

PLAY 1

Defining and Developing Objectives, Strategies, and Tactics

“All winning teams are goal-oriented. Teams like these win consistently because everyone connected with them concentrates on specific objectives . . . nothing will distract them from achieving their aims.”

—Lou Holtz, *Former Notre Dame football coach*

This play will help you to:

- Set the primary objectives for your sports event.
 - Develop your event’s full potential using the P-A-P-E-R Test (promotion, audience, partnerships, environment, and revenue) to identify the many secondary objectives that can be achieved.
 - Set strategies to achieve your primary and secondary objectives in the pursuit of greater success.
 - Develop the tactics that will apply your strategies to achieve the greatest results.
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Introduction

OK, let's stage an event, your boss or client says. They may have a good creative concept of what they want that event to be. It might be a special match, a championship series, skills competition, all-star game, tournament, fan festival, or awards ceremony. Planning and managing events, as you'll discover, can be labor intensive, time consuming, and expensive. So, it's important that for all that effort and money, they can achieve not only the main reason for staging them, but that they can also realize their greatest potential.

Identify the Primary Objective

Start the process with these questions: what do we want our event to accomplish once the audience has gone home and all the bills have been paid? Is the main goal to generate a profit, raise funds for a cause-related charity, or promote a particular sport, league, or lifestyle? Is it meant to expand or enhance business relationships with sponsors, celebrate player accomplishments, or promote other games or events?

Objectives are the answer to the question "WHY"—why are we investing our organization's time and resources to stage the event? Identify a single primary objective, the essential reason for investing your organization's time and resources. Then, inform all of your planning to achieve—at a minimum—this one overarching objective, the one that, if met, would alone qualify the event as a success. Ensure that every member of your event team understands the primary objective, and no matter what you add to the program later, never lose sight of the purest reason beneath. This will help to keep the highest priority in focus for all members of the event organization team. Once you have done so, you can add more features and content to your event to achieve an even wider range of positive outcomes.

Figure 1.1 illustrates examples of the primary objectives for three fictional sports events: an amateur community baseball event, a not-for-profit participatory athletic event, and a professional sports fan festival. Each of the events' organizers has defined a singular goal that is easy to communicate to their respective staffs and stakeholders.

The Powerful Opportunities of Secondary Objectives

The primary objectives for the events in Figure 1.1 are clear, simple, and easily communicable. Those goals will help to guide the creative development and planning processes for each event to ensure they achieve their main purpose. Live sports events, however, can be immensely more powerful and produce even more positive results for the organization. Considering what other, secondary objectives, an event can realize will help give shape to your concept and make it an even more worthwhile investment.

Example 1: Community Youth League All-Star Game

Primary Objective: Give our town's best youth league players a great end-of-season competition that recognizes them for their great performance during the regular season.

Example 2: Road Runners Club Downtown 10K Road Race

Primary Objective: Promote our sport and healthy lifestyles by offering our city's runners a safe, unobstructed downtown road course, and reinforce the excitement of recreational running by encouraging the community to cheer them on.

Example 3: Playoffs Pregame Fan Festival

Primary Objective: Reward and excite loyal fans with an engaging festival preceding the team's first playoff game appearance in three years.

Figure 1.1 Primary Objectives of Three Types of Events

The P-A-P-E-R Test

One way of maximizing an event's potential is by using the P-A-P-E-R Test. This rubric, which stands for *promotion, audience, partnerships, environment, and revenue*, is a useful framework that organizers can use to create a more comprehensive list of additional, or secondary, objectives. Consider each of the P-A-P-E-R components listed in Figure 1.2 and the following discussion to develop additional aspirations for your event.

Developing Strategies

Some outcomes will be more valuable and important to you and your organization than others. Some will be more complicated and difficult, and others far easier to achieve. Prioritize your secondary objectives, selecting those that are most important to your organization, and determine what is feasible, efficient, and desirable for you to pursue. Consider your time and financial resources. Go for the goals with the greatest payoffs in whatever time frame is the most relevant, but with the least possible drain on your resources.

Identifying primary and secondary objectives will help you develop the “Strategies” for your event. Strategies are the answer to the question “WHAT”—what do we need to add to our plans to ensure we meet all of these objectives? For example, if we need to generate revenue, perhaps we need to plan to sell tickets, merchandise, and sponsorships. If we want to expand the audience beyond the core fan, we may have to add new event components that will appeal to them, like more entertainment and giveaways, and communicate that there is more value to attending. If we need to sell more sponsorships, we may have to offer partners more value in advertising, hospitality experiences, and branded fan engagement opportunities. As you can see, this exercise of teasing out more of the opportunities that an event might offer begins to shape the content of the program we are planning.

Let's apply the P-A-P-E-R Test to identify secondary opportunities for the three sample events in Figure 1.1. The first is a typical community sports event with little or no budget, and a staff comprised totally of volunteers. Notwithstanding the minimal resources available, the event has the potential to generate excitement and advance the aims of this community organization. Figure 1.3 illustrates how the P-A-P-E-R Test might be applied to this youth league all-star game.

The volunteer chairman of the youth league in Figure 1.3 realizes that a children's all-star game can do so much more for its participants and teams, the community, and their own organization than simply staging a meaningful competition. As a volunteer with limited time and resources, the chairman knows that the game can exist without any of these additional opportunities and achieve its primary objective with a minimum amount of time investment. All he needs is to obtain a permit for the ball field and hire an umpire. To achieve even a small number of these added secondary objectives, the chairman will have to appoint a committee or task force to prioritize which objectives should be pursued, which ones would be nice to achieve, and which are just not worth the effort.

In the case of the Youth League All-Star Game, getting community leaders (audience) to the event will help to impress businesses from the Chamber of Commerce (partnerships) and encourage coverage by the local media (promotion). A full set of bleachers (audience) watching a well-run, spirited youth activity (environment) will also position future league events as worthy of sponsorships from local businesses and grants facilitated by local politicians (revenue).

It is also helpful to develop secondary objectives that address the host organization's overall mission and challenges. The event chairman in this hypothetical case wants to keep registration fees as low as possible, but knows that money is going to be required the following season to replace equipment and maintain a field that tends to flood after even a brief, moderate shower. The all-star game is a perfect opportunity to raise the money required, whether dollar-by-dollar through the sales of hot dogs or raffle tickets to family members in the bleachers, a few hundred dollars at a time through an expanded group of sponsors, through grants from the county, or all three. Staging the all-star game without engaging in all of the extra work may provide just as wonderful an experience for the children participating. But, with some extra effort, the game could also present an outstanding opportunity to improve the experience for players in seasons to come.

Promotion:

What essential message or important information do we want to communicate about the event, our sport, or our organization? Can we use this event to promote other activities, games, or events?

- Can we use this event to build fan interest in my sport or organization before, during, or after event day? By what measure can this increased interest be demonstrated?
- How do we want the event to position our sport in the community, and what kind of legacy should it leave behind?

Audience:

- Who is our target audience for the event, the people who are most likely to participate, attend, or purchase a ticket?
- Beyond the most likely target, what other audiences with similar interests can we attract to increase attendance, interest, and relevance for our event and further our organization's overall objectives?
- Is there an opportunity to win entirely new fans or enthusiasts to our sport by encouraging their attendance?
- Can we reactivate interest among prior fans who have lost interest?

Partnerships:

- Can we use the event to develop, maintain, or strengthen relationships with our organization's partners and supporters (e.g., our fans, athletes, members, donors, sponsors, community leaders, and local government)?
- What kind of experience do we want our athletes and other partners to have? How do we want them to feel about our organization or sport before, during, and after the event?

Environment:

- Who are our competitors, and how should we differentiate our sports organization from theirs, and our event from the programs they present?
- What do we need to communicate about the positive attributes of our sports event that sets it apart from other activities similarly competing for the public's or a potential sponsor's attention?
- Do we need to address a time or economic inconvenience that attendees, participants, or partners may perceive when deciding to attend?
- Do we need to address a preconceived notion about our sport or organization that makes it more difficult to generate attendance or participation?

Revenue:

- How much revenue do we need to generate for the event and/or for the organization?
- Do we want or need to generate a profit?
- How much money can we invest beyond the revenues we expect to achieve our objectives?
- Should our event be associated with a community cause or charity? How much money do we need to generate for them?

Figure 1.2 Key Elements of the P-A-P-E-R Test

Example 1: Community Youth League All-Star Game

- **Primary Objective:** Give our town's best youth league players a great end-of-season competition that recognizes them for their great performance during the regular season.
- **Secondary Objectives:**
 - **Promotion**
 1. Encourage local media to communicate how our youth league is an important component of our community's quality-of-life, providing our children with a safe, supervised activity.
 2. Generate publicity to bring more kids and families to the event to cheer on their friends and relatives.
 3. Use the event to get more parents to register their kids to play in the league next season.
 - **Audience**
 1. Fill the bleachers and standing areas with at least 200 spectators. (The more people who attend, the more importance the media will place on the game.)
 2. Get new kids from the community to the game to encourage registration at the ball field for next season.
 3. Attract more parents to participate as volunteers, coaches, and assistants. Showcase the importance of the game and our league to local leaders (e.g., mayor, city manager, councilmember, state senator, chamber of commerce representatives).
 - **Partnerships**
 1. Strengthen our ties to members of the local chamber of commerce to encourage current team sponsors to renew their relationships, and to identify new prospective team sponsors for next season.
 2. Use these strengthened ties to businesses and town government to solicit donations to improve the antiquated dugout area and improve overall field maintenance.
 - **Environment**
 1. Demonstrate that our league is highly organized, motivated, and dedicated to coaching our kids, improving their skills and promoting good sportsmanship.
 2. Demonstrate that our organization places an emphasis on kids having a good time, as an alternative to highly competitive leagues in which winning is more important.
 - **Revenue**
 1. Generate \$500 to replace old equipment (e.g., new batting helmets, bases, batting tees) and to help pay for All-Star trophies.
 2. Increase player preregistration for next season by 10 percent.

Figure 1.3 Expanded Community Youth League All-Star Game Objectives

The second fictional event presented in Figure 1.1 is staged by a local running club. This organization has a handful of permanent administrative staff supplemented by a large body of volunteers, event marshals, and municipal employees assigned by the city. The primary objective for the event is consistent with the overall goals for the organization but could also pertain to any of the nearly 30 other running events the club stages each year. Figure 1.4 illustrates how the P-A-P-E-R Test can be applied to allow the Downtown 10K Road Race to stand out uniquely from the rest of the club's calendar.

Example 2: Road Runners Club Downtown 10K Road Race

- **Primary Objective:** To promote our sport and healthy lifestyles by giving our city's runners a safe, unobstructed downtown road course, and to reinforce the excitement of recreational running by encouraging the community to cheer them on from the sidewalks.
- **Secondary Objectives:**
 - **Promotion**
 1. Demonstrate that our sport is a great lifestyle choice for the entire community, providing health and social benefits to all participants regardless of age or income.
 2. Promote our organization as one of the region's top associations of recreational runners.
 3. Encourage spectators to gather to cheer on the runners.
 4. Designate an official radio station in our market that will appeal to our target market and promote both the registration drive prior to the race and spectator attendance on race day.
 - **Audience**
 1. Increase race registration by 33 percent over last year.
 2. Encourage families and friends to "sample" recreational running together for the first time.
 3. Convert those sampling the event into regular recreational runners.
 4. Leverage the on-site excitement of spectators to increase club membership by 15 percent.
 5. Demonstrate the popularity of running and the benefits of our association to potential sponsors of future races and events.
 - **Partnerships**
 1. Strengthen our ties to the city's parks and recreation, police, street, and sanitation departments, whose active cooperation is essential to running races year-round.
 2. Establish a working relationship with the downtown business improvement district, whose objectives include bringing visitors and entertainment seekers to the downtown core during low-traffic weekends and summer evenings.
 - **Environment**
 1. Demonstrate that running is fun, healthy, mentally and emotionally refreshing, accessible, and inexpensive.
 2. Demonstrate that as compared to other sports, running requires little economic investment, is easy to learn, and has few rules.
 - **Revenue**
 1. Generate net proceeds of \$50,000 to pay for operational expenses.
 2. Increase club membership and member revenues by 15 percent.

Figure 1.4 Expanded Downtown 10K Road Race Objectives

The executive director of the Downtown Road Runners Club knows that she can use the scenic attractiveness and excitement of running through the downtown area to revitalize one of the organization's annual 10K races, and has set realistic goals to increase membership and race registration. She also recognizes that she can use the event to establish a working relationship with local businesses in the downtown area to achieve mutual objectives—the repositioning of a business district that is exciting in daylight hours five days a week, but sleepy during nonworking hours. Working with the local chamber of commerce, the race can create unique opportunities for area business owners, and, in turn, generate new sponsorship and official supplier opportunities. Area restaurants and retailers can engage in promotions

that will convert work-week customers into weekend event spectators and may also support efforts to increase participation as places for recreational runners to pick up their registration materials, application forms, and information. The expansion of the list of secondary objectives also reveals the potential for future short-distance road race events during evening hours to further enhance the vitality of the city after regular business hours.

Identifying and evaluating secondary objectives provides event organizers with a strategic framework upon which to develop tactics and strategies that will transform an event into a dynamic, multifaceted marketing tool for its organizers, sponsors, the local community, and a host of other stakeholders. For example, the Road Runners' desire to increase the number of recreational runners in the community might lead the organization to consider tactics such as having two starting lines. The second, located near the midpoint of the original route, and following in parallel lanes so as not to interfere with competitive runners, might be offered as a course for families with young children so an upcoming generation of runners can feel the thrill of passing the finish line without having to run the entire course. Adding a family component to the race could also serve as a market test to determine whether the club might introduce "family" or "junior" membership tiers to increase membership and annual dues revenues.

To strengthen the club's relationship with the city agencies whose participation is integral to the successful execution of the event, organizers might consider offering the police, fire, streets, and sanitation departments a limited number of free race registrations. These agencies can, in turn, donate these free spots to their widows and orphans organizations, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, or another worthy group, and encourage the media to generate human interest stories that feature the beneficiaries.

The third hypothetical sports event in Figure 1.1 is a playoff pregame fan festival to be held on the street outside a team's home arena. There is great demand and excitement in the community because tickets for the first postseason game have sold out in a single day. Capturing the buzz in the marketplace, in itself, can be a great reason to stage a fan celebration. But, as Figure 1.5 illustrates, the P-A-P-E-R Test can reveal many more opportunities.

The organizers of the Fan Festival in Figure 1.5 have been presented with the opportunity to take advantage of an appearance in the playoffs to achieve the overall marketing, revenue, and organizational goals of the club. With a program of free festivities outside the arena, ticket holders for the game can arrive early and celebrate with the greater community of fans. In addition to the early arriving ticketed fans, the team and its sponsors also want to fill the plaza in front of their arena with thousands of non-ticketed fans to achieve their merchandise and concessions revenue objectives. But they also realize that the resulting traffic and competition for parking could upset their most loyal ticket holders. Working with the city to add buses to the mass transportation schedule prior to and after game time could help to reduce congestion and demonstrate how convenient it can be to get to and from the arena. From the city's point of view, providing extra shuttles would give fans the ability to sample the ease of access the mass transit system can provide.

The team will not want loyal fans who could not get tickets to miss the pregame celebration, or the broadcast. It makes strategic sense, then, to install large video screens on the event site to provide game coverage. Additional Wi-Fi access points can be added inside and outside of the arena to accommodate the higher-than-normal concentration of devices uploading and downloading content to social networks and friends.

The inclusion of civic leaders and elected officials demonstrates the importance of the team and the game to the community. These are not the type of guests who shy away from cameras and microphones, so just their presence can help expand the media coverage of the event beyond sports to news and feature reporting.

Chances are the team will never have a more exciting opportunity to speak directly to as broad an audience. This is the time to present celebrants with the ability to take advantage of special ticket promotions to sell new season tickets or multigame packages for the following season. Capitalizing on the "got to be there" nature of the events, the club could offer purchasers free playoff merchandise with a deposit for a multigame package for the coming year.

Example 3: Playoffs Pregame Fan Festival

- **Primary Objective:** Reward loyal fans with a street festival preceding the team's first playoff game in three years.
- **Secondary Objectives:**
 - **Promotion**
 1. Generate added publicity for the team beyond the usual sports media platforms.
 2. Provide the media with attractive, camera-friendly opportunities to capture the excitement of our team's appearance in the playoffs
 3. Encourage the posting of user-generated content featuring our branding and increase fan engagement on social media platforms.
 4. Demonstrate how the excitement surrounding the team contributes to the community's quality of life for both residents and local businesses.
 - **Audience**
 1. Encourage the early arrival of playoff ticket holders to the arena.
 2. Bring fans who are not ticket holders to the arena plaza to add to the excitement of game day.
 3. Attract casual sports fans to the arena plaza to build their level of interest in our team and sport.
 4. Enable members of the community with limited economic resources the ability to enjoy our playoff celebration to the fullest extent possible.
 - **Partnerships**
 1. Provide our sponsors with an opportunity to market to, and communicate with, both loyal fans and casual fans at a time of heightened interest in the team.
 2. Provide civic leaders with an opportunity to appear before the widest range of their constituents.
 3. Provide our media partners with opportunities to enhance viewership of pregame coverage and attract additional viewers and listeners to the game broadcasts.
 4. Provide our online partners with unique content that drives increased page views.
 - **Environment**
 1. Present a celebration at least as highly regarded as the one staged by our local baseball franchise before its last appearance in a playoff game three years ago.
 2. Demonstrate that the arena district is in a safe and easy-to-reach location.
 3. Demonstrate to the community that our fans are passionate, loyal, and excited, but also well-behaved and good-natured.
 - **Revenue**
 1. Sell standing-room tickets to the game.
 2. Increase season ticket sales and sell multigame plans for next season while excitement for the team is at its zenith.
 3. Renew existing and expired season ticket accounts.
 4. Generate \$200,000+ in sponsor sales to cover expenses.
 5. Increase playoff and team merchandise sales by 15 percent over average regular season in-arena sales.
 6. Increase concessions revenues by 10 percent over average regular season in-arena sales.

Figure 1.5 Expanded Playoffs Pregame Fan Festival

SIDELINE STORY

Professional League Drafts

Player drafts for the four major American sports leagues—the NFL, NBA, MLB, and NHL—have become must-see, and increasingly, must-attend events. At their core, they are essentially business meetings during which the leagues identify which member clubs have the right to negotiate contracts with specific amateur or collegiate players. This essential function, enabled by agreement with their respective player associations, is the primary, and most central objective of any Draft. The secondary objectives of making news, promoting a new generation of players to the fans of each team, and engaging fans in an off-season activity have resulted in the draft meetings

becoming televised events. In turn, the success of these broadcasts resulted in a new set of secondary objectives—to satisfy fan demand to attend these news-making events in person, and to add revenue opportunity through sponsors wishing to engage with these avid fans. Each of the leagues is at a different stage in the development of the Draft as a live spectator event and an opportunity to build more business benefit for their organizations. However, they leverage the event to fulfill a variety of organizational goals, and however those objectives change over time, it is still, and ever will be, a business meeting for teams to select the next class of players.

Progress from Strategies to Tactics

Now that you've answered the questions "WHY?" and "WHAT?", it's time to tackle the question "HOW?", that is, the *tactics* you will use to achieve your goals. Identifying the tactics—HOW we will fulfill each of these opportunities—will help us identify the features, activities, and promotions we will integrate into the program, what costs we will incur, and what revenue we can generate. Ultimately, it will help us formulate a budget, an estimate of our event's financial expectations.

Identifying objectives and developing strategies cost your event nothing but time, creativity, and analytical thought. The tactics that are selected and employed are the things that will cost, and potentially, make you money. To illustrate, when you take a road trip, you know where you want to go (objective), and by consulting a GPS app, you identify what roads you will need to take (strategy). You start spending money once you decide to get in your car and begin paying for gas and tolls to drive there (tactic).

So, before a budget can be drafted, you have to develop your list of objectives and determine the best, most realistic, and most cost-effective strategies that will achieve as many of those goals as possible at the lowest cost. Only then can you design the tactics—the content and marketing plan of the event itself. It is at this stage that you will evaluate whether the tactics you embrace will be too complex, too expensive, or too labor-intensive to achieve. Here, you may determine that your event is trying to do too much, and that some lower-priority objectives may need to be sacrificed to benefit some of the more important ones. This evaluation process often continues throughout the budgeting process.

Take a moment to review Figure 1.6, a brief checklist of some general questions you can apply to developing event objectives. You will note how the answers to many of these questions can serve a variety of purposes and achieve multiple aims.

Promotion • What key messages do I want my promotional plans to communicate? How will I encourage the media to help me achieve the outcomes I want before the event (e.g., advance ticket sales, walk-up attendance, increased viewership), and/or after (e.g., positive media coverage, increased membership, financial contributions)? • How can I use publicity, promotion, and advertising to get my message out to the people that I want to hear it? What traditional, digital, and social media outlets should we target? • How can I encourage engagement with fans on social media networks? • How can I use the event as a publicity and promotional engine for my sports organization before, during, and after the event? What compelling stories can I tell? What can I add to the program to make my event more newsworthy? • Can I work with local school districts to deliver educational programs, school visits, or field trips to students that promote my message? • What long-term legacies or benefits can the event leave behind? • How will we clarify or correct any misconceptions about my sport or organization? • Can I expect to achieve my objectives with existing staff and resources, or do I need to get more help from outside the organization? Audience • How can I keep the event fast-paced, involving, and exciting for the audience? • How can I make it easy to buy tickets, easy to travel to, and comfortable for spectators? • What can I do to add value to the event for our existing fans? • How can I get new people to my event? How can I turn them into fans, boosters, members, or supporters? • What other events can I create cross-promotions with to build awareness and attendance? • How can I educate the public about my sport, organization, or event? • Is the event worthy of a live broadcast or stream? Can I package highlights that fans can stream or post? • Can I use social media platforms and mobile apps to engage more deeply and more often with fans at the event and beyond? Partnerships • How can I use this sports event to increase value to current sponsors by providing an elevated level of service to their guests? Are there opportunities to provide sponsors and their customers with unique access to the event, special hospitality opportunities, exclusive mementos, or other benefits? • How can I use this event as a showcase for prospective sponsors by exposing them to satisfied partners at the event? • What exposure opportunities can I offer to partners in pre- and post-event advertising, on-site signage, awards and trophies, entertainment segments, audience promotions, giveaways, sweepstakes, uniform patches and staff attire, or printed and digital materials (e.g., tickets, websites, flyers, posters, information guides, programs, apps)? Environment • Is there another event or organization with which I am competing for audience, attention, sponsors, or athletes? How can I set my event apart from the competition? • Can the event solve or draw positive attention to a pressing issue in the host community?

Figure 1.6 Strategy-to-Tactics Development Checklist

- How is the local community trying to portray itself, and how can our event support those efforts? How can that portrayal benefit my organization, sport, or event?
- What dates and times for the event might fill an entertainment void in the marketplace?

Revenue

- Should we sell admission tickets? How many and for how much? If we are interested in having children attend should there be a reduced children's price? A family package price? Discounted prices available through sponsor promotions? A special price for friends and family of staff and athletes?
- Can I sell merchandise? Will I be selling existing inventory and/or event-specific merchandise? What kind of merchandise and how much—low price points for kids, high price points for premium adult merchandise? Is there a market for high-priced collectibles and memorabilia?
- Can I sell food and/or beverages? What kinds and how much? Hot foods and drinks for outdoor cold weather venues; cold foods and drinks for outdoor hot-weather events? Are there special regional foods that should be among the offerings? Is it appropriate to serve beer at the event and, if so, what will local ordinances permit?
- Can I sell sponsorships? How many, for how much, and to whom? Can I package this sponsorship with similar opportunities at upcoming events? Should I make low-cost packages available for new sponsors who want to test their association with my event or organization? Can I offer multievent or multiyear sponsorship packages? Do I need outside help to design and sell these packages?
- How can I use the event to encourage sales of tickets to other upcoming events? Can I sell those tickets at the event? Should I distribute discount codes or coupons for future events?

Figure 1.6 (Continued)

Sports Events as Business Solutions

With the popularity of sports event marketing as an impactful addition to the marketing mix for corporations of nearly every size, events are frequently born specifically to meet a partner company's marketing objectives. Leading sports event managers are often approached by brands and their agencies to develop a program that achieves the objectives of their partners, such as launching new products, relaunching existing products, increasing sales, and marketing lifestyle programs.

The following Sideline Story demonstrates that a sports event organizer can apply the needs of a sponsor, as well as its own needs, to the creation of a completely new and compelling event concept. It is, therefore, even more important to apply a rubric like the P-A-P-E-R Test to expand the relevance and impact of the program beyond the primary objective of positioning the sponsor's product. The development of additional secondary objectives ensures that the event can be used to achieve multiple benefits for the sponsor and the sports organization, as well as other stakeholders.

SIDELINE STORY

The Labatt/NHL Pick-Up Hockey Marathon

The Labatt Brewing Company, a Toronto-based sponsor, requested that NHL event organizers create a program at the NHL All-Star Weekend that would capture national attention and would embrace key attributes of their Labatt Blue brand of beer, those of genuineness and being “uniquely Canadian.” In response, the NHL created the Labatt Blue/ NHL All-Star Pick-Up Hockey Marathon. Labatt and the NHL sought the heartiest amateur adult hockey players throughout Canada to qualify to play on one of the two teams that would compete on a frozen rink in front of Toronto City Hall continuously, 24 hours

per day, until one side could no longer put a sufficient number of players on the ice. The puck dropped on Monday at 8:00 A.M., and play continued through four days and three nights until approximately 7:30 A.M. on Thursday morning. The event attracted thousands of curiosity seekers, generated hours of national media coverage, and earned a place in the Guinness Book of World Records (which has since been beaten). Though the event clearly met many objectives for the league, this memorable program would never have been developed without the inspiration, challenge, and support of the Labatt Brewing Company.

Post-play Analysis

To realize the full potential of a sports event, it is essential for organizers to develop a comprehensive list of event objectives before creating a budget and devising a business plan. These objectives answer the question “WHY”. Identify the primary objective first—the goal the organization feels is essential above all else. Use the P-A-P-E-R Test (promotion, audience, partnerships, environment, and revenue) as a framework to develop a host of secondary objectives that will offer additional benefits for the organizer, sponsors, and other stakeholders.

Developing strategies answers the question “WHAT” and defines what you will do to achieve your objectives. Identifying tactics answers the question “HOW” and helps you to define in detail how those strategies will be actualized.

Coach's Clipboard

1. Your school's football team is in the top third in the standings and may host a regional championship game in three weeks. Use the P-A-P-E-R Test to outline what the game can achieve for the school, the athletic department, and the team. Prioritize these objectives based on their importance, and how feasible they are to achieve given the time remaining before a possible event. What are the implications if the event must be cancelled the week before it is to be staged because the team does not make the playoffs?
2. You are the brand manager of a line of lifestyle clothing with a modest budget for sports marketing. How can you use the P-A-P-E-R Test to identify the best sports events to fit the marketing aims for your product?
3. What tactics can you employ to make the 10K road race in Figure 1.4 more attractive to a potential “B2B” or “business-to-business” sponsor (i.e., a company that has customers that are primarily other companies, rather than individual consumers)?
4. An energy bar sponsor approaches a minor league sports organization, seeking a new event or promotion that will help to position the product as a nutritionally valid meal replacement bar rather than a candy. The potential sponsor wants the event to portray an active lifestyle and instantly recognized as associated with its product. Design an event that achieves these aims and expand this primary objective to serve the needs of the sports organization.