficient public transportation, improved and expanded food and drink options, and a host of other improvements (James, 2016). One potential solution that is receiving increased consideration is the option of selling of beer throughout stadiums. As of 2014, there were 32 FBS universities that sold beer in their football stadiums whether on or off campus (McWhinnie, 2015). In 2015, both the University of Maryland and the University of Texas at Austin began to sell beer at home football games, increasing the number to 34 (Malone, 2015). The State University of New York at Buffalo is currently contemplating whether or not to sell beer in their stadium. It has been reported, and believed by many, that not only would beer sales increase revenue, but it would also increase student attendance (McWhinnie, 2015). The University of Louisiana-Lafayette, which began selling beer in its stadium in 2013, reported a 34.1% rise in student attendance in the first year.

Previous research has focused on the aspects of beer consumption and factors that influence collegiate sport attendance separately up to this point. Studies focusing specifically on the topic of how beer sales affect attendance have been lacking thus far. The purpose of this study is to examine whether or not the sale of beer inside FBS collegiate stadiums, both on and off campus, affects attendance.

Review of Literature

Factors that Affect Attendance

Many studies have been done on factors that affect attendance and from these we gather our independent variables. These factors are based on either game competitiveness or material factors (Noll, 1974; Meehan et al. 2007; Lemke et al. 2009). Game competitiveness factors include the following for each team playing: winning percentages, playoff appearances, games back in the division, and number of league championships. For this study, we have included home and away win percentages, home and away Football Power Index, whether or not the opponent is within the same conference, whether or not the opponent comes from a Power Five conference, and the number of weeks the home team has been in the Associated Press (AP) Top 25 Poll. This last variable is used in attempt to measure the historical presence of a team, similar to that of number of league championships.

Material factors have included date of game (weekend/weekday), time of game (day/night), weather conditions, population, and income per capita of the region (Noll, 1974; Meehan et al. 2007; Lemke et al. 2009). In accordance, this study includes all of the aforementioned variables with some adaptations. For population, included is both the population of the county that the institution is in and the total home campus enrollment. Also added is the variable of whether or not the game is nationally broadcasted, which has been shown to have an attendance effect (McEvoy & Morse, 2007). Lastly, the variable of whether or not beer is available is added to examine its effect on attendance.

Beer Sales and Attendance

In 1996, the University of Colorado-Boulder banned the sale of beer at home football games in an attempt to lower the rate of excessive consumption on campus (Bormann & Stone, 2001). This event, known as the Folsom Field Beer Ban, resulted in 29% of season ticket holders deciding not to renew their tickets for the following season. The study found that students at the university were even more dissatisfied than the season ticket holders. Both parties stated their level of fan enjoyment at games would be greatly altered by this decision. This suggests that policies put in place to govern alcohol consumption at collegiate football games do affect ticket sales. This “beer ban” continued for nineteen years until the university decided to once again allow beer to be sold in the stadium. During this ban, the program saw its low attendance figures climb slowly until the lifting of the ban in 2015. The dissatisfaction and subsequent drop in ticket sales

due to a decreased level of fan enjoyment is intriguing as Wann (1998) found that alcohol use has no significant relationship with sport fandom.

Chastain, Gohmann, and Stephenson (2015) examined the effect of beer availability on overall attendance in college football in what is the first and only study of its kind to date. The study examined 29 universities associated with the following Group of Five conferences (commonly referred to as the mid-majors): the Mid-American Conference (MAC), Western Athletic Conference (WAC), and the Sun Belt Conference. After running both ordinary least squares analyses and instrumental variable estimations, the investigation found that no significant relationship existed between beer availability and attendance. The conclusions drawn suggested that the addition of beer sales would have limited benefits for a university. The objective of this study is to build upon Chastain, Gohmann, and Stephenson's work by incorporating additional variables and including additional FBS institutions.

While there have been multiple studies examining the promotion and sale of beer on attendance in Minor League Baseball, discrepancies in the results seem to be common. For example, no relation was found between beer sales and attendance in Minor League Baseball by both Paul, Paul, Toma, and Brennan (2007) and Paul, Paul, and Holihan (2008). In contrast, Paul, Toma, and Weinbach (2009) and Cebula (2013) stated that both discounted beer prices and the sale of beer itself were found to have a positive relationship on attendance in Minor League Baseball. Further, a similar study found that beer sales and attendance in Minor League Baseball did possess a positive relationship, but one that was not statistically significant (Chupp, Stephenson, & Taylor, 2007).

Beer Sales and Potential Complications

For some universities, the potential for increases in revenue and attendance is not enough to permit the sale of beer in their football stadiums. The problem of excessive beer consumption by students during college football games is a concern for many universities. The amount of alcohol consumed by students was found to be related to the ranking of the opposing team (Barry et al., 2014). The breath alcohol content levels of students at bars surrounding a Power Five southeastern university after high profile games were found to be significantly higher than after low profile games. The study used the Massey rating system in order to judge whether a game was noted as having a high or low profile status. These findings could point to student attendance being affected by the status of the opponent, and as such, we have included variables that account for such a factor. Boyes and Faith (1993) however stated the opposite, asserting that the sale of beer in stadiums could actually decrease excessive alcohol consumption. Their study found that intoxication levels increased at Arizona State University after the

university prohibited the sale of beer. This was explained by students and other attendees consuming copious amounts of alcohol before the game as well as smuggling alcohol into the stadium. It was stated that there is a possible inverse relationship between in-stadium beer sales and the amount of alcohol smuggled in. It was also explained that the sale of beer would reduce the need for students to consume excessive amounts before the game, while the higher prices of beer at the stadium would reduce the amount consumed during the game.

In addition to excessive alcohol consumption, underage drinking and the associated public image were suggested as having a more profound impact on the decision to sell beer than dram shop laws and NCAA regulations (McGregor, 2012). In relation to the concern of the public image of the institution, some believe that selling alcohol at athletic events would lead to increased criminal activity on campus. In accordance, it was found that college football games are associated with increased levels of criminal activity on and around campus (Rees, & Schnepel, 2009). Examples of such crimes generally include assault, disorderly conduct, vandalism, and alcohol related offenses.

This public image could also have an effect of families attending games. The family systems theory states that family anxiety increases when around people who are drinking, be it family or nonfamily members (Bowen, 1974). Showing that families do not wish to be around those who drink, this could prove to be a reason why the majority of professional sport teams offer a family section, where alcohol is not permitted. With the collegiate football scene being new to serving alcohol and not having these sections firmly in place, this theory provides a hypothesis that attendance would decrease as families would shy away from attending games when alcohol is available.

Methodology

Our study evaluated the five-year period from 2010-2014 to assess whether or not the availability of beer in college football stadiums had an effect on overall attendance figures. Military academies were excluded from the sample due to their mandatory attendance policies, making our sample a total of 125 institutions. The study includes a variety of independent variables that were deemed to have the potential to influence overall attendance in some regard.

Dependent

- Attendance (OA): These figures were obtained from the universities box scores.

Independent

- Nationally Broadcasted (NB): Home games were deemed as nationally broadcast if they were televised on one of the following major networks: ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, ESPN, and ESPN2. These networks were chosen due to their availability across most television platforms.
- Day of Game (DG): This categorical variable was based on the day of the week that the game was played (Thursday, Friday, Saturday, etc.)
- Night Game (NG): A game was designated with this distinction if the start time was after 5:00PM EST, regardless of what time zone the college/university is located geographically.
- Temperature (TEMP): This figure was obtained from box scores that were found on the respective universities athletic page.
- Precipitation (PREC): A game was deemed to have precipitation if it was snowing or raining in the description on the box score of the university's athletic site.
- Home/Away Win Percentage (HW%/AW%): These figures were calculated based on the win/loss record of each team before the start of the game being measured.
- Home/Away FPI: "The Football Power Index (FPI) is a measure of team strength that is meant to be the best predictor of a team's performance going forward for the rest of the season. FPI represents how many points above or below average a team is. Projected results are based on 10,000 simulations of the rest of the season using FPI, results to date, and the remaining schedule. Ratings and projections update daily" (<http://espn.go.com/college-football/statistics/teamratings>).
 - FPI Previous Season: Final FPI value for the previous season. For example, the FPI for all home games of a given program for the 2013 season would be the previous FPI value from the 2012 season.
 - FPI Current (At time of game): The FPI value for a given program at the time of the game being measured.
- Conference Game (CONF): A game was designated as a conference game if the opponent was in the same conference as the home team.
- Power Five Opponent (P5): Power Five opponents were classified as those programs that represented one of the following conferences: B10, B12, ACC, SEC, PAC-12 and the Big East (2009-2012). The Big East was included in this category because it was a BCS automatic qualifying conference before it dissolved as a football conference in 2012.
- Historical AP Poll Appearances (AP): This value represents the total number of times a program has appeared in the AP poll since 1936. For

example, the number of AP poll appearances for a given program for the 2013 season is represented by the number of times they appeared in the poll from 1936-2012. These figures were obtained from <http://collegepollarchive.com/football>.

- Public/Private University (PUB): A university was deemed Public if it is a public institution.
- Home Enrollment (HE): This figure encompasses both the undergraduate and graduate enrollment at the university's main campus only. This figure was obtained from data provided by the Office of Postsecondary Education of the U.S. Department of Education (<http://ope.ed.gov/athletics>).
- County Population (CPOP): 2013 United States census data was used to obtain the overall population for the county in which the university's football stadium is located. This information was gathered using citydata.com.
- County Income Per Capita (CIPC): 2013 United States census data was used to obtain the overall income per capita for the county in which the university's football stadium is located. This information was gathered using citydata.com.
- Beer availability (BA): Beer was deemed as "available" if it was served in all public locations of the institutions football stadium. Universities that sold beer solely in private suites or special admission areas were not counted for the purposes of this variable.

In addition, we hypothesized that stadium location may have an effect on attendance regardless of whether or not beer was offered. A list of off-campus stadiums can be found in table 2 along with a column to indicate whether or not they offered beer in their stadium at any point during the sample period.

Analysis

Statistical analysis was run using a series of multiple linear regressions to measure the correlation between the dependent and independent variables. The SPSS software was used for all statistical tests with an alpha-level of 0.05 as our measure of significance. Variables were gauged on their level of significance (p-value) and beta coefficient (β) values. The beta coefficient is a predictor of the impact of change in the dependent variable based on the independent variables, be it either negative or positive.

Results

The first multiple linear regression was run using the entire sample of 125 programs. The test for the effect of beer availability on attendance resulted in a significant negative relationship. In order to reduce the risk of multicollinearity, a series of regressions were run using only the significant and marginally significant independent variables from the original test of 125 programs to find the most accurate model (See Table 3). The final regression model with its variables is shown here:

$$OA = BA(911.750) + NB(2836.865) + DG(1499.267) + NG(1063.738) + TEMP(58.726) + PREC(2138.983) + HomeFPIPrev(207.893) + AwayFPICur(114.471) + HomeFPICur(354.342) + CONF(3464.430) + P5(3717.471) + AP(70.982) + PUB(3847.068) + HE(0.435) + CPOP(-0.004) + CIPC(-0.079)$$

This regression model had an R^2 of 0.866. This shows that 86.6% of the variance in overall attendance was explained by our independent variables. The regression also showed a marginally significant negative effect of beer availability on attendance ($p=0.051$, $\beta = -911.750$). These findings would suggest that programs offering beer in their stadiums would see a significant decrease in their attendance figures.

In an attempt to examine whether or not a difference in the relative attendance of institutions would influence the effect of beer availability, we elected to eliminate institutions that did not offer beer and had frequent sell out games. This resulted in the elimination of the SEC institutions as the conference does not allow beer sales as well as other various institutions that had similar criteria and had very high average attendance with little variance. In this new sample, a significant negative correlation was still found between beer availability and attendance.

Lastly, we wanted to test for any effect that stadium location might have on attendance (on-campus vs. off-campus) (See Tables 6 & 7). For off-campus stadiums our regressions showed significant correlations with the variables DG, NG, TEMP, HW%, AwayFPIPrev, HomeFPIPrev, CONF, P5, AP, PUB, HE, CPOP, and CIPC, as well as a significant negative relationship between BA and OA ($p=0.003$, $\beta=-3312.141$). Regressions for on-campus stadiums showed similar results, with NB, DG, NG, TEMP, PREC, AW%, HomeFPIPrev, AwayFPICur, HomeFPICur, CONF, P5, AP, PUB, HE, CPOP, and CIPC all having significant effects on student attendance while again a significant negative relation was found in regards to beer availability ($p=0.010$, $\beta=-1543.67$).

Conclusion

Our findings suggest that there is a negative correlation between offering beer in public areas of college football stadiums and overall attendance figures, which may be explained by the family systems theory. As correlation does not equal causation, we are not necessarily suggesting that offering beer in stadiums will have a drastic negative impact on attendance figures. What we are stating is that we did not find any instances in which beer availability and attendance had a statistically significant positive relationship. Additionally, no significant differences were found in regards to the effect of beer availability on attendance and whether the stadium is located on or off-campus. Our findings do have significant implications for athletic directors and decision makers that are considering offering beer in their stadiums. As many programs continue to ponder the sale of alcohol in their stadiums, the effect it has on attendance is an important factor to consider. The decrease in attendance could spur a litany of other negative effects, such as a multiplier effect on decreasing attendance.

It should also be noted that these changes in allowing beer sales in stadiums might be subject to a “honeymoon effect,” where sales/attendance in the initial years are large and then taper down as the excitement and novelty dwindles (Howard & Crompton, 2003). Howard and Crompton found that attendance saw a large increase for the first year after a new stadium was built for a franchise. This increase dropped significantly after the first year but was still higher than it was prior to the building of the new stadium. This could be transferred to the situation at hand of the novelty of selling beer in a stadium for the first time.

As our findings indicate, offering beer is not a viable way to increase attendance at collegiate football games. Based on this information, we suggest that the legal implications and potential for negative publicity are not worth the time and hassle. Ultimately, colleges and universities need to consider alternative options, other than offering beer, to increase their attendance figures, which has been decreasing in recent years (Solomon, 2015).

Limitations & Direction for Future Research

One limitation of this study is that it did not account for the price of in-stadium beer sales. This data was not able to be collected accurately and mostly was not available to the researchers but may play a role in effecting attendance. A higher price point could potentially dissuade individuals from attending the contest or purchasing beer while in the stadium. Therefore, this would negate the idea that offering beer during the game would increase revenue from beer sales. Lastly, the reliability of our data hinges upon the accuracy of the information reported on the box scores and listed on the institutions athletic website

(temperature & precipitation). Future research should aim to incorporate both the price of beer in stadiums as well as the average price of tickets per game which we were unable to find from a reliable source.

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Tables

Table 1

<i>Schools Selling Beer</i>	
<u>Program Name</u>	<u>Years Beer Sold During Sample Period</u>
University of Akron	2012-2014
Bowling Green State University	2010-2014
University of Cincinnati	2010-2014
Colorado State University	2010-2014
Georgia State University	2013-2014
Kent State University	2010-2014
Southern Methodist University	2014
Syracuse University	2010-2014
Troy University	2014
Tulane University	2014
University of Hawaii at Manoa	2010-2014
University of Houston	2010-2014
University of Louisiana-Lafayette	2010-2014
University of Louisiana-Monroe	2013-2014
University of Louisville	2010-2014
University of Memphis	2010-2014
University of Minnesota	2012-2014
University of Nevada	2010-2014
University of North Texas	2014
University of Toledo	2013-2014

University of Nevada – Las Vegas	2009-2014
University of South Alabama	2012-2014
University of South Florida	2010-2014
University of Texas – El Paso	2012-2014
University of Texas – San Antonio	2011-2014
Western Kentucky University	2012-2014
West Virginia University	2011-2014

Table 2

Off Campus Stadiums and Beer Availability

<u>School</u>	<u>Beer Available During Sample Period</u>
Baylor University	No
Colorado State University	Yes
University of Connecticut	Yes
Georgia State	Yes
Kent State University	Yes
North Carolina State University	No
Northwestern University	No
San Diego State University	Yes
San Jose State University	No
Tulane University	No
Temple University	Yes
University of Alabama – Birmingham	No
University of California – Los Angeles	No
University of Hawaii – Manoa	Yes
University of Massachusetts - Amherst	Yes
University of Memphis	Yes
University of Miami – Florida	Yes
University of Nevada – Las Vegas	Yes
University of Oregon	No
University of Pittsburgh	No
University of South Alabama	Yes
University of South Carolina	No
University of South Florida	Yes
University of Texas – San Antonio	Yes
University of Washington	No

Table 3

Model Summary - All Schools

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.942 ^a	.887	.886	9156.5879

a. Predictors: (Constant), County Income per Capita, Nationally Broadcast, Conf. Game, Precipitation, County Population of Stadium, Night Game, Beer Available, Home Enrollment (Main Campus), Day of Game, Temperature, Home FPI Prev. Year, Away FPI Current, Public, Power 5 Opp., Home Team AP Top 25, Home FPI Current

Coefficients - All Schools^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standard Coeffs.		Collinearity Statistics		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	5874.090	2026.278		2.899	.004		
	Beer Available	-911.750	467.670	-.013	-1.950	.051	.838	1.194
	Nationally Broadcast	2836.865	460.170	.048	6.165	.000	.609	1.641
	Day of Game	1499.267	237.378	.042	6.316	.000	.840	1.191
	Night Game	1063.738	360.781	.020	2.948	.003	.855	1.170
	Temperature	58.726	11.828	.034	4.965	.000	.811	1.234
	Precipitation	-2138.983	676.551	-.020	-3.162	.002	.971	1.030
	Home FPI Prev. Year	207.893	25.808	.093	8.055	.000	.283	3.535
	Away FPI Current	114.471	19.025	.051	6.017	.000	.514	1.947
	Home FPI Current	354.342	27.004	.156	13.122	.000	.264	3.788
	Conf. Game	-3464.430	424.111	-.058	-8.169	.000	.751	1.332
	Power 5 Opp.	3717.893	486.309	.069	7.645	.000	.464	2.154
	Home AP Top 25	70.982	1.139	.579	62.334	.000	.434	2.306
	Public	3847.068	677.795	.042	5.676	.000	.683	1.464
	Home Enrollment (Main Campus)	.435	.020	.169	21.929	.000	.631	1.585
	County Population of Stadium	-.004	.000	-.083	-12.719	.000	.872	1.147
	County Income per Capita	-.079	.020	-.027	-4.004	.000	.838	1.194

a. Dependent Variable: Overall Attendance

Table 4

<i>Model Summary - Off Campus</i>								
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate				
1	.864 ^a	.746	.740	10062.803				
a. Predictors: (Constant), County Income per Capita, Conf. Game, Home FPI Prev. Year, Night Game, County Population of Stadium, Day of Game, Away FPI Prev. Year, Public, Temperature, Home Win %, Beer Available, Power 5 Opp., Home Enrollment (Main Campus), Home Team AP Top 25								
<i>Coefficients - Off Campus^a</i>								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standard Coeffs.	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-9826.727	5277.649		-1.862	.063		
	Beer Available	-3312.141	1119.231	-.084	-2.959	.003	.569	1.757
	Day of Game	1434.042	551.952	.059	2.598	.010	.892	1.122
	Night Game	2870.135	955.911	.073	3.003	.003	.784	1.276
	Temperature	132.906	33.369	.101	3.983	.000	.712	1.404
	Home Win %	5146.335	1602.688	.083	3.211	.001	.680	1.472
	Away FPI Prev. Year	178.100	43.098	.105	4.132	.000	.706	1.417
	Home FPI Prev. Year	470.317	55.079	.291	8.539	.000	.394	2.540
	Conf. Game	-3156.898	1086.015	-.071	-2.907	.004	.771	1.297
	Power 5 Opp.	7084.264	1227.329	.179	5.772	.000	.476	2.103
	Home AP Top 25	34.116	3.963	.274	8.609	.000	.452	2.212
	Public	8477.702	2385.974	.093	3.553	.000	.668	1.497
	Home Enrollment (Main Campus)	.460	.092	.152	4.971	.000	.492	2.033
	County Population of Stadium	-.004	.001	-.081	-3.016	.003	.638	1.569
	County Income per Capita	.187	.077	.076	2.435	.015	.469	2.134
a. Dependent Variable: Overall Attendance								

Table 5

<i>Model Summary - On Campus</i>								
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate				
1	.952 ^a	.906	.906	8656.4984				

a. Predictors: (Constant), County Income per Capita, Home FPI Prev. Year, Precipitation, Night Game, Conf. Game, Beer Available, County Population of Stadium, Day of Game, Away FPI Prev. Year, Home Enrollment (Main Campus), Temperature, Public, Nationally Broadcast, Power 5 Opp., Home Team AP Top 25, Home FPI Current

<i>Coefficients - On Campus^a</i>								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standard Coeff.	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	8272.867	2163.480		3.824	.000		
	Beer Available	-1548.061	604.060	-.017	-2.563	.010	.893	1.120
	Nationally Broadcast	2753.608	481.209	.046	5.722	.000	.606	1.650
	Day of Game	1284.723	256.885	.034	5.001	.000	.820	1.220
	Night Game	826.086	383.632	.015	2.153	.031	.853	1.172
	Temperature	56.837	12.408	.032	4.581	.000	.811	1.234
	Precipitation	-2098.590	717.320	-.018	-2.926	.003	.974	1.027
	Away FPI Prev. Year	84.912	19.189	.037	4.425	.000	.548	1.826
	Home FPI Prev. Year	228.330	27.129	.097	8.416	.000	.292	3.429
	Home FPI Current	322.022	28.768	.135	11.194	.000	.267	3.740
	Conf. Game	-3196.430	454.442	-.051	-7.034	.000	.729	1.371
	Power 5 Opp.	4373.056	503.032	.078	8.693	.000	.484	2.066
	Home Team AP Top 25	76.045	1.196	.622	63.563	.000	.404	2.477
	Public	4068.424	693.760	.045	5.864	.000	.657	1.522
	Home Enrollment (Main Campus)	.375	.020	.149	18.579	.000	.600	1.667
	County Population of Stadium	-.005	.000	-.100	-14.804	.000	.856	1.168
	County Income per Capita	-.105	.021	-.035	-5.128	.000	.814	1.229

a. Dependent Variable: Overall Attendance