New Orleans hoping to attract professional baseball team

NEW ORLEANS (UPI) — City and state officials say they will make a formal bid to win a professional baseball team for New Orleans when league officials meet in special session next month.

Gov. Edwin Edwards said he has appointed a committee of private citizens to look for an owner for the team — someone with $25 million to $30 million.

A major league club housed in the Superdome could attract 1.2 million to 1.8 million people each year, according to a market study by Arthur D. Little, Inc., of Cambridge, Mass.

But the team would have to attract 1.9 million to break even, the study said. With attendance of 1.5 million, it would lose $2.1 million a year if ticket prices averaged $6.

That is not unusual, however. In 1983, 18 of 26 franchises lost money, and 10 of them lost more than $3 million.

Edwards and Mayor Ernest Morial released the study, which was commissioned last year by Superdome officials. It is to be submitted to the Professional Baseball Long Range Planning Committee in September.

Arthur Little concluded a baseball team in New Orleans could draw from an area of four million people within 100 miles of the city, stretching from Lafayette to Monroe to Mobile, Ala., and reaching two million homes by television.

Another five million to seven million people visit New Orleans each year, and some might leave the decadent French Quarter for an all-American baseball game. The Superdome is within walking distance of downtown and is a tourist attraction itself, the study said.

"In fact, there is no direct relationship between population and attendance at games," the study said. "Important factors affecting attendance are the closeness of the pennant races, super-stars on a team and the effectiveness with which a club promotes attendance."

New Orleans should be encouraged by the number of fans drawn by teams in other relatively small cities - Cincinnati, Milwaukee, Kansas City, San Diego and Anaheim, Calif. - all with attendance of at least 2 million.

New Orleans is rather a poor city, but including Baton Rouge, 75 miles away, in the statistics makes the spending power competitive, the study said. It would be $16.8 billion, about the same as Denver, Tampa-St. Petersburg, Miami and Phoenix.

The study made several suggestions for bringing a profes-

Abbeville Meridional, Aug. 27, 1985

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