

Report: Wizards, Caps rank among sports' best deals

Tim Lemke

The District is home to two of the best bargains in professional sports, according to recent surveys of prices on tickets and merchandise.

The Washington Capitals and Washington Wizards are among the least-expensive teams for fans of the NHL and NBA with ticket prices well below the league average even as the popularity of both teams has increased in recent years, according to Chicago-based Team Marketing Report.

TMR, which collected pricing data for its annual "Fan Cost Index" surveys, said last week the average ticket price for a Wizards game is \$27.21, the third lowest in the NBA and more than \$21 below the league average.

The Caps, meanwhile, ranked 21st in the NHL in ticket prices, with an average ticket costing \$44.75, more than 12 percent less than the league average of \$51.27.

The Caps showed to be inexpensive compared with their NHL brethren even after raising tickets by more than 7 percent this season, an indication of team owner Ted Leonsis' effort to keep prices down during periods when the team struggled to win.

"Ted was really very responsive as we were going through the rebuild about keeping prices low," said Jim Van Stone, the Caps' vice president of ticket sales. "As the team improved, prices have increased and our goals are definitely to get in above the league average, but at the same time you want to be respectful."

Coming off a season that ended with a playoff loss in the Eastern Conference semifinals, the Caps this year have played before near-capacity crowds, and there is a waiting list for season tickets. The team reported Monday it ranks sixth in the NHL in paid admissions and second among U.S.-based teams, suggesting a demand for tickets that could have been used to justify higher prices. Of the nine teams with lower prices than the Caps, only the San Jose Sharks and Carolina Hurricanes made the playoffs last season.

But Van Stone said the Caps have tried to be sensitive during the economic recession and that raising prices too much too soon could backfire.

"I think our focus from an organizational standpoint is to create a really solid fan base and treat people fairly," Van Stone said. "We want to offer a good price for the product, and instead of getting into the mindset of raising prices to a level that isn't fair, we do it on an incremental basis."

According to TMR, the Caps do have higher-than-average prices for parking, beer, programs and souvenirs, making the total game experience slightly more expensive than other teams with cheaper prices. A family of four that purchases four sodas, two beers, four hot dogs, two programs, two caps and parking would spend \$284, about \$16 less than the league average, TMR said.

The Wizards, meanwhile, were among 14 teams that lowered ticket prices entering the 2009-10 season, and only the Memphis Grizzlies and New Orleans Hornets have lower prices on average. The Wizards, who offered rebates to some season-ticket holders, are less expensive on average than the Washington Nationals, making them the only NBA team with an average ticket price less than the major league baseball team in their city.

"Affordability is very important to us and has been for a very long time," said Peter Biche, the Wizards' president of business operations and chief financial officer. "That's been a longtime policy of Abe Pollin, our owner, and he realizes that the Wizards are part of the community, and we want just about everybody to come to games. And you do that by having tickets that people can afford."

TMR said that including food and merchandise, a family of four would spend \$196.83 at a Wizards game, about \$93 less than the league average. The Wizards' relatively low prices come even after the team reached the playoffs in four of the past five years, though the team did struggle with just 19 wins last year. Biche said the decision to lower ticket prices was unrelated to last year's performance since most fans believed the team was unusually affected by injuries.

"That wasn't us last year," Biche said. "It wasn't fun, but we knew it was for reasons other than not having the talent. So that didn't really factor into our decision on what to do with ticket prices. It was driven far more by being sensitive to our fans, many of whom may be under pressure financially."

The editors of TMR did not return requests for comment.

Elsewhere in the District, the Nationals charged an average of \$30.63 this past season, giving them the seventh-highest ticket prices in major league baseball even after decreasing the average ticket price by 7 percent. But the team last month announced it would not raise ticket prices on season tickets for 2010 and said Monday that new season-ticket holders who buy tickets before the end of this year will receive as much as \$7 worth of free food or merchandise for each game. The Nationals also boast the least expensive ticket of all major teams in Washington, with some upper deck seats selling for \$5.

The NFL's Redskins, meanwhile, entered this season with the 10th-highest ticket prices in football, with an average ticket costing \$79.13, about \$5 more than the league average.

LEMKE, Tim. Report: Wizards, Caps rank among sports' best deals. **Washington Times**, P. 1, Nov. 10th 2009, Disponível em: <http://web.ebscohost.com>. Acesso em: 16 Nov. 2009.