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'Lovable losers' no more: Cubs set for marketing blitz

It only took 108 years. Last week, the Chicago Cubs became the World Series Champions, winning Game 7 — a blood pressure-busting contest with the Cleveland Indians that went 10 innings and included back and forth scoring, spectacular and dramatic plays, an eighth-inning rally by the Indians that tied the game and a brief rain delay between the ninth and 10th inning in which Chicago outscored Cleveland two runs to one to end the game and a drought that has lasted more than century.

Baseball has changed quite a bit the last time since the Cubs won the championship in 1908 and, indeed, in the 71 years since the last time the team appeared in the Fall Classic.

Some examples of the many changes include team and league branding and marketing, how loyal fans watch and engage with the team and its players and technology on and off the field that impacts how the game is watched, coached and played.

Back in 1908 (and in 1945), the secondary market for World Series tickets was virtually non-existent, and any attempts to sell World Series tickets for more than their face value were most likely person-to-person deals — and most likely illegal under anti-scalping laws.

The last time the Cubs won the World Series, a seat in the grandstands at Chicago's West Side Grounds (Wrigley Field didn't yet exist) cost just \$1.50 for the championship series.

Fast forward to 2016, an era in which ticket-selling and reselling is a big — and legal — business that runs on digital platforms like StubHub, SeatGeek, Vivid Seats or TicketIQ and uses sophisticated algorithms to determine pricing and fees.

Cubs fans that traveled to Cleveland for the Game 7 show-down paid the highest prices ever for World Series tickets — reportedly an average of \$1,759 for standing-room-only admission (not even a grandstand seat).

Tickets flooded the digital ticket resellers' platforms following Game 6, driving down prices a bit for "common" seats, as ticketholders sought to monetize their holdings. Premium seats seemed to maintain their high value — StubHub reported a selling price of nearly \$20,000 for two seats behind the Cubs dugout and TicketIQ reportedly had four tickets by the Indians dugout on the third base side listed for \$21,844 each.

For teams and fans, baseball is, and has always been, equal parts numbers — balls and strikes, runs and RBIs, pitch speed and ERAs, salaries and caps — and superstition. The Cubs were a force to be reckoned with in the early 20th century, winning back-to-back World Series championships in 1907 and 1908, beating the Detroit Tigers both years. It was all downhill from there, though, as the team earned its "Lovable Losers" nickname with the longest championship drought in — not just baseball — but in North American major league professional sports.

Cubs fans blame the team's poor showing since 1945 on the owner of the Billy Goat Tavern, who cursed the team that year when he was thrown out of Wrigley Field during Game 4 after other fans complained that the pet goat he brought along smelled terribly. Decades of dismal seasons followed, reaching a low point in 2012 when the Cubs lost 101 games.

Smart trade decisions and draft picks, big spending on free

SPORTS MARKETING PLAYBOOK



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agents and a new manager are all credited with getting the Cubs back to the World Series. The club has also started harnessing new technology in 2016 to collect and analyze mountains of data on player performance.

The team is working with KinaTrax, a motion-capture technology company, to help improve pitchers' performance and prevent injury. Using 12 cameras aimed at the pitcher's mound, KinaTrax produces a 3D video to produce an image for every move in the pitch mechanics.

Sophisticated wearable technology is also being employed leaguewide, both in practice and in game play. At the beginning of the season, MLB's playing rules committee approved two devices for use during games this season: (1) the Motus Baseball Sleeve, which measures stress on players' elbows; and (2) the Zephyr Bioharness, which monitors heart and breathing rates.

The league also approved two different bat sensors for use on the field during workouts, one from Blast Motion and the other from Diamond Kinetics.

The Cubs — and Major League Baseball — have also been implementing new technology to boost fan engagement with the team and its players, for those attending games live and those watching just about anywhere else.

While the Cubs clinched this year's title on Cleveland's home turf, the venerable Wrigley Field, which opened in 1914, is in the midst of a five-year renovation with fan-friendly upgrades such as a new lighting system (the Cubs only played day games until 1988), the addition of two LED video scoreboards in the outfield, a new broadcast center and a two-story entertainment and retail annex, premium suites and luxury clubs as well as the newly completed 30,000-square-foot clubhouse.

In 1908, fans hunkered around the radio to listen to the game. In 2016, fans not lucky enough to have tickets — or willing to pay exorbitant prices and travel to Cleveland for Game 7 — had plenty of options for experiencing the final game beyond broadcast television: streaming video on Fox Sports Go and MLB.tv,

play-by-play action on the MLB At Bat app and real-time commentary on a wide variety of media sites and social media platforms.

Major League Baseball also has launched its own social network. The MLB Fans app allows MLB fans to connect directly with their favorite teams and players and with other fans and includes videos, photos, gifts and commentary and runs sweepstakes and promotions like the recent World Series Game 4 Ticket sweepstakes.

The league also has a multi-year partnership with Snapchat that encourages players to use their smartphones to post pictures and videos inside ballparks for the first time ever.

The Cubs organization has been busy rebranding — and using marketing platforms that didn't exist in 1945 — to make the most of the team's resurgence. The most visible sign of Cubs fever was the proliferation of the "Flying W" — a blue W on a white flag that's been flown at Wrigley Field since the 1930s after every winning game.

The Flying W logo is a central part of the Cubs' promotions and

appears on Cubs merchandise and in marketing campaigns. More traditionally, the Flying W logo appeared all over Chicago this year, from banners on streetlights to online videos of fans rallying behind their team.

Fly the W became the Cubs' post-season marketing slogan during last year's lead up to the National League Championship Series, including the hashtag #FlyTheW, which exploded on Twitter.

Of course, Twitter, tweets and hashtags are modern tools of marketing and fan engagement that didn't exist for most of the time between the Cubs last trip to the World Series and this one.

While the loyalty of the hardcore Cubs fan has never been in doubt, the organization also reached out to more casual fans with a limited-edition clothing line that could only be purchased at the ballpark during the 2016 playoffs.

The exclusive collection, designed by the retail division of Cubs concessionaire Levy Restaurants, presented more subtle branding with different colors and patterns from the traditional Flying W apparel line.

Instead of the solid blue letter on a white background, the new "lifestyle" clothing brand used a distinctive patterned letter on a dark background.

With brand visibility comes knock-offs and ambush marketers, particularly during a lucrative year. While protecting its trademarks is a regular part of doing business for any major league sports team, the Cubs organization moved to aggressively protect its trademarks in court and before the Trademark Trial and Appeal Board, pursuing knock-off makers, alleged trademark infringers and mascot imposters in the run-up to the championship series.

It sued a group of seven vendors allegedly selling uncensored merchandise to fans around Wrigley Field and pursued claims against two men in federal court, accusing them of dressing in bear costumes and posing as a team mascot to solicit money from fans around the ballpark for taking photos and videos.

The Cubs and Major League Baseball also sought permission from the court to work with police in order to immediately

seize counterfeit merchandise for sale outside Wrigley Field.

The team also moved to protect its intellectual property from being infringed upon by a variety of businesses, filing objections with the Trademark Trial and Appeal Board to block a trademark registration application filed by Laserwave Graphics Inc. for a design that incorporates the letter W and an application filed by CopyClear Inc. for a design that includes a red letter C.

It's also opposing a trademark application to register an image of a goat carrying a flag including the letter W for T-shirts and other merchandise.

After 108 years of losing, the Cubs 2016 World Series is a win for the modern age — in more ways than one — giving fans something they've longed for and giving the team a priceless boost for its brand.

The Cubs' marketing has capitalized on the team's changing fortunes while laying the groundwork to extend fans' loyalty and goodwill for years to come. Hopefully, the Cubs won't have to wait so long for their next championship.