Savannah Bananas: They Didn't Fix Baseball. They Built a New Category.

AT-A-GLANCE

Episode	Season 2, Episode 1
Case	The Savannah Bananas and Banana Ball
Core Concept	Category Creation
Core Thesis	The Bananas changed the category by turning baseball into a fast, participatory live entertainment experience.
Supporting Concepts	Positioning, differentiation, Blue Ocean Strategy, Jobs to Be Done, customer friction, experience design
Best-Fit Courses	Principles of Marketing, Consumer Behavior, Brand Management, Sports Marketing, Services Marketing, Marketing Strategy, Entrepreneurship
Suggested Class Length	50 minutes
Historical Parallel	Cirque du Soleil
Big Question	What happens when a brand stops trying to win inside an existing category and instead changes the category itself?
Whiteboard Line	The Bananas didn't reposition baseball. They repositioned what a night at the ballpark could be.

Lesson Overview

This lesson uses the Savannah Bananas as a case study in category creation.

Students will examine how the Bananas moved beyond traditional baseball by redesigning the rules, experience, and audience promise around casual fans. Rather than positioning themselves as a better baseball team, the Bananas reframed the buying decision entirely. They are not simply competing with other baseball teams. They are competing with concerts, theme parks, TikTok, WWE, college football, family movie night, and anything else people might choose for a memorable night out.

The lesson works because students usually understand the Bananas quickly. Even if they do not know the team, they understand the idea of a product that became more fun when someone stopped protecting the old rules.

That is the teaching opportunity.

The Bananas are not just a sports story. They are a strategy story.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

- Explain how the Savannah Bananas changed the category rather than simply differentiating within baseball.
- Identify sources of customer friction inside an existing category.
- Apply Blue Ocean Strategy by naming what a brand reduces, removes, raises, and creates.
- Use Jobs to Be Done thinking to explain what customers are really "hiring" Banana Ball to do.
- Compare the Savannah Bananas to another category-changing brand such as Cirque du Soleil.
- Redesign a stale or frustrating category around customer needs, not industry assumptions.

Key Terms

Category Creation

Category creation happens when a brand changes the way customers understand the buying decision. Instead of competing as a better version of what already exists, the brand reframes the category around a new promise.

For the Bananas, the question is not:

"Would you rather watch this baseball team or another baseball team?"

The question becomes:

"Would you rather spend your night watching something predictable, or would you rather go to a show your family will talk about the whole ride home?"

Positioning

Positioning is the place a brand occupies in the customer's mind compared with alternatives. The Bananas are not positioned only as a baseball team. They are positioned as a live entertainment experience that happens to use baseball as the stage.

Differentiation

Differentiation is how a brand stands apart from competitors. The Bananas are differentiated by their rules, entertainment, fan participation, pacing, and personality. But this case goes beyond differentiation because they change what customers think they are buying.

Blue Ocean Strategy

Blue Ocean Strategy focuses on escaping crowded competition by changing the value curve. Instead of competing on the same factors as everyone else, a company reduces, removes, raises, and creates different forms of value.

Jobs to Be Done

Jobs to Be Done is the idea that customers "hire" products or services to make progress in their lives. Customers may not be hiring the Bananas to "watch baseball." They may be hiring the Bananas to create a fun family night, entertain kids, share a memorable experience, or feel part of something people are talking about.

50-Minute Pacing Guide

0:00–5:00 | Cold Open: The Kyle Field Question

Start with the hook: "On May 2, 2026, more than 102,000 people showed up at Kyle Field to watch Banana Ball." Ask students: "Why would that many people show up for this?" Do not explain yet. Let them react.

5:00–10:00 | Set the Scene: What Is Banana Ball?

Briefly explain the Bananas and Banana Ball. Highlight a few rules: two-hour time limit, no bunting, fans catching foul balls for outs, batters stealing first, walks turning into sprints. Ask: "Which of these rules sounds the weirdest? Which one might actually solve a real problem?"

10:00–15:00 | Baseball's Category Problem

Frame the tension. Baseball has history, ritual, and loyal fans. But for casual fans, it can feel slow, passive, and hard to access. Ask students to name moments in baseball that loyal fans love but casual fans might find boring.

15:00–22:00 | The Category Shift

Explain that the Bananas did not simply make baseball more fun. They treated baseball as the stage for a live entertainment experience. Ask: "Who are the Bananas really competing against?" Push beyond baseball teams.

22:00–30:00 | Framework: Blue Ocean Strategy

Draw four columns on the board: Reduce, Remove, Raise, Create. Work through the Bananas together. Reduce waiting and seriousness. Remove bunting and mound visits. Raise energy and participation. Create a crowd-driven live show.

30:00–42:00 | Group Activity: Redesign the Category

Students work in groups to apply the same thinking to a stale category. Categories can include banking, gyms, museums, dental offices, insurance, college advising, grocery shopping, or local government meetings.

42:00–47:00 | Group Debrief

Have 2–3 groups share. Ask each group: “Did you improve the old category, or did you create a new one?” Push them to name the new customer promise.

47:00–50:00 | Final Takeaway

Close with the whiteboard line: “The Bananas didn’t reposition baseball. They repositioned what a night at the ballpark could be.” Preview the next lesson on Fans First as an operating system.

Opening Script for Instructor

“Today we’re talking about a baseball team that is only sort of a baseball team.

On May 2, 2026, more than 102,000 people showed up at Kyle Field, Texas A&M’s football stadium, to watch the Savannah Bananas play Banana Ball. That’s not a normal sentence.

This was not Major League Baseball. It was not the World Series. It was not a once-in-a-generation pitcher throwing 104 miles per hour. It was a baseball entertainment team where players dance, fans can record outs, bunting is banned, and the final score is barely the point.

So here’s the question for today:

How does a team like that become a national phenomenon?

The easy answer is, ‘They’re fun on social media.’ But that answer is too shallow. The better answer is that the Bananas didn’t just market baseball differently. They changed the category.

They stopped asking, ‘How do we make baseball slightly better?’

They started asking, ‘What if baseball was never the product?’

That’s what we’re unpacking today.”

Core Teaching Explanation

The Savannah Bananas are a useful case because they challenge the way students think about competition.

At first, students will usually place the Bananas in the baseball category. That is technically true, but strategically incomplete. If the Bananas are only a baseball team, then their competitors are other baseball teams. But if the Bananas are a live entertainment experience, their competitors include concerts, theme parks, comedy shows, social media entertainment, WWE, college football, and family movie night.

That shift matters.

The Bananas are not simply saying, “We are better baseball.”

They are saying, “You have been thinking too narrowly about what a night at the ballpark can be.”

> That is category creation.

The Bananas identified friction in traditional baseball: long games, quiet stretches, passive spectatorship, insider rules, and moments that make sense to loyal fans but can lose casual fans. Instead of asking casual fans to become more patient, the Bananas changed the experience.

Their rules are not random. They are strategic. A two-hour time limit attacks game length. No bunting removes a low-action play. Fans catching foul balls for outs turns spectators into participants. Batters stealing first adds surprise. Walks turning into sprints keeps the game moving.

This is why the Bananas are hard to copy. Other teams can copy dancing or funny videos, but that is surface-level. The Bananas’ real strength is alignment. The rules, experience, brand personality, fan participation, and business model all point toward the same promise:

> This will be a night you remember.

Board Framework: Reduce, Remove, Raise, Create

ACTION	BANANAS MOVE
Reduce	Waiting, dead time, seriousness, passive spectatorship
Remove	Bunting, mound visits, games dragging on too long

ACTION	BANANAS MOVE
Raise	Energy, pace, surprise, personality, crowd participation
Create	A live entertainment experience where the crowd becomes part of the product

Instructor Prompt

"Traditional baseball competes on tradition, skill, team loyalty, stats, and the drama of the game itself. The Bananas still use baseball, but they change the value curve. They reduce some pieces of traditional baseball, remove others, raise new sources of value, and create something that feels like a different category."

Group Activity: Redesign the Category

Activity Title: The Savannah Bananas Treatment

Time: 12–15 minutes

Student Prompt

Pick a category that feels stale, frustrating, intimidating, slow, boring, or hard for casual consumers to enjoy.

Your job is not to make a slightly better version of the current category.

Your job is to give it the Savannah Bananas treatment.

That means you need to identify the parts of the category that loyal customers tolerate but casual customers hate. Then you need to redesign the experience around what people actually want.

Category Options

- Banking
- Dental offices
- Gyms
- Insurance
- Museums
- Grocery shopping
- Movie theaters
- College advising
- Airports
- Local government meetings
- Car dealerships
- Doctor's offices
- Youth sports registration
- Public transportation
- Libraries

Group Questions

- What category did you choose?
- What do loyal or experienced customers tolerate that casual customers might hate?
- What would you reduce?
- What would you remove?
- What would you raise?
- What would you create?
- What would your new category promise be?
- What would you call your redesigned experience?

Example

Category: Dental offices

Reduce: Waiting, uncertainty, fear, confusing billing

Remove: Silent waiting rooms, surprise costs, judgmental lectures

Raise: Comfort, transparency, speed, human communication

Create: A "dental concierge" experience where patients know exactly what will happen, what it costs, and how long it will take

New category promise: “Dental care that doesn’t feel like punishment.”

Debrief Questions

- Did your group improve the old category or create a new one?
- What customer friction did you attack first?
- What old assumption did you challenge?
- What would make your idea hard for competitors to copy?
- What would the traditional players in your category probably hate about your idea?

Discussion Questions by Course Level

Intro-Level Questions

- What category do the Savannah Bananas compete in? Is it baseball, sports, entertainment, or something else?
- What parts of traditional baseball might casual fans find frustrating or boring?
- Which Banana Ball rule seems most connected to a customer problem?
- How would you position the Savannah Bananas in one sentence?
- What makes the Bananas different from a normal baseball team?

Upper-Level Questions

- Are the Bananas using differentiation or category creation? Explain the difference.
- What did the Bananas reduce, remove, raise, and create?
- What job are customers hiring the Bananas to do?
- Could a Major League Baseball team copy this strategy? Why or why not?
- At what point does a gimmick become a real business strategy?
- What risks come with changing a category this aggressively?

Graduate / Professional Questions

- What category are the Savannah Bananas really in from a strategic perspective?
- How does category creation change the competitive set?
- What organizational capabilities would a company need to copy the Bananas successfully?
- Where have you seen a company mistake surface-level differentiation for real category change?
- How would you measure whether the Bananas are a sports company, media company, live entertainment company, or brand community?
- What might the Bananas lose as they scale?

Historical Parallel: Cirque du Soleil

Cirque du Soleil is the best parallel for this episode because it shows the same pattern in a different industry.

Traditional circuses competed on animals, clowns, ringmasters, low-cost spectacle, and family entertainment. Cirque du Soleil changed the category by removing animals, raising theatrical production, adding original music, elevating acrobatics, and turning the circus into a premium live performance experience.

Cirque du Soleil did not win by becoming the best traditional circus.

> It won by making “circus” too small of a word.

That maps directly to the Bananas.

The Savannah Bananas did not win by becoming the best traditional baseball team. They changed what a baseball night could mean. Baseball became the structure, not the whole product.

Bridge Sentence

Cirque du Soleil took the circus out of the circus category. The Bananas took baseball out of the baseball category. Different stages, same move: when the old category limits what people can imagine, build a new one around what they already want.

Optional Mini-Case Comparison: Topgolf

Use this if students do not connect with Cirque du Soleil.

Golf can be intimidating, slow, expensive, and skill-dependent. Topgolf made golf more social, casual, food-friendly, date-night-friendly, and beginner-friendly. It did not ask people to become golfers before they could enjoy golf.

Topgolf made golf playable for people who did not think of themselves as golfers.

The Bananas made baseball lovable for people who did not think of themselves as baseball fans.

Quick Prompt

"What did Topgolf remove from traditional golf? What did it create instead?"

Instructor Notes

If students say, "This is just a gimmick"

That is a useful moment. Do not shut it down.

Ask:

"What would make it a gimmick?"

Then ask:

"What would make it a strategy?"

The distinction is important.

A gimmick is a fun thing added to a normal product. A strategy is when the product, experience, brand, and business model all reinforce the same promise.

The Bananas are not just dancing on top of baseball. They redesigned the rules, pacing, fan role, and competitive frame. That is why this works as strategy.

If students say, "Real baseball fans would hate this"

Some might. That is fine.

Category creation does not require winning over every existing customer. In fact, it often requires being willing to disappoint some traditionalists so you can reach a larger or underserved audience.

Ask:

"Who is this not for?"

That helps students understand targeting. The Bananas are not trying to satisfy every baseball purist. They are designing for people who want a fun, memorable, high-energy night out.

If students focus only on TikTok

Bring them back to the product.

Say:

"The content works because the experience is worth recording. The Bananas did not use content to make baseball interesting. They made baseball interesting enough to become content."

Then remind them that Episode 4 will focus on the content engine. This lesson is about category creation.

If students ask whether MLB should copy this

This is a great discussion.

MLB can borrow pieces of the strategy, but it cannot fully become the Bananas without becoming something else. That is the point. Existing category leaders often struggle to copy category creators because they are protecting the old category at the same time.

Ask:

"What would MLB have to give up to copy the Bananas?"

That question usually gets better answers than "Should MLB copy them?"

Quick Slide Outline

Slide 1: The Hook

More than 102,000 people showed up at Kyle Field to watch Banana Ball.

Slide 2: The Big Question

How did a baseball team become bigger than baseball?

Slide 3: The Easy Answer Is Wrong

This is not just a TikTok story. The content works because the product was redesigned.

Slide 4: Baseball's Category Problem

Baseball has history and loyalty, but casual fans can experience it as slow, passive, and hard to access.

Slide 5: The Bananas' Move

They treated baseball as the stage, not the whole product.

Slide 6: The Rules Are the Strategy

Two-hour time limit, no bunting, fans recording outs, batters stealing first, walks turning into sprints.

Slide 7: Category Creation

The Bananas changed the buying decision from "Which baseball game?" to "What memorable night out should we choose?"

Slide 8: Blue Ocean Strategy

Reduce, remove, raise, create.

Slide 9: Historical Parallel

Cirque du Soleil did not make a better circus. It changed what circus could mean.

Slide 10: Classroom Activity

Give a stale category the Savannah Bananas treatment.

Slide 11: Final Takeaway

The Bananas didn't reposition baseball. They repositioned what a night at the ballpark could be.

Assessment Option

Short Written Reflection

Prompt:

In 250–300 words, explain how the Savannah Bananas changed the category of baseball. Your response should use at least two marketing concepts from class, such as positioning, differentiation, category creation, Blue Ocean Strategy, or Jobs to Be Done. Then identify one other category that could benefit from the same kind of redesign and explain why.

Simple Rubric

CRITERION	POINTS
Clearly explains the Bananas' category shift	5
Correctly uses at least two marketing concepts	5
Gives a thoughtful example of another category	5
Writing is clear and connected to the lesson	5
Total	20

Sources and APA Citations

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Final Instructor Takeaway

The Savannah Bananas are not a good example because they are weird.

They are a good example because the weirdness has a job.

Every strange rule, every dance, every fan interaction, and every break from baseball tradition points toward the same strategic promise:

> This is not just a game. This is a night you will remember.