

S. Korea's 2024 baseball season hits 10 m fans, first in 42 years

South Korea's baseball boom is driven by young talent and thriving female fanbase

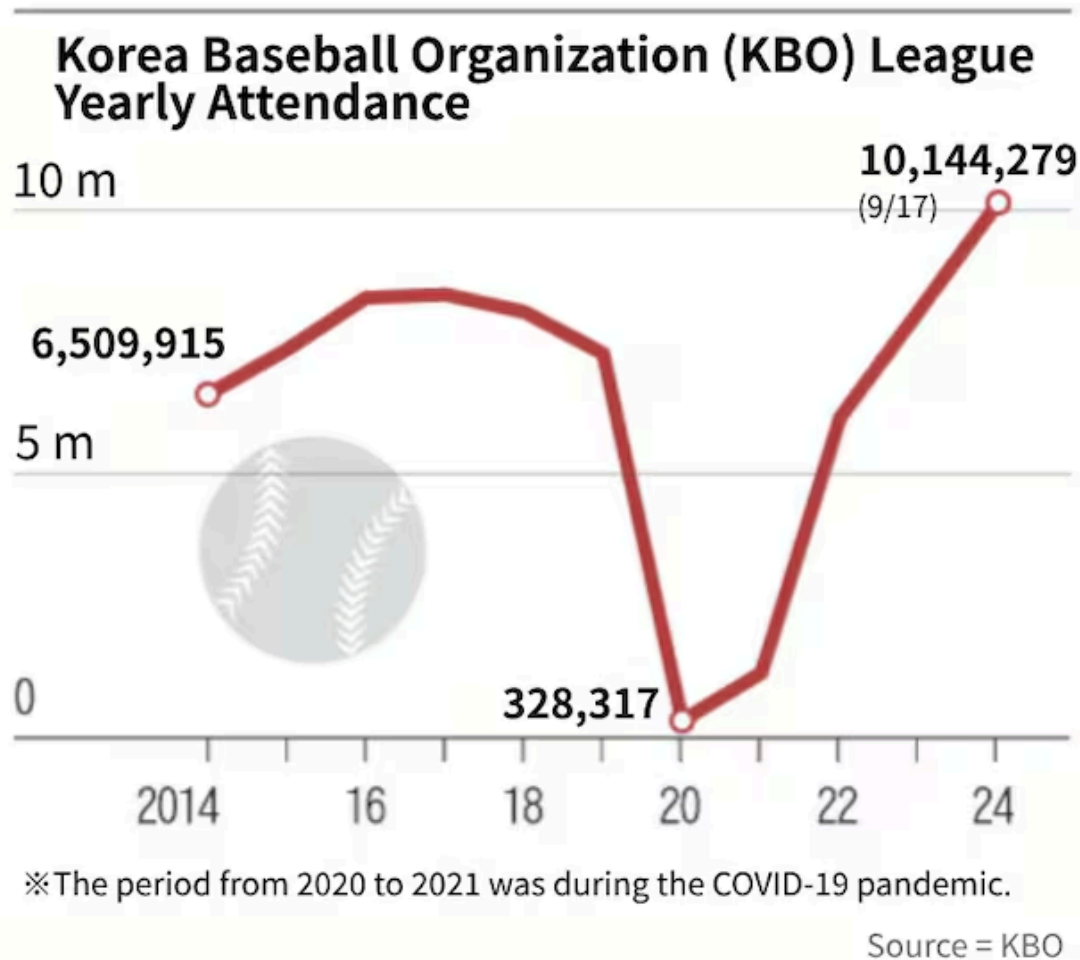
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On Sept 18. at Suwon KT Wiz Park, during the game between KT and Samsung, KT fans packed the first base home stands, wearing red uniforms and enthusiastically cheering with light sticks (BeatBats) and other gear. /Jung Jae-geun (Sports Chosun)

Hyun-jin Lee, 29, from Cheongju, Chungcheongbuk-do, attended her first baseball game this summer, joining a friend who suggested, “Let’s go see Ryu Hyun-jin—you share the same name!” Reflecting on her experience, she said, “It was my first time, but it was such a blast. Enjoying ‘chimaek’ (chicken and beer), singing, and dancing to the cheer songs made it feel like a festival.” Since then, Lee has attended five more games, bought a Ryu Hyun-jin jersey, and plans to keep going back.



Graphics by Kim Ha-gyeong

For the first time in the Korea Baseball Organization (KBO) League's 42-year history, the league has surpassed 10 million spectators in a single season. As of Sept 17., a total of 10,144,279 fans had filled stadiums this year, breaking the previous record of 8,400,688 set in 2017. Six out of the league's 10 teams—KIA Tigers, Samsung Lions, LG Twins, Doosan Bears, SSG Landers, and Lotte Giants—have each drawn over a million home fans this season.

A major factor driving this surge in attendance is the fierce competition for postseason spots. With only 10 days left in the regular season, the KIA Tigers are the only team to have secured a playoff berth, leaving the remaining teams in a tight race. The rise of young talent has also energized the fanbase. KIA Tigers' 21-year-old Kim Do-yeong made history as the youngest player to hit 30 home runs and steal 30 bases in a single season, while Doosan Bears' 18-year-old pitcher Kim Taek-yeon set a record for the most saves by a high school rookie. "The rapid development of young players has drawn in many young and first-time fans," said sportscaster Lee Soon-chol.

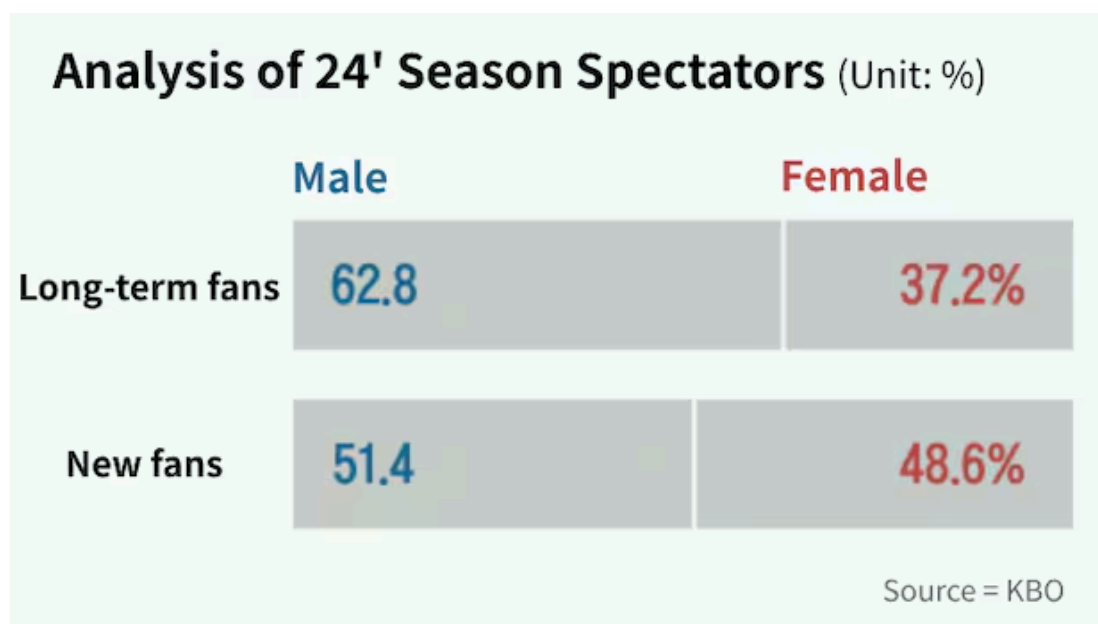


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Beyond the on-field action, baseball has grown into a popular leisure activity, with the stadium atmosphere resembling a festival. A key part of this is the energetic cheering culture, which has been crucial in attracting younger fans. According to a recent survey, 43.2% of fans said the cheering culture was the most memorable part of their experience. Unlike Japan's drum-and-trumpet cheering or the more subdued style in

the U.S., Korean baseball is known for its unique player-specific chants, led by cheerleaders who keep the energy high throughout the game. Creative chants like “Song hero Lim Young-woong, baseball hero Kim Young-woong,” and viral trends such as the KIA cheerleaders’ “Bikki Bikki Dance” have helped fuel the rise of “K-cheering.”

The increasing number of female fans has been a particularly positive development for the league. According to KBO data, 48.6% of first-time attendees this year were women, up from the traditional 37.2%. Among these newcomers, 31.4% were in their 20s, and 53.2% were single, suggesting that young, single women are becoming more engaged with the sport.



Graphics by Kim Ha-gyeong

Doosan Bears' PR team leader, Ham Tae-soo, noted, “Young female fans are incredibly passionate about supporting their favorite players, whether the team wins or loses, and they keep coming back to the stadium. Their enthusiasm rivals that of idol fandoms.” Some fans have pointed out that while tickets to idol concerts can be hard to get and merchandise pricey, baseball games are more affordable, with tickets ranging from 10,000 to 20,000 won. To tap into this growing trend, teams have started producing YouTube content that features players off the field, showcasing their daily lives and training routines to keep fans engaged.

