Going Back to the Ballpark: Memories of Previous Baseball Experiences

Mark Slavich, Grand View University
Eric Hungenberg, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
Dylan Williams, University of Alabama

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Sport practitioners have long acknowledged that they are selling memories that can last a lifetime (Bauernfeind, 2017; Summers, Johnson, & McColl-Kennedy, 2001). These memories are even stated as serving as a motive for fan attendance (Summers et al., 2001). Despite the emphasis on creating memories, scant research exists on what actually creates fans’ memories of previous sport experiences. Previous research within the general psychology discipline exhibits that experiences that are intense, emotional, and scarce in nature are more likely to be remembered (Cialdini, 2001; Sehulster, 1989). Other research demonstrates that the social experience and sensory elements contribute to memories that are later part of the nostalgic experience (Havlena & Holak, 1996; Holbrook & Schindler, 2003). With minimal research of this topic in the sport context, the purpose of this study is to investigate sport fans’ recollections about their previous sport experiences and discover the psychological function these memories serve. The researchers desire to understand how memories contribute to participants’ attitudes and feelings toward the sport experience.

Method/Data Analysis

To address the purpose of the study, a qualitative examination of Major League Baseball (MLB) fans will be conducted. Specifically, in-depth, semi-structured interviews of approximately 30 individuals who have attended at least five MLB games will be conducted. Participants will be recruited via an online sport message board with interviews occurring between the months of January and March 2019. MLB is the context of the current study in order to extend upon the previous work of Summers et al. (2001), who focused on general sport memories. The current study will focus on one type of sport experience to ascertain the components of MLB experiences that fans later recall and the psychological function of these memories.

Following the interview process, data will be independently analyzed and coded by each member of the research team, followed by consensus coding to ascertain the themes. The current study is utilizing a grounded theory approach based upon the unknown nature of the components and function of memories for sport fans (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). Despite previous research of experiential components that contribute to memory as well as the function of memories (Havlena & Holak, 1996; Wilson & Ross, 2003), the research team seeks to uncover such characteristics and function of memory within the sport context.

Discussion/Implications

The current study expects to yield both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the results will exhibit the aspects of MLB experiences that are recalled by participants, and the common characteristics that these memories maintain. Further, the results should also reveal the psychological function of these memories in participants’ lives, contributing to social-psychological literature. Practically, the results will showcase the components of MLB experiences that managers and marketers should emphasize. While the social element is likely to be at play, specific game-centric characteristics (e.g., food, music, promotions, etc.) that participants later recall and hold favorable opinions of are currently unknown, which could benefit sport managers’ decisions concerning the event experience.