Corporate social responsibility (CSR) represents actions that are voluntary and integrate social and environmental concerns (Prieto-Carron, Lund-Thomsen, Chan, Muro, & Bhushan, 2006). Academic research on CSR has examined the discrete benefits that philanthropy, community outreach, cause-related marketing, employee volunteer programs and other socially beneficial activities have on the organization and its constituents. Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), for example, argue that CSR efforts lead to customer loyalty and other positive post-purchase behaviors. De Schutter (2008) found that CSR efforts lead to increased employee loyalty and retention, and Cantrell, Elias, Noble, and Algje (2008) also uncovered benefits for nonprofit partners of the firm. However, this body of research typically examines benefits to either the firm or individual constituent groups, and for the most part ignores the attributes of the type of CSR activity.

In the past few years, the environment has been one of the factors of greatest interest in terms of the market's attitude toward CSR activities (Bird, Hall, Monmente, & Reggiani, 2007). These authors found that the market values CSR activities in the area of the environment. Similarly, Welford, Chan, and Man (2008) found the environment to be the most important concern for stakeholders in a company's CSR efforts. Stakeholder pressures have placed the environment on the agendas of most firms (Kassinis & Vafeas, 2006). King (2007) suggested that in the past twenty years, firms and environmental stakeholder groups have moved from a “relationship of antagonism to one of ‘constructive engagement’” (p. 890). This signifies a shift in thinking about CSR and the environment to one that illustrates the growing importance of this area for businesses.

In this study, we sought to examine whether a particular approach to CSR (environmental sustainability) generates a sustainable mutual benefit (i.e., benefits that are of value to the firm itself and its owners / shareholders (internal), and to its stakeholders or the greater society (external)). External benefit encompasses the intended beneficiaries of the firm’s actions - the majority of which exist outside the company’s boundaries. In order to do so, we examined the focus of activity (strategic / non-strategic) and source of motivation (voluntary / coerced) to determine the orientation of the CSR project undertaken, which may in turn impact the distribution of the benefits that may result (Gyves & O’Higgins, 2008). We considered Burke and Logsdon’s (1996) five conditions for value adding CSR: centrality (closeness of fit to the firm’s mission and objectives), specificity (ability to capture private benefits by the firm), proactivity (degree to which the program is planned in anticipation of emerging social trends and in the absence of crisis), voluntarism (the scope for discretionary decision-making and lack of externally imposed compliance requirements) and visibility (observable, recognizable credit by internal and/or external stakeholders of the firm). That is, it is proposed that CSR activities that have high centrality and specificity, are engaged in proactively and voluntarily and which have high visibility will provide the most mutual and sustainable benefit.

In recent years, CSR has become a strategic imperative not only for business corporations but for professional sport leagues and teams as well. CSR initiatives in professional sport are becoming increasingly institutionalized, formalized, and strategic (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2009; Babiak & Wolfe, 2009), often generating favorable benefits to the organization such as brand image, fan loyalty, and even impacting sales of tickets and merchandise (Sports Philanthropy Project, 2007). In addition to the traditional CSR activities such as community outreach or cause-related marketing, there is a new trend in the realm of sport focused on environmental sustainability and its impact on the management of sport entities. Sport facilities and sport events concentrate large number of people in a confined space over a relatively small period of time, thus introducing hardships to the natural environment (Chernushenko, 1994; Trendafilova & Chalip, 2007). Therefore, new socially responsible initiatives across all sport leagues are taking into consideration the impact professional sport is having on the environment.

The environmental management practices within four major North American sport leagues (National Basketball Association, National Football League, Major League Baseball, and National Hockey League) were studied. This was achieved by conducting 35 semi-structured interviews with senior sport executives (internal constituents) responsible for designing, implementing and managing environmental initiatives for their organizations, as well as...
interviews with executives from (external constituents) sponsors, partner/consulting groups, and advisors to the leagues in their effort to assess the benefit of collaborative environmentally sustainable practices. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis program, where themes and codes were assigned to the data, and patterns were determined.

The interviews revealed the teams' and leagues' perceived benefits from the implementation of environmental management practices. While not explicitly central to the mission and objectives of a sport organization, environmental CSR was considered to be a strategic activity which provided a professional sport organization with internal benefits such as new marketing opportunities, new revenue streams, employee engagement, and image enhancement benefits. Internal benefit was also determined in the value of CSR as being proactive (planned), voluntary (discretionary), visible (attributable to team / league), and specificity (providing private benefits to the organization). External benefits included increased community awareness of environmental issues, a platform for partners to take advantage of the unique resources a professional sport team / league has (i.e., media coverage, community reputation and image), and overall positive impact on the environment itself (i.e., energy use reduction, increased recycling).

Given these findings, we conclude the presentation by discussing the impact and viability of environmental CSR practices on professional sport organizations as well as their external stakeholders, and presenting recommendations for future research in the area of environmental responsibility and CSR.