

Michael A. Roberto  
Jonathan D. Huntley

**case 2-352-016**  
**August 13, 2025**

## Savannah Bananas: Growing the Greatest Show in Baseball

Players dressed in kilts? Hitters with bats on fire? A breakdancing first base coach? Senior citizen dance team? Fans recording an out if they catch a foul ball? With such surprising innovations, the Savannah Bananas, a barnstorming baseball team co-founded by Jesse and Emily Cole, had entertained legions of fans since their inaugural 2016 season. The team invented a new set of rules (branded as Banana Ball) to make the game more exciting. The Bananas sold out games across the nation while amassing more TikTok followers than any team in Major League Baseball (MLB). ESPN described them as the “greatest show in baseball.”<sup>1</sup> Jesse Cole reflected on the team’s success: “All innovation is about falling in love with a problem. We saw a problem — that people were saying baseball is too long, too slow, too boring. We said, ‘How do we defeat that?’ And so we started testing on that.”<sup>2</sup>

As the 2025 season began, the Bananas’ parent company, Fans First Entertainment, pressed forward with ambitious growth plans. Four Banana Ball teams planned to play across the nation in 2025, including at historic Fenway Park, Yankee Stadium, and sixteen other MLB venues. In 2026, Fans First planned to expand to a six-team barnstorming league. Cole remarked, “We have not arrived. We are not there. We are not even close to what I believe we can accomplish. We are just getting started and still in the first inning.”<sup>3</sup>

Big questions remained though. How much could Banana Ball grow without diluting the fan experience or saturating the market? What would it take for Fans First to transition successfully from a single barnstorming club to a six-team league? During the Bananas’ initial run of sensational success, MLB instituted some rule changes to speed up the major league game and increase the number of exciting plays. Would MLB go further and adopt other modifications, considering the Bananas’ popularity, or would some ideas be a bridge too far for traditional fans? How might MLB changes affect the burgeoning Banana Ball league?

### The Baseball Industry

In his 1954 book *God’s Country and Mine*, French-born American historian Jacques Barzun mused, “Whoever wants to know the heart and mind of America had better learn baseball.”<sup>4</sup> Now inscribed in a

---

*Published by WDI Publishing, an Initiative of the William Davidson Institute (WDI) at the University of Michigan.*

©2025 Michael A. Roberto and Jonathan D. Huntley. This case was written by Michael A. Roberto, Trustee Professor of Management at Bryant University, and Jonathan D. Huntley, Bryant University Class of 2021. The case was developed using public sources and was prepared as the basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a situation. The case should not be considered criticism or endorsement and should not be used as a source of primary data.

---