

(PP) SPORT AS A VEHICLE FOR DEPLOYING CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Introduction

The clichés are thick when it comes to sport's influence in the world. Nelson Mandela's averment that sport can change the world holds much ideological sway, supported by reports from the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace, which articulated a strategy for sport's contribution to peace, political stability and health. Indeed, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan once commented that he was interested in the power of football to teach lifelong lessons about playing against others as rivals, not enemies. The sentiment has been echoed by FIFA President, Joseph S. Blatter, who claimed that the game had been developed and taken to the world and now it is time to use football to make the world better. However, the process for achieving a social return from sport is unclear and lacks a coherent force for unification beyond the intentions of a handful of powerful non-government organisations like soccer's FIFA. The corporate trend toward social responsibility represents a significant opportunity for capitalising on a marriage of the ubiquitous appeal of sport and the economic might of the corporate sector. The deployment of corporate social responsibility through sport offers substantial potential for community return. The mobilisation of sport as a vehicle for contributing to corporate efforts toward social responsibility can be seen as a distinct opportunity for both the organisations in charge of sport and those that seek to use sport in their efforts to make contributions to communities (Smith and Westerbeek 2004). Although sport may be utilised toward social goals by numerous parties, this (conceptual) paper is concerned with the role of corporations in using sport as a means to fulfil their social responsibilities. Our contention is that sport, more than any other potential vehicle, contains qualities that make it a powerful force in effecting positive social contributions. Furthermore, we outline the social responsibilities inherent to sport itself, and that corporations need to connect with these inherent responsibilities in order to successfully deploy sport in their CSR efforts.

From a stakeholder perspective, corporate social responsibility (CSR) requires organisations to consider the interests of investors, suppliers, consumers, employees, the community and the environment in discharging their profit-directed activities. Marsden and Andriof (1998) described CSR as the satisfaction of the expectations of all societal stakeholders to maximise the company's positive impact on its social and physical environment, while providing a competitive return to its financial stakeholders. Sport offers such a stakeholder inclusive bridge across social and economic gaps (Davies 2002; Smith and Westerbeek 2004).

Method/Results and Discussion

This paper is conceptual in nature and seeks to explore the role that sport can play as a vehicle for deploying CSR. It attempts to achieve this goal by first, considering the social responsibilities held by the managers of sport in discharging their obligations to players, spectators, governing bodies and other stakeholders; and second, advancing the advantages of the use of sport as a social tool for corporations. In exploring sport's value and appeal as a vehicle for CSR, it is hoped that its utility to the corporate sector might become more transparent. Equally, the financial clout of the corporate sector offers considerable gravity to the efforts of socially-driven sport. The winner in this marriage, it may be hoped, is society. We have argued that a stakeholder perspective is advantageous in considering the potential

marriage of corporate and sport its social responsibility. In particular, it reinforces the reach and diversity of impact that each hold in society. Although corporate social responsibility has been thoroughly articulated, the social responsibilities implicit to sport remain underdeveloped. This paper attempted to make these responsibilities more transparent as a first step toward considering the overlap with corporate social responsibilities. Sport possesses the power to captivate and unite individuals within communities and create environments for contributing to social capital. Equally, the corporate world can mobilise much needed resources to be deployed through sport to meet its social responsibilities. When the two come together in the form of sport-corporate social responsibility, it can be pervasive, youth-friendly, health-oriented, socially interactive, environmentally aware, culturally liberating and fun. Corporate managers and sport managers alike can enhance the economic prospects of their organisations and maximise the social benefits that they deliver to society by better harnessing the power of sport to deliver on social and community objectives.

References

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