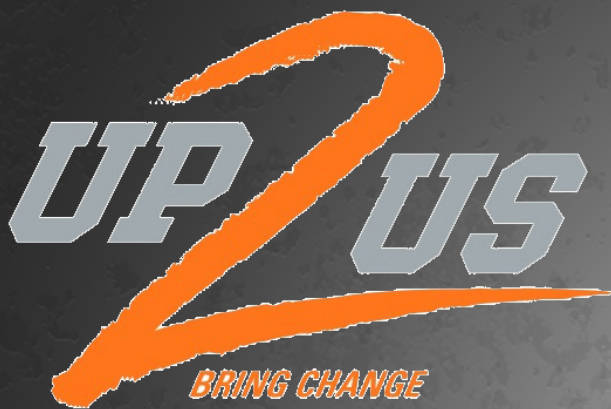




Current Practices and Future Possibilities

How Professional Sports Teams
Can Invest In Community
Programming



Introduction:

Sports can be a driving force for solving the challenges facing our youth such as obesity, academic failure, violence and teen pregnancy. If professional sports leagues and teams can understand how to leverage their brand and assets to have impact on these issues through local youth sports programs, it will be a win-win situation for all parties involved. This is possible. This report explains how.

For the purposes of this report, programs described as “sports programs” more accurately refer to programs that are using sports to teach health and wellness to at-risk youth in low-income communities (also known as “sports-based youth development programs”). The examples provided in the “Current Trends” section are from among the 480 grassroots youth sports programs that are members of the Up2Us coalition. The section entitled “Future Possibilities” is based on information obtained through focus groups of youth sports leaders as well as program advisors within the Up2Us network.

Current Trends:

Currently, “team-based philanthropy” centers around the following five categories: Funding; Signatures and Seats; Free Marketing; Team/Player Involvement; and Use of Space.

Funding

Lesson Learned

1. Professional teams that provide funding directly to programs can play a critical role in sustaining local nonprofits; however, this form of charitable giving forces teams to pick and choose among hundreds of programs.
2. Professional teams can ask sponsors to pay more for sponsorships with the assurance that the additional cost will be dedicated to the teams’ philanthropic giving programs. This can be a win-win for the teams and their sponsors as it provides opportunities for both teams and sponsors to invest in their communities and generate even greater public awareness. Sponsors may also be able to justify the additional costs by drawing on additional budgets, like their foundations or corporate social responsibility dollars to help pay for them.

Current Trends:

Throughout the nation, thousands of community-based sports programs apply for grants through the philanthropic grant arms of their local professional athletic teams. For example, South Bronx United, which uses soccer as a vehicle for social change, has benefitted from a grant by the New Yankee Stadium Community Benefits Fund. Homegrown Lacrosse, which applies a sports-based youth development approach to lacrosse in Minnesota, receives funding from the local professional lacrosse team to fund a full year of in-school programming. In every case that can be cited, direct grants from professional teams are critical for keeping these programs functioning. This is especially the case in these difficult financial times where youth sports are being cut from schools and non-profits are struggling to meet demand from children who want to play.

At the same time, teams are limited by how many dollars they can directly allocate for grant programs. Some have started to work with local programs to find more creative ways to provide grant money. For example, MetroLacrosse, a Boston-based program that provides more than 700 underserved youth with lacrosse and character education programs, worked with their professional lacrosse team, the Boston Cannons, to launch the Boston Cannons Scholarship Fund. The Boston Cannons asked their corporate sponsors to nominally increase their sponsor fee, the results of which were allocated to benefit youth lacrosse. The sponsors came to see this additional fee for sponsorship as a benefit because it provided them increased publicity to a wider community base. The beneficiary of the fund, MetroLacrosse, agreed to advertise these sponsors on all related program activities. Because the elevated sponsorship fees were designated as philanthropic in purpose, sponsors were able to absorb the costs by drawing on other budgets such as corporate and social responsibility and/or marketing. In addition, sponsors were also able to address other internal philanthropic goals through the partnership, such as employee engagement by offering their own staff opportunities to volunteer and attend MetroLacrosse special events. The result was \$30,000 in new funding directed to local programming and lacrosse scholarships.



Current Trends (cont.)



Signature and Seats

Lesson Learned

1. Reduced and/or free seats and signed paraphernalia help grassroots sports programs raise money at special events, such as silent auctions and galas.
2. Seats are an important means by which grassroots programs expose youth to local teams and inspire them to work harder. Seat giveaways also contribute to the development of the team's fan-base.

Professional teams typically donate memorabilia and free or reduced-price tickets to youth sports programs to use for their youth participants and/or at fundraising events. For example, DC SCORES, a national soccer and literacy program, has a relationship with DC United of Major League Soccer. Through this relationship, DC SCORES can rely on an allotment of tickets for every game and signed memorabilia for their fundraising events.

Harlem RBI, a baseball and softball program in East Harlem that uses these sports to inspire educational success in youth, receives ticket donations from both the New York Yankees and Mets. Harlem children and their families have the opportunity to attend games they might otherwise not be able to, and the baseball franchises earn the opportunity to develop their fan base. By donating tickets, teams cultivate fan loyalty, which may eventually bring future revenue through ticket sales and purchased apparel.

Free Marketing

Lesson Learned

1. Onsite promotions are cost-effective ways for teams to benefit local programs by giving them exposure to a wider audience through opportunities such as PSAs, space on programs, booths at stadiums, and videos on jumbo-trons. (cont.)

2. Onsite promotions contribute to goodwill of fans, who view their teams as more community-minded.

Many teams often work with their stadiums to spotlight grassroots programs during games by making public service announcements; giving shout-outs in association with ticket giveaways to youth; playing short cause-related videos on jumbo-trons; and allowing nonprofits to set up tables in the stadium. The Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) is one example of an organization that has benefitted from this through their relationship with the Seattle Storm of the WNBA. The Storm commits to spotlighting the organization's work to empower girls through sports at two of their home games each season. This includes running PSAs at pre-game and at half-time; inviting WSF representatives on the court during pre-game; and allowing their staff to set up a booth to hand out information about their programming at the stadium. In doing this, the marketing benefits run in both directions: The professional teams show evidence of their community involvement and the community programs receive opportunities for wide public exposure.

Team/Player Involvement

Lesson Learned

1. Team personnel are a source of volunteerism ranging from board membership to coaches to trainers to spokespersons.
2. Player appearances provide valuable public relations opportunities to programs; having an established "curriculum" or a pre-set list of activities for player appearances may also make them less intimidating for the athletes.
3. Players that participate in fundraising activities can help nonprofits generate even greater publicity and revenue.
4. Players who serve as spokespersons for a program can increase their impact by making this commitment for a longer period of time.

Professional sports team personnel, at all levels, can provide tremendous impact through volunteerism and player appearances. Youth sports programs welcome player appearances at their events and clinics to both inspire youth participants and to raise publicity for their cause. Players and other team members also find meaning in these visits, especially when they are asked to conduct drills or give pep talks. For example, the Corpus Christi Youth Basketball Program in Atlanta has a partnership with both the Atlanta Hawks and Atlanta Dream of the WNBA to expose their youth to NBA players as role models through site visits during the season. Some teams, like the NY Red Bulls of MLS, have their own curriculum of activities so that their players know what to do during visits to local programs. (cont.)



South Bronx United, which uses soccer to promote character development and health and wellness, often takes advantage of the Red Bulls program which they find helps the whole process run turnkey for their staff and for the visiting athletes. In other cases, players appear at special events and/or fundraisers to raise awareness of a cause. For example, America SCORES Seattle has a strong relationship with their MLS team, the Seattle Sounders. The Sounders put on a series of fundraising events at which players bartend and interact with event attendees, resulting in tremendous revenue for the organization.

Additionally, teams often encourage players and staff to sit on the Board of Directors for community organizations. Urban Initiatives, a soccer organization that teaches healthy lifestyles in the Chicago Public Schools, values professional player participation on boards as a way for the player to make a long-term commitment to support organizational efforts. By committing time consistently to an organization, players and staff can more clearly see the fruits of their hard work and contributions. David Cohen, General Manager of the New York Mets, and Mark Teixeira, First Baseman for the New York Yankees, both serve as members of Harlem RBI's Board of Directors.

Finally, teams provide athletes as spokespeople for community organizations. Mark Teixeira is an active advocate and spokesman for Harlem RBI and chairs the organization's Capital Campaign Committee. Carlos Beltran was also a spokesman for the organization and helped to promote an "adopt a player" fundraising campaign. In both cases, Harlem RBI's leadership points out that the effectiveness of a team spokesperson is far greater when the athlete is able to commit to this role for an entire season versus just a one-off occasion.

It is important to note that players are not the only potential spokespersons that a professional team has to offer. Coach Across America (CAA), an Up2Us program that provides AmeriCorps coaches to nonprofits across the country, often seeks professional coaches and assistant coaches to serve as spokespeople at local events and as guest coaches during games. The CAA staff find that professional coaching staff appreciate these unique opportunities to interact and serve as role models to younger coaches.

Use of Space

Lesson Learned

1. Urban youth sports programs benefit from facilities usage both for their own special events and for program activities such as game days and tournaments.

Field space is a significant problem for youth sports programs that are located in urban areas with few free and/or accessible facilities. Some members have been able to leverage their partnerships with professional athletic teams so that they can use their field space for programming or events. America SCORES New England worked with the New England Revolution to hold their annual SCORES Cup, a charity soccer tournament for young professionals, at Gillette Stadium. Holding this event at the stadium more than tripled the revenues of this event because of the added prestige. Other programs are working with professional teams to help them host fitness days, tournaments, meetings, and other special events at parks and stadiums. Program leaders feel that having youth and supporters in a stadium for even one activity per year can help to inspire the affinity to that stadium's home team.



Future Possibilities:

The first section of this paper described the typical philanthropic strategies of professional sports teams. This second section will discuss the possibility of teams developing a new vision for their potential to catalyze positive impact in their communities while increasing their marketing presence and fan-base. This section is divided into four key sections: 1. *Invest in Sports*; 2. *Recognize the Power of Your Brand as a Catalyst for Good*; 3. *Leverage Your Assets*; and 4. *Inspire Your Community*.

1. Invest in Sports:

Sports participation among youth in this country is declining in every major sport. Recent trends like sweeping cuts to school athletics and the institution of pay-to-play have drastically limited the opportunities for youth, especially in low-income communities. Not only is this a threat to the future talent pool of major sports franchises in this nation, but it is a threat to the wellbeing of youth. At present, this nation faces an unprecedented health crisis based on the increasingly sedentary lifestyles of children. Participation in sports not only prevents childhood obesity, but it has also been linked to reducing dropout rates, gang participation, teen pregnancy, and other high-risk behaviors. For a kid, especially one in a low-income community, playing a sport is not a “frivolous extra” to fill in after-school hours, it is an essential building block for his/her success in life.

Recommendations for Professional Teams:

- 1. Do not be embarrassed to invest in youth sports for fear of being self-serving; on the contrary, invest in youth sports as a proven strategy for addressing the fundamental health, academic, and safety challenges facing children in this country.
- 2. Be a catalyst for your local youth sports community to convene and organize a response to the current crisis in youth sports. Organizations, like Up2Us, can help you conduct symposiums that unite youth sports programs in your community for the purpose of developing strategies that address the decline in youth sports participation. (cont.)

- 3. Allocate in-kind and financial support to sports-based youth development programs that serve children in disadvantaged communities. These programs are critical lifelines to the most under-served youth and they operate in communities where organized sports are fighting for their survival. Up2Us can help you identify high quality sports-based youth development programs.
- 4. Invest in intermediary organizations, like Up2Us, that provide critical support and resources that help to sustain youth sports programs in low income communities.

2. Recognize the Power of Your Brand as Catalyst for Good

The existing paradigm for professional sports teams and their philanthropy is based on professional teams picking and choosing an organization that then addresses a social problem. What if this paradigm were turned upside down? What if a professional sports team picked the problem and let the whole community compete for the best solution?

Professional teams can do this because they have a very powerful tool at their disposal: the influence of their brand to motivate others to action. A professional sports team’s brand may in fact be one of the biggest change-agents in their entire community. If professional teams leveraged the power of their brand to challenge their entire community to achieve social impact, teams could become major catalysts for improving the quality of life in cities across the country.

Recommendations for Professional Teams:

- 1. Recognize the power of your brand as a tool for influencing positive social change throughout your community.

3. Leverage Your Assets:

To activate the power of their brand, professional teams will need to leverage their assets. As described in the first section of this report, professional teams have assets that youth sports programs want: players, coaches, marketing, signatures, seats, access to space, and funding. If they pick and choose only a few recipients for these assets, they often disappoint many programs that were not chosen as beneficiaries. But if teams leveraged these assets by choosing issues and themes that they care about and challenging local programs to earn these assets as rewards for delivering the highest quality programs, everyone can derive some benefit. Already, many corporations, like Pepsi, American Express, Target and JPMorganChase, are moving towards a variation of this model, called “crowdsourcing”, through their own community-wide campaigns.

A few examples of how pro-teams might do this follow:

- Instead of awarding a grant to a single program to address a major health issue, professional teams might challenge youth sports programs to develop health education campaigns in their schools or communities to earn a chance to come onto the court at half-time and shake hands with their favorite players.
- Instead of arranging a player appearance at a local nonprofit, professional teams can challenge youth sports programs to do community service projects, where the project with the greatest impact will be rewarded with a congratulatory visit by one of the team’s high profile players. Better yet, the team with the best project may be invited to do a future community service project (e.g., a hospital visit) together with that player.
- Instead of encouraging a player to do a public service announcement for a local charity, a professional team might ask that player to commit to be a spokesperson for a season to the youth sports program that conducts the most creative project that addresses cleaning up the city (or reducing youth violence, etc.).

By leveraging assets, professional teams achieve many benefits:

- they inspire numerous programs versus just one program
- they are engaging an entire geographic community and not just a single neighborhood
- they attach their brand to multiple organizations that compete to earn benefits
- they inspire excellence through multiple examples of best practices versus just one approach through one grantee
- they prolong brand exposure through a “campaign” versus a one-off giving event
- they promote the public’s perception of them as a community partner that is invested in improving quality of life

Teams can even leverage their sponsors to tackle specific themes, increase their likelihood of ongoing support, and raise additional money to pay for these campaigns. For example, if a major healthcare company is a team sponsor, the team might work with that sponsor to create a “healthcare challenge” that rewards the youth sports program that develops the best “diabetes awareness campaign” with the right to hold their next tournament on stadium grounds.

In addition, teams might consider non-traditional awards. What if a team funded a coach for the youth sports team that conducted the largest canned food drive for the poor? Up2Us has already worked with corporations to award coaches through its Coach Across America program. By awarding a coach instead of cash, the team will have a real-live person to develop continued engagement opportunities with that program and its youth participants throughout the year.

As teams learn to leverage their assets through the power of their brands, one might even see a future where they compete among each other for bragging rights nationwide. What if The Red Sox and Yankees challenged their fans to do community service to win a visit by their professional players? And what if the mayors of Boston and New York then challenged each other’s city to see which of their youth fan-bases were better citizens?

Recommendations for Professional Teams:

1. Use your assets to reward programs that best solve the community problems you identify.
2. Consider leveraging your sponsors to develop and pay for campaigns that combine your assets with topic-areas that you would both like to address.



4. Inspire Your Community:

Professional teams can inspire their communities by leveraging their brand and their assets to challenge local youth sports programs to tackle pressing social issues. The following steps are a roadmap for accomplishing this:

- **Start with your team's core values and beliefs.** What does your team believe in? The owners? The managers? The coaches? The personnel? The players? What values would you like your fans and non-fans to experience when they see your brand? Allow these values to guide your decisions on how your team wants to engage the wider community. (Tip: a simple online survey can help you to gather this information from your team).
- **Decide what challenges you want to address in your community.** There are several ways you can pick a "cause." It might be something personally important to the owners, the managers, the staff and/or the players. You might have sponsors who have a vested interest in "health" or "education." You might also conduct a basic needs assessment of your community. (Tips: You don't have to do extensive research to find these answers. Your Mayor's office or organizations like Up2Us and the United Way can help you determine needs in your metropolitan area.)
- **Develop a program to challenge youth sports to address these needs.** What asset do you want to offer to challenge youth sports programs in your community to tackle your chosen community need? Is it a chance to meet the team? Be recognized on the court at half time? Throw the first pitch? Play at your stadium? Choose an asset—it doesn't have to be cash.
- **Communicate your community challenge.** Set up a simple communication platform to announce your challenge to the community. You can communicate your challenge through social media, your website, print programs, jumbo-tron messages, and other PSAs. (Tip: Organizations with experience running these campaigns, like Up2Us, can help you develop a communication platform).

- **Award and assess.** Award the program whose project represents the greatest impact and reflection of your teams' values. You might ask a fan group, an intermediary program (e.g., Up2Us), or a city agency (e.g., the Dept. of Recreation), to lead your selection process. You can even have your fans vote on the best project on your website. Once you award your top program(s), consider sending a certificate with your team's brand to every program that participated to recognize their efforts in making your community better. Assess how your campaign was delivered and how to improve upon it next year. Keep in mind, if you conduct a challenge this year, expect two or three times more programs to participate in next year's challenge.

Recommendations for Professional Teams:

1. Execute a campaign following simple steps that include identifying your team values, choosing a need, challenging the community through social media, and rewarding projects that best meet your challenge.
2. Know that you don't have to do all the work—intermediaries, like Up2Us, can help. You just need to provide the brand and assets.



About Up2Us

Up2Us is leading a national movement to advance sports as a tool for addressing the critical issues facing youth in this nation, including childhood obesity, academic failure and anti-social behavior. Up2Us accomplishes this by supporting a national network of nearly 500 member organizations operating in all fifty states. Together, these organizations serve 20 million youth through both traditional and non-traditional sports. In joining Up2Us, these members pledge to share best practices; advance initiatives that extend opportunities to new players; and deliver quality programs in underserved communities where there is a tremendous need for constructive outlets for kids.

About Coach Across America

Coach Across America® (CAA) is an AmeriCorps program launched by Up2Us to provide its member organizations with the support needed to train and host highly effective coaches in sports and youth development. CAA's mission is to lead the United States in training and supporting expert SBYD coaches in the nation's most under-resourced communities to promote health and nutrition, educational success, civic engagement, and positive personal and social development among youth.