

World Series ushers in world of marketing opportunities for Rangers

12:32 PM CDT on Saturday, October 30, 2010

By **MELISSA REPKO / The Dallas Morning News**
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Chuck Greenberg remembers looking around Dallas-Fort Worth at the beginning of summer and struggling to spot a Texas Rangers fan.

"You could walk around and never see a Rangers cap and a Rangers jersey," he said.

What a difference October baseball makes. As the Rangers prepare to host Game 3 of the franchise's first World Series, T-shirts sporting the club's now-famous claw-and-antlers will be nearly as present as the five-pointed blue star that symbolizes sports in North Texas.

And that's got Greenberg and the rest of the Rangers' new ownership group looking for ways to turn fan interest into a higher national profile for the team and its players.

The payoff, sports marketing experts say, could boost the franchise's value, sponsorships, and sales of tickets and merchandise.

"We have such likable and charismatic players," said Greenberg, the team's managing partner and chief executive officer since August, when he and other investors bought the Rangers out of bankruptcy for \$593 million.

"Now what we need to do is be innovative and aggressive on the business side to convert all of that interest we have into something that is more lasting regionally as well as nationally."

Up to this point, the franchise and its players flew largely below the national radar.

And the team's marketability remains somewhat paradoxical. Its most valuable player, Josh Hamilton, has had off-field drug problems that could limit his endorsement prospects. Standout pitcher Cliff Lee could end up wearing another team's jersey next year.

Oddly, the club's most marketable member works in its front office, team president and Hall of Famer Nolan Ryan.

The rest of the World Series could change that, depending on how the team and its top players perform, says Peter Stern, president of Strategic, a New York-based sports and entertainment marketing agency.

"The World Series and the Super Bowl have created a lot of stars overnight," he said.

To Greenberg, the turn of fortune that propelled the Rangers into the World Series now presents a "historic opportunity."

"I always thought of the Rangers as being somewhat of an anomaly – playing in the largest market to have only one Major League Baseball team and for years suffering from a mistaken identity of being thought of as a small- or medium-market franchise," he said.

Greenberg admitted being unimpressed with the Rangers' previous marketing strategy. He wants to use the team's success in the first two rounds of postseason play to "completely transform the franchise."

The Rangers recently hired Rick George away from the PGA to be its chief operating officer and will soon bring on a new senior vice president of ticket sales.

In the coming season, the club will market "more aggressively" and will be "thoughtful and strategic in how we reach out to our fans," Greenberg said.

"For years, the Rangers have had one of the smallest season ticket bases in baseball," he said. "And we are going to work hard to change that."

The Rangers began 2010 with about 9,500 season ticket holders. After the club signed Lee, it pushed harder for season ticket sales for the final 24 home games, resulting in more than 11,500 by the end of July.

Connecting with locals

New ownership has gone a long way to strengthen the relationship between the Rangers and North Texas fans, said Charlie Seraphin, senior vice president of sales and marketing for Dallas-based Hunt Sports Group.

"Because it's unrealistic to expect your team will win every year, there is a lot to be said for linking your ownership, your management, your brand and your players with values of the marketplace," said Seraphin, who was the Rangers' vice president of sales and marketing from 1996 to 2001.

To earn long-term support, win or lose, teams must connect with their surrounding community, Seraphin explained.

Since North Texas is "known as a Christian area," Josh Hamilton and his faith-based references in public appearances play well with the local fan base, he said.

In the off-season, the Rangers will have to maintain that connection, Seraphin said. "The team and the representatives of the team need to be in the community on a regular basis so they can be seen and touched and reinforce that reputation."



BRENDAN SULLIVAN/DMN
Rangers season ticket holder Doug Montgomery of Stephenville stocked up on some winter gear last week for a possible World Series road trip. He and others packed the Majestic Grand Slam Gift Shop at Rangers Ballpark in Arlington.

Raising a national profile

The Rangers have already benefited financially.

The club signed a 20-year television deal with Fox Sports Southwest that's reportedly worth \$75 million to \$80 million a year.

Postseason ticket sales also will strengthen the Rangers' bottom line. During the regular season, ticket profits from all Major League Baseball teams are equally split among the 30 clubs. In the postseason, MLB takes a considerably smaller cut, leaving a bigger share for the competing teams.

The Rangers also will benefit from additional concession sales and parking fees.

Merchandise sales show the Rangers are reaching an audience that's willing to spend money. Apparel sales this year have more than doubled from last year and the team moved into the top 3 for best-selling apparel in September, reported VF Licensed Sports Group, Majestic Athletic, a company that makes apparel licensed by Major League Baseball.

The claw-and-antlers T-shirt has been a big hit, with around 40,000 sold so far, the company reported.

As the team has advanced, its TV audience has grown. In Game 1 of the American League Division Series against the Tampa Bay Rays, 2.24 million viewers tuned in, according to research firm Nielsen Co. The decisive Game 6 of the AL Championship Series against the New York Yankees drew nearly 11.9 million viewers.

Marketing individuals

Lee and Hamilton jerseys have been top sellers this season, but Vladimir Guerrero and Michael Young also have been popular, said Jim Pisani, president of VF Licensed Sports Group, Majestic Athletic. The company doesn't release jersey sales figures.

But in terms of widespread recognition – enough to appear in national advertisements – Rangers players still have a ways to go, said Bill Glenn, senior vice president of the Marketing Arm, a Dallas firm that regularly measures consumer awareness of more than 2,600 celebrities.

Among Rangers, consumers give Lee and Hamilton high marks for appeal but both rate low in overall awareness, according to the Marketing Arm's research. Nolan Ryan, who retired in 1993, scores higher than both of the team's biggest names.

"The Rangers right now are more likable than marketable," Glenn said. "If you don't have players who have high awareness nationally, they won't have the ability to represent a brand."

Josh Hamilton shows endorsement potential, despite and perhaps because of his troubled past, said Howard Smith, senior vice president of licensing at Major League Baseball.

Hamilton has spoken out publicly about his struggles with alcohol and substance abuse and got attention again when teammates opted for ginger ale baths – rather than champagne – after clinching the American League Championship Series.

"Madison Avenue is looking for somebody that is inspirational," Smith said. "As a 14-year-old boy, would I want to be like Josh Hamilton? Yes. Girls admire him. The kid has been to hell and back."

Yet Stern of New York's Strategic agency cautions that Hamilton may be tough to match up. "Brands are scrutinizing more and more," he said, noting only certain brands go with athletes that aren't "traditional poster boys."

Ad campaigns work best when there's "a strategic fit" between a brand and an athlete, Stern said. For example, he said, Advil matched well with Ryan's ability to power through four decades of pitching.

Sometimes, though, the most effective brand extension can be homegrown, Greenberg said.

"The claw-and-antlers craze is a perfect example of that," he said. "It happened in an authentic and natural way, and that is a lot better than marketing people coming up with a gimmick."

TV RATINGS

Playing before millions		
The final game of the Rangers-Yankees series drew the second-largest audience for TBS, which broadcast the first two playoff rounds. The audience has been even higher for the first two World Series games on Fox.		
Series	Game	Viewers
American League Division Series	Rangers-Rays Game 1	2,244,000
ALDS	Game 2	2,421,000
ALDS	Game 3	3,513,000
ALDS	Game 4	2,217,000
ALDS	Game 5	6,410,000
American League Championship Series	Rangers-Yankees Game 1	8,111,000
ALCS	Game 2	5,831,000
ALCS	Game 3	8,214,000
ALCS	Game 4	9,846,000
ALCS	Game 5	6,107,000
ALCS	Game 6	11,863,000
World Series	Rangers-Giants Game 1	15,000,000

WS

Game 2

14,100,000

SOURCE: Nielsen Media Research

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