

**Professional Sports Teams' Community Engagement during an Environmental Jolt:  
Shifting Activities and State Differences amid the COVID-19 Pandemic**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Professional sport organizations have increasingly engaged with and contributed to their local communities through philanthropy, programs, and partnerships. While existing literature has revealed types and forms of community engagement in sport, we know less about professional sport organizations' local activities during unsettled times, as in the case of an environmental jolt. This dissertation aims to extend understanding of the relationship between sport organizations and their surrounding environments by investigating 1) the potential shift in professional sport teams' community engagement approach due to an environmental jolt, and 2) whether teams' community engagement approach in response to an environmental jolt varies by their local geographic embeddedness. I employed a qualitative approach to examine these questions in the context of professional sport teams in the U.S. and their community engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Chapter 2, I review academic works around community engagement in sport to provide the background that motivates and contextualizes Study 1 and Study 2 in this dissertation. In Study 1 (Chapter 3), I examine the shift in professional sport teams' community engagement approach in response to an environmental jolt by comparing pre- and peri-pandemic periods. My qualitative analysis suggests that there are notable shifts in teams' community engagement approach, particularly around focus-area priorities, acknowledgment of community members, modes of interaction, affiliated athletes' involvement, and partnerships. The findings represent the broader trends in the way professional sport teams

engage in local communities, and isomorphic behavior among teams across leagues. Building on Study 1, Study 2 (Chapter 4) looks beneath broader trends to explore differences in professional sport teams' community engagement by geographic locations, or the more local institutional environment, during an environmental jolt. For geographic comparison, I grouped teams located in metropolitan areas by red and blue states, corresponding to differences in norms and policies. My findings suggest that the way teams engage in local communities varied by red and blue states, showing different forms of engagement within certain focus areas. Collectively, Study 1 and Study 2 expand the understanding of the relationship between professional sport organizations and their environments by revealing approaches to community engagement amid the environmental jolt.



## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

Professional sport organizations have increasingly contributed to their local communities through community engagement activities (Babiak & Kihl, 2018; Cobourn & Frawley, 2017; Walters, 2009). Community engagement, which is often described as a subset of corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, allows organizations to be involved in addressing social issues and reflecting the needs of local communities (Abdullah et al., 2017; Bowen et al., 2010). In professional sport, teams' community engagement includes, but is not limited to promoting youth development, education, and health, through programs, infrastructure, volunteering, and donations (Babiak & Kihl, 2018; Rowe et al., 2019).

While recent sport management studies around community engagement have explored how professional sport organizations contribute to their local communities (Babiak & Kihl, 2018; Cobourn & Frawley, 2017; Millar & Doherty, 2018), less is known about their community engagement during unsettled times, as in the case of an environmental jolt. Environmental jolts are exogenous shocks or events that are difficult to foresee (Meyer, 1982), such as natural disasters, financial crises, and pandemics, such as COVID-19. In response to a jolt, it is possible that organizations reduce their community engagement, given the threats to their core functions, and limited time and resources (Gray et al., 1995). Alternatively, organizations may expand or shift their focus or approach to include new or growing areas of need, methods of delivery,

and partnerships. In the first study of the dissertation (Chapter 3), I examine how professional sport organizations' approaches to community engagement change in response to an environmental jolt.

Next, I focus on variation in local geographic communities within these broader trends. Local geographic communities are recognized as a more immediate institutional environment (Marquis et al., 2007; Walker & Parent, 2010). The institutional environment refers to a "taken-for-granted social and cultural meaning system" (Handelman & Arnold, 1999, p. 34) that incorporates institutional pressures. Several institutional studies in sport have suggested that organizations often conform to these institutional pressures as means of seeking legitimacy (Slack & Hinings, 1994; Trendafilova et al, 2013; Washington & Patterson, 2011). However, there is a need to consider the institutional environments by local variation as professional sport organizations are embedded in different geographic communities with their own norms, culture, and regulations that can shape behavior (Davis & Greve, 1997). Some studies have paid attention to the geographic differences in understanding sport organizations' engagement in community or CSR activities (Misener et al., 2013; Yang & Babiak, 2021), but we know less about whether organizations' community engagement approach differs by geographical boundaries, particularly by state. In the second study of this dissertation (Chapter 4), I explore differences in professional sport organizations' community engagement approach by red and blue states.

For both studies, I employed a qualitative approach centered on teams in North America (i.e., National Basketball Association [NBA], National Hockey League [NHL], Major League Baseball [MLB], and National Football League [NFL]) and their community engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using an abductive approach, I conducted a content analysis for Study 1 (Chapter 3) to examine the potential shifts in teams' community engagement approach by

comparing pre-pandemic and peri-pandemic periods. Using the data collected for the peri-pandemic periods, Study 2 (Chapter 4) focused on an inductive approach within the framework of local institutional context to discover new insights on the difference of teams' community engagement approach by state political grouping (i.e., red-state, blue-state). Figure 1 illustrates the structure of the dissertation. The conceptual and theoretical foundation of the dissertation is discussed below, followed by the contributions and the summary of each chapter.

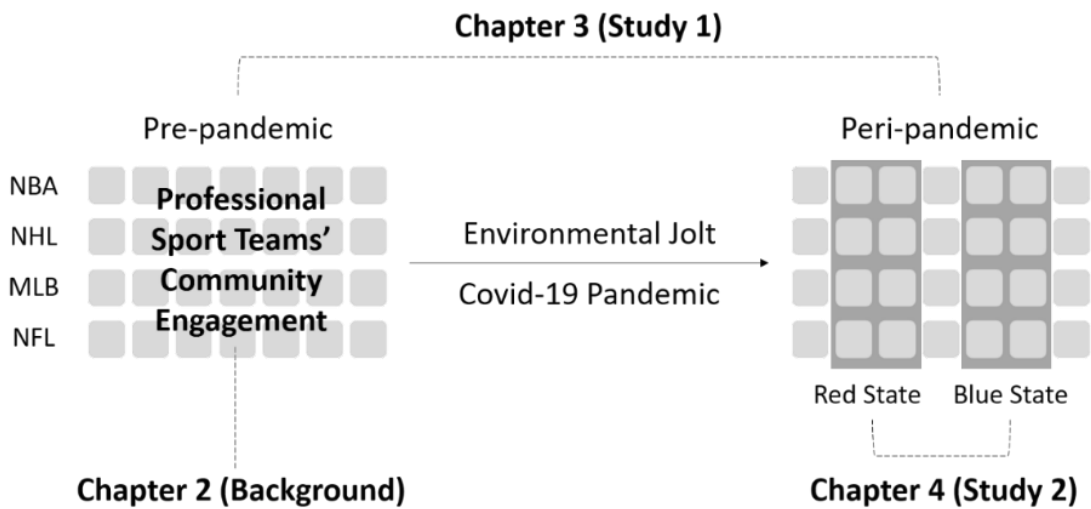


Figure 1. Structure of the Dissertation

### Conceptual Foundation

In the context of CSR, sport management scholars have examined the role of sport organizations in their local communities (Breitbarth & Harris, 2008; Sheth & Babiak, 2010; Skinner et al., 2008; Trendafilova et al., 2017). These works indicate that sport organizations actively engage in communities through donations, fundraising events, partnerships, community development programs, and volunteerism as means of reaching their CSR goals (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006; Kihl et al., 2014; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). These community-focused activities

are referred to as “community engagement,” and address social issues around youth, education, health, equality, diversity, environment, and livelihood (Babiak & Kihl, 2018; Cobourn & Frawley, 2017; Trendafilova et al., 2013).

Scholars have investigated community engagement in sport organizations from various perspectives, including motivating factors (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011; Walker & Parent, 2010), focus and types of activities (Jones et al., 2020; Rowe et al., 2019), related stakeholders (Babiak & Kihl, 2018; Walters, 2009), and strategic approach (Godfrey, 2009; Heinze et al., 2014). These works focus on community engagement during “settled times,” which refers to when there is more stability in the institutional environments (Swidler, 1986). In settled times, it is natural for organizations to know how to act without considering the changes in surrounding environments (Swidler, 1986). However, we know less about professional sport organizations’ community engagement when there are sudden changes or disturbing events in the local communities. These unprecedented changes are referred to as environmental jolts and they can cause uncertainty for organizations about how to act (Meyer, 1982; Sine & David, 2003; Surachaikulwattana & Phillips, 2017; Wan & Yiu, 2009). There is some research, outside sport, that indicates organizations’ philanthropic behavior is affected by natural events operating as destructive exogenous shocks (Tilcsik & Marquis, 2013). For example, Tilcsik and Marquis (2013) found that “major natural disasters depressed philanthropic spending by local corporations” (p. 136). Thus, there is an opportunity to explore how sport organizations may respond to an environmental jolt, whether by adapting, expanding, or reducing their community engagement activities. In examining organizational responses to the environmental jolt, this dissertation is conceptually and theoretically situated within the framework of institutional theory. In particular, this work focuses on the relationship between professional sport teams and

their institutional environments, which refer to the “mechanisms of influence that pertain to legitimacy in a particular societal context” (Grewal & Dharwadkar, 2002, p. 84). Specifically, I examined how teams’ community engagement shifted due to a jolt in the broader organizational field (Study 1) and how differences in team community engagement mapped to the more local institutional environment of geographic communities (i.e., states) (Study 2).

Organizations are influenced by their surrounding institutional environments (Obholzer, 1986), through pressures, such as coercive, normative, and mimetic forces (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Hirsch, 1997) that require organizations to respond by adapting, expanding, and reducing their activities. Some researchers have noted that the uncertainty stemming from the changing environment prompts organizational action, leading organizations to become isomorphic with one another over time to seek legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Greenwood et al., 2002; Orru et al., 1991; Slack & Hinings, 1994). Sport management scholars have drawn on institutional theory to understand broader trends in adopting CSR practices, suggesting that the institutional pressures may lead to similar homogenization of institutional environments (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011; Washington & Patterson, 2011). However, the question remains as to how organizations take action in the institutional environments when the change is fast and severe, which consequently requires them to respond to uncertainties within short periods of time.

In addition, other studies have paid attention to the heterogeneity in organizational behavior, suggesting that organizations respond to institutional pressures from changing environments in a distinctive manner (Garud et al., 2013; Greenwood et al., 2011; Heinze & Lu, 2017). For instance, Wenzel and colleagues (2020) suggested that organizations strategically respond to a crisis, in form of retrenchment, persevering, innovating, or exit to aim for organizational survival.

Communities can operate as more local institutional environments that shape organizational behavior (Marquis & Battilana, 2009; Tilcsik & Marquis, 2013). Communities, such as states and cities, have different local norms and cultures (Davis & Greve, 1997). Thus, we may observe variation in organizations' social action in response to the institutional pressure at the local community level (Marquis & Battilana, 2009; Marquis et al., 2007).

The influence of local context on organizational behavior received scholarly attention in sport management (Collins et al., 2016; Zhou & Kaplanidou, 2018). For example, some scholars studied the relationship between sport organizations and local stakeholders (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006; Cobourn, 2014), noting that sport organizations need "strong relationships with stakeholders within local communities" for organizational success (Cobourn, 2014, p. 25). With respect to variation in local norms and culture, several scholars have also focused on geographic communities at the state level (Shin, 1997; Sung et al., 2015; Woods, 2022). Modern sport organizations are bound to the legal responsibility of their states or local communities that affect their behavior (Heffernan & O'Brien, 2010; Johnson, 1993; Sheth & Babiak, 2010). For example, researchers identified how states as geographic communities have an impact on sport organizations around adopting concussion legislation and philanthropic giving (Di Lu & Heinze, 2019; Yang & Babiak, 2021). Appreciating the literature on the studies looking at local communities at the state level, there is an opportunity to build on these works by examining whether sport organizations' community engagement varies by state.

### **Contribution of the Dissertation**

This dissertation contributes to sport management scholarship in several ways. First, this dissertation contributes to the literature on CSR in professional sport (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Cobourn & Frawley, 2017; Rowe et al., 2019; Walker & Parent, 2010), revealing the trends in

professional sport teams' community engagement in response to an environmental jolt. By comparing two time periods (i.e., pre- and peri-pandemic) in Study 1, this dissertation provides insight into the most recent forms and types of community engagement in professional sports and potential shifts in the way professional sport organizations engage in local communities due to the jolt. Further, this dissertation contributes to the understanding of the relationship between organizations and local stakeholders in professional sports (Babiak & Kihl, 2018; Misener et al., 2013), by exploring how professional sport teams interact with various local stakeholders to resolve a crisis. By looking at geographic differences (i.e., red and blue states) in Study 2, this dissertation contributes to the understanding of the role of local geographic communities in the way professional sport teams implement community engagement activities.

### **Overview of the Dissertation**

Following the introduction, Chapter 2 reviews the academic works around community engagement in sport. I begin by reviewing the broader CSR and community engagement in professional sport literature. Next, I identify four major areas covered in literature around community engagement in sport, including motivation, focus and types, stakeholders, and strategic approach. Chapter 2 focuses on providing the basic knowledge and background of community engagement in sport to motivate and contextualize Study 1 and Study 2 in this dissertation.

In Chapter 3 (Study 1), I examine the relationship between sport organizations and local communities, specifically around the change in professional sport teams' community engagement approach in response to an environmental jolt. Much of the research on CSR in sport, including the more specific area of community engagement, is focused on "settled times," or when there is more stability in the institutional environment (Swidler, 1986). During these

periods, professional teams may have the time and capacity to develop a strategic approach to community engagement - going through a process that includes identifying needs in the local region, meeting with local leaders, considering the team's own strengths, and deciding on focal social issues and partnerships that are a fit with team resources and goals (Porter & Kramer, 2006; Heinze et al., 2014). However, we know less about professional sport organizations' community engagement when there is disruption and uncertainty, as in times of an environmental jolt. Using qualitative content analysis, I explore the community engagement of professional sport teams across leagues in North America before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, which serves as a natural experiment of an environmental jolt. The study found that there are notable shifts in teams' community engagement approach amid an environmental jolt, particularly around focus-area priorities, acknowledgment of community members, modes of interaction, affiliated athletes' involvement, and partnerships. This study contributes to the literature on CSR in sport by revealing how professional sport teams' community engagement is shaped by uncertainty driven by environmental jolts.

The findings from Study 1 represent the broader trends in the local community engagement approach among professional sport teams across leagues, increasing homogeneity, as teams respond to institutional pressures caused by an environmental jolt. The local communities, however, can serve as an immediate institutional environment that shapes different organizational behavior (Davis & Greve, 1997; Marquis et al., 2007). Sport management scholars have recently identified the influence of the local geographic community on the adoption of concussion legislation and teams' philanthropic giving (Di Lu & Heinze, 2019; Yang & Babiak, 2021). In light of the increasing interest in how professional sport teams engage in local communities as part of their CSR initiatives (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Walker & Parent,



2010), there is an opportunity to further explore the geographic factors that lead to variance in teams' more specific community engagement approaches.

Building on Study 1, I explore the differences in professional sport teams' community engagement by geographic variation in Chapter 4 (Study 2). Specifically, I employ a qualitative approach centered on teams from the United States. and their community engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic, examining differences in teams located in metropolitan areas by red and blue states. This state grouping, as means of local communities, maps to differences in institutional factors, such as norms and regulations (Pe'Er & Gottschalg, 2011; Serdar & Reed, 2015), and is particularly salient during crises or environmental jolts when state governments are activated (Gollust et al., 2020). Using the data collected for the peri-pandemic period, this study particularly aims to understand how teams' embeddedness in different states shapes the way they engage in local communities. The results indicate that teams' community engagement by red and blue states varied, centered around interactions with local stakeholders with respect to focus areas and partnerships. This study contributes to a better understanding of community engagement in sport organizations by demonstrating local differences in community engagement and adds to the nascent literature on the role of the geographic community, as a more local institutional environment in sport. Finally, a general discussion and conclusion of the dissertation are presented in Chapter 5.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Literature Review: Community Engagement in Sport**

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature around community engagement in sport. I first review the broader CSR literature in sport to provide basic knowledge and major themes relevant to community engagement in sport organizations. Then, I delve deeper into the research on community engagement in sport, which is often considered part of the CSR in sport literature. Specifically, I identify and review the following themes from the research on community engagement in sport: motivation, focus and types, stakeholders, and strategic approach. This review helps situate and motivate my dissertation studies.

#### **CSR in Sport**

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is broadly defined as “the responsibility of organizations to be ethical and accountable to the needs of society as well as their stakeholders” (Bradish & Cronin, 2009, p. 692). Organizations often work with various stakeholders, including internal actors (e.g., employees, leaders) and external constituents and entities (e.g., customers, communities, local businesses), regarding their CSR efforts. CSR has been characterized as a societal relationship between organizations and their stakeholders that centers on meeting the interests and needs of both parties (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Windsor, 2006).

In exploring the nature of CSR, previous scholars have combined different theoretical approaches to understand the relationship between business organizations and society (Babor & Robaina, 2013; Garriga & Melé, 2004; Ismail, 2009; Maon et al., 2010; Nikolova & Arsić,

2017). There are four main approaches to conceptualize CSR: instrumental, political, social integrative, and ethical approaches (Garriga & Melé, 2004). The instrumental approach views CSR as a strategic tool to maximize the long-term profits of the stakeholders (Nikolova & Arsić, 2017). The political approach focuses on organizations' responsibility in using business power and position within society (Ismail, 2009). The social integrative approach refers to organizations responding to social demands, that is, organizations are obligated to "operate in accordance with social values" (p. 57) to gain legitimacy (Garriga & Melé, 2004). Lastly, the ethical approach describes CSR as altruistic behavior that contributes to the common good of society (Babor & Robaina, 2013). These different approaches map to conceptualizations and understandings of CSR as not only aligned with business objectives to maximize economic performance (Porter & Kramer, 2006), but as opportunities to benefit society (Graafland & Mazereeuw-Van der Duijn Schouten, 2012).

A growing body of literature on CSR in sport identified the unique features of professional sport in delivering and developing CSR in general (Carlini et al., 2021; Rowe et al., 2019; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). Babiak and Wolfe (2009) suggest that there are four factors that uniquely position professional sport organizations with respect to CSR; interest and care for the benefit of the community (passion), financial power and public funds (economics), openness to the public via media communication (transparency), and ability to work in collaboration with organizations at various levels (stakeholder). Smith and Westerbeek (2007) also describe that the nature of sport, including social obligations, documented policies, and expected social benefits through physical activities, allows sport organizations to seek and select CSR programs that match their social engagement strategy and encourage the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders.

Professional sport organizations increasingly engaged in different forms of CSR over the years (Joo et al., 2017; Walters, 2009). One type of CSR that has been widely documented is philanthropic or charitable giving by teams or leagues (Godfrey, 2009; Inoue et al., 2011; Yang & Babiak, 2021). Many professional sport teams have their own charitable foundations, which are a popular way to deploy resources and deliver CSR initiatives. Through their foundations, for example, teams contribute financial donations or gift-in-kinds to organizations focused on education, youth development, and community development (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Cobourn & Frawley, 2017; Inoue et al., 2011). Professional sport teams and leagues are also engaging in community outreach programs and fundraising raising events to bring awareness to various social issues, including disadvantaged youth and families, gender and racial equality, environmental concerns, and poverty reduction (Sheth & Babiak, 2010; Trendafilova et al., 2013; Walker & Parent, 2010). Given that CSR is viewed as an integral part of sport organizations' functions in recent years, further investigation into how CSR is practiced and leveraged in different communities is needed.

The extensive academic literature on CSR in sport has considered the geographic aspect of community engagement, especially those initiated by professional sport organizations (Levermore, 2010; Rowe et al., 2019; Sheth & Babiak, 2010; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007; Walker & Parent, 2010). Professional sport organizations address social issues at the local, national, and international levels. Walker and Parent (2010) suggest, however, that the majority of professional sport organizations focus on local and community-level involvement. Organizations tend to initiate geographically-focused activities, including athlete volunteerism, youth initiatives, charitable donations, fan appreciation, environmental programs, team-affiliate partner programs, and sport program for disadvantaged youth. Walker and Parent (2010) also

suggest that professional sport teams and global sport businesses (e.g., Nike and Adidas) engage in community development initiatives such as construction projects (e.g., parks and house buildings) to benefit local spaces. Given that many professional sport teams bear the name of their home city and represent the geographic region in which they are embedded, teams may have stronger connections with local communities and prioritize local community engagement activities, perhaps more so than national or transnational CSR. For example, Seth and Babiak (2010) noted that “the importance of having a focus on the local community in developing a loyal fan base and creating awareness for the team becomes a strategic imperative for CSR-related efforts” (p. 445).

### **Community Engagement in Sport Organizations**

Sport organizations increasingly engaged in the local communities to reach their broader CSR goals (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Cobourn & Frawley, 2017; Rowe et al., 2019; Walker & Parent, 2010). The literature on CSR in sport has looked at this engagement through different lenses. In this section, I provide clarity around terminology and some of the main themes around the relationship between sport organizations and their local communities. First, there are different terms used to describe sport organizations’ community involvement, including community enrichment (Walker & Parent, 2010), community outreach initiatives (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009), involvement in CSR community programs (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007), CSR engagement in the community (Babiak & Kihl, 2018), community-oriented practices (Rowe et al., 2019), community-oriented activities (Walters, 2009), or community and social-based initiatives (Cobourn & Frawley, 2017). These terms are often used interchangeably in organizational CSR studies as they are interrelated concepts to understand the community and social activities

initiated by sport organizations. For clarity and consistency, I will use the term “community engagement” in this dissertation.

Community engagement refers to the organizational involvement in the community to address social issues and promote the well-being of the community members (Bowen et al., 2010; Deigh et al., 2016). Bowen and colleagues (2010) defined community engagement as “the subset of a firm’s corporate social responsibility activities that are directed towards individual citizens and community groups” (p. 297). Depending on the research, the community group is perceived as a group of individuals affiliated by common identities such as culture (e.g., Asian, African-American), gender and age (e.g., youth, women, LGBTQ), institutions (e.g., school), and geographic region (e.g., local, city, nation). In general, the community can be defined as a social unit of people sharing a commonality (Lee & Newby, 1983); therefore, community engagement can also be described as various forms of organizational activities or socio-economic outreach to benefit different community groups.

Community engagement is commonly accepted as an important part of CSR strategy planned and implemented by sport organizations. Community engagement is often reflected through donations, funds, volunteerism, partnerships, and additional community programs and events (Bhinekawati, 2018; Bowen et al., 2010; Kihl et al., 2014). Within the broader context of CSR, community engagement is beyond just investing in what organizations have, but “to listen to the community to include them in plans and to reflect on the needs of the community” (Abdullah et al., 2017, p. 1540). In other words, community engagement is the combination of bottom-up and top-down approaches where organizations acknowledge the community needs and closely work with stakeholders to support the communities in which they operate (Stone, 2018). Community engagement plays a key role, in both process and outcome, of development in

the community as it allows sport organizations to share values and connect community leaders to better understand their needs and work more collaboratively for mutual benefits.

The literature on community engagement in sport centers on four main areas: motivation, focus and types, stakeholders, and strategic approach. I will provide an overview of the major areas of study in community engagement in sport organizations in the following sections.

### **Motivation for Community Engagement in Sport**

Community engagement has been traditionally considered an altruistic behavior. That is, organizations' interest in social issues and pursuit of community engagement, as part of CSR, is a means of fulfilling ethical or moral duties (Graafland & Van de Ven, 2006; Lantos, 2001; Windsor, 2006). The altruistic view explains motivation in community engagement as efforts to 'give back' for positive influence in society. Babiak and Wolfe (2009) add to this conceptualization by suggesting that professional sport teams are motivated to leverage their unique and valuable resources – facilities, star athletes, sponsors, partners, media attention, and public interest – to contribute to the communities.

Institutional factors may also drive sport organizations' engagement in the community (Babiak & Kihl, 2018; Godfrey, 2009; Trendafilova et al., 2013). Institutional environments, or "taken-for-granted social and cultural meaning systems" (Handelman & Arnold, 1999), can exert pressure on organizations, and organizations are required to respond or adapt in order to gain or maintain legitimacy and thus secure resources for survival (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). For example, Godfrey (2009) suggests that sport organizations are obligated, based on the norms and standards of the field, to promote social well-being through community relations or community engagement activities.

The institutional pressures for community engagement may come through coercive (requirements or regulatory enforcements), mimetic (imitation among organizations due to uncertainty or ambiguity), and normative (rules and standards that flow through professional networks) forces (Delmas & Toffel, 2004; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Pedersen et al., 2013). Studies suggest that these forces may motivate the adoption of community engagement initiatives (Godfrey, 2009; Joo et al., 2017; Trendafilova et al., 2013). For example, Trendafilova and colleagues (2013) found that government regulations and standards are becoming an important institutional pressure for professional sport organizations to adopt environmental sustainability initiatives, including locally in communities, as more state and local governments require the construction of environmental-friendly sport facilities. Babiak and Wolfe (2009) noted that the “professional sport teams in the various leagues are entering into CSR at a relatively similar rate, over essentially the same time frame” (p. 728), which implies that organizations adopt community engagement practices by following other organizations.

The review of the motivations for community engagement in sport suggests the role of both internal and external factors. The unique nature of sport and the diverse resources of sport organizations may allow them to position themselves at an advantage in fostering shared values in social well-being. Also, the institutional perspective suggests external pressures as motivation. This perspective supports the argument that teams’ engagement in the community could be an obligation rather than a choice as more teams across the institutional field develop community initiatives.

### **Focus and Types of Community Engagement in Sport**

Sport organizations engage in community initiatives to address various social issues (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Cobourn & Frawley, 2017; Walker & Parent, 2010). In particular,



professional sport teams and leagues have undertaken community-focused activities in areas such as health and wellness, education, social cohesion, gender equality, environmental sustainability, and anti-violence (Rowe et al., 2019; Trendafilova et al., 2013; Walker & Parent, 2010). For example, focusing on health and wellness issues refers to promoting both mental and physical health. Professional sport teams like the Detroit Red Wings and San Jose Sharks initiated NHL's annual Hockey Fights Cancer campaign to support cancer patients through donations and fundraising events. Also, the Montreal Canadiens have initiated their annual Hockey Talks program in partnership with local nonprofit organizations to bring awareness to the importance of mental health and support educational resources for those in need.

Sport organizations also center their community engagement around certain target populations, including youth, women, seniors, disabled, homeless, and low-income populations. Specifically, youth development through physical activities and education are one of the key focus areas when it comes to professional sport teams' community engagement (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007; Jones et al., 2020). Given the perceived positive influence of sport in promoting a healthy lifestyle and improving self-esteem, sport-based community programs for youth can be appealing to not only young participants, but also to parents, coaches, and teachers (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). Jones and Colleagues (2020) suggest that positive youth development through sports implicit a beneficial feature of children as it helps create positive peer interaction and supportive parental involvement. Hence, many professional sport teams have been developing various youth-related community programs and events (e.g., junior sport programs and junior training camps) as part of their youth outreach initiatives to support disadvantaged youth (Walker & Parent, 2010).

There are different forms and types of community engagement in sport (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Rowe et al., 2019; Sheth & Babiak, 2010; Walters, 2009). According to Rowe and colleagues (2019), professional sport teams mainly focus on three types of community-focused activities; giving, activating, and capacity building. Giving refers to the teams' philanthropic activities such as financial donations and gift-in-kind (Heinze et al., 2014; Sheth & Babiak, 2010). Activating refers to encouraging other community members and organizations to participate in cause-related activities. For example, activating includes volunteering, awarding, fundraising, and raising awareness of certain social issues. In the activating phase, teams may also create partnerships with other organizations to better encourage participation and contribute resources. Capacity building is related to community development. Community development in general consists of initiating asset-building activities or programs to support communities (Bhattacharyya, 2004; Green & Haines, 2015; Walker & Parent, 2010). Hence, the capacity building aims to develop or deliver skills and resources for the benefit of communities through programming. Professional sport teams offering youth programs to enhance youth participation in physical activities can be an example of capacity-building activities (Babiak & Kihl, 2018; Jones et al., 2020).

### **Stakeholders of Community Engagement in Sport**

Stakeholders are often considered the key component in developing and operating community engagement initiatives (Babiak & Kihl, 2018; Heinze et al., 2014; Sheth & Babiak, 2010; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). Several studies have examined how sport organizations interact with various stakeholders from individuals (e.g., participants, consumers, and employees) to groups or organizations (e.g., community groups, corporate partners, and nonprofit organizations). For example, Babiak and Kihl (2018) examined the stakeholders'

perceptions and expectations of community engagement initiatives using the case of MLB's Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities (RBI) program. They address that the stakeholders associated with the community engagement programs (e.g., parents, coaches) likely expect teams to "engage in meaningful CSR initiatives" (p. 129) based on community needs. Similarly, Smith and Westerbeek (2007) suggest that sport organizations are expected to "consider the interests of investors, suppliers, consumers, employees, the community and the environment in discharging their profit-directed activities" (p. 44).

Prior studies have also emphasized the relationship between different stakeholders and sport organizations in the community engagement process. Specifically, scholars highlight the importance of the relationship between sport organizations and their partners (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2014; Heinze et al., 2014; Walters, 2009). Sport organizations show dependence on their partnering organizations to both achieve their goals around community engagement and extend stakeholder satisfaction (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2014; Heinze et al., 2014). Given that community engagement activities are grounded in fulfilling the needs and demands of stakeholders, sport organizations and committed partners work collectively to focus on specific social issues that matter and match their resources (Heinze, et al., 2014). Hence, sport organizations seek partners that could 'contribute resources to a cause or build awareness' (Rowe et al., 2019, p. 371).

In addition, some scholars suggest that internal stakeholders, such as employees, managers, and executives' perceptions toward certain social issues influence the way sport organizations engage in communities. For example, Sheth and Babiak (2010) examined how CSR is perceived by team executives and found that teams prefer what is familiar (e.g., youth-focused programs) over less traditional (e.g., disaster relief, human rights, environment, art)

community engagement initiatives. Porter and Kramer (2006) also note that managers should have a strategic understanding of CSR to avoid “greater costs when the company is later judged to have violated its social obligation” (p. 4).

### **A Strategic Approach to Community Engagement in Sport**

While CSR studies traditionally underline the organizations’ moral imperative to benefit the broader society, scholars proposed a new way to look at community engagement through a strategic perspective. A strategic CSR approach refers to the organizations’ socially responsible behavior that not only aims for social welfare but also to create business opportunities for themselves. According to Porter and Kramer (2006), a strategic CSR moves beyond moral obligation and benefits both society and organizations by “doing things differently from competitors in a way that lowers costs or better serves a particular set of customer needs” (p. 10). Through a strategic CSR, organizations selectively make choices in which social issues to focus on and implement, which allows them to build a competitive advantage and ‘turn social problems into business opportunities’ (Godfrey, 2009, p. 702).

Studies in sport management have also focused on how sport organizations strategically approach community engagement (Heinze et al., 2014; Pharr & Lough, 2012). Heinze and colleagues (2014) focused on the case of the Detroit Lions and found that teams strategically approach community engagement by narrowing impact areas, selecting target beneficiaries based on resources and community needs, and building sustainable partnerships with local organizations. They suggest that a sport organization commits to a strategic process (i.e., deciding, planning, and implementing process) in community engagement, which allows the organization to develop a long-term impact in the local communities and “become embedded in

larger scale community development activities through their authentic partnerships, programming, and brokerage” (p. 684).

Oftentimes, professional sport organizations’ CSR activities are considered a marketing strategy to attract new fans or customers, enhance brand reputation, add value to sponsorship deals, and attract commercial partners (Athanasopoulou et al., 2011; Stinson & Pritchard, 2014; Webb & Orr, 2021). For example, Pharr and Lough (2012) describe professional sport organizations’ community engagement as a form of social and cause-related sport marketing strategy. They also suggest that major professional sport leagues such as NBA, NHL, MLB, and NFL’s community outreach programs lead to positive corporate reputation and consumer intention. Thus, a strategic CSR approach allows sport organizations to acknowledge their capabilities and develop a practical guide to engage in communities, beyond following typical CSR characterized by philanthropy.

In addition, several scholars have examined how sport organizations formulate and implement their community engagement initiatives in a strategic manner (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2014; Cobourn & Frawley, 2017; Heinze et al., 2014; Zeimers et al., 2021). At the formulation and stage, sport organizations identify opportunities and challenges within (e.g., resources, goals) and outside (e.g., market, community) of the organization to make decisions. Implementation varies by organization, but in many cases, sport organizations implement their community engagement programs through community departments or public relations (Jenkins & James, 2012). Zeimers and colleagues (2021) suggest that the size of an organization, staff involvement in the board, staff professionalization, financial autonomy, innovative capability, and knowledge of CSR are some of the organizational factors that can support CSR implementation. Specifically, the authors emphasize the importance of having CSR knowledge

as it can “uniquely exploit opportunities to be positioned strategically within the sport industry” (p. 184). Sport organizations, including professional sport teams, also work with their associated foundations or charities to engage in communities. For example, Cobourn and Frawley (2017) state that while professional sport organizations and their foundations may function differently, the two entities are “deeply embedded with each other’s strategies and business plans” (p. 119) and work together to “achieve synergistic outcome towards shared value” (p. 120).

As this review indicates, there is knowledge of what is motivating professional sports’ community engagement and the forms it takes. The stakeholder and strategic perspectives also provide insights as to how professional sport organizations view and implement community engagement initiatives to benefit both organizations and community members. Previous studies have emphasized the role of professional sport organizations in communities, describing that the sport can be a valuable vehicle for deploying CSR (Heinze et al., 2014; Levermore, 2010; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007; Walters, 2009). However, we have less understanding of how professional sport organizations’ community engagement is shaped by situations of uncertainty. In the next chapter, I examine how professional sport organizations’ community engagement approach changes in response to a sudden and disruptive event.

## CHAPTER III

### **Study 1. Environmental Jolt and Community Engagement: How Professional Sport Teams Responded to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Sport management scholars have outlined numerous types of community engagement in professional sport (Bradish & Cronin, 2009; Rowe et al., 2019; Sheth & Babiak, 2010). Within broader corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts, professional sport teams have increasingly engaged with their local communities around social issues related to youth, education, military appreciation, cultural diversity, gender and racial equality, hunger relief, and health (Babiak & Kihl, 2018; Cobourn & Frawley, 2017; Millar & Doherty, 2018). For example, Walker and Parent (2010) pointed out that teams' community engagement can take monetary and non-monetary forms as evidenced by community programs, charitable donations, youth development programs, and sport-related events. Athletes' participation in teams' community engagement activities is also common (Cobourn & Frawley, 2017). In addition, teams are seeking to enhance their relationships with nonprofit organizations and funding agencies to reach target beneficiaries in local communities (Armstrong et al., 2018).

We know less about how teams alter their community engagement approaches in response to environmental disruption. Organizational behavior can shift in the face of ambiguity stemming from long-term institutional change: teams may scale back their usual activities to minimize damage, aim to preserve the status quo by avoiding substantial modifications, revise their organizational tactics, or discontinue activities altogether to prevent further losses (Cheng

& Kesner, 1997; King, 2000; Lengnick-Hall & Beck, 2005; Meyer, 1982; Oliver, 1991; Wenzel et al., 2020). Such unforeseen developments have been deemed “environmental jolts.” An environmental jolt is a field-wide crisis that disturbs organizational activities (Sine & David, 2003; Wan & Yiu, 2009). Research on environmental jolts often centers on institutional change, focusing on how organizations in a field respond (Meyer, 1982; Meyer et al., 1990) or how stakeholders modify existing institutions due to these unprecedented changes (Cheng & Kesner, 1997; Sine & David, 2003). We know less about how sport organizations, specifically professional teams, react to environmental jolts. The COVID-19 pandemic is one such jolt influencing the professional sport industry. Since 2020, the pandemic has brought never-before-seen consequences to organizations’ operations. Teams in major sport leagues such as the National Basketball Association (NBA), National Hockey League (NHL), and Major League Baseball (MLB) had to postpone their seasons and reschedule regular programs.

Given the extent of pandemic-induced disruption, professional sport teams’ community engagement activities are also likely to have been affected. Teams’ immediate reactions to this environmental jolt—without time to compromise—have not been fully explored. The degree to which community engagement in professional sport has been maintained or changed is similarly nebulous. To understand professional sport teams’ community engagement in response to the environmental jolt, this study addresses the following question: How do professional sport teams’ approaches to community engagement change in response to the environmental jolt? The pandemic serves as a natural experiment by exemplifying an environmental jolt. In particular, this study ponders how professional sport teams’ community engagement activities were sustained and/or shifted amid the pandemic by comparing teams’ responses to this jolt in the pre- and peri-pandemic periods.



## Literature Review

### Community Engagement in Professional Sport

Community engagement is generally viewed as a core component of an organization's CSR strategy. This process typically manifests through donations and other funding, volunteerism, partnerships, and community-centered projects (Bhinekawati, 2018; Bowen et al., 2010; Kihl et al., 2014). In the wider CSR context, community engagement goes beyond strictly investing in organizational assets; rather, organizations "listen to the community to include them in plans and to reflect on the needs of the community" (Abdullah et al., 2017, p. 1540). This form of engagement represents a blend of bottom-up and top-down approaches wherein organizations acknowledge community needs, share interests, and work closely with stakeholders to support the communities in which organizations operate (Fredericks et al., 2016; Stone, 2018).

Professional sport organizations, including teams and leagues, strive to address social issues through community engagement to benefit local communities (Babiak & Kihl, 2018; Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Cobourn & Frawley, 2017). Rowe and colleagues (2019) noted that professional sport leagues such as the National Football League (NFL) are promoting initiatives around health, education, social cohesion, livelihoods, physical activity, disability, gender, and anti-violence. Professional sport teams and leagues are also focusing on an environmental sustainability and infrastructure development (Trendafilova et al., 2013). For instance, NBA Green is a community outreach program that NBA teams leverage to raise awareness and funds for environmentally friendly operations.

Furthermore, teams are tightly affiliated with their leagues in the pursuit of mutual CSR goals. Nearly all teams in the NBA, NHL, MLB, and NFL have dedicated charities and

foundations (Forester, 2015; McGowan & Mahon, 2009) which enable them to adopt league-wide initiatives and then deploy them within local communities where teams are embedded. As an example, the NHL's Hockey Fights Cancer campaign is a league-wide initiative to raise funds and awareness of cancer. Teams participate in this program through events such as rally towel giveaways (New York Islanders), gifts for youth patients (Anaheim Ducks), and financial support for families affected by cancer (Winnipeg Jets). Professional sport teams also establish partnerships to expand local community engagement and realize CSR objectives (Heinze et al., 2014; Levermore, 2010). In delivering league-wide initiatives, teams frequently partner with nonprofit organizations and encourage stakeholders (e.g., local government and community groups) to participate in the cause (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). Heinze and colleagues (2014) observed that professional teams (e.g., the NFL's Detroit Lions) which partner with community organizations are driven to make strong connections throughout their local communities. Partnerships additionally allow teams to disperse resources locally and hence reach in-need populations more easily (Sheth & Babiak, 2009).

Most of the research on community engagement in professional sport takes place during, or assumes, nonturbulent times. Leading teams in the NBA, NHL, MLB, and NFL have taken part in ample local community engagement activities—but how might they respond to sudden exogenous shocks that could disrupt their typical community engagement approaches?

### **Environmental Jolts**

Organizational dependence on the environment is not a choice but a natural behavior to preserve welfare in response to a constantly shifting marketplace (Aldrich & Pfeffer, 1976; Obholzer, 1986). Organizational scholars have contemplated how organizations adapt, expand, and shrink their systems in the face of change (Bradley et al., 2011; Meyer, 1982). Associated

uncertainty spurs organizational action, inspiring organizations to accept new norms over time and devise strategies during institutionalization (Meyer et al., 1990). According to an institutional theory perspective, organizations can become isomorphic with the surrounding environment, as they seek legitimacy through conformity (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Orru et al., 1991; Slack & Hinings, 1994). Organizational studies have long centered around how organizational change occurs and becomes institutionalized over time (Greenwood et al., 2002; Reay & Hinings, 2005). However, little work has considered how organizations take action when change is swift and severe (i.e., in the case of environmental jolts). Such circumstances require organizations to respond promptly to environmental uncertainty.

Environmental jolts are “transient perturbations whose occurrences are difficult to foresee and whose impacts on organizations are disruptive and potentially inimical” (Meyer, 1982, p. 515). They have also been described as periodic effects (Greenwood et al., 2011) or external shocks (Amankwah-Amoah, 2016) that threaten organizational survival and mandate organizations to take immediate action to minimize damage. Meyer, Brooks, and Goes (1990) discovered that the intense pressure accompanying environmental jolts is apt to result in industry homogenization; that is, an organization’s goals, activities, and structures will come to resemble those of competitors. Environmental jolts can also push organizational actors to modify their tactics (Meyer et al., 1990). Sine and David (2003) stated that environmental jolts may further compel institutional actors to seek alternative solutions and develop fresh skill sets. Moreover, organizational actors become highly reliant on institutional logic when responding to environmental jolts because this logic “determine[s] the boundaries of information gathering” (Sine & David, 2003, p. 202).

Environmental jolts are critical to consider in relation to organizational change. These disturbances are often taken as precursors of longitudinal transformation (Munir, 2005) or as catalysts for institutional revolution (Surachaikulwattana & Phillips, 2017; Wan & Yiu, 2009). Disruptions in the institutional environment can spark organizational action and changes in leadership (Boin et al., 2010; Bowers et al., 2017; Forbes et al., 2004), interorganizational structures (Meyer et al., 1990), alliances (Bodolica et al., 2018; Tao et al., 2015), market expansion (Tansey et al., 2018), and power dynamics (Fouts & Smith, 1999).

The uncertainty arising from environmental jolts normally threatens organizations' resources, strategies, and structures (Bradley et al., 2011; Cao & Im, 2018; Meyer, 1982; Milliken, 1987). However, these events can also present opportunities for organizations to improve their performance through strategic responses (Jauch & Kraft, 1986; Sine & David, 2003). Environmental jolts have been recognized as a trigger for immediate organizational action. Yet precisely how sport organizations engage with their communities has not been clearly defined. Organizations are nested in geographic communities "corresponding to the populations, organizations, and markets located in a geographic territory and sharing, as a result of their common location, elements of local culture, norms, and identity" (Marquis & Battilana, 2009, p. 286). Community-specific social networks, understandings, and standards mold organizational action (Davis & Greve, 1997; Galaskiewicz, 1997; Marquis, 2003), including philanthropy and policy adoption in sport (Tilcsik & Marquis, 2013). In one case, Di Lu and Heinze (2019) found that state community norms regarding policy innovation significantly affected the speed with which concussion legislation was implemented.

Several researchers have stressed the need to ponder the relationship between organizations and communities in the event of an environmental jolt. In a study of natural

disasters and corporate philanthropy, Tilcsik and Marquis (2013) discovered that environmental jolts affected nearly all stakeholders in the organizational field that shared the same geographic or local region. Adhikari and colleagues (2016) observed that organizations could recover more effectively from a crisis by sharing leadership with local community members. Drawing on insights from these studies, the current work examines the relationship between sport organizations and local communities with a focus on how organizations reconfigure their community engagement on the basis of an environmental jolt.

### **Empirical Context: Professional Sport and the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) virus is highly contagious, causing respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. Since the first confirmed cases in late 2019, the disease has spread rapidly across the world, resulting in more than 200 million cases and 4 million deaths within a year.

The growing number of positive cases in the U.S. compelled the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to implement social distancing as a way of curbing viral transmission. According to Courtemanche and colleagues (2020), COVID-19 case numbers declined significantly after adopting this protocol. However, social distancing carried major socioeconomic consequences such as job losses (Crayne, 2020), business shutdowns (Fairlie, 2020), and mental distress (Venkatesh & Edirappuli, 2020).

Similar to other industries, this crisis touched sport businesses to an unparalleled degree (Parnell et al., 2020; Ratten, 2020). Many professional sport leagues in North America were forced to cancel part or all regular season or otherwise postpone programming. The NBA, NHL, and MLB each took roughly 4 months to announce they would either resume or open their

seasons in line with safety protocols and operational plans intended to control COVID-19. Table 1 lists changes to the game schedules of North American professional sport leagues during the pandemic.

Table 1. NBA, NHL, MLB, and NFL Season Schedule Modifications due to the Pandemic

<b>League</b>	<b>Season</b>	<b>Original Schedule</b>	<b>Changed Schedule</b>
<b>NBA</b>	2019-20	Oct 22, 2019 – Apr 15, 2020	Suspended: Mar 11, 2020 Resumed: Jul 30, 2020 Ended: Oct 11, 2020
<b>NHL</b>	2019-20	Oct 2, 2019 – Apr 2020	Suspended: Mar 12, 2020 Resumed: Aug 1, 2020 Ended: Sept 28, 2020
<b>MLB</b>	2020	Mar 26, 2020 – Sept 2020	Suspended: Mar 16, 2020 Started: Jul 23, 2020 Ended: Oct 27, 2020
<b>NFL</b>	2020	Sept 2020 – Dec 2020	Started: Sept 10, 2020 Ended: Jan 3, 2021

These professional sport leagues’ operational tactics amid the pandemic featured similarities and differences. All leagues adhered to safety protocols and updated operating systems centered around COVID-19 education, testing, screening, and treatment. The NBA and the NHL adopted a “bubble” system, with teams relegated to an isolation zone where event associates (e.g., players, staff, doctors) remained for the duration of the season. These leagues nevertheless varied in their quarantine boundaries. The NBA stayed within Disney World in Orlando: players and staff from 22 returning teams were housed in three Disney hotels and played the season at the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex inside the Disney World Resort. The NHL bubble was based around a pair of centralized hub cities in Canada—Toronto (for the 12 Eastern Conference teams) and Edmonton (for the 12 Western Conference teams). Each team occupied a single floor in a designated hotel and played their respective seasons at Toronto’s Scotiabank Arena and Edmonton’s Rogers Place Arena. The MLB shortened its regular season to

60 games (from the usual 162) and allowed team travel for 40 divisional games and 20 inter-league games per team. Meanwhile, the NFL had the chance to observe other sport leagues and adjust its plans for the coming season. Compared with the three leagues that returned with new operation formats, the NFL decided to follow its original calendar and resumed in September with 256 regular-season games as scheduled.

Pandemic-induced updates to professional sport leagues' regular seasons concurrently affected teams' community engagement plans. Social distancing presented an obstacle to engagement activities requiring direct physical contact. Distinct organizational responses to uncertainty indicated that professional sport teams facing environmental ambiguity could deploy numerous tactics: (a) protect their core business objectives by reducing community engagement; (b) conduct community engagement activities as initially intended; (c) modify community engagement to suit community needs; or (d) discontinue all community engagement activities. Pandemic regulations apparently hindered routine community engagement. Professional sport teams thus shifted their local community work in light of this crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a type of an environmental jolt whose impact extends beyond a single organization to inspire action among nearly all parties within the organizational field. North American professional sport teams' reactions to this crisis embody an intriguing case to determine how organizations alter certain activities, such as community engagement, in times of uncertainty.

## **Methods**

A qualitative research method was used to elucidate potential shifts in professional sport teams' community engagement. This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon while providing insight into within- and between-context variation (Baxter & Jack,

2008; Hesse-Biber, 2016). This study examined professional sport teams' community engagement during unsettled times, taking the COVID-19 outbreak as an environmental jolt. Upon the WHO's declaration of a pandemic in March 2020, sport businesses encountered disruptions such as postponed regular seasons and canceled programming. Key changes to team operations were expected to contextualize teams' responses to environmental uncertainty.

### **Data Collection**

The study sample included 123 professional sport teams from four major men's leagues in North America: the NBA, NHL, MLB, and NFL. These teams are locally embedded, central entities that faced similar degrees of ambiguity due to the pandemic. Teams had also been implementing various community engagement activities before COVID-19 emerged. These circumstances enabled an in-depth pre–post comparison of an environmental jolt to uncover potential shifts in teams' community engagement.

I retrieved a comprehensive set of articles addressing teams' community engagement activities from teams' official websites. These were publicly available news articles published in 'News' or 'Community News' sections of the team websites. The collected articles included news, interviews, and press releases written by team staff that revolve around various community engagement activities initiated by teams. For example, I collected articles from the Chicago Bulls (NBA) from 'Bulls in the Community News' section on their website.

Following Sheth and Babiak (2010) and Rowe, Karg, and Sherry (2019), I searched for articles using key terms related to community engagement (e.g., "youth," "gender," "racial," "health," "education," "sports," "volunteer"). I also gathered sources that described teams' general priorities in community initiatives and teams' target beneficiaries by reviewing articles' headlines and summaries. In this step, I focused on teams' activities within the geographic



regions (e.g., state, city, town) where they were embedded to better understand local community engagement.

The acquired data covered two-time frames: 6 months prior (September 2019–March 10, 2020) and 6 months after the declaration of the pandemic (March 11, 2020–August 2020). This time horizon was chosen to delineate changes in teams’ community engagement in response to COVID-19. Articles published before the pandemic constitute the “pre-pandemic” period whereas those published after March 11, 2020 represent the “peri-pandemic” period; the pandemic was ongoing at the time this dissertation was written. In all, 3,362 articles were retained for analysis: 1,781 from the pre-pandemic period and 1,581 from the peri-pandemic period.

### **Data Analysis**

I used qualitative content analysis in this study. This method involves reviewing information based on public records, categorizing the content, and uncovering insights from a past yet recent phenomenon (Bowen, 2009). An abductive approach was taken in this case. The selected strategy combines deductive and inductive techniques. The researcher can then use theoretical concepts and observed data to develop knowledge, infer the causes of findings, interpret phenomena, and suggest explanations for the results (Awuzie & McDermott, 2017). This approach suited the current study for several reasons. First, community engagement in the context of professional sport has been explored from various angles in the CSR literature (Cobourn & Frawley, 2017; Walker & Parent, 2010), offering foundational knowledge on how these organizations engage with local communities around social issues. In addition, several studies have shown that sport organizations respond to field-level changes in distinct ways (Heinze & Lu, 2017; Slack & Hinings, 1994; Trendafilova et al., 2013). Thus, based on a

theoretical sense of organizational responses to change, I expected professional sport teams to react uniquely to the focal shift (e.g., in maintaining, modifying, or reducing community engagement due to the environmental jolt of the pandemic). Lastly, scarce investigations have linked sport and environmental jolts, specifically in terms of how these events can alter professional sport organizations' community engagement. The pandemic is a novel environmental jolt that has yet to be fully studied. Therefore, with an inductive approach, I used the observed data to infer how this jolt influenced professional sport teams' engagement with their communities.

Data analysis proceeded through four main stages. First, I reviewed the data several times to familiarize myself with the content and confirm its relevance to the research objective (Hesse-Biber, 2016). I organized data under three conditions in the following order: affiliated league, team, and data publication period. Leagues were numbered as NBA (1), NHL (2), MLB (3), and NFL (4). Teams were listed alphabetically by name (see Table 2). The data publication periods were classified as pre-pandemic (1) and peri-pandemic (2). For example, pre-pandemic data for the Atlanta Hawks were numbered as 1-01-1. This process clearly indicated the sources employed in subsequent analysis.

In the second stage, data were manually coded via the qualitative analysis software NVivo 12. I created a coding map comprising five meta-categories (see Table 3): *focus areas* (health and wellness, education, gender, sport, social justice, local business, recognition); *resources* (financial, facility, program, information); *target population* (individual, organization); *partnerships* (nonprofits, for-profits, government); and *duration* (one-off, weekly, monthly, annual). These initial categories described major areas of interest and stakeholders in professional sport teams' community engagement activities as discussed in the general CSR

literature (Kihl et al., 2014; Rowe et al., 2019; Sheth & Babiak, 2010; Walker & Parent, 2010).

This phase of analysis resulted in a preliminary understanding of teams' community engagement in the pre- and peri-pandemic periods.

In the third stage, I modified the coding map based on observed data and expanded specific categories and sub-categories (see Table 4). This process generated more details. For instance, most of the target population for the "education" focus area was youth, but several teams had also initiated education programs such as coaching clinics. Additionally, a significant amount of content revolved around food insecurity in the peri-pandemic period and was collapsed into a sub-category under the focus area of "social justice." This stage served to link preliminary knowledge with new knowledge by producing inductive codes from which potential themes could be derived.

In the last stage, analytical coding was performed to ascertain contents' meaning and identify connections between coded data. I organized the data into pre-pandemic and peri-pandemic groups using NVivo's matrix function. I focused on abstracting sub-themes from coded texts and rearranged sub-themes by grouping them into larger, more significant themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001). In abstracting sub-themes, I paid particular attention to the frequency of the codes (e.g., food insecurity, sport for youth) to develop an initial sense of key issues around community engagement in each time period, and differences across periods. Guided by this assessment, I returned to the context of the data around key codes under which they have been classified. Then, I modified and re-organized sub-themes under major themes to present the findings. For example, sport for youth was included in the coding map as sub-category, initially, under the sport (category) and focus areas (meta-category). Throughout the analysis, teams engaging in sport for youth initiatives (e.g., junior sport program, youth camps) were the

common sub-themes identified in both pre- and peri-pandemic period, but looking at the context of the coded data, the difference was that most of the youth sport programs were operated virtually in the peri-pandemic period. Also, teams expanded their support for youth sport participation during the pandemic by financially supporting local organizations who deliver at-home physical activities for youth. Hence, I arranged this sub-theme under major themes (e.g., shift in modes of interaction, expanding focus areas), representing the shift in the way teams support sport for youth during the pandemic.

A number of data were excluded from analysis due to incompatibility with the research focus. For example, 95 articles were discarded because the material was irrelevant to community engagement. Articles that contained duplicate or highly similar content (23 articles) and that described teams' global CSR initiatives (25 articles) were also omitted. Furthermore, 103 articles covering the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement were ruled out. The most recent active BLM movement was in June 2020 and could be seen as another environmental jolt that transpired in the pre-pandemic period. Given this study's framing of the COVID-19 pandemic as an environmental jolt, BLM-related articles were not included to avoid confusion around teams' efforts regarding "social justice – racial" issues. Ultimately, 3,116 articles were coded to present the findings.

Table 2. Numerical Order of Professional Sport Teams by League

1) NBA		2) NHL		3) MLB		4) NFL	
1	Atlanta Hawks	1	Anaheim Ducks	1	Arizona Diamondbacks	1	Arizona Cardinals
2	Boston Celtics	2	Arizona Coyotes	2	Atlanta Braves	2	Atlanta Falcons
3	Brooklyn Nets	3	Boston Bruins	3	Baltimore Orioles	3	Baltimore Ravens
4	Charlotte Hornets	4	Buffalo Sabres	4	Boston Red Sox	4	Buffalo Bills
5	Chicago Bulls	5	Calgary Flames	5	Chicago Cubs	5	Carolina Panthers
6	Cleveland Cavaliers	6	Carolina Hurricanes	6	Chicago White Sox	6	Chicago Bears
7	Dallas Mavericks	7	Chicago Blackhawks	7	Cincinnati Reds	7	Cincinnati Bengals
8	Denver Nuggets	8	Colorado Avalanche	8	Cleveland Indians	8	Cleveland Browns
9	Detroit Pistons	9	Columbus Blue Jackets	9	Colorado Rockies	9	Dallas Cowboys
10	Golden State Warriors	10	Dallas Stars	10	Detroit Tigers	10	Denver Broncos
11	Houston Rockets	11	Detroit Red Wings	11	Houston Astros	11	Detroit Lions
12	Indiana Pacers	12	Edmonton Oilers	12	Kansas City Royals	12	Green Bay Packers
13	Los Angeles Clippers	13	Florida Panthers	13	Los Angeles Angels	13	Houston Texans
14	Los Angeles Lakers	14	Los Angeles Kings	14	Los Angeles Dodgers	14	Indianapolis Colts
15	Memphis Grizzlies	15	Minnesota Wild	15	Miami Marlins	15	Jacksonville Jaguars
16	Miami Heat	16	Montreal Canadiens	16	Milwaukee Brewers	16	Kansas City Chiefs
17	Milwaukee Bucks	17	Nashville Predators	17	Minnesota Twins	17	Las Vegas Raiders
18	Minnesota Timberwolves	18	New Jersey Devils	18	New York Mets	18	Los Angeles Chargers
19	New Orleans Pelicans	19	New York Islanders	19	New York Yankees	19	Los Angeles Rams
20	New York Knicks	20	New York Rangers	20	Oakland Athletics	20	Miami Dolphins
21	Oklahoma City Thunder	21	Ottawa Senators	21	Philadelphia Phillies	21	Minnesota Vikings
22	Orlando Magic	22	Philadelphia Flyers	22	Pittsburgh Pirates	22	New England Patriots
23	Philadelphia 76ers	23	Pittsburgh Penguins	23	San Diego Padres	23	New Orleans Saints
24	Phoenix Suns	24	San Jose Sharks	24	San Francisco Giants	24	New York Giants
25	Portland Trail Blazers	25	St. Louis Blues	25	Seattle Mariners	25	New York Jets
26	Sacramento Kings	26	Tampa Bay Lightning	26	St. Louis Cardinals	26	Philadelphia Eagles
27	San Antonio Spurs	27	Toronto Maple Leafs	27	Tampa Bay Rays	27	Pittsburgh Steelers
28	Toronto Raptors	28	Vancouver Canucks	28	Texas Rangers	28	San Francisco 49ers
29	Utah Jazz	29	Vegas Golden Knights	29	Toronto Blue Jays	29	Seattle Seahawks
30	Washington Wizards	30	Washington Capitals	30	Washington Nationals	30	Tampa Bay Buccaneers
		31	Winnipeg Jets			31	Tennessee Titans
						32	Washington Redskins

**Data numbering order (League – Team – Pre/Peri-pandemic data)**

**Ex1) Pre-pandemic data of Atlanta Hawks: 1-01-1**

**Ex2) Pre-pandemic data of Florida Panthers: 2-13-1**

**Ex3) Peri-pandemic data of New York Yankees: 3-19-2**

**Ex4) Peri-pandemic data of Seattle Seahawks: 4-29-2**

Table 3. Initial Coding Map

<b>Meta-category</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Focus area</b>	Health & wellness	Promoting physical and mental wellness
	Education	Learning and character development for youth
	Gender	Reducing gender inequality
	Sport	Sport-related activities and programs
	Social justice	Reducing social and economic gaps
	Local business	Supporting local businesses
<b>Resource</b>	Financial	Financial support through funds, donations, scholarships
	Facility	Building or remodeling facilities for local community
	Program & event	Team-driven programs or events
	Information	Publicly available information
<b>Target population</b>	Individuals	Individual beneficiaries
	Organization	Supported organizations
<b>Partnership</b>	Nonprofit organization	Nonprofit partners
	For-profit organization	Corporate partners
	Government	Relationship with government bodies
<b>Duration</b>	Duration	Operating time of community engagement activities

Table 4. Modified Coding Map

<b>Meta-category</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Sub-category (Examples)</b>
<b>Focus area</b>	Health	ALS / Blood / Cancer / Disability / Mental Health / Physical Health / Other - Health / Other - Injuries and Diseases
	Education	Education for Coach / Education for Teacher / Education for Youth / General Education (college, all-age)
	Sport	Sport for Youth / General Sport (student-athletes, adult sport)
	Social justice	Food Insecurity / Gender Equality / Homelessness / LGBTQ+ / Racial Injustice / Violence / Other – Social Justice
	Local business	Local & Small Business (restaurant, local shops)
	Stakeholder recognition	Coach / Educator & Teacher / Employee (part-time staff) / First Responder (police, firefighter) / Healthcare Worker / Local Business Owner / Military & Veteran / Player / Volunteer / Other – Stakeholder (team owner, mayor)
	Animal	Animal Protection (service dog, abandoned pet adoption)
	Culture	Cultural Diversity (Black History, Hispanic Heritage month)
	Environment	Environmental Sustainability (green project)
	<b>Resource</b>	Financial
Gift-in-kind		Non-monetary Resources (gift, lunch)
Facility		Facility & Infrastructure (building, stadium, playground)
Program & event		Program & Event (sport program, fundraising-event)
Information		Information (online resource, Covid-19 update)
Job opportunity		Job Opportunity (part-time, career discontinuity)
Communication		Awareness / Official Statement
<b>Target</b>	Individuals	Benefit Individual / Benefit Family
	Organization	Benefit Organization
<b>Partnership</b>	Type of partnership	Extended Partnership / New Partnership
	Type of organizations	For-profit Organization / Non-profit Organization
	Type of industry	Apparel & Equipment / Education / Entertainment / Financial Institution / Food / Government / Health / Insurance / Sport / Technology
<b>League</b>	League-wide initiatives	NBA / NHL / MLB / NFL
<b>Duration</b>	Duration	Annually / Monthly / Weekly / One-off / Cancellation & Suspension

## **Findings**

Results revealed several notable changes in professional sport teams' community engagement when initially facing an environmental jolt. First, teams recalibrated focus-area priorities: they expanded their investment, engagement activities (e.g., programs, events), and partnerships to support areas related to or directly affected by this jolt. Second, teams increasingly acknowledged community members in need and those seeking to minimize jolt-related damage. Third, teams altered their modes of interaction—many used tactics that did not require direct physical contact, but still allowed them to engage with their communities virtually. Fourth, athletes became more active in team-initiated community engagement activities during the pandemic. Lastly, teams extended their partnerships (e.g., with existing and new partners) amid the pandemic, especially with local organizations (e.g., government bodies, financial institutions, and other sport teams). Teams tended to enhance their connections with organizations that were in similar geographic regions, had mutual interests, and understood local community needs. The summary of key findings from this study is presented in Table 5.

### **Maintaining and Expanding Focus Areas**

Professional sport teams appeared to turn their attention to certain aspects of community engagement during this environmental jolt, specifically in areas affected by the pandemic. Teams' major pre-pandemic foci in community engagement pertained to areas such as youth (i.e., education and sport), health and wellness (i.e., cancer awareness, blood donation, disability, injuries, and diseases), and diversity and inclusion (i.e., gender and race equality). Other areas of interest included environmental sustainability, animal protection, anti-bullying, and cultural diversity. Although these foci remained prominent among teams during the pandemic, the teams generally attended to more pertinent areas: mental and physical health (i.e., due to quarantine),



food insecurity among at-risk populations (e.g., youth, seniors, and the homeless), and local businesses experiencing lockdowns. Teams mostly reached out to their communities in three ways—expanding investment, increasing activities in certain areas, and connecting local organizations. Additional qualitative data are displayed in Table A.

### ***Expanding investment***

My findings suggest that professional sport teams increasingly invested time, effort, and money into the most vulnerable areas. In particular, teams expanded their investment regarding food insecurity by increasing funding opportunities and donations. These efforts were directed to investing on nonprofit organizations financially, whose priorities were to distribute food aids for local community members such as children and families.

Many teams established new funding opportunities for nonprofit organizations. The Tampa Bay Rays (MLB) described their COVID-19 Relief Grant program thusly: *“Organizations with 501(c)(3) status and a focus on hunger relief, shelter and/or health and wellness and that have been impacted by COVID-19 are eligible to apply”* (3-27-2, April 16, 2020). This program was initiated by respective teams as well as by leagues’ efforts to raise funds to support individuals and nonprofit organizations affected by the crisis. With the closing of local schools and businesses due to the pandemic, the Portland Trail Blazers (NBA) explained that the relief fund is needed now more than ever, saying *“In addition to contributions from the Trail Blazers Foundation, the COVID-19 Relief Fund has already raised money from Trail Blazers players and is part of the NBA Family’s goal of raising over \$50M to support people and organizations.”* (1-25-2, March 23, 2020). This remark suggests that the teams saw food aid in local communities as a top priority, and therefore expanded their investment in securing food availability. Similarly, the Minnesota Twins (MLB) donated \$30,000 to The Sheridan Story,

noting that “*The Sheridan Story is a nonprofit that works to combat hunger by filling the gaps in food access that children face on the weekend and in summers – and now, every day as the state continues to combat the spread of COVID-19*” (3-17-2, March 19, 2020). As demonstrated, teams expanded their investment via monetary donations (i.e., to support nonprofit organizations seeking to fight food insecurity among children) in response to the pandemic.

Several teams also increased their investment in local campaigns by promoting initiatives on their websites and supporting the cause financially, as noted by the Phoenix Suns (NBA): “*Phoenix Suns Charities contributed \$25,000 to support FOOD FIGHT ... mission is to deliver comfort food via Waste Not’s team of dedicated volunteer drivers to thousands of local families who’ve suddenly and unexpectedly found themselves on the ropes*” (1-24-2, April 2, 2020).

### ***Increasing activities***

My findings suggest that professional sport teams increased certain activities, such as local programs, events, and campaigns. Specifically, teams focused on activities that require less physical contact. This attempt was initiated to preserve healthy lifestyle of community members during quarantine and improve local commercial area directly impacted by the lockdowns due to the pandemic.

First, professional sport teams increased activities related to mental and physical health concerns attributable to quarantine protocols. The Boston Bruins (NHL) presented a weekly workout series on their website for at-home training. They stated that “*Staying active and maintaining a consistent routine is particularly important now, for both your physical and mental health. The goal of this series is to share a few different bodyweight routines that you can do at home to stay active*” (2-03-2, March 25, 2020). The Washington Wizards (NBA) offered an event to help people experiencing a difficult transition from pre- to peri-pandemic routines: “As

*part of our continued efforts to support our fans during this challenging time, the Monumental Basketball mental health team of Derick Anderson, Jim Soda, and Stu Singer answered anonymous questions” (1-30-2, May 27, 2020). Several teams, like the Boston Red Sox (MLB), focused on recognizing nonprofit organizations’ efforts to improve mental health: “Given the pandemic’s vast effect on mental health, the IMPACT Awards will this year focus on organizations whose mission includes raising awareness and improving the mental health outcomes of individuals in their community” (3-04-2, May 4, 2020).*

Professional sport teams also paid attention to local businesses, such as restaurants and bars, where business owners had to limit services due to social distancing. Many teams expressed support for small businesses. The Dallas Cowboys (NFL) said, *“This past weekend, the HotBoyz took their time to step up in a big way in order to both support locally-owned businesses and provide food to first responders and hospital employees who are still working during the global pandemic” (4-09-2, March 23, 2020). The Phoenix Suns (NBA) reported that “the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on Carly’s Bistro has been difficult to overcome. The funding that the Suns are able to provide Logan and her restaurant is crucial during these tough financial times” (1-24-2, May 14, 2020); the team also launched a program called “Dishing Out Local Love” as part of their Small Business Assist Program, which included funding local businesses during the lockdown and interviewing local business owners working to fight food insecurity in their community. The Sun’s assistance program encouraged local eateries to remain open and sparked a positive cycle that benefited at-risk populations as well as local businesses, as described by a member of a local nonprofit in Arizona:*

*“We are partnering with the Suns to infuse some much-needed cash and business to small restaurants in the downtown area that will be making food for a variety of nonprofits,” Executive Director of Local First Arizona Thomas Barr said. “We will be working with at least two businesses a week to distribute the funds to so that they can make the meals and get them to the nonprofits. ... I’m so proud to be working with the Suns,” Barr said. “We’re proud that an organization like the Suns stepped up and realized there was a community need. Then swiftly put plans in place and put dollars where they needed to go, not only to support nonprofits but to support the small business community in this time.” (1-24-2, May 14, 2020)*

### ***Connecting local organizations***

My findings suggest that professional sport teams connected with local organizations that share similar focus areas with the teams amid the pandemic. With the help of their local partners, teams bolstered their support in areas such as mental and physical health, youth development, and blood donation.

The Boston Red Sox (MLB) joined the Ruderman Family Foundation for mental health program. Jay Ruderman, the President of the Ruderman Family Foundation, commented that *“Now, with the added stressors of the COVID-19 crisis it is difficult for all of us on some level, and may be unbearable for those struggling with pre-existing mental health conditions”*, and also added *“By partnering with the Red Sox and the Red Sox Foundation, we hope to break the stigma associated with mental health, and to recognize those organizations that are helping to do this crucial work in their communities”* (3-04-2, May 4, 2020). The Washington Wizards (NBA) worked with Leveling the Playing Field (LPF) to support a program meant to increase youth sport participation for mental and physical well-being: *“As part of this partnership, the Monumental Sports & Entertainment Foundation will provide a \$50,000 grant to LPF to support their mission”* (1-30-2, April 6, 2020). The St. Louis Cardinals (MLB) teamed up with organizations focusing on promoting blood donation: *“The St. Louis Cardinals, Anheuser-Busch,*

*FOX Sports Midwest, and the American Red Cross have teamed up to host a blood drive at Busch Stadium on Tuesday, April 21” (3-26-2, April 13, 2020).*

### **Acknowledging Community Members’ Contributions**

Professional sport teams recognized community members during this environmental jolt, particularly those who were struggling, working on the front lines of the pandemic, or aiming to alleviate associated damage. Prior to this crisis, teams typically acknowledged local community members who were actively involved in various sectors. The NFL’s Coach of the Week program highlighted high school coaches who contributed to their community with positive impacts on student-athletes and local football programs during the football season. Coaches were nominated weekly by each team and received grants for their high school football program. Teams profiled other community members in domains such as education (e.g., youth, student-athletes, teachers), sport (e.g., coaches), the armed forces (e.g., military members and veterans), health (e.g., patients), culture (e.g., community leaders), and entertainment (e.g., artists) on their websites based on interviews, scholarships, and grants. Such coverage expressed gratitude for these individuals’ commitment to local communities in numerous focus areas. By contrast, during the pandemic, professional sport teams increasingly recognized people who had been directly affected by the crisis. Additional qualitative data are provided in Table B.

### ***Recognizing those in need of help***

My findings suggest that professional sport teams began to focus on target beneficiaries who were considered highly vulnerable (e.g., due to weathering economic blows from this global crisis). In navigating community engagement throughout the pandemic, teams offered support—both through their own programs and in cooperation with local organizations—to reach at-risk

populations. The at-risk populations included part-time staffs who lost their job due to the regular season hiatus, local business owners experiencing lockdowns, and homeless people.

Professional sport teams organized emergency relief funds and programs for gameday workers and part-time staff. For example, the Golden State Warriors (NBA) established a Disaster Relief Fund for part-time employees: *“The fund will provide assistance to employees who work games at Chase Center who are adversely impacted by the loss of games”* (1-10-2, March 13, 2020). The Philadelphia Phillies (MLB) offered funds for ballpark staff as well: *“Recognizing the stress that the Coronavirus crisis is causing everyone, the Phillies will establish a fund of \$1 million to assist workers impacted by the postponement of Major League Baseball games”* (3-21-2, March 18, 2020). Staff recognition was especially pronounced among the NBA, NHL, and MLB. Teams in these leagues had to postpone their regular seasons and modify events in ways that influenced thousands of part-time staff. Many teams therefore financially assisted staff who had lost their jobs or were otherwise adversely affected by game suspensions.

Several teams additionally spotlighted local business owners. A sizeable number of small businesses in local communities endured lockdowns during the pandemic. In the NFL, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers’ right guard, Alex Cappa, commented in an interview that *“Thousands of people in the Tampa Bay area are being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some are small business owners who have seen their restaurant or bar shutter its doors or severely limit its service with social distancing measures in place”* (4-30-2, April 16, 2020). Lockdowns were inevitable, and many teams showed support for small business owners through recognition programs. The Vancouver Canucks (NHL) started a Fan Hero Awards Program to express appreciation for people dedicated to their local communities. Under this program, the “Most

Exciting Player” category was used to nominate local small business owners and community group members who furnished community aid during trying times. The New York Islanders, also in the NHL, took a similar approach: the team named Donald Rosner a Community Star of the Week. Rosner was a restaurant owner in Huntington, NY; the Islanders reported that “*To date, Rosner has fed over 3,000 front-line workers and makes weekly deliveries to nursing homes and students to feed those in need*” (2-19-2, June 6, 2020). These and other programs recognizing small business owners typified how the pandemic had ravaged small businesses in teams’ local communities while describing how owners worked to benefit those in need.

Teams also gave attention to homeless people affected by the pandemic. Many teams aimed to address homelessness by intensifying support and raising awareness through local nonprofit organizations. For example, the Dallas Cowboys (NFL) raised funds for The Salvation Army. Cowboys Executive Vice President Charlotte Jones noted, “*In response to COVID-19, The Army has redeveloped social safety net programs to ensure safe access to food and shelter in this time of unprecedented need. We are proud to support their tireless work*” (4-09-2, April 9, 2020). The Montreal Canadiens (NHL) assumed a similar position:

*Homeless Canadians, and those at risk of becoming homeless, have been hit especially hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of homeless people in Canada don’t have access to the infrastructure and supplies required to maintain good health. They’re also at a higher risk of contracting the coronavirus. ... In addition, the numerous organizations offering support to underprivileged people are being taxed by the global crisis. They’re facing increased demand while receiving fewer charitable donations. That’s why Hockey Helps the Homeless, a non-profit organization, and Bardown, have teamed up to create a line of exclusive, limited-edition clothing to help Canada’s homeless population. (2-16-2, May 5, 2020)*

### ***Acknowledging those who contributed***

My findings suggest that professional sport teams also highlighted people who had contributed to their communities amid the crisis. Essential workers on the front lines of the

pandemic—healthcare employees, caregivers, and first responders (e.g., police, firefighters)—garnered close recognition. Tony Ressler, Principal Owner of the Atlanta Hawks (NBA), shared his admiration:

*The work of the medical community in combatting COVID-19 across the nation has been inspiring and absolutely incredible. While there is no way to truly repay our doctors, nurses, first responders, and other healthcare workers for making this sacrifice and taking the risks they are taking every day, this effort is an important way to show our great appreciation for their heroic work on behalf of the city of Atlanta. (1-01-2, March 27, 2020)*

Many teams provided meals for frontline workers. Under the Detroit Lions (NFL), “A \$5,000 credit is being established at each of four restaurants in proximity to four hospitals to assist people such as first responders and hospital employees to get takeout meals after work” (4-11-2, March 26, 2020). The Nashville Predators (NHL) announced, “From players individually donating money to the team’s sponsors and partners stepping up ... the Predators are working to provide meals and coffee to various local police departments and medical care workers who are working tirelessly on the front lines” (2-17-2, April 9, 2020). Some teams donated personal protective equipment, such as masks, to hospitals and medical facilities, as noted by the Miami Heat (NBA): “The Miami HEAT store and Refried Apparel are partnering together to turn \$100k in unsold jerseys into over 7,000 masks to be donated to local medical facilities in need” (1-16-2, April 8, 2020). The New York Giants (NFL) donated in this way as well: “Some of the Giants’ other community contributions during the pandemic include the following: Donated medical gloves and masks to Hackensack Meridian Health” (4-24-2, April 11, 2020). The Nashville Predators (NHL) donated “12,000 pairs of gloves to medical personnel in Nashville” (2-17-2, April 9, 2020).

In addition, professional sport teams acknowledged team owners’ and executives’ personal donations on their respective team websites. Owner of the Jacksonville Jaguars (NFL),



Shad Khan, *“personally committed \$1 million in support of northeast Florida’s response to the COVID-19 crisis. The donation is designed to provide essential support to local organizations focused on the immediate health and well-being of First Coast residents”* (4-15-2, March 24, 2020). New Orleans Pelicans (NBA) and New Orleans Saints (NFL) owner Gayle Benson *“donated \$1 million to create the Gayle Benson Community Assistance Fund in response to the Coronavirus situation affecting so many lives in our community”* (1-19-2, March 16, 2020). Owners and executives also contributed through gifts-in-kind. For example, Susan Carper, the Executive Assistant of the Pittsburgh Penguins (NHL), *“[sewed] cloth masks as part of the nonprofit organization Days for Girls’ #Masks4Millions campaign”* (2-23-2, April 24, 2020). Team owners and executives were thus doing their part to relieve pandemic-induced damage. Articles described teams’ financial contributions, target beneficiaries, and wishes for others to join in fundraising.

Professional sport teams also noticed individuals who contributed to local communities in response to the pandemic. The Carolina Panthers (NFL) urged fans to take part in virtual volunteerism as part of the team’s annual Keep Pounding Day program for community service. Panthers’ Community Relations Director, Riley Fields, noted that *“From participating in virtual volunteer opportunities to leaving a note of gratitude for a mail carrier, simple acts of kindness help bind us all together in this challenging time”* (4-05-2, April 30, 2020). Many teams encouraged volunteerism by sharing stories of people who donated their time and labor to those in need. The Cleveland Browns (NFL) posted a monthly “First and Ten Movement” on the team’s website to acknowledge community members who were serving the community. The New England Patriots (NFL) interviewed children participating in the volunteer movement, as in the following profile: *“Junior Cheerleader Haileigh has been busy with her mom making masks*

*and mask covers for local community programs, nurses, doctors, respiratory therapists, and high-risk friends and family ... She hopes to inspire others to help stop the spread of COVID-19"* (4-22-2, April 8, 2020). Teams referred to employees' volunteerism on their websites as well. The Charlotte Hornets (NBA) reported, *"With Hornets Sports & Entertainment employees continuing to work from home, the organization has pledged to complete 1,000 hours of in-home volunteerism by team members to support local nonprofit organizations"* (1-04-2, April 6, 2020). The Golden State Warrior's (NBA) front office staff have engaged in over 250 virtual volunteer opportunities during the NBA hiatus, stated that *"The organization is planning a virtual volunteering week in late May, where employees will be tutoring, editing scholarship essays for high school students, participating in virtual reading events, and calling senior citizens to check in on their well-being"* (1-10-2, May 12, 2020).

### **New Modes of Interaction to Meet Community Needs**

Professional sport teams adopted new interaction modes for community engagement during this environmental jolt. They turned to online platforms to deliver community programs and posted news and resources. Doing so afforded community members access to timely information about the COVID-19 pandemic. The postponement of leagues' regular seasons and social distancing caused many teams to extend temporary shutdowns of their facilities and to suspend or cancel community engagement programming. For instance, the Texas Rangers (MLB) halted their MLB Youth Academy program at MERCY Street Sports Complex; the NFL's Green Bay Packers canceled their annual Tailgate Tour. The Nashville Predators announced the cancelation of public and private community events such as the Preds & Threads Fashion Show and Wine Festival. Teams instead coordinated virtual community engagement activities to abide by COVID-19-related protocols. Teams also seemed cognizant of the

pandemic's potential socioeconomic effects: they took different approaches to community engagement that enabled them to avoid direct contact while continuing to fulfill community needs. Additional qualitative data appear in Table C.

### ***Using online platforms***

My findings suggest that many professional sport teams engaged with their communities online, particularly for youth-oriented events and programs. This attempt allowed youth, regardless of their age and location, to easily download digital resources for learning at home. Although teams had previously (i.e., before the pandemic) provided supplementary information online about their community engagement programs, these platforms became teams' key channels to deliver programming amid the pandemic. Doing so allowed teams to remain responsive and to recruit participants for youth education and sport lessons in local communities during the crisis.

The Houston Texans (NFL) provided digital resources named Huddle at Home for at-home learning: "*The Houston Texans rolled out a new initiative this week for at-home learning during the unprecedented and widespread COVID-19 school closures*" (4-13-2, March 26, 2020). Huddle at Home program provided free digital educational resources for parents, kids, and teachers to help school-age kids learn at home. The Baltimore Orioles (MLB) launched the Summer Slugger program and Digital Kid's Corner, which also provided digital resources for students: "*With nearly 39 million students currently learning at home in the United States and Canada, the Orioles today announced the early return of the Summer Slugger program and the launch of the Digital Kids' Corner*" (3-03-2, March 30, 2020). The Summer Slugger program allowed students to be "*mentally active and engaged while at home by providing stimulation, education, and entertainment to young baseball fans*" (3-03-2, March 30, 2020). These virtual

education resources were generally delivered in collaboration with outside organizations. For example, the Dallas Mavericks (NBA) partnered with Mayor Eric Johnson and the City of Dallas *“by having Mavericks players share public service announcements, as well as with the Dallas Independent School District to feed families and support virtual learning for its students”* (1-07-2, March 18, 2020); the Houston Texans (NFL) and partners *“expedited their 2020-2021 curriculum, making it immediately available because of the need to keep children entertained and educated while schools are closed. Huddle at Home is free for parents and teachers to access for at-home learning”* (4-13-2, March 26, 2020).

Professional sport teams also encouraged youth to be physically active during the pandemic by offering at-home sport programs. Holding regular youth sport programs while maintaining social distancing was challenging, as described by the Dallas Mavericks (NBA), *“In a normal summer, there would be camps of 200 kids convening at various athletic facilities around the Metroplex. With the coronavirus, that is not possible”* (1-07-2, June 22, 2020). Several teams thus opened virtual sport camps for youth over the summer, including instructional videos and live meetings with athletes. The Dallas Mavericks’ virtual camps were *“Broken down into groups of about 20 campers, all armed with a basketball a bottle of water and a cellphone, they listen, learn and play with the assistance of the Mavs Academy staff”* (1-07-2, June 22, 2020). The Los Angeles Rams (NFL) also offered free virtual football camps for youth: *“All registered participants will have access to instructional videos that teach proper football techniques and walk-through recommended drills by position group. Camp days also will feature pre-recorded opening remarks from current players”* (4-19-2, June 25, 2020). The San Francisco Giants (MLB) offered the Junior Giants at Home program, which was described as follows:

*To keep youth connected and active in times of isolation during COVID-19, the Giants Community Fund has announced the launch of Junior Giants at Home, presented by Bank of America. Starting the week of May 11, the four-week virtual season will provide youth, ages 5-18, the opportunity to connect with other local players through live, team-based practices led by the Fund's team of AmeriCorps Ambassadors and the San Francisco Giants coaching staff. (3-24-2, May 8, 2020)*

### ***Providing information and resources***

My findings suggest that several professional sport teams provided various information and resources during the pandemic. Teams updated publicly available resources regularly through their team websites, primarily associated with latest news on COVID-19 and job opportunities. Some teams also posted information regarding the programs or events provided by their partnering organizations, which allowed community members to gain access to additional resources of needs.

Several teams created a website area dedicated to community-related safety reminders and pandemic updates. For example, the Portland Trail Blazers (NBA) created a Virtual Resource Center to “*connect community members to helpful resources in the greater Portland Area as well as some support available across Oregon and even virtually*” (1-25-2, March 23, 2020). The Center included links to “*information about financial assistance from places like the City of Portland's Water Bureau, Human Solutions and St. Vincent de Paul*” and “*online videos and workouts from Beaverton Hoop YMCA, free educational resources from EVERFI and Education.com and access to free laptops and computers for K-12 students from Free Geek*” (1-25-2, March 23, 2020). The Kansas City Royals (MLB) created a separate website (royals.com/royalsrespond) based on the team's affiliation with The University of Kansas Health System. The site provided the latest news on “*the virus and guidelines on hygiene and slowing the rate of transmission*” (3-12-2, March 25, 2020). The Miami Heat presented an online COVID-19 Resource Center (heat.com/resourcecenter) which contained “*links to services,*

*assistance, and discounts being offered by the Miami HEAT family of corporate partners” (1-16-2, April 3, 2020). These platforms embodied new communication avenues bridging teams, partners, and community members. The resource centers also showcased nonprofit organizations the teams were supporting and offered “opportunities for fans to donate to various nonprofits that are assisting in the COVID-19 relief efforts and inform visitors of ways in which they can limit their exposure to COVID-19” (1-04-2, April 6, 2020).*

Many teams also maintained lists of local job opportunities. Some referrals were dedicated to teams’ part-time staff. For instance, through a partnership with the BC Care Providers Association, the Vancouver Canucks (NHL) publicized part-time employment opportunities: *“Given the challenges this work disruption may cause part-time staff, CSE has confirmed details for both a financial assistance program and an initiative that will offer additional short-term employment in the community” (2-28-2, March 17, 2020).* The Sacramento Kings (NBA) connected local hospitals with temporary employment for the team’s event staff, saying:

*The Natomas arena surge hospital will also provide increased opportunities to accrue scheduled shifts for Kings and partner team members who are unable to work due to the closure of Golden 1 Center. Already, many part-time Kings event team members have secured temporary employment through priority hiring programs in place with partners like Raley’s. (1-26-2, April 3, 2020)*

Additionally, teams presented information about temporary employment opportunities available with the team or partnering organizations. These notifications targeted members of the general population who had lost their jobs due to the pandemic. The Pittsburgh Penguins (NHL) partnered with Giant Eagle and Primanti Bros., explaining that *“The Pittsburgh Penguins and Primanti Bros. are two of the first brands to step up to provide PPG Paints Arena workers and Primanti restaurant employees with hiring opportunities in area Giant Eagle stores”* and *“Giant*

*Eagle is still looking to hire hundreds of people across numerous areas of business, including in its stores, at its warehouse facilities and as truck drivers” (2-23-2, March 20, 2020). Many people lost their jobs and encountered financial hardships due to the pandemic, as Miami Dolphins (NFL) Vice Chairman and CEO Tom Garfinkel pointed out: “Unemployment is growing and a lot of people are suffering and need help. It was important for us to start at home and help the most vulnerable in our community with a long-term commitment; not just a one-time event” (4-20-2, May 27, 2020). Professionals sport teams assumed a brokerage role in seeking to curb rising unemployment in response to COVID-19. These efforts represented an addition to teams’ usual community engagement activities.*

### **Changes in Athletes’ Participation in Teams’ Community Engagement Activities**

My analysis suggests that athletes’ community engagement in team initiatives changed substantially during the pandemic, featuring far more active participation and personal contributions, while following government-issued guidance around non-contact activities. I found that athletes increased financial donations, connected with local organizations, and collaborated with other athletes around team initiatives. Notably, athletes were also active in community engagement before the pandemic - particularly for team - and league-wide initiatives. For example, many NFL players participated in the My Cause My Cleats initiative (est. 2016): they wore customized cleats to honor a cause and raise funds for organizations representing that cause. NHL players often took part in the league’s Hockey is for Everyone campaign. This initiative promotes inclusivity in hockey, including through youth hockey programs, heritage and history months, pride events, and gender equality nights. My analysis suggests that although many team-led community engagement events and programs were disrupted by the pandemic,

athletes' personal engagement in team efforts increased during the pandemic. Additional qualitative data can be found in Table D.

### ***Increasing personal donations through team charities***

My findings suggest that athletes increased personal donations, as part of team initiatives, to help those directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, athletes typically engaged with their communities by donating non-cash items or visiting community facilities (e.g., schools, hospitals). For example, the Cleveland Browns (NFL) noted that *“Browns defensive tackle Larry Ogunjobi did his part by donating backpacks to Cleveland Metropolitan School District students in need”* (4-08-1, September 13, 2019). The St. Louis Blues (NHL) reported that *“Blues forward Robert Thomas stopped by with a surprise gift of new hockey sticks for each of the nine children, a net, and balls. He also signed autographs”* (2-25-1, September 5, 2019).

During the pandemic, however, donations by athletes focused on different areas, aligned with teams' efforts. In particular, athletes financially supported nonprofit organizations that provide meals to children, seniors, and at-risk families or individuals severely affected by the pandemic. For example, the Dallas Stars (NHL) announced a \$10,000 food donation to Aunt Bette's Community Pantry at St. Philip's, which was *“raised by the Dallas Stars players, Dallas Stars Foundation and Kroger”* (2-10-2, March 11, 2020). On the Phoenix Suns (NBA), *“Devin Booker, in partnership with Phoenix Suns Charities, will raise money through livestreaming on Twitch to support non-profits that best serve the needs of the most vulnerable in the community”* (1-24-2, March 20, 2020).

Many athletes also donated to COVID-19 relief funds organized by their teams. Several athletes participated in supporting teams' employee relief fund for gameday staff and part-time



workers who lost their job due to the pandemic. According to Utah Jazz (NBA), “Rudy Gobert is donating more than \$500,000 to support both the employee relief fund at Vivint Smart Home Arena and COVID-related social services relief in Utah, Oklahoma City and within the French health care system” (1-29-2, March 14, 2020). On the Tampa Bay Lightning (NHL), “*Captain Steven Stamkos announced the Lightning players are donating 500,000 meals to the Feeding Tampa Bay food pantry and funding part-time workers at Amalie Arena*” (2-26-2, March 25, 2020). Several players from the Orlando Magic (NBA), including Nikola Vucevic and Mo Bamba, assisted teams’ employee relief fund to “help out the workers who have been adversely affected by the loss of games at the Amway Center and Lakeland’s RP Funding Center” (1-22-2, March 22, 2020).

My findings suggest that athletes also contributed personal donations to relief funds established by state governments and promoted by teams. According to the Milwaukee Brewers (MLB): “*Ryan Braun was the first to commit with a \$100,000 pledge to the \$1 million fund, and Uecker added another \$50,000. Lorenzo Cain, Corey Knebel, Josh Lindblom, Brent Suter and Christian Yelich joined with additional pledges for a total of \$300,000 contributed to the initial \$1 million Brewers fund*” (3-16-2, April 13, 2020). Regarding the Arizona Cardinals (NFL), “*Hopkins announced on Twitter he was donating \$150,000 to the Arizona Coronavirus Relief Fund. That fund was started just this week, at its foundation a \$1 million initial donation by the Cardinals*” (4-01-2, March 27, 2020). In sum, many athletes continued to reach out to local communities in collaboration with their team and support the most vulnerable despite the pandemic having altered these professionals’ lives.

### ***Connecting local organizations for teams' community engagement programs***

During the pandemic, athletes engaged more with their teams in connecting local organizations, compared to the pre-pandemic period. My findings suggest that athletes, in collaboration with their associated team (or team charities) and teams' local partners, promoted newly established community engagement programs and events to help those in need. Athletes' efforts hence benefited businesses during lockdowns in addition to helping individuals in need, including local restaurants. Specifically, athletes acted as bridges between local families and local organizations, helping to combat food insecurity while enabling businesses to keep staff employed during a time of job insecurity.

One example of these collaborative efforts was the virtual TeLAthon fundraising event. The Los Angeles Rams (NFL) partnered with ABC-7, the United Way of Greater Los Angeles, Los Angeles Regional Food Bank, and KABC to raise money for the local food banks. According to the Rams, a number of players, coaches, staffs and other members of the Rams community participated in this virtual event, including Jared Goff and Andrew Whitworth, who *“each pledged \$250,000 to Los Angeles Food Bank which will fund a total of 2 million meals for Angelenos in need and serve as the lead gifts for the TeLAthon”* (4-19-2, March 20, 2020).

### ***Collaborating with other athletes within and across teams***

I discovered that athletes collaborated within and outside their own teams and leagues to create community engagement opportunities. Several athletes hosted fundraising and donation events with their teammates. The Chicago Bears (MLB) shared that their linebacker Roquan Smith and punter Pat O'Donnell collaborated to raise funds and *“the money raised by the two players will be donated to ‘I Grow Chicago’, a community group in Chicago’s Englewood neighborhood that supports thousands of South Side residents”* (4-06-2, April 1, 2020). The New

England Patriots (NFL), also shared how Patriots players are working together to provide help, as “teammates banded together, pooling donations to buy grocery store gift cards to families in Boston so they were able to fill their refrigerators, cabinets and pantries” (4-22-2, March 25, 2020). According to the New York Rangers (NHL), players in the NHL have teamed up to help healthcare workers: “*Artemi Panarin of the New York Rangers, Sergei Bobrovsky of the Florida Panthers and players from the New York Islanders purchased and arranged delivery of N95 masks to hospitals in their market over the past few days to aid health care workers in the fight against the coronavirus*” (2-20-2, April 4, 2020). Athletes’ joint coordination of fundraising led community engagement to transcend teams or leagues. These efforts suggest that collaboration enabled athletes to reach communities beyond their own geographic regions.

### **Building Partnerships**

Partnerships were central to professional sport teams’ community engagement during the pandemic. Relationships were maintained or cultivated with existing partners, new partners, and other organizations in similar geographic regions. Yet as with other facets of support, teams had strategically engaged in community-focused partnerships with different organizations long before COVID-19. The Minnesota Wild (NHL) partnered with Let’s Play Hockey and Minnesota Hockey “*for the 11th straight year for the annual Used Hockey Equipment Drive across the Twin Cities*” (2-15-1, September 12, 2019). The United Way of New York City has partnered with NFL teams, the New York Giants and New York Jets, for 25 years to host the Gridiron Gala and celebrate joint community engagement. Their partnership focuses on initiatives supporting “*education, health, and financial stability for New York City’s children and their families*” (4-24-1, January 6, 2019). Many teams and their partners stopped community projects and postponed scheduled activities in 2020 due to the pandemic but found other ways to deliver programming:

in accordance with guidance from local and state authorities, teams connected with organizations such as sport teams, the government, and financial institutions. Additional qualitative data are displayed in Table E.

### ***Extending partnerships with existing partners***

In coordination with existing partners, teams extended their community-focused activities in pandemic-related areas such as food insecurity and youth education. By extending existing partnerships, teams carried out community engagement to address certain needs amid the crisis. They also collaborated with partners to extend the quality of their services and to reach target beneficiaries. For example, the Portland Trail Blazers (NBA) worked with Levy Restaurants and Urban Gleaners, local organizations with which the team had partnered since 2014, to relieve food insecurity in the region:

*With the closing of local schools and businesses, this is needed now more than ever. The Trail Blazers and Levy have donated over 5,000 pounds of food to Urban Gleaners in partnership with Sysco Food Services of Portland since closing our doors to the public on March 12. Over 48,000 pounds of food has been donated since starting the program in 2014, providing food for thousands of children and families and diverting thousands of pounds of food waste. (1-25-2, March 23, 2020)*

The Memphis Grizzlies (NBA) provided full weeks of lunches to medical workers in cooperation with longtime local partners such as Chick-fil-A, The Rendezvous, and Newk's Eatery. The Grizzlies also committed to *"feed[ing] 500 families in need in the coming weeks"* (1-15-2, April 20, 2020) with their partner Taco Bell's support. Several teams extended their programs for youth education through partnerships as well. For example, the Washington Nationals (MLB) announced the return of their annual Nationals Summer Reading Program. They reported having *"expanded the partnership to now include seven local library systems ... Due to the COVID-19 crisis, all participating libraries will run their reading challenges virtually for the 2020 summer season"* (3-30-2, June 16, 2020). The Los Angeles Rams (NFL), together

with the NFL's Fuel Up to Play 60 campaign and America's Dairy Farmers, presented a Hometown Grant to local school districts. Molly Higgins, the Rams Vice President of Community Affairs and Engagement, stated:

*"We are incredibly grateful of our partnership with America's Dairy Farmers to once again work together to support our schools ... Since returning home to Los Angeles in 2016, and as we prepare to kick off our inaugural season at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, we have been able to identify and address needs facing our school communities and this year's grant was especially meaningful given the challenges facing Inglewood Unified students."* (4-19-2, June 22, 2020)

### ***Creating new partnerships***

Teams also focused on building stronger partnerships with new partners. Many teams' community engagement activities were meant to support people affected by the pandemic, including through fundraising events, donating personal protective equipment, and organizing virtual events for community members. For example, the Washington Capitals (NHL) announced a partnership with Fresh Vine Wine, explaining, *"As part of this new partnership, the two organizations are launching a month-long fundraising effort in support of ongoing coronavirus relief efforts within the D.C. community"* (2-30-2, April 3, 2020). Through this partnership, Fresh Vine Wine announced that they will donate 15% of each bottle sold online to the Capitals. The Houston Astros (MLB) donated personal protective equipment, such as masks and hand sanitizer, through a partnership with Crane Worldwide Logistics:

*The partnership between the Astros Foundation and Crane Worldwide Logistics, which was announced on April 1, has resulted in millions of medical supplies being delivered to Houston hospitals within the Texas Medical Center. The goal of the partnership is to provide funding, logistics and transportation support for much-needed medical supplies and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) being used by healthcare professionals to treat COVID-19 patients.* (3-11-2, April 10, 2020)

The Los Angeles Rams (NFL) also donated personal protective equipment in partnership with Buddy's Allstars: *"The Los Angeles Rams recently teamed up with Buddy's Allstars to*

*produce non-medical masks using donated Rams gear. The first 1,000 masks were delivered to Cedars-Sinai to support healthcare staff working outside of clinical areas”* (4-19-2, April 28, 2020). The Sacramento Kings (NBA) partnered with an artist to deliver a virtual event, *In This Together*, to support graduating students in the local community:

*Last month, Warner Records multiplatinum-selling artist Saweetie teamed up with the Sacramento Kings to virtually connect, uplift and engage local students and the graduating class of 2020 through several unique activations including a surprise visit to her alma mater, Monterey Trail High School, and a virtual Studio Session powered by SMUD in partnership with Arden Fair with local young adults. (1-26-2, June 3, 2020)*

### ***Increasing connections with local organizations***

Professional sport teams enhanced their community engagement in collaboration with local organizations during the pandemic, including government bodies, financial institutions, and teams in different leagues. My findings suggest that teams increasingly engaged with organizations located within the similar geographic boundaries, such as cities and states, to implement collaborative community programs.

Given the climbing number of state fundraising events and mayors’ funds for COVID-19 relief support, several teams contributed to government-led funds and worked with local or state governments to encourage community members to donate. For example, the Houston Astros (MLB) partnered with the City of Houston for a personal protective equipment drive event *“designed to collect PPE in support of first responders and municipal employees in Houston working in essential functions”* (3-11-2, April 17, 2020). The Calgary Flames (NHL) launched the COVID-19 Community Support Program to offer financial support for the United Way COVID-19 Community Response Fund in partnership with the City of Calgary: *“Calgary Flames Foundation funds will go directly to vulnerable populations and relief support for indigenous communities”* (2-05-2, March 21, 2020). The Los Angeles Clippers (NBA)

collaborated with Mister Cartoon to present a limited-edition merchandise collection whose proceeds went to the Mayor’s Fund for Los Angeles. The Clippers stated that *“Money raised will support emergency relief for the COVID-19 crisis and essential needs such as childcare and meals for the neediest, relief and counseling for frontline healthcare workers, critical healthcare equipment, and services for L.A.’s homeless population”* (1-13-2, April 29, 2020).

Many teams partnered with local financial institutions, such as banks and insurance companies, to provide support for local schools and nonprofit organizations. Together with PNC Bank, the Pittsburgh Pirates (MLB) delivered \$10,000 grants to 10 local teachers: *“The teachers were chosen in part through the Latino Community Center and the Pittsburgh Public Schools, and each were surprised in an online meeting and awarded the grants in recognition of their efforts”* (3-22-2, August 20, 2020). In partnership with M&T Bank and KeyBank, the Buffalo Bills (NFL) contributed \$540,000 to *“aid front line workers at Kaleida Health, Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center, and Erie County Medical Center (ECMC) in the local fight against COVID-19”* (4-04-2, April 21, 2020).

Professional sport teams additionally partnered with each other through cross-league community engagement activities, especially in similar geographic regions. The Los Angeles Clippers (NBA), Lakers (NBA), and Kings (NHL) launched a joint funding program *“to provide financial support to all hourly event staff employees impacted by the suspension of sporting events at STAPLES Center”* (2-14-2, March 14, 2020). The Denver Nuggets (NBA) and the Colorado Avalanche (NHL) promoted NBA’s Math Hoops program together; the program included *“a fast-paced basketball board game and mobile app that allows students to learn fundamental math skills through direct engagement with the real statistics of NBA and WNBA players”* (2-08-2, April 13, 2020). The San Francisco Giants (MLB) and 49ers (NFL) produced

and distributed masks engraved with their shared partner’s logo, Dignity Health. The co-branded masks were delivered to “fans, workers on the front lines of the pandemic and community organizations” (3-24-2, July 16, 2020). Cross-league collaborations were especially common in cities or states home to teams from at least two leagues, such as Chicago (IL), Denver (CO), Los Angeles (CA), Minneapolis (MN), New York (NY), and Philadelphia (PA). Teams within the same geographic region were likely to have similar objectives and responsibilities in community engagement, understand their communities’ needs, and work together to reach more target beneficiaries.

Table 5. Summary of Study 1 Findings: Pre- and Peri-pandemic Comparison

	<b>Pre-pandemic</b>	<b>Peri-pandemic</b>
<b>Focus Area</b>	Addressed various social issues: youth, health, diversity, animal protection, environmental sustainability, and anti-violence	Expanded investment, increased activities, and connected local organizations Focus areas: youth, health, food insecurity, local business, homelessness, and grants for local nonprofit organizations
<b>Acknowledgement</b>	Acknowledged various community members contributing to the local area (e.g., coaches, veterans)	Recognized those in need of help (e.g., local business owners) and those who contributed (e.g., volunteers, donators) through interviews and grants
<b>Modes of Interaction</b>	Operated regular/annual community engagement activities (e.g., MLB youth academy, NFL Tailgate Tour)	Used online platforms and provided digital information and resources (e.g., virtual sport camps, job opportunities)
<b>Athlete Participation</b>	Participated in teams’ annual events (e.g., hospital visits, school visits)	Participated in teams’ COVID-19 relief programs, more active engagement (e.g., virtual fundraising event)
<b>Partnerships</b>	Partnerships formed for community programs or events (one-off / annual)	Partnerships centered around teams’ COVID-19 relief initiatives, including existing and new partnerships



## **Discussion**

Sport management studies have examined why and how professional sport organizations engage with their local communities (Babiak & Kihl, 2018; Cobourn & Frawley, 2017; Levermore, 2010; Walker & Parent, 2010). Less attention has been given to how community engagement shifts in response to change—especially sudden external events such as environmental jolts. I explored how professional sport teams altered their community engagement around the COVID-19 pandemic. During the first 6 months of the outbreak, teams encountered obstacles in maintaining routine engagement activities. They nonetheless harnessed internal and external resources (e.g., partnerships, athlete donations, virtual programming) to adapt to a changing environment. Teams especially aimed to respond to local community needs by swiftly modifying their engagement strategies. These findings enrich understanding of organizational responses to external change as discussed in the following subsections. I also outline this study’s contributions to the community engagement and CSR literature in professional sport.

### **Professional Sport Teams’ Roles in the Local Community**

Investigations of community engagement in professional sport, and on CSR in sport more generally, have acknowledged the role of professional sport in local communities (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Pharr & Lough, 2012; Rowe et al., 2019; Walzel et al., 2018). Teams’ community roles in times of crisis are comparatively underexplored. This study evaluated teams’ social responsibilities in assisting their communities through activities related to major social themes (e.g., youth, education, poverty, diversity) with attention to specific areas affected by an environmental jolt. My findings suggest that teams adapt to changing environments and to modify their engagement approaches based on local communities’ immediate needs. Professional

sport teams principally tackled urgent issues amid the pandemic (e.g., food insecurity, homelessness, local business lockdowns, mental health). My findings indicate that rather than striving to persist in their regular activities, many teams adopted new ways of interacting with community members (e.g., virtual programs, online centers, job opportunities), which may have been prompted by members' interests in the face of limited resources. These revised engagement strategies also complied with government regulations by avoiding direct physical contact.

Partnerships represented a key approach during this crisis. Professional sport teams extended existing partnerships and established new ones with organizations including local food banks, financial institutions, government bodies, and other teams in similar geographic regions. Partnerships are useful for enhancing local community engagement and achieving teams' CSR goals (Heinze et al., 2014; Levermore, 2010). In delivering team- and league-wide community engagement initiatives, teams joined forces with nonprofits through partnerships and by encouraging stakeholders to participate in their cause (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). Efforts such as the Detroit Lions' partnership with local organizations cultivated stronger community connections (Heinze et al., 2014). This study's findings therefore align with work suggesting that professional sport teams distribute resources locally to reach in-need populations via partnerships (Sheth & Babiak, 2009). Organizations encounter discontinuous change and must respond to minimize loss from environmental jolts (Meyer et al., 1990). In such cases, affiliations with organizations which possess similar CSR goals and expertise could alleviate the burden on teams to provide resources directly to target beneficiaries. The current study showcases professional sport teams' relationships with local organizations during the initial period of an environmental jolt. Future research can examine linkages between teams and newly formed partnerships to clarify long-term impacts of these relationships on local community engagement.

## **Prompt Responses to Change**

This study sheds light on professional sport organizations' responses to environmental change within a short period. Sport management scholars have considered how sport organizations react to change (Fahlén & Stenling, 2019; Heinze & Lu, 2017; Kikulis, 2000). Heinze and Lu (2017) noted that organizations assume distinct roles in the change process and navigate it in unique ways (e.g., dismissal, decoupling, acquiescence, compromise, and co-optation). In cases of uncertainty, organizations may narrow the scope of their conventional activities, preserve the status quo while avoiding heavy modification, revise their organizational tactics, or discontinue business entirely to minimize damage and loss (Cheng & Kesner, 1997; King, 2000, Lengnick-Hall & Beck, 2005; Meyer, 1982; Oliver, 1991; Wenzel et al., 2020). Earlier work shed light on how highly institutionalized entities react to changing environments and how organizations can comply or resist throughout endogenous and longitudinal change processes. Organizations' responses during the beginning phase of an environmental jolt are less clear.

This study suggests that professional sport teams can adapt quickly to unprecedented environmental shifts. Many teams addressed in this work launched relief funds and online resource centers a few weeks after COVID-19 was named a pandemic on March 11, 2020. The Golden State Warriors (March 13<sup>th</sup>), Portland Trail Blazers (March 23<sup>rd</sup>), and Chicago Blackhawks (March 18<sup>th</sup>) each established a COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund; the Calgary Flames (March 21<sup>st</sup>) launched the COVID-19 Community Support Program. In addition, many athletes found new ways to reach out to local communities, collaborating with teams through team charities for donations and teams' local partners for supporting various community engagement programs. Immediate responses via community engagement were observed across

teams. Such timeliness suggests that teams' engagement approaches remain firmly grounded even in uncertain circumstances. Professional sport teams thus seem to have sufficient internal and external resources to support local communities: financial capabilities, community programs operated by team foundations or charities, insight into community needs, and well-established community networks. These assets enable teams to respond productively to crises.

This study's outcomes also echo conclusions about organizational readiness for change (Armenakis et al., 1993; Casey et al., 2012; Doherty et al., 2022; Weiner, 2009). Organizations in crisis situations, such as environmental jolts, need to "react immediately or face severe consequences" (Armenakis et al., 1993, p. 693) such as immediate damage or longer-term organizational threats. Environmental jolts are difficult to anticipate irrespective of organizations' preparedness in crisis management. These events create conditions to which organizations must respond well and swiftly. Teams' local community engagement was not included in their crisis management systems but rather emerged naturally and reflected flexibility to unexpected change. These findings bolster research suggesting that professional sport teams are competent (e.g., in terms of resources, knowledge, expertise, and social networks) in community engagement and CSR (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Heinze et al., 2014; Kolyperas et al., 2016; Zeimers et al., 2019).

### **Environmental Jolts and Institutional Dynamics**

As noted earlier, regarding institutional dynamics, emphasis has been placed on the relationship between organizations and their environment. Organizational dependence on the environment is necessary to preserve organizational welfare in response to change (Aldrich & Pfeffer, 1976; Obholzer, 1986). Associated uncertainty prompts organizational action. Organizations are thus forced to accept new norms and to develop novel strategies throughout

institutionalization. This process causes organizations to likely become isomorphic with the surrounding environment and to seek legitimacy through conformity as opposed to diversity (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Orru et al., 1991; Slack & Hinings, 1994). When organizations in the same institutional field (e.g., professional sport) are exposed to the same environmental jolt, they tended to modify their approach (local community engagement in this case) by modifying their typical behavior. The current study only examined organizations' adaptation during the first 6 months of the pandemic. Institutional pressure (e.g., coercive, normative, and mimetic forces) that might have affected professional sport teams' community engagement therefore may have gone unnoticed. The environmental jolt considered here (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic) was ongoing at the time of this writing. Future work could explore longer-term effects of this jolt and investigate whether observed changes in community engagement were maintained over time. Scholars can also determine whether this study's results apply to sport organizations in different institutional settings. I focused on community engagement among professional sport teams in North America. Subsequent efforts could scrutinize sport organizations' responses to environmental change based on professional teams in other countries or sport organizations outside the professional realm.

## CHAPTER IV

### **Study 2. The Red and the Blue: Differences in Professional Sport Teams' Community Engagement by the Local Institutional Environments**

Sport management scholars often draw on institutional theory to understand corporate social responsibility (CSR) behavior (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011; Godfrey, 2009; Joo et al., 2017). This work tends to focus on broader trends in adopting CSR practices, and thus isomorphism or increasing homogeneity, as organizations conform to institutional pressures (Washington & Patterson, 2011). For example, Babiak and Trendafilova (2011) found that many professional sport organizations adopted environmental management practices aligned with institutional legitimacy. However, we know less about local differences in CSR approaches.

In looking more locally, the role of the community is considered as a more immediate institutional environment (Marquis et al., 2007; Walker & Parent, 2010). Walker and Parent (2010) suggest that the local geographic community can shape the nature and level of CSR in sport. Also, each professional sport team bears the name of their home city, uniquely positioning them in local communities as they often represent the geographic region in which they are headquartered. Because of this local embeddedness, scholars have suggested that professional sport teams have the advantage of implementing a variety of community engagement activities locally (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Plumley & Wilson, 2018; Sheth & Babiak, 2010).

In terms of local embeddedness, professional sport organizations present a rich context for understanding institutional dynamics in sport (Godfrey, 2009, Trendafilova et al., 2013). However, we still have little understanding of the role of geographic location in sport organizations' behavior. In Study 1, I identified that professional sport teams across leagues in the U.S. adapted their community engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic (Study 1), but there is likely variation within these trends in the specific types and forms of participation. Community engagement, as part of CSR, refers to organizational behavior aimed at addressing social issues and promoting socio-economic initiatives for the benefit of community members (Bowen et al., 2010; Deigh et al., 2016).

Given that organizations are embedded in geographic communities (e.g., cities and states) with their own norms, culture, and regulations that can shape behavior (Davis & Greve, 1997), there is an opportunity to extend work on the geographic differences in the way professional sport organizations engage in local communities. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore differences in professional sport teams' community engagement activities by geographic community.

In particular, I explore differences in community engagement by the geographic community of states. Specifically, I examine differences by red and blue state in the U.S. Prior work on the influence of the local geographic community on organizational behavior often looks at states, given differences in local policy, norms and culture (Marquis & Battilana, 2009; McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The role of government, including state government, is especially significant during the times of crisis, like the environmental jolt of the pandemic when local officials look to minimize the damage. One relevant categorization of states is by red and blue states, a distinction based on political and ideological beliefs (Davisson, 2011). Red states and

blue states are states that are defined or categorized by majority vote for the Republican party (red) and Democratic party (blue), respectively. Local regulations and policies around the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., social distancing protocols and local business lockdowns) varied by red and blue states in the U.S. (Adolph et al., 2022; Guess et al., 2022). Thus, in exploring differences in teams' community engagement after a jolt, by geographic community, I focused on the red and blue state distinction.

Reflecting on prior works in examining local communities at the state level (Marquis & Battilana, 2009; Marquis & Raynard, 2015), this study focuses on examining differences in organizational behavior by states, particularly around teams from the metropolitan cities located in the red and blue states in the U.S. In addition, I grouped and compared teams in red and blue states to explore whether teams' community engagement activities differed by their geographic location, a more local community corresponding to different norms, culture, and policies (Crouch & Abbot, 2009; Fiorina et al., 2005).

## **Literature Review**

### **Institutional Environment and Sport Field**

Organizations are constantly influenced by the surrounding institutional environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). The institutional environment refers to a "taken-for-granted social and cultural meaning system" (Handelman & Arnold, 1999, p. 34), which incorporates institutional forces, such as coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Hirsch & Lounsbury, 1997). The coercive force stems from political pressures, often conveyed through laws and regulations. The normative force is associated with professionalism driven by the organizational desire to meet professional values or social standards (Zucker, 1983). Lastly, the mimetic force refers to organizations imitating other ideal organizations due to



environmental uncertainty. Organizations tend to rely on rationalizing agents (e.g., governments, regulators, professionals, and public opinions) to generate institutional controls through complex networks to avoid uncertainty and ambiguity in response to institutional pressures (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). To become institutionalized and legitimated, organizations tend to reflect their institutional environments (or institutional fields) and mimic one another, which results in institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Handelman & Arnold, 1999; Selznick, 1996; Slack & Hinings, 1994).

Earlier works on institutional studies in sport have also addressed that organizations often conform to institutional norms and pressures to seek legitimacy, leading organizations to resemble one another within the same institutional field (Slack & Hinings, 1994; Trendafilova et al, 2013; Washington & Patterson, 2011). Several scholars have adopted the concept of institutional pressure and homogeneity in understanding organizational involvement in community or corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives in the professional sport field (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Joo et al., 2017; Trendafilova et al, 2013). For example, Trendafilova and colleagues (2013) found that professional sport teams feel pressure to adopt new practices around environmental sustainability programs, influenced by other sport organizations' active involvement in eco-friendly initiatives. Babiak and Wolfe (2009) also suggest that legal requirements and regulations often act as external institutional pressures that lead professional sport organizations to adopt and implement similar social community programs.

Whereas the traditional institutional theory focused on organizational retention and stability, more recent works direct attention to the divergence or heterogeneity of organizations exploring how organizations gain legitimacy when non-isomorphic change occurs (Garud et al., 2013). According to this perspective, organizations are more than just passive respondents within

the institutional environment. For example, organizations attempt to shift or reshape existing institutional logic (Galvin, 2002; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008; Washington & Patterson, 2011) and respond to institutional pressures in a distinctive manner (Greenwood et al., 2011; Heinze & Lu, 2017; Hoffman, 1999). This perspective directed attention to the complex and evolutionary process of field-level change, understanding the active and strategic response of organizations to the change in institutional dynamics.

In addition, organizations tend to apply the new institutions to their own organization in a more practical and creative manner, showing variation in response to institutional change (Cheng & Kesner, 1997; King, 2000; Lengnick-Hall & Beck, 2005; Meyer, 1982; Oliver, 1991; Wenzel et al., 2020). For example, organizational responses vary under conditions of uncertainty and organizations can choose to acquiesce, compromise, avoid, defy, or manipulate in response to change (Heinze & Lu, 2017; Oliver, 1991). In addition, Wenzel and colleagues (2020) suggest that organizations strategically retrench, persevere, innovate, or exit in response to a crisis. These studies shed light on how highly institutionalized sport entities respond to uncertainty driven by changing institutional environments in various ways.

### **Local Norms and Culture: Community at the State Level**

Local norms and culture can lead to local variation or heterogeneity within broader institutional trends (Davis & Greve, 1997; Marquis & Battilana, 2009). For example, Davis and Greve (1997) found that some organizations often make decisions based on more susceptible social influences when adopting certain corporate governance practices, as “in some locales, they were considered legitimate by local standards” (p. 32). Marquis and Battilana (2009) noted the influence of local communities on organizations, given that organizational behavior “cannot be understood outside of the cultural and historical frameworks in which organizations are

embedded” (p. 284). Also, corporate social action can be shaped by institutional pressures at the local community level, enforcing organizational conformity to local norms (Marquis et al., 2007). Building on these studies, I propose that there may be differences in organizational behavior around community engagement in sport by their surrounding environment or geographic location.

Organizations are embedded in and influenced by their local communities (Greenwood et al., 2011; Pache & Santos, 2013; Tracey et al., 2011). The recurring theme in institutional studies around local communities is that institutions are not limited to established laws or regulations, but are also composed of different local norms and cultures that constantly change over time (Davis & Marquis, 2005; Marquis & Battilana, 2009). Institutions are composed of regulative (e.g., rules, regulations), normative (e.g., norms, style, type), and cognitive (e.g., activity, practice, routines) structure, which provides stability, predictability, and meaning to the social behaviors (Davis & Marquis, 2005; Scott, 1995).

Organizations are embedded in local geographic communities with their own norms and culture that shape organizational behavior (Davis & Greve, 1997). Accordingly, several sport management studies have focused on the potential influence the local geographic embeddedness may have on organizational behavior around community engagement (Misener et al., 2013; Walker & Parent, 2010; Yang & Babiak, 2021). Community engagement is part of organizations’ CSR efforts that refers to organizational activities or socio-economic outreach to benefit community members (Bowen et al., 2010; Deigh et al., 2016).

The concept of local communities has been defined in various ways, mainly presented in two types; relational and territorial communities (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The relational nature of communities refers to collective groups sharing mutual identities (e.g., gender, racial

identity) or interests (e.g., professional, spiritual). The territorial notion refers to regional embeddedness, from small (e.g., neighborhoods, towns) to larger geographical boundaries (e.g., cities, countries). For example, Marquis and colleagues (2007) suggest that institutions are “properties of a collective, such as a geographic community or organizational field” (p. 15), thus organizational action is shaped by institutional features of the communities in which they are embedded.

The local communities, as means of geographical boundaries, also include the community at the state level (Marquis & Battilana, 2009). In understanding the relationship between organizations and geographical communities, it is important to acknowledge that the institutional norms and cultures may vary based on political heterogeneity (Pe'Er & Gottschalg, 2011; Serdar & Reed, 2015). One of the broadly used groupings of state communities is examining the difference between the red and blue states (Crouch & Abbot, 2009; Gelman et al., 2007; Levendusky & Pope, 2011). This state distinction by color is referred to as the presidential or state-wide election in the U.S., based on whether the voters predominantly voted for the Republican Party (red) or the Democratic Party (blue). Several scholars have addressed the differences between red and blue states, specifically around economic and social issues, such as philanthropy, income imbalance, racism, and gender equality (Brooks, 2007; Fiorina et al., 2005). For example, Gelman and colleagues (2007) suggest that the Republican Party has been commonly viewed as richer states than Democrats and individual income can be an important predictor of voting behavior.

In the context of sports, the concept of local communities has been widely used based on territorial or geographical locations to understand organizational behavior (Collins et al., 2016; Di Lu & Heinze, 2019; Yang & Babiak, 2021; Zhou & Kaplanidou, 2018). Virtually all

professional sport teams are embedded in their local communities whether by bearing the name of their home city or geographic location. Also, professional sport teams tend to have a close connection with local stakeholders through partnerships, which position them at an advantage in building a stronger network within that community (Sheth & Babiak, 2010).

Prior works in sport have addressed the importance of local communities at the state level for understanding organizational behavior (Shin, 1997; Sung et al., 2015; Woods, 2022). For example, Shin (1997) noted that today's professional sport organizations "cannot exist without government policy and the political process" (p. 24). Professional sport teams are legally mandated to follow state and local regulations, whether by means of tax treatment, major policy change, or facility construction (Johnson, 1993; Sheth & Babiak, 2010; Sung et al., 2015; Trendafilova et al., 2013). Hence, modern professional sport organizations are not free from the legal responsibility of their local communities. While it is widely accepted that the laws and regulations of local communities have a high influence on professional sport organizations in their business and decision-making process (Heffernan & O'Brien, 2010; Johnson, 1993; Trendafilova et al., 2013), we know less about how local variation in local state norms and cultures may shape the way professional sport organizations engage with their local communities.

In addition, an environmental jolt can serve as a catalyst for organizational behavior in understanding the influence of local state variation towards embedded organizations (Meyer et al., 1990; Sine & David, 2003). Environmental jolts refer to unprecedented and disruptive events that potentially threaten organizational survival, such as financial crises, terrorist attacks, natural disasters, or pandemics (Amankwah-Amoah, 2016; Greenwood et al., 2011; Meyer, 1982). When an environmental jolt occurs, state government plays an important role and exerts high

influence across the nation (Tansey et al., 2018) as it often causes the decline of institutionalized structures and practices (Sine & David, 2003). The increasing uncertainty driven by the jolt thus may not only influence the way states respond locally to minimize damage, but also alter sport organizations' approaches to community engagement. In this study, I focus on the differences in professional sport teams' community engagement by local state variation in times of an environmental jolt.

### **Methods**

I adopted a qualitative approach to examine professional sport teams' community engagement based on local institutional fields by states. I used the peri-pandemic data collected and coded from Study 1, representing the community engagement approach of professional sport teams in four major leagues (i.e., NBA, NHL, MLB, and NFL) from March to August 2020. The data included media articles published on teams' websites covering teams' efforts to engage in local communities in various ways. The findings from Study 1 suggested that professional sport teams' approach to community engagement changes in times of an environmental jolt, in terms of focus areas, acknowledgment, modes of interaction, athlete participation, and partnerships. Study 1 focused on the shifts in teams' community engagement approach by comparing pre- and peri-pandemic periods without considering differences in local institutional fields. Given that the primary aim of Study 2 is to understand how organizational embeddedness in different geographical communities shapes the way teams engage in local communities, I focused on a single timeline - the peri-pandemic period - to examine how changing local institutional fields due to an environmental jolt potentially influence organizational behavior, in this case, teams' community engagement.

## **Data Sample**

Using peri-pandemic data, I followed four decision steps to construct a sample of professional sport teams suited for this study. First, I categorized professional sport teams by the states in which they are geographically grounded. Of the total of 123 teams in 4 major leagues (NBA, 30 teams; NHL, 31 teams; MLB, 30 teams; NFL, 32 teams), 9 teams located in Canada were excluded. Under this step, there were 114 teams located in 26 states.

Second, the unit of analysis was the states where voters predominantly choose either the Republican Party (red) or Democratic Party (blue) for both the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections. The case of an environmental jolt in this study, COVID-19, was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11th, 2020. Given that the 2020 U.S. presidential election was held on November 3rd, 2020, it is possible that the ongoing status of the pandemic had an impact on the voters' decision. Hence, I decided to focus on the states where the partisanship was consistent regardless of the pandemic. As a result, 21 out of 26 states showed consistency either as red or blue states for both 2016 and 2020.

Third, I focused on teams located in metropolitan areas for comparison between red and blue states. Metropolitan areas refer to densely populated urban cities. According to Huang and colleagues' (2021) study on COVID-19 exposure from March to September 2020, the confirmed case and fatality rates were much higher in urban areas than in rural areas. Given the characteristic of the environmental jolt in this study, I considered teams in states sharing similar geographical features, as in population size and density, to avoid misinterpretation.

Lastly, I focused on states that have at least one professional team across all leagues to secure uniformity across the leagues. This decision was made to ensure the number of teams and data used are similar in size by red and blue states for a fair comparison.

Based on these decision steps, two sets of data were used for analysis. Red state teams included 8 teams from Dallas-Fort Worth in Texas and Miami in Florida. Blue state teams included 9 teams from San Francisco Bay Area in California and Denver in Colorado. A total of 201 articles were used to present the findings. The specifics of the data sample are presented in Table 6.

### **Data Analysis**

This study focused on analyzing the data inductively within the framework of institutional theory, specifically around local variation. As described by Strauss and Corbin (1998), an inductive approach enables the researcher to “begin with an area of study and allow the theory to emerge from the data” (p. 12). An inductive approach is well suited because the nature of the case of an environmental jolt for this study, the COVID-19 pandemic, is a recent phenomenon with limited theory and research. Also, the correlation between community engagement in professional sports and local institutional fields, particularly by state-level differences, has yet to be explored. Thus, I employed an inductive approach to immerse in the data to discover new insights and present the findings through the lens of the local institutional context.

I used the same coded data set (peri-pandemic period) from Study 1. In this study, I focused on identifying differences across teams in their community engagement, within the broader themes revealed in Study 1, by geographic community (i.e., red and blue state). Similar to the analyzing process adopted in Study 1 for deriving significant themes, I first noticed the frequency of the coded texts between teams in red and blue states. In this process, I recognized that some of the themes presented in Study 1 had specific relevance to geographic differences (e.g., focus area, partnership). Other themes from Study 1 were not comparable by geographic



differences in Study 2. For example, themes such as acknowledgment of community members, modes of interaction, and athlete participation in teams' community engagement activities were particularly relevant in comparing across the two time periods (pre- and peri-pandemic), but did not emerge as relevant to the comparison across teams in red and blue states in the peri-pandemic period. Thus, paid particular attention to the ways teams managed focus areas and partnerships by red and blue states.

I used matrix coding queries of NVivo 12 software to compare teams in red and blue states. The matrix coding queries allow the researcher to observe the coded data simultaneously and to "investigate the research question as it was comparative in nature" (Wiltshier, 2011). Given that the aim of this study is to explore teams' community engagement by different geographic location (i.e., metropolitan areas, red and blue states), the matrix coding queries was the best option to examine data side by side. Based on the matrix coding queries results, I identified recurring themes across the states to present the findings.

I started with an interest in examining how teams' community engagement activities differed by geographic communities, focusing on the peri-pandemic period. As I began analyzing the data, I discovered that teams in red and blue states interacted with local stakeholders in different ways around the environmental jolt of the pandemic. These differences may have existed before the pandemic, or were exacerbated due to the pandemic. To add more nuance to the findings, I conducted additional analyses to compare the community engagement of teams in red and blue states in the pre-pandemic period. These analyses allowed me to explore whether the differences I observed in the peri-pandemic period between teams in red and blue states were driven by local variation (i.e., longer-held differences in red and blue states) or the environmental jolt (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic), or a combination of both sets of factors.

Table 6. Data Sample of Teams Located in Red and Blue States

State	Metro-area	# of Data	NBA	NHL	MLB	NFL
Texas	Dallas-Fort Worth	65	Dallas Mavericks	Dallas Stars	Texas Rangers	Dallas Cowboys
Florida	Miami	39	Miami Heat	Florida Panthers	Miami Marlins	Miami Dolphins
California	San Francisco Bay Area	44	Golden State Warriors	San Jose Sharks	Oakland Athletics San Francisco Giants	San Francisco 49ers
Colorado	Denver	53	Denver Nuggets	Colorado Avalanche	Colorado Rockies	Denver Broncos

### Findings

The analysis suggests that professional teams in both red and blue states actively interacted with local stakeholders in response to the environmental jolt, but in different forms. Specifically, my findings indicate differences in teams by red and blue states with respect to focus areas and partnerships related to their community engagement. First, the major focus areas of teams' community engagement initiatives were around three sectors; food, youth, and health. These sectors are the most common social issues when it comes to sport organizations' CSR activities (Rowe et al., 2019), but were noticeably emphasized during the COVID-19 pandemic. While teams in both red and blue states focused on these areas, my findings suggest that the way they engaged was different by state. Second, teams formed local partnerships with business and nonprofit organizations, sport organizations, and governmental bodies to extend their reach to

those in need during the pandemic. According to my findings, the type of targeted partners differed by teams in red and blue states. For example, red state teams showed more partnerships with for-profit organizations and financial institutions whereas blue state teams showed more partnerships with nonprofit organizations. Blue state teams were relatively more committed to forming connections with government states and other sport organizations sharing similar geographic boundaries. In the next section, I present the findings related to teams' major focus areas during the pandemic and how they engage in these areas differ by red and blue states.

### **Support for Specific Focus Areas**

#### ***Similar focus areas: food, youth, and health***

My findings suggest that teams in both red and blue states mainly focused on three areas: food insecurity, youth development, and health and wellness. First, teams mainly focused on fighting food insecurity in both red and blue states. Due to the impact of the pandemic, many Americans lost their jobs and thus resulted in reduced income and increased food insecurity (Wolfson & Leung, 2020). Professional sport teams, regardless of their local embeddedness, focused on financially supporting those most at risk of hunger, such as low-income families, homebound seniors, and children affected by school and related activity closures. Second, teams in both red and blue states promoted youth sport and education during the pandemic. Youth sport and education have long been primary focus areas in professional sport teams' community engagement, including summer camps, STEM programs, and other physical health and education programs (Sheth & Babiak, 2010; Walker & Parent, 2010). With the growing spread of COVID-19 in the U.S., however, existing regular programs initiated by teams locally have been suspended. Also, local governments required all independent school districts and private schools to defer face-to-face instruction, and nearly 39 million school-aged students in the U.S. and

Canada were learning-at-home due to school closures (Moran, 2020). Hence, teams focused on providing digital resources that allowed children to learn and stay active at home. Lastly, the COVID-19 pandemic raised major interest in the health and wellness of community members. Concurrently, many teams in both red and blue states focused on mitigating public anxiety associated with health concerns.

### ***Differences by red and blue: food insecurity***

The salient difference between teams in red and blue states in terms of fighting food insecurity in their local communities was the way they interacted with local stakeholders to broaden the reach of target beneficiaries suffering hunger. Teams in red states focused on supporting local and small businesses, especially in the food service industry including local restaurants and delivery services. For example, the NBA's Dallas Mavericks showed support for DoorDash #OpenForDelivery initiative. The NFL's Miami Dolphins, in partnership with the Truist, provided 2,866 meals over a six-week period, which were prepared by local food trucks and then delivered to the teams' local community partners and nonprofit organizations. Further, they created new meal programs while utilizing local labor and vendors, as described by Miami Dolphins:

*On Sundays, the Dolphins will work with area churches, local leadership, and community groups to purchase food from local restaurants to provide a minimum of 1,000 meals each Sunday that will be distributed to those dealing with food insecurity. The program will generate jobs and revenue for the local restaurant industry, while employing guest services and security staff at the stadium that have been idled as a result of COVID-19-related event cancellations. (Miami Dolphins, May 27, 2020)*

Teams in blue states tended to focus on fighting food insecurity specifically targeted to benefit individual community members during challenging times. One of the major target beneficiaries was the people experiencing homelessness. The NFL's Denver Broncos donated over \$260,000 to “help provide short- and long-term housing solutions for people experiencing

*homelessness and addition*” (May 20, 2020). Also, the NHL’s San Jose Sharks, joined by team’s forward Evander Kane, facilitated meal services to over 180 homeless people.

### ***Differences by red and blue: youth sport and education***

While teams’ focus on youth sport and education initiatives was maintained during the pandemic, my findings suggest that there were differences between teams from red and blue states in where they concentrated their efforts. In particular, I found that teams in blue states tended to focus on financial support for other organizations, such as local nonprofit organizations, that offer youth programs. For example, the NFL’s Denver Broncos distributed *“more than \$150,000 to 35 organizations and nonprofits through its annual Community Grant Program funding cycle”*, which selected organizations that focus on their community development focus areas of *“youth development, quality of life, health & wellness, youth football, and civic engagement”* (June 18, 2020). The Broncos also contributed direct grants of \$250,000 to renovate Broncos Boys & Girls Club to *“connect with and support 62 percent of the Colorado high schools that play football”* (May 20, 2020).

By comparison, teams in red states continued to focus on their existing youth education programs and events. For example, the NHL’s Dallas Stars focused on at-risk youth as they are *“continuing their education programming, including Stick with Reading and Future Goals (STEM) online, and building unity with "Quarantine in Victory Green" T-Shirts”* (April 14, 2020). The MLB’s Miami Marlins presented an online learning platform called the ‘HomeFun’, including at-home learning activities and resources focused on *“math and literacy skills, with the concepts taught through a baseball-themed experience”* (March 24, 2020).

In addition, teams in red states were more focused on operating their own youth academy with the reopening of their annual youth camps, but in virtual forms. For example, the MLB’s

Texas Rangers' youth baseball and softball RBI (Reviving Baseball in the Inner Cities) program returned in June with a seven-week season “*under the guidelines established for youth sports participation as part of the State of Texas reopening*” (June 12, 2020). The NBA's Dallas Mavericks organized virtual summer camps while noting that “*the COVID-19 crisis might require some outside-the-box thinking, but it cannot stop the teaching that is helping kids learn basketball and life lessons*” (June 22, 2020). The MLB's Miami Marlins also launched a youth virtual academy camp, consisting of “*daily virtual calls with additional enrichment activities*” (July 20, 2020).

### ***Differences by red and blue: health and wellness***

I found differences across teams in red and blue states in terms of their approach to addressing the focus area of health and wellness. Teams in red states focused on supporting frontline caregiving workers, specifically those who work in the healthcare industry fighting against COVID-19. One way to support this was to provide meals to healthcare workers in local medical facilities. The NHL's Dallas Stars donated daily meals to “*the 140 people working at the Federal Medical Station, Ellis Davis testing site, and Emergency Operations Center at City Hall*” (April 14, 2020), and the NBA's Miami Heat distributed meals “*to medical professionals at Baptist Health, testing site volunteers at Community Health of South Florida Inc and Publix employees on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Florida*” (April 03, 2020). The MLB's Miami Marlins also provided “*meals for approximately 1,500 medical staff workers in the University of Miami Healthcare System*” to show appreciation for those who dedicate themselves to serving local communities in times of health crisis (April 24, 2020). Another way was to donate personal protective equipment to healthcare workers. The NBA's Miami Heat partnered with Refried Apparel “*to turn \$100k in unsold jerseys into over 7,000 masks to be*

*donated to local medical facilities in need*” (April 08, 2020). The MLB’s Miami Marlins, in partnership with World Red Eye, donated *“masks for local healthcare professionals and frontline personnel by providing clothing, including uniform jerseys and pants”* (April 24, 2020).

Teams in blue states largely focused on promoting blood donations. Due to the public health crisis, maintaining an adequate blood supply for patients in need became more difficult than ever and the stay-at-home mandate hindered potential donors from visiting donation centers. The COVID-19 outbreak also caused the teams to suspend previously scheduled blood drives. Hence, the NBA’s Denver Nuggets and the NHL’s Colorado Avalanche promoted the #DonateBloodColorado campaign, informing that *“Colorado's normal blood supply is at half its normal level due to the cancellation of community and corporate blood drives and a downturn in walk-in volunteers”* (April 02, 2020). Through this campaign, the Nuggets and the Avalanches provided information on community blood centers that accept donations and the steps to take for individual blood donations. The NFL’s Denver Broncos joined by promoting their community partners focused on blood services, such as Vitalant and Children’s Hospital Colorado. For example, the Broncos noted that *“as COVID-19 impacts local hospitals and medical facilities, Vitalant currently faces a shortage in their blood supply”* and *“Children's Hospital Colorado is asking for the help of our community to ensure that they are able to continue to meet the transfusion needs of patients”* (March 15, 2020). The Broncos participated in promoting blood donation by providing support links to their community partners and requesting individual donations to help those in immediate need.

My additional analyses of the pre-pandemic period did not reveal notable differences in community engagement activities between teams in red and blue states regarding their focus on food, youth, and health. In the pre-pandemic period, teams in general, regardless of their local

geographic embeddedness, focused on these areas in similar ways as part of their community engagement activities. For example, many teams in both red and blue states initiated annual food drives (food insecurity), youth academy and sport programs (youth participation), and blood drives (health and wellness) before the pandemic. As identified in Study 1, however, teams extended their activities around these focus areas in the wake of the pandemic. Together, these findings suggest that differences in community engagement around the focus areas in the peri-pandemic period, between teams from red and blue states, were due to the environmental jolt, rather than longer-held norms. As I share below, however, my findings reveal more nuance around the partnerships based on focus areas.

### **Community Engagement through Extending Partnerships**

#### ***Partnerships based on focus areas***

Building partnerships with various organizations has long been recognized as an important strategy to implement CSR initiatives in sport (Heinze et al., 2014; Kihl et al., 2014; Walters, 2009). My analysis indicates that professional sport teams increasingly invested in building partnerships with local organizations to address social issues impacted by the jolt. In accordance with teams' increasing focus on social issues regarding food, youth, and health during the pandemic, many of the partnerships were newly formed or extended around addressing those particular areas.

The notable difference, however, is that the teams in red states had more partnerships with for-profit organizations. For example, red-state teams like the NHL's Dallas Stars "*announce a \$10,000 food donation to Aunt Bette's Community Pantry at St. Philip's*" in partnership with Kroger (March 11, 2020). The MLB's Texas Rangers, in partnership with



“*Food for the Soul, 7-Eleven, Chick-Fil-A, and Papa John's*” distributed meals to 200 West Dallas youth (August 28, 2020).

By comparison, teams in blue states showed more partnerships with nonprofit organizations. The NBA’s Denver Nuggets encouraged community members to join them and their community partners, who “*have a long-standing relationship with the Nuggets and Kroenke Sports Charities*” to engage in efforts to overcome the COVID-19 outbreak (April 02, 2020). Their community partners included nonprofit organizations such as Food Bank of the Rockies, Volunteers of America, Project Angel Heart, Metro Caring, Make a Wish Colorado, and USO Denver. Also, the NBA’s Golden State Warriors partnered with the PG&E Foundation and announced the early launch of their annual grants program to benefit youth in local communities, as noted:

*The joint effort will help Bay Area youth overcome challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, focused on addressing urgent and long-term support of youth development and education programs. The Warriors Community Foundation and PG&E have identified five local non-profits focused on youth development and education in need of support immediately to continue to serve their constituents with summer learning experiences.* (Golden State Warriors, June 15, 2020)

My additional analyses comparing pre- and peri-pandemic periods suggest that these differences in community engagement approach were driven by differences in red and blue states (e.g., norms, resources), rather than by the environmental jolt. In particular, my findings indicate that even before the pandemic, teams in red states tended to partner more with for-profit organizations, whereas teams in blue states tended to partner more with nonprofit organizations.

My additional analyses also suggest that the environmental jolt (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic) may have been a factor that influenced the type or trait of the partners in which teams engaged to support the area of food, youth, and health issues during the pandemic. For example, my findings suggest that a few teams in red states had partnerships with financial institutions and

insurance companies in the pre-pandemic period to organize several community engagement events, specifically those initiated by the associated leagues. According to the Dallas Stars (NHL), for example, insurance companies like the GEICO and MassMutual teamed up with the NHL for several events before the pandemic, including ‘GEICO Speed Shot Challenge’ for fan engagement and ‘MassMutual Financial Face Off’ to promote financial literacy (December 12, 2019). The Miami Dolphins (NFL) hosted the Youth Mental Health Forum as part of the NFL’s Total Wellness platform initiative with the support of Cigna, an insurance company, to invite student-athletes in the Miami area to promote mental wellness and suicide prevention (September 21, 2019). However, my findings suggest that the partnerships with financial institutions and insurance companies were exacerbated during the pandemic. For example, the MLB’s Texas Rangers, in partnership with Comerica Bank, donated 300 backpacks “filled with several beneficial school supplies for primary school and secondary school age youth” as part of their annual Back to School program (August 10, 2020). The MLB’s Miami Marlins also joined the program “to provide school supplies to students from Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach Counties” in partnership with AutoNation, Ultimate Software, and PNC Bank (August 17, 2020).

***Partnership with sport organizations within the same geographic boundary***

My findings suggest that many teams in blue states tried to engage with other sport organizations located in the same geographic region. Specifically, teams in blue states partnered with sport teams within and across leagues that are in the same state. For example, the NFL’s San Francisco 49ers provided personal protective equipment, like face coverings, in partnership with the teams across California:

*The 49ers, in partnership with San Francisco Giants, Oakland A's, Golden State Warriors, Sacramento Kings, San Jose Sharks, and San Jose Earthquakes are working with NBC Sports Bay Area, along with the teams' apparel and merchandise partner Fanatics, NBC Sports California and San Francisco-based bag manufacturer Timbuk2 to donate 50,000 face masks and bandanas to Bay Area Community Services (April 24, 2020).*

The MLB's San Francisco Giants and the NFL's San Francisco 49ers also joined to produce co-branded masks with Dignity Health, which were distributed to frontline workers and community organizations. The NHL's Colorado Avalanche partnered with the NBA's Denver Nuggets to promote the NBA Math Hoops program for local students, which is a "*fast-paced basketball board game and mobile app that allows students to learn fundamental math skills through direct engagement with the real statistics of NBA and WNBA players*" (April 13, 2020).

Although my results indicate that blue state teams were, relatively, more active in forming partnerships with other sport organizations within the same field (i.e., sport industry, state), some teams in red states also partnered with sport organizations during the pandemic. For example, the MLB's Miami Marlins, in partnership with Headfirst Professional Sports Camps, offered virtual summer camps, which "*consist of daily virtual calls with additional enrichment activities*" (July 20, 2020). The Marlins also partnered with Good Sports to provide At-home Play Pack for over 1,000 students, which included "*Marlins-branded drawstring bag, a jump rope, plastic ball and bat set, and practice jersey*" to support youth physical activities during the quarantine (August 25, 2020).

My additional analyses of the pre-pandemic period suggest that teams' partnership with other sport organizations to deliver community engagement activities was not new, but teams tended to show more collaborative relationships with other sport organizations during the pandemic. Specifically, my findings suggest that teams in blue states focused more on engaging with other teams sharing the same geographical boundaries than those in the red states.

In the pre-pandemic period, several teams in both red and blue states often collaborated with sport teams within the same league or other sport organizations for annual league-based community events. For example, teams in blue states like the Oakland Athletics (MLB) and the San Francisco Giants (MLB) teamed up for the Battle of the Bay fundraising event to support the Bay Area Community (November 25, 2019). Red state teams, like the Miami Heat (NBA), collaborated with Special Olympics Florida to host the HEAT Youth Basketball Clinic for young athletes with intellectual disabilities to join their training program.

My analyses of the peri-pandemic period, however, indicate that teams in blue states were not only more active in collaborating with other sport teams than teams in red states, but also tended to focus on forming partnership with teams in the same state. These differences may have been exacerbated due to the environmental jolt (i.e., COVID-19 pandemic), rather than driven entirely by pre-existing differences across states (i.e., norms, resources, policies).

### ***Relationship with governing states***

Interestingly, my findings suggest that teams in blue states were more committed to government-led community engagement initiatives than those in red states. The government-led initiatives include community programs and services such as city- or state-led and governor-designated programs due to public health emergencies, in this case, the COVID-19 pandemic. Several teams in blue states partnered with local governments and financially supported the COVID-19 relief funds. In California, the NFL's San Francisco 49ers partnered with "*Cindy Chavez, President of the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors, and Sam Liccardo, Mayor of San Jose, Comcast, and the Silicon Valley Community Foundation to assist the region's most vulnerable populations*" (March 19, 2020). The NHL's San Jose Sharks also partnered with the County of Santa Clara, the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, Druva, and Majestic Sales to

*“provide residents with free and easy walk-up COVID-19 testing at SAP Center at San Jose”* (June 22, 2020). In Colorado, the NFL’s Denver Broncos committed \$500,000 to Colorado COVID-19 Relief Fund, which provided aid to *“support Colorado communities and organizations affected by the recent outbreak of COVID-19”* (March 18, 2020). The Broncos also *“launched an online auction and donation site to benefit the state of Colorado’s relief fund”* to financially support those impacted by the spread of COVID-19 (March 30, 2020).

My additional analyses of the peri-pandemic period suggest that teams in red and blue states had no or very few relationships with the governing states around community engagement before the pandemic. In the peri-pandemic period, however, my findings indicate that teams in blue states showed, relatively, more partnership with state governments. Similar to the results shown in blue state teams’ collaborative movement with other sport teams sharing the same geographic community, blue state teams’ extended relationship with local or state governments may have been caused by the environmental jolt rather than local variation.

### **Discussion**

While the institutional literature in sport and CSR have explored how the embeddedness in geographic communities can shape organizational behavior (Di Lu & Heinze, 2019; Yang & Babiak, 2021), there is less attention on the role of geography in professional sport teams’ community engagement, particularly amid the environmental jolt. In exploring whether there is variation in the way teams engage in local communities by the state during a crisis, my findings suggest that teams’ community engagement may be shaped by their local environment. The differences in teams’ response to the jolt by the state also suggest that regulative and normative forces may have influenced the way they engage in local communities in different forms.

## **Similar Focus yet Different Approach towards Community Engagement**

This study contributes to the CSR literature in sports by exploring professional sport teams' community engagement activities aimed to benefit their local communities in response to an environmental jolt. Studies have increasingly viewed the professional sport teams' CSR initiatives from a critical perspective, which suggest that sport organizations are often motivated and operated to engage in CSR-related activities for the benefit of themselves as businesses (Giulianotti, 2015; Godfrey, 2009; Levermore, 2010). Regardless of whether the motivation for community involvement is grounded in moral claims or image production, my findings suggest that professional sport teams play a role as active participants in resolving social issues caused by the impact of the jolt.

In addition, my findings indicate that while professional sport teams focused on similar social issues (i.e., food, youth, health) across states during the crisis, the way they implemented community engagement activities to address those particular social issues were different by red and blue states. For example, teams in blue states showed more commitment to state- or city-led community services, whereas teams in red states tended to retain their regular community programs but in virtual forms. Although the prior works on CSR in sports have focused on the social issues and areas of interest in understanding sport organizations' community engagement in general (McCullough & Trail, 2022; Rowe et al., 2019; Walzel et al., 2018), less attention has been paid to how they implement activities in those specific areas in different forms. Future research could delve deeper into the sport organizations' community engagement initiatives to examine potential driving factors of these differences.

There is also an opportunity to build on this study by exploring alternative conditions of local communities. In this study, I primarily focused on setting boundaries for local communities

at the state level. Given that the environmental jolt is a crisis that affects not just a few organizations or industries, but often threatens across states and even globally, narrowing the geographic boundaries at the state level and metropolitan areas was considered a good option for this study to understand community engagement. However, future works could seek other boundaries of local communities, by rural areas or cities, to examine whether the teams' community engagement differs by different levels of local communities. Additionally, future work could extend the boundaries beyond local communities, by comparing nation by nation. Several scholars have identified CSR in sport through cross-national analysis (François et al., 2019; Mamo et al., 2021; Rowe et al., 2019) For example, Rowe and colleagues (2019) explored CSR activities implemented by professional sport leagues in different regions (e.g., North America, the UK, and Australia) and suggest that there are differences in the level of government attention and investment in community-oriented practices “demonstrate the different cultures of giving, activation, and capacity building across the regions” (p. 374). Thus, future scholars could continue to examine the sport organizations' engagement in communities at different levels of geographic conditions.

### **Multifaceted Response to the Same Environmental Jolt**

The findings in this study indicate that there are subtle differences between the teams in red and blue states in the way they engage in local communities. Given that the timeline of this study was the initial 6-month period during the jolt, my findings represent teams' reflex response induced by the impact of the jolt without compromising or decoupling behavior. However, there are limitations as to understanding 'why' there are differences by states in times of crisis, based on the data sample and analysis for this study. For example, my findings on partnerships suggest that teams in blue states were highly committed to government-led community engagement

initiatives, but lack evidence to suggest possible reasons for these results. Given that the case of an environmental jolt used in this study, the COVID-19 pandemic, is a relatively novel phenomenon, academic literature has yet to uncover the difference in organizational response to this rapid change.

In addition, the additional analyses of the pre-pandemic period suggest that some of the differences in the way teams from red and blue state engage in local communities through partnerships were exacerbated due to the environmental jolt. Specifically, teams in blue states tended to show more collaborative movement with various local organizations (e.g., sport teams, government, nonprofits) compared to teams in red states, which indicates that teams in blue states were more responsive and active in resolving various social issues caused by the environmental jolt.

To provide an additional understanding of potential factors that may have contributed to the diverse organizational response by states, I referenced the news articles retrieved from the *New York Times* in this discussion. For example, several newspaper articles suggest that there were partisan differences in how people view and behave in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Badger & Quealy, 2020; Gebeloff, 2020; Leatherby & Harris, 2020). According to the *New York Times* investigation on geographic variations with the use of face coverings (survey of over 250,000 Americans), respondents who identify as Democrats wore more masks than Republicans regardless of whether they live in a community with a high infection rate (Gebeloff, 2020). Also, the national tracking poll of Civiqs by the *New York Times* from March to July 2020 in the US, shows that over 80% of the Democrat voters said they have great concerns about the pandemic in their local area. In contrast, only 30% of Republican voters said that they are “moderately or extremely concerned” and about 40% responded that they are “not



at all concerned” about the COVID-19 outbreak in their communities (Badger & Quealy, 2020; Gebeloff, 2020). These survey data demonstrate that the community members’ response to the pandemic widely varied across the states, specifically among those in red and blue states, during the earlier stage of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, Guess and colleagues (2022) found that blue states had more regulations regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and fewer COVID-19-related deaths compared to the red states. Thus, media coverage and reports provide some evidence that professional sport organizations’ approach to community engagement varied by state, at least in part, due to the distinct reaction of their local community towards the pandemic.

It would be interesting to investigate whether the findings in this study generalize to other geographic settings. While this study focuses on understanding the community engagement of professional sport teams located in the US, questions remain regarding the connection between professional sport organizations and state governments. The variation in response to the jolt across states may reflect the geographic characteristics of a nation. For example, the terms “red states” and “blue states” have been uniquely referred to states in the U.S. “for the political and ideological beliefs of certain geographic locations” (Davisson, 2011, p. 107). While prior studies in sport management have identified the influence of the geographic community on sport organizations, including the adoption of concussion legislation and teams’ philanthropic giving (Di Lu & Heinze, 2019; Yang & Babiak, 2021), it would be plausible to assume that the geographic characteristic of different states and nation have a bigger influence on organizations especially when experienced an environmental jolt.

By showing that professional sport teams’ community engagement differs by the state during the jolt, my findings indicate that the pressures or demands exerted by the state may have influenced organizations’ decision-making processes and actions. Future research is needed,

however, to examine the potential factors or features, such as different norms and cultures, of states that may influence teams' community engagement. States, as geographic communities and more local institutional environments, continue to influence organizational behavior (Marquis & Battilana, 2009). Greenwood and colleagues (2010) emphasized the influence of institutions, especially the state logics, on organizations suggesting that organizations influenced by regional pressures are those whose activities are regionally concentrated. This applies to professional sport teams since they are legally mandated to follow government policies, including federal, state, and local regulations (Sheth & Babiak, 2010). While this study explored the possible heterogeneity at the local community level by grouping teams by red and blue states, the data collected for this study lacks information to uncover the differences in particular state values, norms, and culture. According to Scott (1995), "institutions consist of cognitive, normative, and regulative structures and activities that provide stability and meaning to social behavior. Institutions are transported by various carriers - culture, structures, and routines - and they operate at multiple levels of jurisdiction" (p. 33). Institutional norms and culture vary by state; hence future work could build on this study to investigate the various state norms and cultures (e.g., policies, philanthropy, protocols) and how these variations relate to organizations' engagement in local communities. Future research could pay attention to the normative force, which 'emphasizes the immediate environment of organizations rather than the more general cultural rules of the society at large in driving such organizational change' (Palthe, 2014). It would also be interesting to investigate how the normative forces differ by the state in the absence of an environmental jolt in future studies.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **Conclusions**

The objective of this dissertation was to extend understanding of the relationship between professional sport organizations and their surrounding environments. In particular, this dissertation aimed to examine community engagement across professional sport organizations in times of an environmental jolt. Environmental jolts require organizations to respond promptly to environmental uncertainty and thus force them to modify the status quo for organizational survival. I sought to investigate whether the impact of an environmental jolt changes professional sport organizations' community engagement approach (Study 1) and whether the change in their community engagement approach in response to the jolt relates to or differs by geographic embeddedness (Study 2).

In Chapter 2, I provided a comprehensive literature review of community engagement in sport. I first reviewed the broader literature around CSR in sport, including the definition of CSR, unique features of CSR in sport, and the ways in which sport organizations implement CSR. Specifically, I presented academic works that explore how professional sport organizations engage in local communities through CSR initiatives. I then focused on community engagement in sport. Community engagement is often considered a subset of CSR and described in different terms (e.g., community enrichment, community outreach, community-oriented practices). I defined any community and social-related activities of sport organizations as community engagement. I further introduced the key areas of literature around community engagement in

sport, including motivation, focus and types, stakeholders, and strategic approach in community engagement. Based on prior studies, this review chapter provides basic knowledge and major themes relevant to community engagement, on which the following Study 1 and Study 2 of the dissertation center.

In Chapter 3 (Study 1), I conducted a qualitative study to examine how professional sport organizations' community engagement approach change in response to an environmental jolt. The unit of analysis of this study was 123 teams in major men's professional sport leagues in North America (i.e., NBA, NHL, MLB, and NFL). Using the case of the COVID-19 pandemic as a natural experiment of an environmental jolt, I collected data from articles covering teams' community engagement activities from teams' websites and compared them in two time periods (i.e., 6-months before the pandemic and 6-months after the pandemic) to investigate the shifts in teams' approach during a crisis. The data analyzing process included both deductive and inductive approaches, where I draw on existing frameworks on community engagement in sport to develop an initial coding map deductively, then generated additional codes and themes inductively. My findings suggest that teams increasingly focused on areas that are related to or directly affected by the jolt (e.g., food insecurity, health, youth, local business) by expanding financial investment, increasing activities, and creating stronger partnerships to expand their community engagement approach. Teams also acknowledged community members during the jolt, particularly for those in need of help (e.g., gameday staff, local business owners, families, homeless) by financially supporting vulnerable populations and those who contribute (e.g., healthcare workers, team owners, volunteers) by recognizing individual contribution and donations through community awards or interviews. Teams adopted new modes of interaction with different community members during the jolt, utilizing virtual platforms to operate youth

programs and creating online resource centers to provide information regarding safety reminders and temporary job opportunities. The individual athletes' community engagement featured more active and voluntary participation and personal contribution during the jolt, where they increased personal donations to vulnerable populations, connected with local restaurants to deliver meals to local families, collaborated with other athletes for fundraising events, and leveraged their own foundations or charities to expand engagement in local communities outside their teams. Lastly, building partnerships played a significant role in the way teams engaged in communities during the jolt. In particular, I found that teams collaborated with their existing community partners to focus on key areas such as food insecurity and youth education, and increasingly created new partnerships for fundraising events, donating personal protective equipment, and organizing virtual programs. My findings also suggest that teams jointly worked with various organizations in their local communities, such as governmental bodies, financial institutions, and other sport teams across leagues to extend the quality of their services and broaden the reach of their target beneficiaries. These findings have implications for understanding professional sport teams' roles in the local community. That is, teams are not only active players in assisting community needs in times of crisis, but also act as a bridge between other stakeholders (e.g., government, nonprofits, community partners) and community members. Additionally, my findings indicate that teams have the insights and capacity (e.g., sufficient resources, well-established community networks, and insight into community needs) to respond to uncertain circumstances in a timely manner.

In Chapter 4 (Study 2), I conducted a qualitative study to explore whether the professional sport teams' community engagement approach differs by geographic differences. Using the peri-pandemic data from Study 1, I developed the data sample of teams by red and

blue states based on both the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections in the U.S., which represent the local communities in which they are embedded. I also focused on teams located in metropolitan areas and grouped them by adding at least one team across all four leagues (NBA, NHL, MLB, and NFL) to secure uniformity. This led to a focus on 8 teams from two red states (i.e., Texas and Florida), and 9 teams from two blue states (i.e., California and Colorado). The data analysis was processed inductively through the lens of institutional theory, since the state grouping for local variation maps to differences in institutional factors, such as norms and regulations, that are particularly salient during an environmental jolt when the state governments are activated. Also, I conducted additional analyses of the pre-pandemic period to explore whether the differences observed between teams in red and blue states during the peri-pandemic period were driven by existing local variation or the environmental jolt, or a combination of both factors. My findings suggest that while the focused priorities for community engagement among teams were similar (e.g., food insecurity, youth development, health and wellness), the ways teams initiate or implement support for those particular areas were different by red and blue states. Fighting food insecurity, for example, red state teams tended to focus on financially supporting local and small businesses in the food industry, whereas blue state teams showed more contribution to individual community members and vulnerable populations such as those experiencing homelessness. In terms of partnerships based on focus areas, red-state teams showed more partnerships with financial institutions, while blue-state teams showed more partnerships with nonprofit organizations. Additionally, I found that teams in blue states were relatively more active in forming partnerships with other sport organizations in the same geographic region and showed more commitment to state government-led community engagement services. While the findings of this study suggest that the local geographic

community (e.g., state) may shape the way sport organizations engage in their local areas, my additional analyses of the pre-pandemic period also suggest that these differences may have been exacerbated due to the environmental jolt. This result also indicates that teams in blue states were relatively more responsive in connecting local organizations for COVID-19 relief than teams in red states.

Collectively, the findings from Study 1 and Study 2 suggest that the way sport organizations engage in local communities is highly influenced by their surrounding environments. For example, Study 1 findings suggest that professional sport teams' community engagement shifted by modifying their typical community engagement approach when the change in their surrounding environment is impacted by an environmental jolt. This study also suggests that in the initial response to the jolt, we are likely to observe isomorphic behavior among teams such as focusing on similar areas of community needs, connecting local stakeholders or organizations through partnerships, and using similar modes of interaction. While the surrounding environment in Study 1 refers to the professional sport field and local communities in general, Study 2 highlights the variation in teams' response to the same environmental jolt by different local geographic communities in which they are located. The findings from Study 2 suggest that teams' approaches to community engagement amid an environmental jolt were different by teams located in red or blue states, specifically around their focus areas and partnerships. These findings indicate that while the organizations' general response to the environmental jolt may be similar (Study 1), the variation in local institutional environments may influence the way organizations respond in different forms (Study 2). As identified in the Study 1 findings, teams tended to increase investment and activities in certain focus areas (e.g., food insecurity, youth development, physical and mental health), but the Study

2 findings suggest that the way they engage in those focus areas differed by state. Fighting food insecurity, for example, teams in red states increasingly supported local businesses in the food industry whereas teams in blue states tended to focus on the benefit of individual, vulnerable populations. In terms of partnerships, the findings from Study 1 suggest that teams increasingly connected with governmental bodies, financial institutions, and other sport organizations during the jolt. When narrowing down to the state level, the findings from Study 2 indicate that teams in red states showed more partnerships with financial institutions whereas teams in blue states partnered more actively with governmental bodies and sport organizations sharing the same geographic location. Table F summarizes the major themes from the findings for Study 1 and Study 2. Together, Study 1 and Study 2 contribute to the understanding of the relationship between professional sport organizations and their environments by exploring teams' community engagement approaches when facing environmental jolt.

Recent studies have identified shifts in organizational strategies and behaviors due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Choflet et al., 2021; Spicer, 2020). Scholars suggest that a “combination of new and existing (but extended) strategies could be used by companies considering not going back to business as usual” (Dewick et al., 2021, p. 47). Studies in sport management have also looked at the way sport organizations responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and post-pandemic approaches, such as around sport-for-development (Dixon et al., 2020; Norman et al., 2023), the social role of sport organizations (Inoue et al., 2022; Mastromartino et al., 2020), structural modification of sport organizations and their sport-based programs (Basson & Sallé, 2023; Byers et al., 2022), and CSR actions (Carlini et al., 2021; Smith & Casper, 2020). For example, Basson and Sallé (2023) noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the community-based youth sport initiatives and sport organizations “required adapting quickly to the constraints



inherent in managing the public health situation” to relaunch youth programs (p. 7). Smith and Casper’s (2020) research on sport leagues’ CSR social media communications during the COVID-19 pandemic also suggest that professional sport organizations “will have to shift programs and support to long-term issues such as the economic impact” (p. 343). My dissertation contributes to this trend of research by adding insights as to how professional sport organizations changed their community engagement, presumably to quickly adapt to their surrounding institutional environment, by combining new and extended approaches to engage in local communities.

### **Practical Implications**

This dissertation offers several implications for managers and practitioners engaged in community-related activities of sport organizations. By investigating the most recent case of an environmental jolt, the COVID-19 pandemic, this dissertation provides insights into the way professional sport teams engage in local communities during uncertain times. The findings from Study 1 suggest that the teams can adapt to changing environments by maintaining, expanding, and modifying their community engagement approaches. Practitioners associated with community engagement or CSR initiatives in the professional sport field should pay attention to the internal and external resources of the organizations that could enable them to respond productively to changing environments, especially when the change is sudden and severe. My findings indicate that teams had the internal resources, either financially or non-financially, to recognize and support the most vulnerable areas amid the pandemic and showed flexibility in their community engagement activities by changing the way of interaction while also complying with governmental regulations of avoiding direct physical contact. Externally, teams connected with other stakeholders through various partnerships, which allowed them to expand their reach

to target beneficiaries and achieve mutual goals in local community engagement activities. These findings imply that the teams have a strong capacity to respond to immediate community needs. Practitioners could leverage the existing assets and extend the social network of their organizations to better respond to possible environmental jolts in the future.

The findings of Study 2 suggest that professional sport teams tended to focus on similar social issues, particularly related to the trait of the environmental jolt, but the way they implement community engagement initiatives varied by the states in which they are located. This indicates that the observed shifts in teams' community engagement amid the pandemic (Study 1) are beyond the result of the impact or severity of the jolt. That is, different local geographic factors by states could also act as driving forces that potentially influence the process of decision-making and implementation of certain activities initiated by sport organizations. Also, while the environmental jolt considered in this dissertation was a large-scale event that impacted nationwide, sport organizations may experience more small-scale jolts in the future that may affect certain geographic areas (e.g., natural disasters, strikes). Given that the geographic factors, including local norms, laws, regulations, culture, and historical background, shape organizational behavior (Davis & Greve, 1997; Marquis & Battilana, 2009), the way sport organizations respond to smaller-scale jolts could be different by local demands and governmental regulations. Hence, practitioners should pay attention to surrounding local stakeholders and state governance structures that could directly or indirectly influence their choice and action in addressing social issues through community engagement.

### **Limitation and Future Direction**

This dissertation includes limitations and research directions that could be addressed in the future. One limitation is the use of a single data source. For both Study 1 and Study 2, I

collected and analyzed articles and press releases covering professional sport teams' engagement in local communities from the News and Public Relations sections of team websites. Although the articles published by teams may describe and provide information on the general priorities, activities, and stakeholders involved in community engagement initiatives, these may not fully represent the teams' community engagement approach in response to an environmental jolt. Future scholars may use multiple types of documents, such as self-reported data (e.g., interviews, questionnaires) or teams' annual community relations reports, to explore the possible motivation, impact, and outcome of teams' behavior in depth. Future research could also account for quantitative data sources to measure the difference in community engagement approach numerically. For example, my findings suggest that teams tended to increase financial support for vulnerable populations and nonprofit organizations amid the pandemic. It would be interesting to compare teams' annual expenses (e.g., grants, donations, funds) for community engagement, before and after the pandemic, to measure the actual increase in financial support in future research.

Another limitation is the time frame of data collection. For Study 1, I acquired data by two-time frames (i.e., 6 months pre- and peri-pandemic) to find similarities and differences in teams' community engagement approaches. The peri-pandemic data aligns with the time when the four professional sport leagues (i.e., NBA, NHL, MLB, and NFL) were on suspension of regular seasons and monitoring or planning phase to resume the games. Although these time frames were considered in this dissertation to explore teams' initial responses and potential shifts in the community engagement approach in times of crisis, future work may examine the long-term effects of the observed shifts in teams' behavior. Specifically, further investigation on how the changes in teams' community engagement approach become institutionalized over time

could advance our understanding of the relationship between organizations and changing environments, since the environmental jolt considered (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic) is still an ongoing crisis at the time of writing this dissertation.

Further, future scholars could gather more data to explore how geographic differences affect teams' community engagement. Study 2 of this dissertation focused on examining whether teams' community engagement approach varies by geographic differences. To address this, I analyzed the peri-pandemic data by sampling metropolitan area teams and grouping them by red and blue states. However, the data lacks information to fully uncover the differences in state values, norms, and culture. Future works could explore how institutional norms and cultures vary by geographic boundaries and how these variations affect the way sport organizations engage in local communities.

In addition, future research may expand the findings of this dissertation by considering the impact of other types of environmental jolts. Apart from the natural experiment of the COVID-19 pandemic as an environmental jolt in this study, several incidents such as the natural disaster and massive social movements occurred that may have influenced the way professional sport teams engage in local communities. For example, the St. Louis Blues (NHL) held auctions and raffles to benefit the Community Fund of Middle Tennessee's tornado relief, and several teams from the NFL, including the Houston Texans, Indianapolis Colts, and Jacksonville Jaguars, partnered with Tennessee Titans (NFL) to donate \$100,000 for the Titans and Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee to help those affected by the tornadoes in early March 2020, shortly before the pandemic. Also, the most recent Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was publicly activated on Juneteenth (June 2020), which overlaps with the time period of the COVID-19 outbreak that was declared a global pandemic in March 2020. The BLM

movement and protests have escalated across North America as means of resistance to police brutality and racial discrimination. Professional sport teams showed collective efforts in support of this movement to address social justice issues through partnerships. For example, 11 teams in Los Angeles (e.g., Anaheim Ducks, LA Angels, LA Chargers, LA Clippers, LA Dodgers, LA Football Club, LA Galaxy, LA Kings, LA Lakers, LA Rams, and LA Sparks) joined forces to form ‘The ALLIANCE’ for a long-term commitment in charitable activities across the region to fight racial injustice. The Miami Heat (NBA) partnered with organizations directly serving the Black community (e.g., Black Girls CODE, Health in the Hood, and Florida Rights Coalition) to donate profits from the sale of their special BLM collection of Court Culture Apparel and initiate STEM education programs for African-American youth in their local communities. Given that the framing of the environmental jolt in this dissertation is the COVID-19 pandemic, these types of incidents that may also be considered environmental jolts were omitted in the data analyzing process. Future research could investigate how the teams’ community engagement approaches are affected by other types and forms of environmental changes and how teams engage or address various social issues driven by the multiple jolts that occur simultaneously.

## APPENDICES. Additional Qualitative Data

**Table A. Shift in Focus Areas**

<b>MAINTAINING FUNDAMENTAL FOCUS AREAS</b>		
	<b>PRE-PANDEMIC</b>	<b>PERI-PANDEMIC</b>
<b>YOUTH SPORT</b>	<p>2-20-1. Activities at the Texas Rangers MLB Youth Academy at Mercy Street Sports Complex, presented by Toyota, are designed to help make sports more attainable for disadvantage youth. Tomorrow, Saturday, September 7, an equipment distribution will help Academy athletes continue to gear up to be their best.</p> <p>4-29-1. In celebration of youth football and spreading a love for the game, the Seahawks announced today that the team's Blue Friday Night Lights program is back for a second season. The program will bring Seahawks gameday entertainment elements to four high school football matchups this fall.</p>	<p>1-15-2. For thousands of the franchise's young fans, that development continues with lessons learned on and off the court from participation in Grizzlies Youth Basketball camps and clinics. Those efforts are highlighted on a national level as part of Jr. NBA Coach Appreciation Week.</p> <p>2-09-2. Since the Power Play Challenge launched, it has expanded to include 150 elementary schools in eight districts (Columbus, Worthington, Olentangy, Westerville, South Western, Gahanna, Dublin and Upper Arlington) impacting more than 47,000 students. In its three years, the program has provided approximately 100 field trips and given 22,700 stick/ball combos to fifth graders to continue their hockey development at home.</p>
<b>YOUTH EDUCATION</b>	<p>2-24-1. Education was at the forefront in March and in partnership with SAP, the Foundation unveiled the MidPen Media Broadcast Van at SAP Center. Students from Midpeninsula Community Media Center were then hosted in a suite to watch the Sharks and received a tour of the Sharks Tech Services control room, press box and NBC Sports California TV truck.</p> <p>3-26-1. The St. Louis Cardinals today announced the launch of the Budgeting Buddies Program presented by Scott Credit Union. The Cardinals and Scott Credit Union teamed up to create the free financial literacy program that introduces students to the importance of making smart financial decisions.</p>	<p>2-23-2. The Pittsburgh Penguins and Duolingo have together donated 35 laptop computers to Circles Greater Pittsburgh for distribution to families in our community whose children would not otherwise have access to online learning during school closures due to the coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p>4-21-2. A significant portion of the resources will be directed to the Boys and Girls Club of the Twin Cities as they determine how to continue their youth and family support during this time of closure for their centers. Specifically, our dollars will go directly toward meal and education services to more than 1,000 youth during this crisis.</p>

<p><b>HEALTH &amp; WELLNESS – CANCER AWARENESS</b></p>	<p>3-11-1. As a part of Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, the Astros were selected by Major League Baseball to donate 200 Starlight Brave Gowns to a local pediatric cancer hospital. The Astros Foundation and The University of Texas MD Anderson Children’s Cancer Hospital partnered to host an event this morning and donate the gowns.</p> <p>4-12-1. This October, the Green Bay Packers, Bellin Health and the Vince Lombardi Cancer Foundation are teaming up and inviting fans to take part in the Packers Vs. Cancer campaign.</p>	<p>4-04-2. "Just because COVID-19 is going on, doesn't mean the cancer stops," said Wallace. "So, even when I gave out my number not too long ago, I talked to some people that did have cancer or just finished going to treatment or doing chemo. They have to be extra careful or super isolated from others. So, I wanted to tell them that I empathize with them and understand where they're coming from and that I lost someone as well. Cancer doesn't stop just because the world does."</p> <p>4-05-2. The 10th annual Keep Pounding 5K is going virtual for 2020. Registration is now open for the virtual race benefitting cancer research efforts at Levine Children's Hospital and the Levine Cancer Institute.</p>
<p><b>HEALTH &amp; WELLNESS – BLOOD DONATION</b></p>	<p>2-16-1. On Wednesday, October 23, 2019, the Bell Centre will host the 38th annual Canadiens-evenko Blood Drive, presented in collaboration with RDS and in support of Héma-Québec.</p> <p>4-16-1. It takes less than an hour to save three lives. That's the reality when it comes to donating blood, and for a 22nd year, the Kansas City Chiefs are encouraging fans to make a difference right here in our community.</p>	<p>2-06-2. PNC Arena will be partnering with UNC REX, WakeMed and The Blood Connection (TBC) to host a blood drive on Thursday, in an effort to help our community avoid a critical blood shortage. ... During the COVID-19 outbreak, blood centers and hospitals are pleading for anyone who is feeling healthy to do their part and donate blood.</p> <p>4-15-2. The local chapter of the American Red Cross will receive \$50,000 in support of Anheuser-Busch's initiative to support the continuation of blood drives throughout the country.</p>
<p><b>DIVERSITY &amp; INCLUSION – GENDER</b></p>	<p>1-22-1. On Saturday, Sept. 14 during the Orlando Magic Youth Basketball Academy’s first ever “Her Time to Play” all-girls clinic, Vitela was able to display that hard work while picking up a few basketball pointers from some of Orlando’s brightest coaches.</p> <p>3-25-1. The Seattle Mariners are helping shine a spotlight on the important role women play in the game of baseball with the Third Annual Women in Baseball ticket special and pregame panel. On Thursday, September 12, before the Mariners meet the Cincinnati Reds, fans will have the chance to hear from an accomplished group of women with a diverse background in baseball.</p>	<p>2-09-2. Hands across the room repeatedly shot into the air, with many of the nearly 60 girls in attendance at the Blue Jackets annual girls hockey clinic wanting to ask questions of two women who were once like them before becoming the best in the world.</p> <p>3-25-2. The Seattle Mariners are helping shine a spotlight on the important role women play in sports with a virtual panel discussion featuring an accomplished group of women discussing their paths in sports, the challenges they have faced, the gains that have been made and how far we still have to go.</p>

<p><b>DIVERSITY &amp; INCLUSION – RACE</b></p>	<p>1-26-1. On Saturday, February 1, the Sacramento Kings will tip-off their 20th Annual Black History Celebration, powered by SMUD, as the team hosts the Los Angeles Lakers. This month-long celebration will highlight the Sacramento region’s rich and diverse cultures while shining a spotlight on game-changers dedicated to equality and justice.</p> <p>4-30-1. The Bucs Social Justice program is focused on reducing barriers to opportunities in the areas of police relations, criminal justice reform, racial equality, workforce development and youth empowerment. It garnered national recognition in its inaugural year in 2018 and is accompanied by the \$1 million Social Justice Match Fund.</p>	<p>3-29-2. Though COVID-19 has impacted all Canadians, the pandemic has disproportionately affected those already facing significant barriers in their everyday lives. The pandemic has exacerbated pervasive social issues for communities with greater concentrations of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) individuals, and caused additional strain for families of children living with disabilities. This is the time our communities need our help the most and the Blue Jays are committed to meaningful action to support a more just and equitable Canada.</p> <p>4-12-2. The Green Bay Packers on Wednesday announced that the organization is donating two player-directed \$125,000 grants, one to Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee and one to Sherman Phoenix, as part of the team's ongoing pledge to support social justice and racial equality in Wisconsin communities.</p>
<p><b>DIVERSITY &amp; INCLUSION – LGBTQ+</b></p>	<p>1-20-1. The team’s third annual Pride Night celebration will support diversity and inclusion by showcasing members, supporters and organizations from the LGBTQ community.</p> <p>3-19-1. The New York Yankees today announced that for the second straight year, the Yankees-Stonewall Scholars Initiative will award scholarships to five New York City Public School seniors who have demonstrated academic achievement, a commitment to equality and impactful support for the LGBTQ community.</p>	<p>2-07-2. During this event participants will learn how COH has continued to deliver to Chicago's LGBTQ community during COVID-19. Participants will also be able to raise their virtual PRIDE paddle in support of COH's programs and services and help to match the Sobel June Pride Match fundraiser happening all month long.</p> <p>2-30-2. On Tuesday, June 16, the external video boards at Capital One Arena will be taken over with a "LOVE WINS" banner and graphics featuring the Capitals, Wizards and Mystics. Team social channels will feature pride-related avatars and graphics as well as content featuring fans and voices of the LGBTQ+ community.</p>



**Table B. Recognition of Different and New Community Members**

<b>PRE-PANDEMIC: RECOGNITION OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS</b>	
<b>COACHES</b>	<p>1-22-1. Fifteen years before he landed his first NBA job, Steve Clifford was a special education teacher at Woodland High School in Maine. For the couple years he was there, he was also the head boys varsity basketball coach, which was his foot in the door to coaching.</p> <p>4-14-1. Bart Curtis of Warsaw Community High School has been named the Colts/NFL Coach of the Week, a program presented by Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield, the Indianapolis Colts announced today.</p>
<b>MILITARY &amp; VETERANS</b>	<p>2-24-1. Also in November, the Sharks celebrated Veteran's Day by honoring service members. The evening included a special puck drop by Mission Volant skydiver and military veteran, Javi Lopez. Through in-game auction and 50/50 Raffle proceeds, the Sharks Foundation was able to make donations to both Mission Volant and United Heroes League to aid in their assistance of veterans and their families.</p> <p>4-18-1. The Military Hero of the Week presented by California Resources Corporation was created to acknowledge the heroic efforts and sacrifices made by our U.S. service members, veterans and their families.</p>
<b>FANS</b>	<p>2-05-1. The "C of Red" attending the Calgary Flames game against the Los Angeles Kings at Staples Center on Wednesday was strengthened by the first Air Canada Fan Flight of the 2019-20 NHL season. The flight brought 15 contest winners and two youth "mark makers," recognized for their contributions to the community, from Calgary to Los Angeles.</p> <p>4-08-1. Don Billie is a lifelong Browns fan and season ticket holder that is passionate about giving back! As an Information Technology professional, Billie has used his skills and expertise to serve the less fortunate overseas. While overseas, Billie volunteered his time with communities that have been distraught by natural disasters or new government legislation.</p>
<b>YOUTH</b>	<p>1-26-1. In honor of National Girls and Women in Sports Day on Wednesday, the Sacramento Kings are highlighting two local girls who are making a difference in the community by paving the way for more female participation in basketball.</p> <p>3-28-1. Texas Rangers MLB Youth Academy at Mercy Street Sports Complex, presented by Toyota, participant Kiley Cox was named the Academy's Youth of the Year and joined nine other members of MLB Youth Academies from around the country in being recognized during pregame ceremonies.</p>
<b>YOUTH (STUDENT-ATHLETES)</b>	<p>4-05-1. During the 2019 season, the Carolina Panthers and Guy Roofing are recognizing outstanding high school student-athletes in the Carolinas through the Carolina Panthers Community Captain program. The program recognizes high school student-athletes in North and South Carolina who excel in their sport, in the classroom, and in their community.</p> <p>4-29-1. The Seattle Seahawks, CenturyLink, Inc. (NYSE: CTL) and KIRO Radio announced Steven Lin from Shorewood High School as week nine CenturyLink High</p>

	<p>School Athlete of the Week. Steven will be recognized on the field at CenturyLink Field during the Seahawks vs. Vikings game on December 2.</p>
<b>PATIENTS</b>	<p>4-18-1. Fourteen-year-old Aldahir Solis from Panama is battling Hodgkin's lymphoma, and his wish was to meet players from his favorite team, the Chargers, and watch a game live. This past weekend, the Chargers made it happen when Aldahir visited the team's headquarters Friday and attended the Week 15 game against the Minnesota Vikings on Sunday.</p> <p>4-21-1. Erika's statement summarizes the positive and resilient spirit she's maintained since being diagnosed with stage 4 metastatic breast cancer this summer. She currently is being treated via chemotherapy medications, shots and infusions that are causing her cancer to shrink. Long-term, however, the disease is terminal. Erika was nominated by coworkers through the Have a Nice Day Foundation; the Vikings then partnered with the Minnesota-based organization to give her an experience as a Vikings photographer.</p>
<b>COMMUNITY LEADERS (CULTURE)</b>	<p>1-26-1. The Foundation will also recognize African American Local Leaders in-game for their ongoing efforts to represent their community, serve as leaders and further conversations of equality and social justice. The Local Leaders were selected from the area youth basketball community and through local community partners.</p> <p>4-16-1. The Kansas City Chiefs have selected Janet Murguía as the recipient of the team's NFL Hispanic Heritage Leadership Award. The NFL and the Hispanic Heritage Foundation (HHF) have partnered for the ninth-annual NFL Hispanic Heritage Leadership Awards during the 2019 celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month. The awards recognize the contributions of Hispanic leaders in each NFL market.</p>
<b>EDUCATORS &amp; TEACHERS</b>	<p>2-26-1. The Tampa Bay Lightning honored Dwayne Hawkins as the 24th Lightning Community Hero this season during the first period of tonight's game against the Los Angeles Kings. ... Hawkins has been a business and community leader in the Tampa Bay area for over 50 years. As a longtime member of the Pinellas Education Foundation Board of Directors, Hawkins made significant contributions to improve education in Pinellas County Schools.</p>
<b>ARTISTS</b>	<p>2-31-1. Spence had been working as a graphic designer for WASAC while she was a student at Red River College in Winnipeg, and was enlisted to lead the logo design project for the 2019 Jets WASAC night and Manitoba Moose Follow Your Dreams night.</p> <p>4-26-1. The Arrowhead Art Collection currently features 64 pieces by 40 artists displayed throughout the stadium, making a trip to Arrowhead about so much more than just football. The idea first came about following the stadium's renovations in 2010, and its grown ever since.</p>

**PERI-PANDEMIC: THOSE IN NEED**

<p><b>STADIUM EMPLOYEES &amp; GAME-DAY STAFF</b></p>	<p>2-14-2. Payments from the fund will be distributed to more than 2,800 active hourly event staff which includes ushers, security officers, ticket sellers, ticket takers, parking attendants, merchandise staff, food and beverage employees, housekeeping and operations staff and stage hands, among others.</p> <p>3-12-2. The Kansas City Royals today announced that the organization will begin a fund of up to \$1 million to assist with compensating seasonal part-time game staff affected by the delay in the start of the 2020 season due to the COVID-19 virus that has hit the United States.</p>
<p><b>LOCAL BUSINESS OWNERS</b></p>	<p>1-24-2. To spotlight the participating businesses, we connected with Fair Trade Cafe Owner Stephanie Vasquez, who shared more about the local restaurant, the partnership with the Phoenix Suns and giving back to the community.</p> <p>4-01-2. With the COVID-19 shutdown, "we were shocked," Yadav said. "Being a new restaurant owner, I kind of had no idea what to do next." Yadav praised the support he has received, not only from Local First Arizona (a foundation to aid local businesses) but fellow restaurant owners and the local farmers with whom Sherpa Kitchen work closely under a vision of sustainability and healthy food.</p>
<p><b>HOMELESS SHELTERS &amp; FOOD BANKS</b></p>	<p>2-14-2. The hospitality and retail strategy team from the home of the Los Angeles Kings, Lakers and Clippers donated 7,000 pounds of food that would've gone to waste during the NBA and NHL season pauses and donated them to area homeless shelters Friday.</p> <p>3-22-2. Since March, Pirates Charities has worked to support frontline workers and local non-profit groups that are helping those most in need during the pandemic. The Pirates' charitable arm has donated funds to organizations such as the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank, hosted food distribution events, delivered boxed lunches to local shelters, and more.</p> <p>4-19-2. On Tuesday, March 24, we are partnering with KABC on a virtual Te"LA"thon for Los Angeles to raise money for the United Way of Greater Los Angeles' Pandemic Relief Fund in direct support of community partners, including Los Angeles Regional Food Bank. The UWGLA's Pandemic Relief Fund will provide immediate relief to low-income individuals, students and families at imminent risk of homelessness as well as the unsheltered residents across LA County who are experiencing disproportionate hardship due to the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19).</p>

## PERI-PANDEMIC: THOSE WHO HELP

<b>HEALTHCARE WORKERS</b>	<p>1-23-2. The generous support of Embiid, Harris and Blitzer will enable Penn Medicine researchers to immediately scale testing to 1,000 health care workers in the region. With additional support as the funding campaign continues, the research team hopes to increase testing to include more health care workers, and others, such as police officers and EMS workers, on the front lines of the pandemic.</p> <p>2-20-2. "I know a lot of people that work in hospitals, our team doctors are all around there; they're working hard and it's such a concentrated area, it's been hit pretty hard," Staal, a defenseman for the New York Rangers, said from his home in Greenwich, Connecticut. "Definitely some concerns and thoughts with all of our health care professionals that are doing the job now."</p> <p>4-19-2. Medical providers continue to make heroic efforts to manage the increasing number of coronavirus-related hospitalizations across the United States. The efforts of Everett, other Rams players and community members serve as reminders to our medical heroes that they are not alone during the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>
<b>FIRST RESPONDERS</b>	<p>2-17-2. The Predators have joined forces with eight of their food and beverage partners to feed the eight Metro Nashville Police Department precincts every Tuesday and Thursday during the month of April. Orders from those partners are delivered three times per day to cover the midday, evening and overnight shifts to ensure all those who are working are receiving a meal.</p> <p>3-11-2. The Astros Foundation arranged for Papa John's pizza to be delivered to all 92 Houston Fire Department stations this week. The complimentary lunch was done as a show of gratitude. "Providing lunch is a small way for us to say thank you to so many of the first responders in our city," said Astros Owner and Chairman Jim Crane. "They truly are our unsung heroes. We wanted to show them how much they are appreciated. Papa John's is a longtime partner of the Astros, and they were happy to support us in this gesture."</p> <p>4-13-2. Jon Weeks provided lunch to Houston-area first responders on Tuesday, sending a Texas favorite, Whataburger, to Fire Stations 10, 11, 22 and 42 and medical staff at the Houston Emergency Center. The Houston Texans Pro Bowl long snapper also sent a personal message thanking those working tirelessly during the current COVID-19 pandemic.</p>
<b>VOLUNTEERS</b>	<p>1-04-2. With Hornets Sports &amp; Entertainment employees continuing to work from home, the organization has pledged to complete 1,000 hours of in-home volunteerism by team members to support local nonprofit organizations.</p> <p>3-01-2. "I'm so proud of our organization for implementing a plan that will provide relief to communities across the entire state," said D-backs President &amp; CEO Derrick Hall. "We have had many employees offer to volunteer at local food banks while still practicing social distancing, as each of them simply wants to help those around us. It is not just our civic responsibility, but our honor to be of service to our community during these challenging times."</p> <p>4-12-2. With the need for personal protective equipment spiking throughout Northeast Wisconsin as the community continues to battle the outbreak of COVID-19, the Wisconsin Face Mask Warriors have stepped in to help meet the demand. The group, which sews face masks for essential workers and first responders in the health care</p>

	industry, needs additional support to continue making and distributing the masks to those on the front lines.
<b>TEAM EXECUTIVES &amp; OWNERS</b>	<p>2-29-2. Vegas Golden Knights Owner Bill Foley and the Vegas Golden Knights Foundation announced today, April 3, that they have together donated \$1,000,000 to the Nevada COVID-19 Response, Relief and Recovery Task Force.</p> <p>4-05-2. Carolina Panthers owner David Tepper, through the David A. Tepper Foundation, this week donated \$2.65 million to help the local community in the face of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.</p>
<b>DONATORS</b>	<p>2-19-2. Sometimes the community is the hero. The customers of Main St. Board Game Cafe in Huntington donated over \$13,000 to buy board games for Long Island hospitals. Over 300 board games were donated to the children's wings at Huntington Hospital, NYU-Winthrop, Stony Brook University Hospital and Sunrise Association, which is a camp for children with cancer. Board games were also given as gifts to ER staff and hospital patients.</p> <p>3-03-2. On Friday, September 4, the Orioles will also recognize MELODY BARON, a longtime supporter, advocate, and volunteer for the Living Classrooms Foundation. ... Throughout the pandemic, she has gone above and beyond securing donations of essential items and providing food for Living Classroom families. In recognition of Baron's work, the Orioles Charitable Foundation will donate \$2,500 to Living Classrooms.</p>

**Table C. Change in Modes of Interaction**

**PERI-PANDEMIC: CANCELING OR SUSPENDING**

<p><b>FACILITY</b></p>	<p>2-17-2. From a Predators and Bridgestone Arena standpoint, things will be much quieter than normal. In addition to the pause in the NHL season, the Southeastern Conference Basketball Tournament has been cancelled, and two concerts - Pearl Jam and Zac Brown Band - have already been postponed, with more certain to follow.</p> <p>3-28-2. The Texas Rangers MLB Youth Academy at Mercy Street Sports Complex will suspend programming indefinitely effective immediately. The Rangers have notified the athletes and teams who play and train at the Academy's facilities that the team will closely monitor the situation and keep them apprised of developments. The decision was made due to an abundance of caution for the well-being of the youth athletes and their families.</p>
<p><b>COMMUNITY EVENTS</b></p>	<p>4-12-2. The 15th annual 'Green Bay Packers Tailgate Tour,' originally scheduled to travel to La Crosse, Madison and Milwaukee from May 15-17, has been canceled as part of the collective effort to prevent the spread of COVID-19.</p> <p>4-26-2. With the health and safety of our communities as a priority, and in accordance with guidance from local, state and federal authorities, the Eagles Autism Foundation has announced that the 3rd annual Eagles Autism Challenge presented by Lincoln Financial Group – originally scheduled for Saturday, May 16 – has been postponed.</p>
<p><b>COMMUNITY PROGRAMS</b></p>	<p>1-02-2. As the world continues to navigate the uncertainties around the COVID-19 pandemic, we have made the decision to cancel all Jr. Hawks Summer Camps for 2020.</p> <p>2-26-2. This also includes the suspension of Lightning Made community hockey programming through March 30. That includes the following: Ball Hockey - Lakewood Ranch, Equip the Thunder, Guide the Thunder, Heroes League, Learn to Play (LTP), Lightning Elite Development Program (EDP), Lightning High School Hockey League (LHSHL), Rookie League, Tampa Bay Lightning Girls Hockey, Tampa Bay Lightning Sled Hockey, All Lightning Made Training Center programming.</p>

**PERI-PANDEMIC: RECOGNITION OF COMMUNITY NEEDS**

<p><b>COMMUNICATION &amp; STATEMENT</b></p>	<p>2-21-2. We are fully supportive of the measures taken by the NHL to suspend operations during the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19). The health and safety of our community, fans, players and staff remain our top priority as this situation continues to develop. We are in touch with our event partners and taking the advice of public health authorities in regards to our other areas of operations with the highest priority on keeping our community safe. As more information becomes available, we will continue to communicate with the public about our operations and how the evolving situation may impact you.</p> <p>3-20-2. We are unwavering in our support of public health, and ensuring the safety of our community is our top priority. Following the City of Oakland and Alameda County’s announcement today prohibiting public gatherings of 1,000 people or more through the end of March, the Oakland A’s are working with Major League Baseball on alternative plans for our games that will be impacted at the Oakland Coliseum.</p>
<p><b>DIFFERENT METHODS - YOUTH EDUCATION</b></p>	<p>1-07-2. The Mavericks organization is also partnering with Mayor Eric Johnson and the City of Dallas by having Mavericks players share public service announcements, as well as with the Dallas Independent School District to feed families and support virtual learning for its students.</p> <p>3-16-2. With school children around the country homebound due to COVID-19, registration is open early for the Brewers Summer Slugger program, a free interactive online course that uses baseball to help children, ages 8-11, maintain their math and literacy skills away from the classroom. Developed to combat summer learning loss during vacation months, this digital tool is even more relevant for students now at home due to school closures.</p>
<p><b>DIFFERENT METHODS - YOUTH SPORT</b></p>	<p>1-08-2. Arkwright and his youth basketball team will be releasing drills and instructional videos that will be delivered on an on-demand platform for aspiring ballers who are interested in joining the Nuggets’ youth academy. It’s a tool much like what the Nuggets’ current players are using themselves to remain active during this period.</p> <p>4-27-2. Staying physically active is one of the most important things everyone can do while working from home and going to school virtually. And for Steelers players, that is definitely paramount. That is why Jordan Dangerfield and Terrell Edmunds spent time sharing the importance of exercise during a virtual gym class with students from the Urban Academy of Greater Pittsburgh.</p>
<p><b>INFORMATION &amp; RESOURCES – COVID-19</b></p>	<p>1-19-2. As our team navigates the evolving public health pandemic situation, we will provide updates to our fans, ticketholders and team partners as they become available. In an effort to keep our Pelicans family and New Orleans area community safe, here are seven tips to keep your immune system healthy as we fight COVID-19 courtesy of Ochsner.</p> <p>4-29-2. The Seahawks also recently launched Seahawks.com/WeGotThis as a community space for those affected by COVID-19. People can go there for links to important community resources, ways to help others during these difficult times, and activities for children at who are home and out of school.</p>

<p><b>INFORMATION &amp; RESOURCES – JOB OPPORTUNITY</b></p>	<p>1-19-2. The Pelicans and Lineage, which acquired New Orleans Cold Storage in January 2020, are also collaborating with ASM Global, the world’s leading venue management and services company and the operator of the Smoothie King Center on behalf of the State of Louisiana and LSED, to offer employment opportunities to displaced Smoothie King Center employees who are unable to work due to the suspension of the NBA season in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>3-25-2. The Mariners are creating opportunities for candidates of diverse backgrounds who are interested in careers in professional sports. Through the newly created Diversity Fellowship program, the Mariners commit to hiring at least two Diversity Fellows each year to work in areas such as communications, finance, legal, Information Technology and athletic training. In addition to professional experience, the Mariners will provide candidates with support and mentorship to foster their success.</p>
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**Table D. Change in Athlete Participation**

	<b>PRE-PANDEMIC</b>	<b>PERI-PANDEMIC</b>
<b>DONATING MONEY &amp; NON-CASH ITEMS</b>	<p>1-24-1. Phoenix Suns center and Nassau, Bahamas native Deandre Ayton pledged \$100,000 for Hurricane Dorian relief efforts.</p> <p>3-03-1. Current Orioles players RHP SHAWN ARMSTRONG and LHP PAUL FRY will visit Sarasota Middle School (4826 Ashton Rd, Sarasota, FL 34233) on Wednesday, February 19, from approximately 1:20 p.m. to 2:15 p.m. to participate in a physical education class as part of the Orioles Health &amp; Fitness Challenge.</p> <p>4-20-1. As part of the Miami Dolphins FOOTBALL UNITES™ program and NFL's Inspire Change platform, Dolphins players Sam Eguavoen, Terrill Hanks, Patrick Laird, Jonathan Ledbetter, Ken Webster, and Christian Wilkins, youth of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Miami and local law enforcement officers gathered to launch the Bigs in Blue program through fellowship on Tuesday, Sept. 24. The Bigs in Blue program will provide the 2019 Dolphins rookie class with the opportunity to participate in the community as mentors and foster new relationships with law enforcement and youth.</p>	<p>1-18-2. On Sunday, Timberwolves Center Karl-Anthony Towns announced he will be donating \$100,000 to Mayo Clinic which has begun rolling out a test to detect the virus that causes COVID-19.</p> <p>1-29-2. The Utah Jazz announced today that Rudy Gobert is donating more than \$500,000 to support both the employee relief fund at Vivint Smart Home Arena and COVID-related social services relief in Utah, Oklahoma City and within the French health care system.</p> <p>4-22-2. But last week, more than a dozen Patriots players were able to provide a little help -- and a little hope. Teammates banded together, pooling donations to buy grocery store gift cards to families in Boston so they were able to fill their refrigerators, cabinets and pantries. "This is a unique situation as far as what families are going through and what we're all going through. We know the kind of struggles families go through, mainly because we've all come from that type of background or we know someone from that type of background," Ja'Whaun Bentley, one of the 13 Patriots players to contribute, said.</p>
<b>CONNECTING LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS</b>	<p>1-24-1. Booker teamed up with ProCamps to host 360 kids for his second annual Devin Booker Basketball ProCamp this past weekend. The two-day camp featured fundamental skill stations, hands-on coaching with Booker and his staff, high-energy basketball contests and games for all skill levels.</p> <p>4-06-1. Each week during the football season and through a partnership with Youth Guidance, Chicago Bears players will visit Chicago Public Schools to speak to, motivate, and interact with students who are part of the B.A.M (Becoming a Man) and W.O.W. (Working on Womanhood) programs.</p>	<p>2-04-2. Eichel is teaming up with Bauer Hockey to purchase 5,000 PPE medical masks for hospital workers in Western New York. He announced the donation with a post on Twitter where he thanked medical professionals for their fight against COVID-19.</p> <p>4-19-2. Rams quarterback Jared Goff and offensive lineman Andrew Whitworth announced today that they will be teaming up with the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank to aid Angelenos in need by funding 2 million meals.</p>

<p><b>COLLABORATING WITH OTHER ATHLETES FOR FUNDRAISING EVENTS</b></p>	<p>2-24-1. Logan Couture - who would be named captain of the Sharks later that week - led a group of players, alumni, and broadcasters in organizing two fundraisers to collect money for the Gilroy Foundation, which assists those affected by the shooting. "If we can help people with their day-to-day life away from the game of hockey and put a smile on their face when they need it, then we're happy to do it," Couture said.</p>	<p>1-24-2. Given the unprecedented and constantly-evolving situation surrounding the effects of COVID-19 on our community and beyond, Devin Booker, in partnership with Phoenix Suns Charities, will raise money through livestreaming on Twitch to support non-profits that best serve the needs of the most vulnerable in the community.</p> <p>2-26-2. Captain Steven Stamkos announced the Lightning players are donating 500,000 meals to the Feeding Tampa Bay food pantry and funding part-time workers at Amalie Arena.</p> <p>4-08-2. Browns stars Denzel Ward and Myles Garrett on Saturday are scheduled to pick up their favorite controller and play video games as part of Twitch Stream Aid, an interactive fundraiser for COVID-19 relief.</p>
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**Table E. Use of Partnerships**

**PERI-PANDEMIC: TEAMS UTILIZING THEIR NETWORK**

<p><b>EXTENDING PARTNERSHIP</b></p>	<p>1-24-2. In basketball, it’s important to have trustworthy teammates that you can rely on when the going gets tough. The same can be said for life, especially during these challenging times we’re collectively experiencing today. The Phoenix Suns and Carl’s Jr., one of the organization’s most dependable partners, have teamed up to provide 2,000 meals to those in need throughout the Valley.</p> <p>2-11-2. One thing the COVID-19 pandemic is showing on a daily basis is how interconnected we all are and how everyone working together can help everyone get through this. Several companies who partner with the Detroit Red Wings are stepping up to help front-line workers in need.</p> <p>3-16-2. In partnership with MLB and the leading social impact education innovator, EVERFI, the Summer Slugger program focuses on critical math and literacy skills and teaches these concepts through a baseball-themed, gamified experience. Students earn points, unlock levels and receive progress-based rewards throughout the summer.</p>
<p><b>CREATING NEW PARTNERSHIP</b></p>	<p>3-17-2. With all Minnesota K-12 schools closed from yesterday through at least March 27, children across the state whose primary source of food is in the form of school meals will face a substantial increase in food insecurity. Based out of the Twin Cities, The Sheridan Story is a nonprofit that works to combat hunger by filling the gaps to food access that children face on the weekend and in summers – and now, every day as the state continues to combat the spread of COVID-19.</p> <p>4-19-2. The Los Angeles Rams recently teamed up with Buddy's Allstars to produce non-medical masks using donated Rams gear. The first 1,000 masks were delivered to Cedars-Sinai to support healthcare staff working outside of clinical areas.</p>
<p><b>CONNECTING - SPORT TEAMS</b></p>	<p>2-02-2. The Coyotes collaborated with the Cardinals, Arizona Diamondbacks, Suns and Phoenix Mercury on "All of us. All together," a video thanking area medical professionals and grocery store workers going above and beyond.</p> <p>4-28-2. The San Francisco 49ers are partnering with teams and organizations across the Bay Area to provide the local community with necessary resources and face coverings in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The 49ers, in partnership with San Francisco Giants, Oakland A's, Golden State Warriors, Sacramento Kings, San Jose Sharks and San Jose Earthquakes are working with NBC Sports Bay Area, along with the teams' apparel and merchandise partner Fanatics, NBC Sports California and San Francisco-based bag manufacturer Timbuk2 to donate 50,000 face masks and bandanas to Bay Area Community Services.</p>
<p><b>CONNECTING – GOVERNMENT</b></p>	<p>3-06-2. Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot today announced a groundbreaking campaign, “We Are Not Playing,” in partnership with Chicago’s professional sports teams to combat the spread of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Each of Chicago’s hometown professional sports teams - including the Chicago Bears, Blackhawks, Bulls, Cubs, Fire, Red Stars, Sky, White Sox – has signed on to the initiative, which leverages the influence of sports teams and their players to drive compliance with the statewide Stay at Home order, directing residents to keep themselves and their neighbors safe from the spread of COVID-19 by staying home.</p>

4-06-2. "In order to be there for our friends, families and neighbors in this unprecedented time it takes all of us coming together as one," said Sean Garrett, President and CEO of United Way of Metro Chicago. "We're proud to join forces with The Chicago Community Trust, the City of Chicago and the Chicago Bears to ensure that we can support our neighbors in need."

**CONNECTING –  
FINANCIAL  
INSTITUTION**

1-05-2. The Chicago Bulls teamed up with BMO Harris Bank to upcycle surplus Bulls apparel into 10,000 face coverings to be donated to community partners.

3-27-2. The Tampa Bay Rays and Suncoast Credit Union have launched the 13th season of Reading with the Rays—Read Your Way to the Ballpark, an incentive-based reading program that encourages Pre-K to 12th grade students to read for 24 hours to avoid summer learning loss. Typically a summer-based program, this year's program launches early for kids at home participating in distance learning due to the COVID-19 crisis.

**Table F. Summary of the Findings from Study 1 and Study 2**

**Study 1 Findings**

- Maintaining and expanding focus areas
- Expanding investment
    - Food insecurity: funding opportunities for nonprofits, monetary donations, local campaigns
  - Increasing activities
    - Mental & physical health: workout series, recognizing nonprofits' efforts to improve mental health
    - Local and small businesses: small business assist program
  - Connecting local organizations
    - Connecting with other organizations with same focus (food insecurity, youth, health, homelessness)

Acknowledging community members' contributions

- Recognizing those in need of help
  - Gameday/part-time staff, local business owners, homelessness
- Acknowledging those who contribute
  - Healthcare employees, caregivers, first responders
  - Team owners and executives: personal donations
  - Community members: volunteerism

New modes of interaction to meet community needs

- Using online platforms (e.g., virtual youth programs)
- Providing information and resources (e.g., virtual resource center, job opportunities)

Changes in individual athletes' participation

- Increasing personal donations
  - Monetary or gift-in-kind donations: mostly focused on nonprofits providing meals to vulnerable population
- Connecting local organizations (e.g., local restaurants)
  - Acted as bridge between local families and local organizations
- Collaborating with other athletes
  - Fundraising events with colleagues across teams and leagues

Building partnerships

- Extending partnerships with existing partners
  - Food insecurity and youth education: collaborated with partners to extend the quality of their services
- Creating new partnerships
  - Fundraising events, PPE donations, virtual programs
- Increasing connections with local organizations
  - Governmental bodies (e.g., state fundraising events, mayor's relief fund)
  - Financial institutions (e.g., local banks, insurance companies)
  - Teams in different leagues

**Study 2 Findings**

Support for specific focus areas: food, youth, and health

- Difference in the way red and blue states teams interacted with local stakeholders to broaden the reach of target beneficiaries
- Food insecurity
  - Red: supporting local and small business in food industry
  - Blue: targeting vulnerable population (e.g., homelessness)
- Youth sport and education
  - Red: focusing on teams' own youth programs and events, in virtual forms
  - Blue: increasing financial support for nonprofits offering youth programs
- Health and wellness
  - Red: supporting frontline workers (e.g., healthcare industry)
  - Blue: promoting blood donations

Community engagement through extending partnerships

- Partnerships based on focus areas
  - Red: more partnerships with financial institutions and insurance companies
  - Blue: more partnerships with nonprofits
- Partnerships with sport organizations within the same geographic boundary
  - Blue: relatively more active in forming partnerships with other sport organizations sharing the same geographic location
- Relationship with governing states
  - Blue: relatively more committed to government-led community engagement initiatives (e.g., state Covid-19 relief funds)

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