Chapter 10

Sport Rivalry Is More Than Just “The Game”: Where We Are and Where We Can Go

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ABSTRACT

Sport rivalry research has grown from sport fandom research. And, while sport fandom research has a strong knowledge base, sport rivalry research is still in its infancy. This chapter briefly reviews the extant literature on sport rivalry. Topics include research examining geopolitical rivalries within international football (soccer), the psychological effects of sport rivalry, schadenfreude, and the creation of the Sport Rivalry Fan Perception Scale, a measure of sport rivalry. The marketing implications of sport rivalry research are discussed and areas for future research are provided.

INTRODUCTION

Research on sport fandom is entering a “golden age.” More people are doing more research on more areas of sport fandom than ever before (see Wann & James, 2019). Researchers from psychology, sociology, religion, and marketing have begun investigating the causes and correlates of sport fandom. Research on sport fandom can be traced back to the 1920s and 1930s, beginning with Coleman Griffith, who surveyed Chicago Cubs fans about their motivations to follow the Cubs (Griffith,
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1938). Thus, current research activity builds on a long tradition of examination of the causes and correlates of sport fandom. Furthermore, sport rivalry grows from the same in-group-out-group conflict (see Tajfel & Turner, 1979) that sport fandom does, and the researchers in the area of sport rivalry also tend to do research on sport fandom.

BACKGROUND

Sport Fandom Research

One of the most influential researchers within the area of sport fandom is Dan Wann from Murray State University, who began researching in the area in the 1990s. He has most generally focused on team identification, or the psychological connection between an individual and a sport team (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). The Team Identification-Social Psychological Health Model (TI-SPHM; Wann, 2006) has generated a lot of research. This research has centered on examining how highly identified sport fans are affected by sport team performance (Wann, Dolan, McGeorge, & Allison, 1994), how they cope with a deleterious or undesirable team performance (Wann & Grieve, 2008; Wann, Grieve, Waddill, & Martin, 2008), and the correlates of being identified with a local sport team (Wann, Grieve, Visek, Partridge, & Lanter, 2012). Wann has also examined other correlates of team identification, such as superstitious behavior and mystical thinking (Wann, Grieve, End et al., 2013; Wann & Goeke, 2018; Wann & Zaichkowski, 2009); willingness to help the team win, even through aggressive acts (Wann, Carlson, & Schrader, 1999; Wann et al., 2011; Wann, Waddill, Bono, Scheuchner, & Ruga, 2017); how legalization of gambling on sporting contests would affect fans’ enjoyment of games (Wann, Zapalac, Grieve, Lanter, & Peetz, 2017; Wann, Zapalac, Grieve, Partridge, & Lanter, 2015); dysfunctional fandom (Wakefield & Wann, 2006; Wann & Goeke, 2017; Wann & Ostrander, 2017); and fans’ consumption of sporting events (Wann et al., in press). He has even examined the impact of rivalry on sport fans (Luellen & Wann, 2010; Smith & Wann, 2006; Wann et al., 2016; Wann et al., in press).

The research Wann has completed on sport rivalry appears to be more of a “scattershot” type of research. That is, there does not seem to have been a planned course of research in the area. Luellen and Wann (2010) described a series of three studies in which the rivalry between the University of Kentucky men’s basketball team and Duke University’s men’s basketball team was made salient. In the first study, participants watched a highlight video of the Duke University men’s basketball team. In the second study, participants were exposed to a research assistant wearing a Duke University t-shirt. In the third study, participants watched a video about
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