

**The rooted fan: Exploring suggested improvements to a professional sport team's sustainability initiatives**

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20-minute oral presentation (including questions)

Management

Management 2

Strategic Management

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Sustainability initiatives in sport have the potential to tap large audiences and encourage climate action at events and in consumers' daily life. However, their effectiveness depends on the acceptance of fans and other supporters (McCullough & Trail, 2021). Fans' sustainable behaviors during sporting events and in daily life have been subject to researchers' attention (Casper et al., 2021). Despite the many professional sport teams (PSTs) that have carried out campaigns to increase awareness of environmental problems (Cayolla et al., 2021), the effects of these campaigns among different types of fans are still unclear (Trail & McCullough, 2018). In addition, the suspension of almost all top sport leagues worldwide in the 2020 - 21 season (Weimar et al., 2021) limited the understanding of fans' sustainable awareness and behaviors during sport events. Thus, this study aims to gain greater knowledge about the importance of PST sustainability initiatives for fans.

With the support of a PST, two waves of data collection (June 2020 and June - July 2021) were conducted amid the pandemic. In the first wave, a global questionnaire about a PST's sustainability initiatives was distributed to members registered in the PST's database. In the second wave, another questionnaire was sent to members. In both cases, the questionnaire included space for open-ended suggestions for improving the PST's sustainability practices. This empirical material is the focus of this study, and a total of 1,687 valid suggestions were obtained (n2020=610; n2021=1,077). Through content analysis (Barelsen, 1952), 17 categories and five broad themes were identified: sustainable venue design (i.e., infrastructure improvements, mobility and public transport, renewable energy); eco-friendly matchday operations (i.e., diversifying food and beverage offerings, improving recycling, prohibiting smoking, reducing waste); green sponsorship activation (i.e., partnership/sponsors, relationship with members/supporters); pro-environmental communication (i.e., fan awareness of club strategies, promotion of sustainability measures); and improving matchday experience in general (i.e., communication improvement, encouraging management, game time, parking, stadium access, tickets).

In addition to detailing these themes in the presentation, we will conceptualize the so-called rooted fan - those consumers whose vested interest in the PST's success extends beyond on-field performance. In the context of this study, the environment-focused rooted fan provides actionable suggestions for improving the PST's sustainability programming in order to support the team's triple bottom line.

The current results suggest PSTs should consider three key ideas when developing sustainability initiatives. First, it is crucial to obtain knowledge of what sustainable initiatives their fans consider to be more important. Second, PSTs must monitor how these initiatives evolve over time (e.g., by measuring how fans classify the consistency of waste reduction initiatives in the stadium, how they experience the measures implemented by the PST, and how aware they are of all initiatives). Third, PSTs could use the levels of awareness and sustainable behaviors adopted by fans to develop a segmentation strategy and better customize their communication and impact of sustainability initiatives.