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## **Welcome to the Journal of Contemporary Issues in Sport**

**Wonyoung Kim<sup>1</sup>, Yong-Chae Rhee<sup>2</sup>, and Mark Vermillion<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Wichita State University, <sup>2</sup>Virginia Commonwealth University

### **Why the Journal of Contemporary Issues in Sport**

The *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Sport (JCIS)* is a bi-annual, peer-reviewed, scholarly journal dedicated to advancing knowledge and practice of sport management and related disciplines. The mission of the JCIS is to bridge the gap between academic research and practical application to create an accessible platform that can serve as a forum to share ideas, evidence, and practical strategies with the intention of addressing the complex challenges faced by the sport industry. As sport broadens into a global domain, the demand for rigorous scholarship that can connect various theories and practical applications has never been more crucial. Sport management is no longer limited to an aspect of team operations, sales, ticketing, events, or sponsorship; rather, it is a dynamic field that intersects culture, technology, society, economics, education, and governance. The sport industry, now a multi-billion-dollar global industry sector, increasingly requires data-driven insights, socially responsible engagements, and strategically creative solutions. JCIS provides a forum for both sport management scholars and industry practitioners to examine critical issues, inform dialogue on emerging challenges, and contribute to advancing meaningful solutions meant to generate critical impact within both academic and professional practices within sport and related industries.

### **Shifting Landscape in the Contemporary Sport Industry**

The sport industry is facing never-before-faced challenges and opportunities that emphasize the vital need for rigorous research. Technological innovations, including but not limited to the utilization of artificial intelligence, data analytics, immersive fan engagement, wearable technologies, and interactive and personalized digital experiences (e.g., streaming), have been revolutionizing the landscape of decision-making processes among various stakeholders (e.g., athletes, teams, and organizations). At the same time, sport continues as a crucial social institution, influencing issues in inclusion, social capital, activism, and community development. The increasing emphasis on a culture of governance and ethics (e.g., name, image, and likeness) in intercollegiate sport, ensuring athlete welfare and mental well-being, or promoting transparency in international governing organizations, necessitates critical and practical scholarly examinations. Further, the globalization of sport has broadened the size of potential markets, demanding critical attention for event and facility management, sustainability, and sport tourism. To successfully adapt to these industry changes, demands rigorous analysis supported by empirical evidence that remains relevant to a wide range of internal and external stakeholders. JCIS hopes to curate an opportunity for these discussions, ensuring that research not only contributes to theoretical advancement in sport management and related disciplines but also provides practical implications in an ever-changing sport ecosystem.

### **A Multidimensional Forum on Scholarship to Facilitate Practical Advancement**

JCIS invites a wide range of manuscripts on contemporary subjects across sport management and related fields. Areas of emphasis include, but are not limited to:

- Sport business and management, including marketing, sponsorship, branding, fan engagement, and revenue strategies.
- Social, psychological, and cultural foundations in sport.
- Governance, ethics, and legal issues in sport.
- Leadership, education, and coaching practices in sport.
- Communication and public relations in sport.
- Sport tourism and event management.
- Data analytics and technology adoption in sport.
- Global and comparative perspectives on sport ecosystems.

The JCIS embraces a wide range of methodological approaches, and it welcomes studies that employ quantitative, qualitative, mixed-method, case study, and interdisciplinary approaches. The JCIS encourages creative research capable of addressing multifaceted challenges in the sport and related industries.

### **Establishing Bridges Between Theory and Practice**

One of the fundamental goals of JCIS is to provide the linkage between research in sport management and related disciplines and practical application. Disappointingly, academic findings often remain confined within the setting of scholarly circles, which often results in the lack of application of examined solutions within industry settings. JCIS aims to bridge the disparity by emphasizing practical implications, creative problem-solving, and reader-friendly deliveries of the manuscripts, so that the JCIS can become a valuable resource for scholars, students, and professionals. For authors, JCIS provides a platform to disseminate thorough and meaningful research in a clear and concise format to make the manuscripts more accessible and impactful. Meanwhile, the journal itself serves as a reliable reference point for all readers, providing rigorously tested and practical insights regarding current scholarship, industry-relevant trends, and innovative ideas for informing practice and evidence-based implications.

### **Looking Ahead**

As sport continues to grow and evolve, JCIS is committed to advancing sport management knowledge reflecting the contemporary issues and trends in the sport and related industries. Through fostering discussions across various disciplines, facilitating collaboration between scholars and practitioners, and addressing current and timely challenges, JCIS aims to be a leading voice in sport management scholarship. We encourage scholars, educators, and practitioners to participate in our missions as authors, reviewers, and/or readers. We strongly believe that together we can positively impact both the scholarship and the professional practice in sport management and related disciplines.

## **Exploring Esports Spectator Motivations through a Market Segmentation Approach**

**Ju Young Lee<sup>1</sup>, Aaron Alston<sup>1</sup>, Minkyoo Lee<sup>2</sup>, Jinwook Chung<sup>3</sup>, and Jun-sung Kim<sup>4</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

Previous studies have provided valuable insights into understanding esports consumer motivations. However, their findings are limited due to constraints in the motivation scales used. To address this, the current study adopted the Motivation Scale of Esports Spectatorship (MSES) developed by Qian et al. (2019) to examine esports spectators' motivations across different segmentation variables, specifically esports genres and psychological attachments. This study focused on three esports genres: First-Person Shooters (FPS), sports-based games, and Multiplayer Online Battle Arenas (MOBA). Participants were grouped into three clusters—heavy, moderate, and light esports consumers—based on K-means cluster analysis. A MANOVA was conducted with a 3 (esports genres) × 3 (esports consumer clusters) design to examine motivational factors. Findings reveal that esports consumers have varied needs and desires for spectating based on genre and psychological attachment levels. Notably, heavy esports consumers tend to maintain consistent motivations across game genres, while moderate consumers, especially those who watch MOBA and sports games, exhibit [lower and diminishing] motivations over time. The results suggest that esports genre type and engagement level play critical roles in shaping spectator motivations, underscoring the importance of developing marketing strategies tailored to diverse consumer segments.

**Keywords:** esports, motivation, involvement, segmentation, genre

## **1. Introduction**

As esports continues to develop and establish itself as an important sector within the sports industry, research on esports consumers is actively progressing (e.g., Pizzo et al., 2022). To understand this trend, exploring the reasons why people watch esports has become an important area of study (e.g., Watanabe et al., 2021). Among various approaches, some studies have focused on the similarities and differences between esports and traditional sports (e.g., Brown et al., 2017). For instance, there are studies comparing the motivations of esports audiences with those of traditional sports audiences (Rogers et al., 2022). In terms of viewing motivation, like traditional sports, esports spectators also travel to large indoor (e.g., State Farm Arena) and outdoor stadiums (e.g., Arthur Ashe Stadium) to watch domestic and international professional esports tournaments (e.g., Fortnite World Cup). For example, the League of Legends (LoL) championship has taken place at large arenas, like Madison Square Garden in New York City and the State Farm Arena in Atlanta (Qian et al., 2019).

Similar to established traditional sports, data related to esports viewership also shows significant potential and impressive metrics (Qian et al., 2019). During the 2015 LoL World Championship, 334 million viewers watched the event through YouTube, Facebook, and Twitch. Qian et al. (2020) also highlighted that concurrent viewership reached 4.2 million. This tournament, which has only been around for about 10 years, demonstrates that esports is becoming a fully developed industry, with sustainable profitability and popularity in the global market. Recent data shows even faster growth. Last year, the 2023 LoL World Championship set an all-time record with 6.4 million peak concurrent viewers and 146.8 million hours watched (DeSena, 2023). This surpassed the world record previously held by the 2021 Free Fire World Series event in Singapore, which had the highest viewership in esports history. This growth can be attributed to the majority of younger generations who enjoy online gaming, whether socially or competitively (Hong, 2022; Smith et al., 2019).

While there are various stakeholders involved in attracting consumers to esports, such as developers, sponsors, and tournament organizers, the key element in this growing market is the teenage and young adult professional players, whose age group closely matches that of the primary consumers (Hong, 2022). To better understand this young consumer base, previous studies have investigated various factors that influence esports viewership. These include consumer behavior-related factors, such as the types of games they watch and the frequency of gameplay. However, because many studies adapted and modified motivation scales originally designed for traditional sports fans, they may not have fully captured the unique factors that motivate esports audiences. Therefore, this study aimed to bridge this gap by utilizing a motivation scale tailored specifically for esports, the Motivation Scale of Esports Spectatorship (MSES), to explore how esports viewers' motivations relate to the genre of the game and their level of psychological attachment.

### **Esports Motivations**

Competitive computer gaming began in South Korea and developed over time, expanding globally and growing for more than a decade (Manci et al., 2024). Since esports began to be recognized as a major sports industry, research into it has become more active, with many studies comparing it to traditional sports to better understand its consumers (e.g., Pizzo et al., 2018). Researchers have explored why people watch and follow esports, analyzing both the overlapping and distinct elements between esports and traditional sports. For example, Pizzo et al. (2018) examined the differences in viewer motivation between esports and traditional sports. Similar to traditional sports, esports also feature various types of games developed by gaming companies, and a few of these games have emerged as major esports

competitions that attract large audiences. These competitions can be broadly categorized into three main genres: FPS (First-Person Shooter), sports-based games, and MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena). Ma et al. (2021) investigated the differences between esports genres such as FPS, sports-based games, and MOBA. When comparing video game genres, research has examined the cognitive effects of FPS and MOBA games (Manci et al., 2024). By design, FPS games offer a first-person perspective, typically using fictional or realistic firearms. The primary goal in this genre is to skillfully identify and neutralize enemy targets (NPCs/players) through shooting. This requires fast reaction times, eye-hand coordination, and inhibitory control skills (Oscardio et al., 2023). In relation to fast reaction control, Donovan et al. (2023) mentioned the technique of 'flicking,' which involves quickly adjusting one's aim to find and shoot a target (p. 2). This rapid reaction demands fine motor skills, which are often cited as one reason why esports should be recognized as a form of sport (Jenny et al., 2017).

In the case of MOBA games, these games are played in teams, where each team member combines their character's abilities to strategically battle against the opposing team and win. In addition to neutralizing enemy players, these games often require achieving in-game objectives such as territory capture or flag capture. Competitive MOBA matches tend to last longer than FPS matches, requiring endurance, tactical execution, teamwork, and various other skills. A 'whole-game plan' must be developed through practice with teammates (Manci et al., 2024, p. 6). This also demands cognitive abilities such as memory, particularly when developing in-game characters and facing other players and their characters (Manci et al., 2024).

According to Choi et al. (2020), sports video games fall under the simulation genre. This genre also includes alternative sports like driving/racing games. The overall objective of these games is similar to real sports, where players use teams or individual characters to defeat their opponents. The study found data on the impact of sports simulation games on cognitive development. For example, one of the most popular video game franchises is the Madden Football series developed by Electronic Arts (Jenny & Schary, 2014). This game was named after the late football coach and sportscaster John Madden. When the game was being designed, Madden aimed to make the players' movements resemble the experience of watching real football, giving players the feeling of watching an actual football game through video gameplay. Due to the built-in elements of the game (sports commentators, realistic football play, player statistics), Jenny and Schary (2014) found a positive relationship between playing sports video games and learning real sports.

Jang et al. (2021) also analyzed the impact of gameplay frequency on viewing motivation, distinguishing between high-frequency and low-frequency gamers. While these studies provided useful insights, they often relied on scales designed for traditional sports (e.g., Trail & James's (2001) Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC)) and thus may not have fully captured the unique motivations of esports fans. To address this gap, Qian et al. (2020) introduced the Motivation Scale of Esports Spectatorship (MSES), a scale specifically tailored to esports. Based on Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), it helped identify the motivations of online esports spectators (Qian et al., 2019). Using a mixed-method approach (qualitative and quantitative), Qian et al. initially identified ten key motivations for online esports spectators through semi-structured interviews and open-ended surveys: skill improvement, skill appreciation, vicarious achievement, bonding with friends, social opportunities, excitement of competition, game knowledge, competitive nature, dramatic character, and entertainment character (see Table 1). These motivations were included in a survey using a Likert scale to collect empirical data, confirming that all motivations played an important role for spectators.

**Table 1**

*Variables of the Motivation Scale for Esports Spectatorship (MSES)*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
<i>Skill Improvement</i>	Degree which watching professional players strategies and playstyles will develop the skill of the individual
<i>Skill Appreciation</i>	Degree to which fans admire strategies, quick decisions making, in-game knowledge of professional players
<i>Vicarious Sensation</i>	Degree to which esports spectators become immersed into the gaming experience based on how they are watching the game (i.e., large screens or projected imagery)
<i>Friend Bonding</i>	Degree to which esports fans find camaraderie and develop/maintain friendships with other fans in particular game communities
<i>Socialization Opportunity</i>	Degree to which esports fans interact, online or in person, with other esports fans to gain a sense of belonging
<i>Competition Excitement</i>	Degree to which levels of arousal and excitement fluctuate based on competitions and rivalries
<i>Game Knowledge</i>	Degree to which an individual's game knowledge influences what esports event to watch
<i>Competitive Nature</i>	Degree to which spectating esports fans experience sensations of competitiveness
<i>Dramatic Nature</i>	Degree to which esports fans gain arousal and satisfaction from watching close-score games, to include underdog upsets versus the match being one-sided
<i>Entertainment Nature</i>	Degree to which esports fans experience joy and excitement from watching competitive gaming in general

Note. Adapted from Qian et al. (2019) pp. 467-468.



While motivation scales designed for traditional sports fans have provided valuable insights, their adaptation to esports audiences may not fully reflect the unique factors driving engagement in this rapidly growing domain. Esports, with its distinctive characteristics such as virtual interactivity and genre diversity, requires a more tailored approach to understanding consumer motivations. To address this gap, this study utilizes the MSES, a tool specifically designed to capture the nuances of the esports audience. By exploring the relationship between esports audiences' motivations, the genres of the games they follow, and their level of psychological attachment, this research aims to provide a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of the unique motivational drivers within the esports context. With this approach, the current study aimed to address the following research question:

*RQ:* How do the motivations of esports spectators differ based on esports game genres and level of psychological attachment?

## **2. Methodology**

### **Sample, Procedure, and Measures**

To explore the motivations of esports spectators, this study recruited 486 participants using Amazon Mechanical Turk (M-Turk), an online platform known for its diverse and accessible participant pool (Sheehan, 2017). Participants were first screened based on their esports viewing experience, and those without prior esports event viewership were excluded. Those who passed the screening completed a questionnaire that gathered psychographic information, including their favorite esports game, frequency of watching and playing the game, and their psychological attachment to the game (Zaichowsky, 1994). The psychological attachment to the game was measured with the modified version of Zaichowsky's (1994) personal involvement inventory. Additionally, the questionnaire incorporated items from the MSES scale (Qian et al., 2019), which assessed various motivations such as competitive nature, competition excitement, and entertainment nature. All measures were assessed using 5-point Likert scales.

### **Data Screening & Sample Characteristics**

During data screening, participants who did not play esports were excluded based on their response to the first question after agreeing to proceed with the survey. Additionally, 57 participants were excluded from the final analysis either because they reported not regularly watching esports or because they scored low on detection tests, including one open-ended question, suggesting they might be bots or cheaters. Another 34 participants were identified as outliers and removed, resulting in a final sample of 384 participants. The most popular esports genres were FPS ( $n = 169$ , 33%), sports-based games ( $n = 138$ , 32%), and MOBA ( $n = 77$ , 17%). The final sample had an average age of 36.68 years, with 250 male and 134 female participants. More than 65% of samples have higher education degrees, and more than 52% of participants make more than \$50,000 per year. In terms of ethnicity, 70% of participants identified as White, 15% as Black, and 11% as Asian. On average, participants reported watching 6.42 hours per week of their favorite esports games, and they exhibited moderate to high involvement in their favorite esports, with a mean involvement score of 3.61 ( $SD = 0.99$ ).

## Data Analysis

To better understand the relationship between psychological attachment (Personal Involvement Inventory; Zaichkowsky, 1994) and viewing motivations (Qian et al., 2019), a K-means cluster analysis was performed (Aldenderfer & Blashfield, 1984). Participants were grouped into three clusters based on their psychological attachment scores: heavy esports consumers ( $n = 163$ , 42%), moderate esports consumers ( $n = 87$ , 23%), and light esports consumers ( $n = 134$ , 35%). A MANOVA (Multivariate Analysis of Variance) was then conducted to evaluate the effect of esports genres and esports consumer clusters on the ten motivational factors (i.e., *Skill Improvement*, *Skill Appreciation*, *Vicarious Sensation*, *Friend Bonding*, *Socialization Opportunity*, *Competition Excitement*, *Game Knowledge*, *Competitive Nature*, *Dramatic Nature*, and *Entertainment Nature*) from the MSES (Qian et al., 2019).

## 3. Results

The multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) results indicated that different esports genres had a statistically significant impact on spectators' motivations at the multivariate level, Wilks' Lambda = 0.90,  $F(20, 732) = 1.97$ ,  $p = .007$ . In addition to game genres, the level of psychological attachment that spectators feel toward esports also played a significant role in shaping their motivations, Wilks' Lambda = 0.87,  $F(20, 732) = 2.70$ ,  $p < .001$ . Further analysis revealed that the segmentation of esports consumers into different clusters significantly influenced all motivational factors ( $p < .01$ ; see Table 2). The heavy esports consumer group, for example, scored significantly higher on all motivational factors compared to the light user group, indicating that more frequent or engaged viewers tend to have deeper motivational drives. Additionally, when comparing the heavy consumer group to moderate users, heavy consumers showed significantly stronger motivations across specific dimensions, particularly in terms of socialization opportunities ( $p < .001$ ), entertainment nature ( $p < .001$ ), and friend bonding ( $p < .001$ ). These findings suggest that those who watch esports more frequently are not only more invested in the entertainment aspect but are also driven by opportunities for social interaction and relationship building within the community. Distinct from general consumer engagement levels, particular esports genres influenced specific motivations (see Table 3), including entertainment nature ( $p < .05$ ), skill improvement ( $p < .01$ ), and dramatic nature ( $p < .05$ ). For example, consumers of FPS games had significantly higher motivations related to drama and skill improvement compared to spectators of sport-based games ( $p < .05$ ). This result implies that FPS spectators are especially motivated by the thrill of close matches and the opportunity to learn from skilled gameplay, likely due to the fast-paced, skill-intensive nature of FPS games. Additionally, FPS consumers showed a significantly higher motivation for entertainment value than those who watched MOBA games ( $p < .05$ ).

**Table 2***Significant Univariate Effects for Esports Consumer Group*

Motivations	df	df error	F	esports Consumer	Means	99% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Socialization Opportunity	2	375	17.51	Light	2.28	1.97	2.59
				Moderate	2.41	2.03	2.79
				Heavy	3.18	2.90	3.47
Game Knowledge	2	375	6.52	Light	2.67	2.34	3.00
				Moderate	2.75	2.35	3.15
				Heavy	3.25	2.95	3.55
Skill Appreciation	2	375	9.27	Light	2.73	2.41	3.05
				Moderate	2.74	2.35	3.14
				Heavy	3.37	3.08	3.67
Vicarious Sensation	2	375	8.84	Light	2.50	2.18	2.82
				Moderate	2.72	2.33	3.12
				Heavy	3.19	2.90	3.49
Entertainment Nature	2	375	14.87	Light	2.60	2.28	2.91
				Moderate	2.70	2.32	3.08
				Heavy	3.42	3.14	3.71
Competition Excitement	2	375	9.39	Light	2.48	2.16	2.79
				Moderate	2.72	2.34	3.10
				Heavy	3.18	2.89	3.47
Competitive Nature	2	375	11.82	Light	2.46	2.15	2.76
				Moderate	2.72	2.34	3.09
				Heavy	3.23	2.94	3.51
Skill Improvement	2	375	12.04	Light	2.61	2.29	2.93
				Moderate	2.78	2.39	3.17
				Heavy	3.40	3.10	3.69
Friend Bonding	2	375	15.51	Light	2.31	1.99	2.63
				Moderate	2.48	2.10	2.87
				Heavy	3.19	2.90	3.48
Dramatic Nature	2	375	8.17	Light	2.68	2.35	3.01
				Moderate	2.86	2.45	3.26
				Heavy	3.35	3.05	3.66

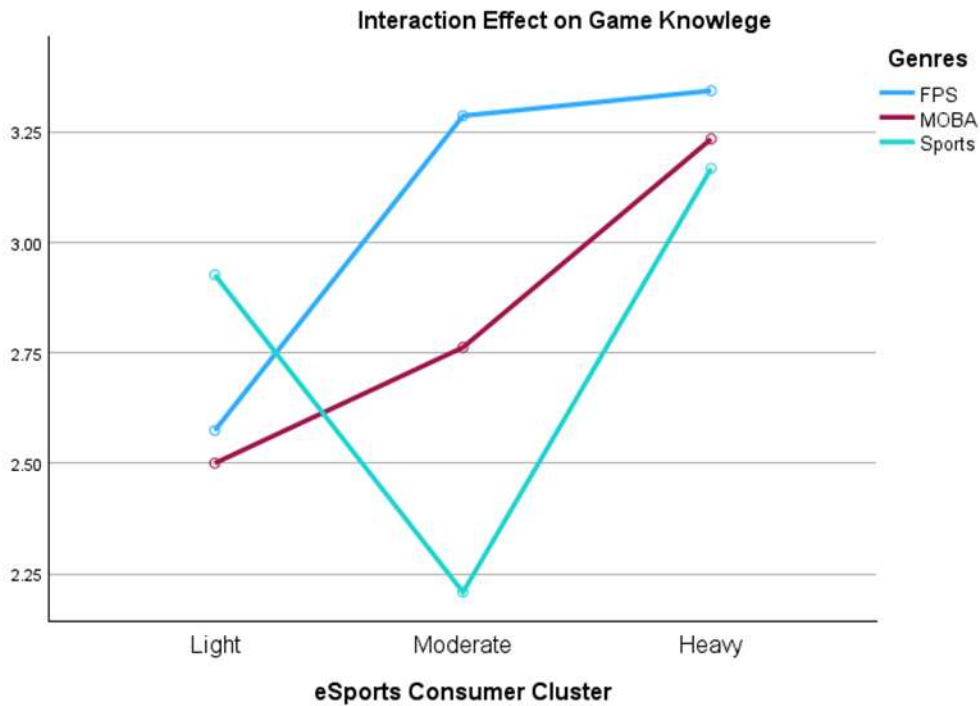
**Table 3***Significant Univariate Effects for Genre*

Motivations	df	df error	F	Genre	Means	99% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Entertainment Nature	2	375	3.75	FPS	3.17	2.90	3.44
				MOBA	2.73	2.33	3.12
				Sports	2.83	2.51	3.14
Skill Improvement	2	375	5.08	FPS	3.21	2.93	3.48
				MOBA	2.88	2.48	3.28
				Sports	2.70	2.37	3.02
Dramatic Nature	2	375	3.96	FPS	3.21	2.93	3.49
				MOBA	2.94	2.53	3.36
				Sports	2.74	2.41	3.07

Moreover, interaction effects between esports genres and esports consumer clusters were observed across various motivational factors. These included factors such as game knowledge ( $p < .05$ ), skill appreciation ( $p = .001$ ), competitive nature ( $p < .05$ ), and skill improvement ( $p < .05$ ). In other words, both the esports game genres and the consumer's level of engagement are key aspects for understanding esports consumers' motivations. As illustrated in Figures 1 through 4, these interaction effects revealed consistent patterns across the motivational factors, emphasizing the unique profile of each spectator type. For instance, moderate and heavy consumers of FPS games demonstrated greater motivation to acquire game knowledge, enhance their gaming skills, appreciate the skill level of professional esports players, and enjoy the dynamic competitiveness characteristic in esports contests. These results suggest that the esports game genre and the level of consumer engagement play crucial roles in shaping spectators' motivations, thus emphasizing the need for marketing strategies tailored to various esports consumer segments.

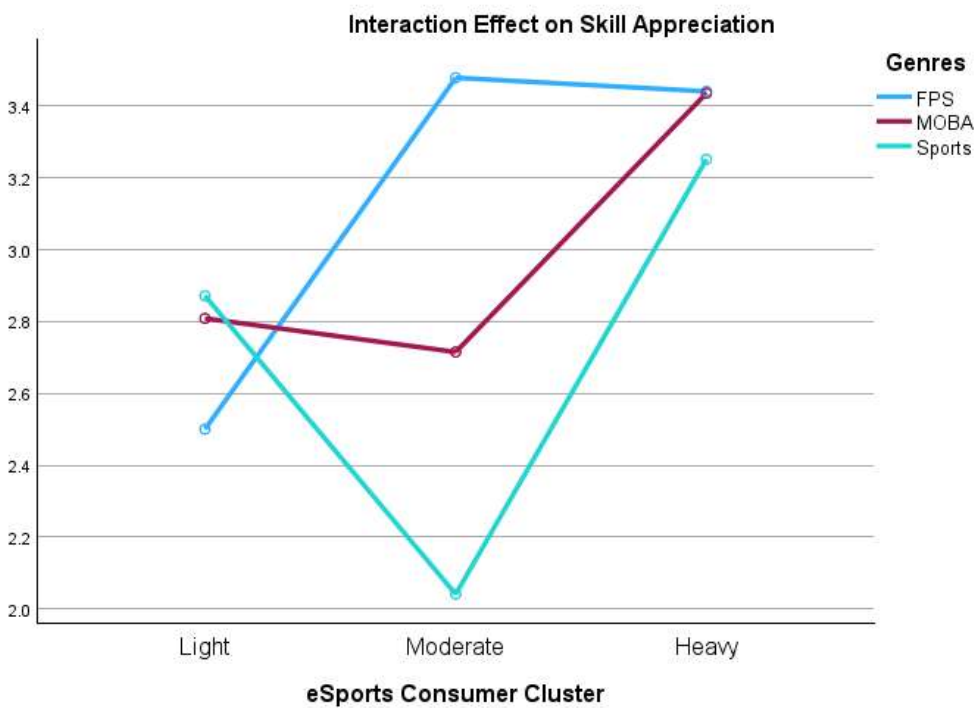
**Figure 1**

*Interaction Effect on Game Knowledge*



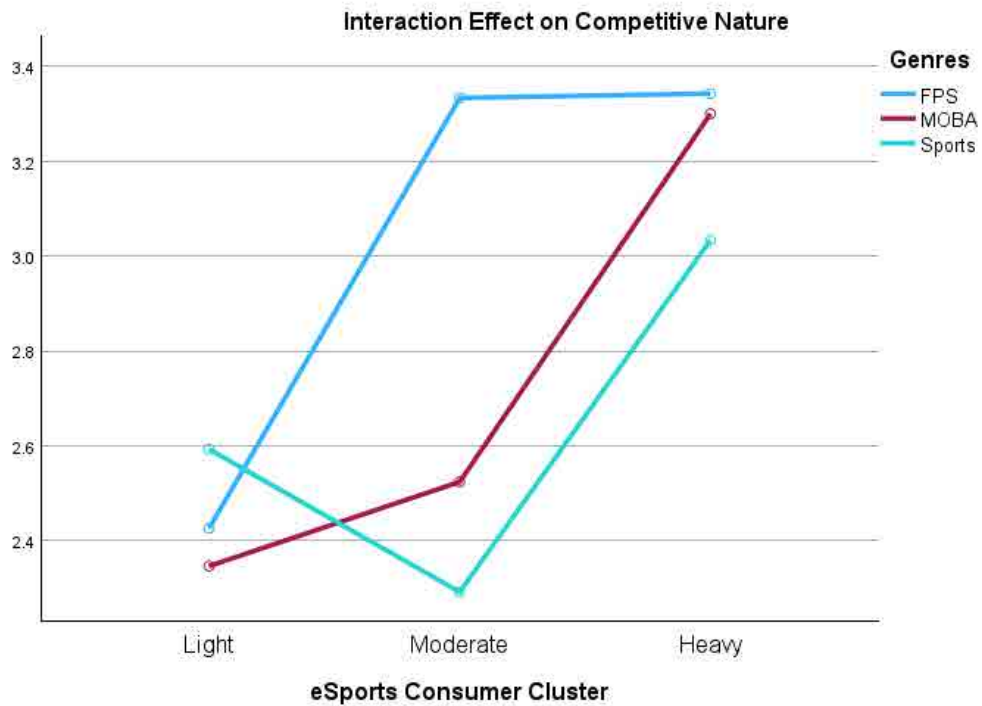
**Figure 2**

*Interaction Effect on Skill Appreciation*



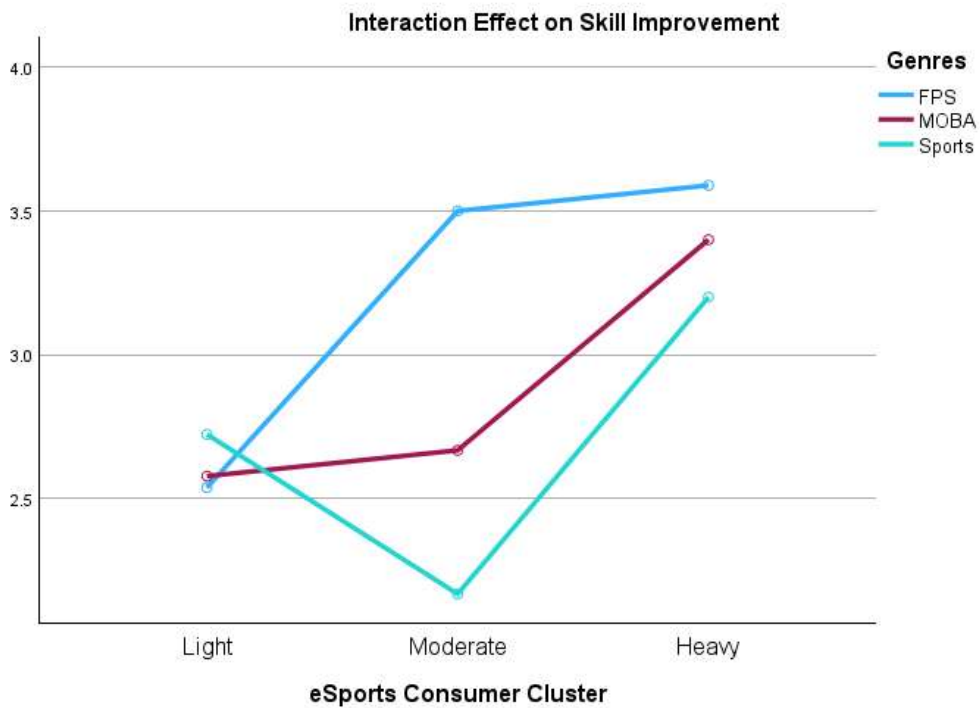
**Figure 3**

*Interaction Effect on Competitive Nature*



**Figure 4**

*Interaction Effect on Skill Improvement*





## **4. Discussion**

This study utilized Qian et al.'s (2019) Motivation Scale of Esports Spectatorship (MSES) to explore the roles of esports genres and consumer clusters. The findings suggest that MSES is an effective tool for understanding the motivations of esports audiences. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of developing marketing and engagement strategies tailored to the diverse motivational profiles within the esports audience, which could significantly enrich the spectator experience by aligning with their expectations. While heavy esports consumers tend to maintain consistent motivations across game genres, moderate consumers—especially those who watch MOBA and sport-based games—demonstrate relatively low and gradually diminishing motivations over time. For moderate users of these genres, initial motivations often fade as they continue to watch and play. During this stage, it is likely that while some viewers initially engage in both playing and watching these games, they may gradually shift away from gaming itself, exploring new games or alternative hobbies, a trend that is well reflected in this study's results. However, some of the moderate consumers evolve into heavy consumers through continued esports engagement, ultimately cultivating a broader range of strong motivations.

Heavy esports consumers with a strong understanding of the game watch esports not only as an opportunity for socializing and entertainment with friends they've met through gaming, but also to learn advanced strategies and specialized skills they can apply in their own gameplay. From a learner's perspective, they closely analyze the high-level tactics and techniques displayed by professional esports players. By observing why certain strategies succeed and comparing these with their own in-game decisions, they aim to integrate insights into their play, striving to improve their skills. These viewers are inspired by the skillful performances of professional esports players and deeply admire the technical expertise displayed in critical moments, such as precise motor skills and hand-eye coordination. This admiration not only fuels their aspirations to reach similar levels of expertise but also reinforces the argument that esports deserve recognition as a legitimate sport, requiring comparable levels of physical precision and mental agility as traditional sports (Jenny et al., 2016). In other words, heavy esports consumers, in particular, watch with a sense of appreciation and respect for professional players' abilities, drawing inspiration from their performances to refine their own skills.

### **Practical Implications**

The study results show that psychological attachment plays a crucial role in shaping the motivations of esports viewers, particularly within the heavy consumer cluster (Qian et al., 2019). Understanding these motivational differences is essential for esports organizers, streamers, and marketers in designing engagement strategies tailored to various audience segments, providing valuable insights for these stakeholders. To start, designing educational and interactive events targeted at both heavy and light users is recommended. For example, recognizing that fans of FPS, MOBA, and sport-based games are highly motivated by skill improvement opens up opportunities for tailored content. Offering tutorials, strategy guides, expert analysis, and detailed post-match breakdowns can meet these viewers' desire to learn, fostering deeper engagement and loyalty. Additionally, hosting Q&A sessions with professional players, providing workshops focused on learning and practicing specific skills, or organizing events where fans can explore advanced gameplay strategies could be particularly effective. Such initiatives not only foster meaningful audience engagement but also cultivate a dedicated fan base, ultimately strengthening the esports ecosystem.

These findings also hold practical implications for game developers, especially regarding the potential use of artificial intelligence (AI) in gaming. According to Wu (2019), AI programs are currently being developed to compete against human players using advanced macro strategies typical in MOBA games, such as ambush tactics and lane control. Though still in development, these AI systems have already achieved a 45%-win rate against human players, demonstrating their potential. Developers might consider creating game modes where players can compete against AI that simulates the strategies of professional players, giving fans a challenging way to practice high-level techniques.

Beyond educational efforts, enhancing the entertainment value and immersive experiences of esports events plays a critical role in audience engagement (Qian et al., 2019). As Qian et al. (2019) observed, “spectators typically watch the game from the same perspective as if they were playing the game themselves” (pp. 472). By simulating the sights and sounds professional players experience, spectators can feel as though they are in the game, adding a layer of excitement to the viewing experience. Tournament organizers can capitalize on this by strategically selecting venues that stimulate multiple senses, optimizing the overall fan experience. Zhu et al. (2021) noted that the layout and physical environment of a venue significantly impact fan satisfaction, suggesting that both functionality and visual appeal are essential. Additionally, special effects—such as dynamic lighting and immersive sound systems—could enhance the sense of vicarious thrill for spectators, with flashy LED displays or realistic game sounds heightening the action (Migliore, 2021).

## **5. Conclusion**

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on esports spectatorship by utilizing a motivation scale specifically designed for esports fans. The findings demonstrate that while esports genres may not significantly influence spectating motives, psychological attachment levels play a key role in shaping these motivations. In particular, heavy viewers of FPS games are motivated by a desire to improve their skills and appreciate high-level gameplay, which presents unique opportunities for marketers and content creators. It would be beneficial for future studies to adopt longitudinal research methods to examine how the motivations of light consumers and moderate consumers change over time and how they transition to the next consumer group. Understanding this aspect could enhance our overall understanding of the motivations that drive consumption among light and moderate consumers, as well as how certain motivations evolve or diminish when they progress to the next stage. Among esports games, there are modes where players face off against opponents online, as well as modes where they compete against programmed virtual opponents within the game (e.g., practice mode). These different consumption patterns of esports consumers could be analyzed in future studies. Additionally, it would be interesting to explore esports consumers' motivations for different games within the same genre. For example, the motivations of people who enjoy the NBA 2K series versus those who enjoy the Madden NFL series, or those who play PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds (PUBG) versus Fortnite, might differ. Additionally, a variety of motivations among competitive and casual players could be investigated in future research. This would allow for a deeper understanding of the diverse motivations of esports consumers and facilitate discussions on how to leverage this information in the market. Esports leagues and tournaments (e.g., Counter-Strike Major Championships, League of Legends World Championship) have now accumulated enough time to write their own history. Rivalries formed between teams and individual players within this context may serve as a motivation for fans to watch (Tyler & Cobb, 2015). Future studies could explore this aspect of rivalry, as the current study found that competition excitement was a key spectating motivation. Overall, this study highlights the importance of segmenting esports audiences based on psychological attachment and tailoring marketing strategies to meet the diverse needs of different fan groups.

## Author Note

We have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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# **High School Athletic Directors: Secondary Education Leaders' Perceptions**

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## **Abstract**

The roles of secondary athletics and activities directors (SAADs) continue to evolve in a rapidly changing landscape of high school athletics. This quantitative study aimed to examine foundational research intersections between sport management and educational leadership by exploring the perceptions of secondary educational leaders of the roles, duties, impact, and career preparation of SAADs. The study's results suggest that secondary educational leaders perceive the role of a SAAD as needing a wide range of skills, including leadership, crisis management skills, and interpersonal communication skills to better manage the internal and external relationships associated with the role. The findings express the recommendation of secondary educational leaders to explore additional training opportunities and educational credentials targeted at better preparing SAADs for the expanding responsibilities their role demands. The results also emphasize that SAADs play a significant role in both the educational and athletic development of students and call for greater collaboration between the academic disciplines of sport management and educational leadership to better meet the dynamic needs of the roles and responsibilities of future SAADs. The authors also suggest the collection of more data to better understand how SAADs are perceived by their colleagues, students, and parents.

**Keywords:** interscholastic athletics, athletic directors, sport management, educational leadership

## **1. Introduction**

More than 7.8 million U.S. high school boys and girls participated in interscholastic athletics during the 2022-23 school year (NFHS, 2023). Those participants are led by thousands of high school athletic directors (HSADs), who are responsible for influencing the culture and experiences of high school coaches and participating interscholastic student-athletes (HSSAs) across the country (Hums et al., 2023; Lopiano & Zotos, 2022; Kochanek & Erickson, 2021). Secondary athletics and activities directors

(SAADs) have recently faced increased demands in their job role(s) (Elam, 2022; Gaddis, 2013; Whisenant & Pedersen, 2004), difficulty in recruiting and retaining high-quality coaches (Sulz et al., 2021), and must interact daily with a wide variety of internal and external stakeholders (Sturges et al., 2020). While the popularity of interscholastic athletics continues to soar, industry and sport management academic discipline research has not grown at similar rates (Seifried, 2022). Experiential learning is key to a number of disciplines and preparation-focused programs within higher education, including sport management (Foster & Dollar, 2017; Foster & Pierce, 2021; Sauder & Murdick, 2018), educational or school psychology, counseling education (Arthur & Archenbach, 2002; King et al., 2022; *U.S. Official News*, 2018), nursing education (Kimzey et al., 2016), teacher preparation (Slavick & Zimbardo, 2012; Svinivki & McKeachie, 2011), business education (Holmes & Sullivan, 2018), and educational leadership (Hightower & Waters, 2018). Interscholastic athletics continues to be a useful site for preparing future sport management students, due to the abundance of experiential learning opportunities available and the environment's connection with educational and professional preparation (Hums et al., 2023). As a result, there is an increasing need to better understand and collaborate with interscholastic sport or athletic programs/departments. Relatedly, as sport management researchers engage with educational leadership scholars, there are several overlapping research areas where collaboration can benefit not only the sport management and educational leadership research literatures but also students and practitioners in both arenas.

To that end, the purpose of this research is to further examine foundational research intersections between sport management and educational leadership areas. In particular, what are secondary educational leaders' perceptions of high school athletic directors' roles, duties, and functions?

## **Literature Review**

Secondary athletics and activities directors (SAADs) are crucial in developing and managing middle and high school sports programs (Sturges et al., 2020). These professionals organize, administer, and oversee athletic activities, ensuring they align with regulatory mandates, educational goals, and community expectations (Kochanek & Erickson, 2021). This literature review examines various aspects of the roles, functions, and expectations of secondary athletics and activities directors and scholarship intersecting interscholastic sports and the sport management discipline.

## **Functions and Roles of Secondary Athletics and Activities Directors**

The primary functions and roles of a SAAD include planning, organizing, and managing school sports programs. These roles have expanded significantly in recent years to accommodate interscholastic the increased complexity of athletics and demands.

SAADs are responsible for the athletics program's overall administration, including scheduling games, managing budgets, and ensuring compliance with regulations and policies. According to Fowler et al. (2017), SAADs must possess strong management skills and a comprehensive understanding of sport legal and ethical issues. In addition, recent studies emphasized the need for SAADs to be adept in crisis management and to have the ability to make quick decisions under pressure, particularly in situations involving student-athlete safety and health (Sullivan et al., 2014). Interscholastic scholarship has also reflected the growing complexity of managing school sports programs in today's educational landscape. For example, increasing awareness and management of concussion-related injuries has become a significant part of the SAAD's role (Bomgardner, 2019; Casa et al., 2013).



The academic and personal development of student-athletes is another critical role of SAADs, including ensuring academic eligibility, promoting student-athlete well-being, and providing guidance and support. Kochanek and Erickson (2021) delved into the critical praxis of SAADs, examining how they navigated social issues within their schools and underscored the SAADs' role in promoting not only athletic success but also social and emotional wellness among students, thus positioning SAADs as crucial figures in the holistic development of student-athletes. The dual role of some SAADs, who also serve as assistant principals, adds even more to the already numerous responsibilities in supporting student-athlete development (Elam, 2022). Moreover, research by Lee et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence (e.g., being aware of one's emotions and managing emotions in others) and soft skills in managing student-athlete relationships and effectively addressing their mental health needs. Faunce (2020) explored gender disparities among SAADs, emphasizing the multifaceted roles these administrators play, including a pivotal role in fostering inclusive and equitable environments for all student-athletes. Research also indicates that participation in interscholastic sports positively impacts student achievement and well-being. SAADs play a pivotal role in creating programs that support academic success and personal development, emphasizing the importance of a holistic approach to education (Elam, 2022). Lee et al. (2020) contributed that athletic directors who actively promote academic achievement and provide structured support systems for student-athletes contribute significantly to their overall success.

Effective communication and collaboration with parents, coaches, and community members are essential for building a supportive environment for student-athletes. SAADs must promote positive relationships and engage stakeholders to enhance the athletic program's success (Whisenant et al., 2007). Recent findings suggest that social media and other digital platforms have become increasingly important for maintaining these relationships and ensuring transparent communication (Forsyth et al., 2020; Zdroik & Veliz, 2020). Johnson et al. (2013) also found that educating parents on the goals of interscholastic athletics topped a list of essential issues for SAADs in building a collaborative and supportive environment with parents of student-athletes.

### **Expectations of Secondary Athletics and Activities Directors**

The expectations placed on secondary athletics and activities directors are high and multifaceted. They must balance administrative duties with the needs of students, coaches, and the broader school community. Zayas (2018) found that SAADs are expected to contribute to the academic and personal development of student-athletes and integrate interscholastic athletics programs within the broader educational mission of the schools. Rudzinski (2022) found expectations from internal and external stakeholders for SAADs to implement initiatives and programs supporting the mental and emotional well-being of student-athletes as part of the ever-growing importance of mental health in educational settings.

Principals and hiring committees often prefer candidates with a background in education, coaching experience, and specific coursework in sport management, law, and finance (Fowler et al., 2017). This diverse skill set enables SAADs to handle the various challenges they face in the administration of interscholastic athletics. Additionally, ongoing professional development and certifications, such as those offered by the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association (NIAAA), are increasingly vital for maintaining high standards of competence and professionalism in an era of unprecedented change (Blackburn et al., 2013).

SAADs are also expected to exhibit strong leadership qualities and make informed decisions that benefit the athletic program and its participants. These skills include policy development, conflict

resolution, and promoting a positive athletics culture in a broader, thriving school environment. Leading and inspiring staff and students is critical to their success (Young, 2010). Recent research by Schneider (2021) underscored the importance of ethical leadership and integrity in the role of athletic directors, particularly in maintaining fair play and sportsmanship.

The expectations are even higher for those serving as SAAD and assistant principals. They must effectively manage the demands of both roles without compromising performance in either role. This dual responsibility often requires exceptional time management and organizational skills (Elam, 2022). Studies have shown that those prioritizing their SAAD role tend to have higher levels of job satisfaction and morale than those who view themselves primarily as assistant principals (Sullivan et al., 2014).

### **Interscholastic Sports and Sport Management**

Interscholastic sports have become an integral part of the educational experience, providing students with opportunities for physical development, teamwork, and personal growth. The management of these programs requires specialized knowledge and skills. While the popularity of interscholastic athletics continues to grow, research connecting SAADs to the sport management discipline has yet to develop as quickly. Forsyth et al. (2020) found that only a handful of journal articles related to research on interscholastic athletics appeared in sport management-specific peer-reviewed journals. Seifried (2022) produced a recent call to sport management scholars to focus research on preparing future sport managers. This article attempts to answer that call, focusing on the development of future SAADs using the perceptions of those who supervise them.

### **Research Questions**

SAADs appear to have wide-ranging impacts on a number of stakeholder groups beyond sports coaches and secondary student-athletes within the secondary educational environment. Impacts and expectations include not only a commitment to education, student support, and other school or district-based colleagues (Rudzinski, 2022) but also developing student-athletes, supporting professionalized and impactful coaching (Zayas, 2018), supporting local communities, and even demonstrating a commitment to character development within sport programs (Vest Ettekal et al., 2018). To successfully execute this complex position with multiple roles aligned to distinct social and educational expectations, SAADs must be well-versed in management best practices, such as performance evaluations, motivating employees, and providing meaningful professional feedback for personal growth (Ratts & Pedersen, 2023). Based upon the previous literature, the purpose of this research was to further examine secondary education leaders' perceptions of SAADs. Specifically, several research questions guide this research, including:

- 1) *How do secondary education leaders perceive the influence of SAADs on various school and community stakeholder groups?*
- 2) *What duties and responsibilities of SAADs are perceived as most important by secondary education leaders?*
- 3) *What professional skill sets and experiences do secondary education leaders perceive as essential to prepare SAADs for career success?*
- 4) *How do secondary education leaders perceive the need for relevant educational training for*

## *SAADs beyond traditional industry credentials?*

### **2. Methodology**

#### **Research Procedure and Sample**

Study respondents were selected from educational advisory groups associated with various district and building leaders who engage professionally with the local educational leadership degrees/courses of a large, state university located in the southern high plains of the United States. Faculty members who routinely work with and/or convene the advisory groups verbally discussed the project with members and received confirmation that they (e.g., respondents) were amenable to completing the survey. IRB-approved surveys were administered electronically using a Qualtrics link and sent to email accounts provided by respondents to the aforementioned faculty members. Once surveys were completed, responses were automatically entered into a downloadable spreadsheet to develop an electronic database. Survey records with missing or skipped questions were discarded from the analyses (n=48).

Survey questions included demographics and then four scales exploring secondary education leaders' perceptions of SAADs' impact, duties, professional preparation, and training. To measure RQ1 impact on other constituent groups including building leaders, teachers, coaches, students, and the surrounding community (e.g., "*As employees, SAADs impact...*"); duties and responsibilities (e.g., "*Regarding their duties, SAADs...*"); professional needs and preparation in skillsets such as budgeting, legal issues, and leadership (e.g., "*SAADs need to understand...*"); and the need for both educational training beyond an industry-provided credential, and an educational credential specifically designed for SAADs (e.g., "*SAADs would greatly benefit from...*"). Each scale was developed as a 5-point Likert-type scale with responses from 1=Low to 5=High.

### **3. Results**

Using the questionnaire's demographic questions, the sample was mostly male (72.9%) as compared to female (27.1%), and exclusively self-reported identifying as Caucasian/white (100%). Almost 80% of the sample self-reported being between the ages of 35-44 (39.6%) and/or ages 45-54 (39.6%) and—as is typical with educational leaders—self-reported high degrees of educational attainment; over 55% having a master's degree, 29.2% having multiple master's degrees, and 14.6% having a doctorate degree (see Table 1).

**Table 1***Percent of Respondents by Demographic Categories (n=48)*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	72.9	35
Female	27.1	13
<b>Race, ethnicity</b>		
White	100	48
<sup>1</sup> Non-white	0	0
<b>Age</b>		
25-34	8.3	4
35-44	39.6	19
45-54	39.6	19
55-64	12.5	6
Above 64	0	0
<b>Education</b>		
Master's degree Multiple	56.3	27
master's degrees	29.2	14
Doctorate	14.6	7

<sup>1</sup>includes self-reports of Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx/Chicano/a, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Asian/Asian American, Multiracial, and International.

Professional experience was self-reported in terms of both their current position and the overall number of years working within secondary education. That is, respondents reported varying degrees of time within their current positions, with over 60% being fairly recent to their current position: 39.6% reported being within their first year, and 22.9% having 2-5 years in the position. The remaining respondents were slightly more seasoned, and included 16.7% being in years 6-10, 16.7% being within years 11-15. Only 4.2% of respondents had over 15 years of experience within their current position. Regarding overall experience within the educational industry, however, respondents reported substantial experience within the secondary education industry. That is, almost 65% of the sample reported more than 20 years of experience within secondary education, with an additional 16.6% reporting over a decade worth of experience. (See Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Positional and Secondary Education Experience by Sample Respondents (n=48)*

Variables	Percent (%)	N
<b>Years in current position</b>		
1 <sup>st</sup> year	39.6	19
2-5 years	22.9	11
6-10 years	16.7	8
11-15 years	16.7	8
16-20 years	4.2	2
21-25 years	0	0
More than 25 years	0	0
<b>Total years in secondary education</b>		
1 <sup>st</sup> year	6.3	3
2-5 years	2.1	1
6-10 years	10.4	5
11-15 years	4.2	2
16-20 years	12.5	6
21-25 years	33.3	16
More than 25 years	31.3	15

Regarding respondents by other school-related demographics, respondents worked primarily within public schools (95.8%) in largely suburban environments (75%), and within larger schools, such as 4A (10.4%), 5A (62.5%), and 6A (12.5%) school environments. Respondents included a diversity of district leaders, such as superintendents (20.8%) and assistant/associate/vice superintendents (2.1%), building leaders, such as principals (43.8%) and assistant/associate/vice principals (12.5%), and athletics/activities directors (12.5%) and assistant/associate/vice athletics/activities directors (8.3%). ) (See Table 3).

**Table 3***Percent of Respondents by School-Related Categories (n=48)*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>School position/role</b>		
<i>Superintendent (district leader)</i>	20.8	10
<i>Asst/Assoc/vice superintendent (district leader)</i>	2.1	1
<i>Principal (building leader)</i>	43.8	21
<i>Asst/Assoc/vice principal (building leader)</i>	12.5	6
<i>Athletics/activities director</i>	12.5	6
<i>Asst/Assoc/vice athletics/activities director</i>	8.3	4
<b>School Type</b>		
<i>Public</i>	95.8	46
<i>Private</i>	4.2	2
<b>School Classification</b>		
<i>1A</i>	6.3	3
<i>2A</i>	2.1	1
<i>3A</i>	6.3	3
<i>4A</i>	10.4	5
<i>5A</i>	62.5	30
<i>6A</i>	12.5	6
<b>School Area</b>		
<i>Urban</i>	6.3	3
<i>Suburban</i>	75	36
<i>Rural</i>	18.8	9

The following univariate results (e.g., descriptives) provide a useful description of the sample, including types of schools, and educational leaders' perceptions of secondary athletics/activities directors, their functions, important professional topics, and required skill sets. Regarding research question #1 (*"How do secondary education leaders perceive the influence of SAADs on various school and community stakeholder groups?"*), respondents noted that secondary athletics/activities directors have a distinct, wide-ranging, and measurable impact on other stakeholder groups within the secondary education setting. That is, there was overwhelming support for the view that SAADs impact numerous stakeholder groups, including building leaders (100%), other building teachers (100%), sports coaches (100%), all secondary students (97.9%), secondary student-athletes (100%), and the surrounding community (100%). (See Table 4).

**Table 4**

*Respondents' Perceptions (n=48) of Athletics/Activities Directors' Impact on Other Employee Groups: Median, Mode, and Percent (%) Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing with Statement*

<b>As employees, Secondary Athletics/Activities Directors impact...</b>	<b>Mdn</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b><sup>1</sup>% agree or strongly agree</b>
<i>...building leaders</i>	5	5	100
<i>...other building teachers</i>	5	5	100
<i>...sports coaches</i>	5	5	100
<i>...all secondary students</i>	5	5	97.9
<i>...secondary student-athletes</i>	5	5	100
<i>...the surrounding community</i>	5	5	100

<sup>1</sup> Likert-type scale ranges from 1 (low) to 5 (high)

Research question #2 (“*What duties and responsibilities of SAADs are perceived as most important by secondary education leaders?*”) examines duties and responsibilities, with secondary education leaders overwhelmingly self-reporting the highly variegated nature of secondary athletics/activities directors’ work. Specifically, respondents noted the impact secondary athletics/activities directors have on students and interscholastic sports, such as being responsible for students’ education (100%), shaping policies and procedures governing interscholastic athletics (100%), coordinating schedules, events, and activities (100%), and being responsible for training coaches to be professionals (93.7%). The unique set of duties and responsibilities for this role, however, also extends to regularly engaging with a school’s surrounding community (97.9%), having responsibilities like other building leaders (e.g., principals or assistant/associate/vice principals) (81.3%), and continually engaging, collaborating, and communicating with an increasingly diverse set of stakeholders (95.8%).

Only a small fraction of secondary education leaders noted that secondary athletics/activities directors engage only with sports-related personnel on a day-to-day basis (18.8%). Indeed, one comment from a survey respondent noted “This [serving as a secondary athletics/activities director] is one of the most dynamics [*sic*] and busiest positions in all of education. Athletic leaders interact with the public more than most administrators and teachers, have a big impact on how students progress, and are among the most visible in the community.” (See Table 5).



**Table 5**

*Respondents' Perceptions (n=48) of Athletics/Activities Directors' Duties and Responsibilities: Median, Mode, and Percent (%) Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing with Statement*

<b>Regarding their duties, Secondary Athletics/Activities Directors...</b>	<b>Mdn</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b><sup>1</sup>% agree or strongly agree</b>
<i>...have a unique set of duties and responsibilities</i>	5	5	97.9
<i>...have responsibilities similar to other building leaders</i>	4	4	81.3
<i>...engage only with sports-related personnel on a day-to-day basis</i>	2	2	18.8
<i>...regularly engage with our community</i>	5	5	97.9
<i>...are responsible for students' education</i>	4	4	100
<i>...are responsible for training coaches to be professionals</i>	5	5	93.7
<i>...coordinate/develop schedules, events, and activities</i>	5	5	100
<i>...continually engage, collaborate, and communicate with an increasingly diverse set of stakeholders</i>	5	5	95.8
<i>...shape the policies and procedures governing interscholastic athletics</i>	5	5	100

<sup>1</sup> Likert-type scale ranges from 1 (low) to 5 (high)

The third research question (*"What professional skill sets and experiences do secondary education leaders perceive as essential to prepare SAADs for career success?"*) centers on secondary education leaders' perceptions of important professional topics and skill sets within interscholastic athletics administration. Important topics, sourced from the previous literature and current professionals, include budgeting and finance (95.8%), legal issues (100%), personnel management (100%), developing or refining strong interpersonal skills (100%), and issues of leadership and how to lead others (100%). (See Table 6).

The final question (*"How do secondary education leaders perceive the need for relevant educational training for SAADs beyond traditional industry credentials?"*) briefly examines secondary education leaders' view of additional education or training for secondary athletics/activities directors. That is, secondary education leaders reported that current or aspiring secondary athletics/activities directors need educational training beyond an industry-provided credential (e.g., NIAAA) (95.8%). Additionally, there was strong support for the need for educational credentials specifically designed for this particular audience and/or occupation (89.5%). (See Table 7).

**Table 6**

*Respondents' Perceptions (n=48) of Athletics/activities Directors' Needs and Preparation: Median, Mode, and Percent (%) Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing with Statement*

<b>Secondary Athletics/Activities Directors need to understand...</b>	<b>Mdn</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b><sup>1</sup>% agree or strongly agree</b>
<i>...budgeting and finance</i>	5	5	95.8
<i>...legal issues</i>	5	5	100
<i>...personnel management</i>	5	5	100
<i>...strong interpersonal skills</i>	5	5	100
<i>...leadership and how to lead others</i>	5	5	100

<sup>1</sup> Likert-type scale ranges from 1 (low) to 5 (high)

**Table 7**

*Respondents' <sup>1</sup>Perceptions (n=48) of Athletics/Activities Directors' Educational Training: Median, Mode, and Percent (%) Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing with Statement*

<b>Secondary Athletics/Activities Directors Would Greatly Benefit from...</b>	<b>Mdn</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b><sup>1</sup>% agree or strongly agree</b>
<i>...educational training beyond an industry-provided credential (e.g., KIAAA, NIAAA)</i>	5	5	95.8
<i>...educational credentials specifically designed for athletics/activities directors</i>	5	5	89.5

<sup>1</sup> Likert-type scale ranges from 1 (low) to 5 (high)

## 4. Discussion

This research aimed to examine secondary education leaders' perceptions of SAADs. Several research questions guided this inquiry and examined secondary leaders' perceptions of SAADs related to their impact on various stakeholder groups, duties and responsibilities, needs and preparation, and educational training.

The findings of this study provided multiple insights into secondary education leaders' perceptions of SAADs' impact, duties, needs, and educational training. This study highlighted the perceived influence that SAADs have on diverse constituent groups, including building leaders, teachers, coaches, students, and the surrounding community. This broad scope of influence emphasizes the importance of the SAADs' role in managing athletic programs and contributing to their institutions' overall educational mission.

This study also confirms that SAADs have a unique set of duties and responsibilities that fall under the umbrella of the sport management academic discipline, such as drafting and enforcing policies and procedures, managing events, and expanding community relations (Fowler et al., 2017). In addition, SAADs must also promote student-athlete education and consistently engage with various stakeholders. These findings support previous research emphasizing the need for SAADs to possess diverse skills, including leadership, crisis management, ethical decision-making, and strong interpersonal skills (Lee et al., 2020; Faunce, 2020; Elam, 2022).

The results of this study also supported previous calls for additional training and educational credentials specifically designed for SAADs, in addition to and beyond the current industry-provided credentials. While current certification programs, like those from the NIAAA, provide a foundational level of competence, the current study echoes previous research, suggesting a need for more comprehensive and specialized educational opportunities to prepare SAADs for the complexities of their roles (Blackburn et al., 2013; Sullivan et al., 2014).

Despite the broad recognition of SAADs' influence, the study highlights gaps in current research exploring and connecting all the perceived roles of SAADs. Addressing this gap could facilitate better preparation for future SAADs as students and provide more robust support structures for their continued professional development.

## **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study illustrated how their educational leaders perceive the complex and evolving roles of SAADs in secondary education settings. This study's results suggested that SAADs play a vital role in the administration of interscholastic athletics and in contributing to their schools' broader educational and developmental goals. The perceptions of secondary education leaders in this study underscore the need for a comprehensive approach to the training and preparation of SAADs, emphasizing the importance of both existing certifications and opportunities to tailor continuing education programs better.

This study's findings hold several practical applications as well. For current and aspiring high school athletic directors, this study's findings highlight the importance of developing a diverse skill set beyond traditional sport management and educational disciplines. Skills in leadership, personnel management, risk mitigation, and interpersonal skills are increasingly critical for successfully navigating the role's responsibilities. SAADs should seek opportunities for professional development that focus on these areas, whether through formal education programs, workshops, or self-directed learning.

For sport management students aspiring to become high school ADs, the study suggests a need to pursue comprehensive education and training that includes sport-specific knowledge and competencies in educational leadership, ethical decision-making, and community engagement. Practical applied learning experiences, such as internships and mentorships with current athletic directors, can provide valuable insights into the daily realities and challenges of the role. By gaining experience in multiple environments (e.g., urban vs. rural schools, different school sizes), students can better prepare for the various educational and community contexts they may encounter in their future careers. Sport management students should also consider developing proficiency in digital platforms and social media, enhancing SAADs' abilities to connect with parents, students, and community members, and fostering a more inclusive and supportive athletic environment.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

While this study provides significant insights into secondary education leaders' perceptions of SAADs, it has limitations. The sample was predominantly male and homogeneous in terms of race and school setting. Future research could benefit from a more extensive and diverse sample to capture a broader range of perspectives, including those from various demographic backgrounds and school settings.

Additionally, this study relied on quantitative data, which, while valuable for identifying general trends, may not capture the full complexity of how secondary education leaders perceive the experiences and challenges of SAADs. Future research could employ qualitative or mixed-methods approaches to better understand how the role of SAADs is viewed not only by secondary leaders but by their peers, the students they serve, and the various stakeholders they often engage with. For future research, we suggest longitudinal studies that explore how perceptions of the SAAD role evolve in response to changes in educational and athletic landscapes. Also, we recommend an exploration of the duties and tasks of SAADs to determine role clarity through job descriptions and onboarding practices. The perceptions of SAADs should also be evaluated about the clarity of their duties in comparison to secondary education leaders' perceptions to determine any gaps in the perceived role of SAADs in a complex and rapidly changing environment.

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## **Appendix**

### **Additional Comments provided at the end of the survey:**

- “This is one of the most dynamics and busiest positions in all of education. Athletic leaders interact with the public more than most administrators and teachers, have a big impact on how students progress, and are among the most visible in the community.”
- “KELI Mentor, KLC, Leadership Blueprint, really anything to develop leadership skills helps all facets of education.”
- “Working with adult/student conflict, coached sponsors to be strong program leaders.”

# **An Experimental Investigation of Fan Reactions to NFL Players and Teams Regarding Competition Decisions**

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## **Abstract**

As top athletes compete in fewer sporting contests, this experimental investigation explored reactions of National Football League players' decisions to compete or not compete in a season and considered fan segments by gender and adult status. Linear mixed effects modeling examined fans' reactions to competition decisions, and a mixed ANOVA examined fans' emotions. Across two studies, fan groups expressed similar reactions where players were not perceived more negatively for not competing, and team perception was not impacted. However, fans expressed positive perceptions of players when a family concern was expressed and they did not play; negative perceptions resulted when a family concern was expressed with a decision to play. Further, fans expressed similar emotions to not competing, including not being revolted, but emerging adult-aged women were more likely to be proud and stressed by a player not competing than men. Practitioner implications include highlighting athletes' various on-the-field and off-the-field roles.

**Keywords:** experimental research, fans, athlete image, sport consumer behavior, NFL, social roles

## **1. Introduction**

In today's sports world, the consistency with which top athletes compete is lower than in previous generations as athletes look to limit injuries, improve their physical and mental health, and better care for themselves and their families (Katherine Clemmons, 2021). Decisions not to compete have led to various fan reactions, where some have been supportive (Asmelash, 2023; Kirschner, 2023). However, others expressed disappointment and frustration in not being able to see their favorite player (Kirschner, 2023; Rohrbach, 2023) and felt athletes were entitled (Bromberg, 2022; O'Malley, 2023). Sport managers now operate in this marketplace to connect with fans, while knowing player availability is more limited. However, few investigations have explored fan reactions to players' competition decisions (Reilly et al., 2023).

A recent sociohistorical event provided an opportunity to examine competition decisions. The COVID-19 pandemic threatened the health of individuals and their families (CDC, 2021) and also

impacted the National Football League (NFL). Specifically, players contemplated whether to play in athletic competitions for the safety of themselves and their loved ones (Keh, 2020). While the pandemic differed from a standard athletic setting, it presented a realm where many players and fans reacted to competition decisions. Ultimately, 67 NFL players opted out of the season (NFL, 2020), and fans expressed an array of reactions, largely negative, about the players and the impact on their teams (Heath, 2020; Smith, 2020). These negative fan reactions were also expressed even if a player just shared such a consideration (Errigo, 2020; Florio, 2020). However, it is possible some fans had positive reactions to the athletes. As such, this setting offered an opportunity to enhance our understanding of consumers by investigating fan reactions to player decisions to compete in the season, as well as exploring segmentation differences in gender (i.e., men and women) and adult status (i.e., emerging adults and adults).

This project also expanded the limited experimental sport marketing research to provide causal understandings rather than correlational associations (Ko & Lee, 2018) and examined how NFL fan segments perceived players and their team, based on players' hypothetical decisions to play or opt out of athletic competition.

### **Fan Segmentation and the NFL**

Fan segmentation is a common technique to better understand consumers by dividing a heterogeneous market into smaller, more homogeneous sub-groups (Dees et al., 2022; Pitts et al., 1994). Segmentation attendance differences have been denoted by ticket-type, age, and gender (James & Ridinger, 2002; Hungenberg & Mayer, 2019). However, this attendance segmentation approach neglects the various forms of spectatorship (e.g., game broadcast and media consumption), particularly as a large number of fans will never attend a game but are still vital to supporting the team and players (Dees et al., 2022). Also, fan reactions to players are not uniformly expressed between generations nor gender (James & Ridinger, 2002; Tobar, 2006). Further, the NFL has particularly struggled to connect with the segment of fans currently in college (i.e., emerging adults; Orr, 2020), which will soon have strong buying power as adult consumers, and some are less enthusiastic about sports (Crupi, 2024; Silverman, 2020). Additionally, the NFL consumer appears to be an under-researched topic (Billings et al., 2020; Hu & Cole, 2016). In terms of fan behavior, men have enjoyed the Super Bowl social setting, but women wanted to view athletes in a human way (Clark et al., 2009). Shane-Nichols et al. (2021) also put forth that the NFL fan prototype should be defined differently for men and women, which supported gender segmentation. As such, there is a need to better understand fans by gender and how emerging adult fans compare to other adult fans, particularly in their perceptions of NFL players and teams.

### **Consumer Perceptions of Team Image and Athlete Image**

The literature has also explored consumer perceptions of teams and athletes, and the importance of awareness, images, and connected associations consumers attach to their favorite team's name and symbol (Bauer et al., 2008; Dees et al., 2022; Gladden & Funk, 2002). These positive associations with a team are an important long-term element in the minds of consumers, as is the organization's core values and ensuring they align with fans (Ross, 2007). In the NFL, the importance of consumer self-expression has been denoted for team loyalty (Walker & Kent, 2009). Wang et al. (2020) also indicated that consumers utilized an NFL team to enhance self-image, which stimulated positive fan behavior. However, when a shortage of social attractiveness occurs, team-related consumption is withheld. Thus, NFL teams and players must convey positive actions

that publicly support desirable personal values and attributes in sport marketing activities to strengthen consumer loyalty. An athlete's image is also emerging in the literature, where athlete identity must first be established and then the desired image communicated (Linsner et al., 2021). Congruence, or the match between the desired athlete image and perceived image by consumers, is also an important area but lacking research (Linsner et al., 2021).

Additionally, Arai et al. (2013) denoted three athlete image dimensions: athletic performance, attractive appearance, and marketable lifestyle. Therefore, if a player does not compete, it removes one dimension. Further, personal and family decisions also impact those dimensions, especially when an NFL player is considering opting out of competition for health and safety reasons. Moreover, perceived authenticity can impact popularity (Arai et al., 2013). As such, congruence between communicated athletic image and the perceived image must match (Taniyev et al., 2022), particularly as differences exist between younger and older fans in authenticity (Moulard et al., 2015). Thus, the potential for players to opt out of athletic competitions presented an opportunity to explore how fan segments (i.e., age, gender) would respond in relation to their team and athlete image perceptions.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This work was guided by Identity Theory and Social Role Theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Witt & Wood, 2010), which recognize that individuals' qualities may be inferred by gender and employment roles. In this outlook, NFL players are strong men who possess athletic competencies and have overcome pain. Gender roles also play a role (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Typically, men are thought to be more agentic than women (e.g., dominant, competitive, assertive) and, per Social Role Theory, individuals are expected to behave consistently with perceived attributes (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Witt & Wood, 2010). As such, NFL players engaging in acts of dominance, competitiveness, and assertiveness during games are likely perceived by fans to possess those traits as central tenets of their identities across various roles (e.g., partner, parent, worker). Additionally, the emerging adult cohort holds different views of family and parenting than other adult cohorts. In particular, emerging adults expect equitable distributions of family caregiving tasks (Boehnke, 2011; Fromm, 2017). This shift in gender role expectations could impact their views of athletes' competition decisions compared to other adult cohorts.

Furthermore, emotions are tied to Identity Theory and Social Role Theory because deviations between expectations and actual behavior often result in their own negative emotions (Stryker & Burke, 2000) and negative emotional reactions by others (Eagly & Wood, 2012). However, congruency between expectations and behaviors leads to more positive emotional reactions, and this feedback can guide individuals' subsequent behaviors as it relates to role beliefs, identity, and enactment of social roles (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Witt & Wood, 2010). Thus, for some fans, player competition decisions may be inconsistent with expectations and prompt negative reactions. However, NFL players are not invincible, and COVID-19 could have threatened their athleticism and health, but also their families. Hence, competition decisions could also have been perceived positively. Differing reactions to playing decisions, then, may be a function of the player's provided reasoning. Therefore, this project expanded the limited experimental sport marketing research (Ko & Lee, 2018) and examined how fans perceived athletes and their team, based upon players' hypothetical decisions to play or opt out of athletic competition.

## **Present Studies**

The current project examined fans' reactions to NFL players and their team when considering the hypothetical competition decision of an athlete (i.e., play or not play) due to COVID-19, with a focus on fan gender and life stage segments (i.e., emerging adults and adults). Both studies incorporated a within-subjects, experimental component that manipulated the COVID-19 concern expressed and the play decision using vignette scenarios. A within-persons design reduces the likelihood that findings are due to individual differences between groups, as each participant is exposed to multiple conditions, which serves as a control to isolate the influence of the variables (Charness et al., 2012). To promote open science initiatives, the study was pre-registered on Open Science Framework (OSF; [https://osf.io/jmkaq/?view\\_only=72705697baa540cdbf7dc87e04241764](https://osf.io/jmkaq/?view_only=72705697baa540cdbf7dc87e04241764)). Social Role Theory and Identity Theory informed the development of the below hypotheses, where five specific hypotheses (H1-H5) were pre-registered, and one exploratory question (EQ) was also examined: (H1) On average, participants will report no change in their perceptions of their favorite NFL team, regardless of the concern expressed by a player or their decision to play for the season. (H2) On average, participants will perceive players in the vignettes who opt not to play for the season more negatively than they had previously, regardless of the concern expressed, than those who opt to play for the season. (H3) On average, participants will perceive players in the vignettes who express concern for self and opt not to play for the season more negatively than those who express a general concern and opt not to play for the season. (H4) On average, participants will perceive players in the vignettes who express concern for family and opt not to play for the season more negatively than those who express a general concern and opt not to play for the season. (H5) On average, participants will perceive players in the vignettes who express general concern and opt to play for the season more positively than those who express concern for self or family and opt to play for the season. (EQ1) What are participants' general emotional reactions to players who had opted out of the NFL season?

As the team was not influencing the decision for the player to opt-in or opt-out of the season, no change was expected in fans' perceptions, thereby contributing to H1. However, fans expect athletes to perform on the field and fulfill their player roles. When behavior deviates from expectations, it often results in more negative reactions (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Stryker & Burke, 2000), thus contributing to H2. Similarly, when reactions were based on a rationale around concern for themselves or a family member, it was expected to be more negative than a general concern because of the agentic expectation of players by fans (Eagly & Wood, 2012), thus contributing to H3-H5. Lastly, to gauge reactions of fans when a football player deviated from the expected role of playing, general emotions were measured for EQ1 to more broadly explore the area of fans' role expectations (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Witt & Wood, 2010).

## **2. Methodology**

### **Study 1**

Study 1 examined emerging adults' reactions to NFL players' hypothetical competition decisions on whether to participate in the season or opt out after expressing specific concerns about COVID-19. Emerging adults were sampled in this study as they are the up-and-coming NFL fans who will have

strong buying power in the near future (Orr, 2020; Silverman, 2020).

### **Materials**

Only measures used in the analyses are described below; the full survey is on OSF ([link](#)).

**Fanhood.** Participants were first asked to select their favorite NFL team. Next, participants indicated their fanhood for NFL football and their favorite NFL team on 10-point scales from 1 *Not a fan* to 10 *A big fan* (Clark et al., 2009; Mayer & Hungenberg, 2021).

**Experimental Vignettes.** Eight shell vignettes were created for four offensive and four defensive positions, and presented randomly: quarterback, wide receiver, blind side tackle, offensive lineman, defensive end, linebacker, defensive back, and defensive lineman. Within each shell, a concern was expressed, and the player's competition decision was made explicit. Both concern and competition decisions varied within each participant and within each scenario; one concern and one competition decision were randomly assigned in each vignette. Three concern options were chosen: *self* (i.e., "concerned about his health and the possibility of contracting COVID-19"), *family* (i.e., "concerned about the health of his family and the possibility of exposing them to COVID-19"), and a control comparison (i.e., "concerned about COVID-19"). Two competition decisions were chosen: *to play* or *not to play*. As such, each shell read, "The [position] of your **Favorite NFL team** has shared that he is concerned about [concern], and/but has opted [competition decision] this season [original emphasis]."

**Perception of Player and Team.** After each vignette, participants responded to a perception change item for the player and for the team on 7-point scales from 1 *Much more negative* to 7 *Much more positive*, with a mid-point of *No change in perception*.

**Opt-Out Emotions.** Participants provided general responses to players opting out on 5-point scales from 1 *Does not describe my feelings* to 5 *Clearly describes my feelings* for the following emotions: Proud, Disappointed, Stressed, Annoyed, and Revolted.

**Demographics.** Participants shared their age, gender, race, and sexual orientation.

### **Procedure**

The project was pre-registered on OSF, which further details the study procedures. Prior to data collection, the project was approved by an Institutional Review Board. Emerging adults at a liberal arts college in the southeast of the United States, who self-identified as NFL fans, were recruited to participate in an online survey from the Psychology and Sport Management Departments' subject pools.

After reviewing the study's information, participants answered questions about their fanhood. Then, participants read "Next, you are going to be presented with eight statements and asked to envision how you would feel if the starting/first-string player on your favorite NFL Team had made each decision. Please read each statement fully before answering the questions [original emphasis]." Participants were then presented with each vignette and a series of perception questions. Next, participants shared their general emotions about NFL players opting out of a season, followed by their demographic information. Participants received course credit/extra credit for their time.

### **Participants**

A total of 139 college-enrolled emerging adults participated; 31 were removed for failing attention checks or denoting that their data should not be used. The excluded participants did not differ from the retained on relevant demographic or fanhood variables (all  $p > 0.118$ ). The analytic sample consisted of 108 emerging adult fans ( $M_{\text{age}} = 19.13$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ; 37% men, 62% women, 0.9% other; 92.6% Caucasian/White, 4.6% African-American/Black, 2.8% other; 88.9% heterosexual, 9.3% bisexual, 0.9% gay/lesbian, 0.9% asexual). They considered themselves pretty big NFL fans ( $M = 6.54$  out of 10,  $SD = 1.99$ ) and of their favorite NFL team ( $M = 7.45$  out of 10,  $SD = 1.94$ ). Emerging adults' favorite NFL teams represented 22 of the 32 franchises.

### **Data Analysis**

To examine H1-H5 on fans' reactions to players' hypothetical competition decisions based on specific COVID-19 concerns, linear mixed effects modeling was conducted in R-studio using the lme4 package (Bates et al., 2015). Separate modeling was conducted for player and team perceptions. Models were compared to identify the best-fitting model (Winter, 2013). The null model examined perception by only including random intercepts for participants ( $M0 = \text{Perception} \sim (1 | \text{id})$ ). Model 1 examined perception as a function of the interaction between COVID-19 concern and competition decision and included random intercepts for participants ( $M1 = \text{Perception} \sim \text{Concern} \times \text{Play} + (1 | \text{id})$ ). Model 2 added random slopes for the COVID-19 concern by competition decision interaction ( $M2 = \text{Perception} \sim \text{Concern} \times \text{Competition Decision} + (\text{Concern} \times \text{Competition Decision} | \text{id})$ ). An alternative was created for each model that included a player position covariate. To examine EQ1, a 5 (emotions: proud, disappointed, stressed, annoyed, revolted)  $\times$  2 (gender: men, women) mixed ANOVA was conducted.

### **Study 2**

Study 2 examined a broader age range of adult fans' (i.e., not emerging adults in college) reactions to NFL players' hypothetical competition decisions on whether to participate in the season or opt out after expressing specific COVID-19 concerns. Adult fans were sampled to evaluate if the Study 1 findings from emerging adult fans would replicate in a broader sample of fans, or if the two fan groups differed in their reactions, potentially due to life stage differences.

### **Materials**

The same materials were used as those in Study 1.

### **Procedure**

The same procedure was employed as in Study 1. However, participants were recruited online via NFL Chat forums, Facebook fan groups, and social media posts. A majority of participants (98.6%) were recruited from social media. Upon completion, participants could enter themselves into gift card raffles.

### **Participants**

A total of 122 adult fans participated in the study; 52 were removed for failing attention checks or saying their data should not be used. The excluded participants did not differ from the retained on



relevant demographic or fanhood variables (all  $p > .200$ ). The analytic sample consisted of 70 adult fans ( $M_{\text{age}} = 33.57$ ;  $SD = 13.89$ ; 67.1% men, 32.9% women; 91.4% Caucasian/White, 5.7% Hispanic/Latino, 1.4% African-American/Black, 1.4% other; 97.1% heterosexual, 1.4% gay/lesbian, and 1 person did not disclose). They considered themselves pretty big NFL fans ( $M = 7.43$  out of 10,  $SD = 2.00$ ) and of their favorite NFL team ( $M = 8.27$  out of 10,  $SD = 1.69$ ). Adult fans' favorite NFL teams represented 22 of the 32 franchises.

### Data Analysis

The same analytic strategy from Study 1 was employed in Study 2.

## 3. Results

### Study 1

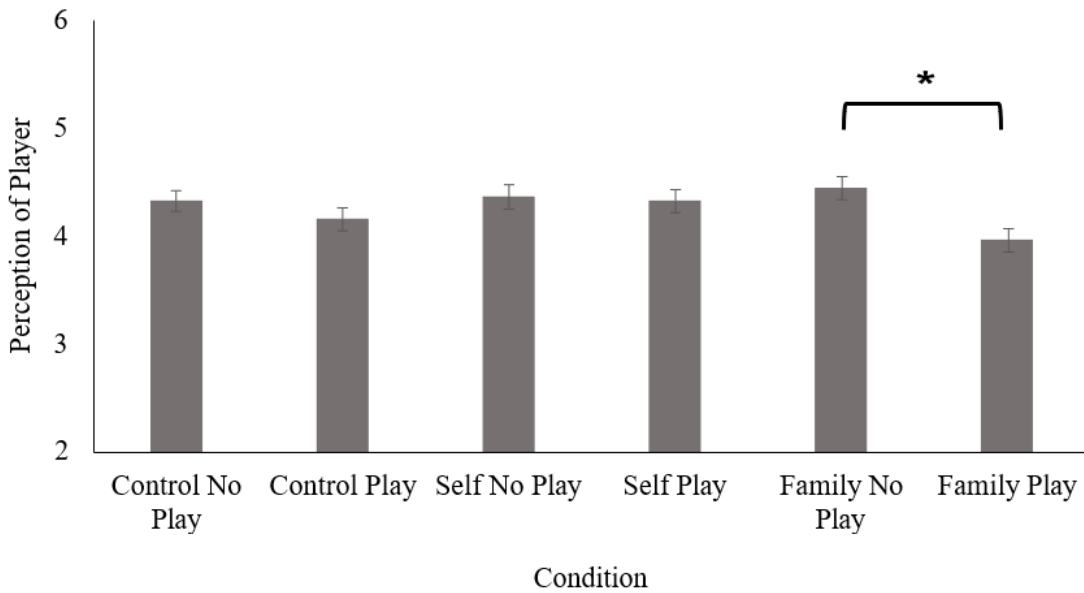
Examining hypothesis 1, the linear mixed effects modeling for emerging adult fans' team perceptions revealed that the alternative version of model 1 was not significantly different from the alternative version of the null model. As hypothesized, the model demonstrated that, when controlling for player position, the COVID-19 concern and competition decision did not influence emerging adults' perceptions of their favorite NFL team ( $X^2(5) = 9.04$ ,  $p = .108$ ).

Examining hypotheses 2-5, the linear mixed effects modeling for emerging adult fans' perception of players revealed that model 1 demonstrated the best fit to the data, and there was no improvement in the covariate model with player position 1. The model demonstrated that the COVID-19 concern and play decision impacted emerging adults' perceptions of NFL players ( $X^2(5) = 25.72$ ,  $p < .001$ ; Figure 1). Specifically, emerging adult fans were more positive in their perception of players who had expressed a family concern and opted not to play ( $\sim .22 \pm .13$  SE), but they were more negative in their perception of players who had expressed a family concern and opted to play ( $\sim -.43 \pm .18$  SE). As such, while there were significant findings, hypotheses 2- 5 were largely unsupported.

Examining the exploratory question, the 5x2 mixed ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of emotion with NFL player opt-outs (Wilk's  $\lambda = .30$ ,  $F(4, 101) = 59.79$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .70$ ), qualified by an interaction between emotion and gender (Wilk's  $\lambda = .86$ ,  $F(4, 101) = 4.28$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $\eta^2 = .15$ ; Figure 2). Comparisons were examined using estimated marginal means with Bonferroni corrections. Overall, emerging adult fans were less likely to indicate feeling revolted than any other emotion: proud ( $M_{\text{diff}} = -1.35$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI  $[-1.76, -.95]$ ,  $d = 1.36$ ), disappointed ( $M_{\text{diff}} = -1.12$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI  $[-1.46, -.77]$ ,  $d = 1.16$ ), stressed ( $M_{\text{diff}} = -.90$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI  $[-1.24, -.56]$ ,  $d = .98$ ), or annoyed ( $M_{\text{diff}} = -.74$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI  $[-1.03, -.45]$ ,  $d = .88$ ). Furthermore, they were less likely to indicate feeling annoyed than feeling proud ( $M_{\text{diff}} = -.61$ ,  $p = .022$ , 95% CI  $[-1.17, -.05]$ ,  $d = .50$ ) or disappointed ( $M_{\text{diff}} = -.38$ ,  $p = .009$ , 95% CI  $[-.69, -.06]$ ,  $d = .32$ ). Focused on the interaction, emerging adult-aged women were more likely to indicate feeling proud ( $M_{\text{diff}} = 1.01$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI  $[.49, 1.53]$ ,  $d = .77$ ) and stressed ( $M_{\text{diff}} = .50$ ,  $p = .037$ , 95% CI  $[.03, .97]$ ,  $d = .42$ ) with an NFL player opt-out decision than emerging adult-aged men. No other comparisons were significant (all  $p > .629$ ).

**Figure 1**

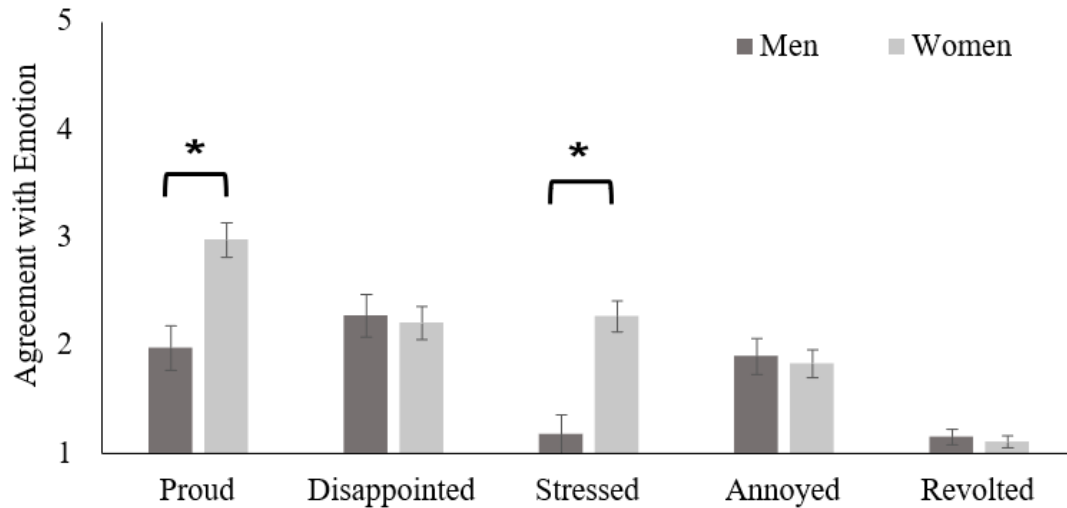
*Emerging Adults' Perceptions of NFL Players Based on Concern and Competition Decision*



*Note.* Error bars denote standard error.

**Figure 2**

*Emerging Adults' Emotions of NFL Players Not Competing*



## Study 2

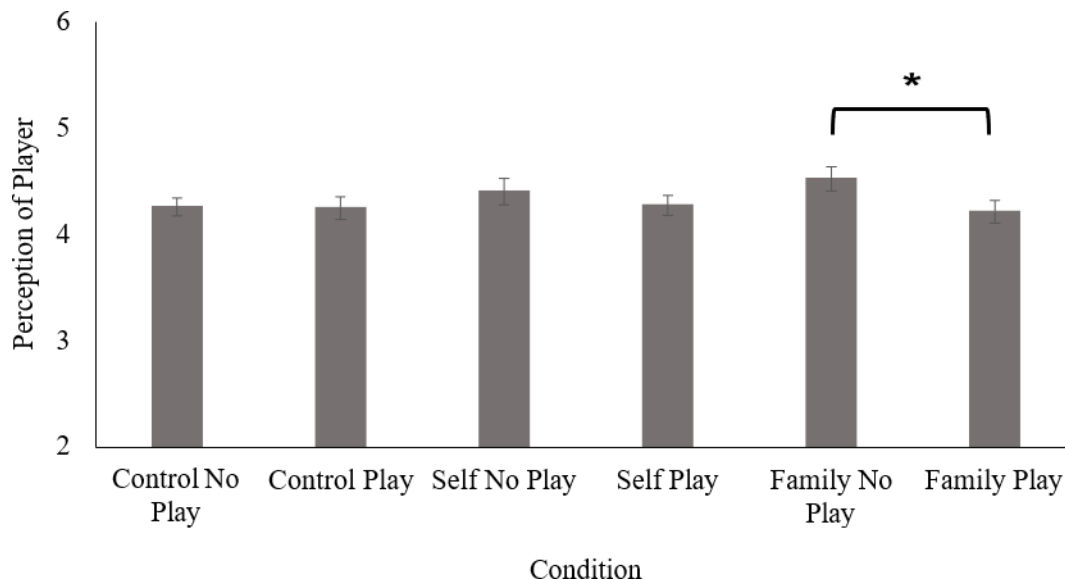
Examining hypothesis 1, the linear mixed effects modeling for adult fans' perceptions of the team revealed that model 1 was not significantly different from the null model, and there was no improvement with the alternative model. As hypothesized, the model demonstrated that COVID-19 concern and play decision did not influence adult fans' perceptions of their favorite NFL team ( $X^2(5) = 5.78, p = .329$ ).

Examining hypotheses 2-5, the linear mixed effects modeling for adult fans' perception of players revealed that model 1 demonstrated the best fit to the data, and no improvement in the covariate model with player position 2. The model demonstrated that the COVID-19 concern and play decision impacted adult fans' perceptions of NFL players ( $X^2(5) = 14.67, p = .012$ ; Figure 3). Specifically, adult fans were more positive in their perception of players who had expressed a family concern and opted not to play ( $\sim .25 \pm .11$  SE) but more negative in their perception of players who had expressed a family concern and opted to play ( $\sim -.33 \pm .16$  SE). As such, while there were significant findings, hypotheses 2-5 were largely unsupported.

Examining the exploratory question, the 5x2 mixed ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of emotion with NFL player opt-outs (Wilk's  $\lambda = .39, F(4, 63) = 25.14, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .62$ ). The interaction between emotion and gender was not significant (Wilk's  $\lambda = .91, F(4, 63) = 1.65, p = .174, \eta_p^2 = .10$ ). Main effect comparisons were made using estimated marginal means with Bonferroni corrections. Adult fans, overall, were less likely to indicate feeling revolted than any other emotion: proud ( $M_{diff} = -1.24, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-1.71, -.77], d = 1.26$ ), disappointed ( $M_{diff} = -.68, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-1.06, -.30], d = .83$ ), stressed ( $M_{diff} = -.32, p = .030, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.63, -.02], d = .49$ ), or annoyed ( $M_{diff} = -.38, p = .004, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.68, -.09], d = .54$ ). No other comparisons were significant (all  $p > .05$ ).

**Figure 3.**

*Adult Fans' Perceptions of NFL Players Based on Concern and Competition Decision*



*Note.* Error bars denote standard error.

#### **4. Discussion**

This project contributes to the understanding of fans' perceptions of NFL athletes and teams through an experimental research design. In sum, hypothesis 1 was supported across both studies with no change in NFL team perceptions regardless of player concern expressed or competition decision. Additionally, although hypotheses 2-5 were largely unsupported, there was an interesting finding related to family-focused concerns in both studies. Further, the emotional responses of both life-stage samples were largely similar (e.g., participants were not revolted). One exception relates to gender differences (e.g., emerging adult-aged men and women felt differently; adult fans' emotions did not differ by gender).

The results of the experimental component indicated that players were perceived more positively when a family concern was provided and the player did not compete, while players were perceived more negatively when a family concern was provided and they opted to play. Perhaps fans recognized and appreciated the varied social roles of players, role conflicts from expressed values, and deemed the family role above the athlete role amid a global health pandemic. Still, further research is needed to understand why fans responded in this manner, which could explore the congruence concept (Linsner et al., 2021; Taniyev et al., 2022).

Contrastingly, the experimental component indicated that fan perceptions of the team were largely not impacted by the player's decision. Thus, sport practitioners can temper their concern that fan engagement will be altered by the decision of a player not to compete. As such, a team could take the approach of not commenting on the playing decisions of its team members. However, the above results suggest that fans recognized the multiple roles of athletes. Therefore, a team may be wise to also recognize these roles, and support players in them, including any decisions to not compete in a game because of a family role (e.g., parental leave, caring for a sick family member, the passing of a loved one). Then, it may behoove teams to invest in their players as people and subsequently highlight their players' off-field capacities, and communicate those to the public to enhance their own imagery and fan loyalty. This messaging might reduce role conflict emotions of fans and aid relationship management efforts between the team and consumers. NFL efforts to support players could also aid some emerging adult fans to be more aligned with a team and not just a player (Orr, 2020; Walker & Kent, 2009; Wang et al., 2020).

In terms of the emotional responses, the results indicated that regardless of life stage, fans were not revolted by player decisions to opt out of competition but were more likely to be proud of such an action. To some, this result would be unexpected (Broomberg, 2022; Leetaru, 2016; Neubaum & Kramer, 2017; O'Malley, 2023; Smith, 2020) and is a reminder to sport practitioners that media commentary by on-air personalities and social media reactions are not the only indicators of fan sentiment. Importantly, sport managers must make adjustments to consumers based upon their given market context (Mayer & Hungenberg, 2021) and should recognize that their fans can simultaneously hold two or more emotions at the same time (e.g., proud and disappointed) regarding their perceived image of an athlete.

While both life stage groups indicated being somewhat proud of the athlete's decision not to compete, emerging adult-aged women indicated their pride at a significantly higher level than emerging adult-aged men. The emerging adult-aged women also felt significantly more stressed by these player decisions than the emerging adult-aged men. As such, they may have experienced a heightened degree of mixed emotions, an understandable reaction amid the COVID-19 pandemic, wherein they may have desired leisure outlets like watching sports but were also concerned for their

own and others' health. Moreover, these results support the dedication of women as sport fans and counter past research on gendered expectations of football fans (Clark et al., 2009; Shane-Nichols et al., 2021). Sport managers will then need to meet these fan expectations of the emerging adult-aged women with gender segmentation strategies. One fan strategy to appeal to and invest in these up-and-coming consumers could be to provide content of players as athletes on the field and off the field in their other life roles.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

One limitation is the sample size. While a within-subjects design does not need to be as large as a between-subjects design (Charness et al., 2012), statistical power would have been improved with a larger sample and/or balanced conditions. Additionally, future work should aim for improved racial representation aligned with NFL consumers. Future inquiries could also aim to consider an individual sport like golf or tennis, where athletes have more event participation control, rather than a team sport with a consistent league schedule. These endeavors could also name specific players, coaches, and their role identities. Future work could also explore college football and players' decisions to opt out of bowl games. In all, this project provided an experimentally-focused understanding of sport consumer behavior, considered fan segments, and engaged in open-science initiatives.

## Author Note

**Conflict of Interest.** No potential conflicts of interest are reported by the authors.

**Compliance with Ethics.** The study was approved by the authors' institutional review board before being conducted. Moreover, participants were presented with a study information sheet before choosing to participate.

**Open Science Statement .** The project was pre-registered on Open Science Framework ([https://osf.io/jmkaq/?view\\_only=72705697baa540cdbf7dc87e04241764](https://osf.io/jmkaq/?view_only=72705697baa540cdbf7dc87e04241764)). The survey and supplemental materials are shared there. The data are available upon request from the second author.

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## **Legacy in Action: How Event Legacies Fuel Community Development and Supportive Behavior**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the multidimensional relationship among social impacts, knowledge of legacy, and the intention to support hosting future large-scale sports events. Only limited research has explored how the perceived legacies influence stakeholders' behaviors, particularly considering the mediated role of knowledge about the legacies from hosting a large-scale sports event. [To assess the relationship, legacy factors derived from social exchange theory were used to reflect both positive and negative social impacts], and knowledge of legacy is conceptualized and developed from existing studies. The results suggest that knowledge of legacy significantly mediates the relationship between perceived social impacts and community support for hosting future large-scale sports events. In particular, understanding the legacy of past events [reduces the negative perception] of economic costs associated with the future support of hosting large-scale sports events in the community. On the other hand, community development is crucial in directly enhancing support for hosting future events. The findings of this study can serve as valuable insights for prospective communities and event administrators to establish an effective and successful planning process by providing a clear rationale to utilize various managerial and communicational strategies to cultivate the understanding of event legacies toward hosting future events.

**Keywords:** event legacy, social impact, community development, supportive behavior

### **1. Introduction**

Hosting large-scale sports events generates substantial social impacts that could reshape attitudes toward the hosting communities and residents' quality of life (Kim et al., 2015). Ongoing controversies have concerned whether the retained social impacts outweigh the costs of hosting large-scale sport events. Hosting large-scale sports events commonly requires the development of

substantial infrastructure involving new sports facilities, transportation systems, and other peripheral facilities to stage the events. However, critical issues have arisen around large-scale sports events as the infrastructure cannot be sufficiently used after the event, particularly for long-term perspectives. Therefore, hosting organizations and regions developed comprehensive strategies to maximize positive legacies (e.g., community development, economic benefits, etc.) while minimizing negative legacies (e.g., economic costs, environmental costs, etc.). This has raised questions about the sustainability, long-term planning, and managerial strategies of hosting large-scale sports events. Existing studies have primarily focused on the short-term impacts rather than assessing how residents' attitudes toward long-term legacies may impact their supportive behaviors in hosting future large-scale sports events.

Any changes may influence residents' quality of life and their continued residence in the hosting communities] as the legacy of the events (Preuss, 2018); thus, a comprehensive understanding of long-term perceived social impacts is critical for generating support while reducing conflicts for hosting prospective large-scale sports events. Numerous studies pertain to intangible socio-psychological impacts, encompassing social cohesion, community pride, social unity, and enhancing community image. While existing studies have acknowledged the significance of examining residents' perceived social impacts on hosting a large-scale sports event, there has been a lack of thorough long-term analysis of legacies. This oversight is concerning, as understanding the long-term legacies of hosting communities (e.g., residents) is vital for the sustainable development of future events. Evaluating how residents' perspectives and experiences related to past event hosting can provide valuable insights for event planners and administrators. It concerns intangible social effects such as community cohesion, civic pride, uniting people, or improving self-esteem, and has examined the relationship between perceived social impacts and behavioral attributes. This is mainly because they are difficult to quantify (Walton et al., 2007). Despite this, it is often stipulated that these intangible effects could be at least comparable in scale to the tangible impact (Noll & Zimbalist, 1997). In addition, limited research has examined how the knowledge of the legacies may influence residents' behavior, such as supporting future event hosting.

### **Event Legacy**

Previous research on the legacies of hosting sports events utilized the framework established by Preuss (2007), which includes the five-dimensional legacy structure, such as positive/negative, tangible/intangible, planned/unplanned, time, and space (Thomson et al., 2013). Event legacy is often recognized as a host city's long-term or permanent outcomes from staging an event (Kim et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 2013). Due to increasing social and political challenges and conflicts surrounding hosting sports events of various sizes, public policy planners and event organizers are actively highlighting the legacies of hosting sports events as a compelling justification for the significant tangible and intangible investments required to host the events (Preuss, 2018). Positive social capital and legacies mitigate potential conflicts among stakeholders so that event planners can justify public spending on events, boosting public support for event hosting and advancing community development through hosting sports events (Kim & Walker, 2012).

### **Social Impact**

Social impact is "...the changes in quality of life of residents of tourist destination" based on hosting various events (Mathieson & Wall, 1982, p. 137). Social impacts of residents toward hosting sports events have been studied in various research contexts, such as mega-sport events (Kim & Petrick, 2005; Kim & Walker, 2012; Wu et al., 2023) and [large-scale international sports events (Carlini et al., 2020)]; Kim et al., 2015). Residents recognize a perceived social impact following the event by

evaluating its outcomes based on the expected benefits (Chalip, 2006). Growing attention has been given to exploring the socio-psychological impacts derived from hosting various sports events. Nonetheless, there is still a lack of attention on how sports event planners and administrators can effectively create legacy outcomes, particularly positive legacies, during the planning and design of hosting sports events (Carlini et al., 2020).

Perceived social impacts of stakeholders, such as residents, can vary by socio-demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, level of attachment, length of residency, political preferences, or the level of identification with the community (Inoue & Havard, 2014; Kim et al., 2015). Residents who recognize legacies from hosting sports events indicated substantial positive legacies, indicating support and interest in getting involved with the event. Numerous studies have identified the legacies of hosting sports events and found that positive legacies enhance the planning of prospective events and facility developments (e.g., Balduck et al., 2011; Inoue & Havard, 2014; Kim et al., 2015).

### **Social Exchange Theory**

Social exchange theory assumes that social behavior results from an exchange process (Lawler & Thye, 1999), with the purpose of the exchange to maximize benefits (e.g., positive social impacts) and minimize negative impacts (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). According to social exchange theory, when recipients receive expected benefits from the exchange process, they feel the need to reciprocate positively (Fazal-e-Hasan et al., 2014; Hsiao et al., 2023). Common observations were identified in the planning and evaluations of hosting sports events, where stakeholders, the beneficiaries, recognize the benefits provided by the efforts of event administrators and planners, the benefactors (Kim et al., 2024; Kim & Lee, 2013). Positive outcomes from the exchange process facilitate attitudes toward satisfaction that can lead to reciprocal behaviors, including but not limited to positive word-of-mouth and intention to support prospective sports event hosting. Intrinsic benefits such as social affiliation and enjoyment directly influence stakeholders' intention to share knowledge positively (Zhao & Detlor, 2023). On the other hand, stakeholders express negative intentions to share their knowledge on the exchange process and contexts when anticipated benefits are not delivered fully (Kim et al., 2015).

### **Research Context: Formula One Korean Grand Prix**

The Republic of Korea hosted a Formula 1 race from 2010 to 2013 in Yeongam-gun, Jeollanam-do, near the southwestern area, a very rural area of the Korean peninsula (Horton, 2024). The hosting site was not a typical tourist destination and had no infrastructure (e.g., hotels, restaurants, etc.) to accommodate event visitors. Additionally, racing sports were not a mainstream sport that garnered support and interest from the public, even in major cities in South Korea. The Korean Grand Prix, hoping to vitalize the local economy and build an attractive image as a tourist destination, built the racing track and peripheral infrastructures with public subsidies and governmental funds. However, many issues surged immediately, including delays in the construction of the Korea International Circuit (KIC), poor track conditions, lower attendance at 150,000, mixed with paid and complimentary attendees compared to other F1 events, and a lack of funds for hosting prospective events (Bulley, 2024). The event was eventually abandoned as attendance died down, coupled with the maintenance costs that Formula 1 tracks require. The track remains for smaller domestic and regional racing competitions, but lacks the glitz and glamour of big-ticket events, such as the Formula 1 race. After years of controversies regarding how to revitalize the hosting site and left-over infrastructures, the local government, in partnership with private developers, executed a strategic development plan, including but not limited to the construction of public golf courses, nature campsites, hosting various leisure and entertainment events (e.g., concerts, festivals, etc.), research and development centers for electric vehicles, and driving center that can host regular



drivers to get quality driving training.

### The Purpose of the Study

Based on the preceding commentary, this study examines the relationship between residents' perceived legacies of hosting a large-scale sports event and the intention to support hosting future events. Based on utilizing the social exchange theory, this study also examined a model focusing on how residents' knowledge of the legacies mediated the relationships between five factors of the perceived social impacts on the future behavioral intention to support hosting prospective large-scale sports events in the community.

## 2. Methodology

### Participants and Data Collection

This study explored the social impacts as legacies of hosting a large-scale international sports event by analyzing survey data from 473 residents of the Southwest Jeollanam-do area, South Korea, in 2022 (N = 473) as the region hosted the Formula One Korea Grand Prix from 2010 to 2013. Participants, selected through convenience sampling, represented a diverse demographic profile: 53.9% male and 46.1% female, spanning generational categories from Generation Z to Baby Boomers. The sample also encompassed a range of income and education levels, reflecting the socio-economic diversity of the host community.

### Measures

The survey instrument assessed perceptions of social impacts across multiple domains, using scales adapted from established measures (e.g., the Perceived Social Impact Scale by Kim et al., 2015). Items were rated on a 1-7 Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree), with higher scores indicating more substantial agreement or greater levels of the measured construct. The knowledge of legacy was measured as follows:

- **Community Development (CD):** Six items measured perceived improvements in community image and opportunities (e.g., "Increased understanding of other cultures," "Enhanced media visibility").
- **Community Pride (CP):** Five items captured the sense of local pride fostered by the event (e.g., "Enhanced the community pride of residents," "Reinforced community spirit").
- **Economic Benefits (EB):** Four items addressed perceptions of economic gains, including business growth and improved infrastructure (e.g., "Increased trade for local businesses").
- **Economic Costs (EC):** Three items gauged concerns about potential financial burdens due to event hosting (e.g., "Excessive spending on new infrastructure").
- **Traffic Problems (TP):** Three items assessed inconveniences related to event-induced traffic congestion (e.g., "Resulted in traffic congestion").

In addition, the Knowledge of the Legacy (KL) was included as a mediated variable (MV) using a four-item scale (KL1 to KL4 on a 1-5 Likert scale) to assess the awareness of legacies derived from hosting the Formula One Korean Grand Prix and its infrastructure development (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .957$ ). The items were conceptualized and developed based on previous research on the stakeholders' perceived knowledge of legacies related to hosting various sports events. (Kim et al., 2015; Preuss,



2018; Thomson, et al., 2013). The dependent variable (DV) in this study was Support for Hosting Future Events (*SPT*), a construct measured through two items assessing community support for future large-scale events (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .930$ ). Each scale demonstrated internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding .70, indicating reliable measurement.

### Statistical Analysis

This study employed a GLM Mediation Analysis to examine both the indirect and direct effects of five independent variables (IVs)—Community Development (*CD*), Community Pride (*CP*), Economic Benefits (*EB*), Traffic Problems (*TP*), and Economic Costs (*EC*)—on the dependent variable, Support for Hosting Future Events (*SPT*), with Knowledge of Legacy (*KL*) included as a mediator. This approach provides insight into both the direct pathways (IVs  $\rightarrow$  *SPT*) and mediated pathways (IVs  $\rightarrow$  *KL*  $\rightarrow$  *SPT*), through which perceptions of social impacts influence community support.

The model is specified as follows:

1. Mediator Equation:  $KL = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 CD + \alpha_2 CP + \alpha_3 EB + \alpha_4 TP + \alpha_5 EC + \epsilon_{KN}$
2. Outcome Equation:

$$SPT = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 KL + \gamma_2 CD + \gamma_3 CP + \gamma_4 EB + \gamma_5 TP + \gamma_6 EC + \epsilon_{SPT}$$

In this model,

- $\alpha$  coefficients estimate the effect of each independent variable on the mediator, Knowledge of Legacy (*KL*), representing the indirect pathway from social impacts to support for hosting future events.
- $\gamma$  coefficients estimate the direct impact of each independent variable on the dependent variable (*SPT*), accounting for the influence of *KL*.
- $\gamma_1$  specifically captures the mediating role of Knowledge of Legacy (*KL*) on *SPT*, illustrating how increased awareness and positive perceptions of the event may translate the effects of social impacts into stronger support for future events.

The GLM Mediation Analysis procedure was used to calculate indirect and direct effects, with statistical significance assessed at  $p < .05$ . This analysis framework allows for a comprehensive understanding of the mediated and direct pathways influencing support for future events.

### 3. Results

The sample included 473 participants, with a nearly balanced gender distribution (53.9% male, 46.1% female). Generational representation spanned from Baby Boomers (23.7%) to Generation Z (25.2%). Most participants were full-time employed (49.1%) or students (18.2%), and 32.6% held a college degree. This study adopted the classifications of the generations by Twenge (2023), which consists of six generations: Silents (born 1925-1945), Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1979), Millennials (1980-1994), Generation Z (1995-2012), and Polars (2013-2029). Income levels predominantly ranged between 1 million and 3 million won (52.6%), and 60% of participants reported residing in the area for over 10 years, reflecting strong community ties.

**Table 1.***Descriptive Statistics of Dependent and Independent Variables (N = 473)*

Variable	Label	N	Mean	SD
Support for Hosting Future Events	<i>SPT</i>	473	5.70	1.33
Community Development	<i>CD</i>	473	5.01	.70
Community Pride	<i>CP</i>	473	4.42	.81
Economic Benefits	<i>EB</i>	473	4.35	.99
Traffic Problems	<i>TP</i>	473	4.45	1.12
Economic Costs	<i>EC</i>	473	5.00	.88
Knowledge of Legacy	<i>KL</i>	473	4.09	.98

**Descriptive Statistics**

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the main survey variables. Overall, participants expressed moderate to high agreement with positive community impacts, including favorable perceptions of Community Development ( $M = 5.01$ ,  $SD = .70$ ) and Economic Benefits ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = .99$ ). Moderate concerns were raised regarding Economic Costs ( $M = 5.00$ ,  $SD = .88$ ) and Traffic Problems ( $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ). Knowledge of Legacy showed moderate awareness ( $M = 4.09$ ,  $SD = .98$ ), while strong community support was indicated for future events ( $M = 5.70$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ).

In addition to examining the relationships among perceived social impacts, knowledge of legacy, and support for future event hosting, this study utilized generational clusters to analyze group differences in attitude toward legacies and their likelihood of supporting future large-scale sport tourism event initiatives. Table 2 summarizes these descriptive statistics by generation, highlighting some generational trends. Notably, Generation Z exhibited the highest mean support for hosting future events ( $M = 6.12$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ), potentially reflecting different social or cultural perspectives compared to older generations.

**Table 2***Descriptive Statistics by Generation for Dependent and Independent Variables*

Variable	Generation	N	Mean	SD
Support for Hosting Future Events	Boomers	112	5.43	1.36
	Generation X	105	5.37	1.66
	Millennials	137	5.82	1.05
	Generation Z	119	6.12	1.13
Community Development	Boomers	112	4.87	0.72
	Generation X	105	4.98	0.77
	Millennials	137	4.87	0.65
	Generation Z	119	5.32	0.59
Community Pride	Boomers	112	4.36	0.77
	Generation X	105	4.43	0.90
	Millennials	137	4.25	0.74
	Generation Z	119	4.68	0.79
Economic Benefits	Boomers	112	4.07	1.11
	Generation X	105	4.31	1.07
	Millennials	137	4.21	0.89
	Generation Z	119	4.80	0.75
Traffic Problem	Boomers	112	4.11	1.18
	Generation X	105	4.48	1.19
	Millennials	137	4.44	1.04
	Generation Z	119	4.75	1.00
Economic Costs	Boomers	112	4.95	0.89
	Generation X	105	5.07	0.95
	Millennials	137	4.98	0.87
	Generation Z	119	5.01	0.83
Knowledge of Legacy	Boomers	112	3.94	1.10
	Generation X	105	3.95	1.07
	Millennials	137	4.11	0.87
	Generation Z	119	4.33	0.86

As we found an interesting result of the generational differences in all three variables, generational effects were assessed using a regression analysis with Boomers as the reference group. Results showed that Generation Z demonstrated significantly greater support than Boomers ( $\beta = .238, p < .05$ ), while Millennials and Generation X displayed an insignificant trend ( $p > .05$ ). These findings indicate that younger generations, particularly Generation Z, are more inclined to support future events, possibly reflecting distinct social or cultural views on the event's impact.

**Table 3***Generalized Linear Model Results*

Independent Variable	Support Future Events ( $\beta$ )
Intercept	1.20 **
Community Development (CD)	.16 *
Community Pride (CP)	-.15 *
Economic Benefits (EB)	.00
Traffic Problems (TP)	.00
Economic Costs (EC)	-.03
Knowledge of Legacy (KL)	1.08 **
Generation (ref = Boomers)	
Generation X (Gen X)	-.09
Millennials (Mil)	.18
Generation Z (Gen Z)	.24 *
$R^2$	.678

Note. \*  $p < .05$  and \*\*  $p < .001$

**Generalized Linear Models (GLM) Mediation Analysis**

The mediation model results, presented in Table 4, include both direct and indirect effects, providing insights into how perceptions of social impacts are associated with support for future events:

1. **Indirect Effects:** Knowledge of Legacy served as a significant mediator for the effects of Traffic Problems ( $\alpha_4 \cdot \gamma_1 = .121, p < .05$ ) and Economic Costs ( $\alpha_5 \cdot \gamma_1 = -.185, p < .05$ ) on Support for Hosting Future Events. These findings indicate that the awareness and legacy of the event can either enhance or diminish support, depending on specific social impact factors.
2. **Direct Effects:** Community Development ( $\gamma_2 = .174, p < .05$ ) and Community Pride ( $\gamma_3 = -.160, p < .05$ ) had significant direct effects on Support for Hosting Future Events. While Community Development positively influenced support, Community Pride showed a negative association, suggesting a complex relationship with future support motivations.
3. **Total Effects:** The combined direct and indirect effects underscore the role of Knowledge of Legacy (KN) in mediating the relationship between social impact perceptions and support for future events. Specifically, Community Development ( $\alpha_1 \cdot \gamma_1 + \gamma_2 = .234, p < .05$ ), Community Pride ( $\alpha_2 \cdot \gamma_1 + \gamma_3 = -.192, p < .05$ ), Traffic Problem ( $\alpha_4 \cdot \gamma_1 + \gamma_5 = .136, p < .05$ ), and Economic Cost ( $\alpha_5 \cdot \gamma_1 + \gamma_6 = -.223, p < .05$ ) showed significant total effects on support for future events.

**Table 4.***GLM Mediation Analysis: Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects on SPT*

Effect Type	Path	Estimate	SE
Direct Effects	CD → SPT	.17 **	.07
	CP → SPT	-.16 **	.05
	EB → SPT	.02	.05
	TP → SPT	.02	.03
	EC → SPT	-.04	.04
Indirect Effects	CD → KL → SPT	.06	.09
	CP → KL → SPT	-.03	.08
	EB → KL → SPT	-.10	.06
	TP → KL → SPT	.12 *	.05
	EC → KL → SPT	-.18 **	.06
Total Effects	CD → SPT	.23 *	.11
	CP → SPT	-.19 *	.09
	EB → SPT	-.08	.08
	TP → SPT	.14 *	.06
	EC → SPT	-.22 **	.07

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

The GLM Mediation Analysis indicates that Knowledge of Legacy (KN) significantly mediates the relationship between perceived social impacts and residents' support for future events. This mediation suggests that increased awareness of the legacies and positive perceptions of the event enhances the long-term translation of perceived social impacts into community support.

## 4. Discussion

In the dynamic landscape of the sport industry, substantial studies have focused on analyzing the impact of hosting large-scale sports events on local communities (Kim et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2015). Studies have examined both the tangible and intangible impacts, such as the influx of visitors (Gulak-Lipka, 2024; Knott & Tinaz, 2022), infrastructural development (Burbank et al., 2002; Waitt, 2003), and the development of sports facilities (Kim et al., 2024; Sparvero et al., 2015) that result from hosting various sports events. Although there has been more focus on examining legacy as a justification for political and socio-economic reasons in planning sports events, there is limited

research on how knowledge of legacies influences behavioral attributes, particularly how the perceived legacy of events shapes residents' future support and engagement. The findings of this study provide comprehensive insights to answer the multifaceted relationships among perceived legacy, knowledge of the legacy, and behavioral intention associated with hosting large-scale sports events.

### **Legacy in Action**

Overall, participants indicated positive social impacts, including a moderately positive perception of Community Development ( $M = 5.01$ ,  $SD = .70$ ) and a moderate attitude toward a negative social impact factor: Economic Costs ( $M = 5.00$ ,  $SD = .88$ ). Knowledge of Legacy showed an adequate level of awareness ( $M = 4.09$ ,  $SD = .98$ ), while strong community support for future events ( $M = 5.70$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ) was identified. These findings are consistent with the previous research. There were statistically significant results on generational perceptions of the perceived social impacts, knowledge of legacy, and support for hosting future events. Interestingly, Generation Z indicated the highest attitudes toward support for hosting future events, a positive social impact factor: community development and knowledge of legacy. Understanding these generational differences can help event planners tailor their strategies to better engage and motivate younger audiences, who are more inclined to support initiatives that enhance quality of life and community growth. This outcome provides valuable insights for event planners: younger generations emphasize the quality of life through community development with a higher understanding of the event legacies regarding support for future event hosting.

According to Wu et al. (2023), when residents appraise social camaraderie and the perceived social impacts as credible, they form positive attitudes toward the events. However, the current study found that Community Pride, despite being a positive social impact factor, negatively influenced the intention to support future event hosting, whereas Community Development had a positive influence. This suggests that while fostering a sense of pride might not directly translate to future support, focusing on tangible community improvements is more effective in encouraging continued engagement. Many studies found positive intangible social impacts, including civic pride, improving self-esteem, and a sense of belonging through hosting sports events (Coghlan et al., 2017; Crompton, 2004; Groothuis & Rotthoff, 2016; Kim & Walker, 2012). However, the current study reveals critical insights for event planners and administrators that they may consider less promoting community and civic pride through the events, as residents do not buy into this as a vital factor to support hosting future events. However, they should deliberately execute public relations strategies to disseminate information on how the event enhances community development and quality of life to garner more stakeholder support.

Regarding the indirect effects, knowledge of residents' legacies from previous event hosting has been identified as a critical mediator between negative social impacts and support for hosting future events. When residents understand the legacies from past events, they are more likely to view negative social impacts, like economic costs or traffic issues, in a positive light. This increased awareness reduces concerns and fosters greater support for future events. The study also shows that a clear understanding of event legacies can directly influence residents' future behavioral intentions by mitigating concerns about economic costs and highlighting potential community benefits (Groothuis & Rotthoff, 2016; Kim & Petrick, 2005).

Lastly, Knowledge of Legacy was confirmed as a critical mediator influencing the effects of social impacts, including positive effects from Community Development and Traffic Problems, and negative effects from Community Pride and Economic Costs. The outcomes of this study can serve as positive motivators for prospective hosts to establish the planning process by providing a clear and justifiable rationale for cultivating positive social impacts while reducing negative social impacts from hosting large-scale sports events. Planning for large-scale sports events, along with the accompanying political rhetoric, typically includes promises of enhancing community development,

fostering community pride, and providing economic benefits while mitigating economic concerns, traffic issues, and environmental challenges for host business communities in both the short and long term (Carlini et al., 2020; Zawadki, 2022). For example, the 2012 London Olympics successfully fulfilled these promises by creating lasting community infrastructure, boosting local pride, and providing significant economic uplift, which positively impacted both local businesses and residents (Smith, 2014).

### **Practical Implications**

According to Matsuoka et al. (2024), various factors such as enhancement of external image, community consolidation and pride, and an interest in sports perceived by hosting the Winter Games positively influence improving attitudes toward hosting another mega-sports event. This study revealed that awareness of legacies from past events significantly mediates the relationship between perceived social impacts and community support for hosting future large-scale sports events. In particular, Knowledge of Legacy [reduces the negative perception] of economic costs associated with the future support of hosting large-scale sports events. On the other hand, community development is crucial in directly enhancing support for hosting future events.

The findings of this study can be used to develop effective public relations strategies. To ensure the awareness of legacies garnered from hosting large-scale sports events, event planners and administrators should consider emphasizing the benefits of community development and image enhancement through hosting large-scale sports events. For instance, although not all outcomes from planned initiatives were successful concerning the Formula One Korean Grand Prix, some leisure-related initiatives have garnered residents' support while drawing visitors to the community. The vacant area near KIC was transformed into a links-style public golf course where golfers can play without caddies and drive on the fairway, which is rare in South Korea. The lower green fees and scenic views have received positive feedback from visitors and residents, particularly younger generations (e.g., Generation Z and Millennials). Newly developed diverse leisure activities, such as small-scale sports events (e.g., F1 Marathon), concerts, camping festivals, and theme parks (e.g., Yeongam Motopia), have contributed to generating a more vibrant atmosphere in the community that raises the hope for future development (Han, 2024; Lee, 2024). In addition, the collective initiative of the SolaSeaDo project by three different neighborhood counties has added more resources to the area development and revitalization plans to attract not only tourists to the community but also to enhance the quality of life for residents, particularly younger generations (e.g., Millennials and Generation Z), so that the region can retain younger populations in the area (Lee, 2024; SolaSeaDo, 2020).

Hosting large-scale sports events inevitably results in excessive spending on facilities and infrastructure development, eliciting economic concerns among residents (Deccio & Baloglu, 2002). This might be attributed to residents' lack of involvement in decision-making and fewer opportunities to learn comprehensive event strategies for hosting large-scale sports events and related facility development (Delamere et al., 2001; Kim et al., 2024). Event planners should develop an ecosystem to equip effective communication channels for enhancing residents' engagement in the decision-making process throughout the hosting events (Delamere et al., 2001; Orr & Inoue, 2019). Addressing concerns about economic costs while improving residents' understanding of positive legacies through public relations strategies is critical to cultivating more significant support for future events.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This study contributes critically to the literature and practice in sport management and related fields. Specifically, it enhances understanding of perceived legacies and their recognition among residents regarding hosting large-scale sports events and faculty development. However, this study



contains a few limitations. First, the current study measured gross legacies, including direct and alternative developmental projects of the Formula One Korean Grand Prix. We believe the results might be different if we measured the net legacies. Second, the scale to measure the perceived social impacts and understanding of legacies would need to add more variables, as the path model explained 64.8% of variance to predict the support for future sports events hosting; thus, the applicability of the results may be limited.

For future research suggestions, the current study examined the complex nature of the mediating effects of understanding legacies by residents. Thus, developing a valid scale to measure the longitudinal legacies would contribute to sport management and related fields. Lastly, evaluating different contexts, including but not limited to mega-sport events, community sports events, facility development, and franchise relocations, would be meaningful to offer comprehensive managerial insights for sport administrators by fostering a better understanding of residents' attitudes toward legacies from hosting sports events.

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