

The NCAA Football National Playoff Tourism: Marketing and Planning for Tourism

Abstract

The American public has a seemingly insatiable demand for football. The National Collegiate Athletic Association, the organizing and coordinating body of college athletics in the US, created its first post-season playoff format for its football teams in 2015. Two semi-final games between the top four ranked teams followed by a championship game between the two winners were a resounding success both in terms of capturing a large TV audience and producing significant advertising revenues for broadcast TV stations. This discussion reviews the playoff format, and its value to participating stakeholders, particularly the tourism industry, while at the same time raising some of the business dilemmas to be faced. The premise of the case study is that participating venues in future playoff games have a great need for formal planning for the event. The case study provides a format for future marketing and planning efforts.

Key words: National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), College Football Playoff National Championship (CFPNC), TV overnight ratings, Bowl games, tourism impact, marketing planning process.

Summary of the Case

The National Collegiate Athletic Association held its first Division I College Football Playoff National Championship in 2015. The format was for the top four ranked collegiate football teams to play two semi-final games with the two winners playing a championship game. This series was inaugurated due to dissatisfaction by fans of college football and the media that cover the sport with the traditional Bowl game series format that did not necessarily pit the two top ranked teams in a deciding game. Not wanting to scrap the traditional Bowl game format which generated great economic benefits to the NCAA and to the participating teams and their respective athletic conferences, as well as to TV broadcast networks and to host communities, the NCAA incorporated a portion of the Bowl format into its championship series. Accordingly, six of the most financially successful Bowl games that also had long histories and traditions were chosen to host the two semi-final games on a rotating basis. The focus of this case study is to explore the future of the series and to provide a format for marketing and planning for future success for participating Bowl game host venues.

Teaching Objectives

- Review the new CFPNC format to provide an understanding of how it works and who can participate.
- Explore the potential monetary value of the CFPNC.
- Present some of the business dilemmas for the universities involved.

- Provide possibilities for forecasting the future development and expansion of the CFPNC.
- Explore the monetary impact on tourism for the playoff series.
- Provide a basis for developing a market plan and mission statement for Bowl host Bowl sites.
- Provide suggestions for successful event planning.

After analyzing the case, students should be able to answer these questions:

- What is the organization of the CFPNC and what are the alternatives in the future?
- What is the monetary value of the CFPNC? And what might future values become?
- What are the business/ethical dilemmas involved for the NCAA and participating universities?
- What is the economic impact for the tourism industry of host Bowl sites?
- What should the goals of the BOD's of a host site be?
- How could an effective marketing plan maximize tourism results for host Bowl sites?
- What should the mission statement of a marketing plan be and what are the target markets?
- What would an effective planning process for Bowl events be to insure the legacy of the event and its future participation in the CFPNC?

Framework for Classroom Use

The analysis of this case is suitable for undergraduate or graduate students taking courses in marketing, communications, meetings and special events, and economics of tourism. The instructor should be able to guide the student in case analysis using it as a tool to encourage student abilities to break down a case into its basic components to understand how each component relates to and has an effect on the other components. The case provides several topics to be considered, including marketing of mega-sports events, mission statement and marketing plan development, event planning, and the environmental sustainability of mega-events. Instructors should start the learning process by providing a framework for case analysis by delivering a lesson focusing on understanding Bowl games and the new NCAA playoff format. Once students have this basic understanding, they should be refining or enhancing their understanding of the facts of the case through outside research and ready for further assigned activities.

- Marketing plan development-Group project with target market analysis and SWOT development.
- Event planning-individual or group project to develop checklist

for planning a major sporting event.

- Expansion of the playoff format-group discussion arguing pros and cons/predicting outcomes.
- Role of post season tournaments for college sports within the academic community-students can interview members of the athletic departments of their respective universities and then present a classroom summary and highlights of their discoveries.

Teaching Approach and Sequence of Discussion Questions: Proposal/Marketing Plan

Students can be asked to create a proposal that will include a marketing and positioning plan for an existing bowl game under consideration for the championship series. This proposal would be submitted to a NCAA committee for consideration. The goal of all the bowl games will be to host a championship playoff game. A link for existing and proposed bowl games was included in the body of the case and is also included here. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_college_bowl_games). Groups should be formed and a bowl game/site should be assigned to each group. Bowl games and sites can be assigned randomly. There is a wide variance of sites in terms of destination size, infrastructure and experience hosting this type of mega sports events and therefore the final products will differ according to the market. The final product will include a fully developed written proposal presentation. Within the perspective of development of a marketing plan for host Bowl sites within the CFPNC framework students should be able to:

- Identify the goals and objectives of the host Bowl site. These may be to increase revenue and profitability, increase brand recognition and legacy of the Bowl, increase tourism related revenues, or enhance the lifestyle and livability of the host site community for its residents. Specificity and measurability should be emphasized.
- Define leadership in the development and execution of an approved marketing plan should be identified. A staff organization chart with role definition and job descriptions should be developed.
- Develop a SWOT Analysis. It is crucial that research and critiques be through a “veil of ignorance” and not be influenced by team, bowl, or location biases.
- Develop a realistic calendar for the marketing plan. Research into planning calendars for previous sporting events will provide model guidelines.
- Define “success” of the marketing plan. Classroom discussion can show students what “success” means for the Bowl site. Definitions may, of course, vary.

Learning Outcomes

Student projects can be presented to a panel of industry professionals and or on-campus NCAA affiliated faculty and staff. The instructor can provide the panel a rubric for the presentation and the panel’s assessments can be incorporated into the final grade for the project. The instructor would grade the project based on an outlined rubric that may include

References

Kotler, P. & Armstrong, G. (2012). Principles of Marketing, (pp. 48-58). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.