

# **Branding the Sports City: A Case Study of Indianapolis, Ind.**

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## **Introduction**

Professional sport teams can provide the host community with various benefits (e.g., economic, social) and costs (Turco & Lim, 1998). Furthermore, hosting mega events can be essential to the community's development. While sport events offer various benefits for local residents (e.g., job, entertainment, experience), they also aid in building the city's brand image.

## **Literature Review**

Previous studies suggest that various sport teams and events play a significant role in building consumers' perceptions of a city. Several studies have investigated the economic impacts of professional sport teams and events and financial operations (e.g., Turco & Ostrosky, 1997; Baade, 1996; Rosentraub, Swindell, Przybylski, & Mullins, 1994; Johnson, 1993; Rosentraub, 2003). However, little is known about the intangible benefits (e.g., brand image) that hosting sporting events and franchises may provide to a city.

Branding is an important aspect for sport cities, as it may aid city officials in differentiating their city from others in the sport marketplace (Keller, 1993). Previous research has focused on the economic impact of hosting major sporting events. Moreover, these studies tend to be critical of hosting sporting events, and suggest alternatives which may yield a higher return on investment.

Despite the lack of a long term economic impact, many cities covet the opportunity to acquire sports teams and host sporting events (Rosentraub et al., 1994). There is a need to re-evaluate the benefits of hosting sport franchises and events as it relates to strategic brand management. This study will examine the branding of a sports city through a case study of Indianapolis, IN.

In the 1970s, Indianapolis implemented its sport and downtown development program, which included an export and substitution component. The export component focused on sport tourism (i.e., attracting amateur sporting events). The substitution component focused on the acquisition of professional teams to lure citizens downtown to stimulate the local economy (Rosentraub, 2003).

## **Purpose of the Study**

This study will investigate the brand-related benefits of hosting sport franchises and events. Specifically, this study will utilize Indianapolis as a case study. Rosentraub (2006) stated that "no city or region in North America has focused as extensively on sports and hospitality for redevelopment and economic expansion as has Indianapolis."

The impact of hosting sporting events and franchises on the host city can be explained in various ways. In this study, the benefits of hosting sporting events were analyzed through two dimensions (i.e., intangible, tangible). These two benefit dimensions are mutual and occur simultaneously.

### **Method**

Secondary statistical data from Bureau of Tourism in the city of Indianapolis will be used to investigate the economic impact and growth of the city through sport. Additionally, a thorough review of existing sport branding and sport tourism literature will be employed to propose recommendations for other sport cities.

### **Discussion**

Since implementing the sport and downtown development program, Indianapolis has branded itself as the “amateur sports capital of the world.” It is home to several major sports entities, team, and events, such as the NCAA, NCAA Men and Women Final Four, World Gymnastics Championship, Indianapolis 500, Super Bowl XLVI, Big Ten Football and Basketball Championships, and the Pan Am Olympic Games to name a few. Other benefits associated with the city’s sport branding initiative include new sport and hospitality-related jobs, and a national reputation as a sport tourism destination.

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