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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Melinda J. Jones entitled "The Meaning of Sport-Related Events in the Process of Becoming and Being a Fan: A Grounded Theory Study of Highly Committed Sport Fans." I have examined the final paper copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Business Administration.

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THE MEANING OF SPORT-RELATED EVENTS IN THE PROCESS OF BECOMING AND BEING A FAN: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF HIGHLY COMMITTED SPORT FANS

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Melinda Jo Jones
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to John Micheletto. Thanks for believing in me, encouraging me, and sharing my dreams. More than anything else, thanks for loving me. I can only hope that I'm as good for you as you are for me.

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ABSTRACT

Newspapers across the country and around the world are filled with reports of events that have occurred within the sporting world. These events range from summaries of wins/losses and statistics of the players in the game to reports of more significant events (e.g., a player's retirement, a team relocation, a league folding, or a player's legal battles).

The initial purpose of this dissertation was to explore and describe sports fans' perceptions of and reactions to sport-related *critical* incidents. However, the research focus was modified to examine (1) what it means to be a sport fan, (2) the factors and conditions that influence an individual to become a sport fan, and (3) how sport fans interpret sport-related events. The design for this study was qualitative and attempted to explore sport fan's experiences by understanding the phenomenon from the participant's perspective.

Grounded theory methodology was selected as a means of exploring this previously unexamined phenomenon. This study relied on interpretations of interviews with fourteen highly committed sport fans and excerpts submitted by sports fans on two popular sport-related websites (www.SportingNews.com and www.ESPN.com). The findings from this study suggest that sport-related events are interpreted differently as a function of (1) the individual, (2) the knowledge and experience the individual brings to an event, and (3) the meaning the individual ascribes to the event. The theory that emerged in this study demonstrates that the process of interpreting a sport related event is dynamic and dependent upon four categories: (1) experiencing the event, (2) becoming more informed regarding the event, (3) determining the personal significance of the

event, and (4) identifying which event components are relevant. Additionally, a sport fan brings with him/her a combination of life and sport-related experiences to each subsequent sport-related event. The fan then takes the accumulated knowledge and experiences with him/her to the next event and the process begins again. The collective of these experiences and interpretations gives meaning to the fan and facilitates the evolutionary process of being a sport fan.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	American Broadcasting Company
AP	Associated Press
BIRG	Basking In Reflective Glory
CBS	Columbia Broadcasting System
CIT	Critical Incident Technique
CNN/SI	Cable News Network/Sports Illustrated
CORF	Cutting Off Reflective Failure
ESPN	Entertainment and Sports Programming Network
MLB	Major League Baseball
NASCAR	National Association of Stock Car Racing
NBA	National Basketball Association
NBC	National Broadcasting Company
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
NFL	National Football League
NHL	National Hockey League
PCI	Psychological Commitment Inventory
SEC	Southeastern Conference
WNBA	Women's National Basketball Association
XFL	Extreme Football League

CHAPTER ONE

PROBLEM DEFINITION

INTRODUCTION

Newspapers across the country and around the world are filled with reports of events that have occurred within the sporting world. These events range from summaries of wins/losses and statistics of the players in the game to reports of more significant events (e.g., a player's retirement, a team relocation, a league folding, or a player's legal battles). These events occur frequently and widespread media coverage ensures ubiquitous public awareness of them. Whether you are an avid sports fan or not, the news "hits your doorstep." On a micro level, how this news impacts each individual person greatly depends upon his/her psychological attachment to a sport entity (e.g., sport, league, team, player, or coach). For example, after enduring the 1994 baseball player strike, many baseball fans lost interest in the game and refused to spend hard earned money to watch players who were perceived to have a "me first" attitude (Dorfman 1999). On a macro level, a sport-related incident has the potential to greatly influence the marketplace. For example, as reflected in attendance figures, a professional sports team can feel the impact of a star player retiring, a team relocating, or a player strike. Thus, sport-related incidents have the potential to become "critical" when they may trigger changes in individual or marketplace behavior.

Although numerous examples of sport-related critical incidents that attract fan attention and affect the market place exist, one of the most recent, prominent events was Michael Jordan's (MJ) retirement from professional basketball in 1999. In June 1998,

seven months before Michael Jeffrey Jordan announced his retirement, he made the game-winning shot with 5 seconds to spare in the championship final against the Utah Jazz, and walked off the court a 6-time National Basketball Association (NBA) champion. For Michael Jordan, what a way to go out - on top - as though Michael had written the script himself. Who couldn't get wrapped up in the excitement (except maybe die-hard Jazz fans)? Fans were screaming "we won" and celebrating the moment, but deep inside, many may have been thinking they had just seen the last jumper from their favorite player.

This "final" retirement announcement of Michael "Air" Jordan (1999) was such a significant event that its occurrence was reported in newspapers and magazines around the globe.

> "Jordan Retires! Shock Felt Around the World," -- headline, Nikkan Sports, Tokyo, Japan
>
> "Irreplaceable Michael Jordan takes final timeout" -- front page headline, The Daily Telegraph, London, England
>
> "Air Jordan is flying no more," -- headline, Frankfurter Neue Presse, Frankfurt, Germany
>
> "Farewell after 13 years of serving as special envoy for one team, one city, one league, one sport and for an entire nation." -- Frankfurter Neue Presse, Frankfurt, Germany
>
> "NBA without Jordan?" -- headline, Gazeta Wyborcza, Warsaw, Poland
>
> "Jordan decides to leave NBA orphaned," -- Daily Novye Izvestia, Moscow, Russia

From these headlines, one surmises that Michael Jordan was a world-renowned athlete and his face was widely recognized around the globe. People liked MJ. People respected him both as a basketball player and as a person. His presence was celebrated.

His absence would be felt.[1] People identified with him. Children (and even many adults) wanted to "Be like Mike!"

It isn't often that an event in the sporting community tends to "rock the world;" however, in every sport, one can locate fans that have intense feelings and are impacted when some type of critical event occurs with respect to *their* favorite sport, league, team, player, or coach. With this in mind, this dissertation initially attempted to explore the concept and occurrence of sport-related critical incidents with respect to fans' 1) perceptions and 2) psychological and behavioral consequences. However, as the study progressed, it became apparent that it was necessary to modify the focus of the research to examine what it means to be a sport fan, the factors and conditions that influence an individual to become a sport fan, and how sport fans interpret and react to sport-related events. This modification will be discussed in detail throughout the next few chapters; however, it is important to note here that these first chapters are included as background for the initial study and to explain how and why the focus of the research was changed.

THE PRESENCE OF SPORTS IN SOCIETY

The desire to watch other people compete in athletic endeavors is not a new phenomenon. Sports spectatorship existed at least as early as the Greek and Roman empires (Guttman 1986; Zillmann and Paulus 1993; Dick and Basu 1994). Even during these early periods, the notions of "team" and "team loyalty" were present. Ancient

[1] Since the writing of this dissertation, Michael Jordan resigned his position as President of Basketball Operations for the Washington Wizards, signed a player contract (his second comeback to professional basketball) with the Wizards, and has retired for a third time.

Roman spectators of the racetrack and the arena developed strong preferences for groups of competitors which contemporary historians label as "teams." In ancient Rome, a "team" of charioteers was identified by the color of the clothing they wore (e. g., blue, green, red, or white) and classes of gladiators in the amphitheater were differentiated by the nature of their armor and weaponry (Lee 1983).

Although sport spectators and loyal fans have existed for thousands of years, the attention given to sports is arguably greater now than at any point in history. Perhaps the best justification for examining the impact of sport-related critical incidents on sport fans lies in the popularity of sports and sport *fandom* in modern society. For the past three decades, researchers have found that at least two-thirds of Americans consider themselves to be a sport fan (Anderson and Stone 1981; Thomas 1986; Lieberman 1991). One can begin to confirm the popularity of sport through the amount of sport coverage in the broadcast media (e.g., television and radio), attendance figures at sporting events, the large number of sport-related movies and videos, the amount of sport coverage in the print media (e.g., books, magazines, newspapers), the emergence of sport on the Internet, and the pervasiveness of sports in informal discussions.

THE BUSINESS OF SPORTS

The presence of sports as noted above, reinforces the fact that sport is big business. Fans impact the marketplace financially by spending an inordinate amount of money on sports and sport-related products. Revenues from licensed-product sales have become a significant part of the sport industry. Sutton *et al.* (1997) found that winning records and seasons, as well as affiliation with other fans and a particular team, influence

fans to purchase licensed products. Consequently, millions of consumers purchase licensed-product items to show support for and demonstrate affiliation with particular sports entities. Long gone are the days when sport organizations were reluctant to promote the sale and use of licensed products, seeing this as unnecessary commercialization of the game. In the mid-1950s, New York Yankees General Manager George Weiss, who viewed Yankee garb as equivalent to "the pope's vestments," said, "Do you think I want every kid in this city walking around with a Yankee cap?" (Helyar 1994). However, as early as 1924, Francis Wallace, noted sportswriter, noticed that shop windows along New York City's Fifth Avenue displayed Notre Dame, Army, Yale, Harvard, and Princeton colors, and if one walked up Broadway one could see neckties in the colors of the same schools, "the aristocracy of the gridiron" (Sperber 1993). This early example indicates that even then, retailers understood that fan identification with sport organizations could increase sales. Formalized collegiate licensing agreements were slow to emerge, although in 1947, Walt Disney agreed to let the University of Oregon use Disney's Donald Duck image for its mascot (Plata 1996). From this meager beginning, the collegiate licensing industry was born and has since grown into a billion dollar industry.

The amount of money spent on licensed products in professional sports is also exorbitant. In 1994, sales of licensed products for professional sports exceeded $9.5 billion (VanMeter 1995). In the United States, retail sales of sport logo clothing alone reached $3.03 billion in 1996, a 13 percent increase over 1995 (Team Licensing Business 49 1997). According to a June 1997 poll conducted by ESPN and Chilton, 51.5 percent of all sports fans had purchased sport logo clothing within the past three months (Team

Licensing Business 9 1997). A total of $10.9 billion was spent on collegiate, NFL, MLB, NBA and NHL items in 1996, a 4.8 percent increase over 1995 (Mullin, Hardy and Sutton 2000).

Research has shown that loyal customers, particularly in the sporting arena, engage in definitive overt behavior (e.g., attending games, watching games on television, buying licensed merchandise, becoming violent toward fans of the opposing team) (Gaskell and Pearton 1979; Branscombe and Wann 1991). However, because of the rising cost of tickets to professional sporting events, attending games has become increasingly less affordable for many current and potential fans. As more and more fans find it financially burdensome to attend events, purchasing licensed products may become a more tangible and more affordable way to demonstrate affiliation with a particular team or league.

Focusing on loyal customers is recognized as a cost-efficient and effective strategy in building and maintaining market share (Jarvis and Mayo 1986) and developing a sustainable competitive advantage (Kotler and Singh 1981). Customer retention is considered an important means of remaining financially competitive (Rosenberg and Czepial 1984). In a sport context, one segment for marketers to target is loyal fans. Those who have a strong psychological commitment and who consistently engage in sport-related behaviors (e.g., purchasing tickets to games, buying sport, team and/or player paraphernalia, reading about and watching sporting events, and engaging in "sports talk" with friends on a daily basis) are important to an organization's continued welfare.

Today, the National Association of Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) boasts of having some of the most loyal fans in all of sports. NASCAR fans are not only loyal to the sport, but also extremely loyal to a particular driver and regularly make purchasing decisions based upon what company/brand "their" driver is endorsing. From 1991 to 1996, attendance at NASCAR events grew 65.5 percent (King 1998). A 1994 study suggested that 71 percent of NASCAR fans bought NASCAR products. Additionally, 40 percent of NASCAR fans said they would switch brands to a product that became a NASCAR sponsor (King 1998). According to a Harris Sports Poll, 64% of Bill Elliot's fans preferred McDonald's as a quick service restaurant (a sponsor of Bill Elliot), whereas only 51% of general NASCAR fans preferred McDonald's (www.harrisinteractive.com 2000). NASCAR is getting the attention of top executives because it offers a level of exposure unattainable with any other sport. As a testament to the popularity and success of NASCAR sponsorship, in two months of sponsorship, Thorn Apple Valley, a sausage maker, began getting shelf space with retailers who weren't interested in their product before the sponsorship began. In 1998, NASCAR received approximately $475 million in sponsorships. No other sport has even come close to this figure (King 1998).

In order for a team or sport to thrive, there must be fans that purchase souvenirs and other team-related paraphernalia and demonstrate continued support by purchasing tickets and attending events. Sports fans, or more specifically, loyal sports fans, are important to a sport organization because they repeatedly engage in behaviors that benefit a team or league. Sport-related critical incidents can potentially impact fans' desire to purchase tickets, attend games, or acquire sport-related paraphernalia. Thus, gaining an

understanding of how sport-related critical incidents influence consumer beliefs, the formation or change of fan attitudes, and subsequent behavior leading to fan loyalty, will facilitate appropriate responses and subsequent marketing strategies geared toward a sport, league, team, player, or coach.

FAN LOYALTY

As noted above, a sports organization's revenues can be greatly impacted by individuals that have a strong psychological commitment to a sport, league, team, player, or coach and who engage in specific sport-related behaviors such as purchasing tickets and/or sport-related products over an extended period of time. Fan loyalty has been described as the steadfast allegiance to a person or cause (Pritchard 1991) and a level of psychological commitment and persistent behavior toward a sport, league, team, player, or coach. Demonstration of this psychological commitment is seen in resultant behaviors. Understanding fan loyalty involves considering both an attitudinal and behavioral disposition toward a sport, league, team, player, or coach. Looking at both the behavioral and attitudinal components of loyalty provides an opportunity to distinguish between different segments of fans. A loyal fan could demonstrate support for a given sport entity by remaining psychologically committed (continuing to support a sport, league, team, player, or coach even during difficult times) and by engaging in specific sport-related behaviors (e.g., repeatedly purchasing game tickets, attending games, viewing games on television, actively engaging in sport discussions, and/or purchasing souvenirs and other sport-related products).

Competition for support and money from sports fans has increased, in part, due to an increased number of sport and non-sport entertainment options. With mounting financial pressures, sports organizations cannot afford fluctuations in fan support and need to maintain a large base of loyal fans. Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, and Sloan (1976) were among the first to provide insight into why fluctuations in team loyalty occur. These researchers found that individuals increased their association with a successful sports team and decreased their association when the team was not successful. These tendencies increased when the individual's public self-image was threatened. Cialdini *et al.* (1976) suggested that basking in reflected glory (BIRG) was an image-management strategy. Individuals desire to associate themselves with successful others in order to gain self-esteem and a feeling of belonging to a group. Although others have suggested that expressions of team loyalty are related to team success (e.g., fans are more loyal when the team wins), Cialdini *et al.* (1976) provided an explanation for why the loyalty of fans varies in different situations. In their study, loyal and disloyal actions were related to the participant's desire to present a positive public image. BIRGing differs from other forms of self-enhancement strategies in that individuals attempt to improve their public image indirectly, rather than directly, by demonstrating their association with some successful other.

Researchers have described a continuum of fan loyalty and team identification as ranging from "die-hard fans" to "fair-weather fans."(Smith, Patterson, Williams and Hogg 1981; Wann and Branscombe 1990; Hirt, Zillmann, Erickson and Kennedy 1992) It has been found that "die-hard fans" (also termed "highly identified") remain committed/loyal and retain their allegiance to *their* team even in a time of loss. However,

"fair-weather fans" seem to be "committed" only when the team is on a winning streak, yet denounce any association with the team after repeated losses (Cialdini, *et al.* 1976). Although Cialdini, *et al.* (1976) strictly looked a win/loss record, it is important to note that other events could have an impact on a fan, whether they are a "die hard" or "fair weather" fan. In other words, one cannot assume that a winning (or losing) record is the only factor that fans take into account when choosing to support (or not support) a team. Research has shown that consumers choose to be involved in sports as highly involved spectators for many varied reasons (e.g., as a diversion, to relieve stress, to add excitement, and/or to feel a part of a group). However, one aspect of being a highly committed fan has not been considered: fan perceptions of and reactions to a particular sport-related critical event. For example, how does a sport-related critical incident effect a sport fan's continuing commitment and behavior toward their favorite sport entity?

CRITICAL INCIDENT

Most likely, the words "critical incident" communicate a similar meaning to many people. These words are typically used to describe events that have had an impact on a person in one way or another. The impact from a "critical incident" can be especially memorable and behavior altering. Logically, these words should be found quite often in the psychological literature. However, in reviewing likely sources of the use of the term "critical incident" or similar phrases (e.g., critical event, significant event), this concept has only appeared in spotty and undistinguishable ways. For example, either various definitions were given that seemed to serve the purpose of the respective author or no definition of critical event was supplied. Additionally, the critical event concept has not

been tied systematically to theory or model building in the applied behavioral sciences. Critical incidents have been examined within the realm of counseling (Hill and Corbett 1993; Wilcox-Matthew, Ottens and Minor 1997), education (Sikes, Measor and Woods 1985; Woods 1993), group growth and development (Cohen and Smith 1976), leadership (Bach 1954; Pigors and Pigors 1965), politics (Pride 1995), terrorism (Killebrew Jr. 1998), law enforcement (Kureczka 1996), and psychotherapy (Goldfarb 1952; Mellett 1952; Speth 1952). The following are offered to illustrate the definitions of "critical event/incident" that have arisen from disparate fields of study:

- Law enforcement (Kureczka 1996, p. 10): "... typically sudden, powerful events that fall outside the range of ordinary human experiences... happen so abruptly, they can have a strong emotional impact..."
- Education (Sikes *et al.* 1985, p. 230): "... highly charged moments and episodes that have enormous consequences for personal change and development."
- Education (Tripp 1993): "...are not all dramatic or obvious (p. 24)...are produced by the way we look at a situation... an interpretation of the significance of an event" (p. 8)
- Group leadership (Cohen and Smith 1976, p. 114): "... the confrontation of a group leader by one of more members, in which an explicit or implicit opinion, decision, or action is demanded of him... judged important enough for a group leader to consciously and explicitly consider whether to act in a specific way..."
- Human behavior (Flanagan 1954): an incident is an activity carried out by someone which is observed and complete enough to infer from; a critical incident is an incident that leaves little doubt as the purpose of the act and the effect of its consequences
- Counseling (Hill and Corbett 1993): a significant therapeutic event in counseling is one that has been deemed significantly helpful or hindering to clients
- Terrorism (Pride 1995, p. 6): "an eruption, unlike routine performance indicators, they are radical discontinuities in the real world that attract attention."

Although the term "critical incident" has been assigned a variety of slightly different definitions, the working, and preliminary, definition that was used to begin this research was based on Tripp's (1993; 1994) definition of critical incidents that occur in the everyday life of the classroom. In general, he emphasizes that:

> "...the vast majority of critical incidents ... are not all dramatic or obvious: they are mostly straightforward accounts of very commonplace events that occur in routine professional practice which are critical in the rather different sense that they are indicative of underlying trends, motives, and structures" (Tripp 1993, p. 24-25).

More specifically, critical incidents are "not 'things' which exist independently of an observer and are waiting discovery... but like all data, critical incidents are created. Incidents happen, but *critical incidents* are produced by the way we look at a situation: a critical incident is an interpretation of the significance of an event" (Tripp 1993, p.8).

Critical Incidents in Sports

Based upon the definition cited above, critical incidents are not necessarily sensational events involving a lot of tension, but may be minor incidents that occur frequently. Therefore, criticality of an incident is based upon the justification, the significance, the meaning assigned to it, as well as the attention garnered from the public to which it is considered important.

Using this definition as the foundation from which this research was built, there appeared to a cornucopia of examples, both positive and negative, of sport-related critical incidents. The abundance of such cases were discovered by simply skimming through the sports section of any major newspaper, taking note of conversations in the elevator, listening to sports talk radio, or perusing the archives of a sports web page (e.g., The Sporting News – Voice of the Fan). It appeared safe to assume that sport-related critical incidents were numerous and occurred on a frequent basis; however, it was unclear what was considered "critical" and how fans might perceive or react to such events.

It is important to note that sport-related critical incidents can occur at any level, sport, league, team, player, or coach. Five specific examples are presented next as a means of denoting the various types of sport-related critical incidents as well as their respective impacts.

The accident that killed NASCAR legend Dale Earnhardt (February 18, 2001) was voted The Associated Press Story of the Year by member newspapers and broadcast outlets, beating Barry Bonds' pursuit of the single-season home run record (See Table 1-1 for the top ten list of the Associated Press Stories of the Year)[2]. Dale Earnhardt's death has the potential to impact the marketplace financially. In the aftermath of his death, one retailer who specializes in selling NASCAR memorabilia stated that sales of Dale Earnhardt paraphernalia made up 60 percent of his revenue (Channel 10 - Knoxville 2001). When an event like this occurs within the sporting industry, it is unclear how fans will react. Where will loyalties lie now that the "Intimidator," as Dale Earnhardt was referred to, is no longer on the racing circuit? One particular fan indicated he would remain a NASCAR fan, but would begin following the racing career of Earnhardt's son, Dale Jr., much more closely (Rovell 2001). When asked how the death of his friend would affect stock car racing, Richard Childress, Earnhardt's longtime car owner and friend responded, "The sport will go on because people like Dale Earnhardt have made it so popular and set it up for the future.... It will continue to be successful and grow even more, but it will never be quite the same" (The Sporting News, December 29, 2001).

Fans of the University of Tennessee's Women's Basketball team routinely expect their *Lady Vols* to win the SEC tournament, to get to the Final Four, and even win the

[2] All tables and figures are located in Appendix A.

national championship year after year. However, the Lady Vols lost to Vanderbilt in the semifinal game of the SEC tournament in March 2001. As if this loss was not enough, without even trying, their loss affected the entire tournament.

> "Georgia won by two Sunday. The SEC lost by 7,000. Such is the plight of SEC women's basketball without the University of Tennessee. The semifinal games drew 11,182 fans. The Georgia-Vanderbilt championship game drew 4,227" (p. D1).

A critical event occurred in the National Basketball Association (NBA) in 1999. A Business Week article entitled "Yikes! Mike Takes a Hike" discussed how Michael Jordan's retirement from the NBA shook the sports business world (Crockett, Leonhardt, Mehcher, Human, Grover, Himelstein and Siklos 1999).

> On Jan. 13, 1999, when His Airness – aka Michael Jeffrey Jordan – officially stepped down from his throne, the earth didn't stop spinning and the stars stayed in the sky. The world of sports business, however, did register a seismic tremor on its Richter scale (p. 74).

Crockett *et al.* (1999) explained how not only the fans, but also the NBA, would feel the pain of Jordan's absence from play. Jordan is cited as being responsible for increasing attendance at games as well as boosting merchandise sales and the value of broadcast rights. It was predicted that the Chicago Bulls would not be the only team to "feel the pain" of Jordan's absence. Evidently, Jordan was popular wherever he played, often selling out seats at stadiums away from home. As if there was any doubt that Michael Jordan's retirement would have any effect on the sporting world, Orlando Magic Senior Vice-President Pat Williams was heard to say "Our Number 1 product just decided to walk away" (Crockett, *et al.* 1999). The "Jordan Effect" reported in June 1998 was figured at approximately $10 billion worldwide. This figure includes not only his impact on the NBA and the Chicago Bulls by creating intense interest in the game and putting

"fannies in the seats," (estimated at impacting overall NBA attendance at $165.5 million) but also all the Jordan-influenced businesses (i.e., the movie *Space Jam* which grossed $230 million at the box office and another $209 million in video sales; Bulls licensed apparel – a top seller since the 1989-1990 season; Coca Cola; General Mills – Wheaties; McDonald's; Sara Lee – Hanes and Ball Park franks; WorldCom; Quaker Oats – Gatorade; Oakley sunglasses) (Johnson and Harrington 1998).

The NBA experienced some discontent from its fan base during the five-month player lockout in 1998. The owners claimed that salaries had gotten out of control and were now outpacing revenues and wanted a new agreement that would limit payroll costs. The players' union had vowed to oppose any deal that included a "hard" salary cap. Many fans viewed the lockout as "quibbling among millionaires" (Crockett *et al.* 1999) and grew rather apathetic. As a result, only 75 percent of Detroit Pistons season-ticket holders and only 30 percent of the people with partial-season tickets renewed their packages for the next season.

Free agency, which was introduced to professional sports in the 1970s, meant that athletes were no longer bound to one team and could negotiate with other teams for higher salaries. Kahane and Shmanske (1997) examined the impact of free agency by investigating the relationship between roster turnover and attendance at Major League Baseball (MLB) games. They found that between 1990 and 1992, teams experienced an annual turnover rate of 27 percent. For each percentage point of player loss (i.e., turnover), yearly attendance was reduced by between six thousand and twelve thousand fans. The results, which do not attempt to account for factors such as player quality,

suggest that player turnover and the potential reduction in fan loyalty can have a detrimental effect on attendance.

The occurrence of sport-related critical incidents is of paramount importance to sports organizations because of the potential impact on company revenues, public stock prices, and market share. Research has been conducted in the areas of fan behavior, team identification, and fan loyalty (e.g., factors affecting attendance (Hansen and Gautheir 1989; Chang and Wildt 1995; Kahle, Kambara and Rose 1996); consequences of team identification (Branscombe and Wann 1991; Hirt et al. 1992); yet only a handful of studies examining the occurrence and resulting impact of sport-related critical incidents have been conducted. Until now, no one has put forth a theory regarding the perception of sport-related critical incidents and the impact these events have on fans. It is necessary to understand fan's perceptions of and reactions to sport-related critical incidents in order to enhance knowledge regarding the impact of these events.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The ability to understand what makes customers "tick" and why/how they act and react is a fundamental part of developing strategic marketing plans. Sport marketing executives need to understand (1) what motivates people to attend or watch games, (2) why and how fan loyalty is formed, maintained, and lost, (3) what sports fans are loyal to, and (4) how loyalty plays out in the purchase and/or consumption of sport-related products. Although all of these aspects of fan support are important, and research has begun to examine many of these areas, sport-marketing executives also need to understand how fans perceive and react to sport-related critical incidents. The way in

which sports marketing organizations respond to and evaluate fan's perceptions of, and behavior following, a sport-related critical incident (e.g., sudden death of a player, loss of a key player due to a draft or retirement) provide valuable information for managers in leading an organization through such critical events.

In sports, a winning team is, in and of itself, insufficient to fill stadiums or arenas with fans. Sport marketing is crucial to successfully entice spectators to flock to sporting events. At a time when sports, leagues, and teams are competing for fans, fan loyalty appears to be eroding and sport "brands" are beginning to lose their equity, their value and their potential. Sport marketers must realize that "fan loyalty to sports leagues and teams is gradually becoming a memory now that players and teams alike can be uprooted on a moment's notice" (Passikoff 1997). Passikoff identified four drivers of fan loyalty/continuity/growth: entertainment value, authenticity, fan bonding (both to athletes and teams) and the team or league's history and traditions. Consequently, the last two drivers, fan bonding and history/traditions could be directly impacted by the occurrence of a sport-related critical incident.

Research to date has shown that fan loyalty has a definitive impact on overt behavior (e.g., attending games, watching games on television, buying licensed merchandise, engaging in violent acts toward fans of the opposing team) and covert behaviors (e.g., self-esteem and social belonging). Moreover, highly loyal fans tend to be highly identified with a particular team (Wann and Branscombe 1993; Wann, Tucker and Schrader 1996; Shank and Beasley 1998). Studies concerning the intensity of identification and its impact on loyalty have been conducted and their findings used to help explain many economical, social, and psychological behaviors. However, until now,

no one has put forth a theory that explains neither how fans perceive sport-related critical incidents nor how fans react, psychologically and behaviorally, to these events. In a society where there has been a proliferation of professional sports, an explosion of negative sport-related incidents, and a strong challenge to attract and maintain fans, it is essential that sports organizations understand what it means to be a fan, particularly after experiencing a sport-related incident.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

As was stated previously, the initial purpose of this study was to investigate and understand the impact of a sport-related *critical* incident, from the fans perspective. In order to accomplish this task, it was necessary to explore (1) how fans perceive and define sport-related critical incidents and (2) fans psychological and behavioral reaction(s) to sport-related critical incidents. Fans' perceptions of and reactions to sport-related critical incidents were assessed by conducting in-depth interviews. During this process, it was found that fan's perceptions of critical incidents were not vastly different and therefore did they provide for much variation within the data. According to the study participants, critical incidents occurred fairly infrequently and tended to be very similar in nature. Hence the research was modified to incorporate fans' interpretations of other types of sport-related events. Note: the word "critical" incident from here until the end of Chapter Three is used with the original description and definition in mind of what the literature indicated a critical incident might be. In Chapter Four and Five, the word "critical" will be used to illustrate how study participants perceived and defined it, unless otherwise stated.

The interview transcripts, as well as excerpts from two sport-related websites, were used to (1) understand participant's descriptions of what it means to be a sport fan, (2) examine the factors and conditions that influence an individual to become a sport fan, (3) investigate how sport fans interpret and react to sport-related events. By investigating these three issues, this research makes a contribution by advancing theory that will assist researchers and practitioners wrestle with how fans interpret not only the occurrence of a sport-related event, but also their own level of commitment.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

One outcome of this research is a better understanding of how fans perceive, define, and react to (1) becoming a sport fan, (2) being a fan, and (3) sport-related events. One primary question initially guided this research: What causes a person to become, remain, or stop being a fan to a sport entity? There are many underlying motives and processes involved in becoming and remaining a fan, as well as numerous issues that may cause a fan to lose interest, decrease commitment toward a sport entity, or cease being a fan. It was proposed that a sport-related critical incident could potentially impact a person's desire to become or remain a fan, a fan's level of loyalty, or focus of loyalty. The following research questions were initially addressed in this research:

(1) How do fans perceive and define sport-related critical incidents?
(2) What are the possible psychological and/or behavioral reactions to sport-related critical incidents?

Because the research outlined above sought to observe and interpret meanings within a particular context, it was neither possible nor appropriate to finalize research strategies before data collection began (Patton 1990). Qualitative research proposals

should specify primary questions to be explored and plans for data collection strategies, but it is perfectly acceptable to undergo alterations as necessary. Therefore, as the study progressed, the researcher decided to modify the research questions to become:

(1) How do fans define a sport fan?
(2) What factors are involved with becoming and remaining a sport fan?
(3) How do fans interpret sport-related events?
    a. How does a sport fan ascribe meaning to a sport-related event?

Why and how the decision to modify the research will be discussed in more detail in a later section. As no theories exist to adequately explain fans' perceptions of and reactions to sport-related *critical* incidents, nor the meanings ascribed to sport-related events, grounded theory methodology (Glaser and Strauss 1967) was used to examine this phenomenon.

OVERVIEW OF DISSERTATION

This dissertation is divided into five chapters: Chapter One is the introduction; Chapter Two provides the literature review, Chapter Three provides the research methodology, Chapter Four discusses the research findings, and Chapter Five reports the conclusions, implications, and establishes a direction for future research.

Chapter One presented the problem that the dissertation addressed; the impetus for initially studying fan's perceptions of and reactions to sport-related critical incidents; the reasoning behind modifying the focus of the study to include (1) the factors involved in becoming a sport fan, (2) the definition of and meaning behind being a sport fan and (3) the phenomenon of ascribing meaning to a sport-related event. Chapter One also

presented the statement of purpose; initial research questions; revised research questions; and an outline of the organization of this dissertation.

Chapter Two provides a preliminary review of the appropriate literatures that facilitated the examination of the research questions.

Chapter Three delineates the research methodology that was used to develop a theory of how fans interpret and react to a sport-related event. Included is an overview of grounded theory methodology, discussions of theoretical sensitivity, data collection, coding processes, and methods to verify the trustworthiness of a qualitative study.

Chapter Four presents the research findings which includes a review of additional relevant literature.

Chapter Five presents conclusions and implications of the results of the study as well as study's theoretical and managerial contributions. Finally, suggestions for future research are considered.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

To better understand fans' perceptions of and psychological and behavioral reactions to sport-related critical incidents, this chapter discusses the prevalence and value of sports in society and provides an overview of research relevant to the concepts of sport-related critical incidents, sportsfanship, fan loyalty, commitment, and identification.

THE PREVALENCE OF SPORTS

For the past three decades, researchers have found that at least two-thirds of Americans consider themselves to be a sport fan (Anderson and Stone 1981; Thomas 1986; Lieberman 1991). One can begin to confirm the popularity of sport through the amount of sport coverage in the broadcast media (e.g., television and radio), attendance figures at sporting events, the large number of sport-related movies and videos, the amount of sport coverage in the print media (e.g., books, magazines, newspapers), the emergence of sport on the Internet, and the pervasiveness of sports in informal discussions.

Sports Coverage - Broadcast Media

Over the past half century, television broadcast coverage has dramatically affected sports spectatorship (Zillmann and Paulus 1993). In 1960, the three major

television networks (ABC, NBC, and CBS) broadcast a total of three hundred hours of sports programming. By 1988, the time allotted to sports programming had increased 500 percent to over 1,800 hours (Madrigal 1995). These 1988 figures do not include sport programming found on the FOX network, ESPN, ESPN2, other cable sport channels, or special pay-per-view sporting broadcasts. In 1988, the three major networks and one sports cable channel (ESPN) devoted 8,760 total hours to sports programming (Wenner and Gantz, 1989). In 1997, only a decade later, sports programming on television in the United States exceeded 37,000 hours, with four major networks allotting over 2,000 hours and four cable network programs devoting 24 hours a day to sport (Bandyopadhyay and Buttone, 1997). The networks are well aware of the ratings potential of major sports programs and are willing to pay extraordinary sums of money for broadcast rights. The fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh highest rated television shows of all time are sport programs (fourth – Super Bowl XVI, 40.0 million viewers: fifth – Super Bowl XVII, 40.5 million; sixth – second Wednesday of the XVII Winter Olympics, 45.7 million; seventh – Super Bowl XX, 41.5 million). Of the 43 highest rated television shows of all time, twenty-one are sporting events (Famighetti 1998). In 1998, CBS, ABC, and ESPN paid a combined $17.6 billion to the National Football League (NFL) in order to telecast football games through the year 2005 (McCallum and O'Brien 1998b). NBC paid $3.5 billion for the broadcast rights for the 2000 to 2008 Olympic Games (Swift 1999). It was estimated that Fox sold $150 million worth of advertisement slots for the 1999 Super Bowl. A 30-second advertisement during the 1999 Super Bowl cost $1.6 million, up from $1.3 million the year before (West 1998; Walters 1999).

Sport coverage on the radio is also widespread. Most professional and major college sport teams have their own radio networks. Sport talk radio has become very popular. Touted by Goldberg (1998) to be the "the church of athletic self-opinion" (p. 213), sport talk radio allows fans to express their views, release their frustrations, and exhibit their knowledge of sport. The first 24 hour-a-day sport talk radio station, WFAN in New York, was introduced in 1987 (Haag 1996; Mariscal 1999) and only ten years later, an estimated 150 such stations were in existence (Goldberg 1998; Mariscal 1999).

Attendance/Spectatorship

During the mid-1980s, nearly seventy percent of American households watched college and professional sports regularly and ninety percent watched the 1984 Summer Olympics (Sloan 1989). However, there are concerns with respect to the media's potential impact on sports spectatorship. Although the Seven Network in Australia achieved a prime time Total People audience share (6 p.m. – midnight) of 61.4% for their coverage of the Summer 2000 Olympics on September 29, the ratings for NBC's (National Broadcast Company) coverage of the event was disappointing (Philadelphia Inquirer 2000). Initially, NBC's ratings looked promising with its coverage of the opening ceremony on Friday evening being rated as the most watched and highest-rated opening ceremony at an overseas Summer Olympics. However, the days following the opening ceremony proved to be a ratings disappointment. For instance, Saturday's rating was a 13.1 (each rating point represents 1,008,000 households, or 1 percent of the nation's estimated 100 million TV homes), down 24 percent from the 17.2 rating for the Atlanta Olympic Games. Even Sunday's rating was low, registering a 14.9 rating, which

was the lowest for Sunday prime-time Olympic coverage since 1980 (Philadelphia Inquirer 2000). NBC's overall ratings for the Sydney Olympics were down more than 36% from the ratings recorded for the Atlanta Games in 1996 (Cuprisin and Wolfley 2000).

The explosion of television choices and the ability to retrieve up-to-date results quickly via the Internet caused major turmoil for NBC. One problem was that NBC's coverage of the Summer 2000 Games wasn't live, sometimes broadcasting events that were almost 24 hours old. Results from these events were immediately available on the Internet causing interest in actually watching the Olympics to be low, even though interest in the competitions' outcomes was still present. As one fan stated, "I'm really not into watching something that I already know the results to" (Cuprisin and Wolfley 2000).

This is certainly no indication that sport spectatorship is dwindling. In 1991, attendance at professional hockey, baseball, basketball, and football games totaled nearly 106 million and attendance at college football and basketball games exceeded 74 million (Madrigal 1995). Over 800 million spectators watch World Cup soccer matches every four years (Zillmann and Paulus 1993). Average attendance figures at regular season NBA games increased from 6,484 (total of 3,721,532) in the 1968-1969 season to 17,135 (total of 20,373,079) for the 1997-1998 season. In 1998, attendance at Major League Baseball (MLB) games topped 64 million. During that time period, other sports turned in equally impressive numbers: NFL – 19.7 million (1998 season), National Hockey League (NHL) – 17.4 million (1997-98 season), NCAA football – 37.5 million (1998 season), and the NBA – 21.8 million (1997-98 season). Professional auto racing, perhaps

one of the fastest growing spectator sports in the United States, also draws large crowds. The 1998 Busch series brought in 2.1 million spectators and 6.4 million people attended the 1998 Winston Cup series (McCallum and O'Brien 1998aa).

Several less visible sports have also achieved high attendance numbers.

(1) The WNBA's (Women's National Basketball Association) inaugural year (1997) drew 41 crowds of more than 10,000 fans and the 1999 season drew 99 crowds of more than 10,000 fans. Additionally, the WNBA registered a record of 1,959,733 fans for regular season attendance in 1999 (http://sportsbusiness.about.com 2000).

(2) Many NCAA Division I women's basketball teams average several thousand spectators per contest (e.g., the University of Tennessee Lady Vols routinely draw more than 12,000 spectators per game).

(3) Crowds at Minor League Soccer games totaled over 2.7 million in 1998 (Wann, Melnick, Russell and Pease 2001).

Interest in watching sports has been greatly impacted by the number of choices and means by which fans can observe their favorite team or player compete.

Sports Movies/Videos

Yet another example of sports popularity in today's society can be seen in the large number of sport-related movies and videos now available. Over the past decade or so, many movies with sport themes have appeared, including *Jerry Maguire*, *A League of Their Own*, *Rudy*, *Space Jam*, *White Men Can't Jump*, *Remember the Titans*, *Major League*, *The Mighty Ducks*, *Bagger Vance*, and *Ali* (see Table 2-1 for a more detailed

list). Other sport-related videos include highlight films from many major sports (e.g., football, basketball, professional wrestling) and films about particular athletes (e.g., *Michael Jordan: Air Time*, *Michael Jordan: Come Fly With Me*, *Michael Jordan: His Airness*, *Shawn Kemp: The Reignman*, *The Joe Montana Story*, *Mickey Mantle: The American Dream Come to Life*, *Shaquille O'Neal: Larger Than Life*, and *Sir Charles*). One only needs to peruse the sport section at their local Blockbuster Video store to see a wide collection of such movies.

Sports Coverage - Print Media

Every major and minor newspaper contains a sports section and statistics show that news editors are expanding their coverage of sports relative to the rest of the paper (Lever and Wheeler 1984). *USA Today*, the "nations newspaper," includes a Sport section as one of its four major components (News, Money, Life) that is often the largest of the four. The amount of coverage that sports is beginning to receive in this type of media is indicative of the popularity of sport in today's society and its importance to the target audience.

Internet Sport Sites

The most recent evidence of the popularity of sport in society is the Internet. In January, 2002, the keyword "sports" resulted in approximately 50 million hits on the Google search engine. The keyword "football" resulted in 14.5 million hits, while there were 17.9 million for golf, 9.4 million for basketball, 9.2 million for baseball, and 6.7 million for hockey. Popular Internet sites for sport include ESPN Sportszone, CBS

Sportsline, CNN/SI, and *USA Today*. It has been estimated that these sites are called up over 100 million times per month (Alvarez 1997; Grover 1998). However, major Internet sites are not the only popular sport-related sites on the web. The Wimbledon site recorded approximately 40 million hits in one week during the 1997 tournament, while the Dallas Cowboys site averaged over 250,000 hits per night during the 1997 preseason (Alvarez 1997).

Further evidence of the impact of sport on the Internet can be found in book and magazine articles that list and describe sport-related Internet sites. A recently published book by Leebow (1999), entitled *300 Incredible Things for Sports Fans on the Internet* provides readers with addresses to a number of fan-friendly sites. Additionally, Sports Illustrated now has a weekly feature on sport in multimedia that contains "The Surfer" section, which describes several sport-specific Internet sites.

Lastly, the growth and popularity of fantasy games on the Internet is another testament to the prevalence of sport in today's society. From professional football and hockey to college basketball and major league soccer to professional auto racing, sports fans can find a fantasy game in which to participate.

Sports Talk

People, whether sports fans or not, regularly engage in sport-related discussions with others. As Kahle, Elton, and Kambara (1997) point out, "sports talk," which "encompasses any conversation about sports and sports-related phenomena" (p. 35), provides a way for individuals to establish shared values and beliefs, to define patterns of interaction, and to develop strategies for conflict resolution. In an effort to demonstrate

how movies imitate life, Kahle, Elton, and Kambara (1997) provide an example of "sports talk" in the film *City Slickers* (1991) where the characters banter back and forth in a dialogue about baseball.

> Phil: Will you stop with Roberto Clemente? Henry Aaron was the best right fielder of our generation.
> Ed: Could he run like Clemente? Could he throw like Clemente?
> Phil: Look! I'm going to say one thing to you. Okay? 755 home runs. Good-bye.
> Ed: Hey, Clemente was killed in a plane crash.
> Phil: What? Are you going to blame that on Aaron?
> Ed: I'm not blaming, I'm just saying.
> Bonnie: Ugh! Baseball.
> Phil: You got something against baseball?
> Bonnie: It's just that I used to live with a guy who was like a baseball encyclopedia, and I just got flashes.
> Phil: You broke up with him because of baseball?
> Bonnie: Uh, no. We had different needs. I needed him to treat me decent and get a job, and he needed to empty my bank account and leave.
> Mitch: Ouch!
> Phil: So you hate baseball?
> Bonnie: No, I like baseball. I just never understand how you guys could spend so much time discussing it. I mean, I've been to games, but I don't memorize who played third base for Pittsburgh in 1960.
> Mitch: Don Hoak.
> Phil and Ed: Don Hoak.
> Mitch: Beat you.
> Bonnie: See. That's exactly what I mean.
> Phil: So what do you and your friends talk about, out there?
> Bonnie: Well, real life, relationships. Are they working, are they not. Who is he seeing? Is that working?
> Ed: No contest. We win.
> Bonnie: Why?
> Ed: Honey, if that were as interesting as baseball, they'd have cards for it and sell it with gum.
> Mitch: Ed, I see by the sun it is time for you to hibernate again.
> Phil: You are right, I suppose. I mean, I guess it's childish. But when I was about 18 and my dad and I couldn't communicate about anything at all, we could still talk about baseball. Now that was real.
>
> - from *City Slickers*, 1991

Outside the United States

Sport spectatorship and fan loyalty are not limited to American sports or fans. In 1997, NFL games or highlights were broadcast in 190 different countries and territories resulting in well over 100 million viewers each week (O'Brien and Hersch 1997). During the 1999 season, NBA games were broadcast to 650 million households in 190 countries. Soccer is the national pastime in many countries and an obsession for hundreds of millions of spectators worldwide. For example, when 160,000 World Cup (1998) tickets went on sale in France, the sponsoring organization received four million phone calls requesting tickets in the first hour (McCallum and O'Brien 1998c). The bond between the fans of European football (soccer) and its teams is intense. Easton and Mackie (1998) reported that more than 1.3 million tickets were purchased for Euro '96 matches and 250,000 overseas visitors followed their teams to England. The matches were broadcast in more than 190 countries and watched by approximately 6.7 billion viewers. The event had an incredible impact on the British economy as well. HSBC Markets reported that Britain's annual domestic product grew by an additional 0.1 percent during the competition due to retail sales and tourism income (Easton and Mackie 1998). In sum, sports are present in any economy and a critical event that occurs within the sporting world has the potential to impact that economy greatly.

THE VALUE OF SPORTS

To understand how sport-related critical incidents impact fans, it is important to first consider the impact of sports on society (i.e., why sports are given such a high value in our society) as well as the impact of sports on individual consumers (fans). Several

researchers have conducted sociological studies focusing on the value of sport to the community (Wohl 1979; Hollands 1985; Snyder and Brown 1987; Regan 1991; Sage 1993). However, very little research has been conducted that focuses on the opinions of direct sports consumers (e.g., spectators and participants).

Societal Viewpoint

When assessing the value of sports to society, there are a number of theoretical perspectives, each with its own strengths, weaknesses, and biases. For example, structural-functionalists argue that sport fandom is a highly beneficial activity to society. On the other hand, conflict theorists view sport fandom in a much more negative way. According to Coakley (1990), three theoretical frameworks are generally followed when studying the value of sport to the community: functional (structural), conflict, and critical.

Functional theorists examine the positive contributions of sport to the community (e.g., inspiration, integration, tension management, goal attainment, achievement/success) (Eitzen and Sage 1986; Coakley 1990; Figler and Whitaker 1991). Other positive impacts of sport have also been studied (e.g., aestheticism, citizenship, dedication, entertainment, identity, loyalty, status, socialization). Stone (1981) suggested that "sport is a collective representation passionately (if at times irrationally and irresponsibly) embraced by community members" (p. 230) and that sport serves to strengthen community identification and bonding. Sport is essentially a social manifestation: "It promotes the formation of social grouping," to reiterate Huizinga (1970). In other words, sport is part of a community, a chance to be with and celebrate with others. Sport is a

public activity, held in a public place, for public pleasure. It provides the opportunity to gather and form identity groups, such as the "Black Hole" in Oakland (Raiders), the "Bleacher Creatures" at Duke, or the "Dawg Pound" in Cleveland. It invokes a deep sense of commonality, allowing racial, gender, religious, and ethnic barriers to be broken down, at least temporarily. In sum, a functionalist approach focuses attention on how sport helps satisfy needs. The functionalist approach leads to the conclusion that sport has the ability to bring people together who might otherwise have very little in common.

Conflict theorists, on the other hand, focus on the negative effects of sport on the community (e.g., commercialism, sexism, exploitation, coercion) (Hughes and Coakley 1984; Coakley 1990; Figler and Whitaker 1991). Conflict theorists believe that in capitalist societies, sporting activity becomes a popular form of entertainment because it encourages materialism (e.g., purchasing tickets and/or buying clothing with team logos). Other negative aspects of sport include excessive winning stress, drug abuse, gambling, and violence (Cheska 1981; Smith et al. 1981; Roberts and Olson 1989; Foley 1990; Frey 1991). Sport has been viewed as potentially regressive in nature. House (1989) referred to sport as "terminal adolescent syndrome"; however, many years prior, Veblen (1934) recognized this side of sport and noted an addiction to sports serves as

> *"an arrested development in the man's moral nature. This peculiar boyishness of temperament in sporting men immediately becomes apparent when attention is directed to the large element of make-believe that is present in all sporting activity" (p. 170).*

Critical theorists believe that sport exists for different reasons for different people at different times. Sport is not simply a source of inspiration nor is it simply an alienating and distorted set of physical activities shaped by economic interests. Critical theorists

believe that sport grows out of the struggles between groups of people trying to live their lives in satisfying ways (Coakley 1990).

Individual Consumer Viewpoint

Images of the sport fan can differ greatly. The sport fan is often described as a "lazy, beer-drinking, couch potato," (Smith 1988; Lasch 1989; Meier 1989; Zillmann, Bryant and Sapolsky 1989) with pathological obsessions that negatively impact interpersonal relationships and a propensity toward violent behavior. *Reader's Digest* ("Game Plans" 1997) printed a story of a wife's conversation she had with her husband as he watched football on a Sunday afternoon. When she asked her husband what he intended to do the following evening, he stated he was planning to watch *Monday Night Football*. When she reminded him that it was their anniversary, he simply said, "Okay, we'll hold hands while we watch the game" (p. 91). Not only are sports fans accused of being lazy, but also insensitive to interpersonal and intimate relationship needs. Quirk (1997), in his book entitled *Not Now, Honey, I'm Watching the Game*, he described a *sportsaholic*, someone who is so addicted to sport that his involvement with it disrupts his relationship with his wife or girlfriend (note: Quirk believed that the vast majority of *sportsaholics* were male!).

However, others have a more positive view of the sport fan. Some describe the sport fan as a happy, enthusiastic supporter, participating in an activity that brings him pleasure. Guttman (1980) challenged the "lazy, couch potato" criticism with the following:

> *"Although it is unusual to denounce museum-goers for not painting still-lifes and bad form to fault concert audiences for not playing the violin, it is quite common, even for those who are enthusiastic about sports to criticize spectators for athletic inactivity" (p. 275).*

Similarly, Hemphill (1995) remarked that it "would be absurd to insist that all spectators become players, just as it would be absurd to insist that everyone should stop reading books and start writing them, that ballet audiences should take up dancing, that movie goers should make their own films" (p. 52). The criticism that sport fans are lazy has not held up well to empirical investigation. Additionally, Roloff and Solomon (1989) found that greater similarity than conflict in sport interests as 63 percent of the participants in their study listed at least one sport they and their partner enjoyed watching together on television and 72 percent listed at least one sport they enjoyed attending together. Therefore, Roloff and Solomon (1989) concluded that there was "no support for the notion that conflict over sports aversely affects relational quality" (p. 308).

Regardless of one's perception of the sport fan, what benefits do people derive from being a sport fan? Does it indeed provide some pleasure? An escape from everyday life? An excuse to escape from everyday life?

Sloan (1979) provided a comprehensive evaluation of theories proposed to explain the appeal of sports. According to Sloan, five theories explain why people are interested in sports: 1) salubrious effects, 2) stress and stimulation seeking, 3) catharsis and aggression, 4) entertainment, and 5) achievement seeking. Sloan purports most, if not all, of these theories "fall under the umbrella of Harris' extremely broad Somatopsychic Theory" (Sloan 1979, p. 226). Harris' Somatopsychic Theory (Harris 1973) states that attraction to sports is a consequence of reinforcing pleasures mediated

by a variety of factors (i.e., activity, arousal, achievement, self concept needs) that result from activity and sport involvement.

According to Sloan (1979), *salubrious effects* theory (also referred to as recreation theory and diversion theory) suggests that sports provide pleasure through increased physical and mental well-being. Specifically, sports are thought to provide recreation or diversion, or a means of escape (McPherson 1975; Lever and Wheeler 1984). As a means of recreation, people restore and rejuvenate their energy to work and deal with life by playing and sports are thought to provide relief from fatigue or boredom. As a diversion, which might be considered a subset of recreation, sports are thought to provide a means of escape from the normal routine or tedium of life. Diversions add new dimensions to life and change life's pace, so to speak. Segrave (2000) refers to sport as a means of escape suggesting that "one of the sources of sport's enormous appeal is that it provides an escape, a brief and often intoxicating respite from the complexities and confusion of everyday life" (p. 61). Deford (1985) refers to sport as a "cozy corner" (p. 44), where the fan finds himself far removed from the difficulties of daily life. Sports enable people to temporarily forget their troubles. Wann (1997) suggested escape might be particularly prevalent during personally difficult and/or stressful times. He noted that historically, many individuals have used sport spectating as a diversion during wartime. For example, President Roosevelt's decision to allow professional baseball to continue during World War II was designed to provide an escape. Roosevelt stated that Americans "ought to have a chance for recreation and for taking their minds off their work" (McGuire 1994).

Although this appears to be a viable explanation as a benefit of and reason to participate in sport spectatorship, it is unclear exactly from what people are escaping. Sloan (1989) argued sport could provide "an escape from work and other tediums of life" (p. 183). Smith (1988) suggested "the search for excitement represents one of the most familiar means of escape" (p. 58). However, Heinegg (1985) pointed out that sport serves as "a flight from the pain of existence" and "worldly cares and crises" (p. 457). These two viewpoints imply that individuals use sports to escape from their understimulated (i.e., tedious and boring) lives as well as to escape from their overstimulated lives.

Stress and stimulation seeking theory suggests that interest in sports is due to an individual's desire to seek arousal from crowd involvement. Klausner (1968) suggested that individuals who do not experience tension, risk and stress in the normal course of life (McNeil 1968; Elias and Dunning 1970) seek to create opportunities to fulfill their needs for stress in socially acceptable or unacceptable ways. Klausner (1968) contended that sports provide a means to create and experience those stresses in socially acceptable ways. A person may desire vicarious stress by watching an event (eustress – pleasant stress), cheering with a crowd, and by investing their emotions in an event. Eustress, a positive form of arousal and stimulation, may be found in acting out the behaviors and emotions of others. For instance, pick-up touch football games are much more prevalent following – rather than preceeding – a Saturday football game.

As indicated, an important component of the stress and stimulation seeking theory is that a person seeks arousal from crowd involvement. Although there are sport-related

behaviors that are public in nature and entail crowd involvement, the theory does not help explain the large number of fans who watch sports in the privacy of their homes.

Catharsis and aggression theories suggest that an individual is interested in sports in order to release tension and aggression by watching the aggressive acts of others (Storr 1970; Iso-Ahola and Hatfield 1986). It was initially thought that by watching others engage in aggressive acts, one's own aggression could be released, vicariously. Social learning theory (Bandura 1983) suggests, however, that watching aggressive acts might actually promote aggressive behavior rather than provide a release (Berkowitz 1970; Berkowitz 1975; Berkowitz 1986). In other words, violent acts are learned via observation and whether the acts are rewarded or punished will determine the extent to which they are inhibited or disinhibited and are displayed by the spectator. In question is whether violent outbursts associated with sporting events are a consequence of observing a sport or a source of spectator attraction. As Vince Lombardi once said, "This [football] is a violent sport, that's why crowds love it" (Michener 1976).

Entertainment theory proposes that people are interested in sports because of its aesthetic value (the beauty of sports) and the moral representation of sports (sports are thought to teach values and to build character). The aesthetics of sport is considered to capture one's attention and to pleasurably occupy one's time. Guttman (1986) eloquently described the artistic nature of sport:

> *"If the runner's stride (and agonized grimace), the gymnast's vault (and forced smile), and the goalie's save (and muddled brow) are not forms of art, they certainly arouse in us emotions related to those we experience when we listen to one of Bach's cantatas or contemplate a still life by Chardin. Unquestionably, there are physical performances that live in the memory like the lines of a poem" (p. 177).*

The aesthetic value of sport performances can even be appreciated by nonfans. Heinegg (1985) noted "even the anti-fan will sometimes stop in his tracks in front of the television set and admire despite himself" (p. 455).

Enjoyment of sport is thought to begin early in life. Young children are introduced to sports through toys and clothing. It is also suggested that children learn the "rules of the game" from adults, along with the value placed on sport as a means of building character and preparing one for dealing with life's obstacles. Zajonc's (1968) mere exposure theory, applied to entertainment, suggests that familiarity leads to attraction and liking and thus, the mere exposure to sports may lead to an interest in sports.

Finally, *achievement seeking* theory proposes that people are interested in sport in order to develop a sense of identity and uniqueness. Fromm (1955) suggested that individuals need a sufficient sense of identity and uniqueness and that if they could not obtain it through their own creative efforts, they might seek some degree of distinction by becoming associated with a positive other or positive group of others. Beisser (1967) theorized that urban dwellers would attach themselves most strongly to sports and particular teams in order to satisfy the needs for belonging and identity that their deindividuated city could not provide. Beisser's theory has some merit within the realm of team identification; however, rural dwellers can not be excluded as they exhibit as much or more interest in sports. Cialdini *et al.* (1976) demonstrated this type of association with the BIRGing phenomenon. Individuals experience achievement through sports by "basking in reflected glory." Based on Heider's Balance theory (Heider 1958), Cialdini, *et al.* (1976) proposed that by associating with a positive other (a team or an

athlete), people believe that they appear more attractive as well. A person identifies with achieving others through vicarious affiliation and by sharing in their successes, and thus satisfies his own individual need for achievement. Schafer (1969) suggested fans identify with a team because that team signifies an extension of their personal sense or self " ...by identifying with the team, the fan is afforded the chance to affirm his own worth and quality..." (p. 33).

Individuals may look to sports in order to develop a sense of identity by associating themselves with a positive other or group of others, like a team or a player. Identifying with a sport, team and/or player may satisfy an individual's need for achievement that may contribute to the development of fan loyalty. Farred's (2000) discussion of identification includes "overidentification: that moment in which the fan makes no real distinction between himself and the team he supports; when he *is* the Chicago Bulls or the New York Giants" (p. 103). By affiliating himself with a particular team, the fan has the ability to live vicariously and manifest the physical abilities that he lacks, or suspects he lacks. Being affiliated and pronouncing this affiliation is a way of *being* athletic.

Research provides further evidence of each theory's viability with respect to how well it explains interest in sports. Sloan (1989) has discussed the results of various research projects that have examined the different theories. Findings suggest that support is most favorable for the entertainment and achievement-seeking theories. Research, as well as evidence from the popular press, has established that there is a high level of interest in sports. By examining the interest in sports through entertainment and achievement-seeking theories, one may begin to understand why there is an attraction or

attachment to sports. These ideas also help provide understanding of how attraction or attachment to sports may develop, as well as what elements may influence such attraction or attachment. In order to further understand this attraction or attachment to sports, it is necessary to explore the occurrence of and the potential influence of sport-related critical incidents.

CRITICAL INCIDENT

Critical events have been defined as " ...mostly straightforward accounts of very commonplace events that occur in routine professional practice which are critical in the rather different sense that they are indicative of underlying trends, motives, and structures" (Tripp 1993, p. 24-25). Tripp (1993) also suggests "the vast majority of critical incidents ... are not all dramatic or obvious" (p. 24).

More specifically, critical incidents are "not 'things' which exist independently of an observer and are waiting discovery... but like all data, critical incidents are created. Incidents happen, but *critical incidents* are produced by the way we look at a situation: a critical incident is an interpretation of the significance of an event" (Tripp 1993, p.8). ...

Many of the initial studies of critical incidents examined military-related phenomena. Miller (1947) examined the proceedings of the elimination boards that contained the reasons for eliminating a particular pilot during World War II. Most of the reasons were tied to specific behaviors. Flanagan (1949) collected reasons for the failures of bombing missions as reported in the Group Mission Reports. Again, many of the reasons for failure were related to specific behaviors. Preston (1948) developed a procedure to determine the critical requirements for the work and evaluation of officers in

the United States Air Force. Finally, Gordon's (1947, 1949) studies identified the critical requirements of a commercial airline pilot.

One method of studying critical incidents was developed by John C. Flanagan (1954). Flanagan's Critical Incident Technique (CIT) grew out of studies carried out in the Aviation Psychology Program of the United States Army Air Force in World War II. The success of the method in analyzing such activities as combat leadership and disorientation in pilots resulted in its extension and further development after the war, where the technique formally came known as CIT. Flanagan described the technique as consisting of "a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing psychological principles" (p. 327). The technique "outlines procedures for collecting observed incidents having special significance and meeting systematically defined criteria" (Flanagan 1954, p. 327). Flanagan (1954) identified an *incident* as an activity carried out by someone that is observed and complete enough to infer from, and defined *critical incident* as an incident that leaves little doubt as to the purpose of the act and the effect of its consequences.

To be critical, an incident must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems clear to the observer and the incident must have an after-the-incident impact on behavioral choices. The term "incident" indicates any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete enough to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act.

Critical events are present in many facets of life. Dearing and Rogers (1996) have created a class of what they term "triggering events" which they believe are critical in

placing an issue on the U.S. media agenda. They define these issues as "spectacular events" and "cues to action," such as the death of actor Rock Hudson from AIDS and the oil spill of the Exxon Valdez.

Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault (1990) conducted a study of critical service encounters in three service industries (i.e., airline, hotel, restaurant). These authors used Critical Incident Technique to examine particular events and related behaviors of employees that caused customers to distinguish satisfactory services from dissatisfactory services. A critical incident was defined as "one that contributes to or detracts from the general aim of the activity in a significant way... specific interactions between customers and service firm employees that are especially satisfying or especially dissatisfying" (Bitner, Booms, Tetreault 1990, p. 73). The authors note not *all* service encounters were classified, only those encounters that customers found memorable because they were particularly satisfying or dissatisfying were classified. The authors set up four criteria for an incident to be considered in the study. The incident must (1) involve an employee-customer interaction, (2) be very satisfying or dissatisfying from the *customer's* point of view, (3) be a discrete episode, and (4) have sufficient detail to be visualized by the interviewer.

Along the same line of inquiry, Keaveney (1995) conducted a critical incident study to determine what behaviors caused customers to switch service providers. Critical incidents were defined as "any event, combination of events, or series of events between the customer and one or more service firms that caused the customer to switch service providers" (p. 72). The author identified more than 800 critical behaviors of service firms that caused customers to switch services. Like the Bitner *et al.* (1990) study,

Keveaney also examined employee-customer service encounters, but chose to broaden the definition of critical incident to include any relevant interface between customers and service firms. In this way, incidents could involve more than one service firm. The key criterion for an incident to be included in the study was that, from the customer's perspective, the incident led to service switching.

Curtis, Helion, Domsohn (1998) set out to identify and describe critical helpful and hindering clinical teaching behaviors of supervising athletic trainers, as perceived by student athletic trainers. These authors also used CIT to identify critical behaviors. A critical incident was defined as "any verbal or physical behavior of a supervising athletic trainer deemed important enough to be reported by a student athletic trainer on a solicitation form" (p. 251). The forms to be filled out required students to describe the circumstances that led up the incident, the supervising athletic trainer's behavior, and the reason why they felt the behavior was helpful or hindering. In order for a solicitation form to be accepted it had to: (1) identify an actual action or omission of a specific verbal or physical action on the part of the supervising athletic trainer, (2) describe an action that took place on the part of the supervisor while in a supervisory role, and (3) be complete and legible. Four major categories were identified: mentoring, professional acceptance, nurturing, and modeling. Helpful (65%) and hindering (35%) behaviors were reported in all categories.

Cheek, O'Brien, Ballantyne, and Pincombe (1997) used CIT to explore the beliefs of a cross-section of careers (nursing and others) and consumers about the value of nursing and the nature of nursing's contribution in aged and extended care. Participants were asked to describe critical aspects with regard to something that happened during the

past two or three weeks involving nursing care that they were part of or that they observed. One requirement was that the incident had to have a clear beginning and ending and it must be important to them and the quality of their nursing practice. When participants recalled a particular event, they were asked the following five questions: (1) What was the aspect of care? (2) When did it occur? (3) Where did it occur? (4) Who was involved? And (5) Why did it occur? Additionally, the participants were asked to describe what happened step by step. The authors found that participants had difficulty identifying a discrete event that had a clear beginning and ending and that occurred within the time frame allotted. Norman, Redfern, Tomalin and Oliver (1992) suggested critical incidents are "often an amalgam of incidents of similar type rather than a clearly recalled single event" (p. 595) and found the most appropriate unit of analysis was not the incident itself, but "happenings" revealed by incidents that are "critical" by virtue of being important to respondents with respect to the quality of nursing care. Based on the difficulty of satisfying the original criterion set forth in their study, Cheek *et al.* (1997) modified the criterion and asked participants to "think of something that has happened involving nursing care that you were part of or that you observed. It must be important to you and the quality of [your] nursing practice" (p. 673).

Lount and Hargie (1997) attempted to identify problem situations priests typically encounter and explore, then formulate and characterize a comprehensive itemization of skills inherent in priest-priest and priest-layperson interactions. These authors also utilized CIT and asked priests to describe their experiences of several one-to-one and one-to-many interactions. The purpose of the study was to uncover priests' own conceptions of their interpersonal communication and counseling skills. In advance of

the interview, participants were asked to recall examples and personal experiences of incidents of interpersonal interaction in the pastoral ministry. Dickson, Hargie and Morrow (1989) suggests allowing respondents time to consider their responses prior to the interview to reduces the likelihood they will focus on trivial incidents during the interview. In this particular study, participants were asked to describe an event/incident from start to finish and to be specific about the actual behaviors and what was said. In this way, each recollection included details of the setting in which the event took place, exactly what occurred, an account of the outcome, and why it was considered effective or ineffective practice.

As indicated by the above research, a critical incident is considered an interpretation of some "event" by an individual. A critical incident can be ordinary or extraordinary, but it is one that attracts attention, is deemed important, and has some impact on the party of interest. The attention derived and perceived importance could be felt on a worldwide, community, or a very personal basis.

Critical Incidents in Sports

The sports industry abounds with examples of events that stand out in people's minds (i.e., retirements, deaths, record breaking performances, resignations, firings, relocations, legal and moral indiscretions, unpredictable and unbelievable scores or outcomes). Many sports have had their share of scandals. For example, Benedict and Yeager (1998) found that 21 percent of players on NFL rosters had been charged with serious crimes ranging from resisting arrest and armed robbery to kidnapping and homicide (note: many of the players had multiple charges. Although the media is quick

to attack the athletes that engage in antisocial antics, unfortunately, it is often the sport's reputation that is damaged (Benedict and Yaeger 1998). There have been only a handful of studies that examine public perceptions, attitudes and beliefs about athletes who have discredited themselves, as well as, their team, league, and sport.

The media can play a major role in creating awareness of a sport-related critical incident. It is also important to note that information regarding sport-related critical incidents are filtered by the media and can also be distorted by impression management strategies of athletes. For example, the media coverage of two athletes who tested positive for the AIDS virus, Magic Johnson and Greg Louganis were treated very differently. Wachs and Dworkin (1997) explained that the media cast Johnson as a "hero for living with a stigmatized illness (p. 332) because of the way he attempted to increase public awareness of AIDS and the way in which he openly dealt with the illness. However, the media cast Louganis as a "carrier who was morally responsible for alerting the heterosexual community to this risk" (p. 332). The "risk" involved an incident in which Louganis hit his head on the diving board and consequently bled in the swimming pool. Wachs and Dworkin (1997) note that "Louganis is a hero only to a smaller, fragmented interest group ... as a hero to gay men" while Johnson is "unequivocally labeled a courageous hero to everyone" (p. 339).

Forecasting a particular event or the potential impact that an event may have can be extremely perplexing. It seems that positively perceived events have a shorter shelf life than negatively perceived events. Record-breaking performances (e.g., Barry Bond's entry into the 500 home run club), assumed to be perceived as positive incidents, are reported in the media, discussed in barrooms, and then quickly forgotten. Negative

stories, on the other hand, reach the media screen, are broadcast quickly, discussed in depth, and have the potential to "hang out there" for quite some time (e.g., Mike Tyson biting off a piece of Evander Holyfield's ear, the death of NASCAR driver Dale Earnhardt). Interestingly enough, the accident that killed "The Intimidator" was voted The Associated Press (AP) Story of the Year (www.sportingnews.com 2001) by member newspapers and broadcast outlets, beating Barry Bonds' achievement of breaking baseball's single-season home run record and the September 11th terrorist attacks. In the AP voting, Earnhardt's death received 31 first-place votes and 663 points overall while Bonds' record got 10 first-place votes and 479 total points. The sports world's reaction to the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks received 25 first-place votes and 461 total points. Rounding out the top 10 were:

4. Arizona Diamondbacks winning a thrilling World Series
5. Michael Jordan's comeback
6. Lance Armstrong winning a third straight Tour de France
7. Tiger Woods winning his fourth straight major at the Masters
8. baseball owners voting to eliminate two teams
9. Cal Ripken Jr.'s retirement
10. Jennifer Capriati's comeback wins in the Australian and French Opens

These results also give justification for the importance of sport in today's society. Of the ten top stories of 2001, nine were sport-oriented. Additionally, one can assume that since these stories were voted "top stories" of the year, they were viewed as *critical* incidents. It is difficult to say, however, whether each of these is perceived as positive or negative as it most likely depends upon the fans' perceptions of the sport, league, team, player, or coach.

There are numerous examples of sport-related critical incidents to which fan's attention is raised and the market place is affected. Deford (1969) coined the term impact

champions to describe athletes who have the ability to "establish a notoriety and an impact that can be turned into box office" (p. 33). Feather (1991) examined reactions to *tall poppies*, people who have achieved fame in their chosen field (e.g., politicians, entertainers, athletes) and then fallen from grace. Grove and Paccagnella (1995) describe "tall poppy syndrome" where people show a "tendency to closely scrutinize high-profile individuals, search for reasons to 'cut them down to size,' and experience satisfaction if they suffer a reversal of status" (p. 88). Tall poppies that are most likely to be "trimmed" are those seen to be "self-centered, quick-tempered, and uncaring in their attitudes and whose integrity and concern for others is suspect" (Feather, Volkmer and McKee 1991). Interestingly, Feather and his colleagues found that among college students, when compared to other prominent public figures in Australia (e.g., politicians, entertainers), the most favorable attitudes were directed toward athletes. Additionally, the students were less pleased about a hypothetical fall on the part of an athlete.

Examples of Sport-Related Critical Incidents

The individual based sport-related critical incidents discussed above are just a few that have occurred in recent years. A brief perusal of several top sport publications reveals that sport-related critical incidents (both positive and negative) occur in almost every sport on a very frequent basis. For example, the following are just a few of the items that have been presented in the media during the past few years:

Major League Baseball:

- Cal Ripken Jr.'s consecutive game playing streak (2632 games)
- Cal Ripken Jr.'s retirement (2001)
- Mark McGwire versus Sammy Sosa home-run hitting record
- Barry Bonds supassing the home-run hitting record (2001)

- Arizona Diamondbacks winning World Series (2001)
- MLB proposed strike (2002)

- **National Basketball Association**:
  - Michael Jordan's retirement (from Chicago Bulls – 1999)
  - Michael Jordan's comeback (Washington Wizards - 2001)
  - Labor dispute/lock-out – NBA plays half season (1998)
  - Lakers back to back championship
  - High school player Kwame Brown - #1 draft pick

- **National Football League:**
  - Barry Sanders retirement
  - Dan Marino's retirement
  - Steve Young's retirement
  - John Elway's retirement
  - Walter Peyton's death
  - Ray Lewis murder trial
  - Mark Chmura's statutory rape allegations

  - **Others**:
  - Dale Earnhardt's death (NASCAR - 2001)
  - Mario Lemeux comeback (National Hockey League - 2001)
  - Lance Armstrong: 4 Tour deFrance titles (1998-2002) - comeback after bout with testicular cancer

Fan Reactions

Each of the above mentioned critical incidents may attract attention, albeit dissimilar interpretations and reactions from fans. What may be perceived as a positive sport-related incident to one fan may be perceived as a negative sport-related incident by another fan. A couple of examples will help illustrate this point:

> Scenario #1: Upon hearing the announcement that Michael Jordan is retiring from professional basketball… a Los Angeles Laker fan is thrilled with the prospect and considers this a tremendous chance for his/her team to win the national title this year!
>
> Scenario #2: Upon hearing the announcement that Michael Jordan is retiring from professional basketball… a Los Angeles Laker fan, who enjoys the thrill of the game and the competitive action on the court,

values the skill and grace of the athlete, will miss witnessing a "slam dunk" from the free throw line by "Air Jordan."

What causes the perception of the same incident to be different? How does it impact a fan's psychological and behavioral reaction? Will a completely different type of critical incident garner the same psychological and behavioral reaction? For example, fans mourned the loss of both Michael Jordan and Dale Earnhardt, but were the psychological and behavioral ramifications similar?

The sports industry and the sport marketing literature have virtually ignored the impact that sport-related critical incidents have on fans. Although research has been conducted in the areas of fan behavior (e.g., factors affecting attendance) and fan loyalty (e.g., how identification effects loyalty) no one has put forth a theory regarding the impact that sport-related critical incidents have on fans. For this reason, it was necessary to build theory in this area in order to further knowledge regarding the impact of critical incidents. To facilitate the understanding of how sport-related critical incidents impact fans, it was necessary to understand the notion of "fan" and explore the concepts of fan loyalty, commitment, and identification.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

A review of potentially relevant literature allows the researcher to formulate what he/she *thinks* is going on with the phenomenon under study and provide a tentative theory of what is occurring (Maxwell 1998). Although no theory regarding fan's experiences with sport-related critical incidents exists, there are several pieces of literature that can be assumed to provide preliminary insight into the phenomenon. The following areas will

be discussed below: a comparison of fans and spectators; the historical development of the loyalty concept within the consumer and sporting arena; commitment and identification.

Definition of a Sport Fan

A fan, short for fanatic, is considered an ardent devotee or an enthusiast. Whether an individual is a fan of a sport, a team, a player, or a coach, he/she is motivated by an extreme, unreasoning enthusiasm. The term 'enthusiast' is also used in place of 'fan,' as it describes someone who has a strong interest in something, usually a hobby, however, it lacks the unfavorable/negative connotation that is sometimes associated with the term 'fan' (i.e., hockey enthusiast).

In their discussion of athletic participation versus athletic spectatorship, Zillman, Bryan and Sapolsky (1989) point out that much of the literature on sport spectatorship has painted a less than attractive picture of the spectator. From violent raids to engaging in an activity that is a "waste of time" (Lazarsfeld and Merton 1948), the spectator's image is not always an appealing one. Spectators have been described as lazy, cruel, and eagerly awaiting a display of violence for which they chant and cheer. However, Zillman, Bryan and Sapolsky (1989) point out violent outbursts and unsportsmanship-like conduct are the exception, certainly not the rule. In fact, being a spectator can bring about some of the same benefits as actually participating in sports (e.g., relief from boredom, enjoyment, personal development). Additionally, being a spectator allows people who would not otherwise have the ability to engage in sports, the opportunity to enjoy sports.

Taylor (1991) and Milgram (1977) suggest that fanatics act with a passion that contributes to excessive or extreme commitment to beliefs, feelings, and actions. There is considerable evidence in the literature that indicates that sport fans derive a great deal of personal meaning from their choice and affiliation with a sports team. They bask in reflected glory (BIRG) and cut off reflected failure (CORF) (Cialdini et al. 1976; Wann and Branscombe 1990).

Brooks (Brooks 1994) presents sports as having tangible as well as intangible elements. The four tangible elements of the core sport product are the sports type (e.g., football, basketball), the participants (e.g., athletes, coaches), the team (e.g., Dallas Cowboys, Tennessee Volunteers), and the competition (e.g., rivals, NCAA championships, the Super Bowl). The intangible elements include more internally generated dimensions (e.g., thrill, satisfaction, pride). Brooks (1994) also delineates the difference between primary and secondary sports markets. Primary markets consist of participants, spectators, and volunteers. Secondary markets consist of people and organizations that affect consumer sports tangentially (e.g., corporate sponsors, advertising market). Participants are the actual producers of the sport and without them; there would be no sport. Spectators are actual consumers of the sport and includes television viewers, stadium attendees, radio listeners, and press readers. Research conducted at the university level uncovered three different clusters of consumption items that are important to spectators (Brooks 1994). The first cluster relates to the tangible core product. People in this cluster want to see highly developed skill and talent; the best athletes in action; exciting and exhilarating competition. Therefore, what is important is the quality of the contest, the skill of the participants, and the team record. The second

cluster relates to a feeling of ownership or team association, similar to the BIRGing phenomenon. This association helps explain why people begin watching 'their' team during championship games after not watching all season. The third cluster relates to environmental factors (e.g., exciting atmosphere, chance to have a good time with friends).

Spectator versus Fan

Developing, or having, an interest in sport, does not qualify an individual as a loyal sport fan. Pooley (1978) first suggested that a sport fan may be distinguished from a sport enthusiast (or spectator) according to the individual's level of involvement. Pooley (1978) suggested "spectators" observe a particular event and when it is over they forget about the event. An "involved fan," however, is different in that they "continue their (sic) interest until the intensity of feeling toward the team becomes so great that part of every day is devoted to either the team or in some instances, the broad realm of sports in general" (p. 14). Level of involvement suggests that a loyal fan has a psychological commitment toward a sport, team and/or player, and that his/her behavioral dispositions demonstrate such a commitment. In other words, a *fan* has a vested interest in sports.

McPherson (1976) proposed six characteristics to identify a sport fan. A sport fan:

1. Invests varying amounts of time and money in various forms of direct and indirect secondary sport involvement.
2. Has a varying degree of knowledge concerning sport performers, sport statistics, and sport strategies.
3. Has an affective (emotive) involvement with one or more individuals or groups in the sport system.
4. Experiences, and either internalizes or verbalizes, feelings and mood states while consuming a sport event.

5. Employs sport as a major topic of conversation with peers and family members.
6. Arranges leisure time life-style around professional and amateur sport events.

The Disposition Theory of Mirth (Zillmann and Cantor 1976) helps explain a fan's reaction of cheering for a particular team and hoping that the opponent is defeated. The Disposition Theory of Mirth is a general model from which a fan's affective reactions to events can be predicted. In general, the theory asserts, the "loss of value inflicted upon our enemies and gain of value obtained by our friends is appreciated, and the gain of value obtained by our enemies and loss of value inflicted upon our friends is deplored" (Zillmann and Cantor 1976, p. 113). Two dispositional conditions can occur. The optimal condition is when a team that is extremely liked defeats an opponent who is extremely disliked (enjoyment is experienced). At the other end of the continuum, is the condition where an extremely disliked opponent defeats an extremely liked team (disappointment is experienced).

A fan may make a personal investment in sports by participating in a sport, spending time watching live events or televised games, listening to sports on the radio, reading about sports in newspapers, magazines, and/or other sport-related publications, using sports as a topic of conversation, and/or spending money on sport-related products or paraphernalia. To better understand the dimensions of sportfanship, it is important to consider the concept of loyalty.

Loyalty

The concept of loyalty has been the subject of study for a long time. Moreover, the concept has been examined by several disciplines (e.g., psychology, politics, organizational behavior, marketing, and sport/leisure). Conceptually, the concept of

engaging in repeat behavioral patterns, whether it involves purchasing, voting, attending, and/or retention, is critical and desirable to almost any business enterprise. Loyal customers are often a primary goal of marketing programs and are central to a firm's competitive advantage (Dick and Basu 1994).

Little is known about the conceptual nature of loyalty or its relationship to other marketing concepts and some controversy exists over the real meaning of loyalty (Jacoby and Kyner 1973; Jacoby and Chestnut 1978; Dick and Basu 1994). After many years of research, the conceptual nature of loyalty is still in question. The notion that loyalty plays a critical role in generating repeat purchase behavior remains an implicit assumption among academic scholars and practitioners. Although the construct of consumer loyalty has received a considerable amount of attention in other disciplines, "its application to the study of spectators and fans remains in an embryonic stage" (Funk and Pastore 2000).

Traditionally, researchers focused their time and effort into operationalizing brand loyalty, while the conceptual nature of brand loyalty received scarce research attention. As a result, research efforts were often devoted to measuring an ill-defined construct which hindered scientific progress of understanding, explaining, and predicting customer loyalty (Jacoby and Kyner 1973; Jacoby and Chestnut 1978). "Regardless of how sophisticated the operationalization, before a phenomenon can be measured one must clearly define what it is and what it is not" (Jacoby and Kyner 1973). Conceptual definitions should precede and determine one's operationalizations rather than vice versa.

Brand loyalty research has covered three different conceptualizations: behavioral, attitudinal, and a composite of both behavioral and attitudinal definitions. Even as far

back as 1973, Jacoby and Kyner pointed out that the construct of brand loyalty had intrigued investigators for at least three decades. At that time, reviews of the work on loyalty revealed inconclusive, ambiguous, or contradictory findings and thus, brand loyalty research had failed to contribute significantly to our understanding of consumer decision processes. Jacoby and Kyner (1973) suggested that one explanation for this confusion and controversy might be that there were at least eight major approaches to operationally defining brand loyalty. "So many definitions make it difficult and hazardous to compare, synthesize, and accumulate findings" (Kollat, Engel and Blackwell 1970). Regardless of which measure an investigator selects, a single unidimensional measure is probably insufficient for measuring such a complex multidimensional phenomenon as brand loyalty. Olson and Jacoby (1971) administered 12 specific brand loyalty measures to 177 toothpaste purchasers. The optimal factor-analytic solution accounted for 67% of the variance and yielded four factors: Behavioral Brand Loyalty, Attitudinal Brand loyalty, Multibrand Loyalty, and General Brand Loyalty. Day (1969) and Jacoby (1971) also suggest brand loyalty consists of both behavioral and attitudinal components.

In order to more fully understand the concept of loyalty, it is important to further investigate each individual component of loyalty. Behavioral measures are taken from consumers' overt or self-reported behaviors. Attitudinal measures are developed from consumers' brand preference or intent. The composite approach, which integrates both components into a loyalty index score for each purchaser, has been widely supported as the most holistic method to define brand loyalty.

Behavioral Approach

Early work in loyalty research focused on an individual's behavior as the full representation of brand loyalty. Researchers began, however, in the 1960's to question behavior as the sole indicator of loyalty. Day (1969) helped advance the definition of loyalty by including the concept of psychological attachment as a distinguishing component.

A review of early research on brand loyalty found that most of the original studies employed a behavioral approach. Loyalty was operationalized as the repeat purchase of a particular brand over time (Brown 1952; Cunningham 1956; Tucker 1964). Brand loyalty was measured by the actual purchase behavior of an individual, or from their self-report of purchase behavior (Pritchard 1991). Jacoby and Chestnut (1978) grouped the behavioral definitions into four groups: 1) the sequence in which brands were purchased where successive choices of the same brand were thought to represent loyalty, (Brown 1952; McConnell 1968), 2) the proportion of purchase devoted to a particular brand where the proportion of total purchases represented by the largest single brand used, (Cunningham 1956), 3) the probability of purchase which looked at the average number of purchases for which an individual stays with a particular brand, (Assael 1987), and 4) a combination of these criteria.

Traditionally, behavioral conceptualizations and operational definitions of brand loyalty have been based upon direct observation or self-reports of actual behavior patterns of repeat purchasing behavior over time (Jacoby and Chestnut 1978). Approximately 60% of the operational definitions reviewed by Jacoby and Chestnut (1978) were primarily concerned with identification of (1) brand choice sequence (Brown

1952), (2) probability of purchase period (Lipstein 1959), or (3) the proportion of purchases concentrated on a specific brand (Copeland 1923; Brown 1952; Cunningham 1956). While the conceptualizations all centered on repeat purchase patterns of a given brand over time, the operational definitions varied considerably and lacked consistency in capturing the phenomenon. Often a "loyal" customer on one scale was not "loyal" on another scale. Because loyalty was operationalized only in terms of overt behavior, consumers were sometimes classified as loyal in one study and as non-loyal in another, even though both studies used the same database. This lack of success in identifying relationships when measuring loyalty in terms of use led researchers to conclude that brand loyalty encompassed more than repeat use. Behavioral measures did not discriminate between purchasing based on habit or lack of convenient alternate opportunities, ("spurious" loyalty) and purchasing based on "true" loyalty (Oliver 1999).

A study by Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1996) focused on measuring the behavioral consequences (loyalty) associated with service quality. Their model suggested that behavioral intentions are influenced by service quality, which in turn influences actual 'remain/defect' behaviors. They also suggested that behavioral intentions and the resulting behaviors are strong indicators of a bond between the marketer and the customer. They also specified several types of favorable behavioral intentions, including participating in positive word-of-mouth communication, recommending the service provider to other customers, and decreasing price sensitivity. Unfavorable behavioral intentions include engaging in complaining behavior, participating in negative work-of-mouth communication, and taking third party action. The Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman study (1996) had several problems that should be

addressed. Behavioral consequences were conceptualized and measured using multiple dimensions, however, each dimension was very similar. The discriminant validity between behavioral dimensions (constructs) is questionable. Additionally, most of their behavioral dimensions were operationalized with only one or two items that raises questions regarding reliability of the measures (Peter 1979). Lastly, Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1996) suggested intentions to act indicates a bond between customer and the company, yet they suggest that actual behaviors should be measured in follow-up studies. While intentions are often measured, their relationship to actual behaviors is questionable. Many researchers have suggested that intentions are not particularly good predictors of actual behavior. Oliva, Oliver and MacMillan (1992) state "... an intention is only a tentative measure of behavioral loyalty, especially because follow-up studies are rarely performed" (p. 85)

Attitudinal Approach

One of the shortcomings with using behavior as the full representation of loyalty is that there is a failure to consider what motivates such behavior. Attitudinal measures of loyalty provide the means by which to understand the factors which lead to the development and modification of loyalty (Pritchard 1991). Research on loyal attitudes has examined brand preference (Guest 1964) and price sensitivity to repurchasing a particular brand (Monroe and Guiltinan 1975). In addition, some work has examined brand preference in terms of accepted and rejected brands as a means of measuring loyal attitudes (Jacoby 1971; Jarvis and Wilcox 1976). Recognizing that both components play

an important role, some research has attempted to include both dimensions in measures of loyalty (Pritchard 1991).

Attitudinal definitions of brand loyalty refer to consumer preferences or intentions (Guest 1964; Jarvis and Wilcox 1976). These types of measures assess consumers' strength of affection toward a brand and explain an additional portion of unexplained variance that behavioral measures do not explain (Olson and Jacoby 1971). The attitudinal conceptualization indicates a psychological commitment to a given brand (Jacoby and Chestnut 1978). While behavioral definitions of brand loyalty are satisfactory in prediction, attitudinal definitions give a better understanding of the underlying psychological phenomenon behind the behavior (Jacoby and Chestnut 1978). Attitudinal measures of brand loyalty focus on preference and future intentions for a given brand. Typical attitudinal survey items may include the following types of items: "Which brand do you prefer? For how long have you preferred this brand? Which brand do you intend to purchase?"

Although attitudinal measures of brand loyalty may bring increased understanding, brand preferences may not tightly correspond to actual purchase behaviors (Oliva, Oliver and MacMillan 1992). Customers may prefer a brand, however; there may be intervening, or situational factors that can deter or interfere with final purchase decisions. For example, a customer may prefer a certain brand but find that the store is temporarily out of stock on that particular item and thus purchases a competitor's brand. Additionally, a participant's true feelings may not be captured as she may feel compelled to answer an attitudinal question in a socially desirable way. The utility of attitudinal measures alone was found to be limited (Jacoby and Chestnut 1978). One explanation

for these results is that an individuals' purchase of a preferred brand maybe constrained by such factors as time, money, or the situation in itself.

There are three distinct themes in the defining attitudinal loyalty:

1. Investment. Becker's (1960) 'side bets' or investments theory – proposed that lack of alternative activities and accumulation of investment in a program reflect investment loyalty.
2. Normative pressure. Participant's awareness of social expectation or normative pressure from significant or relevant others – suggested that increased social expectation or normative pressure from significant others produces a high level of commitment (Pritchard, Howard and Havitz 1992; Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons and Keeler 1993).
3. Affective attachment. Participant's internalization of a program – a psychological attachment through affective attachment to and identification with the program.

In sum, studies that view loyalty as a purely attitudinal construct, tend to look at the relationship between loyalty and psychological constructs. They seek to explain a correspondence between one psychological construct (loyalty) and other psychological constructs (i.e., satisfaction, perception, involvement, and preference). These conceptualizations tend to fall short of explaining the true meaning of loyalty.

Composite Definitions

Jacoby and Kyner (1973) indicated that a unidimensional measure was not sufficient for measuring a complex phenomenon like loyalty. Day (1969) also suggested that true loyalty includes a favorable attitude toward a brand along with repeated

purchasing of the product. Researchers subsequently recognized the importance of examining loyalty from a multidimensional perspective (Jacoby 1971; Olson and Jacoby 1971; Newman and Werbel 1973). One of the major problems identified in previous research has been the failure of many researchers to use a clear, concise conceptual basis for operationalizing loyalty (Pritchard 1991).

Jacoby (1971) presented one of the first comprehensive definitions of brand loyalty that has been substantiated empirically. He defined the state of brand loyalty as "a biased (nonrandom), behavioral response (purchase), expressed over time, by some decision-making unit, with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands, and is a function of psychological decision-making, evaluative processes" (p. 655).

A composite definition of brand loyalty includes both behavioral and attitudinal components. Customers are not only asked about their preferences for a particular brand, but also about their actual purchase behaviors of that particular brand. Chestnut (1978) suggested that composite measures of brand loyalty add sensitivity for detecting various levels of loyalty and hold promise for future loyalty researchers.

Building on Day's work, Olson and Jacoby (1971) stressed the need for a well-defined construct of brand loyalty, which is accomplished in their definition of brand loyalty. Their definition includes six necessary and collectively sufficient conditions for brand loyalty: 1) a biased, non random, 2) behavioral response, 3) expressed over time, 4) by some decision making unit, 5) with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands, and 6) is a function of psychological (decision-making, evaluative) processes. This conceptual definition lays down a solid foundation for exploring and

examining brand loyalty, which clearly advocates a composite measure containing both attitudinal and behavioral items, where the behavioral response stems from a relative preference for a brand. Results from Olson and Jacoby's (1971) study supports the notion that cognitive and behavioral loyalty are separate and identifiable components of purchasing.

Loyalty may be viewed as a distinct form of repeat purchase behavior, characterized by psychological commitment. Jacoby and Chestnut (1978) have suggested that the concept of commitment provides the essential basis for distinguishing between brand loyalty and other forms of repeat purchase behavior, and also provides a perspective from which to assess the degree of loyalty.

According to Pritchard (1991), during the 1970's, loyalty research focused predominantly on refining measures of the behavioral dimensions of loyalty. Research examining loyalty from a composite perspective, related to a sport setting, has been conducted in the leisure field (Howard, Edginton and Selin 1988; Backman and Crompton 1991). Research has attempted to assess loyalty by examining first the behavioral dimension of loyalty, and second by administering commitment scales to measure recreation consumers' attitudinal dimension. One of the difficulties with previous research however, has been the formulation of valid and reliable attitudinal measures (Pritchard 1991).

Pritchard (1991) explained that different items used to develop measures of attitudes have come from descriptive features of loyalty consumers. Items have been based on person-specific characteristics rather than on a theoretical premise. Day (1970) has argued that measures of an attitudinal component should be based on psychological

processes. Muncy (1983) has also argued that many earlier measures were developed from operational definitions rather than from a theoretical conceptualization of loyalty. Drawing from the work of Day (1969), Jacoby (1971), and Jacoby and Chestnut (1978), Pritchard (1991) developed a Psychological Commitment Inventory (PCI) with which to assess the attitudinal component of loyalty based on the premise of psychological commitment.

Although Jacoby and Kyner (1973) focused on testing all six of the previously mentioned elements, most of the loyalty research has focused primarily on two main dimensions, behavioral and attitudinal (Jacoby and Chestnut 1978; Backman and Crompton 1991). Although Day was the first to propose a two-dimensional conceptualization of loyalty integrating both behavioral and attitudinal components, later research provided empirical evidence that consumer loyalty was in fact composed of these two separate but related elements (Olson and Jacoby 1971; Backman and Crompton 1991). Therefore, researchers now generally agree that loyalty measures should combine both behavioral and attitudinal components (Howard, Edginton and Selin 1988; Backman and Crompton 1991). For example, Backman and Crompton (1991) used attitudinal and behavioral scores to segment participants in their study of golf and tennis participants. Backman and Crompton (1991) conceptualized loyalty as having two-dimensions: psychological attachment and behavioral consistency (intensity of use). Psychological attachment describes the strength of a participant's general attitude or commitment toward an activity, whereas behavioral consistency assesses the intensity of participation. According to various combinations of high or low scores on the two-dimension, Backman and Crompton (1991) classified individuals into one of the following four

categories: a) high loyalty, b) latent loyalty, c) spurious loyalty, or d) low loyalty. Figure 2-1 illustrates the four cells that emerged from their two-dimensional paradigm of activity loyalty.[3]

High loyalty describes participants who exhibit strong psychological attachment and high intensity of participation. *Spurious loyalty* refers to participants who exhibit high intensity of participation but whose psychological attachment is weak. It is conceptually similar to the notion of inertia (Assael 1992) in that a consumer perceives little differentiation among brands in a low involvement category and undertakes repeat purchase on the basis of situational cues, such as familiarity or deals. Additionally, social influence may also lead to spurious loyalty (e.g., individuals may consistently attend their college's basketball games because of peer or social group influences, but they may not be very strongly committed to it). Spuriously loyal consumers are likely to switch activities if the social circumstances change. *Latent loyalty* describes those who have a strong psychological attachment to the activity, but exhibit low intensity of use. These individuals may lack the resources necessary to increase their intensity of use. For example, cost of participation may inhibit their level of use. Additionally, the low intensity of use may be due to a marketplace environment where non-attitudinal influences (e.g., subjective norms or situational effects) may be more influential than attitudes in determining patronage behavior. *Low loyalty* refers to those individuals that exhibit weak psychological attachment and low intensity of use.

Similarly, Dick and Basu (1994) classified individuals into one of the following four categories: a) loyalty, b) latent loyalty, c) spurious loyalty, or d) no loyalty (See

[3] All figures are located in the Appendix.

Figure 2-2). They conceptualized that customer loyalty can be operationalized by two dimensions: a) 'relative attitude' derived from both "attitude strength" (i.e., the degree of an individual's attitudinal strength toward a brand), and "attitude differentiation" (i.e., the individual's perception of differences among brands), and b) "repeat patronage" (behavioral measure). The distinction between high, low, spurious, latent, and no loyalty is important.

The *spurious loyal* consumer is operationalized as one who repeat purchases the same maker's brands and whose ratings of positive disconfirmation are smaller than that of negative disconfirmation in absolute size. The spurious loyal consumer would also heed the situational (context sensitive) cues such as sales terms, salesmen's service, crash test report, and automobile card.

The *latent loyal* consumer is operationalized as one who will switch to a different maker's brands and whose ratings of positive disconfirmation are greater than the one in negative disconfirmation in absolute size. This group would be interested in such normative variables as other people's image perceived n the car ownership, company's credibility, advertising image, and reputation because their decision process would involve socially acceptable normative criteria. Variety seeking may also explain, to some degree, the normative variables' effect on maker switching with little regard to the level of satisfaction.

The *loyal* consumer is operationalized as one who repeat purchases the same maker's brand sand whose ratings of positive disconfirmation are greater than the one in negative disconfirmation in absolute size. Loyal consumers may give strong weights to both situational and normative variables since they are sensitive to the information

provided by the maker itself as well as the information about the company provided by the social reference group.

The *no loyal* consumer is operationalized as one who switches to a different maker's brands and whose ratings of positive disconfirmation are smaller than the one in negative disconfirmation in absolute size. No loyal consumers may not care too much about both situational and normative variables because such stimuli lack distinct sales incentives to dissatisfied, loyalty-free customers.

Selin, Howard, Udd and Cable (1988) suggested that participants who exhibit high loyalty are more likely to continue to participate in a specific activity than to switch to other activities. On the other hand, spuriously loyal participants are more likely to discontinue their participation because it was based more upon habitual behavior. Howard and Thompson (1984) reported that habit and convenience were the most common reasons cited by participants for registering for programs, suggesting that only a relatively small proportion of users were highly loyal.

Although the models proposed by Backman and Crompton (1991) and Dick and Basu (1994) are useful, their operationalizations do not address the dynamic process of loyalty development. Iwasaki and Havitz (1998) proposed a conceptual model that emphasized the dynamic process of loyalty development and the multidimensionality of both behavioral and attitudinal factors of loyalty. They operationalized behavioral loyalty by using six components including a) duration of brand use, b) frequency of brand use, c) intensity of brand use, d) sequence of brand use, e) proportion or percentage of brand use, and f) probability of brand use over time.

Duration refers to long-term length of participation, patronage, or use (Park 1996). Duration of participation and length of behavioral loyalty are related, but not synonymous (Havitz and Howard 1995). *Frequency* refers to number of purchases, uses, or participation over a specified time-period (Park 1996). *Intensity* is defined in terms of hours per week (or day, month, or year) devoted to purchase, use, or participation (e.g., Park 1996). *Sequence* of brand use has been defined in terms of undivided loyalty (e.g., AAAAAA, divided loyalty (ABABAB), unstable loyalty (AAAABB), and no loyalty (ABCDEF) (Brown 1952; Pritchard, Howard and Havitz 1992). *Proportion* or purchase refers to the percentage of brand loyalty. *Probability* of purchase differs from the previous five measures in that its intent is to predict future behavioral loyalty rather than quantify past behavior. Lipstein (1959) proposed "average staying time" which was calculated as the reciprocal of the probability of brand switching (Pritchard *et al.* 1992). Side bets, sunk costs, and social norms provide useful information in predicting probability of purchase. Since each component of behavioral loyalty reflects a unique form of repeat patronage (Jacoby and Chestnut 1978; Pritchard, *et al.* 1992, Park 1996), they considered all of these components rather than operationalizing behavioral loyalty as a unidimensional construct.

Dick and Basu (1994) argued that attitudinal loyalty consists of attitude strength and attitude differentiation. Iwasaki and Havitz (1999) contend that attitude strength is reflected in informational consistency, position involvement, and confidence as facets of psychological commitment, and in preference stability and resistance to counter persuasion as facets of resistance to change. Additionally, they argue that attitude differentiation is reflected in informational complexity, confidence, and volitional choice

as facets of psychological commitment, and in preference stability and resistance to counter persuasion as facets of resistance to change. They suggest that the facets of psychological commitment and resistance to change reflect the attitudinal components of loyalty; a conceptualization that is consistent with most loyalty literature (e.g., Day 1969; Beatty, Kahle and Homer 1988; Pritchard, Howard and Havitz 1992).

Selin *et al.* (1988) and Howard *et al.* (1988) operationalized loyalty to recreation programs by integrating behavioral and attitudinal components to compute an index to measure participants' loyalty. The behavioral dimension was defined by adopting a proportion of purchase measure that has frequently been used in consumer behavior studies. A five-item Likert type scale measured attitudinal program commitment. The studies conducted by Selin *et al.* (1988) and Howard *et al.* (1988) were concerned with loyalty to a particular agency or specific programs offered by an agency. However, research has found that consumer loyalty is largely product or activity-specific (Bloch, Sherrell and Ridgway 1986). Invariably, enduring enthusiasm is attached more to a specific activity than to the organization or agency sponsoring the activity. Backman and Crompton (1991) extended the Howard *et al.* (1988) and Selin *et al.* (1988) studies by focusing on participants' loyalty to the activities of golf and tennis irrespective of the supplier.

Fan Loyalty

Wakefield and Sloan (1995) conducted a study to determine the extent to which stadium surroundings may play a role in determining the tendency for a spectator to attend games. The results indicated that specific stadium factors (e.g., parking facilities,

cleanliness, crowding, fan control, and food service) influence a fan's desire to stay at a stadium as well as their intention to return to that stadium. However, a fan's loyalty to the home team was found to play the largest role in determining their desire to be at the stadium. These findings suggest that several elements are important to consider regarding the success of a sports organization and among those elements, fan loyalty appears to be particularly pertinent. As indicated, however, Wakefield and Sloan (1995) examined fan loyalty from a unidimensional perspective.

The attitudinal dimension of fan loyalty, or psychological commitment, implies that an individual has made a conscious choice to form an association with a particular sport, team and/or player. Such a decision suggests that an individual has considered various alternatives and has chosen to identify with a specific sport, team and/or player. Iwasaki and Havitz (1998) proposed a model (see Figure 2-3) that emphasizes the dynamic process in the development of loyalty and the multidimensionality of both behavioral and attitudinal factors of loyalty. They outline the dynamic relationship between involvement and loyalty in which individuals go through a psychological process in the development of loyalty (i.e., involvement → psychological commitment → resistance to change → behavioral loyalty).

Segmenting Fans based on Loyalty

Loyalty has been used as an effective segmentation variable in a number of market research studies. McQueen and Miller (1985) found that segmenting tourists into first time and repeat visitors was an effective way to differentiate among tourists. Other studies have also used the behavioral component of loyalty (repeat purchasing) to

segment markets (Ronkainen and Woodside 1980; Gitelson and Crompton 1984). In a sport context, loyalty segmentation has the potential to provide a distinct and effective means by which to develop marketing and promotional strategies for different segments of fans. Segmentation enables marketers to identify fans that have differing levels of involvement with or attachment to a particular sport, team and/or player. Practitioners may identify fan groups and utilize various means of promotion and/or communication that will have the most impact on a specific group.

An example of the importance of using loyalty segmentation is found in public recreation. Reports suggested that municipal park and recreation agencies have experienced significant financial decline (McCarville and Crompton 1988). With decreased levels of financial support, the importance of customer loyalty was identified as a primary goal (Bullaro and Edginton 1986). Howard (1985) and Warnick and Howard (1985) have reported the extent to which public recreation agencies rely on repeat patronage. Roughly twenty percent of those that took part in recreation programs accounted for sixty percent of the total registered attendance. Repeat consumers are considered to be a vital part of the continued success of an organization and researchers advocate the importance of understanding the nature of a consumer's loyalty in order to market a product or service effectively (Howard, Edginton and Selin 1988). In a sport context, a similar perspective regarding the importance of loyalty can be found in the "80-20" rule and Mullin's (1985) Escalator Model.

The "80-20" rule suggests that eighty percent of an organization's business will come from twenty percent of the customer base (Mullin, Hardy and Sutton 1993). In terms of sports fans, those that are loyal to a sport, team and/or player are likely to be

those that invest the most time and resources in following them. According to the "80-20" rule, it is the loyal fans, those in the twenty percent group, who have the largest influence on a sports organization's continued success. Mullin (1985) discussed a hierarchy of segments and introduced the escalator model to illustrate the importance of segmenting sports fans based on loyalty.

Mullin *et al.*, (1993) identified four different sports consumer groups: 1) heavy users, 2) medium users, 3) light users, and 4) non-consumers. As indicated, heavy users (loyal fans) are thought to contribute the highest percentage (80%) of consumption, even though they do not represent the largest percentage (20%) of customers. Considering different strategies to effectively reach different customer groups, Mullin (1985) has proposed the Escalator Model. The model emphasizes the importance of satisfying the different needs of each group, and at the same time, promoting movement from one group to the next (upward movement) (see Figure 2-4).

A strategy for non-consumers focuses on increasing awareness of a sport, team, and/or player, and providing the opportunity for consumers to experience a game or event. Through initial exposure to a game or event, it is proposed that a non-consumer may become a light user as a result of a positive initial experience. The emphasis for recruiting light users is to identify those who have attended at least one game or event, and to provide incentives to increase their frequency of attendance. As light users attend additional games or events, they become medium users. Medium users have an interest in a sport, team and/or player. The objective with this group is to increase the psychological commitment through various means by which consumers identify with a sport, team and/or player. For heavy users, retention is the primary objective. It is

important to continue offering opportunities so that heavy users desire and maintain psychological commitment.

One helpful aspect of the Escalator Model is that it highlights the progression individuals may follow as they develop loyalty to a sport, team and/or player. Going further, Mullin *et al.*, (1993) suggested that there might be a life cycle for a sports fan. A life cycle perspective suggests loyalty may develop over time and that various elements may influence the development of loyalty at different phases of the cycle. A life cycle perspective also suggests an important area in loyalty research that has received little attention... *how* loyalty may develop, *how* it is maintained, and *what* elements may influence such development/maintenance. Understanding loyal fans involves more than attempting to develop marketing programs or promotional strategies to encourage continued loyalty. In order to develop effective programs and strategies, it is important to understand several other concepts, such as how fans form and maintain such loyalties (what influences the development/maintenance of loyalty) and what impacts these loyalties.

Even though a multi-dimensional view of loyalty is widely accepted (Backman 1988), unidimensional constructs of loyalty may still be found. In a sport setting, Wakefield and Sloan (1995) examined the effect of loyalty and other stadium factors on attendance at college football games. Loyalty was defined as allegiance or devotion to a particular team developed over time. While the definition incorporates the idea of psychological commitment, the measures of loyalty were based on behavioral aspects (i.e., attendance). The support for a multidimensional construct indicates that research on loyalty should consider both perspectives (Day 1969; Jacoby 1971; Jacoby and Kyner

1973). More recently, the problems with this unidimensional view of loyalty and the poor conceptualizations to operationalize the loyalty construct have been addressed.

The majority of empirical research in loyalty has been conducted using operational definitions and has ignored the importance of a conceptual basis for such operationalizations (Pritchard 1991). Without a theoretical focus on which to base operational measures, researchers may not have an accurate understanding of the loyalty construct. Jacoby and Kyner (1973) pointed out that while "operational definitions may be sufficient for specifying how to measure brand loyalty and may, under certain circumstances, enable one to make reasonably good predictions regarding future behavior, they are quite arbitrary and provide nothing more than surface understanding." In the leisure discipline, Pritchard (1991) addressed the importance of operationalizing loyalty from a conceptual basis.

The behavioral component of loyalty (repeat patronage) is relatively straightforward. For example, an individual who purchases sport-related magazines on a regular basis or who purchases season tickets year after year, may be thought of as engaging in repeat purchasing behaviors.

Drawing from the suggestions of earlier researchers (Day 1969; Jacoby and Chestnut 1978), Pritchard (1991) emphasized that the theory of commitment best describes the attitudinal component of loyalty. Through development of a psychological commitment instrument, Pritchard (1991) provided a basis from which to better understand the attitudinal component of loyalty. Combined with previous work on the behavioral component of loyalty, it is possible to examine the importance of loyal fans through an understanding of loyalty's behavioral and attitudinal components.

Fans that are considered more loyal tend to be highly identified with a particular team (Wann and Branscombe 1993; Sutton et al. 1997). However, not all loyal fans are alike. Not only do their motivations and needs differ (Wann, Tucker and Schrader 1996; Fisher and Wakefield 1998), but also the behaviors that result when engaged in sport-related consumption behavior. Loyalty has been shown to have differing degrees, and the behaviors that result may be contingent upon whether a fan is a "high-identified" or a "low-identified" fan. Most of the studies concerning the intensity of fan loyalty have focused upon team identification specifically and have helped explain many economical, social, and psychological behaviors.

Commitment

The term commitment has often been used as a synonym for the term loyalty (Buchanan 1985). For example, Bryan (1977; 1979) working with sport fishermen, posited that participants' degree of recreation specialization, from generalist to specialist, reflected their involvement with and commitment to the activity. However, commitment was defined as the "extent of the individual's time and effort involved in the sport" (Bryan 1977, p. 184). This definition neglects the affective component of loyalty (Buchanan 1985). Buchanan suggested that reliance on only behavioral measures may provide an explanation for the empirical lack of support for Bryan's (1977) conceptualization of specialization reported by Wellman, Roggenbuck and Smith (1982).

Commitment is believed to provide a measure of the psychological decision-making and evaluative processes that underlie loyalty (Jacoby 1971). Understanding why commitment may be considered an important element of loyalty is found in a definition

of the construct. Sociologists tend to define commitment in terms of the social factors that constrain or commit an individual to a consistent line of action (Becker 1960). Psychologists define commitment in terms of decisions or cognitions that fix or bind an individual to a behavior (Pritchard 1991). Drawing from both sociology and psychology, research in consumer behavior tends to define commitment in terms of preference stability and resistance to persuasive communications (Robertson 1976). Crosby and Taylor (1983) define commitment as:

> "The tendency to resist change in preference in response to conflicting information or experience. Psychological commitment is maximized when (1) the individual is motivated by a need to maintain consistent relationships between preference and salient aspects of cognitive structure [Rosenberg 1960 and (2) important values and self-images are linked to the preference, leading to a state of position involvement (Freedman 1964)"

Two important elements included in the definition of psychological commitment are cognitive consistency (Rosenberg 1960) and position involvement (Freedman 1964). Consistency between beliefs and feelings for an object are thought to develop a stable, behavioral intention toward that object (Rosenberg 1965). Pritchard (1991, p. 24) explained that "The affective component of attitude is the overall positive or negative response to an object, while the cognitive component is made up of beliefs about the potentialities of the attitude object for attaining or blocking the realization of valued states." It is thought that the more a given object is viewed as instrumental to obtaining positively valued goals and to blocking negatively valued events, the more favorable will be an individual's affect toward the object.

The notion of position involvement also contributes to the idea of consistency. One's beliefs (cognitions) regarding their involvement with an attitude object are

evaluated in order to determine whether they are consistent with, and contribute toward the attainment of desired value states and self-images (Freedman 1964). This suggests that the "values' and "self-images" perceived by an individual in their commitment to a particular sport, team and/or player, would be evaluated to determine if they are indeed consistent with an individual's internal view of what values and self-images are, or should be true for them.

Utilizing the definition and description of the components of psychological commitment as a theoretical framework, Pritchard (1991) developed a psychological commitment inventory (PCI). The PCI provides a measure of the dimensions thought to characterize psychological commitment: resistance, volition, and complexity. The first dimension, *resistance*, reflects an individual's reluctance or resistance to change important associations with or beliefs about a particular object (in this setting, a sport, team and/or player). Pritchard (1991) explained that the elements comprising the resistance factor show the importance of symbolic association, awareness, and perpetuation of a public-self in ongoing relationships.

The second dimension, *volition*, incorporates the elements of free choice, control, and self-responsibility for one's preference for a particular sport, team and/or player. Pritchard (1991) suggested that the internal perception that one may freely act in some way would contribute to the degree to which they feel committed to the act or decision. In other words, when an individual perceives that their attachment to a sport, team and/or player is a result of personal choice, they are likely to feel a stronger or higher degree of commitment to the sport, team and/or player.

The third dimension, *complexity*, captures the concept of cognitive complexity. The richness of idea content or the number of ideas regarding an attitude object are thought to determine the ease with which an attitude or preference may be changed (Day 1970). The more complex the ideas one has regarding a sport, team and/or player, or the greater the number of ideas about a sport, team and/or player, may influence the ease or difficulty of changing an attitude or a preference. Complexity is also thought to result in greater attitude polarization and more complex schema structure (Millar and Tesser 1986). Robertson (1976) suggested that low-commitment behavior is characterized by a relatively simple cognitive structure. Changing one's preference would require little change in cognitive structure, resulting in less resistance to changing one's commitment to a sport, team and/or player. Individuals with higher levels of commitment tend to have more complex cognitive structures, and are more likely to resist efforts to change their association with an attitude object, like a sport, team and/or player (Freedman 1964).

Moving beyond earlier research that focused primarily on the behavioral components of loyalty, a better understanding of the loyalty construct may be achieved by considering both the behavioral and the attitudinal components. Research by Day (1970), Jacoby and Chestnut (1978), and Pritchard (1991) provides an understanding of the theoretical premise of commitment. Considering both the behavioral component, and the psychological commitment involved in loyalty, a basis is now available from which to more accurately explain the loyalty construct and to consider implications for developing and maintaining loyalty.

As indicated, previous research has focused on measurement of the behavioral component of loyalty. With attention being given to developing instruments from a

theoretical premise, researchers are able to more accurately examine the attitudinal component of loyalty. Having a better understanding of the loyalty construct, recognizing both the behavioral and the attitudinal components, attention may now be directed toward understanding more in-depth *how* loyalty may develop and *what* elements may influence its development.

Early research suggested that there are different motivational processes underlying single attitudes. According to Kelman (1958; 1961), compliance occurs when attitudes and behaviors are adopted in order to obtain specific rewards or avoid specific punishments. Identification occurs when people adopt attitudes and behaviors in order to be associated with a satisfying, self-defining relationship with another person or group. Finally, internalization occurs when people adopt attitudes and behaviors because their content is congruent with the individuals' value systems.

Another antecedent thought to provide a more accurate description of the sort of thinking that leads to customer loyalty is commitment (Day 1969). Some researchers hold that this construct could "provide the essential basis for distinguishing... [and] assessing the relative degrees of brand loyalty" (Jacoby and Kyner 1973, p. 3). This view is not universally held, however, as other researchers suggest that the two constructs are either not related (Oliva *et al.* 1992) or that they are synonymous and represent each other (Assael 1987). An intermediate view asserts that the constructs are indeed related, yet by definition are distinct, with commitment leading to loyalty (Beatty, Kahle and Homer 1988).

On the surface, some definitions of loyalty and commitment suggest that similar attitudinal biases are at work. Many researchers have defined loyalty as the composite

blend of brand attitude and behavior, with indexes that measure the degree to which one favors and buys a brand repeatedly (e.g., Day 1969; Pritchard and Howard 1997). Commitment differs from this composite definition as it is usually considered in purely cognitive terms that measure consumer attitudes off attachment to a brand. Morgan and Hunt (1994) endorse this distinction and describe commitment as an enduring desire to continue an attachment [relationship]. Kelley, Donnelly, and Skinner (1990) contend that the attitudinal domain of this attachment is best understood in symbolic terms (i.e., customer identification), as committed patrons tend to identify strongly with the goals and values of an organization.

The concept of "structural commitment" from Johnson's Commitment Theory (1991) is somewhat similar to Levinger's (1979) concept of barriers. Johnson theorizes that an individual's decision to continue a relationship is a function of three distinct subjective experiences of commitment: (1) individuals' feelings that they want to continue the relationship; (2) their feelings that they ought to continue it; and (3) their feelings that they must continue, which is termed structural commitment. Structural commitment, theorized to be experienced as external to the individual, is viewed as stemming from the individual's assessment of the costs of terminating the relationship that will be posed by the environment, including irretrievable investments in the relationship, social reaction, the difficulty of termination procedures, and the availability of acceptable alternatives.

Rusbult's Investment Model (1983; 1991), proposes that people will feel more satisfied with a relationship to the degree that many rewards are received from the partner and the relationship, few costs are incurred, and each partner has a lower rather than

higher comparison level. As in Johnson's (1991) model, psychological commitment to the relationship plays a central role in the Investment Model. Rusbult theorizes that to the extent the individual is satisfied with the relationship, he/she should be committed to it.

Satisfaction is viewed as only one of three aspects of commitment, however. "Importantly, it is *increasing satisfaction*, the perception that one's alternatives are *becoming and less and less attractive*, and the recognition of *increasingly great investment* that leads to increased commitment" (Rusbult 1991, p. 160, italics in original).

Kelley (1983) has advanced a theoretical analysis of commitment that avoids the interpretive problem of what kind of relationship the participants are expressing their commitment to continuing. He observes that the construct of commitment has been invoked primarily to predict relationship stability. He focuses attention on the conditions that may underlie the individual's intention to continue the relationship, arguing that to understand and predict stability, one must identify the causal conditions that act to keep the individual in the relationship. He classifies these causal conditions as: (1) those responsible for the positive aspects of the relationship, as well as the costs that would be incurred upon leaving he relationship, or the 'pros' of the relationship; and (2) those that act to push or draw the individual our o the relationship, or the 'cons' of the relationship. Kelly (1983) theorizes that the important feature of these causal conditions for the prediction of stability is the "consistency with which, over time and situations, the pros outweigh the cons" (p. 289) for each partner.

Being committed usually means performing some public behavior on behalf of a position, making it more or less irrevocable because change is costly, socially awkward, damaging to self-esteem, and/or personally dangerous. It is possible to include "private commitment" in the definition as well, in which the individual privately resolves to stick by a particular position. However, as McGuire (1964) and Janis and Mann (1971) have noted, there is a continuum of degrees of commitment; private commitment is at the weakest end, and the evidence is that it has small effects, if any. Dissonance theory has suggested that public commitment serves to strengthen dissonance-provoking choices such as agreeing to give a counter attitudinal speech (Helmreich and Collins 1968).

Identification

The intensity at which a fan "identifies" or associates himself with a particular team has been a hot topic in the sport marketing and sport psychology literature for the past decade. Numerous researchers have contemplated the concept of identification, its antecedents, and its consequences. Team identification refers to the extent to which a fan feels psychologically connected to a team (Guttman 1986; Sloan 1989; Hirt et al. 1992; Wann and Branscombe 1993; Wann 1997). This term has also been used to describe a fans loyalty to a specific player (Wann 1997; Rinehart 1998). Branscombe and Wann (1992) refer to spectators' identification with the team, which is "the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as fans of the team, are involved with the team, are concerned with the team's performance, and view the team as a representation of themselves" (p. 1017).

Research has been conducted that examined the differences among sport fans in terms of their level of commitment or identification with a particular team. Wann and Branscombe (1993) developed a measure to assess individual allegiance or identification with a sports team. Their study demonstrated that there are consistent differences among fans that vary in level of identification with a team on several behavioral, cognitive, and affective dimensions. Although there is agreement that highly identified fans differ from those low in team identification on several motivational and behavioral (outcome) dimensions, for the most part, highly identified fans have been viewed as being similar. Interestingly, Wann and Branscombe (1993) suggested that their measure of team identification could be modified slightly to determine individuals' identification with particular players compared to a team as a whole.

Research indicates that team identification is not necessarily impacted by the location or outcome of a team's most recent game (Wann, Dolan, McGeorge and Allison 1994; Wann 1996; Wann and Schrader 1996), but remains fairly consistent over time, from game to game, from season to season. In other words, a fan's level of identification appears to be unwavering. Farred (2000) claimed that because sport is a social construct, it is the team, not necessarily the player that is important, thus fans will continue to follow and care about their local team. Farred (2000) also suggests identification with a city becomes complicated when a professional franchise changes venues. He suggests geographical identification plays an important role in sports and occasionally fans are left "orphaned." When the Baltimore Colts were relocated to Indianapolis in 1984, Farred (2000) claimed fans' reactions showed that they were less Colts supports than they were Baltimoreans.

Smith, Patterson, Williams and Hogg (1981) conducted a study that provided information on becoming a loyal fan. The purpose of the study was to examine the profile of a deeply committed male sports fan. Using adult subjects, one element of the study asked subjects to identify who was most influential in getting them involved in sports. Results indicated that subjects were most influenced by fathers, followed by friends, coaches, and the mass media. Consistent with other work in sport socialization, the findings indicated which agents might influence an individual's attachment to a sport, team and/or player.

Many researchers have found that identification may be an important modifier for spectator behavior (Mann 1979; Smith 1983; Schurr, Ruble and Ellen 1985; Guttman 1986; Schurr, Wittig, Ruble and Ellen 1987; Zillmann, Bryant and Sapolsky 1989). Also, the degree of team identification has been found to be a major predictor of spectator behaviors, including affective reactions (Hirt et al. 1992; Simons and Taylor 1992; Wann and Branscombe 1992), arousal (Branscombe and Wann 1992), and tendencies to increase or decrease associations with the target team (Wann and Branscombe 1990; Wann 1993).

It has been shown that identification with a team can become central to some people's identity, particularly those with high team identification (Cialdini, *et al.* 1976). For fans with a high level of identification, the role of team follower is a major aspect of their identity. Because of this close association with a team, highly identified fans often view the team as a reflection of themselves. The team becomes an extension of the individual (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Tafjel 1981; Smith and Henry 1996). The team's successes become the fan's successes and vice-versa. The NCAA attempted to market

this phenomenon during the 1999 men's basketball championship tournament with the slogan, "When it happens to *my* team, it happens to *me*."

Nearly every major professional sport has a Hall of Fame, where the best of the best from the respective sports are inducted. The NFL must realize that being a fan is also a valued and emotional undertaking. In 1999, Visa began sponsorship of the NFL Hall of Fans. Beginning in 1999, each year, a fan from each of the NFL teams is nominated and inducted into the NFL Hall of Fans. For these fans, it is quite an honor to represent their team in this way. Following are excerpts [italics inserted for effect] from several inductees from the 1999-2000 football season (www.visa.com):

> Barbara Sanders: Cleveland Browns ("The Bone Lady")
> "... The greatest fans in all of sports, Browns fans, have an unwavering sense of pride that stems from a deep emotional connection to *our* team that goes beyond football....."
>
> Dan "Boltman" Jauregui: San Diego Chargers
> "Through winning and losing seasons, my allegiance is to this team."
>
> "Bengal" Gene Boldman: Cincinnati Bengals
> "Being a Bengal fan is not just something you do on Sunday afternoons, it's a way of life – *my* life."
>
> Steve "Raider Mort" Mortara: Oakland Raiders
> "The opening of the 2000 NFL Football season marked my 41st year as an original Oakland Raiders fan.... it's *my* team, the Raiders."

There are numerous reasons why a fan becomes identified with a particular team (e.g., socialization from parents, player talent, geography, peer influence, success of the team). The fans cited above are obviously local fans that have been following *their* team for many years. It would be interesting to monitor these fans reactions when *their* team was experiencing a sport-related critical incident. Steve Mortara was the only one that mentioned a critical event occurring with his team (The Oakland Raiders) and how his

commitment to the team was unwavering throughout. Recall that Steve mentioned he was an "original" Oakland Raider fan. He goes on to say, "From Kezar to Candlestick to Frank Youell to Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum to Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum to Network Associates Coliseum; from Bay Area Joke in 1960 with colors of white, black, and orange to the Silver and Black Attack to World Champions: it's *my* team, the Raiders." Steve appears to be a committed, loyal, and highly identified fan of the Oakland Raiders. It is anticipated Steve will continue to follow this (*his*) team to the end.

SUMMARY

While much of the focus on fans has been in the fan identification and fan loyalty areas, there is a need to focus on the potential impact that sport-related events have on fans. Nearly every week, some type of sport-related incident is announced. Stories abound regarding relocations of teams (e.g., Cleveland Browns), retirements of players (e.g., Michael Jordan, John Elway, Cal Ripken, Jr.), comebacks of players (e.g., Mario Lemeux, Michael Jordan), drug convictions/arrests (e.g., Darryl Strawberry), and/or leagues going defunct (e.g., XFL). On the surface, some of the examples cited above may be perceived as negative incidents. It was not anticipated that fans would only recall negatively perceived sport-related incidents, or that they will only have psychological and behavioral reactions to negatively perceived incidents. It was assumed that fans would also recall positively perceived critical incidents and would be impacted by their occurrence. Additionally, it may be that the occurrence of multiple critical incidents may have a cumulative effect on fan loyalty.

The difference between a sport spectator and a sport fan was presented next. Additionally, the concepts of loyalty, commitment, and identification were also discussed. It has been noted that fans, particularly loyal fans, have an impact on the financial standing of sport entities. Fans not only consume a sporting event, thereby spending money on tickets, but also purchase merchandise and sport-related paraphernalia (e.g., t-shirts, banners, hats, and hot dogs). Sport spectatorship has become an important and common leisure activity and has had an economical impact in the area of sport entertainment.

The initial purpose of this research was to investigate and understand sports fans' psychological and behavioral reaction to a sport-related critical incident. In order to accomplish this task, it is necessary to explore 1) the different types of sport-related critical incidents that exist, 2) how the media presents these occurrences, 3) how the media's presentation impacts fans' reactions, and 4) actual fan reaction to sport-related critical events. During this process, it was found that fan's perceptions of critical incidents were not vastly different and did not provide the variation the researcher was looking for within the data. Hence, the research was modified to examine fans' interpretations of other types of sport-related events and to investigate the meaning of these sport-related events in the process of becoming and being a sport fan.

Chapter Three provides a more complete description of research methodology, including sampling plan, research protocol, interview guide, coding and analysis techniques, and steps to ensure trustworthiness of the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

The initial purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of sports fans' perceptions of and reactions to sport-related critical incidents. The concept of sport-related critical incidents and the impact these events have on fans has only been scarcely studied, thus, no theories existed that adequately explained this phenomenon. Therefore, it was necessary to explore how these events were perceived by fans and develop a preliminary model that will help understand the psychological and behavioral impact of sport-related critical incidents on sports fans. By investigating fan's perceptions of and potential subsequent reactions to sport-related critical incidents, this research makes a contribution to both theory and practice, as researchers and practitioners wrestle with how and why fans react to the occurrence of such incidents. However, as was stated previously, the initial findings from the study forced the modification of the research to examine fans' interpretations of other types of sport-related events and to investigate the meaning of these sport-related events in the process of becoming and being a sport fan.

Grounded Theory methodology was used to guide the data collection and analysis of the data. In-depth interviews with sports fans were conducted in order to more fully understand fans experiences with sport-related critical incidents. In order to understand why a qualitative approach was chosen to study fans perceptions of sport-related critical incidents, it is helpful to delineate the differences between qualitative and quantitative inquiry.

QUALITATIVE VERSUS QUANTITATIVE INQUIRY

Qualitative research is an approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings. Broadly defined, qualitative research, means "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss and Corbin 1990). More specifically, qualitative research is "any systematic investigation that attempts to understand the meanings that things have for individuals from their own perspectives" (Singletary 1994). Whereas quantitative researchers seek to predict and generalize findings, qualitative researchers seek to understand and extrapolate to similar situations. Qualitative analysis results in a different type of knowledge than does quantitative inquiry.

Eisner (1991) pointed out that all knowledge, whether gained through quantitative research or qualitative research, is referenced in qualities, and there are many ways to represent our understanding of the world:

> *"There is a kind of continuum that moves from the fictional that is 'true' - the novel for example - to the highly controlled and quantitatively described scientific experiment. Work at either end of this continuum has the capacity to inform significantly. Qualitative research and evaluation are located toward the fictive end of the continuum without being fictional in the narrow sense of the term"* (Eisner 1991, pp. 30-31).

This sentiment echoes that of Cronbach (1975) who stated "the special task of the social scientist in each generation is to pin down the contemporary facts. Beyond that, he shares with the humanistic scholar and the artist in the effort to gain insight into contemporary relationships" (p. 126). Cronbach claimed statistical research (i.e., quantitative) is unable to account for the many interaction effects that take place in social

settings. Cronbach also stated "the time has come to exorcise the null hypothesis," because it ignores effects that may be important, but that are not statistically significant (1975, p. 124). Qualitative inquiry accepts the complexity and dynamic nature of the social world. However, pitting these two paradigms against one another is not necessary. Patton (1990) advocates a "paradigm of choices" that seeks "methodological appropriateness as the primary criterion for judging methodological quality" (p. 39) Moreover, some researchers believe that qualitative and quantitative research can be effectively combined in the same research project (Patton 1990; Strauss and Corbin 1990).

There are several considerations when deciding to adopt a qualitative research methodology. Strauss and Corbin (1990) claim that qualitative methods can be used to better understand any phenomenon about which little is known. These authors discussed several reasons for conducting qualitative research: uncovering and understanding a little-known phenomenon, gaining new views and perspectives about a well-known phenomenon, or uncovering the intricate details of a phenomenon.

Qualitative methods can be used to gain new perspectives on things about which much is already known, or to gain more in-depth information that may be difficult to convey quantitatively. Thus, qualitative methods are appropriate in situations where one needs to first identify the variables that might later be tested quantitatively, or where the researcher has determined that quantitative measures cannot adequately describe or interpret a situation.

The ability of qualitative data to more fully describe a phenomenon is an important consideration not only from the researcher's perspective, but from the reader's

perspective as well. "If you want people to understand better than they otherwise might, provide them information in the form in which they usually experience it" (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Qualitative research reports, typically rich with detail and insights into participants' the world, "may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader's experience" (Stake 1978) and thus more meaningful.

Features of Qualitative Research

Several writers have identified what they consider the prominent characteristics of qualitative, or naturalistic, research (e.g., Lincoln and Guba 1985; Patton 1990; Eisner 1991; Bogdan and Biklen 1998). The list below incorporates these authors' descriptions of qualitative research:

1. Qualitative research uses the natural setting as the source of data. The researcher attempts to observe, describe, and interpret settings as they are, maintaining an "empathic neutrality" (Patton 1990, p. 55).
2. The researcher acts as the "human instrument" of data collection.
3. Qualitative researchers predominantly use inductive data analysis.
4. Qualitative research reports are descriptive, incorporating expressive language and the "presence of voice in the text" (Eisner 1991, p. 36).
5. Qualitative research has an interpretive character, aimed at discovering the meaning events have for the individuals who experience them, and the interpretations of those meanings by the researchers.
6. Qualitative research has an emergent (as opposed to predetermined) design, and researchers focus on this emerging process as well as the outcomes of the research.
7. Qualitative research is judged using special criteria for trustworthiness (these will be discussed in some detail in a later section).

Patton (1990) points out these are not "absolute characteristics of qualitative inquiry, but rather strategic ideals that provide a direction and a framework for developing specific designs and concrete data collection tactics" (p. 59). These

characteristics are considered to be "interconnected" (Patton 1990, p. 40) and "mutually reinforcing" (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p. 39).

It is important to emphasize the emergent nature of qualitative research design. Because the researcher seeks to observe and interpret meanings within a particular context, it is neither possible nor appropriate to finalize research strategies before data collection has begun (Patton 1990). Therefore, qualitative research proposals should specify primary questions to be explored and plans for data collection strategies, but should remain flexible enough to undergo alterations as necessary.

The Role of the Researcher in Qualitative Inquiry

Before conducting a qualitative study, a researcher must do three things. First, (s)he must adopt the stance suggested by the characteristics of the naturalist paradigm. Second, the researcher must develop an appropriate level of skill necessary to become the vehicle ("human instrument) through which data will be collected and interpreted. Finally, the researcher must prepare a research design that utilizes accepted strategies for naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to what they call "theoretical sensitivity" of the researcher. This is a useful concept with which to evaluate a researcher's skill and readiness to attempt a qualitative study.

> *"Theoretical sensitivity refers to a personal quality of the researcher. It indicates an awareness of the subtleties of meaning of data. ... [It] refers to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn't"* (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p. 42).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) believe theoretical sensitivity comes from a number of sources, including professional literature as well as professional and personal experiences. The credibility of a qualitative research report relies heavily on the researcher's ability to be sensitive to the data and to make appropriate decisions in the field (Patton 1990; Eisner 1991).

Interactive Model of Research Design

The abundance of quantitatively oriented models of research design doesn't fit the ways in which most qualitative researchers go about their work. Maxwell (1998) suggests, "qualitative research design has often been treated as an oxymoron" (p. 69). The logic and process of qualitative research is not explained adequately by quantitative research design. The activities in a qualitative study, namely collecting and analyzing data, developing and modifying theory, elaborating or refocusing research questions, and identifying and dealing with validity threats, are typically going on simultaneously, with each influencing the others. In addition, design decisions may need to be modified or reconsidered *during* the study in response to new developments or to changes in some other aspect of the design. However, this does not imply that qualitative research lacks design, only that it requires a broader and less restrictive concept of *design* than traditional quantitative studies.

Maxwell's (1998) Interactive Model of Research Design (see Figure 3-1) consists of research study components and illustrates ways in which the components may affect, and be affected by, one another. It does not presuppose any particular order for the

components nor any directionality of influence. The model has five components: purposes, conceptual context, research questions, methods, and validity.

- Purposes: The ultimate goal(s) of the study. The issues that should be examined. The reason for the study and why the results are important.
- Conceptual Context: What the researcher thinks is going on with the phenomenon under study. The theories, findings, and conceptual frameworks that lend support or guidance to the study. The literature, preliminary research, and personal experience that will be used. Contains the theory that already exists or that the researcher is developing.
- Research Questions: The specifics of what the researcher really wants to understand by doing the study. The questions the research will attempt to answer and the ways in which the questions relate to one another.
- Methods: the approaches and techniques that will be used to collect and analyze the data.
- Validity: The ways in which the researcher might be wrong/inaccurate. The plausible alternative explanations and validity threats to the potential conclusions. The way in which the researcher will deal with these threats.

This model does not differ significantly from others presented in the literature, however, it does provide an explanation for the relationships *between* the components. The components form an integrated and interacting whole, with each component closely tied to several others, rather than being linked in a linear fashion. The connector lines illustrate the two-way connections of influence. Maxwell (1998) states the research questions are, and should be, at the center of the model. They are an integral part of the

research design in that they connect the other four components into a consistent whole. Several of these components have been presented in earlier sections, however, it is important to offer certain explanations again in order to more fully understand the research design that will be undertaken for this study. Several of these components will be discussed in later sections.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of qualitative research was to understand and describe participants' experiences by allowing them to "tell their story." One method of doing this was to identify common themes that emerged when participants described their experiences in their own words. The goal was to produce an account of their experience that was faithful to what they reported, that extends to other related contexts, and that could be audited in terms of the researcher's decisions.

The initial purpose of this study was to explore and describe sports fans' perceptions of and reactions to sport-related critical incidents. The design for this study was qualitative, and thus, attempted to explore fans experiences by understanding the phenomenon from the participant's perspective. This study set out to explore how fans perceive and define sport-related critical incidents as well as fan's psychological and behavioral reaction(s) to sport-related critical incidents. However, as was stated previously, the research focus was modified to examine fans' interpretations of other types of sport-related events and to investigate the meaning of these sport-related events in the process of becoming and being a sport fan. The outcome of this study is an

inductively derived model that will assist in understanding the manner in which sport fans interpret sport-related events and the impact such events have on sport fans.

Any theory that is inductively developed by examining the data should provide clear categories and hypotheses that lead to verification in future research. Categories and hypotheses should also be clear enough to be operationalized in quantitative studies. Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest "one canon for judging the usefulness of a theory is how it was generated" and that a theory that is inductively developed is more likely to represent the phenomenon of interest than a theory that is deductively generated and tested.

Hutchinson (1993) contends, "grounded theorists search for social processes present in human interaction" (p. 111). The objective of this particular search was an understanding of the reality as perceived by the people involved in the phenomenon under study. This reality was constructed through analysis of their personal perceptions of their own experiences, social interactions, and behaviors. A theory emerged from this analysis that provides a new understanding of the phenomenon that was generated from the data. The theory will provide, upon empirical confirmation, a basis from which relevant sport-related marketing and media decisions may then be developed (Hutchinson 1993).

Deduction Versus Induction

Many people distinguish between two kind of argument/reasoning: deductive and inductive. Deductive reasoning works from the more general and ends up with more specific (or a "top down" approach). For instance, one might begin thinking about a

theory that helps explain the topic of interest. The theory is then narrowed into more specific hypotheses that can be tested. Next, observations/data are collected to address the hypotheses that ultimately lead to testing the hypotheses with specific data that leads to a confirmation (or not) of the original theory (See Figure 3-2). Inductive reasoning works the other way, moving from specific observations to broader generalizations and theories (or a "bottom up" approach). With inductive reasoning, the starting point is with specific observations and measures, from which patterns are identified. Tentative hypotheses are then formulated which help develop some general conclusions or theory. In the case of fans' perceptions of and reactions to sport-related critical incidents, no theory existed to explain the phenomenon. The researcher entered into this study with no presupposed hypotheses. As such, this research began at the very "bottom" level by examining the data from the sport fans' perspective and worked toward developing a theory that explained the phenomenon of interest.

This chapter discusses the methodology used in the study, including the following areas: (a) the types of possible methodologies for studying the phenomenon of interest, (b) description of the chosen approach (grounded theory), (c) theoretical sensitivity in grounded theory, (d) sampling methodology, (e) data collection methods, and (f) data coding and analysis methods. The procedures utilized to conduct this study are presented along with measures selected to ensure methodological rigor.

Qualitative Research Designs

Qualitative research designs depend on the written or spoken words and/or observable behaviors as data sources (Bloland 1992). There are several prominent types

of qualitative research: naturalistic-ethnographic, phenomenological, and grounded theory research.

Naturalistic-Ethnographic research involves observation and description of phenomena within a specific context (Wiersman 1995). That is, research is conducted in a "natural setting." The purpose of naturalistic-ethnographic research is to document what occurs in the setting without manipulating variables or imposing structure. An inherent weakness of naturalistic-ethnographic research is limited generalizability of results. However, naturalistic-ethnographic researchers are not concerned with issues of generalizability, but rather focus on providing context for data. In this way, phenomena are documented within a specific environmental context. The emphasis is on description of what occurs without pre-conceived hypotheses. Such research may generate hypotheses throughout the data-collection process and/or focus observations around these hypotheses (Wiersman 1995). Analyses may involve some quantification, such as proportions or percentages, but primarily rely upon qualitative descriptions of the phenomena.

The term phenomenology needs some clarification because it is frequently used in the most general way to mean any sort of experientially based methodology. In general, a phenomenological study is one that is grounded in the direct experience of aspects of ones own consciousness. According to Husserl (1970), phenomenology meant examining things as they appear, in a rigorous and unbiased way, so that one might come to understand the human consciousness and experience. The development of specific methods for studying human experience is one of the primary contributions of phenomenology. In the more strict philosophical sense, phenomenology refers to "any

method for the study of consciousness that (1) grounds knowledge about consciousness in intuition as the prime source of insight and as the final arbiter of truth about consciousness, and (2) recognizes the possibility of, and seeks knowledge about, the essential structures of consciousness" (Spiegelberg 1982,,p. 63). The purpose of phenomenology is to allow individuals to contact phenomena as they actually live them out and experience them (Husserl 1970).

Phenomenology is a way of unfolding the dimensions of human experience and how humans exist in the world. It examines (a) what is distinct in each person's experience and (b) what is common to the experience of groups of people who have shared the same events or circumstances. Phenomenology was developed as a method for exploring experiences with the goal of getting at the world that exists prior to conceptualizing about it. The point of view taken in phenomenology is always the person experiencing the phenomenon.

There has been a lot of controversy in psychology over whether the subject matter studied should be consciousness (the internal viewpoint) or behavioral (the external viewpoint). Behaviorists viewed personal experience as so unreliable and variable that it wasn't even worth including in psychology. Some others viewed this as "throwing the baby out with the bathwater." Around the turn of the century, Edmund Husserl, designed phenomenology as a kind of philosophical foundation for scientists who had anything to say about what it means to be human. This philosophy involved paying attention to our own experience in such a way that you can describe it as fully and completely as possible. In phenomenology, there is no rigid dichotomy as it sees both behavior and consciousness as necessary to psychology. Both are seen as different aspects of the same

phenomenon; the world as lived by the subject. This is a very different alternative to the modernist, positivist notion of science, namely that there are two ways to deal with anything, a subjective way (not worth much, in the positivist view), and an objective way (the *real* truth, in the positivist view).

Using a naturalistic-ethnographic approach to examine how critical incidents that occur within the sporting community are perceived by sport fans was possible (e.g., following fans of a particular team as an announcement of a critical incident occurs); however, this type of approach would have been very costly, particularly in terms of time demands, access to data, and contextual issues. It might also have been possible to "predict" a critical event within a particular context and submerge oneself within that context; however, this would have entailed a longitudinal and "luck of the draw" examination at best. Additionally, both approaches described above involved the researcher dictating the direction of the research based on his/her definition and perceptions of a sport-related critical incident.

The research conducted here initially sought to understand perceptual interpretations of and reactions to sports-related critical incidents as experienced by the fan. This was executed by asking fans to personally relate their experiences. This, in turn, provided a contextualized understanding of what was and is important to *them*. As no theory existed regarding fan's perceptions of sport-related critical incidents, this research strived to develop a preliminary model that would illustrate how critical incidents that occur within the sporting community are perceived by sport fans. Grounded theory methodology, was chosen as an appropriate method for exploring this particular phenomenon.

GROUNDED THEORY

Overview

In 1967, two academic sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss at the University of California-San Francisco, put forth Grounded Theory Development as a systematic approach to generate new conceptualizations of what is going on in newly emerging areas of study. Their seminal work (1967), "The Discovery of Grounded Theory," moved researchers past the hypothesis-testing uses of raw data into the hypothesis-generating potential of their observations. Grounded theory research strives to understand people by directly examining their interactions, the meaning of those interactions and the way they interpret them: in essence, how people define their reality. The methodology involves observing, describing, and dissecting those complex social processes to ascertain the meaning and the relationships of the objects under study. Stern, Allen and Moxley (1982) assert that the "... emerging theory is grounded in the study data rather than being forcibly related to some grand theory which simply does not fit" (p. 202). Blumer (1969) contends that empirical validation in scientific inquiry lies in the congruence of the findings to the social world under study and not through manipulation of the method. Grounded theory has three underlying assumptions:

- People experience shared meanings and experiences (Hutchinson 1993);
- All of the concepts pertaining to a given phenomenon have not yet been identified; and
- Relationships between the concepts are either poorly understood or the concepts are conceptually undeveloped (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

By providing an understanding of the process by which experience happens, grounded theory adds another component to the description of experience that is common in other qualitative approaches (Artinian 1998). In this study, this approach sought to

develop a preliminary model that was inductively derived through examining the experiences and the meanings of those experiences for fans. Grounded theory methodology provides the framework for taking observations, intuitions, and understandings to a conceptual level, and provides guidelines for the discovery and formulation of theory (Orona 1997). The theory is grounded in reality as experienced by participants and requires interpersonal interaction on the part of the researcher with both the data and the participants in the study. Since this method was developed by sociologists for the purpose of "discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research" (Glaser and Strauss 1967, p. 2), it is particularly useful for understanding fundamental social-psychological patterns (Chenitz and Swanson 1986).

Grounded theory methodology begins with an area of study and then what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge. It is precisely because of the emergent nature of grounded theory methodology that this research and the resulting research questions were modified. As the study progressed, it became apparent that the findings were leading the researcher in another direction. This, in itself, led to much richer and deeper findings of the study than were originally anticipated. Using this methodology, data are coded and analyzed to discover relevant categories and the relationships among them. Hypotheses that propose relationships among concepts are inductively derived from the actual data relating to the phenomenon under study. Research begins with a broad view and becomes progressively narrower and more focused as concepts and relationships are discovered. Data collection, analysis, and coding proceed simultaneously with emerging categories determining subsequent data collection.

Through a constant comparative method, which will be described in more detail in the section on coding and analysis, concepts and relationships are both generated and provisionally tested see (Figure 3-3). Comparisons sensitize the researcher, enabling recognition of potential categories and identification of relevant conditions and consequences that appear in the data. Each incident identified from data is compared with previous incidents in the same and different groups of the same category that in turn generates the theoretical properties of the category (Glaser and Strauss 1967). This results in a theory that is "derived from data and then illustrated by characteristic examples of data" (Glaser and Strauss 1967, p. 5). The theory that is generated is faithful to everyday reality.

Grounded theory is a method that has been used extensively across a variety of social science disciplines. The basic tenet of this approach is that a theory must emerge from the data, or in other words, a theory must be grounded in the data. Hence, the approach professes to be inductive rather than deductive. As defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990), "the grounded theory approach is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon" (p. 24). The intent is to develop an account of a phenomenon that identifies the major constructs, or categories in grounded theory terms, their relationships, and the context and process, thus providing a theory of the phenomenon that is much more than a descriptive account (Becker 1993). What differentiates grounded theory from much other research is that it is explicitly emergent. It does not test a hypothesis. It sets out to find a theory that accounts for the research situation as it is. The aim is to

understand the research situation. This distinction between "emergence and forcing" is fundamental to understanding the methodology (Glaser 1992).

Grounded theory requires that theory emerge from the data, but these are not seen as separate and distinct concepts. Data collection, analysis, and theory formulation are regarded as reciprocally related, and the approach incorporates explicit procedures to guide this. Research questions are open and general rather than formed as specific hypotheses, and the emergent theory should account for a phenomenon that is relevant and problematic for those involved (Becker 1993). Analysis involves three processes, from which sampling procedures are derived, and which may overlap:

- open coding, where data are broken open to identify relevant categories;
- axial coding, where categories are refined, developed and related; and
- selective coding, where the "core category", or central category that ties all other categories in the theory together, is identified and related to other categories.

Data collection is guided by theoretical sampling, or sampling based on theoretically relevant constructs. In the early stages of a project, open sampling of persons, sites or documents, involving purposive, systematic procedures, is used to discover and identify data that are relevant to the research question. In later phases, relational or variational sampling is used, to locate data that confirms and verifies relations between categories or limits their applicability. The final phase of a study involves discriminate sampling, with deliberate and directed selection of persons, sites or documents to confirm and verify the core category and the theory as a whole.

Two key procedures, asking questions and making comparisons, are specifically detailed to inform and guide analysis. Other procedures, memo writing and the use of

diagrams, are also incorporated as essential parts of the analysis. The need for a high level of theoretical sensitivity on the part of the researcher is necessary.

Grounded theory has some distinguishing features designed to maintain the "groundedness" of the approach. Data collection and analysis are deliberately fused, and initial data analysis is used to shape continuing data collection. This is intended to provide the researcher with opportunities for increasing the "density" and "saturation" of recurring categories, as well as for examining unexpected findings. The approach also maintains that initial data collection and preliminary analyses should take place prior to consulting or incorporating research literature. This is intended to ensure that the analysis is based *in* the data and that pre-existing constructs do not shape the analysis and subsequent theory formation. However, if existing theoretical constructs are utilized or pre-existing assumptions are present, they must be justified in the data and stated *a priori.* The literature review can be viewed as another data source and integrated into data analysis. Typically, however, reading and integrating literature is delayed in the process, not omitted, and thus is regarded as an important part of theory development.

Grounded theory aims to be a rigorous method by providing detailed and systematic procedures for data collection, analysis and theorizing, but it is also concerned with the quality of the emergent theory. Grounded theory must meet four criteria for judging the applicability of theory to a phenomenon: fit, understanding, generality, and control (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

- *Fit* refers to theory carefully derived from diverse data and faithful to the everyday reality of the area;
- *Understanding* means that theory should make sense to researchers in that area as well as to those who were studied.

- *Generality* refers to theory that is based upon comprehensive and broad conceptual interpretations, includes extensive variation, and is abstract enough to be applicable to a wide variety of contexts in the area; and
- *Control* means that conditions under which the theory applies are stated and become a basis for action in the area.

The Process

In general, there are three major components of qualitative research: the data, the analysis, and the final report. Interviews and observations are the most common sources of data in qualitative research; however, other relevant sources of data (e.g., primary documents, secondary data, literature) can be useful as well. Maxwell (1998) refers to "conceptual context" as not only a "literature review," but also concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that support and/or inform the research. Maxwell suggests the pieces that make up conceptual context are "constructed, not found; borrowed and built, not something that exists ready-made" (p. 77). Four main sources of information help build a researcher's conceptual context: experiential knowledge, existing theory and research, pilot and exploratory studies, and thought experiments.

The procedures used to analyze and interpret the data collected will be discussed in detail in a later section. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest certain coding procedures and explain that these could differ according to the training, experience, and purpose of the individual researcher(s). Lastly, findings may be reported either in written form (e.g., journals) or in verbal form (e.g., conferences) and the degree to which the findings are reported may vary as well. For example, one researcher may choose to present an overview of his/her findings or simply an in-depth look into his/her findings.

There are sets of activities that must be followed in developing theory using the grounded theory approach: selecting a phenomenon of interest, developing the research question, choosing a research setting, enhancing theoretical sensitivity, choosing a sampling methodology, collecting the data, data coding (open, axial, and selective) and analysis, memoing and diagramming, and verification. These activities are not to be performed in a prescribed order, but rather are intended to serve as activities that will be worked simultaneously as each activity may be continuously revisited. The activities involved in grounded theory, as well as the particular activities proposed for this study, are presented in Table 3-1.

Select a Phenomenon

A phenomenon of interest must be chosen *a priori*. Typically, social phenomena that are complex, problematic, and about which very little is known are appropriate for research using grounded theory. The initial phenomenon of interest in this study was fans' perceptions of and subsequent reactions to sport-related critical incidents. To be considered within the realm of sport-related critical incidents, the event itself must have been deemed important and relevant enough (by the fan) to have an impact on him/her. For example, an event that encouraged discussion, either positive or negative, most likely indicated the level of importance that fan placed on the event. The event must also be sport-related. For instance, the event itself must involve some form of sport entity (i.e., sport, league, team, player, coach). The event could be an "off the field" event, but it

must involve a sport-related entity. An event could also involve current as well as former athletes.

During the process of collecting, analyzing, and coding data, it was found that fan's perceptions of critical incidents were not vastly different nor did they provide the variation the researcher was looking for within the data. According to the study participants, critical incidents occurred fairly infrequently and tended to be very similar in nature. Hence the research was modified to incorporate fans' interpretations of other types of sport-related events. The research was altered to (1) understand participant's descriptions of what it means to be a sport fan, (2) examine the factors and conditions that influence an individual to become a sport fan, (3) investigate how sport fans interpret and react to sport-related events.

Conceptual Context

Maxwell (1998) defines conceptual context, or a conceptual framework, as the "system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that support and inform your research" (p. 77). A conceptual framework is a formulation of what the researcher *thinks* is going on with the phenomenon under study, providing a tentative, *a priori*, theory of what is occurring. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest theory provides a model or map of why the world is the way it is. A useful theory is one that tells a story about a phenomenon. In other words, it provides new insights and broadens understanding of a phenomenon based on the data. The function of theory in research design is to help assess purpose, develop realistic and relevant research questions and methods, and identify potential validity threats to the conclusions.

Develop a Research Question

Once a phenomenon of interest is chosen, a researcher must formally develop the research question(s). The way in which this question is asked is extremely important because it determines the type of research methodology that should be used. Grounded theory methodology should be chosen *only* if the problem mandates using it. Strauss and Corbin (1990) pointed out that a potential problem with formulating research questions and choosing a research methodology is that sometimes the idea to use the grounded theory method is determined *a priori* and then a research question is posed to fit it. Although there is no one correct way to engage in asking research questions and determining appropriate methodology, Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest the research question should dictate the choice of methodology. Due to the shortage of research and the importance of understanding fan's perceptions of sport-related critical incidents, a theory needed to be advanced regarding the impact of these events on fans. Specifically, the initial research questions for this study were:

(1) How do fans perceive and define sport-related critical incidents?
(2) What are the possible psychological and behavioral reactions to sport-related critical incidents?

As was stated previously, qualitative research proposals should specify primary questions to be explored and plans for data collection strategies, but is perfectly acceptable to undergo alterations as necessary. Therefore, as the study progressed, it became necessary to modify the research questions as follows:

(4) How do fans define a sport fan?
(5) What factors are involved with becoming and remaining a sport fan?
(6) How do fans interpret sport-related events?
    a. How does a sport fan ascribe meaning to a sport-related event?

Choose a Research Setting

Once the phenomenon has been selected and the research question appropriately framed, the researcher must choose a setting in which to examine the phenomenon. The chosen setting must have a high probability of containing the phenomenon of interest. The setting should also contain various examples of categories. In other words, the selected setting should not be so structured and inflexible such that it limits the potential findings that may occur (i.e., examining the phenomenon from an entirely different perspective).

It was proposed that sport-related critical incidents could occur within and across various sport entities (e.g., sport/league, team, and player/coach), thus, it was important to capture fan's perceptions and the impact of many types of sport-related critical incidents. This was accomplished by examining the phenomenon at the individual consumer market level, in the form of sport fans. Although organizations (e.g., professional leagues, sponsoring companies, sport marketing firms) are also impacted by sport-related critical events (e.g., profit, market share, stock prices), the initial purpose of this study was to examine fan's perceptions of and psychological and behavioral reactions to sport-related critical incidents. As the research was modified to examine sport fan's descriptions of a sport fan, the factors and conditions that influence an individual to become a sport fan, and how sport fans interpret and react to sport-related events, the consumer market remained an appropriate setting for this study because it was the consumer's (fan's) interpretation of and reaction to a sport-related event that he/she felt was personally relevant that was of interest. Additionally, the consumer market was appropriate because the meaning a fan ascribed to a sport-related event was an individual

phenomenon and should be viewed and studied as such. Sports, as well as events that occur within the sporting arena, are frequently the focus of many casual group discussions and these discussions could potentially influence consumer's attitudes about a particular sport/league, team and/or player. An argument is not being made for or against this phenomenon, nor is the focus on the processes involved therein. Rather, the phenomenon, as it occurs individually and as the consumer processes the information and reacts accordingly, was of interest in this study.

Enhance Theoretical Sensitivity

Theoretical sensitivity is an essential component in conducting grounded theory research. It refers to a "personal quality of the researcher that indicates an awareness of the subtleties of meaning in data" (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p. 41). It is an inherent characteristic of researchers that stems from their understanding and perception of their own world and how that influences their understanding and perception of the world they wish to study. Glaser attributes theoretical sensitivity to the " ... social psychology of the analyst; this is, his (sic) skill, fatigue, maturity, cycling of motivation, life cycle interest, insights into and ideation from the data" (Glaser 1978, p. 2). It also refers to attributes that a researcher carries with him/her to the study. It encompasses qualities such as having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand the data, and the ability to separate what is pertinent from what is not (Glaser 1978). It is important that the researcher think conceptually rather than concretely. In other words, the researcher must be sensitive to the theory and not force ideas and conceptions into the evolving theory.

Grounded theory methodology dictates that the researcher enter into, and conduct, the study with an open and unbiased mind. Glaser (1978) contends that theoretical sensitivity is first approached through entering the field of study with as few preconceived ideas about the research setting as possible. This approach allows the researcher to view the interactions objectively and remain sensitive to the events as they unfold. However, Strauss and Corbin (1990) contend that a researchers' prior experience with the research setting may in fact sensitize them to the nuances of the experience. The example these scholars offered was experience with loss, through either death or divorce. Thus, a researchers' personal experience may provide a basis from which to make comparisons. Regardless which approach is followed, the researcher must observe self-behavior and be acutely aware of one's own preconceptions, values, and beliefs (Hutchinson 1993). Bearing this in mind then, "theoretical sensitivity" suggests if *a priori* assumptions and/or issues exist, they must be noted.

Based upon this researcher's interest, knowledge, and experience with sports, it was necessary to point out that an analysis of sport-related critical incidents on fans *could* be impacted by the actual event, characteristics of the fan, and/or characteristics of the sport, league, team, player, or coach. It was noted that the perception of a sport-related critical incident *may* be dependent upon the following issues:

- An anticipated (e.g., Michael Jordan's retirement) versus unanticipated (e.g., Dale Earnhardt's untimely death) event;
- A positive or negative event (as perceived by the fan);
- A career-ending (e.g., baseball All Star, Roy Campanella became a quadriplegic after a car wreck in 1958 which ended his career) versus a non-career ending event;
- A single event versus the occurrence of several events that could have a cumulative effect;
- An event that occurred "on the court" versus "off the court";

- An event that was experienced personally by the fan (e.g., at the game when the critical incident occurred) versus communicated through other means (e.g., media sources or personal communication);
- With whom a fan identifies (e.g., sport, league, team, player, or coach);
- The length of time and level of intensity of identification/loyalty;
- Whether the fan has a secondary source of identification (e.g., another favorite team or sport);
- A fan's previous experience with *their* sport, team and/or player;
- A fan's prior/existing knowledge of *their* sport, team, and/or player;
- The experience (denoted by length of time with the sport/team) of the team/athlete;
- The image/reputation of the team/athlete (as perceived by the fan).

Theoretical sensitivity implies openness to the data free from preconceived ideas regarding the phenomenon under study, but not an ignorance of the phenomenon. It requires the creative use of one's knowledge and experience while at the same time maintaining the reality of the phenomenon (Strauss and Corbin 1990). An attitude of skepticism is always necessary and validation of creatively generated categories and statements of relationships is essential. Through use of theoretical sensitivity, the researcher will utilize herself as an instrument to creatively name categories, make free associations necessary for generation of questions, and make comparisons which lead to discovery. This sensitivity "enables the analyst to see the research situation and its associated data in new ways and explore the data's potential for developing theory" (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p. 44).

Theoretical sensitivity may be derived from several sources including professional experience, personal experience, literature, and the analytic process of interacting with the data. Professional experiences can provide the researcher with a rich knowledge base from which to draw insights. However, Strauss and Corbin (1990) caution that this kind of experience can block one from seeing what has become routine

or obvious. Personal experience can provide a basis for making comparisons and contribute to sensitivity, but the researcher must be careful not to assume that her experiences are similar to those of everyone else (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

Literature can stimulate theoretical sensitivity by providing concepts and relationships to examine against actual data (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Relevant literature can actually "sensitize" the researcher to the phenomenon of interest. Numerous publications such as books (theory and research) and documents (biographies, popular press articles, etc.) can provide a background of information for familiarization with the phenomenon under study (Strauss and Corbin 1990). However, Becker (1986) warns that existing literature, and the assumptions embedded within it, could distort the way research is framed, causing certain concepts to be overlooked or conceptualized in predetermined ways. He asserts that "a serious scholar ought routinely to inspect competing ways of talking about the same subject matter," and warns to, "use the literature, don't let it use you" (p. 149). However, used in a correct manner, relevant prior research can be justification for the study showing how the work will address important or unanswered question(s). Additionally, existing literature can be useful when making decisions regarding methodology by suggesting alternative approaches or revealing potential problems. Lastly, existing literature can be used as a source of data that can be used to test or modify a newly emerging theory.

The use of literature is interwoven into the research process. Initially, it may provide an understanding of the phenomenon of interest, but as the research progresses, the literature can be used for validation and further understanding of the emerging concepts. The literature can also provide the stimulus for further questioning and actually

redirect further sampling. Descriptive materials and quotations found in the literature can be analyzed and included as secondary sources of data.

Despite the body of knowledge in the areas of fan behavior and fan loyalty, the impact of sport-related critical incidents as experienced by the fan has virtually been ignored. Very few studies have directly examined fans' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors as they relate to experiencing a critical event in the sporting arena. The research questions provided previously were developed to explore the experiences of fans that have been exposed to sport-related critical incidents in order to gain an understanding of their perceptions and reactions.

While analyzing data gathered during this study, the researcher gained additional theoretical sensitivity. Further insight and understanding of the impact of sport-related events were gained as the researcher gathered, categorized, and interacted with the data. This increased sensitivity to concepts, their meanings, and relationships made it necessary to interweave data selection with data analysis because each complements the other (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Analytic sensitivity, together with the theoretical sensitivity gained from professional and personal experiences, allowed the researcher to approach the research situation with openness and creativity.

While theoretical sensitivity is important, it is equally important that theoretical sensitivity be balanced by reality and that researcher bias does not affect interpretation of the data. To uncover and minimize possible bias and identify any preconceptions and assumptions with respect to the phenomenon under study, two processes ("bracketing" and "horizontalization") were employed. Bracketing is the deferment of the researcher's personal prejudices and biases so as not to impose structure in the interview.

Horizontalization involves treating all data as if it were equally important, thus avoiding the tendency to overemphasize data consistent with the researcher's preconceived notions (Heppner, Kivlighan and Wampold 1992).

Prior to conducting any interviews, the researcher underwent a bracketing interview conducted by a colleague familiar with the phenomenon under study as well as the methodology being used in the study. The interview was analyzed to uncover the researcher's personal experience with and/or pre-conceived ideas with regard to sport-related critical incidents.

Cross-checking of participants' stories, critical self-reflection of the researcher's perceptions, memoing, log keeping, and content verification were utilized to minimize researcher bias. Additionally, all observations, thoughts, categories, and questions about the data were scrutinized and not simply accepted as fact. Nothing was ever taken for granted. In order to minimize researcher bias, bracketing, horizontalization, stepping back and asking questions, and precise research procedures, were used in this study.

Choose a Sampling Methodology

Three methods of participant recruitment were utilized for this study. The researcher solicited participants by posting notices in and around a mid-west community (e.g., college campus locations, bookstores) that briefly explained the study and provided telephone contact information (See Figure 3-4). Secondly, the researcher contacted a local sports broadcaster that was running a sports trivia contest and sought his help with locating potential participants. These potential participants were sent a short description and the requirements of the study. Lastly, participants were also good sources of

additional participants, as they seemed to know several people in the community that would be good candidates. Thus, a "snowball" technique of identifying potential participants was implemented as well. When potential participants contacted the researcher, the study was explained and a few preliminary questions were asked, thus screening the potential participant for theoretical relevance. Following are a list of questions that each potential participant was asked prior inclusion in the study:

- "Do you have a favorite sport, league, team, player or coach?"
- "How do you go about following your favorite sport, league, team, player or coach?"
- "How long have you followed your favorite sport, league, team, player, or coach?"
- "How many hours a week (during the season) do you watch …?"
- "Have/Do you travel to watch …..?"

Participation in the study was based on two criteria: (1) an individuals self defined status as a sport fan and (2) screening based on the above questions. Based on these two criteria, if the participant was willing to continue participation in the study and able to articulate his/her experiences, an interview was scheduled at a time and site convenient for the participant. Initial interview sessions focused on the participant's (1) experiences as a fan, (2) perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about sport-related critical incidents, and (3) psychological and behavioral responses to these incidents. Prior to the each interview, participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire. The questionnaire asked participants to list and elaborate upon their favorite sport entities (e.g., team, player) and also to list some events that "got their attention." The questionnaire also included several sociodemographic questions (e.g., age, gender, marital status, income level, occupation) (See Appendix 3-1). Having the participant complete the questionnaire before the interview was an attempt to (1) provide information regarding

the participant's favorite teams, players, etc., that the researcher could focus the discussion around, (2) give the participant time to think about being a fan, and (3) increase the likelihood that participants would be able to recall sport-related events during the interview (Dickson *et al*. 1989). The information gathered from the questionnaire was also used for sample description purposes.

Participation was strictly voluntary with no consequences to participants for failure to take part in, or withdrawing from, the study. Before beginning the interview, informed consent was obtained from each participant. Participants were briefly told of the study's purpose and asked for permission to audiotape the interview. Participants were also assured of anonymity. During all stages of the study, a concerted effort was made to protect each participant's confidentiality. There was minimal risk to participants in the study. It is doubtful that any of the interviews evoked overly emotional reactions that caused any distress to the participants. In contrast, participants might have benefited from the opportunity to discuss their experiences with the researcher and gain insights into their own interpretations and resultant behavior patterns.

The researcher remained flexible in order to add additional participants due to a snowballing effect or investigate other sources of data that resulted during the course of the interviews. Regardless from whence the researcher found the participants, potential participants were (1) asked if he/she considered him/herself a sports fan (self description), (2) asked the questions posed above, and (3) received a brief explanation of the study. All potential participants claimed to have strong feelings toward a sport entity and thus were included in the study.

Consistent with the research design using grounded theory, the sample size was determined by the emerging themes and sample selection continued until theoretical saturation occurred. Theoretical saturation occurred when (a) no new relevant categorical data emerged, (b) category development was dense, and (c) relationships between categories were established and validated (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

Theoretical Sampling

A specific type of sampling used in grounded theory is theoretical sampling. Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe theoretical sampling as a process of jointly collecting, coding, and analyzing data. They contend the blending of these three activities is what generates an emergent theory. Theoretical sampling is purposive sampling that increases the diversity of the sample while searching for different properties. Theoretical sampling involves "sampling on the basis of concepts that have proven theoretical relevance to the evolving theory" (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p.179). This type of sampling, involves sampling events or incidents that are indicators of categories, their properties and dimensions, not persons per se, in order to develop and conceptually relate them.

Theoretical sampling allows the researcher to achieve the objective of understanding a phenomenon in depth, rather than breadth. It is not important in grounded theory to find out *how many* people feel a certain way, but rather to understand *how* people feel and *what causes* them to feel that way. To be considered important and thus supported, redundancy in the data is desired. Therefore, comments and thoughts that may otherwise be "thrown out" and considered insignificant, must be fully explored. Theoretical sampling does not always involve sampling more people. The researcher can

also re-sample the previously collected data by returning to the transcripts or notes to recode in light of additional knowledge gained as the theory emerges or by going back to a particular participant and ask them to elaborate on their thoughts.

Two basic questions are asked in theoretical sampling: (1) what groups/subgroups should be studies next? and (2) what is the theoretical purpose for studying this group? (Strauss and Corbin 1990). There are many groups that could be chosen for comparison, therefore, groups must be chosen according to theoretical criteria (i.e., theoretical relevance). For example, the researcher should choose a group that will generate as many properties of the categories as possible. One difficulty with grounded theory is that the researcher is unable to determine the number or types of groups *a priori*. Because of this, the researcher is also unable to determine how long the research project will take. However, the researcher should be able to discuss the type of theory desired, substantive or formal, and the areas in which the groups will be found. When generating substantive theory, as opposed to formal theory, the researcher must keep a particular class of groups in mind. For instance, in generating substantive theory, the researcher might choose to study sport-related events that occur and thus examine the impact on sport fans. However, if the aim of the research is to develop formal theory, the researcher might select dissimilar groups to study. For example, the researcher might select to study events that occur in other areas (e.g., political, organizational) and thus examine the impact on other groups of individuals.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) define substantive theory as "that developed for a substantive, or empirical, area of sociological inquiry" and formal theory as "that developed for a formal, or conceptual, area of sociological inquiry" (p. 32). Although

substantive and formal theories fall within the "middle range" of theories (see Figure 3-5), they do "exist on distinguishable levels of generality, which differ only in terms of degree" (p. 33). This research aimed to develop substantive theory, that which is developed for the sport world. By changing the focus of attention from substantive to formal concerns, it is possible that the substantive theory that emerged from this research could be used to generate grounded formal theory in the future. Glaser and Strauss (1967) "believe it most desirable, and usually necessary, to start a formal theory from a substantive one" (p. 79).

Sampling was cumulative and continued to increase in focus as the research progressed. Sampling was directed by the logic and purposes of the three types of coding procedures (i.e., open, axial, selective) utilized in grounded theory and also by theoretical sensitivity. Sampling, data collection, coding, and analysis took place simultaneously in a circular process that was continuously refined as the theory began to emerge. As data was coded and analyzed, the researcher was directed towards further data collection based on what had emerged thus far and what needed further clarification and/or exploration. During initial data gathering, sampling had little structure and was open to all possibilities for uncovering as many potentially relevant categories with accompanying properties and dimensions as possible.

Participants were initially asked to "Tell me about your experiences as a fan …". While interviewing and observing, the researcher adjusted the interviewing procedure to become more focused and reflect what was discovered in previous interviews. For example, the last few interviews began by asking participants to "Tell me about a sport-related event that stands out in your mind." From there, the researcher inquired about the

reason it was an important event to the participant and how he/she felt about it. It should be noted that the word "critical" was not mentioned by either a participant nor the researcher until the fifth interview. It was at this point that the researcher introduced the term to examine the reaction to the terminology. To obtain clarification on particular points made by the participant or former participants, questions became more focused in order to achieve richness and completeness of the phenomena description. For example, probing questions such as, "Could you tell me more about that?" or "How did that make you feel?" were necessary.

As concepts, categories, properties, and dimensions emerged; sampling became relational and variational, focusing on uncovering and validating relationships. The researcher attempted to find as many differences as possible at the dimensional level of the data through questioning and comparing. There were several ways the researcher used relational and variational sampling. First, it was done systematically, moving from situation to situation, in order to gather data on theoretically relevant categories. Second, persons, sites, or documents that maximized the opportunity to obtain data among categories were chosen purposefully. For example, several Internet websites provided excerpts from sport fans discussing their reactions and feelings toward certain sport-related events. The two sites that were utilized in this research were ESPN's Readers List (ww.ESPN.com) and The Sporting News' Voice of the Fan (ww.sportingnews.com). An assumption was made by the researcher that the types of fans that were taking time to write into these sites regarding an event, were avid fans that were knowledgeable about the event that occurred. Additionally, because these fans took the time to respond, it is assumed that the event had some degree of relevance/importance to them as fans. These

were precisely the types of fans the researcher sought out as participants in the study. Thus, these sources of data were extremely valuable in adding to and validating the information the researcher uncovered in the interviews.

Sampling became even more directed and deliberate as the themes continued to emerge, using discriminate sampling methods. Participants that maximized the opportunity for verifying the core category and story line were selected. In order to achieve this, the researcher became more fastidious when evaluating the answers to the introductory questions used when qualifying people as potential participants. It became necessary to insure that fans were indeed highly committed/avid fans before being included in the study. Adequate sampling is necessary for reasonable assurance of saturation, relevance, workability, and integrality of the chosen core category and establishing the relationships of other categories to this core (Glaser 1978).

Collect Data

Qualitative investigations generally rely on the integration of data from a variety of methods and sources of information. By utilizing several different methods that have different strengths and weaknesses, the risk that conclusions will reflect biases or limitations of a specific method is reduced and a better assessment of validity and generality of the data are allowed. For this reason, it was pertinent that other data sources, as they presented themselves, were investigated. If a participant referred to other forms of data, the researcher took the time to examine that data. For example, several participants indicated that his/her perception of a sport-related critical incident relied on the news presented on a particular Internet website (i.e., www.ESPN.com). Therefore,

the researcher was lead to examine that data source. In fact, several participants indicated that the only sport-related news they received was from this particular website and that they paid more attention to the headlines on that site than anything else. During the researcher's periodic perusal of this website, she came across a "List" section which presents numerous reader and sport writer lists. These lists presented reactions from readers asked to vote on and respond to various issues and events (e.g., greatest U.S. women's sports moments, dirtiest pro players, shocking baseball moments, ugliest moments of 2002). Furthermore, The Sporting News has a similar website (www.sportingnews.com) that presents a section entitled "Voice of the Fan." Each day, the website proposes a question and readers (sport fans) submit their thoughts. These questions typically revolved around recent events that occurred within the sporting world. Additionally, as was discovered to be of importance, these questions did not always deal with on-the-field performances. Both sources of data (i.e., lists and subsequent quotes) from fans were deemed important enough to include in this analysis as well. The concept of theoretical sampling, which was discussed above, proved to be an important aspect of this data collection. Flexibility was a key component in retrieving as much relevant data as possible. The mediums in which the data could be found did indeed change once the data collection process ensued.

In-Depth Interview

In-depth, one-on-one, interviews with self described sport fans were conducted. The purpose of grounded theory is to let the data build the theory, not for the researcher to force data or a theory to emerge, therefore, the researcher was careful not to induce too

much structure. An argument against retrospective interviews is that they may not yield "accurate" information as it may be difficult for someone to recall past thoughts or perceptions. However, (Gardial, Clemons, Woodruff, Schumann and Burns 1994) suggests a person's memory of a situation may influence behavior, regardless of how "accurate" their portrayal of the situation. Memory may also predict future behavior because people might act/react based on what they recall about a situation instead of what actually happened.

People may also feel forced to explain their behavior despite the fact that no logical explanation can be given (Flint, Haley and Mentzer 1996). For this reason, it was important that the interviews were focused on *actual* behaviors and interpretations of the participants rather than on rationalizations for such. Questions that sought explanations or reflection were avoided because the purpose was to examine the detailed description of the fans experiences in order to capture and analyze the experiences as they were lived, not to obtain rationalizations for behavior. One exception to this was when a strategy that participants used began to emerge in which they *rationalized* the information or the event occurrence. In this sense, the researcher allowed the participant to expand upon his/her rationalization in order to more fully understand the outcome when dealing with the sport-related event or the information received regarding the event.

The interviews were unstructured in the sense that the participant was given a topic on which to focus, but the interview was allowed to go in whatever direction the information lead. The goal was to examine the meaning behind a sport-related event and the impact these events had on sport fans by examining fan's personal experiences. Several probing, as well as follow-up, questions were used to encourage the participant to

open up and discuss a topic without being lead to an answer. These types of questions will be discussed in the next section.

Journal notes were kept based on actions that were observed and thoughts that arose during the interviews. Observations made during each interview, and any information obtained before or after the tape recorder was turned off, was entered as data in field notes. For instance, during the debriefing session, several participants began talking more about the types of events that impact them and the reasoning why. After the participant left the room, the researcher documented this information on the back of the participant's questionnaire in order to keep all the information from that participant intact. Additional field notes include the researcher's impressions, feelings, thoughts, and experiences. Occasionally, the researcher would enter into casual conversations with people regarding sports and sporting events. These individuals' thoughts and feelings, although not purposely sought out as participants became part of the researchers field notes. Often times, the researcher found that these individuals were imparting some of the same information that was being heard in the interviews, thus validating what the researcher was discovering through that means of data collection. Once transcribed, interview data was transferred to a computer software program called NUD*IST Vivo 1.3©, a qualitative data management system.

At the onset, all participants were informed of the chance that additional interviews might be necessary. However, the initial data collected from each participant was deemed exhaustive enough that it was not necessary to collect additional data from any participant.

The Qualitative Interview

The goal of the qualitative interview is to obtain a first-person account of some specified domain of experience. The ensuing dialogue is largely set by the participant and does not follow a predetermined path. The interview is designed to generate a conversational atmosphere that will be carried throughout the interview. In this way, the interview ends up being more circular than linear. The experience and perceptions of the participant is the focus of the interview; therefore, he/she should be considered and treated as the expert. It was pertinent that the researcher did not give the impression that he/she knew more about the topic of study. In fact, there were several situations in which the researcher had to confess her lack of knowledge with regard to certain events or certain athletes that were involved in the events. At this point, the researcher asked the participant to explain the event in further detail or asked additional questions to learn who the participant was referring to. The interview also used descriptive questions such as "What was X like?" and "How did you feel when X occurred?" Additionally, the researcher reacted to and used the participants own words and phrases when asking follow-up questions. Using the terminology supplied by the participant is necessary in that it accomplishes two things. First, hearing familiar words allows the participant to relax and feel comfortable with the questions being asked. Second, using the participant's words does not allow the researcher the opportunity to impose his/her own presupposed conceptualizations. For instance, one participant used the phrase "that was bush" to describe how he felt when attending a certain football game. The researcher followed up by asking exactly what he meant by "bush," so coding and analysis would pertain to the participants' meaning, not the meaning imposed by the researcher.

Qualitative interviewing is intended to be flexible, iterative, and continuous, rather than prepared in advance and unchanging. It was important for the researcher to allow for adjustments in the research design. As the researcher learned more about the participant's experiences, she modified the pattern of questioning. Being flexible also meant being able to alter the interview so that participants were asked about particular subject areas of which they were most familiar.

An iterative design simply means that the phenomenon of interest and the resultant themes/model become much clearer after completing each round of gathering and analyzing information. The researcher actively solicited a wide variety of ideas, themes, and explanations during the first interviews. In this way, the researcher allowed the participant to respond in any way he/she chose. Initial questions in an interview were very broad; attempting to cast a wide net, in order to receive a wide range of responses and to make sure that what is asked later had meaning to the participants. An example of a particular question was "When you hear the word "fan," what comes to mind?" or "Tell me about your experiences as a sport fan." The next step in the iterative process was to narrow the topic in order to limit the number of themes that were explored. Finally, the analysis and testing of the researcher's understanding was emphasized as themes were put together to form new theories. The iterative process ended when the information that was being put together supported a small number of integrated themes and each additional interview added no more ideas or issues to the themes. Glaser and Strauss (1967) call this point "theoretical saturation."

The continuous nature of qualitative interviewing indicates that questioning is redesigned throughout the project. One particular response might suggest a new line of

questioning or it might suggest that different people should be contacted and interviewed. In this way, the research continues to be organized and focused, but the exploration of new topics can be accommodated.

Interview Protocol

Only one researcher conducted the interviews. The disadvantages to having only one researcher (e.g., efficiency and different perspectives) were outweighed in this instance by the advantages. Some of the advantages of using only one researcher were: 1) elimination of interviewer training, 2) greater consistency in interviews, and 3) increased ability to take information from each interview to the next.

Interviews were conducted in an environment where both the participant and the researcher felt comfortable. As it turned out, all but one interview were conducted in a conference room at the researcher's university. The other interview was conducted in the participant's office. Each interview began with an explanation regarding the purpose of the research, what was of interest, and why their responses were valuable. All participants were assured that their responses would be kept in the strictest confidence. Participants were asked for permission to audiotape the interview. No participant objected to being audiotaped. The participant was asked to complete a short questionnaire that asked him/her to list and elaborate upon his/her experiences as a sport fan and list several sport-related events that got their attention (See Appendix B: Questionnaire). Interviews were transcribed as soon after the interview as possible. Immediate transcription allowed for timely coding and analysis of the data and offered

suggestions of topics and questions that needed to be addressed in subsequent interviews. After each interview, the researcher's comments and thoughts were entered into a journal.

The initial interviews were unstructured. Subsequent interviews were used to verify and expand upon findings and concepts identified from previous interviews. Because of this, later interviews became more structured and focused as the researcher tried to work through and understand the data collected previously. Occasionally, probing techniques were used in order to get the participants to share their thoughts and feelings more openly. Initially however, the participants were asked to focus on the topic of interest. This task was accomplished by beginning with broad questions, and then, asking more focused questions. It was thought that some participants might be more willing and able to engage in open conversation regarding their perception of and reaction(s) to sport-related incidents than other participants. Therefore, several questions, prepared in advance to begin an interview, were geared toward differing levels of detail. Each participant was asked one of the following questions at the beginning of each interview.

- "Tell me about your experiences as a sport fan."
- "When you hear the word "fan," what comes to mind?"
- "When we talk about major events in sports, what comes to mind?"
- "Can you tell me about a sport, league, team, player, or coach that you are a fan of?"
    - "What is it about that sport, league, team, player, or coach that intrigues you?"
- "Tell me about an event that occurred with your favorite sport, league, team, player, or coach that got your attention?"
    - "What was it about that event that made you 'sit up and take notice?'"
    - "What impact did that event have on you?"

The word "why" was avoided as much as possible so that the participant did not feel as though he/she has to rationalize all thoughts and actions. Thompson, Pollio and Locander (1994) suggest that seeking answers to "why" questions is an ineffective way to generate description of a lived experience. Therefore, rather than asking, "Why did Dale Earnhardt's death impact you?" the researcher might have asked, "What was it about Dale Earnhardt's death that impacted you?" Although these questions are very similar in content, asking the question in this way alleviates the potential of putting the participant on the defensive. Generic probes were also used in order to get the participant to discuss a topic in more detail (e.g., "Tell me more about that?" "Can you describe that a little more for me?" "How was that for you?" and "What were you aware of at the time?").

All participants were advised of the possibility of the need to revisit them to obtain clarification of a thought or concept. However, it was unnecessary to do so as all the information obtained during the initial interviews was comprehensive enough.

It was important to determine a participant's extent of knowledge of the particular event he/she has recalled, as well as their knowledge of sport, league, team, player, or coach. It seemed logical that an event that was recalled/mentioned would be one that is fairly well known, as well as personally significant, to the participant. However, to make this assumption could potentially bias the analysis, therefore, it was necessary to ascertain the significance level, as well as the knowledge level of a particular event.

Data Coding and Analysis

In grounded theory, coding is the central process by which theories emerge from the data. Coding "represents the operations by which data are broken down, conceptualized, and put back together in new ways" (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p. 57). Throughout the coding process, two analytic procedures are used: making comparisons and asking questions. Three types of coding are used in grounded theory: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. These coding types are not done sequentially, but iteratively. The researcher and research team may move between all three types of codes during any coding session, interpreting, asking questions, and making comparisons using the constant comparative method. The constant comparative method involves making comparisons of derived concepts, relationships, and hypotheses with data and previously derived concepts, relationships and hypotheses. This method is used jointly with theoretical sampling to generate an integrated and conceivable theory with a core category that accounts for most of the variation in a pattern of behavior (See Table 3-2 for suggested rules for coding).

Open Coding

Open coding is the "process of breaking down, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data: (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p. 61). During this coding, phenomena will be named and categorized through close examination of the data. This is accomplished by taking apart observations, sentences, or paragraphs of the first few interviews, generally line by line, and giving each individual event or description a name that

represents the phenomena. By asking questions such as, "What is this" and "What is going on here?" the researcher assigns names to these specific concepts. It is also imperative that the researcher continue to compare these concepts in order to place them in appropriate categories as well as to keep the number of categories from becoming too large. Incidents will be compared with related incidents as the analysis progresses in order to group and label similar phenomena. The name to which an incident is assigned is important, in that it should represent a phenomenon. Some category names might be words or phrases that the participant themselves used. These codes are often called "in vivo" codes (Glaser 1978; Strauss 1987). Names of these categories can also come from concepts in the literature or can simply be metaphors that the researcher feels represents the incident.

Data are then collapsed and similar concepts are grouped into categories and given a conceptual name that is more abstract than that given to the concepts (dimensions) grouped under it. For example, Strauss and Corbin's (1990) lady in the red dress example derived a main category (Food Orchestrator) and two subcategories (Types of Work and Conditions for being a good Food Orchestrator). The name of the category should be logically related to the data and graphically describe it. Categories will be further developed in terms of their properties that will represent the characteristics or attributes, and their dimensions, which represent the location of a property along a continuum, or the degree of an attribute.

For example, the research conducted here resulted in several categories, one of which was "strategies used to deal with incoming sport-related information." This category also resulted in three sub-categories (acceptance, attention, and rejection).

Furthermore, these particular sub-categories resulted in several properties (agreement, rationalization, information search, disagreement and denial). The dimensions on each of these properties can be placed on a continuum based upon how much the participant engaged in that strategy (i.e., amount of agreement or rationalization).

Open coding can be conducted in several different ways. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest beginning with the initial interview and conducting a line-by-line analysis, which could include a phrase-by-phrase or word-by-word examination. Although requiring a lot of time, this type of analysis can also be quite exciting because it tends to be the most generative. An initial line-by-line analysis is also a way to learn the coding procedure and usually is not carried on for too many sessions. Additionally, coding by sentence or paragraph may also be considered. In this case, the researcher considers the major idea mentioned in the sentence or paragraph. This type of analysis is quite useful when several categories have already been identified. Lastly, an entire document can be coded by asking "What seems to be going on here?" and "What makes this document different/same from others that I've coded?" In this research, open coding was initially performed at the word by word level and then progressed to sentence to sentence. As participants were likely to mention several items within the same discussion on a topic, it was necessary to examine the data this closely.

Throughout the process of open coding, the researcher must think analytically rather than descriptively about the data in order to generate provisional categories and produce generative questions. Basic questions of who, what, why, where, when, and how must be asked of the data to "open it up" and "see" with analytic depth and theoretical sensitivity (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Questions that are raised upon analyzing one

interview will be used to look for answers in another. As open coding collapses the data in order to identify categories, their properties, and dimensional locations, the researcher must begin to build the data back up to facilitate the development of an overall theory.

Axial Coding

Axial coding utilizes a set of procedures to put data, which are taken apart by open coding, back together in new ways by making connections between categories and their subcategories. It is very complex and involves making comparisons and asking questions, just as in open coding. It is important to note that although open coding and axial coding are distinct processes, they do not happen in a distinct order as the researcher alternates between the two processes during analysis. In axial coding, each category is specified according to: (a) terms that give rise to it, (b) the context in which it is embedded, (c) the action/interaction strategies by which it is handled, managed, and carried out, and (d) consequences of those strategies (Strauss and Corbin 1990). This will result in a paradigm model through which subcategories are linked to a category in a set of relationships. The paradigm model (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p.99) promotes density and precision for each category. As it develops through axial coding, the paradigm model appears as:

Causal Conditions/Antecedents → Phenomenon → Context → Intervening conditions → Action/Interaction Strategies → Consequences

The categories, subcategories, properties and dimensions that resulted from open and axial coding and referring to the paradigm model can be found in Table 3-3.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), four distinct analytic steps are performed simultaneously during the process of axial coding. These steps are:

1. Hypothetical relating of subcategories to a category. This is accomplished by denoting the nature of the relationship between them and the phenomena.
2. Verifying those hypotheses against the actual data. This is accomplished by looking for evidence, incidents, and events that support or refute the questions we are asking.
3. Further development of categories and subcategories. This is accomplished by continuing to search for other properties of categories in terms of their properties and the dimensional locations of data. For example, as each incident is compared, it is important to denote where each property can be dimensionally located.
4. Linking categories at the dimensional level. This accomplished by exploring variation in phenomena and comparing each category and subcategory for different patterns discovered by comparing dimensional locations of data (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p. 107). This step of noting patterns in the data is crucial because it lays the foundation for the next type of coding, selective coding.

The purpose of axial coding procedures is to capture as much of the complexity, movement, and reality of the phenomenon as possible. The discovery of similarities and differences among and within categories is critical to grounded theory.

Selective Coding

Selective coding, which is the last type of coding, builds on the basis of axial coding and involves integration at a higher and more abstract level of analysis than axial coding. Most importantly, selective coding involves the identification and selection of a core category that is "... the central phenomenon around which all the other categories are related" (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p. 116). Selection of the core category involves the explication of a story line that is a conceptualization of the story about the central phenomenon of the study. The core category is identified by (1) examining all the categories and (2) identifying one category that is broad enough to encompass all that has been described in the story. All other categories are then related to the core category by means of the paradigm. The storytelling and its sequential order are the keys to ordering the categories in a clear fashion. Categories are arranged and rearranged in terms of the paradigm until they fit the story and provide an analytic version of the story.

Relationships are validated by means of writing hypothetical statements and returning to the data for verification. Patterns are uncovered and used to group the data accordingly for specificity. Connections are solidified through generating hypotheses, asking questions, and making comparisons. Categories are filled out, further developed, and refined as necessary. The theory is then laid out narratively and/or diagrammatically as a substantive model. Finally, the theory is validated against the data again to complete the grounding. Any cases not fitting the theory are traced back to determine what conditions caused the variation and these are built into the theory.

The core category that emerged from this study is interpreting a sport related event. Everything that surrounds this core phenomenon has an impact on how a fan

ascribed meaning to the event. In other words, the manner in which a fan experiences an event, the issues that a fan deals with when acquiring more information to become more informed, the event components that a fan deems personally relevant, a fan's perception of the personal significance of the event to themselves, and his/her overall interpretation of the event are dependent upon and/or have an impact on the way in which it impacts the fan.

The final step in grounded theory analysis, which is connected to the ability to explain variation of phenomena, involves using a conditional matrix to examine the interaction of the phenomenon within societal contexts and develop theory. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest using the conditional matrix to consider the wide ranges of conditions, actions, and consequences related to the phenomenon. The researcher is then able to (a) be theoretically sensitive to the range of conditions that might bear on the study phenomenon and the range of potential consequences that result from action/interaction and (b) systematically relate conditions, actions/interactions, and consequences to a phenomenon, on levels ranging from international to individual. The grounded theory is examined within the context of the conditional matrix by tracing it through conditional paths. It is important to note that the researcher did not speculate on possible conditions, as Strauss and Corbin (1990) advocate. Rather, the researcher identified several more macro conditions to suggest that such context may be influencing the core category.

Whether or not a substantive or formal theory emerges depends upon the level(s) at which the phenomenon is examined. Substantive theory exists when a phenomenon is

examined at a particular level (i.e., one particular situational context) while a formal theory exists from studying a phenomenon under many different types of situations.

A substantive theory was developed from this research. In particular, this research set out to examine how avid, highly committed, sports fans interpret sport-related events. Additionally, the sport fans were from the United States and thus, relayed information regarding events that occurred within this cultural context. The sport-related events that were examined occurred at many different levels, including athletes and coaches, teams, leagues, and sports. The substantive theory concentrates on the findings within this realm. However, formal theory could be developed that includes the examination of the meaning ascribed to a sport-event that involves sports and sport fans from other countries. Even more remote would be developing a theory that incorporates other industries in which fans exist (e.g., actors, politicians).

Memoing and Diagramming

Strauss and Corbin (1990) stress the importance of performing both memoing and diagramming, regardless of how much time the researcher does not have! These two activities should begin at the onset of the research project and continue until the final writing. Memos and diagrams are written records of the researcher's analysis of the data. Strauss and Corbin (1990) outline several kinds of memos: (1) code notes, (2) theoretical notes, (3) operational notes, (4) diagrams, (5) logic diagrams, and (6) integrative diagrams.

1. Code notes: memos containing the actual products of the three types of coding (conceptual labels, paradigm features, and indications of process)

2. Theoretical notes: theoretically sensitizing and summarizing memos that contain the products or inductive or deductive thinking about relevant and potentially relevant categories, their properties, dimensions, relationships, variations, processes, and conditional matrix (See Table 3-4 for a brief summary of Theoretical Memoing rules, Glaser 1978, p. 89-91)
3. Operational notes: memos that contain directions to the researcher and to team members, if applicable (e.g., sampling, questions, possible comparisons, leads to follow up on)
4. Diagrams: visual representations of relationships between concepts
5. Logic diagrams: visual representations of analytic thinking that show evolution of the logical relationships between categories and their subcategories – shows how categories are related to one another
6. Integrative diagrams: visual representations of analytic thinking, used to try out and show conceptual linkages

The researcher engaged in all six types of memos throughout the collection, coding, and analysis of the data.

Trustworthiness

Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest three areas of importance in judging the trustworthiness of a qualitative study. They suggest judgments be made regarding: (a) validity, reliability, and credibility of the data, (b) adequacy of the research process (See Table 3-5 for a detailed outline of the criteria), and (c) empirical grounding of the research findings (See Table 3-6 for a detailed outline of the criteria). Qualitative research evaluation criteria developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), which includes evaluation of data as well as the research process, together with criteria by Strauss and Corbin (1998) for empirical grounding, and Miles and Huberman (1994), provided the framework for verification for this study.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose four criteria for evaluation of qualitative research: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability.

Additionally, Miles and Huberman (1994) propose a fifth criterion, utilization or application.

Credibility

This criterion pertains to the clarity of linkages, explanation of discrepancies, internal coherence and relation of concepts. Also included are comprehensiveness, richness of the descriptions, and explicitness of rules for confirmation of propositions and hypotheses. In other words, credibility refers to the extent to which the findings accurately describe the participants' reality.

Credibility depends less on sample size than on the richness of the information gathered and on the analytical abilities of the researcher (Patton 1990). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest five techniques or activities which increases the likelihood that credible findings and interpretations will be produced: (1) prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation; (2) peer debriefing; (3) negative case analysis; (4) referential adequacy; and (5) member checks. Three of these techniques were utilized in this study: triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checks.

First, credibility can be enhanced through triangulation of data. Denzin (1978) identifies four types of triangulation: (1) data source, (2) method, (3) investigator, and (4) theory. This study focused on triangulating the data through the use of multiple data sources. Although not anticipated, the data collected for this study became triangulated in that several other sources of fan thoughts, feelings, and interpretations were found by perusing several of the sport-related websites that study participants indicated they used. In particular, two websites, ESPN.com and thesportingnews.com have links to sections

where fans write in and/or vote on topics of the day/week. These sites proved valuable as they were used to help develop and validate the concepts that emerged from the initial data source, interview transcripts.

Second, peer debriefing is a process where the researcher exposes him/herself to a colleague "for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p. 308). Having a colleague play "devil's advocate" helps keep the researcher honest and requires him/her to search for and explain emergent meanings and interpretations. In this study, the researcher engaged two separate colleagues in this activity as categories and properties of the theory began to emerge. Each of these colleagues offered valuable suggestions and pertinent questions.

Third, another technique for addressing credibility issues includes the use of member checks, in which participants are asked to corroborate findings (Lincoln and Guba 1985, pp. 314-316). Through the use of member checks, several participants were asked to confirm the accuracy of the conclusions by reviewing and evaluating the emerging substantive model for "truthfulness." However, it is important to note that participants' reactions may not necessarily be valid (Bloor 1983), therefore, their reactions should be simply regarded as evidence that the researcher had not misinterpreted the meanings behind the participants words.

Additionally, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that it is important to consider how valid and reliable the researcher is as an information-gathering instrument. They propose that qualities of a good qualitative researcher-as-instrument include: (a) familiarity with the study phenomena and setting, (b) strong conceptual interests, (c) a

multi-disciplinary approach as opposed to a single disciplinary approach, and (d) good investigative skills. The researcher has familiarity with and strong conceptual interest in the study phenomenon. Although the researcher would not consider herself an avid fan of any particular sport entity, her interest level in this phenomenon is quite high. Additionally, several pilot interviews were conducted which assisted in flushing out any concerns with the interview protocol or problems that the researcher faced. Although this could have been viewed as being problematic when using a purposive sampling strategy, the benefits derived from conducting several pilot interviews outweighed any potential issues. For instance, pilot interviews served to enhance the researcher's interviewing skills and assisted in ascertaining the types of questions that would more fully flush out the experiences that fans have with sport-related events.

Transferability

This criterion pertains to the larger importance of the study. Issues addressed are contributions of the study, applicability of conclusions and outcomes to other studies, suggestions of settings for further testing of findings, ease of replicability of findings, theoretical diversity permitting broader application, and congruency, connectedness, or confirmation with prior theories.

Since this study produced a substantive theory, or one that is generated for specific, circumscribed, and empirical areas of inquiry (Hutchinson 1993), it is only applicable to similar groups. Replication of this research with other groups of fans (e.g., low to moderately loyal fans, fans from other countries, other industries – entertainment, politics, corporate) would be necessary to determine the applicability of this theory to

other types of fans. The descriptive details provided by study participants will allow for comparison with other sample groups. The contributions of the study, applicability of conclusions and outcomes to other studies, suggestions of settings for further testing of findings are discussed in Chapter Five.

Dependability

Kirk and Miller (1986) note that "issues of reliability have received little attention" from qualitative researchers, who have instead focused on achieving greater validity in their work (p. 42). Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that "since there can be no validity without reliability (and thus no credibility without dependability), a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter" (p. 316).

This criterion pertains to consistency and stability of the study over time, across researchers and methods. It involves aspects of (1) clarity of research questions and congruence with the study design, (2) clear specification of basic paradigms and analytic constructs, (3) adequate agreement of coding checks, and (4) peer or colleague review procedures. If multiple researchers are involved in data collection, comparable data collection protocols could be evaluated as well as agreement and convergence among observers. However, no protocols for multiple field workers were necessary, as only one researcher was involved in data collection.

Also included in this criterion are questions relating to collection of data across the full range of appropriate settings, times, and participants, making of quality data checks, and explicitness of status and role of the researcher within the site. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest a technique called an inquiry audit to assess dependability of a

study. An inquiry audit consists of two steps, examining the *process* and the *product* (e.g., the data, findings, interpretations, recommendations) of the study. In this study, the researcher engaged a researcher, an expert in performing qualitative research, to perform an inquiry audit. A description of the process as well as the findings and interpretations from the study were provided to this outside researcher.

Confirmability

This evaluative criterion of Lincoln and Guba (1985) refers to the study's freedom from unacknowledged researcher bias. In other words, the findings are determined by the subjects and are not influenced by the biases, motivations, interests, or perspective of the researcher (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

A number of other areas related to confirmability that the researcher can include are: (a) explicitness of the study's general methods and procedures with enough detail for others to follow an "audit trail" (a scheme for identifying data chunks according to the speaker and the context), (b) availability of study data for reanalysis, (c) conclusions explicitly linked with exhibits of condensed or displayed data (presenting the participants "voice" by using quotes that illustrate the themes begin described), and (d) consideration of competing hypotheses or rival conclusions (Miles and Huberman 1994).

This criterion requires personal assumptions, values, and biases of the researcher be made explicit in the study. For this study, personal biases and values of the researcher, regarding the area of study were made explicit through a bracketing interview that was conducted by an experienced researcher. Additional measures to insure freedom from researcher bias included cross-checking of participants' stories, critical self-

reflection of the researcher's perceptions, review of memos and logs, and use of other qualitative researchers for concurrent data analysis and content verification. Additionally, one aspect of performing an inquiry audit, the checking of the *product* of the study, helps establish confirmability as well. Lastly, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that triangulation, discussed previously, is a technique that can also be used to assess a study's confirmability.

Utilization/Application

This criterion refers to the pragmatic value of the study. Questions applicable in this area include whether: (a) potential users will see findings as physically and intellectually accessible, (b) there is a catalyzing effect for specific actions as a result of the findings, (c) users of the finds experience empowerment or develop and learn new capabilities, and (d) problems can actually be solved as a result of the findings. In order to satisfy this criterion, findings from this study will be published and disseminated in appropriate journals (e.g., Sport Marketing Quarterly, Qualitative Research Design, Journal of Sport & Social Issues) as well as at pertinent conferences (e.g., Society for Consumer Psychology). Implications for this research are discussed further in Chapter Five.

SUMMARY

This study was exploratory in nature; therefore, utilizing a qualitative research method was appropriate. Kerlinger (1986) explained several purposes of qualitative research: (1) to discover significant variables in the phenomenon, (2) to discover relations

among these variables, and (3) to lay the groundwork for systematic and rigorous testing of hypotheses (Flint 1997). Grounded theory methodology as outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) was used to explore the meaning the sports fans derive from a sport-related event. The findings from the study were used to develop a preliminary model that is grounded in the data and reflects the reality of experience for fans. Grounded theory methodology was most appropriate for this study because it 1) facilitated an understanding of an important, yet understudied, phenomenon and 2) presented the impact of sport-related events from the participants' perspective.

The study was based on an inductive approach, which sought to develop a "grounded" theory. Such a theory is grounded on the bases of empirical data generated in the field of practice. The principal concepts and relationships were generated not so much as a by-product of a literature search (which of course is not practical for exploratory investigations), but from field data. Because a grounded theory is based principally on empirical data collected from the field, it is unusually meaningful and relevant for practitioners and is often operationalized in *their* language.

Chapter Four presents the interpretations of the interviews conducted with sport fans ad excerpts from two sport-related websites. The chapter also discusses the findings with relation as to why the research focus was modified to include other sport-related events, not simply critical events. Chapter Five provide conclusions, contributions, implications of the research, as well as areas for future research exploration.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS

CHAPTER OUTLINE

This chapter presents interpretations of fourteen in-depth interviews conducted with sport fans as well as information gleaned from several sport-related websites that feature excerpts written by sport fans. The interviews were initially designed to understand fan perceptions and reactions to sport-related *critical* incidents; however, as was discussed previously, the focus of the research was modified to investigate the meaning of sport-related events in the process of becoming and being a sport fan.

This chapter begins by outlining the interpretation process. The next section provides an overview of the study participants. The subsequent section presents an overall view of participant's descriptions of a sport fan as well as their interpretations of a sport-related critical incident. The final section discusses the importance of understanding the processes that are undertaken to become and be a sport fan. The various categories that enable a sport fan to interpret and give meaning to sport-related event are presented. Each of these categories shapes the meaning that contextualizes what it means to be a fan. Each concept presented in the analysis is supported with dialogue found within the interview transcripts and/or from several other data sources (i.e., sport-relevant websites). The chapter concludes with a summary of these findings.

INTERPRETING THE FINDINGS

The primary data source for this study was fourteen interview participants. A secondary source of data, excerpts from sport fans that either submitted their own comments or voted online regarding a particular sport-related topic on two different websites (www.SportingNews.com and www.ESPN.com), supplemented the participant transcripts. The analysis of these transcripts and website comments uncovered concepts which have been integrated into a better understanding of how individuals ascribe meaning to a sport-related event in the process of becoming and remaining a sport fan. Each concept/factor is described and illustrated by either text from the participant interviews or supplementary data sources. In order to provide the context under which the concept was developed from the interviews, typically more than just a word or sentence from a transcript or a website excerpt is provided. It should be noted that occasionally, surrounding sentences might contain data that helped form another concept. As such, the reader may notice an overlap of text sections throughout the analysis.

Participants did not describe their experiences as a sport fan or sport-related events in any particular order. Often times, a memory of one event would ignite memories of another experience. Thus, a participant might venture off course and back again, relaying other situations/circumstances that might have impacted their thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors. In many cases, the researcher found that although discussed jointly with related concepts, sometimes the concepts were separate and distinct ideas that deserved attention as such.

THE PARTICIPANTS

All interview participants described themselves as "highly committed/avid" sports fans. Overall, nine participants rated themselves as a "5" on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = mere observer; 5 = highly committed/avid fan). The remaining five participants rated themselves as a "4." Males comprised nine of the fourteen interview participants. Of those nine males, six designated themselves as an "avid" sports fan. Three of the five females designated themselves as an "avid" sports fan. Additionally, with regard to the secondary source of data, it was presumed that individuals who had taken the time to draft a reply or vote on certain sport-related topics, would most likely designate themselves as a "4" or "5" on the sport fan scale. Thus, this analysis is based upon data collected from fans that feel an extraordinary amount of devotion and commitment toward a sport, team, and/or player.

Table 4-1 illustrates the socio-demographic breakdown of the participants. The age of the participants ranged from 24 to over 56 years of age. All but one participant was Caucasian. All of the participants had either some college, were college educated, or had graduate degrees. Although all participants were currently residing in the same mid-western city in which they are interviewed, most were born, raised, or spent time in other locations around the United States. Therefore, each participant brought with them distinct backgrounds, experiences, and interests with regard to becoming and being a sport fan.

"CRITICAL" INCIDENTS IN SPORTS

Initially, the following definition of a critical incident was used to guide the research:

> "... the vast majority of critical incidents ... are not all dramatic or obvious: they are mostly straightforward accounts of very commonplace events that occur in routine professional practice which are critical in the rather different sense that they are indicative of underlying trends, motives, and structures" (Tripp 1993, p. 24-25).

It was also presumed that critical incidents are "produced by the way we look at a situation: a critical incident is an interpretation of the significance of an event" (Tripp 1993, p. 8). From this working definition, the researcher presumed that (1) sport fans would interpret each critical event differently and that one event might not have as much meaning for, or impact on, each sport fan and (2) critical incidents were not necessarily sensational events, but may be incidents that occur on a regular basis and could be recalled easily.

It is true that a large number of sport-related events occur and garner the attention of both the media and the public; however, in this study, most of these events were not deemed critical in nature by the study participants. The study revealed that fans define and interpret a *critical* incident quite similarly and that sport fans recalled *other* types of events more readily and used their interpretations of these events in their quest to become or remain a sport fan.

One factor the study participants used to measure criticality was the impact the event has on them as a fan and/or on the sport in general. For example, the death of NASCAR driver Dale Earnhardt in February 2001 not only impacted fans, but also impacted the sport of NASCAR. One participant noted *you shouldn't die doing your*

sport... an athlete shouldn't die doing what they love. Another participant, David, said *he wasn't done...[that accident] took one of the greatest racers of all time out of the mix.* One fan, who responded to The Sporting News inquiry for fans to pick the worst sports moments of 2001, recalled several moments that stuck out in his mind; however, Dale Earnhardt's untimely death made a particular impression:

> "The worst sports moment of the year was the death of Dale Earnhardt. Putting up with jerks like Terry Glenn, Randy Moss, and boneheads like "Dud" Selig and some Browns fans are just aggravations sports fans will always have to deal with. Losing a sports legend in such a tragic way is something that fans will never get used to." Tony H.

The fact that safety standards were investigated and subsequently changed after his accident added to the impact the event had on fans and the sport. Dale Earnhardt's death could also be considered positive because of the impact it had on the safety and visibility of the sport.

> George:
> Um, and Earnhardt's situation, it seems to have really enhanced the sport. I mean, it's a terrible thing to say I guess, but it all of a sudden, I think, put NASCAR at national visibility, at a much higher level than they ever were before, you know.

Critical incidents were also described as the type of event that doesn't occur with regularity, *something that would never happen again.* One participant described critical incidents in the following way:

> David:
> A critical incident is something that if I look back at the history of the sport, it will be mentioned ... something that really changed a sport or an event that will go down in history as an unbelievable event.

With this as his guide, David cited the following as examples of critical incidents: Joe DiMaggio's hitting streak, Cal Ripken's game playing record, Dale Earnhardt's

death, and quite possibly the professional baseball (MLB) and basketball (NBA) strikes, both real and threatened.

It was also found that expected events, those that sport fans begin to anticipate, were not deemed critical. Felisia recounted whether she felt Lance Armstrong winning his 4th Tour de France in 2002 was a critical event:

> Felisia:
> I don't think so because I think it's come to be expected ...when he beat cancer and all that, that was big ... to come back and be able to win is big, but he just keeps doing it and doing it.

The researcher initially anticipated record breaking performances might be considered *critical*; however, most participants did not interpret record breaking performances in this way because these events were viewed as something that would occur repeatedly throughout the history of the sport. A discussion with David proceeded from talking about Ted Williams' hitting record to Barry Bond's home run record breaking performances:

> David:
> Oh yeah, him [Ted Williams] hitting 400, I look at those records, to me I look at every record differently, things that are going to be broken ... that's great that Bond's broke a record, that's fantastic, but you know that somebody's going to break it again in the next ten years.

David then proceeded to describe Barry Bond's record breaking event as "*impressive ... it's impressive in that Barry Bonds set a record ... it's impressive because no one else has done that, but in my eyes that record will be beaten.*"

In sum, the researcher's initial assumption that critical incidents would be numerous and perceived individualistically was not entirely true. Although the events that were deemed critical did appear to impact most of the participants; because of the

nature of these events (i.e., historical types of events), there were not a large number of these types of events, or a wide variety of events that qualified as such.

Based upon this finding, the focus of this research was modified to study *other* types of events. By expanding the focus of the research, categories that enable fans to interpret sport-related events as they related to becoming and being a sport fan began to emerge (See Figure 4-1). Additionally, several conditions emerged that had the potential to impact an individual's desire to become a fan (i.e., family influence, proximity to the team, experiencing an event). As individuals become sport fans, their interpretation of a sport-related event is based on four categories: experiencing the event, gathering information, determining personal significance, and identifying relevant event components. Each of these conditions and categories plays a role in shaping the meaning that contextualizes what it means to be a fan.

A SPORT-RELATED EVENT

A sport-related event could involve attending a college football game, watching the 7th game of the World Series on television, reading about a professional basketball player's car accident, watching a replay of a grand slam home run on the local news, or seeing the score of your favorite baseball team run across the ticker on ESPN. In other words, these events can be everyday occurrences or they can be fantastic news stories that capture a great deal of media attention. To qualify as a sport-related event, the event was required to have some connection to a sport, team, league, player, or coach. No restrictions were placed upon the participants to discuss certain types of events. In other words, recollection of on- and off-the-field events, professional, collegiate, and even

lower level sports qualified. Participants did not venture off track too often and generally stayed within the realm of sport events. In the event that a participant did mention other events that did not have any connection to sports, the researcher guided the discussion back to sport related events. Thus, for the study's sake, digression from sport-related events was kept to a minimum and most participants tended to only relay stories that had some connection to a sport entity.

UNDERSTANDING THE SPORT FAN

In 1999, the Manchester United Football Club won the 'treble' of English Football: the Premier League, the F.A. (Football Association) Cup, and the European Cup. Brian is 41 years old, married with two children, works as a civil servant in Fleetwood, Lancashire and is an avid Manchester United football (soccer) fan. This is his story.

BEING THERE

> "There is no doubt that this was the ultimate. All the years of following Manchester United, through thick and thin, culminated in them winning firstly the English Premiership, then the FA Cup and finally the European Cup in the most dramatic fashion imaginable - all this in the space of ten magical days in May! And to be able to be at all three occasions was something I will never forget. But as with all stories, perhaps the best place to start is at the beginning."

BECOMING A FAN

> "It all really began for me in the summer of 1967. I was eight years old when I was given the chance to go to watch Manchester United play Tottenham Hotspur in the Charity Shield, the pre-season fund raiser between the current League Champions and FA Cup holders. The match nowadays is played at Wembley but at that time it was held at the home of

the Champions, so we set off for Old Trafford with 60,000 others for an afternoon which was to influence greatly the rest of my life."

"The match was a thriller - a 3-3 draw. I had attended the game with my three older brothers - one a United fan, the other two Tottenham supporters, and it was Michael and Peter who were celebrating early. The "Spurs" were 2-0 up after only five minutes with the second goal a drop kick from Tottenham goalkeeper Pat Jennings! However the great Bobby Charlton scored what seemed like two identical goals to even the scores. Denis Law and Jimmy Greaves traded goals in the second half (the names just go on and on!) and honours were even. My first taste of professional football had been a classic. I had fallen in love with the game, but most of all I had fallen in love with Manchester United. There would be many rocky times along the way, but this was a relationship which would certainly stand the test of time!"

STAYING A FAN - THROUGH THICK AND THIN

"While it has been a distinct pleasure to be a Manchester United fan during the nineties, this has not always been the case. There have been many disappointments since I started following the 'reds' in 1967, including relegation to the Second Division in 1974, (even though it was only for one season). But in Britain we say that real supporters do not abandon their team when times are hard, but stay with them 'through thick and thin.' I have been more fortunate than most as in 1993 I managed to acquire a season ticket to the "Theatre of Dreams" to coincide with the most successful period in the club's history. I had always attended as many games as I could, but to be one of the privileged 40,000 or so guaranteed a seat for every home game is what dreams are made of. It has been sheer delight (in most cases) to make the 170km round trip each game during the last six seasons and adding together the occasional away match, I have felt very much a part of the club's success." (anonymous; http://elt.britcoun.org.pl/s_treble.htm)

Brian's experience with becoming and continuing to be a fan parallels several important findings from this study, namely, the conditions behind becoming a sport fan (i.e., geographical location, family influence, and experiencing an event) and several categories in the process of being/remaining a fan (i.e., experiencing the event, personal significance). As for becoming a fan, note how vividly Brian recalls the game he attended 33 years ago when he was only 8 years old. He readily admits that his

experience that afternoon greatly influenced the rest of his life. Also, family influence (brother) and his residence at the time had a large impact on whether he would be a Manchester fan. Brian continued to be a fan "through thick and thin," but the experience of going to every home game (thanks to receiving season tickets) resulted in "sheer delight." This was indeed a dream come true for Brian. Over the years, Brian became extremely attached to/identified with the Manchester team ("I have felt very much a part of the club's success"). This attachment, which helps build one's identity, is just one aspect of being a fan.

To understand how sport-related events impact fans, it is important to revisit the impact of sports on society as well as the impact of sports on fans. Chapter Two provided a detailed discussion concerning these societal and individual consumer viewpoints. In sum, the viewpoints suggest that sports can act either as a positive or a negative force on society and in the lives of the sport fan. Several factors that motivate an individual to become a sport fan were also presented (e.g., seeking excitement, as a form of escape, to release tension, as a form of entertainment, and to help develop a sense of identity). By further examining a fan's interest in sports, one may begin to understand why there is an attraction or attachment to sports, what elements influence such attraction or attachment, and how this attraction or attachment to sports develops and grows. In order to further understand this attraction or attachment to sports, it is necessary to explore the potential influence of sport-related events on individuals as they become and remain sport fans.

A Sport Fan

Each participant in this study was given a short questionnaire before the interview took place and was instructed to complete the survey at his/her leisure prior to arriving for the interview (see Appendix 4-1). Among the items that were asked was the following question: "What is your idea of a sports fan?" Although a variety of answers surfaced, there was a common theme among all the participants ... being a sports fan brought enjoyment and included spending time either going to, or reading or hearing about, sport-related events. This feeling of enjoyment seemed to arise from not only being a spectator, but also staying current with information regarding a favorite sport entity (i.e., sport, team, or player). In other words, a certain level of involvement was required to be considered a sport fan. Consequently, a sports fan was described as being enthusiastic and expending quite a bit of time following a sport, team, and/or player. Some behaviors that illustrate "following" were watching, reading, keeping track, and going to sporting events.

> Interviewer:
> What is your definition of a sport fan?
>
> Alex:
> Someone who follows sports, maybe follows a team, basically just follows sports. I think it's pretty broad, it covers a lot of areas, it's someone who is a fanatic, it's someone who really follows a team.
>
> Interviewer:
> And when you say the word "follows", exactly what do you mean by that?
>
> Alex:
> He just watches games, keeps track of how they're doing, things like that. He doesn't necessarily have to follow a team, though, either. Actually, you know, someone that enjoys tennis, plays tennis or watches tennis, you may not have a particular player that they're a fan of but definitely would be a fan of the sport. I would consider that a sport fan also

Many studies conducted with regard to sport fans use a behavioral approach (i.e., attendance at sporting events) to measure fan involvement/attachment (Murrell and Dietz 1992; Gantz and Wenner 1995); however, several researchers have attempted to overcome this behavioral only approach by examining fan's feelings, motivations, and attitudes toward a specific team or player as well as sport-related behaviors (Hunt, Bristol and Bashaw 1999; Mahoney, Madrigal and Howard 2000). This enables the sport fan to be considered highly identified or highly involved without having to exhibit actual sport-related behaviors (i.e., attending a large number of sporting events).

Bessier (1967) described a sport fan as "an athlete removed, an athlete in spirit, if not in fact. Through lack of physical capacity or psychological desire, he is a competitor without the necessity of facing the dangers of competition ... Although his competition is vicarious, he can enjoy the pleasures of victory, the sorrow of defeat, the tension of the climatic moment. Moreover, he can, if he wishes, express his emotions verbally and even physically without fear of censure ... He can share intense feeling with strangers who understand." It was apparent that the term "sports fan" conjured up similar reactions for the study participants, that is, a sports fan is one who doesn't simply regard the game cursorily, but with great enthusiasm, emotion, and commitment; both mentally and physically. For instance, for Keith, a sports fan's "life revolves around sports" and Leslie indicated that a sports fan "spends the majority of their time with sports and sport-related activities," while David felt that a sports fan "expends emotion." Felisia not only mentioned "watching" sporting events, but also "cheering through the good and the bad, enjoying the game, not just the team." Of course, each participant brought with his/her

own ideas, beliefs, and experiences with regard to being a sport fan. For instance, although all of the respondents described themselves as serious or avid fans and therefore most likely used themselves as a reference point when defining a sport fan, several participants had been involved, either leisurely or competitively, in the sport or possibly for the team for which they were a fan. Additionally, participants who had personal affiliations with teams, players, and/or coaches had different and varied interpretations of some of the events that were recalled. These ideas, beliefs, and experiences encompassed being involved in/with sports at many various levels, not only for particular sports, teams, players and/or coaches, but also at the professional and collegiate level.

Becoming a Sport Fan

Enjoyment of sport is thought to begin early in life (Sage 1974; Coakley and Donnelly 1999). Young children are introduced to sports through toys and clothing and learn the "rules of the game" from adults, along with the value placed on sport as a means of building character and preparing one for dealing with life's obstacles. Zajonc's (1968) mere exposure theory, applied to entertainment, suggests that familiarity leads to attraction and liking and thus, the mere exposure to sports may lead to an interest in them.

Sport socialization has been examined by relatively few researchers (e.g., McPherson 1976; Smith et al. 1981; Sleap 1998; Wann et al. 2001), however, the results tend to illustrate a rather common theme, that is, family and peer influences are central to becoming a sport fan. Sleap (1998) suggests it is "difficult to untangle the extent to which sporting behavior is determined by inherited characteristics or by learned social influences" (p. 29). Wann et al., (2001) defined fan socialization as "the process by

which fans learn and accept the values, beliefs, attitudes, and norms of the sport fan culture" (p. 24). McPherson (1976) identified four sources, termed socialization agents, that are responsible for teaching the values, beliefs, attitudes, and norms of sport fandom; family, peers, school, and community. McPherson (1976) found that for young males, peers, family and school had the most influence (respectively) while for young females, family, and peer groups tended to have the most influence. Similarly, Smith, Patterson, Williams, and Hogg (1981) conducted interviews with highly involved adult male sport fans to examine the socialization agents that had the most influence in their lives as sport fans. The respondents reported that fathers had the greatest influence, followed by friends. It should be noted that the options given the respondents in Hogg's study were limited to father, brother, friend, coach, mass media, and no one.

Research by Wann, Tucker, Schrader (1996) indicated that there are a number of reasons underlying an individual's decision to first identify with a particular team. The most common reason for an individual to become a fan was that his/her parents were supporters of a particular team. The second greatest influence was the talent and characteristics of the players. Geographical reasons (i.e., following the local team) and the influence of one's friends and peers tied for third most prominent reason. Surprisingly, the success of the team was only the fifth most commonly mentioned reason for originally identifying with a team.

The motivation behind becoming a sport fan at an early age was fairly similar for all the study participants. Most of the participants relayed stories about how parents and/or siblings, and even grandparents played a part in becoming a sport fan, either by introducing them to the sport as a participant and/or as a spectator. Family influence is

rather pervasive in developing an attachment to a team at a young age. In this study, David recounted the influence his father and grandfather had on him becoming a die-hard Boston Red Sox fan:

> David:
> I've been a sports fan since a very young age. *My grandfather really got me into it ... always watching football games with him or watching baseball games with him.* He was legally blind, so what I remember is growing up, he would always sit and listen to the ball games, so actually sitting there with him listening to the ball games, I got a real appreciation of the game listening to it on the radio because you take so much for granted when you can go see a ball game. *My dad was always the one who would take us to see the Red Sox because we're from Boston, so he would take us to Fenway to see a game and now I really have that much more appreciation for that.* Then from there, I am from a family of three boys, so I was always the one playing in the yard, playing sports ... my love of sports really started then and I have played sports since.

David also mentioned that on a day to day basis, it was his father's influence that caused him to be the kind and type of sports fan he is today. Ingrid was also influenced by the male members of her household when she was growing up:

> Ingrid:
> Well, I have an older brother, three years older than me, and played sports. He was always going with his friends to play sports so I always went. Wherever he went, I'd go too. He didn't want me to, but too bad. I had to go! *My parents are from New York, so growing up, it was the Yankees, the Mets, Rangers, all the New York teams. So, we just watched sports with my dad.* We'd sit on the couch and watch the Mets. *If my dad liked the Mets, I loved the Mets.*

Hunt, Bristol, Bashaw (1999) examined the halo effect's impact on becoming a sport fan. These researchers found that becoming a fan may be a sequential process. For instance, one may become a fan of the sport first, then a team, then a player on the team. The opposite may also occur, becoming a fan of a player, with the halo effect going to the team and then to the sport. These researchers suggest that a young child, who is exposed

to the following types of information about a specific sport, may be predisposed to become a fan of a sport: exposure to specific sport elements, child's ability to play the sport, parents' and/or siblings' preferences, friends' preferences, and local media attention to the sport. It is unclear whether the participants in this study initially were fans of a sport, team, or player. However, it does appear that their attachment to a sports team was greatly influenced by geographical location.

In this study, participants described several different reasons for becoming a sport fan at an early age, including geographical constraints/influences. Many young people are drawn to the local team because they have access to these events and most of their friends are also fans of the local team. Furthermore, if a child moves into a neighborhood, becoming a fan of the local team gives him/her the ability to make new friends quickly. As will be discussed later, relocating at an older age may have the same impact, but older fans may utilize different strategies to deal with his/her loyalty and self-esteem issues. Many of the participants in this study indicated that the motivation behind their initial attachment to a particular team was due to location, where they were born and/or raised or lived for some time. The target of the following participants' original attention began at an early age and was primarily due to the area in which they lived.

> Interviewer:
> Tell me a little about how you became a fan of the Pittsburgh Steelers.
>
> Alex:
> I was born and raised in Pittsburgh so it sort of gets ingrained at an early age. The first NFL game that I can remember watching was one of their Super Bowls, I think it was the last one back in 1980.

++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++

Interviewer:
Tell me a little about how you became a fan of the [Los Angeles] Lakers.

Bob:
Well, I grew up in the LA area so in, uh 1984, they were playing Boston in the finals and I remember hearing it on the radio and watching it on TV and ever since then, I was stuck.

++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++

David:
I am from Boston, so I hate the Yankees … Boston-Yankees, it goes back to the whole curse of the Bambino, they got [Babe] Ruth and the Red Sox have never won a World Series since 1918. So that's such a huge rivalry back home, major bitterness.

Interviewer:
So, you couldn't be from Boston and like the Yankees?

David:
No, you really can't be. I respect Steinbrenner in what he does in that it's a business and he does whatever it takes to win, so I respect that, so really, if I wasn't from Boston, I would probably say, the Yankees, it's fantastic what they do. But, being from Boston, I totally push that aside and say they're the Yankees … I would be disowned … I could never go home!

It should be noted that geographical location does not simply impact young sport fans; it also plays a role in becoming a sports fan for older individuals. Chris revealed how he recently, as an adult, became a fan of the Seattle Mariner's:

Chris:
We were there [Seattle] for her [wife's] Ph.D. program for four years so we were there from 1997 to 2001 … being immersed in the excitement around the team … different fans, different people would take me to games so they could share their excitement of the team.

Several studies have found that sport fans feel as though teams represent *their* city and thus feel a connection to both the team and the city (e.g., Stevenson & Nixon 1972; Mizruchi 1985). Borrowing from Durkheim's view of social solidarity and communal sacred objects, Schwartz and Barsky (1977) suggest that "if residents invest themselves

in favor of their local athletic teams, it is partly because those teams are exponents of a community to which they feel themselves somehow bound .... A local team is not only an expression of the moral integrity of a community; it is also a means by which that community becomes conscious of itself and achieves its concrete representation" (p. 657).

With the advancement of technology (e.g., transportation, satellite, cable television and the Internet), fans are now able to experience events concerning their favorite teams or players, regardless of how far they live from the city that a team calls home. Not only can fans retain an allegiance to a team if the fan moves, but a fan can also develop and maintain an allegiance to a team if the team moves. For this reason, fans are not as likely to support a team solely on the basis of a shared geographical connection. While location may be a factor in developing and maintaining a level of fanship, other factors may also play a role in becoming and being a fan. For instance, teams can also represent an individual fan based on his/her liking and disliking, individual players, etc. As in the case of George above, the fact that he was impressed with Chicago's manager and some of the players also had an impact on George's decision to become a fan.

Interestingly, while some fans may root for the home team in order to feel connected to their local community, other fans may root for a team that helps set them apart and bring some uniqueness to them as fans. John, who was a die-hard fan of another team when he moved across country, did not alter his behavior when he settled into his new community.

> John:
> Yeah, I still wear them [team paraphernalia]. There's just something about being in a community where *everyone's wearing the same thing and I don't want to be part of that.* And then *when you move to a new area and you're unique, uh, your interests are unique, you tend to be more proud of the teams that you follow.*

John appeared to be a rebel in his new town as he was not influenced to discontinue his loyalty to his old team and become a fan of the new local team based on geographical location. In fact, he made a conscious decision to remain attached to his old team and was proud to continue supporting it.

Illustrating the strength of geographical location (and family) influences, Barrett (1999) presents a narrative about his family, who are also sports fans, in a lively article entitled "Love, Hate, and the Illogic of Fandom." Barrett relays a story about his dad, who was named after Brooklyn Dodger shortstop Glenn "Buckshot" Wright.

> "He [dad] owed no allegiance to his native borough ... you liked who you liked and rooted accordingly. There was no blind loyalty to a particular franchise just because it represented your home city or state. Moreover, if your team did happen to be from out of town, you had to work even harder to follow them. It made you a better, more loyal fan ... Favorites weren't the entire story, though. There's also the question of which is stronger, love or hate? Any Giants fan in baseball has to hate the Dodgers. If you were a Rangers follower in the 1970s, as I was, the big, bad Boston Bruins as well as those Bullies of Broad Street, the Philadelphia Flyers, were big time enemies. These grudges are forever. Although I stopped being a Ranger fan almost 15 years ago (sports love easily can turn to hate, yet hate very rarely reverses to love), I still can't stomach the sight of the Bruins of Flyers: in-person, on TV, on even in print" (p. 69).

Geographical location can influence becoming a sport fan, even if the fan or the team moves to another location. Team relocation can cause problems for sports organizations dealing with irate fans from the former city and unsupportive fans in the new city. Lewis (2001) made a distinction between civic (city) loyalty (e.g., "I am a

Cincinnati fan") and symbolic (franchise) allegiance (e.g., "I am a Reds fan"). His research found that most fans that professed a civic allegiance either resided in the city they support or spent their childhood in a particular city. He also found that many symbolically allegiant fans claim no past connection to the city for which the team they root for is located, rather fans tend to associate some unique personal experience to the beginning of the their team allegiance. Lewis (2001) suggests that family connections or family traditions or a personal link to the team (e.g., knowing a player on the team personally) is important in developing symbolic allegiance. He also points out that often times these allegiances overlap, where fans profess loyalty not only to the city, but also the team (e.g., its mascot and logos). However, when a team relocates, fans often are faced with a choice in where their allegiance lies.

As the literature suggests, and as was demonstrated in this study, geographical location and family influence were found to be significant factors for a young person becoming a sport fan. Although Zajonc's Mere Exposure notion (1968) suggests that simply being exposed to an event may encourage attraction and liking, this aspect of becoming a fan seems to be overlooked in the sport literature. Several participants recalled events that were extremely influential in their desire to become a sports fan. Many of the above examples illustrate how the events that were watched or heard were instrumental in the individual becoming a sport fan. Witnessing and experiencing an event at an early age, regardless of whether it is influenced by family members or location, appeared to be an important factor in becoming a sport fan. George, an older participant in the study, recalled his first sports memory fairly distinctly:

> George:
> *My earliest sports memory was watching the 7th game of the World Series in 1962 and, you know, watching Bobby Richardson catch, it was Willie McCovey's line drive to end the 7th game and clinch the Yankees last world championship for about 15 years after that. You know, that memory sticks with me ... it's the earliest conception I have of being a fan.* I mean, I don't remember going to any games or doing a whole lot sports life up to that point, you know, almost 10 years old at that point. But *that's when I started, you know, being a fan* and I remember the following year, one of the kids that lived up the street sold me this brown grocery bag full of baseball cards and there was hundreds of them for like $5 and I thought it was the greatest gift in the whole world then.

The following example demonstrates how not only location ("grew up in Pittsburgh"), but also family ("my mother") and an experience with a sport-related event ("defining childhood memories") influenced this individual's life as a sport fan.

> "With all due respect to Thurman Munson and Darryl Kile, the most shocking loss was Roberto Clemente. I *grew up in Pittsburgh*, and Clemente died when I was 7 years old. *His loss is one of my most vivid and defining childhood memories*. I *remember my mother telling me, 'Roberto died trying to help others, honey. God takes his best as soon as he can.*' I cried for days. I've got a tear in my eye right now. God must really have needed a great man to play right field." Jim Wilkeson – Lexington, KY (ESPN.com – Page 2 – Readers: Most Shocking Moments in Baseball History)

Team success as well as player personalities and talent, are also reasons why people become sport fans. While some individuals simply "jump on the bandwagon" with successful teams and players, highly committed fans tend to continue their fanship in good times and bad times. Although "jumping on the bandwagon" typically occurs at a young age because the success of a team might initially attract a person to a team, it can also occur with older individuals, even those who already consider themselves to be a fan.

Interviewer:
Do you think actually going to the games helped you become a fan?

Chris:
Not to one of the games, no. It actually took until they were actually a good competitive team.

++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++

George:
Well, as I was filling out the list of my favorite teams and stuff, *it appears to me that I'm probably something of a front runner.* I mean, when I was growing up it was the end of that golden era where they [Yankees] won, you know, 10-12 championships in a 15 year period. So I'm sure that was part of it, although, even they went into their down cycle after that and I still continued to be a big baseball fan, and I enjoyed watching a lot from that standpoint. So, I think it had to do with that, you know.

Interviewer:
Have you noticed that with any other teams that you follow?

George:
Well, I was probably about 10 when I first started getting interested as a fan in sports. I was a big Celtics fan. Buffalo had its own hockey team and *they were pretty good*. They won one of the minor league titles one year that I remember. *But in general were pretty good*. And they actually got finally an NBA team as well for a little while that was okay, not great, not terrible. So, I mean, *I kind of followed all those cause they were local, you know, and the Irish because of my parents' affiliation.* And those were probably the biggest ones ...the Celtics ...the Bills for football obviously.

Interviewer:
Okay. Were all those teams pretty good?

George:
They were. Actually, now that I think about it, because the Bills, you know, it was the old AFL days and they won two championships when I was 11 and 12 and they were competitive every year. So, yeah, *I guess I would say that they were all pretty decent.*

Several factors influenced George's desire to become a Chicago Cubs fan in his late teens (i.e., location, experiencing the event, players on the team).

George:
I think part of it is where you live. Although growing up I, and I have to just think back, you know, when we were 16 we were taking this trip across country and I remember being, I, *I think there are certain things that, charismas that you capture from a team.* I became a Cubs fan in '69, the season of that terrible disappointment.

Interviewer:
How did you become a fan of the Cubs?

George:
Well, I think it was because they had been downtrodden for so long and Leo Durocher was the manager and had that real higher image and they were having this great year. I just remember *we took a cross country trip and we stopped in St. Louis and we stayed two days with my aunt and the Cubs were playing the Cardinals. And it was on TV which was unusual.* You didn't always see those games on TV that often. And *I just remember being really caught up in that and just following them really closely then and a few years later over the next couple of years. So I think part of it does also have to do with where I've lived*, I mean, the fact that we've lived out here now for the last 20 years has had something to do with it … we kind of plan our vacation trips around making sure that we include at least one ball park there. So we're at the point now over the last ten years, I think we've hit about 15 different parks.

Interviewer:
You're like that VISA commercial. (laughing)

George:
Exactly, yeah. I was so mad when they came out with that and I didn't get to be part of that. … *So some of it's that way and some of it you just, I mean, we went to Cleveland in '94. It was the first year at Jacobs Field. Brand new park.* Our Danny was like 9 years old and he's a huge Indians fan, and it was, *I know it was the imprinting from going to that game at just the right time and it was an incredibly exciting game that they won in their last at bat and it was just as they were taking off.* They were just starting to become a good team and the following year was when they, I guess they won, the won the first, at that first World Series. *So I think part of it has to do, you know, you have some sort of a natural affiliation when you kind of get caught up in the moment like that and kind of just get curious and start watching them.*

These three conditions, sport socialization, geographical location, and team success, as well as experiencing a sport-related event, play a major role in the process of

becoming a sport fan and influence the strength of the attachment to a particular sport entity.

Being a Sport Fan

Several researchers have attempted to understand what it means to be a sport fan and why fans continue to follow a favorite team (e.g., Eastman and Riggs 1994; Uemukai et al., 1995; Wann, Tucker, and Schrader, 1996; Jones 1997; Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, End and Jacquemotte 2000). Wann, Tucker, and Schrader (1996) found that the number one reason for continuing to support a team was the perceived success of the team. Alternately, Dietz-Uhler *et al.* (2000) found that the number one reason for being a sport fan was the participant played sports. Research by Jones (1997) found a different pattern. Contrary to Wann *et al.* (1996), Jones (1997) found that team success was not the greatest influence on the decision to continue to support a sport team. Rather, geographical reasons were the most important. Success of the team was the fourteenth ranked reason given to follow a particular team. It should be noted that Jones' study was conducted in England using fans of English professional football (soccer). In this case, the number of teams and geographical proximity to these teams could influence the degree of impact that location has on a fan's decision to follow a team. Similarly, Uemukai et al. (1995), conducting a study of Japanese football fans, found that geographical reasons topped the list of reasons for currently identifying with a team.

Research has also previously examined the emotional and behavioral reactions of sport fans in response to game (event) outcomes (Mann 1974; Cialdini et al. 1976; Gaskell and Pearton 1979; Silva III 1984; Grove, Hanrahan and McInman 1991; DeNeui and Sachau 1996; Lapidus and Schibrowsky 1996; Stott 1998; Dietz-Uhler and Murrell

1999; Wann, Brewer and Royalty 1999; King 2001; Bizman and Yinon 2002) as well as reactions to law breaking athletes (Dietz-Uhler, End, Demakakos, Dickerson and Grantz 2002) and sports pages (Wann and Branscombe 1992). Additionally, research has examined the motivations behind engaging in sport-relevant behavior (i.e., attending games) (Sloan, 1979; Kahle, Kambara and Rose, 1996; Wann, Schrader, and Wilson 1999; Pons, Laroche, Nyeck and Perreault 2001). However, to date, no study has examined how sport fans interpret particular sport-related events in their quest to remain a sport fan. This study attempts to uncover how fans interpret sport-related events by examining the process that fans go through during and after experiencing such an event.

Model Components

Sport fan behavior involves not only being a spectator, but also staying current with occurrences within the sporting world. Recall that this study's participants described a sport fan as an individual who enjoys sports and spends time either going to, watching, or reading about sport-related events. Each of these sport-relevant actions involves experiencing and gathering information about an event, either directly or indirectly. The way in which fans experience and/or learn about an event can impact the way in which it is interpreted (e.g., experiencing the event first hand, reading about it in the newspaper the next day, watching the event on television).

Recall that one factor in this study that was found to be influential to an individual's desire to become a sport fan was experiencing an event. In those cases, experiencing an event typically meant attending a game or watching a game on television with a family member and something about that event was etched in the mind of the

young sport fan. Because of this, many sport fans can recall certain events that occurred early in their lives that influenced them to become a sport fan. Likewise, after becoming a fan, individuals experience many different types of sport-related events (i.e., attending games, reading about a favorite player).

Gathering sport-related information in order to become more informed either first-hand or through an outside source (e.g., the media), is also an important and popular activity among sport fans. Much of the information gathered by a sport fan is mediated by another source and can potentially impact the way in which the information is interpreted. Often times the information received regarding a sport-related event is not always positive or may occur outside of the playing field. For instance, frequent reports of professional athletes engaging in outrageous off-the-field activities are delivered via the media to sport fans. As a result, sport fans are faced with identifying the type of information that is pertinent to them as well as deciding how to react to such information.

An event might be more relevant to a fan if they are currently a fan (i.e., highly identified) or if they have some personal affiliation with the sport entity. For instance, if an event impacts a sport fan personally or if the event is considered shocking (i.e., sudden death of a star athlete); it can generate a different meaning for the sport fan than if the event did not impact them or was not considered relevant or interesting. These interpretations enable the fan to deal with the type of information they receive and to react accordingly. Often times, fans will continue to gather information regarding the event, utilizing additional sources in order to make sense of the event that has occurred. In these instances, the initial interpretation of an event may or may not change based upon the auxiliary information.

As previous research has found, team/player characteristics were also found to be important factors in this study; however, several additional factors were also deemed important to sport fans. This study found that upon experiencing a sport-related event, a sport fan tends to interpret the event in a way that is meaningful to him/her and this interpretation then precipitates a change in the sport fan. The results from this study revealed that there are four categories or activities that influence how a sport-related event may be interpreted: (1) experiencing an event, (2) becoming more informed, (3) determining the level of personal significance of the event, and (4) identifying relevant (interesting) components of the event (See Figure 4-1). By utilizing some or all of these categories to interpret a sport-related event, a fan is then able to determine what an event means to him/her and how it influences their status of being a fan (See Figure 4-2).

The following excerpts regarding Sammy Sosa, right-fielder for the Chicago Cubs, being caught using a corked bat in a game against the Devil Rays on June 3, 2003, are presented in order to illustrate how one event can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Reactions, both positive and negative, to this incident, were posted on The Sporting News's "Voice of the Fan" website on June 4 (www.sportingnews.com). Most likely, not all of these responses were written in by Cubs fans; however, one Cubs fan's response is worth noting. The varied responses to this incident illustrate several aspects of the model introduced above, namely recalling past information, personal significance (e.g., identification), and relevant event components (e.g., nature of the event - positive versus negative). The following interpretations of the event include both positive and negative interpretations which make use of current knowledge of the event and prior knowledge of Sammy's success.

"I believe Sammy. How many broken bats has he had in his days playing? *They have never found a corked bat until now*. It was an accident." Joe – Boston, MA

"*Sosa hasn't been hitting well*, and I don't believe he picked up the corked bat by mistake. He knows the difference between the corked bat and legal bats. To me, he isn't credible. *Not only has he been caught using a corked bat, he has made it worse by trying to say he only made a mistake*! Sosa is an example of what is wrong with baseball and an explanation of why it is in a freefall: cheaters, liars, performance-enhancing drugs, money, a lack of personal responsibility and an absence of loyalty. The game is saturated with selfish interests and selfish people." Dan Campbell – Searcy, AR

"I think Sammy Sosa has to be given the benefit of the doubt here. He claims he uses a corked bat during batting practice before games to impress the crowds and kids who come out early to watch batting practice. In this case, he just grabbed the wrong bat in the game. I don't really understand why a slugger like Sammy would need a corked bat to hit dingers in practice, since *he jacks plenty off big-time pitching*. That said, *Sammy has shown that he is a talented enough hitter that he doesn't need to cheat to give himself an edge*. After MLB goes through all of his game bats, if it turns out that he had more than one corker in his bag, that is trouble, and I'll have no choice but to change my mind. Until that happens, I won't believe this is a regular thing for Sammy." Josh Miggler - Las Vegas, NV

"Anyone who accuses Sosa of being a serial corker hasn't watched him play the past five years. *I've seen him break at least 10 to 15 bats prior to this*. None of those bats was corked. He picked up the wrong bat. Whether folks want to accept it or not, it can and does happen." Jon Issacs – Washington, DC

Lastly, the following response concerning the same event, written by a Cubs fan, illustrates how personal significance (i.e., identification) can influence the interpretation of the event.

"Being a Cubs fan does not help diminish the sadness I feel on this incident. How can Sammy Sosa put himself in this situation? Why does he have a corked bat? The fact he had a corked bat tells it all. He deserves all of the negativity and punishment he has received and will continue to receive for years to come. All of his credibility is gone as far as this Cubs fan is concerned." Dan Perez

The examples presented above illustrate how the same sport-related event can be interpreted differently by sport fans. Fans do not strategically analyze each individual aspect of an event; rather they incorporate the entire experience, utilizing all pertinent information, occasionally gathering additional information, and identifying the relevant aspects of the event as they continue their support for a particular sport entity. It is important to point out that although the four categories that emerged in this study were deemed important to the participants in the study, this study did not determine which categories were assessed most often or which categories were considered most influential when interpreting an event. However, the study did determine that a sport fan may not consider all categories to be relevant when interpreting a sport-related event, that a sport fan could interpret several categories simultaneously, and that the categories, other than experiencing the event, were not assessed in any particular order when attempting to ascribe meaning to an event. The examples that follow in this section will help demonstrate (1) that fans may not consider all four categories when interpreting an event, (2) the interrelationships between the categories in the core process, and (3) the non-linear nature of the model. Therefore, determining the meaning of an event and the influence it has on a fan involves interpreting the event using a combination of the following four categories: experiencing an event, becoming more informed, determining the personal significance of the event, and identifying relevant components of the event. These four categories will be discussed next, illustrated with examples from participant interviews and excerpts found on several sport-related Internet sites.

Experiencing the Event

The manner in which a fan experiences or learns about a sport-related event can greatly impact the meaning that event holds for them and how it influences them as a fan. Participants in the study provided several examples of where or how they experienced/learned about an event: (1) first hand by personally witnessing the event (most likely an on-the-field event), (2) through some form of mass media (i.e., newspaper, television, Internet), (3) through a fellow fan or acquaintance, or (4) through a combination of any of the above.

Participants tended to base their interpretation of the sport-related event upon the manner in which the information was obtained. By virtue of the event itself, the type of event reported by the media is likely to be different than the type of event that a sport fan might experience personally. For instance, it is unlikely, although not impossible, that a sport fan might witness many off-the-field types of events. The only off-the-field occurrences that were recalled as being personally experienced by the study participants were autograph sessions and one situation where a study participant, a Magic Johnson fan, had the opportunity to play pick-up basketball at a local gym in Los Angeles with Magic. More often than not, the type of event that is experienced personally is an on-the-field occurrence (e.g., attending a game). Therefore, the information received from this experience and the subsequent meaning ascribed to it is likely to be different as well. Although most of the information that is received in this manner tends to be rather objective (i.e., scores, statistics), the sport fan who experiences a game personally also has the opportunity to gain a different perspective and are able to make subjective

assessments based on that experience. Additionally, the personally experienced event might derive more emotion based upon the type of event that occurs.

Several fans recounted experiences where they personally experienced more than just the game by attending. These participants were impacted to a greater extent because of events that occurred during the game and the fact that they were in attendance. For instance, Chris was fortunate enough to have sideline passes to a University of Washington football game when they played Stanford during the 1999 football season. However, an unfortunate occurrence on the field left Chris with more than just the experience of watching the game from the sidelines:

> Chris:
> You know, two players for the Washington Huskies football team just passed away and uh, *Curtis Williams was paralyzed in a game at Stanford, which happened to be the first game that I was ever on the sidelines at a collegiate athletic event*. And, you know, *it was a thrill to be on the sidelines and then to see someone get paralyzed*. But the strange thing was we were winning like 28 to 12 or something like that and they scored two touchdowns after recovering two onside kicks and took the lead with like 45 seconds left, which could have derailed our chances to go to the Rose bowl. But we came back and in a series of three plays, scored with like 15 seconds left to win. You know, there was [sic] all these emotions. These players were concerned for Curtis' well being yet they wanted to win. *It was just an incredible amount of emotions*.
>
> Interviewer:
> Being right there on the sidelines, how do you think that impacted you?
>
> Chris:
> *Being on the sidelines, it's kind of like they're playing for you, you're totally detached from the crowd*. You know, *you're kind of one with the team* because you're on the sidelines ... but to me, that *kind of hit me hard because, I was there. I saw it happen and when it happened, the friends who I was with said they thought he was dead right there*. But, when he, when the news came out that he died, that was pretty shocking too.

Not only did Chris personally experience a shocking event, he made his own assessment as to what happened. As he experienced the event first hand, he trusted what he witnessed and did not have to rely, at least immediately, on other sources of information to *experience the event*. Additionally, the other information that Chris recalled, the score during the game and the outcome, are rather objective pieces of information. He relied on his own memory and experience to recall that information. Chris did not have to seek out that information from other sources, nor did he doubt afterward that his recollection was inaccurate. The type of information, although at the risk of not being entirely complete, tends to be trusted. This is not to say that sport fans only rely on this type of information and do not seek out other sources to fill in some of the blanks. In the case of Chris above, although he personally witnessed the event, he realized later that he did not have the complete story. It was the media's subsequent report of the event that clued him into the details and the outcome of that tragic event. This category of "becoming more informed" will be discussed in the next section.

The media plays a role by informing fans about an event in a variety of ways. A fan can watch a newscast, read about the event the day after in a newspaper, or read about the event in a magazine. In the above scenario, Chris mentioned receiving additional information from media sources in the days that followed the incident. Chris also learned of the Curtis Williams' death via a media source. Additionally, a fan can watch the event as it is being broadcast. Several participants recounted stories of watching events on television or listening to them on the radio. Although the fans were not present at the actual event, the experience of viewing or hearing a game via a media source seemed to

bring great enjoyment to these fans. Felisia, a Michael Jordan fan, truly enjoyed watching him and the Chicago Bulls play as often as possible.

> Interviewer:
> Do you still consider yourself a Jordan fan?
>
> Felisia:
> I would say a Jordan fan back when they were winning. But even when they weren't winning, I mean, they would lose to Detroit in the finals for years and I would love, you know, loved watching them.

Some fans simply enjoy watching a team or a sport for the entertainment value of the event. For instance, Alex and Felisia, respectively, watched games in which they were not necessarily rooting for a team to win, but watched because of the enjoyment they received from the experience.

> Alex:
> Uh some teams I'll just like if I like watching them play. I'll see a team last year like Missouri was pretty fun to watch. I'm usually not a fan of Missouri, but they looked great and they were fun to watch.
>
> Interviewer:
> What made them fun to watch?
>
> Alex:
> Uh, it was the speed of the game, the flow of how the players played. They have a couple of players that just made outstanding moves and played great all the time. It just made them fun to watch so you appreciate it. So you watch them.

Felisia, who grew up watching specific baseball teams because of her family's attachment to the Yankees and the Mets, now simply enjoys watching baseball.

> Felisia:
> It was always the Mets and the Yankees. My brother was the Yankees fan. My dad was the Mets fan. So we had a little rivalry going in the house. I would watch both, liked both, and then just recently, you know, *if I'm going to watch baseball, I'll sit down and watch any team playing. It doesn't matter. I watch them.*

"Through the mass media, millions of viewers, listeners, and readers are brought immediately into the experience of a great sports performance (Real 1990). Some may argue that watching a broadcasted event is very much like watching the event live, maybe even better. Lever and Wheeler (1993), in their discussion of the impact of mass media on sport, discussed the evolution of radio and television broadcast of sporting events. To counter the argument that watching an event on television would not provide the same appeal as witnessing the game in person; Lever and Wheeler (1993) suggest

> "with the use of multiple cameras, television can give the viewer a sense of the totality of action that may never be achieved by the eye witness seeing the event form only one angle of vision. By the use of close-ups of other fans, distant shorts of the stadium, and officials wired for sound, the fan may become a part of the event in a way that he or she cannot when actually attending it. Among other things, the fans at home is able to see the action from the perspective of the immediate participants, thanks to cameras on the level of the field." (p. 1")

Televised games allow the fan to continue to either follow their favorite team or begin following a team even if they do not live in close proximity. Watching a televised game also enables the fan to view plays up close and repeatedly, something that is not always possible when actually attending a game. However, it should be noted that the media has some degree of control over what part of the game, which athletes, which slow-motion replays, and which sideline brawls are shown. Of course, the media does not control the actual event as it occurs; only what we, as fans, see when viewing a sporting event via television. Therefore, in this analysis, watching a broadcasted event is considered to be experiencing an event that is mediated by the media. In sum, experiencing a sport-related event, either directly or indirectly, has the potential to greatly impact the meaning that a sport fan ascribes to that particular event.

Becoming More Informed

Sport fan behavior involves not only being a spectator, but also staying current with occurrences within the sporting world. Recall that this study's participants described a sport fan as an individual who enjoys sports and spends time either going to, watching, or reading about sport-related events. A highly committed sports fan continuously gathers additional information that builds up his/her bank of knowledge and then uses this information to help interpret additional events as they occur. This is just one way in which the fan changes upon experiencing and interpreting an event. For instance, John recalled legal indiscretions by two famous athletes. Based upon John's prior knowledge of both of these athletes, he expressed surprise that one athlete had engaged in this type of activity ("it is out of character"), while not being surprised that the other was involved in such an activity ("he's a punk"). Without this knowledge, John may not have interpreted the events in this way.

Additionally, the knowledge and experiences that sport fans accumulate can produce emotional reactions when experiencing and interpreting an event. Ed recalled how the death of Ted Williams and Jack Buck impacted him as a fan.

> Ed:
> Jack Buck was the radio announcer for the St. Lewis Cardinals for about thirty-five or forty years. He always seemed to be there during a lot of dramatic moments in baseball because for about fifteen years he also was the World Series announcer on television. And *I have these great memories of just his lines or his quotes and his voice, his voice was a terrific voice.* Everybody liked him and he died just literally a week before Darryl Kyle. In fact at Busch Stadium in St. Louis they were having a ceremony for Jack Buck and then the team went on the road, and they were in Chicago when Darryl Kyle died, and that was just like three or four days after the Jack Buck services.

Interviewer:
You mentioned that impacted you more than Ted Williams passing.

Ed:
Oh they both did. Ted Williams more because of his grandeur and legend and stuff like that I guess more than anything else. But *I actually had more memories of Jack Buck than I do Ted Williams.* I put them in a different category than those people in their twenties and thirties.

Interviewer:
What makes you put them in a different category?

Ed:
That's a good question. And I think there's probably a couple of reasons; one is I like baseball better than the others so that could be the place to begin although Darryl Kyle played baseball too. But you know *when Ted Williams died there was like fifty years of memories that that conjured up. Same thing with Jack Buck*, and since Jack Buck didn't retire in the sense that Ted Williams did and then got out of the picture. Jack Buck announced for twenty, thirty or forty years. So *I mean I associated him with things that happened in the 90's, the 80's, and 70's and 60's. And those memories kind of came back I think when he died.*

Participants become more informed about sport-related events by utilizing interpersonal sources (e.g., friends) and various mass media sources. Participants indicated that the source of the information was significant in determining whether that information was considered credible. For instance, information obtained from friends perceived to be highly credible sport fans might be considered more credible than receiving information from certain mass media sources. However, it should be noted that most participants used similar media sources (e.g., ESPN.com, Sports Center) for their sport-related information because they considered them to be more trustworthy than others.

Highly committed sport fans tend to gather sport-relevant information from outside sources quite frequently. The desire to learn more about an event appeared to be

a common activity for the study participants. Some participants admitted going to a particular sport-related website several times a day "just to see if something major had happened." Several participants indicated that they only scan the headlines of these sport-related websites but will pay more attention to stories that capture their interest. In particular, ESPN.com and its successive "Page 2" website supply different types of information to the fan. Page 2 not only includes on-the-field information, but also provides entertaining news reports of off-the-field activities, whereas, ESPN.com tends to concentrate on reporting more on-the-field information. Some information search is ongoing, for instance, Alex mentioned that when his team is performing poorly, he tends to not watch ("I don't go out of my way to see them play"); however, he continues to read as much about the team as possible.

Several participants indicated that they purposely seek information from interpersonal sources; friends or acquaintances. However, it should be noted that some information can be obtained inadvertently, simply by overhearing a conversation. One fan offered this response (Page 2 of ESPN.com) when asked to comment on the "Most Shocking Moments in Football":

> "Undoubtedly, the night Joe Theismann had his lower leg snapped like a stale chopstick by LT [Lawrence Taylor] in 1985. Not necessarily because it was as grotesque a sight as anyone has seen on live TV, but because it happened in front of about 70 bah-jillion people during 'Monday Night Football.' Moreover, if you didn't see it, you could damn well bet at least *five people told you about it the next day*." Derrick Ingram – Lexington, KY (emphasis added)

The trustworthiness of the information received from this type of source is dependent upon the source itself. Although one would assume that fellow fans (friends) might always be credible, this may or may not be the case. Bob learned of Magic Johnson's

HIV diagnosis from a friend and although the friend was in fact relaying credible information, Bob's initial reaction was one of doubt:

> Bob:
> When the news came out about Magic Johnson, I cried.
>
> Interviewer:
> Do you remember how you heard about it?
>
> Bob:
> Yeah, I remember it. I was in high school and I was walking to basketball practice and *someone told me and I thought they were lying*. I thought, "there's no way." So *I went home and it was all over the news and I just couldn't believe it, couldn't believe it.*

Although new information is sometimes received in this manner, interpersonal sources are also sought out and utilized for discussion purposes. Thus, sport fans tend to seek out other sport fans they perceive as credible that have similar interests and/or knowledge regarding certain sports or sport entities (e.g., friends, co-workers, acquaintances).

Most participants indicated that they relied heavily on several different media sources (i.e., ESPN.com, Sports Illustrated, ESPN's Sports Center, local newscasts, newspapers) as a means of keeping up with what was going on in the sporting world. The primary source for sport-related information is the media, mainly because of its accessibility and the purpose it serves. Fans not only have instant access to certain media sources, but also access to directed media sources. For instance, a golf fan can obtain golf information from a number of sources, both off-line (i.e., Golf Digest magazine) and online (i.e., www.golfdigest.com). Most participants indicated that they visited or viewed various media sources on a daily basis. Although some media sources might only be viewed cursorily, the importance of having these sources available was quite common among participants.

Interviewer:
So, you keep track of what's going on with a sport, team or a player … how would you go about doing that?

Bob:
Uh, just watching TV, maybe looking at a newspaper, checking up on them on the Internet.

Interviewer:
Do you have a particular site on the Web that you check?

Bob:
Yeah, ESPN.com, like almost everybody else does.

Interviewer:
Does that give you pretty much all the information you want to know?

Bob:
Yeah, uh, really *all I want to know is the scores, maybe the standing, maybe how the players did, what's their point, their statistics… a lot of sites will give you that* ... it's just a matter of where you feel more comfortable going.

Additionally, most of the participants agreed that they utilized these sources to obtain accurate information and to gain knowledge. "The media serves as a cognitive and affective conduit for a sport fan. Sports fans identify with *their* team or player through the media, acquire information and understanding about them, and feel emotional identification with them. The media allows fans to see not only great deeds but also the deflation of heroes in their bad moments, the failure of authority in crisis. Sports pages examine the heroes in minute detail, warts and all, outlining details of greedy contracts, after-hours drug abuse, and undisciplined sex lives, but sports heroes and their motivating power over others live on" (Real, 1990, p. 351).

The motivation behind securing such information, as well as the type and amount of information sought, differed among participants. Some simply wanted to see how

their team(s) or players faired in a recent game, while others wanted to know as much as possible about their favorite or all teams, sports, players. As was mentioned in Chapter 3, several participants in the study were participating in a sport trivia contest being held by a local sport radio station (WDND – ESPN radio) and thus were motivated to consistently monitor a wide range of sport-related occurrences. When an event is deemed important by a sport fan, he/she may engage in gathering additional information in order to become more informed and to help determine what the event means to him/her. Alex, recalled how closely he followed what was occurring in the world of professional golf and what seemed to "jump" out at him.

> Alex:
> One of the things that *jumped out at me* before the Masters was when the Club Director, that they run that tournament as a separate set of rules. Basically, like they're not under USGA rules, they're not under PGA rules. They're their own governing body. And they're considering at some point in the near future having one ball that would just be distributed to all the players. … So they're thinking about, about getting around that by having a Masters approved, a generic ball that they just distribute for the week.
>
> Interviewer:
> How'd you feel about that?
>
> Alex:
> Well, I'm not opposed to it. I guess it kind of *made me think about*, you know, what the rules are out there that the other governing bodies have that have let it get to this level. I mean, I guess that I thought that it was a pretty dramatic step for the tournament to take and if they didn't have as much power as they do, they would have been laughed at. … But, you know, I think that Augusta has a right to do something like that. *It's something, I think that I followed it, I mean, I was pretty, it worked up, you know, some, some passion, emotion to me and it made me, it was big enough that I took a mental stance on it in that, you know, I just didn't take in the info and process it and then run. You know, I thought about it, took the time, like, okay, I agree with that.*

Often times, as in the case of Chris witnessing Curtis Williams' unfortunate accident, fans will attend a sporting event and then read/hear about the event via some media source afterward. This additional information can potentially create a new meaning of the event. For instance, if Chris had not heard another word about Curtis Williams (which is unlikely), either about the injury or his subsequent death, his experience and the consequent meaning which he derived from that event might be very different. The fact that he learned more about the event and trusted the source of the additional information certainly did not make the event less shocking, but it did bring some aspect of reality to the event for him.

The potential for source and information issues arise when sport fans experience or learn about an event through the media. Participants indicated that when they accessed information from a media source, they occasionally encountered issues with the types of sources that supply sport-related information (e.g., newspaper, television, Internet) as well as their own perception of the media's credibility and control over the sport-related information (See Figure 4-3).

Although there is a discrepancy across media channels with regard to credibility (i.e., television, newspaper, and the Internet), Johnson and Kaye (1998), Flanagin and Metzger (2000), and Kiousis (2001) found that in general, the public is skeptical about any type of media. A 1997 Roper poll showed that people are as likely to believe everything they hear from a lawyer or a Congressman (3 percent) as they are from a newspaper reporter (2 percent) (Freedom Forum, 1997). This study found that fans are generally skeptical about the media and the messages the media provides regarding sport-related events. Therefore, it is imperative that we focus on the different informational

and source issues that fans face: trust (i.e., credibility of message and source) and control of the information (e.g., focus, amount) by the media.

Trustworthiness

Participants indicated that they sometimes questioned whether they could trust the source from which they received the sport-related information. Credibility issues tend to be more of a media issue than an interpersonal issue. As stated previously, most fans who obtained sport-related information via an interpersonal channel tended to rely on friends and acquaintances they deemed credible. Most participants indicated that their dependence upon the media to keep them informed of sport-related activities was because they were, for the most part, perceived to be credible and trustworthy. By far, ESPN (the website as well as the TV station – Sports Center) was the most often cited (used).

> Interviewer:
> So, where do you get your sports news from?
>
> Chris:
> Uh, my most trusted source, ESPN.com … it's my homepage, I go there probably twice a day, just to see if anything major has happened.

However, participants did not always consider the media, as a source of sport-related information, to be unbiased or trustworthy. Participants felt that the media sometimes engaged in irresponsible reporting, often times "jumping on a story" without all of the facts, thus presenting a small fraction of the information, revealing incorrect information, and/or drawing premature conclusions.

> David:
> The *thing that really bothers me is the early speculation on the whole Iverson thing*, I am not an Iverson fan, but Iverson on the court is unbelievable, so I respect him as one of the top basketball players. But the

whole Iverson thing of, you know, before it got to him turning himself in, the stories that there was blood in the car, there was broken glass, and he threw his wife out of the house naked, *I mean no one knows what the story is. It's like a snowball rolling down the mountain and the media is always at the top pushing it and letting it go and you can't stop it.* And then it gets to the point where they say, well, that's really not what happened, this is what happened, then no one says, oh, you did a horrible job reporting that. *I blame the media for making it much more of an issue than it really was.* I don't excuse what he did, but it's almost one of those things, if you're in a court room, if I'm just going to listen to one side and say, oh, you're guilty. Well, at least let the defendant talk. I mean, you've got to hear both sides and then make your decisions from there, but the media doesn't give us that opportunity.

Additionally, Chris felt as though the media couldn't be trusted and certainly took precautions when reading certain news stories.

Chris:
I don't really trust what the media has to say. I don't necessarily believe everything they say. The media tends to blow things out of proportion.

These findings appear to mirror the literature on credibility issues which has focused on two primary domains: source and medium. Source credibility refers to "different communicator characteristics and how they influence the processing of a message." (Kiousis, 2001) In general, source credibility examines the individual, group, or organization that is parlaying the message to the receiver. In this study, the source would be the friend or acquaintance or the news reporter that provides the information. Medium credibility focuses on the channel through which the message is delivered, not the sender. In this study, the medium could be a specific television newscast, newspaper, or Internet site.

There appears to be a trend toward declining confidence in the media. So much so, that in the mid-to-late 1980s, considerable research focused on examining media credibility; however, the focus of research has shifted back to source and message

credibility issues. Johnson and Kaye (1998) suggest that media credibility deserves attention for two reasons: (1) credibility levels dropped considerably during the 1990s and (2) most of the early credibility studies were conducted before several new media outlets evolved, namely the Internet. Most of the participants in this study revealed that their favorite and/or most trusted source of information regarding sport-related events was ESPN.com. Interestingly, Westley and Severin (1964) found that perceptions of media credibility and media preference were not necessarily correlated. In other words, the most preferred medium may not always be considered the most credible. At that time, television was reported as being more credible than newspaper reporting. However, more recent studies have shown that newspapers may have gained some credibility points (Johnson and Kaye, 1998; Flanagin and Metzger, 2000).

The discrepancy in credibility ratings may be due to several factors. One, people may use different standards to assess credibility of television versus newspaper versus other types of media reporting. "People tend to judge the individual journalist who delivers the news on television by themselves, but they assess the entire institution of the newspaper when judging print media" (Kiousis, 2001, p. 385). Therefore, opinions of television may be more favorable because viewers may like a news anchor/reporter and thus attribute credibility to them, where as the newspaper reporter typically is unknown. Two, credibility may be judged on peripheral characteristics (e.g., aesthetic quality). For instance, television has access to more technological, powerful tools with which information can be reported and thus may be perceived as being more credible.

Flanagin and Metzger (2000) found that the Internet was used "to get information" more than books, magazines, television, newspapers, the telephone,

electronic mail, or face-to-face communication. However, the Internet, has some strengths and weaknesses as well. Although it is a widely used source of information, mainly because it provides abundant, easily available, often comprehensive information (Flanagin and Metzger, 2000), its unregulated approach introduces an increased potential for error or exploitation. Internet sites that parallel their print counterparts invoke the same editorial processes, but they constitute only a small portion of the information available on the Internet. Many sport fans frequent chat rooms which are designed for open discussion of various sport-related topics. These particular sources of information typically do not have systems in place to verify the information that is passed through this channel. However, most of the participants in this study indicated that their primary source of information was either television (i.e., SportsCenter on ESPN) or the Internet counterpart, ESPN.com. By using a well known site and through continued experience, most fans feel as though they can determine if they are receiving credible information or not, and adjust accordingly.

Control

Participants also voiced an opinion about how the media tends to control (1) the nature of information (i.e., positive or negative), (2) the focus of the information (i.e., on-the-field versus off-the-field), and (3) the amount of information disseminated to the public, thus influencing a fan's knowledge and subsequent interpretation of the event. In their study of news media impact on presidential evaluations, Miller and Krosnick (2000), point out that during the past twenty years, research has shown that the media does have an impact on public opinion.

Nature of the Information

The media's role is to report incidents and one would hope that the news that is reported is honest and unbiased. However, for many of the participants, this was not necessarily the case. Participants tended to feel that what they hear about an incident is at the mercy of the media.

> David:
> Naturally, it goes back to the media. You never, you only heard about bad things. Barry Bonds has done a lot of great things for the community that you never hear about but Barry Bonds slips on one things and it's all over the news, so I mean that's the power of the media.

Additionally, if the media has a desire to communicate a story in a positive or negative manner, they can and will. Two very similar events received large amounts of, yet diverse media coverage. Greg Louganis' announcement that he had contracted the HIV virus was treated very differently by the media than when Magic Johnson announced that he had contracted the HIV virus. Both stories received a great amount of media attention. In fact, an article in American Spectator described the impact of the Magic Johnson announcement: "to hear the media tell it, Johnson's announcement has replaced JFK's assassination as the event people will recall thirty years from now." (Fumento 1992). However, both events did not receive the same treatment with regard to the presentation of the positive or negative side of the event. Louganis's announcement was treated with great disdain. While the media did not ignore Johnson's reasons for contracting the virus, he was not treated as disparagingly as Louganis.

Participants acknowledged that most of what we know about athletes is learned through some type of media source and how that information is presented. Several

participants indicated that they don't really know the athlete personally; they only know what the media wants them to know. The image that an athlete has is dependent up on several things, his demeanor on the playing field and in front of the media and how the media chooses to portray him. Nate discussed how the media can help or hinder the image of an athlete by the type of information they choose to present:

> Nate:
> *Image is very big and the media can do a lot to help or hinder that image.* I mean, I look at it, *the media a lot of times is all you see of somebody.* You know, all I see of the guy who just played basketball is him on the court and him in his post-game interview. *I don't see him after the game signing autographs for every kid that wants one because the media doesn't film that.* So, all I'm going to hear about is that he was driving 120 mph and hit somebody … you know, I don't hear that he passed out turkeys on Thanksgiving for eight hours. On occasion, you do hear that kind of stuff, but it's almost like the good is expected and anything bad, I'm just going to dwell on that.

The type of attention the media gives to some sports, teams, and players definitely gets attention from fans, but not always in a positive manner. Although the media is considered a useful source of information, its reputation is not always positive. A couple of examples follow:

> "[Dan] Snyder has learned a lot the past couple of seasons. The Redskins' front office has been saying that there's a plan in place, and these signings are strong evidence of it. *Still, the media loves to bash Snyder, and I expect more of the same.*" Fritz - Hyattsville, MD (SportingNews.com – March 5, 2003)

> "Welcome to the world of big-time sports, LeBron, where the media builds you up and then tears you down!" Brett Housley - Lakenheath, U.K. (SportingNews.com – February 1, 2003)

Keith and John cited the Barry Bonds home run race as examples of how the media influences what we know and how fans feel about it.

Keith:
Last year, when Barry Bonds was going through the home run race, *I was definitely not rooting for him to get it just because of his personality that comes through the media ... you know, the media has so much control over what we think as fans.*

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John:
I think Barry Bonds is a prime example. I think the media, well, I think he's been working hard the last two years to change his image, or the image of his character. But, there are still, I mean, it's widely known that he's not liked by his teammates. He's not very nice to fans. *The media doesn't care for him. He's one I think the media has kind of said, you know what, this guy's been a jerk to me, so I'm going to write articles about what a jerk he is.*

Similarly, two additional responses from "The Voice of the Fan" suggest that the media had a lot to do with how fans feel about Barry Bonds:

" ... *He [Barry Bonds] gets put down by the media because he is not friendly and approachable*. So what? ... For years it was Ken Griffey, Jr. this and Ken Griffey, Jr. that. *Well, as Griffey has fallen by the wayside, the media searches for a new "golden child" to promote*, while Bonds just goes out reaching milestone after milestone." Gary Magnus – Lindenhurst, NY (SportingNews.com – August 12, 2002)

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"*His [Barry Bond's] demeanor has led to his less-than-stellar public perception, but his personality has been trashed by the media, which is due in large part to his refusal to cater to their wishes*. If you hear a lot of what he has to say, he's a good guy and a good father." Brian Shea – Louisville, KY (SportingNews.com – August 12, 2002)

Negative news stories (e.g., scandals) not only appear to permeate the media, but also seem to persist a lot longer than they used to. This phenomenon may be due to the addition and use of new information outlets (e.g., all-news cable TV, the Internet). There also appears to be an economic stake in publishing such stories. "You can't underestimate the media's ability to inflate these stories, as long as there is a financial

reason to do so," said Michael Kinsley, editor of Slate, an online magazine. "When you see that a large number of subscribers are checking out stories about Monica Lewinsky on the Web, you're going to ride that story as long as you possibly can" (http://www.pub.umich.edu/daily/1998/oct/10-22-98/news/news19.html).

Focus of the Information

Although the media has no control over the types of sport-related events that occur, they do and can choose what type of information is going to be reported. The media chooses to report events that occur (1) on-the-field or off-the-field, (2) on a particular level (e.g., professional versus collegiate), (3) within a particular sport (e.g., men's versus women's tennis) or (4) everyday or sensational news stories.

On-the-field information pertains to events that are more performance based (i.e., scores, statistics), whereas, off-the-field information pertains to events involving a sport entity that occurs outside the realm of the actual sport per se and is more behavior based (i.e., players arrested for DUI, athlete deaths). Interestingly, most participants indicated that they did not particularly care for, nor did they want to hear/read reports regarding off-the-field activities of players. One participant stated that he did not care to know certain things about an athlete; in particular, how much money a player made. Bob made it perfectly clear that he did not care for the media's coverage of particular off-the-field occurrences.

> Bob:
> ... and it seems like if you go to the college football web page, all the information is about – *all the headlines are about players that have committed crimes or, you know, all the negative stuff outside of the game – that's where the focus is.* So, *I usually don't read it unless it has to do*

> *with some player that I specifically, uh, that are affiliated with a team that I know.* But I'm more interested in the statistical stuff, you know, information about the team, how they're doing, how individuals are playing, if a player is injured, any kind of information on the team that has to do with the game. Stuff like, one of the Mariners players got arrested for DUI, and I'm like, what is there to know? The guy got arrested. He was drinking. I mean what else could there be in the story that would be interesting to me?

It appeared as though on-the-field information was more important, valued, and desired. This information allows sports fans to develop and/or modify an attitude toward a player's performance. Participants indicated that they also appreciated other types of on-the-field information that facilitated the assessment of the athlete as an athlete. For instance, fans want to hear about how the player played, if he gave 100 percent during a game, or if his priorities were in the right place.

> Interviewer:
> Are you an Allen Iverson fan?
>
> Maggie:
> No, I can't stand him. He thinks the rules don't apply to him, shows up to practice when he wants … where's his priority? I can't stand those types of players. If your priority isn't on the field then you shouldn't be an athlete.

The ability to make these types of judgments was considered very important by most participants. Although being a superstar was not necessarily a requirement to be listed as a favorite, the fan certainly wanted to stay current with how the athlete was performing.

Although several participants indicated there was little to no interest in off-the-field activities, these activities were cited as reasons why a player was liked or disliked. However, when faced with receiving off-the-field information, David indicated that he preferred to learn about the positive activities rather than negative or irrelevant ones.

David:
Yea, it goes right back to the media. MTV has this show called "Cribs" and what it is geared toward is it shows, they take a camera crew into athletes, actors or actresses houses and show all the great, oh this is Jason Williams from the New Jersey Nets house and look at how big his house is and look at the driveway, he has eight cars and he's got a pool. That's the media. They don't say this is Grant Hill, Grant Hill that has a portfolio that is worth two million dollars because he has invested in bonds. That doesn't sell anything, no one wants to hear that. Everyone wants to see Jason Williams' new Ferrari that he just got with $80,000 rims.

Interviewer:
Do you want to see that?

David:
No, I could care less.

This study revealed that perception of an athlete is based on a combination of two perceptions: on-the-field performance AND off-the-field behavior. Bob and Keith when informed of both superior performance and negative behavior, appear to able to separate on- and off-the-field activities accordingly:

Bob:
I definitely would say I didn't like Michael Irvin because he's a total jerk … he got caught with cocaine multiple times, he was charged with rape, I think once, but he got out of it, like a lot of them do.

Interviewer:
So, you don't like him as a person?

Bob:
Yeah, I didn't like him as a person and he was really loud and obnoxious, so that didn't help either. But, he was still a pretty good football player.

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Keith:
You know, if he plays well, you know Deion Sanders, *he's an athlete so it's hard to dislike him especially whenever somebody is so dominant, I love those people. So, anyone who is the best at what they do, I respect that.* But I guess it goes down to what do, *when I look at somebody and say is that somebody I want my kid to grow up to be*, no. If I read

> tomorrow that he beat his wife, then that's not somebody I would want as the whole role model type. But, *at the same time, for what he's doing, if he is a college football player, when he is on the college football field, if he is the best, I respect that.* I mean, he is, it's taken a lot of work and time and effort to get from where he used to be to what he is doing now. And *what he does off of the field kind of determines if I say he is a classy guy* or you know that he is a fantastic football player and just a real, you know, not a nice person … *I can separate it and say you know, what he does off the field while if might not be right does not take away from what he does on the field.* … I mean if he, the whole Barry Bonds, you know, home run leader and everyone says he is a royal pain in the butt, he doesn't talk to me. Say what you want, when he is on the field, he is fantastic. So now is he somebody I want, you know, if I had a kid, I would say I want you to be like him …. No.

As mentioned earlier, fans felt as though the media did not broadcast good/positive incidents (i.e., donating money or time to a needy cause) as frequently as negative incidents. Many participants recognized the media's focus on the negative incidents (i.e., legal and/or moral indiscretions) because this is the kind of information that "sells."

> Nate:
> They [the media] focus on the most, you know, fantastic, most … they exploit stuff to make it look just absolutely terrible … cause that kind of information sells … it's going to cause people to watch.

Two other fans also recall incidents where the media's focus on off-the-field incidents has become slightly overwhelming:

> "Before 9/11, I had never seen any event get so much news coverage. There was a nationwide consensus of shock as we watched the white Bronco go down the 405 … *Since this incident, it seems athletes' private lives have become as much a tabloid issue as sports page content.* Shocking." David Guerreva – Torrance, CA (ESPN.com – Page 2 – Readers: Most Shocking Moments in Football)

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"Terrell Owens is one of the most talented receivers in the league. *It's just too bad his off-field antics are always mentioned first.*" John Wardle – Vancouver, B.C., Canada (SportingNews.com – October 17, 2002)

Recall that several of the study's participants indicated that they did not necessarily care to hear/learn about negative, particularly off-the-field, information. However, considering the influence this type of information had on a participant's propensity to like or dislike a particular athlete, it is difficult to ascertain if this type of information is truly undesired. As many stories regarding negative off-the-field events also tend to have degree of shock value, as will be discussed later, the appeal of these negative and sometimes shocking stories has a long history in the evolution of humans and is considered to be part of human nature (Davis and McLeod 2003). So, although sport fans may state they have no interest in these types of stories, human nature dictates that when faced with shocking news or gossip, most individuals will pay attention.

Study participants appeared to readily recall negative off-the-field activities, but had less recollection of positive off-the-field activities. Several of the study participants indicated that they considered this a media issue. The media reports negative on-the-field as well as negative off-the-field events, but as the study participants suggested, the former usually does not warrant as much media attention as the latter. An athlete performing poorly, by making errors during play, is expected (and forgiven) at times, whereas off-the-field bad behavior is often considered, for the most part inexcusable and sometimes unexpected and shocking. Occasionally, fans' reactions to the media's report of certain off-the-field activities are not always positive. Admittedly, Randy Moss, wide receiver for the Minnesota Vikings, is not a favorite among sports fans. Many fans feel

he has issues on- as well as off-the-field, but this one fan is not pleased with how the media treated one particular off-the-field event involving Randy Moss:

> "Two traffic tickets and the media is treating Randy Moss like the next O. J. Give the man a break!" Joe – St. Paul, MN (SportingNews.com – September 27, 2002)

A study by Eastman and Billings (2000) demonstrated a high degree of favoritism toward certain sports (e.g., male oriented) even at times when female sports and athletes were engaging in newsworthy activities. A study investigating the coverage of the 1996 Olympics on Australian television found that women sports were only covered 33 percent of the time (Toohey 1997). Research has shown that on American television, women received almost as much air time as men, 43 percent to 57 percent, respectively; however, the coverage was skewed toward more physically attractive sports (e.g., diving, swimming, gymnastics) than hard contact sports (e.g., field hockey, judo) (Tuggle and Owen 1997).

One particular response to the media coverage of Dale Earnhardt's death illustrates the frustration that some fans experience with media reporting.

> "... *the only time the mainstream media gives any recognition to racing is when a fatality occurs. This presents a skewed perspective of our sport.* I've been told that more people are hurt and killed each year playing football than in racing, but that's never mentioned on the nightly news highlights of the latest crash. ... And so it is that, once again, the news stations are talking about racing, covering our sport in the black shroud of death, *highlighting only the danger components while failing to report on the other 499 and a half miles of close, exciting action, or Michael Waltrip's first-ever Cup victory, or the high drama of so many lead changes.* I'm not dismissing the impact of a loss like that of an Earnhardt. Rightly so, comparisons are made describing Earnhardt's death as the equivalent of losing Babe Ruth in the last inning or Wayne Gretzsky in overtime. *But there's more, a whole lot more to racing, than crashing and death.*" (www.widgetracing.com/jpmd/r_stnd59.htm)

Lastly, Nate and David seemed cognizant of the media's goal to show things that get people to watch. They claimed that the media knows what sells and they're going to show and report those things that sell:

> Nate:
> That *goes back to the media*... whenever you watch Sports Center, they don't show the lay ups, they don't show the nice pick and roll, they don't show the three point shot unless it was something unbelievable. *They show the dunk, they show the behind the back pass ... that's the most unfundamental thing they do ... it's all for show ... that's what gets people to watch.*

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> David:
> Things have changed. My love of sports is still there, but it's different. Some of it is, I guess, part of growing up too. You know I have a family now. But things have really changed, you didn't used to hear about certain things. The first thing wasn't Alex Rodriguez making 250 million dollars. You know the first thing was Larry Byrd had 32 points last night and he broke his pinky finger and scored 20 points after that. So *I equate a lot of that to the media. I mean the media has really changed how sports are viewed.*
>
> Interviewer:
> What has the media done?
>
> David:
> Well I think they have really, the purity of it, *it's not so much on the game as it is on the business or what's going on outside of it.* I mean Larry Byrd's home life was not the greatest, you know he was divorced and he had these problems, but *you didn't know about those things. You knew about Larry Byrd the basketball player. Where now all you hear is about Alan Iverson is arrested, and Shaq* [Shaquille O'Neal] *said this to the tabloids. I mean, so what is kind of corrupted so much in my eyes, is what the media has done.* Because you are bringing everything outside into the lime light and that's something that really has, you know, you watch baseball because you like baseball and you want to see who wins the game, not because that guy beat his wife last night or you know that guys not playing tonight because he is holding out for more money ... but *the media makes that the primary point.* You know before if Byrd didn't have a good night, people weren't saying, hey you make 80,000 dollars, you know that wasn't it. It was more come on. I think *the media has really*

> *changed just the perception of the game and just what the game is all about*. It's a business now. I mean now you are talking about baseball teams that may go bankrupt. I mean you never heard those things before.

In sum, the media determines what they think is newsworthy and controls the type of information that is presented to the public. In turn, the sport fan that consumes this information is using this to interpret the event and determine what it means to him.

Amount of Information

The amount of information the media chooses to share also plays a part in enhancing a fan's knowledge base and subsequent interpretations of sport-related events. In many cases, fans feel as though the media shares too much information and fans soon grow tired of repeatedly hearing the same story. One fan discussed his reaction to hearing continuous media coverage about LeBron James:

> "LeBron [James] isn't even drafted yet and *I'm sick of hearing about this kid in the news*, whether it be about "gifts" or his reaction to a coaching change. Sounds like yet another spoiled kid, while classy vets like John Stockton and David Robinson inch toward retirement." John – Calgary (SportingNews.com – February 1, 2003)

Another example of the media presenting too much information occurred in 1985 when Joe Theismann, quarterback for the Washington Redskins, broke his leg during a game against the New York Giants. The following fan evidently saw way too much and when responding to the Most Shocking Moments in Football, this is what he recalled:

> "Joe T's leg snap … can we see it seven more times please, ABC?" Colvin – Annapolis, MD (ESPN.com – Page 2 – Readers: Most Shocking Moments in Football)

The following example brings all three issues of sport-related media reporting together: nature (i.e., positive versus negative), focus (i.e., on- or off-the-field), and

amount of information provided. An error made by Bill Buckner, first baseman for the Boston Red Sox in the 1986 World Series, has become a popular event on blooper reels. Bill Simmons, sport writer for ESPN: The Magazine wrote:

> " ... October rolled around, and with it, another anniversary of the Clip That Won't Die: Mookie [Wilson] grounds to first, a creaky [Bill] Buckner hobbles over, moving like a guy hopping off the crapper to answer the phone, reaches down in sections ... but not far enough. The error is now part of October, like New England foliage, Columbus Day or Michael Myers." (www.ESPN.com/page2 - October 16, 2002)

With all of this negativity and distrust, it is amazing that fans still rely on the media as their primary source of information. Again, their desire to remain informed causes sport fans to seek out pertinent sport-related information from various forms of information sources.

Determining Personal Significance

Although the media filters the type and amount of information provided to the marketplace, fans ultimately make the final judgment on what is important and significant to them, what is attended to, and how that information is interpreted. Ed interpreted the deaths of the following sport entities differently because of his attachment to the athlete or team.

> Ed:
> Well, I mean Darryl Kyle is the same age of my daughter so obviously something like that makes you give pause. I don't know if meant just young people [sic] I mean like the guy with the Minnesota Vikings who had the heat stroke.
>
> Interviewer:
> Korey Stringer

Ed:
Yeah Korey Stringer who had the heat stroke or whatever it was. Yeah I mean that's really an unfortunate kind of thing. I would say that even though it should be the other way around - I mean those are the things since these people are in their youth that should move me more then anything. *But since I didn't really have any personal attachment either to the team or to them as individuals I was certainly saddened by their deaths. But Jack Buck dying left more an impact on me even than Ted Williams.*

A sport-related event that has some level of personal significance is likely to garner attention from a sport fan. There are several ways in which an event can have personal significance and thus have the potential to cause different interpretations of an event based upon the impact and strength of the personal significance (See Figure 4-4). The first, and most common, is simply that the individual is a fan of the sport, team, player, or coach that was involved in the event, in other words, highly identified with a sport entity. This identification towards a sport entity obviously plays a role in what the event means to the fan, particularly a highly committed fan. This has been well documented in the literature and was discussed in Chapter Two. The second type of personal significance is when an individual has a personal affiliation with the sport entity (i.e., team, player, or coach). For instance, a fan might personally know, or feel they personally know, a player or coach because they have had an athlete in class, met the player, or played for a team.

As was previously discussed, there are numerous reasons why a fan becomes attached to, or identified with, a particular team (e.g., socialization from parents, player talent/team success, geography, peer influence). Team identification refers to the extent to which a fan feels psychologically connected to a team (Guttman 1986; Sloan 1989; Hirt et al. 1992; Wann and Branscombe 1993; Wann 1997). This term has also been used

to describe a fan's loyalty to a specific player (Wann 1997; Rinehart 1998). Branscombe and Wann (1992) refer to spectators' identification with the team, which is "the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as fans of the team, are involved with the team, are concerned with the team's performance, and view the team as a representation of themselves" (p. 1017). Research indicates that team identification is not necessarily impacted by the location or outcome of a team's most recent game (Wann et al. 1994; Wann 1996; Wann and Schrader 1996), but remains fairly consistent over time, from game to game, from season to season. In other words, a fan's level of identification appears to be unwavering. For example, Ed's identification with the New York Yankees does not allow him to become too attached to a player from another team.

> Interviewer:
> Are you a Cal Ripkin fan?
>
> Ed:
> Yeah. I think as an individual he's absolutely top notch he's a class guy. And you know what he did for the Orioles and stuff was fantastic. So, yeah I'd say so yeah. But probably less so than I would be if he were a Yankee. You know there's just that attachment there.

Many researchers have found that identification may be an important modifier for spectator behavior (Mann 1979; Smith 1983; Schurr, Ruble and Ellen 1985; Guttman 1986; Schurr et al. 1987; Zillmann, Bryant and Sapolsky 1989). Also, the degree of team identification has been found to be a major predictor of spectator behaviors, including affective reactions (Hirt et al. 1992; Simons and Taylor 1992; Wann and Branscombe 1992), arousal (Branscombe and Wann 1992), and tendencies to increase or decrease associations with the target team (Wann and Branscombe 1990; Wann 1993).

It has been shown that identification with a team can become central to some people's identity, particularly those with high team identification (Cialdini, *et al.* 1976). For fans with a high level of identification, the role of team follower is a major aspect of their identity. Because of this close association with a team, highly identified fans often view the team as a reflection of themselves. The team becomes an extension of the individual (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Tafjel 1981; Smith and Henry 1996). The team's successes become the fan's successes and vice-versa.

It should be noted that the strength of one's identification can include the length of time that individual has been a fan. In this study, the age of a sport fan, mainly from a standpoint of how long he/she had been a fan, coupled with the way sports have changed (i.e., the increase in the number of teams/sports, lack of loyalty from individual players) played a part in how an event was interpreted. For example, an older participant (over 50 years of age) not only had more years of being a fan, but also was accustomed to sports "the way they were, before things changed." These participants were accustomed to following players that had a lifetime career with one team. The lack of loyalty among players was mentioned quite frequently, by both younger and older participants, however, the impact was slightly different. A younger participant seemed to accept their favorite player playing for Team A one year and Team B the next considerably better than an older participant, who tended to value loyalty much more.

Personal affiliation with a team, player or coach can also impact a sport fan's interpretation of an event. Wann, Tucker and Schrader (1996) asked individuals to list why they became, remained, and discontinued being a sport fan. The results of their research showed that a very small percentage of people mentioned the importance of

personal affiliation (e.g., "the team representing a school I now, have or hope to attend," "I know, have met with, and/or am friends with the players"). However, the majority of participants in this study mentioned following a team or player because of some type of personal affiliation.

Not only can this type affiliation or interaction with the sport entity have an influence on whether an individual becomes a sport fan, but also on the strength of the attachment and their subsequent behaviors. Personal affiliation can cause a fan to engage in overt fan behaviors (e.g., attending games, buying team paraphernalia). For example, Bob received his undergraduate degree from UCLA and his Masters Degree from Notre Dame. Although he would receive gifts from friends that contained other schools logos, he would only buy licensed collegiate products that contained his school's logos.

> Bob:
> There was a period in college where my friends for my birthday would just get me basketball shorts from their schools. I have Santa Barbara shorts, I have Santa Clara shorts, I have Cal shorts, I have Notre Dame shorts. Other than that, maybe I'll have, like my friend who works for the Bucs, he got me a Bucs tee shirt so I usually don't go buy it myself unless it's something from Notre Dame or Cal, because I have an affiliation with them.

Personal affiliation can cause some sport fans to become avid fans, supporting their player or team regardless of their success or downfalls. A sport fan can have an affiliation at a number of levels. For instance, a sport fan could have an affiliation with a team because either they used to play for that team or they somehow were related to the team (e.g., went to school or worked for the university). Additionally, a sport fan can feel a sense of affiliation with players or coaches because they know, or feel they know,

these individuals on a personal level. Participants in this study mentioned these types of affiliation.

Bob has two female friends, 6'5" twins, who now play professional basketball, one for the Sparks and one for the Mystics. Although he admitted he does not watch women's college basketball ("I just never really got into it... it's just not the same..."), and feels as though women's basketball is "not as entertaining, not as athletic, and the play is a little slower," he did try to keep up with how his friends were doing.

One participant, Felicia, began developing a relationship with a softball coach at summer camp when she was 13 years old. This little league coach subsequently became Felicia's head coach at The University of Michigan, where they went to the World Series three of the four years she was playing for her. Felicia continues to follow this coach and the team by occasionally going to games and keeping up with scores from all the games. Felicia listed this coach as one of her favorites and when she became a coach herself admitted to trying to emulate what she had seen as a player. Although now that Felisia is affiliated with another university, she still feels an attachment to the Michigan softball team and the coach.

Lastly, Chris expounded upon his attachment to certain teams and players. Chris's attachment comes from a variety of causes. For example, in some instances, he knew a player personally and had developed a relationship with him (e.g., grew up with him, coached him, met him at an autograph session) and hence followed the teams for which this player was affiliated. Additionally, Chris's feelings of attachment came from simply liking a player initially and then continuing to follow that player from team to team. Admittedly, Chris was not initially a fan of some of the teams, but because his

players developed an affiliation with particular teams, he became more interested and began following those teams.

Chris:
You know, another theme too is I think *players who I have somehow gotten to know.*

Interviewer:
Personally?

Chris:
Personally. Or I've followed them, you know, from one level to the next. Those will become teams that I follow or, I mean, I don't really consider myself a Colts fan, but I'm sure that I'll watch 'em more now because one of the Washington Husky quarterbacks is now a quarterback for the Colts too.... so that'll draw my interest to the Colts. And then there are some other players, too, like in pro hockey there's this player who plays for St. Louis who last year played for the Avalanche, who, before that, played for Philadelphia. *So those were teams I followed because he was on the team. You know, he grew up like right down the street from me and I coached him in baseball.*

Interviewer:
So you know him personally?

Chris:
I knew him. Yeah.

Interviewer:
So you've got two things that seem important to you ... location and personal affiliation.

Chris:
Yeah. But it has to be a good personal affiliation.

Interviewer:
Now, tell me a little bit about how that, how you start to follow a player. What causes you to follow them?

Chris:
Hmm. Well, like I said, *usually it's because I have established some kind of relationship with them.* When *I was in Seattle I had a program where I brought players in, you know, to speak with the students and we played a little football game at the end of the day.* You know, and then I'd run into

them because an academic, an athletic community at Washington wasn't that big, so I'd run into 'em, you know, at sporting events or on campus when I was with my wife. So, you know, *I think knowing them personally, getting to know them, you know, we like to go to those like preseason autograph picture day type things and, you know, get to meet each player. I mean, that, I think to me that endears a team more so to me.* And like at Notre Dame, where *we had the baseball banquet and we sat with Javier Sanchez... we talked to him, we established a little rapport with him and, you know, we followed him and he was one of the players that we really were excited for.* He had some good games. So I think it's more, you know, *I think at this stage of my life it's more players who I've met.* When I was younger it was more players, you know, who were exceptional at what they did. You know, like in the 1970's I loved the Pittsburgh Steelers. You know, I never met any of those guys. I never even came close to it. But, I mean, they were so dominant and they were so talented.

In sum, personal significance can be built in two ways: through identification and/or a personal affiliation with a sport entity (i.e., team, player, or coach). The impact and strength of a fan's personal significance to a sport entity and thus a sport-related event has the potential to generate different interpretations.

Identifying Relevant Event Components

Another category that fans use to interpret the meaning of an event is identifying components of an event that are relevant and of interest to them (i.e., predictability, nature, location, and shock value) (See Figure 4-5). Accordingly, there are several dimensions that a fan considers when engaging in this part of the process. For example, an event can be considered unexpected or expected, positive or negative; an on- or off-the-field occurrence, and/or shocking/sensational or trivial. Predictability refers to the expected or unexpected nature of the event. If a fan considers an event to be a regular occurrence, it may be interpreted as expected. A fan can interpret the nature of the event

as being either positive or negative, typically by considering the consequences and impact on themselves and/or on the sport. An event can occur either on-the-field or off-the-field. An on-the-field event is typically performance based (e.g., Barry Bonds hitting another homerun, LeBron James being the number one draft pick in the NBA, Lleyton Hewitt losing in the first round of Wimbledon, Sammy Sosa being caught with a corked bat). An off-the-field event is typically behavior based (e.g., Roberto Clemente providing assistance to earthquake victims in Nicaragua; death of St. Louis Cardinal pitcher, Darryl Kile; Allen Iverson being arrested for assaulting his wife). Lastly, the shock value of an event, whether it is considered hi (i.e., shocking/sensational) or low (i.e., trivial) influences the amount of attention a fan pays to the event. The analysis of the interview transcripts was conducted from the participants' perspective, therefore if a participant felt that an event was negative or shocking or expected, then it was analyzed as such.

A fan can perceive several of this category's properties simultaneously. This simultaneous interpretation influences the meaning of the event and the subsequent impact it has on a sport fan. For instance, in this study, an event was rarely considered positive in and of itself; a fan typically considered several properties at one time when interpreting what the event meant to them. For example, one participant recalled Lance Armstrong's continued success in the Tour de France. For this participant, this event was considered positive, on-the-field, and expected. Additionally, one property could be considered more important than another. For instance, the fact that an event occurred on- rather than off-the-field may not be the most important aspect of the event to a particular fan. Again, in reference to the Lance Armstrong example presented above, his expected (i.e., predictability) performance (i.e., on-the-field) was considered a great

accomplishment (i.e., positive event); however, the participant placed more weight on the predictability of the on-the-field event than the positive nature of the event.

The properties of an event that can impact the interpretation of an event and what it means to the fan are the: predictability, either expected or unexpected; nature, either positive or negative; location, on- or off-the-field; and the shock value of the event, ranging from high to low. The discussion that follows presents each of these properties, supplemented by examples from the interviews and excerpts from the sport-related websites. As will become apparent from these examples, fans typically identify more than one property at a time while interpreting an event, therefore the discussion that follows will venture back and forth between each of these properties as well.

Predictability

Predictability refers to the expected or unexpected nature of the event. The term *unexpected* represents the type of event that the fan perceives as occurring with little regularity or may not have occurred before. For example, an unexpected event might be Kobe Bryant shooting 100 percent from the free throw line, and scoring 46 points in a game against the Kings. As will be presented later, it is not only the frequency with which this type of event occurs, but also the appeal of this type of event (i.e., shock value) that makes it memorable and meaningful.

Expected events are sometimes initially considered *unexpected*, however, when the occurrence of these events becomes fairly predictable, fans can readily anticipate the outcome, and may become less impacted by the results. Expected events could be interpreted as positive or negative (e.g., the New York Yankees making the World Series

playoffs year after year, the Chicago Cubs not winning the World Series since 1908). The following excerpt illustrates how an unexpected event can be perceived as positive.

> "I'll give an honorable mention to the *unexpected* return of Jennifer Capriati to the top of women's tennis." Dan McCone (SportingNews.com – December 30, 2001 (Fans pick best sports moments from 2001)

This is not to say that expected events are not attended to, some fans still enjoy the sport enough or respect the player enough, to continue to watch even though they "know" who's going to win. A good example of this is Tiger Woods. David discussed Tiger's "domination" of the sport:

> David:
> You almost assume that Tiger is going to win and if Tiger doesn't win, something must have happened. And I think it's even more so when you're hearing it from other players. You know, when you hear Nicklaus saying how dominant he [Tiger] is. Or, you're hearing Ells and Mickelson just saying 'he's on a different level than us.'

Although the Tiger Woods and Jennifer Capriati examples can be interpreted as being positive, some fans might find themselves rooting for the underdog in situations such as this or simply rooting for a close match. Some expected events do not bring on such positive feelings. For instance, most participants in this study revealed that Mike Tyson's continual bad behavior, both in- and out-of-the-ring has come to be expected. When a fan hears another story of how Mike bit someone or now has delved into body art, it does not come as a surprise anymore nor is it shocking. NASCAR driver, Tony Stewart, who has found recent success on the track, has been plagued by his reputation as a bad boy off-the-track. His dealings with the media as well as one well publicized scuffle with fellow NASCAR driver Robby Gordon in February 2000 have led to this negative reputation. One fan discusses the expectant nature of Tony's behavior:

> "Tony Stewart's past transgressions would be forgivable if it was not for the fact that he can reasonably be *expected to commit the very same misconduct over and over again.*" Joe Daudish – Westchester, IL (SportingNews.com – January 23, 2003)

The predictability of a sport-related event is determined by the individual fan. An expected event might be considered positive by some fans and negative for others. The following example illustrates how the New York Yankees' continuous winning streak is considered to be negative.

> Bob:
> Uh, baseball, the *New York Yankees seem to be able to win every year* so I definitely think there's a problem with baseball and how they're financially set up. There's no revenue sharing, the teams are, you know, basically market size and how you can get local media revenues and you don't share those at all. So *who's going to win it every year? The Yankees*. So, I think that *kind of takes away from the sport a little bit.*

Additionally, what is deemed expected by one fan might be considered unexpected by another fan. For instance, one fan who expects Tiger Woods to win every golf tournament he enters might consider a loss as unexpected. Alternately, another fan who also expects to see Tiger Woods win time and time again, may also realistically expect that he might lose every once in a while and thus a loss may not be entirely unexpected. An interesting realistic expectation from a fan can be illustrated by the following example. Alex, a die-hard Pittsburgh Pirate fan, recalled how hearing about one of the teams' players starting the year with an injury impacted him.

> Alex:
> I took note of one of Pirates better players, started the year with an injury. I was just following when he is going to come back and then probably a week and a half or two weeks ago.
>
> Interviewer:
> Did he get injured during the early season?

Alex:
Yeah. It was a minor injury but this, but I was just curious at to when he was going to come back.

Interviewer:
And when you found out that he was injured, how did that impact you?

Alex:
Not a whole lot to be honest because nobody had high expectations for the team anyway. I mean, like I wasn't, I mean, I felt bad to some degree, but you were not devastated. It was more like an, oh here we go again kind of a thing rather than, oh my God, what are they going to do now?

As many of the above examples illustrate, an event can be interpreted using not only the property of predictability but also any of the other properties in this category (i.e., nature, location, appeal).

Location of the Event

Location of the event refers to not only where the event occurs, but where the fan perceives it occurs. For instance, one fan might perceive Pete Rose betting on baseball to be an on-the-field type of event, while another fan might perceive it to be off-the-field. However, in general, this study found that participants were consistent in their perception of the difference between on- and off-the-field events. As was stated previously when talking about the nature of the type of information the media presents, on-the-field events typically pertains to events that are more performance based (i.e., scores, statistics), whereas, off-the-field events pertains to events that involve a sport entity and occur outside the realm of sports per se, and are more behavior based (e.g., players arrested for DUI, athlete deaths).

Because athletes are often considered to be role models, their behavior off-the-field is important in building a following. One participant, when recalling a negative off-the-field event, said *"I was annoyed when I heard about it [comment made by a professional baseball coach]. He is someone I respected and considered a leader. He's someone people look up to and he serves as a role model. What he said was careless and inappropriate."* Most fans admitted that a player's performance on-the-field was what first gets them noticed and they desire continued good performance. However, a superior player who is not respectable in other areas (i.e., off-the-field) may not become or remain a role model for many people.

> Felisia:
> I can't like people like that, you know, you look at Gary Sheffield who plays for the [Atlanta] Braves. I was watching TV one time and they were talking about how he had put a hit out on his mother. Like, come on. You're a professional athlete. Or, Dwight Gooden. How many times has he, and Darryl Strawberry gone in [to jail] with drugs and all this? And they're still around.

This final example shows how a fan felt that a negative off-the-field event impacted sports in general.

"The OJ fiasco is the most shocking moment in all of sports. For a world-renowned star to be implicated in such a hideous crime was a shock, not only to the sporting world, but to the entire society. It is a *real black mark upon sports*." Arty Gullotti – Ft. Wayne, IN (ESPN.com – Page 2 – Readers: Most Shocking Moments in Football)

Bob, a Notre Dame student, discussed his interpretation of a particular legal indiscretion that hit close to home. This event is an example of how an athlete's off-the-field behavior can not only impact a fan, but also destroy the athlete's current and future career.

Bob: Uh, the Notre Dame players, the yet un-named players who are under investigation for assault. I mean, that definitely made me step up and take notice.

Interviewer:
So, when you heard the news about the alleged rape, how did that make you feel?

Bob:
Well, I was just pretty much disgusted. You know, it didn't matter a lot to me that they were football players. But maybe it was a little bit worse because people just sort of always attribute the football players to the privileged class walking around here. But, *it just gives me a general feeling of, you know, disgust I suppose it the best word to use.*

Although Bob appreciates superior on-the-court performance, he revealed how Martina Hingis' negative on-the-court behavior, not necessarily her performance, influenced him.

Bob:
I'll watch women's tennis, I don't know why, but I'll watch Capriatti go against one of the William's sisters or Hingis. But, I never really liked Hingis either. I appreciate her being good, but I don't really like her that much so, I'll root against her when I watch.

Interviewer:
What is it about her [Hingis] that you don't like?

Bob:
Uh, she *seems kind of bitchy, I guess. She's always crying.* Kind of like McEnroe, but he was a character. He was funny. He's more of a character than Hingis, who is more whiney.

Additionally, the following fan recognized the greatness behind Carl Everett's on-the-field performance but stated how the meaning behind this event was quickly changed because of a disappointing occurrence directly afterward.

"One of the worst actually should be one of the best. Carl Everett's home run off of Jamie Moyer in the at-bat when he was hit by pitch. Everett was so mad after getting plunked, he pointed to the wall and basically told Moyer the next pitch he hits is going out. Man, this is Babe Ruth type stuff here … Everett hit one out in his very next at-bat, just as promised. Only thing is, the Babe never grabbed his crotch afterward like Everett

did. *That one "gesture" **ruined** what could have been a great sports moment.*" Kevin Reavy – Exton, PA (SportingNews.com – December 31, 2001 – Fans pick the worst sports moments of 2001)

Most participant's interpretations of either on- or off-the-field events were also interpreted as being positive or negative. Due to this interrelatedness of these two concepts, there is quite a bit of overlap presented in the next section.

Nature of the Event

Nature of the event refers to a sport-related event being interpreted as neutral, positive, or negative with respect to the event's impact and consequences on the fan and/or on the sport entity (e.g., player, team, sport).

Neutral Events

Neutral events were interpreted as being neither positive nor negative, but simply added to the fan's information base (e.g., a player getting traded from and to teams that an individual was not a fan of). In other words, the event was of some interest, but it did not impact them in any great way. Many times, these events were also interpreted as having a low shock value (e.g., trivial), which will be discussed later. For example, Alex recalled following the NFL draft simply because he was interested in what players his team, the Pittsburgh Steelers, would get. Although the NFL draft got Alex's attention, it didn't seem to impact him greatly.

Interviewer:
Can you think of anything that has happened that made you sit up and take notice in any of those sports, teams or players you listed?

> Alex:
> Well the NFL draft happened last weekend, so I took notice of which players the Steelers got … So I just, I took notice of who got drafted where.

Positive events were typically viewed as something that satisfied the participant (e.g., a fans team winning the Super Bowl) and/or had a positive impact on the sport entity or society (e.g., a quarterback throwing a last minute touchdown pass to win a championship game; an athlete donating money to a charitable cause). Negative events were typically interpreted as something that dissatisfied the participant (e.g., a fans team losing in the Super Bowl; an athlete's legal indiscretion) and/or had a negative, destructive impact on the sport entity (e.g., MLB strike; Mike Tyson getting arrested and going to jail for rape). Again, it should be noted that whether an event was interpreted as positive, negative, or neutral was determined by the individual participant.

The following reactions to Michael Jordan's (second) comeback with the Washington Wizards reveals how this event was interpreted as positive and negative, respectively.

> "I am quite happy that Michael Jordan decided to play again … Not only did it bring me joy to watch him again … he is still very good." Shimon Peres – Tel Aviv (SportingNews.com – December 11, 2002)

> "Michael Jordan is the biggest idiot ever. He came back once, that was fine; but twice, no. Fortunately, he didn't experience a career-ending injury. But, I think it was stupid for him to come back." E. C. – Cedar Springs, MI (SportingNews.com – December 11, 2002)

In this study, negative sport-related events were, in and of themselves, recalled more often than positive ones. Approximately 73 percent of the events recalled by participants were interpreted as negative, while only 19 percent were considered positive and 8 percent were considered neutral. The "Mud Sticks" theory, developed by the

Sports Media Challenge group, a marketing group that specializes in athlete image management, can be used to explain why some incidents cause more of a stir than do others (www.sportsmediachallenge.com). The "Mud Sticks" theory reflects the way most people digest and remember information. Most information falls easily into three categories: neutral, positive, or negative. According to the Mud Sticks theory, when information is neutral, it has a positive psychological impact because people are learning something about an athlete (i.e., abilities, personal demographics). Positive information has more impact because people are learning something about the athlete and they're developing a positive impression. However, negative information has even more psychological impact. Hence, bad news (a.k.a., "Mud") has a much stronger impact on our psyches and thus is remembered longer (Anderson 1999).

Negative Events

There are several ways in which a sport-related event could be interpreted as negative (i.e., destructive, disappointing). Again, note that other properties (e.g., location, predictability) are often present in the interpretations of negative events. Negative sport-related events were typically interpreted as off-the-field events; however, several negative on-the-field events were also mentioned. Negative off-the-field events were mentioned quite frequently and were either legal or moral indiscretions or attitudinal issues displayed by a sport entity.

Negative events can be destructive in a variety of ways: to the athlete (and their career), to the team, to the sport, to the league, or to sports in general. One of the study's participants, Ed, as well as other excerpts from sport-related websites, reveal how

pervasive this is in sports today. This first example illustrates how one fan felt that a negative event impacted a particular team.

> "I think the worst sports moment of 2001 is a tie between the whole George O'Leary coaching thing at Notre Dame and the Michigan-Michigan State game. First of all, in the George O'Leary thing, it *unexpectedly sunk the Notre Dame football team even lower than ever.*" Dan Fenner – West Bloomfield, MI (SportingNews.com – December 31, 2001 – Fans pick the worst sports moments of 2001) (emphasis added)

The following examples demonstrate how fans felt a negative event impacted a sport/league.

> Ed:
> I mean you've got a whole bunch of people whose hobby seems to be making children. And you know they just leave them – they've got kids all over the place. People like Shawn Kemp and many, many others like that. I mean, *how can you have any respect for the people who are doing this and for the league*? I mean, I *look at the NBA for the most part as a renegade league*. You know, people there who are, you know, one step away from being real felons. Allen Iverson leaps to mind right now, that's sort of what the thing is now. (emphasis added)

> "I hate the Cowboys, but any salary cap/free agency system that forces a team to cut a legend like Emmitt Smith is *horrible for the long-term health of the NFL*. Let's *hope this is a wake-up call for the league*." Scott Ellinwood – Rockville, MD (SportingNews.com – March 2, 2003) (emphasis added)

> "*The Giants and Dodgers leaving New York completely changed the game of baseball and led inevitably to the mess of today*. There'd be no talk of contraction or moving teams from city to city and league to league without the actions of 'pioneers' like Walter O'Malley. He and his peers have a lot to answer for." Willem O'Reilly – Buena Vista, CO (ESPN.com – Page 2 – Readers: Most Shocking Moments in Baseball History) (emphasis added)

> "... I wish I could get paid a full year's salary for doing eight months of work. Fans should set their own strike date. Who's going to pay the players' salaries if there aren't any fans going to games?" Rick Hardy – Vista, CA (SportingNews.com – August 16, 2002)

A well publicized negative event occurred in 1988 at the Seoul Olympics. Ben Johnson ran the 100 meters in 9.79 seconds making him the fastest human ever. It was an exciting moment, not only for Johnson, a Canadian citizen, but also his Canadian countrymen. However, the event quickly turned into a nightmare, destroying Johnson's career and his countrymen's spirit. Days after winning a gold medal, Olympic officials confiscated Johnson's gold medal. Ben Johnson had tested positive for steroid use. As a result, Johnson lost millions of dollars in endorsement deals and sponsorship fees and he was suspended from competition for two years.

Negative on-the-field events can also be interpreted as being destructive. The following fan appears to feel Michael Jordan's rotation with the Washington Wizards was destructive to his career.

> "Thankfully the Michael Jordan experience with the Wizards is about to end. What a career-tarnishing debacle that was!" Chris – Sacramento, CA (SportingNews.com – December 11, 2002)

Lastly, the following example illustrates that it is possible for both on-the-field performance and behavior to contribute to being interpreted as a negative, destructive event. It is interesting that both examples indicate that Randy Moss's behavior is destructive to the team for which he plays (Minnesota Vikings).

> John:
> The Vikings have a new head coach this year and Randy Moss, as I mentioned earlier. He has some real *attitude issues and slacking off, he's been accused of everything from taking plays off to not trying ... he's got an arrogant attitude about him.*

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> "There comes a time when a player's talent is outweighed by the baggage he brings with him. A coach needs to know if a player's talent is worth the *disruption. Randy Moss's attitude* is an insult to classy players like Walter Payton who put the team first even with stellar talent … Randy Moss is a perfect example of a spoiled child who has been catered to because of his physical abilities all his life, and as a result, expects the world to continue to do so no matter what he does off the field." Rick Graham – Yorktown, VA (SportingNews.com – September 27, 2003)

While destructive events are those that mean the athlete is engaging in either on- or off-the-field activities that negatively impact themselves, the team, the sport, the league, or sports in general, disappointing sport-related events bring some form of dissatisfaction to the fan. Disappointment can cause frustration, regret, discontent, or displeasure. For instance, George, who was a Lou Holtz fan before Lou became the Head Football coach at Notre Dame, had this to say about Holtz's departure from Notre Dame to coach at South Carolina in 1996:

> Interviewer:
> You listed Lou Holtz as one of your favorite coaches. Were you a Lou Holtz fan before he got to Notre Dame?
>
> George:
> I was, I mean, I was absolutely thrilled when they finally picked him as coach because I had followed his career and I really admired what he had done at Arkansas.
>
> Interviewer:
> When he left Notre Dame to go to South Carolina, how did that impact you?
>
> George:
> I was really sad. I remember thinking at the time I was surprised at how many people were kind of glad, that thought he had worn out his welcome and that they were tired of his 'shtick' and everything. I was disappointed. I would much rather he had decided to take a sabbatical year and come back and recharge his batteries that way.

The following fan reveals his frustration and discontent with baseball's home run record chase. Alluding to the idea that times have changed, he is not impressed with the individuals who have recently reached/surpassed the record. According to comments from other fans, it seems as though performance enhancing drugs, the equipment with which the players have access to, as well as ball park sizes, play a part in this frustration.

> "I'm unimpressed with Bonds breaking the 600-home run barrier … home runs are now cheap. Bonds, McGuire, and anyone else who has played through the last decade should have an asterisk next to their career stats. Their accomplishments are not as impressive as pre-1990s players and should be held in lower regard." Dave Holtz – Indianapolis, IN (SportingNews.com – August 12, 2002)

It seems as though some athlete's indiscretions are more quickly forgiven than others. Mike Fresina interviewed women in the wake of the Marv Albert trial in which he was accused of sexual battery. As the story unfolded, most women indicated that knowledge of Albert's indiscretions alone would not keep them from watching a game he was broadcasting or have any lasting effect on their view of athletes (Fresina 1997). However, Fresina (1997) found the trend of spousal abuse, rape, sexual misconduct and infidelity (to name only a few indiscretions) could have a cumulative effect on attitudes and subsequent behaviors. Single events that occur in the sport industry can have an impact on fans, which in turn can impact the marketplace. However, it may take a succession of events (i.e., one athlete continuing to make the news or several athletes engaging in similar behaviors) to make an impact. Ultimately, some indiscretions could be the proverbial "straw that breaks the camel's back."

This cumulative effect of player's (bad) behaviors may have had an influence on the following fan.

SportingNews.com – September 27, 2002
"There was a time, not that long ago, in sports when you could look at a guy and say, 'That is what is wrong with pro sports today.' Today, you can say that about far too many athletes ... Being a man means stepping up and taking responsibility. Wayne Gretzky and Cal Ripken, where have you gone?" Kyle Scott – Saint John, N. B., Canada

When experiencing a negative event, a fan might engage in a rationalization strategy where the fan logically, in their minds, makes an excuse as to why the event occurred, or a denial strategy where the fan denies the event occurred. This type of strategy can be utilized with both on- and off-the-field negative events; however, in this study it was found to be more common with negative off-the-field behaviors.

Dietz-Uhler *et al.* (2002) examined how sport fans react when an athlete from their favorite team, compared to the rival team, engages in criminal behavior. The results of the study suggest that sport fans reactions to criminal behavior by players on their favorite team in two ways, both being defensive strategies, by either defending the player (reporting great liking and more favorable evaluations of him/her) or defending the (their) team (letting it be known that they will stick with their team no matter what). Dietz-Uhler et al. suggest that the study's results indicate that fans might be content with the leniency that is often shown to athletes who break the law.

Mann (1974) found the most common reaction to a loss in a sporting event is "not violent outburst, but a series of face-saving excuses or 'rationalizations' in which defeat is attributed to bad luck, poor refereeing, dirty play by the opposition, or a combination of all three" (p. 38). This study revealed that not only do fans rationalize poor behavior, but they engage in different types of rationalization techniques in order to protect their status as a fan.

The most common technique identified in this study was a "humans make mistakes" strategy followed by using an athlete's record of superior performance to help the fan accept the negative behavior. The following two responses (one study participant and a reader of the SportingNews.com) are prime examples of how a fan was able to excuse Pete Rose's behavior (betting on baseball) and then reiterated the player's performance on the field.

> "Leave it alone already. The man [Pete Rose] made a mistake. Move on! Let him into the Hall, for goodness sake. The man ended his career with over 4,000 hits." Bill Brewer (SportingNews.com – December 12, 2002)

The following example illustrates how Nate seems to excuse most of the negative behavior by athletes because their on-the-field performance is so spectacular. This is an indication of the amount of weight Nate places upon on-the-field performance when interpreting an event.

> Nate:
> I'm sure I could think of some players I don't like. But, I always find something good about them especially if they can play. There's always something good about them. People that I wouldn't like would be people that were just thugs, maybe football players that just come out there and are just dirty all the time, but even then, I appreciate what they do because they're performing well.

The following example illustrates how fans rationalize bad behavior on basic human nature.

> "The 1919 fix by the White Sox is the most shocking moment in baseball history. Untimely deaths, blunders, unseemly behavior and even deranged fans are all examples of events involving human beings that could be expected to happen every so often given the human condition. But a professional team that connives to fix a game, enters a different dimension of human failing that is unmatched. It is a clear example of a stupid and immoral decision…" Jean Petter – Athens, GA (ESPN.com – Page 2 – Readers: Most Shocking Moments in Baseball History)

Another method of rationalizing a negative event is to blame another source (i.e., attributing blame outwardly toward another person or cause). The following fan's responses illustrate how an outside source (the meter maid) is an easy target to blame for Randy Moss' for his behavior. It is important to point out that both fans readily agree that Randy Moss was in the wrong.

> "I'm not a fan of Randy Moss, but I do believe he's the victim of an overzealous traffic cop who went above and beyond for the sake of a minor infraction." Russ Sparks – Jasper, AL (SportingNews.com – September 27, 2002)

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> "Why is everyone so quick to judge Randy Moss? Basically, he tried to make an illegal lane change. If anyone else had been in the car, the meter maid would have just written down the plate number and made out a ticket." William Benokin – Lakeville, MN (SportingNews.com – September 27, 2002)

Another method of rationalizing a negative event is to compare it to something else or something worse, either another occurrence or another athlete. For instance, if another athlete has engaged in a similar activity, it causes some fan's to then rationalize that this behavior is acceptable.

> "I agree Randy Moss might have some issues, but have any of you seen the NBA? He's a saint compared to those players." Jason – Minneapolis, MN (SportingNews.com – September 27, 2002)

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> "Michael Jordan has had gambling problems, too. Is Springfield going to keep him out of the Hall of Fame? Pete Rose should be judged by what he accomplished on the diamond, not for his addictions off of it." Marc Campbell – Albuquerque, NM (SportingNews.com – December 12, 2002)

Lastly, the examples that follow illustrate how one fan seems to rationalize the negative event while another fan can not forgive the event.

> "Leave it alone already. The man [Pete Rose] made a mistake. Move on! Let him into the Hall, for goodness sake. The man ended his career with over 4,000 hits." Bill Brewer (SportingNews.com – December 12, 2002)

> "Pete Rose broke the one rule that can't be forgiven. He agreed to a lifetime ban because of the overwhelming evidence against him. Since then he has lied about his guilt. He deserves contempt, not the Hall." Dan Gilmore – Eugene, OR (SportingNews.com – December 12, 2002)

A fan might also deny an event occurred when faced with negative news. This usually occurs when a fan does not trust the source of the message or the message itself. A fan that engages in denial is typically trying to overlook a negative behavior and thus denies that it ever really happened, or happened in the way it was reported. The following fan engaged in a strategy of denial when he first saw OJ Simpson arrested for the murder of his wife and her friend.

> "I'll never forget that photo of him [OJ Simpson] standing handcuffed, looking like a little kid in a heap of trouble, just a couple of days before 'the chase.' Nobody wanted to believe it." Brian Morrissey – Chicago, IL (ESPN.com – Page 2 – Readers: Most Shocking Moments in Football)

Leslie, did not, and still does not, believe that Michael Jordan's first "retirement" from basketball was not actually a retirement at all, but that he was forced to sit out by the NBA because of his gambling problem. Of course, she has attempted to gather more information regarding this "fact," but has been unsuccessful. Note that this reaction is different than rationalization in which the fan acknowledges that the event occurred.

Positive Events

Positive sport-related events have a positive effect on the fan and/or a sport entity. In this study, most positive events took place on-the-field (e.g., great plays, winning touchdown passes, exciting games); however, several off-the-field occurrences were also

cited (e.g., Roberto Clemente providing assistance to the needy in Nicaragua). The meaning the fan derived from a positive event tended to depend upon whether he/she was currently a fan (i.e., highly identified); however, this was not always the case. If the participant was a fan of the player or team, bragging rights were in order (BIRGing: Basking In Reflected Glory) (Cialdini et al., 1976). If he or she was not a fan of a particular player or team, and their favorite team or player was not impacted, the reaction was similar in that he/she recognized spectacular (i.e., impressive) on-the-field performance. Recall that one of the motivators for being a sport fan is to witness worthwhile and exciting sport action (Wann, Tucker and Schrader, 1996; Sloan, 1979).

Positive events can arouse very different feelings in fans than other types of events. Fans typically found positive events to be (1) exciting because the event portrayed an amazing or incredible feat and/or (2) inspiring or moving in some emotional way. The following example illustrates how one fan's indifference to an event's outcome was interpreted in a positive manner. Although Bob did not care who won the home run race of 1998 between Sammy Sosa and Mark McGuire, he was genuinely excited about the event and viewed the experience as a positive one.

> Bob:
> The year that Mark McGuire and Sammy Sosa were going after the record [home run] was great.
>
> Interviewer:
> What was it that made it so great?
>
> Bob:
> Because both of them were just so, such fan favorites and really into it. Sosa's a lovable character. He's out there throwing kisses, you know, waving to the fans and McGuire's, you know, definitely also a fan favorite. *It was just fun*. They love each other and when Maguire set it, Sosa was there and he came over and gave him a huge hug. It wasn't

really a, it was like a race but it wasn't a rivalry. They kind of appreciated each other a lot *and it was just fun*, you know. *There was nothing negative about it.* So that was good. I kind of wished both, they both did break it. Maguire just hit more. *So, yeah, that was good.*

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"I can't argue with the choice of Ray Bourque, so this is a co-best of 2001 because *the return of Mario Lemieux was incredible. After a 3 ½ year absence, Lemieux came back to post incredible numbers*. Not to mention, Lemieux helped lead the Penguins into the conference finals – a place no one expected to see them." Benny D. – Seattle, WA

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"The best story of the sports year is Lance Armstrong. He recently battled and survived cancer, and then came back and won the Tour de France, *biking's most amazing feat.* Wait a second, make that three in a row!" Kevin Kitchell – Bloomington, IL

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"I believe that there was a three-way tie for the best sports moment in 2001. The first was Lance Armstrong. The *man just continues to amaze year after year* through cancer and drug scandals. The second was watching Tiger Woods pull off his slam. *It was just amazing to watch.* Third was David Duval winning the British Open. Who deserved it more?" Chris Makris – Abbotsford, B.C.

The following examples illustrate how a positive event can be inspiring and moving, respectively, to those watching or following sport-related events.

"The best thing about this year probably was the World Series. It was *exciting and so was seeing a change of power for at least one year with the Diamondbacks winning over the Yankees*." Mike Hoffman

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"Ray Bourque … When he raised the Cup and *they showed his young son crying, I joined him, and I would bet my life millions of Boston fans were doing the same.*" Bill Lyman – Lake City, FL

Although it was more common for positive events to be on-the-field types of events, several fans mentioned off-the-field activities that were positive in nature (e.g., Tiger Wood's willingness to donate money and time to helping those less fortunate, Dave Winfield's foundation that gives free baseball tickets and healthcare to underprivileged children). The lack of positive off-the-field events being recalled may be a factor of the media's control over the type of information (positive versus negative), the focus of the information (on- versus off-the-field), as well as the amount of information that is broadcast to the public. As discussed previously, the media has a responsibility to report the news in an unbiased manner; however, even the participants in this study recognized that the media sometimes focuses on negative information and news stories that are considered sensational or scandalous or have some level of shock value.

Shock Value

The shock value of an event can range from high (e.g., sensational) to low (e.g., trivial). A sport-related event that encompasses a high level of shock value not only garners attention from the mass media, but also the consuming public. As the level of shock value increases, the probability of a fan developing a high level of interest in the event increases. The amount of attention given to the event, by the media and the sport fan, increases the likelihood that the event will impact the fan as well. Shock value does not simply reiterate the unexpected nature of an event; it merely suggests that the event has a different type of appeal that is often accompanied by an emotional component. The following examples illustrate events that were considered highly shocking.

> "When Roberto Clemente died, *time stood still. The bereaved city didn't know whether to cry or wind its watch.*" Scott – Pittsburgh, PA (ESPN.com – Page 2 – Readers: Most Shocking Moments in Baseball History)

> "... I glanced up at the TV behind her, it was on ESPN. And I saw a picture of Darryl Kile on it, and '1968-2002.' The sound was off, so I had no idea what was going on. *I jumped up, I was shaking...*" Jon – Boulder, CO (ESPN.com – Page 2 – Readers: Most Shocking Moments in Baseball History)

Of course, as discussed above, a fan can interpret an event based on several properties at one time. In other words, an event can considered shocking, negative, and off-the-field. Although there seemed to be some correlation between unexpected and high shock value events, the study revealed incidences of unexpected events that had low shock value. Take for example the sport fan that expects Tiger Woods will play well and win every golf tournament he enters. If this fan possesses little interest in golf (i.e., low relevance), when Tiger loses or does not play well (i.e., unexpected), the fan may become aware of the event because the media makes it a story, but it may not impact him greatly. As a case in point, Tiger has not been playing well on the golf circuit and in one particular tournament was entirely out of contention (the 2003 US Open). However, one sport fan was overheard saying "Tiger is the only golfer that even when he has no chance of winning, the media will still focus on him." Additionally, Tiger's picture, not the leaders, was on the front page of the sport section in the Chicago Sun Times.

Often times, events that offer a high level of shock value garner a great deal of attention from the media and the consuming public. Certain events, dependent upon the amount of personal significance a sport fan assigns to the event, seem to garner more attention and fans might engage in activities to try and gather as much additional

information as possible. However, some events although seemingly sensational by media standards, may only receive a small amount of attention from some fans, because the level of interest in the story is low, and therefore, they simply accept the news of the event and do not desire to acquire further information and become more informed. For instance, one participant recalled a drug arrest of a particular athlete and although the media presented this story in a sensational fashion, the participant whose interest level was low, thought the athlete was "stupid" to begin with and did not desire more information on the subject. It should be noted that this sport fan, although not a fan of this particular athlete, did possess prior knowledge of the athlete that helped him interpret this latest, in a string of, negative legal indiscretions. Therefore, even information regarding a sport-related event that has a low level of interest is often used by a highly committed sport fan to interpret current and future events.

Fans tend to gather additional information regarding sensational events for a variety of reasons. In this study, one reason cited fairly frequently was the desire to acquire information in order to develop a more informed opinion. However, because many participants were either skeptical of media reporting or simply because they wanted to learn more about an event before jumping to a conclusion, an "innocent until proven guilty" approach was often taken when accumulating additional information. Even participants that were not necessarily fans of a particular athlete sometimes took this approach. Because gathering additional information about an event is a popular activity among highly committed fans, some media sources center their efforts on up-to-the-minute reporting of certain events. For example, a new website offers breaking news of Kobe Bryant's alleged sexual assault in July 2003 (www.freekobe.com).

Participants frequently cited curiosity as another reason for desiring more information regarding negative sensational news stories. Gunton's Magazine suggested "there are more people who will give a cent for twelve pages of scandal, abuse, caricature and venal representation that will give two cents for clean, wholesome news ..." (Anonymous, 1898, p. 332). The appeal of sensational news has been explored from a variety of perspectives including sociology (e.g., Bird and Dardenne, 1990) and journalism (e.g., Clayman and Reisner, 1998). Many researchers contend that the emotional appeal of a story helps determine whether or not it is afforded valuable space on the front page of a newspaper (e.g., Danson and Soothill, 1996; Sorenson et al., 1998). These researchers found that emotional appeal is uncorrelated with frequency of occurrence. For example, violent outbursts after sporting events that result in numerous deaths may draw attention whether the events occur once a year or once a week.

Davis and McLeod (2003) examined sensational front page newspaper stories regarding "ordinary" people, those that were neither famous (e.g., movie stars, royalty) nor public officials or employees acting in the line of duty (e.g., politicians, police officers). Their study revealed the following categories of stories were considered sensational: heroism/altruism, cheater detection, reputation, treatment of offspring, robbery and vandalism, marital/courtship anomalies, taking a stand/fighting back, and miscellaneous category that included bizarre or unusual events as well as stories about people caught breaking specific rules.

Sensational sport-related events mentioned either by participants in this study or on the sport-related websites appear to fit into these different categories as well.

- heroism/altruism (e.g., Joe Delaney, linebacker for the Kansas City Chiefs, drowning in 1983 while trying to save two boys; Roberto Clemente delivering food to earthquake victims; Bobby Orr not cashing any checks during his last year with the Chicago Blackhawks because he had been injured),
- cheater detection (e.g., Sammy Sosa's corked bat; Ben Johnson testing positive for steroids after the 1988 Seoul Olympics; George O'Leary lying about his educational and athletic background),
- reputation (e.g., Randy Moss, Allen Iverson – bad; Cal Ripken, Tyrone Willingham – good),
- treatment of offspring (e.g., Ron LeFlore owing $57,000 in back child support; Sean Kemp fathering nine illegitimate children by various women),
- robbery/vandalism (e.g., John Croce, team trainer of the 76ers and brother of former 76ers President, Pat Croce, was fired after allegedly being caught on videotape stealing money from the pants of Allen Iverson),
- marital/courtship anomalies (e.g., Michael Jordan's affairs; Jason Kidd's assault on his wife; Tawny Kitaen beating her husband, St. Louis Cardinal pitcher Chuck Finley; Fritz Peterson and Mike Kekich swapping wives),
- and miscellaneous events (e.g., Albert Belle being arrested for DUI; Mike Tyson biting off Evander Holyfield's ear during a boxing match; Jayson Williams, being indicted in the shooting death of a limo driver and charged with manslaughter; the Tonya Harding/Nancy Kerrigan fiasco)

Interestingly, although these "sensational" events garner attention by the media, some fans may become oversaturated with such stories and the impact may be dwindling. In her book *Scorpion Tongues*, Gail Collins suggests that when "scandal fatigue sets in … ultimately, you create a culture that is not shockable."

Again, a fan pays attention to the news of a sport-related event for a variety of reasons (e.g., personal significance, shock value). For example, a New York Mets fan is going to pay more attention to information about that team than another; however, they might not pay attention to, nor remember, women's tennis scores that fly across the ticker on ESPN. However, highly committed sport fans may seek out reports of shocking and sensational sport-related events.

Hattie:
I couldn't even tell you who won this year's Daytona 500. I know it *wasn't one of the marquee names because it was something that didn't stick with me.* When I go to ESPN.com, I look at the headlines they have first and just see if anything looks interesting or *if its one of those kinds of stories that sort of gets itself* ***above the buzz****. I'm willing to read about a lot of different sports if they're seemingly a* ***big story****.*

A life-ending event was often described as being tragic and was interpreted as being a negative event with high shock value. The meaning fans ascribed to deaths of athletes differed based on the particular player (e.g., current vs. former player; super star vs. average player) and the circumstances surrounding the death of the athlete. For instance, the death of a player that was "past his prime," might not warrant much attention from a sport fan (e.g., low shock value) or greatly influence the fans interpretation of the event because "*he had lived his life already*" (i.e., Ted Williams). In fact, in some instances, due to the age and/or the health of the retired athlete, a death might also be considered expected and therefore less tragic. The death of a current player tended to have more shock value, but again, the interpretation of the event was impacted by the athlete's status as a player. For example, the death of a current super star was interpreted differently than an average player or one that had not played as long and thus had not had time to prove himself (i.e., Darryl Kile).

The circumstances surrounding an athlete's death can also influence the interpretation of the event. If it was felt that the death could have been prevented by the player (e.g., getting regular medical checkups, not drinking and driving, less smoking/drug use) then it was not considered as tragic. However, if the death was purely an accident then it might be viewed as more tragic and potentially be interpreted differently.

News of a major loss or upset could also be considered a sensational story. As discussed previously, dependent upon the fan's personal significance to the team (i.e., identification or affiliation), one fan might interpret this event as positive while another fan might interpret it as negative. For instance, one participant, a New York Yankees fan perceived and reacted negatively to the unbelievable finish of the 2001 season for the Arizona Diamondbacks (the 2001 World Series involved the favored Yankees and the underdog Diamondbacks). This particular participant engaged in the process of CORFing (Cutting Off Reflected Failure) (Wann and Branscombe, 1990) by stating "*they* just played bad and the Diamondbacks deserved to win!" (emphasis added).

The following fans' comments on the most shocking moment in baseball history illustrate how sensational sport-related events influence not only the meaning of the event but also the impact it has on the fan. As the word "shocking" is used in the question it is not surprising that the responses include the word "shocking" to describe the event.

> "I realize that I might be somewhat biased not only because of where I live, but also because of how recently it happened, but the unimaginable death of Darryl Kile is easily the most shocking moment that I have ever experienced related to baseball. I can vividly recall the day of the Jack Buck memorial service … Only a few days later we settled into our seats at my friend's apartment only to hear the tragic news. Words still cannot describe the shock and devastation of my friends and I, let alone the obvious effect upon the Cards family." Robert K. – St. Louis, MO (ESPN.com – Page 2 – Readers: Most Shocking Moments in Baseball History)

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> "John McSherry (age 51) died on Opening Day of 1996 in Cincinnati, and it was the most shocking thing I've ever seen on a baseball field. To see him stumbling back from the plate … it was just disturbing. Almost equally as shocking is the fact that Marge Schott pushed for the game to continue! Unbelievable." Charles – Cincinnati, OH (ESPN.com – Page 2 – Readers: Most Shocking Moments in Baseball History)

Although both of these examples were interpreted as being negative, sensational and shocking events can also be considered positive.

> Nate:
> I remember early on this year or last year, someone hit four home runs in the game and that's just like *unbelievable.* So that's something that anyone who talks about that game, you have to start by saying, "did you see he hit four home runs?"

Interrelationships Between Categories

Although the previous sections discussed each of the categories of the core process independently, it is important to reiterate that the emergent model contains categories that interact with each other in a non-linear fashion (see Figure 4-1). The study found (1) a sport fan may not consider all of the categories to be relevant when interpreting a sport-related event, (2) a sport fan could interpret several categories simultaneously, and (3) the categories, other than experiencing an event, are not necessarily assessed in any particular order when attempting to interpret an event. For instance, one fan might "experience," "identify relevant components," then "determine personal significance" of an event without engaging in gathering more information to become more informed about the event, while another fan might "experience," "determine personal significance," then "identify relevant components" of the event. Additionally, another fan might simply "experience" an event and then "identify relevant components" of an event. Although many of the previous examples illustrate this phenomenon, a few additional examples provided below demonstrate the categories assessed by study participants when interpreting a sport-related event.

In the first example, Chris indicates that he feels a degree of personal affiliation (i.e., personal significance) to Randy Moss because Chris played the position of wide receiver as a youngster and spent some early years living in Minnesota. Additionally, Chris identifies and interprets relevant event components, namely nature (i.e., negative) and location (i.e., on- and off-the-field behavior). Lastly, Chris acknowledges his familiarity of Randy Moss's reputation and prior behaviors (accumulated knowledge).

> Chris:
> Uh, I like Randy Moss and he's probably the biggest a-hole in football. I mean, *he doesn't do anything to make anyone like him*. But, *he plays for Minnesota, in a position [wide receiver] that I played as a kid*, and I love that position, so I can appreciate his talent. *I appreciate his God-given talent, but who he is as a person, he's a jerk and he does stupid stuff.*

In the second example below, George admits that his identification (i.e., personal significance) with a particular player, Ted Williams, was very high (i.e., "he's probably my favorite player") and was due to various off-the-field activities (identify relevant event components). Additionally, much to George's mothers chagrin, he buried himself in reading "Sports Voice" a publication where he received most of his sport-related information (i.e., becoming more informed). Interestingly, George also recognized how Ted was treated by the media, which was previously discussed as being part of becoming more informed by utilizing various media sources. Recall that some fans felt that the media was sometimes biased and untrustworthy as well as having control over the type, focus, and amount of information that was provided to the public.

> George:
> I think I would say my affiliations with teams are probably much stronger than the players over the years because it was when the boys started collecting cards with me that we would have, you know, start having these talks and they would talk about who my favorite players were. ... I thought about it for a while and Ted Williams retired before I was really

> even cognizant of his existence. But, you know, the *only reading that I did growing up was Sports Voice*, you know. I drove my mother nuts, but she settled for that ultimately, well at least there was some reading. So I knew a lot about the history of the game and how good he was. Actually that's probably one of those cases what I identified with, with somebody like him is *his ability to stand up for who he was, you know, to be his own man and even though it didn't play real well in the press all the time, the fact that he was going to stand for the values that he stood for. And I think, also, the fact that he gave up probably the biggest chunk of his career that any athlete's ever given up to do, to serve in the two wars that he served in*. That's just, for some things I really admired and so I kind of came to this realization through the kids asking me the question that *he's probably my favorite player* from that standpoint.

The third example involves Felicia who played professional softball for two years before the league folded. In our interview, she compared softball and baseball indicating how she felt that players from each sport contrasted dramatically. In this particular example, Felicia was reminiscing about the impending MLB strike and how many of the players are greedy and just playing for the money. In the example below, Felicia uses two categories to interpret the event: (1) she admits that she is a die-hard baseball fan ("it's not going to change my idea about baseball") and (2) she identifies two relevant event components, nature (negative – "they want the big bucks…that's ridiculous") and location (on-the-field).

> Felicia:
> We were not playing for the money. We were playing because we loved the game. Which, I think is different from why some people are in major league baseball. Yeah, they love the game, but they want the big bucks.
>
> Interviewer:
> Do you think there was ever a time in history that people played because they loved the game?
>
> Felicia:
> Yeah, I think back when it was like Lou Gehrig and Babe Ruth and all them. They didn't make that much money and I don't think they cared.

They just wanted to play. And I think you have certain players now that they just want to play. *But you also have players like Alex Rodriguez that was traded because he wanted more money. I think he made like $21 million a year. That's ridiculous*. What about all these people that, you know, make less than $5 an hour? Come on.

Interviewer:
Is that going to keep you from liking some of those players?

Felicia:
Yeah, but it's not going to change my idea about baseball. ... It's so ingrained in me at this point, I don't think anything could keep me from watching baseball.

The final example demonstrates how Chris again felt a personal connection to the event, Larry Triplett being drafted by the Indianapolis Colts. Chris' relationship with Larry began when they were both at the University of Washington and now, according to Chris, will continue because they both live in Indiana. Chris' admits his excitement about the draft results and will most likely experience other events involving Larry in the future ("I look forward to going down to Terra Haute").

Chris:
I listed some of my *favorite players* and then like the recent events that I recall, you know, about these players, or like, *Larry Triplett is a defensive lineman from University of Washington. He got drafted by the Colts*. I was *excited about that because I live in Indiana and I actually had established a relationship with Larry. And I look forward to going down to Terre Haute.*

Each of these examples is provided to demonstrate not only the non-linear relationship of the four categories in the core process model, but also the interrelationships that exist between these categories.

The Evolving Sport Fan

The impact of experiencing and interpreting sport-related events causes the sport fan to continuously evolve (See Figure 4-2). This evolution may be fairly unnoticeable in that they may simply possess more sport-relevant knowledge or it may encompass something greater. For example, some fans may begin the process of terminating their fanship upon learning of a negative, off-the-field event. Conversely, upon hearing news of a positive off-the-field event, some fans may become more identified while some fans may learn something about an athlete and become a fan.

A sport fan brings with him/her a combination of life and sport-related experiences to each sport-related event. A sport fan's previous experience, accumulated knowledge, and individual characteristics can influence the interpretation of a sport-related event. Demographic and sociodemographic factors (e.g., age, family life cycle status, gender) may influence the way in which a sport fan experiences and interprets a sport-related event. At the time of the study, Felicia and her husband, both avid sport fans, were expecting their first child. In a discussion regarding athlete's off-the-field behavior, Felicia stated that her perspective has changed now that she is at a different stage in her life.

> Felicia:
> I look at things differently, you know, with people that have families and do things or, you know, say they're going to do things for their families and then don't do them. Or I'm sure I do, maybe not consciously. But, *I'm sure the fact that we are going to have a family does play a factor. And I think maybe it was always there, but I think even more so now. It's more prevalent just because, you know, we are going to have a family.*

The following two examples illustrate how attachment to sports and teams are impacted by family life cycle orientation and other family members. David's attachment to sports

has changed partly because of a maturation process and partly because his family orientation has changed, while George's loyalty to sport teams has been expanded due to his wife's team preference.

> David:
> Things have changed. My love of sports is still there, but it's different. Some of it is, I guess, *part of growing up too. You know I have a family now*.

++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++

> George:
> *So, and then part of it* [loyalty to a team], *you get through marriage. You know, my, Diane and I used to kid each other that we had a mixed marriage because she's a Twins fan and I'm a Yankees fa*n. At least we're both American League fans so that works out all right at World Series time.

Just as a fan's prior experience and his/her individual characteristics can influence the meaning of a sport-related event, a fans' interpretation of an event can vary widely and a fan can also react and evolve in a variety of ways. Studies indicate that sport fans react emotionally to event outcomes and often respond to team outcomes as if they are personal outcomes. Sloan (1979) found that (1) fans indicated greater happiness and little anger or discouragement after victories and (2) watching sporting events can affect spectators' emotions, in terms of more positive emotions (i.e., happy, satisfied, pleased) when their teams won and negative emotions (i.e., angry, frustrated, discouraged, sad, upset) when their teams lost. After watching his team, the Pittsburgh Steelers, lose in the Super Bowl, Alex's reaction was filled with intense emotion.

> Alex:
> I think it was really an emotional experience. It felt terrible. Got me angry, uh, disappointed, and I was furious, up the scale as high as you'd want to go.

The following examples illustrate the level of emotional reactions that can result from experiencing and interpreting a sport-related event. Alex is a Pittsburgh fan through and through. If a team is from Pittsburgh, he is a fan. So, when one of his favorite players left Pittsburgh to play for San Francisco, this was his reaction.

> Interviewer:
> You mentioned Barry Bonds before, and how he was signed away from Pittsburgh. Are you a Barry Bonds Fan?
>
> Alex:
> No.
>
> Interviewer:
> Were you ever?
>
> Alex:
> I definitely was when he was a Pirate … then he left so then I *hated* him … I felt abandoned.

The following fan felt the same way as Alex felt about Barry Bonds; however, in this instance, this fan was disgruntled that the team kept Barry.

> "The biggest mistake the Giants made was trading Matt Williams, a true team player and leader, and keeping Barry Bonds, a team divider. *I can't wait until the day Bonds retires or is traded and I can become a Giants fan once more.*" Jim Garwacke – Atlanta, GA (SportingNews.com – August 12, 2002) (emphasis added)

Chris experienced a disappointing visit to watch his football team play Nebraska. His visit was tainted by the fact that the other team's fans were rude and obnoxious and he felt he was treated poorly. When asked what made him "hate" the Nebraska team and its fans, this is what he had to say:

> Chris:
> I *didn't really develop this hate until after I had been to Nebraska for a game.* We were told that the Nebraska fans were so nice, so sportsmanlike, nanananananana. *We sat in the end zone and I guess here's what really made me hate them.* We were walking down to a bathroom

> to get a drink, and it was really hot, and *people were jeering us, you know. Yelling at us, screaming at us, things I can't even remember.* But, I mean, I just remember there were a lot of bad words. And when I got to the bottom of the staircase, some old guy, uh 50, 60 years old, got in my face and was saying every negative thing he possibly could about me and my team…

In addition to reacting emotionally, a fan's interpretation of a sport-related event can cause (1) the fan's level of identification to change and/or (2) behavioral reactions. The following discussion illustrates the variety of reactions and changes that can occur after a fan has experienced and interpreted an event. The following examples express not only the fans interpretation of an event, but also the potential evolution for each fan, whether it be lowering the level of attachment to a team or sport, discontinuing support for a team, becoming a more knowledgeable fan, or becoming a more cynical fan. These changes are precipitated by the occurrence, and subsequent interpretation and reaction to a sport-related event.

When a fan experiences a positive event (e.g., record breaking performances, unbelievable outcomes to a game/series), their level of identification or attachment may continue or increase or an individual may become a fan of the sport entity involved in the event. Recall that the majority of the events that were mentioned by participants in this study were negative, off-the-field events. However, when participants did recall a positive event, their interpretation and reaction was either positive or neutral. In other words, upon experiencing a positive sport-related event (e.g., their team winning a championship) the participant indicated that they were still a fan or revealed the excitement they felt to be a part of the event, indicating a possible increase in level of identification which consequently facilitated their evolution as a sport fan. The following

example illustrates how Tiger Woods remains appealing to Bob because of the way he plays and carries himself both on- and off-the-field.

> Interviewer:
> Do you have any favorites in golf?
>
> Bob:
> I like Tiger, like everybody else. It's just fun to watch someone that's that good. And some other players that are good, like Phil Mickleson. Those are the two guys I like the most probably.
>
> Interviewer:
> What is it about Tiger that makes you like watching him?
>
> Bob:
> He's so good. He just carries himself really well. He's respectable. I'm sure it also has to do with the fact that he's breaking barriers. He's the most successful black golf player. He's really opened the sport up to a lot of people. People will come to the galleries that never used to come to golf tournaments. It changed it. Made it more fun I think.

Ed's recollection of a game during the 1951 pennant race illustrates how this event, he interpreted as being positive, impacted his level of identification with the Dodgers.

> Ed:
> Well I'll tell you what *always stands out in my mind* and I love to see it on TV is the 1951 playoff between the Giants and the Dodgers when Bobby Compton hit his home run. And I remember being outside, this is early October 51, I was outside with my brother who is a little younger than I am. In those days we had this little portable radio and we'd bring it out and you know try to set it up and get the angle just right so we could listen to the game. We were listening to the game on the radio, we're probably looking at baseball cards or something like that, and I remember when he hit the home run. *And Russ Hodges the announcer for the Giants saying the Giants win the pendant. That was a lasting moment to say the least. I loved being a Dodgers fan back then.*

Upon experiencing a negative event, a fan's level of identification toward a sport entity may continue or decrease or more interestingly, their level of identification toward another team or sport may increase.

Interviewer:
Do you find that there's a change now because, you had mentioned it earlier, that players used to stick with one team and you could name the players on the 1959, on the 1962 Yankees. ...And now do you find it difficult to remember who played for them three years ago?

George:
Right. The roster changes so often.

Interviewer:
How do you think that impacts you as a fan?

George:
I think that waters down professional sports across the board. *Yeah, I think that does take away a really solid part of identifying with the teams.* I just, it took something, identity is just not the same anymore because of that.

It seems as though the impending Major League Baseball (MLB) strike in the summer of 2002 had these effects on several fans. The following examples illustrate the frustration of some fans and the change that has taken place within these individuals with respect to the occurrence of this particular sport-related event.

> "*The reason fans aren't voicing as much anger as they did in '94 is we just don't care anymore* ... So go ahead and strike already. Stop trying to play on the sympathies of fans who aren't going to be there in September – whether you are or not." Louis – Waltham (SportingNews.com – August 16, 2002)

> "*I don't care if they do strike.* I hope they do strike, and I hope the owners lose a bunch of money .... Baseball seems to think the fans will come back. They always come back. *I've got news for you baseball: I'm not coming back.* I used to attend over 10 games a year. *I used to buy merchandise. Now I watch the games on TV. I haven't been to the park for a single game this year and I have no plans to go back. Instead, I spend my sports dollars at Chargers games.*" Adam (SportingNews.com – August 16, 2002)

> "*I gave up watching and supporting pro sports years ago when the sports turned to thug ball, team owners paid for their complexes with our tax dollars, and the athletes believed they deserved instant millions, also at my expense ... As for me, my dollars go to the college game*, where

> hopefully some of these athletes will get an education and realize it's still only a game." Edward Greenlee – Garland, TX (SportingNews.com – August 16, 2002)
>
> " ... I just wish I could have grown up in the golden era of American sports before steroids and growth hormones, when guys like [Ted] Williams, [Mickey] Mantle, [Babe] Ruth and others hit homers without steroids and without needing to make $100 million. *Bring on college football!*" Bradley Stuhlman – Clinton, CT (SportingNews.com – August 16, 2002)

Although the threat of another baseball strike in summer 2002 caused many fans to wash their hands of MLB, some die hard baseball fan most likely stuck around. For Ed, the threat of yet another MLB strike had a different effect. Even though Ed was a die hard baseball fan, he seemed to have had enough when MLB (Major League Baseball) was threatening to strike again during the summer of 2002. The strike of 1994 had taken its toll on Ed and so when it was likely to happen again, he announced to his family that he was boycotting baseball for good. Ed also made this announcement during the strike in 1994, but try as he might, in the wake of an additional negative event, Ed just could not let go of his attachment to baseball.

> Ed:
> I was very upset in '94 when they closed shop. I mean I thought that was the dumbest thing I've ever heard. And in fact I know a lot of people that said I'm never going to watch baseball again. And it took about a year and a half after that to realize you know that truly is a stupid attitude. *The fact is it's a game I love and love watching it, and love following it and keeping track of it. You know why should I punish myself* or beat up on myself because some idiots out there are just so selfish that they don't know how to share the pie really is what it comes down to more than anything.

One Internet website (www.major-league-baseball-strike.com) is devoted to presenting information, both serious and humorous regarding the baseball strike(s). On the front page, it reads "Strike 1: 1982; Strike 2: 1994; Strike 3: 2002 – They're Out!"

This illustrates the impact that this event has had on fans and the reaction to this and any future strikes that may occur. For an avid fan, severing all ties to a team or sport probably does not occur very often because it would most likely take an event whose impact was enormous to cause this type of reaction. However, the following examples reveal just how far fans are willing to go to deal with the MLB strike.

> "If the players strike, it won't bother me, because they are not fun to watch any more ... *I don't even bother to watch anymore.* I say strike – and put some college games on, where the kids play because they love the game and not for the money." Mike – Virginia Beach, VA (SportingNews.com – August 16, 2002)

> "To those morons squabbling over the pot of gold: *I won't be contributing to the pot anymore after another work stoppage. Have a nice life.*" Scott – Albuquerque, NM (SportingNews.com – August 16, 2002)

> "It is time for the current players all to retire and go home. They have ruined the game of baseball forever. *It is no longer a fun game for both players and fans ... I have been a fan for over 50 years, but I won't be one after August 30.*" Edwin J. Christy – Birmingham, AL (SportingNews.com – August 16, 2002)

Keith's loss of interest in professional basketball was caused by the strike and player's obsession with money, instead of playing for the love of the game.

> Keith:
> You know the way that it has impacted me most is that I still love the game but *my love of the sport has dwindled*...it's not as strong and I guess that is part of growing up too. I *wouldn't care if the NBA folded right now* ... my love of college sports has definitely replaced the professional level, because I view it as being more pure. You know, I always talk to people and I say *when the NBA went on strike, from that point, I really wash my hands of the NBA.* Then they say, 'why do you still watch baseball, they went on strike?' And I was like, yea, I know, it's a double standard, but it's been harder for me to let go of baseball.

Ed's reaction and resultant evolution into terminating his loyalty to the NBA was very similar to Keith's.

Interviewer:
So even though they [New York Knicks] were a poor performing team you continued to follow them?

Ed:
Right. And then in the late 60's and early 70's they got to be real good. In fact they won the championship a couple of times, and did well at other times. ... The people on their team in the late 60's and early 70's were really class people. I mean Bill Bradley was on their team for crying out loud, and Dave DeBusher, Walt Frazier. I mean people, Willis Reed people who you know were real decent people, good role models. And you never heard about any kind of trouble that they got into or anything else. So that was kind of fun following them. Jerry Lucas another one; fast forward - now they've had periods in the last ten years that they've been pretty good. In fact they've been in the finals a couple of times. *But I really am not even a little bit interested because you know they're just a bunch of hoodlums really is what it seems like.*

The next example illustrates one fans interpretation and subsequent reaction to a recent occurrence in the NFL (National Football League). Emmitt Smith had played for the Dallas Cowboys since he was drafted in 1990 from the University of Florida. In February 2003, the Dallas Cowboy organization released Emmitt, much to the chagrin of many Cowboy fans. It appears as though this particular fan is going to give up watching the Dallas Cowboys after experiencing this (negative) event.

> "Letting Emmitt Smith go was the worst mistake the Cowboys have ever made. He is the only reason I watched the Cowboy games. He was the best and most respected player they had. *Now they have nothing for me to watch*." T. K. Guinn – Jennings, OK (SportingNews.com – March 2, 2003)

Because this study focused on highly committed fans, these individuals already follow sports, teams, and/or players. It was rare to find a current sport fan that became a fan of an additional sport, team, or player; however, a few examples did surface.

> "Got to go with the World Series. *I love the Astros, but after that, I root for the Diamondbacks* ... It was probably the best World Series in my memory. The young franchise going toe-to-toe with the most heralded

> franchise in baseball and winning it was a thrill to see." Erich Eisenach – Kingwood, TX (SportingNews.com – December 30, 2001 (Fans pick best sports moments from 2001)) (emphasis added)

This last example illustrates how one fan interpreted the 1994 MLB strike as not only impacting the sport drastically, but also impacting sport fans, including himself.

> "Not the Kaiser, not Hitler, not the Depression, not scandal, nor natural disaster; nothing had ever stopped the Fall Classic. In 1994, *baseball became the first major professional sport whose championship was canceled by its own accord*. It forever broke the naïve illusion that sports were an eternal constant, a refuge somehow immune. It *forever broke the emotional trust in fans for all sport. We are more cynical now and more grown-up, and not as childlike in our devotion*." John Lillie – Nashville, TN (ESPN.com – Page 2 – Readers: Most Shocking Moments in Baseball History) (emphasis added)

Although research indicates that a fan can be impacted emotionally when experiencing (i.e., watching) a sporting event, no one has examined how sport fans evolve as they interpret a sport-related event. This study suggests that this evolution is dependent upon not only the experience with a sport-related event and the level of identification toward a sport entity, the elements of an event that a fan identifies as relevant, how a fan becomes more informed regarding the sport-related event and how he/she wrestles with issues that arise from accumulating this additional information through media sources, but also the fan's past experiences, knowledge, and sociodemographic factors.

External Contextual Influencers

Outside macro-environmental factors might also influence a fan's interpretation of a sport-related event and his/her evolution as a sport fan. These external factors fall outside the realm of the sport-related event and the individual characteristics and experiences a fan brings to an event. Although this study did not uncover a wide variety

of external factors, it is pertinent to recognize that these types of factors have the potential to impact the way in which an event is experienced and interpreted. For example, George recalled the terrorist activity at the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich, Germany. It is important to note that this impacted not only the way in which George interpreted the event, but also his perspective toward sports and being a sport fan. This example illustrates several concepts contained in the model: experiencing an event, fan evolution, individual characteristics, and external context influences.

> George:
> I remember the '72 Munich Olympics and what happened there, you know, real well, almost like it was yesterday.
>
> Interviewer:
> And how did that impact you?
>
> George:
> Well, it *made you stop and think about the, you know, it was something that was way beyond sports* and the, you know, that sports had all these other ramifications and I think you... Like I was pretty simple minded growing up. I was what I would describe as kind of a typical guy and I was much more into sports than world events and so it really made you step back and think about, other things that were going on in the world and the international consequences and those types of things. I guess I'd say the work stoppages in baseball over the years, you know, that made you step back a little bit. *I think it's a lot of combination with getting older* and having other diverse interests as well, you know, that maybe where it was more of a do or die, life or death situation that, you know, maybe you start to realize that sports isn't so important. Maybe being a fan isn't as reciprocated on the other side from the teams and the players and that kind of thing, maybe the way you think. So, I mean, those are the two things that come to mind when you ask that question.

Another more recent contextual influence was the September 11th terrorist attacks. This event impacted a great deal of people in a variety of ways, but it probably was not expected to have a particular impact on sports or sport fans. However, after that event, NFL games, college football games, and MLB games were cancelled. When the games

resumed, the victims of the attacks were honored by moments of silence and fans waving American flags in stadiums and arenas. Before the Dodgers played the Giants in San Francisco, there was no traditional first pitch from a dignitary; instead, the son of a man who died in the attacks placed the ball on the pitcher's mound. (http://edition.cnn.com/2002/US/09/11/ar911.memorial.nation) On September 11, 2002, players and fans observed a moment of silence at 9:11 p.m. during evening games. Ed, one of the study participants recalled how the 9/11 attacks impacted his experience and interpretation of a baseball game he attended after the attacks, as well as how this external influence impacted his evolution as a sport fan.

> Ed:
> Well, the ceremonies after September 11 last year were especially significant in my mind. In fact, I went to one of them, we went to the White Sox Park in the first game after the attacks, and that was moving. I think some of the other teams did that too. The attacks and seeing how people reacted, came together, was really moving. It really made me see things from a different, a new, perspective. Made me, gave me, a bigger understanding of what's important.

Although this study uncovered only a few examples, it is important to acknowledge the potential impact that external contextual influencers, unrelated to a sport-related event, have not only on sports, but also sport fans.

SUMMARY

This chapter examined sport fan's interpretations of sport-related events and how these events impacted them as fans. One primary question guided this research: What causes a person to become, remain, or cease being a sport fan? The concepts that emerged were grounded in two sets of data: the primary source, interviews from study

participants and the secondary source, excerpts from fans that wrote in either on their own accord or to vote online on two different websites (www.SportingNews.com and www.ESPN.com).

The process of becoming a sport fan was found to be influenced by several conditions, namely geographical location, family, and interaction with an event. The theory that emerged illustrates different categories, properties, and dimensions of an event that enable fans to interpret a sport-related event and determine what it means to them as sport fans. After becoming a fan, the way in which the categories surrounding a sport-related event are interpreted is important in determining how that event will cause the fan to evolve. The process of interpreting a sport-related event can be based on the interaction between four categories: experiencing the event, becoming more informed, determining the personal significance of the event, and identifying relevant event components.

The way in which fans experience and/or learn about an event can impact the way in which it is interpreted (e.g., experiencing the event first hand, reading about it in the newspaper the next day, watching the event on television). When a sport-related event occurs, fans often face dealing with source and information issues that arise due to the type and amount of media attention given to the event. These issues involve how trustworthy the information is considered and the perceived control the media has over the information they disseminate. The media plays a large role in disseminating information, both positive and negative, regarding on- and off-the-field sport-related events.

There are several ways in which an event can have personal significance and thus have the potential to cause different reactions based upon the impact and strength of the personal significance. A fan also goes through a process of identifying relevant event components. For instance, location, predictability, shock value, and nature of the event can influence what an event means to the fan and how it impacts them. Finally, external contextual influences can impact the way in which a fan experiences and interprets a sport-related event.

Upon experiencing and interpreting a sport-related event, a fan determines what an event means to them and continues to evolve as a sport fan. Regardless of the impact of a sport-related event, a degree of change occurs within the fan, even if it only consists of becoming a more knowledgeable fan. It is the constant effect of experiencing and interpreting sport-related events that determines what kind of fan an individual will become and remain. The next and final chapter describes contributions of the study, managerial, research, and pedagogical implications, and areas of future research that should be explored.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

CHAPTER OUTLINE

This study has attempted to develop a theory that describes the meaning that individuals ascribe to a sport-related event as it contributes to the process of becoming and being a fan. This chapter offers conclusions from the study and addresses the contributions and implications of this research. A review of the study is presented first, followed by the study's contributions. The third section provides implications for various stakeholders within the sport industry. Finally, areas of interest for future research are offered in the fourth section, and several summary remarks are made in conclusion.

REVIEW OF THE STUDY

This study set out to offer insight into an important phenomenon within the sport-marketing world. Understanding sport fans and the behaviors they exhibit toward their favorite sport entity (e.g., team, player) is considered an essential aspect of sport marketing. Sport marketing executives need to understand (1) what motivates people to attend or watch games, (2) why and how fan loyalty is formed, maintained, and lost, (3) what sports fans are loyal to, and (4) how loyalty plays out in the purchase and/or consumption of sport-related products. Although all of these aspects of fan support are important, and research has begun to examine many of these areas, sport-marketing executives also need to understand how sport fans interpret sport-related events. The way in which sport marketing organizations respond to and evaluate fan's perceptions of, and

behavior following, a sport-related event (e.g., sudden death of a player, an athlete being arrested for a legal indiscretion, a team winning consecutive championships) provide valuable information for managers in leading an organization through such events.

Chapter One presented the impetus for studying events that were originally thought to be of a critical nature. Literature from diverse fields (e.g., education, terrorism, law enforcement, human behavior, counseling) provided the researcher with definitions of a *critical incident*. This study began by exploring sport fans' perceptions of, and reactions to, sport-related *critical* incidents (e.g., what types of events stood out for the study participants, how they were impacted by these events, and how they reacted to these events). Grounded theory methodology was selected as a means of exploring this previously unexamined phenomenon.

The basic tenet of grounded theory is that a theory must emerge from the data, or in other words, a theory must be *grounded* in the data. Stern, Allen, and Moxley (1982) assert that the "... emerging theory is grounded in the study data rather than being forcibly related to some grand theory which simply does not fit" (p. 202). This distinction between "emergence and forcing" is fundamental to understanding the methodology (Glaser 1992). Grounded theory methodology begins with an area of study and then what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge. This study relied on interpretations of (1) interviews with fourteen highly committed sport fans and (2) excerpts submitted by sports fans on two popular sport-related websites (www.SportingNews.com and www.ESPN.com).

Through the process of collecting, coding, and analyzing the data, it was discovered that critical incidents were not the only types of sport-related incidents that

garnered attention from highly committed sport fans. Sport fans also interpret "other" sport-related events in such a way that facilitates their quest to become or remain a sport fan. The research was modified to study not only critical events, but also other types of events that tended to stand out in the minds of the participants. The model that emerged from the data contains four major categories reflecting the process by which fans interpret events: experiencing the event, becoming more informed, determining personal significance, and identifying relevant event components.

Additionally, a sport fan brings with him/her a combination of life and sport-related experiences to each subsequent sport-related event. By experiencing and interpreting the meaning of consecutive sport-related events, the sport fan continues to evolve as a fan. Regardless of the impact of a sport-related event, a degree of change occurs within the fan, even if it only consists of becoming a more knowledgeable fan. It is the continuous effect of experiencing and interpreting sport-related events that determines what kind of fan an individual will become and/or continue to be.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

Summary of Study Findings

The findings from this study suggest that sport-related events are interpreted differently as a function of (1) the individual, (2) the knowledge and experience the individual brings to an event, and (3) the meaning the individual ascribes to the event. For instance, some individuals may be life-long die-hard fans of a particular team, while others may have just become fans of the team. Additionally, as several examples in Chapter Four illustrate, one fan might interpret an event as positive, while another fan

might interpret it as negative; one fan might desire to acquire additional information regarding the event, while another fan might not. The findings revealed four categories that encompass the process a fan goes through when interpreting a sport-related event that facilitates in the overall process of evolving into a sport fan: experiencing the event, becoming more informed, identifying relevant event components, and determining personal significance. The fan then takes the accumulated knowledge and experience with him/her to the next event and the process begins again.

One factor in this study that was found to be influential to an individual's desire to become a sport fan was experiencing an event. In those cases, experiencing an event typically meant attending a game or watching a game on television with a family member and something about that event was etched in the mind of the young sport fan. Because of this, many sport fans can recall certain events that occurred early in their lives that influenced them to become a sport fan. Likewise, after becoming a fan, individuals experience many different types of sport-related events (i.e., attending games, reading about a favorite player) that influence their evolution as a sport fan.

Gathering sport-related information in order to become more informed either first-hand or through an outside source (e.g., the media), is also an important and popular activity among sport fans. Much of the information gathered by a sport fan is mediated by another source and can potentially impact the way in which the information is interpreted. It is common for sport fans to continue to gather information regarding the event, utilizing additional sources in order to make sense of the event that has occurred. In these instances, the initial interpretation of an event may or may not change based upon the auxiliary information.

Often times the information received regarding a sport-related event is not always positive or may occur outside of the playing field. For instance, frequent reports of professional athletes engaging in outrageous off-the-field activities are delivered via the media to sport fans. As a result, sport fans are faced with identifying the type of information that is pertinent to them as well as deciding how to react to such information.

An event might be more relevant to a fan if they are currently a fan (i.e., highly identified) or if they have some personal affiliation with the sport entity. For instance, if an event impacts a sport fan personally or if the event is considered shocking (i.e., sudden death of a star athlete); it can generate a different meaning for the sport fan than if the event did not impact them or was not considered relevant or interesting. These interpretations enable the fan to deal with the type of information they receive and to react accordingly.

The categories in the model interact with each other in a non-linear fashion. In other words, the results of the study suggest that (1) a sport fan may not consider all of the categories to be relevant when interpreting a sport-related event, (2) a sport fan could interpret several categories simultaneously, and (3) the categories, other than experiencing an event, are not necessarily assessed in any particular order when attempting to interpret an event.

Major Contributions

This study is the first attempt to develop a theoretical understanding of the meaning that sport fans ascribe to sport-related events as they contribute to the process of becoming and being a sport fan. As such, the findings must be viewed as conditional.

Further exploration of the meaning behind sport-related events is needed before broad conclusions and comprehensive recommendations can be specified. Even so, this study provides a significant initial step toward understanding how sports fans interpret and react to sport-related events in the process of becoming and being a sport fan. Five specific contributions are discussed next.

First, as the literature suggests, and as was demonstrated in this study, geographical location (e.g., Schwartz and Barsky, 1977; Mizruchi, 1985) and family influence (e.g., McPherson, 1976; Smith, Patterson, Williams and Hogg, 1981; Wann, Tucker and Schrader, 1996) were found to be significant factors for becoming a sport fan, particularly at a young age. However, one significant aspect of becoming a fan, the importance of experiencing a sport-related event, seems to have a stronger influence on becoming a fan than is currently demonstrated in the literature. In this study, several participants recalled events that were extremely influential in their desire to become a sports fan. Many of the examples provided in Chapter Four illustrate how the events that were watched or heard were instrumental in an individual becoming a sport fan. Witnessing and experiencing an event at an early age, in addition to other outside influences (i.e., family members, geographic location), appeared to be an important factor in becoming a sport fan. As will be discussed in the subsequent implications section, this is an important contribution not only to the literature, but also as it has strategic implications for sport marketing organizations.

Second, this study helps to broaden the phenomenon of a sport-related event. Most research conducted regarding sport fan behaviors and reactions to events focuses on either experiencing an actual sporting event (e.g., team success - Wann, Brewer and

Royalty, 1999) or reacting to news that impacts a particular sport or team (e.g., team re-location - Lewis, 2001). This study expands the notion of events that impact sport fans to include not only results of on-the-field events (e.g., wins and losses), but also any type of event that is sport-related. The consequence of this research demonstrates that any sport-related event, whether it is positive, negative, on- or off-the-field, expected or unexpected, has the potential to impact sport fans. For example, upon experiencing and interpreting an event, a fan can increase or decrease their feeling of attachment to the sport entity involved in the event. Or, the fan could simply become a more knowledgeable fan upon receiving additional information regarding an event. Therefore, the event, any type of sport-related event, and the resultant interpretation based on the other three categories, can be the catalyst which causes a sport fan to continuously evolve.

Third, many researchers have examined the impact of team identification on fan behavior (e.g., Guttman, 1986; Mann, 1979; Smith, 1983; Schurr, Ruble and Ellen, 1985; Zillmann et al., 1989). Most of the research conducted regarding team identification focuses on the motivation for and the consequences of being highly identified (e.g., Wann, Dolan, McGeorge and Allison, 1994; Wann, 1996; Wann and Schrader, 1996). Team identification has been described as "the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as fans of the team, are involved with the team, are concerned with the team's performance, and view the team as a representation of themselves (Branscombe and Wann, 1992, p. 1017). The amount of research conducted in the area of team identification suggests that this is a concept that has a far reaching effect on sport fans

and their subsequent behaviors. This study, however, provides new insight into the area of team identification research.

The results of the study indicate that participants tend to interpret a sport-related event based on two elements of personal significance, identification and personal affiliation. It is this second element, personal affiliation with a sport entity, which is rarely discussed in the literature. Personal affiliation can cause some sport fans to become avid fans (e.g., supporting their player or team regardless of their success) and engage in overt sport-related behavior (e.g., buying team paraphernalia). A sport fan can have an affiliation at a number of levels. For instance, a sport fan could have an affiliation with a team because they played for the team or were somehow related to the team (e.g., attended or worked for the university). Additionally, a sport fan can feel a sense of affiliation with players or coaches because they perceive they personally know these individuals. In this study, many participants indicated that a personal affiliation with a player caused them to follow that athlete and/or the team for which the athlete played.

Some researchers suggest that personal affiliation is encompassed within the concept of team identification (e.g., Wann, Tucker and Schrader, 1996). However, the results of this research suggests that personal affiliation, by itself, has a stronger influence on becoming and being a fan than is currently being considered in the literature. This study does not discount the impact of team identification in the process of becoming and being a fan. In fact, this research supports much of research conducted by these scholars. However, the results of this research suggest that there are additional factors including personal significance, that are involved in the process of becoming and being a sport fan,

namely, experiencing an event, becoming more informed, and identifying relevant event components. As the model depicted in Figure 4-2 illustrates, the combination of these factors causes a fan to continuously evolve as a sport fan.

A fourth interesting discovery and contribution of this study is how source and informational issues play a role in the meaning that a sport fan ascribes to a sport-related event. Sport fans typically rely on different media outlets as they desire to become more informed and thus gather additional information regarding sport-related events. Participants in this study revealed that they felt the media tends to control the amount and type of news that is reported with regard to a sport-related event. It is interesting to note that although the media is sometimes considered suspect (i.e., untrustworthy) and biased (e.g., presenting more negative than positive information) in its reporting, it remains a very popular means of acquiring sport-related information. Additionally, for the most part, participants claimed to be disinterested in reading/hearing about negative off-the-field activities; however, this information was used largely to interpret an event and evaluate an athlete's potential as a role model. Although previous research has suggested that sport fans engage in sport-related behaviors (e.g., reading about sport-related events), no research has been conducted that demonstrates how information gathered from the media impacts a sport fan's interpretation of a sport-related event.

Finally, this study is enhanced by the manner in which sport-related events were recalled by study participants. Previous studies have neither utilized this methodology nor examined fan reactions in this manner. Unlike other studies, participants in this study were not asked to react to specific events that recently occurred or they recently attended, nor were they asked to provide a listing of events along a timeline or a factual report of

past events. Rather, participants were asked to recall events that stood out in their mind, regardless of the time frame in which these events occurred. An argument against retrospective interviews is that they may not yield "accurate" information, as it may be difficult for someone to recall past thoughts or perceptions. However, Gardial et al. (1994) suggest a person's memory of a situation may influence behavior, regardless of how "accurate" their portrayal of the situation. Memory may also be a predictor of future behavior because people might act/react based on what they recall about a situation instead of what actually happened. Participants were asked to provide *their* interpretations of sport-related events, thus the model that emerged in this study is based on assessments of participants' interpretations of the events that they themselves recalled.

Overall, this study has provided some insight into the process of how sport fans experience, acquire, and interpret relevant sport-related events and corresponding information. It is proposed that managers and researchers may become better prepared to act and react accordingly if they possess a better understanding of the way in which sport fans interpret sport-related events, regardless of whether they are positive, negative, on- or off-the-field, expected, or unexpected; and how these interpretations facilitate change within the sport fan.

IMPLICATIONS

Due to the qualitative nature in which the phenomenon was studied, the findings led to the development of theory, not the testing of the theory. Thus, the concepts integrated in the theory have yet to be confirmed. However, if supported by future research, they suggest a number of implications for stakeholders within the sport industry

(e.g., team managers, league commissioners, marketing managers, athletes) and the media. At a time when sports, leagues, and teams are competing for fans, fan loyalty appears to be eroding and sport "brands" are beginning to lose their equity, their value, and their potential (Passikoff 1997). As this study demonstrated, fans, even highly committed fans, are becoming easily dissatisfied, disgruntled, and frustrated; particularly when faced with numerous and repetitive negative sport-related events. Sport marketers must acknowledge this, begin to understand the factors that fans take into account when interpreting a sport-related event, and engage in proactive strategies in an attempt to reduce the number of negative occurrences and to overcome the consequences that occur when a fan interprets an event negatively.

This study revealed several items that can have implications for the practice of marketing, the media, and members of the sport industry. Individuals and organizations (e.g., teams, team owners, companies that sponsor athletes, athletes) that have the potential to be impacted by the occurrence of a sport-related event and the subsequent interpretation of that event by a sport fan should become more aware of how an event, regardless whether it is positive or negative, on- or off-the-field, impacts sport fans. For example, companies outside of the sporting industry that utilize celebrity athletes as endorsers for their products may be impacted, positively or negatively, by a sport-related event. The recent charge of sexual assault by Kobe Bryant (July 2003) has the potential to impact not only fans, but also Kobe's endorsement deals and the companies/products he represents. The SportingNews.com website recognized the potential impact of this particular event and asked fans to vote on how they would react if Kobe Bryant endorsed a product for their company:

Question: If Kobe Bryant currently endorses your product, what action would you take?

- Suspend all ads until the case has been decided
- Continue to run ads until the case has been decided
- Cut all ties immediately

This question, in itself, acknowledges that sport-related events have consequences that have far reaching effects, not only on sport fans, but also on companies, teams, leagues, and athletes. On an individual level, an athlete may assume that being a superstar is enough to guarantee role model status and may discount how his/her off-the-field behavior can impact himself, the team, the companies he represents and current or potential sport fans. The following recent excerpts based on the Kobe Bryant circumstance provided above, illustrate how an event can raise many questions in the minds of sport fans and how fan's perceptions have changed based on their interpretation of the event.

> "You have to answer to your wife and your God? How about the fans who have supported you, Kobe? *What a lame role model you have become.* You should be ashamed of yourself." Charles Torrance - CA (SportingNews.com – July 21, 2003)

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> "Why did Kobe have this great-guy image in the first place? Does he donate some extraordinarily large quantity of time to charity? Or was it because he had not been accused of any crimes? Most people haven't been accused of crimes. I wouldn't say they are all great people, just civilized. *Well, that has changed now for Kobe. At the very least he is an adulterer (a.k.a. scumbag). ... Please, enough of these high-priced jerks insulting our intelligence.* Save it!" Bill Ryan - Atlanta, GA (SportingNews.com – July 21, 2003)

Moreover, the media can impact a fan's interpretation of an event, by concentrating on reporting truthful and complete information, and presenting both the negative and positive side of sports and sport-related events. Again, using the example

above, the media's rush to judgment on the Kobe Bryant case is illustrated by the following fan's comment:

> "I watched the decision to charge Kobe Bryant with a felony count of sexual assault. I have faith in the legal system and have to assume that, because of physical evidence and testimony, the state feels it has a legitimate case. Where my problem comes in is the district attorney's plead to "respect the victim's privacy." I would agree with this, but something bugs me. Kobe's privacy has not been respected. *His name was dragged through the mud and media before a charge was even filed.* Where's the privacy? Give Kobe a chance. Not because he's Kobe Bryant, but because our country was founded upon that premise. Let the courts work this out. Let due process rule the moment. *Public opinion can be a stronger weapon than the law, and that is a shame. I know the media will cover the hell out of the story. Fair enough, but cover it with delicacy and compassion -- for all parties concerned.* There are so many possible scenarios that might have happened. Let's give the court a chance to sort them out for us." Jesse Knight (SportingNews.com – July 21, 2003)

The implications that surfaced from this study are illustrated using the following six themes: (1) accentuating the positive, (2) looking at the forest, (3) setting up the shot, (4) starting their engines, (5) getting to know you, and (6) the ever evolving fan.

Accentuate the Positive

The model that emerged in this study illustrates a continuous process that a sport fan goes through when experiencing and interpreting a sport-related event. As long as the fan remains a fan, sport-related events are going to be experienced, additional information is going to be sought and gathered in order to become more informed, personal significance is going to be assessed, and relevancy of event components are going to be determined. However, this process does not conclude with an interpretation

of an event, rather it is sustained by the internalization of the meaning of the event and the evolution of the fan.

As suggested by this study, highly committed sport fans regularly engage in gathering sport-related information in order to become more informed. When engaging in this activity, they take notice of many different types of events and may even be exposed to certain information that he/she has little interest in (e.g., trivial information). However, as long as the fan continues to be a fan and pays attention to what is happening in the sport world (at whatever level), the sport fan will continue to gather and pay attention to incoming information. Thus, a sport fan will ascribe meaning to these sport-related events and will continue to evolve as a sport fan, even if it only consists of becoming a more knowledgeable fan. It is the constant effect of experiencing and interpreting sport-related events that determines what kind of fan an individual will become and remain.

One criticism of the media that surfaced in this study was the lack of positive information being reported by the media, particularly with off-the-field occurrences. As one participant stated "we don't know the athlete personally ... we only know what we know because of the media." Participants admitted to using off-the-field information to assess an athlete's probability of gaining "role model" status. One implication from this research is the importance of providing the media with reports of positive off-the-field activities. The media's reports of positive (impressive) on-the-field play helps get the player/team recognized by current and potential sport fans. If sports organizations would begin a campaign that focuses on positive off-the-field behaviors, the media will have no choice but to report these events to the public. As noted in the study, negative off-the-

field events attract attention because human nature plays a role in what is attended to. However, participants also indicated a tendency to assess the quality of the person by using off-the-field information. Therefore, sports organizations and the media might benefit by focusing on information that is more positive. However, sports organizations cannot rely on the media to be knowledgeable about and report the positive activities that are taking place. Sport organizations (i.e., teams and leagues) must also implement strategies to promote their own athletes/teams by distributing press releases indicating their player's positive behaviors. A good example of this is the Professional Golf Association's (PGA) self-promotion of the money given to charity from each tournament and the time the players devote to charities and to disadvantaged persons.

This study suggests that it is unreasonable and naive to think that negative off-the-field events are going to disappear; however, if a number of positive events were acknowledged and reported, a sport fan might be more equipped to compensate for negative activities, and thus build a stronger attachment to the sport entity.

Look at the Forest

The second implication also has to do with the media and the type of information that is presented to the consuming public. Most fans indicated a tendency to look at the whole picture, not just the athlete's performance on-the-field, when interpreting meaning of an event. In other words, an athlete is not a one-dimensional creature. He/she is not simply viewed as an athlete, but is viewed as a member of the society in which the sport fan lives and thus may be held to the same standards that other people in society are held to. Although, it seems some leniency is placed on the behaviors of famous celebrities,

athletes included, a sport fan typically considers more than athletic prowess when making judgments regarding an athlete or a team. It would behoove the media, as well as the entire sport industry, to include information about the athlete as a person, not simply the athlete as an athlete. Additionally, many teams and/or leagues could try to regulate some of the behaviors that their players exhibit. One participant in the study mentioned that he respected Michael Jordan because he was a superior athlete and he could always be relied upon to take the high road. As this participant recalled, Jordan always dressed professionally in his after-game briefings whereas some athletes would show up in sweatpants, wearing a hat sideways or some other type of head covering. This participant suggested that the league should impart rules of conduct with regard to attire at these press conferences. If the athlete did not comply, then he/she could be fined a certain amount of money. Even if the athlete did not comply, fans would know that the league was making efforts to bring some level of class to the sport. Members of the sport industry should be aware that sport fans are interpreting events on more than one-dimension. Concentrating on presenting the whole picture may enable fans to make better and more informed judgments and may likely build more loyalty or attachment toward certain athletes or teams.

Set up the Shot

The third implication of this research is one in which sport fans have a tendency to distrust the information they receive through the media. Although participants in this study indicated that several sources were considered more reliable than other sources (e.g., ESPN.com), a tendency to distrust some information still existed. Participants felt

that the media often reports a story in order to make them feel a certain way or presents a story too quickly without complete knowledge of the story. Not taking the time to set up the story may cause some fans to process this information, prematurely jump to conclusions, and interpret the event based upon what they think they know. Because of the rush to be the first to air a story, the media can destroy an athlete's image simply by presenting incomplete and/or inaccurate information. There's no way to get around the importance of airing information quickly and how this impacts ratings for a particular media outlet; however, the media should be aware that fans would rather have the complete and correct information an hour later than have incomplete and incorrect information quickly. Taking the time to make sure the story is complete and accurate is extremely important when understanding how fans interpret the meaning of a sport-related event.

Start Up Their Engines

This study demonstrated that there are several factors that play a role in an individual becoming a sport fan; geographical location, family influence, and experiencing a sport-related event. The first two factors were not only found to be significant in this study, but research also indicates their importance. However, researchers have not assigned the level of significance the third factor deserves. Many of the participants in the study were able to recall events that occurred in their childhood that greatly impacted their desire to become a sport fan. Although geography and family influence may have also been a factor, these participants recalled enjoyable, interesting, and exciting moments that influenced their desire to be a sport fan.

An analysis of the events that were recalled provides the following observation: in every instance, it was a positive, not a negative, interpretation of an event that created a desire to become a sport fan. Additionally, most of the events occurred on-the-field. Therefore, the implication of this finding is particularly important to sport marketing organizations that are responsible for making particular events happen. Obviously, a sport marketer has no control over how many home runs are hit in a game, who wins, or if someone catches a baseball, but they do have some amount of control over the atmosphere of the event. Since many individuals are introduced to sports and become fans early in life, sport marketers are given a great opportunity to provide a memorable event. Future research should be conducted with regard to a fan's early experience with a sport-related event to gain a deeper understanding of how and why an individual becomes a sport fan.

Getting to Know You

The results of the study indicate that participants tend to interpret a sport-related event based on two elements of personal significance: identification and personal affiliation. As discussed previously, team identification is a popular research theme and has been examined by numerous scholars. This study, however, provides new insight into the area of team identification research. This study found that personal affiliation with a sport entity can cause sport fans to become avid fans and can occur on a number of levels. First, a sport fan could have an affiliation with a team because they played for or were somehow were linked to the team (e.g., attended or worked for a university). Second, a sport fan can feel a sense of affiliation with players or coaches because they

know, or feel they know, these individuals on a personal level. Sloan (1989) discussed how "bonding" influenced some fans, typically female fans, to prefer certain sports because they felt they knew the players better because the sports allowed for "access" to the players. For example, female sport fans typically preferred sports where the player's faces could be seen (e.g., baseball versus football or hockey). Obviously, safety standards, rules, and uniforms are not going to be altered to accommodate for this; however, the implication here is that if a fan feels a personal connection to a player, he/she is likely to interpret an event differently than a sport fan that feels no direct connection to the event. The strength of this personal affiliation, whether perceived or real, can influence the way in which an event is interpreted. Therefore, it is important for members of the sporting community to attempt to build a personal affiliation with its fans. This can be accomplished by a team or athlete engaging in a number of activities (e.g., autograph sessions, community involvement). These types of activities might not only encourage increased levels of perceived personal affiliation, but also assure a positive interpretation when a fan interprets this off-the-field type of event.

The Ever Evolving Fan

The last implication of this research involves the process with which a sport fan experiences and interprets a sport-related event and continues to evolve as a sport fan. The myth of "once a fan, always a fan" can not be assumed in any case. As this study showed, even die hard fans can lose interest or become frustrated after experiencing certain sport-related events (e.g., Major League baseball strike, Barry Bonds leaving Pittsburgh). The model illustrates the complexity of the four categories that surfaced as

well as the significance behind the process of evolving as a sport fan. Each of the four categories deserves attention from not only market researchers, but also stakeholders within the sport industry. To become more aware of the process that fans go through upon experiencing a sport-related event is to understand a piece of the puzzle that has not been examined. For instance, team managers and publicists should be aware of how, why, and which categories are interpreted by sport fans. As noted earlier, the categories in the model interact with each other in a non-linear fashion. In other words, the results of the study suggest that all four categories may not be deemed relevant in all cases. Furthermore, the categories that a sport fan deems relevant may be interpreted simultaneously and/or in no particular order. Although the categories that comprise the model are important, the fact that fans continue to evolve upon experiencing and interpreting an event is even more significant. Members of the sporting industry should acknowledge that being a sport fan is a dynamic process and that a sport fans level of identification and loyalty could be altered by experiencing and interpreting just one sport-related event. Teams, leagues, sports, and athletes can not assume that a fan will always remain a fan. Therefore, it is imperative that members of the sport industry engage in proactive, as well as appropriately reactive, strategies when a sport-related event occurs. For instance, negative events should be avoided if possible and handled with care after the fact; and positive events should be publicized properly.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study provides a foundation for understanding the process of interpreting sport-related events and what these events mean to fans in their quest to

become and remain a sport fan. Understanding these interpretations requires working with sport fans as they incur certain sport-related events. Results from this study demonstrate that upon experiencing a sport-related event, a sport fan engages in various activities in order to interpret what the event means and by doing so, the sport fan continues to evolve. Research on the process of becoming a fan through interpreting and experiencing a sport-related event has the potential to keep researchers busy for many years. This study began with an initial analysis of the reactions toward sport-related critical incidents. The progression that took place during this study and the subsequent concepts that emerged provides the basis for validating the theory and extending the study to incorporate additional approaches of studying the phenomenon.

Validation Studies

This study is limited to making theoretical propositions, thus it has not provided validation of the theoretical concepts and relationships that evolved. Validation of such concepts must be accomplished by exploring different samples and utilizing different research methods. Although Strauss and Corbin (1990) indicate that emergent concepts are partially validated in grounded theory via constant comparison between emergent concepts and data, these validations are only provisional. In other words, the findings are subject to change as additional data become available. Validation of the theoretical relationships proposed in this study can occur in a number of ways. This type of validation was not intended with this study, but does serve to limit the universal assertions that can be made from the findings.

This study developed a theory of how sport fans ascribe meaning to sport-related events while becoming and remaining a fan. This theory should be validated regarding the (1) categories, properties, and dimensions, (2) relationships within the process, and (3) the context in which this theory applies. Although the theory stands alone as a contribution to knowledge, it should be validated within multiple contexts using a variety of methods to build confidence in its stability and provide a firm foundation for normative advice to members of the sporting industry and media outlets.

Specifically, validation studies might be driven by the following kinds of questions:

1. Can this study's theory be validated using other data sources in the sport industry?
2. Does the process model provide for variation that might exist?
   a. Are the categories found in the model comprehensive enough to describe how fans interpret sport-related events?
   b. Are the properties within each category comprehensive enough?
3. Is the theory context bound?
   a. Using less avid fans, other countries, untraditional sports, other industries (e.g., Hollywood, corporate decisions and activities)

Validation with Other Data Sources, Methods

Future research must make validation attempts via a number of methods. One strategy to improve the credibility of the results and confirm the finding of a study is to triangulate the data. Triangulation involves obtaining data from more than one source and/or using more than one method to get it. This study used three data sources: (1) personal interviews with highly committed sports fans, (2) excerpts written by sports fans found on several sport-related websites, and (3) extant literature pertaining to various aspects of the emergent theory (e.g., team identification, media bias, sport fan

commitment, sport fan motivation). Other methods of data collection could be utilized to add richness to the data and help confirm the findings. For instance, additional insights into how fans interpret and react to a sport-related event could be gleaned from conducting additional qualitative studies using observation research or focus group data. As base-line data is accumulated, the potential for collecting data via survey methods or experimental manipulations is also a possibility. Different elements of the theory may be tested using various sport-related events as the backdrop. The results from these other types of data collection can provide evidence and reassurance to the question of internal validity.

Validation studies can also seek to verify the process of interpreting a sport-related event within different contexts. By addressing context questions, the generality of the model can be determined. This study relied on purposive theoretical sampling and thus, as prescribed by qualitative research, the findings cannot be generalized to large populations. At the most limited level, this study's findings can be generalized to a population that is similar to the study participants, highly committed sport fans. All sports fans, with varying degrees of interest in sports, or even sports fans of a single team, did not have equal probability of being selected as study participants. Participants were selected expressly for the purpose of elaborating on the study's emergent themes. The sample consists of carefully chosen participants based upon their self-designation as highly committed sport fans. As such, this study's findings depict interpretations of sport-related events which may apply only to similar types of sports fans.

Comprehensiveness of the Model

The model that emerged from this study encompasses four categories: experiencing the event, becoming more informed, identifying relevant event components, and determining personal significance. These categories, as well as their respective properties and dimensions, should be validated within the context of highly committed sport fans. To respond to this may require exploring the theory with an increased sample size and/or utilizing diverse methods of study.

This type of validation can be accomplished by further qualitative studies (e.g., interviews) or quantitative methods (e.g., surveys, experiments). Regardless of the approach, the research should focus on the variation that might exist in different contexts and how this might impact the model structure and comprehensiveness. For instance, are there instances that might occur that are unaccounted for by the categories, properties, and dimensions currently in the model? By addressing these types of questions, the reliability and dependability of the model can be determined.

Contextual Applications

Once validated within the context of highly committed sport fans, the model should be validated and examined for potential contextual limits. Studies might be conducted with (1) fans that do not consider themselves to be highly committed, (2) highly committed fans from other countries and possibly other sports, and (3) fans experiencing the same sport-related event, and (4) fans of other types of famous individuals within another industry (e.g., Hollywood).

Different Fan Base

Additional studies that include interviews with moderately and less committed sport fans might prove interesting and insightful and should be conducted in order to understand the influence of sport-related events on all types of sport fans. For instance, less than avid fans may not access the media to seek out sport-related information quite as often as their avid counterparts. Therefore, when faced with information regarding a sport-related event, less than avid fans may not have the type or amount of internal information (e.g., personal significance, experience) or desire for involvement in order to deal with the incoming information in the way that an avid fan might. As a result, an avid fan might be more willing and able to rationalize negative off-the-field behavior than a "mere observer" who has little to no emotional connection to the player. The theory would make a greater contribution to the literature and the sporting industry if it can be generalized to accommodate for differing levels of sport fans.

Multicultural Analysis

Another area of research that may be extremely interesting to examine is sport fan interpretations of sport-related events across different cultures. The interpretations and theoretical concepts developed here apply to a set of participants within a small mid-western community. There are obviously thousands, if not millions, of sports fans throughout the United States. The variation in focus of fanship (i.e., team vs. player, locations of favorite teams, and length of fanship) as well as the distinct socio-demographic groups that were represented increases the likelihood that findings would be similar to findings with similar sports fans within the United States. However, findings

are limited to this country and the sports that are carried within its boundaries. In different countries, sports that one culture considers "traditional" are likely to be different from other cultures. Additionally, fans in other countries may have a different level of access to sport-related events that occur in their country and information regarding those events. The amount and type of information presented to the public in these countries may also differ and may impact the interpretation of such events. A question of interest is whether fans across different cultures generate similar interpretations of sport-related events.

Specific Sport-Related Event Analysis

As discussed previously, participants were asked to recall events that stood out in their mind, regardless of the time frame in which these events occurred. Because of this, it is assumed that participants recalled events that they deemed important, relevant, and of interest to them as sport fans. A positive consequence of collecting data in this manner was that a wide variety of sport-related events was mentioned and this enabled the researcher to realize that a modification of the research study to include a variety of sport-related events was necessary. The interpretations that resulted and the corresponding model that emerged were due to the richness of the data collected in this manner. However, in general, interpretations regarding the meaning ascribed to a particular sport-related event were not possible because many different sport-related events were recalled. It would be interesting to examine how sport fans interpret particular sport-related events. A study of this nature could advance the knowledge that

academics and stakeholders within the sport industry have regarding sport fans and sport fan behavior.

As was found in this study, the types of events that seemed to be recalled most frequently were negative, off-the-field types of events. A sport marketing executive might be most interested in the types of events that seem to have the most impact. For instance, an event that simply confirms a fans level of identification and fanship is important, but an event that causes a fan's level of identification to decrease (or terminate) may be of greater importance. With mounting financial pressures, sports organizations cannot afford fluctuations in fan support and need to maintain a large base of loyal fans. Competition for support and money from sports fans has increased, in part, due to an increased number of sport and non-sport entertainment options. Additionally, as this research shows, negative sport-related events, either on- or off-the field also have the potential to be interpreted in such a way that impacts a fan's level of identification and loyalty to a team or sport. In order to accomplish this, it would be imperative to conduct the study within the most relevant context. For example, as Kobe Bryant is now being charged for sexual assault, it might be interesting to conduct a study involving Los Angeles Lakers fans to determine (1) how they interpret an event of this nature, (2) how they deal with additional information regarding the event, (3) how personal significance (i.e., player or team identification) impacts their interpretation of the event, and (4) how they have evolved as fans with regard to the event (e.g., the type and level of change that the event caused).

Other Industries

Finally, this model could be tested within entirely different contexts. There are many other industries for which individuals become fans, either for entertainment, financial, or consumption purposes. For example, other fields of entertainment can be examined to determine how fans interpret events involving movie stars, musicians, or politicians. There are an abundant amount of events involving these types of personalities. It would be interesting to determine if "fans" interpret and react to these events similarly. Additionally, interpretations of and reactions to corporate executive decisions and actions, as well as large corporate maneuvers, can be examined. For example, it might be interesting to examine how fans interpret and react to Bill Gates' Foundation (The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) donating millions of dollars to fund programs that reduce global health inequities (e.g., infectious diseases; HIV, AIDS, and tuberculosis research) and aid in the form of scholarships to educational programs across the nation. Do individuals develop a stronger link to this company because of this "off-the-field" activity performed by its Co-founder, Chairman, Chief Software Architect, and ex-CEO?

Expansion Studies

Although successful in answering the research questions put forth at the beginning and those questions proposed throughout, this study has also generated many questions along the way. This study was designed to propose answers to questions and stimulate programmatic research on sport fan's interpretations of and reactions to sport-related events. The proposed research program will be fueled by questions that emerged

from this study and will likely emerge from additional studies concerning sports fans and different types of sport-related events. Expansion studies may be driven by questions such as:

1. How do the actions, strategies, and consequences of one category influence the actions, strategies, and consequences of another category?
   a. What kind of influence does personal significance have on how fans deal with becoming more informed? Vice versa?
   b. What kind of influence does personal significance have on identifying relevant event components? Vice versa?
   c. How does personal significance influence a fan's experience of an event?
   d. What kind of influence does a fan's experience of an event have on becoming more informed? Vice versa?
   e. What kind of influence does a fan's experience of an event have on identifying relevant event components? Vice versa?
   f. What kind of influence does identifying relevant event components have on becoming more informed? Vice versa?
2. Are some categories (e.g., becoming more informed, identifying relevant event components) and properties (e.g., location, predictability) within the process model considered more relevant and have more influence on a sport fan's interpretation than other categories or properties?
3. How do sport fans deal with media bias and control when experiencing or becoming more informed about an event?
4. How and when do fans change with respect to experiencing and interpreting a sport-related event?
5. How do internal and external contextual influencers impact a (1) fan's experience and interpretation of an event and (2) subsequent evolution as a fan?
6. If the theory does not apply in other contexts, what categories and relationships do apply?

Category Interaction

This study identified four major categories that a sport fan assesses when interpreting a sport-related event. The study also found that interpreting an event is a non-linear, dynamic process. In other words, the categories are not assessed in any particular order and may be considered simultaneously. The findings suggest important

interactions exist between categories; however, this should be explored more deeply. Examining any of the above interaction questions could be accomplished utilizing various qualitative techniques (e.g., focus groups, personal interviews) or quantitative methods (e.g., survey instruments, experimental design). For example, a qualitative study using in-depth interviews with sport fans might examine the influence that event components that are identified as being relevant has on becoming more informed. A study of this nature could explore the influence of event components on (1) the way in which a fan chooses to become more informed, (2) how a fan deals with media bias and control while becoming more informed, and (3) how much information a fan desires and seeks. The implication of identifying and acknowledging potential interactions between categories would not only enhance sport marketer's knowledge of sport fans and thus influence the type of strategy chosen to deal with various sport-related issues, but also advance knowledge in the area of academic sport fan research.

Relative Importance of Categories

Similar to the above research focus, it is important to determine if certain categories or properties are considered more important and influential in the process of interpreting a sport-related event and thus have an impact on the evolution of a sport fan. For instance, does a sport fan typically engage in becoming more informed regarding a sport-related event, or is this activity sometimes overlooked? If so, when and why does this occur? Do sport fans always identify that an event occurs either on- or off-the field? If so, what impact does that have on a fan's interpretation of the event?

If certain categories and their respective properties are found to have more influence on the interpretation of a sport-related event, sport marketers can use this information and focus their efforts on publicizing these particular aspects of an event to sport fans. Again, addressing these types of research questions could be accomplished by utilizing qualitative or quantitative methods of study.

Media Bias and Control Issues

Sport fan behavior involves not only being a spectator, but also staying current with occurrences within the sporting world. A highly committed sports fan continuously gathers additional information that builds up his/her bank of knowledge and then uses this information to help interpret additional events as they occur. Most participants indicated that they relied heavily on several different media sources (i.e., ESPN.com, Sports Illustrated, ESPN's Sports Center, local newscasts, newspapers) as a means of becoming and remaining informed with sport-related events. The primary source for sport-related information is the media, mainly because of its accessibility and the purpose it serves. However, participants indicated that the source of the information was significant in determining whether that information was considered credible. Participants indicated that when they accessed information from a media source, they occasionally encountered issues with the types of sources that supply sport-related information (e.g., newspaper, television, Internet) as well as their own perception of the media's credibility and control over the sport-related information.

Although this study established that fans occasionally have issues with media bias and control, it did not identify how sport fans deal with these issues when experiencing or

becoming more informed about an event. For instance, a study might focus on the type of actions or strategies that fans undertake when faced with information received through a media source. Or, a study could compared the type of actions or strategies that fans undertake when faced with information received through media sources that are perceived as being highly, moderately, and only slightly credible.

Fan Evolution

As noted in Chapter Four, a sport fan brings with him/her a combination of life and sport-related experiences to each sport-related event. The impact of experiencing and interpreting sport-related events causes the sport fan to evolve continuously. Just as there are many different types of sport-related events, the interpretation of these events can vary widely and a fan can react and evolve in a variety of ways. This evolution may be unnoticeable in that they may simply possess more sport-relevant knowledge or it may encompass something greater (e.g., increase or terminate fanship). Although this study found that a fan does in fact evolve upon experiencing and interpreting an event, exactly how and why this phenomenon occurs was not investigated. It would be interesting and pertinent to explore the type of impact an event and its subsequent interpretation has on a sport fan. Although this phenomenon could be investigated in a variety of ways, a longitudinal study that examined the long-term impact of sport-related events on particular fans might provide extremely valuable data.

Internal and External Contextual Influencers

This study identified several internal and external contextual influences that have the potential to impact the way in which a fan experiences and interprets a sport-related event. For instance, a sport fans age or stage in the family life cycle may not only change their ability and willingness to engage in sport-related behavior, but also impact their perspective when experiencing a sport-related event. A 20-year old college student might interpret an event much differently than a 50-year old individual. A single person might interpret an event much differently than a sport fan that is married with children. Likewise, an external factor, such as a terrorist attack, could also influence a fan's ability or willingness to engage in sport-related behavior. Although these types of factors are most likely to be uncontrollable, knowledge of how sport fans react when faced with these types of factors will enable marketers to make better strategic decisions in the wake of such events.

Although this study identified several internal and external contextual influencers, supplementary studies to identify additional factors and examine their influence on sport fans would enhance marketer's knowledge of sport fan motivations, behaviors, and reactions. For instance, it might be interesting to compare the interpretations of specific sport-related events with relation to sociodemographic variables (e.g., age, gender, family life cycle stage).

Context Continuity

Addressing context questions can help validate a theory; however, research can be conducted that further examines the impact of contextual limitations. For instance, an

attempt to validate the theory in other contexts (e.g., other industries, across cultures) might reveal that the theory does not apply in certain contexts. In this case, it is important to examine the theory further and determine (1) which categories, properties, and dimensions do apply and/or (2) if there are additional concepts that are applicable in these contexts. Again, these questions can be explored using either quantitative or qualitative research methods.

Order of Research Priorities

Several possible studies can extend from this particular research project and constitute a program of research focused on examining the meaning a sport fan ascribes to a sport-related event as they contribute to the process of becoming and being a sport fan. It might be helpful to prioritize some of these kinds of studies to form a directive program of research. To form a solid foundation upon which other studies can be conducted with confidence, validation of the current theory should be attempted prior to expanding the theory.

Following initial validation studies within the context of highly committed sport fans, validation attempts could be made within additional contexts and thus, the research stream could take many intriguing directions. The direction chosen may be partially dictated by opportunities that arise. For example, exploring the meaning ascribed to sport-related events outside of the United States, to include countries whose pastimes include untraditional sports or sports not found in the U.S., then possibly other industries (e.g., actors/actresses, musicians, politicians, corporate executives).

Expansion studies should then focus on furthering the findings from this study with regard to the categories that emerged, the interrelationships between them, as well as the evolutionary process of being a sport fan. These studies could be conducted using a variety of methods, most of which are quantitatively oriented.

This program might be modified as research results emerge. Nonetheless, following such a program should enable further knowledge and thorough development of the categories and relationships involved in the process of interpreting sport-related events while becoming and remaining a sport fan. This knowledge and understanding has the potential to impact the sport industry as well as the media that disseminates sport-related information.

Methodologies

The methods utilized to validate the results and expand this research study should include, but not be limited to (1) surveys of fans' experiences, (2) experiments designed to further examine the interrelationships between the categories in the process model, and (3) longitudinal studies designed to more closely examine the process of interpretation and the impact a series of events might have on a sport fan.

Within these studies, the most straightforward would be survey studies. Experimental design provides a means of testing the theories categories and subsequent relationships, but may require considerable design time and financial resources. Longitudinal exploration would provide rich and detailed understanding of how fans interpret events and the overall impact of certain events; however, it would also demand considerable time and financial resources.

Survey Instruments

One type of study that may be conducted is a one-time (e.g., after-only) survey. The one-time survey approach develops a survey instrument which examines relevant constructs and asks respondents to reflect on a sport-related event that has just occurred. As the purpose of the theory is to assess the meaning ascribed to a sport-related event, it is appropriate to examine the after effects of such an event. Although the current knowledge that a sport fan holds with regard to the athlete or the team that an event involves may impact the results, this can be captured when examining the reaction to new information, the interpretation of the event, and the event components deemed relevant. This survey approach may be restricted by respondents' memories, knowledge, interest level, and personal significance of the event.

Experimental Design

Another validation approach may be to conduct a variety of experiments designed to manipulate the amount, type, and focus of information received regarding a sport-related event. For example, scenarios could be developed for sports fans to interpret. These scenarios may describe various types of sport-related events, including both on-the-field performances and off-the field behaviors. Additionally, the nature of information (i.e., positive versus negative) and the amount of information could be manipulated to examine the interpretation that results from different types of events and how fans deal with the incoming information. Lastly, the source of the message could be manipulated to render results regarding trustworthiness of the source. Interpretations which fit within the categories, properties, and dimensions proposed by this study would

partially validate the theory. Interpretations which do not fit would not necessarily invalidate, but possibly, modify the theory. Additionally, the ways in which a sport fan evolves could be examined; however, capturing all of these concepts in a single experiment might prove complicated, if not impossible. Testing the model might require that it be broken up into segments. Such an approach is less holistic than testing the entire model, but possibly more practical.

Either of these approaches are strong candidates for validating the theoretical concepts depicted in this study. However, one major assumption in conducting either the proposed survey or experimental method is that the sport-related event that the researcher chooses to study is one that would attract attention from the majority of sport fans. This, in itself, introduces a bias in the study and makes validation of the concepts more difficult.

Longitudinal Studies

Given the limitations of one-time surveys and experimental manipulations, a longitudinal approach may be undertaken. A longitudinal study that focuses on interpretations made by specific sport fans would provide the means with which to identify not only how sport-related events are interpreted but also the impact of the interpretation on a fan (i.e., how, when, why a fan evolves). This can be accomplished by taking measurements of relevant constructs multiple times with the same set of participants over a pre-determined time period to record the different interpretations and the potential change in the sport fan as they experience and interpret sport-related events. This may be done by contracting with certain sport fans to provide interview and/or

survey data at regular intervals (e.g., monthly) over an extended period of time (e.g., a year).

Beginning with the data collected in this study as a foundation, future studies that continue monitoring highly committed sport fan's interpretations and consequences of those interpretations could provide a richer understanding of the type of sport-related events that have the most impact. Additionally, a longitudinal study might provide a better understanding of the factors which influence a fan's interpretation of a sport-related event and is likely to capture the meaning and the dynamic nature of the process with which a fan interprets a sport-related event.

CONCLUSION

This study is a step forward in an important program of research focused on helping sport marketers and sport-related media outlets understand what a sport-related event means to sport fans and how this event and subsequent knowledge gathered about the event combine to influence a sport fan. This understanding will enable stakeholders within the sport industry, sport marketers, and the media to better recognize, anticipate, drive, and react to certain fan interpretations. The theory that emerged in this study demonstrates that the process of interpreting a sport related event is dynamic and dependent upon various categories, namely how the event is experienced; the type, amount, and nature of the information regarding the event as well as the source of that information; the personal significance of the event; and which event components are relevant to a particular sport fan. Thus, stakeholders within the sport industry (e.g., team owners, league owners) and the different media outlets can anticipate that certain

information is not only desired but also sought after and may result in specific interpretations. This study points researchers and stakeholders within the sport industry in a useful direction by providing them with a model to guide the issues that impact sport fans.

This study may also serve as a catalyst for new research in the sport marketing area. Although researchers have attempted to study fan motivations and behaviors, no one has put forth a study that examines the meaning that a sport fan ascribes to a sport-related event in their quest to become and remain a sport fan. The more we know about how fans interpret and react to sport-related events and the information received about such events, the more likely we are to augment feelings of loyalty and the behaviors resulting from such loyalties (e.g., watching games, buying sport-related paraphernalia), attract new fans, enhance the equity behind sport "brands," recover the positive feelings that have been eroding toward many professional sports (e.g., Major League Baseball, the National Basketball Association), and possibly enhance the entertainment value that is vital within the sporting industry. Those members of the sporting industry that react and proactively engage in appropriate actions with regard to sport-related events, whether positive or negative, are likely to keep and/or build their fan base. In a society where there has been a proliferation of professional sports, an explosion of and reporting of negative sport-related events, and a strong challenge to attract and maintain fans, it is critical that sports organizations understand how sport fans are interpreting all different types of sport-related events.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1-1. Associated Press Story of the Year – Top Ten (2001).

Place	Event
1	Dale Earnhardt death – February 18, 2001
2	Barry Bonds single-season home run record
3	September 11 terrorist attacks
4	Arizona Diamondbacks winning the World Series
5	Michael Jordan's comeback to the Washington Wizards
6	Lance Armstrong winning a third straight Tour de France
7	Tiger Woods winning his fourth straight major at the Masters
8	Major League Baseball owners voting to eliminate two teams
9	Cal Ripken Jr.'s retirement
10	Jennifer Capriati's comeback wins in the Australian and French Opens

Table 2-1. Movies with Sport Themes.

Sport	Movie
Baseball	The Natural
	For the Love of the Game
	Field of Dreams
	Major League; Major League 2
	Bad News Bears
	A League of Their Own
	Bang the Drum Slowly
	When It Was a Game
	61*
	The Rookie
	Hardball
Football	The Replacements
	Any Given Sunday
	The Longest Yard
	Little Giants
	Remember the Titans
	Rudy
	The Program
Basketball	White Men Can't Jump
	Hoosiers
	Space Jam
	Hoop Dreams
Hockey	Mystery Alaska
	The Mighty Ducks; D2
	Youngblood
	Slapshot
Golf	Happy Gilmore
	Tin Cup
	Bagger Vance
Boxing	Ali
	Rocky
Wrestling	Beyond the Mat
	Vision Quest
Car Racing	Driven
	Days of Thunder
Bowling	King Pin
Billiards	Color of Money
Figure Skating	Cutting Edge
Soccer	Lady Bugs

Relative Attitude	Repeat Patronage (Behavior) High	Repeat Patronage (Behavior) Low
High	**Loyalty**	**Latent Loyalty**
Low	**Spurious Loyalty**	**No Loyalty**

Figure 2-1. Two-Dimensional Paradigm of Activity Loyalty

Source: Backman, S. J. and J. L. Crompton (1991). "Differentiating Between High, Spurious, Latent, and Low Loyalty Participants in Two Leisure Activities." Journal of Park and Recreation Administration **9**(2): 1-17.

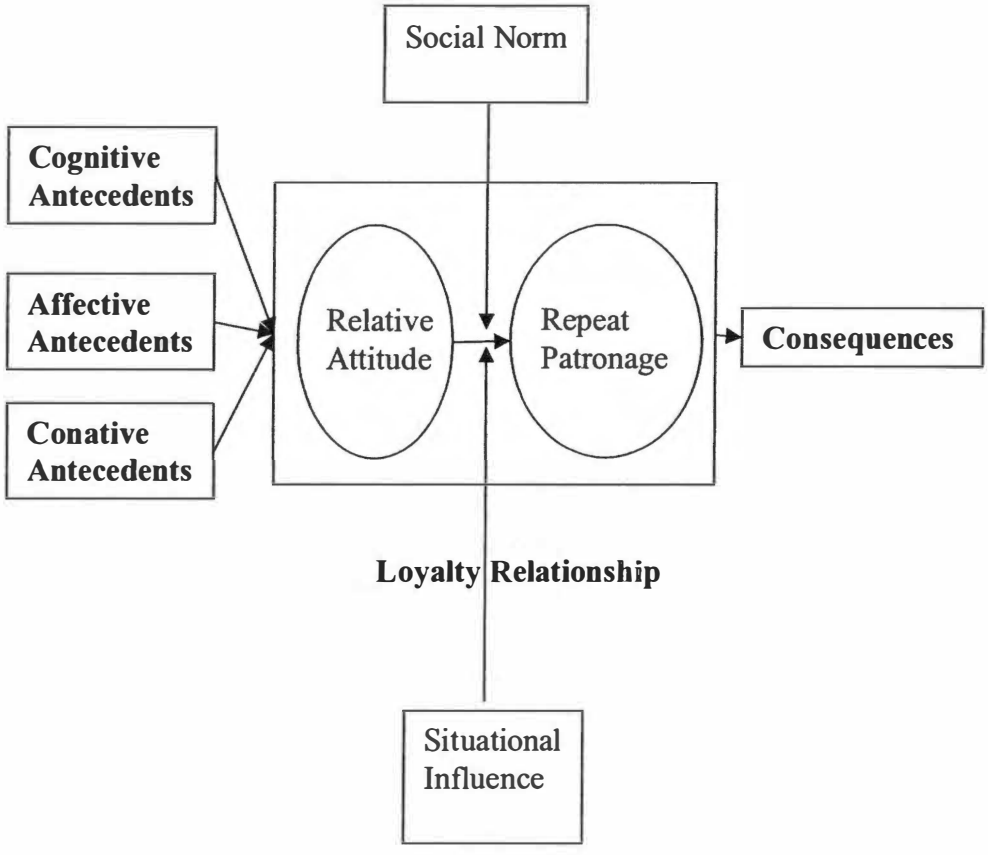


Figure 2-2. Framework for Customer Loyalty

Source: Dick, A. S. and K. Basu (1994). "Customer Loyalty: Toward an Integrated Conceptual Framework." Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science **22**(2): 99-113.

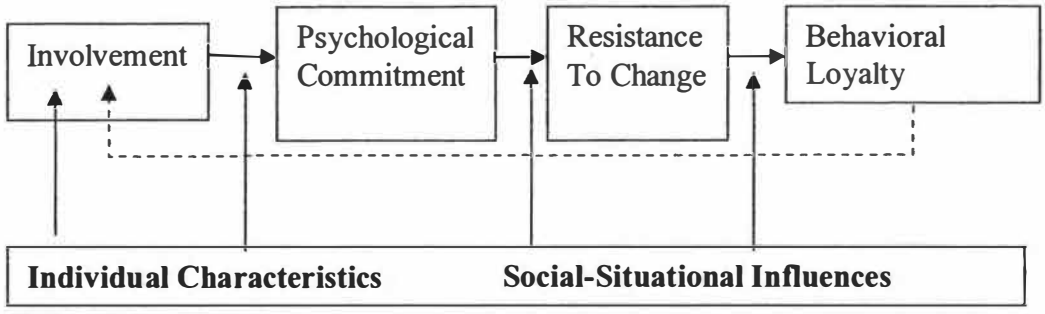


Figure 2-3. Path Analytic Model of Loyalty

Source: Iwasaki, Y. and M. E. Havitz (1998). "A Path Analytic Model of the Relationships Between Involvement, Psychological Commitment, and Loyalty." Journal of Leisure Research **30**(2): 256-281.

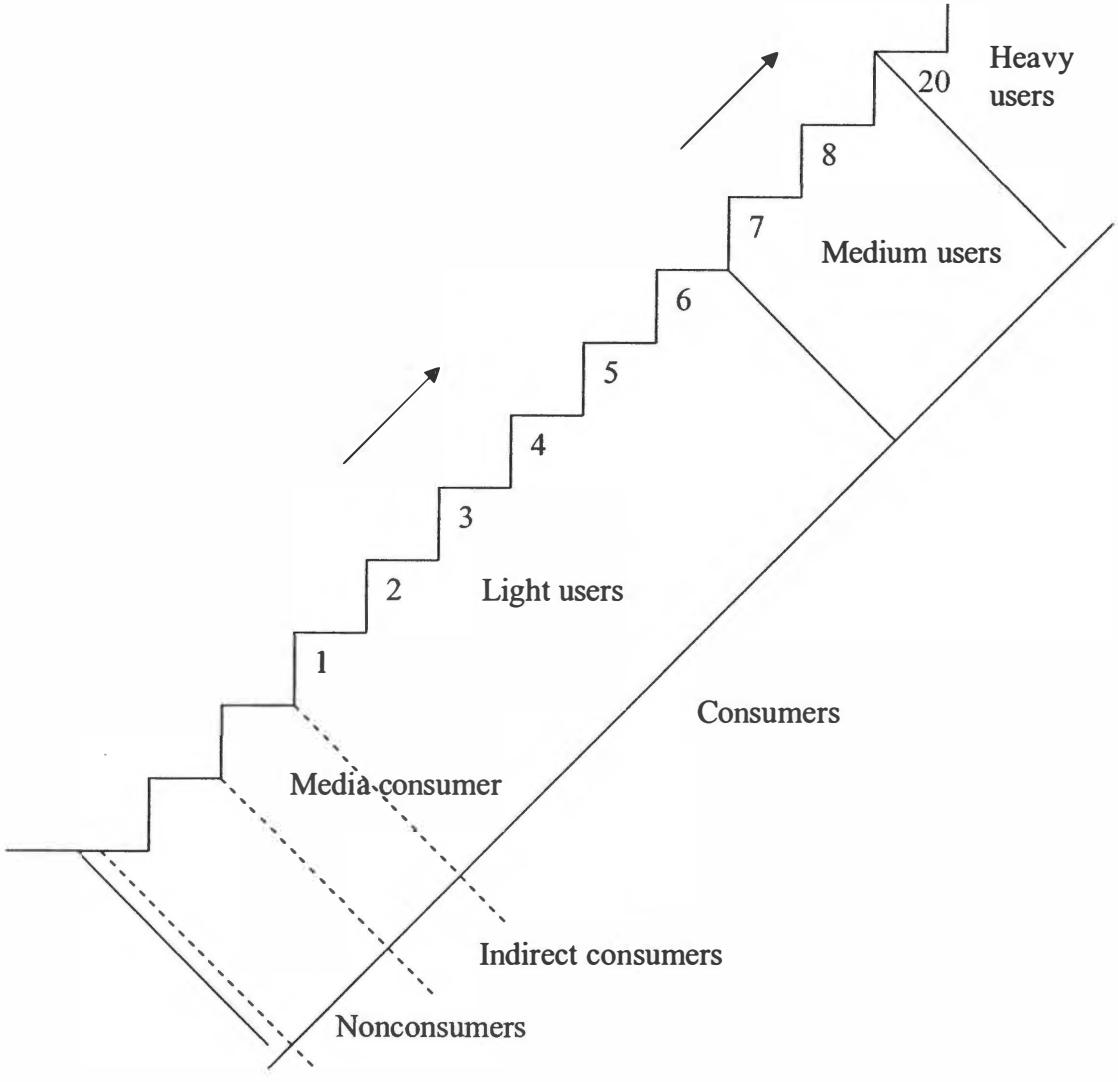


Figure 2-4. Escalator Model

Source: Mullin, B. J., S. Hardy, W. A. Sutton (1993). Sport Marketing. Champaign, IL, Human Kinetics Publishers.

Table 3-1. Activities in Grounded Theory.

Activity	This Study
Select Phenomenon	• Fan's perceptions of and reactions to sport-related critical incidents • Fan's interpretations of sport-related events
Research Question(s) - 1	• How do fans perceive and define sport-related critical incidents? • What are the possible behavioral reactions to sport-related critical incidents?
Research Question(s) - 2	• How do fans define a sport fan? • What factors are involved in becoming and remaining a sport fan? • How do fans interpret sport-related events?
Choose a Setting	• Avid sports fans
Enhance Theoretical Sensitivity	• Literature review on fan loyalty/fan behavior • Literature review on fan identification • Literature review on critical incidents • Personal experience • Asking questions, remaining flexible, making comparisons, being skeptical • Interacting with the data
Choose Method(s)	• In-depth, unstructured interviews
Sampling	• Interviews: participant's chosen based self description of being a "fan"
Theoretical Sampling	• Allow interviews to be guided by or influenced by previous interviews • Continue until redundancy occurs
Handling of the Interviews	• Audiotape, transcribe, begin analysis upon completion of first interview • Work part-to-whole process
Coding	• Begin with first transcript • Develop categories, metaphors, parameters, and dimensions
Memoing	• Keep journal of thoughts, questions, observations, relationships, notes
Integration	• Following axial coding and completion of all interviews

Table 3-1. Continued.

Activity	This Study

Verification	• Confirmability
	  • Conduct a bracketing interview
	  • Provide an "audit trail"
	  • Make data available for re-analysis
	  • Present the participants "voice" by using quotes that illustrate the themes being described
	  • Consider competing hypotheses or rival conclusions
	• Dependability
	  • Inquiry audit
	• Credibility
	  • Triangulate data sources
	  • Engage in peer debriefing
	  • Conduct member checks – several participants asked to evaluate findings; input solicited from qualified researchers
	  • Conduct pilot interviews for experience
	• Transferability
	  • Replicate research with other fan groups
	• Utilization/Application
	  • Publish and disseminate results

Table 3-2. Suggested Coding Rules

	Rule	Source
1	Ask general questions	
	▪ What category or property of a category, of what part of the emerging theory, does this incident indicate? ▪ What is going on here? ▪ What is happening? ▪ What is the participant's main concern? ▪ What are people doing? ▪ What accounts for the answers of these questions? ▪ What kinds of events are at issue here? ▪ How are they constructed? ▪ What do these events mean? ▪ What else could it mean?	
2	Analyze the data line by line. An incident could be found in a phrase, or one-two sentences, or occasionally in a word or a paragraph	Glaser, 1978, pp. 56-58; Glaser, 1998, p. 140; Strauss and Corbin, 1998, Ch. 5
3	The analyst must do his own coding	Glaser, 1978, pp. 56-58; Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 98
	"Keep moving through the data as quickly as possible... do not beat one incident to death... the goal is to find the latent patterns and this takes lots of incidents..."	Glaser, 1998, p. 145
4	Always interrupt the coding to memo the idea.	
5	Do not assume any face sheet variables (e.g., age, gender, education, etc.)	Glaser, 1978, pp. 56-58

Table 3-3. Categories, Subcategories, Properties & Dimensions.

Categories	Subcategories	Properties	Dimensions
Experience Event	Direct Indirect		
Become More Informed	Trust Control	Nature Amount Focus Message Source	Positive → Negative Large → Small On/Off-the-Field
Determine Personal Significance		Identification Personal Affiliation	High → Low High → Low
Identify Relevant Event Components		Location Predictability Shock Value Nature On vs.	On/Off-the-Field Expected → Unexpected High → Low Positive → Negative

Table 3-4. Theoretical Memoing Rules.

No.	Rule
1	Keep memos and data separate.
2	Always interrupt coding for memoing
3	Do not be afraid to modify memos
4	Keep the list of the emergent codes handy.
5	Compare memos: Collapse or dimensionalize the codes and memos.
6	Do not elaborate logically.
7	Write memos about concepts, not people.
8	Write one idea at a time.
9	Indicate saturation.
10	Always be flexible

Source: Glaser, Barney (1978). Theoretical Sensitivity. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press, pp. 89-91.

Table 3-5. Criteria for Judging the Adequacy of the Research Process.

Criterion #1	How was the original sample selected?
Criterion #2	What major categories emerged?
Criterion #3	What were some of the events, incidents, actions, and so on that pointed to some of these major categories?
Criterion #4	On the basis of what categories did theoretical sampling proceed?
Criterion #5	What were some of the hypotheses pertaining to conceptual relations and on what grounds were they formulated and tested?
Criterion #6	Were there instances when hypotheses did not hold up against what was actually seen? How were these discrepancies accounted for? How did they affect the hypotheses?
Criterion #7	How and why was the core category selected? Was this collection sudden or gradual, difficult or easy?

Source: Strauss and Corbin (1990), Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques, Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Table 3-6. Criteria for Judging the Empirical Grounding of the Study

Criterion #1	Are concepts generated?
Criterion #2	Are the concepts systematically related?
Criterion #3	Are there many conceptual linkages and are the categories well developed? Do they have conceptual density?
Criterion #4	Is much variation built in to the theory?
Criterion #5	Are the broader conditions that affect the phenomenon under study built in to its explanation?
Criterion #6	Has the process been taken into account?
Criterion #7	Do the theoretical findings seem significant and to what extent?

Source: Strauss and Corbin (1990), Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques, Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

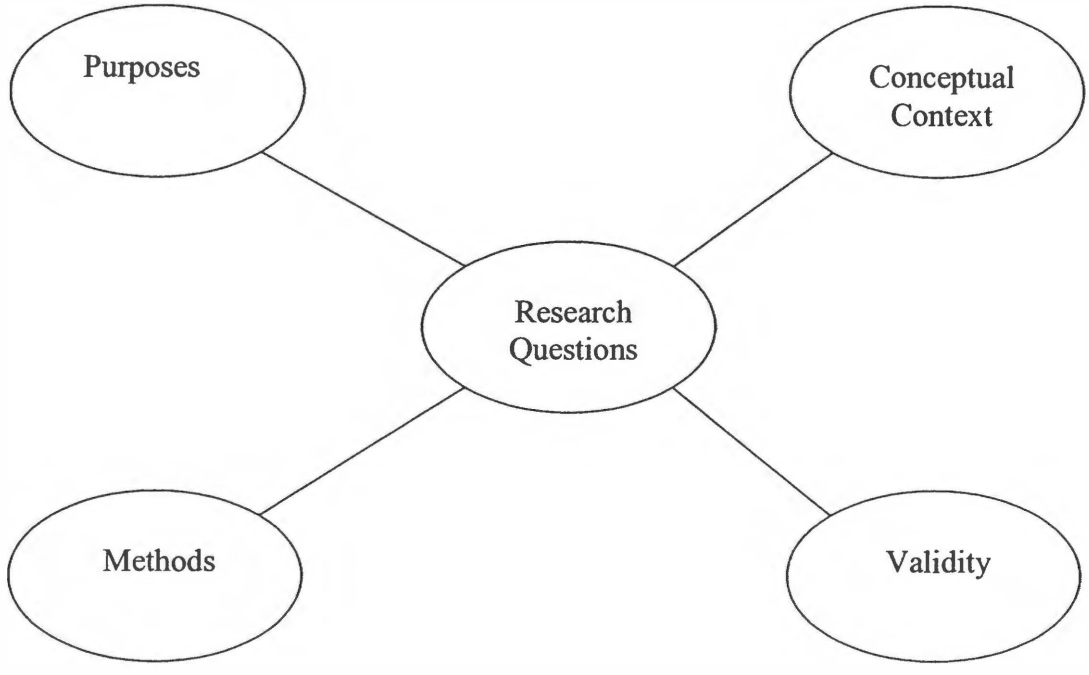
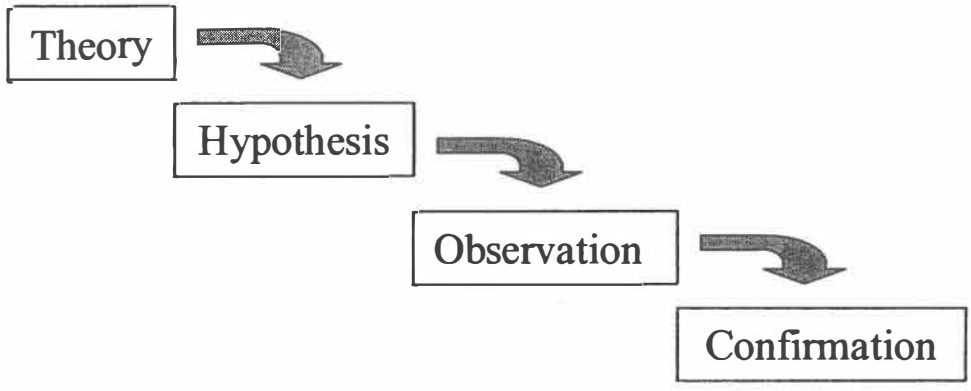


Figure 3-1. Interactive Model of Research Design.

Source: Maxwell, J. A. (1998). Designing a Qualitative Study. Handbook of Applied Social Research Methods. D. J. Rog. Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications: 69-100.

Deduction



Induction

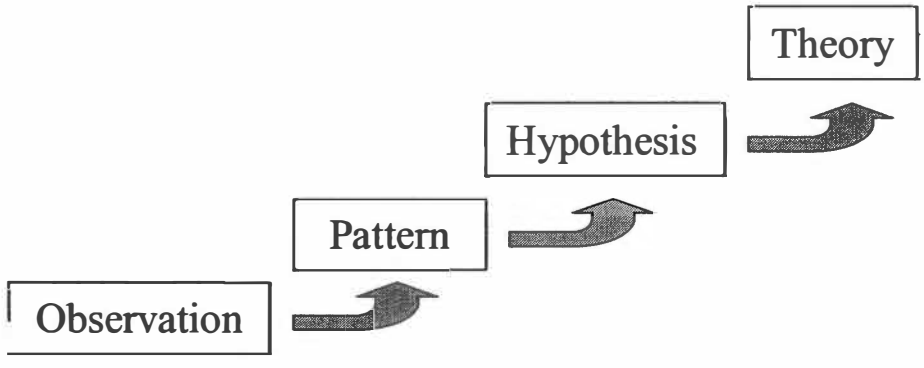


Figure 3-2. Deduction Versus Induction.

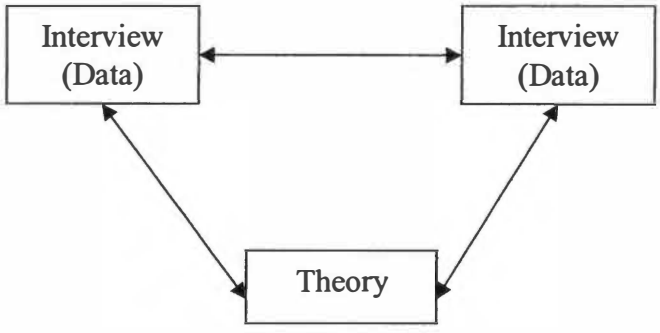


Figure 3-3. Constant Comparative Process.

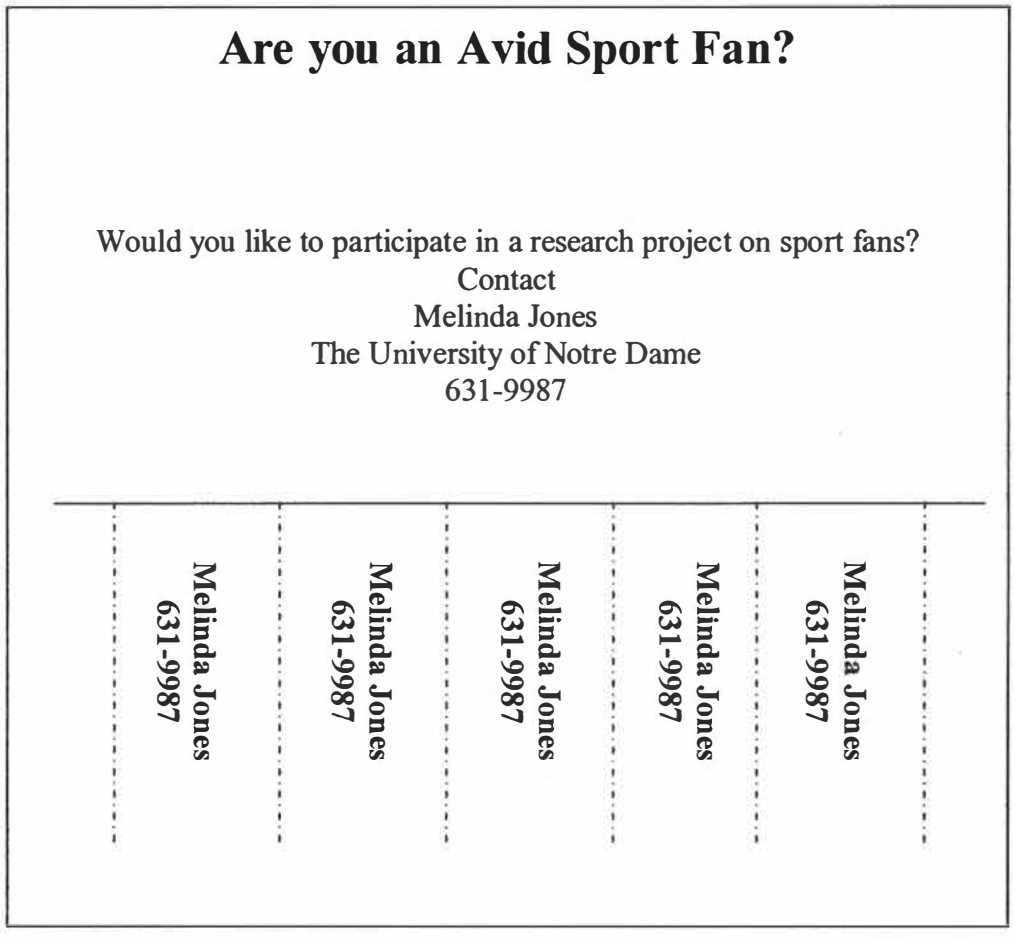


Figure 3-4. Solicitation Notice.

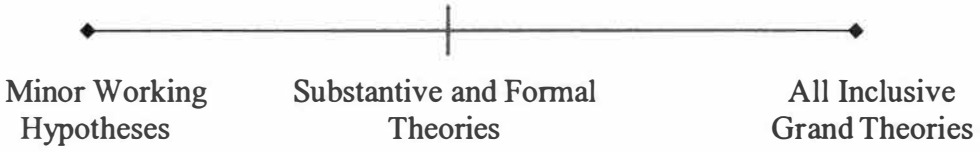


Figure 3-5. Substantive and Formal Theory.

Glaser, B. and A. Strauss (1967). The Discovery of Grounded Theory. New York, Aldine Publishing, pp. 32-33.

Table 4-1. Participant Data.

Part#	Nickname	SF Defn	SF	Gend	Mstat	Occ	Race	Age	Resid	Educ
1	Alex	watches, reads, takes time	5	Male	Never married	Student	Caucasian	26-35	IN	Post Grad
2	Bob	enjoys, follows	5	Male	Never married	Student	Caucasian	18-25	CA	Post Grad
3	Chris	read, spend time, plan life around	4	Male	Married w/ no children	Unemployed	Caucasian	36-45	IN	Post Grad
4	David	enjoy watching, expend emotion	5	Male	Married w/ no children	Employed	Caucasian	26-35	IN	Post Grad
5	Ed	follows with degrees of enthusiasm	5	Male	Married w/children	Employed	Caucasian	over 55	IN	Post Grad
6	Felisia	watching, cheering thru good/bad, enjoys the game, not just the team	5	Female	Married w/ no children	Employed	Caucasian	18-25	IN	College
7	George	active interest	4	Male	Married w/children	Employed	Caucasian	46-55	IN	Post Grad
8	Hattie	keeps track of what's happening in sport world	5	Female	Married w/ no children	Employed	Caucasian	36-45	IN	Post Grad
9	Ingrid	enjoys watching	4	Female	Never married	Employed	Caucasian	26-35	IN	College
10	John	follows intensely	5	Male	Never married	Employed	Caucasian	18-25	IN	College
11	Keith	life revolves around it	5	Male	Divorced	Employed	Caucasian	46-55	IN	Some College
12	Lisa	majority of time spent with sports	5	Female	Married w/ no children	Employed	Caucasian	26-35	IN	College
13	Maggie	reads, plays, watches	4	Female	Never married	Student	Caucasian	18-25	IN	Some College
14	Nate	spends time watching, going, reading	4	Male	Married w/children	Employed	African-American	over 55	IN	College

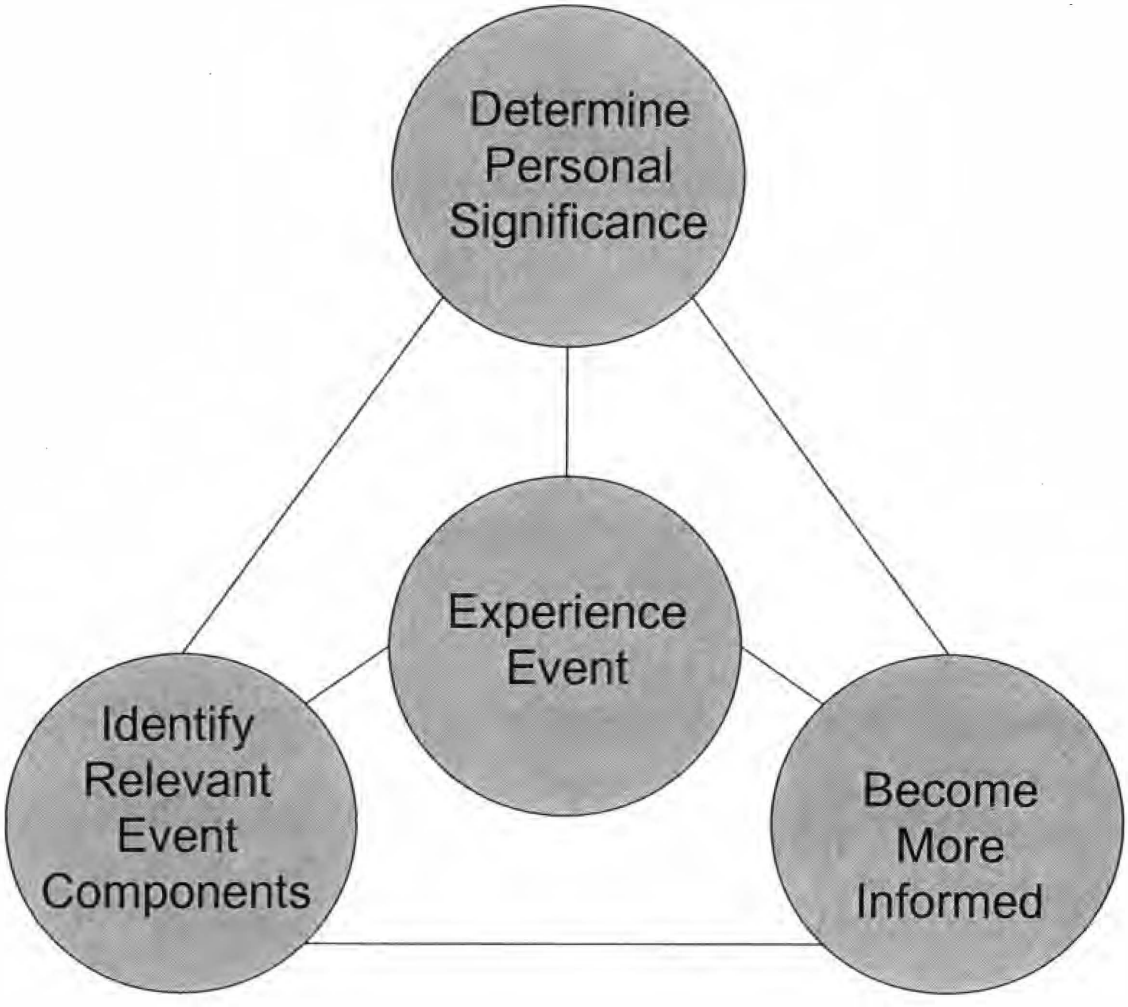


Figure 4-1. Interpreting a Sport-Related Event.

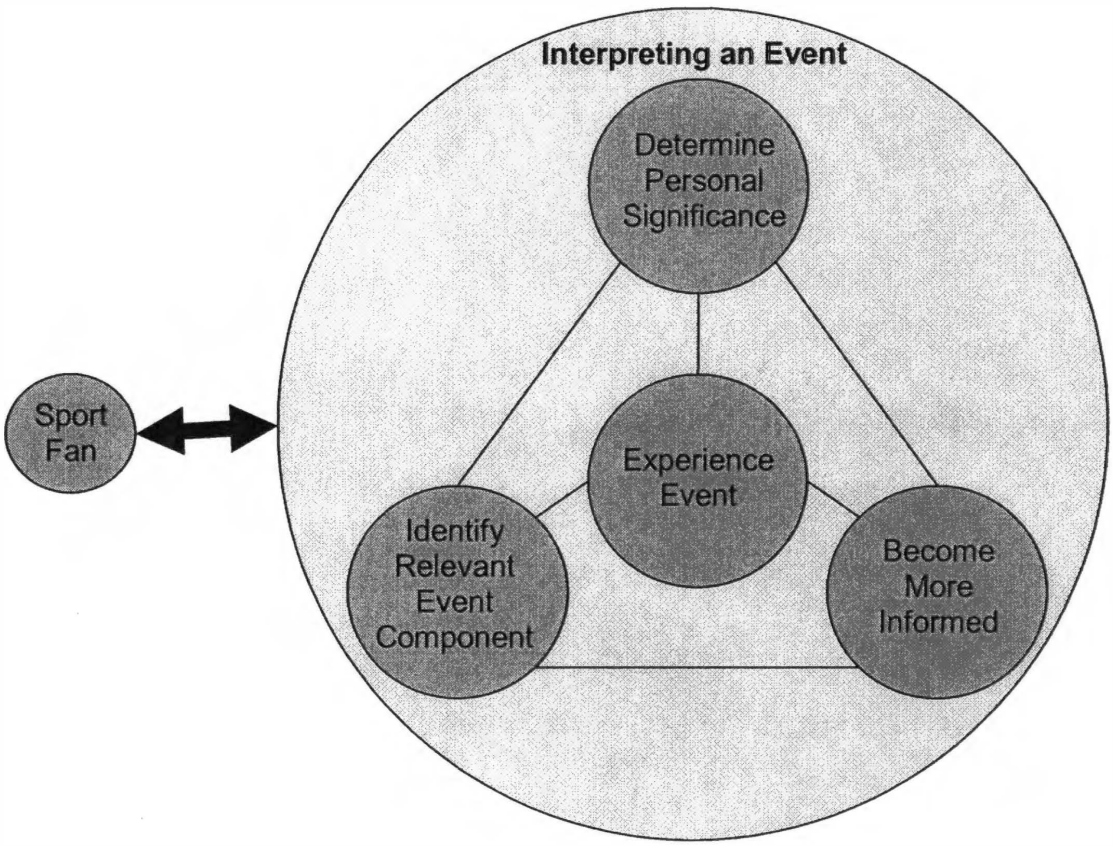


Figure 4-2. Process of Being a Sport Fan.

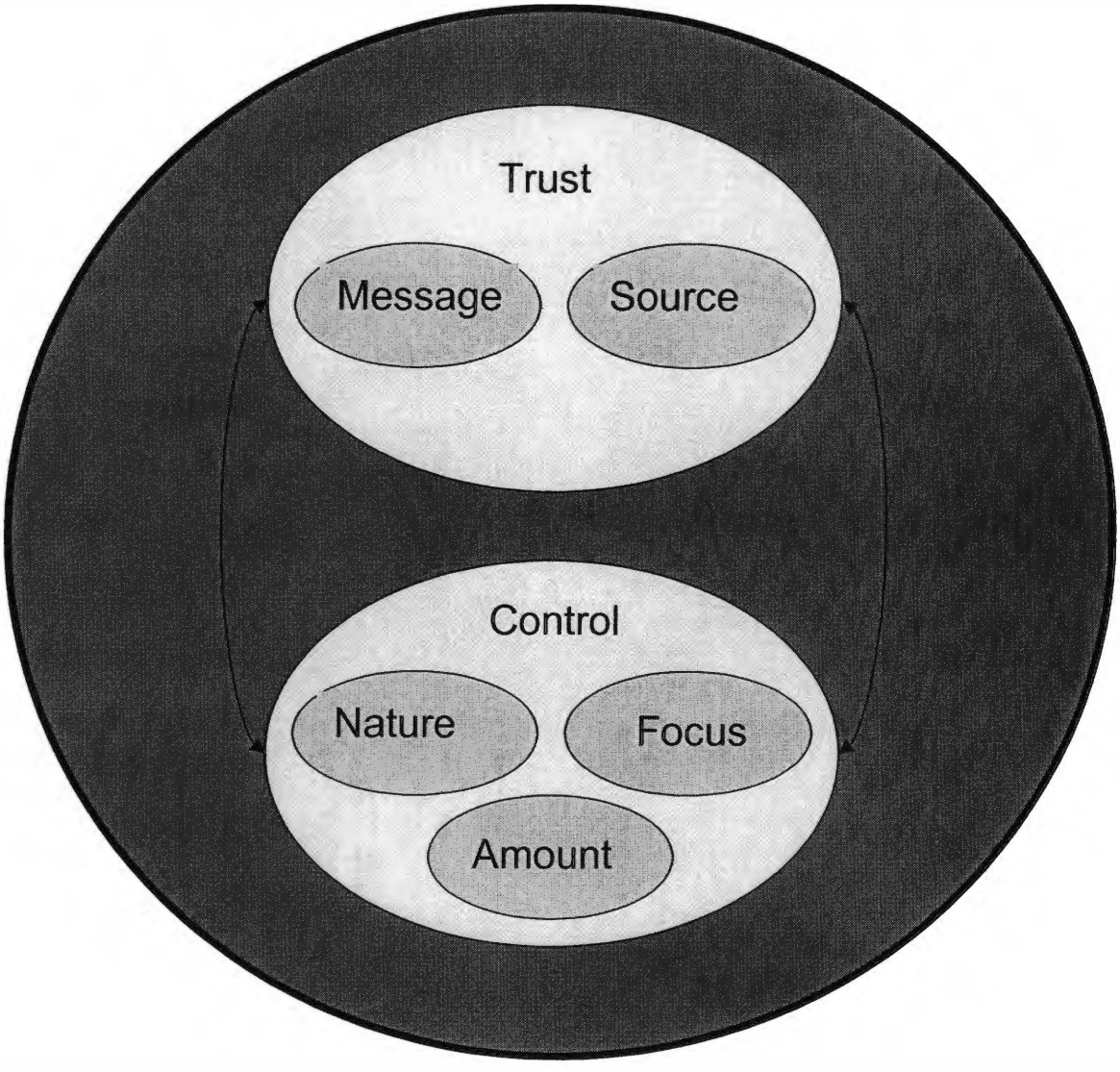


Figure 4-3. Source and Information Issues.

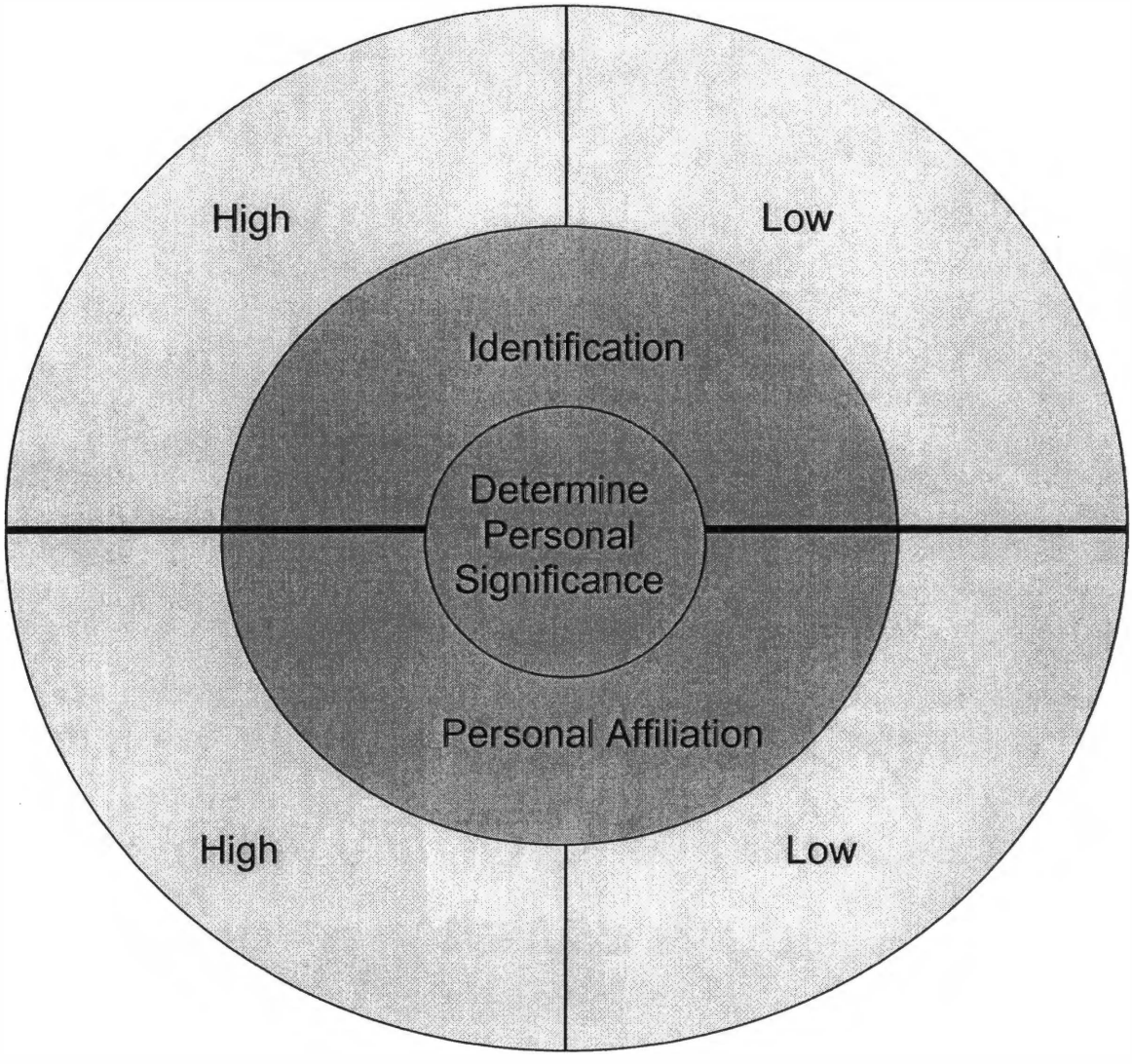


Figure 4-4. Determining Personal Significance.

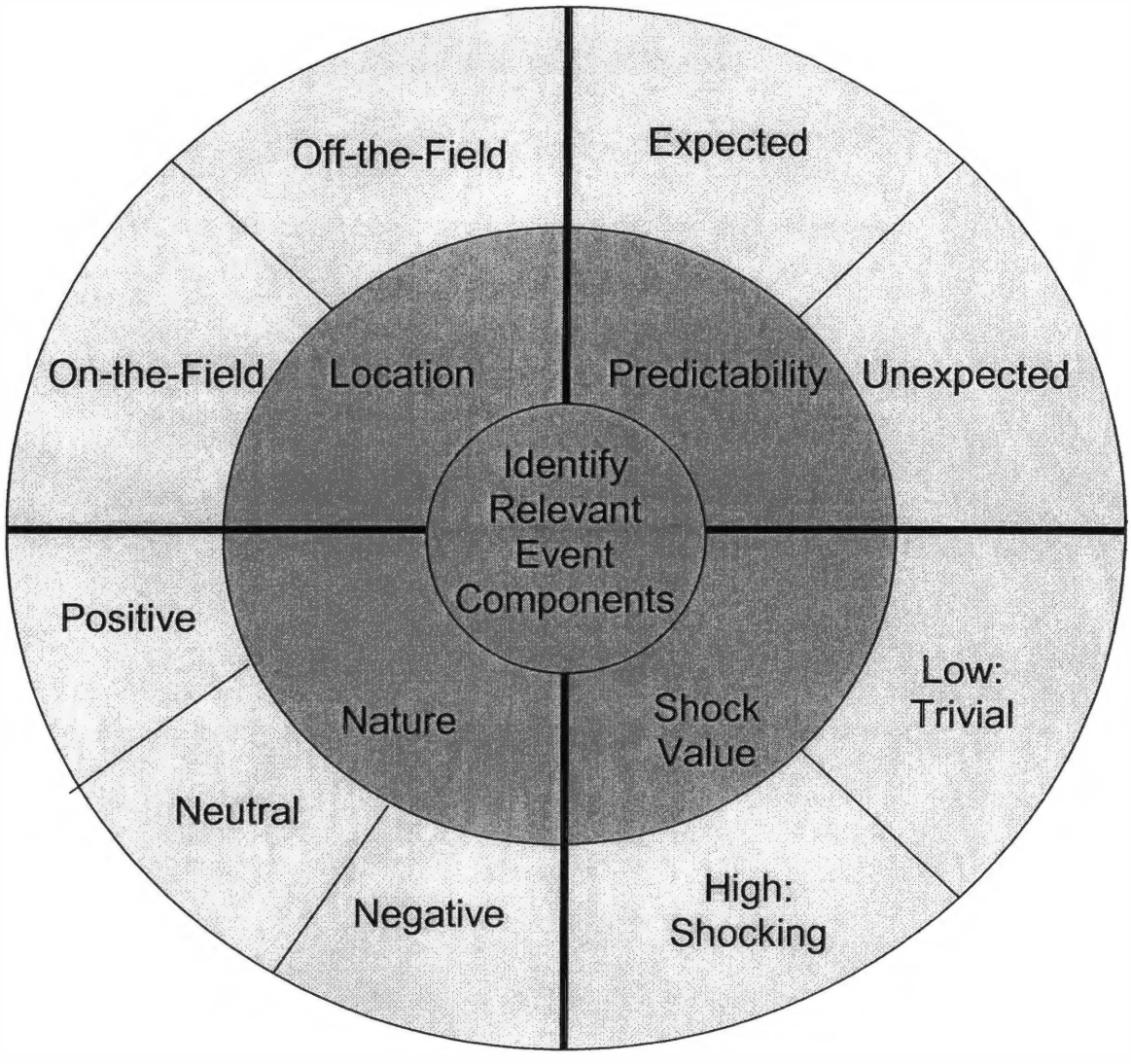


Figure 4-5. Identifying Relevant Event Components.

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE

Appendix B. Participant Questionnaire.

PART 1

1. Do you consider yourself a sport fan (spectator, not participant)? Yes __ No __

2. Do you have any favorite (college or professional) sports, sport leagues, sport teams, players and/or coaches? Yes _____ No _____
   If yes, please continue. If no, thank you for your time.

Sport

3. Are you a fan of any **sports** (college or professional)? Yes _____ No _____
   If no, skip to Question #6. If yes, please continue.

4. Please list all your favorite **sports** (as a spectator, not a participant) below. Keep in mind that you do not have to fill up every empty slot. Please list only those sports that you consider a favorite.

College	**Professional**
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10	10.
11.	11.
12.	12.
13.	13.
14.	14.
15.	15.
16.	16.
17.	17.
18.	18.
19.	19.
20.	20.

5. Please circle **ONE** sport that you feel is your favorite. If you listed only one sport, please circle it.

Appendix B. Continued.

League

6. Are you a fan of any particular sport leagues (college or professional)?

   Yes _____ No _____

   If no, skip to Question #9. If yes, please continue.

7. Please list your favorite sport **leagues** below. Keep in mind that you do not have to fill up every empty slot. Please list only those leagues that you consider a favorite.

College	**Professional**
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10	10.
11.	11.
12.	12.
13.	13.
14.	14.
15.	15.
16.	16.
17.	17.
18.	18.
19.	19.
20.	20.

8. Please circle **ONE** league that you feel is your favorite. If you listed only one league, please circle it.

Appendix B. Continued.

Team

9. Are you a fan of any particular sport teams (college or professional)? Yes _____
   No _____
   If no, skip to Question #12. If yes, please continue.

10. Please list your favorite sports **teams** below. Please list as much information as possible (i.e., sport, level). Keep in mind that you do not have to fill up every empty slot. Please list only those teams that you consider a favorite.

College	**Professional**
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10	10.
11.	11.
12.	12.
13.	13.
14.	14.
15.	15.
16.	16.
17.	17.
18.	18.
19.	19.
20.	20.

11. Please circle **ONE** team that you feel is your favorite. If you listed only one team, please circle it.

Appendix B. Continued.

Player

12. Do you have any favorite players (college or professional)? Yes _____ No _____

If no, skip to Question #15. If yes, please continue.

13. Please list your favorite **players** below. Please list as much information as possible (i.e., sport, level). Keep in mind that you do not have to fill up every empty slot. Please list only those players that you consider a favorite.

College	**Professional**
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10	10.
11.	11.
12.	12.
13.	13.
14.	14.
15.	15.
16.	16.
17.	17.
18.	18.
19.	19.
20.	20.

14. Please circle ONE player above that you feel is your favorite. If you listed only one player, please circle it.

Appendix B. Continued.

Coach

15. Do you have any favorite coaches (college or professional)? Yes _____ No _____

    If no, skip to Section 2. If yes, please continue.

16. Please list your favorite **coaches** below. Please list as much information as possible (i.e., sport , level). Keep in mind that you do not have to fill up every empty slot. Please list only those coaches that you consider a favorite.

College	**Professional**
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10	10.
11.	11.
12.	12.
13.	13.
14.	14.
15.	15.
16.	16.
17.	17.
18.	18.
19.	19.
20.	20.

17. Please circle ONE coach above that you feel is your favorite. If you listed only one coach, please circle it.

Appendix B. Continued.

18. Please list all of the items you circled above. If you didn't circle an item, please leave the corresponding area blank below.

1	Sport	
2	League	
3	Team	
4	Player	
5	Coach	

19. Of the items listed above, which do you feel is your favorite? For example, if you could only watch ONE game that featured your favorite sport, league, team, player or coach, which would you prefer to watch? Please list your favorite below.

_____

VITA

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