

# Unit 11

## Sports & Entertainment Communication

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### OVERVIEW

The topics covered in unit eleven introduce the various components of sports and entertainment communications including publicity, public relations, community relations and media relations. A key concept discussed is the integration of publicity with the sponsorship component of the sports and entertainment business model, as well as aligning publicity plans with promotional and sales efforts. Unit eleven also examines the various methods organizations employ to effectively communicate information about their products and services with customers, media and fans.

### OBJECTIVES

1. Explain why sports and entertainment communications are important
2. Define publicity
3. Differentiate between publicity, public relations, media relations and community relations
4. Identify the three approaches to media relations
5. Describe the different ways community relations programs are implemented
6. Name the six functions of sports and entertainment communications
7. Explain how publicity impacts other areas of sports and entertainment business
8. Create a press release with all its essential elements
9. Recognize the types of information typically included in press kits
10. Understand some of the social issues that impact the business of sports and entertainment

### KEY TERMS

*Clickbait*  
*Community Relations*  
*Crisis Management*  
*Ethics*  
*Foundation*  
*Goodwill*  
*Media Blitz*  
*Media Relations*  
*Press Conference*  
*Press Kit*  
*Press Release*  
*Public Relations*  
*Publicity*  
*Publicity Plan*  
*Publicity Stunt*  
*Social Issues*  
*Sportswashing*

### LESSONS

- [\*\*LESSON 11.1\*\*](#) [Sports & Entertainment Communications](#)  
[\*\*LESSON 11.2\*\*](#) [Publicity](#)  
[\*\*LESSON 11.2\*\*](#) [Functions of Sports & Entertainment Communications](#)  
[\*\*LESSON 11.4\*\*](#) [Integrating Publicity](#)  
[\*\*LESSON 11.5\*\*](#) [Generating Publicity](#)  
[\*\*LESSON 11.6\*\*](#) [Social Issues in Sports & Entertainment](#)

# Sports & Entertainment Communications

## ROLE OF SPORTS & ENTERTAINMENT COMMUNICATIONS IN SEM

The role of communications in sports and entertainment is to provide specific news and information as it pertains to teams, athletes, organizations, events, celebrities and all other forms of entertainment. This includes event schedules, player statistics, actor profiles and everything in between.

### Sources of sports and entertainment information:

- Any news or media outlet is a potential source of sports and entertainment information
  - MTV, Sports Illustrated, Jim Rome radio show, movies.com, USA Today
- Almost any type of information an individual could want is accessible through the media
  - Radio, TV, Print, Online
- Social media and online platforms provide a direct line of communication with teams, organizations, athletes and entertainers

## Role of Communications Staff

The role of a communications staff employed by a sports or entertainment organization is to effectively disseminate information for the benefit of the business. The communications staff, including PR professionals and any contracted agencies, will play an integral role in shaping and managing the organization's image. With the introduction of the Internet and social media, effective communication becomes even more critical to an organization's success.

## Public Relations

However, it is not just an important tool for sports and entertainment organizations. The world of public relations has changed drastically, especially for athletes and celebrities whose careers are based on gaining and keeping positive public opinion.

## Leveraging Social Media

Consider how musicians today can build a career entirely over the Internet using a web site, YouTube, TikTok, social media, and an effective marketing strategy. From weekend warriors to independent bands and Grammy-winning artists, thousands of musicians have embraced social networking sites like Facebook and YouTube to upload material, promote tour dates and albums while interacting with fans in an effort to build and/or grow a fan base.

- Justin Bieber was originally “discovered” by a talent executive on YouTube when he was searching for new talent online. Pop stars Justin Timberlake and Usher would later engage in a bidding war to sign Bieber (he eventually signed with Usher).<sup>1</sup>
  - Since then, other artists like Tori Kelly, Soulja Boy, Lana Del Rey, Charlie Puth, 5 Seconds of Summer, Calvin Harris and The Weeknd have launched their careers through YouTube.
- Shawn Mendes launched his pop career in six seconds by posting a clip to Vine, a now defunct video sharing app that only allowed six second videos.
- Halsey began her career by posting videos to Tumblr and YouTube
- Megan Thee Stallion became popular after racking up thousands of plays on Soundcloud
- Saweetie's videos on Instagram helped her build a following, and she now has more than 13 million followers and a very successful music career
- In 2019, Lil' Nas X broke the record for most consecutive weeks at the top of the Billboard charts with his breakout song (featuring Billy Ray Cyrus), “Old Town Road” after the song debuted on the popular social media platform TikTok.
  - Lil' Nas X attributes strategic marketing to his success, even posting on [Twitter](#), “the rumors are true i am a marketing genius”.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1635334/20100402/bieber\\_justin.jhtml](http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1635334/20100402/bieber_justin.jhtml)

A variety of streaming platforms has made it easier for artists to be discovered. [Rolling Stone](#) estimates “self-releasing” artists could generate \$2 billion in revenues this year, up from \$643 million just a few years ago.

- According to [TikTok](#), more than 70 artists were able to leverage their success on the popular social media platform to sign deals with major record labels in just the last year alone
  - In its first ever US Music report, TikTok reported that over 176 different songs that debuted on the platform surpassed 1 billion video views in 2020
  - Nearly 90 songs that trended on the platform in 2020 climbed onto the Top 100 charts in the US, with 15 of those reaching No.1 on a Billboard chart
  - In 2022, TikTok launched [SoundOn](#), its own promotion and music distribution platform

It is not just musicians, however, who must develop effective communications strategies if they wish to establish a successful enterprise. Actors, artists, influencers and celebrities engage with fans using social media to promote albums and films, create buzz and dispel rumors. Social media provides an opportunity for athletes and entertainers to communicate directly with fans in an unfiltered environment,

At times, an artists' social media following can be as important as their talent in terms of attracting attention from directors and fans. Said veteran casting director Mike Fenton in an interview with [thewrap.com](#), “*There is no question that today if you have good numbers on social media, you have become a better choice to be cast. It would behoove actors to generate a social media presence.*”<sup>5</sup>

Fans can discuss topics surrounding their favorite entertainers and celebrities on web sites like IMDB and read movie reviews with apps like Rotten Tomatoes. These digital conversations are generating publicity for both the films and the actors and actresses featured in the films.

Sports and entertainment organizations have embraced technology and social media as an additional means for communicating information to fans. For example, a baseball team might turn to social platforms like Twitter to keep fans updated during rain delays or movie release dates.

While social media can be a valuable communications tool, the instant accessibility provided by various social channels can pose challenges for sports and entertainment communications professionals. Sports and entertainment organizations have less control now over the flow of information between the organization and its fans.

Legendary New York Yankees’ star Derek Jeter became one of the first athletes to take control of his messaging when he announced that he would be retiring via Facebook, eschewing traditional communications channels like press conferences and news releases.<sup>2</sup>

- Click [here](#) to read the transcript of the official announcement posted on Jeter’s Facebook page.
- Soon after retirement, Jeter launched The Players Tribune, a media platform that gives first-person reflections, thoughts and experiences from professional athletes and offers athletes a unique platform for sharing their voices with fans.

One year after Jeter broke the news of his retirement through social media, Kevin Durant announced his decision to leave the Golden State Warriors in free agency to join the Brooklyn Nets on the Instagram page for ‘The Boardroom’, an online series looking at sports business produced by Durant and business partner Rich Kleiman.

- Click [here](#) to see the IG post

Athletes and celebrities now have a unique platform to communicate directly with fans, providing a medium for delivering unfiltered opinions and dialogue. Social media helps to build brands and cultivate a loyal following, and athletes and celebrities can share news in a way that puts their personality on display. They can share any information they want, ranging from personal news to product information about the brands they endorse or their own product lines. Using social media, they no longer must rely on traditional media channels to tell their side of the story when negative news stories surface. They can communicate the message on their own terms.

## Risks of Social Media

However, social media does not come without risk. Controversial posts can also create headaches for both the organization and/or the athlete/celebrity when the individual posts something that is perceived as offensive. Posts also live forever on the Internet, even when the account owner believes a message has been taken down or deleted. Accounts can also be hacked, posing an additional risk to the athlete, entertainer, or organization.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.sbnation.com/nba/2012/7/3/3135374/deron-williams-nba-free-agency-2012-mavericks-nets>

## WHAT IS PUBLICITY?

**Publicity** is public information appearing in the mass media as a news item at no cost to the organization. When the *New York Times* reviews a movie in their newspaper or on their website, that particular motion picture is gaining publicity, whether the review is good or bad. When musicians perform at award shows or other major events, they are generating publicity. Good marketing can help to generate publicity for sports, entertainment, and event properties, and for individual athletes and entertainers.



### FUN FACTS

- According to [Billboard](#), digital streams of Rihanna's songs surged 231% in the U.S. following the pop star's performance at halftime of the Super Bowl in 2023.
- Her songs across his entire song catalog generated a combined for nearly 260 million on-demand streams worldwide in the week following the event.
- The performance helped propel 16 different Rihanna songs (including songs not performed during the Super Bowl halftime show) to the Billboard Global 200 chart.

## HOW IS PUBLICITY GENERATED, MANAGED AND CONTROLLED?

In the world of sports and entertainment communication, publicity is generated and defined by three primary components:

1. **Public relations**
2. **Media relations**
3. **Community relations**

The biggest disadvantage of publicity, however, is that it cannot be controlled by the organization, athlete, or entertainer. The New York Times may give a film a negative review, discouraging consumers from purchasing tickets and going to the theater. Public opinion is often perceived by consumers as more credible than advertising.

### 1. Public Relations

**Public relations** are activities that promote the image and communications an organization has with its employees, customers and public.<sup>3</sup>

### 2. Media Relations

**Media relations** refers to the relationship between an organization and the media.<sup>10</sup> The goal of media relations is to develop and maintain a positive relationship with mass media outlets.

### Media's impact on sports and entertainment publicity efforts

The "magnifying glass effect" of media coverage refers to the constant media coverage of newsworthy events taking place, as well as the reactions and interpretations of those events by other sources.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup>[https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/super-bowl/8550364/jennifer-lopez-shakira-streaming-bump-super-bowl-halftime-show#:~:text=Sunday's%20Super%20Bowl%20LIV%20led,and%20video%20combined\)%20on%20Feb](https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/super-bowl/8550364/jennifer-lopez-shakira-streaming-bump-super-bowl-halftime-show#:~:text=Sunday's%20Super%20Bowl%20LIV%20led,and%20video%20combined)%20on%20Feb)

<sup>4</sup> *Sport Marketing*, Mullin, Hardy, Sutton, 2nd ed., p. 33

Featuring sports and entertainment news related items has proven to be an effective strategy for media organizations, and is the type of content that helps media companies to:

- Increase circulation
- Boost ratings
- Amplify the number of readers/listeners
- Generate clicks

## “Clickbait”

**Clickbait** refers to headlines or other content, typically online or posted on social media, whose goal is to attract consumer attention in a way that leads visitors to click on a particular web page. These headlines are often manipulated, drawing consumer attention by leaving out a key piece of information. The use of clickbait represents a form of journalism that can draw admonishment and is even considered by some to be unethical. Rampant clickbait leads to an erosion of trust and credibility for journalists, even those who pride themselves on doing their jobs with integrity.

Clickbait can also lead to frustration for PR professionals representing teams, leagues and other sports and entertainment organizations, as well as athletes and celebrities.

For example, Green Bay Packers’ star quarterback Aaron Rodgers has regularly voiced his frustration with the clickbait practice, telling former teammate John Kuhn in an [interview](#) for the team’s website: *“That’s the media cycle these days. Unfortunately, the media -- other than obviously yourself -- there’s a lack of integrity, I think. There’s a rush to put up headlines that are clickbait because the ad revenue is based on the amount of visits you get to your website. So instead of putting in a title that aptly fits the forthcoming article, it’s more lucrative to post something that’s going to generate the most commotion so that your site or your story gets the most hits possible. And when you’re in a really low news cycle like in June and July, when there’s not much football going on, that’s the kind of stuff that comes out. We don’t need to spend any time talking about it because it’s complete ridiculousness.”*<sup>5</sup>

## Media Blitz

A **media blitz** is a term used to reference an intense communications campaign which utilizes various aspects of media to reach as many consumers as possible. Organizations will often strategically launch a media blitz as a way to support a sales or marketing effort.

### Examples:

- Every year, the NBA engages in a daylong media blitz to kick off coverage of the NBA All-Star Game and the celebrity-driven events that surround the game.
- In the lead up to the 2018 Ryder Cup, the PGA Tour launched a media blitz that sent team captain Jim Furyk on a 9,000-mile, 14-city trophy tour beginning at Yankee Stadium (the Team USA captain took the championship trophy from the last Ryder Cup to each stop)<sup>6</sup>
  - After throwing out the first pitch at the Yankees game and posing with players for photos, Furyk made an appearance at the Empire State Building and on the Today Show.
- As the franchise ramped up sales efforts leading up to the opening of a new stadium, the Minnesota Vikings launched an all-out media blitz surrounding their “Vikings Legacy” program right before the NFL Draft.



<sup>5</sup><https://www.cbssports.com/nfl/news/aaron-rodgers-tired-of-clickbait-coverage-blames-fake-news-for-perceived-matt-lafleur-drama/>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.rydercup.com/news-media/usa/jim-furyk-ryder-cup-media-blitz-and-showed-yankee-stadium-he-can-bring-some-decent>

- Each year to kick off the college football season, the SEC launches a 4-day media blitz, where the media provides extension coverage of all the teams in the conference, discusses trending topics and high-profile athletes are discussed at length
- In 2023, the NBA sent its championship trophy ([the Larry O'Brien Trophy](#)) on a month-long U.S. tour to generate publicity for the upcoming NBA Finals.
  - Tour stops created a wide variety of cross promotion opportunities with the Kentucky Derby, the Formula1 Grand Prix event in Miami, WWE Raw, the Indianapolis 500, Westminster Dog Show and the premier of "White Men Can't Jump."
  - Other stops as part of the coast-to-coast media blitz included visits to the sets of "Good Morning America" and "Access Hollywood", an appearance on the food show "Hot Ones" and Pat McAfee Show on YouTube, and ESPN's airing of the Scripps Spelling Bee Championship.

## Negative Publicity

What effect on an organization can media relations have? How can publicity and the media impact a sports or entertainment brand?

A perception exists that the media tends to seek out and report stories with negative connotations implicating sports and entertainment organizations, celebrities and athletes.

Despite the concerns over click bait journalism, there is no shortage of activity within the sports and entertainment industry that lead to headlines featuring storylines that generate negative publicity. Some of the most common sources of negative publicity are the result of controversial behavior from athletes and celebrities, or the actions of a sports team, league or other organization that frustrate fans.

### Examples include:

1. Inflated contracts of athletes and entertainers
2. Gambling
3. Performance enhancing drugs
4. Escalating costs for attending events
5. Recruiting violations and unethical behavior in collegiate sports

## 1. Inflated Contracts Of Athletes And Entertainers

Athletes are making more money now than ever, and some tend to flaunt their riches. For the average fan who has to save enough money to afford to buy a jersey or tickets to a game, seeing athletes earning millions might rub some fans the wrong way.

- Last year, the Washington Nationals traded their star outfielder, Juan Soto, after he rejected an offer that would have been the richest contract in MLB history
  - The deal was worth a [reported](#) \$440 million over 15-years, which would have topped the 12-year, \$426.5 million deal that Mike Trout signed with the Los Angeles Angels in 2019.
  - Over the course of his contract, Trout will make \$97,374 per day. Compare that to the median household income in the U.S. at \$61,372 per year, according to the latest census data.
  - Soto was traded to the San Diego Padres, who had just signed their star shortstop, Fernando Tatis, to a 14-year, \$340 million contract in 2021, and would later be suspended for 80 games after testing positive for a banned substance. The Padres also [signed](#) superstar Manny Machado to a 10-year, \$300 million deal in 2019, the richest deal in MLB history at the time.
  - Considering the MLB labor dispute when owners locked out players that resulted in the cancellation of Spring Training in 2022, fans were understandably frustrated
    - A Morning Consult poll suggests that 45% of MLB fans placed the blame for the lockout on the owners, with 21% blaming the players.
      - For a perspective on fan sentiment, read "Don't call the MLB lockout millionaires vs. billionaires. There are far bigger stakes" at [yahoo.com](#), and review the comments posted.

- Regardless of who was to blame for the league's inability to reach a deal, Major League Baseball's lockout generated a lot of negative publicity in 2022
  - Consider some of the headlines carried by major media platforms as the lockout progressed:
    - "One Thing About Baseball Really Is Timeless: The Transparent Greed of Owners" - [Esquire Magazine](#)
    - "MLB lockout only reinforces a certain ugliness about the game" - [ESPN](#)
    - "Opinion: Players' greed is to blame for the lockout" - [Chicago Tribune](#)
    - "Baseball fans are mostly to blame for the MLB lockout" - [The Globe and Mail](#)
    - "Baseball fans were furious after MLB owners followed through on plan to extend the lockout" - [USA Today](#)
  - In 2023, spending on Major League Baseball players reached an all-time high when MLB teams combined to shell out [\\$3.65 billion to free agent contracts](#), more than doubling the \$1.5 billion that the free agent class earned just three years prior.
- Boxer Floyd "Money" Mayweather, who earned \$300 million in 2015 and topped Forbes' annual list of the World's wealthiest athletes for the third year in a row, told USA Today in a story that his hobby is "collecting money" and lives in a 22,000-foot home with multiple garages for his collection of sports cars and bragged to CNN of an \$827,000 gambling win.<sup>7</sup>
  - Mayweather's huge payday in 2017 after the fight with UFC champion, Connor McGregor, reportedly pushed him over the \$1 billion mark in career earnings.
    - The only other athletes to surpass \$1 billion in career earnings are Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods.
    - In 2017, Mayweather was also under investigation by the IRS as they claimed he owed over \$22 million in back taxes from 2015.
      - In 2019, Mayweather finally paid his tax debt.
      - Click [here](#) for a slideshow from MSN examining the "24 Crazy Ways Floyd Mayweather Spends His Money".
  - "Money" Mayweather banked an [estimated](#) \$65 million for his exhibition fight with YouTube star Logan Paul, or roughly \$1.5 million for every punch thrown, and more than Magic Johnson and Larry Bird made in their entire NBA careers combined
    - After the event, which left many paying customers frustrated with what they had just watched, Mayweather said "When it comes to legalized bank robbing, I'm the best."
- Forbes [reported](#) that the world's 10 highest-paid athletes banked a cumulative \$1.11 billion in 2023, the highest total in history, up from the \$992 million banked in the previous year according to [Forbes](#).
  - Soccer star Ronaldo made \$136 million, making him the world's highest-paid athlete in 2023, followed by soccer stars Lionel Messi (\$130 million) and Kylian Mbappé (\$120 million). LeBron James was fourth on the list, earning \$119.5 million, and boxer Canelo Alvarez rounded out the top five, hauling in \$110 million.
- According to [CBS Sports](#), Bryce Young, the number one pick in the 2022 NFL Draft, will make nearly \$38 million guaranteed over a four-year period with his first contract, including a \$24.6 million signing bonus, despite not yet having played a snap in an NFL game.
- Genesis, a rock-and-roll music group, topped [Forbes'](#) latest list of highest paid entertainers, earning \$230 million after selling their music rights, along with income from tour earnings and royalties.
  - The Top Five:
    - Genesis - \$230 million
    - Sting - \$210 million
    - Tyler Perry - \$175 million
    - Trey Parker and Matt Stone - \$160 million
    - James L. Brooks and Matt Groening - \$105 million
  - Click [here](#) to see the entire list at forbes.com

When the Paycheck Protection Program was established during the pandemic in 2020, it was designed to provide financial support to struggling small businesses during times of economic duress.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/boxing/2013/05/01/floyd-mayweather-jr-robert-guerrero/2126863/>



- However, the Los Angeles Lakers (a franchise valued at \$4.4 billion according to Forbes latest rankings of the most valuable teams in sports) applied for, and received, a \$4.6 million loan from the federal government as part of the program.
  - Recognizing the negative publicity that the loan would create for the franchise, the team did return the money. According to CNN, a Lakers spokesperson said in a statement: *"The Lakers qualified for and received a loan under the Payroll Protection Program. However, once we found out the funds from the program had been depleted, we repaid the loan so that financial support would be directed to those most in need. The Lakers remain completely committed to supporting both our employees and our community."*<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Gambling

- In 2016, a huge scandal rocked the tennis world when two Italian players, Daniele Bracciali and Potito Starace, were accused of criminally conspiring to fix at least two matches for an illegal gambling ring.
  - The chief prosecutor in the case said in an interview that he suspected the gang of corrupting another 30 international matches at tournaments including Wimbledon and the French Open.<sup>9</sup>
- The #2 ranked badminton player in the world, Kento Momota, was kicked off the Japanese team and disqualified from the 2016 Rio Olympics after he was found guilty of repeatedly gambling at an illegal casino.
- Officials say the illegal betting market generates hundreds of billions of dollars every year, and the International Olympic Committee goes to great lengths to prevent events from being "fixed." Sports betting is perfectly legal in the United Kingdom and is considered a legitimate part of the national economy but, in 2012, the country's gambling establishments partnered with government officials leading up to the London Games to report and prevent any event fixing. The BBC reported that Olympic organizers also set up an intelligence team to monitor suspicious betting patterns and tip the government with any information on individuals that may have attempted to fix Olympic events.<sup>10</sup>
- The 2018 legalization of sports gambling in the United States has organizations at all levels debating how concerned they should be about the potential of compromised integrity of their respective sports.
- In 2019, the coach who led Nigeria to two Olympic Games medals was banned for life by FIFA for agreeing to receive bribes to fix soccer matches.
- In 2021, San Jose Sharks' star Evander Kane was [reportedly](#) being investigated by the NHL for betting against his own team, an offense that would lead to a lifetime ban from the league (it is important to note that Kane [denied](#) the allegations and agreed to fully cooperate with the investigation)
  - Unfortunately, this wasn't the first time Kane ran into gambling trouble as he was [sued](#) by a Las Vegas casino in 2019 for allegedly walking away from half a million in gambling debt
- By the start of the 2023 season, eight NFL players were [suspended](#) in various capacities for the upcoming season after being caught gambling on NFL games.

## 3. Performance Enhancing Drugs

The use of steroids and performance enhancing drugs has been well chronicled in recent years with prominent athletes having their legacies tainted by alleged drug use.

- UFC star Jon Jones had his license to fight revoked last year, fined \$205,000 and was facing a potential 4-year ban after a second violation of the league's doping policy.
- Seattle Mariners star Robinson Cano was suspended 80 games in 2018 after testing positive for PED use and suspended again for the entire 2021 season after testing positive for a banned substance for a second time as a member of the New York Mets (he also forfeited \$24 million in salary as a result)
  - Cano would have gone down as the best second baseman of his era and a potential Hall-of-Fame candidate if not for the PED use
- New England Patriots star wide receiver Julian Edelman was forced to sit out the first four games of the 2019-20 NFL season for violating the league's policy on performance-enhancing substances.
- A 2009 Marist College Center for Sports Communication poll suggested that 70% of baseball fans thought players who used steroids should not be admitted to the Hall of Fame, 24% believed they should be given this honor, and 6%, at the time, were unsure.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/27/business/los-angeles-lakers-return-ppp-loan-trnd/index.html>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.buzzfeed.com/heidiblake/heres-the-evidence-of-worldwide-match-fixing-prosecutors-say?utm\\_term=.ej84d0Dp0#.my2VJLP2L](https://www.buzzfeed.com/heidiblake/heres-the-evidence-of-worldwide-match-fixing-prosecutors-say?utm_term=.ej84d0Dp0#.my2VJLP2L)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2012/may/25/man-pleads-guilty-in-basketball-betting-ring/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.bostonglobe.com/sports/2015/08/10/marathon-doping-report-very-concerning-baa/nOXIre8BhCvqZKEwZdzFRL/story.html>



- Fast forward to 2013, when Marist conducted a poll asking the same questions just prior to MLB’s suspensions of those involved in the Biogenesis case, and 78% now think players who have used steroids or other performance-enhancing drugs should not be eligible for the Hall of Fame, 18% think they should, and just 4% are unsure.<sup>12</sup>
- Two years ago, a poll from Marist suggested 68% of baseball fans nationally think the MLB has taken the right steps to curb the league’s PED problem
- In 2015, reports of rampant doping by distance runners cast a dark cloud over marathon competitors as a report from the London suggested that 32 medal winners at the world’s top six marathons registered suspicious blood tests over a 12-year testing period and of the 5,000 athletes tested, more than 800 of the blood results came back “abnormal”<sup>13</sup>
- David Howman, the chief executive of the World Anti-Doping Agency, said in an interview that he believes one out of every ten Olympic athletes are using performance enhancing drugs.<sup>14</sup>
- At the 2020 Tokyo Games, Russian athletes competed under the name “Russian Olympic Committee” (or “ROC”) because the country was technically banned from the Tokyo Games for its years of breaking anti-doping rules
  - The name “Russia” was not allowed to appear on any uniforms or equipment, they weren’t allowed to fly the Russian flag or hear their anthem when they won gold
- Soon after signing a massive 14-year, \$340 million contract, San Diego Padres star Fernando Tatis was [suspended](#) for 80-games for violating Major League Baseball’s performance enhancing drug policy.

#### 4. Escalating Costs For Attending Events

- A whopping 63 percent of respondents to an Associated Press poll suggested that the high price of attending MLB games was “by far the biggest problem in Major League Baseball”.<sup>15</sup>
- Nearly half (49%) of fans polled in Sacramento about Kings’ ticket prices for the new downtown arena suggested that, “Yes, the team plans to cater mostly to high-income customers”.
- In 2022, Walt Disney Co. raised ticket prices twice in one year, pushing park prices for a one-day, one-park ticket to between \$109 and \$189, depending on demand. Magic Kingdom and Disney’s Hollywood Studios both saw a price increase of more than 12%, according to a [CNN report](#).
- According to a [Time Magazine](#) report, it would cost a family of four over \$600 for tickets to see a Chicago Cubs game, not including parking, concessions or any merchandise.<sup>16</sup>
  - Hot dogs at Wrigley Field cost nearly \$6 apiece, bottled water is \$5.25 and peanuts are \$4.75.
  - Comparatively, according to Minor League Baseball, the average cost for a family of four to enjoy a MiLB game in 2017 was \$64.97 – this includes two adult tickets, two child tickets, four hot dogs, two sodas and two beers.<sup>17</sup>
- According to [Pollstar](#), the average price for a concert ticket to the 100 biggest concerts was \$28.50 in 1996. By 2021, that figure had climbed to \$87.10, with prices on the secondary market pushing the face value of top shows into the stratosphere.

#### 5. Recruiting Violations / Unethical Behavior In Collegiate Sports

While collegiate athletes are considered amateurs (or non-professional), collegiate athletics is big business. The stakes can be incredibly high for institutions to build and maintain elite programs. That pressure can lead to unethical behavior as coaches work to find competitive advantages, which often manifests itself in the form of recruiting violations or other infractions, including academic fraud.

For example, in 2023, the NCAA, college sports’ governing body, gave LSU’s football and basketball programs a punishment of a three-year probation (not including the postseason) for recruiting violations. They were also forced to [vacate 37 wins](#) from the football program’s 2012-2016 seasons under former coach Les Miles. The decision was the result of an investigation that found the program provided “impermissible” benefits to former Tigers players, including one instance of a player being paid by a booster who reportedly embezzled funds from a Baton Rouge children’s hospital.

#### Three approaches to media relations

Each respective league or governing body/organization has their own guidelines for discipline; however, intense media scrutiny often makes such punishments seem insufficient to the general public, creating further fan disenchantment. Meanwhile, athletes and entertainers have a unique platform to involve themselves in a positive manner within the community. It is the responsibility of an athlete or celebrity (or sports/entertainment property) to direct media attention toward these efforts.

<sup>12</sup><http://maristpoll.marist.edu/723-more-than-six-in-ten-fans-believe-connection-to-biogenesis-steroid-clinic-too-little-to-justify-mlb-suspensions/>

<sup>13</sup><http://maristpoll.marist.edu/723-more-than-six-in-ten-fans-believe-connection-to-biogenesis-steroid-clinic-too-little-to-justify-mlb-suspensions/>

<sup>14</sup> [http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/mariners/2015951189\\_basenotes19.htm](http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/mariners/2015951189_basenotes19.htm)

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/olympics/london-2012/8710041/London-2012-Olympics-one-in-10-athletes-are-drugs-cheats-says-anti-doping-chief-executive.html>

<sup>16</sup> <http://time.com/money/4713938/heres-how-much-more-expensive-being-a-cubs-fan-is-in-2017/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.milb.com/river-bandits/news/cost-of-attending-bandits-game-below-milb-average/c-219619808/t-196097124>

### Three approaches to media relations:<sup>18</sup>

#### 1. Reactive

- Responds to informational and other inquiries from media sources and external entities.
- Player interviews, appearances, biographies, profiles etc.

#### 2. Proactive

- The point of initiation is the organization rather than an external entity or media source.
- Organizations take the initiative in providing information and creating publicity.
- Distribution of press kits, press releases.

#### 3. Interactive

- Refers to an organization's effort to create and maintain a strong relationship with the media.

## 3. Community Relations

**Community relations** focus on an individual or organization's commitment to bettering their respective community.<sup>19</sup>

The goal of a community relations effort is to assist in achieving an organization's public relations objectives related to enhancing public understanding, gaining public approval and acceptance, ultimately leading to public support while building fan loyalty.<sup>20</sup>

**Community relations are typically implemented one of five ways:**

1. Player or celebrity initiated
2. Team or organization initiated
3. League or governing body initiated
4. Community initiated
5. Brand initiated

### 1. Player Or Celebrity Initiated

- The Michael J. Fox Foundation auctioned off a limited-edition collection of Nike shoes inspired by the actor's Back to the Future character. The high-profile auction [raised \\$9.4](#) million for the foundation, the largest private funder of Parkinson's disease research in the world.<sup>21</sup>
- Thousands of athletes and celebrities, from Justin Timberlake and Cristiano Ronaldo (in his underwear), participated in one of the most successful viral fundraising campaigns we have ever seen in the Ice Bucket Challenge, a cause tied to generating awareness and raising funds for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease.
  - As a result, the ALS Association raised \$220 million in donations (compared to \$1.9 million the previous year), including 453,210 new donors to the Association.
- Beyoncé's foundation, "BeyGood", [donated](#) \$1 million to students through a newly established Renaissance Scholarship Fund, and another \$1 million to small business owners during her 2023 Renaissance tour.
- In 2022, Los Angeles Lakers star and former University of Kentucky basketball player Anthony Davis [donated](#) \$350,000 to aid in recovery efforts after floods devastated Eastern Kentucky.
- In 2023, Michael Jordan made a record-breaking \$10 million donation to [Make-A-Wish America](#) as he celebrated his 60th birthday. According to the organization, Jordan's support for Make-A-Wish dates back to the first wish he granted in 1989. In the years since, he has granted hundreds of wishes to children all over the world, becoming one of the all-time most requested celebrity wish granters. He remains one of the organization's most popular wish requests. In 2008, he was named Make-A-Wish Chief Wish Ambassador for the life-changing impact he has had on wish kids and their families.
- From 2021 to 2023, Harry Styles' "Love on Tour" ranked as the fourth highest-grossing tour of all time. According to [Us Magazine](#), the pop star donated \$6.5 million of tour profits to charities including Planned Parenthood, Choose Love, Physicians for Reproductive Health, Rebuild Foundation, REVERB, Black Voters Matter Fund – Capacity Building Institute, Save the Children, CARE, Everytown Gun Safety, BEAM, among others.

### 2. Team or Organization Initiated

Sports teams and athletes are often quick to lend a helping hand when their communities are suffering, recognizing the powerful platform available to them and the role they can play in helping a community to recover and/or heal.

<sup>18</sup>[http://espn.go.com/college-football/story/\\_/id/8191027/penn-state-nittany-lions-hit-60-million-fine-4-year-bowl-ban-wins-dating-1998](http://espn.go.com/college-football/story/_/id/8191027/penn-state-nittany-lions-hit-60-million-fine-4-year-bowl-ban-wins-dating-1998)

<sup>19</sup> *Sport Marketing*, Mullin, Hardy, Sutton, 2nd ed., p. 318-320

<sup>20</sup> *The Sports Business Program: Marketing Your High School Athletics*, Lindauer, p. 20

<sup>21</sup> *Framework for Strategic Sports Marketing*, Presentation Notes, Dr. Brian Turner, Slide #168



- The Buffalo Bills teamed up with the United Way and launched the "Character Playbook" educational initiative, a digital course offered in middle schools that focuses on youth character development and building healthy relationships.
- The Miami Dolphins Foundation (whose mission is devoted to providing and supporting signature education, health, youth athletic programs and volunteer activities that inspire and engage communities throughout Florida) raised over \$600,000 through its annual "FinsWeekend", an event that features former and current players, cheerleaders and staff participating in activities like fishing and golfing.<sup>22</sup>
- The San Antonio Silver Stars of the WNBA played their annual breast cancer awareness game on a [pink court](#) painted by breast cancer survivors in an effort to raise awareness and funding for the initiative.
- In 2022, The University of Kentucky Basketball team [hosted](#) a telethon and open practice to raise money for the Red Cross flood relief efforts in Eastern Kentucky, with the three-hour event raising more than \$3.3 million.
- According to [Sports Business Journal](#), professional sports teams donate millions of dollars every year to charitable organizations, including three teams that were nominated for "Organization of the Year" last year:
  - Austin FC's nonprofit arm, 4ATX Foundation, donating over \$738,000 to local organizations
  - Golden State Warriors "Warriors Community Foundation" creation of a \$1.85 million grant which was distributed to a total of 51 nonprofits
  - The Tampa Bay Lightning donating \$5.2 million to the local community
- Many sports teams organize charitable events around the holidays, like the [New York Mets](#) donating turkeys for Thanksgiving to area nonprofits or the Ken Garff Season of Giving partnership with the [Utah Jazz](#) that includes an annual toy drive and holiday party for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Utah.

### 3. League Or Governing Body Initiated

- The NFL is engaged in an effort to fight childhood obesity with the [NFL Play 60 program](#).
  - From the NFL website: "As a brand and leader that believes in the power of sport, the promise of young fans and whose players embody health and fitness; the NFL and its Clubs are committed to reversing the effects of the childhood obesity epidemic. NFL PLAY 60 is a national youth health and fitness campaign focused on increasing the wellness of young fans by encouraging them to be active for at least 60 minutes a day."<sup>23</sup>
- Click [here](#) to read how social media has helped raise awareness of the [NBA Cares](#) Campaign, the league's official global community outreach initiative that addresses important social issues such as education, youth and family development, and health and wellness.
- According to the league's [website](#), the NHL response to the COVID-19 health crisis included \$15 million in contributions from players, owners and club foundations, over 500,000 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) donated, and over 1,000,000 meal and food donations.

### 4. Community Initiated

Oftentimes community or event organizers will call on athletes or celebrities to participate in an event to help raise levels of awareness. For example, the state of West Virginia was hit hard by floods in 2016. Community officials called on West Virginia University to help with relief efforts. WVU responded by launching the Dollars for Disaster Donation program in which jars were placed around campus and various WVU athletic teams hosted drop-off sites to collect water and other needed items.

### 5. Brand Initiated

Brands will create community relations initiatives to utilize the powerful platform of sports and entertainment to encourage positive action and behavior.

- Every year, ESPN raises awareness and money for cancer research through the [V Foundation](#)
- Nike distributed \$250,000 to 26 Portland area community groups through the Nike Community Impact Fund of The Oregon Community Foundation.
  - The program aims to provide area you with positive experiences through "sports and physical activity, and advance healthier, supportive and more inclusive communities."
  - According to the [Portland Business Journal](#), the Fund has awarded 356 grants, worth \$3.75 million-plus, since launching in 2010.

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.socialmiami.com/soceyes.asp?g=miami-dolphins-finsweekend-57484>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.nfl.com/news/story?id=09000d5d80b4a489&template=with-video&confirm=true>



- When the coronavirus health crisis struck in the spring of 2020, Under Armour quickly [responded](#), donating \$1 million to Feeding America and another \$1 million to youth sports nonprofit Good Sports, along with manufacturing 500,000 masks and thousands of face shields and hospital gowns for frontline workers.
- In 2023, BODYARMOR sports drink [announced](#) a partnership with “Operation Homefront, a national nonprofit whose mission is to support military families. The brand donated \$500,000 and unveiled a new flavor packaged in a camouflage bottle. On a local level, BODYARMOR [gives back](#) by refurbishing basketball courts and renovating youth facilities from Compton to Miami.

## Foundations

A **foundation** is an association established by an organization, athlete or celebrity to maintain, assist, or finance other institutions or programs that are of an educational, charitable, or social nature.<sup>36</sup> Many athletes and celebrities have used their celebrity status to make a positive impact on issues important to them. Through foundations, individual athletes and entertainers can shed negative images and/or build a positive image.

Many high-profile athletes and celebrities have formed foundations or take an active role in supporting or leading foundation-related activities.

- Derek Jeter formed his foundation during his rookie season with the New York Yankees. The foundation’s mission states aims to 1) create signature programs which will acknowledge and reward youths who avoid drugs and alcohol and those who choose healthy lifestyles 2) fund organizations which help prevent and treat teenage substance abuse and 3) leverage the integrity and popularity of Derek Jeter by hosting special events for today’s youth which serve as a platform for his message.<sup>24</sup>
- In 2019, Stephen Curry and his wife Ayesha [launched](#) the Eat. Learn. Play. Foundation to address nutrition, education and recreation needs for Oakland area youth.
  - The couple will make an annual seven-figure donation to the foundation to cover all administrative expenses, so that other money raised will go entirely into supporting the foundation’s programs.
  - By 2023, the organization [had raised](#) and invested \$38 million in support of 27 different community partners. The program had reached 150,000 area youth, distributed 500,000 books, and invested \$3.4 million in literacy programs, and provided 25 million meals served to families in need.
- Like many athlete and celebrity foundations, former Dallas Mavericks’ star Dirk Nowitzki pledged his support during the pandemic when the [Dirk Nowitzki Foundation](#) donated more than \$100,000 to North Texas organizations to aid local organizations in their fight against the coronavirus.
  - A [study](#) from the Rutgers School of Business found that donors gave 1.4 percent more to charities associated with celebrities—to the tune of \$100,000 annually.
  - Click [here](#) to see the ten most charitable celebrities in 2015, according to The Sydney Morning Herald.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.tum2foundation.org/intro/mission.asp>

# Functions of Sports & Entertainment Communications

There are seven primary functions of sports and entertainment communications:<sup>25</sup>

1. Inform and communicate
2. Create interest and excitement
3. Shape and enhance organization or brand image
4. Recruiting tool
5. Introduce new products or innovations
6. Generate and/or collect feedback
7. Crisis management

## 1. Inform & Communicate

- Communicate information with consumers
- Gather, present, and distribute information about the organization or product
- Involves publishing programs, brochures, updating websites etc.

## 2. Create Interest & Excitement

- With a sound communications plan, organizations can create interest and build excitement for sports or entertainment property or brand
  - For example, sports teams often post creative content online and on social media platforms to reveal the schedule for an upcoming season. A similar strategy exists when new or alternate uniforms, jerseys, or helmets are introduced. The organization benefits because fans discuss and interact with content during the offseason, a period of time when they aren't typically thinking about the team.
  - The publicity helps to get fans excited about the franchise, and can even result in an uptick in merchandise and ticket sales. It can also open up new sponsorship inventory. To introduce the team's 2022-23 schedule, the Atlanta Hawks [posted on Twitter \("X"\)](#), "Smile, the schedule is here. Delivered by @PapaJohns."

## 3. Shape & Enhance Organization Image

- Work with "cause" programs
- Important to all facets of sports and entertainment marketing, including corporations, teams, leagues, and individuals.
- This function closely resembles a marketing function.
- Generate goodwill
  - **Goodwill** is a general willingness to work with a person or organization based on a positive reputation or relationship.<sup>26</sup>
  - Companies can generate goodwill in a number of ways, oftentimes through an affiliation with a particular sport, team, league or event.

## 4. Recruiting Tool

- Publicity can give collegiate athletic programs a leg up when recruiting student athletes.
  - The University of Texas generated a lot of publicity with the installation of new, cutting edge lockers and other upgrades for their locker room.
    - Each locker featured a 43-inch flat screen (which [reportedly](#) showed each player's highlights on a loop) with glowing locker doors at an estimated cost of \$10,500 per locker.
    - The Longhorns published player responses to seeing the new locker room through various social media channels, no doubt taking advantage of their reaction for future leverage on the recruiting trail.
- Professional teams also must "recruit" potential draft choices and free agents.

<sup>25</sup> Sport Marketing, Mullin, Hardy, Sutton, 2nd ed., p. 324-333

<sup>26</sup> Sports & Entertainment Marketing, South-Western Educational Publishing, p. 102



- In today's era, the recruiting effort can sometimes go beyond the front office.
  - While most leagues have measures in place to prevent what is called "tampering", player-to-player recruitment has become a common practice in sports.
  - LeBron James actively recruited former Pelicans' star Anthony Davis in an attempt to get him to join the Lakers, infuriating some league executives who felt the action was a violation of the NBA's "tampering" rule.<sup>27</sup>
  - When Aaron Rodgers was traded from the Green Bay Packers to the New York Jets, he recruited both [former teammates](#) and [other NFL stars](#). While not all of them wound up on the Jets' roster, his efforts underscore the important role individual players can have on a franchise from a personnel perspective.

## Recruitment of Franchises And Events

Recruiting isn't limited to high profile athletes. In some instances, communities, cities and countries will lobby for major events and expansion franchises.

- The city of Los Angeles prepared a \$5.3 billion bid and created a branded website to position itself as the United States' candidate to host the 2024 Olympic Games.<sup>28</sup>
  - Click [here](#) to watch the city's "candidate" presentation on YouTube.
  - Ultimately, the city's recruiting efforts paid off as the International Olympic Committee awarded the 2028 Summer Games to the city of Los Angeles (Paris, France won the rights to host the 2024 Summer Games).
- In 2016, Las Vegas managed to lure a new NHL team to the city (along with a \$500 million franchise fee price tag) with its recruiting efforts.
  - The organization was aggressive and persistent in their efforts to attract a franchise while demonstrating to the NHL that the city could support a hockey team by gathering 14,000 fan deposits for season tickets.
  - As part of their recruiting effort, the hopeful franchise owners launched a "Vegas Wants Hockey" website to help maintain momentum with fans and to stay on the NHL's radar.
- In 2018, Seattle ramped up its efforts to attract an NHL expansion franchise, launching a website ([nhlseattle.com](#)) and selling deposits to (hopefully) future season ticket buyers.
  - The group responsible for trying to bring a NHL team to Seattle [announced](#) they had sold 33,000 season tickets just four hours after putting them on sale, with a waiting list of more than 4,000.
  - The effort was rewarded in 2019 when the NHL [announced](#) Seattle would be awarded an expansion franchise, set to begin play in the 2021-22 season (the franchise fee was \$650 million).
  - Shortly after the franchise introduced the team's new name, the Seattle Kraken, they saw a 35% [increase](#) in the season ticket-holder waiting list, propelling the number of fans waiting on the opportunity to purchase season tickets to 51,000.
- Major League Baseball commissioner Rob Manfred has expressed interest in expanding the league from 30 to 32 teams, but is on record as saying that won't happen until the Oakland Athletics and Tampa Bay Rays get new ballparks
  - When the league does decide to expand, there are several cities identified by the [league](#) as potential cities that have the infrastructure to support a team already in place (Portland, Montreal, Austin, Vancouver, Mexico City, Charlotte and Nashville)
  - Expansion fees for MLB could reach \$2.2 billion, according to an [ESPN](#) repor.
- According to the [Sporting News](#), several nations have expressed interest in hosting the 2030 FIFA World Cup. FIFA begins a two-year vetting process and a final decision will be made in 2024, six years before the event. Spain and Portugal have joined forces to submit the "Iberian Bid" (a reference to the Iberian Peninsula on which both nations lie), with Ukraine later joining the bid.
  - Meanwhile, several South American nations also proposed a joint bid, including Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, and Paraguay, while Morocco is also considered to be a potential favorite. Other potential bidders include a bid involving Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and a coalition between Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, and Serbia.

## 5. Introduce New Products Or Innovations

- Build new product awareness and interest
- Position new product

<sup>27</sup> <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/2811897-report-gms-angry-nba-isnt-intervening-after-lebrons-anthony-davis-comments>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/12/us/olympics-los-angeles-2024.html>



## 6. Generate & Collect Feedback

- Determine acceptance and effectiveness of organizational policies
- Gather specific consumer data
  - Attitudes
  - Preferences
  - Behaviors

## 7. Crisis Management

**Crisis management** refers to a coordinated effort to handle the effects of unfavorable publicity or of an unfavorable event.<sup>29</sup>

Crisis management often includes a strong focus on public relations to recover any damage to public image and assure consumers that recovery is underway. Successful crisis management requires a plan in advance for how to respond if and when a scenario develops where the organization must respond to negative publicity.

According to Joe Favorito, sports media expert and author of the book *Sports Publicity*, the key to effective crisis management is keeping everyone on track, following the flow of information, working with public authorities and media who may not be familiar with your situation or practices, and having the organization speak with one voice when problems arise.<sup>30</sup>

### Crisis management examples:

**2019:** In a game watched by millions of sports fans around the country, Nike was forced to react to a crisis when Duke's Zion Williamson, the most recognizable athlete in college basketball, was injured wearing a Nike sneaker when it "malfunctioned" on national TV.

- Within 24 hours, Nike executives met with Zion and his family and began working on a custom-designed shoe to better support his foot.
- Duke's head coach Mike Krzyzewski released a statement supporting the brand soon after, [saying](#): "(Nike designers) went to China to actually look at the making of a shoe that would be very supportive and then they came back within a week with different alternatives to make sure that it was done right. So their immediate, great response was appreciated, and it was something that we have grown to expect from our relationship with them."<sup>31</sup>

**2020:** A [story](#) broke reporting a "toxic" culture on Ellen DeGeneres' incredibly popular and successful daytime television show, the brand built on the premise of positivity and kindness, was revealed to reportedly be not-so-kind behind-the-scenes.

- In response, the network [launched](#) an investigation, fired several executives, issued multiple apologies, and promised to improve the culture for employees
- However, some were skeptical, wondering if the show and its "be kind" brand would ever recover.

**2021:** Global banking giant JPMorgan faced a public relations nightmare after its backing of the proposed European Super League

- Because of the swift and significant backlash from fans and the soccer community at large following the Super League announcement, JPMorgan quickly issued a [statement](#) suggesting they regretted supporting the new league

**2021:** After facing widespread criticism for its controversial handling of the GameStop and AMC stock situation where the company placed restrictions on purchases of stocks, Robinhood invested in a Super Bowl commercial to aid in damage control

- Click [here](#) to learn more about the commercial and to see the Super Bowl spot at cnet.com.

<sup>29</sup> Sport Marketing, Presentation Notes, Slide 17 of the Chapter 15 Lecture, Ryan Langan, University of South Florida

<sup>30</sup> <http://joefavorito.com/category/crisis-management/page/2/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.dukechronicle.com/article/2019/03/duke-mens-basketball-thanks-nike-zion-williamson-mike-krzyzewski-discuss-the-aftermath-of-the-shoe-lemma>

**2022:** The Pac-12 lost two prominent member schools when UCLA and USC announced they would be leaving the conference for the Big 10, leading college football insider Brett McMurphy to [predict](#) the demise of Pac-12 sports during an appearance on ESPN’s “The Paul Finebaum Show.”

- The decision by UCLA and USC to defect from the Pac-12 reverberated throughout the industry with yet another conference realignment shifting the landscape of college sports, forcing a response from all parties involved.
  - The Pac-12 quickly issued a statement calling the decision surprising and disappointing.
    - Click [here](#) to read the statement in full.
  - UCLA and USC both issued statements, expressing their appreciation to the Pac-12 and other member schools for a long and successful partnership, while communicating their excitement for the future as members of the Big 10 Conference.
    - Click [here](#) to read the statement from UCLA.
    - Click [here](#) to read the statement from USC.
  - Click [here](#) to read the statement from the Big 10.

**2023:** Things got worse for the Pac-12 conference in 2023 when the conference lost six more member schools when Oregon and Washington announced they would be leaving the conference for the Big 10, following UCLA and USC, while Arizona, Arizona State, Utah, and Colorado jumped over to the Big 12. The defections left the conference with just four schools, California, Oregon State, Stanford, and Washington State.

# Integrating Publicity

## IMPORTANCE OF INTEGRATION

Publicity can provide exposure, visibility and awareness for sports and entertainment organizations at all levels. Many businesses successfully leverage that publicity in a way that can help the organization to reach business goals.

Some of those areas include:

- Sales
- Sponsorship and endorsement
- Promotion
- Game operations
- Merchandising
- Viewership and ratings
- Social media following

## Sales

### Negative Publicity Effect on Sales

The presence of negative publicity can have an adverse impact on sales. Statistically, consumers have shown a decline in willingness to support organizations who demonstrate an inability to effectively control or manage their image.

- A combination of poor on-field performance and consistent negative publicity off the field resulted in an almost 8,000 fans per game drop in attendance for the 2011 Los Angeles Dodgers for the season.<sup>32</sup>
  - Under new ownership and a resurgence on the field, the Dodgers attendance rebounded in 2012, increasing by nearly 5,000 fans per game by the all-star break and by 2013, the team was leading the league in attendance.
    - The franchise, who struggled mightily to fill seats just ten seasons ago, have now led the league in [attendance](#) for the last seven seasons in a row.
      - Click [here](#) to view current MLB attendance figures from espn.com.
- According to [NPR](#), all the negative publicity surrounding the host country (recession, political chaos, high crime, Zika virus) hurt ticket sales for the 2016 Summer Games in Rio.
  - Only a few months prior to the games less than 50% of tickets had been purchased, figures that are significantly lower than previous Olympic games.
    - With just two weeks prior to the start of the Paralympic Games (hosted in Rio right after the Olympic Games), only [12%](#) of ticket inventory had been sold despite being priced at around \$3 each.
    - Compare that to the Summer Games in 2012 when the London Paralympics attracted a nearly sold-out crowd.
- In 2017, Wells Fargo pulled their sponsorship of the Iditarod (the world's most famous sled dog race).
  - Event organizers [speculated](#) the decision was based on pressure created publicly by animal rights organizations.
- In 2021, several sponsors distanced themselves from the Tokyo Olympic Games in the wake of a whirlwind of negative publicity surrounding the event.
  - Executives from major Olympic sponsors like Panasonic and Toyota chose not to attend the Tokyo 2020 opening ceremony as Japanese public opinion polls showed a majority of its citizens were against hosting the event as the pandemic continued to surge
  - Many sponsors also pulled back on advertising and promotional activities surrounding the Tokyo Games
- In 2022, attendance at the Oakland Coliseum took a nosedive as negative publicity continued to follow the Oakland A's, with the team sitting in last place in league attendance at the All-Star break.

<sup>32</sup> <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/dodgers/2011/08/dodger-stadium-half-empty-and-just-wait-until-next-year.htm>



- By 2023, the team was dead last in attendance, drawing fewer than 11,000 fans per game, as the franchise struggled with the negative publicity surrounding the franchise.

If a newly released film receives poor reviews from the *New York Times* or negative reviews through social platforms like Rotten Tomatoes, movie-goers are less likely to flock to the theater to see it.

- Hoping to follow the formula that results in most superhero films becoming a box office success, Warner Bros. invested heavily in the 2023 release 'The Flash', with a [reported](#) \$220 million production budget and another \$150 million promotional budget.
  - Unfortunately for the studio, sometimes negative publicity can trump even the best marketing and promotional efforts. The movie was crushed by critics and the film flopped.
    - 'The Flash' was panned by critics and garnered just a 64% rating on [Rotten Tomatoes](#).
    - The film's star, Ezra Miller, was noticeably absent from promoting the film, except for a red carpet appearance at the premier. Miller was arrested multiple times in 2022 and was the subject of several controversies, culminating in the actor issuing a public apology, possible factors in the film's disastrous return at the box office.
  - As a result, 'The Flash' became the biggest flop in superhero film history, and was [reportedly](#) on track to lose more than \$200 million.
- The negative publicity associated with 'Blackfish', a documentary drawing attention to SeaWorld's treatment of killer whales, was still eroding the theme park company's [revenues](#) four years after the film's release.
  - Despite a heavy investment in marketing and promotional efforts, the company has been unable to reverse the trend of declining attendance.
  - Increases in marketing expenditures also contributed to declining profits.

## Positive Publicity Effect on Sales

On the flip side, positive publicity can result in a significant uptick in sales. For example, positive reviews from film critics and fans can provide a nice lift at the box office.

- Praised by both critics and fans (97% positive audience rating on Rotten Tomatoes and an average score of 8.3 out of 10), 'Top Gun: Maverick' [broke](#) numerous box office records.
  - The film opened with \$126.7 million in sales, the highest opening weekend box office haul for any Tom Cruise film and the actor's first film to garner more than \$100 million during its debut.
  - By late August, 13 weeks on the big screen, the film had generated \$683 million at the box office in North America, enough to overtake Marvel's "Avengers: Infinity War" (\$678 million) as the sixth-highest grossing movie in domestic box office history.
- The buzz generated by performing at the annual Grammy Awards and/or winning an award typically provides an increase in music sales for featured artists (referred to as the "GRAMMY effect").
  - The [2023 Grammys](#) had a major impact on sales for artists and their music.
    - After *Harry's House* won the Best Pop Vocal Album award at the 2023 GRAMMYS, Harry Styles saw a sales boost of over 51%. The LP sold 38,000 units in the week following the show.
    - After [Beyoncé](#) made GRAMMY history at the 2023 ceremony with [her 32nd win](#), her Best Dance/Electronic Music Album-winning *RENAISSANCE* sold 37,000 equivalent album units, up 109%.
    - In other U.S. Spotify stream gains for those with performances during the broadcast, Harry Styles' "As It Was," saw a more than 75% increase; [Brandi Carlile](#)'s "Broken Horses" saw a more than 2,700% increase; [DJ Khaled](#)'s star-studded "God Did" (featuring Jay-Z, [Rick Ross](#), [Lil Wayne](#), and [John Legend](#)) saw a more than 650% increase; [Mary J. Blige](#)'s "Good Morning Gorgeous" saw a more than 390% increase.
- The excitement surrounding the possibility of a horse winning the sport's most prestigious title, the Triple Crown, inevitably gives a big boost to sales of almost everything associated with the races.
  - In 2018, with Justify in position to capture the Triple Crown, ticket prices at the Belmont Stakes [cost](#) an average of 145 percent more than admission to the event the previous year with merchandise sales also getting a huge lift.
- In 2021, a 'Save Manifest' campaign drew global attention when [a petition](#) from fans demanded more seasons of the show 'Manifest' (which had recently been canceled by NBC). The publicity generated through the #SaveManifest campaign helped to quickly [propel](#) the show to the #1 most-viewed program on Netflix in the early summer, even putting it on track to potentially become the most popular show on Netflix ever.

- After being featured in Season 4 of Netflix's hit series 'Stranger Things', Kate Bush's 1985 single 'Running Up That Hill' shot up to number one on the iTunes music chart.
  - According to data from Luminate (formerly Nielsen Soundscan), the song saw a 16,867% streaming increase, which led to it becoming the [most audio streamed song](#), both within the US and globally, in early July (when the series was released)

Positive publicity can provide fans with a sense of optimism which often leads to increased sales.

- According to [WMCA Action News](#), The University of Memphis men's basketball team experienced a boost in ticket sales when they hired well-known and highly respected coach Anfernee "Penny" Hardaway in 2018.
  - The Tigers reported a \$4.5 million increase in athletic tickets sales and donations after the hire.
  - When a picture of the team's new coach was posted of him recruiting players at a camp in Dallas wearing a blue, flat-brimmed hat, the school bookstore immediately [sold](#) out of the product.
  - Last season, attendance at Memphis Tigers men's basketball games [doubled](#), thanks in large part to the enthusiasm generated by Hardaway's involvement with the program.
- When the Philadelphia Phillies signed MLB star Bryce Harper to a record contract in 2019, fans responded to the news by flooding the team's website and team store to buy his jersey.
  - The day he was officially introduced and his jersey hit the team's store, Harper's jersey broke the 24-hour sales record for a jersey launch in any sport, according to [data](#) from Fanatics.
  - Overall, the news of the Bryce Harper signing drove a 5,000 percent increase in sales of Phillies merchandise compared to the same day from the previous year.
- Within 12 hours of securing the first pick in the 2023 NHL Draft and the hope of seeing top prospect, the 17-year old phenom Conor Bedard, Chicago Blackhawks fans purchased \$5.2 million in season tickets, according to [Front Office Sports](#).
- Mac McClung stole the show at the 2023 NBA Slam Dunk Contest, despite not being on an NBA roster. However, ticket sales for his G League Team, the Delaware Blue Coats, [went up five times the daily average](#) after McClung's dunking prowess was on full display for millions of fans watching the competition.
  - [According to the NBA](#), the 2023 Slam-Dunk contest was the most-viewed edition of the competition ever with fans viewing video of McClung's dunks 520 million times, including a record half billion in the first 12 hours following the competition alone.

Historic moments and "anniversary" events create positive publicity that helps to boost sales.

- The 100<sup>th</sup> running of the Indy 500 drew a [record](#) crowd of 350,000 – roughly 100,000 more fans than attended the race in 2015.
- In celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> PGA Championship, event organizers [expected](#) to sell over \$2 million in headwear merchandise at the tournament's merchandise shop alone.
- Nebraska will [celebrate](#) the 100th anniversary of Memorial Stadium throughout 2023 with numerous plans to commemorate the historic milestone.
  - The first of those will be a one-year reduction in football season ticket prices for the 2023 season. Nebraska has sold out 389 consecutive home games, a streak that dates back to 1962. The sellout streak encompasses nearly two-thirds of all games played in Memorial Stadium since it was dedicated in 1923.
- According to [Sports Business Journal](#), NASCAR was able to leverage its celebration of its 75th anniversary to add several new corporate sponsors at the start of the 2023 racing season.
- The Colorado Rockies [celebrated](#) the team's 30th anniversary season in 2023 with alumni appearances around the area, special 30th anniversary-themed giveaway items, and the first ever post-game drone show at the team's stadium, Coors Field.

## Sponsorship & Endorsement

Corporations do not want an affiliation with an individual or organization with image problems. If a sponsorship or endorsement relationship generates negative publicity, the sponsoring business or brand may choose to terminate the marketing campaign or even the entire partnership.

**2016:** After fabricating a story about being robbed at gunpoint during the 2016 Summer Games in Rio, many sports business experts suggested that USA swimmer Ryan Lochte would not only lose over \$1 million in sponsorships but would be highly unlikely to find other brands to partner with ever again.

**2018:** After Papa John's founder John Schnatter was heard uttering a racial slur, more than 20 sports teams and leagues either distanced themselves by suspending the relationship or [cut ties](#) with the brand altogether, even though Papa John's was a paying sponsor.

- Major League Baseball suspended its "Papa Slam" promotion while the University of Louisville changed the name of the football stadium from Papa John's Cardinal Stadium to Cardinal Stadium.<sup>33</sup>

**2020:** The negative publicity surrounding the Washington Football Team's former nickname (Redskins) prompted the team's sponsors to pressure the team to change its nickname.

- According to a report in [AdWeek](#), investors worth over \$620 billion sent letters to Nike, Pepsi and FedEx calling for the end of their sponsorships of the team.

**2021:** Ralph Lauren cut ties with golfer Justin Thomas after he uttered a homophobic slur during a PGA Tour event, issuing the following [statement](#): "We are disheartened by Mr. Thomas's recent language, which is entirely inconsistent with our values. While we acknowledge that he has apologized and recognizes the severity of his words, he is a paid ambassador of our brand and his actions conflict with the inclusive culture that we strive to uphold. In reflecting on the responsibility we have to all of our stakeholders, we have decided to discontinue our sponsorship of Mr. Thomas at this time. As we make this decision, our hope is that Mr. Thomas does the hard and necessary work in order to partner with us again—truly examining this incident, learning, growing and ultimately using his platform to promote inclusion."

**2022:** Callaway announced they would "pause" their relationship with legendary golfer Phil Mickelson, who had endorsed the brand and played the clubs since 2004, after his comments about the PGA Tour and support of the LIV Golf

- The brand released an official [statement](#) released to the Golf Channel, saying "Callaway does not condone Phil Mickelson's comments and we were very disappointed in his choice of words – they in no way reflect our values or what we stand for as a company. Phil has since apologized and we know he regrets how he handled recent events. We recognize his desire to take some time away from the game and respect that decision. At this time, we have agreed to pause our partnership and will re-evaluate our ongoing relationship at a later date."

**2022:** Adidas terminated their relationship with San Diego Padres' Fernando Tatis Jr. after MLB suspended the star shortstop for PED use, [saying](#) that "We believe that sport should be fair. We have a clear policy on doping and can confirm that our partnership with Fernando Tatis Jr. will not continue."

**2022:** Adidas also cut ties with Kanye West after the rapper made insensitive comments on social media and media interviews. The decision left the company with \$1.3 billion in Yeezy inventory, leading to a [reported](#) \$540 million in losses. Soon after the Adidas and Ye breakup, Nike announced that it [terminated](#) its partnership with Kyrie Irving after the NBA star shared controversial content on social media.

## Promotion

Some promotions can be offensive to some consumers.

- MiLB's Lexington Legends faced significant fan backlash when their 'Millennials Night' promotion offended a segment of their fan base.
  - The team promised that, upon entering the park, fans would receive a participation ribbon, stating in a news release: "We know it's a big feat to leave the safe confines of your home with Netflix beaconing you to stay on the couch, so the Legends are ready to congratulate fans on their accomplishment, even if they are still in sweatpants."<sup>34</sup>

Promotions may become too "gimmicky" or don't feel authentic and turn fans off to the product or backfire in a way that creates negative publicity.

- Woody Harrelson participated in one of Reddit's "Ask Me Anything" (AMA) threads, but the actor's answers infuriated the website's users as he attempted to promote his film, "Rampart." After Harrelson grew frustrated with fan questions and left the discussion, users called it "the worst AMA of all time" and an "epic fail by Woody Harrelson's PR machine."<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/2018/07/16/papa-johns-pro-college-teams-cut-ties-john-schnatter-slur/790722002/>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.kansascity.com/sports/spt-columns-blogs/for-petes-sake/article211083979.html>

<sup>35</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/06/woody-harrelson-enrages-redditors-with-marketing-attempt\\_n\\_1257871.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/06/woody-harrelson-enrages-redditors-with-marketing-attempt_n_1257871.html)



Publicity can help generate revenue in other ways through the implementation of creative promotions.

- University of Notre Dame offers membership opportunities for kids 14 and younger to join “Clancy’s Kids Club” for an annual fee of \$15. Members receive, among other things, free admission to more than 100 Notre Dame athletic events each year, a newsletter, t-shirts, coupons and invitations to special kid’s club events.<sup>36</sup>
  - Kids clubs are an effective tool by generating additional revenue as well as enhancing the team’s image.
  - Kids clubs also enable the organization to begin building brand loyalty at a grassroots level.

## Game Operations

Game entertainment can become a source of negative publicity for a sports franchise.

- Music can be too loud at games
- Particular entertainment acts may be offensive to some fans

Game entertainment can also be a valuable source of positive word-of-mouth advertising.

- A child may choose to wear the face paint to school the next day to show off to friends, sparking interest within the school. Game entertainment examples like face painting are prevalent among minor league baseball franchises and collegiate athletic events.

## Merchandising

Sales of team, player, or celebrity related merchandise tends to slump in the wake of negative publicity while positive publicity or associations can help increase merchandise sales.

- When news broke that the New York Mets’ would sign former Heisman trophy winning ex-NFL QB Tim Tebow to a minor league baseball contract, [sales](#) of jerseys bearing his name shot to #1 among Mets players on MLB’s online store and #3 overall in just one day.<sup>37</sup>
- When the Loyola University Chicago men’s basketball team advanced to the Final Four in 2018, sales of Ramblers merchandise [skyrocketed](#) by 300%.
  - The star of the tournament was not even a player, it was the Ramblers’ Sister Jean, the 98-year-old nun and team chaplain, who [ESPN](#) noted had been mentioned in over 20,000 stories in the media—more than several high profile coaches in the tournament combined.
    - The publicity generated by the media attention surrounding the program during its March Madness run helped boost sales of everything from t-shirts to keychains (and Sister Jean bobbleheads, which set a sales [record](#)).
- With the buzz generated by a rebranding effort and a move to a new \$54 million downtown ballpark, the Charlotte Knights Minor League Baseball club saw merchandise sales increase sevenfold.<sup>38</sup>
- When the Charlotte Bobcats rebranded using the franchise’s original nickname, becoming the Charlotte Hornets once again, merchandise sales for the year jumped by 300% despite a subpar team performance.<sup>39</sup>
- Thanks in part to the buzz surrounding the team with the league’s best record (Boston Bruins) playing at home at the historic and iconic Fenway Park, the 2023 edition of the NHL’s Winter Classic broke NHL merchandise records. According to a story published by [ESPN](#), the NHL said its e-commerce sales were the highest for a Winter Classic game ever, and up 200% from the 2022 event.

<sup>36</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/06/woody-harrelson-enrages-redditors-with-marketing-attempt\\_n\\_1257871.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/06/woody-harrelson-enrages-redditors-with-marketing-attempt_n_1257871.html)

<sup>37</sup> [http://www.espn.com/blog/new-york/mets/post/\\_/id/124289/dont-look-for-tim-tebow-jersey-at-citi-field](http://www.espn.com/blog/new-york/mets/post/_/id/124289/dont-look-for-tim-tebow-jersey-at-citi-field)

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.sportsbusinessdaily.com/Journal/Issues/2015/06/01/Marketing-and-Sponsorship/MILB-merchandise.aspx>

<sup>39</sup> <https://hoopshabit.com/2015/04/16/charlotte-hornets-rebranding-literally-pays-off-big-time/>



## Television Audience/Ratings

Positive publicity can lead to an uptick in ratings and viewer interest.

- Major League Baseball's decision to change the format of its annual home run derby helped generate more buzz surrounding the Gillette Home Run Derby presented by Head & Shoulders, ultimately resulting in a 26% increase in ratings on ESPN
  - The event got another boost in 2017 when the league saw a resurgence in home runs for the first half of the season including a record-setting performance from Yankees' breakout star, Aaron Judge.
  - All the hype and excitement building up to the event led to record ratings, with nearly 9 million fans tuning in to ESPN to watch ([representing](#) a 55% increase from 2016).
- NASCAR's 2023 street race event in Chicago generated a lot of buzz, giving them the highest rating for a NASCAR race on NBC since the Brickyard 400 in 2017. Excluding the Daytona 500, the Chicago Street Race was the most-watched Nascar race since the Daytona road course in 2021.
  - The publicity was good for the city of Chicago, as well as the impact it had on ratings for NASCAR and NBC.
    - *"This is like a giant ongoing advertisement for the city with some racing stuff mixed in"* [said one fan on Reddit](#) while watching the race.

Meanwhile, negative publicity can have the opposite effect.

- The NCAA's decision to move football playoff games to New Years Eve several years ago proved to be incredibly unpopular with fans.
  - The negative publicity surrounding the decision had a major impact on viewership as ratings fell 40% from the previous season.
  - The ratings disaster prompted the NCAA playoff committee to reverse their decision to air games on New Year's Eve, instead broadcasting them on the Saturday before in hopes of creating higher ratings.
  - The decision paid off as ratings for the Peach and Fiesta Bowls increased 14% over 2016 (although ratings were still down from two years prior).

It is critical that an organization effectively communicate internally as well as communicating messages externally.

1. Employees in every department should be on the same page
2. The workforce should be not only informed, but also involved
3. Employees should be aware and contributing
4. The organization must exercise the mentality that each employee is the face of the organization
5. The staff must realize that they are representatives of the organization at all times

## Social Media Following

Thanks to the publicity created by the news that one of the world's biggest sports stars would be joining Major League Soccer, Lionel Messi's new club Inter Miami CF [gained an incredible 4.2 million followers](#) on Instagram in just 24 hours. Three days later, the franchise had more followers than any NFL, MLB, NHL, or MLS team.

# Generating Publicity

## HOW DO ORGANIZATIONS GENERATE AND MANAGE PUBLICITY?

It is critical to recognize how consumers perceive the organization as a whole. The organization must have a realistic and accurate understanding of how the brand is received throughout the community and manage the publicity strategy accordingly. This strategy is developed as part of the organization's publicity plan.

Sports and entertainment organizations generate publicity through a variety of platforms, all designed to increase visibility. These initiatives are also intended to help to craft a positive perception of the organization as a whole.

### Publicity Plan

To establish an effective communications strategy, an organization must develop a **publicity plan**. The plan will identify how the organization intends to generate publicity. It will also identify how the organization will monitor and gauge community response to each organizational effort to manage the publicity.

**Common components of a publicity plan include:**

- Press conferences
- Press kits
- Press (news) releases
- Public speaking engagements
- Clinics
- Player appearances
- Community involvement
- Mascot, cheer team and band appearances
- Social media
- Fan correspondence
- Publicity stunts
- Media interviews
- "Private screenings" prior to a film release
- "Sneak previews" of a product prior to launch
- Media blitz

### Press Conference

**Press conferences** take place when an organization spokesperson or the athlete/entertainer addresses the media to answer questions or make announcements.<sup>40</sup> When an organization calls a press conference, it is generally implied that the organization has a newsworthy announcement featuring information of significant importance.

### Press Kit

**Press kits** are important as they provide much information regarding an organization or event to the media in a variety of ways. It is a package of information distributed to the media to assist them in reporting.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> <https://hoopshabit.com/2015/04/16/charlotte-hornets-rebranding-literally-pays-off-big-time/>

<sup>41</sup> *Marketing Essentials*, Glencoe-McGraw Hill, 2nd ed., p. 301



### Press kits include:<sup>42</sup>

- Athlete, entertainer, organization, or event background
- Fact sheets
- Biographies
- Photographs
- Statistical information
- Contact information
- Current press releases
- Related press clippings
- Historical chronologies
- Organizational newsletters
- Testimonials from key personnel
- Recommendations for features

Most organizations now create an electronic version of the media kit because they are easier to distribute, and it allows for the integration of multimedia, audio and video.

## Press Releases

A **press release** is a prewritten story about an organization or athlete/entertainer that is disseminated to various media.<sup>43</sup> These are often referred to as news or media releases.

### Effective press releases will:

- Be clear and to the point
- Address specific pieces of information
  - Date
  - Release statement
    - Typically states FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE or TO BE RELEASED ON
  - Headline
  - Contact information
  - The Lead
    - Lead paragraph must grab reader's attention
  - Text (body of release)
    - Should answer the questions who, what, where, when, why and how
  - Pitch<sup>68</sup>
    - The release ends with identifying information, including a phone number and email address. This is where you pitch to the audience
    - Example: "Call this number to find out more about the new Dallas Stars "Adopt-a-Family" program
  - End
    - Press releases typically end with "end" or "#####"
- Be creative and informative or the organization runs the risk of the media not reporting the information
- Feature a catchy title
  - According to a [study](#) from SEO Agency suggests a properly crafted headline can increase web traffic by 500%
- Kept to one page if possible

## What Is The Purpose Of A Press Release?

### Information an organization may distribute via a press release include:

- Announcement of a team's key free agent acquisition
- Release of game schedules
- Highlights of a new blockbuster film to be released
- Announcement of an upcoming promotion
- Description of an upcoming community relations event

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.ais.msstate.edu/AEE/Tutorial/3203preselements.html>

<sup>43</sup> The Dream Job: Sports Publicity, Promotion & Marketing, Helitzer, p. 95

## Publicity “stunts”

**Publicity stunts** are marketing efforts that are activated with the sole purpose of achieving a high level of media coverage and public awareness. Publicity stunts (also referred to as PR stunts or marketing stunts) can serve as an effective vehicle in generating public “buzz” surrounding an organization or athlete/entertainer.

For example, the PR agency responsible for marketing the film “Kong: Skull Island”, staged a creative stunt when they placed giant ape “footprints” in five separate locations around Los Angeles. To enhance the imagery and make the footprints look even more realistic, fog machines, broken chairs, crushed vehicles and scenic props were added to the sites to create the illusion that Kong had been wreaking havoc around town.

### Examples of Publicity Stunts:

- To generate publicity for the start of their inaugural season, Ice Cube’s “Big 3” basketball league teamed up with the ad agency Wieden+Kennedy (representing Fox Sports, the official broadcaster of the upstart league) to take over an iconic basketball court in NYC and stage a four-point shooting contest.<sup>44</sup>
  - Click [here](#) to see a video
- Will Ferrell teamed up for a publicity stunt with Major League Baseball by playing for 10 different positions on 10 different teams in one day during Spring Training (in addition to generating tons of attention for the league and raising nearly \$1 million for charity).<sup>45</sup>
  - Click [here](#) to see why mediapost.com called the stunt a “Grand Slam” for MLB
- In 2018, MiLB’s St. Paul Saints sent out a March Madness tweet promising \$10,000 for one lucky fan (via retweet) if a No. 16 seed could knock off a No. 1 – a feat that had never been done in the history of the NCAA men’s basketball tournament.<sup>46</sup>
  - The stunt generated more publicity than the team had imagined (the tweet generated more than 15,000 retweets), but cost the franchise \$10,000 (they selected one fan via Facebook Live as the lucky winner).
- In 2020, former “Jackass” star Steve-O literally taped himself to a Los Angeles area billboard outside a CVS to promote an upcoming comedy special, “Gnarly” (perhaps not coincidentally, a new Jackass movie is set to hit theaters in 2021).
- In 2022, to promote a new sci-fi series on Prime Video called ‘Night Sky’, Amazon [beamed](#) the first episode from outer space.
- In 2023, the iconic character “Ghostface” from the ‘Scream’ film franchise was spotted in cities throughout the United States, prompting multiple [911 calls](#) from concerned bystanders. However, the sightings were nothing more than a publicity stunt from Paramount and Spyglass promoting the upcoming release of ‘Scream VI’.
  - In addition to the stunt, the studio’s marketing was effective. The film set a franchise record [\\$44.5 million opening weekend](#) in the U.S.

## Publicity Stunt Risks

When spontaneous, publicity stunts pose a risk and could yield undesired results.

- From USA Today: “When U.S. luge slider Kate Hansen posted a video online questioning whether there was a wolf walking down her hallway in the Olympic Village (where athletes stay) during the 2014 Sochi Winter Games, it was part of a hoax involving talk show host Jimmy Kimmel. Hansen, who finished competing Feb. 11 and is staying at the Olympic village, tweeted a video Thursday morning with the hashtag #sochiproblems and #sochifail.” The #sochiproblems hashtag was commonly used by visitors to Sochi for complaints surrounding the Games. “I’m not sure about repercussions, but I can tell you that our organization is not happy with the incident,” USA Luge spokesman Sandy Caligiore said in an email to USA TODAY Sports. “Sochi problems? Sochi fail? That’s not USA Luge speaking.”
  - Click [here](#) to see Hansen discuss the incident on the Kimmel Show.
- Michael Phelps and the Discovery Channel were widely criticized by fans after they promoted a race between Phelps and a great white shark when the “race” turned out to be nothing more than a race simulated by a computer.<sup>47</sup>
  - In 2020, Discovery Channel launched another stunt to promotion “Shark Week” when they [announced](#) that former heavyweight boxing champ Mike Tyson would “fight a shark” in the new season of the popular series.

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/ice-cube-fox-sports-and-wieden-kennedy-took-over-an-iconic-nyc-basketball-court-to-promote-big3/>

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.mediapost.com/publications/article/246424/why-will-ferrells-spring-training-stunt-was-a-gra.html>

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.startribune.com/st-paul-saints-keep-their-word-lucky-fan-will-win-10-000-after-16-seed-ncaa-upset/477169933/>

<sup>47</sup> <http://bit.ly/NdYwMm>

- A [publicity stunt](#) that went viral in which former NFL quarterback Drew Brees appeared to have been struck by lightning as part of a promotion for gambling establishment PointsBet was immediately criticized by an organization of lightning strike survivors, which attacked the marketing gimmick as being "inappropriate" and "disgusting."

## Publicity Stunt Outcomes

In some instances, an event takes place where the public is not sure whether or not the activity was a publicity stunt.

- NASCAR driver Jeff Gordon released a [video](#) that showed him purportedly taking an unsuspecting car salesman for a wild test drive, sparking a wild debate online as to whether the video was fake.
  - In 2014, Jeff Gordon and Pepsi released a second version of the "[test drive](#)" viral video to exact revenge on the blogger who originally called Gordon's video out as "fake" the first time around, this time posing as a cab driver (the video reached over a million views in a few hours).
- Pepsi's "Uncle Drew" videos (starring Kyrie Irving playing pickup basketball as an old man) have generated millions of views over the past several years.
  - When they were first posted, fans were not sure if the videos were staged.
  - Pepsi described the video on its YouTube page as such: "Pepsi MAX went to a pick-up game in Bloomfield, NJ pretending to shoot a documentary on a basketball player named Kevin. When his Uncle Drew came into the game, some magical things happened."
  - Another video, released just after Irving and the Cleveland Cavaliers won the NBA championship, racked up 1.5 million views despite the fact that most fans were aware the games were not real.
    - Click [here](#) to see the videos on Pepsi's YouTube page.
  - The campaign was so successful that it spawned a box office [film](#), 'Uncle Drew', which was released in the summer of 2018 and beat box office projections.
- Several sports teams have engaged fans over the years with April Fool's Day pranks to generate publicity.
  - In 2016, the Oregon Ducks went "all in" on an April Fool's prank, tweeting out an announcement that they would be replacing the Autzen Stadium playing surface with an LED field that would change colors and shoot fireworks whenever the Ducks scored.
    - The Ducks even posted an entire gallery of images featuring the "construction work" on their athletics website.
  - In 2018, the NHL's Phoenix Coyotes issued a [press release](#) suggesting the franchise had just hired NBA legend and TNT analyst Charles Barkley as a "special advisor" with the bottom of the release reading, "Also, Happy April Fool's Day!"
  - In 2022, the Steelers [announced](#) that they had signed Snoop Dogg to a contract as a wide receiver on social media, and while most fans quickly recognized the prank, the stunt resulted in plenty of conversation online.



# Social Issues in Sports & Entertainment

**Social issues** in sports and entertainment refer to everything from the ethical actions of athletes, entertainers and sport/entertainment organizations to the sports and entertainment industry's efforts to do their part to positively impact society.

**Ethics** are the moral standards by which people judge behavior. Words often associated with ethical behavior include honesty, integrity, respectfulness, confidentiality, non-discriminating, legal and socially responsible. Most sports and entertainment organizations feel they have an obligation to operate their business from an ethical standpoint.

## Examples of current social issues in sports and entertainment:

- “Greening” of sports and entertainment
- Gender equality in sports and entertainment
- Racial equality in sports and entertainment
- Social justice
- Attention to mental health
- Sportsmanship
- Compensation for college athletes
- “Sportswashing”

## The “Greening” Of Sports & Entertainment

Today's consumer is more aware of how their buying decisions affect society and the environment around them, and are willing to make choices in their product purchases to have an impact on the world around them. A recent market research study concluded that environmentally-friendly packaging plays a vital role in consumer purchase decisions and helps greener companies gain a competitive advantage over non eco-friendly competitors.<sup>48</sup>

- Adidas partnered with [Parley](#) on an initiative that would take ocean waste and transform it into clothing and sneakers and recently launched a sneaker made entirely of yarns and filaments reclaimed and recycled from ocean waste and illegal deep-sea gillnets.<sup>49</sup>
  - Parley is described as “A collaboration space where creators, thinkers and leaders from art, film, music, fashion, technology and science partner up with major brands and environmentalists to raise awareness and to collaborate on projects that can end the destruction of the magic blue universe beneath us: Our Oceans.”)
  - In 2018, Adidas outfitted [every](#) Major League Soccer team with uniforms made from recycled ocean waste.
  - In 2019, adidas executed a fantastic publicity stunt when they teamed up with Parley for the Oceans to turn the iconic Bondi Icebergs Pool in Sydney into a tennis court in the leadup to the Australian Open.
    - Click [here](#) for a behind-the-scenes look at the project.
- Puma announced plans to launch a greener packaging initiative by phasing out the traditional cardboard shoe box and replacing it with a new package that includes a bag, ultimately using 65% less cardboard.<sup>50</sup>
- Nike released a free app (called “[Making](#)”) to help designers make informed decisions about the environmental impacts of the materials they select, powered by data from the Nike Materials Sustainability Index (a database built on more than seven years of materials research and analysis).
- The [Sports Business Journal](#) reported in 2016 that roughly 60% of teams are selling sponsorships that include 'green' assets.

## Other examples of the “greening” of sports and entertainment include:

- Lincoln Financial Field in Philadelphia (home to the NFL's Eagles) is [powered by solar panels and wind turbines](#) and plans are already in play to capture rain that falls from the stadium roof to potentially flush the toilets or even water the field.<sup>51</sup>
- [NASCAR](#) has the largest recycling and environmental sustainability programs among all U.S. sports. NASCAR has the world's largest solar-powered sports facility, a tree planting program capturing 100% of the emissions produced by on-track racing, and

48 The Dream Job: Sports Publicity, Promotion & Marketing, Helitzer, p. 95

49 <http://www.forbes.com/sites/abinlot/2015/06/30/adidas-and-parley-team-up-for-sneakers-made-from-recycled-ocean-waste/>

50 [http://pr.e-agency.com/pdf/sports\\_division.pdf](http://pr.e-agency.com/pdf/sports_division.pdf)

51 [http://articles.philly.com/2013-04-16/news/38558948\\_1\\_don-smolenski-turbines-desean-jackson](http://articles.philly.com/2013-04-16/news/38558948_1_don-smolenski-turbines-desean-jackson)



the largest recycling program in sports with Coca-Cola Recycling, Coors Light, Safety-Kleen and Creative Recycling. As NASCAR Green enters its fifth year, it continues to educate NASCAR fans and reduce the sport's environmental impact through strategic partnerships with the teams, tracks, and Official Partners while validating green technologies.

- NASCAR's program even features its own Twitter handle (@NASCARGreen).
- The Baltimore Orioles' [website](#) features an entire page dedicated to informing fans about their commitment to sustainability, including the fact that the team recycles 600,000 pounds of materials annually, encourages bicycle transportation to games and recognizing that only green-friendly cleaning products are used to clean Oriole Park.
- Nike announced its NBA uniforms would be partially made from recycled plastic bottles.
  - Click [here](#) to see the uniforms.
- Nearly 400 sports teams and venues spanning 14 countries, including almost all NFL, NHL and MLB teams, are members of the Green Sports Alliance, an organization whose goal is to leverage "the cultural and market influence of sports to promote healthy, sustainable communities."
  - Click [here](#) to see how the Atlanta Falcons implemented "green" strategies when building their new home (Mercedes-Benz Stadium).
  - Click [here](#) to see how the Sacramento Kings focused on sustainability when building the Golden 1 Center (a venue the franchise proclaims as the "greenest arena in the U.S.).
- Organizers of the 2028 Summer Games in Los Angeles have been hard at work trying to determine methods to create the most sustainable Olympics in history, beginning with the [formation](#) of a 50-person Sustainability Committee to help lead the initiative.
- Amazon invested in the naming rights to Seattle's new NHL arena, but instead of calling it "Amazon Stadium", they opted for the name "Climate Pledge Arena".
  - According to a release, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos said "Instead of naming it after Amazon, we're calling it Climate Pledge Arena as a regular reminder of the importance of fighting climate change."
    - Climate Pledge Arena will [use](#) recaptured rainwater to make the ice and will source a significant amount of local food for concessions, while operating on "zero waste" and powering the arena with "100 percent renewable energy".
    - [Estimates](#) suggest the investment was between \$300 million and \$400 million over the lifetime of the deal.

## Gender Equality In Sports & Entertainment

Title IX is a federal law enacted in the United States in 1972 that mandates equal educational and athletic opportunities for students of both genders.

- According to the Women's Sports Foundation, one in thirty-five high school girls played sports forty years ago; one in three do today. Before Title IX, fewer than 16,000 women participated in college sports; today that number exceeds 200,000.
- The summer of 2012 marked the 40th anniversary of Title IX and for the first time in history, American women outnumbered the number of men representing the United States at the Olympic Games.
- Eight women now hold the title of "[General Manager](#)" in minor league baseball, believed to be the most at any time.<sup>52</sup>
- In 2012, Shannon Eastin became the first woman to officiate an NFL game when she worked the opening game of the pre-season between the Green Bay Packers and San Diego Chargers.
  - In 2015, the Arizona Cardinals added Jen Welter to the team's coaching staff to work with the team's inside linebackers as a training camp/preseason intern.
  - In 2018, Katie Sowers became the second full-time female assistant coach in NFL history when she was hired by the San Francisco 49ers, joining Buffalo Bills quality control coach Kathryn Smith, who last year became the league's first female full-time assistant.
- In 2014, [Becky Hammon](#) became the first woman to be hired as an assistant coach in the NBA when the San Antonio Spurs announced that she would be joining head coach Greg Popovich's staff.
  - In 2015, Hammon [led the Spurs](#) to a Summer League championship as the team's head coach.
  - In 2019, the Cleveland Cavaliers [hired](#) Lindsay Gottlieb, former University of California head coach who led the Golden Bears to seven NCAA Tournament appearances, making her the seventh female assistant in the NBA.
- Just prior to the 2019 NBA draft, the New Orleans Pelicans hired former WNBA and UConn star Swin Cash as VP of Basketball Operations and Team Development — making her the first high-ranking African-American woman in an executive position with the league, according to the [NY Post](#).

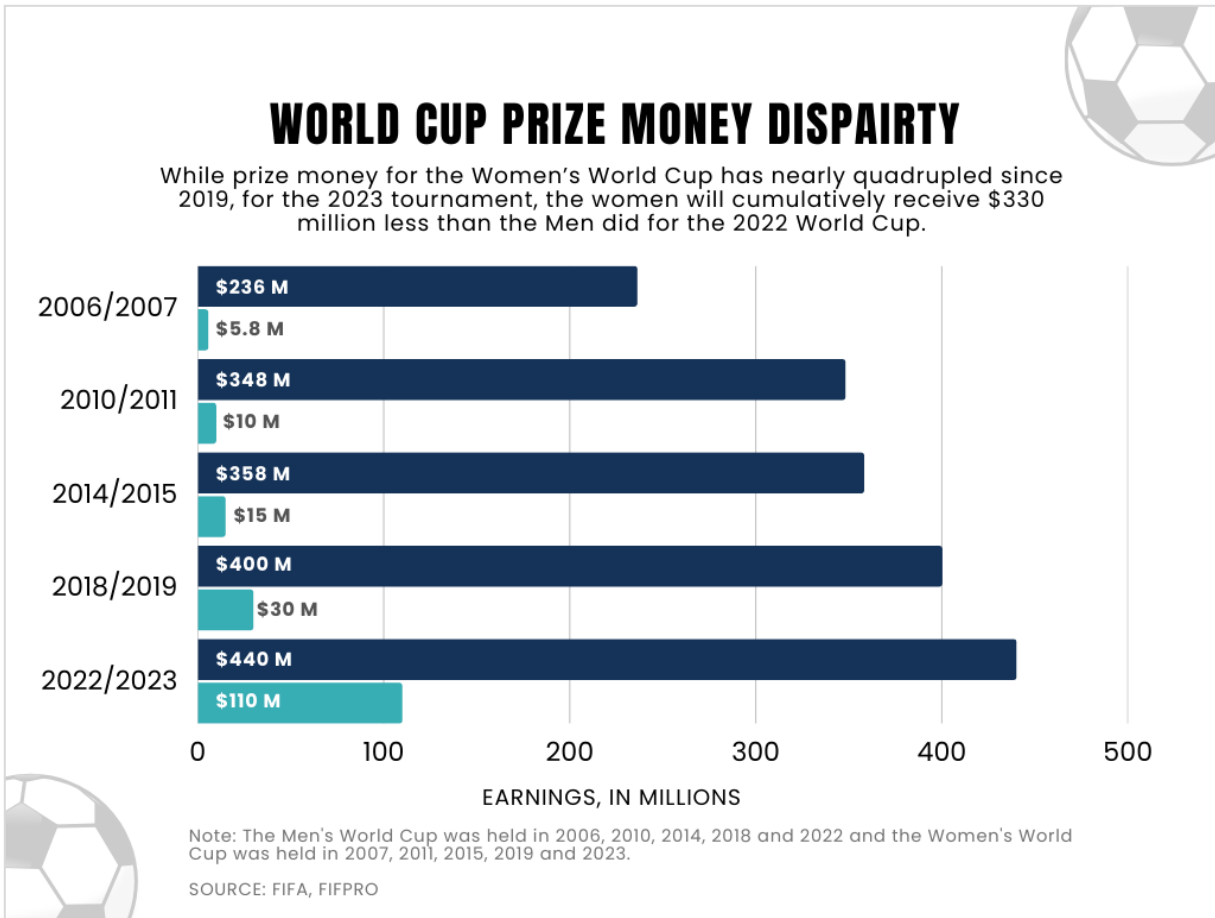
<sup>52</sup> <http://www.brandchannel.com/home/post/2010/05/18/Puma-Green-Packaging.aspx>

- In 2020, Tori Miller was [promoted](#) to General Manager of the College Park Skyhawks, the NBA G League affiliate of the Atlanta Hawks. Miller's promotion makes her the first woman to hold the title of General Manager in the history of the NBA G League.
- Today, according to the [Women's Sports Foundation](#), all four tennis Grand Slam events offer equal prize money to the male and female winners.
- When the Association of Surfing Professionals was acquired in 2012, now known as the World Surf League, the new ownership made it a policy that the men's and women's Championship Tour events would offer equal prize money.
- In 2021, Breanna Stewart made history when Puma signed the Seattle Storm star to a long-term endorsement deal, [announcing](#) she would become the first WNBA player to have her own signature shoe in more than a decade
- Another WNBA star also made [history](#) in 2021 when EA Sports announced Candace Parker would be featured on the cover of its popular NBA 2K game, the first time a WNBA player ever graced the cover
- In 2021, Sarah Thomas became the first female to ever [officially](#) the Super Bowl
- In 2022, EA Sports [announced](#) that the cover of its popular NHL video game franchise would feature a woman for the first time, with Canada's Women's National Team member Sarah Nurse gracing the cover of NHL 23 along with Anaheim Ducks' phenom Trevor Zegras

Despite the progress that women's sports have made since the law was enacted, disparity remains.

- For example, in 1972, women coached 90 percent of women's college athletic teams. Today it's only 42.9 percent.<sup>53</sup>
  - According to a [newsweek.com](#) report, there remains a large gap in compensation between men and women playing for the United States Soccer Federation.
    - In 2017, women earned \$99,000 only if their team won a minimum of 20 matches – men on the other hand earned \$263,320 for the same feat, and were guaranteed \$100,000 even if their team lost all 20 games.
      - The women also received no compensation for any matches played beyond 20, whereas the men were paid between \$5,000 and \$17,625 for each game played beyond 20.
- The gender pay gap issue was perhaps the biggest storyline of the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup with the US Women's National Team bringing the conversation to the masses throughout their championship run.
  - According to statistics from [Time.com](#), prize money totaled to \$30 million in 2019 for the Women's World Cup, with the USWNT earning roughly \$4 million for winning the tournament. By contrast, the prize money pool for the 2018 Men's World Cup totaled about \$400 million, giving reigning champion France's men's team \$38 million—more than the total pool for the women.
  - In May of 2020, Federal Judge R. Gary Klausner [rejected](#) the women's team's argument over receiving lower pay than the U.S. men's team. He also dismissed a claim of unequal working conditions related to the number of turf and real grass fields.
  - However, in 2022, the U.S. Soccer Federation [announced](#) it reached a deal to pay the U.S. Men's National Team and the U.S. Women's National Team equally, eliminating the pay gap that female players had been fighting for while agreeing to a settlement that would provide the women's team \$22 million in back pay.
- The pay gap was still a major storyline for the 2023 Women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand.
  - Prior to the event, FIFA [announced](#) that, for the first time, about \$49 million of the record \$110 million Women's World Cup prize money would go directly to individual players — at least \$30,000 each for participating and \$270,000 to each player on the winning squad.
  - However, despite the progress, players at the 2023 Women's World Cup earned on average just 25 cents for every dollar earned by men at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, according to a CNN [report](#).
    - Sadly, that was still an improvement: At the 2019 World Cup, women made eight cents on the dollar, comparatively, according to data provided by world governing body FIFA and global players' union FIFPRO.

<sup>53</sup><http://www.ecofriendlilymag.com/sustainable-transportation-and-alternative-fuel/nascar-goes-solar-at-pocono/>



- Male and female golfers and basketball players receive drastically different levels of compensation.
  - The [LPGA announced](#) the 2023 schedule would provide a record prize purse with a cumulative payout of more than \$101 million spread out over 33 official events.
    - Compare that to the \$25 million [prize purse](#) paid out to participants in the 2023 Players Championship as part of the men's PGA Tour for just a single event, with Scottie Scheffler, the tournament champion, taking home \$4.5 million.
  - According to a [Yahoo! report](#), the gender wage gap in basketball is bigger than ever, despite an explosion in popularity.
    - At the 2023 All-Star Weekend, [WNBA](#) viewership was up 67% over the previous season, putting the league on pace to be the most-watched regular season in more than twenty years
    - Attendance was up 27%, putting the league on track to see the highest average attendance in five years.
    - The WNBA had achieved double-digit growth for partnership revenue this year, which reached an all-time 27-year high.
    - Merchandise sales surged as well, with overall sales of WNBA merchandise up 78% on the year, while sales of WNBA gear at Dick's Sporting Goods was up 68%.
    - The league saw significant gains digitally and on social as well, with the number of monthly users on the WNBA app increasing by 147% over the previous season and social media engagement up by 84% in terms of total video views.
  - However, a huge disparity in pay exists.
    - For comparison sake, Spotrac.com reports the the [largest annual contract](#) currently in the WNBA is held by Jackie Young, who earns \$252,450 each year, followed by Arike Ogunbowale, who earns \$241,984 annually, [Diana Taurasi](#) (\$234,936) and Jewell Loyd (\$231,515).
    - The minimum pay for an NBA player in their first year is \$953,000, while the [highest-paid player](#), Steph Curry, will earn nearly \$52 million in salary for the 2023-24 season. Jalen Green earned a [reported \\$500,000](#) for one season in the NBA's developmental league, G League Ignite, before being drafted by the Houston Rockets.

- In Forbes' annual [ranking](#) of highest-paid athletes in 2023, Serena Williams was the only woman to find herself in the top 50, and she came in at 49th. Not only that, the majority of those earnings came from endorsements. Now that Serena has retired, this could be her last appearance on the list.

## Racial Equality In Sports & Entertainment

Hiring practices in the sports and entertainment industry have historically demonstrated a racial imbalance.

- In 2003, the National Football League established the Rooney Rule, requiring all NFL teams to interview minority candidates for head coaching and senior football operations positions.
  - In 2020, NFL owners approved changes to the Rooney Rule aimed at improving diversity in coach and front-office hiring, also discussing an addition to the rule that would have rewarded minority hiring with draft-pick compensation (a discussion regarding that proposal was ultimately pushed back for a later date).
    - Click [here](#) to read more about the changes to the Rooney Rule from espn.com.
  - Bill Russell, the 11-time NBA champion with the Boston Celtics, endorsed a measure in 2020 that made the NCAA's West Coast Conference the first Division I league to require all schools to include a minority finalist for job openings in athletics.
    - According to the new "Russell Rule", finalists for any opening for an athletic director, senior administrator, head coach or full-time assistant coach within the West Coast Conference must include a member of a traditionally underrepresented community.
- The NBA regularly scores high marks and sets the bar for other professional sports leagues in racial and gender diversity, according to a 2023 report released by The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport.<sup>54</sup>
  - The league earned an A+ for racial hiring practices and an A for gender hiring practices in a [report](#) compiled by The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport.
  - Major League Baseball had one of the lowest scores among professional sports leagues, earning an overall C+ in the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sports annual report, with a "B" grade for racial hiring practices and "C" for gender hiring practices.
    - Click [here](#) for links to more racial and gender reports from the University of Central Florida's Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport.

Unfortunately, with regards to racism, the industry still has much room for improvement.

- The University of Central Florida's Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport [recorded](#) 25 acts of racism in sports in the United States in 2019, down from 52 in 2018. Internationally, there were 131 instances of racism in sports in 2019, down from 137 the previous year, demonstrating a slight decrease but showing racism in sports is still prevalent.

## Social Justice

When the 2020 murder of George Floyd sparked protests around the country, the sports and entertainment world took the opportunity to use their position of influence as a platform to fight for racial injustice and police brutality.

- After Floyd's death, the [Minnesota Twins](#) made multiple statements in support of the racial and social justice movement and removed a statue of the team's former owner Calvin Griffith, who made explicitly racist comments in the past. The Twins also donated \$25 million to the racial justice movement in the Twin Cities.
- When NBA players resumed the 2019-20 season "in the bubble" during the COVID-19 health crisis, many players included messages of social justice on their jerseys instead of their names while the league unveiled a basketball court that prominently [displayed](#) the message "Black Lives Matter".
- The day after Jacob Blake was shot seven times in the back by police in Kenosha, Wisconsin, leaving him paralyzed from the waist down, the Milwaukee Bucks boycotted their playoff game with the Orlando Magic, which led to the NBA and the NBPA agreeing to call off all the playoff games for the next two days. The WNBA quickly followed suit, followed by several MLB and NHL games being postponed, while several NFL teams had walkouts at practice.
- In 2021, as the league celebrated its 25th anniversary, the WNBA unveiled a series of new initiatives aimed at tackling social justice issues, including the development of a Social Justice Council, formed by several of the league's players.
  - The mission of the council, according to the league's [website](#), is to create space for ongoing conversations about race, voting rights, LGBTQ+ advocacy, gun reform and other important social issues.

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.tidesport.org/racial-gender-report-card>

- At the Tokyo Games, despite the IOC's hard stance on prohibiting expressions of social justice by banning any protests, U.S. shot-putter Raven Saunders briefly held her arms above her head in the shape of an X after accepting her silver medal, defying event organizers.
  - In a statement, Saunders (who has been outspoken on racism, bigotry and issues of social justice throughout her career) [explained](#) what the "X" meant, saying it represented the "intersection of where all people who are oppressed meet"

## Attention to Mental Health

More and more athletes are speaking out as advocates for not only generating awareness for mental health but also being mindful of their mental health. When Lindsey Vonn, one of the most iconic athletes in U.S. history, first went public about her long-time battle with depression, she became one of the first prominent athletes to publicly discuss mental health. Two years later, Michael Phelps, the most decorated Olympian in history, spoke of his mental health struggles and the stigma associated with it. More have followed suit, and three athletes in particular, have prioritized addressing their mental health over competition, despite the inevitable backlash that would follow. Leagues and teams have also started to shine a light on the cause, working to erase the stigma associated with mental health.

**2023:** According to data from an NCAA [survey](#), more than 80% of head, assistant and associate coaches across all three divisions reported spending more time discussing mental health with student-athletes than they did before the COVID-19 pandemic.

**2023:** The [Cincinnati Reds](#) spotlighted mental health issues for the entire month of May (Mental Health Awareness month), including a pregame ceremony with guests from local organizations in appreciation for their work in the community. The Reds, like many professional sports teams, also have a staff member on the payroll who is focused on providing mental health support for players.

**2022:** Double Olympic snowboarding champion Chloe Kim [stepped away](#) from the sport before the 2022-23 season to focus on her mental health.

**2021:** Simone Biles, considered by most as the greatest gymnast of all time, stunned the world when she [withdrew](#) from the team all-around final competition at the Olympic Games to focus instead on her mental health.

**2021:** Tennis star Naomi Osaka, one of the highest-paid female athletes in the world who has struggled with anxiety and depression for many years, pulled out of the French Open to tend to her mental health.

- Osaka would later publish an essay in [Time Magazine](#) saying "it's OK to not be OK."

**2021:** Calvin Ridley, star wide receiver for the Atlanta Falcons, [stepped away](#) from football just five games into the NFL season to focus on his mental health.

### Other athletes who have openly advocated for mental health awareness:

**2020:** In an open letter to fans titled "To Anybody Going Through It", published in the Players' Tribune, Kevin Love chronicled his struggles with anxiety and depression.

**2018:** After losing three straight sets in just 52 minutes at the Mubadala Silicon Valley Classic tennis competition, Serena Williams [opened up](#) about her struggle with postpartum depression.

**2018:** NBA All-Star DeMar DeRozan tweeted, "This depression get the best of me..." and later told [the Toronto Star](#) "It's one of them things that no matter how indestructible we look like we are, we're all human at the end of the day."

**2016:** During an appearance on 'Ellen', legendary MMA fighter Ronda Rousey shared that she had contemplated suicide, and that she had lost both her father and grandfather to suicide. Rousey would later say "[We need to take] the stigma away from everything suicide and [make] it actually acceptable for people to talk about and look for help and not feel ashamed of themselves for it," according to [the Huffington Post](#).

## Sportsmanship

Sportsmanship and the spirit of competition (competing in a moral and ethical manner and not with a "win at all costs" mentality) often fall by the wayside when stakes are the highest.

- U.S. women's soccer star Hope Solo was criticized for being "unsportsmanlike" with her comments when she called the Swedish team "a bunch of cowards" following the team's loss to Sweden in the 2016 Summer Games in Rio.
- In 2017, two of the world's most popular soccer players were hit with suspensions and fines for treatment of league officials.
  - Lionel Messi received a four-game ban and was fined \$10,000 by FIFA for verbally abusing a match official.



- Cristiano Ronaldo Cristiano Ronaldo received a five-match suspension for pushing a referee in the back after being sent off with a red card.
- Also in 2017, an operations employee for the St. Louis Cardinals was given a 46-month prison sentence, fined and banned for life from Major League Baseball for hacking into the Houston Astros' computer system and gaining access to the team's classified information.
- In 2020, the Houston Astros were [criticized](#) by many fans and media members when Major League Baseball confirmed they found evidence of the team orchestrating an elaborate "sign-stealing" scandal during the 2017 playoffs when the team went on to win the World Series.
- In 2021, an former clubhouse attendant for the Los Angeles Angels accused star MLB pitchers Yankees' Gerrit Cole, Astros' Justin Verlander and Nationals' Max Scherzer of doctoring baseballs in formal lawsuit
  - Sports Illustrated [covered](#) the story with the headline, "This Should Be the Biggest Scandal in Sports"
- In 2022, Miami Dolphins owner Stephen Ross was [fined](#) \$1.5 million and suspended from participating in team events and operations through October 17th for violating the NFL's tampering policies by having improper conversations with quarterback Tom Brady and the agent for Sean Payton, then the head coach of the New Orleans Saints. The team was also stripped of its first-round draft pick in 2023.

Poor sportsmanship can even trickle down to all levels of sport.

- A cheating scandal rocked the 2014 Little League World Series when the U.S. champion, Jackie Robinson West out of Chicago, allegedly used ineligible players.
- Another scandal disrupted the 2015 Little League Softball World Series when one team allegedly intentionally tried to lose in an effort to force a three-way tie in the U.S. division that would eliminate an Iowa team that the Washington team wanted to avoid playing in the championship game.
  - Click [here](#) to read more about the 2015 scandal from foxsports.com.
- In 2019, a New Hampshire Little League coach accused a Rhode Island team of cheating (stealing signs) in a tournament game leading up to the Little League World Series.

Professional sports teams are subject to public scorn and fan ridicule when the actions of the front office are perceived as "tanking" (intentionally losing games) in an effort to gain a higher draft pick the following season (typically positioned by the franchise as a "rebuilding year").

- In 2015, it was the NHL's Buffalo Sabres, which led one Buffalo area sports reporter to publish [this story](#) online: "At Every Level of Sport, Tanking Raises Moral Questions".
- Last year, it was NBA teams being [accused](#) of tanking for the opportunity to draft LSU's Ben Simmons, one of the most heralded basketball prospects to enter the NBA in recent history.
- In 2017, Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban came under scrutiny and received a call from league commissioner, Adam Silver, for his comment, "once we were eliminated from the playoffs, we did everything we could to lose games."
- In 2020, after the front office completed a complete shake up of the franchise's roster, including trading and releasing several of the team's top players, many in the media suggested the team was "tanking" to end up with the worst record, and top draft pick next year, for the opportunity to select Clemson's QB Trevor Lawrence in 2021 (Lawrence is considered by many to be a "can't miss" NFL prospect).
  - After the team traded Pro Bowl defensive standout Yannick Ngakoue and released star running back Leonard Fournette, many in the media accused the team of "Tanking for Trevor"
    - [USA Today](#): "The team waived running back Leonard Fournette on Monday, a stunning decision many outsiders view as the latest in a series of head scratchers that could help the franchise tank the season and get the No. 1 draft pick" while a [Fan Sided](#) headline reported "Jaguars going into complete Tank for Trevor Lawrence mode" and a [Bleacher Report](#) headline read "Jacksonville Jaguars in Driver's Seat for Trevor Lawrence After Ngakoue Trade".
- In 2022, both the Miami Dolphins and Cleveland Browns were investigated by the NFL after accusations of "tanking" were filed. In both cases, however, the league was unable to find evidence that the teams were intentionally losing games and neither the Dolphins nor the Browns faced any punishment.
- In 2023, the NBA [fined](#) the Dallas Mavericks \$750,000 for tanking when they began resting players at the end of the season in an effort to improve their chances at a lottery pick in the 2023 draft. The NBA concluded that the Mavericks engaged in "conduct detrimental to the league."

The concept of tanking has long been a conversation in the NFL with several teams in recent years all but admitting they were trying to lose games to secure higher draft picks. Many [experts](#) think if the NFL adopted a draft lottery system they could eliminate teams from losing on purpose.

## Compensation For College Athletes

In 2021, the NCAA began to allow its athletes to monetize their name, image and likeness, or NIL. The move represents one of the biggest changes to the landscape of college athletics in history, and opens the door to collegiate athletes potentially earning millions through endorsement deals and sponsored content on social media.

Immediately after the rule took effect, several college football, basketball, and volleyball players cashed in. NCAA athletes were allowed to begin profiting from their NIL on July 1<sup>st</sup>, and Nebraska volleyball star Lexi Sun [announced](#) on Twitter that her clothing line with partner Ren Athletics would launch July 1<sup>st</sup> at midnight.

The University of North Carolina also quickly jumped to the forefront, developing a program to organize group licensing deals for its athletes. According to [NPR](#), UNC athletes can now earn money from their NIL alongside the school's trademarks and logos, meaning when a UNC jersey bearing their name and number is sold, the student-athletes would be paid by a third party (not by the University).

- It took less than a month for the University of Alabama's quarterback to cash in on the new rules as Bryce Young rang up over [\\$1 million](#) in Name, Image and Likeness endorsement deals, despite the fact that he had only thrown 22 pass attempts in his entire college career
- Syracuse basketball star (and the son of the team's coach), Buddy "Buckets" Boeheim, became the [first college athlete](#) in the new NIL era to sell gear with his name and also have it licensed with the trademark of the university
  - Buddy Buckets merchandise included:
    - Hoodies for \$59.99
    - T-shirts for \$29.99
    - A "Buddy Buckets" inscribed mini-basketball for \$75
    - Limited edition trading cards for \$45
    - A 15-20 minute Zoom call with Buddy for \$200
- High school basketball sensation Mikey Williams, one of the top prospects in the 2023 college basketball recruiting class, quickly took advantage of the new rules when it was announced that he signed a contract with an agency to handle his NIL rights.
  - According to ESPN, thanks in part to his massive following on social media (Mikey has over 5 million followers across his platforms), the deal is expected to generate "millions" for the young star.

## How have athletes benefited from NIL?

In year one of NIL, athletes throughout the country cashed in, earning thousands of dollars in income through deals that NCAA rules had previously restricted.

Some athletes have incredible earning potential with millions of dollars up for grabs in the NIL space.

- University of North Carolina star Armando Bacot was projected to be an NBA draft pick after a strong season that culminated with an appearance in the NCAA championship game in 2022. However, thanks to assurances that he would earn an estimated [\\$500,000](#) in NIL and other deals, he decided to return to the Tarheels for his senior season.
- In its ["NIL 100 Rankings"](#), the recruiting and NIL website On3 suggested Bronny James' NIL value as a high school senior was \$7.2 million, thanks to [deals](#) with companies such as Nike, Beats by Dre and PSD Underwear. Others on the list include LSU volleyball star Livvy Dunne (\$3.3 million), Texas quarterback Arch Manning (\$2.9 million), USC quarterback Caleb Williams (\$2.6 million), Oregon quarterback Bo Nix (\$1.7 million), and LSU basketball star Angel Reese (\$1.6 million).

There is plenty of NIL money to go around. It isn't just the high profile athletes at power five, name-brand colleges and universities getting NIL deals. Athletes across all sports and at smaller schools are also seeing the benefits.

- For example, Rayquan Smith, the self-proclaimed "King of NIL" is a track-and-field star and running back at Norfolk State, a small HBCU on the Virginia coast. Smith made a [reported](#) 70 different endorsement deals in the first year of the new NIL rules.
- Cassidy Cerny, a cheerleader at Indiana University who gained instant fame after a video of her dislodging a basketball from the top of the backboard during the broadcast of a 2022 NCAA tournament game went viral, [signed](#) a NIL deal with a t-shirt company, BreakingT.

Others benefit from NIL collectives. Collectives are essentially organizations created by prominent alumni, influential supporters/boosters, and donors who pool funds together for a specific school or institution. These collectives are putting even more pressure on the existing NCAA financial model, pushing college football toward a model that more closely resembles professional sport.

- The Volunteer Club, described by [Sports Illustrated](#) as “one of the largest and most ambitious collectives in the country.” With more than 1,000 members, The Volunteer Club distributed about \$4 million to 130 University of Tennessee student athletes in 2021, with a goal of raising \$25 million for the 2022-23 academic year.
- By 2023, Tennessee’s NIL operation had become the leading collective in the nation, according to [On3](#), with the Volunteer Club growing to 2,769 members, and its “Spyre Sports Group” having worked 1,400 deals, with 90 athletes on active contracts. The Volunteer Club had procured \$13.5 million in NIL deals in the last two years.

## How have collegiate athletic programs responded to NIL?

Colleges and universities have been quick to embrace NIL, helping their athletes to navigate the new opportunity.

- After the 2022 season, Duke basketball created a new position on its staff designed specifically to help players understand and maximize their NIL opportunities, and [hired](#) former Nike and NBA employee Rachel Baker as the program’s General Manager.
- By 2023, many programs had established internal programs to help guide and facilitate NIL deals for its athletes, like Ohio State’s “[Corporate Ambassador Program](#)” to help arrange partnerships between Buckeyes’ athletes and local businesses, and the creation of the “[Edge Team](#)”, an internal advisory group.

## How have brands responded to NIL?

It isn’t just local car dealerships and restaurants, national brands have partnered with college athletes for NIL deals.

- Just prior to the start of the 2022-23 football season, Auburn Tigers quarterback T.J. Finley [inked](#) a deal with Amazon, becoming the first college athlete to sign a NIL deal with the company
- Rather than pursuing deals with individual athletes, Adidas [created](#) a NIL network for up to 50,000 college athletes to become paid endorsers for the brand.

NIL deals offer brands an opportunity to get creative with their marketing.

- Kool-Aid [signed](#) Alabama defensive back Ga’Quincy McKinstry to a NIL deal in 2021. McKinstry’s nickname is “Kool-Aid.”
- Former Texas Longhorns’ Heisman-candidate running back, Bijan Robinson, created his own condiment, launching “Bijan Mustardson” (a gourmet dijon mustard product) in 2022. The [online store](#) also featured merchandise including shirts, hats, and foam fingers. Prior to the NIL rule taking place, marketing activities like this were impermissible for NCAA athletes.
  - Robinson also lined up a [deal](#) with an Austin area Lamborghini dealership in 2022.

However, like any endorsement deal, NIL deals with athletes present some risk to the brand.

- Myles Brennan, quarterback for the LSU football team, had NIL deals in place with Raising Canes, Smoothie King, GameCoin, a local car dealership, and a local restaurant (via Darren Rovell on [Twitter](#)). However, just before the start of the 2022 season, Brennan abruptly decided to walk away from football.

## What does the future hold for NIL?

One year into the new NIL rules, the landscape remains a bit murky as schools, athletes, and the businesses negotiating deals continue to explore ways to work together. In the short-term, brands and collectives will continue to sign student athletes to lucrative NIL deals, without structured regulation.

- In the summer of 2022, the NCAA [said](#) that its enforcement staff was “actively investigating potential abuses of NIL transactions” as it relates to recruiting and asked schools to assist in those investigations.
- As NIL continues to grow, the [Sports Business Journal](#) has reported that the NCAA board and other college leaders have made it clear that they want to see more enforcement of long-established rules to help regulate how NIL deals are made and violations are enforced.

Could this lead to college athletes being paid? The wheels could already be in motion. On the heels of its historic \$1 billion media rights deal, Big Ten commissioner Kevin Warren suggested the conference sees a future where athletes receive compensation above and beyond NIL opportunities. Appearing on HBO’s *Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel* (via [Brett McMurphy](#) of The Action Network on Twitter), Warren said the Big Ten envisions the league eventually having 20 members and paying players.

## “Sportswashing”

**Sportswashing** is the practice of an organizational or governmental effort to leverage sports to reshape or improve their image. Most often, this occurs through the sponsorship of an event and/or its athletes, or by hosting an event (typically a mega-event). Globally, sportswashing is a tactic that can be used as a political strategy for directing attention away from controversies or scandals, including human rights allegations and corruption.



### PODCAST ALERT

For a great conversation about the controversial practice of “sportswashing”, consider sharing (or assigning) a podcast discussing the topic. Freakonomics discussed the concept of sportswashing in an episode in 2022, including a conversation surrounding the 2022 FIFA World Cup, Beijing Winter Olympics, and LIV Golf. Click here to visit the Freakonomics website to listen to “What is Sportswashing (and does it work)?” podcast.

### Recent examples of sportswashing:

#### 2022: LIV Golf

- Saudi Arabia spent billions of dollars to create an upstart professional golf league, luring some of the biggest stars in the game to join the tour, diverting the world’s attention away from criticism of the Saudi government.
- Saudi Arabia also has its sights set on hosting major global sporting events, [saying](#) the Olympic Games would be an “ultimate goal” for the country.

#### 2022: Beijing Winter Olympic Games

- China played host to the 2022 Winter Games, despite alleged human rights violations and its opposition to independent Taiwan.

#### 2022: FIFA World Cup

- Qatar, amid criticism for their position on women’s rights, treatment of the LGBTQ community, and abuse of migrant workers, spent a [reported](#) \$220 billion to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

#### 2018: FIFA World Cup

- Russia used the 2018 FIFA World Cup to influence the perception millions of fans around the globe had about the host country, deflecting attention away from growing international tensions and human rights controversies.

## UNIT 11: KEY TERMS DEFINED

**Clickbait:** headlines or other content, typically online or posted on social media, whose goal is to attract consumer attention in a way that leads visitors to click on a particular web page.

**Community Relations:** Focus on an individual or organization's commitment to bettering their community.

**Crisis Management:** a coordinated effort to handle the effects of unfavorable publicity or of an unfavorable event.

**Ethics:** The moral standards by which people judge behavior.

**Foundation:** An association established by an organization, athlete or celebrity to maintain, assist, or finance other institutions or programs that are of an educational, charitable, or social nature.

**Goodwill:** A general willingness to work with a person or organization based on a positive reputation or relationship.

**Media Blitz:** an intense communications campaign which utilizes various aspects of media to reach as many consumers as possible.

**Media Relations:** The relationship between an organization and the media.

**Press Conference:** when an organization spokesperson or the athlete/entertainer addresses the media to answer questions or make announcements.

**Press Kit:** press kits provide information regarding an organization or event to the media in a variety of ways. It is a package of information distributed to the media to assist them in reporting.

**Press Release:** Prewritten story about an organization or athlete/entertainer that is disseminated to various media.

**Public Relations:** Activities that promote the image and communications an organization has with its employees, customers and public.

**Publicity:** Public information about a company/team, good, or service appearing in the mass media as a news item at no cost to the organization.

**Publicity Plan:** a publicity plan identifies how the organization intends to generate publicity and monitor and gauge community response to each organizational effort to manage the publicity.

**Publicity Stunt:** Specific events or activities that are activated with the sole purpose of achieving a high level of media coverage and public awareness.

**Social Issues:** everything from the ethical actions of athletes, entertainers and sport/entertainment organizations to the sports and entertainment industry's efforts to do their part to positively impact society.

**Sportswashing:** the practice of an organizational or governmental effort to leverage sports to reshape or improve their image.