

**Assessing Donor Motivations in Professional Sports: Development of a Conceptual Framework**

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**Management/leadership**

**Thursday, May 30, 2013**

**20-minute oral presentation**

**(including questions)**

**Abstract 2013-015**

**10:35 AM**

**(Room 404)**

Under the influence of philanthropic movements, more than 1,100 nonprofit organizations related to professional sport leagues, teams, and/or athletes have participated in various philanthropic activities (Lee, Heinze, Babiak, & Juravich, 2011). Among these professional sport related charitable organizations, some are quite successful in generating revenue and disbursing grants for their cause of interests. For example, the total estimated revenue for the NFL Players Association was nearly \$46.5 million and the Dikembe Mutombo Foundation was \$5.1 million (Johnson, 2007). However, it is notable that many of these charitable organizations have an operational budget of less than \$1 million per year that might cause financial problems for effective charity operations. Although the total number of charitable organizations have increased, the actual amount of donations have actually decreased in recent years; for instance, the total dollar figure of donation was \$298 billion in 2011 when compared to \$335 billion in 2007 (Blackwood, Roeger, & Pettijohn, 2012). For professional sport charitable organizations to continuously survive and thrive in adverse situations and to develop effective fundraising strategies and programs, understanding their donors' perceptions toward the charitable organizations and identifying the factors that could encourage people to donate more money would be necessary. Nonetheless, the psychological motives of people who donate their money to charitable organizations related to professional sport entities have rarely been studied. Since the number of professional sports' charitable organizations is continuously increasing, empirical evidence derived from research investigations is necessary to formulate viable procedures to effectively promote current donors involvement and attract new donors.

Although researchers have addressed donor perceptions, motivations, and behaviors in various sport contexts (e.g., Filo, Funk, & O'Brien, 2008; Gladden, Mahony, & Apostolopoulou, 2005; Leslie & Ramey, 1988), especially for college athletics (e.g., Billing, Holt, & Smith, 1985; Mahony, Gladden, & Funk, 2003; Staurowsky, Parkhouse, & Sachs, 1996; Verner, Hecht, & Fansler, 1998), participants' motivations to take part in charity sport events (Filo et al., 2008, 2009, 2011; Won & Park, 2010), sport tourism (Coghlan & Filo, 2012; Snelgrove & Wood, 2010), and corporate social responsibility initiatives in the professional sport industry (Babiak, Mills, Tainsky, & Juravich, 2012; Kent & Walker, 2010; Sheth & Babiak, 2010; Tainsky & Babiak, 2011), previous research findings might not fully explain donor motivation related to charitable organizations that are represented by professional sport teams, leagues, or athletes. While some factors derived in the previous studies might be adaptable to professional sport settings, considering the different characteristics of professional sport teams or athletes (e.g., highly commercial, higher level of community visibility and media coverage, and presence of individual athletes' foundations) when compare to college athletics, different motives might affect people's intention to participate in charitable programs of professional sport entities. Accordingly, identifying related theoretical contexts based on previous research findings and developing a framework of inquiry into professional sport donors would be the first step to enhance studies on donor behaviors in professional sports. Conducting a comprehensive review of literature as the primary methodology of research inquiry, the purpose of the study was to develop a theoretical framework in an effort to better understand the motives of donors in the professional sport setting.

Numerous donor behavior studies have been conducted in mainstream business, management, and marketing (e.g., Bendapudi, Singh, & Bendapudi, 1996; Guy & Patton, 1989; Hibbert & Horne, 1996; Kotler, 1979; Sargeant, 1999; Sargeant, West, & Ford, 2001) and suggest that charitable giving behavior is a complicated process and to some extent, it could be predicted by various factors. Bendapudi et al. (1996) developed a conceptual framework consisting of four factors (i.e., antecedents, moderators, donor behavior, and consequences) and Guy and Patton (1989) suggested five steps that would lead people to help others in need: (a) awareness of another people in need, (b) interpretation of the situation, (c) recognition of personal responsibility, (d) perception of ability/competence to help, and (e) implementation of helping action. Sargeant (1999) indicated that there could be several external inputs affecting an individual's awareness toward charitable organizations, which in turn lead to potential perceptions that

## **2013 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2013)**

may influence his/her attitude toward charitable giving behavior and charitable giving decision process. In the sport management literature, much of the donor behavior studies have stemmed from the athletic donor motivation study conducted by Billing et al. (1985). The researchers identified four key motives for athletic donor motivation: (a) socialization, (b) philanthropy, (c) success, and (d) benefits. Following this research protocol, other researchers (e.g., Mahony et al., 2003; Staurowsky et al., 1996; Verner et al., 1998) have attempted to identify factors that would help predict donor motivations in college athletics; consequently, a number of motives for collegiate athletic donors have been recognized (e.g., benefit, philanthropy, power, socialization, success, and commitment). Researchers have also examined the role of involvement in athletics (Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011), barriers for athletic alumni giving (Shapiro, Giannoulakis, Drayer, & Wang, 2010), motivations for academic and athletic donors (Stinson & Howard, 2010), and donor motivations associated with green stadium (Jin, Mao, Zhang, & Walker, 2011).

While different approaches have been taken to study motives for charitable giving in sport, some common factors that influence people's giving behavior could be identified and integrated from previous research findings. The first common factor would be the tangible benefits that are related to monetary values, such as tax benefits or free gifts. Previous research findings (e.g., Billing et al., 1985; Staurowsky et al., 1996; Verner et al., 1998) revealed that people donated because they could receive monetary benefits. Similar to college athletic donors, professional sport donors may receive tax deductions, souvenir items (e.g., free t-shirts, hats, or small gifts), or free game tickets by participating in charitable programs. The second factor is the awareness of charity needs. It could be assumed that if people are aware of others' needs for help, they will be more likely to become potential donors (e.g., Filo et al., 2008; Guy & Patton, 1989). Essentially, if an individual recognizes that others are suffering from a disaster or health issues, he/she will be more likely to help those people in need. The third factor is the image of the charitable organization. People will be more likely to participate in charitable giving if the organization has a positive image in the community, such as familiarity, social responsibility, efficiency, or effectiveness (e.g., Bendapudi et al., 1996; Sargeant, 1999). If a charitable organization has a high profile and is successful in achieving its mission to help others, people will likely donate their time and money to that organization. The fourth factor is personal involvement with a cause. Previous studies suggest that people who are highly involved with a cause tend to have positive attitudes and participation intention toward the charitable organization (e.g., Bennett, 2009; Kim, Walker, & Kim, 2011; Kottasz, 1994). In other words, people are more likely to donate based on their interests in and awareness of needs of their community. The fifth factor is the level of identification with the organization. If people feel a high level of attachment or belongingness to the organization, they will be more likely to participate in and/or donate to charitable events of the organization or the organization's charitable programs (e.g., Filo et al., 2008, Kim et al., 2011; Mahony et al., 2003).

As a result of synthesizing and analyzing donor motivation themes, a five-factor model was conceptualized in this study (i.e., tangible benefits, awareness of needs, image of the charitable organization, personal involvement with a cause, and organization identification). A structural model is further depicted to examine the impact of these donor motivation factors on donation behavior variables in professional sport settings. Given the limited understanding of why people donate or do not donate to professional sports, this developed conceptual framework would help academicians further verify the relevance and importance of the identified donor motivation factors, and help practitioners to develop campaigns to effectively appeal to current and potential professional sport donors.