

An Investigation Into Professional Athlete Philanthropy: Why Charity Is Part of the Game

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This study explored the philanthropic landscape of professional athletes and their charitable foundations. This research also investigated factors influencing the formation of philanthropic foundations among this group of individuals. First, data were collected to identify athletes in four professional North American sport leagues who had formed charitable foundations. Then, 36 interviews were conducted with athletes, foundation directors, league and team executives and a sport agent to explore the motives and beliefs about philanthropy in professional sport. Using the theory of planned behavior, this paper identified the factors considered in the formation of charitable foundations in this unique group, primarily focusing on attitudes (altruistic and self-interested), perceived behavioral control, subjective norms, self-identity and moral obligation as antecedents to athlete philanthropic activity. The paper also discusses the unique context in which these individuals operate, some of the particular constraints they face, and identifies opportunities for athlete foundations and their partners.

The professional sport industry in North America has increasingly focused on social responsibility over the past 10 years and sport philanthropy has emerged as a key element of these activities (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Sheth & Babiak, 2010; Sports Philanthropy Project, 2007). In this industry, professional sport executives are increasingly becoming concerned with the image and public perception of their teams and, as such, reaching out to the communities in which they operate (Arney, 2004). Athletes are an important resource that professional sport teams use to both make an impact on a social issue and to garner positive associations for themselves and the team, as one sport executive states:

Players, in addition to their work on the field, must also do their part in integrating the team into the community it represents. Whether it is through community appearances for a sponsor or other community activities, the goal is to have fans in the market associate them and the team for which they play to positive community activities. (Hamilton, 2004, p. 82)

Given the tremendous scrutiny professional sport teams and athletes receive in the media, it is important to make strong connections with the community. This sentiment was emphasized by another sport executive:

We have to get out with our fans and interact with them as much as possible. We have to get our players out there . . . We have to get them into the community, shaking hands and supporting charitable causes. This contact is important because we are in an era where unfortunately so much of the business of pro sports has seeped into the front page of the paper, especially the attention given to the salaries our players earn. (Wallace, 2004, p. 38)

Professional athletes in major American sports are unique, representing the brand of the team and league as well as their own personal brand. The positive or negative ramifications of nonsporting pursuits influence the value of these brands placing utility in their appraisal. Given the relatively recent emergence of sport philanthropy, “. . . many (athletes) may not be aware of the value — of both their communities and their teams — of exercising philanthropy through carefully and strategically structured foundations and programs” (Sports Philanthropy Project, 2007).

The concept of philanthropy for athletes has recently garnered attention with the work carried out by three

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large charitable foundations established by high profile professional athletes—Andre Agassi, Tiger Woods, and Lance Armstrong. These three athletes have the biggest charitable foundations of any professional athlete in terms of donations and programs as well as assets: Agassi—\$81 million; Woods—\$48 million; Armstrong—\$31 million (charitynavigator.com, 2009). This trend of philanthropy and activism among athletes has been recognized since 1994 by USA Today through its Most Caring Athlete Award, and organizations such as Athletes for Hope, MVP Philanthropy, the National Heritage Fund, the Sports Philanthropy Project, and the Giving Back Fund, which have been created by and / or for athletes to provide support for those who have a deep commitment to charitable and community causes. The Giving Back Fund, for example, strives to establish high profile role-models for underrepresented groups and helps manage foundations of players in the National Basketball Association and other sports.

The significance of sport and philanthropy exists in the role that sport plays in the cultural fabric of our society. Sport is intrinsically about aspiration and becomes inspirational in the eyes of onlookers. It requires discipline, passion, and dedication, and athletes that excel at the highest levels of sport have the platform and opportunity to be able to inspire, motivate, and leverage their celebrity to make a difference in causes and issues that are important to them. Athletes today garner attention beyond what they do on the field of play, and expectations are increasingly being placed on them by stakeholders to demonstrate their charitable involvement and good deeds (Roy & Graeff, 2003). As Stuart (2007) argued, American society has an “obsession with fleeting moments of fame, and our centuries-long tendency to place elite athletes upon a social pedestal for athletic acts deemed as ‘heroic’” (p. 127). Because of athletes’ ability to sway consumer choices (Veltri, Kuzman, Stolar, Viswanathan, & Miller, 2003), athletes have the potential to earn millions of dollars in addition to their lucrative playing salaries, putting their actions both on and off the field sharply into focus (Charbonneau & Garland, 2006; Kim & Na, 2007; Stewart, 1999).

Although the theme of sport, its athletes, and philanthropy are converging in practice, little attention has been paid to it in the academic literature to date. Specifically related to athletes and philanthropic or charitable involvement, the scholarly work in this area (Phyllo, Funk, & O’Brien, 2008, 2009, O’Brien & Chalip, 2007) examines participant attachment to sport events aligned with a charitable cause (in this case an athlete’s foundation focusing on cancer). The issue of social responsibility in sport has been a growing topic of interest; however, this interest has primarily led to investigations of philanthropy, community outreach, or cause-related marketing efforts of professional sport teams and leagues (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006, 2009; Brietbarth & Harris, 2008; Sheth & Babiak, 2010; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007; Walker & Kent, 2009). This work has explored social responsibility and philanthropy as it contributes to a sport organization

as well as the impact that it has on the social issues these organizations are addressing. Little academic attention has been paid to the professional athletes themselves as philanthropists, and scant attention has been paid to the decision-making processes and motives behind philanthropic behaviors in this group of individuals.

Research Questions / Objectives / Purpose

While demographic factors such as gender, age, marital status, education levels or income levels that are associated with differences in charitable giving have been explored in the philanthropy and charitable giving literature (cf., Brown & Ferris, 2007; Burgoyne, Young, & Walker, 2005; Freeman, 2004; Jackson, 2001; Kottasz, 2004; Radley & Kennedy, 1995; Wright, 2001), there is still a need for research to be conducted within a theoretical framework that considers a range of individual factors, such as attitudes, and social factors, such as norms, that influence charitable giving (or as is the focus in this case, the establishment of charitable foundations, i.e., ‘*formalized*’ philanthropy). Thus, there is a gap in the academic literature concerning 1) the motives for creating foundations and 2) the factors that inhibit or encourage charitable giving or information that might aid the development of interventions to increase or improve levels of philanthropic endeavors. There is also a lack of factual information on athlete foundations, especially regarding the antecedents to their formation, their strategic positioning, and challenges and opportunities afforded to them. Furthermore, we know little about the state and scope of athlete philanthropy. What type of athlete is formalizing their charity efforts by establishing foundations? How does the phenomenon of athlete charity break down by sport? Given the growing emphasis in the area of sport philanthropy and the power of sport to influence and mobilize a large part of society (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007), the purpose of this research is to examine the nature of philanthropy from this community of individuals. Specifically, the following research questions are addressed:

- a) What is the ‘landscape’ of professional athlete philanthropy? What is the profile of an athlete who forms a charitable foundation?
- b) What are the motivations behind the formation of charitable foundations? What beliefs underpin these determinants? What unique challenges or barriers do athlete foundations face? To what extent are these professional athlete foundations using their assets and resources in a strategic way?

Literature Review

This section highlights the literature as it relates to philanthropic and charitable aims of individuals. We provide a brief background on some of the key issues

in the field of nonprofit and philanthropic organizations and charitable giving. We then consider strategic and altruistic motives behind (formalized) philanthropic behavior (i.e., the formation of charitable foundations) and suggest that the theory of planned behavior allows for a detailed consideration of both strategic and altruistic determinants leading professional athletes to form their own charitable foundation.

The landscape of charity and philanthropy in society has shifted and the boundaries of this sector have changed over the past decade. There has been continual growth in the value of foundation assets and amount of money disbursed. Estimated total giving in the United States in 2008 (from individuals, corporations, and foundations) was \$307.65 billion, of which foundations gave an estimated \$41.21 billion, or 13% of the total (Giving USA, 2009). Giving has increased over the past 40 years, with foundations providing an increasing share of the total (and individuals a smaller share) because of the growing number of individual and family foundations and the increasing assets that these foundations hold (Giving USA, 2009).

Charitable organizations play an important role in American society, contributing both time and funds to numerous research efforts and causes that aid the needy. Research on charitable giving has often focused on identifying the individual demographic factors such as gender, age, marital status, education levels or income levels that are associated with differences in charitable giving (Burgoyne, et al., 2005; Lee, Piliavin, & Call, 1999; Lord, 1981). Such research provides valuable insights into charitable giving, but it is solely descriptive. Reliance on descriptive aspects of charitable giving fails to further our understanding of the factors that inhibit or encourage charitable giving, or provide information that might aid the development of interventions to enhance or increase levels of charitable giving (Smith & McSweeney, 2007).

Forming a charitable foundation is distinct from other charitable options such as creating a fund within a community foundation or donor advised fund, establishing a support organization, or direct gifts. The administrative process to form and manage a foundation is comprehensive and requires the determination of the type of foundation it will be (i.e., public charity—derive revenues from public sources; private foundation—start foundation with endowment (Foundation Center, 2009)), development of vision and mission statements, appointment of board members, dealing with a myriad of tax and legal issues, expert financial management, design of termination procedures, identifying grant-making objectives and soliciting for opportunities, and evaluation and impact of charitable activities. Careful consideration needs to be given to determine whether a charitable foundation is the best vehicle for one's philanthropy—although it may afford the founder a certain level of prestige.

Public charities represent the largest share of active 501(c)(3)¹ designated organizations. Over the last ten years, the number of public charities has grown by 60%, from 593,802 in 1998–947,274 in 2008 (National Center

for Charitable Statistics, 2009a). Those starting a new organization usually prefer public charity status, because it may enjoy some advantages over private foundations such as higher donor tax-deductible giving limits, the ability to attract support from other public charities and private foundations, as well as a \$25,000 income threshold to trigger the submission of the annual Form 990² filing (private foundations file Form 990-PF regardless of income) (Foundation Group, 2009). The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) requires that the structure and governance of a public charity be at arms-length and without private benefit to insiders. As such, the IRS requires that a quorum of board members exist for a public charity who have no personal stake in the organization, either directly or potentially through relationship.

Private foundations on the other hand, offer their founders greater control of the foundation dealings and can be controlled by related parties, but are disadvantaged somewhat on deductibility limits to donors, have mandatory Form 990-PF filings, and minimum annual asset distributions (5% each year) (Foundation Group, 2009). There are approximately 100,000 private foundations in the United States. A founding individual, a family, or a corporation usually endows these organizations. The vast majority make grants to fund 501(c)(3) public charities, although they may also provide scholarships, support government activities, or conduct operating activities similar to those of public charities (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2009b). The number of private foundations registered with the IRS increased by 54% over the past decade, from 70,480 in 1998–108,594 in 2008.

Strategic Philanthropy

In the literature on corporate social responsibility (CSR), the concept of strategic philanthropy is emerging as an alternative to solely altruistic activity on the part of a company. Waddock and Post (1995), Saiia, Carroll, and Buchholtz (2003), and Porter and Kramer (1999, 2006) all present strategic philanthropy as the synergistic use of a firm's resources to achieve both organizational and social benefits. Thus, from this paradigm, there is the dual objective (and outcome) of 'value added' to the business and charitable benevolence in addressing a pressing social issue. While these authors have examined this concept in a corporate setting, the principles might similarly be applied to individual responsibility—and philanthropy. The concept of strategic philanthropy, as it relates to individuals such as professional athletes who are still employed and playing on a professional team, relates to the view that philanthropic activities may provide the athlete (and team and league) with a benefit (financial, political, social capital) to themselves and their brand or image as well as social benefits for the causes they support.

Closely linked to the idea of strategic philanthropy, prosocial behavior which encompasses a wide range of activities intended to benefit someone or something other

than oneself has been found to be motivated by altruism and self-interest or some combination of the two (Baston, 1998; Piliavin & Charng, 1990). The altruistic motivation behind much philanthropic engagement is often referred to as ‘warm glow’ feelings (Andreoni, 1990) which capture the emotion connected with prosocial helping behavior. In contrast, those supporters driven by egoistic or self-serving motives are concerned with some return in exchange for their charitable activity. For example, tax incentives have been shown to be a powerful motivator for some donors (Peloza & Hassay, 2006). Peloza and Hassay (2006) identified other egoistic motives associated with charitable behavior such as recognition, reward seeking, social pressure, and expected reciprocity—the belief that one might have need for the services of the charity in the future. These two dichotomous concepts can be integrated and examined at the level of individual charity efforts directed toward ameliorating a social ill, where there also may be a positive impact on brand image and where philanthropy is also framed in moral and ethical terms.

These perspectives described above both have merit as a means to explain and understand philanthropic behavior; however, the full picture of philanthropy is unlikely to be explained wholly by these two points of view alone. Other factors influence individual philanthropic decisions such as internal and external constraints, the ability to have behavioral control over such decisions, the degree to which an individual considers philanthropy as a component of a person’s self-identity, and the resources available to engage in it (e.g., slack—financial resources). These variables are considered likely to influence decisions to engage in philanthropy (Dennis, Buchholtz, & Butts, 2009). The factors highlighted above emerged from Ajzen’s (1985, 1991) theory of planned behavior (TPB) and serve as the theoretical framework for this research examining formalized philanthropy among professional athletes. A more detailed discussion of the TPB follows.

Theory of Planned Behavior

The theory of planned behavior examines a range of proposed antecedents that for the purposes of this study, will further our understanding of the intentions to engage in formalized philanthropy—influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral controls. The theory of planned behavior has been used in a number of contexts to determine the motivations underpinning human behavior. For instance, it has been used to predict leisure intentions and behavior (Ajzen & Driver, 1992), charitable donations (Smith & McSweeney, 2007), philanthropic decisions by corporate executives (Dennis et al., 2009) engaging in physical activity (Trafimow & Trafimow, 1998), and composting (Kaiser, Woelfing, & Fuhrer, 1999) to name a few. However, although there are a number of studies focusing on altruistic and helping behaviors (Konkoly & Perloff, 1990; Pomazel & Jacard, 1976), there has been little research on individual philanthropic activity using the TPB.

TPB posits that human action is guided by three kinds of considerations including beliefs about the likely outcomes of the behavior and the evaluations of these outcomes (behavioral beliefs), beliefs about the normative expectations of others and motivation to comply with these expectations (normative beliefs), and beliefs about the presence of factors that may facilitate or impede performance of the behavior and the perceived power of these factors (control beliefs) (Ajzen, 1991). Finally, given a sufficient degree of actual control over the behavior, people are expected to carry out their intentions when the opportunity arises. However, because many behaviors pose difficulties of execution that may limit volitional control, perceived behavioral control is thought to have an additional direct effect on behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

Specifically, the model proposes that attitude (i.e., the evaluation of the target behavior), subjective norms (i.e., perceived social pressure regarding performance of the behavior), and perceived behavioral control (i.e., perceived control over performance of the behavior) influence behavior primarily through their impact on behavioral intention (Ajzen, 1991; Dennis et al., 2009). That is, the more one intends to engage in a particular behavior, the more likely one is to actually engage in it depending in part on the amount of resources and control one has over the behavior (see Figure 1 for a graphic representation of the model). Thus, the resources and opportunities available to a person must, to some extent, dictate the likelihood of behavior achievement. Others have included self-identity (Dennis et al., 2009), and the concept of slack as contributors to decisions made regarding human behavior. Each of these variables are discussed in more detail below.

Attitude, or the overall evaluation of the attractiveness of the behavior to the individual, considers what outcomes may arise from a certain behavior (Ajzen, 1991). It suggests that individuals may be more inclined to engage in a particular behavior if outcomes are perceived to be favorable. This concept relates to that of strategic philanthropy or the service value of actions in that it considers the benefit to oneself personally, whether that may be maximizing returns to the athlete in this case, in the form of increased revenues, improved image, or an enhanced brand. At the same time, philanthropic or charitable actions can allow the individual (or their foundation) to increase the welfare (i.e., cause value) of the recipients of the charitable contributions. Thus, behavior is determined by the decision maker’s perception of the potential consequences of that action.

Another factor in the TPB, subjective norms, suggests that social pressures affect behaviors (Ajzen, 1991). Thus, philanthropy would be viewed as a means for the individual to increase or manage power and legitimacy in the eyes of key constituents—or ‘important others’ to the individual—and would be motivated to comply with these self-selected referents. Thus from this perspective, decisions to engage in philanthropy are reactive in nature as the decision maker’s perception of these forces influences decisions to be charitable (Dennis et al., 2009).

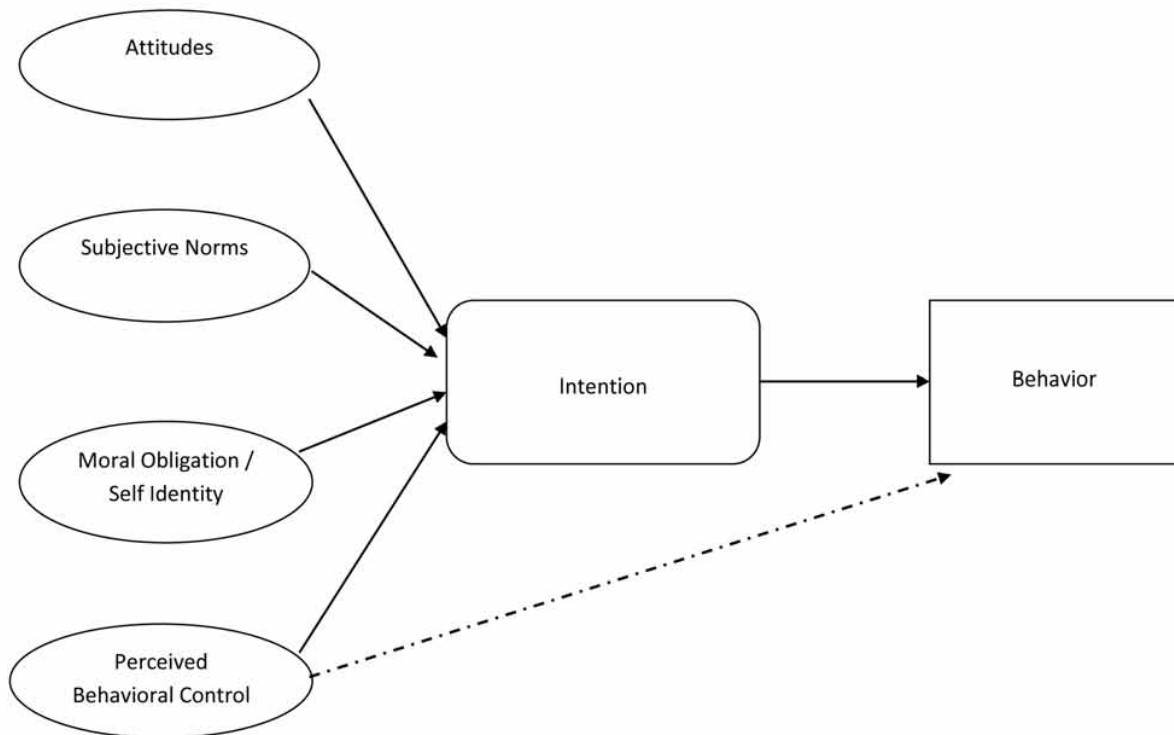


Figure 1 — Theory of Planned Behavior Model

Beyond subjective norms, certain decision making contexts require the consideration of moral norms (Ajzen, 1991). Moral obligation is the degree to which a person feels an ethical responsibility to perform a certain behavior and can also influence whether that individual will perform the behavior. Individuals may decide to participate in philanthropy as a result of their feelings of personal obligation to help others (Dennis et al., 2009). Certain decision making contexts, philanthropic activity among them, require consideration of moral norms (personal feelings of a moral obligation to perform, or refuse to perform, a certain behavior). In the context of philanthropy, moral obligation is closely linked to the underlying theme of altruistic drivers of charitable behavior, and philanthropic decisions have a moral component that cannot be overlooked (Sanchez, 2000).

Self-identity is the salient part of an actor's self which relates to a particular behavior. Research suggests that individuals are more inclined to engage in a behavior to the extent that they consider that behavior as an important component of their self-identity (Dennis et al., 2009). Self-identity and moral obligation are closely related in that they both examine the normative influence present within the individual. For instance, the extent to which individuals identify themselves with their philanthropic endeavors serves as an important component of their identity and helps them define who they are.

Perceived behavioral control (PBC), the perceived ease or difficulty of performing a certain behavior (Ajzen, 1991), is a key dimension of the TPB. Specifically, this dimension considers whether a behavior can be performed by the individual (i.e., are they capable of carrying it out?). Behaviors are constrained by internal or dispositional abilities, cognitive skills, emotions, perceptions of self-efficacy, as well as external (situational) factors. Thus, individuals may be constrained in their latitude of action by environmental and personal characteristics, and powerful forces can have an impact on the discretion of an individual to act in a variety of behaviors (Ajzen, 1991; Dennis et al., 2009). PBC is more important in influencing a person's behavioral intention particularly when the behavior is not wholly under volitional control. One is more likely to perform, or intend to perform, behaviors that are perceived as being relatively easy or within one's control. However, if the skills, abilities, and resources needed to perform the behavior are outside of the control of the individual—or if the situation is not favorable—the behavior is likely to be constrained (Ajzen, 1985, 1991; Ajzen & Driver, 1992; Dennis et al., 2009; Fang, 2006; Smith & McSweeney, 2007).

TPB is thus a model that combines both strategic and altruistic perspectives—incorporating behavioral control, attitudes, subjective and moral norms, and self-identity. We believe that this is an appropriate perspective by which to examine motives, beliefs, and intentions underpinning

the charitable behaviors of professional athletes. A point of clarification, in this study the TPB is used as a frame by which to examine (not predict) philanthropic behaviors among professional athletes. Following is an overview of the methods used to examine philanthropy among professional athletes in North America.

Method

Given the research questions proposed in this study to better understand the landscape and scope of philanthropy among professional athletes, as well as the motives, beliefs, and intentions underpinning charitable behavior among this population, we employed several methodological strategies.

Data Collection

The data collected for this study come from a number of sources and the collection was carried out in three phases:

- a) The first phase involved identification of professional athletes who had established independent charitable foundations (public or private charities, funds within community foundations, or donor advised funds or foundations). This information was collected and examined at two time intervals: eligible athletes who were on team rosters for the 2005–06 season for their respective sports (National Basketball Association (NBA), National Hockey League (NHL), National Football League (NFL), and Major League Baseball (MLB)), and athletes playing during the 2008–09 seasons. The purpose of this two-phased data collection was to uncover and identify any trends in the existence of professional athlete foundations over time and across professional sport leagues. It additionally serves the purpose of providing a benchmark for future research on shifts or changes in philanthropy among this group of individuals.

This dataset was created from several sources. General information such as name, birth date, league experience, and stint on current team was collected for all players on team rosters from *espn.com* and each of the four leagues' respective sections on *sports-reference.com*. The *USA Today* database on player salary was then used for its 2005–2006 and 2008–2009 salary and contract data. Additional sources, including *insidehoops.com*, *cbssports.com*, and *rodneymfort.com*, were used to supplement and confirm salary information. The research team then used *Google*, the *Foundations Directory*, *Internal Revenue Service*, and player association web pages to identify which players purported to have established foundations and followed relevant hits to decipher the name of the foundation and its mission. Information on which players established foundations was verified by the *Sports Philanthropy Project* (an organization designated to support league, team, and athlete charity), each of the league offices and the respective player association

headquarters. These findings were then searched and confirmed on the *Foundation Center* and *GuideStar* home pages for further detail including whether the foundation had filed a Form 990, and the total assets, revenues, and expenditures for each respective year examined. 990 forms were further examined to determine the amount of support athlete foundations were giving and to whom they were giving it.

- b) The second data source included media coverage of professional athlete foundations and charitable work. Media reports related to professional athletes and their charitable foundations were examined from 1990 until 2008. Newsprint, magazine, and periodicals from the top 20 US daily newspapers by circulation (Newspaper Association of America, 2009) were examined by conducting a Lexis-Nexis search. Key search terms included: name of athlete, team names, foundation, charity, philanthropy, charitable donation, charitable involvement, giving, NFL, NHL, NBA, MLB, football, baseball, basketball, and / or hockey. This search resulted in a total of 132 reports which were categorized on a yearly basis to identify any growth in media awareness on professional athlete charity in general. Media data sources have been found to offer rich insight into institutional matters such as legal violations and sanctions, the adoption and implementation of new philanthropic initiatives, and the formation of partnerships which can be useful for studying trends and institutionalization of certain types of behavior (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). The media data provided a proxy for broad interest in the topic of athlete philanthropy as well as providing a richer context and background for particular athlete foundations which were included in the interview phase.
- c) Semistructured interviews were conducted with 36 professional athletes, team and league senior executives, foundation executive directors, and a sport agent who all either had insight in directly managing a charitable foundation or worked in collaboration with one. Table 1 indicates the breakdown of the interviewees of this study.

Table 1 List of Interviewees

Category	# of Interviewees
League Executive	4
Team Executive	4
Professional Sport Agent	1
Professional Athlete	10
Senior Administrator—Athlete Foundation	15
Athlete Philanthropy Organization Representative	2
TOTAL INTERVIEWS	36

The interviews ranged from between 30 minutes to 1.5 hr. These interviews were conducted both in-person and via telephone. Respondents answered questions pertaining to the motives behind their decision to form a charitable foundation and their engagement in philanthropic activities—beyond what they are expected or required to do for their league or team. Each interview was based on the seminal question of this research: “What motivates you to be philanthropic?” Interviewees were then further questioned about their attitudes toward charity and philanthropy, the perceived social and organizational (league, team) pressures to be charitable, the role their moral obligation (ethics) played in engaging in philanthropy, and the benefits or drawbacks of their decision to form a foundation. The interviews allowed for an in-depth understanding of the participants’ perspectives concerning their philanthropic motivations and actions. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and sent to the participants themselves to be reviewed for accuracy and clarity. During the transcription process, we followed the ‘denaturalism’ approach in which idiosyncratic elements of speech (e.g., stutters, pauses, nonverbals, involuntary vocalizations) were removed (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005) as this study was not intended to be a conversation analysis *per se*. Rather, we were interested in the informational content of the dialogue with the informants in this study. While we still aimed for a full and faithful transcription, our concerns related more to the substance of the interview itself (i.e., the meanings and perceptions created and shared during the conversation) (Oliver, et al., 2005). The selected passages that were included in this manuscript were ‘cleaned up’ for grammar, diction, and response tokens (such as uh, ah, uh huh, etc.).

Data Analysis

Data on the number of athletes with foundations and information from 990 forms from both time frames were tabulated in an Excel file where cross-sectional means, frequencies, and totals were determined for the foundations themselves, as well as player characteristics for those with and without foundations.

Interview transcripts and media documents were analyzed using *Atlas.ti*. We created a Hermeneutic Unit (HU) for this project, to which we then assigned relevant documents including transcripts and relevant media documents. We then reviewed the primary documents and passages of interests (paragraphs, sentences, phrases) were assigned codes in a deductive manner (i.e., in concert with the theoretical framework). Initial coding was developed with codes derived from the nonprofit, social responsibility, charity, and philanthropy literature, as well as from constructs from the TPB. Examples of codes included: social outcomes (making positive impact on beneficiaries), personal outcomes (benefits to image, enhanced brand, increased revenues), social pressures from important others (family, teammates, team executives, coach, friends), moral obligation, community norms and values, philanthropy part of social identity;

perceived ease of being charitable, perceived difficulty of being charitable, and unique assets of professional athletes in philanthropy. Throughout the data analysis process, memos and notes were taken to ensure a degree of reflexivity related to the data and a system by which we noted questions or issues associated with the data (Oliver, et al., 2005). From this open and axial coding, we then moved to examining higher-order themes to build a framework of understanding of the motives and behaviors underpinning the philanthropic efforts of professional athletes. Recurring themes identifying the motives behind the formation of charitable foundations emerged—and aligned with elements from the theory of planned behavior; the codes and themes were then reviewed, confirmed, and if necessary were revised by the authors. Once a finalized list of codes and broad themes was developed, all textual data were then analyzed once again with the revised codes. A final code book including codes for all athlete philanthropy motives, challenges, and opportunities was created. The interview transcripts and documents were then reanalyzed with the updated codes and a final review for consistency and accuracy was conducted. Patterns in and interrelationships between the coded passages relating to the motives athletes had with respect to philanthropy and charity were found. These are reported below.

Results / Discussion

The results of the research are presented in two sections. In the first section we report on the findings of the existence and related variables regarding professional athlete foundations. In the second section we present and discuss the qualitative data from the interviews conducted for this study.

The Landscape of Athlete Philanthropy

Surveying the field of athlete foundations suggests that for both time periods, professional athletes who had longer tenures in their respective leagues and who had higher salaries on average tended to have a higher rate of having established a charitable foundation. In 2006 for instance, 519 professional athletes purported to have foundations and 221 were found to have official 501(c)(3) status from the IRS. In 2008, 509 athletes purported to have foundations and 198 were found to have official 501(c)(3) status from the IRS. Tables 2 and 3 highlight trends and detailed information regarding the existence of professional athlete foundations, including the number who had received charitable status (this number is conservative in that it does not represent those athletes who have formed a foundation through a local community fund or an organization like the Giving Back Fund or athletes who have established their foundation abroad), the total number of players in each league, average league salaries and service for each of the years examined. The data for the 2008–09 analysis do not include information about revenue, grants / contri-

butions, and assets because 990 forms were not available for 2008 at the time of writing. The data suggest relatively little change in the number of athlete foundations over the two year time period. These data do not indicate the discontinuation or failure rates of foundations, which is an important consideration for this population of philanthropists and a crucial question for future research (i.e., how long on average do athlete foundations exist and can we predict their formation?). In addition, it should be noted that the player data included in the following tables come from the 2005/2006 and 2008/2009 seasons, respectively, rather than the years in which each players' foundation was formed. While it may be beneficial to report player characteristic data from founding years for *predictive* analyses, the current year data are sufficient in presenting an overview of the vast differences in player characteristics (in terms of tenure and income) between those currently with and without foundations.

Athlete Philanthropy and Theory of Planned Behavior

The second objective of this research was to uncover the motives and intentions professional athletes have to engage in philanthropic activity—namely forming their own charitable foundation. In addition, we sought to examine the challenges and opportunities perceived by key individuals involved in this sector as to their involvement with charity. Below we highlight the significant findings as they relate to motivation and use TPB to frame the findings. We use representative quotations from the interviews to provide context and to echo the words of the interviewees themselves.

Attitudes to Philanthropy. As articulated above in the review of literature, Azjen (1991) discussed attitude as the evaluation of the attractiveness of the behavior to the individual. In this case, the individuals' attitude toward philanthropy and charity was their evaluative reaction to the behavior, which reflected their predisposition to respond in a favorable or unfavorable way to that action (Eagly & Chaiken, 2007). The respondents in this study had all already formed their own charitable foundations, thus they had already responded in a favorable way. The objective was then to uncover their attitudes toward philanthropy that led them to this behavior. The findings suggest that professional athletes engaged in philanthropy because the outcomes—to themselves and to those that they served—were perceived to be favorable, despite the considerable hurdles associated with foundation formation.

A significant attitude toward charitable behavior among the interviewees suggested that being altruistic offered positive outcomes of satisfaction, feelings of helping, and being engaged in a community which were perceived to be favorable to the athletes themselves. For instance, one athlete discussed the positive feelings of satisfaction associated with helping children become more involved in sport through the work of his foundation—and he considered this outcome as attractive.

It feels great to me personally seeing the help we can give to these school sport teams. They send us photos showing their team in action wearing the new jerseys we outfitted them with. They ended up winning a tournament, and they made sure I got a trophy too. You look at that and you can say you did something that mattered.

Altruistic attitudes are only one of the possible motivations explaining prosocial behavior; indeed some actions deemed as altruistic, may in fact be self-serving. Hibbert and Horne (1996), for instance, found that charitable giving was motivated by career advancement, public recognition and enhanced social status. Other self-serving attitudes toward charitable behavior followed Dawson's (1998) and Ariely, Bracha, and Meier's (2009) findings that these activities can offer fun, provide tax relief, enhance image, and improve self-esteem. In addition to these attitudes, this research showed that the quest for self-interest in engaging philanthropically was highlighted by the participants as being to help one's family, secure the respect of others, enhance their brand image, or gain social prestige. In this vein, one athlete commented:

What I do with my foundation – I get to meet a lot of people, have fun at my events with my friends and people who donate money, and work with people from local businesses and municipal government. Not only is it good networking for me, but I have access to a lot of powerful individuals through the charitable work I do.

Many respondents noted that player charitable foundations are often formed in and focused on cities where the athlete plays. This may serve both altruistic (they care about the cities in which they have lived) and self-serving motives (their image and reputation is enhanced in those cities) and may be a logistical necessity—in order for an athlete to be involved and participate with foundation programs and events, access and timing to these activities are crucial. One athlete foundation's executive director demonstrated this concern:

The cities in which [player's foundation] are active are the cities he has played in. He needs to be around and close in order to be supportive of his foundation. It is a huge challenge to coordinate these activities if the athlete is not nearby, or somewhere where he visits often. Because he has the media attention and the notoriety, it has to be this way for the foundation to be successful.

The attitudes highlighted above provide a more nuanced view of athlete philanthropy—that there are both altruistic and self-interested objectives in engaging in this behavior—and the attractiveness of charitable behaviors to professional athletes.

Subjective Norms. The next dimension of the TPB posits that social pressures affect behavior, and that

certain activities would be viewed as a means to increase or manage power and legitimacy in the eyes of “important others” (Azjen, 1991). Several of the most important constituents were identified by interviewees as family members, teammates and coaches, team executives and owners, league governing bodies, the media, sport agents and managers, and communities in which the athletes played. In the context of athlete philanthropy, forming a foundation can serve to legitimize the associated player as a genuine community actor, one of the central functions being to abide by the community’s norms and values (Wolpert, 2002). A typical athlete comment related to abiding by community norms and values:

The community expects a lot from us – both on and off the field. Professional sport teams and athletes are high profile in the cities in which they play, and oftentimes whether we like it or not, we are viewed as role models. The community gives us a lot, and so for me, it is important for me to be seen giving back to the community that supports me and my team so strongly.

Interviewees perceived that having a foundation legitimizes the philanthropic athlete in the eyes of community members and donors / supporters of the athletes cause.

Before I started my foundation, I had been doing charitable things for several years. I gave scholarships out of my own pocket to students at the high school where I grew up, and the NFL matched the money I donated. I also bought blocks of tickets for games and gave them to programs for kids in the city. I did appearances and gave money to several other non-profits. Then, I decided that I wanted all these activities under one umbrella, and then I could really impact who I wanted to and just have it be more legitimate in other people’s eyes. So, if I hosted a fundraiser, for example, people who made a donation could receive a tax deduction.

In addition to community related concerns, professional athletes are frequently scrutinized by local and national media—their actions both on and off the field of play—often serving as a ‘double edged sword’ for athletes with foundations. Being viewed as charitable is one avenue by which an athlete can create a positive image (or avoid a negative one) and gain support from key constituents (such as fans, and team and league executives). Interviewees considered that media attention as an asset for a professional athlete with a foundation because it could help shed light on a cause or issue that might not typically have the capacity to do so. However, because of that scrutiny, charitable athletes must be even more cautious and aware about their public activities. This is an interesting issue particularly given the discrepancies reported in the last column of Tables 2 and 3 where in many cases less than half of the athletes who ‘purported’ to have a foundation actually were officially recognized as

doing so by the IRS. Certainly some athletes who purport to have foundations may do so through different avenues (such as a donor advised fund, or under the umbrella of a community foundation); nonetheless, there appear to be a substantial number of athletes who purport to have a foundation (and may appreciate the value of being perceived philanthropically for their image and reputation), but do not follow through, despite the potential for negative press.

Other key groups of ‘important others’ influencing subjective norms related to philanthropy for professional athletes were their teammates and coaches. In the interviews athletes revealed that they significantly valued team members’ perception of them as a ‘good teammate’ or a ‘good person’. In addition, athletes considered a charitable foundation can play a vital role to fostering that image. There appeared to be support for the respondents from both teammates with their own charitable foundation, and those without. This support manifested itself in a number of ways including personal appearances at foundation events, providing memorabilia, or financially supporting the athlete’s foundation. One athlete stated:

I get a lot of support from my teammates. They think it is great that I have a foundation and some of them are even starting their own now. I can count on them to help support any of my activities and events, and I would do the same for them. It is important for us to support each other like this.

(Coach) has high expectations of us off the field. He is very involved in charity work and views that as a really positive thing. I learned a lot from him and want to emulate some of the work he does, and he is very supportive of all of us athletes who have our own foundations.

Interviewees also viewed subjective norms around philanthropy, charity and community involvement as being typically strong at the league and team levels. In fact several of the leagues have community involvement and philanthropy as part of their league mission or objective. So the culture of these leagues, and at the team level as well, creates a setting in which philanthropy and charity is fostered, supported, and often encouraged. One athlete commented:

Right now, the league and every team are so involved in philanthropy and charity. We have to do community and charity activities for the league, and for our teams – it is written into our contracts that we have to do a certain number of appearances each season. So being charitable is definitely valued and appreciated. Over and above what I do for the league and team, I do on my own with my own foundation. I think that this has value for the league and team as well. It cannot hurt to have players seen doing positive things because so often what you read about professional athletes in the media is all the negative stuff.

And in a similar context, a league executive commented on the relationship of support between the league, teams, and player charities:

There is a pretty strong history and relationship between the players' foundations and the support they get from their clubs. The NHL fully supports the philanthropic efforts of our players, for example we provide a digital connection between our website and player foundation websites, and in some instances there are partnerships between team and player charities. The fact that our players are charitable dovetails nicely with our league CSR messages.

Indeed, it is not surprising that perhaps one reason athletes do establish a foundation is that it can help them build their reputation in the community, and in turn, this may lead to more endorsements and make them more valuable to their teams. In addition, it is perhaps just one more thing an athlete can do to present himself as a positive role model for his team, while avoiding becoming a distraction that attracts publicity of the negative type. This can potentially create a more positive perception of the athlete come time when roster decisions need to be made. Some might argue that the latter rationalization may be an overly-calculated maneuver that is not going to work in an age where playing statistics rule and competition for playing time is cutthroat. That said, it might prove to be beneficial for the athlete if a coach or team executive admires the work the athlete does off the playing field and thinks of them as an asset to the team. Given the often negative media scrutiny, teams may be grateful for whatever good publicity they can receive due to the fact that their financial health is tied at least to some degree to their community's perception of them.

However, the subjective norms and expectations of key stakeholders were not always directed toward the formation of charitable foundations. Although professional athletes were encouraged, expected (and often contractually obligated) by the team and league to do charitable and philanthropic acts in the communities in which they played, forming a charitable foundation was something that was often cautioned by senior executives in these organizations. Indeed, professional athletes have been discouraged from forming foundations during their playing days for fear of damaging (negative) publicity (Biederman, Pierson, Silfen, Berry, Glasser, & Sobel, 1996). The influence of the league on athlete philanthropy suggests that, especially in the first few years of playing in a particular league, athletes should wait and move cautiously before forming a foundation. One league executive commented:

There has been an increase in charity at the player level and an increase in grants and foundations established by players. NFL Charities, our foundation, gives \$1 million annually to players that have started foundations - to give you an idea of the increase, 5 years ago we had about 20 players applying, and this year we had over 100 player applications for that \$1

million pool. On the flip side, we caution players that they should not establish foundations right away, but rather work with community organizations to get a good sense of what is involved and to find a cause they can be passionate about before they start one.

Another league executive stated that:

Starting a foundation is not something we encourage our players to do unless they truly understand how much is involved in it. Sometimes the public perceives that foundations and charitable work are done for the wrong reasons. So instead we will talk to all of our incoming players about our NBA Cares program and programs the Players' Association has as alternatives to foundations. We provide them with tools on how to manage the many requests they are going to get and how to find things they really care about and to be genuine in their support. We also tell them they better have a better reason than "My agent said I should start a foundation." to go down that road. Certainly from our players' perspective some might not have understood the seriousness with which they should have gone about starting a foundation. We do have some examples of excellent player foundations, but we have too many examples all over the country and across all sports of foundations that were not set up and managed properly.

For athletes, charitable foundations are about more than just good works. They are also about good business. Many of the top sports agencies require that athletes agree to establish a foundation or volunteer their time or money for a charitable purpose before they will represent them. Through this charitable stipulation, the agency is really ensuring favorable publicity for their athlete and the opportunity to leverage relationships, and ultimately create opportunities for endorsement or sponsorship. However, one sport agent raised a number of concerns related to establishing player foundations such as the issue of retirement, or the potential for frequent relocation for the athlete and the implications that would have for their charitable endeavors.

Everybody wants to start a foundation; everybody wants to run their foundation; everybody wants to be a part of their foundation and depending on who you talk to like financial advisors or teams, some will tell you it is great for a player to focus on a non-profit as long as they are committing their time and their funds. Others will tell you that it is better for them to partner with a cause or athletic league. From what I have seen teams are very strict. It is also a question of what they want to do after they retire. Are they going to dissolve their non-profit because they do not have the income that they once had, or will they take a more prominent place on the board because they have more free time? I would not recommend it for a rookie, they can get their foot in the door with the team and the league if they love being in that city.

Players will start one and then end up playing in 4 or 5 different cities before they retire. So do you pack it up and move it with you, or do you just not have the pull anymore because you are not with that team?

Thus, social norms and expectations of important others often encouraged professional athletes to establish their own charitable foundation. In spite of this and while the trend at the team level indicates a substantial increase in the formation of team-related foundations between 1997–2008 (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009), the trends indicated in our findings in Tables 2 and 3 show no notable increases in the existence or growth of athlete foundations over this two year period. Concerns about impact, effectiveness, and image led some constituents (like team and league executives) to encourage athletes to exercise caution about when to form their foundation and how to carry out their philanthropic activities. Despite this, several support systems such as seminars, training, and other educational offerings have been put in place by the teams and leagues to help athletes who wanted to establish a foundation.

Moral Obligation / Norms / Self-Identity. Beyond subjective social norms, philanthropic decisions have a moral component that cannot be overlooked according to Sanchez (2000). In this study, professional athletes' feelings of personal obligation to help others emerged as an important component of the drivers of charitable

behavior. Almost every athlete interviewed suggested that because of their good fortune (and often challenging past), they felt they were morally and personally obligated to help others who were less fortunate. This was exemplified in comments such as "I had a difficult childhood – we grew up very poor and my mother raised four children by herself. I promised myself that if I ever had an opportunity to help others in the same situation, I would do so." Other similar statements came from different athletes:

Growing up, we did not have a lot – we were poor, and my parents worked hard. I always knew that if I was blessed with opportunity when I grew up, I would give back. Faith was very important to me, and by establishing my foundation with a focus on faith and Christian values, I felt that I could help people who were less fortunate than me, now that I have the resources and ability to do so.

Another athlete commented that:

Sport has definitely been an asset in my life and has afforded me many opportunities. I feel like it was my duty to help others who are not so fortunate, so I started this foundation.

I wanted to have a legacy that was more important than what I did on the field. This legacy that is left

Table 2 2006 Data on Professional Athlete Foundations

League	2006 # Athletes	2006 # Salaried Players	# Purported Foundations	Official (GuideStar/ Filed 990) ⁴	% Purported (Salaried) ⁵	% Filed (Salaried) ⁶	% Filed of Purported (Salaried) ⁷
MLB	1242	795	88	45	11.07%	5.66%	51.1%
NFL	2379	1764	315	102	17.86%	5.78%	32.4%
NBA	433	433	91	64	21.02%	14.78%	70.3%
NHL	741	741	25	10	3.37%	1.21%	40.0%
Total	4813	3733	519	221			

League	Average Revenue	Total Program Services/ Grants/ Contributions	Average Assets	Total Revenue	Total Program Services/ Grants/ Contributions	Total Assets
MLB	\$ 419 937	\$ 225 993	\$ 415 674	\$ 12 598 106	\$ 6 777 682	\$ 12 470 226
NFL	\$ 178 278	\$ 81 624	\$ 140 097	\$ 13 905 650	\$ 6 366 678	\$ 10 927 582
NBA	-	\$ 155 170	\$ 507 168	-	\$ 6 206 823	\$ 20 286 716
NHL	\$ 205 683	\$ 231 078	\$ 466 013	\$ 1 851 147	\$ 2 079 704	\$ 4 194 119

League	Average League Salary	Average Salary (No Foundation)	Average Salary w/Official	Average League Service (years)	Average Service (No Official)	Average Service (w/Official)
MLB	\$ 2 858 353	\$ 2 547 525	\$ 8 156 563	7.14	6.83	12.04
NFL	\$ 1 765 474	\$ 1 641 842	\$ 4 058 033	4.72	4.51	8.59
NBA	\$ 3 865 939	\$ 3 281 644	\$ 7 234 767	5.32	4.69	8.92
NHL	\$ 1 402 914	\$ 1 387 349	\$ 2 668 889	6.77	6.66	15.22

Table 3 2008 Data on Professional Athlete Foundations

League	2008 Athletes	2008 Salaried Players	Purported Foundations	Official (Guidestar) ⁸	% Purported (Salaried) ⁹	% Official (Salaried) ¹⁰	% Official of Purported (Salaried) ¹¹
MLB	1200	858	65	39	7.6%	4.6%	60.0%
NFL	2289	1755	303	99	17.3%	5.6%	32.7%
NBA	463	463	110	55	23.8%	11.9%	50%
NHL	722	722	31	9	4.3%	1.3%	29%
Total	4661	3707	509	198	13.7%	5.3%	38.9%

League	Average League Salary 2008	Average Salary (No Foundation)	Average Salary w/Official	Average League Service (years)	Average Service (w/Official)
MLB	\$ 3 131 041	\$ 2 851 104	\$ 9 171 789	7.14	10.1
NFL	\$ 1 947 402	\$ 1 666 959	\$ 4 257 147	4.72	9.1
NBA	\$ 4 658 460	\$ 4 075 886	\$ 8 980 098	5.32	7.9
NHL	\$ 2 135 201	\$ 2 119 156	\$ 3 377 778	6.77	13.2

behind – hopefully will touch the lives of many people. I see a lot of people do charity work to help themselves image-wise. My work, I like to keep it to myself – I feel better about it that way because I feel it is my duty to give back.

The moral component in decisions about whether to form a charitable foundation or not emerged from a concern for others, and appeared to be based on an altruistic notion that forming a foundation can improve the lives or well being of others. Because of their (social) position and financial means, professional athletes viewed establishing a foundation as an opportunity for generating an enhanced impact on the intended beneficiaries of their benevolence.

Perceived Behavioral Control. PBC considers the perceived ease or difficulty of performing a certain behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Behaviors can be constrained (or enhanced) by a number of variables including abilities, emotions, perception of self-efficacy, and by external or situational factors. Several respondents suggested that by establishing a charitable foundation, they had more personal control over who and how they could help others and be philanthropic. This type of control was viewed as being very important and a key determinant as to why an athlete formed their charity. For example, one athlete stated:

I opted to form a foundation for the freedom it offered in making choices about who / what to contribute to and focus on. In this way, a foundation would allow me to develop specific programs that I am interested in.

The biggest asset that athletes perceived helped them in foundation formation and in its activities and programs was their celebrity status. Athletes have the attributes of celebrity, recognition, and fame that allow

them advantages in philanthropy that other foundations and charitable organizations may not have access to. All the athletes and executive directors interviewed indicated that they had an advantage in a built-in athlete endorser as spokesperson for the foundation. For example:

Our foundation is unique because people will just turn out just because of the organization is affiliated with (player). People just seem to acknowledge professional athletes and they do have a kind of celebrity status, and that is a huge draw for a lot of athletes and their non-profits and what typically distinguishes them from other types of charities. In some ways it is a misfortune because you are criticized more, but I would definitely say the pros outweigh the cons in regards to a professional athlete having a charity compared to a “regular person” having a charity. That name recognition is worth a lot.

Another athlete commented that:

I think the biggest advantage I have as a professional athlete with a foundation is the notoriety I have offers a unique platform to deliver my message about what I care about. It helps in opening doors for sponsorships, getting people to come to events, getting the media to run a story about my charity. The media is interested in what I say, and I will always mention something about my foundation when I am interviewed. People tend to know me and this is really beneficial for my foundation.

As Fisher and Wakefield (1998) suggested, lesser known and unsuccessful charities are less likely to have donors or members who identify with and support their organization. Perhaps the association of a celebrity (a professional athlete) might provide advantages to their foundation. Koernig and Boyd (2009) found that a famous athlete is more effective when endorsing a sport-related

brand than a nonsport product, but only for enhancing the image of the celebrity. Given this possible disconnect in endorsement success, it may be appropriate and informative to evaluate the ‘fit’ perceived between the celebrity endorser (athlete) and the product they endorse (charity—sport related or nonsport related). Might an athlete who has a philanthropic image and whose foundation addresses sport-focused efforts have more advantages (i.e., access to sponsors and community partners, more clout with donors, and enhanced philanthropic image) in their charitable activities?

Professional athletes reported that while forming a foundation was something that was important to them—given their moral obligations and the social norms expecting athletes to be charitable—there were a number of aspects of this type of activity that were challenging and often constrained their efforts. While forming an individual foundation may provide a number of advantages to an athlete, there were several drawbacks to be considered, including the costs associated with forming a foundation, the complex administration for individuals not trained in this area, the time consuming nature of managing and administering funds and programs (particularly for an athlete who has contractual responsibilities to participate in their team’s philanthropic initiatives), and it has the potential to expose the individual. For instance, a major constraint identified by a number of respondents was their lack of knowledge and expertise in the area of philanthropy.

I did not really know anything about having a foundation before I decided to form one. I really did not know how hard it would be! So I had a very steep learning curve. I had to learn about all the financial side, the marketing side, and the administrative aspect of it too. Fortunately, I had my family and good friends and advisors that helped and supported me in this. They took on some of the responsibilities when I could not do it myself.

The following quote illustrates the constraints related to managing the myriad responsibilities an athlete has—to their team, to their foundation, to their sponsors etc.:

Actually one of the hardest things to work around is my schedule and responsibilities - because within my contract I have several mandatory community appearances a year with the team. Fortunately, I have been there long enough to where the community relations manager knows what I like to do. I am pretty willing to go to almost anything with them as long as I am available. That has been my biggest hurdle in regards to starting a year round program with my foundation in both Indianapolis and Philadelphia (where the athlete works, and where the athlete grew up). Even in the off season I have commitments with the team. When I have a free day, I always try to do something in Philadelphia with my foundation. But I also have to juggle a family, appearances for sponsors, my company and my restaurants.

One of the most pressing issues related to athlete philanthropy is the length of the athlete’s career and questions regarding the implications of the athlete’s retirement for the charitable foundation. Professional athletes have typically short playing careers (4.4 years in the NFL is the shortest average playing career, to about 7 years in MLB as the longest playing career³). As such, there is a far shorter peak earnings period in sports than in other professions (Torre, 2009). While professional athletes are wealthy compared with others in American society, they are by no means in the echelon of wealth of billionaires, hundred-millionaires and some CEOs. Further complicating the issue is that an estimated 60% of NBA players are broke within five years of retiring, 78% of NFL players are bankrupt or under financial stress because of joblessness or divorce within two years, and many MLB players struggle financially after retirement (Torre, 2009). In addition, not all athletes who have foundations are the top earners in their leagues. Indeed the majority of them are not household names. This raises concerns as to the sustainability of many of the professional athletes’ charitable foundation once they retire. For instance, one executive director of an athlete foundation stated:

When he retires - for us that is the unknown. Are people still going to support this foundation once his name is not in the media all the time, or when he is no longer playing? Will the foundation still be able to have the same fundraising capabilities it does now in 5 years time? Will people be asking ‘Who is (professional athlete)?’ Now some players like Peyton Manning will not have that problem, everybody knows who Peyton Manning is and he will pull people to the end of time because that is his celebrity status in his non-profit. Someone like Peyton and Derek Jeter are on a whole different level than most athletes that have charitable foundations. Theirs will definitely be able to continue after they retire. I am not so sure about ours.

Given the above findings and discussion, the celebrity endorser literature may shed light on the nature and opportunities of athlete philanthropy. Celebrity endorsers (i.e., actors, athletes, media personalities, and even politicians) have been shown to provide advantages to companies through their endorsement of a product or service. Such advantages include increased information credibility, instant recognition, implied preference, competitive advantage, attention to and acceptance of the message by the audience, positioning advantages, brand visibility, and improved customer memory (Armbruster, 2006; Lord & Putrevu, 2009; Till, 1998).

According to Samman, McAuliffe, and MacLachlan (2009), “Celebrity endorsement is not a new method of marketing an idea, but its application to humanitarian issues is relatively recent.” (p. 138). Few studies have been concerned with the impact of celebrity on the non-profit sector (Sammam et al., 2009), and no academic literature has examined the role of celebrity endorsers as

philanthropists. The literature that does examine athletes or celebrities and philanthropy primarily focuses on the perceptions and responses of external stakeholders—mainly customers. Lord and Putrevu (2009), for instance, examined how dimensions of endorser credibility affected consumer judgment and choice. They found attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise to be determinants of the perceived credibility of the celebrity endorser, modified by the informational or transformational intentions of the consumer. Work on a parallel theme discusses the ability of the public to identify celebrities and the causes they support and advocate for (Samman et al., 2009). The argument is that celebrities have the ability to garner attention by virtue of their public recognition and fame, and the media focus they attain. Thus, by associating themselves with a cause or social issue, they bring attention and awareness that would not be able to have been achieved otherwise.

In the nonprofit sector, celebrities may be able to heighten public awareness of a cause. In this case, where celebrities are selling an abstract idea, the credibility of the person delivering the message or endorsement is of vital importance (Erdogan, Baker, & Tagg, 2001). Public perceptions of celebrities involved in charitable causes are formed based on the cause the celebrity espouses, perceived knowledge, motivations and character of the individual (Samman et al., 2009). The celebrity must navigate and balance perceptions regarding their sincere commitment or whether they are seeking publicity or self-promotion. Consideration needs to be given to the length of celebrity association with a given cause vs. a ‘flash in the pan’, short lived type of involvement (Samman et al., 2009).

Conclusions

Altruism, giving, and reciprocity constitute essential facts of societies. These constructs are basic aspects of society which keep them intact, provide some of their main properties, and influence all other aspects important for societies to thrive (Kolm, 2000). Thus, it is a valuable exercise to examine the issue of altruism, giving and reciprocity among influential individuals in society. This study has used the theory of planned behavior to examine the motivations of professional athletes who behave charitably by establishing their own foundation. Despite what are considerable hurdles and challenges, a number of philanthropically-minded athletes formalize their charitable efforts by forming foundations. The findings identified key attitudes toward philanthropy—including altruism and self-interest, the social norms and ‘important others’ involved in leading these individuals to form charitable foundations, the moral obligations and factors related to the perceived behavioral control of the activities surrounding charitable foundation formation and management.

This study revealed that professional athletes are focusing increasing efforts on charitable and philanthropic activities beyond monetary contributions (Knecht,

2007; Tainsky & Babiak, 2007) by forming charitable nonprofit organizations. Overall the findings of this research suggest that athletes’ motivations and the benefits they derive from behaving charitably are complex and nuanced. The results of this initial exploration into athlete philanthropy suggest that athletes who form foundations appear to consider the strategic implications of their philanthropic work. Athletes discussed both altruistic and self-interested motives for establishing a foundation, and strategically use their recognition or fame to increase the profile or awareness of the charity or issues the charity addressed, to generate revenues for their foundation, to attract and interest volunteer support, as well as to leverage other resources of nonprofit and corporate partners. This was intended to help the work of the foundation to reach a broader audience.

Results also indicated that athletes who are typically established in their league (i.e., by years of service and salary) have a higher rate of owning a charitable foundation, which may point to a strategic use of the athlete’s ‘brand’ to have more impact. This may also be a function of the resources needed to run a charitable foundation—even in light of purely altruistic reasons for doing so. By identifying trends in players who have established individual foundations we can begin to evaluate to what extent philanthropy promotes loyalty and other benefits to the player and his foundation, team, and league. Understanding these issues may encourage others to establish similar charitable foundations or to better understand the associated pitfalls.

Implications and Future Research

The findings from this study extend the existing research on motives and factors determining charitable efforts (foundation formation), by using the TPB in examining these actions. This application allowed for a more detailed consideration of motives beyond altruism and provided a view into the perceptions and values around sport philanthropy and the context in which it operates. This research filled a gap in the literature by considering the ‘why’ of philanthropy as opposed to simply the ‘who’. However, this investigation only offers a limited view. We have some insights into why some athletes establish charitable foundations, but know little about why others may chose not to do so. As a starting point, the findings from this study will help fill some of the gaps to help understand attitudes toward philanthropy, what subjective norms are preventing or limiting this type of behavior, and the limits on TPB that could help athletes and sport executives determine the best route for an athlete to take while engaging in charitable activity.

Professional athletes today, for better or for worse, have a substantial impact on society. These individuals have agency, power and influence that they did not have decades ago. Today, athletes are multidimensional, have passions that extend beyond their field of play, and because of corporate sponsorships, and social media and marketplace tools in the context of social impact

strategies, they are able to do far more than they could ever do before. Athletes likely understand the impact they have on fans and customers however the findings suggest that the norms that are shared within sport organizations among teammates might also be influential in whether an athlete engages in charitable behavior. More established and senior players might serve as mentors and inspire other team members to understand the obligation and opportunity they have.

There also appears to be opportunity for athletes to radiate their impact throughout the world in which they work, fueling a push toward a place of much greater social change. Because athletes, sport teams, and leagues have the ability to connect with those people who are not just giving money and adding time, but bringing their tools (cross-sector partnerships / relationships, access to media, facilities, events, and financial resources) to bear on the social change that is desired, the steps toward this great social change may be accelerated with further professional athlete participation. Ultimately, the athlete, team, league, those convening events, corporations, and communities at large will benefit. It will be important to try to gauge the effect of players' agents (or mega agencies), of their unions (player associations), of their leagues, and of their corporate sponsors on the articulation of their philanthropy and its intersection with team efforts.

Athlete philanthropy may be viewed skeptically by some due to stories of abuse and mismanagement in the administration of these foundations (c.f., Knecht, 2007). Indeed, one highly visible abuse could trigger a reaction that could have negative ramifications on all athlete foundations. Athletes must give careful thought to the best vehicle for their philanthropy, given the uncertainties of playing career and fading celebrity status after retirement. In many cases, they might best serve (and be best served) by offering financial donations or by aligning themselves with an existing cause or foundation—rather than creating their own—where experts can execute the philanthropy much more effectively and efficiently.

Several relevant and important research questions might follow from this initial study. For example, examining the mediating (positive) effects on brand, image, or reputation of previous charitable involvement after a philanthropic athlete experiences a character bruising experience such as being caught using performance enhancing drugs (e.g., Roger Clemens), being a bad sport (e.g., Andre Agassi's recent unsportsmanlike actions at a charity tennis match), or a moral scandal on the scale of golfer Tiger Woods. Additional questions might center around the impact of an athletes' negative experience on their foundation itself. For example, Lance Armstrong is likely the most prominent philanthropic athlete in the public eye to date. However, from the most recent troubles facing him—a federal investigation stemming from accusations by Floyd Landis regarding Lance Armstrong's use of performance enhancing drugs—many questions arise with respect to the ability for Armstrong to overcome these claims and sustain a positive public image. Maybe more importantly is the effect on Armstrong's foundation

itself, Livestrong, and its ability to raise support and awareness for cancer around the globe (Salter, 2010).

Other important future research questions may explore differences between motives and intentions of charitable giving between athletes who have formalized their philanthropy via the establishment of a foundation and athletes who opt for other avenues of giving (such as direct donations to causes, or giving of their time and 'celebrity' persona). Furthermore, we do not know how long athlete foundations exist, for example, after an athlete retires. There is a highly focused window of opportunity for athletes to capitalize on their command of the media and the interest of fans and customers. As social entrepreneurs, these athletes often use their celebrity and fame to generate awareness and raise funds for causes and issues that are dear to their hearts. In many cases, after an athlete retires and does not command the media attention and focus, one of their biggest assets as philanthropists is not as strong. The issue of how long athlete foundations typically exist would be an important one to explore further.

The findings from this study apply to male professional athletes. The extent to which they may be generalizable to female athletes is not known. There may be gender differences in attitudes, norms, and perceived behavioral control in female professional athletes such as basketball players, tennis players or golfers for example. Other relevant and potentially insightful information to better understand athlete philanthropy and charity may include the cumulative earnings over the athlete's career, the number of years of the athlete's tenure, and the point at which foundation was created during career (e.g., did a football player form their foundation immediately upon being drafted, or did they wait several years before creating their foundation?). Additional factors such as organizational or network influences contributing to philanthropic behavior also need to be considered, for instance the culture of the team / organization to which the athlete belongs, or whether their teammates, or coaches are also philanthropically inclined. Answers to these questions would provide a richer understanding of philanthropic behaviors in this highly scrutinized population.

Giving is taking place by athletes, and that is a fortunate thing, but unless that giving is managed and done in a transparent and strategic manner, we will not know what the impact is. The phenomenon of charity and philanthropy among professional athletes is one that merits further exploration, and the findings of this study offer initial thoughts on a field that has tremendous opportunities for future empirical investigation.

Notes

1. A 501(c)(3) organization is a nonprofit organization (usually incorporated) that has applied for and obtained recognition of tax exemption by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). To qualify for 501(c)(3) status, an entity must be organized and operated exclusively for religious, charitable, scientific, public

safety, literary, or educational purposes, or to foster national or international amateur sports competition, or for the prevention of cruelty to children or animals.

2. Form 990 is the IRS *Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax*. It is the 501(c)(3) equivalent of a corporate tax return, there is just no tax to be paid.

3. These are average service times for athletes currently listed on team rosters.

4. Foundations which were described on the GuideStar website or filed a 990 form for 2006 were deemed "Official Foundations"

5. Refers to the percentage of salaried athletes (as of 2006) who were purported in some fashion during a foundation search to have a charitable foundation

6. Refers to the percentage of salaried athletes (as of 2006) who actually filed a 990 form for the 2006 year

7. Refers to the percentage of purported foundations that filed 990 forms for the year 2006

8. Foundations which were described on the Guidestar website for 2008 were deemed "Official Foundations"

9. Percentage of salaried athletes (as of 2008) who were purported in some fashion during a foundation search to have a charitable foundation

10. Percentage of salaried athletes (as of 2008) who were deemed "Official" for the 2008 year based on exhaustive search

11. Percentage of purported foundations that were deemed "Official" for the year 2008

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