

## Kernels see 15% increase in ticket sales

Written by Jim Ecker

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Attendance for Cedar Rapids Kernels baseball games declined each of the past three years to an 11-year low of 160,064 in 2012, but the club's new partnership with the Minnesota Twins could move the needle in the opposite direction.

The preseason sale of season tickets is running 15 percent of last year's pace with opening day just three weeks away, according to Kernels General Manager Doug Nelson.

"Our season ticket total already exceeds the entire amount that we sold last year," he said. "I would say it's 100 percent attributable to the Twins and the excitement within the community."

The Kernels sold the equivalent of 383 season tickets in 2012. That includes "full" season tickets for all 70 games, along with "partial" ticket packages. The Kernels count two "partial" 35-game packages as one "full" season ticket.

Nelson hopes to sell 450 season tickets this year.

The Kernels and Twins signed a four-year agreement in September that will carry through the 2016 campaign. The Kernels previously had been affiliated with the Los Angeles Angels, but now they have a relationship with a Major League team from the midwest.

"It's really gone smoothly," said Nelson. "They're just a great organization to work with."

"When I have a question, I know somebody is going to get back to me within a day or two with an answer."

The Kernels drew an all-time high of 196,066 fans to Veterans Memorial Stadium when the new ballpark opened for business in 2002. They drew 184,190 fans in 2005, but have not topped 173,219 since then.

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The Kernels had 173,210 paying customers in 2010, but it dipped to 169,000 in 2011 and dipped again to the all-time low in the new park of 160,064 last season.

Kernels officials spoke in previous years of trying to attract 200,000, but Nelson is not sure if that's realistic.

"I think that's a wonderful goal," he said. "But 200,000 requires everything to go perfectly, which means Mother Nature cooperates, we have a winning championship-caliber team and we have a schedule that maps out well, where we have all kinds of weekend games.

"In real life," he said with a smile, "everything rarely goes perfectly."

Nelson has set a more realistic goal, he feels.

"So my challenge to our staff is 185,000," he remarked. "I said, 'Let's be realistic. We know Mother Nature is going to throw us a curveball or two. I doubt the league is going to schedule us with nothing but Friday and Saturday games.

"185,000 is a very realistic goal. And it does not mean we're not shooting for 200,000."

The Kernels would have to increase ticket sales by 15.6 percent this season to jump from 160,064 fans to 185,000. The club is running 15 percent of last year's pace on season tickets, so they would need to maintain that pace during the season to approach 185,000.

Nelson feels the Kernels have a fair and equitable schedule in the Midwest League this season. They have 12 Saturday night contests with post-game [fireworks](#) displays, which annually draw some of the biggest crowds of the season.

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The Kernels also will have a [special attraction](#) at the ballpark for every day of the week.

The Kernels also will have a new videoboard this season that measures 48 feet wide by 30 feet high. It is three times wider than the previous videoboard and six feet taller with better resolution.

"You truly feel like you're at a Major League ballpark," said Nelson.

The club also will have new speakers on the concourse level of the stadium for an improved sound system.

The Kernels have raised the price of single-game tickets by \$1 this year, across the board. The new prices are \$12 for premier seats, \$10 for club seats, \$9 for plaza seats and \$8 for lawn seats.

Fans will be given a \$1 discount for all single-game tickets purchased in advance, which would put them back at 2012 prices.

The Kernels will be offering a special deal to fans at their annual [Spring Fling](#) this Saturday at the ballpark from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Anyone who purchases \$50 worth of merchandise at the Bimm Ridder shop at the ballpark will get four tickets to opening day.

Fans will be able to purchase tickets at the ballpark this Saturday during the Spring Fling. The box office will open this Monday during regular business hours. Fans also may purchase tickets at [www.kernels.com](http://www.kernels.com).

The Kernels are scheduled to open the season Thursday, April 4 against Beloit at 6:35 p.m.