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Successfully Marketing a Collegiate Baseball Program Within Resource Constraints: A Special Case of Volunteerism

Tony Lachowetz, Sam Todd, & Windy Dees

KEYWORDS:

volunteering, sport industry, sport management students, marketing collegiate baseball, innovation, volunteers

ABSTRACT

Given resource constraints in marketing budgets of athletic departments, many marketers of intercollegiate athletics often face a difficult choice between marketing all sports fairly, and marketing only those sports that would provide the highest return on investment of marketing dollars. This case study explains the creative efforts made at one university to incorporate student volunteers when marketing, promoting, and selling tickets to collegiate baseball. After a brief overview of volunteerism in sport, this specific case first outlines the background to the problem, then details of how two student groups collectively contributed to stimulate the marketing efforts of the baseball program at Georgia Southern University (GSU).

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INTRODUCTION

Scholarship in the organizational sciences is replete with studies that focus on how organizations use scarce resources to generate organizational outcomes (Crook, Ketchen, Combs, & Todd, 2008). In fact, the allocation of resources is a significant challenge confronted by firms of all kinds (Cheng & Kesner, 1997). Given that intercollegiate athletic departments often operate under financial constraints, marketing directors naturally face these resource allocation challenges when dispersing marketing dollars to various sports (Greenwell, Mahony, & Andrew, 2007). The decision for many athletic marketing directors involves a choice between the desire to focus limited marketing dollars only on those few sports that generate revenue to maximize the financial return and the desire to promote athletic teams equally out of a desire to be fair. From a study of athletic marketing directors in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics,

Greenwell, Mahony, and Andrew (2007) discovered that the majority of respondents preferred the former strategy of resource allocation and cited maximized financial return on the dollar as their main motivation for that allocation strategy. However, such strategy inevitably leaves some intercollegiate sports with limited or no marketing support in some cases.

What follows is a case study of how one intercollegiate athletics department, together with the help of sport management faculty and students, overcame this manufactured dilemma to market a product without the highest financial return in the product mix, specifically collegiate baseball in this instance. Using student volunteers in two distinct capacities, the sales and marketing efforts employed for baseball specific purposes at Georgia Southern University (GSU) are considerably more than their athletic department-allotted budget would otherwise accommodate, given departmental

resource constraints. In total, the two separate volunteer groups generated over \$20,000 in ticket sales, stimulated the game-day experience through on the field entertainment, staffed a retail store in the concourse of the ballpark that sold over \$4,000 of merchandise, collected market research data from baseball fans, and spread goodwill towards the baseball program on the campus. All of these efforts positively contributed to the marketing of a financially strapped college baseball program whose attendance figures consistently rank in the top of the Southern Conference and 38th nationally (NCAA.com).

Volunteerism in Sport

Volunteerism in sport has recently received increased attention as the sport industry increasingly becomes more dependent upon this labor segment (Cuskelly, Taylor, Hoye, & Darcy, 2006; Doherty, 2006; Fairley, Kellett, & Green, 2007). Among other topics, scholarship in this area has focused on the retention of volunteers, recruitment of volunteers, management of volunteers, and motives of volunteers. While some scholars have focused research on the motivations of volunteers at particular events, or sports (e.g., Fairley et al., 2007), Chelladurai (2006) outlines three more general reasons why people tend to volunteer for sporting events. First, volunteers often gain some benefit directly from their participation (i.e., utilitarian outcomes). In this sense, an individual may volunteer to gain a specific new skill that he/she wishes to implement at some later date in an employment position. Second, people often volunteer for social incentives derived from interpersonal relationships gained during or through the experience (i.e., affective incentives). Anecdotally, many sport management administrators and professors attest to the fact that students who establish well developed networks of professional

contacts in the sport industry often secure entry-level employment in the industry faster than others without those connections (B. Goss, personal communication, April 7, 2009). However, many scholars in the organizational sciences also write about the impact of networking on career-related outcomes as well (Ferris et al., 2007; Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska, & Shaw, 2007; Todd, Harris, Harris, & Wheeler, forthcoming). In particular, Todd et al. (forthcoming) discovered that those employees reporting high levels of networking relationships at work experienced higher levels of career satisfaction, marketability, and compensation as compared to employees with limited networking skills.

Finally, people volunteer in some instances from a desire to do something positive or because of a shared belief in organizational missions, values, or goals (i.e., normative incentives). In this case, a person could volunteer to help with causes such as fundraising for cancer research, a children's hospital, or a youth sports league/facility. While motives of the student volunteers in this current case are not altogether known, all three motives could possibly be represented, i.e., students could join the two critical student volunteer groups based upon a desire to help the baseball team (normative), existing relationships with other sport management majors who are in the group (affective), or a means to develop their resumes (utilitarian). Regardless of their motivation(s), the following case examines the innovation created within one intercollegiate athletic department that used volunteerism in sport to generate appreciable outcomes for its baseball program whose marketing budget was virtually nonexistent.

GSU Sports Marketing Resource Constraints

Table 1 provides the attendance figures for the three highest attended sports at GSU (football, men's basketball, baseball) for the 2007-2008 season. All three sports generate revenue for the athletic department. The football team obviously plays in a larger stadium (capacity 18,000) and can therefore accommodate more fans than the baseball stadium (capacity 3,000). On the other hand, in any given season, GSU may host only five to seven football games, while the baseball team generally plays anywhere from 30-35 home games. Therefore, in a given year, the total attendance for football and baseball could be somewhat similar, especially if the baseball team were to reach capacity crowds.

Table 1

Georgia Southern Home Attendance for Football, Baseball and Basketball

2007-2008 Season	Home Games	Total Attendance	Average Attendance
Football	6	113,551	18,925
Men's Basketball	13	32,152	2,473
Baseball	31	40,929	1,320

One of the challenges of marketing GSU baseball is the constraint of resources within the athletic department. Currently, the athletics budget allocates approximately \$15,000 for the marketing of football, but nothing on other sports, including baseball. For the baseball team, marketing revenue is generated using a variety of methods. One method calls for a company or business to donate a specific amount of money which will then be split

among football, men's basketball, women's basketball, and baseball. GSU Sports Marketing Director Brent Jones stated, "If these businesses can see the billboards, and if they are fans of Georgia Southern Athletics, then they are more likely to purchase a sponsorship package for these sports." Even with this plan, Jones believes football still accounts for 75-80% of all athletic department sponsorships.

Another method of revenue generation for the baseball budget is through VIP suite rentals. The VIP suite can be rented for \$300 for a weekday game and \$500 for a weekend game and is often an effective way for businesses to entertain potential clients and/or reward current customers. In fact, Jones stated, the VIP suite rented for 29 of 32 home games in 2007 (B. Jones, personal communication, January 3, 2009).

Baseball Data for Case Analysis

Stadium

Completed in 2005, J.I. Clements Stadium boasts a seating capacity of 3,000 spectators and several other amenities not typically found in collegiate baseball stadiums belonging to schools of its size (GSU student enrollment is approximately 17,500): a Champions Room and VIP suites. The stadium's Champions Room, located on the main concourse of the stadium, provides a place for companies and private groups to hold special meetings. The VIP Suite has a seating capacity of 27 with a party room inside and club seating outside the suite. The stadium itself has the capacity to accommodate 30 media members and has a booth for television coverage as well as separate spaces for home and visitor radio coverage. Finally, the scoreboard added in 2008 provides clear graphics including a new digital message display board.

Table 2

Top 40 NCAA Division I Schools Ranked By Average Baseball Home Attendance

<i>Team</i>	<i>Dates</i>	<i>Attendance</i>	<i>Avg</i>
1. LSU	41	311,187	7,590
2. Arkansas	32	222,985	6,968
3. Florida St.	38	186,879	4,918
4. Texas	30	179,282	5,976
5. Texas A&M	42	176,723	4,208
6. Mississippi St.	29	174,223	6,008
7. South Carolina	34	161,761	4,758
8. Mississippi	33	155,489	4,712
9. Wichita St.	34	141,715	4,168
10. Tulane	39	140,402	3,600
11. Clemson	30	140,040	4,668
12. Nebraska	31	136,120	4,391
13. Rice	36	134,150	3,726
14. Arizona St.	43	131,244	3,052
15. Alabama	27	120,254	4,454
16. Miami (Fla.)	41	107,009	2,610
17. Southern Miss.	31	106,040	3,421
18. Florida	31	96,235	3,104
19. East Caro.	30	93,490	3,116
20. Georgia	37	93,152	2,518
21. Baylor	30	92,152	3,072
22. Auburn	35	84,879	2,425
23. Cal St. Fullerton	37	78,692	2,127
24. Stanford	35	73,453	2,099
25. Hawaii	27	71,293	2,640
26. TCU	33	63,959	1,938
27. Houston	33	63,068	1,911
28. Kentucky	29	61,889	2,134
29. Virginia	37	58,594	1,584
30. Texas Tech	25	56,556	2,262
31. North Carolina	35	51,347	1,467
32. Oklahoma St.	31	50,400	1,626
33. Long Beach St.	32	50,126	1,566
34. Georgia Tech	33	49,859	1,511
35. Fresno St.	28	48,688	1,739
36. Stetson	29	47,334	1,632
37. La.-Lafayette	25	46,661	1,866
38. Ga. Southern	28	45,410	1,622
39. North Carolina St.	34	45,051	1,325
40. Tennessee	28	41,899	1,496

Attendance

Table 2 shows the Top 40 schools ranked by average baseball attendance from the 2008 season. In 2008, GSU ranked 38th in national Division I baseball average attendance. As shown in the table, the teams ranked highest are often from the largest athletic conferences (e.g., Southeastern Conference [SEC], Big XII Conference [Big XII], Big Ten Conference [Big Ten], and Atlantic Coast Conference [ACC]). These teams include Louisiana State University (LSU), The University of Arkansas (Arkansas), Mississippi State University (Mississippi State), the University of Texas (Texas), the University of Nebraska (Nebraska), The Ohio State University (Ohio State), the University of Georgia (Georgia), the University of Oklahoma (Oklahoma), the University of Minnesota (Minnesota) and North Carolina State University (NC State). Combined, these 10 schools have made 85 appearances at the College World Series in Omaha, Nebraska, and captured 18 national championships. However, not all schools listed in the Table 2 play in such conferences. Teams such as California State University-Fullerton (Cal State-Fullerton), the University of Louisiana-Lafayette (Louisiana-Lafayette), California State University-Fresno (Fresno State), Miami University (Miami-Ohio), and GSU remain consistent exceptions. Between these smaller conference schools are four NCAA National Championships (all won by Cal State-Fullerton) and 21 trips to the College World Series.

Given these figures, one significant challenge GSU faces when attempting to increase attendance at baseball games is its membership in the Southern Conference, a theoretically supported premise illustrated in and supported by sport marketing literature. In a study on motivations influencing attendance at college sporting events, James and Ross (2004) found factors of entertainment and skill to be the strongest motivators leading

to attendance at collegiate baseball games. In this light, one could estimate that fans believe baseball games in major athletic conferences to be the most attractive because they have the best entertainment and highest level of skill. In fact, according to Jones (B. Jones, personal communication, November 12, 2008), many fans mistakenly assume that all sports at Georgia Southern are classified the same way as the sport of football, since the football team competes in the NCAA's Football Championship Subdivision (formerly Division I-AA). While still a Division I conference, fans in the southeastern United States generally do not regard the talent of the players competing in the Southern Conference with as much esteem as the SEC or the ACC.

Perhaps another aspect of this challenge facing GSU involves the relative comparison fans make between GSU baseball and the other, more notable programs in the same state including the University of Georgia (1990 National Champions), Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) (3-Time College

World Series participant), and Columbus State University (2002 Division II National Champions and two-time Division II National Championship Runner-Up in 1986 and 2007).

Table 3 shows baseball attendance figures from the 2007 season for the 10 teams in the Southern Conference (arranged by highest average attendance). Clearly, the average attendance figures for The Citadel and Georgia Southern are more than twice the attendance figures for the next school in the list. Thus, despite the distinct possibility of the diminished esteem of the quality of baseball competition in the Southern Conference relative to other area institutions, GSU defies the attendance odds against it by successfully drawing fans to home baseball games relative to other teams in its conference.

Current Baseball Marketing Strategies

With a nearly nonexistent baseball marketing budget, GSU's sport marketers must be creative in their marketing strategies. As such, the marketing staff uses a database of season ticket holders for baseball, basketball and football (around 5,000 people) to distribute information regarding each upcoming baseball season. In addition, Jones and his staff often cross-promote baseball during football and basketball season with 30-second radio ads about the upcoming season and various baseball ticket packages available for interested fans. Additionally, the staff hands out schedule cards at special events, orchestrates special commercials with the baseball coach, and distributes a monthly marketing newsletter through e-mail blasts and Web site buttons on www.georgiasoutherneagles.com. Finally, the staff utilizes the baseball team's summer camps to promote the upcoming season to the youth in the area, targeting youths who participate in summer camps in anticipation that campers will approach their parents with information about baseball tickets.

Table 3

2007 Attendance Figures of Southern Conference Baseball Teams

Team	Games	Total Attendance	Average Attendance
Citadel	40	60,707	1,517
Georgia Southern	31	40,929	1,320
Western Carolina	27	16,127	597
Elon	28	11,228	401
Wofford	32	12,831	400
Coll. of Charleston	31	11,410	368
Furman	25	8,766	350
UNC-Greensboro	29	9,578	330
Appalachian State	24	3,949	164
Davidson	33	5,334	161

The Student Market

The current total enrollment at Georgia Southern University is approximately 17,500 students, 88% of which are undergraduates. To target these students, Jones' staff distributes flyers around campus publicizing upcoming baseball games. With the enrollment of Georgia Southern University continuing to rise and projected to surpass 25,000 by 2020, a well-strategized marketing plan targeting students will prove critical to student attendance at GSU athletic events.

The Family Market in Statesboro

While the college student market is often hard to penetrate, families can sometimes be an easier target market in a small community like Statesboro with a population of 56,000. Jones and his staff constantly make concerted efforts to show that a trip to the ballpark can be an inexpensive day of fun for the entire family. Appearances by the school mascot GUS the Eagle often provide talking points for children of all ages. Moreover, kids 12 years and under can become members of the Junior Eagle Club, which means these youth are admitted to the games for free and are entitled to run around the bases after all Sunday home games. The ultimate outcome, however, is the potential generation of positive word-of-mouth that GSU stands to gain from an enjoyable family experience (Swanson, Gwinner, Larson, & Janda, 2003).

Saturday Baseball Tailgates

In 2008, the GSU sports marketing initiated Saturday Baseball Tailgates for the 2008 baseball season. During five selected Saturday baseball games, GSU sports marketing and select area businesses co-hosted free tailgates for 500-700 fans one hour before the start of GSU baseball games. Since promotions' success in impact attendance at sporting events is well documented, (McDonald & Rascher, 2000) Jones and his staff expect this to be a popular offering in future seasons.

The Role of Student Volunteerism in Baseball Marketing

Given these financial and resource constraints in the GSU athletic department, appreciable outcomes greatly needed and have been successfully generated through the help of student volunteers from the GSU sport management program. Volunteerism has occurred primarily through two main groups: students taking a sales class in the sport management program, and a student-based group called Grand Slam Marketing (GSM).

Students in the GSU sport management program at Georgia Southern University may opt to enroll in a course involving the ticket sales process in the sport industry. Every fall semester, approximately 25 students enroll in this sales class and learn the intricacies of selling the sport product. Students are first exposed to current literature involving the sales process, the nature of consumer response to sales, prospecting for leads, phone script development, overcoming obstacles, closing the sale, and other sales principles such as cross-selling, database marketing, and upselling. During the course, students have the opportunity to role-play with salespeople from both intercollegiate and professional athletics sales staffs. Then, in conjunction with the GSU athletics ticket office, students practice their skills in a five-week ticket sales campaign targeting men's and women's basketball and baseball ticket sales. Each student receives a partial database of former season ticket holders for basketball, baseball, and football that they use when making initial calls. By asking for names of friends who are sports fans, students then attempt to extend their partial database to use in future weeks of the sales campaign. At the end of the semester, the students who sold the most products are presented with many different awards ranging from cash prizes to official GSU athletic gear.

Figure 1 displays the baseball product code sheet used by students during their sales presentations and includes full-season ticket packages, as well as 10-game and 20-game flex ticket packages. The scripts that students use during the calls coincide with these products. If a fan is not interested in a full-season package, students are encouraged to sell a partial season package. In 2007, the class generated over \$20,000 in ticket sales for the baseball program alone, which amounted to over 400 season tickets.

One very popular product sold as part of the class is called the Ballpark Bound plan, which essentially allows for a fan to purchase season tickets that are then distributed to local non-profit groups for use by underprivileged children in the area. Some groups receiving Ballpark Bound tickets include the Joseph Home for Boys, the Boys and Girls Club, and Statesboro Middle and High schools. The long-term aim of the initiative is to generate grassroots interest in GSU baseball. In 2007, the class sold 83 Ballpark Bound season tickets

Figure 1

Baseball product sheet used in sales class

Eagle Baseball (BB)			
BB1	Reserved Adult	Premium Seating (1)	\$100
BB2	Reserved Youth	Premium Seating (12 and under) (1)	\$50
BB3	General Admission Adult	General Admission Seating (1)	\$70
BB4	General Admission Youth	General Admission Seating (1)	\$35
BB5	General Admission Fac/Staff/Sen	General Admission Seating (1)	\$60
BB6	Flex Plan (25 Games)	25 Games/Tickets	\$50
BB7	Flex Plan (10 Games)	10 Games/Tickets	\$30
BB8	Ballpark Bound	Charity Youth Season Ticket	\$35
BB9	Birthday Package	10 Tickets	\$50
BB10	Weekday Suite	Luxury Suite	\$300
BB11	Weekend Suite	Luxury Suite	\$500
BB12	Adult Single Game	Adult Single Game Ticket	\$8
BB13	Youth Single Game (12 and under)	Youth Single Game Ticket	\$4
Eagle Dugout (BB)			
BB12	Single Tier	Eagle Dugout	\$30
BB13	Double Tier	Eagle Dugout	\$60
BB14	Triple Tier	Eagle Dugout	\$125
BB15	Home Run	Eagle Dugout	\$250
BB16	Grand Slam	Eagle Dugout	\$500

valued at \$2,905, so there were roughly 2500 tickets distributed to kids in the area over the course of the season (83 season tickets multiplied by 31 home games).

GSM exists as the second critical student group assisting GSU Eagle Sports Marketing. This group is populated by roughly 20 volunteers per season (mostly sport management majors) under the direction of the sport management faculty. The mission of GSM is to provide an enjoyable and memorable fan experience to everyone attending GSU baseball games by performing three key functions: 1) increasing awareness of upcoming events in the student body and

community, 2) assisting with game-day sponsor activation and on-field promotional activities, and 3) operating and managing a retail outlet in the stadium concourse for the University bookstore (W. Dees, personal communication, April 1, 2009). First, students who are involved in the first function create and send out flyers, e-mail blasts, and announcements promoting upcoming baseball games on campus. This helps drive awareness of upcoming events and ultimately impacts attendance positively. Next, students assigned to the second function are responsible for sponsorship activation and on-field activities between innings. One of the more popular activities the students organize is a sumo wrestling contest where fans dress in Sumo wrestling costumes and wrestle each other for 2 minutes. Other activities conducted on the field are dizzy bat contests, build-a-burger promotions, and longest drive contests with plastic golf balls. All of these promotions are sponsored by particular businesses from the community at large and thus, represent sponsorship activation efforts by the volunteers. Additionally, students generate a host of marketing research in stadium that provides Eagle Sports Marketing with information on fan demographics and psychographics, sponsorship recognition, and how effective certain promotions were. The data is then used to inform marketing strategy for upcoming baseball seasons. In the third primary function of GSM, students manage a satellite retail store in the stadium concourse that contains licensed baseball merchandise and souvenirs. This third function directly generates additional revenue streams through a partnership with the University Bookstore.

Before GSM was established, the University Bookstore had no presence at the GSU baseball games. Costs to operate a satellite bookstore at the stadium (primarily paying bookstore employees' salaries) would offset any revenue generated by GSU merchandise sales. However,

with GSM volunteers staffing the retail store, these costs of staffing the booth are eliminated, and the financials are more justifiable to the University bookstore. In 2007, retail store in the baseball stadium concourse generated \$5,734 in revenue; in 2008, it generated revenues of \$4,022. This volunteer-based system has benefited GSM's members who gain valuable retail and marketing experience through their participation in the GSM organization. But more importantly, the efforts of the student volunteers truly do fulfill GSM's mission to provide an enjoyable and memorable fan experience, which ultimately reflects positively upon GSU sports marketing at large. Moreover, the baseball focused marketing efforts of GSU sports marketing are greatly enhanced by the cumulative work of the student volunteers in the GSM organization. Through the efforts of student volunteers, fans are now more entertained with on the field activities, there is heightened awareness of each upcoming baseball game, and the retail store creates both financial returns to the University and opportunities for fans to purchase related merchandise during the baseball games.

Conclusion

Given the current economic climate, resource constraints are quite commonplace for most companies, and much academic writing has focused on the processes through which resources, though limited, are converted into appreciable firm outcomes (Slotegraff, Moorman, & Inman, 2003). This case study is one example of innovation generated by the development of two volunteer groups staffed by sport management students who collectively assisted with the all aspects of promoting, marketing, selling for the baseball program. One group of student volunteers concentrated on stimulating ticket sales for baseball through their enrollment in a ticket sales class in a sport

management program and sold over \$20,000 of baseball tickets, which also included over \$3000 of season tickets donated to underprivileged children in the area. Another student volunteer group focused efforts on the marketing, promotions, and merchandising areas of the baseball program. In sum, this group improved the overall game-day experience for fans through on-field sponsorship activation between innings and increased awareness of upcoming baseball games.

According to Chelladurai (2006) people often volunteer for utilitarian reasons in hopes to gain valuable experience that can later be translated into attractive work experience. In this case, many students in the sales class and students in GSM achieved a utilitarian return on their volunteer efforts after graduation in the sense that they were more qualified to work in those particular areas of the sport industry. Since implementing the sales class in 2005, over 30 students who were enrolled in that class have received entry-level job offers in ticket sales or sponsorship sales in the sport industry. From the GSM side, many students have successfully found employment in marketing areas of minor league baseball and intercollegiate athletics as a result of their involvement with the volunteer organization. Some students have even found sponsorship activation to be of interest and discovered that their work with GSM was considered by sport industry managers to be a highlight on their resume.

As articulated by Doherty (2006), rates of volunteering are declining, but an ever-increasing demand for it exists within the sport

industry. Indeed, within athletic departments at many universities, resource constraints make student help virtually a necessity. The cumulative effort of sport management faculty and students at Georgia Southern University provides an example to industry leaders of how this problem can be handled in a creative, innovative way that provides tangible benefits for all stakeholders involved.

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A SYSTEMS-BASED THINKING & LEARNING JOURNAL

Successfully Marketing a Collegiate Baseball Program Within Resource Constraints: A Special Case of Volunteerism

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Research Problem / Purpose

Given resource constraints in marketing budgets of athletic departments, many intercollegiate athletics marketers often face a difficult choice between marketing all sports fairly and marketing only those sports that would provide the highest return on investment of marketing dollars. In many intercollegiate athletic departments, the resource constraints are so impregnable that managers often are forced to rely on a host of volunteers to accomplish the daily operational tasks. This case study explains the creative efforts made at one university to incorporate student volunteers when marketing, promoting, and selling tickets to collegiate baseball. This case provides examples of how intercollegiate athletic marketing directors can capitalize on student help to greatly enhance the outcomes for fans, students, and other stakeholders in the athletic department.

Issues

Volunteerism in sport has recently received greater attention as the sport industry increasingly becomes more dependent upon this labor segment. While some scholars have focused research on the motivations of volunteers at particular events or sports, Chelladurai (2006) outlines three more general reasons why people tend to volunteer for sporting events. First, volunteers often gain some benefit directly from their participation (i.e., utilitarian outcomes). Second, people often volunteer for social incentives derived from interpersonal relationships gained during or through the experience (i.e., affective incentives). Finally, people volunteer in some instances because of a desire to do something positive or because of a shared belief in organizational missions, values, or goals (i.e., normative incentives). While motives of the student volunteers in this current case are not altogether known, all three motives could possibly be represented, i.e., students could join the two critical student volunteer groups based upon a desire to help the baseball team (normative), develop existing relationships with other sport management majors who are in the group (affective), or capitalize upon a means to develop their resumes (utilitarian). Regardless of their motivation(s), this case examines the innovation in one intercollegiate athletic department that utilized volunteerism to generate appreciable outcomes for its baseball program whose marketing budget was virtually nonexistent.

Summary

Volunteerism at Georgia Southern University has occurred primarily through two main groups: (1) students taking a sales class in the sport management program, and (2) a student-based group called Grand Slam Marketing (GSM).

Students in the sport management program at Georgia Southern University may opt to enroll in a course involving the ticket sales process in the sport industry. Each fall semester, approximately 25 students enroll in this sales class to learn the intricacies of selling the sport product. Students are first exposed to current literature involving the sales process, the nature of consumer response to sales, prospecting for leads, phone script development, overcoming obstacles, closing the sale, and other sales principles such as cross-selling, database marketing, and upselling. During the course, students have the opportunity to role-play with salespeople from both intercollegiate and professional athletics sales staffs. Then, in conjunction with the GSU athletics ticket office, students practice their skills in a five-week ticket sales campaign targeting men's basketball, women's basketball, and baseball ticket sales. Each student receives a partial database of former season ticket holders for basketball, baseball, and football to use when making initial calls. By asking for names of friends who are sports fans, students then attempt to extend their partial database to use in future weeks of the sales campaign. At the end of the semester, the students who sold the most products are presented with many different awards ranging from cash prizes to official GSU athletic gear. Students use specific product code sheets during their sales presentations that included full-season ticket packages, as well as 10-game and 20-game flex ticket packages. The scripts that students use during the calls coincide with these products. If a fan is not interested in a full-season package, students are encouraged to sell a partial season package. In 2007, the class generated over \$20,000 in ticket sales for the baseball program alone, which amounted to over 400 season tickets. One very popular product sold as part of the class is called the Ballpark Bound plan, which essentially allows for a fan to purchase season tickets that are then distributed to local non-profit groups for use by underprivileged children in the area. Some groups receiving Ballpark Bound tickets include the Joseph Home for Boys, the Boys and Girls Club, and Statesboro Middle and High schools. The long-term aim of the initiative is to generate grassroots interest in GSU baseball. In 2007, the class sold 83 Ballpark Bound season tickets valued at \$2,905, which distributed roughly 2500 tickets to area children over the course of the season (83 season tickets multiplied by 31 home games).

Grand Slam Marketing (GSM) exists as the second critical student group assisting GSU sports marketing. This group is populated by roughly 20 volunteers per season (mostly sport management majors) under the direction of the sport management faculty. The mission of GSM is to provide an enjoyable and memorable fan experience to everyone attending GSU baseball games by performing three key functions: 1) increasing awareness of upcoming events in the student body and community, 2) assisting with game-day sponsor activation and on-field promotional activities, and 3) operating and managing a retail outlet in the stadium concourse for the University bookstore. First, students who are involved in the first function create and send out flyers, e-mail blasts, and announcements promoting upcoming baseball games on campus. This helps drive awareness of upcoming events and ultimately impacts attendance positively. Next, students assigned to the second function are responsible for sponsorship activation and on-field activities between innings. One of the more popular activities the students organize is a sumo wrestling contest where fans dress in sumo wrestling costumes and wrestle each other for two minutes. Other activities conducted on the field are dizzy bat contests, build-a-burger promotions, and longest drive contests with plastic golf balls. All of these promotions are sponsored by particular businesses from the community at large and thus, represent sponsorship activation efforts by the volunteers. Additionally, students generate considerable amounts of in-stadium marketing research that provides GSU sports marketing with information on fan demographics and psychographics, sponsorship recognition, and promotion effectiveness. Data is then used to create marketing strategy for upcoming baseball seasons. In the third primary function of GSM, students manage a satellite retail store in the stadium concourse that sells licensed baseball merchandise and souvenirs. This third function directly generates additional revenue streams through a partnership with the University Bookstore. Before GSM was established, the University Bookstore had no presence at the GSU baseball games. Costs to operate a satellite bookstore at the stadium (primarily paying bookstore employees' salaries) would offset any revenue generated by GSU merchandise sales. However, with GSM volunteers staffing the retail store, these costs of staffing the booth are eliminated, and the financials are more justifiable to the University bookstore. In 2007, retail store

in the baseball stadium concourse generated \$5,734 in revenue; in 2008, it generated revenues of \$4,022. This volunteer-based system has benefited GSM's members who gain valuable retail and marketing experience through their participation in the GSM organization. More importantly, however, the efforts of the student volunteers fulfill GSM's mission to provide an enjoyable and memorable fan experience, which ultimately reflects positively upon GSU's sports marketing and intercollegiate athletics department. Moreover, the baseball-focused marketing efforts of GSU sports marketing are greatly enhanced by the cumulative work of the student volunteers in the GSM organization. Through the efforts of student volunteers, fans are now more entertained with on-field activities, awareness of each upcoming baseball game is heightened, and the retail store creates both financial returns to the University and opportunities for fans to purchase GSU merchandise during the baseball games.

Analysis and Discussion

According to Chelladurai (2006) people often volunteer for utilitarian reasons in hopes to gain valuable experiences that can later be translated into a vita of work experiences that potential employers find attractive. In this case, many students in the sales class and in GSM achieved a utilitarian return on their volunteer efforts after graduation in the sense that they were more qualified to work in particular areas of the sport industry as a result of their experiences. Since implementing the sales class in 2005, over 30 students who were enrolled in that class have received entry-level job offers in ticket sales or sponsorship sales in the sport industry. From the GSM side, many students have successfully found employment in marketing areas of minor league baseball and intercollegiate athletics as a result of their involvement with the volunteer organization. Some students have even found sponsorship activation to be of interest and discovered that their work with GSM was considered by sport industry managers to be a highlight on their resumes.

Many scholars note that rates of volunteering are declining, but increased demands exist for it within the sport industry. Indeed, within athletic departments at many universities, resource constraints make student help virtually a necessity. The cumulative efforts of the sport management faculty and students at Georgia Southern University provide an example to sport industry managers of how this problem can be handled in a creative and innovative way and one that provides tangible benefits for all stakeholders involved.