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The Value of Sports Teams:  
The Influence of Coaches, Fans, and Players on Value

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**Abstract**

In this paper, I argue that the true value of a team comes from the coaches, fans, and players. These are the people who influence the monetary and competitive success of a team, so are the ones who affect the value the most. Growing up, I have always been a part of a sports team and have cheered for multiple professional teams across numerous sports, but I have always questioned how a team should be valued. I have also always been in business, so I believed that the monetary value was a good source but have found that it goes much deeper than that. I will be discussing how one needs more than the monetary value as teams may not have the most net worth but do have competitive success. The main subject that I will be talking about will be the influence of coaches, fans, and players on both the monetary and competitive success. With the uses of many different sources, I will be informing the reader of the proper way to see the overall value of a team through their coaches, fans, and players.

**Section I: Introduction**

The sun beating down on the turf field as everyone is sprinting around, chasing the ball to wherever it goes. Fans in the stands shouting at the top of their lungs; words of praise and encouragement coming from most while others cry out when a mistake happens. The coach yelling about how each player could be doing better and advising the players on what will help them on the field. Star players taking control and making big plays to help advance their team to victory. One team being blown out by the other as the final whistle sounds. Does the winning team have more value than the other? How are they valued? These are the types of questions that arise in every sport and many people do not know how to answer them.

America has never set a true way to measure a team's value in sports and has merely left it up to interpretation. This causes many arguments within sports communities as to who is the best. Most sports will base it off the monetary value, which comes from the profitability of the team, or how they rank within the standing of the league that they are in. Though this may give a solid estimated value, to see the true value of any team one must look at the coaches, fans, and the player associated with the team. Even though a team may be in dead last, if they have a solid fan base, then they have a certain value that places them higher than last. These people are who truly give a team its value. The influence of coaches and fans on players allows for sports teams to gain both monetary and competition success, as well as raise the overall value of the team.

**Section II: Coaches in Basketball**

With a steady rise in popularity of the sport, the importance of coaches to teams has grown tremendously. It can be seen through the increase in salaries to many coaches at both the professional and intercollegiate levels. The monetary value of coaches has developed to truly represent how influential they are to the players. Another way that shows a basketball coaches

importance to the team is testimonials, stories, and surveys by players. A survey conducted by Stacy A. Forsythe, a graduate student at Western Kentucky University at the time, interviewed multiple collegiate athletes who went through coaching changes. One of these athletes competed on their college women's basketball team for two years before experiencing a coaching change (Coach A was replaced by Coach B) after a bad season. With the change from Coach A to Coach B, the very coming season was a complete success for the team as they even advanced to the NCAA tournaments first round. The informant also discusses her, "trust in the new head coach to develop a successful program" as well as how, "Coach B's ability to bring everyone up to speed" (Forsythe, 2015). A change in coaches is a tremendous burden on a team, but when the coach is strong and influential on their players, it can lead to major success as it did for the student mentioned above. The team began to decline and was losing value until the new coach came in and was able to turn it around. Coach B remained strong and through their ability to influence the player was able to reverse the teams declining monetary and competition level.

### **Section III: Coaches in Football**

The coach above was able to maintain a successful program, but how does a coach inspire if they are leading a losing team? Facing the Giants is a modern film released in 2006 that goes through the true story of a football coach, Grant Taylor, who pulls his team together to help redeem the season. After six seasons of posting a losing season and beginning the seven 0-3, Grant Taylor re-evaluated his coaching style and was able to inspire his team to not lose another game. The Eagles, Taylor's team, advanced to the state championships and clinched the title. There is one scene that truly shows the effect that a coach has on his players. It is when one of the players believes that there was no chance that they could win the state championship, so Taylor has him do a death crawl while one of his teammates sits on his back and is blind-folded.

Taylor does not give the player a certain distance to travel just to give all he can give and throughout the whole crawl, Taylor was there yelling to keep going and that the player only had a little left to go. By the end of it, the player was able to make it all the way to the other end zone. The player never believed that he could have made it that far and thought that he only made it halfway across the field. The inspiration that coach Taylor can pass on to his player allows him to get their best effort which raises their competitive value. Coaches push their players to the extreme because they know how much they can give and do this just raises the overall skill level of the team. Grant Taylor's ability as a coach to inspire his players leads to the team becoming competitively successful and raises the value of the team.

#### **Section IV: Coaches in Hockey**

Inspiring twenty or more players as they prepare for one of the most physically challenging sports is a very difficult task. A hockey coach must string together the perfect words for a five to ten-minute speech before each period that keeps his players energized and focus on their goals. The inspiration that they bring to their players will determine if the team will come out with a victory. Herb Brooks was one of the best at inspiring his team to leave everything they have on the ice. He is best known for coaching the 1980 gold medal-winning U.S. Olympics men ice hockey team. The team started as twenty individuals, many who played against each other at rival colleges, that were very talented, but could not work in unison. With Brooks at the helm, the team became a family and went to defy the odds and defeat the dominant U.S.S.R. at the Olympic Games. Document in both a book, as well as a movie, Brooks pre-game speech has become one of the most notable moments in sports history. With a silence within the locker room, Brook delivers his speech that was only written on a scrap of yellow paper. Three short sentences stuck out the most, "You were born to be a player. You were meant to be here. This

moment is yours” (Coffey, 2005). Brooks delivered these words and they stuck with his team. The inspiration that he was able to provide flow to his players and allowed them to take down what was the best team in the world. Without a strong coach, the 1980’s U.S. Men’s Ice Hockey team would not have had the success that they did. The influence of Herb Brooks on the team raised their competition level to unbelievable heights.

### **Section V: Fans in Basketball**

Coaches within sports teams influence players through knowledge and inspiration, but the fans give the players something more to play for. The pride of the city keeps player working hard and raising up the team. Fans can also have a very influential impact on the monetary value of a sports team by attending games and buying apparel. A prime example of this comes from when the Charlotte Hornets relocated and later became the New Orleans Pelican. The relocation was prompted from the little support the team had in Charlotte, but in New Orleans, the team only grew. The valuation of the team has almost tripled in recent years which, “can primarily be attributed to new ownership investing in trades for superstar athletes and obtaining superstar athletes through the NBA draft, which in turn increased the overall competitiveness of the franchise and increased fan interest” (Rozier, 2018). The Pelicans were struggling with fan support but once they moved and able to grow their support, the value of the team increased. Fans play an important role in the success of a team as they influence the overall monetary value by showing their support.

### **Section VI: Fans in Football**

It is quite clear to see the sheer support that football fans show for their teams by their actions and apparel on game days. They are fully committed to their team and influence the team's value significantly. One team that it can clearly see be impactful on is the Dallas

Cowboys. In 2009, the Cowboys opened their new stadium and saw their local revenue, “increase from \$280 million to \$420 million due to the team’s ability to sell personal seat licenses” (Abreu and Spradley, 2016). The new stadium consisted of numerous club and luxury seats that many fans purchased so that they could be at every game and have the best seats. Commitment to their team led many fans to spend anywhere between \$150,00-\$900,000 on these seats which leads to their team being valued monetarily higher than others. Another important part of the Cowboys’ increase in revenue came from the sale of apparel. Even if a fan cannot be at every game, they can still show their support by buying merchandise from their team. The Cowboys capitalized on this as, “the Cowboys’ 25% increase in worth from 2015 was fueled by their ability to control local revenue from merchandise sold apart from the NFL’s licensing agreement” (Abreu and Spradley, 2016) which reflects on the support that their fans give them as the fans want their team to be successful. The fans showing their support also inspires their team to strive to do better in games to prove that they deserve the support. The overall influence of the fans through the purchase of seats and merchandise has led to an increase in monetary value and allows the team to do better in competition.

### **Section VII: Fans in Hockey**

The purchase of merchandise is also a heavy influence within all hockey team’s monetary value, but one of the support of fans at the games helps the teams competitive value. A moment where this could be seen is during the Pittsburgh Penguins versus Arizona Coyotes game in December of 2017. The Coyotes were the home team which typically allows for an advantage in support from the fans, but after a dominant season before, the Penguins had the complete support of the fans in the stadium. Within the seats of the arena was a sea of black and gold, the Penguins colors, and cheers that only supported the Penguins. As time was ticking down with a tied game,

the roars from the fans gave inspiration to the Penguins as they came out and scored with only two minutes remaining in the game. This strong fan base allowed for the Penguins to come out victorious in the contest as the fans influenced them to play better. Going into the arena with the backing of the people there only inspires a team to prove themselves to be better. The influence of the fans during this game gave a team, which should have been at a disadvantage, the inspiration to push forward and achieve a victory which raises their competitiveness.

### **Section VIII: Players in Basketball**

With the influence of fans and coaches, players can push their team forward to gain success on the court, but players also have an important role in the monetary value of their team. Yao Ming is one player who brought extreme monetary value to his team as he was the first prominently Chinese player in the National Basketball Association (NBA). When he was drafted in 2002, there was not that strong of an international interest in the league but adding him to the lineup caught the attention of the Chinese sports markets. The NBA was able to begin their expansion into China through Yao Ming which has allowed for a strong basis as, “relations within social media, television broadcast, and the overall NBA brand continues to expand tremendously within international sports markets” (Rozier 2018). Yao Ming has allowed for the expansion into a foreign market and with that comes immense wealth as there are more people for his team to sell their products too. Without the joining of many international players, many teams would not have the outreach that they do. The player himself has influenced his team through his nationality to gain monetary value.

### **Section IX: Players in Football**

It can also be seen that players also have an immense impact on the competitive success of teams, even if it is just one player. Within the sport of football, there are numerous times when

one player becoming injured has caused their team to lose their competitive edge and begin to lose games. A prime example of this is the 2008 NFL season when the New England Patriots lost star quarterback Tom Brady in the first week. The team ended up going 11-5 and did not qualify for the playoff and is the only time they have not been in the playoffs since drafting Tom Brady. It was the Miami Dolphins who won the division that year while playing with a healthy roster. As Bill Barnes argues:

The New England Patriots' fall was driven by the season-ending injury to quarterback Tom Brady in Week 1. And the Dolphins, who won the division in the final week, received 16-game seasons from Pennington, who had played only one other full season in his nine-year career, and Brown, who played his first in four seasons.

The ability for a player to be on the field changes the whole outcome for a team as seen by this season. Tom Brady plays a key role in his team's competitive success on the field as he inspires the players around him. Without him, the Patriots are not as strong and do not have the same success. Injuries, as terrible as they are, allow fans and coaches to see just how important every player is on their team as losing one player could put a season on hold.

### **Section X: Players in Hockey**

Along with bringing competition success, a player can also bring financial success for their team within the team's home city. A star player can attract fans to come to watch the games and spend money. They also provide the team much-needed skill that will help win games. An example of on such player is Sidney Crosby for the Pittsburgh Penguins. The Penguins were struggling with their fan base and needed to find a way to stay competitively and financially successful. They soon drafted Sidney Crosby, along with other stars, in hopes that he could make a large impact for the team, which he did. It was quite clear to see that, "after the draft the

revenue started increasing, and the team saw financial success. They eventually won a Stanley Cup together” (McGinnis 2013). The one player changed the whole dynamic of the team and influenced them so much that they claimed the highest title in hockey. Crosby was also able to bring his team financial success as everyone wanted to watch him play and buy merchandise with his number. Even if a team is struggling financially or competitively in hockey, one player could change that and bring a dynasty of greatness with them.

### Section XI: Counter-Argument

Though the influence of coaches and fans can clearly be seen, some may still argue that the value of a team comes solely from their net worth. The net worth of a team does play a very significant role in their value, but it not the only decider. As can be seen in the chart of the top 11 highest valued National Hockey League (NHL) teams below, the New York Rangers have the highest value.

Figure 1: Ice Hockey: NHL Team Valuations (Forbes) (in mil. of \$ - add 000,000)

Item	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
New York Rangers	306	365	411	416	461	507	750	850	1,100	1,200	1,250	1,500
Toronto Maple Leafs	332	413	448	470	505	521	1,000	1,150	1,300	1,150	1,100	1,400
Montreal Canadiens	230	283	334	339	408	445	575	775	1,000	1,175	1,200	1,250
Chicago Blackhawks	168	179	205	258	300	306	350	625	825	925	925	1,000
Boston Bruins	235	243	263	271	302	325	348	600	750	750	800	890
Los Angeles Kings	205	209	210	208	215	232	276	450	580	580	600	750
Philadelphia Flyers	246	244	275	273	301	290	336	500	625	660	720	740
Vancouver Canucks	192	211	236	239	262	300	342	700	800	745	700	730
Detroit Red Wings	258	293	303	337	315	336	346	470	570	600	625	700
Pittsburgh Penguins	133	155	195	222	235	264	288	480	565	560	570	650
Washington Capitals	127	145	160	183	197	225	250	414	500	565	570	625

Going off the net worth is a good way to view how a team is doing financially, but it is not a true reflection of a team. This chart is only based off net worth and does not reflect the competition value that teams have. In the 2017 season, the Pittsburgh Penguins won the Stanley Cup, but they are only ranked 10th in value in this chart. Only using the monetary value causes people to rank

teams poorly as it does not reflect the overall team. Knowing how much a team makes is very important as it can show how supportive the fans are, but it does not consider other influences which leads it to value teams incorrectly.

## **Section XII: Conclusion**

Every sports team strives to achieve both financial and competitive success so their overall value increases. The team needs to have both aspects to get a full view of their value because basing the value from just one does not truly reflect the team. The influence from coaches and fans on the player helps the team grow in both aspects so to find the true value of a team, one must look at the coaches, fans, and players as they produce successes throughout a season.

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