

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Sport

Aubrey Kent, Temple University, USA, kent@coe.fsu.edu

Matthew Walker, East Carolina University, USA

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Abstract

A quick glance to any sport organization website reveals that most teams, leagues, and organizations participate in some form of societal and community outreach. Whether in the form of community improvements, employee/player volunteerism, or educational initiatives designed to target the team's locale, most organizations identify the need to embrace some form of socially responsible behavior. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) ultimately implies that a company is responsible for assessment of their wider impact on society (e.g., Mohr, Webb, & Harris, 2001), and these demands on business' to address and respond to social concerns are an increasingly important component of modern business and an instrumental aspect of CSR (Carroll, 1999).

Social responsibility has also become increasingly prevalent in the sport industry. For example, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) has made significant investments regarding social responsibility, "more than 40 percent of FIFA's income goes directly towards supporting the grassroots of the game, development work, and partnerships with relief organizations" (FIFA Activity Report, 2002-2004, p. 66). Through their foundation, Reebok sponsors a Human Rights Award providing \$50,000 grants to recipients.

The Philadelphia Eagles "Go Green" environmental campaign aims to provide a cleaner community for Philadelphia's citizens. Nike's Fair Labor Standards Act promotes sound worldwide labor practices. Nike presidents Mark Parker and Charlie Denson maintain that CSR challenges their organization to take a good, hard look at their business model, and understand the company's impact on the world around it (Nike, 2006). The NFL and NBA's partnerships with the United Way and Read to Achieve, respectively, are just two of the many humanitarian and educational initiatives that sport leagues are involved with. "We have just two missions at the NBA," says Commissioner David Stern, "the most immediate is to be a successful league. But the other is to use our strength for social responsibility" (Genzale, 2006, p. 34).

As previously mentioned, CSR has not been well studied within the context of sport. In order to better understand CSR within the sport industry, a qualitative analysis was conducted. A content analysis of secondary literature and media sources from a random cross-section of teams in the sport industry revealed categories of CSR. The analysis revealed that sport teams are engaged in a variety of socially responsible activities. The results also suggested that teams implement different CSR activities based on the core mission of their giving programs, which overwhelmingly are

directed locally in keeping with suggestions of CSR best practice (e.g., Marquis, Glynn, & Davis, 2007).

Team CSR activities include, but are not limited to, the following activities: athlete volunteerism, educational initiatives, philanthropic/charitable donations, community development, community initiatives, fan appreciation, health related initiatives, and community-based environmental programs. For the most part, teams give back in a number of non-monetary ways however, philanthropy and charitable initiatives pervade all of the organizations as well. Every organization examined in this analysis promoted the philanthropic dimension of CSR through some type of charity or team-based foundation aimed at providing assistance to disadvantaged citizens. While the missions of these foundations vary, there remains one constant – to assist those in need within their respective local communities. On the basis of this analysis, we assume a relatively high degree of interdependence among local community actors and the sport organizations presence in the locale. Based on thematic emergence and the aforementioned conclusions, the following categories of team CSR initiatives are proposed to encapsulate CSR activities for professional sport teams, and were included in the framework for this study: (1) philanthropy, (2) community involvement, (3) youth educational initiatives, and (4) youth health initiatives.

References

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