

HOW DID A NEW SPORT TEAM MAKE CHANGES TO A COMMUNITY?

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Abstract

Introduction

It has been argued that sport makes significant changes to our society. Sporting activities including sporting events and sport clubs are able to create social capital and to contribute to solve various community problems (Nicholson & Hoye, 2008; Okayasu et al., 2010). The community value of professional sport was also identified in the previous research (Zhang et al., 1996). Especially, newly established professional sport teams have not only economical but also socio-psychological impacts in community and among fans and spectators (James et al., 2002; Lock et al., 2009; Nigel et al., 2011). However, only a few empirical studies have been conducted to investigate such impacts. In using the case of a new professional basketball team, the present study examined whether perceptions of spectators on the community value of sport team, psychological commitment to hometown, and motives to attend games changed from a year before the new team entry to just after the opening of its first season.

Method

The target professional basketball team of this investigation was launched in Akita, Japan in October, 2010. Its proposal was accepted by bj-league (Professional Basketball Japan) in May, 2009. In order to collect data from spectators in a year before the team's first season, a survey was conducted on the spectators of a pre-season game in Akita in September, 2009. Since the new team had not been introduced, we selected a game played by two teams from different cities. Each data collector selected subjects from each block of seating in the arena according to approximate proportions of age and sex of spectators in that block. A total of 391 usable questionnaires were collected.

For the data after the team's introduction, the second survey was conducted on the spectators of two games played by the new team in Akita in November, 2010. The way of distributing questionnaires were the same as the way in the first survey. A total of 474 usable questionnaires

were collected.

In order to examine perceptions of spectators on the community value of sport team, we employed items to assess the perceptions on the new team's contribution to community activation and enhancement of people's interests in basketball. Three items were used to measure psychological commitment to the community. The questionnaire also included a set of questions pertaining to demographic characteristics, spectating behaviors, and motives to attend basketball games.

Results

Initially, since Zhang et al. (1993) revealed that demographic variables affected the perceptions on the community value of professional sport, we assessed the similarity of spectators in 2009 and in 2010. As a result, there were no significant differences on age and sex between the two groups. While the average age of subjects in 2009 was 38.4, it was 38.2 in 2010 ($t = .26$, n.s.). The rate of female among the subjects in 2009 was 53.2%, whereas it was 51.6% in 2010 ($\chi^2 = .66$, n.s.).

The results indicated that spectators in 2010 did report a higher level of evaluation for the team's contribution to community activation compared to spectators in 2009, $M = 4.44$ and $M = 4.26$ respectively ($t = 3.17$, $p < .01$). There were also significant differences between the two groups with respect to the perceptions on the new team's contribution to heighten people's interests in basketball. Spectators in 2010 reported higher levels of appreciation regarding the influence of the new team launch upon adults and children's interests in playing and watching basketball.

Furthermore, the level of psychological commitment to the community, assessed with three items ($\alpha = .90$), among spectators in 2010 was significantly higher than the level among spectators in 2009, $M = 4.28$ and $M = 4.16$ respectively ($t = 2.31$, $p < .05$). Regarding motives to attend games, there were also significant differences between the two groups on five dimensions of motive. Spectators in 2009 were high in skills, whereas spectators in 2010 were high in escape, social interaction, drama, and entertainment.

Discussion

This empirical study showed the important pieces of evidence that a newly established sport team affects perceptions of spectators on the community value of sport team, psychological commitment to hometown, and motives to attend games. The level of evaluation among spectators with respect to the new team's contribution to community increased after the new team was established. The psychological commitment to the community among home-game spectators was also enhanced after the team's introduction. These findings proved the significant value of professional sport teams and might encourage community activation through professional sport.

References:

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