

Over the course of the past 4 months, I have been researching what makes a MiLB team successful. Throughout this process, I have had to define exactly what finding "success" means when it comes to operating a MiLB team. When I first started my research, I assumed that the teams with the highest attendance would be successful, however, I came to find that at the end of a season, profit determines success. So this is what I looked into, finding what makes a MiLB team monetarily successful, year after year.

To explain the background of the MiLB, the concept of minor league baseball started in 1871 however, most consider the first true minor league to be the Northwest league that was formed in 1883. Minor League baseball started to look like what we see now around 1925.

All of the minor league teams are operated as independent businesses. Minor League teams are affiliates of Major League teams. Major League teams either sign 2 or 4-year contracts with their Minor League affiliates and at the end of those contracts they can either resign or choose to find a new affiliate. Many teams stay with their affiliates for long periods of time such as the Philadelphia Phillies who have had a partnership with

their double-a affiliate, the Reading Fightin Phils that has lasted over 50 years.

Minor League Baseball provides opportunities for player development and a way to prepare players for the major leagues. There are a total of 9 levels in Minor League baseball. The levels starting from lowest to highest are, rookie, advanced rookie, Class A short season, short season, class A, Class A Advanced, Double-A, and Triple A. There is also a rehabilitation league that players from all levels are sent to when they have an injury during the season.

As I said, going into my research, I was looking at success in terms of attendance for MiLB teams. I assumed that the teams that had the most attendance were the most successful. I also assumed that this would be mainly because of the promotions that each team ran. I came to many different conclusions when it comes to what makes a Milb team successful each year. These conclusions change based upon the local of a MiLB team. The MiLB is run by teams in small towns in middle America and the South. Teams in Middle America and the South have loyal fans that come to every game for generations.

In the 2019 season, the Tampa Bay Rays were awarded as the top farm system in the MiLB because of their performance. The

MiLB released an article breaking down how the Rays were picked as the top farm system in 2019. In the article, much credit is given to those running the show, rather than just the players and coaches. "We meet the criteria," admitted senior advisor of player development and baseball operations Mitch Lukevics, who served as the Rays' director of Minor League operations until September, when he passed that title to Jeff McLerran. "When you talk about having the No. 1 farm system, you're talking about 100 people, 200 people [besides the players]? I don't know. But it's a total organization success. It goes from the ownership to the "clubbies" that are instrumental in what we do. It sounds corny, but I've been in this, this is my 45th year. I firmly believe in this. This is how it's done."

In baseball, you can't control much. A club can't guarantee that they will have a stacked roster or a successful season. However, the front office staff can ensure that no matter the quality of the team, there will be fans in the stands that are there for the experience that they have created and cultivated over many years of experience and feedback.

The California League has a different set of adversities to overcome. California, Southern California to be specific, is the hub of entertainment. The best athletes, actors, and experiences

are all within an hour from each other in Los Angeles. This creates a competitive atmosphere for all organizations in the area, but especially for Minor League teams. MLB teams can't bank on having big-name athletes draw fans to games, instead, they have to get creative.

I should mention that I have always been interested in finding a career in baseball. This past year I decided to take an internship with a MiLB team, the Rancho Cucamonga Quakes. I quite honestly, saw this position as a stepping stone to find a job in the MLB. However, I came to love the MiLB. I learned a lot during my time with the Quakes about what it takes to run a MiLB team successfully. The majority of my research comes from the Quakes front office staff. The Quakes have received many awards over the years and they have been credited with finding consistent success throughout the years.

In my interview with Chris Pope, the Vice President of The Rancho Cucamonga Quakes, I came to find that the teams in the California League that report a higher attendance each year, aren't necessarily the teams that have the highest profit. In fact, the Rancho Cucamonga Quakes tend to come in at number 6 in the California League when it comes to attendance each year. However, when it comes to profit, they are always in the top two

teams. So while teams like the Inland Empire 66er's report a higher attendance, their profit is significantly lower. All of these numbers can be found as public information on the MiLB and California League website, after teams report their numbers to the commissioner of the league each year.

So how do they do this? And why does attendance not correlate to profit? In my conversation with Chris Pope, he credits this to keeping the value of their ticket. While many other teams in their conference offer deal like \$1 ticket Friday, or flash ticket sales for less than half of the price, the Quakes have not and never will do this. Pope says, "why would we sell our Monday tickets for less than our Friday tickets? What is that telling the fans? It's telling the fans that the quality of their experience will be less on certain days, and that's not the case. We treat every game like it's a sellout, or like it's our July 3rd game. (The Quakes biggest day, attendance and profit-wise are always July the 3rd.)" Pope also added that attendance is always reported as sold attendance, not in park attendance. This means while fans may buy a \$1 ticket, many don't actually show up. The Quakes continue to have a better correlation with fans buying tickets

in advance and showing up to the game because of the value their tickets hold.

This attention to detail and want to create an equal and amazing experience each game doesn't end with the fans. The Quakes find a lot of success when it comes to retaining partnerships with their sponsors each year. The Quakes have found a lot of financial security in these partnerships year to year. But these partnerships are exactly that, partnerships. The Quakes are very thoughtful in who they choose to do business with. They want these partnerships to be mutually beneficial for both parties. The Quakes look for partners that fit their "affordable family fun," atmosphere at the ballpark and in the community.

In my conversations with the Marketing and Sponsorship department, I got some more insight into how this process works from the inside by speaking with Sponsorship Account Executives, Trevor Moorhead and David Fields. When the Quakes market sponsorship packages, they market their Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights as their "sell-out" nights. This is when they run the bulk of their promotions that sponsors can buy for the season. Some sponsors want these Thursday, Friday, Saturday nights to promote their weekend deals. One of the Quake's

biggest sponsorships during the 2019 season was with Buffalo Wings and Rings. This local restaurant wanted the weekend slots so that they could promote their Thursday-Saturday night deals. The owner was very adamant that these are the days he wanted. Another sponsorship the Quakes had in the 2019 season was with Terra Vista Animal Hospital. Terra Vista wasn't as interested in the "sell-out" days, however, they wanted to have their own designated day to promote adoptions. So instead of having their promotions run on the weekends, they opted to buy all of the Wednesday games of the season for their "Bark in the Ballpark." This promotion let fans bring their animals to the game and Terra Vista was able to show the dogs that they had up for adoption through on-field promotions.

Through my interviews, focus groups, and research, I have found that a ball club is only as successful as the front office makes it. Attention to detail, retaining ticket value, and genuine care put into producing quality affordable family fun is what sets the Quakes apart from other organizations in the Southern California area.

When I first started my project I assumed a couple of things. I assumed that the teams with the most attendance and the best on-field promotions would be the most successful.

Through my research, I came to find that, in the California League, success is found in other ways by the Rancho Cucamonga Quakes.

Minor League baseball is a huge business that is often neglected. People love to watch the big names play on the big stage, but they often forget that they all come up through the Minor League farm system. For the majority of players, the MiLB will be the biggest stage they get. This is why teams across America are working to make that experience great for fans and players.

The MiLB thrives in small towns in Middle America. That doesn't mean it can't be successful elsewhere. The California League is known as a powerhouse for young talent. While there is so much young talent in California, getting fans to come to games is a challenge of its own.

In conclusion, the California League has a unique set of obstacles to overcome in the land of entertainment. The Rancho Cucamonga Quakes are always at the top of their league financially year after year. While they never come close to reporting the highest attendance, they are always in the top two for financial success each year. The Quakes credit this to their two main business tactics.

The first is their affordable family fun model. The Quakes advertise their affordable family fun experience. They do this by picking to partner with specific family-friendly companies as well as running family-friendly on-field promotions. The Quakes will never run a promotion that doesn't fit this model.

The second is, the Quakes always keep the value of their ticket. The Quakes will never diminish the value of their ticket by doing flash sales to increase attendance. This keeps the value of the tickets and they believe it is why they remain financially successful every year.

The MiLB is much different in different states outside of California. The MiLB thrives in small towns in Middle America. That doesn't mean it can't be successful elsewhere. The California League is known as a powerhouse for young talent. While there is so much young talent in California, getting fans to come to games is a challenge of its own. I limited a lot of my research to the California League but in the future, I would like to look into what the underlying factors that make all teams successful from California to Carolina are. From my research, I would gather that it is customer service and affordable family fun. When I first started my project I assumed a couple of things. Minor League baseball is a huge business

that is often neglected. People love to watch the big names play on the big stage, but they often forget that they all come up through the Minor League farm system. For the majority of players, the MiLB will be the biggest stage they get. This is why teams across America are working to make that experience great for fans and players.

Resources:

The majority of my research was conducted by interviews as well as inside information given to me by the Rancho Cucamonga Quakes organization. All of the information I was given is public, however, not all of it has been published.

Focus group consisted of

David Fields: Sponsorship Account Executive

Trevor Moorhead: Sponsorship Account Executive

Grant Riddle: Vice President/General Manager

Interview with:

Chris Pope: Vice President

Recourses I used to gather knowledge about the MiLB outside of the Quakes front office:

The MiLB website, which publishes stories and statistics of their team's success year to year.

<https://www.milb.com/>

Wikipedia proved to be a good resource to learn more about the history of the MiLB when fact-checked using other sources.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minor_League_Baseball

Other sources used to fact check:

<https://www.baseball-reference.com/>

<http://mlb.mlb.com/mlb/history/>

<https://www.history.com/news/who-invented-baseball>