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In a recent interview Jerry Jones, owner of the Dallas Cowboys, was asked about the number one challenge facing the National Football League (NFL). Jones mentioned the in-game experience as the main challenge for the NFL. He expanded by giving examples related to removing barriers for attendance such as poor parking and traffic and focusing on improving customer service by offering fans new amenities to give them something they cannot get at home (Kaplan, 2013b). This may sound familiar to sport marketing professionals and researchers because recent studies have demonstrated the importance of sport facility amenities and customer service in the professional sports setting (Greenwell, Fink, & Pastore, 2002; Greenwell, Lee, & Naeger, 2007; Ross, 2007; Wakefield, Blodgett, & Sloan, 1996).

Professional sport facility building, renovation, and upgrades seem to be at an all-time high with 125 of the 140 major North American professional sports teams currently playing in stadiums built or refurbished since 1990 (Baade & Matheson, 2011). Also, the focus on customer service in professional sports seems to be more important than ever and some teams like the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, even call their season ticketholders “members” and offer exclusive benefits such as food tastings and meet the coach nights (Kaplan, 2013a). The proliferation of sport facility construction/renovation and the improvement of the in-game experience have not been limited to major professional sports; the minor league experience has also been improved with new facilities and attractions. For instance “Crabby Cove,” a bumper boat pond, was recently added at the Regency Furniture Stadium, home to the Southern Maryland Blue Crabs professional baseball team (Mielach, 2012).

While $2.64 billion was spent on the renovation or construction of 50 minor league sports venues in 2012, this was significantly less than the recent spending on improvement of major sports facilities. Additionally, minor league sports facilities are older than their major professional sports counterparts (Agha, 2013; Sports Business Journal, 2013). However, minor league sports executives have taken notice of the customer service issues associated with the aging ballparks and arenas and it appears that major league amenities for minor league sports facilities are being planned across the country. For example, the Charlotte Knights minor league baseball team recently announced that they will be installing the largest video board in the history of minor league baseball at BB&T Ballpark prior to the start of the 2014 season at a cost of about $3 million (Muret, 2013; Sports Business Journal, 2013). Researchers and practitioners have noted that new minor league sports facilities and amenities, like the aforementioned giant video board at BB&T Ballpark, may increase attendance and improve the customer satisfaction of spectators (Agha & Rascher, 2013; Greenwell, Lee, & Naeger, 2007; Muret, 2013).

The line of research related to the influence of the physical facility on customer satisfaction in sports comes from the service quality literature and has been grounded in the serviscape model, which has subsequently been modified to apply to sports and called the sportscape. It has been well documented that spectator perceptions of the physical facility in the sports setting can significantly influence spectator pleasure and subsequently behaviors such as re-patronage and the level of customer spending (Bittner, 1992; Greenwell, Fink, & Pastore, 2002; Greenwell, Lee, & Naeger, 2007; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1999; Wakefield, et al, 1996). However, few sport management studies have examined customer satisfaction as an outcome of spectator perceptions of the physical facility. The limited research in this area has demonstrated the importance of customer satisfaction related to the physical facility as a measure of service quality and more importantly a predictor of re-patronage (Chelladurai & Chang, 2000; Greenwell, Fink, & Pastore, 2002; Greenwell, Lee, & Naeger, 2007; Yoshida & James, 2010).

While the body of research related to the sportscape and customer satisfaction in sport has been growing, a few gaps in the literature have been identified and addressed in the current study. First, while the sportscape adequately
measures various factors related to spectator perceptions of the physical facility and research has been done to examine the effect of these factors on customer satisfaction there are still only a small number of studies in this area, especially related to minor league sports (Greenwell, Fink, & Pastore, 2002; Greenwell, Lee, & Naeger, 2007).

Secondly, while practitioners and researchers agree that added amenities can improve spectator perceptions of the physical facility and thus customer satisfaction, few if any studies have been conducted examining similar sports events in different facilities with contrasting (renovated vs. not renovated) levels and quality of amenities (Greenwell, Lee, & Naeger, 2007; Sports Business Journal, 2013; Yoshida & James, 2010). Additionally, the current study represents the first study to investigate these issues in the context of an emerging minor league sport, NBADL basketball. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to investigate how perceptions of the physical facility influence customer satisfaction in a unique setting, NBADL basketball, when comparing facilities in various stages of renovation (renovated vs. not renovated).

The following hypotheses will be tested:

H1: Perceptions of the physical facility (sportscape) will have a positive effect on NBADL spectator customer satisfaction.

H2: The interaction between the perceptions of the physical facility and renovation status (renovated vs. not renovated) will significantly influence NBADL spectator customer satisfaction.

H3: Arena renovation status (renovated vs. not renovated) will significantly influence NBADL spectator customer satisfaction.

The sample will be selected from a group of spectators attending two different NBADL games at varying facilities. The first facility was built in 1983, is located in a small Northeastern U.S. city and recently underwent a $48 million complete renovation. The second facility was built in 1951, is located in a small Midwestern U.S. city and has not received a major renovation since opening. Spectators will be asked to complete a paper and pencil questionnaire related to their perceptions of the physical facility and customer satisfaction utilizing a modified version of the mall intercept technique (Lysacker, 1989). The questionnaire will be distributed at two different games at each NBADL arena during the 2013-14 NBADL season. Respondents will be asked to answer a variety of demographic questions, all five sub-scales from the Wakefield, et al, (1996) sportscape scale, and a three item customer satisfaction scale (Madrigal, 1995; Oliver, 1980). The sportscape and customer satisfaction measures in this study will be measured with a seven point Likert type scale items (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree). Complete results and implications will be reported at the NASSM 2014 conference.