

Session: **Factors Affecting the Market Demand of High School state Basketball Tournament**
Abstract nr: **EASM-0255**

Market environment for high school basketball in the United States

B. Cianfrone¹, B.G. Pitts¹, M. LeGrande¹, K. Linz¹

¹Georgia State University, Kinesiology and Health, Atlanta, USA

bpitts@gsu.edu

This symposium identifies key market demand factors associated with high school basketball tournament attendance in four parts: (1) Market environment for high school basketball in the United States, (2) Factors potentially affecting attendance at high school state tournament, (3) An investigation into consumer profile of a state basketball tournament: Socio-demographic segmentation, and (4) Examining the importance and relevance of market demand factors: theoretical and practical implications.

Sports are a popular extra-curricular activity in high school. In the U.S., approximately 55.5% of high school students participate in one or more organized sports (NFHS, 2010). Of various activity options, basketball is the most popular high school sport, in terms of number of schools offering varsity programs, with 17,869 boys and 17,582 girls teams (NFHS, 2010). Despite the popularity among students, funding sports has become increasingly challenging, due to increased costs of program operations, budget competition among sport teams within an athletic program, market competition, and recent budget cuts throughout the U.S.. Typically, sport teams in a public high school are funded through the school's annual budget provided by the state or generated through fundraising from private donations of parents and supporters, known as boosters. In recent years, the concept of "pay to play" by charging student activity fees is prevailing in high schools, which at times is coupled by reduction in the number of competitions, travel costs, equipment expenditures, and even an entire sport in an effort to cope with financial shortage ("States across the Nation", 2009). To offset today's poor economy and wide-range of budget cuts for educational services, schools are becoming more reliant on creative revenue generations to support the athletic department, such as sponsorships, ticket sales, concessions, and donations from boosters.

Oftentimes, successful high school sport teams receive more administrative attention and support, leading to more funding. This emphasis on winning can also lead to more parental, alumnus, and community support, which may translate into increased booster giving, sponsorship dollars, and income from event attendance. The potential financial resources as a result of winning are essential for maintaining and growing athletic programs. Additionally, as parents and the community become more connected and involved with high school sports, they are more likely to support favorable budget measures when public funding is discussed and voted during political forums and elections (Garcia, 2009).

In the U.S., high school sports have a well established system that leads to district, regional, state, and even national championships and subsequent notoriety. The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) organizes and regulates rules, officiating, coaching certifications, and competition (NFHS, 2010). State championships are organized by the

respective state high school organizing bodies. The state high school governing bodies manage the playoff system for each sport, such as hosting regional events leading to state championships. The playoff and championships are popular for the players, their families and friends, and the surrounding communities. Families and community members often choose to travel to the regional and championship games to support the student-athletes. Revenue generated from regional and state championship events provides increased budget resources for both the involved teams and the state association. Hosting these events can also be an economic boost and a source of pride for the host organization and community involved.

In this study, a comprehensive review of literature revealed that event attendance and other forms of financial support to high school basketball is critical for this sport to survive and thrive in the U.S. However, research investigations on marketing issues associated with high school basketball events have been rather limited and rarely assessed. According to several scholars (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2008; Pitts & Stotlar, 2007), analyses of consumer variables, such as factors affecting decision making for sport event attendance, is fundamental for formulating effective marketing strategies to promote the events. Accordingly, in order to attract and retain spectators for high school basketball tournament events, it is necessary for the hosting organization, sport association, and teams to evaluate those factors that may affect game attendance. Periodic evaluation should be conducted to determine target markets, analyze market situation and environment, develop marketing objectives and strategies, and provide feedback about the implementation of an overall marketing plan. Following this introduction, this symposium will explore three marketing perspectives of high school basketball tournament events: (a) factors affecting the attendance of high school state basketball tournament, (b) consumer profile of high school state basketball tournament event, and (c) key market demand factors associated with high school state basketball tournament event.