

February 2012

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### Recommended Citation

Stone, George W.; Cort, Kathryn T.; and Nkonge, Japhet (2012) "An Exploratory Model of the Antecedent Factors Contributing to Fan Support/Attendance at HBCU Basketball Games," *Atlantic Marketing Journal*: Vol. 1 : No. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/amj/vol1/iss1/2>

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# An Exploratory Model of the Antecedent Factors Contributing to Fan Support/Attendance at HBCU Basketball Games

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## **Abstract**

*The factors that impact attendance at sporting events in general and at small college sporting events in particular have been widely examined by sports marketing academicians. Among the various factors emerging over two decades has been attendance based on identity with individual teams and players, to idiosyncratic factors such as the environment and the entertainment value of the sporting event itself. Less is known, however, about what creates and promotes the desire to attend sporting events associated with historically black colleges and universities (HBCU's). HBCU's, like their other small college athletic departments, are now facing financial difficulties because of dwindling administrator support ensuing from declining state budgets, forcing the athletic directors of these schools to come up with innovative methods to bolster attendance---the primary source of revenue at small colleges. The authors develop and then test a 33 item scale that includes 11 potential factors explaining attendance at HBCU sporting events. Results and conclusions are then reported. As the authors note, the unique role sports plays in the life of the HBCU fan is ripe for further investigation, and practically speaking, is a valuable area of research for those interested in helping preserve the rich heritage of these programs.*

**Key words:** antecedent factors, attendance, fan loyalty, small college sports programs, sports marketing

### **Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners:**

Marketers at small colleges and in particular HBCUs can consider the antecedent factors that were examined in this study to gain insight into sports marketing programs that could lead to an increase in attendance/demand. Survey research, as done in this study, shows the value of marketing research to marketing programs.

## **Introduction**

While a great deal has been written about the generalized value of college athletic programs, less attention has been paid to the economic realities facing specific types of athletic programs, particularly at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) whose unique circumstances may help explain the approach used by athletic directors in managing and marketing the specific sports programs associated within each HBCU athletic department (Armstrong, 2002). Athletic programs at major U.S. colleges and universities are serious enterprises, wielding a great deal of social and economic influence on both the campus and the local economies. While many argue that the net outcome of these programs is favorable in terms of the net benefits accruing to the institution, opponents often complain that overemphasis on athletics detracts from the primary goal of the institution, which is, to provide a quality education. This point is often driven home by the fact that most sports programs are not self-sustaining; forcing the administration to divert funds from academic programs into financially shaky athletic programs with an apathetic fan base. Hence, unless fans are interested enough to truly support the program with their dollars, athletic programs can quickly become a drain on the financial resources of the academic side of the institution. A poorly performing sports program can thus be detrimental to the overall welfare of the institution (Fink et al., 2002; Weeth, 1994).

Similarly, at smaller institutions where the level of revenue generation is invariably smaller from both ends of the spectrum (i.e., academic and athletic) the value of the benefits received from maintaining athletic programs weighed against the operating cost associated with keeping them alive may be even more critical to the survival and credibility of the institution. As many detractors indicate, the value supporters expect is rarely delivered to the satisfaction of the fan base (Lehnus and Miller, 1996). Unlike their large college athletic conference counterparts, the dilemma for small college administrators is more pressing because the typical small college athletic program is rarely self-sustaining; which means that most of these programs must be subsidized from the general operating budget of the university (Helitzer, 1996).

One of the more pressing problems for many small college athletic programs in terms of profitability is the lack of fan attendance. At HBCUs, the issue of attendance is further complicated by the constraints on the pool of consumers from which marketers of these programs can reasonably expect to draw patrons. The present study examines selected factors believed to be key influencers promoting attendance at HBCU sporting events. The authors developed a conceptual model of HBCU fan attendance derived from an earlier generalized small college fan attendance model, which in turn, was based on a combination of factors emerging from a literature review of generally accepted factors influencing attendance, and previous work in this area involving extensive focus group studies at three small college athletic programs (Brokaw et al., 2006). The current model is therefore derived from earlier work on both fan attendance in general, and a model developed more specifically for small college athletic programs. The current attempt to develop an attendance model for HBCU's in particular, is thus primarily explorative in nature.

The authors nonetheless present a series of factors that have been empirically tested and which may serve as a useful starting point for future research in this area. The sample used in the study includes fan samples taken during three randomly selected non-conference and conference basketball games at a nationally recognized HBCU. Marketing strategy implications are derived from the results and presented in the final section.

## **The Importance of Fan Support as Derived From Attendance at Sporting Events**

The typical large university athletic program is able to draw upon a variety of revenue streams that may or may not be available to any great extent at the small college level. Among the revenue streams most often cited include: *promotional sponsorships* in the form of paid radio and television broadcasts, sales of stadium advertising, and advertisements placed in the sporting event program; *school insignia / logo licensing fees* which include the monies raised from placing the school mascot on retail athletic attire; *donations generated by special ticket incentives* such as those paid by individuals joining alumni or sports boosters' programs, or, for reserved seating at the school's sporting events; *money provided by the academic institution* for sustainment of the athletic program; and finally, *ticket sales / gate receipts* from fans attending games. While there are undoubtedly many other innovative revenue generating methods available and currently in use, the categories listed are generally considered the *major* sources utilized by athletic departments across the spectrum of college sports.

As with their large university counterparts, small college athletic directors attempt to exploit each of the noted revenue streams to the fullest extent possible. Because the fan base is generally much smaller and in most cases, less generous, small college athletic departments tend to rely on institutional funding to a much greater extent than larger, conference affiliated schools. Although most college

presidents understand the benefits associated with fielding strong athletic teams and actively encourage and promote college athletics, the economic and political realities associated with running an academic institution make it difficult to divert funds from academic programs to support their athletic department. Absent the ability to raise the sort of funds available to larger schools from sources such as advertising and other promotional endeavors, licensing fees, or big donor contributions, and with often limited institutional support, the most reliable method of generating operating revenue appears to be through increasing the level of ticket sales at paid sporting events.

Regardless of the size of the program, athletic directors universally encourage packed stadiums filled with exuberant fans. While obviously important to the larger program, gate receipts are more critical in terms of *total revenue* at the small college level (Pitts and Stotlar, 1996). Robust ticket sales, particularly at football and/or men's basketball games (i.e., the two sports' programs responsible for the majority of revenues generated across all college divisions), are crucial for most athletic programs because the revenues generated from these two sports typically fund the other non-revenue generating athletic teams. Because fan attendance is so closely linked to the team's won-loss record, fielding winning teams in the two major sports is considered a necessity in terms of sustainability (Pitts and Stotlar, 1996; Baade and Tiehen, 1990; Noll 1974).

In a broad sense, the success of a collegiate athletic program can be measured by the extent to which the individual sports program independently or interactively generates revenue, loyalty, or recognition. This happens through fan attendance at events and/or consumption of program related products. Attendance generates obvious and immediate revenue that includes sales of tickets, concessions, souvenirs, and other event-related products and services. Attendance also appears to be one of the factors associated with fan involvement, potentially generating a sustained stream of important long-term benefits such as increased donations from fans and alumni to the institution itself. One's level of involvement with the institution may thus provide additional insight into the individual's willingness to support (or not) consumption behaviors vis-à-vis attendance at the school's sporting events.

The importance of winning notwithstanding, factors associated with attendance at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (i.e., HBCU's), may, as previously noted, be somewhat different than attendance factors normally attributable to increasing attendance at larger programs, particularly given the unique status HBCU sports programs have traditionally played in terms of instilling pride and identity with the university among members of the local and regional African American community (Armstrong and Stratto, 2004). Hence, while it is reasonable to expect that current sporting event attendance models apply to HBCU's, it is also equally plausible that other, perhaps idiosyncratic factors unique to the HBCU, might be present which can provide a more robust explanation of attendance at these type institutions. Indeed, given the symbolic

role that sports has played in terms of influencing the socio-cultural atmosphere of many HBCU's, athletic directors might be better off investigating the culture and level of institutional involvement of their fan base rather than focusing specifically on winning percentages or promotional campaigns to increase attendance. The emphasis may thus shift as much toward increasing fan loyalty and identity with the school and its traditions, etc., than emphasizing improving the more salient and obvious elements for improving attendance (i.e., improving the team's current won-loss record, etc.). At this juncture, however, any declarative statements to that effect are mere conjecture, indicating the need for more robust future study in this area.

## Measures

The proposed conceptual model of attendance factors builds upon the existing framework used by Brokaw et al. (2006) describing antecedent or causal elements considered most influential in promoting fan attendance at small college sporting events. As part of the confirmatory effort, the current authors conducted a series of focus group interviews with students and fans of one of the two major sports (i.e., basketball in this study) most closely identified with the HBCU institution in question. The current model therefore incorporates factors previously noted as small college antecedent factors, as well as those emerging from focus group analysis suggesting HBCU specific factors. The factors are presented below.

*Affiliation with the school athletic program* (Brokaw et al., 2006; Kwon et al., 2005; Fisher and Wakefield, 1998; Sutton et al., 1997). A set of 5 measurement items related to fan affiliation with the school's general sports and basketball programs were included (i.e. "One of the main reasons I go to basketball games here is because I want to support the \_\_\_\_\_ basketball/sports program." and, "It is important for me to support the \_\_\_\_\_ sports teams through my attendance.")

*Liking sports/basketball* (Zhang et al., 1996; Graham et al., 1995) included 4 items related to either sports in general or basketball in particular (i.e., I attend sporting events at \_\_\_\_\_ primarily because I just love to watch sports." and, "The primary reason I attend basketball here at \_\_\_\_\_ is because I love to watch basketball.").

*Entertainment value of the event* (Ferreira and Armstrong, 2004; Funk et al., 2003; Pitts and Stotlar, 1996; Turco, 1994) included 4 items related to the game as an entertainment alternative (i.e., "The special events (such as homecoming, or games at which t-shirts or prizes are given away) are the main reason I attend \_\_\_\_\_ basketball games." and, "The special events (homecoming, special guests, entertainment, etc.) are more important to me than attending for just the basketball game itself."). Two items were added that pertained specifically to the opponent the team would be playing ("The reason I'm here for today's game is

because of the opponent we're playing." and, "I often attend \_\_\_\_\_ home games based on who the opponent is.").

*Identification with the team's players* (Wann et al.,2004; Donovan et al.,2003; Armstrong, 2002; Sutton et.al.,1997) which relate to fan identity with the players, perhaps because they know them personally as friends or as fellow classmates ("I attend basketball games at \_\_\_\_\_ because I like many of the players." And, "I've become familiar with many of the players on the \_\_\_\_\_ basketball team through my attendance at home games.").

*Cheerleaders; the band, and attending because friends go* ("I attend \_\_\_\_\_ basketball games because I like to watch the cheerleaders perform." And, "I attend basketball games at \_\_\_\_\_ because I love to watch the band." And, "I enjoy attending \_\_\_\_\_ home games because I know I'll meet many of my friends there.").

*Time* (such as time conflicts) that might prevent or curtail the ability to attend ("I generally have too many other time conflicts on days when the \_\_\_\_\_ basketball team games are played." And, "If the games were held at a different time I would attend more of \_\_\_\_\_ home basketball games."). The *time* factor is interesting because of its ambiguity. Time as an attendance issue is important because it conveys the matter of choice; in other words, the fan must decide whether the time spent attending the sporting event is more beneficial than engaging in some other alternative activity. Time from this perspective may be indicative of one's enthusiasm for the sporting event compared to other forms of entertainment (Brokaw, et. al., 2006). Time may also be a source of conflict involuntarily preventing the individual from attending (e.g., the individual had to study or work at the same time the basketball game is being played). Time thus represents a combination of restraints and enthusiasm levels (i.e., "I usually have scheduling conflicts at the same time basketball games are being played." and, "Fraternity and/or Sorority functions/parties often interfere with my attendance at home basketball games." and finally, "I would rather spend my time engaged in other activities than attending \_\_\_\_\_ basketball games."). A total of 11 items related either directly to time or the costs and benefits associated with attending games.

Finally, respondents were asked to address issues related to the team's won-loss record (Pan and Baker, 2005). One of the reasons the authors surveyed respondents at basketball games rather than at football games is because basketball has been mildly successful in developing a winning program over the past decade whereas the football program has dramatically declined both in terms of success on the field and in terms of attendance (e.g. in many instances fewer than 1000 fans remain after the band has performed at half time). One of the reasons for the sparse attendance has been the poor play and record of the team, with no team in the past five years achieving a .500 record and two consecutive seasons in which the team was winless. The lone exception during this period is the homecoming game, which is always traditionally a sellout

regardless of the team's won-loss record. Items related to the team's won-loss record therefore included the following ("The main reason I don't attend many \_\_\_\_\_ home basketball games now is because of the team's record." and, "The team's record plays a big part in whether I attend home games or not." and finally, "The team's record *has little or no impact* on my attendance at \_\_\_\_\_ home basketball games.").

## Sample and Survey Method

While many of the items in the survey were developed from the Brokaw et al., 2006 study related to small college sports attendance, additional teams were added to fit the unique characteristics of this HBCU fan sample. Graduates of the HBCU under investigation include nationally recognized political, social, and business leaders. The university is located in a medium sized (e.g., 250,000 population) city located along the mid-Atlantic. The city is home to four public and private colleges of various size and demographic makeup, whose athletic programs are of similar classification. The football program at the university was at one time considered one of the elite black college football programs in the nation. During the past decade, however, the football program has been on a sustained losing streak, having won only two games the past two seasons and experiencing several coaching changes over the previous five years. The basketball program has been more successful over the same period, contending at various times for conference championships and typically qualifying for the conference tournament.

Surveys were administered at three consecutive home basketball games by student-led teams of marketing research students. Students were asked to administer surveys to every 5<sup>th</sup> person entering the arena ticketing gates, with students providing detailed instructions. Students were told to use their own judgment when handing out surveys and to avoid giving out surveys to small children. In many cases, the surveys were completed at the gate area where they were checked for completeness. Several announcements were made early in the game and volunteers collected surveys until half-time when the "winning" stub number was announced. The "winning" ticket stub holder was awarded a basketball signed by members of the team. The same method was used for each of the three home games. A total of 218 usable surveys were collected using this procedure. The sample was split evenly between male and female respondents (i.e., 104 males vs. 103 females with 11 miscoded); the mean age for the sample was around 22 (mean=3.3), with 65% circling block 3 (19-22); roughly 19% of the sample was over the age of 22 and 15% were 18 or younger. The majority of the sample (84%) was unmarried and 82% reported having no children. Approximately 83% of respondents classified themselves as students of the university and 94.5 % were affiliated with the university (i.e., student, staff, administrator, or faculty). 48 fans representing 13.4% of the sample attended two games or less and were classified as low attendees. 72 fans representing 32.9% of



the sample attended 8 games or more and were classified as high attendees. Two of the three games sampled included a conference opponent, with the outcome considered important both in terms of post season advancement and as an incentive to attend.

## **Scale Reliability and Factor Analysis**

The reliability of the 45 item survey instrument (assessed using Cronbach's Alpha) was .820. A 5 point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree) was used to assess agreement or disagreement with each item. Principal components factor analysis using Varimax rotation was used to assess factors emerging from the 45 items in the measurement instrument (see Churchill 1979). A 33 item scale emerged consisting of 11 factors having Eigen values greater than 1 and having individual item factor loadings of .5 or above. The 11 factors explained 65.28% of the variance in the exploratory model. A description of the factors emerging from the factor analysis is listed below:

### **Factor 1: *Sport Event Alternatives*** (var=9.48%; cum=9.48%):

V1 (.770): "I would rather spend my time engaged in other social activities than attending \_\_\_\_\_ basketball games."

V2 (.768): "I would rather watch movies or television than attend \_\_\_\_\_ basketball games."

V3 (.723): "I would rather spend my time doing homework or studying than attending \_\_\_\_\_ basketball games."

V4 (.703): "I would rather watch basketball games on television than attend the games at \_\_\_\_\_."

V5 (.615): "Fraternity and/or sorority functions/parties often interfere with my attendance at \_\_\_\_\_ home basketball games."

### **Factor 2: *Supporter of School Sports Teams*** (var=9.38; cum=18.86%)

V6 (.833): "It is important for me to support \_\_\_\_\_ sports' teams through my attendance."

V7 (.811): "I am a fan of \_\_\_\_\_ sports."

V8 (.781): "One of the main reasons I go to basketball games here is because I want to support the \_\_\_\_\_ basketball/sports program."

V9 (.707): "If I could choose between attending a similar sporting event elsewhere and attending a \_\_\_\_\_ sporting event, I would still choose to attend the \_\_\_\_\_ sporting event."

### **Factor 3: *Cheerleaders/Band*** (var=8.96%; cum=27.82%)

V10 (.845): “I attend \_\_\_\_\_ home basketball games because I like to watch the cheerleaders.”

V11 (.842): “The cheerleaders greatly influence my decision to attend \_\_\_\_\_ home basketball games.”

V12 (.842): “I would go to a \_\_\_\_\_ home basketball game just to watch the cheerleaders perform.”

V13 (.515): “I attend \_\_\_\_\_ home basketball games because I love to watch the band.”

V14 (.480): “The band is the main reason to attend \_\_\_\_\_ home games.”

**Factor 4: *Entertainment Value*** (var=6.70; cum=34.52%)

V15 (.757): “The special events (homecoming, special guests, entertainment, etc.) are more important to me than attending just for the basketball game itself.”

V16 (.726): “The special events (such as homecoming or games at which t-shirts or prizes are given away) are the main reason I attend \_\_\_\_\_ home games.

V17 (.600): “I attend basketball (and other \_\_\_\_\_ sporting events) because it is a relatively inexpensive form of entertainment.”

V18 (.514): “The reason I am here for today’s game is because of the opponent we’re playing.”

V19 (.500): “I often attend \_\_\_\_\_ home games based on who the opponent is.”

**Factor 5: *Identity with the Players*** (var=5.86%; cum=40.36%)

V20 (.812): “I attend basketball games at \_\_\_\_\_ because I like many of the players.”

V21 (.749): “I am familiar with many of the players on the \_\_\_\_\_ basketball team.”

**Factor 6: *Time Conflicts*** (var=5.54%; cum=45.92%)

V22 (.748): “I generally have too many other time conflicts on the days when the \_\_\_\_\_ home games are played.”

V22 (.614): “I usually have scheduling conflicts at the same time the games are being played.”

V24 (.594) “I’d attend more of \_\_\_\_\_ home basketball games if they were played later in the day.”

**Factor 7: *Fan of Sports*** (var=5.28%; cum=51.20%)

V25 (.783): “I attend sporting events at \_\_\_\_\_ because I just love to watch sports.”

V26 (.756): “The primary reason I attend basketball games here at \_\_\_\_\_ is because I love to watch basketball.”

V27 (.620): “The basketball game itself is the main reason I attend games here at \_\_\_\_\_.”

**Factor 8: *Friends Attend*** (var=4.51%; cumulative=55.71%)

V28 (.792): “I enjoy attending \_\_\_\_\_ home basketball games because I know I’ll meet many of my friends there.

V29 (.725): “I attend \_\_\_\_\_ home basketball games because many of my friends attend.”

**Factor 9: *Team Record*** (var=3.39; cumulative=59.06%)

V30 (.696): “The main reason I don’t attend many of \_\_\_\_\_ home basketball games is because of the team’s record.”

V31 (.499): “The team’s won/lost record plays a big part as to whether I attend home games or not.”

**Factor 10: *Other than the Band***, (var=3.29%; cumulative=62.34%) V32 (.806): “The band **is not** the main reason I attend home basketball games.”

**Factor 11 *Other Time Issues***, (var=2.94%; cumulative=65.28%)

V33 (.734): “If the games were held at a different time I would attend more of \_\_\_\_\_ home basketball games.”

## **Results of ANOVA and T-Tests**

The 11 factors were analyzed using ANOVA tests of significance, with the variable NUMGAMES (number of home games attended) serving as the dependent variable. The 5 point Lickert Scale was collapsed into 3 categories with 48 low (22%), 94 medium (44%), and 72 high (34%) attendees represented in the 214 respondent sample. The following factors and their significance levels were noted with significant factors indicated in bold:

F1: Sporting Event Alternatives (F=4.098) significant (.008)

F2: Supporter of School Sports Teams (F=3.592) significant (.015)

F3: Cheerleader/Band (F=1.154).330)

F4: Entertainment Value (F=.636)(.593)

- F5: Identity with Players (F=1.548)(.205)  
 F6: Time Conflicts (F=4.106) significant (.008)  
 F7: Fan of Basketball/Sports (F=4.667) significant (.004)  
 F8: Friends (F=.898) (.444)  
 F9: Team Record (F=1.872)(.137)  
 F10: Other than the Band (F=1.643) (.165)  
 F11: Other Time Issues (F=1.233) (.300)

### Results of ANOVA

Results of ANOVA indicate that four factors emerged as likely predictors of attendance at HBCI basketball games. These factors included: 1) *alternative choices that potentially interfere with attendance at sporting events*, 2) *the level of loyalty to the school and its sports' programs*, 3) *time conflicts that prevent attendance*, 4) *being a fan of basketball and sports in general*.

### Results of T-Test

Two groups of respondents, one comprised of those who had attended two games or less at the time of the survey collection (n=48; low attendees) and those attending 8 or more games (n=72; high attendees) were compared on each of the 11 measures using t-tests to examine evidence of significance of differences. Two additional factors emerged using this method (e.g., *identity with team players* and *team record*) as significant. The t-test significant factors are as follows: **Sporting Event Alternatives** (t = -3.176 @ .002); **Supporter of School Sports Teams** (t = -4.18 @ .000); **Identity with Players** (t = -2.351 @ .020); **Time Conflicts** (t = -3.146 @ .002); **Basketball/Sports Fan** (t = -2.650 @ .009); **Team Record** (t = -1.685 @ .095 \*\*\* .10 or less).

### Results of Regression

Stepwise regression analysis was run using attendance as the dependent variable, this time with four of the six factors having a significant influence on the dependent variable (attendance). The 4 significant independent factors were: *sporting event alternative*; *time conflicts*; *fan of basketball/sports*; and *identity with players*. Surprisingly, one's identity with the school sports program was not a significant predictor of attendance, nor was the team's won-loss record. Independent variables entered in the regression analysis included: *Sporting Event Alternatives*, *Supporter of School Sports*, *Identity with Players*, *Time Conflicts*, *Basketball/Sports fan*, and *Team Record*. Stepwise regression revealed an R<sup>2</sup> of .204, with the following 4 factors proving significant: **Time Conflicts** (F=12.152 @ p=.001), **Basketball Fan** (F=11.509 @ p=.000), **Sporting Event Alternatives** (9.630 @ p=.000), and **Identity with Players** (F=8.803 @ p=.000).

Somewhat surprisingly, association and identity with the school athletic program and the team's won-loss record were not significant.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The factors emerging as significant using regression are somewhat unexpected since fan loyalty based on affiliation with the school itself proved significant in both ANOVA and t-test analysis. Focus group discussions clearly suggested students attend games as much for social and entertainment value reasons, and so it is somewhat surprising that cheerleaders, the band, and entertainment value (two items related to *Opponent* loaded on the *Entertainment Value* factor) were not significant. Social identification theory, however, may be at play since "identity with players" emerged as a significant factor. Interestingly, three factors emerged as significant across all three methods of analysis. These were: Sporting Event Alternatives, Time Conflicts, and Fan of Basketball. Being a supporter and fan of the school's athletic program and identification with the school itself was a significant factor in both the ANOVA and t-test analysis. These four factors are consistent with previous efforts to establish a small college attendance model. Other factors such as the team's won-loss record which has been demonstrated to impact attendance emerged as significant only when comparing high and low attendees. In the case of the HBCU where the current study was conducted, the dismal won-loss record of the school's football team in particular has dramatically impacted attendance at games. Because the basketball team has experienced sporadic success and is generally in the mid to upper level of the conference, attendance has not suffered to the same degree as is currently being experienced by the football team. Nonetheless, compared to home attendance at basketball games for a major conference such as the ACC, attendance at smaller schools is quite small. Average home attendance at basketball games for the top five ACC schools (see below), compared with

University of North Carolina	19,144
University of Maryland	14,910
N.C. State	13,779
University Virginia	10,156
Florida State	9,327

that of three small local programs (UNCG 4,261; HBCU 2,325; High Point University 1,347) provides perspective as to the disparity of gate receipt funding that exists between large athletic conference programs and smaller programs. For example, every school affiliated with the ACC managed to break even in terms of funding for its football, and men's and women's basketball programs during the 2009-2010 season, with schools such as UVA (\$81,841,000), Florida State (\$75,209,000), Duke (\$68,536,289), UNC (\$67,613,805), and Boston College

(\$64,502, 395) each bringing in excess of \$60 million for the three programs. Interestingly enough, the revenue generated by the UNC (revenues: \$20,551,168 versus expenses: \$6,647,459) and Duke (revenues: \$26,667,056 versus expenses: \$12,286,475) men's basketball programs more than doubled each program's respective expenses, easily offsetting the financial losses suffered by the women's basketball program (*News and Observer*, May 1, 2011).

While the ability of HBCU athletic directors to duplicate these home attendance (and corresponding financial revenues) results remains a virtual impossibility, the HBCU fan base has traditionally been quite enthusiastic in supporting their athletic programs. Much of this support stems from identification, community wide, with the traditions surrounding the respective institution (Kwon and Armstrong 2004). Sustaining long term fan loyalty is difficult, however, when the program is undergoing a sustained losing streak with no end in sight due to inadequate funding, poor facilities, poor recruiting and inept coaching. Further, sustaining a losing program becomes increasingly difficult at a time when college administrators are facing budget cuts and many of the alumni supporters themselves are struggling financially. Judging from the results of the t-test, fans who attend games on a fairly routine basis (i.e., high attendance fans) are likely those who strongly identify with both the school itself and the sports program.

As this exploratory study has demonstrated, fielding a winning team may not be as important as other factors in terms of attendance, particularly since two of the three factors that appear consistent in either analyzing differences in attendance level and/or predicting future attendance appear to be related to why people *are not attending*. Indeed, the sample revealed that roughly 85% of the attendees at the three games were students enrolled at the university, which would make conflicting entertainment options and other time conflicts quite influential. Larger schools do not face the same issue since they are not so dependent upon student attendance as a primary source of revenue (Armstrong and Stratto, 2004; Armstrong, 2002). Hence, while HBCU athletic directors should continue in their attempt to field the best teams possible, they must also realize the team record may not be the most important factor contributing to filling seats. What the team is competing with is what any sponsored activity must contend with---in other words, the multitude of activities associated with college life--- not the least of which include academics and part-time jobs. Indeed many HBCU students appear to work as many hours to pay for their college education as they spend in the classroom. Hence, after allocating time for study, work, and other social activities, attending sporting events may simply not be a high priority.

While this study has begun the process of investigating many of the factors which might tend to explain attendance at HBCU sporting events, future efforts need to include a more thorough investigation of the year group of the students attending the games. No attempt was made, for example, to collect information

as to whether it is upper classmen or freshman attending the games. Other interesting aspects of studying HBCU sport programs include the unique role that sports has historically played in the life of the typical HBCU fan, such as the extent to which the HBCU sports program is linked to the institution itself, and whether that linkage may be declining due to the increasing propensity of major sports programs to rely upon the athlete base that was traditionally reserved for the HBCU sports program. It may be, for example, that sports fan loyalty at the HBCU institution is generationally based, and that younger generations no longer feel compelled to support HBCU sport's programs to the same extent as older fans who's loyalty to the HBCU sports program may be based, in part, on the inability of an older generation of black athletes to compete at historically white universities. These are interesting issues that could potentially explain not only the lack of attendance but the lack of performance on the field. Sports marketers interested in saving HBCU sports programs should therefore attempt to discover new and innovative ways to assist HBCU athletic directors in recruiting what should by all rights be their traditional source of athletic excellence---the black athlete. Unfortunately, with the lack of financial resources available to compete with larger athletic conferences, HBCU's are faced with the same problems facing every other small college program...competing with other smaller schools for that group of athletes who have been overlooked by the major conference powers.

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