Employee diversity has the potential to provide meaningful organizational benefits. For instance, in their categorization-elaboration model, van Knippenberg, De Dreu, and Homan (2004) argued that diversity in a group setting is related to elaboration of information and perspectives such that group members exchange more ideas, engage in more constructive debate, and draw from their varied knowledge bases. This elaboration of task-relevant information is then thought to improve the creativity and decision making of the group, ultimately leading to performance gains. Empirical research has largely supported their model, as diversity has been found to positively relate to constructive inter-group communications and subsequent performance gains (Cunningham, 2008b; Keller, 2001; Phillips, Mannix, Neale, & Gruenfeld, 2004; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007).

From a different perspective, Robinson and Dechant (1997) suggested that diversity aids performance in large part through improved marketplace understanding. Specifically, as people identify with and relate to others who are similar to the self (Byrne, 1971; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), a workforce with a mix of people from varied races, genders, ages, personalities, and attitudes might be able to reach a broader customer base than would a homogeneous workforce, and in doing so, generate performance gains. As one example of this, when NASCAR sought to attract a more racially diverse fan base, they called on Ervin “Magic” Johnson to assist their efforts. George Pyne, NASCAR’s chief operating officer, noted “Magic will help NASCAR achieve its goals to better educate new audiences and facilitate greater participation among the industry and communities of color” (as cited in “Magic,” 2004).

In the sports setting, improved marketplace understanding would translate into a greater and more diverse fan base. Interestingly, however, this linkage has received little empirical attention. In one case, Fink and her colleagues (2001, 2003) found that a proactive (i.e., progressive) diversity management strategy...
was positively associated with the attraction of a diverse fan base, both in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I and Division III universities. Nonetheless, the authors did not examine the effects of departmental diversity itself. As another example, Armstrong and Peretto Stratta (2005) found that products (in this case, professional basketball) geared toward African Americans were more likely to be consumed by people from that race; in contrast, people from all races consume products designed for the general public (see also Gouke, 1987). As with Fink et al.'s research, however, Armstrong and Peretto Stratta did not investigate the racial composition of the professional staff; instead, these authors examined the effects of the racial composition of the team and the associated promotional activities.

Thus, while all of the aforementioned studies contribute to the understanding of attracting a diverse fan base, the linkage between employee diversity and the attraction of a diverse fan base remains unexamined. For that matter, it is unclear if the different diversity forms might have a varied impact on such efforts. The purpose of this study is to address these gaps by examining the relationships among diversity, the attraction of a diverse fan base, and revenues generated in the context of NCAA athletic departments. Specifically, in drawing from the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991, 2001; Wernerfelt, 1984), we argue that organizational diversity represents a unique competitive advantage that allows for greater attraction of diverse fans, and that racial diversity, in particular, is likely to yield the greatest effects. Finally, we submit that the attraction of a diverse fan base is likely to positively relate to the total revenues generated. In the following sections, we provide an outline of our theoretical framework, including an overview of the different diversity forms, and present specific hypotheses.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Diversity Forms**

Harrison, Price, and Bell (1998) identified two forms of diversity: surface-level and deep-level. *Surface-level diversity* refers to those dimensions that are readily observed, such as dissimilarities based on race, gender, age, body-type, and in some cases, physical ability. *Deep-level diversity*, on the other hand, refers to those differences among people that cannot be seen. These include dissimilarities based on attitudes, personality, values, and beliefs.

In some cases, the two diversity forms might be related, such that people who vary based on, for example, race might also differ from one another in their perspectives and life experiences (Cunningham, 2006). There is also reason to believe, however, that the two diversity forms might have unique effects on subsequent outcomes—dynamics that are discussed in subsequent sections—and research generally supports this position (Mannix & Neale, 2005; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). Thus, in this study, we examined the effects of both
surface-level (i.e., racial diversity and gender diversity) and deep-level diversity of departmental employees on the subsequent attraction of a diverse fan base.

Diversity as a unique competitive advantage

In this study, we drew from the resource-based view of the firm, a theory originally put forth by Wernerfelt (1984) and later expanded upon by Barney (1991, 2001). Barney holds that organizations should be able to gain a competitive advantage over their counterparts if they possess resources that are valuable, rare, and difficult to imitate (i.e., imperfectly imitable). These resources can take three different forms: (a) physical capital resources, which include the organization’s use of technology, its equipment and physical structure, and its geographic location; (b) organizational capital resources, which refer to the organization’s structure and planning mechanisms, its coordinating systems, and the informal relationships among organizational employees; and (c) human capital resources, such as the employees’ collective training and development, experience, intelligence, and acumen (see also Mahoney & Pandian, 1992). A sport organization is thought to have a competitive advantage when it possesses valuable organizational resources not concurrently being implemented by its competitors (Barney, 1991). Further, this competitive advantage is sustainable when its core competencies are, in addition to being valuable, considered rare and imperfectly imitable (see also Peteraf, 1993). A number of researches have demonstrated the efficacy of the approach in understanding organizational effectiveness (e.g., Amis, Pant, Slack, 1997; Cunningham, 2003).

One significant byproduct of the resource-based view is its influence on the management of human resource Wright, Dunford, and Snell (2001) note that although the field of strategic human resource management “was not directly born of the resource-based view (RBV), it has clearly been instrument to its development” (p. 702). The contribution of the resource-based view to strategic human resource management stems from the shift among strategists from focusing solely on fact external to the organization. Instead, internal factors, such as the organization’s people, are now seen as potential sources of competitive advantage thereby legitimizing human resource functions to the overall success of the firm (Wright et al., 2001). To be sure, research has demonstrated that an organization’s human resource system and its employees can serve as a catalyst for sustained advantage over competitors (see Wright et al., 2001).

In the current study, we argue that is not just human resources, but a diverse workforce that contributes to continuous success organizations realize (for other examples, see Cunningham & Sags 2004; Richard, 2000). Consider the following. A diverse workforce is valuable because it is likely to have greater market understanding than is a homogeneous one (Cox & Blake, 1991; Robi
son & Dechant, 1997). As Richard notes, "the insights and cultural sensitivity that women and racioethnic minority employees bring to a marketing effort improve an organization's ability to reach different market segments" (p. 165). This relationship has been noted in the athletics context, where diversity among departmental employees is thought to attract and benefit racial minority student-athletes (Cunningham, 2008b). These same dynamics have been observed for both surface- and deep-level diversity forms (for an example, see Siciliano, 1996).

Diversity is also difficult to imitate. People from different backgrounds and who have varied life experiences and perspectives bring unique perspectives to the workgroup. What's more, the identification a diverse workforce has with a diverse customer base comes through shared experiences—events that cannot be easily duplicated. Some may argue that training could, in time, reduce these advantages. However, as Miller and Shamsie (1996) note, in the time it takes to accrue these knowledge-based resources, those who are imitated have likely further honed their skills.

Finally, workforce diversity is rare, especially in the university athletics setting. In the 2005-2006 academic year, Whites made up 90.0% of all athletic directors, 88.9% of all associate athletic directors, 87.5% of all assistant athletic directors (DeHass, 2007). Across all racial groups, men were more likely to hold positions of power in the athletics setting than are women (DeHass, 2007; see also Acosta & Carpenter, 2008). And, the similarities are not just limited to demographics, as the "typical" athletics administrator has been characterized as Protestant, heterosexual, and able-bodied (Fink et al., 2001).

In short, diversity is valuable, difficult to imitate, and rare, and thus seemingly provides athletic departments with a unique competitive advantage. Thus, workplace diversity should be associated with the attraction of a diverse fan base. This rationale led us to hypothesize that racial diversity (Hypothesis 1a), gender diversity (Hypothesis 1b), and deep-level diversity (Hypothesis 1c) will all be positively associated with the attraction of a diverse fan base.

The primacy of racial diversity

With our first set of hypotheses, we suggested that racial, gender, and deep-level diversity would all be positively associated with the attraction of a diverse fan base. It is also possible, however, that the effects of some diversity forms would be stronger than others. We suspect this is the case for racial diversity. This supposition is primarily based upon the underlying theoretical tenets of the resource-based view. Recall that resources are likely to provide their greatest competitive advantage when they are valuable, difficult to imitate, and rare (Barney, 1991, 2001). In focusing on the rarity of the resource, the statistical evidence previously presented (DeHass, 2007) suggests that racial diversity among athletic department employees is a rarer commodity than is
gender or deep-level diversity. Lapchick’s (2007) Racial and Gender Report Card also attests to as much, as the athletic context was rated poorer for racial diversity than it was for gender diversity. As racial diversity in athletic departments is rarer than are gender or deep-level diversity forms, the effects of racial diversity on subsequent outcomes should be the strongest. Consequently, we hypothesized that the relationship between racial diversity and the attraction of a diverse fan base would be stronger than the corresponding relationships of gender diversity (Hypothesis 2a) or deep-level diversity (Hypothesis 2b) and the attraction of a diverse fan base.

Diverse fan base and revenues generated

There are several potential benefits to attracting a diverse fan base. First, there is some evidence that people make inferences of an organization’s diversity culture based on visual cues. For instance, McKay and Avery (2006) suggested that, for an outsider, a “potentially vivid signal of a firm’s diversity climate is to actually see or meet a number of minority employees on a site visit” (p. 404). Similar dynamics could be observed with respect to an organization’s fan base, such that an organization with a diverse fan base might be presumed to have a proactive diversity culture. Second, the “average” fan for college athletic events is a White male earning over $50,000 annually (“Fan Frenzy”, 2007). Attracting fans beyond this demographic, therefore, means larger crowds attending the sport events. Third, and related to the second point, larger crowds attending the events translates into greater revenues generated for the athletic department. Given the difficult financial situations in which most athletic departments find themselves (Fulks, 2008), any extra revenues would be welcome.

In this study, we were particularly interested in the latter effects—that is extra revenues generated. As previously noted, attracting a diverse fan base will also mean drawing more people to the athletic events and subsequent additional revenues generated. Thus, we hypothesized that the attraction of a diverse fan base would be positively associated with total revenues (Hypothesis 3).

Method

Participants

Data were gathered from 911 athletic administrators (i.e., athletic directors, associate athletic directors, and assistant athletic directors) employed at NCAA Division I athletic departments. The sample consisted of 588 men and 310 women, while 13 people did not list their gender. Most of the participants were White (n = 727, 79.8%), followed by African American (n = 120, 13.2%), Hispanic (n = 18, 2.0%), persons who listed “other” (n = 12, 1.3%), Asian Americans (n = 9, 1.0%), and Native Americans (n = 5, 0.5%). Fourteen persons did not provide their race. There was a wide distribution based on age.
18-30 years (n = 113, 12.4%), 31-40 years (n = 264, 29.0%), 41-50 years (n = 232, 25.5%), 51-60 years (n = 249, 27.3%), and over 61 years (n = 39, 4.3%), with 20 persons not providing that information. Finally, participants’ mean organization tenure was 10.18 years (SD = 9.12) while their mean occupational tenure was 17.05 years (SD = 10.39).

**Measures**

Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire that measured the surface- and deep-level diversity of their department, the department’s ability to attract a diverse set of fans, and their personal demographics (as previously highlighted). We collected the total revenues generated from an archival data source.

Surface-level diversity. Both racial and gender diversity of the department was assessed. Following Cunningham (2008a, 2009), the scale was designed to measure the degree of demographic differences within the department. Administrators were asked to provide the proportion of athletic department personnel who were categorized into six different racial groups: African American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, White, and “other.” Responses options for each category ranged from 1 (0-10%) to 10 (91-100%). The standard deviation was then computed for each department, and that value’s distance from zero (which would represent complete diversity) was used as the final diversity score. As a way of illustrating this calculation, a department with 0-10% African Americans (value of 1), 0-10% Asian Americans (value of 1), 0-10% Hispanics (value of 1), 71-80% Whites (value of 8), 0-10% Native Americans (value of 1), and 0-10% “Other” would have a diversity score of -2.80.

For gender diversity, administrators marked the proportion of men and women who worked in the department. The same formula previously described was used to compute the gender diversity score. For instance, a department that has 51-60% women (which would be a value of 6) and 41-50% were men (which would be a value of 5) would have a diversity score of -.71. On the other hand, another department that has 91-100% men (which would be a value of 10) and 0-10% women (which would be a value of 1) would have a diversity score of -6.36. Thus, larger values are representative of greater department diversity.

Deep-level diversity. Deep-level diversity was assessed with three items adapted from Harrison, Price, Gavin, and Florey (2002) (α = .76). The phrase “As a whole, how different are members of your athletic department with respect to” was followed by “personality”, “values”, and “attitudes”. The items were anchored by a Likert-type scale from 1 (very different) to 7 (very similar). Responses were reverse scored such that higher scores were indicative of greater perceived deep-level dissimilarity. Other researchers have demonstrated the sound psychometric properties of the scale (Cunningham, 2006; Harrison et al., 1998, 2002).
Attraction of diverse fan base. Participants responded to a single item from Fink et al. (2001, 2003) to indicate the degree to which their department attracted a diverse fan base: “My athletic department attracts a diverse customer (fan) base”. Responses were made on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Total revenues. Total revenues generated were gathered from the Office of Postsecondary Education Equity in Athletics Data Analysis Cutting Tool Website (http://ope.ed.gov/athletics/) for the 2007-2008 academic year.

Procedures

We followed Dillman’s (2000) recommendations for survey research. Specifically, after generating a mailing list of the athletic director and her or his top five assistants (N = 1937) from all NCAA Division I universities (N = 330), postcards were mailed to alert the administrators of the upcoming study. One week later, a questionnaire packet containing a cover letter, questionnaire, and postage-paid return envelope was mailed, with a reminder postcard being mailed one week later. Four weeks after the mailing of the questionnaire packet, a second questionnaire was mailed to all non-respondents encouraging their participation. In all 911 persons responded (600 after Round 1, 311 after Round 2), for a response rate of 47.03%. Early and late respondents did not differ in their estimation of how well the department attracted a diverse fan base, thereby suggesting that non-response bias is likely not a substantial concern (Dool & Linder, 2003).

Data analysis

The data were first aggregated from the individual to the group level. Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations were calculated for the data. Structural equation modeling, using AMOS 7.0 (Arbuckle, 2006), were then used to test the study hypotheses. Because deep-level diversity was measured with three items, it was specified as a latent variable. The other variables which were all measured with a sing item, were treated as observed variables. The confirmatory fit index (CFI and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were used to assess model fit.

Results

Data aggregation

Given that our hypotheses focused on the department, rather than individuals, it was necessary to first aggregate the data to the appropriate level of analysis. We assessed both the variance between groups, by way of intraclass correlation (ICC(1)), and agreement within groups by way of inter-rater agreement (r) values (see Bleise, 2000; Dixon & Cunningham, 2006). Only staffs with two or more respondents were included in the study (see Klein & Kozlowski, 2000). Results provide evidence of sufficient variance between groups, as the mean ICC(1) value was .30, well above the general cutoff of .12 (James, 1982). The
mean inter-rater agreement was .93, above the .70 cutoff recommended by James, Demaree, and Wolf (1993) as representing high agreement among group members. Cumulatively, these results suggest that (a) administrators from a given department generally agreed with one another concerning the study variables, and (b) there was substantial variance among the different departments. Thus, aggregation was statistically justified, and the departmental score was then computed by taking the mean of the responses from that entity. This resulted in the sample decreasing from 911 administrators to 258 departments.

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. Several points are worth noting here. In interpreting the results, it is important to remember that gender and racial diversity values closer to zero represent greater diversity. Comparisons of those two mean scores indicate that departments had greater gender diversity than racial diversity, $t_{(256)} = 10.41, p < .001$. Second, departments were characterized by relatively low deep-level diversity, as the mean score was significantly less than the midpoint of the scale ($4). t_{(186)} = -8.41, p < .001$. Finally, racial diversity was positively associated with the other diversity variables and the outcome variables.

Hypothesis testing

An illustrative summary of the findings is presented in Figure 1. The structural equation model was a close fit to the data: $\chi^2 (N = 258, df = 11) = 4.70, p = .95; CFI = 1.00, RMSEA (90\% CI = .00, .01) = .00, p_{close} = .99$; thus, we used this model to test the study predictions. We hypothesized that racial diversity, gender diversity, and deep-level diversity would be positively related to the attraction of a diverse fan base, respec-

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<td><strong>Descriptive Statistics</strong></td>
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<td>1. Racial diversity</td>
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<td>2. Gender diversity</td>
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<td>3. Deep-level diversity</td>
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<td>.11</td>
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<td>4. Diverse fan base</td>
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<td>.24***</td>
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<td>5. Total revenues</td>
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<td>-.03</td>
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| Mean                  | -2.96 | -2.24 | 3.44 | 4.35 | 13409143.26 |
| Standard deviation    | .42 | 1.15 | .91 | 1.03 | 16005117.73 |

*Notes. Racial and gender diversity values closer to 0 represent greater department diversity. Deep-level diversity and diverse fan base measured on 7-point scales. ***$p < .001$. *$p < .05$.*
tively. Results indicate that racial diversity ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$) and gender diversity ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$) were both positively associated with the variable of interest, while deep-level diversity was not ($\beta = -.09$, $p = .31$). Thus, Hypotheses 1a and 1b received support, while Hypothesis 1c did not.

In Hypotheses 2a and 2b, we predicted that the influence of racial diversity on the attraction of a diverse fan base would be stronger than would the corresponding associations based on gender diversity and deep-level diversity, respectively. To examine these hypotheses, we computed additional analyses with the coefficients of interest constrained to equal one another. I then used the chi-square difference test to determine if the models significantly differed from one another, variates that would indicate that the strengths of the paths were significantly different (see Cunningham, 2006).

In testing Hypothesis 2a, the $p$ from gender diversity to the attraction of a diverse fan base was constrained to be equal to the path from racial diversity to the attraction of a diverse fan base. Results indicate that the model fit was significantly reduced by adding the constraint: $\Delta \chi^2 (N = 258, \Delta df = 1) = 13.28, .01$. Thus, Hypothesis 2a was supported. Hypothesis 2b, which predicted that

\[
\chi^2 (N = 258, df = 11) = 4.70, p = .95; CFI = 1.00, RMSEA (90\% CI = .00, .01) = .00, \text{ p close } = .99
\]

Figure 1. Illustrative Summary of study Results.

Note. Differences in the boldness of the lines represent significant differences in the strength of the relationships.
influence of racial diversity on the attraction of a diverse fan base would be stronger than the corresponding path from deep-level diversity, was also supported. Specifically, the model with the constrained paths was a significantly poorer fit than was the hypothesized model: \( \Delta \chi^2 (N = 258, \Delta df = 1) = 10.37, p < .01 \). These collective differences are presented by the increased boldness of the path from racial diversity to the attraction of a diverse fan base in Figure 1.

Finally, we predicted that the attraction of a diverse fan base would be positively associated with total revenues (Hypothesis 3). This hypothesis received support \( (\beta = .15, p < .05) \).

**Discussion**

One of the purported benefits of a diverse workforce is greater identification with and understanding of various target markets, thereby potentially creating performance gains for the organization (Robinson & Dechant, 1997). Interestingly, however, this assumption has received little empirical scrutiny (Armstrong & Peretto Stratta, 2005; Fink et al., 2001, 2003). The purpose of this study, therefore, was to examine the influence of various diversity forms on the subsequent attraction of a diverse fan base, and how doing so could potentially impact subsequent revenues generated. Results from the study indicate that both gender and racial diversity positively influenced the attraction of a diverse fan base. We also found that the effects of racial diversity were stronger than were the effects of the other diversity forms. Finally, the presence of a diverse fan base provided tangible benefits in the form of total revenues generated by the department. In the remainder of the paper, we outline the contributions of this study, provide practical implications, and discuss the limitations and future directions.

**Contributions and implications**

This study contributes to the literature in a number of ways. First, Cunningham and Fink (2006), in their assessment of the diversity literature in sport management, argued that “additional attention is needed in the theoretical development and theory building in diversity research” (p. 460). Our research addresses such a need, as we grounded our predictions in the resource-based view (Barney, 1991, 2001; Wernerfelt, 1984). Doing so allowed us to empirically test previously taken-for-granted assumptions concerning the relationship between departmental diversity and marketplace understanding.

Second, and in a related way, our theoretical grounding also enabled us to generate hypotheses (Hypotheses 2a-2b) completely unique to the diversity literature—that is, we were able to test for the distinctive effects of different diversity forms on the attraction of a diverse fan base. From a resource-based view, those human capital resources that are rare should positively contribute to the competitive advantage a firm realizes (Peteraf, 1993; Wright et al., 2001). Our data provided strong support for this contention with respect to the racial di-
versity of the department. Not only was racial diversity rarer than the other diversity forms, but it also had significantly stronger effects on the attraction of a diverse fan base than did the other diversity forms. These findings point to the primacy of racial diversity among departmental employees in the marketing efforts of intercollegiate athletic departments.

Third, given the varied effects of diversity on the overall workplace and employees within it (for a review, see Cunningham & Fink, 2006; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007), some have questioned whether the "case for diversity" should be tempered. Mannix and Neale (2005) wrote, "The promise of such a clear-cut financial business case may be more elusive than advocates for diversity had hoped. Instead, the traditional human-resource reasons for diversity...are likely to remain stronger arguments for many organizations" (p. 49). While not denying the positive human-resource effects for diversity, we respectfully disagree with Mannix and Neale's contention, as our data show that departmental diversity (particularly racial diversity) and the attraction of diverse consumers can appreciably impact the business bottom line. To put our findings into perspective, departments in our research averaged $13.4 million in total revenues per year (see Table 1). A 2% difference in those revenues (the amount of variance explained by the attraction of a diverse fan base) translates into $268,000. Given the financial shortfalls most athletic departments face today (Fulks, 2008), these additional revenues can meaningfully impact departmental operations.

Finally, and in tandem with the previous point, our findings have implications for practice and making the "case for diversity" to athletic administrators. Our study contributes to a growing body of literature in the athletics setting pointing to the positive influence of diversity on organizational effectiveness (see also Cunningham & Sagas, 2004). Fink and Pastore have argued that "for diversity initiatives to be truly embedded within the organization, those in power must be convinced of diversity's relationship to organizational effectiveness" (p. 314). Our study, and others like it, provides evidence of this linkage.

Limitations and future directions

Despite the many contributions of the study, there are potential limitations. First, we focused solely on the university athletics setting, and thus, cannot be certain of the same relationships in other contexts. Second, we did not examine other diversity forms, such as differences based on functional background, age, sexual orientation, or education. It is possible that inclusion of these forms might have altered the results.

We also foresee several avenues for future research. First, and in line with the first limitation, this study should be replicated in other settings. Observing similar findings would only strengthen the findings of the current study. Additional research is also warranted to better understand the potential intervening
mechanisms between department diversity and the attraction of a diverse fan base. In our theoretical framework, we argued that this association was observed because of the increased understanding of and identification with different consumer segments. Researchers should explicitly consider these variables in their later models.

CONCLUSIONS

In short, our research suggests that diversity, and more specifically, racial diversity, matters within the context of intercollegiate athletics and the attraction of a diverse set of consumers. These findings are likely to be particularly useful for (a) athletic departments with financial shortcomings (i.e., most departments), and (b) athletic departments in diverse settings where a vast potential consumer base might be untapped. With respect to the latter point, departments in “majority minority” states (i.e., those where the majority of the population are racial minority: Texas, New Mexico, California, and Hawai‘i) might especially benefit from more concerted efforts to attract diverse fans. Given the many moral, human-resource, and financial benefits of diversity, our hope is that this research contributes to the “case for diversity” made to sport managers and athletic administrators.

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Drs. George Cunningham and John Singer are faculty members at Texas A&M University.