

An examination of the motivating factors for volunteers at a professional tennis event

Gina Pauline, Syracuse University

Jeffrey Pauline, Syracuse University

**Management/Leadership
Session 9**

**Thursday, May 29, 2008
4:00 PM - 5:00 PM**

**Poster
Abstract 450**

Volunteers make a critical contribution to sporting events (Williams, Dossa, & Tompkins, 1995; Farrell Johnston, & Twynam, 1998; Strigas & Jackson, 2003; Hamm & MacLean, 2006). In many cases, without the personal investment of volunteers, sport events would not be possible (Williams et al., 1995). The growing need and use of volunteer labor within sports combined with limited economic resources has created a necessity to examine the volunteer demographics, motivation, and intentions to remain (Cuskelly, 2004). Of particular concern is research suggesting that the available pool of volunteers may be declining due to the increasing demands of everyday life, longer working hours, and more women in the workforce. Sport event volunteers should be perceived as a scarce resource so organizers must become more effective in their volunteer recruitment and retention efforts (Reed & Selbee, 2000).

Sport events are a unique entity as they provide a relatively short term (15-20 hours) but intense experience for volunteers (Green & Chalip, 1998). Furthermore, volunteering for a sport event provides a brief opportunity to immerse oneself deeply into the subculture of the sport industry. Green and Chalip (1998) suggest that volunteers within the sport industry commit their time because of an attachment to the sport and have distinct motives. Previous research has studied areas such as the demographics, motivation, commitment, and intentions to remain at a variety of single events including curling (Twynam, Farrell, & Johnston, 2003), marathon running (Strigas & Jackson, 2003), international events (Karlis, 2003), and golf events (Hamm & MacLean, 2005; Pauline, Pauline, & Mulvihill 2007).

Pearce (1993) noted that each volunteer-based organization operates within an individualized industry that attracts volunteers for a variety of reasons. It is necessary for an organization to develop an understanding of the factors that appeal to volunteers in order to retain their services year after year (Hamm and MacLean, 2005). The present study examined the volunteers from the RCA Tennis Championship, an ATP tour event, held annually in Indianapolis, Indiana. There were three purposes to this study. The first purpose was to examine the demographic profile of volunteers for the RCA Tennis Championship. The second purpose was to evaluate the factors that motivate these volunteers. The final purpose was to evaluate whether there were significant differences by gender on the volunteers motives.

The Sport Volunteer Motivation Scale (Strigas & Jackson, 2003), a five factor model (purposive, egoistic, material, external, leisure), as well as a demographic questionnaire was distributed to the volunteers at their orientation meeting and credential distribution, one week prior to the championship. The study consisted of 289 participants.

Descriptive statistics were utilized to describe the profile of the volunteers. The volunteers in this study closely resembled the general tennis-playing population in: age (45 years and older, 52.9%), ethnicity (Caucasian, 93.4%), and household income (\$75,000+, 70.7%). Furthermore, volunteers averaged 12.10 prior experiences and 109.91 hours volunteering for a sport event. The results also showed that the volunteers at the RCA Tennis Championship were motivated by material factors as well as a commitment to the event. Leisure pursuits proved to be the least motivating factor. A MANOVA showed no statistically significant differences between gender on all five factors (Wilk's E = .972, $F(5, 282) = 1.625, p > .05$).

These results exhibit some inconsistency with previous research regarding both the motivating factors as well as the statistical differences in motivation by gender (Han, Quarterman, Ha, Lee, & Bae, 2007; Hardin, Koo, King, Zdrick, 2007; Pauline, Pauline, Mulvihill, 2007). Existing literature has pointed to primarily purposive reasons (e.g., I want to help make the event a success) as the motivating factors for giving their time and effort to a sporting event. However, in the current study, material factors were the highest ranking reasons, indicating that volunteers for this ATP event were highly motivated by factors such as complimentary event items (i.e., tickets, event merchandise). Therefore, tennis event coordinators need to strongly consider including strategies that incorporate the material factor into their recruitment and retention efforts.

Event organizers have the task of recruiting, coordinating, and retaining volunteers annually. Specific to tennis, organizers must understand the uniqueness of the sport, the demographics and motives of the volunteers, as well as how each of these factors are related to the motives to volunteer. The results from the present study point to the benefits of continuing to do research examining the demographics, motives, and commitment. By doing so, this will improve planning, management, and retention efforts for maintaining a strong volunteer base for future events.