

Welcome to Nassau Mausoleum: A Case Study of Hockey Telecasts From ESPN's Worst "Stadium Experience"

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This article uses a case-study approach to develop an understanding of how framing on game telecasts can increase the brand equity of sports venues. In 2014, ESPN ranked the NHL's New York Islanders last in "stadium experience" among all 122 teams in the 4 major North American sports leagues. Given the Islanders' looming relocation, the 2014–15 NHL season afforded the last opportunity to consider how telecasts would portray the team's arena, Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum on Long Island. Based on a textual analysis of Islanders telecasts, 2 frames emerged: atmosphere (loud cheering and tributes to veterans) and nostalgia (famous moments and players from the arena's history). Teams that play in poorly regarded venues can encourage broadcasters to employ frames such as atmosphere and nostalgia to increase attendance and sales of venue-related merchandise.

Keywords: framing, arena, venue, brand equity

In the fall of 2014, *ESPN The Magazine* unveiled its annual "ultimate standings" of teams in the four major North American sports leagues (Keating, 2014). To create the standings, a consulting firm surveyed 1,002 fans to form criteria that they valued most in return for the emotion, money, and time they invest in clubs in Major League Baseball, the National Basketball Association, the National Football League, and the National Hockey League. One of the criteria was "stadium experience," factoring in the quality of the venue, fan-friendliness of environment, and frequency of game-day promotions. After the criteria were identified, an additional 101,000 fans rated their home teams in each area. Finishing dead last in stadium experience among all 122 teams was the only major professional sports team on Long Island, the NHL's New York Islanders.

A few weeks later, the same stadium experience was portrayed much more positively on Islanders telecasts. As the team kicked off its last season at Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Uniondale, the Islanders telecasts on MSG Plus emphasized the loud atmosphere in the arena and stirred nostalgia for memorable moments in its history. The favorable depiction of the arena opposed long-standing

media portrayals of an antiquated “Nassau Mausoleum” with dim lighting and long lines for bathrooms and concessions in a narrow, crowded concourse (Finn, 1999; Lapointe, 1998). In 2004, Islanders owner Charles Wang proposed rejuvenating the arena and redeveloping the surrounding land as part of his so-called Lighthouse Project to give “tired and old” Long Island a “swift kick in the tuchis” (Botte & Quinn, 2004; “NY Islanders Owner,” 2005). The project never came to fruition. A few years later, NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman remarked, “There is probably no worse major-league facility right now in North America than the Nassau Coliseum” (Starkey & Yohe, 2009). Amid an asbestos investigation in 2012, *Time* ranked the Coliseum the second-worst stadium in the United States, behind only the since-demolished Metrodome in Minneapolis (Gregory, 2012). After more futile campaigns to refurbish the Coliseum, the Islanders announced plans to relocate to the new Barclays Center in Brooklyn, NY, after the expiration of the Coliseum’s lease in 2015 (Chen & Berger, 2012).

Much research has investigated the significance of a sports venue in driving attendance and contributing to a team’s brand (Dawson, Malmisur, & Lewis, 1984; Fillingham, 1977; Gladden & Milne, 1999; Hansen & Gauthier, 1989; Ross, Russell, & Bang, 2008), while other work has considered framing on the telecasts of sports megaevents (Angelini & Billings, 2010a, 2010b; Billings & Tambosi, 2004; Real, 1975; Scott, Hill, & Zakus, 2012). However, little attention has been paid to how sports venues are framed on intraleague telecasts, a major means by which teams connect with fans. This research aimed to fill a gap in the literature by exploring how a notorious sports venue was depicted during game telecasts. The 2014–15 NHL season afforded the last opportunity to consider how telecasts portrayed arguably the worst professional sports arena in North America.

This paper explores the intersection of marketing and communication in Islanders telecasts. Using framing theory (Goffman, 1974; Tankard, 2001), a textual analysis examined 20 game feeds from the Islanders’ last season at Nassau Coliseum, incorporating broadcasts of both the Islanders and their opponents. Islanders telecasts are produced by a regional sports network, not the team itself. However, the telecasts share the team’s interest in marketing the home venue to attract viewers, and commentators may risk dismissal if they do not frame the venue positively and anger the Islanders, who have final say over the hiring and retention of on-air talent (Botta, 2010). Other teams own the networks that air their games and can directly dictate how the venue is presented. This article demonstrates how teams can encourage positive portrayals of their venues on game telecasts to increase brand equity, leading to higher attendance and more sales of venue-related merchandise.

Literature Review

Sports Venues and Brand Equity

Nassau Coliseum’s image directly affects the Islanders. Marketing research has established the importance of a venue to the brand equity of a sports team. Aaker (1991) defines brand equity as a set of assets and liabilities that are linked to a brand and add to or subtract from its value, such as name awareness, loyal customers, perceived quality, associations, and patents and trademarks. In the current context, brand equity can be viewed as the differential effect of knowledge of the Islanders

brand, including knowledge of Nassau Coliseum, on the perceptions, preferences, and behaviors of fans (Keller, 1993). An extensive body of research concerns the branding of places, commonly known as place branding (Hankinson, 2007; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). According to Zavattaro, Daspit, and Adams (2015), successful place branding requires the combination of “a place’s tangible, unique elements with affective, emotion-based elements” (p. 12). Every sports venue, even one as poorly regarded as the Coliseum, has unique and affective components that are useful to marketing the home team.

Trumpbour (2007) describes the modern sports stadium as “the most visible and recognizable structure in many communities,” supplanting the ancient cathedral (p. 2). The high visibility of a sports venue, however, does not necessarily foster high attendance. Bitner (1992) contends that a facility itself can have a substantial effect, sometimes negatively, on customers’ satisfaction. To test the impact of a sports venue on attendance, Wakefield and Blodgett (1994) exposed participants to footage of two ballparks with vastly different reputations in Cincinnati and Cleveland. The footage of Cleveland’s Municipal Stadium highlighted some of the same aspects for which Nassau Coliseum has been criticized, including older seats and dark and narrow spaces. Not surprisingly, viewers expressed a greater willingness to go to games in Cincinnati. Schofield (1983) cites several venue factors that can affect a team’s brand and attendance, including aesthetic qualities, layout, restrooms, and concessions. Much research has found that a venue affects attendance and team allegiance to some extent (Funk & James, 2001; Funk & James, 2006; Gladden & Milne, 1999; Ross et al., 2008). Stadiums create brand associations (Kaynak, Salman, & Tatoglu, 2008), especially for losing teams that rely on venue factors to compensate for poor performance (Hill & Green, 2000).

Marketing Nassau Coliseum promised to be an uphill battle heading into the 2014–15 season. ESPN’s ranking of the Coliseum as the worst stadium experience in professional sports followed decades of negative publicity. The news media had previously reported on a leaky roof patched with temporary sealants and tape and on faulty hoists supporting the above-ice scoreboard and sound system (Curtis, 1998; Lapointe, 1998). The “Nassau Mausoleum” nickname gained popularity through repetition on sports radio, even appearing on shirts to tweak the Islanders (Hirshon, 2015; Meenan, 2011). Wallet-busting concession prices detracted from the arena’s fan-friendliness, too. During the Islanders’ farewell season, the Coliseum charged far more than the NHL average for hot dogs, soft drinks, and beer (Greenberg, 2014). On the online review site Yelp, the Coliseum entered the 2014–15 season with a paltry two and a half out of five stars (“Nassau Coliseum,” 2014). One post included a photograph of a seat with a simple message scrawled on the back: “This place is a dump.”

Framing in Sports Telecasts

This study investigates the framing of Nassau Coliseum on Islanders telecasts. Entman (1993) defines framing as the selection of some aspects of a perceived reality that make them more salient in a communicating text. According to Entman, frames are marked by the presence or absence of words, images, and sources of information that “provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” (p. 52). The framing perspective assumes that no presentation of observation via

text can be value-free (Woo, 1996). Islanders telecasts inevitably contain frames about Nassau Coliseum, although they may be unconscious judgments (Entman, 1993) and are not necessarily distortions of reality (Woo, 1996). Still, even an accurate frame highlights a specific aspect of reality, often with a profound impact on audiences. Baran and Davis (2008) argue that media exposure commonly results in learning consistent with the frames within a text, and Angelini, MacArthur, and Billings (2014) state that frames can have “powerful effects” (p. 228).

This study takes a step toward filling a gap in sports-media research. Previous studies on sports telecasts have focused almost exclusively on megaevents such as the Super Bowl (Real, 1975), the World Cup (Billings & Tambosi, 2004; Scott et al., 2012), and the Olympics (Angelini & Billings, 2010a, 2010b; Billings & Angelini, 2007; Billings & Eastman, 2003; Dayan & Katz, 1992; Gruneau, 1989; Larson & Park, 1993; Rothenbuhler, 1988; Tomlinson, 1989; Whannel, 1989). Meanwhile, scant attention has been paid to regional telecasts of games between teams in a major North American sports league. While more viewers tune in to megaevents than a typical NHL game, the regularity of team telecasts throughout a season leads to faithful audiences, a sense of intimacy, and important effects (Billings, 2011). Newcomb (1974) argues that recurring programs create “a much stronger sense of audience involvement” (p. 253). Viewers who tune into Islanders broadcasts throughout the course of a season may be more influenced by those frames than the ones they see in the broadcast of a single megaevent.

Framing theory has frequently proven useful in analyses of sports telecasts. Operating with limited airtime, sports broadcasters and producers employ frames to organize and present information with “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation of selection, emphasis, and exclusion” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). The construction of a sports telecast is driven by concerns about reaching desirable demographics and attaining high ratings (Billings, 2009). Rader (1984) calls out sports commentators for trying to hold onto viewers by excitedly describing even the most routine plays, cheapening the games they are calling. In other instances, more subtle elements of a telecast, such as decreased production values, may affect audiences. For instance, Hallmark and Armstrong (1999) argue that telecasts that devote fewer cameras and on-screen graphics to women’s college basketball games promote the notion that men’s athletics are superior. Knowing that many fans tune in to watch their favorite team (Wenner & Gantz, 1989), broadcasters are likely to describe the team in flattering terms to keep the viewers content (Billings & Tambosi, 2004). Studies on Olympics telecasts have applied framing to issues such as gender (Angelini & Billings, 2010b; Angelini et al., 2014; Billings & Angelini, 2007; Billings & Eastman, 2003) and race and ethnicity (Angelini & Billings, 2010a; Billings & Angelini, 2007; Billings & Eastman, 2003). In contrast, little research has considered how sports broadcasts frame venues, even though researchers have noted that attitudes about a venue can affect attendance and team allegiance (Funk & James, 2001; Funk & James, 2006; Gladden & Milne, 1999; Ross et al., 2008).

Given the sizeable audiences for hockey telecasts in recent years, examining the frames on the broadcasts is worthwhile. The gold-medal game between the United States and Canada at the 2010 Olympics attracted 27.6 million American viewers, the largest national audience for a hockey game since the Miracle on Ice in the 1980 Olympics (Carter, 2010), and the 2013 Stanley Cup Finals lured 5.75 million viewers, the largest audience for the championship series in at least 20 years (Kissell, 2014).

Viewers are also tuning in to regular-season intraleague broadcasts in great numbers. The Pittsburgh Penguins boasted a 7.57 rating in the 2013–14 season, meaning that 7.57% of households in the Pittsburgh market watched the Penguins for any given game (Ourand & Botta, 2014). Islanders broadcasts, the focus of this study, offer a good starting point for analyzing NHL telecasts, as the team witnessed the second-highest ratings jump in the NHL in 2014, rising 71% (Ourand & Botta, 2014).

Method

Research Design

A qualitative-research design was employed for this study involving the textual analysis of NHL telecasts. All texts are polysemic (Fiske, 1987; Morley, 2004), and interpretations tend to vary depending on one's culture, experiences, and psychology, among other factors (Real, 2011). A pioneer in the examination of sports telecasts, Real (2011) outlines three approaches to textual analysis: emphasizing signs and codes as dominant forces in viewers' interpretations, placing the personal concerns of viewers ahead of anything in a text, and regarding both a text and viewers as proactive in determining a realized meaning. Rather than assume viewers' concerns, this study takes "an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations" of the Islanders telecasts to understand how sports-media frames can color our view of the world (McKee, 2001, p. 140).

Islanders games air on a regional network named MSG, which is owned by the Madison Square Garden Company (De La Merced, 2014; MSG Media, 2014). During the NHL season, MSG subscribers in the New York metropolitan area can also watch the games of the Islanders' regional rivals, the New York Rangers and the New Jersey Devils (MSG Media, 2014). In addition, MSG broadcasts the games of the NBA's New York Knicks and the New York Red Bulls of Major League Soccer, whose seasons overlap the NHL schedule to varying degrees (MSG Media, 2014). Both the Rangers and Knicks are tenants of Madison Square Garden and owned by the same company that runs MSG Network ("Our Brands," 2014). Rangers and Knicks games receive first priority and air on the network's flagship channel, MSG, while Islanders games are relegated to a sister channel, MSG Plus, known onscreen as MSG+ (MSG Media, 2014). Islanders coverage on MSG+ in the 2014–15 season included a 30-minute pregame show named *Visa Islanders Game Night* and a postgame program, *Islanders Postgame Show* ("MSG Networks," 2014).

This study sought to analyze the portions of Islanders broadcasts with the widest reach. While regional viewers watch Islanders games on MSG+ through cable or satellite providers, out-of-market fans must turn to NHL Center Ice, a digital-television subscription package, or NHL GameCenter Live, an online subscription service from NHL.com ("NHL Center Ice," 2014; "NHL.com," 2014). GameCenter offers dual feeds of home and away broadcasts for all games, but Center Ice is less predictable. For this study, some Islanders games on Center Ice included both feeds, but others included only one feed, usually the home broadcast. Islanders pre- and postgame shows were excluded from the study because they were not available on Center Ice or GameCenter Live, limiting their reach. This analysis does consider content from intermissions, which was available on both Center Ice and GameCenter Live.

The Islanders telecasts in this study typically began with a preview of the game by host Shannon Hogan, working her first season for MSG after 4 years at Fox Sports Detroit (Best, 2014). Hogan then introduced the Islanders' broadcast team, Howie Rose, in his 20th year as the team's play-by-play commentator, and former Islanders forward Butch Goring, in his fifth season as the color analyst ("MSG Networks," 2014). During intermissions, Hogan analyzed action from the previous period, interviewed Islanders players past and present, and narrated highlights from simultaneous NHL games. On select broadcasts, Stan Fischler appeared as a correspondent and former Islanders star Mike Bossy handled studio analysis ("MSG Networks," 2014; "New York Islanders," 2014).

Sample

This textual analysis covers 20 game telecasts spanning the first third of the Islanders' farewell season at Nassau Coliseum. The feeds were selected based on a predetermination about which telecasts would be most likely to contain references to the Coliseum. Included are the Islanders broadcast feeds from 14 games: the season opener versus the Carolina Hurricanes in North Carolina on October 10, 2014, and the first 13 Coliseum home games of the season, dating from October 11, 2014, to December 6, 2014. For comparison, the study also examined six game feeds from the Islanders' opponents: the season opener, the last home opener at the Coliseum, and four games in which opposing teams played their final regular-season contests in the arena.

Two research questions were developed to explore the disparity between ESPN's ranking of Nassau Coliseum as the worst stadium experience and the expected positive framing on the telecasts. Teams that play in venues with lackluster reputations may benefit from understanding how the telecasts framed "Nassau Mausoleum" to raise the brand equity of the team.

RQ1: Which frames would the Islanders telecasts employ to portray Nassau Coliseum?

RQ2: For comparison, which frames would the telecasts of the Islanders' opponents employ to frame Nassau Coliseum?

Results

The televised framing of Nassau Coliseum was classified into two categories that were most evident on Islanders telecasts: atmosphere and nostalgia.

Frame 1: Atmosphere

First, this study examined how hockey telecasts framed the atmospherics at Nassau Coliseum. Borrowing a phrase from ESPN's ultimate standings, the "stadium experience" of fans results from environmental factors such as venue design and cleanliness, food and drink availability, and general atmosphere (Kahle et al., 2003; Keating, 2014). All marketing involves a positive surface appearance (Deighton, 1992), an important point for sports marketers, who can control many aspects of atmosphere but not a team's winning percentage or player roster. Creating an

enticing atmosphere for spectator sports can yield huge returns at the gate. Kahle et al. found that atmosphere drives attendance at sports events. The atmosphere may encompass the olfactory appeal of the smell of popcorn, peanuts, hot dogs, and beer (Westerbeek & Shilbury, 1999), as well as perceptions of the density, appearance, and behaviors of other fans, including applause, chanting, and other indications of excitement (Schwarz, Hall, & Shibli, 2010; Uhrich & Benkenstein, 2012). Atmosphere is a key contributor toward fan attitudes, which are in turn a “primary building block of team and brand loyalty” (Kahle et al., 2003, p. 146).

All the Islanders broadcasts featured establishing shots of Nassau Coliseum. The oval-shaped arena rises only 75 feet above the ground, and its façade of off-white concrete and split-face concrete stone has inspired mocking comparisons to a giant mushroom, a loaf of bread, and a huge vanilla cake (Hirshon, 2010; “Venue Facts,” 2014). As Wakefield and Blodgett (1994) demonstrated in their research on the old Municipal Stadium in Cleveland, footage of an aging sports venue does not always encourage a positive perception among audiences. Teams in older arenas can distract from the venue’s exterior appearance by creating other points of emphasis for the telecasts. Viewers of the Islanders broadcasts were often encouraged to think about Nassau Coliseum’s unique history. Shots frequently focused on the rafters, which display blue, orange, and white banners honoring the team’s four Stanley Cup championships, multiple division titles, and inductees into the Islanders Hall of Fame. Other banners bear the names of former Islanders coach Al Arbour and general manager Bill Torrey and the retired numbers of six players from the Stanley Cup dynasty, Denis Potvin (No. 5), Clark Gillies (No. 9), Bryan Trottier (No. 19), Mike Bossy (No. 22), Bob Nystrom (No. 23), and Billy Smith (No. 31). Another banner pays homage to Long Island rocker Billy Joel, who played nine sold-out shows at the Coliseum on a 1998 world tour (“Venue Facts,” 2014).

More uniquely, the Islanders telecasts accentuated the high excitement level inside the Coliseum. With a low ceiling of 97 feet, the Coliseum holds in crowd sound (Cotsonika, 2014; “Venue Facts,” 2014), and the Islanders broadcasts frequently alluded to the loud atmosphere. This emphasis began with a 3 1/2-minute compilation of historical game footage and interviews with current players that aired during the season opener (Gallagher, 2014a). Five of the seven players in the clip commented on the high volume at the Coliseum. Cal Clutterbuck called the arena “one of the louder buildings I’ve seen on a regular basis,” and Colin McDonald recalled one time when players getting dressed in the locker room an hour before the game could already hear the fans in the stands. Three other players, Kyle Okposo, Casey Cizikas, and John Tavares, specifically referenced the noise during the Islanders’ 2013 playoff series against the Pittsburgh Penguins. Raw footage from the series, ostensibly shot by a fan, showed the scoreboard flashing, “Rock This Barn,” as the crowd chanted, “Let’s go Islanders!” Okposo said, “I’ve never played in a building that loud my entire life, and it was pretty special.” Then footage played of Cizikas scoring a goal to seal a playoff win, leading fans to cheer wildly. Tavares said that he “couldn’t even hear myself think” at that moment. Cizikas added, “It was one of the most exciting times for me as a hockey player. You could hear the crowd roaring.”

Loudness continued as a theme through the Islanders’ first 13 home broadcasts. Before the home opener, host Shannon Hogan noted the din of the crowd: “I have to say, this place is bumping right now. It feels like a playoff game in there” (Gallagher,

2014b). When the Penguins visited for the second game of a home-and-home series in November, play-by-play commentator Howie Rose said the Coliseum “sounds very much like it did in the playoffs between these teams 2 years ago” (Gallagher, 2014k). Later, Rose put the Coliseum’s loudness into perspective:

We go to so many buildings around the National Hockey League that are virtually identical—antiseptic, high ceilings, the noise gets lost. Relatively speaking, it was a library in Pittsburgh last night and a madhouse here in Uniondale tonight. You gotta love it.

Player comments also promoted this depiction of the arena. Matt Martin and Okposo both described the Coliseum as “loud” in interviews on the broadcasts (Gallagher, 2014k, 2014n). “When we score and stuff it gets loud, but you get 16,000 in here and the building gets rocking and we definitely feed off that energy,” Okposo said. At various points, Goring, Hogan, and Rose each referred to the Coliseum as an “old barn,” an endearing term applied to older arenas with high noise levels (Gallagher, 2014a, 2014d).

Besides the emphasis on loudness, the telecasts framed the mood at the Coliseum as high-energy. At the home opener, Rose said that he had not “quite felt this kind of buzz for an opening night here” in a quarter century, and Goring called the atmosphere “crazy” with “emotional” fans (Gallagher, 2014b). Fans were heard chanting on many home telecasts, contributing to an upbeat atmosphere. When the Islanders won the home opener, the crowd shouted, “Yes! Yes! Yes!” in unison, borrowing a popular chant from professional wrestling (Mark, 2014). Rose incorrectly interpreted the chant as a plea for the team to stay at Nassau Coliseum: “Stay! Stay! Stay!” His misinterpretation promoted the notion that Islanders fans viewed the arena positively. At other games, Rose recalled when Coliseum crowds in the 1980s chanted “Chico!” for goaltender Chico Resch (Chere, 2014; Gallagher, 2014e) and noted the crowd trying to upset opposing netminder Martin Brodeur with “Marty” chants (Gallagher, 2014p). The enthusiasm of the Coliseum faithful was also highlighted by shots of fans holding signs supporting the team, including “Always Believe,” “Happy Birthday Clutterbuck,” and “Halak It Like That,” a reference to Islanders goalie Jaroslav Halak (Gallagher, 2014e, 2014i, 2014n).

Aside from fan reaction, the broadcasts also played up the recognition of veterans in the arena’s name in an era when many sports venues, including Barclays Center, bear the names of corporate sponsors. A Veterans Day broadcast opened with footage of a military vehicle in front of the Coliseum and a close-up of a monument topped by a bald eagle (Gallagher, 2014g). The camera targeted the inscription: “Dedicated to the courageous men and women who have fought to give us a peaceful tomorrow. Memorial Day, May 29, 1972.” As the broadcast moved inside, announcer Jiggs McDonald, filling in for Rose, commented, “What better place to be than the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum on this evening.” Cameras caught a computer-animated American flag on the scoreboard as members of the USO Show Troupe sang the national anthem and paratroopers descended from the rafters with a giant American flag.

In general, the Coliseum was presented as a fan-friendly environment. Fans were seen tailgating in the Coliseum parking lot before games (Gallagher, 2014a, 2014b) and enjoying the concessions (Gallagher, 2014d) and the team store (Gallagher, 2014f, 2014l). After every home win, the telecasts caught Islanders players skating to

center ice and holding their sticks aloft to salute the Coliseum fans (e.g., Gallagher, 2014e). Players named among the three stars of the game were seen tossing pucks into the stands as souvenirs (e.g., Gallagher, 2014i, 2014m, 2014n, 2014o), and the first star typically thanked the crowd in an on-ice interview with Hogan. After a game on Thanksgiving Eve, Hogan encouraged first star John Tavares to express gratitude for the fans: “I’m thinking there are a lot of things that you guys are really thankful for right now, including this crowd” (Gallagher, 2014m). He responded, “Yeah, I mean, it’s been absolutely unbelievable playing in front of home right now, atmosphere has been incredible, and the guys are really feeding off it.”

Frame 2: Nostalgia

Besides an emphasis on atmosphere, this study analyzed how Islanders telecasts framed Nassau Coliseum by stoking nostalgia. Nostalgia has been defined as “a longing for the past, a yearning for yesterday, or a fondness for possessions and activities associated with the days of yore” (Holbrook, 1993, p. 245). In a sports context, nostalgia may involve happy memories of games and athletes of yesteryear. Fans relive moments in the history of their team by touring halls of fame, sports museums, and sites of sports history (Adair, 2004; Hinch & Higham, 2004; John, 2002). With time, arenas can also develop “a sufficient mystique to become tourist attractions in their own right” (Bale, 1988, p. 120). Even events outside of the living memories of fans might factor into their identification with a franchise (Ramshaw & Gammon, 2005). Kaynak et al. (2008) urge sports marketers to capitalize on nostalgia “as a vehicle to enable consumers to connect with the team” (p. 352).

Islanders broadcasts consistently stirred nostalgia for the Coliseum. In all the telecasts analyzed here, the cameras caught Islanders players wearing commemorative shoulder patches bearing the phrases “Tradition on Ice” and “43 Years of History” and a simple drawing of the Coliseum topped by four Stanley Cups, which remained on their jerseys throughout the season (Muir, 2014). Continued exposure to the patches likely registered with viewers, as research has demonstrated that audiences recall logos they see on athletes’ clothing (Robinson & Bauman, 2008). The broadcasters’ comments also framed the Coliseum as a historic venue. Rose called the Coliseum “this fabled building” (Gallagher, 2014b) and pointed out a quirk that has drawn much attention over the years, the odd way in which pucks bounce off the bottom of the boards and in front of the net (Gallagher, 2014h). Discussing those unusual bounces, Goring said, “No place is like the Coliseum.” Multiple broadcasts showed players walking out of the locker room and past plaques that honor team legends (e.g., Gallagher, 2014i, 2014k). The broadcasts also engaged fans with trivia questions that revolved around players whose names and numbers hang in the Coliseum rafters (Gallagher, 2014a, 2014b, 2014h).

At the start of the broadcast of the Islanders’ home opener, a graphic appeared on screen with “Rich Tradition” and “Bright Future” on either side of a film reel (Gallagher, 2014b). The reel included seven wistful images: the Coliseum façade, the Stanley Cup banners, Denis Potvin hoisting the Cup in 1980, Mike Bossy after scoring his 50th goal in 50 games in 1981, Shawn Bates celebrating a penalty-shot goal in the 2002 playoffs, and shots of Casey Cizikas and John Tavares, both of whom scored in the 2013 playoffs (Hirshon, 2010; Staple, 2013). As the reel lingered on screen, the voice of Islanders coach Jack Capuano was heard saying, “There’s a

lot of memories in this building.” For the next minute, historical game footage was interspersed with snippets of interviews with Islanders players. First, viewers saw arguably the most famous goal in Coliseum history, when Bob Nystrom scored in overtime to notch the Islanders’ first Cup in 1980. Other clips showed Potvin and Bryan Trottier celebrating the fourth straight Cup in 1983, David Volek scoring in overtime to clinch a playoff series in Pittsburgh in 1993, Bates scoring the penalty-shot goal in 2002, and more recent goals from Cizikas, Tavares, and Okposo. Some of the clips included the announcers’ calls and the blaring goal horn, while the audio for others consisted of dramatic music and comments from Islanders players. At one point, Okposo said, “They grew up with such a rich tradition, a lot of them in the ’80s when they were winning the four Cups, and we want to try and instill some of that tradition back.” Similarly, Tavares, one of the heroes of the 2013 playoffs, said that he wanted to make the postseason “the expectation and the norm around here.” As the segment concluded, the picture turned to the Coliseum façade and Capuano was heard saying, “The history of this building and the tradition that they have here is something that will never be forgotten.”

During the period under study, the Islanders invited three players from the Stanley Cup dynasty, Potvin, Nystrom, and goaltender Billy Smith, to lead the current team onto the ice and drop the puck (Gallagher, 2014k, 2014n, 2014p). For weeks before these alumni appearances, the telecasts advertised the giveaways for the games: miniature replicas of the players’ Coliseum lockers complete with jerseys, helmets, and nameplates (Gallagher, 2014b, 2014d, 2014l). Cameras followed Potvin, Nystrom, and Smith waving to fans and greeting current Islanders players as the broadcasters discussed their banners in the rafters. Later, the honorees went to the broadcast booth, where conversation invariably turned to the final season at the Coliseum. Asked about returning to the Coliseum for one of the last times, Smith replied, “It’s great coming back to Long Island. It’s great to see this building full again” (Gallagher, 2014k). Potvin was also queried about his emotions (Gallagher, 2014n). He said he lingered on the ice after dropping the first puck to look around the Coliseum. “I was just taking it all—you know, the view is pretty good,” he said. “I’m looking around and I can see the old ghosts of the game for a moment there.” After a lengthy discussion of his Hall of Fame career, Potvin added, “It is, I must say, a little bittersweet, the fact that this is the building where it all happened.” Nystrom, meanwhile, said fans often tell him where they were when he scored the Cup-clinching goal at the Coliseum in 1980 (Gallagher, 2014p). He said some people jumped up so enthusiastically that their hands went “right through the ceiling boards.”

Other former players were interviewed by Hogan during intermissions. The Islanders’ all-time goals leader, Mike Bossy, appeared after a scoreless first period versus San Jose and evoked his playing days: “I scored 573 goals in my career and there is not one goal in the first period, so that’s basically no fun for me” (Gallagher, 2014c; MacDonald, 2004). In addition to his appearance to drop the puck, Potvin also spoke with Hogan during a visit by the Florida Panthers, whose games he broadcasts (Gallagher, 2014h). Hogan began one question by mentioning the Stanley Cup teams and recognizing the nostalgia of fans: “I know the fans still smile thinking about it. What sticks out as one of your favorite memories?” Potvin answered by recalling an Islanders–Rangers rivalry game in the Coliseum’s inaugural season of 1972–73. The Islanders had yet to win over the fans, and the

Coliseum crowd cheered when the Rangers scored a goal. “That was one of those things where we really became a team very quickly because we didn’t want to get embarrassed in our own building,” Potvin said.

Hogan also interviewed former Islanders forward Ray Ferraro, who was in the arena to cover a game against Toronto for the Canadian sports network TSN (Gallagher, 2014d). As an Islander, Ferraro scored two memorable overtime goals at Nassau Coliseum in a playoff series versus the Washington Capitals in 1993 (Lapointe, 1993a, 1993b). The day before he appeared on the Islanders broadcast, Ferraro posted a nostalgic tweet: “Excited to be heading to Long Island for my last gm @ Coliseum/some of best memories there, ’93playoffs, Al Arbour, fun teams #NYI #leafs” (Ferraro, 2014). The tweet appeared on screen as Ferraro explained that he had not been inside the Coliseum in a decade. The return visit apparently stirred his emotions: “I walked through the doors over here just to our right, and I couldn’t believe how familiar it was. . . . The best moments of my career were in this building, and for me, I was really, really happy to get a chance to come back today.” While most historical references on the broadcasts centered on the Cup reign in the early 1980s, Ferraro’s visit summoned nostalgia for the 1993 playoff run. A lower-third graphic listed Ferraro’s 13 playoff goals, and clips showed him celebrating three goals against the Capitals, with teammates mobbing him, the Coliseum spotlight shining on him, and fans waving signs, tossing confetti, and pounding the glass. Later in the game, Rose and Goring discussed Ferraro and the Islanders’ goaltender in the 1993 postseason, Glenn Healy.

The most striking instance of framing came in the last telecast in this study (Gallagher, 2014p). Rose opened the broadcast by referring to the arena with a nickname from its past. At the time, the Islanders had won 10 of their first 12 home games to start the season and led the division. Alluding to the team’s success at Nassau Coliseum, Rose said, “For the first-place New York Islanders, home is where the points are. As the late cartoonist Bill Gallo coined, welcome to Fort Neverlose. This afternoon, the Islanders back at the Coliseum to face the Blues, next.” A longtime cartoonist for the *New York Daily News*, Gallo is widely credited with coining “Fort Neverlose” during a stretch in the 1980s when the Islanders won 19 consecutive playoff series and four Stanley Cups (Ng, 2014). By conjuring the Fort Neverlose mystique, Rose encouraged audiences to associate the Coliseum more with its history than its lackluster appearance.

Framing on Opponents’ Feeds

Finally, this study analyzed the broadcast feeds of the Islanders’ opponents for six games. These telecasts included the season opener, the home opener, and four games in which opposing teams made their last regular-season trips to Nassau Coliseum. To begin the season, the Islanders faced the Carolina Hurricanes on back-to-back nights for their season and home openers. Near the end of the season opener, Hurricanes color analyst Tripp Tracy predicted “an electric atmosphere” at the Coliseum the next night (Mallia, 2014a). During the home opener, Tracy and play-by-play commentator John Forslund called the scene “fabulous” and “fanatical” (Mallia, 2014b). In the second period, the camera focused on the banners in the rafters while a graphic listed four tidbits about the Coliseum, ranging from historical facts (“Opened: Feb. 1972” and “Islanders: 4-Time Stanley Cup Champs

[1980–83]”) to the Coliseum’s uniqueness among NHL arenas (the second-oldest and second-smallest in the league).

The first franchise to bid farewell to the Coliseum was the San Jose Sharks. The Sharks broadcast also marked the most positive portrayal of the arena of the six opponents’ telecasts in this study (Koppett, 2014). Not one criticism was uttered by broadcasters Randy Hahn or Jamie Baker. Hahn described the Coliseum as “oozing with history” before mentioning that the Sharks’ head coach, Todd McLellan, was drafted by the Islanders in 1986 and played several games for them. Later, as the cameras focused on the banners in the rafters, Baker reflected, “Randy, I’m having a moment right now. This is it. It’s the last time I’m going to be here at Nassau Coliseum unless these teams meet in the Stanley Cup Finals. Look at those names.” During the broadcast, two graphics listed facts about Coliseum and Islanders history. As in the Hurricanes telecast, the Coliseum’s distinction as the second-oldest NHL arena was included. So were happy moments such as a five-goal game by Bryan Trottier in 1978, five Stanley Cup Finals, and achievements of defenseman Denis Potvin. Most notably, the telecast demonstrated the intensity of Islanders fans with footage from a 2003 game during which fans in Santa Claus outfits were invited onto the ice. Two fans pulled off their red suits to reveal New York Rangers jerseys underneath, and Islanders fans began grabbing them. “One of the great moments in the history of this building,” Hahn said. “It really tells you how fierce the rivalry is.” It is notable that the positive commentary revolved almost entirely around history, not noise level. The atmosphere was probably not loud for the game against the Sharks, a nonconference opponent visiting on a weeknight.

In contrast, the broadcasters for the next team to make its final Coliseum stop, the Dallas Stars, were decidedly unkind. Before the game, Stars play-by-play commentator Ralph Strangis and color analyst Daryl Reaugh stood side by side in the Coliseum with a view of the ice behind them (Walsh, 2014). A smiling Strangis welcomed viewers back from a commercial break: “Ralph Strangis and Daryl Reaugh in our final regular-season visit ever to the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum. What a grand old house and it’s still standing, almost impossibly.” As Strangis spoke, Reaugh chuckled and displayed exaggerated enthusiasm for never having to visit the Coliseum again by giving a thumbs-up and mouthing the word *yes*. Reaugh smirked while saying, “Yeah, I mean, I’m just looking at our broadcast location right now. It’s something to behold.” These comments certainly reinforced the Nassau Mausoleum impression. So did a graphic that vouched for the Stars’ success on Long Island: 9-5-1 with five straight wins from 1996 to 2000 and Dallas’s Mike Modano scoring 12 points in 12 games. “No surprise,” Reaugh said. “There have been some lean years for the Islanders here in Uniondale.” As a shot of the Coliseum façade appeared on screen, Reaugh ridiculed its design: “It was built back in the early ’70s, back when they were building these industrial, gray, cement venues around North America.” Only in the final few seconds of the segment did Reaugh mention the Islanders’ four Stanley Cups, as historical footage showed Bob Nystrom’s Cup-clinching goal, Trottier holding the Cup, and Al Arbour hugging Mike Bossy.

The Coliseum received widely disparate treatment in the three remaining opponents’ broadcasts. The arena hardly factored into the Winnipeg Jets telecast, which only cursorily showed the façade and plaques by the locker room while play-by-play commentator Dennis Beyak incorrectly reported that the Islanders would relocate east (actually west) after the season (Cicirello, 2014). During the Veterans Day game,

the Colorado Avalanche broadcast team remarked on the appropriateness of playing at an arena named after veterans, discussed the loudness of chants, and attributed two Islanders goals to pucks unusually deflecting off the boards and in front of the Colorado net, which they described as “Nassau Coliseum bounces” (Menzies, 2014). A graphic on Coliseum history listed “famous shows” by Elvis Presley, Pink Floyd, Frank Zappa, and Billy Joel. Avalanche play-by-play commentator Mike Haynes also emphasized the sightlines: “It’s a great place to watch a game here. You don’t have the huge corporate boxes. Every seat is great for every fan anywhere you are in this building.” Finally, viewers of the St. Louis Blues broadcast saw game footage from the Islanders’ dynasty era (Pabst, 2014). They also listened to color analyst Darren Pang briefly complain about the broadcast booth, where he said conditions were so cramped that “you can’t fit your notes.” Toward the end of the telecast, Pang revealed the “snapshot of the game,” a picture of himself outside the Coliseum with puddles on the old, uneven pavement in front of the arena.

Commercials

While commercial breaks were generally excluded from analysis, one spot merits recognition because of its frequency on the Islanders telecasts and its focus on Nassau Coliseum. The 30-second commercial opened with an establishing shot of the arena’s façade and moved inside, where Goring and Hogan were sitting in the stands and chatting about the final season (e.g., Gallagher, 2014j, 2014l). At one point, Goring looked out at the ice and said emphatically, “It’s the last one at the Nassau Coliseum. This place, it’s like my home. I know it like the back of my hand.” Goring and Hogan were shown roaming a hallway in the arena, taking in a view of the ice near one of the goal lines, and returning to their seats. All the time, Goring continued to profess his familiarity with the Coliseum: “Every hallway, every view. I know the boards, the dressing room, every inch of it.” Hogan asked, “So is there anywhere you don’t go?” Goring replied, “One.” He paused and gestured toward the ice. “The penalty box.” The spot concluded with a tease for the next Islanders telecast.

Like many other elements of the Islanders telecasts, this commercial appealed to fans’ sentimentality for Nassau Coliseum. Goring’s wistful recollection of the hallways, the boards, the dressing room, and views from various vantage points encouraged viewers to think about the Coliseum nostalgically. Indeed, the commercial’s attempt at hockey humor alluded to Goring’s playing career during the arena’s glory days in the early 1980s (“Butch Goring,” 2014). The joke was that Goring, known for being an especially clean player, would not have spent much time in the penalty box. Throughout his 16-season career, Goring was a perennial contender for the Lady Byng Trophy, awarded to the player exhibiting “the best type of sportsmanship and gentlemanly conduct combined with a high standard of playing ability” (“Butch Goring,” 2014; “Lady Byng,” 2014).

Discussion

Almost 4 decades after his landmark study on the 1974 Super Bowl telecast, Real (2013) reflected on trying to fill a gap in research by treating a sports megaevent with the “kind of serious, sustained, critical analysis which it had not been receiving” (p. 31). Although megaevents draw the most viewers individually, teams reach

their fans more consistently through intraleague telecasts, which have received little scholarly attention. Given the importance of venue to a team's brand equity, this case study sought to determine how intraleague telecasts trying to excite viewers about games at Nassau Coliseum would frame the supposedly worst professional sports venue in North America.

Few would expect the Islanders broadcasts to paint Nassau Coliseum in as negative a light as ESPN had. However, the telecasts could have avoided discussion about the arena and focused on generating anticipation for the team's move to the Barclays Center the next season. Instead, the telecasts referenced Nassau Coliseum in commentary and historic footage that fit into two broad categories of frames, atmosphere (mostly loudness and tributes to veterans) and nostalgia (home to memorable moments and players). Angelini and Billings (2010b) note the power of "emphasis through repetition of the same types of comments" (p. 367), while Kuhne and Schemer (2015) maintain that media content can elicit emotions and affect attitudes. The Islanders telecasts contributed to excitement and nostalgia during the arena's final season that resulted in ticket sales. The team witnessed a 10.7% jump in attendance in 2014–15, the second-largest spike in the NHL (Jones, 2015), and Nassau Coliseum sold out for 27 of 41 regular-season games, the most capacity crowds there in 3 decades (Hornick, 2015). The positive framing of Nassau Coliseum on the Islanders telecasts also complemented the team's marketing of venue-related merchandise for the first time in recent memory. The same "Tradition on Ice" jersey patches that appeared so often on the telecasts were available for purchase in the team store, as were pucks with likenesses of the arena. After the season, the team quickly sold out of \$20 vials of melted ice from Nassau Coliseum (Derespina, 2015; Leahy, 2015). The high demand for mere bottled water from the worst "stadium experience" in professional sports speaks to the nostalgia stirred partially by the telecasts.

The framing of Nassau Coliseum on the Islanders telecasts could serve as a model for other teams trying to promote their venues. In the New York sports market, the owners of the NHL's Rangers, NBA's Knicks, and MLB's Mets all own the regional networks that air their team's games, so the teams dictate the framing of their venues on the telecasts ("Our Brands," 2014; Ozanian, 2014). Even networks not owned by the teams that they cover would seem to want to increase viewership by presenting an appealing picture of the venue where half their telecasts take place. Some teams playing in aging venues have built entire brands around them (Hill & Green, 2000). Fenway Park in Boston, Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles, and Camden Yards in Baltimore are popular destinations even when the teams they host are losing. Although the Chicago Cubs have not won a World Series since 1908, attendance has climbed at Wrigley Field for 3 decades thanks to the marketing of the mystique of the ivy-covered "friendly confines" (Babcock, 2014). While the Islanders successfully charged \$20 for melted arena ice, the Cubs have convinced fans to open their wallets for ballpark dirt ("Cubs Authentics," 2015).

This inspection of hockey broadcasts revealed that every mausoleum has a silver lining, at least on television. Teams can encourage positive framing of their venues by providing eye-catching settings for broadcasters, gaining practical utility out of inevitable framing in telecasts (Scott, Hill, & Zakus, 2014). For the relatively low cost of inviting former players back to drop the puck before games, the Islanders created opportunities for nostalgic on-air commentary and broadcast interviews

with team legends. The telecasts also focused on the bronze Hall of Fame plaques that the team installed in 2008 in the hallway outside the home locker room and banners in the rafters with the retired numbers of prominent players (“Hall of Fame Plaques Unveiled,” 2008). Halls of fame and retired number banners can build team identification among fans by evoking positive childhood memories while creating aesthetically pleasing points of emphasis for broadcasters and decreasing the number of shots of the venue’s unattractive traits (Sutton, McDonald, Milne, & Cimperman, 1997). Other NHL teams have erected likenesses of former players at their venues, such as statues of Bobby Hull and Stan Mikita outside the United Center in Chicago and Mario Lemieux by the Consol Energy Center in Pittsburgh (Gentile, 2012; Hedger, 2011).

Still, the Islanders did not fully realize opportunities to benefit from the nostalgia for Nassau Coliseum, leaving openings for others to exploit. One company manufactured a line of Coliseum products such as silk-screen prints with the arena’s nickname *Madhouse off the Meadowbrook*, a reference to the nearby Meadowbrook Parkway, and blue and orange T-shirts with likenesses of the Coliseum and the retired number banners next to the phrase *Raised in a Barn* (“The Tristate Co-op,” 2015). The *Fort Neverlose* moniker that Rose referenced on one broadcast was plastered on T-shirts, hoodies, iPhone cases, mugs, pillows, and tote bags (“Fort Neverlose,” 2015). Some shirts were printed with the original Nassau Coliseum logo (“Nassau Coliseum,” 2015). Others bore the phrase *It Happened at the Coliseum* with allusions to memorable moments at the arena (Moire, 2015). Perhaps the Islanders had underestimated the allure of their arena. The team may have lost out on significant revenue over the years by not selling Nassau Coliseum merchandise despite the venue’s storied past. Other teams in historic venues should learn from this mistake.

Conclusions

Opportunities abound for future research in this area. Given the value of social media in branding (Lipsman, Mudd, Rich, & Bruich, 2012), especially in sports (Abeza, O’Reilly, & Reid, 2013), studies could explore whether the Islanders’ posts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram reinforced the televised framing of the Coliseum. It is interesting that the Islanders telecasts were not alone in their positive portrayals of the Coliseum. This analysis demonstrated that the arena was depicted positively on opponents’ broadcasts, as well. Only the Dallas Stars announcers griped about the Coliseum at any length, and even their broadcast also pointed out its history. So why the disparity between the portrayals of the Coliseum in *ESPN The Magazine* and game telecasts? The positive presentation of the arena could speak to differences between the game experiences of broadcasters and fans that merit scholarly exploration. Announcers generally have access to better amenities than fans, who must contend with worn seats, jammed concourses, crowded bathrooms and concessions, and other aggravating qualities that contribute to the “Nassau Mausoleum” reputation. The opponents’ broadcasters might also be forgiving or ignorant about the shortcomings of an arena they visit only a few times a year. The Coliseum’s last season called for reflection on its history, and the opponents’ broadcasters behaved like guests at a funeral, remembering their deceased friend’s glory days rather than his sickly appearance in recent years.

In light of the framing of Nassau Coliseum on Islanders telecasts, this study provides a comparison point to examine televised depictions of the team's new arena. Islanders telecasts from Barclays Center will no longer be able to emphasize tailgating, a rich tradition, or a proud association with veterans (Kreda, 2013). Whereas the Coliseum boasts excellent sightlines and a deafening atmosphere, Barclays has been criticized for hundreds of seats with obstructed views and has not received much attention for the loudness of its crowds (Kreda & Klein, 2014; Staple, 2014). Of course, the stadium experience at Barclays presents its own unique attributes that set it apart from the Coliseum in positive ways, including its brightness and a trendy Brooklyn address (Kreda, 2013). Perhaps Islanders telecasts will make an about-face from stressing the throwback feel of the Coliseum to emphasizing the modernity of Barclays. But framing Barclays will not be easy. It may not be a mausoleum, but it's not Fort Neverlose either.

Case Questions

1. How might teams use game telecasts to present a positive image of their home venue?
2. As in most contracts between teams and television networks, the Islanders have final say over the hiring and retention of MSG's on-air talent. Should the team have mandated that its broadcasters speak positively about Nassau Coliseum on air? Why or why not?
3. Many sports broadcasts encourage fans to connect with the team or its announcers on social media. How could the Islanders have encouraged fans to chime in with nostalgia-laden posts about Nassau Coliseum on social media?
4. During one telecast, Islanders broadcaster Howie Rose referred to Nassau Coliseum with the nickname "Fort Neverlose," which evokes the Islanders' striking success in the arena in the early 1980s. Teams commonly capitalize on nostalgia in their brands: The Packers, for example, consistently market Green Bay as "Titletown" in an attempt to conjure past championships even at low points when the team does not come close to winning titles. Which steps could the Islanders have taken to market Nassau Coliseum as "Fort Neverlose" and counteract the public perception of a "Nassau Mausoleum?"
5. The emphasis on nostalgia in the Islanders' telecasts seemed to have targeted older fans who remember the team's glory days at Nassau Coliseum in the early 1980s. How might the telecasts have reached younger fans who were not alive for the Islanders' Stanley Cup dynasty?
6. In this study, it was demonstrated that the Islanders telecasts stoked nostalgia by recalling historic moments in Nassau Coliseum's history. How might broadcasters offer a positive portrayal of an arena without a storied past?
7. What steps could the Islanders have taken to ensure more positive discussion of their arena on the opponents' broadcasts?
8. In this study, the broadcasters for the San Jose Sharks offered a flattering depiction of Nassau Coliseum. Should announcers for an away team praise the opponents' arena? Why or why not?

9. How can sports teams neutralize negative comments about their venues on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and review Web sites such as Yelp?
10. How might the Islanders continue to market the team's history in the new arena in Brooklyn?
11. Besides positive commentary on game telecasts, how can sports teams promote a positive experience at an older venue without spending significant money on renovations?

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