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SURVEY / *Seattle team wins fan support over proposed baseball league*

Mariners big fish in Vancouver

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VANCOUVER – Baseball fans in the Lower Mainland have sent a message to the group that operates B.C. Place stadium: They'd rather see the Seattle Mariners play eight games a season than watch Vancouver's proposed United Baseball League franchise 77 times.

The B.C. Pavilion Corp. recently commissioned a survey that they hope will help them decide whether to embrace the Mariners or the UBL. Seattle's American League Mariners want to play eight regular-season games annually at B.C. Place, beginning in 1996. But the six-team UBL, which promises to be a third major league, wants to place a franchise in Vancouver and is demanding exclusivity.

The survey of 300 adults was conducted by Campbell-Goodall Consultants early last month. The survey carries a 3 per cent margin of error.

"What I was surprised at was the overall awareness of baseball and the desire to have baseball here," Neil Campbell, Pav-Corp's vice-president and general manager said. "In both cases it was more than I anticipated. When we took this survey, the [major-league baseball] strike was very strong in people's minds. We felt the numbers we got were really strong with that in mind."

Those who responded to the survey were asked if they would "definitely" attend one of more games at B.C. Place. The Mariners received a yes from 22 per cent of respondents while the UBL figure was 14 per cent.

"The written comments we got with the survey," Warren Buckley, president of Pav-Corp, said, "seem to agree that 77 home games for the UBL would be a tough haul, a tough sell. The Mariners for eight games, yes. There appeared to be more enthusiasm for the eight-game Mariners package than the 77-game UBL package."

The city's existing baseball team, the Vancouver Canadians of the Triple A Pacific Coast League, also strongly favours the Mariners. Although the California Angels stock the Canadians roster, the team has a working agreement with the Mariners. The Seattle team buys advertising on the outfield fence at Nat Bailey Stadium and also purchases four season tickets, which are given to local charities.

"We felt we needed this [survey] before we talked to either the Mariners or the UBL about what is the right business decision for us."

B.C. Place is a domed stadium, hardly the ideal setting for summer sport in Vancouver. But respondents to the survey said B.C. Place would not discourage them from attending games.

Finally, the survey confirmed the strong local interest in the Toronto Blue Jays. It asked which AL teams fans would like to watch. The Blue Jays were mentioned by 56 per cent of fans while the New York Yankees were named by 35 per cent of respondents. Other teams, in order of preference, were the Chicago White Sox, Boston Red Sox, Detroit Tigers, Baltimore Orioles, Texas Rangers, California Angels and Kansas City Royals.

Buckley said that the Mariners have committed to playing eight games a year in Vancouver even if they receive the new open-air stadium in Seattle they are desperately seeking. The only possible long-term obstacle to the Mariners playing in Vancouver is if no new stadium is built and the team leaves the Pacific Northwest.

The article EM9515 reprinted above is used in Chapter 4 the STAT 231 Course Materials.