

College Connection

Programs Benefit Students, Assess Sports Landscape

By Matt L. Ottinger

Ball State Fulfills Missing 'Link' for Sports Networks

What began as a fledgling pilot academic program at Ball State is transforming into a highly regarded feeder system for some of the largest television and media outlets in the world. Ball State University's immersive Sports Link curriculum allows students to receive intense hands-on training in sports broadcasting.

"It's basically the ESPN of Ball State," asserts Chris Taylor, instructor of telecommunications/sports immersion & media, who oversees Sports Link. "Everything ESPN does at the national level, we do it for athletics at Ball State."

Taylor contends the field of sports broadcasting is as prominent as it has ever been.

"There is a need for this," he surmises. "Sports are such a part of our society and culture; there's a job market there, and there are so many outlets – online, cable networks, you name it. It's growing while many other industries are contracting right now."

He adds that networks such as CBS have expressed concern to him about where they will find qualified staff in the future. Fortunately for future graduates, training remains the focus for Sports Link. While there is an academic course paired with the program, Taylor says most of the learning is done on the job. With focuses on writing, reporting, shooting and hosting a variety of shows, most participants are telecommunications majors, although journalism, communications and a few public relations students are taking part. Taylor acknowledges the production schedule can closely resemble that of a real job in the field.

"It's daily hands-on work," he says. "Just last week, we broadcast a soccer game live – and that was at least a 12-hour day for the students."

Taylor also beams that nine of the 10 students who graduated from the program in its inaugural year found full-time jobs in the field – and the one other person is freelancing while working toward starting his own sports production company.

"We are the only school in the country doing completely student-produced programming," he declares.

Sports Link's production packages have been viewed on ESPN, ESPNU and Fox College Sports, and the program's work has earned an Emmy.



Ball State sophomore Pat Boylan, a Carmel native, serves as host for one of Sports Link's shows.

INFORMATION LINK

Resource: Chris Taylor, Ball State University Sports Link, at www.bsusportslink.com

Study Measures Our Love of the Games

Indianapolis is no stranger to the sports world. The impact – both on the economy and in the city's image – has been substantial. Therefore, it's fitting the University of Indianapolis has developed a report to further measure the perception of sports across the United States.

Larry DeGaris, associate professor of marketing and president of the consulting company Sponsorship Research & Strategy, led the effort in building the UIndy Sports Report (supported by a University of Indianapolis grant).

"This was sort of a follow-up to a study Miller Lite commissioned back in 1983," DeGaris explains. "We really wanted to understand people's perception of sports and how it's changed in 25 years. This study was different in that there were a lot of questions on the first one that were Cold War-relevant and not as many on commercialization, as it wasn't as big of a factor then."

Conducted in January 2009, the study surveyed 1,121 people across the nation using an online questionnaire.

“We asked about interests and behaviors, but also about social issues like race, gender, sexual orientation, performance enhancing drugs – and also about business and economic issues,” he relays. “One of the goals was to help the community outside of the academic world.”

He contends the most surprising finding was that sports fans like advertising more than non-fans.

“We hypothesized that relationship would be there, but didn’t anticipate the strength of the relationship,” DeGaris clarifies. “It’s a significant finding for advertisers and media. *Ad Age* magazine actually wrote an article on that aspect of the report.”

He says that another noteworthy conclusion is that today’s Americans are less likely to view athletes as role models than in the past. DeGaris believes trends such as promoting athletes’ sexual promiscuity and other issues that are now more publicized play a part. Other key findings convey that professional football is still America’s favorite sport, fewer people attend live sporting events now and nearly half of all Americans oppose publicly funded sports facilities.

INFORMATION LINK

Resource: Larry DeGaris, University of Indianapolis, at www.uindy.edu

Racing Degree to Put Students on Fast Track

It stands to reason that if a college student was able to obtain a bachelor’s degree in Motorsports Engineering, it would be in Indianapolis – one of the true racing capitals of the world. Now, a program that launched at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) five years ago is in its second year of being offered as a major concentration.

Director Pete Hylton says that the program encompasses more than just engineering, as the industry itself is so varied.

“There are close to 2,000 companies in Indiana that focus on motorsports in some way,” he offers. “That’s a much larger number than most people realize.”

Hylton explains this includes not just race teams – with track designers, fabricators and sanctioning bodies (the Indy Racing League and the United States Auto Club as examples) being among the areas of interest.

When asked about partnerships that have been formed between the school and private businesses, Hylton contends the most successful has been IUPUI’s pairing with Don Schumacher Racing (DSR) in Brownsburg. DSR, which has seven National Hot Rod Association Top Fuel championships to its credit, enlisted the help of IUPUI students on exclusive research and development projects on engine, clutch and chassis components using state-of-the-art technology.

“This definitely resulted in a benefit for the team,” Hylton notes. “In the summer, they set a new record in a race with a chassis designed by two of our students.”

IUPUI’s Motorsports Engineering program also recently announced a partnership with the 2011 USAC Regional Midget Series to allow students to help with the management and promotion of the series, including public relations, marketing, graphic design and media.

Hylton says that the program includes 60 to 70 students, but no graduates yet as it hasn’t been in existence for four years. He adds that IUPUI has placed interns with race teams, design shops, gear box suppliers, a wind tunnel research center and the Indy Racing League.

“It’s such a broader spectrum (of possible jobs) than what people think,” he shares.

INFORMATION LINK

Resource: Pete Hylton, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, at www.iupui.edu



Larry DeGaris’ new study helps to quantify the impact sports has on American culture.

IUPUI students are leaving their mark on the racing world. Shown is the school’s logo on Sarah Fisher’s car during an IZOD IndyCar race.

