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# SPORTS INFORMATION AND SPORTS MEDIA IN HIGH SCHOOLS

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SPORTS INFORMATION AND SPORTS MEDIA IN HIGH SCHOOLS

A Creative Project Submitted to the  
Office of Graduate Studies  
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By  
Meredith R Shaul  
2015

## **Introduction**

Sports information is a growing field. This is especially true because we live in a society that thrives on technology which is constantly evolving. People, and more specifically, sports fans want quick access to information about their favorite teams. Sports are a huge part of American life (Pons, Murali, & Nyeck 2006; Scholl & Carlson, 2011). Sports fans want to be able to access information about their favorite players and sports teams in the blink of an eye. This includes statistics, rosters, stories, videos, and more. Thanks to sports information directors (SIDS) and College Athletics Communicators (CACs) working for collegiate athletics teams, this quick access has become a reality (Stoldt & Vermillion, 2013). This type of access and information enables fans to feel like they have an inside advantage when it comes to knowing the latest information about their favorite teams and athletes. (Hipke & Hachtmann, 2014; Whiteside, Hardin, & Ash, 2011). The use of social media and sports information tactics allows fans to feel like they are co-creating value and building relationships with their favorite sports teams. This type of relationship and interaction builds culture and brand for colleges and universities (Hipke & Hachtmann, 2014).

Athletics are important to colleges and universities but, in some ways, they may be even more important to high schools. For instance, while most high school athletes do not go on to participate in collegiate athletics, the number of student athletes in American high schools continues to grow. Further, participation in athletics continues to boast a number of benefits according to the National Federation of State High School Association article “The Case for High School Activities” (NFSHA, 2008). Therefore, it seems that sports information could be used to create even more value and build even stronger brands and community at the high school level.

Before delving into how sports information may be of value to high schools and their athletic departments, it is important to briefly review its history and take a look at where it all started. CoSIDA (College Sports Information Director's Association) was founded in 1957 and is comprised of over 3,000 members from all three NCAA division schools. CoSIDA considers themselves an active partner with public relations departments at the collegiate level. In fact, they have two primary goals, one of which is to "assist communications and public relations professionals at collegiate levels" (CoSIDA). Their second goal is to "play a significant leadership and resource role within the overall collegiate athletics enterprise" (CoSIDA). Today, CoSIDA is a huge organization that does a lot of work for the collegiate athletics community. This includes determining All-American sports performers, working with athletes on continuing education programs, holding conventions on sport related topics, and helping fund awards and scholarships. This is just a short list of the things the organization does. One resource that CoSIDA offers is many suggestions of best practices for having strong sports information and athletics communication. Many of the colleges and universities that will be highlighted in the literature review follow CoSIDA best practices for their social media and sports information.

In order to best showcase the value of having sports information programs in high schools, it is necessary to review the relevant literature surrounding the benefits and best practices of sports information and sports media in collegiate athletic programs. Specifically, the literature review will highlight the importance of social media and sports information in creating a brand and increasing a sense of community across college campuses. In addition, the literature will detail the most popular and widely used social media outlets among successful collegiate sports programs to show the impact strong branding can have in creating social capital. Next, the review will examine the importance of athletics within high schools across the United States

taking a look at the academic and other benefits associated with participation. Lastly the literature will emphasize that having sports information and strong social media practices in place can complement the academic and administrative aspects of school life. This literature lends to the project portion of this paper which utilizes that information and best practices to structure a basic social media and sports information plan that could be used in high school athletics programs. Finally, the paper will conclude by reviewing the importance of implementing social media and sports information in high school athletics while emphasizing that this plan is merely a strategy for implementing the beginning stages. As stated before, sports information is a growing field and for high schools specifically, it is just beginning.

## **Literature Review**

### **College Athletics and Sports Information Practices**

Sports and athletics are a huge part of American life, especially collegiate athletics. While many people enjoy watching professional leagues such as the NFL or NBA, many others enjoy watching collegiate sports, some perhaps even more than professional league. This can be for many reasons, but for one, a lot of spectators may feel loyalty to their local university team or the sports team from the university they used to attend (Lee, Miloch, Kraft, & Tatum, 2008). As a result of their popularity, schools and their athletic departments are constantly trying to keep up with the wants and needs of their fan base. In addition, they need to be able to keep up with what other schools are doing. Sports information plays a large role in helping universities keep up with the times and keep fans, families, alumni, and students engaged (Wallace, Wilson, & Miloch, 2011). This section showcases the many benefits and opportunities that social media and sports information can offer a college or university. Specifically it explores the powerful brand and community building that can be achieved with social media and sports information. It highlights

the most popular forms of social media used nationally including Facebook and Twitter which have been successfully used by many sports teams to engage and communicate with fans. Lastly, this section will also present some specific collegiate sports teams and their use of sports information that will help serve as an example for this sports information plan and how it could be of value to high school athletic programs.

First, it is important to demonstrate that sports information can offer a school strong branding and community opportunities. Branding refers to anything an organization uses to give themselves a unique identity (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2000). This could include their name, logo, design, or more. In order to create a strong brand, an entity or organization needs to offer some type of competitive advantage (Wallace et al., 2011). In other words, they need to stand out against competition. Colleges and universities are constantly looking for a competitive advantage in terms of exposure (Lee, Miloch, Kraft, & Tatum, 2008). They want to know how they can be different or more exciting than another school or program. Research by Lee et al. (2008) suggests that athletics and strong sports programs can facilitate strong connections among current students, fans, alumni, the community, etc. The article states “successful athletic programs can facilitate widespread institutional brand identification (p.178).” Therefore, successful sports are not only important to the athletic department, but to the school as a whole, and even the outside community.

In terms of community, colleges and universities can use their athletics and sports teams to build a stronger brand and sense of belonging. For instance, many athletic department mission statements have community involvement as one of their main goals (Warner & Dixon, 2011). One of the examples of a mission statement they discuss is Duke University, “Athletics also plays an important role in creating a sense of community in the University,” and later concludes

by saying: “The mission of the athletic department is ultimately the mission of Duke itself ‘to engage the mind, to elevate the spirit, and stimulate the best effort of all who are associated with the University.’” The department is not only trying to engage their athletes, but also the entire school community by further emphasizing that Duke athletics are merely an extension of the university as a whole (“Duke University Blue Devils”).

In addition, research is finding that people want to be involved in this type of community. Specifically, people are more open to and engaged in “relationship marketing.” In essence, this means that people want to be involved with brands that they identify with. For colleges and universities, this means students and fans want to be a part of the overall athletics experience whether they are an athlete or not. Audiences expect to be able to build relationships and interact with their favorite brands (Tapscott, 2009). One way that athletic departments are able to do this is by utilizing social media. While there are a variety of social media tools and apps available, two of the most popular are Facebook and Twitter.

Wallace et al. (2011) conducted a study which examined the use of Facebook by Big 12 sports teams to build their brand. This study discusses the particular importance of Facebook and notes that Facebook and Twitter are two of the most important social media channels when dealing in sport because they offer two- way communication with fans. Facebook does not face character limits the same way Twitter does, thus making communication easier. Their findings indicated that using a variety of communication techniques and content keeps audiences interested and engaged. For instance, posting photos with sport content as a caption or posting game updates are two examples of varying content that might be on a Facebook page. In addition, they found that Facebook increased their brand exposure and worked to cultivate long

term relationships. If people feel like they are getting value from the page, they will keep coming back.

While Facebook is one channel for two-way social media communication, Twitter is another that is growing more popular. A study by Witkemper, Lim, & Waldburger (2012) suggests that Twitter is used by most, if not all, professional sports teams within the United States. Further, like Wallace's article, he suggests that Twitter helps bring about brand awareness and identity to fans. Witkemper et al. conducts a study that seeks to find the primary motivations for fans to follow athlete's Twitter pages. Findings indicate that generally fans have four reasons for following their favorite athletes on Twitter: to gain information about them, for entertainment purposes, to enhance their sport experience, and to pass time. Twitter is a quick and easy way to gain information, as well as an easy form of two-way communication which makes it interesting and engaging to fans. Further, by being able to engage in communication with their favorite athletes or teams, they are enhancing their experience.

It may be hard to imagine that social media contributes to building community, but its ability to provide a quick and easy communication channel makes it possible. For example, when examining sports information and social media, a study by Whiteside, Hardin & Ash (2011) found that having this type of social media information, and even interaction, available about collegiate sports teams fostered a stronger sense of community. The key is that the information is interactive. An example of this may be an athletic department retweeting a Twitter message posted by a collegiate fan discussing the upcoming football game. This interactive social media is emphasized in another study focusing on Big Ten schools and their athletic departments. Specifically, their research found that having social media and strong sports information allowed for "two-way communication" (Hipke & Hachtmann, 2014; Wallace, et al., 2011). This study

interviewed athletic directors and sports information personnel in Big Ten athletic departments. Their findings indicated that 89% of those interviewed said social media use changed how they were interacting with external entities such as alumni, fans, families, etc. (Hipke & Hachtmann, 2014). In this sense, social media use is offering athletic departments and programs a means of communication that they did not have before. Instead of emails or letters, fans can get on the internet and post an interaction immediately and expect a quick response.

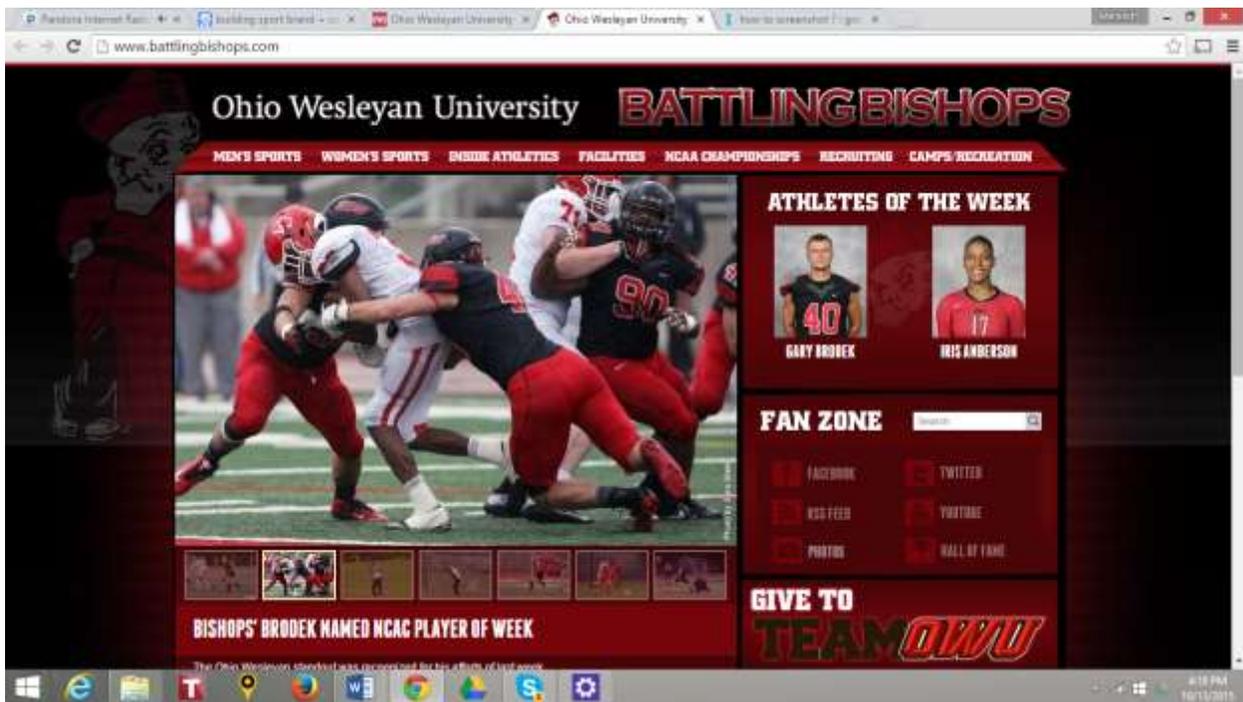
Amy Martin, a marketing executive and social media consultant who works closely with athletes and athletic teams emphasizes the importance of social media use. Like Hipke & Hachtmann (2014), Martin understands the importance of two-way communication. In fact, in an interview she says “fans are beginning to expect their favorite teams and athletes to communicate via these channels” (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010). In this sense, teams/athletes are working hand in hand with fans, etc. to build their brand. One piece of advice that Martin gives when working on building a brand is to, again, remember that this type of social media use is a form of two-way communication. “To build these relationships, you have to constantly be listening to your audience.” Further, she suggests that when building a brand on social media, athletes and teams often experiment to see what does and does not work with their fans. She suggests that a team or athlete’s personality will begin to “shine through” over time (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010). This means not merely posting on social media, but also responding to fans and the audience. Together, the fans and teams are shaping the brand or “personality.”

Second, good sports information directing involves the use of many tools and resources including social media and athletics web page capabilities. Facebook, Twitter and social media platforms are not the only form of sports information communication. However, social media is the main resource that athletic departments are using as technology evolves. Research conducted

by Stoldt (2012) looked at the impact of social media in athletic communication. A survey was sent to CoSIDA members asking the benefits of social media. One athletic director was quoted saying “social media have significantly impacted how athletics programs communicate.” They further went on to say that this communication is both internal and external in that it reached the college community itself, but also family members, alumni, and fans in general. The question is, what type of social media resources are the majority of colleges and universities using.

Research conducted by Davis, Deil-Amen, Rios-Aguilar, and Gonzales Canche (2012) examined the use of social media in higher education in general and found that Facebook and Twitter seemed to be the most used and most popular. While these social media channels may be two of the most obvious, others include online streaming sites as well as the college or university’s individual team sports pages (Scholl & Carlson, 2011; Whiteside, Ardin, & Ash, 2011). Each of these resources has something to offer fans. As stated above, the social media networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook allow for two- way interaction and brand co-creation (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010; Hipke & Hachtmann, 2014). This type of social media also offers internal and external entities the immediacy that they are looking for (Hipke & Hachtmann, 2014). In today’s society people expect information fast. Social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter allow for that type of quick, click-of-a-button communication. The other types of resources such as live streaming and the team web site offer insider information and access. For instance, one article discusses the need for college athletic teams to promote their visibility within the media (Whiteside et al. 2011). They suggest the use of press releases, player and team interviews, access to game programs, etc. If people have access to this type of visibility, they get to know the players and the teams. Once again, fans are becoming part of the process.

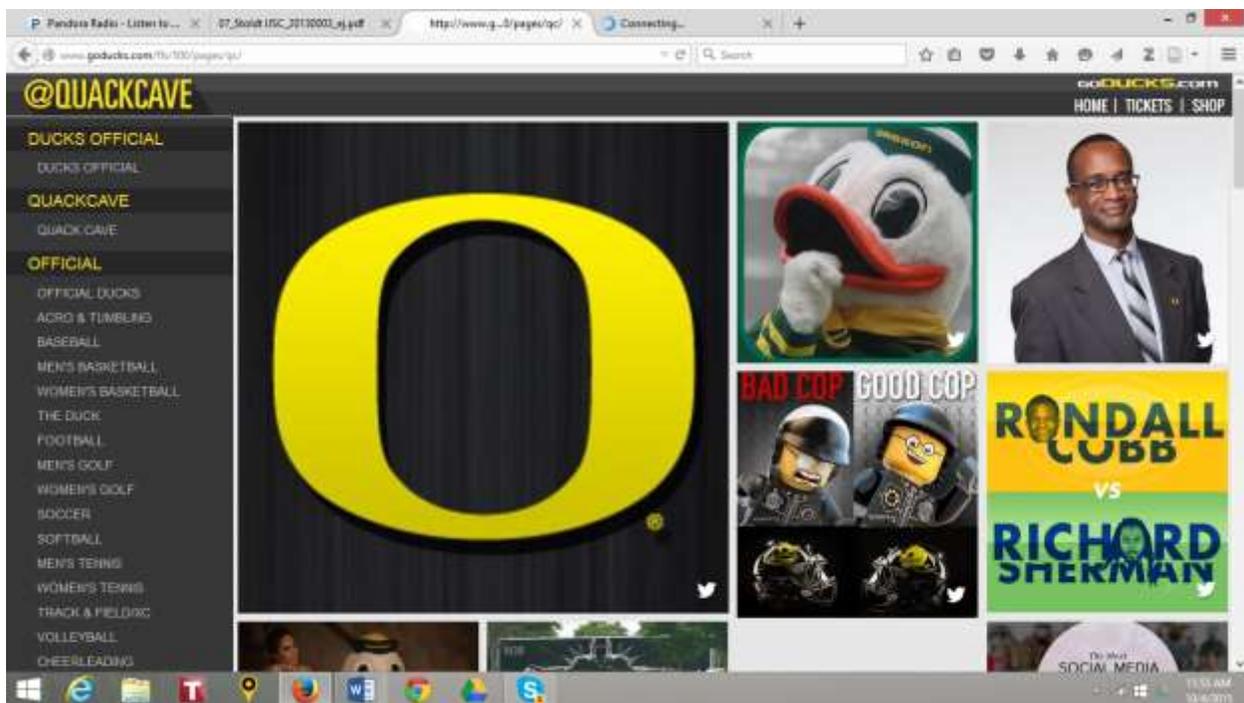
Third, In order to best understand the use of these various tools and resources, it is important to take a look at some specific collegiate sports and professional teams that have implemented strong sports information practices. Today, when you go on to a college or universities website you can find a tab for “Athletics” that will link you to a separate website. These sites will have pages for all teams with rosters, statistics, schedules, and more. For example, below is the athletic department page for Ohio Wesleyan University. In the background you can see their mascot, the battling bishop. The first thing that appears are sports headlines. They have separate pages for all sports teams, as well as other information including links to all their other social media platforms. On the whole, this is the general layout of most collegiate athletic pages. However, some larger schools have gone above and beyond.



(Pictured above: Ohio Wesleyan University athletics web page)

One example of a premium quality athletic web page would be the University of Oregon and their fan website referred to as the “Quack Cave” (Stoldt & Vermillion, 2013). Jude (2012)

cited the “Quack Cave” as being the “first digital media hub in college athletics.” On this web site, students are enabled to have interactions and conversations about happenings in the Oregon sports world. Jude interviews Andy McNamara, who manages the social media in the Oregon athletic department, about the idea behind the “Quack Cave”. McNamara stated that Oregon was looking for a way to better interact with their fans. He says the Quack Cave gives fans an experience that is both personal and unique. This is Oregon’s competitive advantage. The Quack Cave essentially puts all possible forms of social media/interaction in one place. For instance, there are links to Twitter pages, the team store, ESPN and more. This web page is extremely user friendly and comprehensive.



(Pictured above: The University of Oregon official athletic website)

It is important to note that not all college and universities are big schools with huge athletic departments like the examples above. However, strong athletic departments and strategies can still play a large role in shaping the brand and community of the school. One main

difference may be that a lot of smaller, Division II or III, schools focus more on education and like to keep some form of separation between athletics and education. However, athletics still play a crucial role. For instance, research by Richards and Aries (1999) surveyed student athletes and non-athletes and found that while athletes had to commit time to their athletics they had grade point averages equally as high as their non-athlete counterparts. In addition, they were equally as involved in other activities and experienced the same levels of reported growth and satisfaction during college. These findings indicate that student athletes were just as integrated within their school system as non-athletes. Previous research has indicated that athletes at bigger schools with a larger focus on athletics see themselves as a separate entity and are not as well connected with the rest of the school (Prentice, 1997).

The research above, which highlights the importance of athletics in smaller schools, leads into the importance and possible success of strong social media and sports information in high school programs. Most high school programs are not likely to rely as heavily on their sports programs as Division I collegiate programs are. For one, high school sporting events are not used to generate revenue in the same way that collegiate sporting events are. Therefore, they cannot use any of that revenue to build a huge social media platform. However, when it comes to branding and building a sense of community, athletics still play a very important role. This is especially true considering the number of high school students who participate in athletics. As high school athletics continue to be on the rise, social media and sports information may only help them.

### **High School Athletics**

While there is not a lot of attention given to high school athletics in terms of sports fans and engagement, high school sports are largely considered a way of American life (Kniffen,

Wansink, & Shimizu, 2015). Further, The National Federation of State High School Associations boasts that athletic involvement encourages self-confidence, self-discipline and skill development (“The Case for High School Activities,” 2008). Communities across America gather week after week to watch their hometown sports teams. Some of these people are fans, some are parents, some are other students, and even some are community members and alumni. In fact, a lot of research has shown that sport participation is a way of building social capital. Social capital, as defined by Robert Putnam are “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam, 1995, p. 2). Further, Putnam suggests that building this social capital helps us build stronger institutions. For schools, this could mean both stronger academic as well as athletic institutions.

Another study by Fritch (1999) also suggests that high school athletics are a way for people to form social capital. In essence, people like to get together and watch sports to build relationships as a part of this capital. Even if we cannot engage in these activities together, our shared value of a given sport or team is part of that social capital (Lin, 1999). This social capital is certainly not limited to professional or collegiate athletics. In fact, it can start as young as kindergarten or when sporting events for children begin. For instance, parents gather and coordinate snack schedules for events which is in turn creating social capital. A similar study which echoes findings by Fritch was conducted by Thomas Perks (2007). His research calls on the ideas and conceptualization of Putnam and found that sport involvement from a young age helps build social capital and encourages people to become involved in more activities. For high schools this could mean stronger connections made in sport that permeate other parts of the school and other types of involvement. As involvement in high school sports grows it is

important to examine how this type of sport involvement can benefit, not only the athletes, but the rest of the school and its community.

### **Growth of Sport Involvement and Participation**

First, sport involvement and activity has become increasingly popular over recent years. The National Federation of State High School Associations, found that participation in sport grew from approximately 3.9 million in 1971 to 7.8 million in 2013 (NFSHA; Kniffin et al., 2015). Involvement keeps growing and it does not appear to show any sign of slowing down. In addition, athletic involvement in schools is inclusive. For instance, research by Yeung (2002) showed that 55% of sophomore males and 42.5 % of sophomore females participated in high school athletics. Further, students of all races and backgrounds are represented in high school athletics. In addition, his research discusses how both private and public schools had increasing numbers in athletic participation. These growing numbers are encouraged by research that suggests there are a number of benefits to athletic participation in high school.

However, it is important to note that while both males and females, as well as people of all races, are participating in school sports those numbers are not necessarily equal. For instance, one study by Fejgin (1994) examined school sport participation and found that participation was not equal among gender or socioeconomic groups. Specifically, their research found that males of a higher socioeconomic status were most likely to participate in school athletics. Having sport participation that is one-sided does not help promote community or build social capital. Therefore, it may be even more important for academic administration and athletic departments to come together to encourage participation among all students. The support of the administration and athletic department could really help build social capital and strengthen the

school as a whole. This is one way the athletic and academic departments in schools could work together to complement one another.

### **Athletics Impact on Academics and Well Being**

There is a large body of research which demonstrates the benefits of athletic participation on academic and scholastic achievement. In addition, there is a lot of research that also examines the other benefits of participating in high school athletics as well. First, in terms of academics, research by Hartmann (2008) suggests that there is a significant positive correlation between sport participation and academic achievement. His research also demonstrates that on average athletes perform better academically than their peers who do not participate in sport. Research by Fegjin (1994) had similar findings when examining whether competitive sport participation contributed to academic goals. He found that participating in sports in high school contributed to higher grades and better educational aspirations. Further, research even suggests that not only do students involved in sports perform better academically, but that they may enjoy academics more than students who do not participate in athletics (Harrison & Narayan, 2003).

While there is a wealth of research suggesting the academic benefit to participating in high school sports, there is also an abundance of research suggesting a wide range of other unique benefits. A number of these benefits include factors that contribute to positive mental health. For instance, one study found that students chose to get involved or stay involved with sports because they found friendships, enjoyed feeling competitive, and had a sense of positive reinforcement when doing well (Garcia, 2014). Similarly, research by Eide & Ronan (2001) found that students involved in athletics not only had better grades but also had a better self-concept, more career aspirations, as well as less disciplinary problems. Similar findings surrounding a positive impact on self-concept and career aspirations were found by Fejgin's

study (1994). Research by Harrison and Narayan (2003) echoed Fejgin's findings, but also found that student's participating in athletics were less likely to express feelings of sadness and anxiety, and they were also less likely to be suicidal.

Not only are there immediate benefits to high school participation in sport, but also long term benefits as well. For instance, one study by Greenleaf, Boyer, & Petrie (2009) examined whether college aged women still experienced physical as well as psychological well-being after high school. Findings indicated that there were both immediate and long term benefits from participation in high school sport. Specifically, the learned behaviors such as sport competency and importance of physical fitness led to higher levels of physical activity in college. In turn, these women had a better psychological well-being and felt better about their bodies. Another study examined academic achievement after participation in high school sports. Troutman and Dufur (2007) studied female academic achievement at the collegiate level after participating in high school sports. Their findings suggest that females who participated in sports in high school were more likely to graduate college than females who did not.

There are also long term benefits supporting social engagement and community involvement. For instance, research mentioned above by Thomas Perks (2007) on social capital, indicated that sport participation increased the likelihood of strong relationships and community involvement later in life and as kids grew older. In essence, the social capital that kids built in high school, or even before, when participating in athletics helped them build stronger relationships and community connections later on. In the same way that sport participation encourages social interaction and community involvement, it can also tie the athletes closer to the school environment and even the community as a whole.

## School Involvement

Participation in school athletics can lead to a stronger connection to the school itself. For instance, an article by Ishee and Lee (2004) discusses how students that are involved in their school athletic programs feel a stronger sense of identification with their school. Further, they support the values that are put forth by their school. This sentiment is echoed by additional research conducted by Veliz and Shakib (2012). Their research wanted to explore whether participation in sport lowered the likelihood of violence and delinquency in schools. Their findings were supported by social control theory and suggested that students who participated in athletics felt a stronger connection and bond with their school, and therefore, were less likely to act out. Veliz and Shakib's (2012) research also examines the effect sports programs have on the school as a whole. The better the sports program, and the more involvement, the less trouble was experienced from students in school. These studies show why it is important that schools strongly support their athletic programs because the two can go hand in hand and complement each other.

Despite the many benefits that have been researched in regard to athletics in high school, some schools do not support their athletic programs because they do not see the benefits. There are both sides to this argument. For instance, one article by Smith (1994) suggests that while some schools may want to get "back to the basics" and focus on academics rather than athletics, it could be hindering them. He argues that schools could reach their goals by supporting athletics, but many schools are putting it on the back burner. One article which discusses getting back to the basics was featured in *The Atlantic* titled "The Case Against High School Sports." Amanda Ripley argues that sports were implemented in a time when America was ahead of the rest of the world in academics, but they now have become a distraction and we have fallen

behind (2013). In a rebuttal publication within *The Atlantic*, titled “High-School Sports Aren’t Killing Academics” Daniel Bowen discusses how the distraction and lack of American academic progress is not about sports at all. Further, he ties in the idea of social capital and how it is a predictor of academic success. Bowen agrees with Smith’s notion and suggests that if schools administrators were more involved, it could only help students and encourage stronger commitment and higher academic achievement (Bowen, 2013).

The question becomes how athletic departments and schools can get administrators on the same page. Time and attention from faculty and other administrators can have a large impact on student athletes. For instance, in an article written by Allen Yancey (2007) on getting school administrators more involved in their student’s athletic participation, he answers the question: “why do we want to do this?” His answer is that not only does involvement from teachers and administrators help support student athletes, but it also has benefit for the school. Specifically, he discusses how often times students may not have a lot of support from their family members. In this situation, seeing their teachers and administrators come out to games, races or matches can make a big difference. Further, Yancey argues that students will respond positively to this time and attention by performing better in school. Yancey’s ideas are supported by research conducted by Garcia (2015) which examined why students participated in high school athletics. Her findings indicated that athletes remained participants because of the friendships they made, the competitive nature of the sport, and also because of the drive of the fans. Garcia makes note that schools would be wise to work on building community surrounding sports teams. She suggests that having fans and administrative support reinforces positive behavior and in turn helps both the athlete and the school.

An article written by Hough (2014) in *The Capital* newspaper about new athletic director Clayton Culp further echoes this sentiment expressed by Yancey. Culp was a student athlete himself who grew up to be a teacher, coach and athletic director. In the paper he discusses the importance of academics and athletics as a partnership. He discusses the way coaches teach outside the classroom and how academics and athletics can complement one another. Coaches and teachers need to work hand in hand to mentor student athletes. One way that athletic departments may be able to try and foster this type of environment is through the use of social media and strong sports information. Having this information readily available to students, and staff helps create a social capital which fosters an environment where athletics and academics can complement one another.

### **Social Media and High School Education and Athletics**

This section will lead into the current project by exploring the way school athletic departments are effectively using social media and other forms of technology to enhance their sports information. In today's society it is commonplace for high schools to use social media and other measures to communicate with their students (Wang, 2013). This is true for all academic departments as well as athletic departments. However, there appears to be little to no research surrounding social media and sports information in high schools. Therefore, this section will primarily explore the use of social media in high schools and how it is evolving.

Since technology is on the rise and ever changing, it is not surprising that many schools and their varying departments have some reservations when it comes to using social media. For instance, they may wonder what is and is not appropriate when it comes to posting. The use of social media may require a set of policies and procedures that schools have never used before. One article by Wang (2013) takes a closer look at both the benefits and drawbacks that schools

may see when deciding whether to take on social media. Specifically, she notes that the use of social media can make things easier and draw families and communities closer. However, she also acknowledges that schools may have some anxiety about drawing lines and making sure to do things correctly. Within her research Wang calls on the theory of social capital as discussed earlier. She cites Lin (1999) and quotes her saying that social capital can be defined as ‘resources embedded in social structure which are accessed and or/mobilized in purposive actions (p.6).’ In this case, social media resources are a part of this social capital. This is an important point because in the past social capital may not have been seen as involving social media at all. However, Wang notes that social media and its resources are all about two-way communication and making connections (2013). Wang’s research challenged readers to develop an understanding of how social media can be used to enhance social capital.

### **Best Practices in Social Media**

In terms implementing social media, CoSIDA has published several articles regarding best practices when using social media. In one of their publications they discuss the summary of results from a two part survey entitled “*CoSIDA Social Media Survey Results & Analysis.*” In part one of their survey they call on athletic departments and social media administrators and ask which social media channels they are using. The results show that the top four types of social media used for their sports information are Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, and Instagram. Twitter was selected as being the most important. The survey went on to ask what athletic departments had as their goals when engaging in social media. 83.65% of respondents said they had a goal to increase the reach of their fans through postings. 73.47% said they had a goal to increase loyalty and engagement to their team or school. 63.78% said one of their goals was to increase

attendance at sporting events. Overall, the goals and objectives focused on awareness and getting fans excited and involved.

Part II of the survey focused more on how athletic departments can use social media as a part of their everyday communication. One problem that the survey addressed was the fact that many schools (36%) did not have a strategy at all when it came to social media and other sports information posting. The article emphasized the importance of incorporating a strategy which included setting some type of measureable goals. Examples of this might include tracking Twitter followers or Facebook engagement. In addition, the article reinforces the importance of having policies and procedures in place for how to implement social media and what to do when something goes wrong. This is especially important if there are students that might be doing any posting (CoSIDA).

From the limited amount of research, it is clear that schools that have social media incorporated into their athletic departments rely heavily and benefit from working with their students. One of the only available examples of a high school with a specific sports information department is Saint Ignatius High School located in Cleveland, Ohio. This athletic department is student run with faculty advisors. Their website describes their “Student Sports Information Department” as a “team of students that follow all Saint Ignatius sports teams at all levels of play. These students update the school website, write recaps of games and matches, and keep you continuously updated” (McCormick, 2015). A similar example of athletic department’s utilizing students as a part of their staff is Gilmour Academy located in Gates Mills, Ohio.

In an article posted on *Ed Social Media* the Gilmour Academy assistant director of athletics discusses how schools can use their own student athletes to promote their social media (Waldrich, 2015). In the article Jeff Waldrich discusses many positives to including students in

the process. Some of the benefits include the student feeling like they are “part of the process,” athletes being able to add knowledge about technology and make things “cool,” getting to know the student athletes, and the students are more likely to promote media that they helped produce. Gilmour uses a variety of social media outlets to promote their athletics. This includes, but is not limited to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube and even their own app exclusive to their student athletes (see photo below). Each of these platforms is used in a variety of ways. Some of the unique ways Gilmour uses social media includes promotional videos for sporting events, interviews with different student athletes, Instagram photo contests, and student takeover on Instagram. Waldrich emphasizes that this type of social media use and promotion is similar to a lot of collegiate athletic programs. He discusses how their athletic department likes to give their student athletes collegiate type treatment even though most of them will not compete after high school athletics. Overall, he believes this makes their athletes feel special and more pride and connection with their school (Waldrich, 2015). This is an essential piece to getting a social media and sports information plan moving.



## **Project**

This project will analyze a hypothetical school's athletic department based in-part off of a local area private school. This private school was chosen simply based on personal knowledge of the program and its potential budget. However, this project can certainly be adapted to any school public or private. For the purpose of this project, the school will be referred to as simply PS (Prep School). In order to better understand the context of the current sports information/sport social media within the school's athletic department it is important to conduct a public relations analysis. This analysis will call on the literature review in developing the right techniques to implement the plan. This includes choosing the right types of social media and engagement techniques.

This analysis follows guidelines as presented in "Strategic Planning for Public Relations" (Smith, 2013). The analysis will begin with an examination of the schools internal and external environment and then delve into their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats when it comes to the school's current athletic department and use of sports information. Once the background has been established, goals and objectives will be set for the social media/ sports information strategy itself. The plan will begin with a situational and SWOT analysis to analyze how they compare to local schools in terms of sports information. In addition this indicates where PS stands in terms of resources and advantages as well as where they might have room to improve. Once the objectives and goals are set, the decisions regarding how to implement them will be supported by the relevant literature. The plan will include tools and resources used, a timeline for implementation, and a budget. The plan will conclude by discussing analytics and measurements that would be used to assess the effectiveness of the plan. A public relations plan

was chosen because as Smith says, it's no longer effective just knowing how to do something but rather we need to know "what to do, and why, and how to evaluate" (Smith, 2013 p.1).

### **Public Relations Analysis**

Conducting a situation analysis was imperative for this plan as part of the "formative research" stage because it allows for the gathering of information both internally and externally (Smith, 2013). Specifically, it begins with a brief overview of the school's situation, in this case, involving sports information. Obstacles and opportunities are identified as a way to analyze both strengths and weaknesses in the organization in terms of the specific need surrounding athletics. Therefore, the opportunities and obstacles are specifically surrounding sports information. The SWOT analysis looks at the organization on a larger scale making it easier to identify resources and tools that can be used to assist the plan. The examination of internal and external environment is a more in depth description of the opportunities and threats described in the SWOT. An analysis of the internal environment looks at the internal performance and structure, in this case, of the school and athletic department (p. 43). On the other hand the external environment looks at competitors or other external road blocks (p.47). Once this research and examination concludes goals and objectives can be formed to help reach the desired outcome. After goals are set a timeline is put into place with tactics as to how to achieve them. Finally, all goals and tactics are followed with measurements to determine their success or effectiveness (Smith, 2013).

**Situation Analysis:** PS is a school with strong academic achievement and little emphasis on athletics. However, popularity in athletics within the school is increasing and athletes would like to see their sports as a bigger part of the school. PS has an opportunity to capitalize on this, specifically by increasing their development in sports information. They can likely achieve this

by promoting their sports through popular social media channels and enhancing their current web page.

### **Opportunities**

- *Opportunity 1:* Make athletics a stronger part of PS life and allow it to complement the school and its overall mission.
- *Opportunity 2:* Engage players, faculty, and fans using new sports information techniques
- *Opportunity 3:* Allow students to assist in the development of a sports information/ social media plan

### **Obstacles**

- *Obstacle 1:* There is not a lot of experience within the athletic department surrounding sports information and social media
- *Obstacle 2:* There may not be enough resources (people) available currently to implement a strong plan
- *Obstacle 3:* Some people may feel that this push for athletic goes against the overall school mission.

### **S.W.O.T. Analysis**

- *Strength:* PS has a growing athletic program and the ability to use this growth to leverage a new sports information and social media plan. Students are interested and could prove to be a valuable resource.
- *Weakness:* The athletic department does not have a lot of experience with sports information or social media. Further, they do not currently have enough staff to support a strong sports information program.
- *Opportunity:* The school and the athletic department have an opportunity here to have students help engage other students, faculty, and fans by promoting the use of sports information and social media.

- *Threat:* The main threat here would be that some people may not see the value in having a strong sports information/social media program. They may be concerned that it would detract from the schools strong academics.

## **Internal Environment**

The school being analyzed is an all-girls school founded in the late 1800s with a strong emphasis on academics. PS has offered over twelve different sports since 1998 and has had growing success ever since. Just over 60% of the school's population participates in at least one sport. While extra-curricular activities are encouraged, the school also offers a number of other clubs and academic programs that are not connected to athletics. The school boasts team state championship titles in basketball, field hockey, tennis, lacrosse, soccer, and golf. The school has also had four individual champions in varying sports.

PS is a member of the Ohio High School Athletics Association (OHSAA) and was a member of the Private Schools League (PSL) for a number of years. They have since left the PSL and are no longer part of any conference, but rather compete as independent. Nearly all sports teams compete at the Division II level with the exception of track and field and golf. The majority of athletic coaches at PS are also members of the school's staff. Members of the physical education department of the school are also required to serve as coaches for at least one season at either the middle school or high school level.

The current athletic department at PS consists of two main positions. The head athletic director, and the assistant athletic director. Neither of these positions deal specifically with social media as it relates to the school's athletics. There are other people on staff that do assist in the athletic department, but it is not their only role in the school. For instance, many of the staff who

work in the physical education department also help out in the athletic department in some capacity. Since there are not many positions within the athletics department, resources are spread fairly thin and it would be difficult to launch a social media plan run by an athletics staff member only.

In terms of sports information within the PS athletic department there is very little. There main website links to an athletics page that appears not to have been updated in many years. Limited information is available there. There are schedules, but not all of the information is accurate. There is no access to team photos, rosters, or archives of any type. There are also no clear links to any other forms of social media or athletic sites for the school. In addition to the site, PS does have a Twitter account which they post from periodically. There are game updates or scores at times, but not consistently. Besides these two outlets they do not have other forms of sports information development or social media.

### **External Environment**

From the outside looking in, PS is a highly esteemed academic institution for girls. It sits in a suburban area of Cleveland surrounded by a number of other local schools. Within a 10 mile radius there are two other prominent all girls prep schools. Within a 25 mile radius there are two other co-educational private prep schools. The school is also surrounded by two local public school districts. PS is considered academically competitive and selective in their enrollment. However, many of these local schools would be considered stronger in athletics than PS. In addition, many of these schools boast teams with a number of state titles. Not only are these schools both academically and athletically competitive, but many of them also have strong social media and sports information departments.

PS has a rival co-educational private school that is very strong in athletics. Specifically, they have had twice as many teams and individuals that have been in competition for state titles or championships. In addition, this institution, we will call “School G,” offers more sports for students, and also puts a stronger emphasis on their athletics by incorporating them into their schools overall mission. They have an athletic department which consists of many positions including a position that focuses specifically on maintaining and producing sports media content for the school. School G also has students on staff who help support this sports media role. Many people within the local area recognize School G as an athletic powerhouse and come out to support their sports. While School G is also a private prep school, it is considered to be more of a “sport school” than PS. Families and athletes have expressed a desire for more support behind their school’s athletics because they can work in conjunction with the schools academics.

### **Goals and Objectives**

The ultimate goal here is to create a partially student-run sports information/social media plan that can be used to promote athletics at PS. By implementing this plan the athletic department will engage more audiences including athletes, other students, faculty, family and fans. One crucial element of this plan is to ensure that the promotion of athletics is complementing the academic side and overall mission of PS as an institution. Each goal and its objectives will be broken down below. It is important to have a specific plan in place because as mentioned in the CoSIDA survey, a large number of colleges did not have social media plans in place and also no objectives (CoSIDA). Without set goals and objectives social media and sports information is less effective and may not be successful.

*Goal 1:* Identify and implement the three most important sports information/social media tools that the school can use to promote their athletics.

- *Objective:* To understand which channels will be most engaging to students, faculty, and others.

*Goal 2:* Identify ways to use these new social media/sports information strategies in a way that complements the school's overall mission.

- *Objective:* To promote an environment that understands the complementary nature of academics and athletics.

*Goal 3:* Gain the support of the student body by involving students in the sports information/social media process.

- *Objective:* To create an environment where students feel connected to their school and their athletics because they are a part of the communication process.

### **Three Social Media Resources**

The first goal of this sports information/social media plan is to identify the three most important tools that can be used to promote PS athletics. According to the research conducted, it would appear that two of the most obvious tools to be used when implementing this plan are Facebook and Twitter (Davis et al., 2012). While some may argue that social media is changing, and Facebook is less popular among high schoolers than adults, research suggests that it is still highly trafficked (Wallace et al., 2011). High school students may be less inclined to be on Facebook these days, but it is likely that parents and faculty would still use Facebook and might find it useful for message postings and other sports related information. In addition, as Wallace et al. (2011) also mentioned, Facebook is good for two-way communication. A parent may post on the wall asking "Is there a parking fee for the soccer game this weekend?" An administrator could quickly get online and answer this type of post. While most of the research discussed

Facebook pages of specific sports teams, in this instance it would be more important for the athletic department to have one Facebook page instead of one for each sport. If the athletic department found success with their one athletics page then they may decide to branch out and create individual pages with different administrators, but to start one central page would likely be most useful.

The second tool or resource that the athletic department should use based on the research is Twitter. Many studies demonstrated that Twitter has such popularity because of its fast pace nature and ease of use (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010 & Hipke & Hutchinson, 2014). In addition, the research discusses how this immediacy in access to information is important to both internal and external entities (David et al., 2012, Hipke & Hachtmann, 2014). For PS, this means that twitter could be used as an information system for athletes and fans alike. For instance, internally, if the athletic department needed to relay information that a certain sports team's practice was cancelled, it could notify them via Twitter. On the other side, externally, the athletic department can use their Twitter page to send out updates every few minutes about the score of the basketball game, etc. In addition, like Facebook, Twitter also allows for two-way communication (Witkemper, 2012). However, Twitter requires a user to type a message with limited characters. An example of this may be if the athletic director mis-typed a game location and someone tweeted at the athletic handle and corrected the mistake. The administrator would be immediately notified.

While Twitter and Facebook were two obvious choices for resources or tools to be used to promote sports media, the third choice was not as simple. Research has indicated many other resources as being useful for athletic directors and their athletic departments. For instance, as noted, Whiteside (2010) mentions the importance of press releases and statements, team and

player interviews as well as other media like game programs. In this instance, for a school like PS, it would be useful for them to keep an up-to-date sports page on their school website. As mentioned previously, the current site is outdated and lacks information besides the absolute basics. PS could start by updating their current site and including links to updated player bios. This would include rosters with photos attached and information about each athlete including year in school and their sports position if applicable. In addition, the website already has individual pages for each sports team which currently only includes the schedule. PS can follow the lead of St. Ignatius, mentioned in the literature review, and have recaps for each individual sports game or competition (St. Ignatius High School). In addition, PS can begin keeping up with statistics by immediately posting scores once a game is over. As time goes on, it may be useful for PS to add video footage of plays or competitions to go along with the recaps like Gilmour Academy (Gilmour Academy). While utilizing the school website does not necessarily encourage a dialogue or two-way communication, this is a site that all students and administrators visit on a daily basis. Having more information regarding athletics would be more interesting and engaging.

### **Complementing the School Mission**

The second goal in the implementation of this sports information plan is creating strategies that ensure the promotion of these athletics complements the academic and overall mission of the school. It is important to emphasize to administrators that athletics are an important part of building community within a school (Garcia, 2015). Athletic departments would be wise to emphasize to administrators that they want to work together, not build up athletics on their own. Every school athlete is a student athlete. One way to encourage this partnership is to promote one another. For instance, if PS has its own school Facebook page and

posts about its success in ACT or SAT scores compared across the state, the athletic department administrator would be wise to repost this on their athletics page. Some of those students may also be athletes. This not only shows support for the academics of the school, but it also shows any outsiders that the school has high academic and athletic standards.

In addition, in touching on the idea of “social capital,” having these resources allows for the production of social capital within the school environment (Lin, 1999). Having these types of athletic resources will allow faculty, staff, and families to learn more about athletics. This is especially true for any staff or families that have not been previously involved in athletics. As Clayton Culp emphasized in a 2014 article in *The Capital*, coaches are mentors in the same way that teachers and other staff members are. Everyone is working together toward a common mission. One way that athletic administrators could raise awareness would be by friending faculty and staff, or following them on Twitter or Facebook. Suddenly, information and posts that they have never seen before are showing up on their Facebook news feed or on their Twitter. In addition, if the school has its own social media accounts, they can add the new athletic social media accounts. This is a great way to create awareness.

Another idea, inspired by the Gilmour athletic website, would be to have a student-athlete spotlight feature (Gilmour Academy). The school could promote both its academics and athletics by writing feature articles about student athletes who excel both in and outside of the classroom. Having this type of exposure benefits not only the school itself, but also the athletic department. There are a number of girls who go to PS and participate in athletics, take honors classes, and are involved in high level academic projects. Having these features might give more insight into their lives which could be beneficial to both administrators and other students. Administrators and other faculty may not realize all the activities that student athletes participate in. In addition,

other students may be inclined to pick up athletics if they see that another student who excels academically is able to do so.

### **Student Involvement**

Another key piece to making a successful social media/sports information plan is to incorporate members of the student body (Gilmour Academy, St. Ignatius High School). Of course, it is crucial for there to be a faculty mentor or administrator involved, but students will be the key to the functioning of the plan. The first step in this process is identifying an administrator who is willing to oversee this program. Ideally, the person would be someone involved in the athletic department who could give insight and check into the student postings. At PS, as stated earlier, there are two main administrators in the athletic department: The athletic director and the assistant athletic director. The assistant athletic director, is fairly social media savvy and has been involved in many athletics. She would be the ideal candidate here.

Next, it is important to select students to implement the pieces of the plan. Ideally, one or two student would be assigned to each area: Twitter postings, Facebook page updates, Website features. While Twitter and Facebook could likely be operated by one student each, the website has the opportunity for multiple managers. For instance, one student may be in charge of student athlete spotlights while another student maintains schedules, rosters, etc. In order to truly maximize the purpose of the plan, it is important to have at least some students who are not athletes in charge of the social media plan. This would really create the type of engagement the school is looking for. In addition, having non-athletes operate the social media would likely lead to less bias in what sports are covered.

The St. Ignatius Student Sports Information Department as well as the *Ed Social Media* piece by Jeff Walrich really inspire student involvement and incorporation when implementing a social media plan. Each of these two schools have actively incorporated their students in creating their social media and athletic postings. Jeff Walrich makes some good points in his *Ed Social Media piece*. For instance, when students are involved in the process, they are more likely be engaged and share/promote the information. This is crucial to PS building their social capital within the school. Engaging students who are not athletes and making them a part of the process, makes them feel more committed and involved. In addition, it might foster new relationships between athletes and non-athletes that would not have been likely before. For instance, a student may write a piece on an athlete they have never spoken to before. As research suggests, this builds social capital because the athlete and non-athlete are creating shared value (Fritch, 1999). This is an opportunity to build bridges among the school. Students may now see an opportunity where they did not see a place for themselves in athletics before. Not everyone is an athlete, but they can certainly become a part of the process.

### **Measurement**

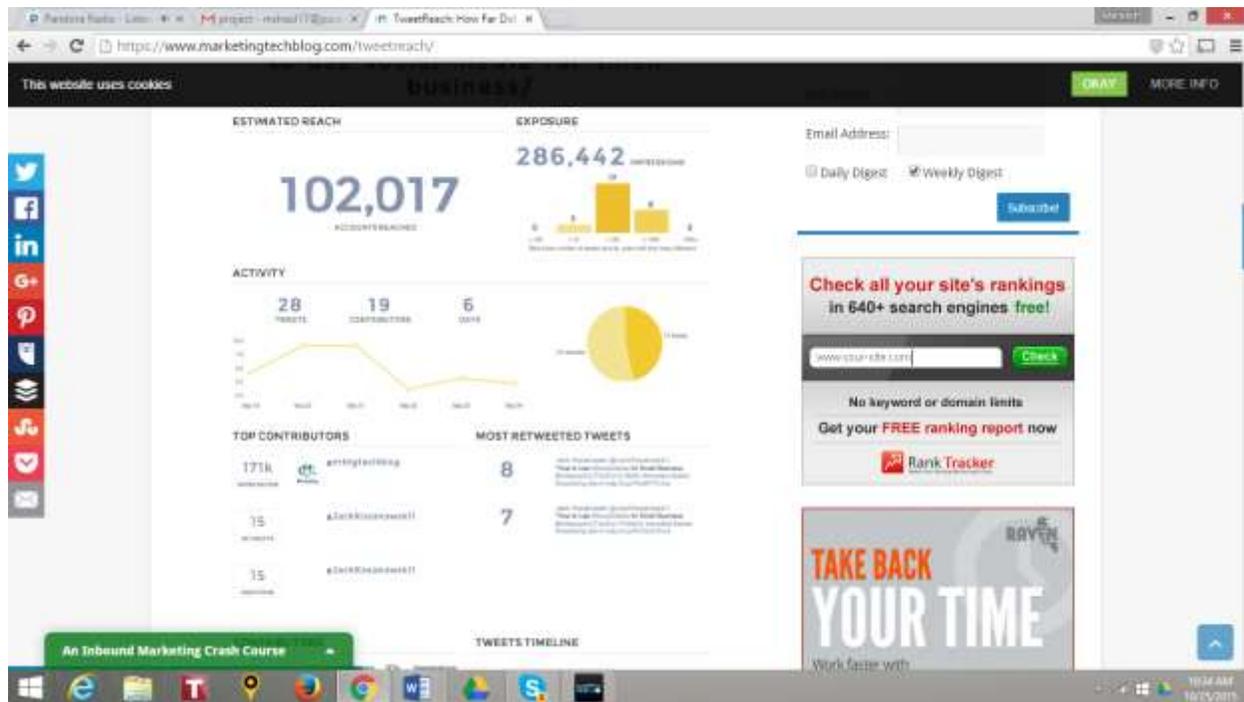
When implementing any type of social media plan or strategy, it is crucial to have metrics in place to see if goals are being met (CoSIDA). In this instance we will likely have a few different types of metrics in place. For instance, where it might be easy to measure social media engagement on Twitter and Facebook simply by tracking Tweets or checking engagement on a post, it is harder to measure student engagement. Measurements will be broken down among the three different goal types.

## Twitter

To start, Twitter and Facebook each have analytics and trackers that can show engagement. Timeline will be discussed in the next section, but it would be important to have a “beta” or trial testing period for Twitter and Facebook posts. It may be of value to measure social media outreach in three month intervals or quarterly. For Twitter, there are a few different ways of measuring outreach. PS will first need to decide whether they are willing to put together a budget specifically for sports information and social media outreach. If they decide that they want to go without a budget, PS may choose to simply use “Twitter Analytics”. This is an option that exists within the main Twitter account. Therefore, if PS created @PS\_athletics, they could get on their home page and find “Analytics.” This page will allow for a snapshot of how the account is doing. Specifically, it will include monthly summaries of top tweets, top mentions, impressions, profile visits and new followers (Twitter). While this is pretty basic information, it could certainly be useful when first getting started on an account.

If PS should decide that they want to invest some money in their social media/sports information plan, they can choose from a number of Twitter analytics programs. One of the most popular twitter analytics tools is TweetReach (Tweetreach.com). With TweetReach, PS would be paying about \$99 per month and get all the basic analytics offered off the Twitter site and more. Some of the features include full reports and account engagement which allows an administrator to learn about their audience and how to engage them. In addition, Tweetreach allows an administrator to measure how their tweets are performing against other Twitter material (Marketing TechBlog, 2015). An example of a full report with analytics is shown in the photo below from a Marketing TechBlog article about TweetReach features. Here you can see that TweetReach gives specifics on their analytics including specific tweets, contributor handle

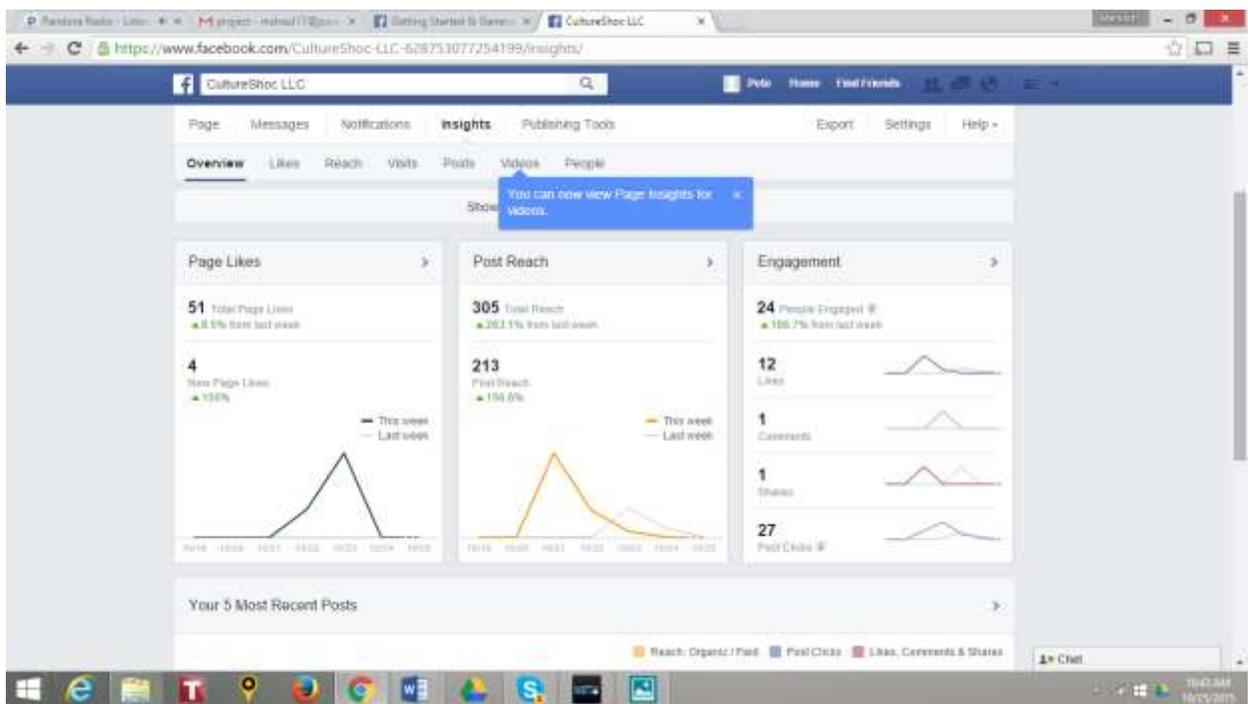
names, and statistical graphs which are not featured on Twitter analytics. This would be beneficial in helping PS know which of their tweets were most popular and who was engaging/interacting with them on Twitter. In addition, this would help in planning for what types of Tweets to send out.



## Facebook

Unlike Twitter, there are not as many analytics options when it comes to Facebook tracking. While there are a couple outside analytics options, there is not a lot of research to suggest that it would be a better investment than what Facebook provides. Facebook offers an analytics tool called "Facebook Insights." Once a page on Facebook has over 30 followers or "likes," the administrator is given the option of using their "Insights" page (Facebook). Facebook Insights allows the administrator of a page to see various metrics about their performance, which of their posts have been most engaging, when audience members are most active and more. For PS, if they created a PS Athletics Facebook page, they could use Facebook Insights to see who follows

them and which posts they find most engaging. It would be of interest for the administrator to see whether more students, parents, or faculty engaged with the Facebook page. From there, posts could be tailored to the audience and what they are most receptive to. For instance, if parents are the primary audience, they may be more engaged in posts that are informational such as practice cancellations or weather delays. Below is a photo of what a Facebook Insights page looks like when giving metrics and analytics. One can see here that Facebook Insights details the number of followers a page has in “likes,” how far a given post has traveled in “post reach,” and the level of engagement with those posts. Under “engagement” it is easy to track different types of engagement which would be useful in determining how best to interact with people who like or follow the page.



### Athletics Page Engagement

While Facebook and Twitter have given metrics and analytics, it can be more challenging to measure engagement on the athletics website and other social media channels. In order to get

feedback and assess engagement it would be useful to use surveys. First, it is important to create a survey that gets distributed to the student body, faculty, and families of student athletes regarding the athletic website. A survey of this type could be created on Survey Monkey. It would be critical to first determine who is taking the survey: athlete, non-athlete, or parent. Once this has been determined, there are a few different types of questions that should be asked. These would most likely be made into likert-scale questions where a survey taker answers from a range of 1-10. See Appendix A.

Having a variety of different questions would allow administrators to determine whether or not people find the content on the website informative, useful, and engaging. Further, noting the particular audience (student athlete, non-athlete, parent, faculty, etc.) is also important because their answers would give more perspective into how each of them views the site and what might be valuable to them. This survey would be distributed after the first quarter of beta testing and then periodically, perhaps yearly, as more changes are made to the website. Overall, the site needs to be easy to access and engaging to all audiences. The school may already have a way to track visitors to their website which would also be useful here in seeing how often the website is visited.

### **Sports Media Complimenting the School Mission**

Again, it can be challenging to measure the success of a sports media program and how it complements a school's overall mission. This is another area where it would be important to get the opinions of many audiences using survey feedback. However, it would likely be more important to get the opinion of school administrators and faculty. Survey Monkey could also be useful here in creating a survey to assess opinions on whether the new sports/social media plan is successfully complementing the mission of school. It would be useful to send out this survey

after the first quarter of the new beta program and then follow up subsequently (yearly) as the plan progresses. This survey might consist of likert style questions as well as some open ended questions and responses as well. Some examples of questions that might be useful in this survey are shown in Appendix B.

Responses from this survey would assess whether or not the school and administrators feel that the new social media/sports information plan is effective in communicating the schools overall mission. It is important that administrators see the value in the sports information program, and therefore this feedback is crucial. If anyone should feel that the plan is not doing so, they can list why or give suggestions as to what could improve the plan.

### **Student Run Sports Social Media**

There are a couple of ways to measure the goal of incorporating students into the social media/sports information plan. First, it would be important to survey the students involved in the actual production/monitoring of the sports social media. Second, it would be important to also survey the sports social media through the eyes of student athletes and other audiences. This way, the plan is assessing whether the students implementing the plan are engaged, and also determining whether student-athletes and other audiences (staff, families, etc.) find the reporting engaging and accurate. These questions are in likert format. Some example types from each of the surveys is listed in Appendix C.

These two survey types would be of value because they provide insight from the perspective of the social media team as well as the audience members viewing the media. These should be distributed after the first quarter of social media/sports information implementation. After gathering this initial feedback, there may be a need for some changes. Follow up surveys should

be conducted at least on a yearly basis. It may also be important to eventually create different surveys for different audiences regarding the perception of the sports media and its impact on the school environment.

### **Budget**

There are a few considerations when coming up with a budget for this type of project. First, it would be important to examine whether any of the social media outlets or pages would cost the school money. The school already pays for their personal website domain space and, therefore, would not be charged additionally because they are not creating a separate athletics website. Second, another consideration would be student payment for their services in creating, maintaining and updating the new social media sites and pages. This would come in the form of a monthly payment with a rate of 8 dollars and 10 cents per hour assuming students spend two hours a week working on their personal social media project or role (National Conference of State Legislature, 2015). Lastly, the school would need to consider whether to pay for any analytics as mentioned above when considering any necessary measurements. Therefore, pricing for analytics could be anywhere from 0-\$99 per month. However, in terms of other data collection, there would be a fee from 0- \$25 per month in order to sign up and use Survey Monkey. See Appendix D.

### **Implementation Calendar**

It would be easiest to implement a new social media/ sports information plan at the beginning of a new school year. For this project, that would mean that the timeline for the trial period would begin in August (when pre-season for sports begin) and end the end of October. The calendar attached will provide a sample of an athletics sports schedule and when posts should be

made, schedules updated, bio pieces written, etc. However, it is important to note that the trial period ends at the end of October. Therefore, within the first week of November the surveys should be distributed and analytics should be run to find out the effectiveness of each of these new social media/sports information tools. From there, amendments or additions can be made for the following quarter. See Appendix E, F, and G.

### **Conclusion**

While sports and athletics in themselves have been popular for many years, social media and sports information has encouraged fandom. As the review of literature suggested, many professional and collegiate sports teams and athletic programs utilize different social media strategies to engage their fans and promote their brand. Many large colleges and universities have created websites which house a multitude of different social media options when it comes to following their athletics and varying sports teams. However, while colleges and universities may put a large emphasis on their athletic programs, only a small percentage of the school population are student athletes. Therefore, it may be even more important for high school athletic programs to use social media because they have such high numbers of student athletes.

High school athletics programs are huge all throughout the United States and continue to grow. Therefore, this project argues that it is just as important, if not more important, for high schools to have a strong social media/sports information presence. For one, it adds to the social capital of the school. Athletics have the ability to bring a community together. In this case, having a strong athletics program that is linked to the school's overall academic mission can help bolster the community and further commitment among students. This is important because some school administrators may worry that athletics, and having a strong athletic focus, could take away from the school's general academic mission. However, literature suggests just the opposite

emphasizing the positive impacts of athletics in schools. Not only do student athletes tend to perform better academically, but they also feel more connected and better in touch with their school community. Therefore, the best way to have an effective social media/sports information plan is to be sure that it encompasses and complements school values. For this project, this involved the creation of a strategic plan surrounding social media and sports information.

The overall objective of this project was to create a social media and sports information plan for a school that is strong in academics, but lacking in terms of athletic support. While many of the students at the hypothetical school are also athletes, the school does not put a strong emphasis on promoting their athletic programs. Therefore, the goals for this project included finding the three best social media tools or resources for promoting athletics, promoting social media and sports information in a way that complements the academics and overall mission of the school, and incorporating students in the social media/sports information process.

It is important to note that this social media plan is fairly basic. While the literature reviewed many different schools and programs at the collegiate level, this plan was not meant to mimic those programs. Instead, it utilizes pieces of these programs that would be of most value to high schools. This is why conducting any type of internal audit is important when creating a plan specific to any school or program. Not every school would be the same, and in this case, PS is starting from the bottom. Therefore, this program is simple and easy for the school to monitor. Further, it allows students to be a part of the process which further ties together the overall mission of the school. Components of this plan such as the timeline and budget are also fairly simple. Adding other types of social media or devoting more time and effort could certainly prove more costly. If PS found success with this social media/sports information program they could certainly add more or different components. However, feedback from analytics and

surveys is crucial before moving forward. It is likely that they would make slight tweaks and changes based off of the initial feedback. Again, it is important to emphasize that measuring and getting feedback is crucial and should not be done just once. Even if everything was positive and successful after the trial period, it would still be important to monitor progress at least on a yearly basis.

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## Appendix A

### Athletics Page Engagement Survey Sample

#### Type 1: Questions about accessibility and ease of use

1. *I can easily navigate the athletics website and find what I am looking for.*
2. *I find that the athletics website has all of the relevant information I need when looking up information about an upcoming game/match location.*
3. *I find all of the information listed underneath each sport useful.*

#### Type 2: Questions about game recaps/summaries

1. *I find the game summaries and recaps accurate.*
2. *I find the game summaries and recaps interesting and engaging.*
3. *I find that the game summaries and recaps are comprehensive and feature multiple players/positions.*

#### Type 3: Questions about feature articles (student-athlete spotlight) and other news releases.

1. *I find the feature articles interesting*
2. *I find the feature articles accurate*
3. *I find the feature articles to be engaging with the mission of the rest of the school.*

## Appendix B

### Sports Media Complimenting the School Mission Survey

1. *I feel that the new social media/sports information program has added to the value of the school.*
2. *I feel that the new social media/sports information program supports the school's overall mission.*
3. *I feel more connected with the school as a whole now that there is greater access to information about athletic.*
4. *Do you feel that adding an athletics/ sports media strategy has taken away from the school's mission? If yes, how \_\_\_\_\_*
5. *What else do you think could be added to the athletics website or social media to highlight the school's overall mission? \_\_\_\_\_*
6. *Is there anything you would suggest is removed from the athletics website/new social media plan? If yes, please list what and why? \_\_\_\_\_*

## Appendix C

### Student Run Sports Social Media Engagement Survey

Survey 1 on perspective of the students running the social media and athletics pages:

1. *I feel that I am adding value to the school by helping in the production of sport social media.*
2. *I feel that people find value in my sports social media pieces.*
3. *I feel more engaged with the school as a result of being involved in sports media.*
4. *I feel that incorporating sport social media has been important to the school.*

Survey 2 on the perspective of audiences regarding the sports social media and athletics pages.

1. *I feel that the sports social media has improved the perception of athletics within the school.*
2. *I feel that the information provided on sports social media and the athletics page is valuable and informative.*
3. *I feel that the incorporation of this sport social media has helped the bridge between athletics and academics within the school.*
4. *I feel that the sport social media has helped the administration have a better understanding/more information on student athletes.*

## Appendix D

### Budget Options

<b><u>Lowest Price Plan</u></b>		<b>Number</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>Website Domain</b>		0	0	
<b>Student payment</b>	8.1/hr	3	194.4	2 hrs per week
<b>Tweetreach</b>		0	0	
<b>Surveymonkey</b>	25/month		25	
<b>Monthly total</b>			219.4	
<b><u>Highest Price Plan</u></b>		<b>Number</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>Website Domain</b>		0	0	
<b>Student Payment</b>	8.10/hr	3	194.4	2 hrs per week
<b>Tweetreach</b>	99/month	1	99	
<b>Surveymonkey</b>	25/month	1	25	
<b>Monthly total</b>			318.4	

## Appendix E

### Calendar Month August

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	
						First day of Practice begins today.  First day of Practice begins today.  Launch twitter handle @PS_athletics  Send updates for sports  Fall sports scrimmages begin.  @PS_athletics tweet on game location/time/scores	
	Launch PS Facebook Athletics Page  Facebook page weekly recaps and photos from athletic scrimmages.					Make sure all sports rosters, schedules, and other info are correct on website.	
	Update athletics website with correct scores for games/meets						Official first day of competition.
Facebook page weekly recaps and photos from weekend games.	Update athletics website with correct scores for games/meets						@PS_athletics tweet on game location/time/scores
Facebook page weekly recaps and photos from weekend games	Update athletics website with correct scores for games meets.		Game Day- @PS_athletics tweet on game location/time/score	Game Day- @PS_athletics tweet on game location/time/score	First student-athlete sports piece on athletics page by day's end.		@PS_athletics tweet on game location/time/scores
Facebook page weekly recaps and photos from past week and weekend games.	Update athletics website with correct scores for games and meets over past week.						

## Appendix F

### Calendar Month September

		Game Day- @PS_athletics tweet on game location/time/score	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	Game Day- @PS_athletics tweet on game location/time/score	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	@PS_athletics tweet on game location/time scores.	<b>5</b>		
Facebook page weekly recaps and photos from past week and weekend games.	<b>6</b>	Update athletics website with correct scores for games and meets over past week.	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	Game Day- @PS_athletics tweet on game location/time/score	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	Game Day- @PS_athletics tweet on game location/time/score	<b>12</b>	
Facebook page weekly recaps and photos from past week and weekend games.	<b>13</b>	Update athletics website with correct scores for games and meets over past week.	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	Game Day- @PS_athletics tweet on game location/time/score	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	Game Day- @PS_athletics tweet on game location/time/score	<b>19</b>	
Facebook page weekly recaps and photos from past week and weekend games.	<b>20</b>	Update athletics website with correct scores for games and meets over past week.	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	Game Day- @PS_athletics tweet on game location/time/score	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>	Second student- athlete sports piece on athletics page by day's end.	<b>25</b>	Game Day- @PS_athletics tweet on game location/time/score	<b>26</b>
Facebook page weekly recaps and photos from past week and weekend games.	<b>27</b>	Update athletics website with correct scores for games and meets over past week.	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	Game Day- @PS_athletics tweet on game location/time/score	<b>30</b>					

## Appendix G

### Calendar Month October

					<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	Game Day- @PS_athletics tween on game location/time/score					
Facebook page weekly recaps and photos from past week and weekend games.	<b>4</b>	Update athletics website with correct scores for games and meets over past week.	<b>5</b>	Game Day- @PS_athletics tween on game location/time/score	<b>6</b>		<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	Game Day- @PS_athletics tween on game location/time/score		
Facebook page weekly recaps and photos from past week and weekend games.	<b>11</b>	Update athletics website with correct scores for games and meets over past week.	<b>12</b>		<b>13</b>	Game Day- @PS_athletics tween on game location/time/score	<b>14</b>	Game Day- @PS_athletics tween on game location/time/score	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	Regular season ends.	
Facebook page weekly recaps and photos from past week and weekend games.	<b>18</b>	Update athletics website with correct scores for games and meets over past week.	<b>19</b>	Game Day- @PS_athletics tween on game location/time/score	<b>20</b>	Game Day- @PS_athletics tween on game location/time/score	<b>21</b>		<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	Game Day- @PS_athletics tween on game location/time/score	
Facebook page weekly recaps and photos from past week and weekend games.	<b>25</b>	Update athletics website with correct scores for games and meets over past week.	<b>26</b>	Game Day- @PS_athletics tween on game location/time/score	<b>27</b>		<b>28</b>		<b>29</b>	Begin sending out engagement/feed back surveys	<b>30</b>	Game Day- @PS_athletics tween on game location/time/score