

Sports and Recreation Management Trends in New England

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Abstract

Changes in the professional spectra of sports and recreation management make constituent need satisfaction increasingly challenging. Potential negative consequences for failing to keep pace with industry changes bring need for awareness of industry trends to premium level. Professional relevance relies on fluid behavioral repertoires. Behavioral adjustments based on informed decisions increases effectiveness. Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to identify and inform practitioners regarding industry trends impacting sports and recreation management over the next decade.

Using the Delphi technique for analysis of outlook data reported by industry experts, influential importance of major global trends impacting individuals, communities, and professionals in the New England region was examined. Results included increased use of technology for enhanced spectator experience, promotion of sports and recreation services as tools for preventative health care and healthy lifestyle, and promotion of sports and recreation services as tools for relationship building.

Keywords: Sports, Recreation, Management, Trends

1.0 - Introduction

Even a casual observer would have to agree, currently the rate of change is unprecedented, and it may also fairly be said that because of this, change itself has become a trend. The demands of change, and negotiating one's way through all the distractions concomitant with change, require that a skilled sports and recreation workforce take the time to discover how best to craft a fit into the industry. So how do sports and recreation professionals find a way to be intentional about the trends of change that immediately affect them? How do they figure out how to best manage the many changes that shiver their way into the business of sports and recreation service delivery? These are some of the questions that served to drive the instant study.

The easy answer to the above questions, and similar ones, is that sports and recreation management practitioners have to be strategic. And part of being strategic is to know what it is that we are facing. Yet even when sports and recreation professionals are diligent and contemplative, sorting through all the messages sent their way every day can be daunting. In the era of social media, the availability of information, opinions, and interpretations is at a premium. Accordingly, it is helpful to prioritize such information.

National and global trends are noteworthy in this regard, and the geographical context and focus of this study was the New England area, comprised of Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont. Over the past decade, this region of the United States has experienced notable growth in popularity, both in the professional sports sector, as well as in general adult and youth sports and recreation experiences (Crompton and Howard, 2013).

The region has five major professional sports teams, as well as millions of acres of park lands, replete with numerous outdoor recreation opportunities.

From the ski slopes to the shoreline, from the bleachers to the beaches to the backcountry, New England is stocked full of opportunities for sports and recreation enthusiasts. The region also employs several thousand sports and recreation specialists tasked with managing the year round holiday havens peppered throughout the countryside and cityscapes (Arsenault, 2014; Crompton and Howard, 2013).

The national and global trends affecting the delivery of sports and recreation services are complex, resulting in a layered web of both hazards and opportunities. There is valuable data, helpful for understanding and negotiating trends, that can be garnered from the experts who own, operate, and manage these New England venues. Such information can be insightful for scholars and practitioners alike. Using identified trends as the backdrop for the study, the authors sought to narrow the scope of inquiry by asking New England sports and recreation management experts about which trends will most likely have the greatest influence on sports and recreation management professionals in the New England area over the next 10 years.

2.0 - Literature Review

Godbey (2006) indicated that to ignore the rate and scope of the trends of change destines people to failure in the future, both personally and professionally. To examine how it is that sports and recreation are being reinvented through trends of change is to set forward with an eye on the future, and will be useful for preserving operational compatibility and success. Sports and recreation have international popularity and have increasingly become central to life existence. This will likely continue, but at an accelerated rate. Past models of service delivery will soon be inadequate, and will be replaced by individuals and systems that are forward-thinking and forward-looking. In concert with the idea of looking forward to the future, this section begins with review of identified trends in youth sports, and the remainder of the section includes review of trends according to recreation and parks, and professional sports.

2.1 - Youth Sports

Not surprisingly, much of the change currently at work in American society reflects the tensions that accompany the reinvention of sports and recreation in our society by members of the younger generations. One of the conspicuous by-products of our present rate of change is that trends in one sector substantially overlap with other trends within other sectors of the sports and recreation management industry. Perhaps nowhere is this more apparent than in trends in youth sports (Godbey, 2006).

Over the past 50 years, youth sports have undergone both major and minor shifts in popularity and concomitant participation levels, according to the influencing sway of social and cultural oscillations. The American legal system, which reflects societal and cultural opinions and expansions, has introduced legislation such as Title IX in 1972, which has presented opportunity for substantial upgraded modifications to youth sports. The result has been more options of opportunity, safer environments in which to participate, and increased interest levels (Woods, 2011). For example, since the mid-1980s, soccer has steadily grown in popularity. Americans have increased their support of Major League Soccer (MLS), and have made icons out of the US Soccer Women's National Team. Popularity has also increased among community youth soccer leagues, as well as in high school soccer. This is evidenced by the fact that participation by boys and girls in youth leagues sanctioned by the US Soccer Federation doubled in size in less than 20 years, from two million in 1990 to four million in 2007 (Johnson, 2012; Wallerson, 2014).

While traditional sports such as basketball, football, and baseball have garnered the lion's share of the attention of American youth over the past 4 – 5 decades, of late, more and more young people are expanding their interest areas to include sports and recreation activities that are non-traditional. In the last five years, dominant American team sports such as baseball, football, and basketball have felt the difference. The stretching of the sports and recreation interest areas has resulted in fewer children playing traditional team sports. Also, more kids are dropping out of team sports before they reach high school. Since 2008, there has been a steady decline in participation among both boys and girls ages 6 – 17 in America's historically most popular team sports. Specifically, Little League Baseball participation numbers have fallen, participation in high school football has experienced steady decline, and high school basketball has also dropped notably. Additionally, the rampant growth felt in youth soccer since 1990 has stalled, and participation rates have remained the same for the past five years. Interestingly, where team sports such as football, baseball, basketball, and soccer have weakened participation levels, some team sports such as volleyball, ice hockey, and lacrosse have gained in popularity.

However, the actual number of participants in team sports such as these is a mere small fraction of overall youth participation in team sports, and the general direction of team sports participation among America's youth is downward (Johnson, 2012; Wallerson, 2014; Woods, 2011).

Perhaps the greatest effect of youth interest changes has been experienced in youth contact sports, particularly football. Fainaru and Fainaru-Wada (2013) reported that Pop Warner football has experienced a nearly 10% drop in participation since 2010. This loss represents close to 25,000 players, and is consistent with national, school-sanctioned program losses. If losses of this magnitude continue, the long-term effects could be substantial – it has been estimated that between 60 – 70% of players in the National Football League (NFL) played Pop Warner football.

In addition, playing football has also been linked to long-term physical damage, including brain injury, dementia, and chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), which has been linked to severe depression and suicide, as well as Parkinson's Disease, Alzheimer's, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (also commonly referred to as "ALS," or "Lou Gehrig's disease"), and other neurological disorders. Not surprisingly, in football, as well as in virtually every other team contact sport, incident-related rule changes have begun to take place. These rule changes include a pervasive reach into youth sports and reflect a general attitudinal shift toward a focus to reduce the risk of injury to players. In addition, responsive initiatives have been put forward by several leading national organizations such as the NCAA, the NFL, the Department of Defense, the National Institutes of Health, the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the National Federation of State High School Associations, in partnership with other regional and national agencies, for the promotion of reducing the health risks associated with team contact sports (Associated Press, 2014a; Mihoces, 2014a).

Johnson reported that overall, as young people grow toward adolescence, participation in youth sports declines. While parental or youth participant fear of long term physical damage may be a considerable force affecting decisions about whether or not to participate in team contact sports, risk of injury is not the only phenomenon acting as a deterrent to youth participation in team contact sports (2012). Woods cited several factors that influence the present decline. For example, families may choose to limit their expenditures on participant fees, coaching instruction, sports equipment, sports camps, traveling teams, tournament entries, and other costs associated with team sport participation. Societal, familial, or personal pressure for high performance may translate into substantial time commitments – for sport specialization, individual workouts, longer hours of practice, and traveling to and from games. Young people are increasingly resisting these extended time commitments. In addition, young people who start pursuing sports early in life, before the age of six, tend to grow bored of team sports before they can truly become rooted in them (2011).

Not surprisingly, there are other sports and recreation activities to which America's youth are shifting their attention. These include dancing, swimming, diving, in-line skating, ultimate Frisbee, cycling, BMX riding, and skateboarding. Each of these activities has garnered an increased percentage of youth participation over the last decade. While some demographic sectors have seen higher levels of increased participation in these activities, the rates of participation in all groupings are generally affected by factors such as income levels, living locations, familial responsibility, and socio-cultural factors (Johnson, 2012; Murray, 2014; Vogt Isaksen, 2013; Woods, 2011).

Accordingly, young people around the world, are changing their sports preferences. More recently, these shifts have become increasingly diverse and intensified. Naturally then, noteworthy trending has made its way into families and communities. Many of the influences that have impacted youth sports have also had an effect on the recreation and park sector.

2.2 - Recreation and Parks

Though organized youth team sports remains well-favored, clearly other opportunities are gaining ground. Understandably, the shift away from organized, structured youth sports has altered participation patterns in recreation and parks. For a variety of reasons, the sports shift trend has also reached adults and families, many who are now indicating new preferences in their sports participation. These trends require dynamic planning by park managers and recreation programmers. State agencies and municipal government organizations are recognizing that in order to provide meaningful and appropriate opportunities for constituents, insight regarding leisure alternatives is at a premium (Bartram, 2014; Bowers and Green, 2013; Levitz, 2014; Madren, 2014).

A variety of national and regional factors may influence decision making regarding ways to provide for the sports, recreation, and leisure needs of communities, and there is one common denominator that is affecting virtually all individuals tasked with providing such services – major demographic shifting and increased urbanization. Interestingly, this is a global phenomenon, and has resulted in almost uniform population increases in urban areas. For example, in 2008, approximately 50 percent of the global population lived in urban areas. At present rates of migration, by the year 2050 that figure will grow to 75 percent. In the United States, 80 percent of the population is predicted to live in urban areas by 2050, and one out of five will be over the age of 65. Effectively, these trends suggest that the US will continue to get bigger (population expected to exceed 400 million by 2050), more ethnically and racially diverse, and older. These trends will substantially impact how recreation and parks are experienced (Armstrong, 2011; Godbey, 2006; Levitz, 2014; Krogstad and Lopez, 2014; Strestha and Heisler, 2011).

To face these challenges, recreation programmers, sport managers, and leisure activity directors must seek ways to address varying cultural norms and effectively use creativity to craft pathways for extensively diverse populations to find respite. Some outdoor play such as climbing trees, building forts, jumping rope, playing tag, and neighborhood games may fade as childhood pastimes, but remain desirable. Expanding cultural demand suggests that new cross-cultural recreation activities will also be desirable. Recreation programmers, sport managers, and leisure services directors must creatively find ways to graft the old pastimes into new forms of enjoyable and desired experiences (Bowers and Green, 2013; Chambers, 2013; Madren, 2014).

Also critically important in the coming future is the role that parks and recreation will have in successful municipal development. In order to remain relevant, and light of the international fascination with parks, outdoor areas, recreation activities, and sports, it follows that urban park and recreation areas need to play a major role in shaping, and re-shaping cities, both in the United States, and around the world. (Ammon, Southall, and Nagel, 2010; Chambers, 2013; Hoffmann and Dolesh, 2014; Levitz, 2014).

Recreation and parks have also been substantially affected by leaps in technology. Technology specifically designed and developed for sports, recreation, and leisure expression has greatly increased, and will continue growth rates approaching exponential. Accordingly, technology will play a major role in urban development, particularly in the implementation of sports facility construction, parks and greenspace development, and recreation program planning. It is expected that the effects of technological advancement on such development will be remarkable, and will broaden options and opportunities for enhanced recreation and park experiences (Godbey, 2006; Russell, 2013).

The trends identified in this section, and the changes that accompany them are happening remarkably fast. Advances in technology are at the root of the rapidity of these trends and change. Service providers in park and recreation venues must respond in kind, and wise use of technological advances will be necessary to keep pace. Not surprisingly, increased use of advanced technology has also created noteworthy change in the world of professional sports.

2.3 - Professional Sports

The global popularity of professional sports is unprecedented, and this is due to trends across a variety of domains. Technological innovations and the media have substantially changed the way professional sports are experienced. Kunkel, Hill, and Funk reported that instantaneous coverage of both mainstream and remote professional sports events has been realized, and further sophistication of both media and technology suggests never-before-imagined familiarity and involvement. At present, elevated levels and forms of interaction allow viewers to be increasingly engaged in their spectator experience. Player statistics and access to background or otherwise relevant information is at a viewer's fingertips, over a variety of mediums. This makes professional sports more interesting to spectators and, in many cases, more enjoyable (2013). Effectively, when a "point-and-click" mentality rules the day, the entire professional sports spectator experience can be transformed into a frenzy of factoids tapped out in the palm of a hand. Yet, if one prefers, professional sports can still be enjoyed in a more conventional manner, on the recliner in front of the television set, or in seats, on-site, right there at the match. This range of possibilities inspires unparalleled attractiveness (Kwak, Lee, and Mahan, 2013).

In addition, advances in technology in the form of social media are trending among professional leagues, teams, coaches and professional athletes. Wysocki reported:

“Social media have transformed sports media and its consumption. Fans, athletes, and teams now have the ability to easily connect with one another. Social media provide professional teams and athletes with more control over the release of sports news, in addition to increasing their self-preservation management.

Sports journalists and other sports media personnel also utilize these mediums to reach audiences, but the public, professional teams and athletes now have the ability to bypass traditional media outlets through social media platforms. Blogs and Twitter have revolutionized sports media by giving athletes and teams an active role in content production. Mass media outlets appear to be losing their edge in sports media due to professional athletes’ progressive engagement in social media.

The integration of social media into sports communication changes the dynamic of how news and information is released. This provides opportunities for professional sports teams and professional athletes to better connect with their stakeholders” (2012, p. 10).

As the professional sports industry in America continues to grow at an accelerated rate, the media have also been identified at the core of this expansion. Van Riper reported that the professional sports industry is expected to grow to nearly \$68 billion by 2017, reflecting an approximate 5% growth rate. Gate revenue is expected to be over \$19 billion, yet the most stable growth will come through media rights. Fees for media rights have skyrocketed in recent years, and are expected to post record numbers over the next five years. While merchandise and apparel sales will still continue to climb, media rights and sponsorships will carry the industry to continued upward financial growth. Marketing, brand loyalty, and sponsorships are all increasingly becoming highly regarded, as the power of corporations is fully realized, and the stability that comes from long-term commitment is established (2013).

At the player-athlete level, professional sports are framing themselves in adherence with prevailing social and cultural influences. Nowhere is this more evident than in the area of concern for player injuries. However, in some instances, progress in this regard has been somewhat mollified, and has required sanctioning from outside the industry. In July 2014, a class action lawsuit against the NFL resulted in a federal judge in Philadelphia awarding a multi-million-dollar compensation package to several former NFL players, for their concussion related claims (Associated Press, 2014b; Mihoces, 2014a). This landmark, unprecedented ruling was predicated on claims by retired players that the NFL refused to acknowledge, ignored, and concealed evidence compiled over several decades. Such evidence indicated that the inherent nature of the game of football included substantial risk of concussions, and that concussion brain injury has been linked to long-term health effects and problems. It has been estimated that there are approximately 20,000 former NFL players who are eligible for compensation (Farmer, 2014; Mihoces, 2014b).

Player injury, it may fairly be said, affects the bottom-line. As concerned as players are about risks for career-ending and long-term injury, they are also concerned that incident-related rule changes will increase, rather than decrease, their chance of long-term injury (Barzilai and Brady, 2014). Also trending in the area of player injury are issues associated with players who, during the off-season, or as part of their personal preference, leave their team temporarily to participate in other leagues or tournaments in some other country (e.g. The Olympic Games). In these other environments, regulations, rules, and player attitudes regarding sportsmanship may not be the same as in America. Accordingly, risk of injury may be elevated. As rules governing professional sports are increasingly internationalized, variability within these trends will likely be diminished (Ratten, 2011).

Changes in sports facilities and on-site sport event operations can also be expected to need to accommodate these diverse profiles. Risk management practices, premises liability, and negligence standards will likely become more internationalized. Successful blending of cultural preferences, acculturation, assimilation and heightened sensitivity to differences will need to be implemented in issues of crowd management, as well as food and beverage management. For professional sports ancillary support businesses to facilitate maximized experiences and repeat customers, service delivery personnel will need to be trained accordingly, and be able to execute successful integration of diversity. Maximum effort in this regard will need to be applied (Ammon, Southall, and Nagel, 2010; Ratten, 2011).

3.0 - Methodology

The purpose of this study was to identify future sports and recreation trends that will affect the industry over the next 1 to 5 years in New England. Professionals in the sports and recreation industry were surveyed, and results were evaluated through use of the Delphi technique.

The population of interest for the study was approximately 25 established professional experts currently working in, or closely associated with, a wide range of sports and recreation venues across the New England area. These specialists were purposively sampled due to their demonstrated knowledge and expertise in the sports and recreation management industry. The majority of this population was identified as experts through their long-term involvement and success in the sports and recreation management industry, their mutual and cross-industry affiliations, their association with sports and recreation in New England, and their familiarity with one another as active and conversant colleagues in the industry.

These business professionals were asked to complete two iterations of a survey instrument developed by the authors of this report. The first stage of the questionnaire was sent to the experts with instructions for completion of the survey and the evaluation procedures to be implemented. The response rate was strong at over 60%, and returned surveys were evaluated independently and collectively by the authors. Consistent with the Delphi technique, the authors produced a report based on the findings of stage one, and distributed that report back to the experts for review and additional comment. This allowed respondents to revisit their responses to the questionnaire, *as well as* the responses from the other participating experts. Final comments were generated and evaluated, and the findings appear in the next section.

4.0 - Findings

Twenty-six Likert scale questions were asked in combination with four qualitative questions regarding trends in sports and recreation management in New England over the next decade. Using the Delphi Technique, data were analyzed in two stages. In the first stage, frequency data for the Likert scale questions were collected and summarized. Additionally, responses to the four qualitative questions were used to refine the analysis of the data from the Likert scale questions. In the second stage, participants were afforded the opportunity to review, revise, and augment their responses, then these results were analyzed. Accordingly, the following paragraphs provide details of the results of data analysis.

Respondents were in agreement, *without exception*, that the top five trends listed below will have an impact on sports and recreation management in New England over the next 10 years. Additionally, a majority of the responses to qualitative inquiry were offered in support of these top five. Accordingly, the top 5 developments received the greatest trending support from respondents were as follows:

- Use of digital technology in sports marketing
- Use of connectivity and social media for an enhanced spectator experience
- Increased emphasis on the benefits of sports and recreation participation as promoting a healthy lifestyle
- Use of sports and recreation services as a tool for preventative health care
- Use of sports and recreation services as a tool for relationship building

Examples of respondents' comments in support of these five included clarifying statements, such as the one seen below, from a respondent who indicated,

“Connectivity, with specific regard to social media, is a low cost and far reaching method of marketing, advertising, and production. The model for profit out of sports and recreation events seems to be trending more towards one-time vs. multiple or long term events. This will [a]ffect programming and cost.”

Others added, “The delivery of all media and content is directly affected by the major focus on digital and social medias,” and, “The social media experience will become an active part of the spectators' game experience. Healthy lifestyles [are] also a prominent factor in how people make disposable income decisions. People are simply looking for fun ways to be healthy.” Still one other indicated, “Social media changes the way communities organize and interact, and that is likely to become more evident in the years ahead.”

Extending beyond the top five, it is noteworthy that there were an additional five trends that also received substantial support as projections for trending in sports and recreation management in New England over the next decade. Accordingly, respondents were in agreement, with only a few exceptions, that these next five trends will also be operative in sports and recreation management in New England over the next 10 years. These next five trends appear as follows:

- Use of access to information through online learning
- The threat of concussions and other sports injuries on participation levels in youth sports
- An increased focus on the individual spectator experience in professional sports

- Branding in professional sports marketing
- Networking in all ways requiring work to be organized in new ways

Responses to open-ended questions presented additional support for these trends. One study participant indicated,

“The ability to solicit for, and successfully procure sponsorships of sports organizations is a trend that will have a substantial impact on sport management in New England over the next 5 – 10 years!! The cost of coaches, officials (referees), and facilities continue to rise. The ability of an organization to pay for such things will require more sponsorships from the business community. Much like international soccer, you'll begin to see advertising on team uniforms and banners around athletic facilities to help defer the costs. Pay to play programs and town funded programs don't completely cover the rising costs and the insurance premiums required to host such leagues in towns and school athletics.”

Another respondent added,

“The acknowledged threat of physical or mental harm to children participating in sports is difficult to overcome. Parents will never knowingly put their children in danger, and schools will not be able to manage the lawsuits that arise.”

Also telling were these responses:

“With all of the research and data that is coming out, as well as parents' childhood idols coming forward with the impact concussions had on them, more and more parents are not allowing, or paying, for their child to participate in youth leagues. Parents are more mindful of concussions and their lasting damage.”

“The affect that concussions have on the youth and the physicality of the sports they play will have a direct effect on the amount of youth that participate in physically demanding sports. Sports like football, soccer, hockey, lacrosse, and sports where there is physical contact to other athletes will have reduced levels of participation. However, these sports are also great forms of exercise that help to keep the youth of society fit and in shape. While physical team sports may have decreased participation the role of activities have on the health and fitness of our youth will remain high. Individual sports like golf and tennis may see increased participation levels due to the possibility of concussions and the long term health of the individuals and youths.”

“As our economy becomes more automated, industries are impacted and the need for human labor will decline in some fields and will increase in other fields. These changes impact where people live and work, and the population pool of athletes.”

Interestingly, some currently popular sustainability issues did not crack the top ten trends in the instant study. For example, receiving mixed reviews was the issue of “Going Green” as a strategy for sustainability. However, there was some sentiment for environmental consciousness evidenced in the qualitative responses in this study. Examples of these include:

“The development of green space for non-organized recreation [is needed]. [Also], [t]here is a need to get children out of the house and away from gaming/television and other sedentary activities.”

“Green facilities are popping up everywhere. They are the long term answer to fitness centers and sports facilities. Simple modifications such as LED lights or low flow toilets make an impact.”

4.1 - Themes

Not surprisingly, virtually all the issues that were identified as trending globally were also identified by respondents as trending in New England over the next five years. From the top ten trends receiving the greatest support from respondents in this study, in particular, the following four distinctive themes appeared within the responses:

- Information, and digital access to information, has become the lifeblood of sports and recreation spectatorship and participation.
- Though sports and recreation are seen as vital tools for promoting the values of healthy lifestyle and healthy social relationships, the sophistication of the promotion of these values through sports and recreation will increase.

- The intensity of competition for participant involvement in sports and recreation in New England has risen to a level such that professional sustainability cannot be achieved without the use of cooperative relationships and both personal and professional branding.
- Parental and participant concerns about factors which affect healthy lifestyle, such as sports injuries, these will have a long-term effect on decisions of choice regarding sports and recreation participation.

Noteworthy evidence of these themes appeared according to respondents' recommendations to the next generation of sports and recreation management practitioners. Respondents indicated the following recommendations can prove especially helpful to hopeful future sports and recreation management practitioners:

- Develop a strong understanding of social media and how it increasingly connects to sports and fans.
- Emphasize the sports and recreation activities as a component of living a healthy lifestyle
- Emphasize the social elements of sports and recreation activities; that not only is it a component of a healthy lifestyle but a means for social interaction as well.
- Something not mentioned directly is the current battle against substance abuse. This falls across both Health and Wellness and doing our part as a community pillar to provide folks with an outlet for a healthy lifestyle.
- Make sure you are knowledgeable in all platforms of social media. The skills are necessary in the field today
- Be flexible and willing and open to change. If you are not flexible the industry will leave you behind.
- Develop full understanding and utilization of digital and social media that affects content delivery and consumption.
- Research and follow the trends of interest for the younger audience as they have more distractions away from the typical sports products or services.
- Pay attention to what is happening with the concussion law, as it will likely spread to other sports in other ways.
- Brand loyalty is what keeps many schools and professional sports going. Always protect the brand.

5.0 - Implications and Discussion

The instant study reveals several noteworthy implications relevant to sports and recreation management in New England. First, whereas trending away from youth sports that include inherent risk of head injury to participants will likely continue, and gain momentum, it may fairly be said that the popularity of NFL football is sufficiently insulated from on- and off-the-field scandals, and its popularity will likely remain strong over the next 5 – 10 years.

In effect, the experts surveyed in this study suggested that the public in the New England region are increasingly willing to forgive, and perhaps even forget, at least for a while, the on- and off-the-field scandals that have appeared in professional sports. In particular, the implications represented by the recent lawsuit awarding former NFL players millions of dollars for concussion-related injuries are likely to be viewed as if these are “somebody else’s problems” and most likely to “take care of [itself].”

While the wisdom of this may fairly be questioned, the ripples of change are just not strong enough, and what remains is that there is barely a hint of change coming to football, and all major contact sports, in New England. This is not to say that safety and head injuries are being ignored. In contrast, on playgrounds and playing fields throughout New England, long-term effects of serious injury are now actively being considered. But, rather than deal with trying to imagine the effects of sweeping changes being made to the nature of sports that include high levels of player susceptibility to long-term injury, these experts suggest that a large number of participants and providers in New England prefer simply waiting until changes are made to these sports, and then adapting to them.

Further, the results of this study supported the notion that there is a collective social reliance on sports and recreation professionals tasked with the administration of sports, coupled with advances in technology, such that what is preferred is the preservation of Romanesque, gladiatorial instincts. People are absolutely fine with watching, either on television or at a stadium, great feats of athleticism amidst the bashing of heads and perilous twisting, smashing, and crunching of head-to-head combative competition. In fact, this is what the public wants. But, at the same time, this voyeuristic, vicariously participating public is highly protective of their own young ones. They demand that the latest and greatest of safety precautions be implemented in youth leagues for the precious ones of the next generations.

At least around the neighborhood, or in their own backyards, the use of sports and recreation for the promotion of wellness and healthy living is outweighing the need for violent, concussive injury.

Albeit, this seems easily predicted – over the past 30 years, American society has demanded safer environments for sports and recreation. Minimizing risks of injury has moved to the forefront of our collective social consciousness. Not surprisingly then, our results support the notion that sports alternatives that do not include high risks for head injuries will likely continue to gain in popularity. As for professional football, and childhood dreams of playing in the NFL, in the interim, while the NFL sorts through its concussion issues, youth sports participation in less injurious sports will continue to receive an uptick.

The second major implication from the results of this study is best interpreted in the context of the globalization of sports. Consider this: The question of “who is your neighbor?” is being redefined on a daily basis. Fundamentally then, globalization of sport provides maximization of diverse commercial opportunities, interests, and strengths, as well as an increased awareness of this diversity. Concomitantly, more and more people are seeking to enjoy the comforts and pleasures of life, and equating their ability to do so with wellness and a preferred standard of living. What is also simultaneously increasing is our awareness of the comforts and pleasures of other members of the global society – our neighbors.

This is not to say that global society has not had a preference for fun in its history – but rather, quite the contrary. What has changed is our awareness of the comforts and pleasures of life, including those being enjoyed by other people and other cultures, and such awareness has substantially increased. Central to this perspective transformation has been the globalization of sport, as well as increased understanding of the sheer joys of participation, both actively and vicariously. Accordingly, these have become sufficiently enticing such that sports and recreation activities have received increased attention and popularity, particularly in New England. Perhaps it may also be said that this is true on a larger scale as well.

A third point of interest sparked by the results of this study then comes when we consider prospects for employment in the sports and recreation management industry. University students, fresh college graduates, and young professionals attempting to break into the sports and recreation industry workforce are faced with an array of alluring temptations, all of which can lead to a trapped perspective.

These temptations are all seemingly natural, and include a belief that there are plenty of jobs out there. Sports and recreation management jobs are available worldwide, so there must be plenty of openings. Also among these temptations is a sense of entitlement – an expectation that being educated in New England, or in America for that matter, will automatically yield job offers. Another temptation is to be easily distracted – to lose focus on what is required to get a good job in the sports and recreation industry, and keep such a job. All of these paint prospective sports and recreation industry professionals into a corner characterized by a false sense of job security. Especially for up-and-coming sports and recreation professionals, this is a dangerous perspective echoed loudly through the responses of industry professionals surveyed in this study.

The next implication of the instant study is closely associated with the presence of distractions identified as interfering with a healthy perspective on the availability and security of employment in the sports and recreation industry. Understandably, history and common sense suggest that it really does not take all that much for a person to be distracted, but – the present level and number of potential distractions presented to new industry professionals is undeniable and unprecedented. What is sweeping the youth of New England is “FOMO.”

Interestingly, FOMO is more precisely understood to be the “fear of missing out.” Described briefly, this “fear of missing out” is worry or uneasiness that comes from the perception that an interesting or exciting event may be occurring somewhere else. Additionally, such anxiety is typically alerted to viewers on posts made visible via social media outlets (“FOMO,” 2015). Caught in the grip of the fear of missing out, sports and recreation industry professionals can have their energies and attention diverted from the tasks most relevant to the efficient, effective, and safe delivery sports and recreation activities.

The fear of missing out can be more than just a fear, and accounted for wisely, its paralysis potential limited substantially. A clear take-away from the proliferation of the fear of missing out is perhaps obvious – there is necessity of focus on the task(s) at hand, in spite of myriad distractions. The respondents in this study, experts possessing a wealth of insight for future sports and recreation management professionals, urged this “in stereo.”

Respondents in this study also clearly emphasized the importance of branding. In the same way that professional branding involves the development of a consistent message that reflects the values of an agency, organization, or institution, personal branding includes the careful cultivation of one's personal digital footprint. In order to have an effective personal brand, there has to be a strong digital footprint. Accordingly, the primary venue for the development of a personal brand is through social media. Further, this is where being intentional and strategic is at a premium. In truth, there is really no longer any room for careless social media postings intended to be humorous or harmless. Social media has blurred the boundaries between one's personal and professional presence. Everything that a person posts should be reflective of the values they want to promote. Sports and recreation professionals will do well to realize this, and follow through with being attentive to assure it.

Competition in the arena of personal branding is not static, but rather it is rigorous, dynamic, and compelling. Accordingly, carefully crafted personal branding messages send several crucial signals to potential clients and/or employers. Among these important messages are that an individual has clarity of direction, goals, and purpose, that they have embraced their self-awareness and are tuned in to their strengths and resolve, and that they are keen to understand how they can differentiate themselves from their competitors.

Interestingly, also important to the development of a strong, cohesive personal brand is to demonstrate that one has developed connections with mentors. This shows the inclination for continued personal development and a commitment to authenticity. Whereas authenticity commands respect, the nature of social media dictates that authenticity and value are at a premium. In order to generate desired respect through personal branding, individuals must be authentic.

6.0 - Future Research

This study was an examination of trends in sports and recreation management in New England over the next 10 years. Multiple experts currently working in the sports and recreation management industry in New England were surveyed to identify the trends they perceived to be the most prevalent, and the most important, on several levels, including economically, socially, and physically.

Areas of future research prompted by the present study, its findings, and implications include examination of the long-term effects of decreased youth participation rates in contact sports, the effects of the globalization of sports, and the nature and use of social media in sports and recreation. Youth participation rates telegraph, to some degree, the support of parents. For example, if parents are discouraging their children from participation in sports like football and hockey, which are still relatively popular in New England, then where and how are these parents encouraging their kids to participate? A topically similar question might be, how long before drastic changes are made to the nature of the game of football? Additionally, given the globalization of sport, what new sports and recreation activities might become popular in New England in the future? And among spectators, social media is clearly changing how viewers participate in the spectator experience – what have been the effects of the changed experience?

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