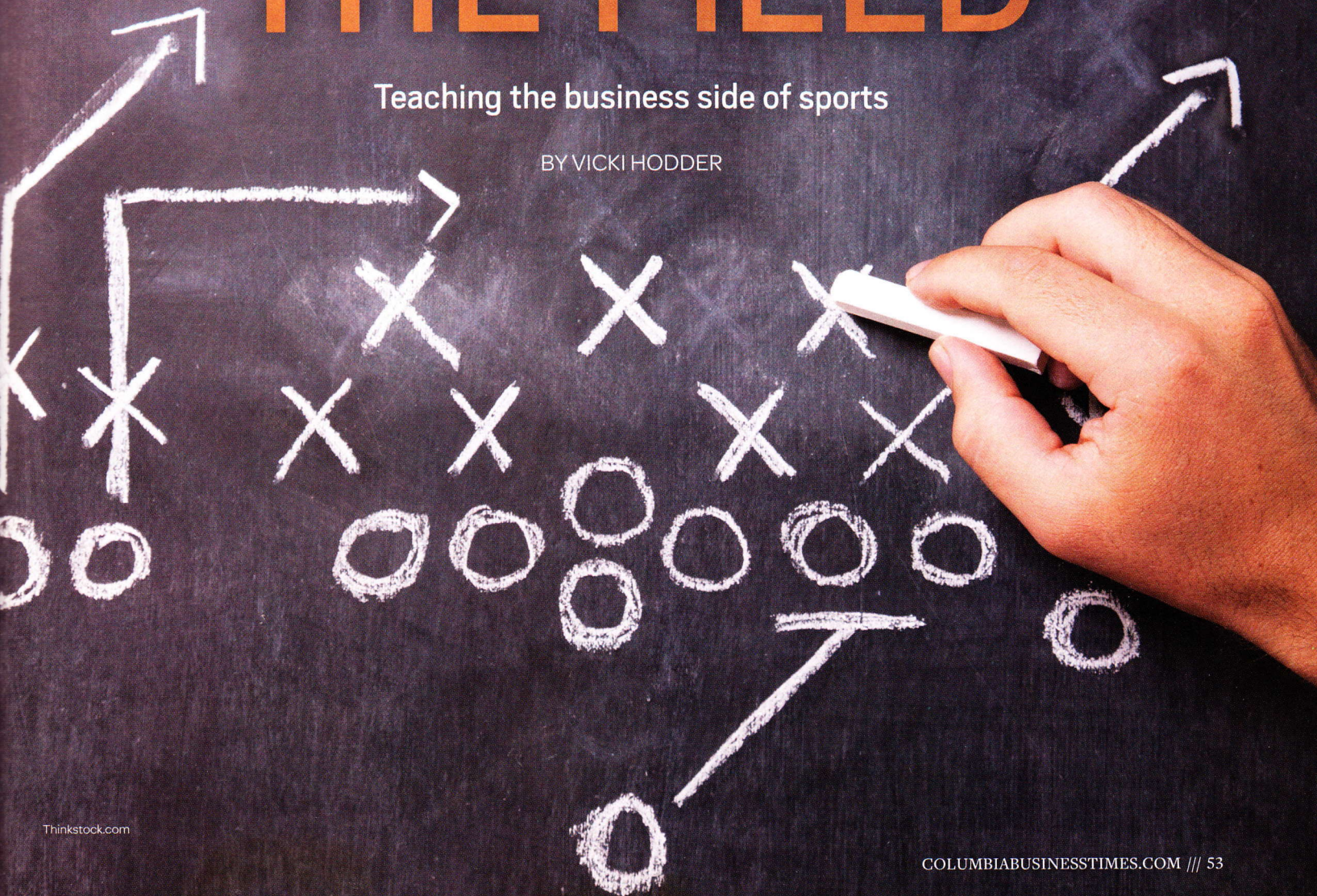


LEADING THE FIELD

Teaching the business side of sports

BY VICKI HODDER





LOOK NO FURTHER than this year's World Cup to get a handle on the rapid growth of new sport management programs at the University of Missouri. The 2014 soccer tournament was noteworthy as much for the unprecedented size of its U.S. audiences as for the games themselves, prompting press reports about American soccer fever and record-breaking television viewership. High-profile sports competitions such as the World Cup are one reason demand for education programs focusing on the business side of sports is surging.

"Part of it's just the culture in which we live," says Robin Ammon, North American Society for Sport Management business office manager and University of South Dakota sport management associate professor.

Academic sport management programs actually have been around for a while. Ohio University launched the first American sport management program in 1966, and enough programs existed by the late 1980s for NASSM and the National Association for Sport and Physical Education to start working together

on curriculum guidelines. Now more than 450 universities report on the NASSM website that they offer some type of sport management program. But the popularity of sport management programs is cyclical, reflecting an array of social factors as well as demand for program graduates, Ammon says.

Most of MU's sport management programs started during a global growth spurt that Ammon says the field has witnessed during the past four or five years. In 2011, MU kicked off two new sport management emphasis areas in the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources. In 2013, the university began offering a new athletic training bachelor's degree within the School of Health Professions. A longstanding sports turf focus within CAFNR's Division of Plant Sciences also continues to prepare students for jobs maintaining and managing athletic fields.

Student response to the new sport management academic tracks has been enthusiastic. Read on for snapshots of the various MU sport management programs that have drawn students into the field.

SPORT MANAGEMENT

CAFNR's sport management emphasis within its parks, recreation and tourism bachelor's degree is the fastest-growing of MU's relatively new array of sport-industry academic tracks. Students in this emphasis learn how to manage collegiate or professional sport day-to-day operations, which prepares them for careers ranging from sports marketing to ticket sales. Emphasis classes include Sport Economics and Finance, Business of Sport and Legal Aspects of Sport.

"What sport management does, at least on the business side, is produce the event, manage the event, sell and market the event and make it as fun as possible so people will come back over and over again," says Nicholas Watanabe, parks, recreation and tourism assistant teaching professor, who helps run the program.

Students apparently see the fun in the field. Enrollment in the sport management emphasis jumped by more than 120 percent during its first two years, going from 220 students in the fall of 2011 to 487 students in the fall of 2013, according to Bryan L. Garton, CAFNR associate dean and director of academic programs. That increase is "way beyond" what MU officials anticipated, though administrators expected growth when they began the program based on industry demand, Garton says.

Program administrators point to several factors to explain its popularity. MU focused on building the sport management programs, planning and investing resources in them, Watanabe says. Recruitment and advertising also have played their roles, he adds. More generally, Watanabe cites a nationwide awareness of the field that has sparked sport management programs in high schools as well as colleges. Students may be drawn to the program by their interest in sports and find unexpected opportunities in the industry once they're admitted, Watanabe says.

Watanabe believes the sport management program will continue growing at a slower pace but notes limits to growth such as classroom size and the number of professors involved in teaching courses.

Garton cautions that future program growth depends a great deal on the job market. Relatively few of the program's participants have graduated to test those waters, so MU does not yet have a track record by which to gauge potential growth, he says.

"It's one thing to have great enrollment growth," says Garton. "We don't want to be producing graduates who can't get jobs."

ATHLETIC TRAINING

Launched in 2013, MU's athletic training bachelor's degree is built on a network of collaborations that administrators aim to use to make it a nationally prominent program. The four-year degree housed in MU's School of Health Professions focuses on the skills required to keep athletes healthy and injury free. After graduating from a program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education and passing the Board of Certification Inc. exam, athletic trainers often work in high schools, colleges, hospitals and fitness centers. Demand for athletic trainers is on the rise, with the Bureau of Labor Statistics predicting the number of jobs will grow by 19 percent from 2012 to 2022. The field's promise helped prompt interest in the development of MU's athletic training bachelor's degree, says Kyle Gibson, chair of the department of physical therapy.

"By far the most common degree program requested that Mizzou didn't have was athletic training," Gibson says.

The program began with 44 students, with about 60 students applying for the 20-plus spots open this year, Gibson says. Although administrators are managing enrollment to abide by space limitations, MU's athletic training program has been growing in other ways. Most notably, MU hired David Colt, who Gibson describes as "incredibly well known in the field," as its new athletic training program director.

Colt, a nationally recognized athletic trainer and former Northwest Missouri State University head athletic trainer, stepped into his position at MU in mid-June. Colt plans to use the athletic training program's strong relationships with the area's medical community and MU's athletic department to create a leading athletic training program replete with hands-on learning opportunities. And because they are based in the School of Health Professions along with occupational therapy and physical therapy students, athletic training students also will benefit from interdisciplinary education opportunities, Colt says.

"We should be one of the best programs not only in the Midwest but in the country," Colt says. "We can do that."

That said, Colt's first goal is to earn CAATE accreditation within the 2015-2016 academic year. From there, Colt says, his goal is to produce outstanding athletic trainers who will lead the field.

SPORT VENUE MANAGEMENT

MU stepped into the evolving field of sport venue management a couple years ago by providing a new emphasis within its hospitality management bachelor's degree. The program includes courses on sport venue promotion, security and operational risk management and delivering "the fan experience" in its focus on the requirements of running stadiums, arenas and other centers used to stage sports events.

Enrollment in sport venue management has grown by nearly 18 percent since the program's inception. Sixty-six students enrolled in the emphasis in the fall of 2011, compared to 79 students in the fall of 2013, CAFNR's Garton says.

The program's specialized instruction makes sense in the face of what has become a rapidly changing field, says Jeff Mann, chief operating officer for the International Association of Venue Managers. Although it shares core competencies with other types of venue management, sport venue management is adapting to the challenge presented by advanced home viewing technology, Mann says. Along with handling quick influxes of large crowds and rapid event turnover, sport venue managers also must be adept at luring people out of their homes and into their facilities.

"It's not as much about the game as it used to be," Mann says. "It's a big social experience."

MU's curriculum tackles such industry challenges, covering customer service and meeting guest expectations. The program also looks at the field's increasingly specialized business practices, such as the variety of premium seating options and other special amenities.

SPORTS FIELD MANAGEMENT

CAFNR's undergraduate degree in turfgrass science is the oldest — and lowest profile — of its academic tracks with a sport management focus.

The program began with the renovation of MU's Simmons Field in 1992. Brad Fresenburg, an MU assistant extension professor and turfgrass specialist, says his involvement in the baseball field's renovation gave rise to his specialization in sports field management. It also prompted Fresenburg to develop an academic focus on creating and maintaining sports fields that has as its highlight internships at MU's baseball, softball and football practice fields. Since then, 52 students have completed internships with MU athletics, Fresenburg says.

"Once we renovated the field, it looked so nice, we thought this was an opportunity to get the students involved," Fresenburg says. "Now we're up to five interns per year."

Fresenburg's commitment to the sports turf industry earned him the 2013 Dr. William H. Daniel Award from the Sports Turf Managers Association, a Kansas-based professional association for sports field managers throughout the world. Despite such industry recognition, Fresenburg considers sport turf management a largely overlooked opportunity on the roster of sport management careers. Indeed, Fresenburg says the typical number of students in the MU sport turf program has dropped from 20 to 25 during the 1990s to between 10 and 14 nowadays.

Yet demand for sport turf interns as well as managers outstrips supply, Fresenburg says.

"If I had 10 or 20 more students in our program, I could find internships for them," he says. "In my mind, it's a great opportunity." **CBT**



Photo by Anthony Jinson