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THE BENEFITS OF PUBLIC APPEARANCES FOR A
SPORTS FIGURE'S IMAGE

By:
Andrea L. Pujat

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
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Approved by _____
Dr. Donald Bagin

Date Approved 6-30-03

ABSTRACT

Andrea L. Pujat

THE BENEFITS OF PUBLIC APPEARANCES FOR A SPORTS FIGURE'S IMAGE

2002 / 03

Advisor: Dr. Donald Bagin

Master of Arts in Public Relations

In this day and age of high salaries, free agency and shuffling around from city to city and team to team, sports figures are not concerned with being role models. Public appearances, management of image and the distinct understanding of how actions affect fan approval are being ignored.

This study examines the benefits of public appearances for a sports figure's image and examines if there is a discrepancy between what executives think fans feel is important and what fans really feel is important.

Six interviews were conducted with sports executives and sports professionals to gather information about the views of public appearances and what is expected of players. One hundred intercept surveys were conducted with sports fans. The surveys obtained information on what fans feel are important characteristics in a sports figure.

The study revealed that there are benefits to public appearances. The study also showed that the things sports fans find important are changing and sports organizations may have to change the approach used to reach fans. Suggestions were made on how sports organizations and sports figures can use public appearances.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The general public pays close attention to sports figures. Following the life of sports figures has become a national pastime. All sports athletes have begun to manage their personal image separate from the team they are connected with or the sport they make a living playing. Although the trend of people watching a sports figure's moves off the playing field is not a new one, more athletes have realized the benefits of arranging public appearances and the importance of appearing at special events. Many publicly sought-after sports figures are the ones that give back to the public through charities and giving of time on their off season to reach out to the public.

In recent years sports figures have become popular role model choices for children, teenagers and even college athletes. The media, the fans and also the general public watch sports figure's actions more now than ever before. It seemed everyone was aware of the situation in 1995 when O.J. Simpson was on trial for murder in 1995. And this past summer when Philadelphia basketball star Allen Iverson was arrested, thousands followed the story. The news media shapes the images of sports figures for the public and the media usually only highlight their lives when negative stories break.

Some sports figures detrimentally do not consider their image off the playing field as important to fans. They want the high salaries claimed by fan favorites for the ability to pack arenas, yet unfortunately fail to make a strong connection between off field or off-court behavior and positive fan perception. Personal appearances can be a major part of maintaining a positive public following and increase the longevity of a particular sports figure's time in the limelight. The possibilities for endorsements, talking engagements, job proposals and further public appearances after a sports figure's career in the sport is over can all be enhanced by how the public perceives that athlete.

Face-to-face communication is the most effective way to convey a story, enhance an image and convince an audience that integrity and credibility exist. Public appearances for sports figures can do just that according to Randy Ehman of Keepler Associates. "I assist agents in setting up appearances at colleges across the nation. Not enough sports figures understand the benefit of really reaching out to their fans. They worry about a million-dollar contract and forget that the only way they will maintain any further fame after their sports career is over is through the die-hard fans they touch." The memory of meeting a sports hero can last a lifetime for a fan.

Many of the most popular sports figures send autographed pictures for charity auctions, attend social gatherings and dinners. As a result of these personal interactions within in the realm of his/her personal life fans feel connected to the celebrity and also the sport he/she plays. That feeling of connection makes fans for life. According to Matthew Sedita, editor for NBA.com, "People will be less likely to be a fair weather fan

or a wagon jumper. It won't be easy to leave a team behind when you heard the quarter back speak in person or had the goalie sign a 8X10 picture to you personally."

Need

The researcher saw a need for this study when it was realized that very few sports figures manage their personal image. They are consistently fighting for better contracts and higher salaries. However, with the influx of free agency and threats of both lockouts and strikes the researcher was struck at how fans have become less loyal to their favorite sports figures. Public relations practitioners frequently examine how the public perceives a company, but has anyone really looked at how the public perceives a single sports figure and if public appearances off the playing field can strengthen a career and a fan base. This could be the key to why baseball's fan lose, to stadiums emptying out before the middle of the game or even to the poor ticket sales that are plaguing many professional sporting events. This study is an attempt to find if public appearances and making a connection with fans on a more personal level can help sports figures maintain a strong fan base and use those circumstances as a positive image builder.

Purpose

The two main purposes of this study were to find out how public relations practitioners and publicists manage a sports figures image and to find out how personal appearances can affect their public appeal. Many athletes fall out of the public eye after their sports prime is over, but a few are able to remain public figures and still draw public

attention. This phenomenon could be a direct result of how the sports figure manages his/her image during his/her career.

Problem

This study identified if public appearances can have positive effects upon a sports figure's fan appeal and to what extent. The study also examined if public appearances play an important role to a sports figure's staying power. This study will find if a younger generation views public appearances and sports figures differently than older generations. This study looks at an aspect of sports figures' careers that has not been studied

Procedures

The researcher contacted sports publications such as magazines, online websites and other sports publishing venues to request research or knowledge of research on the topic. Letters were sent, emails were sent and phone calls were made to obtain research or letters stating the publication had never researched this topic and was unaware of any research conducted by other organizations on this topic.

The researcher interviewed a number of sports commentators, sport lawyers, public relations directors for sports teams and some current or retired sports figures. The interviews were conducted to find out how and why they feel personal appearances are important to an athlete's image. These interviews were a mix of phone and in-person interviews. Other sports commentators, sport lawyers and public relations directors for

sports teams were contacted through email messages and letters. These requests were for quotes or any related research they might know of on the thesis topic.

The researcher also created an intercept survey for fans, which was conducted at “The First Union Center before a Flyers home game and one before a 76ers home game. These surveys will attempt to determine how the public perceives sports figures and if a personal experience with one might change or adjust the public perception. The fan survey was conducted find out if the public feels that personal appearances of athletes actually create or help contribute to their perceptions the athletes.

Limitations

There are some significant limitations that exist within this study. The researcher does not have unlimited access to people who schedule sports figures’ public appearances and is limited to those who respond to inquiries. Also it is limited mostly to the people available, mainly in Philadelphia and its surrounding area. The researcher was also limited to those sports fans that attending the games and the lack of gender differences in fans. Most sports fans are male and that limited answers to men’s perspective. The researcher was also limited to fans from the Philadelphia and south Jersey area. This study would not be able to be generalized for the professional sports areas across the United States because the scope of the study is not broad enough. The limits of distance, availability and respondents all played a part in this study.

Terminology

Athlete – a recognized sports figure paid to play any nationally recognized sport.

Personal Appearance – any planned appearance or performance that an athlete is paid to attend or attends simply for the publicity it can bring.

Publicist – a person who manages the public image of an athlete or sports figure.

Sports figure – a well-known athlete who currently plays or in the past played a nationally recognized sport.

Sports lawyer – a lawyer who works directly for an athlete to deal with performance contracts and all the details of making public appearances.

Sports team public relations practitioner – a public relations specialist who handles the overall public image of a particular sports team.

Chapter Two

“ . . . And that is how I became a professional athlete.”

No, that is not a personal statement, but the conclusion of a hall of fame baseball player’s presentation when asked to talk about his love for baseball during a public appearance. However, does that help his fans connect with him? Are they simply attending to get his autograph? Do fans view sports figures differently if they have shaken their hand? What are the benefits of public appearances for sports figures and their image? These are the questions that began a search of related research on this topic.

The researcher used three different libraries in the search to find related research on the topic chosen for this thesis project. Online databases at the Keith and Shirley Campbell Library at Rowan University, the Mount Laurel Library in New Jersey and the University of Pennsylvania Library were searched for relevant information. There were no books available outlining the specific benefits of public appearances.

Extensive search engines were used to find related information. The search engines used were Lexis Nexis, Alt. Press, Newsbank, Silver plate and Pro Quest. Many keywords and phrases relevant to the topic were searched with zero relevant finds. The key word phrases searched included:” “fan loyalty,” “sports figures,” “personal appearances” and “public appearances”. This search yielded 37 unrelated articles, which were read and proved useless to the researcher.

Other keywords were used in the search such as: player, athlete, image, sports and athletic. The searches using these keywords produced 77 unrelated hits. These articles were determined unrelated to the topic and not relevant to the research.

After broadening the search to include more web sites, sports franchises including the websites athletic league organizations, as well as online searches, the effort produced zero relevant articles. This led the researcher to find alternative sources for information. For this topic the three libraries used, Internet and online resources yielded no relevant articles, books or online statistical information.

Sports magazines were the next publications examined by the researcher. Five magazine editors were emailed and for any related research that his or her magazine had conducted on the topic of “the benefits of public appearances for sports figures and their image.” This email also requested any possible contacts at the organization for interviews to be conducted by the researcher.

The magazine editors emailed were at the following organizations:

Sports Illustrated, World Soccer, Golf Monthly, Lindy’s Football Annual and Street and Smith Pro. Some editors responded quickly and accommodated the request for a letterhead copy of his or her position on the topic and the organizations related research, if any was available. (Read the letters in Appendix A.)

After exhausting the magazines that gave specific email addresses for the editors the researcher resorted to mailing letters to editors at other sports related magazines. Among these were ESPN Magazine, Athlon Sports, Stuff, Golf Digest, Tennis, Slam and The Hockey News.

David Sutter, copy editor of ESPN Magazine wrote, "Your subject "the benefits of public appearances for a sport's figures image," is one that The Magazine has never covered nor researched."

ESPN leads the industry in its sports coverage and is valued as the top sports television channel, one of the top sports magazines with a wealth of industry knowledge.

The researcher also contacted editors of local newspapers, Philadelphia sports commentators and other sports enthusiasts to get information on the topic. Philly News editor Bill Lyon wrote, good luck "I am unaware of any such research."

The researcher sought out prominent news anchors and sports commentators for information and research knowledge. Sports commentator and writer for NBC Frank Deford was emailed for comments and information about the topic. Frank Deford is a staff writer for *Sports Illustrated*, a correspondent on HBO's "Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel" and appears on National Public Radio each week on Morning Edition. Deford has written 12 books and is a member of the Hall of Fame of the National Association of Sportscasters and Sportswriters. Deford wrote, "I know of no research and I'm afraid I

can not help you on that subject [“the benefits of public appearances for a sport’s figures image”]. My sense is that athletes who [do public appearances and] are prominent public speakers are mature and retired.” Deford has been around the sports fields and met many sports figures, but even he was merely stating an opinion and he could not offer any research articles, studies or hard facts on the topic.

Many magazine editors responded to the request for related research. However the response was negative and they could not offer any written help. Some sent a typed letter saying they do not know of any related research and the organization they belong to has never done research on this topic.

Managing editor Jason Kay of the Hockey News wrote, “ The Hockey news to the best of my knowledge, has never researched “The Benefits of Public appearances for Professional Sports Figures and their image. Further, I am unaware of any other publication that has.”

Lindy Davis, publisher of Lindy’s Sports annuals, wrote, “My company has never published any material on the benefits of public appearances for professional sports figures and their image nor am I aware of anyone who has.”

The editor of Athlon sports, America’s Premier Sports annuals, Mitchell Light wrote, “Athlon Sports has not done any research on [the] topic.”

The research conducted was thorough and the researcher tried to find surveys, studies, information and opinions from many sources. By using the Internet team sites many contacts were made within the professional sports industry. The most useful information was received from the in-person and phone interviews, because people were able to speak freely to the researcher about personal experiences with public appearances and the attitudes of sports figures towards public appearances within the interviewees own organizations.

Chapter Three

Procedures

The researcher used five sources for this thesis: 1) a search of on-line databases offered by Rowan University's Campbell Library, the Mount Laurel Township Public Library and The University of Pennsylvania's library; 2) Various search engines on the Internet; 3) in-depth phone and in person interviews 4) mailing, calling and writing various sports writers, sports teams public relations practitioners and sports figures for information on the subject; 5) intercept surveys of sports fans.

Secondary Research

For this study the researcher examined the benefits that public appearances could have on a sports figures and their images. To find information the researcher used the databases Lexis-Nexis, Alt-press watch, Newsbank, Silver Platter and Pro-Quest using Rowan University's Campbell Library. The researcher used "sports figures," "personal appearances", "public appearances", "image", "athlete", "fan loyalty" and "public figures" as search keywords. These terms yielded 242 results in sports related stories, but none were relevant to the researcher's topic.

The researcher visited various search engines such as, Google, Dogpile and Yahoo. Using the same keywords above the search engines listed 147 sports merchandise and all the major sporting teams' sites, but nothing relevant to the research was found. The researcher also searched all sports magazines' web sites and television channels that strictly pertain to sports broadcasting and have websites for relevant information. These searches yielded 23 contact names and phone numbers for possible interviewees.

Primary Research

Contact was made with sports writers and editors from ESPN Magazine, Sports Illustrated Magazine, USA Today, The Philadelphia Inquirer and The Philadelphia Daily News to request research and information on the research topic. Also sports commentators, sports figures and sports agencies were contacted to request information on the research topic.

In-depth in person interviews were conducted with Dave Coskey, vice president of the Philadelphia 76ers Organization, Zack Hill, director of public relations for the Philadelphia Flyers, Greg Casterioto, media relations representative for the Philadelphia Phillies, and Matthew Sedita, editor of NBA.com. Telephone interviews were conducted with Tim Kerr, former right wing for the Philadelphia Flyers and Scott Smith, managing editor of Street and Smith's Sports Annuals.

One hundred intercept surveys were conducted with sports fans by the researcher. Fifty-eight of these intercept surveys were conducted at the First Union Center before a Philadelphia Flyers game and 42 intercept surveys were conducted before a Philadelphia Seventy-Sixers game. The researcher chose intercept surveys because the questions were short and simple. To enhance the results the researcher needed to be present while the person answered the questions and needed to observe initial responses. The researcher wanted to have face-to-face interaction with each person and be present to get the first reaction from each person and not allow time for those surveyed to think deeply and deviate from their gut reaction.

The results of the survey as well as the interview results appear in chapter four.

The interview information combined with the survey responses and letters received from the sports associations revealed important tips and techniques for managing a sports figures public appearances and how those appearances can benefit his/her image as well as the team and franchise as a whole.

Chapter Four

Findings

Intercept Surveys

One hundred Intercept surveys were conducted with sports fans in the Philadelphia area. Forty-three percent were conducted at the First Union Center before a Philadelphia 76ers playoff game against the New Orleans Hornets; 57 percent were conducted at the First Union Center before a Philadelphia Flyers playoff game against the Ottawa Senators.

The survey consisted of seven questions, including one open-ended question about sports figures' personalities as a whole. The survey was conducted randomly by walking through the parking lots of the First Union Center and looking for possible respondents. Since it was a sporting event the most noticeable limitation was the lack of possible female participants. Eighteen percent of the respondents were female while 82 percent were males. (The full intercept survey is presented in Appendix B.)

Ninety-six fans surveyed admitted to being sports fans while only four percent said they were not sports fans. Obviously since the respondents were attending a playoff game, most of those surveyed were interested in sports. Ninety-one percent of respondents surveyed confirmed their love for sports by saying that they followed

athletes' careers. Nine fans surveyed admitted to not following professional athletes' careers at all. The first two questions of the survey determined whether or not the respondents' answers could be considered important to the study. Since most respondents were sports fans and many followed the careers of athletes, the answers to the questions that followed could be valid, reliable and able to be generalized to the sports fans of the greater Philadelphia area.

Eighty-five percent of those surveyed felt that sports figures have to manage their actions off the playing field and in their personal life. Many people cited Allen Iverson as being a poor example of a sports figure. Because they felt he does not pay attention to his public figure status and they expect him to pay attention to his personal life. Respondents also mentioned Jeremy Roenick as a good example of a sports figure giving of himself and his personal time to the fans. Since the surveys were conducted at a 76ers game and a Flyers game these are obvious fan choices for examples or extra comments.

Ninety-one percent did feel that positive publicity enhances the entire team and their image. However nine respondents did not think that positive publicity for one player enhances the team image as a whole. Many people said that if a player gets good press the week of a game they cheer a little harder for the team during the game. Fans also mentioned that if a player messes up and gets in trouble with the law or uses any artificial substance, they feel the sports figure is doing something to hide the fact that he or she does not possess skills and talent in the sport.

The next question caused controversy and heated discussion between respondents when the researcher approached fans in groups of two or more. The question asked if fans are more loyal to players or teams. Even though only 18 percent of respondents felt that fans are more loyal to players, each respondent was very positive in his/her response. Eighty-two percent feel that fans are more loyal to teams. When respondents were questioned together in groups of two or more respondents argued at times and tried to sway people and their answers. People felt very strongly about their opinions on this question; there was no hesitation by any respondents and they spoke up quickly to give their answer. Some people mentioned free agency as a reason for following players, because they move from team to team more. Those who answered teams were emphatic that the Philadelphia fans will always love the Eagles, Flyers and 76ers regardless of players leaving for other clubs. One male respondent said very seriously, "You can't live here if you refuse to cheer for our teams; we'll kick you out."

The next question also caused some dissension in groups of two or more respondents. The question asked if an athlete's personality contributed to the way a fan thinks of his or her performance. Some people asked for an explanation of this question. The researcher gave the example of a sports figure who is a "nice person" who receives good press and gives back to the community, but has an off night. As a fan, will you let a poor performance slide because of his/her reputation or hold that performance against him/her. This question had the most difference between the responses, except for the open ended question. Twenty-nine percent said no, it does not matter if the athlete is a saint off the court, if he/she has an off night the fans will turn against the athlete. While

71 percent said yes they will let sports figures slide occasionally with an off game if they lead a good life overall. There were some interesting remarks after the researcher asked this question. Most fans said that they would let the “Good Guy” slide if he was taking care of business most of the time. A few fans said that in Philadelphia “fans don’t let anyone slide here with an off night.” One female respondent said, “I love all the Flyers players, but if any one of them can be blamed if we lose tonight I will personally tear his jersey off his back and rip it up.” This female was a little extreme, but she did not laugh after the comment; she seemed quite serious. These opinions were in the minority, but show an interesting view of fan psychology and vested interest.

The final question asked in the intercept survey was open-ended. The researcher asked each respondent what one personality trait does an athlete need to be well liked by fans. Because of the nature of this question, there were obviously many different ideas and many different answers. The following tables list the answers of each respondent. A few answers were given more than once, but the researcher asked for different answers if the survey was given to more than one person at the same time. The researcher also took some side comments from respondents.

A female respondent said, “It’s not real tough. They should just be a good person.”

The personality traits varied greatly but they are listed in the tables that follow. The percentage next to the word shows how many respondents mentioned which trait.

Table 1.1

Personality Trait	Percentage
Heart	11 %
Aggressive	6 %
Personable	5 %
Charisma	4 %
Attitude	3 %
Courage	3 %
Dedication	3 %
Enthusiasm	3 %
Friendly	3 %
Hard Worker	3 %
Humble	3 %
Articulate	2 %
Communicate	2 %
Consistent	2 %
Courtesy	2 %
Desire	2 %
Honesty	2 %
Human	2 %
Hustle	2 %
Integrity	2 %
Intensity	2 %
Leader	2 %
Nice Person	2 %

Table 1.2

Personality Trait	Percentage
Professional	2 %
Respect	2 %
Responsible	2 %
Skills	2 %
Team Player	2 %
Tough	2 %
Character	1 %
Charm	1 %
Congenial	1 %
Eager	1 %
Energetic	1 %
Flashy	1 %
Fun	1 %
Gracious	1 %
Gritty	1 %
Humor	1 %
Leadership	1 %
Loyalty	1 %
Mean	1 %
Modesty	1 %
Showmanship	1 %
Spirit	1 %
Unselfish	1 %

Interviews

To better understand the organizations involved with sports and executives of sports teams, the researcher interviewed six people. The author of this thesis conducted all the interviews. Thirty-three percent of the surveys were conducted in person and 66 percent of the surveys were conducted over the phone because of location difficulties. (A full list of interview questions is available for viewing in Appendix C.)

The in-person interviews were conducted with Dave Coskey, vice president of the Philadelphia 76ers Organization, Zack Hill, director of public relations for the Philadelphia Flyers, Greg Casterioto, media relations representative for the Philadelphia Phillies, and Matthew Sedita, editor of NBA.com. Telephone interviews were conducted with Tim Kerr, former right wing for the Philadelphia Flyers and Scott Smith, managing editor of Street and Smith's Sports Annuals.

The interviews conducted with the sports professionals gave the research direction and provided interesting results. Many different opinions exist within the sports industry. However, the main ideas surrounding public appearances are similar in all major sports. The differences exist due to different levels of different player cooperation, organization structures and the changes that are now taking effect across the entire industry and in all sports. Many changes are occurring in the sports industry. Players are making more money than ever before and players move from team to team more often. Free agency and playoff pick-ups make team loyalty a thing of the past. Players do not stay on a team for their entire careers and that makes the world of sports more interesting to fans, but also more difficult as well.

The interview questions asked of each sports professional fall into three categories: fan perception, player traits and the public relations benefits for teams.

Fan perception

The way that sports professionals view what the fans want is very interesting. Each interview candidate had a different idea of what fans think. Former hockey player Tim Kerr said he had an understanding now about fans that he never had during his playing years. The way in which executives and others involved in a sports franchise view the fans is extremely important, because they run the team and they try to meet the fans' needs while they reach the franchise goal of selling tickets and bringing in advertising revenue.

The first question in this category asked; in your opinion do you think fans are more loyal to players or teams?

Four of the sports professionals felt fans are more loyal to teams. While two felt that the fans are becoming more loyal to players. Scott Smith of Street and Smith's said, "In the old days I would have screamed "teams" to that question, but now our magazine has found players and the younger generation are more loyal to players and they move with the player." Matt Sedita of NBA.com also commented on this question saying, "There are more Washington Wizards fans in basketball then there ever were before Jordan joined the franchise. They are not an all-star team, but people followed Michael Jordan to the Wizards."

The second question in the category of fan perception asked, In your opinion does an athlete's personality contribute to the fan's perception of their performance. This

question resulted in some interesting discussion about athletes that are nice guys, but have an off night. The interviewees all felt that in Philadelphia you must perform well at your sport or you will not have fan support. Greg Casterioto said, "Human nature says that [fans] will let the nice guy slide, but not here in Philadelphia." Each interviewee said that the fans are quite fickle. Fans in Philadelphia will love you for a great game, even if you have never performed that well before, but they will still always remember and hold the bad games over a team's head.

The third and final question asked in this category is about public appearances. The interviewer asked, why do you think sports fans attend public appearances? This question surprisingly spurred two answers from the interviewees. Four sports professionals said that all fans want is the autograph. Greg Casterioto said, "Fans want to walk away with something. They want that autograph. I just don't think autographs are worth anything anymore, but fans want autographs without a doubt." The other answer given by two interviewees was that fans want personal interaction and to see that these people they view as heroes are real people. Dave Coskey of the 76ers said, "People are drawn to appearances for personal interaction." Each interviewee was very sure of the answer they gave and felt strongly about it. Each sports professional told two or more stories about fans thanking them for an appearance and that they got the autograph they wanted or the personal interaction they were hoping for by attending the appearance.

Player Traits

The second category of interview questions has to do with player traits and how sports professionals view the players. Player personality traits are important to a franchise because you need each player to have a part. Matt Sedita of NBA.com said, “every player has to play a part. If a player is great as the sixth man in basketball, or the bench player in baseball, or the enforcer in hockey, then you can not fault him or her for playing his/her part on the team, just because they are not the all-star. There are so many parts on a team that need to be played. If an athlete plays a key part on the team, well then that is the only trait needed.”

The question asked was: what three personality traits do athletes need to be well liked and why? The answer given by four interviewees was “friendly.” Each interviewee said, “there aren’t three traits, they just need to be friendly.” Zack Hill from the Flyers said, “you want three traits, fan friendly, media friendly and well, friendly.”

Coskey said, “There aren’t three traits there is one trait, passion.” He continued by using Allen Iverson as an example. “A.I. is popular regardless of all the negative press he gets and even through the injuries he has suffered he still always gives 210 percent.”

Tim Kerr, former Flyers player, said, “It is not very hard to be liked by fans. They want to like you. I would suggest they stay clean by not messing up in life, they show up at things and try their best on the court or ice or field and simply be good people.”

The next question about player traits asked: do you believe that athletes pursue careers in announcing or do you think they are chosen by the organization? This question was termed interesting by each interviewee. Everyone felt that it was a little bit of both. If you have a strong personality and reporters and people within the organization can see it, they will come after you, but some people have to do the legwork. Greg Casterioto pointed out that, “[years ago] players needed to still make money after they stop playing, but now they make so much when they play they don’t have to work after they are done playing.”

Coskey agreed with the Phillies media representative saying, “Fewer athletes are going to be involved in broadcasting, because there is such a big difference in salary. It is difficult for them to go from making millions and millions of dollars to making a normal person’s salary.”

Zack Hill from the Flyers had the most positive attitude about those players that he feels could succeed as announcers. Hill said, “The guys on my team are all fantastic, but they wouldn’t all make great announcers. They know their own strengths and weaknesses, but I actually call the people about players that would make great announcers. I make calls and promote them during their career, for the future.” Hill continued by making a star example of Jeremy Roenick. “Jeremy is the most accessible athlete I have ever worked with in my 16 years with the Flyers. I call him and he will do anything I ask. He already knows he wants to remain in the public eye and is doing anything he can to be there.”

The final question in the player trait category was: do you ever hear complaints about appearance requirements in the contract? This question had the most differing answers in this category.

Zack Hill from the Flyers said, "I have no problems at all; they do anything and everything I ask. Hockey players across the board are just great guys." With a completely opposite perspective Coskey said, "The players don't offer to do any. They basically do what we ask, but we cannot make them go above that and they know they won't be cut for refusing." From the player perspective, Tim Kerr said that during his playing years "there were four to six appearances written into my contract and I although did not like giving up a day off to do them, I was obligated." Casterioto of the Phillies said, "Phillies players never complain when it involves kids, but they don't like dealing with adults. They don't complain about much, but they hate the media in the clubhouse. They want to be alone in there; however, that isn't a reality." With an outsider's standpoint, NBA.com editor Matt Sedita said, "I bet they don't like doing them at all." The only one to even hint that players do not have to be required to do public appearances was Scott Smith from Street and Smith's said, "They give enough on the court and don't owe anything." This question obviously brought out some very different opinions and there was no consensus. That just shows how differently fans, industry professionals, players and public relations sports professionals all view public appearances through their own position and understanding.

Public Relations Benefits for the Team

The third and largest category of questions is the public relations benefits for the team. These questions showed how sports professionals viewed public appearance benefits for the team and the player. The questions probed thoughts on how the image of other players might be affected by one athlete's actions off the field and also how it might affect the team image as well as the one player's image. The remaining 14 questions focused directly on how the interviewees viewed public appearances as a public relations tool for one player's image and for the entire team's image. The researcher wanted to find a true understanding of how executives, middle management sports public relations professionals, athletes and sports writers all viewed the role of public appearances as a PR tool.

The first question in this category asked the interviewees simply if they feel sports figures need to manage their actions off the playing field. Five of the six professionals answered yes and brought up the fact that sports figures are no different than any other public figure and will be watched by everyone and will be considered a role model. Greg Casterioto took a different approach, but still agreed with the others. He said, "Players don't [think they have to manage off field actions], but we wish they would. Most public relations efforts are reactive when they need to be proactive. In Philadelphia image is so important."

The next two questions asked opposing sides of a particular issue. All the interviewees answered yes to both of the following;

- 1) In your opinion does negative publicity for one player damage the franchise and team as a whole?
- 2) In your opinion does positive publicity for one player enhance the franchise and team as a whole?

The most interesting part about these two questions was not the yes answers, but the fact that each interviewee could clarify his answer with examples on both sides of the issue. Each interviewee took an example from his organization or his sport's knowledge to recall a time when negative publicity caused by one player hurt the entire franchise and the fans reacted negatively. Each interviewee could also recall an example of when positive publicity gained by one player helped the entire team image and as a result fans viewed the team in a better light.

The next question asked what each interviewee considered the most challenging part of setting up public appearances. Once again there was a consensus answer. The scheduling is the most difficult part. Casterioto of the Phillies said, "players do not live in the city they play in anymore. They can afford now to have multiple homes. So the scheduling and getting them here for appearances is most difficult." Flyers public relations director Zack Hill says scheduling around the games is tough. My players show up and want to do the appearance, but during the season it is difficult to schedule things." Scott Smith agreed, he said, "sports figures are just so busy. With practice and games and all the other stuff they do making appearances fit in for the fans and the player is difficult."

The next two questions asked the interviewee to rate the value of public appearances and the value of endorsements for an athlete's image on a scale of 1-10 with one being low value and 10 being high value. The answers differed greatly on this question. 76ers executive vice president Coskey surprisingly rated each lower. Coskey gave public appearances a three and endorsements a one. He said that, "how a person performs is all that is important to the fans and endorsements used to matter, but high salaries have done away with the importance of them to the players, and to the fans."

Phillies Media representative Casterioto rated public appearances a six and endorsements a seven. He said, "Both of these things help to connect them with fans and if a sports figure is out of sight, then he is out of mind." Zack Hill of the Flyers agreed more with Casterioto. Hill felt that public appearances were difficult to rate in a general term because they can be so different, but he gave the category a seven. While he felt that endorsements are extremely important. He rated endorsements a 10 saying, "With Toyota commercials running so often the Flyers are on television all the time." Scott Smith of Street and Smith's felt that both deserved high ratings. Smith gave public appearances an eight and endorsements a nine. Matt Sedita of NBA.com ranked public appearances and fan interaction a 10 and endorsements a six. Sedita said, "Fan interaction and appearances are key and endorsements are another part of exposure." Tim Kerr, the former Flyers player, gave each a much lower rating than the others. He seemed to agree more with Coskey. Kerr gave public appearances a 3 and said, "appearances don't do that much for the image of the player. He ranked endorsements a 2 and commented, endorsements put

players in the media eye, but not all great players get endorsements.” The results were interesting, public appearances and endorsements help the exposure, but obviously the interviewees were not positive that both public appearances and endorsements can help a sports figure’s image.

The next interview question asked interviewees opinions on how the team benefits by having a player who interviews well on the team. All the interviewees saw this aspect as a benefit. “The media wants good quotes,” said, Hill. Hill continued saying, “Fans want to know the players are normal people too.” Coskey was the only one that differed from the others. Coskey pointed out that the concept was subjective. He could feel that a player interviewed well, but the media doesn’t agree. He said it is subject to the opinion of the reporter.

Do you feel it is important for sports figures to maintain public appearances during the off-season? The interviewees all agreed that a presence must be kept; however, it is a challenge because players do not live in the city that they play. Phillies media representative Casterioto mentioned all the competition that exists for the entertainment dollar and said, “It takes more then just winning in the season.”

To find out some public relations tactics that the interviewees would use if they have a player not received well. I asked each what they suggest to sports figures who are not received well by the public. Coskey said “I would need to find the cause of the poor perception and work from there. There is nothing I can suggest if it isn’t something the

player can control.” Greg Casterioto believes that “there is nothing you can tell the players who do not understand the importance of dealing with the fans correctly.” Sedita pointed out the old saying, “a leopard can’t change its spots and fans realize if a player is trying to change his or her image.” Tim Kerr said, “It is so simple, players have to be accountable, on and off the court and stay out of trouble.”

The research then turned to examine organization policy for dealing with public appearances. Each interviewee was asked if their organizations required sports figures to make public appearances. Tim Kerr said that the appearances were written in the contract. The other responses from the interviewees were that organizations ask sports figures to do public appearances on a regular basis and they are usually good about it. Few did mention it can be difficult at times to get a firm commitment for an appearance from an athlete and to trust that the athlete will show.

The next two questions examined organizational policies further and asked the interviewees if they feel sports figures’ contracts should include public appearances and if they think there should be more public appearances written in contracts. Coskey from the 76ers organization said, “current players do about 300 appearances in a year and told the researcher that the appearances are written in, but not enforced, because if the player does not want to do the appearance, he won’t get penalized.”

Phillies media representative Greg Casterioto said contracts should include them, but they don’t always do them and players should be held to the contract agreements, but

no one is ever disciplined for not doing an appearance. Flyers public relations director said it should be written in, but he has never seen it in a contract. Hill also said, “[appearances] should be mandatory in all four major sports. Other teams might [need to write them in contracts and hold them to it but, hockey] does not need to.” NBA.com editor Matt Sedita thinks that teams should assess its players and make requirements known and he is “sure players are prim Donna’s and do not want to do appearances.” Scott Smith from Street and Smith’s Annual Magazine did not have a strong opinion on these questions he simply said, “they should be in contracts and the players need to give more.” Former Flyers player Tim Kerr had a different take on these questions from being a player He told the researcher that his contract had four to six appearances written in yearly and he felt “appearances were not fun, because they took a day off away, but I was obligated.”

The researcher wondered if the interviewees had to counsel a player who wants to continue his/her career after the playing years what public appearances they would suggest. Each had a different idea of what a player would need. However, each person noted it would depend greatly on the player’s personality. Smith said he would suggest any appearance with the United Way. Casterioto said he would tell players to save money cause careers in sports can end abruptly. He also noted that players need to gain young fans so they are liked for years to come. Sedita said, “players need to do anything that will reach out to fans personally.” Coskey said the player “must be someone who has ability to convey a great personality.” Appearances cannot change the personality of a player and he or she needs to be accepted by fans to remain in the public eye. Overall

interviewees noted players need to give a little more of themselves to keep a strong public image.

The final question of the interview asked if team management would be willing to pay for presentation coaching to be sure your athletes make positive public appearances. This examined the importance of player image for the organization and how much they value it. Each person thought it would be a good idea but the organizations do not all pay for extra coaching. The 76ers do presentation coaching in house. The Flyers used to, but they found that the team did not need much help. Kerr feels “players need to be themselves and he thought presentation coaching would not have helped the players and might not want to be coached. The Phillies have also paid for it in the past to teach body language and to work on tempers.

The information gathered from the interviews was very informative and was used as one of the primary sources for the researcher. All those interviewed made comments and told personal stories to the researcher. The interesting information showed differences in Philadelphia team’s philosophies, challenges, similarities and intricacies. The following chapter will look deeply into the findings and show the researchers most prevalent observations.

Chapter Five

Interview Evaluation

The major setback in the research process on this topic was the lack of information and related research available from professional sports organizations, sports magazines and all other sports venues. The topic lacked a foundation and a benchmark on which to base research findings and conclusions. Therefore research began with the executive level of organizations, the editorial level of publications and a former player of a prominent sports team. After the executive level was researched sports fans were then surveyed for comparison. Interviews and fan surveys were used to compare how executives and fans think both similarly and differently about public perception, the importance of public appearances and feelings about sports figures actions off the field.

The interviews conducted with sports professionals was the main basis of this study, because of the knowledge and close relationship each interviewee has to sports figures and the public relations aspects of the professional sports industry. Interviewing these individuals provided the answers needed to determine whether or not organizations view public appearances as a benefit to a player's image. However, the interviews had some setbacks, because of the diverse views and distinct differences in the sports themselves.

The interview questions were specific to see what a sports figure could do to better his or her image and to gain fan approval. One problem became apparent through the interviews. All the interviewees could speak only about the sport they worked with and lacked knowledge about sports figures in different sports. This is an understandable setback. The researcher could not expect the interviewees to know about sports figures in all the top professional sports. However, it posed a problem when they answered questions and generalized their knowledge to the entire sports industry, because hockey players, baseball players and basketball players differ dramatically.

Intercept Survey Evaluation

The research gathered from the fan survey made fan perception and opinions evident. There were three limitations found in the circumstances in which the intercept surveys were given to sports fans. The first problem was that the only fans available were at either a Flyers game or a 76ers game. This limited the scope of fans, because they instantly related each question to the team they were going to watch. The other setback was that most of the respondents were male. This could screw the results a bit, because even though most sports fans are male, female fans might think differently. The other setback was the age range of the fans. Most of the fans were in the upper end of the age range given on the intercept survey.

There were many benefits to surveying the fans. The intercept survey allowed the first response from fans to be recorded and gave the researcher an accurate read of fan

approval and feelings about public appearances. The survey also allowed the researcher an excellent source for understanding fan mentality toward the personal lives of sports figures and how they manage themselves off the field.

Conclusions

Sports professionals need a better understanding of what fan perceptions are held and they cannot assume ticket sales are an indication of fan approval. The main difference that was shown by the fan surveys is that younger fans' responses are in the minority. While the overall findings were very similar to what the interviewees felt, young fans in the lower age range all disagreed with them.

The most interesting findings from the interviews were those that could be directly matched to survey questions answered by the fans. Fans and interview respondents all felt that sports figures need to manage their actions off the playing field. However, the younger survey respondents all disagreed. Fans in the 14-20 and 21-30 age ranges all feel that sports figures give enough on the court and as long as they are winning games they do not have to worry about their actions off the field.

The other surprising thing is that younger fans are following players more than teams. All of the eighteen percent that said they feel more loyal to players were in the lower age ranges. This shows that sports professionals need to begin changing their ideas of fan perception. Even though the teams are not losing fans the trend is changing and

sports professionals need to begin changing their mind set and make sure they are relating to all fans. The sports professional have a good feel for their longtime fans' perceptions and beliefs; however, they must start to reach the younger, upcoming fans so sports teams can remain the choice of entertainment and maintain their lasting traditions of sell out crowds and happy fans.

The interviews gave the author an excellent idea of what each sport values in players and athletes and how the different sports organizations treat sports figures. Hockey values strong, loyal players and values integrity and toughness. Hockey treats each player with a certain amount of respect, but the organizations expect a lot from each player and each team. It holds players accountable for actions off the ice and asks them to do many appearances. Basketball values the skills and talent a player possesses and has fewer expectations for actions off the court. Basketball also treats players to higher salaries and perks early in their career and therefore cannot ask them for more without paying each sports figure for the extra time. Baseball values experience and approachableness. Each organization expects players to perform, but will not back a player if he or she are failing in his or her personal life. The interviews were also valuable to understand player dedication and how organizations view player loyalty. Another important finding was each organization's ideas about fan perception and fan desire.

One of the major findings from the study showed that fans want to interact with players in anyway either through public appearances or autograph signings or benefit auctions and ceremonies. The problem seems to be the players and the organizations not

expecting more of each sports figure. The players do not want to connect to the fans. In most of the major sports they feel they give enough on the playing field. The interviewees all said that even though public appearances are written into contracts they are not enforced. Players need to have a new commitment to fan and gaining their approval. Future fans might seem to care less about player actions and loyalty, but they still want to feel a connection to the player. Since they seem to follow players more than teams sports figures need to keep a connection with fans and maintain a closer relationship.

Recommendations

Sports figures should think more about fans and team approval than the money. Many fans surveyed mentioned the baseball strikes and lockouts. Sports figures squabble over millions and they still do not give anything extra to the teams, franchise or the fans.

Sports executives should hold sports figures to their contracts. If those appearances are written in contracts and negotiated, then sports figures should be held to them. Along with that they should maintain a positive attitude while fulfilling those requirements.

Sports figures that connect to the fans and show a positive persona are the ones that continue in the public eye after their playing years. They are the players that become announcers, host sports shows on television, and are interviewed on the radio or inducted into the hall of fame.

Public appearances will not make or break a sports figure's career and the team or franchise will still sell tickets to games even if its players do not attend public appearances. However, in the long run if players do not connect to the fans they will lose in the end. The organization must make a concentrated effort to be sure they are meeting fan expectations and maintaining a positive public image. If players and organizations wish to beat the possible negative effects of sports figures gaining higher salaries, free agency, movement from team to team and the possible threats of strikes, they need to connect to the fans in many ways. Public appearances are not the only answer, but the benefits will directly result in gaining fan support and positive publicity.

Research Recommendations

To better study this topic and learn more about the benefits of public appearances research should be done across the sporting industry. The sports of football, soccer, golf, and etc. could all possibly benefit from players making public appearances. A study of the attitudes, feelings and requirements in these sports would enhance the research of this project. In-person interviews should be conducted with other sports writers, sports professionals, organization executives, current sports figures and public relations directors in the industry. These interviews could give a more in-depth look into the sports world and the benefits each sports figure could appreciate by maintaining a positive image. In addition, fan surveys and focus groups could help researchers understand the feelings, needs and opinions of a greater variety of sports fans.

APPENDIX A



NBA Entertainment

Andrea L. Pujat
Residential and Campus Life
201 Mullica Hill Road
Glassboro, NJ 08028

Dear Ms. Pujat:

January 15, 2003

The subject, the benefits of public appearances for a sport's figures image has never been researched or studied by NBA.com. I also am unaware of any research existing on the topic. Good luck with your project.

If you need further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

Matthew Sedita
Editor, NBA.Com



.....
The Magazine

Andrea L. Pujat
Residential and Campus Life
201 Mullica Hill Road
Glassboro, NJ 08028

Dear Ms. Pujat:

Nov. 26, 2002

Your subject, "the benefits of public appearances for a sports figure's image," is one that The Magazine has never covered nor researched. Whether anyone else has, we couldn't say. Sorry we could not be of any assistance. Thanks for writing, and good luck.

David Sutter
Copy. Dept.

copy: pchr
DMM/PUSG

The Hockey News

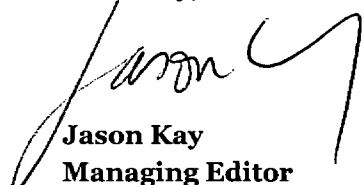
Andrea L. Pujat
Residential and Campus Life
201 Mullica Hill Rd.
Glasboro, NJ
08028

Andrea,

In response to your request, The Hockey News, to the best of my knowledge, has never researched "The Benefits of Public Appearances for Professional Sports Figures and their Image." Further, I'm unaware of any other publication that has.

Hope this helps and good luck with your thesis.

Sincerely,



Jason Kay
Managing Editor
The Hockey News

LINDY'S

SPORTS ANNUALS

February 4, 2003

Andrea Pujat
Rowan University
Residential and Campus Life
201 Mullica Hill Road
Glassboro, NJ 08028

Dear Andrea:

My company has never published any material on the benefits of public appearances for professional sports figures and their image nor am I aware of anyone who has.

Good luck in your endeavor.

Sincerely

Lindy Davis
Publisher



AMERICA'S PREMIER SPORTS ANNUALS

February 3, 2003

Andrea L. Pujat
Residential and Campus Life
201 Mullica Hill Road
Glassboro, NJ 08028

Ms. Pujat:

Athlon Sports has not done any research on the following topic: "The Benefits of Public Appearances for Professional Sports Figures and their Image."

Let me know if I can assist you in any way.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "ML", with a long, sweeping underline.

Mitchell Light
Editor



Residential & Campus Life

Rowan University
Residential and Campus Life
201 Mullica Hill Road
Glassboro, NJ 08028

Dear Editor:

My name is Andrea L. Pujat and I am a graduate student in the Public Relations program at Rowan University. I am in the process right now of gathering research for my master's thesis. I am writing to request your help. I have been unsuccessful in finding literature on my topic. I am writing to ask you if your magazine has ever researched my topic.

My thesis topic is "The Benefits of Public Appearances for Professional Sports Figures and their Image." If you could contact me about any information your establishment has on the topic I would appreciate it greatly. If you are unaware of any research your magazine has done on this topic and do not think you have ever researched it, I have enclosed a self-addressed stamped envelope. Please write a short letter on letterhead, signed with your title, stating that your magazine has never researched the topic and you are unaware of any existing research on "The Benefits of Public Appearances for Professional Sports Figures and their Image."

This would assist me greatly. I am also looking for sport's editors and/or reporters to interview for my primary research. If you would be willing to set-up an hour phone or face-to-face interview with me (depending on your location) you can reach me with the contact information below.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration. I would be very willing to write an article, sidebar, thesis summary or informational piece for your magazine once I am finished with my thesis and research. Feel free to contact me if your magazine might be interested in publishing the information I find on this topic.

Sincerely,

Andrea L. Pujat
Residential and Campus Life
201 Mullica Hill Road
Glassboro, NJ 08028
Office - 856-256-4187
Home- 856-256-6533
Email – AndreaPuja@yahoo.com

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

Name

Company

Title and short job description

- 1) In your opinion do you feel sports figures need to manage their actions off the playing field?
- 2) In your opinion does negative publicity for one player damage the franchise and team as a whole?
- 3) In your opinion does positive publicity for one player enhance the franchise and team as a whole?
- 4) What do you consider the most challenging part of setting up public appearances?
- 5) In your opinion do you think fans are more loyal to players or teams?
- 6) What 3 traits do athletes need to be well liked? Why?
- 7) Do you believe that athletes pursue careers in announcing or do you think they are chosen by the organization?
- 8) In your opinion does an athlete's personality contribute to a fan's perception of his/her performance?
- 9) On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate the value of public appearances to his/her image?
Obviously 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest.

- 10) On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate the value of endorsements to his/her image?
Obviously 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest.
- 11) In your opinion what are the benefits of having a player who interviews well on your team?
- 12) Why do you think sports fans want to attend public appearances?
- 13) In your opinion do most sports figures think they need an agent to manage their public appearances?
- 14) Do you feel it is important for sports figures to maintain public appearances during the off season?
- 15) What do you suggest to sports figures who are not received well by the public?
- 16) Does your organization require sports figures to make public appearances?
- 17) Do you feel sports figure's contracts should include public appearances?
- 18) Do you think there should be more public appearances written in contracts than there are already?
- 19) Do you ever hear complaints about those requirements?
- 20) If you were counseling a player who wants to continue his/her career after the playing years are over what public appearances would you suggest?
- 21) Do you think team management would be willing to pay for presentation coaching to be sure your athletes make positive public appearances?