

Understanding Sports Philanthropy: The Case of Denver Sports Teams

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Professional team sports continue to play an important role in city and state economies and provide a mechanism for creating community unity and cohesion. According to the Internal Revenue Service, sports team franchises generate revenues from a variety of sources, including: revenue sharing from national television broadcasts, merchandise licenses, gate receipts,¹ local media, and stadium box seats revenue. The industry of professional sports is a multi-billion dollar industry. Most recognize the immediate economic return that teams bring into communities and the loyal fan base that keep their teams sustainable. However, upon further examination of professional sports and their economic and social roles, an interesting question emerges as to what understanding professional teams have as to what their role is within civil society. The overarching question becomes whether or not professional sports teams have a responsibility to act in a socially responsible fashion and be contributors to the maintenance of our civil society? In a famous quote by Charles Barkley, he states that he is “not a role model.” However, given the semi-celebrity status bestowed upon athletes and their associated team, one has to wonder if Barkley’s statement is truly accurate. Nike uses the slogan “be like Mike;” while Sprite uses “The Life.” The branding of athletes suggests that the public/fans are either listening and/or emulating the actions of their favorite athletes. Perhaps Barkley is wrong; maybe athletes and professional sports teams are role models. If one believes this assumption, then it is not hard to believe that professional sports teams have a socially responsible role to play within our society.

This paper explores the world of professional team sports philanthropy through an examination of Denver based teams. The purpose of this paper is to create a framework for understanding the philanthropic activities of professional sports teams and to further our understanding of the context in which giving occurs. Increasing our knowledge within these two areas will help charitable organizations to develop stronger strategic partnerships with these possible funding organizations. Using case study methodology, this paper explores four general questions relating to team sport philanthropy:

- To what extent are the major sports teams engaging in philanthropic activities, including volunteerism and grant making?
- What decision-making process is used when deciding on which activities to engage in?
- What are the motivations associated with sports teams who engage in such activities? and
- What positive and/or negative impacts do sports teams experience when dealing with philanthropy?

The answers to these questions provide valuable insights to practitioners and scholars studying philanthropy, but also help to bridge our knowledge and understanding of an understudied segment of philanthropic activities.

¹ According to the IRS Sports Franchise Market Specialization Program report, the sharing of gate receipts varies. The NFL splits gate receipts 60-40 with the home team receiving a larger amount; the NHL allows the home team to retain all gate receipts; the NBA allows the home team to keep 94 percent of the gate and the league keeps the remaining 6 percent; the split in the American League of MLB is 80-20, and the National League the visiting team receives 42 centers per admission (August 1999).

A Framework of Understanding: The Linkage between Corporate Social Responsibility and Sports Philanthropy

There is a gap in the literature concerning the philanthropic activities related to athletics, specifically in the area of team sports. Although there are newspaper and magazine articles that tout the goodwill exhibited by individual athletes and teams, there are few research designs that empirically study the philanthropic activities of the four major sports leagues of football, basketball, baseball, and hockey. Currently, there is only one major organization providing information pertaining to sports philanthropy: The Sports Philanthropy Project. To begin our understanding of the sports philanthropy, it is important to first establish a framework for studying this topic. The most plausible model is that of corporate social responsibility.

Early forms of corporate philanthropy are evidenced through the actions of wealthy philanthropists such as Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller who strategically aligned their wealth to charitable causes. In 1872, the American railroads formed a strategic partnership with the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in order to provide workers with activities and housing. These types of examples led to two court cases: *Steinway v Steinway and Sons et al.* (1896) and *Main v. C.B. & Q Railroad* (1899) which helped to legitimize the use of corporate funds for philanthropy provided that corporate funds would provide social benefits (e.g., homes, churches, and schools) to employees (Sharfman 1994). The return to the corporation was the ability to attract employees. Not all charitable institutions supported the notion of corporate philanthropy. Hull House, for example, rejected donations based upon company employment practices. Additionally, industrialization and urbanization outpaced the need for corporations to pay attention to the needs of the communities in which they operated within.

However, by 1917 a move to legalize corporate contributions continued. By 1935, the Internal Revenue Service created a tax regulation that allowed corporations to deduct up to five percent of their pretax income for charitable contributions. The IRS ruling helped to encourage corporations to not only donate, but also raised legal and ethical concerns. During World War I, several corporations wanted to support the Red Cross, but out of fear and legal uncertainty, corporations declared an extra dividend and submitted it to stockholders with the request that they in turn donate to the Red Cross (Sharfman 1994). This effort involved 148 corporations that donated nearly \$18 million, marking the first time that corporations donated such large sums of money.

Following the Red Cross campaign, states began to pass laws that allowed corporations to make contributions regardless of its relation to the business. The first law was passed in Texas in 1917 with New York, Illinois and Ohio following. In 1953, the Supreme Court definitively ruled that it was not illegal for public corporations to contribute funds to nonprofit organizations in *A.P. Smith Manufacturing Company v. Barlow*. The Court held that shareholders "whose private interests rest entirely upon the well-being of the corporation, ought not to be permitted to close their eyes to present-day realities and thwart the long-visioned corporate action in recognizing and voluntarily discharging its high obligations as a constituent of our modern social structure"

(<http://www.fee.org/vnews>). Despite the legal precedent, the debate over the ethics of

donating funds that were seen as that of shareholders and the proper role and focus of corporations continued.

But in 1971, Milton Friedman became one of the more vocal critics of corporate philanthropy. He thought that corporate philanthropy equated to theft from stockholders insofar as the business manager's social responsibility reduces returns to stockholders (Betsch 1982). Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell (1983) assert, however, that corporate philanthropy's continued legitimacy is attributed to "[inter-organizational] isomorphic pressures." These authors state that organizations are forced to become alike due to pressures which they have classified as coercive, the use of legal or other force; normative or pressures driven by widely-held values; and mimetic, pressure to imitate a successful institutional leader. It is argued that in this way, firms engage in more corporate philanthropy due to increased pressure from other corporations. Additionally, the passing of legislation that allowed for corporate contributions has sent a signal to corporations that the states have sanctioned this as legal and legitimate; therefore, raising corporate expectations (Sharfman 1994). Thus, society and consumers may have come to expect corporate philanthropy.

The concept of corporate social responsibility has evolved since the mid-twentieth century. Myra Alperson (1996) observes that it began in the 1940s with social auditing and the measurement of the impact of business conduct and products on stakeholders. In the sixties and seventies, social auditing began to evolve as consumers became more aware of the ethics behind corporations. Alperson observes that the social screening of companies began to emerge by individuals seeking socially responsible investments.

The 1990s brought new definitions of social responsibility, especially as a response toward increased scrutiny of business. Archie Carroll (1991) defined social responsibility using a pyramid model: at the base is basic economics (the company has a responsibility to be profitable); next the company has the obligation to follow the law; conducting business in an ethical manner follows; and at the top of the pyramid comes philanthropic responsibility to be a good corporate citizen. Terry Besser (2001) defines it as the contribution that businesses make for the better social good beyond what the marketplace value they provide. Lastly, Ed Petkus and Robert Woodruff (1992) define corporate social responsibility simply as doing good while avoiding harm.

In 1994, Walker Information conducted a two-year research project called Measuring Corporate Citizenship Project with 16 multi-national corporations. A survey was sent to over one thousand households of the companies to determine the consumer's perception of the company's social performance. Findings showed that socially responsible companies received a positive corporate reputation, employee and brand commitment and support and loyalty of consumers and stakeholders (Lee 1997).

With this base information, it is easy to link professional sports teams within the umbrella of corporate philanthropy. Professional sports teams operate as business franchises. Like traditional corporations, most sports franchises are privately held but some have public shareholders (e.g., Green Bay Packers). While their bottom line is profitability, many sports teams have found, like their business counterparts, being socially responsible may have a positive return on their brand and the loyalty of their consumers. Thus, the

foundation and economic justification for corporate philanthropy amongst professional sports teams lies in its marketing and public relations benefits (Lee 1997, Tillman 1997, and Sagwa 2000). Corporate philanthropy can be found in many forms and professional sports teams can be found engaging in them: corporate foundations, fund drives, volunteer initiatives, matching gift programs, strategic nonprofit alliances, and marketing promotions. The remainder of this paper explores these types of engagements and their impact.

Creating Context: The World of Sports Philanthropy

The Sports Philanthropy Project defines sports philanthropy as “the emerging sector within corporate philanthropy through which professional sports organizations forge partnerships and strategically invest in the health and well-being of their communities by dedicating and leveraging both financial and in-kind resources to address local problems” (www.sportsphilanthropy.com/faq). Evolving out of the industry of professional sports is a philanthropic world that is complicated by multi-level organizational structures designed to facilitate the process of giving back to the community and a lack of systematic evaluation to measure true impact outside of measuring dollars contributed. According to Greg Johnson, we have to create models for understanding the nature of philanthropic activity by athletes and teams. We need to create models that assess organizational assets versus in-kind donations and contributions (Interview 2005). When sports teams engage in philanthropy, they will often mix and match a wide range mechanisms including: cash grants, tickets, merchandise, game day events, media relations, corporate and league relations, and the celebrity status of athletes (Johnson 2002).

Each professional sport is associated with a league association: National Football League (NFL) National Basketball Association (NBA), National Hockey League (NHL), and Major League Baseball. According to the Internal Revenue Service’s Sports Franchise Market Segment Specialization Program (1999), league associations operate as tax exempt organizations under section 501(c) 6 and are responsible for “promoting the sport; negotiating national television broadcast rights, and national sponsorships agreements; and protecting the interests of the sports franchise owners and the sports league as a whole” (IRS Training 2123-005). Table 1 shows the number of sports teams associated with each league association.

TABLE 1: League Associations and Franchises

League Association	Number of Sports Franchises
National Football League	32
National Basketball Association	30
National Hockey League	30
Major League Baseball	30

According to a study commissioned by the Sports Philanthropy Project by Rebecca Robinson (2005), “the total population base of 114 major league teams in the U.S. has the following distribution of foundation types: 48 percent are 501(c)3 public foundations, 24 percent are 501(c)3 private foundations, 12 percent are donor advised funds of a larger community foundation, 7 percent are affiliated with owners’ separate charities, and 9

percent have no established foundation, fund, or affiliation.²” Thus, sports teams have created vehicles to implement their programs of philanthropy.

Each professional league association has designed and currently promotes some type of philanthropic program for its franchises to participate in. Most programs are designed to provide guidance to franchises as they implement their own form of sports philanthropy. The following is a snapshot of the program design and associated activities for each league.

National Football League

The National Football League commitment to philanthropy began over 75 years ago. The NFL creates umbrella programs that they promote to team franchises to participate within. Major program initiatives include: One World educational classroom, the United Way Partnership and the Super Bowl and Pro Bowl event-based outreach. To better understand their program structure, the NFL has six program themes. Table 2 highlights each program area and provides brief descriptions.

Table 2: NFL Program Initiatives

Program Initiative	Description
Youth: A Better Future	These youth programs are designed to stimulate young minds, encourage healthy lifestyles and promote a life-long love of athletics and football. Youth programs include: Teacher of the Year, Punt, Pass & Kick, NFL Youth Education Towns, NFL Junior and High School Player Development, & Play it Smart.
Community: Building Strong Ties	Community outreach centers on creating opportunities for individuals and families to succeed. Programs include Pro Bowl Outreach, Tuesdays in the Community, and Super Bowl Outreach
Diversity: Understanding Each Other	NFL multicultural programs celebrate the diversity of the nation while working to create educational, economic and outreach opportunities for all people in all communities. Programs include Minority Coaching Fellowship, International Outreach and One World – Connecting Communities, Cultures and Classrooms.
Volunteerism: Lending a Helping Hand	Join the Team allows NFL fans to join teams in volunteer projects that shape communities. Programs include NFL Community Quarterback Award, NFL Junior Community Quarterback, Walter Payton NFL Man of the Year Award and Student All Star Program.
Health	The health program centers on creating a balanced and healthy lifestyle for individuals and families. Programs include NATA and PFAS Scholarships, Teamsmart, and Play Safe (Health and Safety Series
NFL Charities	NFL Charities supports programs and initiatives that deliver education and youth services, designates funds to assist the foundations of current and former players working in local communities and awards sports-related medical research grants that advance sports medicine.

Source: The Official Website of the National Football League (www.nfl.com)

² Note: Robinson’s 2005 study excludes the eight Canadian teams associated with professional sports due to the difference in the tax laws and regulations of Canadian charities.

National Basketball Association

The National Basketball Association created an umbrella structure known as NBA CARES to “address important social issues with an emphasis on programs that support education, youth and family development and health-related causes.” The impact of NBA CARES is for “the league, players, and teams to raise and contribute \$100 million for charity, donate more than 1 million hours of hands-on volunteer service to communities around the world and build more than 100 places where kids and can learn and play” (<http://www.nba.com>). Table 3 provides a brief listing of the programs associated with NBA CARES.

Table 3: National Basketball Association Program Initiatives

Program Initiative	Description
Read to Achieve	A year-round campaign to help young people develop a life-long love for reading and encourage adults to read regularly with children.
Hurricane Relief	Partnership with the American Red Cross to encourage donations for relief efforts.
Reading Programs and Events	NBA’s Read and Learning Centers or Reading Corners that encourage read-alouds, shared reading and online activities at schools, community-based organizations
Jr. NBA/Jr. WNBA	This program encourages youth basketball participation programs that stress teamwork, skill development, and sportsmanship for players, parents, officials, and coaches.
Basketball Without Borders	A program designed to promote friendship, goodwill and education among young people through sport.

Source: The Official Website of the National Basketball Association (www.nba.com).

National Hockey League

The National Hockey League also promotes a program of philanthropy. While there is no visible umbrella structure that link their program initiatives together, the NHL offers activities in the areas of diversity, health, grant assistance, and the promotion of team sports. Table 4 provides a summary of each activity.

Table 4: National Hockey League Program Initiatives

Program Initiative	Description
Hockey Fights Cancer	Founded in 1998 by the NHL and the National Hockey League Players’ Association, Hockey Fights Cancer is an awareness program designed to raise money to fight cancer. More than \$6.8 million dollars has been raised to support local cancer research organizations as well as the American Cancer Society and Canadian Cancer Society national organizations. This initiative features the annual Hockey Fights Cancer On-Line Auction.
NHL Diversity	The NHL Foundation founded this program in 1995. NHL Diversity supports and unique programming to nonprofit youth hockey organizations in North America that are committed to offering opportunities to play hockey to economically disadvantaged boys and girls of all ages.

	Approximately 32 inner city, volunteer organizations receive non-monetary support. Special features of NHL Diversity include the Willie O'Ree All-Star Weekend and the NHL Diversity Hockey Scholarship Program.
NHL A.S.S.I.S.T. Grant Program	For eight years, the NHL Assists Skaters and Shooters Intent on Succeeding Together grant program is designed to help youth hockey organizations worldwide defray the costs of equipment, ice time and travel. The grant awards are up to \$10,000 for a total of \$100,000.
Hockey's All-Star Kids	The NHL and the National Hockey League Players' Association created the Hockey's All-Star Kids Foundation in 1999. The foundation is designed to link the hockey community with the youngest victims of cancer and other diseases. Through a partnership with Children's Hospitals in Canada and the United States, the program includes patient visits, fund-raising support and activities that create a positive environment for patients and their families.

Source: The Official Website of the National Hockey League (www.nhl.com)

Major League Baseball

Major League Baseball groups its ten philanthropic activities under the umbrella of MLBCommunityprograms. Table five provides a summary of each activity.

Table 5: Major League Baseball

Program Initiative	Description
Baseball Tomorrow Fund	A joint partnership between the Major League Baseball Players Association and Major League Baseball, Baseball Tomorrow provides funding for programs, fields, and equipment purchases for youth baseball in the United States, Canada, and the world.
Baseball Assistance Team	B.A.T. provides help to former players in need. Since its inception in 1986, B.A.T. has helped more than 1,700 individuals for a total exceeding \$12 million. Through charitable contributions from corporations, foundations and individuals, B.A.T. provides assistance to those with financial, psychological or physical burdens.
Boys & Girls Clubs of America	1997 marked the creation of the partnership between Major League Baseball and the Boys & Girls clubs America. The partnership looks for ways to help prepare kids for the 21 st century. As an official charity of Major League Baseball, Boys & Girls Clubs of America directly benefit from programs such as Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities and Rookie Leagues. The partnership also includes a donation of \$2.5 million by MLB and has resulted in more than \$16 million in direct and indirect support from individual teams and players.
Breaking Barriers: In Sports, In Life	Breaking Barriers is a multi-curricular character education program developed by MLB, Major League Baseball Players' Trust for Children and

	Scholastic, Inc. The curriculum uses baseball theme activities and lessons to teach children the values and traits needed to overcome barriers and challenges in life.
FanFest	John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance company and Major League Baseball partner to provide an interactive baseball spectacular for baseball fans of all ages.
Join the Major Leagues @ Your Library	2005 sparks the start of Batter Up for 21 st Century Literacy – Join the Major Leagues @ Your Library. A partnership between Major League Baseball and the American Library Association, his program is designed to help all ages build 21 st century literacy skills: learning how to use the computer and other media; learning how to find, evaluate and use information; and learning how to use information and communicate.
Pepsi's Pitch, Hit and Run	Pitch, Hit and Run provides boys and girls aged 7 to 14, with the opportunity to showcase pitching, hitting, and running abilities. There are four levels of competition that provide participants with the opportunity to reach the National Finals at the MLB All-Star Game.
Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities	Since 1989, Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities has grown into an international campaign of over 200 cities and 95,000 players. The program provides disadvantaged youth an opportunity to learn and play the game of baseball.
Roberto Clemente Award	In partnership with John Hancock Financial Services, the Roberto Clemente Award (originally the Commissioner's Award) is given annually to the baseball player who displays a strong commitment to community and understanding of the value of helping others. Each team nominates a player. This award has been given since 1972.
Rookie League	The Rookie League Pitching Machine Program was created in 2002 in partnership with the Boys & Girls Clubs of America for children ages 5-12. This program is designed to teach the basics of baseball. Currently, there are a total of 132 Rookie League Programs.

Source: The Official Website of Major League Baseball (www.mlb.com)

While each professional league has established some type of philanthropic program and has participation from athletes and sports teams, only the National Basketball Association through the Collective Bargaining Agreement requires players to participate in philanthropic projects: seven individual and six team appearances.

While one can study the activities related to sports philanthropy by examining league programs, more can be learned by looking at the implementation of activities through the vantage point of sports teams. By studying professional sports, one can ascertain questions that may lend themselves to a macro-level analysis that can be studied quantitatively.

Methodology

Robert Yin (1984) asserts that a case study is an appropriate methodological approach when (1) the particular case represents a critical test of the proposed theory/strategic response; (2) the case is a unique event; and (3) the analysis serves a revelatory purpose (i.e., the investigator is able to analyze a phenomenon previously inaccessible to scientific investigation and able to produce descriptive information pertaining to the phenomenon being studied). The following analysis is of Denver based - professional sports teams: Broncos (football), Avalanche (hockey), Nuggets (basketball), and Rockies (baseball).³ The city of Denver was chosen because it hosts all of the professional teams, for proximity to the researcher, and for its uniqueness with regards to team ownership.

The case study provides an accurate narrative description of each team franchise's activities associated with philanthropy. The case study uses qualitative approaches to data collection and analysis. Information was drawn from elite interviews with the person(s) responsible for charitable causes (i.e., Community Relations personnel) and an analysis of program records. Interviews followed a specified set of questions and were conducted in a manner that allowed the interviewees to offer guidance and instruction about how philanthropic activities unfold and their perceived impact.

In general, the case study focuses on questions associated with nature of philanthropic giving. More specifically, the case analysis describes the organization's context (i.e., the type of franchise, types of charitable giving/programmatic activities, and its physical, financial, and human resources). Following this, an effort is made to understand why particular teams engage in their selected types of philanthropic activities. Other questions at this point address decision-making, accountability, and evaluation of activities. Finally, an assessment of the nature of the benefits derived from engaging in philanthropy is made in the context of the organization under analysis. Here, the focus is on the perceived gains and the implications of such an effort on the ability of the organization to satisfy its original mission when it comes to philanthropy. Through this kind of analysis, a better understanding of practices associated team with team sport philanthropy is gained.

An Examination of Denver Based Sports Teams

Kroenke Sports Enterprises (Denver Nuggets and Colorado Avalanche)

E. Stanley Kroenke is the owner of Kroenke Sports Enterprises, LLC, a unique sports venture within the sports industry. Kroenke Sports owns and operates several professional sports teams and related businesses, including: Colorado Rapids (Major League Soccer), The Colorado Mammoth (National Lacrosse League), one-third interest in the Colorado Crush (Arena Football), Altitude Sports & Entertainment (24-hour regional television network), Nuggets (National Basketball), Avalanche (National Hockey), Prairie Gateway (Soccer Stadium), and the Pepsi Center and Universal Lending Pavilion, the Paramount Theater. The vast holdings of Kroenke Sports are extremely important to the philanthropic activities of their associated sports teams because they are

³ Note: At time of presentation -- Information related to the Colorado Rockies will be omitted from this working paper -- a consent form needs to be secured to identify persons related to the case. Once the form is secure the information will be placed into the study.

able to quickly integrate services into a seamless production that enables to leverage their philanthropic activities quickly and effectively into the community. For example, they own major cultural facilities in which they can hold various events and control a major media outlet that creates a mechanism for marketing and advertising activities.

Program Activities

Philanthropic activities are under the direction of Vice President of Community Relations, Deb Dowling Canino and her four person staff. The staff work to implement a program of giving in the primary areas of education and health and youth sports programs. Cash contributions, event partnerships, donations of autographed merchandise and tickets, grants, board service, player appearances and employee volunteerism round out their philanthropic activities. Based on information provided in their *Summer 2005 Update*, the following is a description of their philanthropic activities:

- Kroenke Sports Charities Ticket Donation Program: This program allows people the opportunity to attend an event at the Pepsi Center and Universal Lending Pavilion. During the 2004-05 season of the Denver Nuggets, over 8,800 tickets were donated. Additionally, over 250 people were given the opportunity to attend a Nuggets basketball game with their family through the Quality Time Program whose mission is to encourage parents to spend quality time with their kids.
- Art of Sport: This program encourages creativity and an interest in the arts for elementary school students. Participants receive a sports-themed art book and are invited to submit an original piece of artwork for judging. Students have experienced the arts with athletes by touring the Denver Art Museum or painting pottery at Color Me Mine.
- YMCA Jr. Nuggets: Operating in 14 YMCAs, the Junior Nuggets program serves over 17,000 boys and girls (3-17 years in age). This program works to build athletic ability and leadership skills with the assistance of players, alumni and coaches.
- Read Team: This program helps 2nd-3rd graders increase their literacy skills and love of reading by asking them to read for 20 minutes a day for 20 days in the months of January and February. During the 2005 season, over 5,000 metro area students read a total of 400,000 minutes and were rewarded for their reading with prizes from the Denver Nuggets and Mammoth.
- Team Fit: Team Fit encourages physical fitness among children in K-5th grade. Participants receive fitness instruction tips and exercises with an emphasis on participation rather than ability. Classrooms with high levels of participation are rewarded with team incentives including an opportunity to work out in the Nuggets locker room and on the practice court.
- NBA All-Star Game: In 2005, city of Denver hosted the All-Star Game. Through a collaborative partnership with Carmelo Anthony and the Eddie's Kids Foundation, over 2,000 children were able to attend an the interactive basketball exhibit known as Jam Session.

Additionally, the Nuggets and Avalanche have created the Denver Nuggets and Colorado Avalanche Community Funds both funds of the McCormick Tribune Foundation.⁴ These funds support Colorado nonprofit organizations that serve the needs of low-income children and families. The dollars raised are matched by the McCormick Tribune Foundation at a significant percentage; thus increasing the dollar amount available to support local programs (Summer Update 2005). Both funds use a themed quarterly grant cycle: 1st Cycle – Education and Business Sense, 2nd Cycle – The Love of Sport, 3rd Cycle – Community Development, and 4th Cycle – Health and Well-Being. The following is a description of the programs funded by the Community Fund. The McCormick Tribune sets the mission and parameters for grant making. Currently, grants are to serve underserved family and children. No money is granted for advocacy or research. Neither fund has a published mission statement. The primary interests of the Nuggets include: youth programs (at risk), education, health, and local charities. The primary interests for the Avalanche are: Children and Families (child abuse/domestic violence prevention, drug and alcohol abuse, health and well-being of sick or disabled youth; tutoring and mentoring for children; food, clothing, shelter, parenting and strengthening the family unit, and youth sports) (www.rrmtf.org).

Funded programs include:

- Denver Public Schools Foundation: Both the Denver Nuggets Community fund and the Colorado Avalanche community Fund support the Denver Public Schools Lights on After School Initiative. This program initiative created the Denver Prep League that includes six sports: volleyball, basketball, soccer, cross country, baseball, and flag football for 22 middle schools. Students must maintain a C average or better to remain eligible.
- Event Partnerships: A number of events benefiting local agencies are sponsored in part by the Nuggets and Avalanche Funds. These events include: Denver Polo Classic, Celebration for Young Entrepreneurs, Fall Classic at Sanctuary, Western Fantasy, Race for the Cure, Raising the Roof, Legends and Champions, Brokers Benefiting Kids, U.S. Soccer Foundation Pass Back, Wild Wicked Evening, Building For Children Gala, and Avs Celebrity Golf Classic.

According to the McCormick Tribune Foundation's *2004 Annual Report*, the Colorado Avalanche Community Fund gave \$793,000. The Denver Nuggets Community Fund gave \$1,078,000 (p. 39).

⁴ Note: The Denver Nuggets is one of 49 funds of the McCormick Tribune Foundation's Community Programs. The Community Programs consists of partnerships with newspaper, television, radio and sports organizations. "Because of their high profile and broad impact in their communities, program partners can be very successful in raising public awareness, and funds, in support of important local issues. The matching dollars provided by the foundation further increase the impact of local giving. Although the foundation's board of directors retains final approval of all fund guidelines and all grants, the Communities Program allows program partners considerable discretion over their giving. Partners choose grantmaking priorities and suggest to the foundation guidelines for their funds based upon local community needs" (www.rrmtf.org).

Kroenke Sports has also created an employee volunteer program known as KSE C.A.R.E. (Community Assists Reflect Excellence). This program is designed to give employees an opportunity to participate in service projects that benefit disadvantaged children and their families. For 2005, employees partnered with Centex homes and Habitat For Humanity of Metro Denver for “Adopt-A-Day” project, where they built the foundation for a home. For the third straight year, employees returned to Fairview Elementary, a Denver Public School to present Junior Achievement elementary school curriculum over the course of a school day. This program is designed to inspire kids to learn the economics of life through free enterprise education.

Canino asserts that like most professional sports teams, their mission and activities center on children and youth. “Kids are a natural bond;” they enjoy and play the game (Interview 2005).

According to the Summer 2005 Update, more than \$15 million in contributions have been made to Colorado charities through the Denver Nuggets and Colorado Avalanche Community Funds and funds of the McCormick Tribune Foundation since 2000. The Colorado Avalanche and Denver Nuggets Community Funds, in partnership with The McCormick Tribune Foundation. Additionally, in 2005 in just 10 days, the funds raised more than \$4 million for the victims of Hurricane Katrina. Deb Dowling Canino reports that since 1993, the Nuggets have contributed over \$22 million; while the Avalanche have given over \$10 million since 1995 to various philanthropic activities.

There are a few programs that fall within the program areas of the National Basketball Association and National Hockey League. According to Canino, the programs follow the outline/parameters of the national leagues but are adapted to fit the local context (Canino Interview 2005).

Decision Making & Participation

In order to receive support from either the Fund or the Team, applicants must follow and fit the grant guidelines. Although the philanthropic program is implemented by a staff of five, the ultimate decisions as to what the actual activities and/or amounts of money that will be contributed rests with senior staff (i.e., Executive Vice President, Senior Vice President of Finance and the Vice President of Community Relations). Ultimate authority rests with the owner.

Players for the Nuggets are contractually obligated to participate in two team community events; players for the Avalanche are obligated to participate in three events. One of required events is the Choppers Dinner (a major fundraising dinner). Team personnel (i.e., coaches, cheerleaders, mascot) are also invited to participate in events. Players may suggest philanthropic activities for the team to participate and/or ask for charities to affiliate from Community Relations staff. While the staff has the option of participating or not, they will help players with their initiatives by providing research and recommendations. They will also help to link players with other aspects of their in-house operations (e.g., media, venues). By working as a coordinating arm, community relations staff can assure that favorable stories appear in the media and that players are not competing with each other when it comes to similar interests. According to Canino, the community relations department is “overly protective” of their players; therefore, they

want to work with their athletes. Staff work to coordinate efforts to prevent duplication; however, if the player has their own foundation they will not interfere or provide assistance. This level of over protection ties to “protecting the Denver Nuggets brand and the company’s reputation” (Interview Dowling, 2005).

Quantification of Time and Evaluation:

Rooted in the collective bargaining agreement of the National Basketball Association, Denver Nuggets players are contractually obligated to make individual and team appearances. Each appearance and/or activity lasts between three to four hours on average. The Avalanche are obligated through team contracts but not through the Association. According to Canino, there is no process in place to systematically evaluate philanthropic activity. Most of the time, the community relations department relies on outside indicators to measure success as provided by their community partners. Canino asserts that results do happen because of the “star-status” of their athletes. She believes that success is attributable to the fact that kids want to mirror the actions of their favorite star-athlete so if he says to read they will read. Thus, the celebrity of athletes creates change.

Costs, Benefits and Reorganization:

According to Canino, the benefits of sports philanthropy for Kroenke Sports far outweigh the negatives. She asserts the biggest cost to the organization came five years ago when a Nuggets coach made “stressful” comments that had a negative impact on the Latino community. The organization, however, turned this negativity into a positive with the creation of a Latino Advisory Committee that works directly with the Kroenke Sports.

Within the last three years, the organization made changes in its management and operational structure that resulted in more open communication. Specifically, the organization realigned its community relations’ structure with that of corporate relations and fan services, resulting in stronger internal relations to yield better philanthropic results. According to Canino, Kroenke Sports has a “duty to make the community better. Kids are the future and in order to give them a chance at a quality future, the organization will continue to leverage the talents of their players back into the community” (Interview, 2005).

The Denver Broncos

Bowlen Sports, Inc. is the corporate general partner of the Denver Broncos Football Club. Bowlen Sports manages finance and corporate family matters. Both Bowlen Sports, Inc. and the Denver Broncos Football Club are owned and operated by President and Chief Executive Officer Pat Bowlen. Bowlen Sports includes ownership of INVESCO Field at Mile High.⁵ Philanthropic activities occur through the Denver Broncos Charities Fund, a fund of the Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation established in 1994. Like Kroenke Sports, the Broncos Charities’ mission centers on children. Unlike Kroenke Sports, the Broncos Charities have a definitive mission statement:

⁵ Note: A portion of the costs are covered by a penny per \$10 sales tax on retail goods paid by the voters of a six county area that agreed to the construction.

The Denver Broncos Charities Fund supports programs designed to positively impact youth in the areas of education and youth football with a particular emphasis on programs aimed at disadvantaged and at-risk youth. The Fund will also consider organizations that have programs devoted to health and hunger, including specific programs related to the physically or mentally challenged (Denver Broncos Charities Fund Information Sheet 2005).

Like Kroenke Sports, criteria are used to review applications semi-annually. Funded activities of the Broncos Charities in 2005⁶ include the following:

- The Denver Broncos Boys and Girls Club: Opened on August 28, 2003, the Denver Broncos Boys and Girls club has 1,400 members ranging in age of six to 18. The club was made possible due to a Bronco commitment of \$1.2 million for five-years.
- The Ronald McDonald House of Denver: A fund partner since 1998, the Denver Broncos work through the annual Light the House Campaign. Light the House is a 50-foot heart structure in a house that is hung outside INVESCO field. For every donation of \$5 or more a bulb inside the structure is lit – the goal is to light the house.
- Lynche’s Leaders (John Lynch Foundation Partnership): This partnership has led to the expansion of the Broncos’ relationship with the Boys and Girls Club to six additional affiliate branches in Denver. The program concentrates on teaching leadership skills to junior and high school members over a six-month period.
- Tackling Prostate Cancer Campaign: Partnering with the Prostate Cancer Education Council’s free screening week, Broncos work to promote the need for prostate testing. Al Wilson has been the spokesperson for the past three years. The campaign also includes Wilson’s participation in the PCEC Annual golf Tournament and visiting screening sites.
- Youth Football Task Force: Started in 2004, the task force is comprised of metropolitan Denver youth league representatives who come together to address issues of concern of youth football players (e.g., techniques, sportsmanship and recruitment).
- Broncos Charities Reading Corners: This program began in 2004 and provides libraries with kid-friendly furniture in Broncos’ colors throughout the Denver Public School System. The goal is to create 5 to 7 reading corners every year.
- Broncos Bowl: Simulating a real “professional football atmosphere” youth teams are invited to INVESCO Field at Mile High to scrimmage and celebrate what it means to be an athlete.
- Broncos Wives Food Drive: Since 1981, Colorado’s hungry and homeless have benefited from this drive sponsored by the wives of Bronco players, coaches and staff. Cash donations and non-perishable food items are collected outside the gates of the stadium from fans. COMPA Food Ministry distributes the goods to food pantries.
- Brown Robe Benefit: Since its start in 1994, Pat Bowlen has served as the honorary chair of this fundraiser that benefits the Capuchin Franciscan Province of Mid-America Inner City Programs. Proceeds go to disadvantaged youth in the five points.

⁶ Information from the 2005 Denver Broncos Annual Report and www.broncos.com

- Cherish the Children Gala: Annabel Bowlen serves as one of the Chairs and the President of the Beacon Center. The gala showcases members of the Cheerleaders squad performing and Broncos players and wives participating “Champs on the Ramp.” The Beacon Center provides services in the area of residential care, mental-health treatment, education and support to adolescents ages 10-18.
- Pro Active Pro Athletes: In Partnership with the Denver Domestic Violence Task Force and Verizon Wireless, Broncos have partnered with other sports athletes to provide public service announcements and collect cell phones to help assist the victims of domestic violence.
- Drive for Life: In partnership with Bonfils Blood Center, Drive for Life is one of the largest blood drives in the country. Rod Smith serves as the spokesperson and is motivated by his daughter’s need for transfusions due to her Sickle Cell Anemia.
- Annual Youth of the Year: Held at INVESCO Field at Mile High, the Annual Youth of the Year is the largest fundraiser for the Boys and Girls Club of metro Denver. The Youth of the Year receives a \$4000 scholarship as a contribution to a young person’s journey to successful adulthood. This program began in 1961.
- INVESCO Field at Mile High: Since 2001, the stadium and Centerplate work with nonprofit organizations/groups to staff concession and merchandise booths. \$3.95 million has been placed back into the community. Additionally, INVESCO Field has hosted multiple special events and assisted nonprofit organizations with their fundraising efforts. Over \$1 million has been raised on behalf of nonprofit organizations and special causes through attendee support and in-kind donations.

Other activities include: Wells Fargo Bank Cup, Law Enforcement Torch Run, Tip-A-Cop, Denver Broncos Community Holiday Party, Safe Proms in Colorado, Mike Shanahan Golf Classic, Fantasy Playground Builds, Gatorade Jr. Training Camps, and Kids Caravan. Unlike Kroenke Sports, The Denver Broncos publish a readily available table summarizing the number of agencies awarded funds and the total amount given by year. Table 6 shows this summary.

Table 6: Financial Impact of the Denver Bronco Charities Fund

Year	Total Grants	Number of Agencies Awarded
1994	\$ 720,500	27
1995	\$ 989,975	24
1996	\$2,157,100	39
1997	\$2,567,500	42
1998	\$3,529,404	41
1999	\$2,865,600	41
2000	\$3,199,500	44
2001	\$2,001,000	28
2002	\$1,669,000	18
2003	\$1,384,000	14
2004	\$1,661,000	16

Source: 2005 Denver Broncos Champions in the Community Annual Report⁷

⁷ According to the McCormick Tribune Foundation, the amount of grants was \$1,656,300 for 2004.

The Broncos maintain a distinction between their individual team programs and the ones adopted from the NFL's program thrusts. Like Kroenke sports, they will adapt league programs to fit the local context. According to Pamela Krotchko, Manager of the Denver Bronco Charities, "the NFL will provide program structures but they are not intrusive when it comes to implementation" (Interview 2005).

Decision Making & Participation

Decisions pertaining to philanthropic activities are found in two areas: the Corporate General Partner and within the Denver Broncos Football Club. For the Corporate General Partner, activities are handled by the Vice President of Community Development in collaboration with the Vice President of Finance, Vice President of Public Relations, Vice President of Operations and Vice President of Marketing. A similar structure is found within the Club. Pamela Krotchko serves as the Manager of the Denver Broncos Charities Fund. Her work, however, is joined by the work of the Community Development Manager, the Director of Alumni Relations and the Director of Media Relations (Also see restructuring). Decisions are aligned with the resources offered by the staff of the associated departments. Upper management of the Broncos Club (i.e., Executive Vice President of Business Operations and related staff) make decisions on outside financial commitments of the club.

There is a separation among the staff based on money raised from corporate dollars and money raised from fundraising activities. Corporate dollars are spent on activities/requests related to providing community support for nonprofit activities associated with the purchase of community tables for events and/or providing some type of donation. These types of requests are faxed to the Club and are reviewed on a monthly basis using pre-established criteria: Have we supported the organization in the past? Why the request is being submitted? How much is the request? On the other hand, money raised from the public is spent more on the community programs that the Broncos provide or partner with other organizations to provide. Nonprofit organizations in the community can apply for either corporate dollars or public dollars but not both.

In order to communicate their organization's giving philosophy, Krotchko and her staff use various mechanisms, including: training camp session, dedicated staff person, annual report, and the website. Additionally, staff meetings are used to remind staff of the mission as it relates to philanthropy.

The Broncos franchise does not require any athlete to participate in a community program; instead, they are highly encouraged. Thus participation amongst players varies. There are no mechanisms currently in place to track time and level of volunteerism. Players can bring ideas to the staff on what to participate and/or contribute to, however this practice is not encouraged. Athletes are encouraged to implement outside ideas on their own, especially if they have their own foundation.

Quantification of Time and Evaluation:

The Broncos conduct an annual evaluation of their programs and activities. Findings are released in their Community Report. Financially, they report the year – to - year financial impact of the dollars granted. These numbers are coupled with antidotal information in the form of “stories” that illustrate to the reader the activity that was undertaken. According to Krotchko, “the stories are key – it is what they do” (Interview 2005).

There are no other real evaluation tools used to study impact outside of this reporting. Krotchko relates that she and the Broncos Club know that they are accountable to the public because the community feels a sense of community ownership of the team. Thus, making sure that the community knows the story of those who benefit from the services is where true impact occurs, in her estimation.

Costs, Benefits and Reorganization:

Krotchko rationalizes the need for philanthropy in the community with the general business case. She states that the community serves as a partner to the Bronco’s organization. Through their partnership, the mission pertaining to philanthropy can be accomplished. Interestingly, upon first hearing of this concept, one might think that Broncos are really engaged in some form of strategic philanthropy (Burlingame 1994). However, without a real tie to systemic evaluation, it can only be guessed.

Like Kroenke Sports, the Broncos Club undertook reorganization in 2000. Krotchko states that five years ago, staff conducted operations in relative silos: no one shared information. This led to the process of realigning key positions and offices in order to create better communication flow and strategic alignment between key staff. This realignment allows for stronger philanthropic activities to emerge because staff are lending their resources to strengthen the activity.

Lessons Learned

Mission Choice

One common theme shared among the sports teams under study is their choice of mission. In all cases, recipients of philanthropic activities are children and youth, typically disadvantaged and/or underserved. The areas of general focus are education and public health. According to community relations personnel, the choice to concentrate services around children and youth is quite logical since children play sports and love athletes. The choice of concentrating activities in the area of children and youth services is a conscious decision since this target group is extremely marketable and provides the best return on investment. While this seems understandable, the research also uncovers other assumptions that should be tested. Sports play an important recreational role in the lives of many children. There may in fact be a cultural relationship to this mission choice given that several athletes were able to use their athletic ability to escape financial hardship endured while growing-up. While sports philanthropists believe that they are leveraging their celebrity status by encouraging/helping children through the emphasis of educational (e.g., literacy) and leadership skills rather than that of athletic skills, what

remains to be seen is if the children are really understanding that is the emphasis. In other words, can the target market see beyond the celebrity?

Decision Making

Decision-making as it relates to the choice of activity to engage in is controlled by a small number of staff. In every case, the final decisions rested with the Owners and upper management. The process of decision-making is extremely controlled and in the eyes of staff for good reason: to increase marketability and to reduce incidents of liability and/or negativity.

The decision of whether to engage in an activity does not fall to individual athletes. While individuals can suggest an activity, if it does not meet pre-established criteria, the athlete will be encouraged to pursue the activity on his own. There appears to be two models of providing assistance for such endeavors: Control and Hands-Off. In the control model, the sports franchise provides assistance to the individual athlete and in the Hands-Off model no advice is provided. The control model seems to mitigate negative outcomes associated with bad philanthropic engagement as it relates to bad publicity.

Participation

Case study organizations offer two models for participation: mandatory and voluntary. All the teams report that they do not have a systematic way of tracking levels of participation. Additionally, there is no distinction as to whether or not mandatory or voluntary participation effects the quality of participation. What is known is that athletes will participate, especially when asked.

Partnerships and Strategic Alliances

In all cases, partnerships and/or strategic alliances with nonprofit organizations was a key aspect of the philanthropic activity. The nonprofit organization provided the target market and the athletic organization provided the resources (e.g., monetary, volunteer athletes, space, and etc.). The direct benefit for the nonprofit organization is a resource while in most cases the direct benefit for the sports team was increased visibility and marketing opportunities. In other words, the volunteer activities/philanthropy of athletic teams creates a form of marketing that needs to be further understood.

Marketing and Evaluation

In all cases, the sports teams under study utilize annual reports, websites, and press releases, short vignettes during a sports game to tell the “story” pertaining to their philanthropic activities. This form of marketing seems to have a similar story thread: X cause is having a negative affect on the life of Y person(s). Sports team or athlete X intervenes and Y receives a benefit or is helped. Z amount of money was spent. The use of story telling is perceived by staff as the way to show impact and receive the fastest return.

Additionally, the cases under study show that the organization has not developed any formal measures to evaluate the impact experienced by recipients. The evaluation method that has been adopted centers on quantifying the dollars donated. Most of the staff also operate using a “perceived benefit model” that highlights the notion that athletes are semi-celebrities. It is the celebrity status that creates a positive philanthropic

effect. For example, if athlete X says read – then child Y will read because they idolize that athlete and want to be around that athlete. Kott (2005) writes:

...if Americans pay attention to nothing else, they pay attention to their favorite teams and players – from the sneakers they wear to the breakfast cereals they eat, from the values they hold dear to the causes they support. This celebrity influence is invaluable to team foundations...which capitalize on their cachet to raise public awareness of pressing social and health issues and to rally support for programs that address them... You can be sure that when one of our players goes out and talks to kids about the importance of reading, they hear the message (p. 22).

The problem with this perceived celebrity benefit model is that the actual benefit may be in fact temporary. For example, while the athlete says read – how long will that child actually read? Will (s)he read only while being actively engaged during the philanthropic activity or will they be able to model and adapt their behavior quickly in order to emulate the message being given? The absence of strong measures and data that test true impact are sorely missing. Additionally, it is harder to see just how sports philanthropy really fits into a strategic philanthropy model as asserted by the Sports Philanthropy project since data relating to cost and benefits are not readily available and or used.

Lastly, a special and perhaps rare concern arises as to what are the real and tangible outcomes of these efforts especially upon underprivileged children who idolize athletes to a degree where they believe that they can play place their “eggs” in a basket where less than 2 percent of the eggs will actually hatch. In other words, there is a growing number of children who believe that they too will go on to play professional sports. Are they hearing the athlete say it is important to read or go to school? Or do they just see the athlete who has now visited him which fuels the desire to play professional sports? These types of implications are worthy of additional study.

Conclusion

Greg Johnson states that sports philanthropy is a potentially strong and powerful philanthropy. And it is positioned to grow even more effective as ownership becomes increasingly adept at its execution; as sponsors seek additional cause-related activation of their mammoth contracts; and as public pressure mounts in support of socially responsible business practices. However whether or not such developing philanthropy actually comes to serve the public good in proportion to which it is capable remains a fluid proposition. In some quarters glitzy, superficial and even harmful efforts are put forth as charitable enterprise. True visionaries in the our field, on the other hand, continue to cast a light that will help us all to live up to our full sports philanthropic potential (Kott, 2005, p. 25).

The case analysis of the Denver-based sports teams provides additional information to the literature on sports philanthropy, particularly our knowledge of professional team sports. The perceptions of the Community Relations personnel raise several questions regarding the manner in which sports teams engage in philanthropy, including: (1) What is the correct organizational structure that sports teams should adopt when trying to achieve efficiency and effectiveness when engaging in charitable giving? (2) How do individual athletes feel about the philanthropic activities chosen by their team? (3) How can sports teams evaluate impact outside of monitoring the amount of money contributed to a particular charity? And, (4) do the customers/fans of professional sports teams care about the stewardship of a particular team? Will it affect their loyalty to a team and/or their willingness to support the team monetarily and non-monetarily?

Although many would find this case to be representative of the manner in which professional sports teams engage in philanthropic activity, this case represents the fact that professional sports teams place significant dollars back into the community. The practical implication of their activities suggests that there are models that may help these organizations to not only become more efficient and effective but to effect even greater change within society.

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