

Major League Sports and Sustainability

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Abstract – The article discusses the sustainability efforts of major league sports organizations: NBA, NHL, NFL and MLB. These sustainability activities include implementing green initiatives, partnering with corporate sponsors to increase environmental awareness, or creating greener, more efficient arenas. All the major sports leagues have made tremendous strides in becoming more environmentally friendly by installing many environmentally friendly items in their stadiums, participating in recycling and composting programs as well as food drives to better help the people of their communities.

Keywords—Sustainability, Sports.

I. INTRODUCTION

It has been said that sports and music are a universal language. In terms of sustainability, all sports leagues the NBA, NHL, NFL and MLB with the help of Green Sports Alliance are performing activities such as implementing green initiatives, partnering with corporate sponsors to increase environmental awareness, or creating greener, more efficient arenas. Allen Hershowitz, the co-founder of the Green Sports Alliance and senior scientist for the National Resources Defense Council, states “All industries meet through professional sports. To use the nonpartisan leverage of Major League Baseball, the NFL, the National Hockey League, and NBA there’s an implicit statement by that league and team that environmental stewardship matters” [1].

II. GREEN SPORTS ALLIANCE

In February 2010, a collective group led by the National Resources Defense Council and Paul G. Allen’s Vulcan Inc. founded the Green Sports Alliance (GSA). The purpose of the group was to “exchange information about better practices and develop solutions to their environmental challenges that are cost-competitive and innovative. The information gathered from this collaboration is available to Alliance members in order that they gain a better understanding of how sporting events can be performed in an environmentally sensitive manner” [2]. Starting out with only a few teams in the Pacific Northwest over the past few years, the Alliance’s membership grew to approximately 260 sports teams and venues representing twenty diverse leagues. Members of the GSA are “reducing waste, conserving energy and water, and eliminating toxic chemicals, among many other ongoing initiatives and accomplishments” [2]. By incorporating sustainability into their operations, teams are engaging fans and, ultimately, saving considerable amounts of money.

III. MAJOR SPORTS LEAGUES’ CORPORATE PARTNERS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Members of both the National Basketball Association (NBA) and the National Hockey League (NHL) are raising awareness about sustainability and environmental issues by partnering with name brands to offer green products for sale and offering incentives for green behaviours e.g. recycling. Since 2012, the NBA has partnered with Sprint to host the NBA All-Star E-Recycling Day and inspired fans to safely recycle their aged electronics. Fans received two tickets per car for dropping off items to be recycled, and also got the chance to meet NBA legends Nick Anderson and Bo Outlaw. In addition, the NBA has partnered with Sprint and a handful of other companies to plan and execute NBA Green Week to generate awareness and funding to protect the environment through on-court activations and hands-on community service projects [3]. The league made a specific effort to reduce its carbon footprint during Green Week by partnering with one of the leading suppliers of renewable energy, Sterling Planet. The result of this league wide initiative was “a carbon avoidance of more than 10 million pounds, which will be one of the largest pollution offset initiatives by any sports league worldwide, and the only one to involve every team in the league” [4].

Other corporate sponsors for the Green Week initiatives are: Ekocycle, Coca-Cola, Adidas, Levi’s, Beats by Dr. Dre, and New Era. Ekocycle makes everyday products and clothing from recycled waste. Adidas created a limited edition shirt that was made from a combination of organic cotton and material from three recycled bottles. Levi’s produce jeans that feature eight recycled plastic bottles per pair of jeans. Beats by Dr. Dre, one of the leading headphone and music equipment production companies, produces a special set of headphones that uses various types of recycled materials while New Era created a version of its signature fitted cap that utilizes a high percentage of recycled materials, containing at least one recycled bottle [5].

NHL has partnered with various corporate sponsors in an effort to raise awareness about environmental issues. Among the NHL’s corporate sponsors who exemplify an emphasis on sustainability are Honda, Bridgestone, Scotiabank, and Pepsi [6]. Honda is the official vehicle of the NHL and has implemented numerous sustainable tactics. Scotiabank is the official bank of the NHL, the most environmentally conscious entity in the banking industry. Pepsi is the “Official Soft Drink, Sports Drink, Energy Drink, Water, Snack, and

Sports Nutrition Partner of the NHL” [6]. In 2012 alone PepsiCo’s highly efficient system saved fourteen billion liters of water and fifteen million dollars in costs associated with water. PepsiCo also partnered with organizations to help deliver safe water to approximately three million people in underprivileged, developing countries

IV. MEASURING AND REPORTING ON SUSTAINABILITY

In early 2014, the NHL became the first league to publish a sustainability report that addresses the distinct connection between hockey and the environment, and the numerous difficulties that the NHL faces as a result of a changing climate. One example of excellent initiatives to restore water put forth by the NHL in the report is Gallons for Goals. The NHL will restore one thousand gallons of water to a damaged river for each goal scored during the NHL’s regular season. As of November 30, 2014, 1,868 goals have been scored. Therefore, the NHL will restore 1,868,000 gallons of water [7].

Both the NBA and NHL implemented advanced metrics systems to track data about sustainability. The NBA introduced an on line tool Mosaic designed to track the impact on the environment and allows all NBA teams and venues to track, analyse, and identify cost savings opportunities within their environmental footprint [4]. The NHL implemented the NHL Metrics that allows NHL arenas to record and analyse data gathered from operations (e.g. water and energy use, waste generation, recycling). The 2014 NHL Sustainability Report states “By maximizing efficiencies of the League’s and Club’s resource use-using less while reusing or recycling the assets under control-we are effectively improving our economic performance and enhancing our environmental impact” [6].

V. SUSTAINABILITY AT SPORT ARENAS

The sports leagues not only encourage fans and players to be more environmentally conscious, but most importantly operate sustainable, economic friendly arenas. The Citizens Business Bank Arena in Ontario recently became the first arena in the United States to make the ice for its hockey rink from recycled water, a “ground-breaking water conservation project” which along with other water conservation efforts (making the switch to waterless urinals, using low flow faucets, and implementing irrigation techniques to save water), is estimated to save five million gallons of water in one year alone [8].

The Staples Center in Los Angeles recently underwent widespread upgrades including the 7.5 million dollar renovation is a new Light Emitting Diode (LED) lighting system. It is the first NBA arena to be upgraded with this new, more efficient lighting. The new system is expected to reduce energy usage and save approximately \$280,000 per year [9].

VI. CONCLUSION

All the major sports leagues have made tremendous strides in becoming more environmentally friendly by installing many environmentally friendly items in their stadiums, participating in recycling and composting programs as well as food drives to better help the people of their communities. As long as these organizations continue their initiatives toward eco-friendly efficiency and sustainability, they will not only make their communities better off, but they will be able to prosper for future generations to come.

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