

ABSTRACT

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Thesis / Sports experience design and strategic marketing can be a positive catalyst in improving the well being of cities and the people who live there.

I chose to write this paper because as sports have positively affected my life, I want to educate others on their potential benefits. My objective is to shine a light on the tremendous positive impact that sports experience design can bring to a city. When used correctly, the social platform players have can be used for good. An alluring sports environment can lead to a better financial situation for a city because of the traffic it generates and the jobs it provides. Benefit to other industries is another positive result of SX design. Bigger psychological/health issues, such as depression and obesity, have been shown to improve with the introduction of sports in one's life. Sports experiences can offer a sense of belonging in a community. Experience design can be the lead factor in guiding people to sports and sports events. All in all, sports experiences can stretch far beyond just design.

A term you may need to know throughout this paper is experience design, which can be defined as the practice of designing products, processes, services, events, omnichannel journeys, and environments with a focus placed on the quality of the user experience and culturally relevant solutions (Aarts 46).

Upon walking into a stadium, the energy feels electric. “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” can be faintly heard under the sound of a ball hitting a bat and hysterical fans cheering. The air smells of sweet cotton candy and popcorn and the deep orange sunset casts the perfect glow to the warm summer night. The home team mascot can be seen dancing around the stadium, doling out high-fives and taking pictures with excited young ballplayers. Massive gift shops freshly stocked with the home team’s fan gear can be found in every corner of the stadium, creating a sense of pride amongst the fans. All of these factors work hand-in-hand to create an experience for the fans in attendance. The strategic creation of such an experience can be defined as sports experience design, or SX design. While a sports experience can certainly be assumed to set a foundation for a fun night or two, many cease to realize the lasting touch a successful sports organization can have on a city. There have been many cases in which the introduction of a professional sports team helped pull a city out of a tough financial state. In addition, the psychological benefits from a sports experience can reach a vast age range of audiences and have a lasting benefit. While sports are likely to result in a positive mental outcome no matter what, a well-designed environment enriches the sports experience for each and every fan in attendance, therefore maximizing the benefits. Sports experience (SX) design and strategic marketing can be a positive catalyst in improving the well being of cities and the people who live there.

Sam Fullerton, author of *Sports Marketing*, notes the importance of sports marketing through stating, “Marketing through sports flourished in the 1990s and continues to represent a key strategic domain for marketers today” (Fullerton 3). When discussing the reach within a community that a professional sports team can possess, it is important to note the large social platform that each of the players carry. To name a few, LeBron James currently has 37.6 million Instagram followers, Tom Brady has 4.1 million, and Mike Trout has 1.5 million. This is only a fraction of the total amount of people following professional athletes, and also only shows statistics of a single social platform. What these followers don’t always realize is that the content posted by these athletes is often designed behind the scenes by sports marketing and design teams. Creative teams

working for a sports organization strategically take photos and design social graphics that will draw positive attention to their team. Due to the fact that millions of people look up to professional athletes, they, as well as the design and marketing teams who create their content, possess power when it comes to spreading a message. They can use this to strategically market their content towards their social following. Teams and players alike often start foundations or run events with the goal of raising money for charity. One example comes from the Turn 2 Foundation, Inc. started by Derek Jeter, former shortstop of the New York Yankees. He started the foundation in 1996, hoping that it would motivate young people to “Turn 2” healthy lifestyles and stay away from drugs and alcohol. In the 22 years since the foundation was created, it has raised and awarded over \$23 million for its cause (Turn 2 Foundation Overview). This is merely one example that a large fanbase can pack a punch. Often times, players feel a personal connection to the city that they play for. This can result in them starting foundations that directly benefit their city and its people. This goes to show that introducing a professional sports team to a city can yield players that care immensely about the city- therefore using their platform for its benefit.

Another financial perk that can come from a sports experience is the money its presence can bring in for the city and its people. It can stimulate economic activity within the city in multiple ways. First, it is no secret that tourism is a trillion dollar industry and sports are a multi-billion dollar industry (Kurtzman). According to the Travel Industry Association of America, it is estimated that in one year, over 50 million adults in the United States traveled 50+ miles to organized sport events, whether as spectators or participants (Daniels). From these statistics, it is apparent that billions of tourism dollars are spent at sporting events each year, ultimately benefiting the host city. People flock from all parts of the country to experience sports. Growing up, they hear about these cities and stadiums, some standing over 100 years, and crave to see it firsthand. Design plays a part in this because the stadiums were custom-built for fan satisfaction. Second, an alluring sports environment can lead to a better financial situation for a city because of the amount of jobs the sports industry provides. A study on spectator sports concluded that

the industry contributes 456,000 jobs with an average salary of \$39,000 per job. It provides opportunity for growth, too. Between umpires/referees/officials, athletes, coaches and journalists, the amount of jobs has shown to steadily grow- averaging an 8.3% increase in jobs between 2009 and 2013 (Burrow). If sports were to disappear altogether, thousands of people would lose their jobs and the economy would take a huge hit.

Not only do sports bring in billions of tourism dollars and provide thousands of jobs, but their success contributes to the success of multiple other industries in a city. For a team to operate, they need a stadium/arena to play in. This venue would not be possible if it weren't for the construction and architecture industries. Sports require team branding and uniform design, done for them by workers in the apparel and design industries. Food service companies are hired to serve their food at events and electric companies are paid to keep the stadium lit and heated. Sports carry the potential to be a vital piece in the success of other industries in their city. The San Diego Padres can serve as an example of how a well-designed sports environment can lead to a positive result. Throughout the 1990's, they had been in need of a new ballpark. They knew that if a new ballpark was built with the help of any tax dollars, it would need to have lasting benefit for the city (Rosentraub 146). PETCO Park, their new stadium, cost \$483.1 million to build- 38.8% of which was paid for by the team, 42.6 percent was paid by the city of San Diego, 17.2% was paid for by the redevelopment agency and 4.3% was covered by the Unified Port of San Diego (Rosentraub 147). The area of the city in which the Park was built was renamed the Ballpark District. After the renaming in 2010, in just one year, \$2.87 billion of new real estate development was generated in the district (Rosentraub 159). This proved that the city's investment was a worthy one financially. The taxes generated by the district more than exceeded what it cost to build it. The design, planning and construction of the ballpark provided thousands of people with jobs. The new ballpark generated excitement for San Diego and, arguably, made it a better place than it was before.

In addition to the financial benefits a city can gain from sports, psychological improvement can be another plus. A sports experience can affect its attendees

in a way that can extend beyond the event itself. In one case, sports have been proven to benefit children in a huge way and combat issues such as childhood obesity. Childhood obesity, which is defined as having excess body fat, is a prominent issue in America and has been for years. As stated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Data from 2015-2016 show that nearly 1 in 5 school age children and young people (6 to 19 years) in the United States has obesity" (Childhood Obesity Facts). One of the very first things professionals suggest to help children lose weight is to get at least 60 minutes of physical activity a day. Though it isn't an easy task to coax children into exercising more, there are factors that make it manageable. When a child goes to a sports event, they marvel at the athletes playing. They see the posters of their favorite players plastered around the arena. Ellis Cashmore, the author of *Sports Culture: An A to Z Guide*, also points out, "Major sports have such vast audiences, both live and, more importantly, through television, that they have become an almost logical site for advertising" (Cashmore 386). Outside of the stadium, children see sponsored athletes on different commercials and products products such as Gatorade and Wheaties. Thus, it is clear that athletes take on a role model position without trying. If children view professional athletes as a role model, they are much more likely to join a sports team. Given that youth sports teams often practice multiple days a week, this effortlessly offers a solution for more physical activity in a child's life. The risk factors associated with childhood obesity, as stated on the CDC website, include, "higher risk of having other chronic health conditions and diseases", "bullied and teased more than their normal weight peers" and "more likely to suffer from social isolation, depression and lower self-esteem" (Childhood Obesity Facts). Attending a sports event can help to diminish these problems. While it seems like a simple solution, attending a sports event can create a ripple effect for children struggling with obesity. If they are inspired by the sports atmosphere and the players in it, they may be more inclined to participate in sports themselves.

As well as they can help fans outside the stadium, sports experiences can be an incredibly positive influence for fans in the present moment. In short, sports teams can generate a sense of community. Take the Seattle Seahawks' 12th Man campaign, for example. The Seahawks

won Super Bowl XLVIII on February 2nd, 2014 to top off an extremely successful 2013-2014 season (Rosenthal). The Seahawks have had a title for their fans, the 12th Man, for decades. In 1984, they even retired the number 12 in honor of their fans. The name “12th Man” comes from the idea that a football team has a limit of 11 players on the field at a time (Bien). However, the fans can contribute to a team’s success through their spirit, energy and volume. While the campaign was created decades ago, it took off during the Seahawks 2013-2014 Super Bowl run. Flags, car stickers, shirts and other merchandise printed with a bold “12” could be seen up and down the west coast. The city of Seattle was electric with energy. This title undoubtedly brought the city together, creating an immense feeling of pride and community. It cannot be proven, but many believe that the energy of the Seattle fans was a huge contributor in their Super Bowl run. This energy speaks to the impact a sports organization can have on an individual person, as well. Another way sports can impact an individual is because they allow others to feel success, even if it is not directly their own. When the Chicago Cubs won the World Series in 2016, fans in the city of Chicago could be seen on TV crying, hugging and cheering. Though the game was held in Cleveland, the environment at Wrigley Field in Chicago still mattered. It gave the fans a place to rally together, watch the game, and celebrate together at the end. The stadium had “World Series Champions” merchandise and “CUBS WIN” banners ready to go in case the team won. In the moment, the fans looked as if they were as happy over the win as the players themselves. Psychologically, these fans felt a sense of loyalty to the Cubs. They identified with the team. Watching the game at Wrigley allowed them to experience the game together, celebrate, and share a feeling of community. The design and preparation done by the Cubs organization allowed for this moment to reach its full potential.

At this point, it’s apparent that sports have the potential to benefit cities in a major way. However, it is essential to recognize that sports experience design and

strategic marketing play a vital role in maximizing these benefits. Experience design is all about the quality felt by the user when they experience a product, environment, service or event. A good or bad experience can contribute to the emotional outcome of the user. If a user feels negatively in any way, unsafe or unimpressed, they can choose to not experience said product, environment, service or event again. Good sports experience design leaves fans wanting to come back for more. If they walk into a stadium that’s clean, well designed, easy to navigate and packed with visual elements promoting team spirit, they’ll likely have a positive experience. It creates pride to see pieces of a team’s history, a giant photo of one’s favorite player, or even a statue of a previous athlete. Through SX design, a designer can custom tailor an experience for the thousands of fans that attend a game. Design can make one sports venue stand out from another. It can be a major component in the way a fan remembers a game. It can be the trigger that inspires an unmotivated child to get involved with sports. Though sports venues can appear effortlessly seamless, the design behind them takes immense strategy and thought. Without good SX design, none of the components that fans appreciate about a stadium would be possible. Arguably, it is the main contributor towards the psychological benefit gained by fans at a sports event.

In conclusion, it is clear that sports extend far beyond a rivalry or a #1 draft pick; a sports experience can be inspiring or even life-changing. Sports experience (SX) design and strategic marketing can be a positive catalyst in improving the well being of cities and the people who live there. Sports teams are good for cities. They boost morale and create excitement and pride for one’s hometown. Not only can well-done SX design be a helping factor in improving a struggling economy, but it can make for a smooth experience and lasting memories for fans. Looking forward, cities without sports organizations should consider bringing a team to their hometown. In doing so, it is hoped that the city and its beloved population will improve together.

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