

Fans of Liverpool, Bobcats, NHL have reason to cheer

While Liverpool fans surely were hoping the days of an American-based ownership group for their team were over, the faithful could not have asked for better reps than John Henry, Tom Werner and New England Sports Ventures. Setting aside the legal machinations around the deal and the sale price for now, NESV has proved to be a top-flight steward of a historically strong franchise rooted in tradition. They are smart operators who recognize the deep-seated loyalties of a fan base and

How we see it

make sound commercial and competitive decisions.

■ If Michael Jordan is as engaged as our lead story details this week, it's a good thing not only for Charlotte but for the NBA. Within league circles, Jordan has been mentioned as having astute business instincts that were suppressed because of his reservations to commit time. Now that he's more engaged, he may prove to be a surprisingly successful owner and his iconic status adds a buzz sorely lacking in the market. But where will Jordan net out in coming labor talks and what stance will he take against today's players voicing their views on labor, given his own outspokenness when he rebuked the late Abe Pollin in past CBA negotiations?

■ In a deal that seems obvious, but likely overlooked, kudos to the NHL for partnering with food distribution group Rock and Wrap It Up! to donate all prepared but unsold concessions on game nights to local shelters and places of need. In this time of excessive waste — and extreme need — it's a smart and altruistic program.

Team RSNs are prospering

My compliments to John Ourand on his recent interview with Ted Leonsis [Oct. 11-17 issue of SportsBusiness Journal] regarding the ongoing development of team, league and conference networks. Leonsis' responses went beyond the headlines to explain several of the key objectives in developing and owning a network.

The only thing I would note is that, based upon the track record of the past 25 years, most of these networks, when properly structured, have succeeded. As of today, dozens of major sports teams, leagues and conferences own/co-own television networks. As pioneers and leaders, YES and NESN often receive the headlines, but over the past decade alone, team RSNs have successfully launched in

How you see it

New York, Chicago, the Bay Area, Baltimore/Washington, Denver and Cleveland to the

point where over 25 [percent] of the teams in Major League Baseball and the NBA own or co-own their respective regional network.

As for leagues and conferences, the NFL, MLB, NBA, NHL and Big Ten have each launched their own successful, widely distributed network. As in any new business category, there have been failures, like Minnesota's Victory Sports and Portland's Action Sports, but even those efforts ended up being leveraged into much-improved rights agreements. Most other team and league networks launched before and since have achieved long-term prosperity.

Given this track record of success, it should continue to be a seller's market for network development going forward. A growing number of media platforms and partners will be chasing after a relatively fixed number of key sports properties to drive ratings and revenues, a situation that's more or less been in place since the dawn of broadcast television and radio. As long as each potential network prepares and structures itself properly, I think most will continue to succeed.

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What message do you send to youth?



CHRISSY CAREW

Young people today look up to professional athletes for their power, grace and ability on the field or the court. Sometimes sports figures are also heralded by young people for their high-flying lifestyles, material assets and high-profile friends.

What they should not be admired for is social behavior that is unacceptable. Unfortunately, the media has been inundated lately with stories of such transgressions.

Shouldn't we be educating our youth on some of the positive, community-oriented and charitable things that players do on a regular basis?

I believe that from the time we are very young children, everyone who holds influence over our lives, for better or worse, contributes to the core of who we are — that unique spirit within each of us made up of our ideas, perceptions, motivation and sense of faith.

This is why I feel it is imperative for the sports industry, whether it is coaches, school administrators, scouts, agents, sports marketers, sponsors or most importantly, professional athletes, to recognize the impact they have on the impressionable youth in this country.

Not all of us have positive role models in our family. Many of the children today going into athletics come from broken homes. The

impressions made during this time can have positive and negative effects on that child's future. I realize we do not live in an idyllic world and, therefore, nothing is perfect. However, our children require more positive reinforcement.

Too often, all kids see is the glorification of the materialistic and hedonistic lifestyles that some professional athletes lead. When an athlete's actions lead to negative consequences, there is blanket, and often sordid, coverage of their misdeeds.

When an athlete is arrested for DUI and kids see that his punishment is just to sit out a quarter of the team's next game, what is that telling them about responsibility?

A hero of the Super Bowl goes into a night club and is arrested for carrying a gun. Another is accused of abusing a young woman. What are we doing to educate young athletes early on in their careers about putting themselves in such situations?

Major brands target the young demographic audience with edgy campaigns. Then we wonder why there is a disconnection regarding values.

We must all be cognizant of the message we're delivering to youth. That's why I believe the entire sports industry has to be held accountable.

What I would recommend:

■ Offer young athletes personal and life coaching to better prepare them for the challenges they face off the field.

■ Present stories of professional or retired athletes whose actions away from the field are examples of the positive community impact that is possible with athletic success. Inspire youth with actions embodied in values and moral beliefs rather than expensive possessions and the celebrity lifestyle.

When I hear people say these athletes are overpaid, I say, pay them as much as they want. However, if players accept that monetary reward, they must also accept that they owe it to the kids who watch them to be a role model. Make them accountable, not only to their teammates and family, but to the children who watch them on TV, who buy their jerseys and who seek out their autographs.

If they're not ready to do that, they don't deserve the rewards. ■

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