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Learning Sport Management

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Abstract

Sport management seems like a glamorous career path. Many students believe if they do well in classes and graduate they will be the next General Manager of the New York Yankees or Athletic Director of a major Division I intercollegiate athletic department. While sport management professors hope that every student has the potential to succeed, it is incumbent upon faculty members and students to have a realistic expectation of their career options and a true understanding of what it takes to be successful. This article leads a fictitious student and faculty member through four years of the student's educational adventure in sport management with special attention being given to what students can undertake to best prepare them for the future and improve their chances of landing the right job. This case study demonstrates the value of a comprehensive sport management education and what students can do to set themselves apart from their competition in the job market.

Four Years Ago

“Welcome to our open house for prospective students at the University of Hope. My name is Dr. Smith and I am the Chair of the sport management department. I also teach sport marketing and event management. So how many of you love sports?” Almost every hand shot up. Even a number of the parents raised their hands. That is when I started getting excited and knew I wanted to learn more about sport management. I had dreams of becoming the next General Manager of the New York Yankees. I played fantasy baseball for a number of years and had played varsity baseball at my high school. This was my first campus visit and I liked the fact that the university had a nice recreation center, a Division II athletic department with a strong baseball program, and a sport management program.

“Who wants to work in baseball?” I raised my hand as fast as possible. I did not think Dr. Smith would call on me, but he did.

“What is your name sir?”

“My name is Frank Jones.”

“What is your dream job Mr. Jones?”

“I would like to be the GM of the New York Yankees!”

I did not anticipate all the giggles and laughs from those around me.

“Well Mr. Jones, I think many others in this room would like the same job, but let me ask you a quick question. If I was the owner of the New York Yankees why should I hire you?”

I thought for a second and then answered, “I am a hard worker and know a lot about baseball.” I thought this was a good answer, but apparently not.

“Well Mr. Jones, how many other hard workers out there love baseball and know a lot about the sport? Don’t answer, but just think about it. How many people want to be the manager of a fast food restaurant or a gas station versus how many people want to be the next GM of the Yankees?” Dr. Smith broke his gaze with me and addressed the others in the crowd.

“I know many of you love a specific sport or want to get a high level position in the sport industry. That is great and I encourage it. However, I want you to be realistic. There is only one GM

position with the New York Yankees and there are many people with 20-30 years of baseball experience who want the same job and are much more likely to get it than a recent graduate of our, or any other, sport management program. We will provide the opportunity to acquire the skills and training necessary to work in the industry, but you need to be proactive to improve your chance of getting a job in your chosen field. You have to do well in the classroom and need to take courses that might not be exciting in your eyes, such as finance, accounting, and strategic planning. You have to get involved in the sport management club and seek leadership opportunities. You need to intern with two or three different organizations. You need to pay your dues. You need to demonstrate you have a skill set that will enable you to make a positive contribution to your potential employer. With that said, what do you think you can contribute to the Yankees, Mr. Jones?"

I did not know what to say. Thankfully the professor interrupted my train of thought and saved me from further embarrassment. "I do not expect you to know what you can contribute at the present time, but you might say passion, integrity, or dedication. However, the key is always what you can contribute to the success of the team or organization. You each have unique skills and abilities, and the sooner you learn to channel those into a successful track record, the sooner you will be able to achieve your career goals." Dr. Smith went on to talk about internships, the breadth of the sport industry, how to break into the industry, and the types of classes offered at UH.

I walked out of the session with wide eyes. I always believed that if I just worked hard, I could get a top-level job in the sport industry. I did not think about all the challenges I might face, especially the competitiveness of the job market. I still wanted to study sport management, but knew I needed to be a strong student to bolster my chances for landing a great job. I promised myself I would work hard and dedicate myself to achieving my goal.

End of First Semester of College

I can't believe how fast my first semester went by. I finished my first term and it was time to pick classes for the next term. Dr. Smith said I could meet him in his office to talk about a plan. I kept

thinking about all the things he said at the open house. I wondered if I was doing the right things. I got decent grades and learned a bit. I was trying to set myself apart like Dr. Smith talked about. I joined the sport management club and really liked the soccer clinic we ran for local kids. That was a lot of fun. I even got a part-time job running the shot/game clock for intramurals this semester, but I did not know if this was enough to compete for the jobs I wanted in the future. I went to Dr. Smith to prepare for my second semester.

“Frank, how are you? How were your classes this semester?”

“My classes were pretty good. I struggled a little in accounting, but I got a tutor and pulled out a C+. I also took intro to business, math, English, biology, and intro to sport management, which I loved!”

“What did you love about intro to sport management?”

“I just thought it was interesting and did not realize how many aspects of the sports industry there are. I never thought about everything that goes into a major league baseball game. From the marketing and tickets to the operations and security, it takes a lot of people to get ready for a game and they do it every day!”

“Frank, this is great! I’m glad you are starting to see how big the sports industry is and all the opportunities it holds for you. That’s what we are trying to teach you at UH. Not everyone is going to graduate and be the GM of the Yankees that first year, but there are lots of different jobs out there to get you started and work your way up. Start thinking about internships that will help prepare you for a full-time job in the industry. I’m also glad you got a tutor for Accounting and earned a decent grade. That class is the foundation for other required classes so it’s important to not just pass, but to do well and learn the material. What about your business class, how did that go?”

“The business class was good. We had to do a group project and it was really difficult. My group was okay, but some people didn’t do all the work they were supposed to so we had to stay up all night the night before it was due to get it done. That was really frustrating.”

“What did you learn about working in groups?”

“I learned that you have to be on a good team and everyone needs to do their part to get a good grade. Being in a group with people that don’t care really stinks. I’ll think about who I want to work with the next time I’m assigned a group project.”

“That’s an important lesson to learn Frank. You don’t always have control over the people you work with and in the real world you likely cannot choose who you work with. What could you have done to get a different result?”

I thought to myself, what could I have done differently with the group? We complained to each other about colleagues who did not pull their weight, but we did not talk to them directly. I realized I was trying to avoid conflicts and didn’t truly address the issues. I guess ignoring an issue in the workplace will never solve a problem and will just allow a problem to fester.

Before I could think any more about the management lesson I was learning, Dr. Smith asked me about my math class. I was not very strong in math, but he explained to me how numbers are a critical component of sport finance including everything from creating budgets to pricing tickets. I never thought math was something I would need, but Dr. Smith made me realize I needed to improve my math skills.

Dr. Smith raised the same issues with my English class. I texted and e-mailed all the time and felt I could communicate really well. However, Dr. Smith emphasized the need to engage in business communication and how writing clear and concise memos, executive summaries, business plans, proposals, and even personal thank you notes would be important as I progressed in my career. I had never heard of some of the things he was saying and realized I had a lot to learn.

Dr. Smith asked me for a writing sample. I was hoping I could just give him one of my English papers, but he asked for a one-page paper explaining what value I could provide to a sport organization. The assignment was much harder than I anticipated. I did not know how to start, but after doing some research I found some skills that could be valuable. By the time I finished, I felt I had a better grasp of my skill set. I gave him my paper and heard back a couple weeks later...but not from Dr. Smith. I heard from Stacy Jones, the general manager of a local AA baseball team. She read my paper and called to discuss what I had written. I never thought the paper would be shared with others, but it just goes to

prove that when you send something out you never know who is going to see it. I knew that anything I put on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn were public and could be seen by anyone, but didn't think my writing sample would be sent around.

Student Activity:

Take a few minutes to make a list of the skills you can bring to a sports organization. What are your strengths? What areas do you believe you need to work on? After you have your list, share it with a classmate. What do your fellow students have on their lists that you could add to yours?

I was concerned when I first received her call, but she ended up being a great resource. She told me that some of the items I thought were key skills were actually quite basic and I needed more detail and focus. For example, I indicated that I was okay with Microsoft Word and Excel. She said almost everyone has basic or advanced skills in these areas and that if I wanted to stand out I should highlight more unique skills. She acknowledged that knowing various Microsoft Office programs is important, but if I knew ticketing or event management software programs that would be a much stronger skill set to highlight. Even though I was initially irritated that Dr. Smith shared my paper with others, now I'm glad to have connected with Stacy and appreciate Dr. Smith's efforts to help me.

Student Activity:

What classes do you think Frank should take next semester? Why? Did he take any classes his first semester that you took? Are there any classes you would like to add into your curriculum? Which classes would you eliminate? Why?

The second semester was pretty uneventful. I took several university core classes including psychology, American government, a stats class, a micro economics course, and a sport sociology class. I

was prepared for my next meeting with Dr. Smith. I told him that in the psychology class I learned what motivated people to act in a given manner and how to motivate employees, which would serve me well as a future manager. I didn't learn much related to sports in the American government class, but I realized how important it is for professional teams to develop strong relationships with local government authorities to assist in handling everything from traffic issues to zoning and issuing bonds for stadium construction.

The stats class was not that exciting for me, but the teacher gave us several assignments dealing with baseball player stats and it showed me a new perspective on how to evaluate success. I had taken an economics class in high school, but this stats class helped me focus on what individuals examine on a small-scale economic analysis. Many families in a down economy cannot afford to attend sporting events, and the cost of my college tuition helps me appreciate how hard my parents work to put me through school. Sports teams need to compete for customers and their discretionary dollars. Every family only has a certain amount of money to spend on entertainment. A sports team needs to motivate people to spend their money with them and not at an amusement park or the movies. The sport sociology class gave me a good perspective on how sports have evolved in the United States and how important sports are to American society.

Overall I thought my first year was very successful. Of course, Dr. Smith asked me all sorts of questions about what I was doing to improve my resume and set myself apart from the competition. He said we need to work continually to improve.

End of Second Year of College

I could not believe I have completed two years at UH. I finished my finals and went to meet with Dr. Smith. One of the most exciting parts of the year was a guest presentation by Rob Cooper, the Vice President of Ticket Sales for the New York Yankees. He is a UH Alum and had worked in the industry for over 10 years.

As I sat in the auditorium listening to Mr. Cooper talk about his experiences with UH and the New York Yankees, I couldn't help but imagine myself getting there one day. Mr. Cooper told us he started as an unpaid intern working game days during summer break. He did that for three years while he was a student. He handed out programs, collected tickets, worked with the marketing team doing promotions, and even helped the concessions crew. Sometimes he worked with multiple departments on a given day. Mr. Cooper described how he helped out wherever he was needed and while he may not have enjoyed all of it, he learned new things every day. We learned that interns have to be willing to put in long hours. Mr. Cooper warned us that sports internships are not always glamorous and you don't get to hang out with the players. He said it can be very rewarding and a lot of fun, but we needed to work hard and do a good job to make a name for ourselves. One thing he kept saying was that he "tried to be a sponge." I didn't get what he was talking about at first, but by the end I think I understood. He wanted students to know that we needed to absorb all we could from every experience in the industry.

Mr. Cooper said if we learned as much as possible we could create a niche for ourselves in an organization. He told us to become indispensable. If we were experienced in many areas of a sports organization, we were more likely to be hired full-time. He recommended that we get to know as many people as possible and learn what their jobs were all about. We should treat everyone we encountered with courtesy and respect because you never know when you might need their help and who might be in a position to give you a job later.

He told us a story about helping an elderly couple get to their seats and how he later learned they were the GM's parents. He explained that he could have easily pointed them in the right direction and returned to work, but he took the time to escort them to their seats. They were so thankful for his help and it really made his day. Then, they told their son (the GM) about him, and he called the director of marketing to thank her for hiring him. When he graduated, she offered him a job in ticketing. It wasn't the only reason he was hired, but it helped. Mr. Cooper thanked Dr. Smith for teaching him about customer service.

He then showed us some PowerPoint slides about how other executives got their jobs in the sports industry. Each slide showed a different executive and provided information about their backgrounds, which were very diverse. Some had bachelor's degrees, while others had master's degrees. Some started in ticket sales, while others were from the operations side of the industry. A number of people had worked in concessions or field maintenance and worked their way up to facility management positions. A final group included several executives who came from other industries, such as a former marketing executive in the pharmaceutical industry and a former lawyer. Mr. Cooper's presentation showed that everyone has a different journey and they all became successful regardless of the path they took.

This presentation was possibly the highlight of my sophomore year. I also really enjoyed getting involved with the sport management club, planning events and helping recruit students to attend UH. It was fun and I like talking to people. It was time to meet with Dr. Smith again. I remember the conversation like it was yesterday.

"Frank, how are you doing?"

"I'm fine, Dr. Smith."

He folded his computer screen down and looked me in the eyes. He then asked, "What is the most important lesson you learned this year?"

I thought for a second, and then answered, "What I learned from the presentation by your former student."

"What did you learn from that presentation?"

"I learned there are many different paths to get a good job and that I have to be a sponge."

"I'm glad you remember that analogy. What do you think it means, being a sponge?"

"I think it means absorbing everything I can when I'm working for a company or on an internship."

"Ok, I hope that's something you practice regularly. When you go home, think about some ways you can absorb more and 'be a sponge.' Did you learn anything more valuable from the presentation?"

I did not know what he was talking about and the inquisitive look on my face told him as much.

“Did you make a connection?”

I got it now. “Yes, I got his business card.”

“Okay, and what did you do with the card?”

“I put it in my wallet.” As soon as I said it I felt like an idiot. I had kept the card in my wallet and showed it to my friends, but didn’t really do anything else with it.

Dr. Smith laughed and I joined in the laughter. “How much good is that card doing you in your wallet? Does the card in your wallet get you an internship or a job? I hope you learned that networking does not happen when you meet someone and don’t follow up. Every relationship is a two way street. If you do not do anything to help grow that relationship, it will quickly die. If I were you, I would have sent him a thank you note for coming to campus. I also might have sent him an interesting article from an industry publication with implications for his job. I also might have offered to help him with any project or assignment he might have, but I would not have contacted him asking for free tickets to a game. The key is to offer a potential mentor something, not just to take or ask for something. The more you can give, the more they will want to stay in touch with you and reach out to you. The same thing applies to connecting with people on LinkedIn. If you learn that, then you have learned a critical skill.”

Student Activity:

Write the letter that Frank should have written to Rob Cooper.

I wish I had thought about that before I put the card into my wallet. I asked if it was too late.

“It’s too late to send a thank you card,” Dr. Smith said, “but you can reference his visit to campus and that you thought about him when you read an article in an obscure publication he might not have read. You just have to do research in some non-sport publications such as Discover, Scientific American, Popular Science, Psychology Today, and others. I often find these publications to be more beneficial than

some of the mainstream sport publications. I'm sure Rob reads the industry publications, but he may not have time to read the others. This would give you something interesting to e-mail him about."

I told Dr. Smith I would get on it. Later that week, I actually found an interesting article about the psychology of consumer decision-making and sent it to my new Yankees contact with a nice letter. That started a great relationship, which lasted throughout my educational career and into my professional career.

Dr. Smith also reviewed the classes I had taken in my second year. While I completed several additional university core classes (such as a composition, communication, macroeconomics, and even a drama class), he focused more on my business classes. I had taken another accounting course, which focused on the management side of accounting and how data can help managers do their jobs. I took a management course and really enjoyed the concepts, though I was a little confused about management and leadership. Once I did some research and wrote a great paper on the difference between the two, I really felt I knew what a manager did. It was not all about planning, organizing, directing, and controlling. The manager I wanted to become would be the manager who did not mistreat employees, but worked together with them as a team to accomplish jointly developed goals. When I told Dr. Smith about my perspective he was very happy.

Student Activity:

Write down the differences and similarities between management and leadership. How would you decide what type of manager you want to be?

My marketing class was not what I expected. I was always interested in Super Bowl commercials and thought we would be really creative in the class. Instead the teacher focused more on research and how to determine what customers really wanted. We developed a survey, which I used at a basketball game to get information from over 100 fans. The results showed that most of the attendees heard about

the game from friends through word of mouth and that the team's effort to use blast e-mails to increase attendance was not successful. Based on our findings, the team started a more focused approach using social media to attract fans. When I came to a game near the end of the season and saw a large crowd, I was happy my research helped shape their marketing approach.

Other business courses I took included a business math class and a management information systems class. Those classes helped me appreciate how computers and "big data" are critical for any business to track orders, determine what has occurred in the past, and plan for the future. The last business class I took was a business law class where I focused most of my attention on concepts such as contract law and intellectual property law. I was familiar with player contracts and sponsorship contracts, but we had a great assignment on trademarks and I focused on the use of Indian mascot logos and the potential legal ramifications. That assignment was really helpful because I also took a sport law class and we covered the same topic in that class. The sport law class was focused on tort law and negligence because the instructor said those are the most likely issues we would face working in the industry. While I liked the antitrust material, the instructor, a former lawyer, indicated that lawyers handle most antitrust issues and that team executives never really get involved in those issues. I thought that was useful because instead of teaching what the book said, our teacher focused on what we would most likely deal with on the job. That was really helpful and I wish all my instructors would take that approach.

The last class I took was a sport facility management class. I really liked what we learned and the approach the teacher took. Instead of just lecturing, the instructor brought in guest speakers who actually managed facilities and we got to tour all types of facilities including gyms, YMCAs, a local park and recreation facility, a swimming pool, an arena, and a smaller stadium. When I told Dr. Smith about all these trips he asked: "What was the most important thing you learned from the facility tours?"

"I thought I knew what was necessary to run a facility, but I did not realize the importance of technology in managing facilities. I really liked seeing how the computer management maintenance systems worked and how a manager can control the lights or the sprinklers from thousands of miles away. I also did not realize how difficult it was to manage unionized employees. My management class taught

us all about motivating employees, but dealing with unionized workplaces was one of the major challenges raised by some of the facility managers, and we never discussed that.”

“I agree with you Frank. Most people don’t think about that and I am glad you picked up on it. It sounds like you learned a lot this past year and I think you are really going to enjoy the classes you need to take next year. Have you ever thought about taking Spanish? I think it would be great for you to build your skill set a bit by taking a foreign language.”

“Great, I took one Spanish class in high school. I can take it again and try to improve.”

“What are you doing this summer?” He asked me.

“I am working at a summer camp. I will be doing sport programming and in charge of 12-13 year olds.” I thought this was a good answer and that it would further my career.

“That is good Frank, but we need to make sure you have more significant industry experience next year. If you have some free time in the evenings you can volunteer with a sport organization or shadow some executives. Think about what you might like to do over break and when we meet again in the fall, you should bring a list of organizations where you might like to apply.”

I said I would try, but the summer became a little hectic and I was so tired after working in the hot summer sun that I really did not follow through.

End of Third Year in College

In the fall of my third year I took sports marketing, international business, two more core classes, and a sports career prep course. I heard that the career prep class was really helpful and all the hype was justified. A guy in my dorm who took the class last year said we would work on resumes, cover letters, mock interviews, and networking. I knew I needed the class before I could register for an internship, but did not realize how difficult it would be to figure out where I should do my internship and what I should do. I was interested in a baseball internship, but did not really know the options or where to start.

It turned out the original resume I prepared was a joke. I thought about my conversation with Stacy Jones, the baseball GM, who reviewed my skill statement. I thought I had taken those lessons to

heart, but my whole resume was just a list of the classes I had taken. Dr. Smith, who taught the career prep course, mentioned that just taking a course does not mean I, or anyone else, necessarily learned the material. I wanted Dr. Smith to just fix my resume, but he insisted that I needed to do my own. I guess it wasn't fair to expect him to create resumes for all the students in the class, but he did work with me to create a more focused resume that showed what skills I had and how I was able to use them. For example, it was easy to say I was a people person or had strong communication skills. However, the challenge was that I needed to prove that to others. I wrote down what I was doing and specified that in my summer job I was asked to train other counselors and became the lead counselor interacting with parents and solving issues. I was able to prove this success through a fabulous job performance evaluation, which I was more than willing to share.

Based on that course, I changed my approach to many things. I opened a LinkedIn account. Dr. Smith had been talking about LinkedIn since my first year, but I assumed only old people used it. I didn't realize how many people were on there and how important it was. I changed my email address from studman101 to a more professional address. I changed my Facebook profile and postings to remove any reference to partying. Dr. Smith pointed out that pictures of me drinking when I was under age 21 actually show me violating the law and would immediately send a red flag to any prospective employer. I did the same with my Twitter, Instagram, and Vine accounts. I needed to clean up what I was putting out there. I also started dressing more professionally. Dr. Smith taught us that you should dress for the job you want, not what you are currently doing. I had always just gone to class in whatever was comfortable, but I started to think about the message I was sending to other people. I decided that from now on, whenever there was a guest speaker, I was wearing business attire, and I wouldn't wear sweatpants to class anymore. I needed to dress the part.

The sport career prep course wasn't like other classes in college. All the students worked on our resumes and cover letters together using peer editing. It was helpful to see my classmates' resumes and cover letters. It gave me some good ideas for how to improve mine. My first drafts were not very good, but they got better. Now, I'm pretty happy with them. There were a lot of guest speakers in that class too.

We heard from UH grads and sports industry professionals. It was great to hear about their backgrounds and experiences, but we also got to introduce ourselves and ask questions. At the end of the semester, we were asked to write a reflection about what we learned. Here is my journal entry:

I learned in the career prep class that the sports industry is unlike other industries. It requires a strong background in business and knowledge of sports. I learned that the hours in sports industry jobs are longer than our non-sport counterparts. Since sporting events occur on nights and weekends while other people are enjoying their free time, sport managers are working. I also learned that pay might be lower in sports industry jobs, especially when you first get started. I'll describe it as a typical supply and demand issue. Since there is a low supply of sport management jobs, the demand is high. Since the demand is high, the employers do not need to offer more money to potential employees. I'm not sure how I feel about this one. If I have to work more hours than other people, should I make less money? But, since it is sports and I won't be going to work in some boring cubicle, I think I'll get over it. I'll go to a stadium every day for work! Finally, I learned that networking is really important. Even though there are a lot of teams at the professional and college levels, we kept hearing that it is a small industry. We need to make a good impression on everyone we meet. I'm really excited to get started in my internship and put all this knowledge to good use!

Student Activity:

What would you include in a career prep class? Is there anything that Frank's class was missing that you think is important?

The international business class I took was a great class for me to see how the world was becoming flatter and sports was often the glue that brings so many different countries and cultures

together. I knew soccer was big, but I never realized how big a business it was. I thought National Football League (NFL) teams were worth the most money, but they paled in comparison to soccer royalty such as Manchester United or Real Madrid. I'm so glad I took Spanish because I saw how valuable it was to connect with people all over the world. I decided to take more classes and minor in Spanish.

The sport marketing class allowed me to leverage the research skills I learned in the regular marketing class. The four P's were something we really refined and it seemed like the sport products out there were changing very quickly. The growth of fantasy sports and sport technology changed significantly while I was in school and I knew it would keep changing at a rapid pace. I thought I had found my passion because of the ever-changing side of sports and sport products.

I started really applying for internships when I got back to school for the spring semester. I couldn't afford to pay rent, so I looked for internships near my parents and my grandparents. There are a lot of different kinds of internships out there: marketing, ticket sales, promotions, facilities, community relations, public relations, video, and food and beverage. It was really overwhelming in the beginning. The career services office on campus was very helpful. They continually posted information about available internships on a bulletin board in their offices and on their website. While I could always check for new postings online, I preferred to stop by their office every week to see if anything new was added. That way I could talk with them about any internships I was interested in applying for.

Student Activity:

Where would you look for internships in the sports industry? What resources are available to help you?

Out of all the applications I submitted, I got four phone interviews and three in-person interviews. The phone interviews were about a half hour each and while I found them really difficult at first, they got easier each time. The first one was a little awkward. I was nervous and didn't really know how to answer the questions she was asking. It was for a ticket sales and service internship with a Division I university.

I wasn't sure I would be good at ticket sales. If I had a hard time talking to her on the phone, could I really call people all day and ask them to buy tickets? The other downside was that internship was at a school where there would be no games or events going on in the summer. I really wanted to work games and get some hands on experience.

Student Activity:

What questions would you ask during an interview? With a partner, come up with a list of questions you would expect to be asked during an interview.

My next phone interview was with a minor league baseball team. Since the organization was so small, I wasn't interviewing for a specific position. Everyone basically chipped in wherever it was needed to get the job done. I liked the idea of being able to work in a lot of different areas. The interview was also a little more casual. I got an in-person interview with this team.

My third phone interview was with a sports camp. I had attended this camp growing up so I knew the person doing the interview. It was for a counselor position working with 10-12 year olds. I knew I could do this job and be good at it since I had worked at a similar camp the previous summer. The nice part about this position was that it was paid! It wasn't a lot of money, but it was something. I got an in-person interview with the camp too.

The final phone interview was with an NFL team. I really wanted this one! It was working in the office up until training camp, and then working at camp and pre-season games. This would have been awesome! I really liked the guy I interviewed with and thought he had a great job! Unfortunately, I did not get an in-person interview for this one. They sent me an e-mail, thanked me for my time, and invited me to apply again the following year. I knew I could get more experience and try again for a position like that my senior year.

I eventually decided to go with the minor league baseball internship, but it was a tough decision! Even though the sports camp position was paid and this one was not, I really wanted to try something different and was so excited about working with a professional team. My parents agreed to help me out financially so I could make it work.

I accepted the internship in late March so I was able to really focus on my classes the rest of the spring. I took another Spanish class. I also took a human resource management class that seemed to repeat some of the material from the management class, so I did not think it was as useful. I was really stretched by taking another stats class focusing on business stats and an introductory finance class. The finance class really pushed me to examine the Wall Street Journal, which I had never previously read. My folks always talked about their retirement plans at the dinner table, but this was the first time I really had to find out what stocks were all about and how to determine if a company was financially strong.

The sport management class I took that spring was international sport management. The international business class helped prepare me for the international sport class. I especially liked how our professor brought in a number of sport executives from around the world who Skyped with us and talked about some of their challenges. I thought the American sport business model was great, but after seeing the socialized systems in Canada, England, and Australia I began to realize there were many more opportunities abroad than in America. Maybe my Spanish minor could give me the edge to travel or work internationally.

When I met with Dr. Smith at the end of the year I was excited that I had an internship scheduled and was entering my senior year.

“How are you doing, Frank?”

“Great Dr. Smith.”

“It was wonderful to have you in the career prep class and I heard you got an internship.”

“Yes, I am working with the minor league team near my home.”

“That’s great! So we need you to register for the internship credit hours during the summer. You will need to complete the internship contract, submit weekly logs, and then write a paper at the end of the internship.”

“Yes, sir. I have the contract here and am ready to register for the class.”

“Great, now I am going to throw you for a loop!” I was ready to talk about my class schedule and did not know what to expect from Dr. Smith next.

“How would you like to spend your fall semester studying in Central America? I saw an opportunity for you to take another internship in the fall working with a baseball organization in Central America. You can register for three credits of internship, and take two business classes and two Spanish classes at the local university to keep you on track for graduation in the spring. What do you think?”

I was really thrown for a loop. Now we were talking about two internships and an international educational experience. I couldn’t believe it, and then the other shoe dropped. “The baseball organization is commonly referred to as MLB...you would be working for the big leagues. The application is due next week so you need to get to work on your application materials ASAP.”

Student Activity:

Would you apply for this internship in Central America? What opportunities might this experience provide? Are there any potential drawbacks?

Things got a little fuzzy, but I think while I was jumping up and down for joy that I might have kissed Dr. Smith on the cheek! I was so stoked and could not have asked for a better opportunity! If I could get a position like that, it would be amazing. Of course I was a little nervous and I would have to tell my mom I was going to be out of the country for a few months, but what an amazing opportunity...working for Major League Baseball in Central America!

I got started on the application right away. My resume and cover letter were done, but I needed three letters of recommendation. Dr. Smith said he would write one, but it was hard to find two more. I felt awkward asking my former supervisor at the camp and the intramural sports director. I worked for each of them and thought I had done a good job, but what if they said “no”? Luckily, they both agreed and I got my application in on time.

Prior to Fourth Year of College

It was a great summer! My internship for the Westville Bats was the hardest job I had ever had. In order to get credit for the internship, I needed to write a reflection paper about my experiences. I started a list at the beginning of my internship and built the paper from there. My list showed all that I had accomplished over the summer.

1. I worked in the ticket office during the day and then did marketing and promotions during games. I answered phones, mailed tickets, worked in the customer service booth, and helped pass out giveaways.
2. I helped plan the promotional nights. We made a calendar of games and ideas, and then worked to try to get groups to attend games. I'm really proud of the *Little League Night* I coordinated. Seeing the kids run the bases after the game was awesome, and it was our highest attendance all summer!
3. I tried selling tickets. It was harder than I expected, but it got easier once I got the hang of it. Those first few calls were so awkward and I didn't sell one ticket. My supervisor was really willing to help and even made me a script to follow when I made calls. After that the calls went a little better and I even sold a few tickets!
4. I pulled tarp. This was grunt work that just had to get done. We had a few rain delays that summer and a group of us had to pull the tarp onto the field. It was not fun, but I remembered how Mr. Cooper told us the importance of being a team player and making the best of all situations. I think the field manager appreciated that I didn't complain like the other interns did.

5. I worked concessions. I was assigned to shadow the concessions manager for a few games this summer. She had a tough job, but was really nice and took the time to show me the ropes. We started early in the day and made sure all the stands were stocked for the game. Then we made sure all the registers had the allotted amount of money and change. We met the workers at the security entrance, gave them their assignments for the game, handed out uniforms, and escorted them to their locations. During the game, we walked around and checked on all the concession stands and food hawkers. Then at the end of the night, we counted the drawers and made sure we escorted everyone out of the stadium. I was exhausted after those games. I had no idea how much work went into all the concession stands.
6. I got involved with community outreach. I had no idea what this meant before I did my internship. I worked for the community relations manager traveling to schools and summer camps handing out information on upcoming games and getting the kids excited. We brought our mascot, Batty, with us to get the kids interested. I even dressed up as Batty a few times. The costume was kind of hot and smelly, but the kids were so excited to see me that it was fun to dance around and high five them.

I made some great friends with the other interns and some good contacts for the future. We spent so much time together and I really miss them, but we stay connected through social media. Best of all, the Bats were very happy with my work and even said I could come back the next summer.

A few things surprised me about my internship. I knew from my career prep class that it would be a lot of hours, but I had no idea it would be that many. During our two-week home stand in July, I worked from 8:30 am to 4:00 pm in the office and then was responsible for setting up giveaways and promotions before the game. I worked at the info booth during the games and then had to make sure all the fans cleared the facility to get ready for the post-game clean up. I didn't leave until after midnight every night and had to be back first thing the next morning. I knew the internship was unpaid. I expected to be able to pick up some hours at the restaurant where I worked in high school to make some money,

but there was really no time for that. Thankfully, my parents agreed to help pay for gas for my car. I'm not sure what I would have done without them.

I heard word over the summer that I got the MLB internship in Central America. I was excited, but scared at the same time. I knew it would be a good experience and look awesome on my resume. I called Dr. Smith to tell him the good news. He was excited and said he was proud of me. I even remembered to write thank you notes to the people that wrote my recommendation letters.

Fourth Year of College

My time in Central America was a blast. I was really able to leverage my Spanish classes and pick up conversational Spanish. I felt comfortable having a basic discussion in Spanish and was even able to develop a relationship with a young lady who became my girlfriend. I have to thank Dr. Smith for that as well.

It was really interesting taking business classes in a foreign country. The respect the students gave to the professors was incredible. I did not see anyone using smartphones in class. The courses included much more lecturing compared to the interactive classes I was used to at UH. I think I learned a lot, but I know learning Spanish and doing the internship was the most important part of my semester.

Unlike my internship with the Bats, this internship was in an office and I had to go to work every day in a suit and tie. Thankfully the sport career prep course helped me out and I knew how to dress for success. I was doing a lot of research, including both primary data with survey development and secondary data from online research. I had to write a number of reports and was required to watch a lot of baseball games on TV, in Spanish. That was one of the easiest ways to improve my language skills.

I returned to campus for spring semester. While I was away, I was actually asked to serve as the vice president of the sport management club. It was nice to know my fellow students thought of me as a leader. The hard work and professionalism I tried to demonstrate in class and around campus were well received. I do not think I was considered a teacher's pet, but rather a serious student who wanted to have the best opportunity to land a job.

My final semester I took a capstone course, sport finance, my last Spanish class, and an elective. My sport management curriculum kept me so busy; I did not take many electives. Dr. Smith told me to pick something I would enjoy that would help me in my future career. I decided to take sport psychology. I thought it would be interesting and was still sport related. The sport finance class built on the regular finance class and it allowed me to really focus on budgeting and tearing apart revenue and expense projections. Working two internships and seeing the penny pinching at both organizations really instilled in me a desire to grasp sport finance as one of the most important skills I could master. I laugh when I think about how silly I was when I started college. I really thought I had no use for math. Now I know how important budgeting and accurate financial statements are to success in the sports industry.

The best course my senior year was the sport management capstone course. The course was a combination of a sport communication and an event management class. We had to put on an event. It was the soccer event I had worked on every year since I started at UH, but now I was part of the management team. We had to do everything from securing the facilities, marketing the event, bringing in fans, selling merchandise, finding sponsors, and numerous other tasks. We had 20 people in the class who put on the event and we really did not have enough time and skills to run the event as well as I would have liked. However, the event went off without any problems and we had 38 teams participate and actually raised more than \$2,000 for a cancer charity.

The highlight of my last semester was a phone call from one of my contacts from the Bats. He was now working with an AAA baseball team in California. They were undertaking a very aggressive effort to reach Hispanic fans and he was in charge of those efforts. He had heard from mutual friends about my internship in Central America. We had a good working relationship and I remembered that he was always impressed with my work ethic while I was with the Bats. His call meant a great deal to me and was so glad I had made a good impression. It was so good that he offered me a job. I was going to be in charge of community outreach to the Hispanic community. I had a job offer!

After finishing my coursework, I had dinner with Dr. Smith right before graduation. I could not thank him enough for everything he had done for me while in the program. He was a great mentor and I

really enjoyed his classes. He was the first educator who treated me as an adult and while he was supportive and helpful, he pushed me to take ownership of my career. He guided me, but I worked for all I earned.

I could not believe I finally graduated. The years flew by so fast. I could not believe it was just four years before that I was sitting in the auditorium listening to Dr. Smith talk about careers in the sports industry. It had been a busy four years. Yes, I had done some partying, but I also had a number of part-time jobs/internships, worked for the intramurals office, and took a lot of classes. While I was swamped with my capstone class in my last semester (and also had a little bit of senioritis), I could not help but feel bad for a number of my fellow students who had not had any luck finding jobs.

I saw frantic students approaching Dr. Smith for guidance throughout my senior year. He asked me to sit in on a presentation he was giving to these soon-to-be-graduates and he was telling them they should have been sending out resumes a while ago. Dr. Smith gave the following advice to the students:

1. Make your name easy to read and a little bigger than the rest of the text on the page.
2. Organize your resume in chronological order.
3. Check, double check, and triple check for spelling or grammatical mistakes on your resume and cover letter.
4. Use your cover letter to tell an organization why they should hire you, not why you want the job. Sell yourself and make sure you include examples of work you've done that is relevant to the organization. Do not repeat your resume.
5. Whenever possible, do a little research and find out the name of the hiring manager. It's better to address your cover letter to a person rather than writing: To Whom It May Concern.

Some students had posted their resume on numerous web sites. They set up e-mail alerts to notify them when a new position was posted. Some searched every day for a sports industry job and sent out hundreds of letters in those spring months. Some had a number of interviews, but most did not have any solid job offers. It was really frustrating. Dr. Smith told the students that they were not using one of the most important tools available to assist them in their job search: their network. He told the students that

employers get hundreds of resumes for every job that is posted. Even though most of the students had solid resumes and some good industry experience, it was still difficult to get noticed. He explained that it is impossible for sports organizations to spend a lot of time reading through resumes and cover letters for every position. They rely on their networks to recommend potential employees.

I echoed his strategy and told them about my success in finding a job in the industry. My hard work and dedication during my internship, my professionalism, and, most importantly, my network paved the way for my eventual job. I then took out my wallet and showed them the business card from my contact with the New York Yankees, who I can now call my friend. I told the students: "I will always keep this card in my wallet to remind myself that I always have to think about networking and an important part of my network are professors, such as Dr. Smith." The tips I would give anyone considering a sport management degree are as follows:

- ✓ Study abroad, wherever it is.
- ✓ Learn a foreign language.
- ✓ Network, network, network.
- ✓ Use your professors as a sounding board and career guide.
- ✓ Learn from every class, every person, and every activity.
- ✓ Be a sponge.
- ✓ Get involved in student clubs, in event management, local clubs, etc.
- ✓ Do as many internships as possible and learn everything you can from each one.
- ✓ Be willing to start at the bottom and work your way up.
- ✓ Work hard and do a good job. People will notice.
- ✓ You never know who you are interacting with, so treat everyone with respect.

Teaching Notes

The previous case study is designed for use during an introduction to sport management class with students new to a sport management education program. It should be used in the introductory class

so students gain an understanding of how their university core and degree related classes fit together and why it is so important for students to do well in classes such as math and English. Students can be organized into groups and asked the following questions before reading the case study:

1. What do you think a young professional should know in order to do well in the sport industry?
2. What do you think the ideal curriculum should be (assuming students will have to take 21 courses- 121 credits) at many universities for a four-year degree?
3. What courses do you predict will help you in your careers?

Students should then be given the case study and asked to read it while thinking of themselves as the main character. There are student activities dispersed throughout the case study to encourage students to apply the materials. In addition, after the students read the case study they should be exposed to the discussion questions and activities below, as well as revisit their initial answers to questions 1, 2, and 3 to determine if they would change any answers and why. The authors hope this exercise will enlighten students regarding the realities associated with the degree program they have chosen and what they need to do in order to excel in this industry.

Research

Core content areas were established as guidelines for sport management programs (Jones, Brooks, & Mak, 2008). Recommended classes for sport management programs include sport marketing, legal issues, ethics in sport, sport finance, and communications (Parkhouse & Pitts, 2001). Additionally, Jones, Brooks, and Mak (2008) discussed the recommended content areas include “behavioral dimensions in sport, management and organisational skills in sports, ethics in sport management, marketing in sport, communication in sport, finance in sport, economics in sport, legal aspects of sport, governance in sport and field experience in sport management” (p. 80). These guidelines are designed to provide students with well-rounded exposure to sports. After program specific classes, additional required courses are

selected by individual colleges and universities. Asking students to compare and contrast programs may help to students form opinions on sport management programs and the validity of certain classes.

Internships have been shown to be a valuable learning tool for sport management students. Educational philosophy often explores the concept of learning through experience. Dewey (1997b) described the “intimate and necessary relationship between the processes of actual experience and education” (p. 154). Internships provide students with the opportunity to gain actual experience during education. There are two phases of learning through experience (Dewey, 1997a). Primary learning is accomplished from the actual experience and secondary learning is through the immediate reflection of that experience (Light & Dixon, 2007). Frank was asked to reflect upon his experiences in order to achieve not only primary learning but also secondary learning. Light and Dixon (2007) explained that sport management education should include experience and participation in the sport management field. Applied experiences will help to reinforce class content and prepare students for sports industry employment. Students have a need for experiences that provide them the opportunity to practice what they have learned in classes (Light & Dixon, 2007). Gault, Redington, and Schlager (2000) indicated that students who had completed internships had greater career success. Cobb (1997) explored the benefits of an internship, including: “assist to clarify career interests and goals, provide interns with opportunities to apply classroom theory, enhance student knowledge and skills in sport management, and help students build confidence, maturity, and professionalism, as well as develop future contacts for employment” (p. 97). The benefits of hands-on learning in the sports industry through internships is an important preparation for sports industry employment (McNiff, 2013). Internships provide students with valuable learning as well as the opportunity to network in the field of sport management.

Sport management students can benefit from mentors in the sports industry. A mentor in sport management “is often viewed as a wise and trusted counselor; someone who is confident in what he or she accomplished and wants to share that wisdom with a like-minded aspirant” (Horine, 2011, n.p.). In this case, Frank was able to find mentoring from a variety of sources (Dr. Smith, Stacy Jones, Rob Cooper, and his past supervisor who offered him a job).

Discussion Questions & Activities

After reading the case, students should undertake the following:

1. Develop an ideal sport management curriculum based on what you think you should take and when. Compare that curriculum to at least three other curricula from other sport management programs.
2. Develop a skills inventory highlighting the tangible skills you think you can offer a sport organization and then identify the skills you do not think you have yet and then develop a plan for obtaining those skills.
3. Research current job postings the student may be interested in pursuing after graduation and then:
 - ✓ Develop a necessary skills inventory for those types of jobs.
 - ✓ Identify the skills they already possess.
 - ✓ Identify the skills they currently do not possess.
 - ✓ Develop strategies to obtain those skills within a specified timeframe.
4. Select an organization and have the students do research until they can find a connection with that organization. Repeat with additional organizations to show the strength of the class network and the value to creating important industry relationships.
5. Have students bring resumes and cover letters to class. Use a sample job posting to have the students work in groups to tailor the cover letters to apply to the specific posting. This can also be used as a session to peer edit resumes and cover letters.
6. Research current job postings the students may be interested in pursuing after graduation. Have them generate a list of questions they might be asked during an interview and create appropriate responses. The questions should include standard questions that may be applicable to all jobs, specific questions relating to the job they have applied for, and specific questions they may receive based upon the application materials they have submitted.

Teaching Suggestions

1. The professor creates interview itineraries based on various segments of the industry (e.g. professional sports, intercollegiate athletics, facility management, etc.). Each itinerary outlines a series of meetings scheduled throughout the day with real individuals from that segment of the industry. In preparation for their hypothetical interview, students must do the following:
 - ✓ Research and compile background information on those individuals (e.g. education, work experience, etc.).
 - ✓ Research and compile information on current issues related to the organization or the individuals (topics they should be prepared to discuss during an interview).
 - ✓ Generate a list of questions they would ask each individual during the interview process.
2. Break the class into groups. Each group must identify and discuss how various course subjects (such as those listed below) relate to one another and may impact one another. Share with the class:
 - ✓ Booking an event & Budgeting
 - ✓ Negotiating contracts & Ethics
 - ✓ Creating a marketing plan & NCAA compliance issues

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