Sustainability at the President's Cup: An Eagle or a Double Bogie?

Jamee Pelcher, University of Tennessee
Sylvia Trendafilova (Advisor), University of Tennessee

Facilities/Events - Sustainability (Professional Sport)  
Poster  
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Over the last decade, scholarship at the intersection of sport and the environment has steadily increased. Areas of studies include corporate social responsibility (Trendafilova & Babiak, 2013), assessment of environmental activities of sport organizations (Bunds & Casper, 2015), recommended practices for environmentally friendly sport events (Mallen et al., 2015), and recently, fan engagement and behaviors regarding environmental sustainability (McCullough, 2013; McCullough & Kellison, 2016). While environmental issues have been addressed in various sports and recreational settings, golf has been slow to implement and promote environmental sustainability due to it being heavily under the microscope for its negative impact when it comes to sustainable practices (Brooks, 2006, Mallen et al, 2011). Despite the publicly stated environmental intentions of the Professional Golfers’ Association (PGA), it remains unknown whether sustainable practices are being implemented and embraced by event organizers and fans at tournaments. The President’s Cup has a reputation and culture that is different than most other traditional golf tournaments on the PGA Tour. Despite the decorum typical of golf fans and competitors at golf events, the President's Cup has become known for noisy fans singing in the grandstands, crazy attire, drinking, and outrageous behaviors.

The purpose of this study was to assess spectator behavior in response to the environmental initiatives communicated by the event organizers, Royal Melbourne Golf Club, at the 4-day President's Cup (December 2019) in Melbourne, Australia. Using the theory of planned behavior this study utilized a qualitative case study design, which included document analysis, content analysis of online websites and resources, and field observations. Data were thematically coded to draw out themes pertaining to fans’ behaviors.

The content analysis of the President's Cup website revealed no communication of sustainability programs through the event website. Additionally, there was no mention of environmental sustainability efforts in print material either. Findings indicated that event organizers did not communicate, signal, educate, or promote any environmental sustainability efforts using recycling bins, signage, or promotional materials. Subsequently, notes from the participant observation detailed a horde of littering, heckling, and damage to nature at the event. Specifically, piles of beer cans and trash were left on the sides of the holes on the course. In the portable restrooms, cans and bottles were left in the sinks. Fan behavior became more damaging and disturbing as the tournament progressed. Littering on the course became more prevalent and fan behaviors expanded to the degradation of the course itself as fans trampled the greens and could be seen in the treetops.

This research advances the knowledge base of environmental fan behavior as related to golf events. In our presentation, we will discuss our findings in more detail, including possible explanations of fan behavior at this event. Additionally, we will explain the managerial implications which include a set of environmental guiding principles for event organizers on how to effectively plan for a sustainable event, as well as how to encourage fans to act in a more environmentally friendly manner.