Sport Commissions and Amateur Sports Research of Case Study

Chen, Chao-Chien, Assistant Professor, Department of Physical Education, Asia University, Taiwan
Hsu, Chih-Hsien, Associate Professor, Department of Leisure and Recreational Management, Asia University

ABSTRACT

This paper explores different avenues for small-scale sports tourism in the direction of amateur sports tournaments and how establishing a sport commission can help. It focuses on recreational sport tournaments for adults and youth by examining a case study dealing with the organization of a sports commission and the economic impact it has resulted on the community. The reason for discussing sports tournaments is because they are fairly low-investment opportunities that small communities can explore, with large returns for the resources that are already present.

Keyword: Commission, Amateur

INTRODUCTION

Sport is one of the fastest growing industries in the United States, jumping from twenty-fifth largest to the eleventh largest (Kelly, 2000). This jump is fueled somewhat by the sport tourism sector. Sport tourism itself is spreading like “wild fire.” There are numerous vacation options to choose from, like scuba diving tours, sport themed cruises, and fantasy camps (Gibson, 1998). The sport tourist is categorized by their motivation and their activities. These categories are divided up as follows: nostalgic sport tourist, event sport tourist, and the active sport tourist (Gibson, 1998), which is a key in targeting the right market for small community sport tourism.

The economic returns associated with this industry are immense. The mega events of sports such as the Olympics and Super Bowl are large providers of economic impact to the host cities, but you do not have to be a big time city to reap the benefits. There are many opportunities for small communities to share a “piece of the pie” by hosting adult and youth tournaments with the help of local sport commissions (Kelly, 2000). The role these sport commissions play are very important in the economic impact a sporting event can have on a small community.

By focusing on amateur sports, these communities can take advantage of a growing portion of the sports industry. There has been a steady growth in youth participation in team sports (JOPERD, 1999; Rasmussen 2000), and the increase of adults participating in a more active lifestyle (Gibson, 1998; Green & Chalip, 1998). With more children participating in traveling teams, parents are forced to plan vacations around tournament dates and the same goes for adults choosing to pick sport based vacations (Gibson, 1998). There is more than enough opportunity for small communities to capitalize on these emerging trends in sport. The purpose of this paper is to explore different avenues for small-scale sports tourism in the direction of amateur sports tournaments and how establishing a sport commission can help. The paper will focus more on recreational sport tournaments for adults and youth by examining a case study dealing with the organization of a sport commission and the economic impact it that has resulted on the community. The reason for discussing sport tournaments is because they are fairly low investment opportunities that small communities can explore with large returns with the resources that are already present.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Parson (1990) examines the importance that American place on sport and how it is becoming a very profitable industry. He looks at sport spectators, recreational sports, and sports gambling as determinants that “sport is for sale.” He alludes that sport will never be same after “dollarmania.” Parson argues that in 1988, Americans spent $3.3 billion dollars on sport spectatorship alone, which only accounted for 6.6% of what was spent on sport that year. Recreational
sports were where Americans spent about $48 billion dollars, which is a result of the increase of active lifestyles in America. The third category of sport spending is with sports gambling and that amount was $7.4 billion. He goes on to ask the question “What is the price of the dollar in sport?” He then looks at several different situations that have helped the dollar influence the future of sport. Parson concludes by stating that there is a large amount of money in the sport industry, but that money may buy out “true sport” and make it just another product on the shelf made to turn a profit. In the next article we look at the positive side to the very wealthy sport industry.

Kelly (2000) boasts that the sport tourism industry has the potential to lift a small city economy. He explains that there is plenty of opportunity for small communities to take advantage of from the growing “craze” of sport. He discusses the role of sport commissions and how their role is vital in marketing and being able to organize the sporting events, also that sport commissions should team up with the convention and visitors bureau to be able to exploit all the resources in the community. He also mentions that the size of the community is not a factor when it comes to the ability in making an impact on their economy, it just takes creativity and commitment. The highest returns on investment come with adult softball and youth soccer tournaments, and being able to understand who their target market are for this segment.

To help identify who the participants are for sport tourism Gibson’s (1998) article opens with a description of sport tourism and defines the different types of sport tourist, and profiles the active sport tourist. The active sport tourist is defined as the participant, who travels to take part in sport. This category is then subdivided into two other categories, which are the “Activity Participants,” who participate in sport for relaxation, and the “Hobbyists,” who travel to take part in sport competition. She goes on to discuss the increasing opportunities that are available for the active tourist, such as health and fitness resorts, adventure tours, and fitness themed cruises. She then profiles the active tourist as being between the ages of 25-34 with household income between $50,000-75,000, and primarily educated males, and discusses that wealth and social class lends a hand in sport participation. Gibson then takes a look at the future of sport tourism research by suggesting that the gender, race and social class are very good indicators of who is likely to choose a sport-based vacation.

As mentioned in Gibson’s article (1998), people are participating in more active lifestyle, because of many different motivations. Alexandris, Grouios, & Tsorbatzoudis (2002) investigated what constraints influence their motivation and participation in recreational sports. Their study examines the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural dimensions of constraint and looks at their hierarchy when it comes to motivation in recreational sport. Intrinsic motivation means the person will voluntarily participate in the activity, and extrinsic motivation is when the individual participates for a reward or to identify with the importance of participation. This is what the Green and Chalip (1998) article is hinting at by the women going to this tournament to relate and identify with their own social group. This study goes on to explain different combinations of the constraints that affect participation positively and negatively and how that may lead to amotivation. The study then concludes that its results support several of the accepted theories and models of motivation.

Green and Chalip (1998) help explain who is participating by exploring the motivations of the active sport tourist traveling to participate in their chosen sport by examining a women’s flag football tournament. The authors explain the increasing growth in active lifestyles and how it is not only the younger population, who are participating, but also the older segment is starting to stay more active. This trend is leading to more vacations that are based on or around sport. The paper presents the ideas that the active sport tourist does not only travel for the competition, but also to be able to identify with the subculture of their sport. As in the case of the women football players, they enjoy being able to socialize with people who share their same interests during social events sponsored by the tournament organizers. They travel as teams, and along with these teams comes family and friends, which in turn bring along more economic impact for the community hosting the event. In all, the authors suggest that a key to a good tournament is providing the opportunity for the participants to be able to share their subculture by escaping their daily routines.

As stated before, sport tourism can really make an economic impact as mentioned in the article “York Makes Spending a Sport.” Reardon (2002) displays the affect that sport tourism has had on York County. They have gone after sport to really make some money. Reardon explains how the sport commission and visitor bureau have worked together in constructing sporting facilities to help attract sporting events that would impact their economy. He also
shows the result of the new ice arena generating about $1.5 million during an ice skating event. As does Kelly (2000) suggest, York County is focusing on adult and youth sports to be a large market they can take advantage of. The article concludes that the community’s investment in the facilities is starting a trend in neighboring counties.

To be able to be successful like York County, there has to be an understanding of the economic patterns of sporting events. Crompton whose study points out some of these patterns to look out for when hosting an event and understanding how the event actually affects the economy. The article describes the findings of the study of 30 sporting events in seven cities. He found that when some of these cities were estimating their returns from the events they were calculating them incorrectly, which lead to a misunderstanding of the economic effect of the events. In most case the positive effects were underestimated. The study found that adult softball and youth soccer events were the most successful, which is consistent with other articles. It also found that the more out-of-town participants, the larger the economic impact would be. What was also found that on average an adult softball participant would impact the economy about $100 a day, and that about 21 people were associated with each softball team including family and friends. Crompton sums up some of the emerging patterns that are arising with sporting events and their affect on the local economy.

As evident in the other articles, youth sports are an increasing market for sport tourism. This is true because there has been a constant growth in youth participation in team sports over recent years as explained by The Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance. From 1990 to 1999 there was a 12.6% increase in youth participating in team sports, but also the large increase of female participation had a significant impact on this figure. For example, they mentioned a 27% increase of female playing soccer. They also found an increase in X-sports, such as skateboarding and inline skating. In their study they concluded that there is a constant growth of youth participation in sports.

This growth of youth participation in sports is consistent with what is found by Rasmussen (2000). She speaks about the evolving world of youth sport and how the kids are put under pressure to win, but it does state some facts that are very interesting such as there is an increase in organized youth sport, because of the unsafe environments that are surrounding today’s youth such as drugs and violence. She states that over 2 million kids play in club sports, which are the traveling teams that go to tournaments. Rasmussen goes on to discuss the “clique and identity” issues facing youth that are participating in sports.

As mentioned in previous articles, when the adult teams and youth teams travel they bring along friends and family. As discussed Rosenblate and Russell (1975) explore some motivations and problems of family vacations. They speak about how family relationships on the road are less tension filled, because the get away from their daily routines. But on the other hand they explain that this increased togetherness may cause territorial conflicts between the family members. Another problem that may arise while on vacation is the role of each individual, because it is not clearly defined like it is in the home setting. The authors also explore the ideals and values associated with vacationing, and states that families have stronger ideals about their vacation then other more important things. They conclude no matter what problems may happen the majority of vacations taken are remembered as good vacations, because people tend to forget about the problems, and remember only the good times.

CASE STUDY

The Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission (MASC) is a success when it comes to bringing economic impact from sports to local communities. The Minnesota State Legislature established MASC in 1987. The role given to MASC was to help bring economic impact to Minnesota by using the avenue of amateur sports. Since 1987, MASC has contributed to $376,708 million dollars of economic impact to the state of Minnesota. The MASC’s has accomplished this by focusing on its three main goals, which are as follows: 1. Create economic impact development through amateur sport, 2. Create maximum opportunity for sport participation for all Minnesotans, and 3. To establish Minnesota as a national model for the Olympic and amateur sport movement.

The MASC has recognized that by helping organize local sport commissions throughout Minnesota it gives these small communities an opportunity to benefit from sport tourism. The way they do this is by developing annual sport
tournaments that are hosted in their state of the art facilities located throughout the state. One of their biggest tournaments is the “Schwan’s USA Cup: International Youth Soccer Tournament,” which is hosted at their flagship facility, the National Sports Center, located in Blaine, MN. During the seven-day tournament held in 2000, there were 686 teams that included 95 teams from foreign countries and 249 teams from 34 other states. The daily attendance for the tournament was 27,980 people. With that amount of participants the tournament was the largest amateur sport event in the state of Minnesota and boasted a gross economic impact of $21.8 million dollars of which $15.6 millions of it is made up of out-of-state participants. The secret for its success was its size and the weeklong duration, which forced participants to look for lodging in the three surrounding cities, Roseville, Brooklyn Center, and Plymouth. Many of the participants vacation in Minnesota either before or after the tournament, whose economic impact is not included in the figure above. This is only one of twelve major events that are hosted by the MASC. The MASC hosts events in 14 sports, which includes sport as golf, broomball, and figure skating.

Another key to the MASC’s success are its state of the art sport facilities. It has the resources of 11 facilities, which can host a variety of sport events. The National Sports Center, which hosts the Schwan’s USA Cup, is the major contributor to the economy by bringing an average of $24.861 million dollars to Minnesota. The facility covers over 602 acres that are divided into 52 soccer fields, a 12,000 seat outdoor stadium, a 250-meter cycling velodrome, an indoor sports hall, which includes a cafeteria and residence hall, 2 ice arenas, and an 18-hole putting course that is home to the National Youth Golf Center. With the ability to offer a wide range of sports, it is not a surprise that this facility is able to achieve an annual operating profit of more than $100,000 dollars a year since 1991.

The MASC should be a role model to all communities that want to tap into the vast economic benefit of hosting sports events. Just like the MASC, local sport commissions can generate a large amount of money, but the primary goal in doing so is attracting out-of-town money by organizing tournaments or events that require multiple days of competition and encouraging vacationing before or after the tournament or event. This concept can be applied at any level from the small town to the big city. It is just a matter of having a sport commission that utilizes its resources in hosting these sports events.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

With everyone trying to take advantage of the booming sport tourism industry, where do the small towns and cities fit in? The towns that have no college sports or professional teams near by, how do they share the wealth of sport? Most of these small towns do not have million dollar stadiums, what do they have to offer? The segment of amateur sport is where their niche is located. One way to achieve this is to establish a local sport commission that can work closely with the convention and visitors bureau to attract this segment of the market (Kelly, 2000).

Who makes up this segment of the market? The “hobbyist” does. This is the active sport tourist who travels to compete in different tournaments (Gibson, 1998). Gibson (1998) profiles the active sport tourist as being primarily male, between the ages of 25-34, educated, and wealthy. This does make up a large percentage of the market, but it is not the only group to pursue. As seen in the Green and Chalip’s article (1998), there is a very large following of women in flag football, which holds tournaments at the state and national levels. Also, youth athletes are very much “hobbyists” as well. There are about 2 million youths participating in organized sports, including traveling teams (Rasmussen, 2000; JOPERD, 1999). We understand that the children do not make the final decisions, but what parent does not support their children’s hobbies? As written in the Wall Street Journal (April 19, 2002), more and more family vacations are being planned around the children’s traveling team schedule. Adult “hobbyists” are doing the same thing; they are using these weekend tournaments as mini-vacations.

Now that we know who the segment is lets find out what some of their motivations are. People have always traveled for leisure. Vacations are a part of the American way of life; it has been engrained in our society (Rosenblate & Russell, 1975). What better way for a “hobbyist” to relax and travel then to participate in a very competitive tournament with some of his/her closest friends. Green and Chalip (1998) present the idea that most of these participants travel the long distances just to be able to identify themselves with their own sport subculture. To some
people finding importance in their sport and social acceptance is motivation enough (Alexandris, Tsorbate & Grouios, 2002). There is evidence that the tournament itself may not be of the highest quality, but because of the good time the participants have socializing, it makes it a good tournament (Green & Chalip, 1998). The same is true for youth sport, the children enjoy making friends and traveling, but so do the parents. This is very important idea to hold on to when it comes to hosting these types of tournaments, as we shall see later on.

When targeting these “hobbyists” what needs to be kept in mind is that most of these participants travel with family and friends (Green & Chalip, 1998; Crompton 1999). Softball teams in Crompton’s study (1999) traveled with an average of 21 people, including family and friends. The average daily economic impact was $100 per participant in the softball tournament (Crompton, 1999). Also, as stated before children do not travel by themselves they bring their parents and siblings, which means increased hot dog and souvenir sales at these tournaments. With keeping these trends in mind lets look at what the role of the sport commission is and how it can take advantage of the target market, the “hobbyist.”

As seen in the case study, a sport commission can be a source of large economic impact at any level. Kelly (2000) believes that the emergence of these local sport commissions have help boost sport tourism. The job of the sport commission is to handle the marketing and organizing of the of the sports event along with partnering with the convention and visitor’s bureau to advertise what the local community has to offer. By seeking funding from the local government many sport commissions raise the funds needed to construct sport facilities, as in the case with the Minnesota Amateur Sport Commission (Kelly, 2000; Reardon 2002). But the community does not have to have a new facility to be able to benefit from sport. It just takes some “creativity and hard work” to “share some of the pie” (Kelly, 2000).

The sport commissions needs to be able to host and attract tournaments that will leave a significant economic impact on the local community. There are three key factors that were evident in the case study. The first was that multi-day sports events that required overnight stay had the largest impact, as is consistent with the Crompton article (1999). The second is the size, the community would like to host a large event, but most make sure that it has adequate resources to do so, because this could lead to negative exposure and less growth in the future. The third was to try to lure participants either before or after the tournament to try to capitalize on their spending. But the most important of all is to make sure the participants are enjoying the tournament not only from the competition side, but from the social side as well. Like in Green and Chalip’s article (1998), social gatherings for the participants are a good way to maximize their experience and spending while in town, which makes a successful tournament. Also following the trends in what sports are growing in active participation. For example, youth soccer and adult softball tournaments are the sports that creating the largest economic impact for the host community (Crompton, 1999), which makes them good places to start for newly established sport commissions.

**CONCLUSION**

Sports are a part of American society, and will be forever. Americans spend billions of dollars annually by either watching sports or participating in sports (Parson, 1990). It is a foundation for identity. This is why people are beginning to choose sport as a vacation option, especially if it is just a weekend trip. It allows them to let go of their problems and control their own fate (Green & Chalip, 1998), while taking a short break from their daily routine. This is a good reason why amateur sports are a very prosperous market niche to pursue. If a small community and their sport commission can attract this market segment it will be an unbelievable source of economic benefit. They must establish a good relationship with their community and local businesses and start off small. The community does not have to invest in some huge sport facility right a way. If it establishes a reputation as a good sports town, with a quality tournament then it will grow by itself into an amateur sport powerhouse like the Minnesota Athletic Sport Commission. The sport industry is a land of opportunity for sport commissions and their local communities that are trying to generate economic impact from sport.
REFERENCES


