

## Fans returning to Sports Playbook-3

Six days since the last report and the unexpected theme which dominated the first two editions, hasn't changed. Maybe not everything was totally unexpected. Dallas is really Big; Des Moines was as far from Dallas as the map said and my host in Iowa was the super star on all levels I was expecting.

Surprise highlights: Des Moines Iowa is a terrific modern banking and tech Hub surrounded by rivers. The bridges that dominated the travel between Florida to Texas were replaced by Casinos enroute from Texas to Iowa. It felt like every highway stop in Oklahoma had a place to play cards and in Kansas it also included a 200-room hotel. The impact of the staff shortage means the highway outlets minus gas are closed after 8pm, big concessions lines remain in 20% capacity sports venues and McDonald's which is now starting staff at \$12 per hour is about \$16.00 Cdn for a meal. Lastly, if you've ever wondered where all the XXX video stores and sex merchandise stores disappeared too? They've all relocated to the exits off I-70 between Kansas City and St Louis.

Additional discoveries: Thanks to Mark Cuban writing an 11th hour additional \$20M personal check, American Airlines is so nice and polished I felt like I shouldn't be wearing my shoes inside. Kaufmann Park home of the Kansas City Royals is nowhere near the city, tailgates before every game and has a kids full baseball park behind centre field waterfall. Busch Stadium in St Louis is centre ice to the city, draws from a 30-mile radius midweek, 600 miles/ 5 states on weekends and prides itself on being affordable and friendly. IE: Fans can bring in their own food, 50% tickets exist for locals (limited dates) and if you want a paper ticket, just ask.

Playing the long game works. Just hours after learning in a discussion with the Cardinals front office how they try to get every child from East Missouri to the ballpark in some capacity during their grade school days, I overheard stories from different groups of fans (all decked out in Cardinal Red) detailing the grade 1 stadium tour, singing the anthem, and about a play they made at second (at Busch Stadium) in the school regional.

In Iowa the incredible number of families at the game might be connected to the reality that every fall Newborn in Des Moines starts life in an Iowa Wild onesie.

Biggest short-term challenges Teams are facing coming out of COVID:

Game Day Event Staffing shortage: Already aware this was a pre lock down concern (thanks to a Dan Morrow MLSE discussion about Uber), the combination of virus fear and government subsidy has put this problem on steroids.

Ticket Awareness: Most fans have been away for at least 12 months, and they assume that limited capacity doesn't include them. This is especially true to those who don't have their name listed as the primary on a Season Ticket Holder account.

Seating Pods were a mess: They made sense to your regional health authority and your team CFO, but they didn't make sense to your box office staff and most importantly, to your fans. Fans looking for a pair of tickets (the overwhelming majority of the ticketing buying base) were often turned away, driven towards cheaper tickets, and should they succumb to buying extras would

floor price the secondary market with the unwanted tickets. From a team side, strangers (secondary buyers) were shocked to be sitting with strangers while some of the best inventory perished in the box office.

COVID live game aren't the same experience: Whether this is Season Ticket holder perks eliminated, exhibits closed, club access shutdown, early entry not permitted or being asked to wear a mask, the experience isn't as good.. That said, 99% of fans are great and especially those showing up during "Mask" season are committed and your biggest supporters. All they want from you is to support them back and tell (not surprise) them.

The COVID event perks: bathroom lines are great, parking is easy and the trip to the game on the highway took half as long.

Good news is on it's way: The really good front offices are adapting which in conjunction with vaccinations rates soaring, will give sports in the US a chance to return to 2019 capacity with optional mask guidelines. The Ramping up to meet demand for the playoffs with Skeleton staff award might go to Sara Daniels team in Carolina who has increased capacity 4x to 12k fans.

What's exciting to watch from a Ticketing Business side: Teams who can ramp up to execute playoff distribution are to be commended particularly when most of them are running Skeleton staff. That said, as the Oakland A's and Tampa Bay Rays will attest, this is often a short term verification. The front office's to watch are the ones that make you double take and say to yourself, how are they so full midweek vs a non rival?

Stars in week #3.

My friend/family reaching out and caring. Facetimes with my family and Kelly are followed closely by a few of my WhatsApp discussion groups, comments on this blog, emails and calls. My appreciation for alone time hasn't increased in the last 18 days.

Pat Ryan- My trip to Missouri was terrific and highlighted by Pat's referrals. In addition, his data and distribution channels will also be imperative to teams whose level of ticket demand will be on full display as state Governor's will use Sports to showcase their economies being back.

Really kind hosts in Dallas, KC, St Louis and Des Moines who in addition to Saturday game, created a great next day Sunday.

Hotel Front Desks- Janice in Dallas extended my check out by 6 hours, Michael in Iowa bump my room and told me where to park for free and Susan in St Louis apologized for the front desk being away for my 1:00am check in and comped my second night.

The great game day |Usher staff- In addition to answering my 20 questions, suite/club tours from the Cardinals and Iowa Wild, media centre stop to meet the play by play for voice for the Iowa Cubs, stadium architect detail from Mavs Usher Jerry who was born in St Catherines, Ont and Cheryl from the Royals who directed the Jumbo Tron trivia contest host to feature me the Canadian.

Today is day 1 on the trips last week which will include states I've visited in the past; friends I've known for 28 years and 5 venues I've only heard about second hand or watched on TV in Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York. The highlight will be returning to places I recognize and seeing my good friends TP, JD and Hop in New York.