

# John Zang Reviews Attendance Woes IN ECHL and SPHL

*Zang Recommends Lower Level Professional Teams Should Review Their Marketing Strategy*

CANADA, June 12, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As the lower level professional hockey season has completed, John [Zang](#) provides an update as to risks to the viability of teams for the upcoming 2023-2024 season.

John Zang has extensive knowledge in regard to professional sports. He is a former Vice President of Operations for the El Paso [Buzzards](#) hockey Club which was a member of the Central Hockey League. He was also legal counsel for the Calgary Stampeders of the Canadian Football League. John Zang states "through my experience it is clear that the viability of hockey clubs is based on fan support--that is ticket revenue and revenues from fans in attendance". Minor sports rely on home game revenues, which for the most part consist of ticket sales, a portion of revenues from food and beverage sales, and arena parking. Zang noted in his experience based on the costs to run a hockey team an average attendance of at least 3,000 is necessary for a team to avoid financial struggles.

Looking at minor professional hockey, i.e. the Southern Professional Hockey League (the SPHL) and the ECHL, in the 2022-23 season we see that the following teams failed to meet that 3,000 average attendance mark:

Trios Rivières Lions (ECHL): Attendance-- 2617

Iowa Heartlanders (ECHL): Attendance-- 1851

Wheeling Nailers (ECHL): Attendance-- 2115

Birmingham Bulls (SPHL): Attendance-- 2886

Macon Mayhem (SPHL): Attendance-- 1607

John Zang stated "when I view these teams who are struggling with attendance, aside from the Trois Rivières Lions, we see teams in southern US, that is non-traditional hockey markets. My experience is that you have to tailor the experience to meet your audience in these locations. You cannot simply ask the population to come enjoy the hockey game and you certainly can't ask them to buy a ticket for something they know very little about".

Zang took over the operations of the El Paso Buzzards early in the 2001-02 season. At that time attendance was on some occasions lower than 1,000 fans. Zang stated that when he took over he met with the owner and presented a plan to, first introduce the game to the people of El Paso, second put a product on the ice that fans would enjoy, and third increase revenues. While

Zang operated the El Paso Buzzards, the 2001-02 attendance averaged 3,425 fans per game. That represents more than the previous year by 1,500 more butts in the seats per game. After John Zang left the Buzzards in the following season (2002-2003) we see the attendance shrink to 2,839/game.

What Zang did was firstly reduce the price for seats and in some cases create partnerships with businesses to promote free tickets. Zang stated that “the reason for this was to allow the unknowledgeable fan the opportunity to watch a Buzzards game. I grew up in Canada, so I knew all about hockey. In El Paso the population is mostly Hispanic, they didn’t grow up with hockey. They had to be introduced to it. By reducing the ticket prices the Buzzard said to the fans that we believe in our product come and watch it, we are willing bet that you will come back.”

Before ensuring the Buzzards stands were full, John Zang went to the operator of the concessions and finagled a way to see the Buzzards gain a greater share of the concessions if there was larger fan base. This represented a major strategic win for the Buzzards as it recouped revenues through food and beverage sales. As Mr. Zang stated “the people of El Paso enjoy their beer”. He also ensured the Buzzards got a greater share of parking revenue and increased the parking costs. Again a means to create more revenue from the Buzzards game goes. Zang noted that “this is not unlike what I hear the Florida Panthers of the NHL are doing with their increased parking costs during their Stanley Cup run.”

The net effect of all of this was to significantly increase revenue for the Buzzards during the year. But that was not enough for Zang, he needed to convince the new fans to buy a ticket and come again. Zang recognized that he was dealing with a different population to what was present in Canada or the northern US. He knew he had to give the people what they enjoy. In El Paso that was fighting. In Zang’s words “I couldn’t force the fans to enjoy a pretty passing play, they had to learn that. But I could see they loved a good fight.” Zang and the owner then proceeded to recruit more pugilistic hockey players. Including Clint Collins and John Hewitt. By adding Collins we added a good fighter who could also play hockey. And with Hewitt we knew that we had someone who wins his fights”. The atmosphere in the El Paso Coliseum became electric, the stands were full, the action on the ice exciting, and the team was winning. John Zang noted that although the goal was to create financial stability, in the long term you still have to put a good winning product on the ice. As Zang noted “we had a great coach, Trent Eigner, he was able to mold the Buzzards into a winner which saw us reach the semi-finals.

In reviewing the marketing strategy of some of the hockey teams located in the southern US, one sees a similar strategy to that is used in Canada and the northern US. According to Zang, that strategy is failing to recognize the population the team is drawing from. You have to be creative you cannot just take what you learned at sports management school and apply to wherever you are. John Zang noted “you need to, first and foremost, look at where you are and apply what you know to your city’s desires.”

Looking forward, in the 2023-24 season we should watch whether the five teams listed above

choose to change their strategy to get more butts in the seats or whether they proceed with the same old marketing strategy.

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