

The Utilization of Hiring High-Profile Head Football Coaches to Market the Athletic Department & Boost Fan Attendance at NCAA Division I Institutions

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ABSTRACT

NCAA Division I Football programs are an important revenue generator for intercollegiate athletic departments. For that reason, fan attendance is vital to the success of the athletic department. While NCAA Division I football continues to be popular, attendance at college football games has steadily declined over the last few years. Therefore, athletic directors have begun to look at various ways to help reverse this trend in order to increase attendance resulting in more revenue from ticket sales. One solution to this growing issue is that athletic directors have begun to look to hire “High-Profile” head football coaches they can use to market their respective athletic departments and football teams and in return boost game day attendance. Recent NCAA Division I football coaching hires such as Lane Kiffin at Florida Atlantic and Jeff Brohm at Purdue have resulted in both programs seeing an increase in attendance as a result of the publicity from the hires. These examples cause athletic directors to question if making a “High-Profile” hire is a good marketing tool to utilize for their athletic departments.

College football has seen a steady decline in attendance. According to Duffley (2019), despite the college football playoffs, there are less and less fans coming to games. Furthermore, attendance at college football games fell each of the last four years (Baker, 2018). Athletic directors working in connection with their sport marketing staff are tasked with trying to reverse this trend. The ability of fans to watch their favorite football team’s games on television or at the local sports bar instead of getting out and fighting traffic and attending the game in-person has caused many fans to stay home (Bonesteel, 2018). This choice by college football consumers has caused athletic administrators to search for various ways to market their intercollegiate football programs to fans in hopes that they will attend the games in-person.

Issues such as food and tailgating fees, parking, fewer combined discretionary funds as well as high-definition television have resulted in fans deciding to stay home rather than attend games

live (Buckley, 2018). Athletic administrators have searched for ways to reenergize their fan base and one such way is with “High-Profile” coaching hires.

Most recently, Florida Atlantic University and Purdue University used “High-Profile” coaching hires to help market their athletic departments. According to Ching (2018), a change in leadership helps drive fan interest especially if the new coach wins. Both Kiffin and Brohm were hired to provide a marketing boost to their respective institutions and the results from the first year show that the institutions made a good decision in hiring the coaches.

Florida Atlantic had the third highest increase in fan attendance in the Football Bowl Subdivision as the football team saw an increase of 8,875 fans per game (Ching, 2018). The addition of Kiffin as the football coach immediately brought attention and publicity to the institution and athletic department. Kiffin had the third most followed Twitter account among Division I head coaches and his social media success helped the university’s online presence grow as well (AlBaroudi, 2018). The social media accounts for Florida Atlantic football and Florida Atlantic athletics increased 55 percent and 30 percent respectively (AlBaroudi, 2018). The marketability of Lane Kiffin not only influenced the athletic department but also the university as a whole. According to Joshua Glanzer, Florida Atlantic’s Vice President of Media Relations, “Athletics’ publicity value shot up 701 percent to \$75,790,000 million and the school in total rose 159 percent to \$96,950,000 million” (AlBaroudi, 2018).

Like Florida Atlantic, Purdue University made the decision to hire an up and coming “High-Profile” coach in Jeff Brohm when they made a football coaching change in 2017. The hiring of Brohm resulted in the nation’s biggest increase of 13,000 fans per game in one year (Ching, 2018). The hiring of Brohm brought an excitement to the Purdue campus that resulted in more than \$2,563,903 dollars more football revenue than the previous year with one less home game (Russo, 2018). The additional revenue received did not include monies coming in from parking, concessions, and merchandise. The ability of the athletic department to market Jeff Brohm as the “face” of Purdue allowed the institution to see a significant increase in revenue.

As NCAA Division I athletic departments consider ways to attract fans and increase attendance at their football games, athletic directors are tasked with finding the best ways to market their programs. The use of “High-Profile” coaches has shown to be one possible way to add marketability to these programs.

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Keywords: Sports marketing, intercollegiate athletics, football, revenue, publicity, fans, attendance

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers, and Practitioners: It is imperative for athletic administrators and sport marketers to understand the importance a coaching hire can have on the marketability of the institution. As colleges and universities attempt to find ways to increase fan attendance and increase revenue dollars, the ability to capitalize on a "High-Profile" coaching hire can help in marketing not only the athletic department but also the institution.

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