Tourism is an important part of economic planning for many cities. One particular segment of the tourism industry, sport tourism, has shown rapid growth in recent decades due to the potential economic benefits that sporting events provide to host cities and communities (Chalip, 2006). In the past, a considerable amount of the sport tourism research has focused on the economic impacts that spectator oriented sporting events such as the Olympic Games, Indianapolis 500, and Super Bowl have on host cities (Horne and Manzenreiter, 2004; Matheson & Baade, 2006; Mondello & Rishe, 2004).

A number of economic impact studies involving large scale spectator oriented sporting events have shown that some of these events may not be the "cash cows" they were once thought to be. In some instances, the economic benefits of hosting large scale sporting events have been minimal (Daniels & Norman, 2003; Horne and Manzenreiter, 2004; Mondello & Rishe, 2004). According to Crompton (2006), specific reasons can help to explain why some large sporting events have limited or no economic gains. In some instances, unrealistic multipliers are used to calculate indirect spending and, as a result, inflated economic impact figures are reported (Matheson & Baade, 2006).

Mondello and Rishe (2004) point out that smaller-scale, participant oriented sporting events such as marathons and half-marathons may actually benefit the local economy more than large scale events. Reasons for this include decreased event expenses, less investigator bias, a minimized crowding out effect and increased overall accuracy in data collection and measurement.

Over the years very few studies have attempted to examine direct spending associated with participant orientated sporting events. The purpose of this study was to examine direct spending patterns for a participant oriented half-marathon event over a four-year period. Data for this direct spending study was collected from participants who competed in an annual half marathon that was held in 2003, 2004, 2006 and 2009. The event is well-known nationally and it attracts runners from throughout the United States. Overall, a total of 4,200 out-of-town event participants responded to the direct spending surveys over the four year period.

Results from the data collection revealed that fairly consistent patterns of direct spending could be identified for the four years. For example, per respondent spending on lodging, food/beverage and entertainment were very similar. Total direct spending per respondent was also very similar with a low of $933 in 2003 to a high of $1,088 in 2009. The type of transportation used, average round-trip mileage to the event and the city stayed while attending the event were almost identical. The average size of travel was listed at 3 for 2004 and 2009 and 4 for 2003 and 2006, respectively. The length of stay for three of the four years was listed at 2.9 night and 3.0 for the fourth year. In terms of where the participants stayed, "hotel" was selected most often each year at 76%. The number of rooms used per night ranged from a low of 1.5 in 2004 to a high of 2 in 2006. The average age of respondents was very similar for each year at 37 years. Responses to the gender, race, educational level and family income questions were also very similar for each year.

Although results of direct spending studies generally reflect estimates of spending patterns for "spectator oriented" sporting events, it is clear from the results associated with the 2003, 2004, 2006 and 2009 half marathon events, that the data collected for all four years are similar and reflect consistent patterns. This would suggest that the data collection methods are reasonably accurate. Although the results do not reflect the final figures, they do reflect figures of spending that took place. This information should prove to be very useful to future participant oriented events and their planners.