

LEADERSHIP

Four Ways Sports Build Strong Communities Through PR



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Sep 25, 2017, 08:00am EDT

Updated Sep 25, 2017, 09:44am EDT



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In our daily lives, we are surrounded by incredible amounts of sports coverage, yet we often fixate on countless negative stories about collegiate

and professional athletes, teams and leagues. Fan obsession with damaging topics versus positive headlines is troubling.

Thankfully, there are many ways the sports industry amplifies feel-good stories that are key to building healthy communities. Public relations is a marketing vehicle that is underutilized in highlighting cheerful reports about the millions of lives sports and athletes impact daily.

However, there are organizations in the sports industry that are doing it right, offering valuable PR case studies that all businesses can get inspired by.

Economic Impact

In the U.S., youth sports is a \$15 billion industry that has grown by 55 percent since 2010, [according to a recent article by TIME](#). While some argue the cost to participate has skyrocketed, others posit community-based activities provide positive outlets for young people to gain valuable skills beyond the playing field and inject much-needed revenue into local businesses.

Tournaments across various sports are valuable team-building exercises for players and parents. Moreover, multi-day events significantly boost regional economies. For example, US Club Soccer – our partner and prominent member of the U.S. Soccer Federation, leading in developing soccer clubs across America – hosted back-to-back national championships in Westfield, Indiana in July 2017. It is [estimated Indianapolis saw](#) a \$12.2 million economic impact from nearly 12,000 hotel room nights, \$550,000 in car rentals and \$425,000 in food and beverage consumption.

For businesses, telling a story of how they have contributed to a community's economic impact may not be top of mind, but it should be. Engage in conversations with regional tourism boards, sports commissions and Chambers of Commerce to determine how your company has

contributed to economic benefits. Once details are finalized, sharing this content via media outreach and company-owned channels can be helpful in spreading the positive news.

Charity

ESPN SportsCenter's *My Wish* recently celebrated [its 10th anniversary](#), inspiring viewers with gripping and heartwarming stories of altruism. This typifies media's unique position in sports, propelling many leagues, teams and players to engage local charities.

Charitable giving is often driven by sporting events. Golf is a poster child, [driving \\$3.9 billion annually](#). Philanthropic contributions, including those from professional tournaments, largely contribute to the industry's persona. A majority of funds go to causes outside of sports [including military organizations](#) like Folds of Honor, Salute Military Golf Association and Fisher House Foundation.

A [2016 National Golf Foundation study](#) concluded that golf as a fundraising vehicle annually covers 143,000 events with 12 million participants at 12,700 facilities. This equates to 1% of all U.S. charitable giving each year.

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Local businesses can strengthen awareness via PR by highlighting their charitable giving. Be sure to outline events and activities where company philanthropic efforts can be shared with media through news releases, images and website blog posts.

Volunteers

To execute a sports event, volunteers are critical to the operation. Moving massive crowds isn't easy and events usually don't enjoy resources to pay all of those who provide their time.

Professional golf events begin lining up volunteers months, if not years, in advance, due to myriad tasks – security, parking, merchandising, concession, etc. The 2017 U.S. Open in Erin Hills, WI "hired" 5,400 volunteers and the 2018 PGA Championship at Bellerive Country Club in St. Louis, MO has 4,000 volunteers already confirmed.

Beyond event assistance, community leaders often dedicate themselves to causes beyond their full-time jobs in sports. Take Wade Breaux, a US Club Soccer member manager in Texas, who put himself in harm's way during Hurricane Harvey to rescue stranded Houston-area residents. That's volunteerism at its finest, deserving of a national megaphone.

A unique way to leverage volunteer involvement to create brand awareness is allowing a trusted individual to take over company social media accounts to showcase how your organization is giving back to a local event or community organization.

Youth Development

It's hard to find a sport in America that doesn't participate in youth development. The outcomes of these programs that serve underprivileged communities are what create exceptional human-interest stories locally, regionally and nationally. They bring the American Dream to life when underdog individuals and teams beat the odds and reach the unthinkable.

All major North American professional sports leagues – MLB, MLS, NBA, NFL, NHL – engage with youth via programs in urban and rural areas. The PGA TOUR is a large supporter of The First Tee, which reached 5.3 million young people in 2016 through 1,200 golf locations and 9,000-plus elementary schools.

Notwithstanding, children classified as inactive jumped from 20 percent in 2014 to a whopping 37.1 percent in 2015, [as reported by Sports Illustrated Play](#). Strikingly, three out of every eight kids are barely partaking in any physical activity at all, much less in youth sports leagues. Reversing this pandemic deserves considerable airtime.

Companies in any industry can identify areas to contribute by first researching local community programs where the organization is based. Instead of this being a unilateral decision, business executives should empower colleagues with their suggestions. This allows employees to become directly engaged and invested in the chosen program through charitable contributions, volunteering their time and so on. In turn, the community involvement becomes a great story to share with media.

By prioritizing the power of public relations, there are unique opportunities to be more proactive about positive storytelling for youth and adults. In turn, stronger and more engaged communities will sprout across America.



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