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## **Baseball Makes A Comeback National Pastime Is Number One Again In Fan Loyalty**

**MLB scores first place in TV ratings and Team Clothing**

**NBA Moves To Second, NFL Drops To Third**

**NEW YORK, NY March 31, 2017** – With Spring Training underway Major League Baseball officials weigh changes in the grand old game in an effort to make it more attractive to fans. But based on this year's *Sports Fan Loyalty Index* from Brand Keys, they may be trying to fix what ain't broken. And it's not all about winning games.

According to 17,852 fans participating in the 25th annual survey conducted by Brand Keys, the New York-based brand engagement and customer loyalty research consultancy, Major League Baseball was rated #1 in fan loyalty for the first time in a decade, beating out the National Football League, perennially Major League Sports' loyalty leader.

"Fan loyalty ratings never lie. They're a leading-indicator of behavior and profitability, and should be a key statistic professional sports teams should track because it always tells us what fans are going to do," said Robert Passikoff, founder and president of Brand Keys, "And what they're going to watch."

"All sports fans have an Ideal League in mind," said Passikoff. "The league that better meets fans' very high expectations for game features and values that drive loyalty *always* sees increased TV game viewership and purchases of licensed merchandise." MLB's 2016 World Series was the highest rated and most-watched series since 2004. For the Fall season, the World Series ranked as TV's top show for adults 18-49 years of age, topping *Sunday Night Football*.

### **What Drives League and Team Fan Loyalty**

"MLB's leadership, which recently eliminated the four pitch intentional walk in order to 'speed up the game' may be tinkering too much," said Passikoff. Brand Keys' *Sports Fan Loyalty Index* was designed to help professional sports team management identify precise fan loyalty rankings "with insights that enable leagues to identify areas – particularly emotional ones – that could use some strategic brand coaching," said Passikoff, "Because besides win-loss ratios, there are other powerful and emotionally-based loyalty drivers that need to be taken into account when it comes to fans." The percentages next to each loyalty driver indicates the contribution each makes to fan loyalty and league engagement:

#### **History and Tradition (30%):**

Are the game and the league part of fans' and community rituals, institutions, and 'tribal' beliefs?

**Fan Bonding (29%):**

Are players particularly respected and admired?

**Pure Entertainment (21%):**

Win-loss ratios for sure, but more importantly, how entertaining is their play? Is it a consistent experience year-to-year?

**Authenticity (20%):**

How well they play as a team. Do they seem unified? Does it involve both skill *and* strategy?

**League Rankings**

Rankings can be influenced by how loyalty drivers are handled, so it's critical that league marketers manage them strategically to better meet fan expectations," said Passikoff. "You have to know what fans really expect – beyond a winning season." And since league (and team) loyalty rankings correlate very highly with fans' positive behaviors, loyalty is a leading-indicator of TV viewership and product purchases. For 2017 league loyalty rankings were found to be as follows:

1. Major League Baseball
2. National Basketball Association
3. National Football League
4. National Hockey League

NFL ratings took a nosedive throughout its last season, which is troublesome because live events are supposed to be the last bastion of defense against the Internet. This is the second consecutive year the Super Bowl has failed to set a new ratings record. Pre-election NFL ratings were down by 12 percent Year-Over-Year and ratings for the 2016-17 season were down 9 percent YOY and were off 6 percent through the playoffs.

The National Basketball Association, consistently ranked #3 in terms of fan loyalty, moved up to the #2 spot this year. Not-so-coincidentally NBA's viewership increased from last season on all four networks: ABC was up 9 percent, ESPN up 10 percent, TNT up 1% and NBA TV games were up 19%.

The 2016 Stanley Cup Final was one of the lowest-rated NHL title games since the sport returned to NBC 11 years ago, and is again ranked #4.

**2017 Top-5/Bottom-5 Team Loyalty Rankings**

Via interviews with 250 self-declared fans in each team's local market, the survey provides more than just gate counts, but diagnostic insights that enable league and team management to identify areas, particularly emotional aspects of loyalty, that need strategic brand coaching. Current 2017 MLB top-5 and bottom-5 brand standings are listed below:

Top-5

1. Chicago Cubs (+6)
2. Washington Nationals (+3)
3. Los Angeles Dodgers (-1)
4. Boston Red Sox (+4)
5. San Francisco Giants (-2)

Bottom-5

- 30. Arizona Diamondbacks (-1)
- 29. San Diego Padres (-2)
- 28. Colorado Rockies (--)
- 27. Milwaukee Brewers (-5)
- 26. Minnesota Twins (-10)

“Loyalty is incredibly powerful,” said Passikoff. “And when it comes to loyal baseball fans, their attitudes echo what pitcher Gaylord Perry noted, ‘The only trouble with baseball is that it’s not played year round.’”

In the meanwhile, for the rest of the season, “Go (INSERT YOUR TEAM’S NAME HERE)!”