

Factors Affecting Spectator Attendance at 2003 NCAA Women's Final Four Basketball Championship

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Introduction

The NCAA has staged the Women's Final Four Basketball Championship since 1982. In the first decade, cities didn't want to bother hosting an event that drew relatively small numbers of spectators. But the passage of 20 years has brought more fans, prestige, media exposure and money to this annual collegiate women's basketball championship. In addition, the Women's Final Four has been sold out for ten consecutive years since 1993 and has had eleven recorded sellouts overall.

Many collegiate athletic departments are under pressure to increase non-university funding revenue. Revenue from ticket sales of collegiate sports events is one of the important sources (Howard & Crompton, 2004). Gaining an understanding of the factors that might influence spectator attendance in collegiate sporting events is the key element to develop appropriate strategies, which will eventually lead to the attainment of both the athletic administrator's and NCAA's objectives. Four major categories of variables affecting spectator decision making on game attendance identified in prior research were examined: (a) game attractiveness (b) economic (c) sociodemographic and (d) audience preference (Green, 1995; Greenstein & Marcum, 1981; Hansen & Gauthier, 1989; Hart, Hutton & Sharot, 1975; Lu, 2002; Schofield, 1983; Zhang, Pease, Hui & Michaud, 1995). From previous studies, different factors were identified to have a positive influence to attract people to go to the game (e.g. chance to see breaking record, competitiveness, promotions, TV broadcasting of "away games). However, there were also some factors that showed that spectators cared less or were being distracted from attending the ballgame (e.g. substitute forms of entertainment, television effect and competition of other sport events). Therefore, in order to increase the NCAA championship tournament revenue, more in-depth research need to be done. Most previous related studies have been done in four major professional sports (MLB, NFL, NBA and NHL). A limited number of studies have been conducted in the context of collegiate women's basketball tournament. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine various factors, which may influence spectator attendance at NCAA Women's Final Four Basketball Championship.

Method

The questionnaire used in this study was developed by Green (1995), Hansen and Gauthier (1989), Kasky (1994), Schofield (1983), Zhang et al. (1995), Lu (2002), and subsequently modified by the researcher. After analyzing by Cronbach's Alpha, the reliability of the questionnaire was .75. Data for this study were collected at 2003 Women's Final Four Basketball Champion in Atlanta. As a result, 281 spectators voluntarily completed the survey. A 5-point Likert Scale was used for scoring the survey instrument. The 5 points influencing rate were translated as follows: 1= no influence to 5= strongly influence.

Results and Discussion

Four teams qualified to play in 2003 NCAA Women's Final Four Basketball Championship. They were the University of Tennessee, University of Connecticut, Duke University and University of Texas. In 2003, the Women's Final Four attracted a total of 56,420 (28,210 per game average) (NCAA sports .com., n.d.).

Subjects (n=281) were spectators who attended the championship event. Female subjects consisted of 65.1%. Spectators averaged 45 years of age (range 12-83), mostly were Caucasians (86.1%), are well educated (66.9% have undergraduate and above degree), have a nice household income, and a majority (62.8%) are married (44.3%) or live with partner (18.5%). Majority spectators were from other states (Tennessee 17.9%, Connecticut 16.4%), only 22.7% of spectators were from local (Georgia).

MANOVA analysis showed that none of the demographic, audience preference, economic and game attractiveness factors impacted attendance significantly. Although subjects perceived highly on several factors which influenced their attendance, such as entertainment value of the game, chance to attend a championship game, to support the teams, however, results from regression(R square= .026) and

MANOVA ($p > .05$) showed that there was no major factors which influenced spectators attendance at Women's Final Four. The factors with the least influence on attendance were promotions of the event, days games were scheduled and other activities taking place in the city. In addition, people who attended games in previous years would agree to come to the tournament again ($r = .291$, $p = .0$). These findings support other research and reports that the popularity of women's basketball is growing. NCAA administrators and college athletic administrators can use the information in this study to develop and manage strategies to maintain and even increase game attendance.

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