
Reviewing and Construction Planning for Boston College Football Game

Introduction

There is an enormous amount of planning that goes into to preparation of a Division I NCAA football game. Between considering stakeholders and the legacy of the event, marketing and branding the school's image and ensuring the event itself is run smoothly, there is a lot to be aware of for sport managers who plan an NCAA football game. Planning for a Boston College football game is no different, and offers its own unique challenges. As a member of the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), one of the 'Power 5' conferences in Division I football, the Eagles are considering among the top tier of college football programs and as such, the events and games held at the Eagles' Alumni Stadium must reflect that prominent status. BC's unique location in the pro-saturated sports market of Boston is also a significant challenge to overcome. Furthermore, as a college sporting event, considering how the game relates back to the school itself and brands the image of the school is paramount. Planning for a Boston College football game requires clear organization of strategies pertaining to a number of areas including consumer experience, supplier management, personnel management, its event mission, marketing plan and a legacy plan. It is critical that these strategies are clear and developed; each season Boston College has only six or seven games to host in three months and there is no room for error during that time span.

The Athletic Director of Boston College, Brad Bates, is ultimately responsible for the results of each home game and how it affects the school, the fanbase, the ACC and NCAA overall, and the rest of the stakeholders involved. If even one of those stakeholders are not satisfied with the how the event turned out, it could cost Bates his job; this is why strategies must be formulated and planned well in advance of each event. Consumer Experience Planning for the consumer experience is one of the most important parts of any sporting event. Consumers are the pivotal focus for all for-profit sporting organizations, as without the consumers, there won't be profits. Ensuring consumers have the best possible experience is crucial to earning revenue both in the present and future, as consumers become lifetime buyers of the brand(Rick, 2015). For Boston College, this takes on an even bigger meaning. Alumni of the school represent the largest majority of fans who attend home football games. Whereas the ~2,000 strong student section will be hard pressed not to have 100% capacity, filling the rest of the 44,500 seats at Alumni stadium is left to mostly alumni and their families. Because Boston as a sports market is incredible pro-oriented with the common fan having almost no interest in college athletics, which is surprising given the large number of colleges in the area, BC's marketers are limited in this

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available fanbase that are interested in attending home games (Gordon, 2014). While this is something that obviously needs to be addressed by Boston College's marketing department given the massive potential of having the full support of a sports crazed city such as Boston, the current limitations need to be planned for in the meantime. Because the majority of non-student fans in attendance are season ticket holders or repeat attendees, the consumer experience of a Boston College football game is vital to ensuring they stay that way. If they experience becomes sub-par, the school risks those fans not renewing season tickets the following year, and given the lack of available fanbase discussed, there would be a catastrophic blow to the number of tickets sold. This is why BC provides a standard college football customer experience, complete with tailgating on campus and a pre-game fanfest, as well as half-time marching band performances to provide that well known sense of a college game day atmosphere. In addition to this standard experience, BC offers a unique experience in the intangible aspects of attending a game at Alumni Stadium. In its 58-year history, it has been host to a number of historical games and was the home for the 1969 Boston Patriots. It has seen three capacity upgrades in its lifetime and aesthetical improvements most recently in 1994.

These factors add character to the stadium that has intangible value for fans and bring up nostalgic feelings for alumni, similar to the way Fenway Park operates for Boston Red Sox fans. Overall, the consumer experience plan needs to take advantage of these stadium aspects as well as provide the game day opportunities to keep their consumers satisfied and returning each game and season. Supplier Management Boston College employs a number of suppliers for each football home game, most notably the food service suppliers, merchandise suppliers, and equipment suppliers. Each supplier must coordinate with the event staff to ensure they are providing the supplies in the proper and efficient manner (Masterallexis, 2015). The food service supplier must make sure their products are being distributed evenly throughout the stadium's concession stands and to hawkers; as well as ensuring they don't run out of supplies. They also must provide the personnel to work at the concession stands, as Boston College does not employ staff for that role. The suppliers for Boston College merchandise, as well, must ensure before the game that their supplies are available at each merchandise booth and that there is an even assortment of products. However, they do not need to maintain a full inventory of products or provide personnel. Lastly the equipment suppliers, as in football equipment for the players, must have their supplies available well before the game, as well as ensuring the equipment is in prime condition. There are other minor suppliers that need to be managed, for instance if the pre-game ceremonies include pyrotechnics, the supplier for those must coordinate with the staff to ensure they go off properly and, more importantly, safely.

The coordination and management of suppliers is an important aspect to running a college football event smoothly and ensuring a great customer experience. Personnel Management Another important part of managing a college football game is managing personnel. There are a number of different areas of event staff that have their own duties and jobs, and each need to

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be managed to ensure they are run correctly. Security staff, health officials, game coordinators, and booster club volunteers are just some of the areas that the event requires personnel in (Masteralexis, 2015). As discussed, suppliers will sometimes need to send their own personnel to the event who also need to be managed. It is important that all of these areas are in communication with one another throughout the event to ensure there is no confusion should there be any issues that need to be addressed. This communication is done through managers, who also control their staff to make sure their jobs are being done correctly. It might be necessary, for example, for concessions to be in communication with security if a fan ordering food is being disruptive. Other areas most certainly need to be in communication, particularly the game coordinators with the referees, as managing the game clock and knowing when there is a media timeout are vital to the smooth running of the game itself. Event Mission Boston College's event mission for each home football game is to provide the best consumer experience possible while branding the school's image in a positive way. This is a common event mission throughout college football teams, and athletics in general across all for-profit organizations. Providing a great consumer experience brings in revenue, which is the main goal of for-profit organizations, and improving the brand of the school indirectly does the same. An excellent example of how improving the athletic brand image directly drives revenue for schools is 'Hail Flutie'. In 1984, Boston College quarterback Doug Flutie threw a hail-mary pass to beat Miami in the final seconds of a national televised game. The Eagles went on to earn a victory in the Cotton Bowl and Flutie was named the Heisman trophy winner.

The subsequent year, applications to Boston College increased tremendously as a result of the attention brought on by the school's athletics (McDonald, 2003). This example is so well known it is indeed called the "Flutie Effect" when referring to how sports can increase awareness and interest in all colleges. Each game, Boston College, and schools everywhere, look to make sure the brand image of the team is improved so that it positively affects the future growth of the school in general. Marketing Plan As with the event mission, the overall marketing strategy for Boston College football games is geared towards increasing the overall brand image of the team and the school. However, that is not the only responsibility the marketing plan has, only its overarching goal. Boston College's marketers main purpose is to drive marketing campaigns to bring in fans into the game. These need to be tailor made to specific segments in order to attract those specific fans to attend (Rick, 2015). As discussed, the majority of attendees at the event are alumni, therefore the marketing plan is tailored to bringing in that group of fans. BC's marketers do this through providing ticket deals for families, so alumni feel enticed to bring their children and spouse, giving them a sense of the Boston College football atmosphere. The marketing strategy also has to consider marketing to students, even though it isn't incredibly difficult to succeed at. Students will show up in force even without a marketing campaign, but they ensure a 100% capacity through offering the Gold Pass, which is a student's access to all athletic events. However, it offers more than just a ticket; it rewards students who attend more games, arrive earlier, and offers prizes to the most 'spirited' students (Kolva, 2013). BC knows

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students contribute tremendously to the atmosphere of college football games through their loud presence and cheers, which helps ensure the best consumer experience for the alumni looking to relive their days at the school, as well as fans of college football who simply enjoy the atmosphere.

Legacy Plan Considering the legacy of a sporting event is an important part of planning. The results of the event after they are finished sometimes have long and far implications, or small and simple ones, and can be economic, political, or cultural in nature (Rick, 2015). For a for-profit event like Boston College football, the main consideration of legacy is how to improve profits for the following iteration of the event. Improving the brand image of the team and the school long term, as discussed, is also a main goal. However, that is not the only concern for the legacy of a BC football game or any NCAA football game. Ensuring safety is a top concern for event managers, especially in a large capacity stadium such as Alumni. Making security a priority helps prevent the legacy of the event from being diminished by possible emergencies. Health concerns, too are imperative considerations for legacy planning. Making sure there are no ill-effects of attending a game is vital for the long-term sustainability. For example, if thousands of attendees experienced ear damage due to loud stadium music, that would certainly hurt the legacy of the event in the future (Engard, 2010).

Legacy planners also have to consider the economic impact of each football event. While the tangible effects of a local economy might be felt more in a college football crazed town such as Tuscaloosa, Alabama rather than Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, there are still considerations to make for how the game affects the surrounding area (Baade, 2008). For example, the neighborhoods surrounding Chestnut Hill receive a large influx of visitors six or seven Saturdays in the fall, driving revenue for local businesses, but also putting a strain on roads and infrastructure in the immediate neighborhoods near campus. These impacts need to be considered when planning for the legacy of Boston College football events. Conclusion As examined, planning for a Boston College football game needs a high level of detail and strategy in order to be successful. Event planners need to consider a wide number of areas when planning the event to ensure the event runs smoothly and efficiently. Because Boston College is a for-profit institution, most of the goals and considerations when marketing, branding and considering legacy are centered around generating revenue from the event, but they also have to ensure they continue the practices that make the brand successful and attractive to alumni and fans; mostly continuing to provide that great consumer experience. Boston College faces many challenges in accomplishing this task, from competing with the Boston sports market, ensuring the safety of all attendees, and guiding the communication of all personnel groups, but the event staff that run the games get this done on a weekly basis each fall in Chestnut Hill, and it shows through the brand image BC projects in the sports industry. The Eagles are known as the premier college football team in the northeastern region, and it is clear through both their on-field play, and off-field event management that fans are attracted to see the Eagles.

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