Sport as a Change Agent: Tailgaters' Recycling Behavior

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It has been stated that since professional sport organizations are considered "social institutions," they must not only actively pursue but also take the lead in CSR initiatives (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006; Zeigler, 2007). However, sport organizations must not only take the lead in these initiatives and model responsible behavior, they must also use their power and influence to be change agents within society. This evolution of CSR will become the standard by which organizations, sport and otherwise, will be judged simply due to the fact that the consumer has become more sophisticated and has learned to recognize insincere social responsibility initiatives (Business Wire, 2008).

With financial support from a 2009 NASSM Research Grant Award, the present study was designed with the purpose of assessing a data-driven intervention aimed at enhancing the behaviors and self-reported attitudes of tailgaters regarding recycling efforts while tailgating, utilizing McKenzie-Mohr (as found in McKenzie-Mohr & Smith, 1999) and Darton's (2008) social marketing-based frameworks.

Specifically, the research team worked in conjunction with students from the University's Sport Management program, the student chapter of the Sport Marketing Association, and student-athletes from the Department of Athletics CHAMPS/Life Skills program to implement a knowledge-based intervention where students and student-athletes served as educators of athletic event tailgaters about recycling, its benefits, ease and opportunity.

The intervention was based on data collected from collegiate athletic event tailgaters in a tailgate setting void of any venue or event-orchestrated recycling campaign. Results indicated that respondents recycled significantly less while tailgating (M = 2.35, SD = 1.69) then while at home (M = 3.7, SD = 1.76), t (407) = 13.89, p < .0005, η² = .32. Furthermore, 51% (F (5, 392) = 27.04, p < .0005) of the variance in the 'recycling while tailgating' scores was predicted by a simple multiple regression model. In the final model, only two of the factors were statistically significant, with the Purchase of Green Products component recording a higher beta value (beta = .35, p < .0005) than the Knowledge component (beta = .24, p < .0005).

After establishing a baseline of recycling behavior by measuring the pounds per person recycled at a tailgate event, the intervention was executed and longitudinal data collection has continued at consecutive tailgate events to determine the effect of the intervention. The baseline recycling measure was established at .132 pounds of recycling per person (n=1060). Post-intervention Time 1 yielded .235 pounds of recycling per person (n=850) and Time 2 yielded .169 pounds per person (n=358). Post-intervention Time 3 will be determined on November 14, 2009, concluding the longitudinal data collection phase of the present study. At that time, data on respondents’ self-reported recycling attitudes will also be collected.