Offseason Sport Facility Usage: Snow Days, A Case Study

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According to Rosentraub (2002), the public investment in Cleveland’s downtown renovation in the 1990’s and through the turn of the bicentennial exceeded $800 million. This investment included $218 million, $152 million, and $293 million to provide facilities for the MLB Indians, NBA Cavaliers, and NFL Browns, respectively. Though these investments stimulated private investment in restaurants, several office buildings, hotels, galleries and select specialty shops, the value of these investments has been debated for years, and many often question the annual public investment needed to pay the debt charges on these amenities. However on the positive, Cleveland is no longer perceived as the city with a burning river, racial riots, and a depressed and decaying downtown (Howard & Crompton 2004, Rosentraub, 2002). Cleveland has attracted residents, people from across the region, and tourists; annually the city attracts more than five million people to its downtown areas for baseball, basketball, and football games, as well as other forms of entertainment (Howard & Crompton 2004). These five million people who attend events are coming to a downtown that just a few decades ago was avoided (Howard & Crompton, 2004).

Traditionally, sport organizations have acquired financial resources from three generic sources, the public sector, the private sector, and the sport enterprise. They procure funds from these sources to offset the cost of these ventures, and Cleveland is no exception. The private sources include investment capital, corporate sponsorships, and donations. The public sectors sources include hard and soft taxes, grants, abatements, bonds, and grant subsidies. The enterprise characteristics have traditionally included tickets, concessions, PSL’s, naming rights, luxury seating, merchandise, media fees, and auxiliary services. Although the public sector has traditionally assumed a significant role in the financing of sport facilities and many have identified government support to be axiomatic in the public recreation agency and collegiate contexts, critics question the use of those funds for professional sports teams. Therefore, teams today must constantly look for creative new sources of funding. Teams must be creative and incorporate additional entertainment options that are designed to lure the fan to the sports complex, even on non-game days (Howard & Crompton, 2004).

Innovations of quality auxiliary service applications are an asset for any sport organization. Sport entities today must overcome a variety of obstacles to attract consumers to a facility. In 2000, a Harris Research Group study identified the factors that constantly wreak havoc on the market strategies of sport marketing departments and their attendance measures: comforts of watching sports at home on big screens, DVRs, replays, inappropriate player behavior, congested traffic and parking, poor seating availability, team performance, and change in demands and family interest, (Swift, 2000, Howard & Crompton, 2004). In an era of struggling economies, the value of economic and community impact is often questioned; therefore, team innovations have to overcome the perceptual conflict that questions the value that these teams have within a community. Image, pride, vibrancy, and fraternization in an era of sellouts do not often get questioned, but in an era when sales are struggling or team player movement is questioned, the value of these teams and the strategies they utilize to attract consumers are often at the forefront of consideration.

The purpose of this study is to examine the feasibility, value and impact of Snow Days, a unique auxiliary implementation strategy developed by the Cleveland Indians for the 2010/2011 offseason. Snow Days at Progressive Field is a new and innovative outdoor attraction initiated by the Cleveland Indians organization to utilize the open-air facility during the winter months. Although these strategies have been used by recreation-specific facilities, Snow Days will be one of the first full offseason auxiliary implementation strategies applied by an American professional sports franchise. The researchers, in collaboration with the Cleveland Indians organization, will examine the missions and operations of Snows Days and deliver recommendations as to ways the Indians organization may improve services and evaluate future feasibility.

The proposed study will collect data from three major sources: customer satisfaction surveys conducted onsite, general observations and interviews with key stakeholders and staff, and the assessment of financial and market data provided by the Indians organization. The extent to which the variables under investigation are completely and accurately defined prior to hypothesizing any functional relationships will be critical to ensure construct validity and an accurate definition of attribute characteristics. The research team will utilize data from both primary and secondary sources to secure relevant background information, historical trends, and any additional specific information relative to the scope of the study. Additional measures will be utilized to help ascertain the viability of facilities and its amenities. These measures will also help to further accentuate and
define market characteristics.

This assessment will allow the researchers to extrapolate from the various sources of data and assessment strategies to produce an accurate projection of future cost, revenues and opportunities. Upon completion of the study and for this presentation, the researchers will provide a model overview that highlights the market, operational and physical characteristics of the operation of the event. Included within the model will be sustainability options highlighting decision opportunity and attribute differences related to cost, organization, and orientation of Snow Days. An assessment and development of a universe of options will also be provided. This outcome base scenario will be developed to provide a variety of recommendations and alternatives as they relate to the success of the event. In addition, the researchers will provide recommendations as to what warrants the most advantageous strategies to undertake for future implementation.