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Sports Fantasy Camps: Opportunities for AMTP Members

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ABSTRACT

Sports Tourism is one of the fastest growing areas of the global travel and tourism industry. More organizations are providing more immersive experiences for a growing (and increasingly diverse) fan base by developing Sports Fantasy Camps. This manuscript provides an overview of such Camps and broader Sports Experience Tourism in the area around the Coastal South Carolina (i.e., North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida).

INTRODUCTION

Today's sports fans have a variety of ways to interact with their favorite teams and sports. They can follow their favorite athletes and coaches on social media such as Twitter and Facebook. They can subscribe to relevant news feeds on their smart phones. They can compete in online fantasy sports leagues. They can watch and/or listen to their teams on local television or radio. In recent years, there has been a dramatic increase in more immersive fan experiences to now include stadium tours, fan fantasy camps, video games (e.g., Tiger Woods Golf, Major League Baseball, NCAA football), equipment trials, online fantasy sports leagues, and other highly interactive and personalized experiences (Mitchell, Thorn, and Rockey 2013).

The term "*Sports Experience Tourism*" best captures this growing form of Sports Tourism and fan "connectedness" to their favorite teams, athletes, sporting venues, equipment providers, and other related parties (Mitchell, Thorn, and Rockey 2013). In close proximity to our meeting place in Hilton Head Island, SC interested fans can:

- Attend Baseball Fantasy Camps in South Florida
- Drive a NASCAR racing car in Daytona Beach, FL
- Play a round of golf under PGA conditions at the TPC Sawgrass course in Ponte Verda, FL
- Race a Dragster in Gainesville, FL
- Go to Rodeo School in Summerville, GA
- Tour the Georgia Dome and Turner Field in Atlanta, GA

Historically, AMTP meeting participants have been drawn largely (but certainly not limited to) the Southeastern United States. The purpose of this manuscript is to examine the growing phenomenon of Sports Fantasy Camps with extra attention to their availability to the

Southeastern United States. The intent here is **not** to provide a census; rather, a cross-section of camps will be profiled in the hopes of stimulating participant awareness of this growing industry while concurrently encouraging greater scholarly evaluation of the activities themselves.

- **Author's Note:** We have historically had many AMTP participants from the Pittsburgh, PA area. These folks can participate in a Pittsburgh Steelers Fantasy Camp which includes a tour of Heinz Field and football drills at St. Vincent College in Latrobe, PA. Interested fans can also tour PNC Park (home of the Pittsburgh Pirates) and the CONSOL Energy Center (home of the Pittsburgh Penguins). Further, interested fans can attend the Pirates Fantasy Baseball Camp in Bradenton, FL.

SPORTS FANTASY CAMPS

Overview of Industry

While Sports Tourism is a multi-billion dollar business and one of the fastest growing areas of the \$4.5 trillion global travel and tourism industry (Tassiopaulosa and Haydamb 2007), little research has been conducted to examine the impact and participation rates of the various elements of Sport Tourism such as Sports Fantasy Camps. Since the first Sports Fantasy Camps were introduced in 1996, there has been tremendous growth in the number of programs available as well as the number of fans participating in them (Gibson and Fairley 2011).

Sports Fantasy Camps are used by Sport organizations for a number of reasons, including: (a) creating more brand loyalty; (b) generating additional revenue; (c) getting involved in philanthropic ventures; (d) providing additional sponsorship opportunities; and (e) stimulating sport tourism in the local economy (Mitchell, Thorn, and Rockey 2013). Typically, fans are offered the opportunity to immerse themselves in a favorite sport with current or retired players and coaches and to do so (ideally) in the venue where they currently watch the team play. Here a description of Mike Krzyzewski's Coach K Academy at Duke University (K Academy, 2013):

"K Academy will once again bring team-building techniques into an once-in-a-lifetime experience for the ultimate Duke or college basketball fan. Every camper will spend five days in America's #1 college sports venue – Cameron Indoor Stadium – where they'll go from opening day tryouts to Sunday's championship tournament. Along the way campers will play numerous games on Coach K Court in Cameron and learn the inside scoop on Duke's four-time national championship program. A lively social program, including a charity auction benefiting Durham's Emily Krzyzewski Center, completes the experience. All campers reside in the four-star and recently renovated Washington Duke Inn & Golf Course located on the Duke University campus."

The price of the program is \$10,000 with \$4,000 of that being a charitable donation. Other higher-profile NCAA basketball fantasy camps include University of Kentucky (John Calipari Basketball Fantasy Experience), Syracuse University (Jim Boeheim SU Basketball Fantasy

Camp), University of Kansas (Bill Self Basketball Experience), Indiana University (Tom Crean and the IU Basketball Family Fantasy Weekend), and others.

Ronca (2012) describes Sports Fantasy Camps as “a cross between vacation and training camp. You’re paying for the privilege to spend a few days hanging out with your idols – mingling, meeting-and-greeting, learning more about the game and even playing alongside your hero.” Zullo (2011) suggests the challenge for providers is to find the right balance between hospitality and reality. Heydari (2007) notes that fantasy camps are neither the ease of summer camps nor the rigor of training camps.

An interesting aspect of the Sports Fantasy Camp experience is that fans can use the camps to, in fact, remove the “fantasy” aspect of the sport and become actual participants in games and organizations they enjoy and admire. These fans are able to both watch and participate in the experiences of players, coaches, and administrators of sport organizations, thus removing the mystic of the experience as viewed from the stands or television. Without Fantasy Camps, the fan’s perception of what players and managers experience is left to the imagination, speculation, or rumor (again, given their indirect participation). The Sports Fantasy camp experience gets the fan “out of the seats and onto the playing field” to become active participants. As such, the term “Sports Fantasy Camp” may be a misnomer as fans are shown the reality of sport rather than the fantasy of sport (Mitchell, Thorn, and Rockey 2013).

List of Options in Close Proximity to AMTP Members

Table 1 provides a list of example Sports Fantasy Camps from both Collegiate and Professional sports with opportunities in close proximity to the AMTP meeting in Coastal Georgia (Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, and South Carolina). The camps listed in **Table 1** typically combine lodging, meals, coaching, competition, social events, and other activities in a multi-day immersion. The prices for these camps can change annually based on the number of days, single- or double-occupancy of rooms, and demand based on recent success of the team and/or organization. Note, **Table 1** is meant to be illustrative rather than exhaustive.

Table 1
Sports Fantasy Camps in Close Proximity to this AMTP Meeting

	Provider	Brief Description	Cost
Basketball	Dwyane Wade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4-day residential camp in Miami, FL • Coaching and competition provided • Lodging, meals, and ground transportation provided 	\$12,500
	Mike Krzyzewski	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5-day residential camp in Durham, NC (home of Duke University) • Draft, training, and tournament competition in Cameron Indoor Stadium • Leadership development • Lodging, meals, and ground transportation provided 	\$10,000 (includes a \$4,000 tax deductible contribution)
Football	Dabo Swinney (Clemson)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-day residential camp in Clemson, SC (home to Clemson University) • Skills competition and training • Rub Howard's Rock and Run down the hill into Death Valley stadium • On-field All-in Bowl Game in Death Valley Stadium • Lodging, meals, and ground transportation provided 	\$2,000 (\$1,400 tax deductible)
Baseball	New York Yankees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6-day residential camp in Tampa, FL (Spring Training location) • Games among teams • Dream Games against former Yankee players • Yankee Stadium Camp reunion the following summer (in New York) • Lodging, meals, and ground transportation provided. 	\$4,950
	Boston Red Sox	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9-day residential camp in Fort Myers, FL (Spring Training location) • Games among teams on local fields • Dream Games against former Red Sox players in Hammond Stadium (spring training stadium) • Lodging, meals, and ground transportation provided. 	\$4,195
	Minnesota Twins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8-day residential camp in Fort Myers, FL (Spring Training location) • Games among teams on local fields • Games also played in Hammond Stadium (spring training stadium) • Lodging, meals, and ground transportation provided. 	\$4,095
	Pittsburgh Pirates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential camp in Bradenton, FL (Spring Training location) • Games among teams on local fields • Lodging, meals, and ground transportation provided. 	Not available

Source: Original. Information gathered from camp websites.

Table 1 continued ...

Sport	Provider	Brief Description	Cost
Golf	Professional Golf Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single-day residential experience in Ponte Vedra, FL (home to the TPC Sawgrass Golf Course) • VIP locker room privileges • Personal professional caddie with name on bib • First tee announcement and introduction • One-evening's lodging included 	\$1,385 - \$1,525
NASCAR	Richard Petty Driving Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs offered at 23 different locations: Atlanta, GA; Madison, IL; Brooklyn, MI; Bristol, TN; Homestead-Miami, FL; New Loudon, NH; Fontana, CA; Indianapolis, IN; Orlando, FL; Charlotte, NC; Newton, IA; Phoenix, AZ; Joliet, IL; Kansas City, MO; Fountain, CO; Darlington Raceway, SC; Sparta, KY; Richmond, VA; Daytona, FL; Las Vegas, NV; Fort Worth, TX; Monroe, WA; and Martinsville, VA. • Single-day experience • Drive and Ride programs both available • Non-residential program (lodging and meals not provided) 	\$109 (ride) to \$2,699 (full racing immersion)
Motorsports	Mario Andretti Racing Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs offered at 11 different locations: Atlanta, GA; Fontana, CA; Charlotte, NC; Joliet, IL; Darlington, SC; Homestead-Miami, FL; Sparta, KY; Las Vegas, NV; Myrtle Beach, SC; Richmond, VA; and Fort Worth, TX. • Single-day experience • Both NASCAR (closed-wheel) and INDY (open-wheel) experiences available • Drive and Ride programs both available • Non-residential program (lodging and meals not provided) 	\$129 (ride) to \$464 (drive)
Drag Racing	Frank Hawley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs provided at 7 different locations: Gainesville, FL; Las Vegas, NV; Indianapolis, IN; Baytown, TX; Norwalk, OH; Reading, PA; and Denver, CO • Single-day and multi-day experiences provided. • Drive and Ride programs both available • Participants can earn their NHRA licenses which allows them to compete at NHRA tracks 	Varies based on program
Rodeos	Sankey Rodeos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs provided at 10 different locations: Derby, KS; Van Wert, OH; Penrose, CO; Buhl, ID; Zolfo Springs, FL; New Caney, TX; Humansville, MO; Summerville, GA; Centerville, IA; Martin, TN • 3-day and 4-day Rodeo School and instruction • Non-residential program (lodging and meals not provided) 	\$410 (3-day) \$435 (4-day)

Source: Original. Information gathered from camp websites.

The Fan Experience

The Fantasy Camps highlighted above are multi-day residential camps at fixed locations. Clemson Football campers, for example, want to exit the bus atop the hill in the North Endzone of Memorial Stadium (a.k.a. Death Valley), rub Howard's Rock, and run down the hill and onto the field. The same can be said for Duke Basketball fans and their desire to shoot a basketball in Cameron Indoor Stadium.

Single-day camps represent a low-cost market entry strategy for a school, player, or coach interested in introducing Sports Fantasy Camps to their camp programs. The Myrtle Beach Pelicans host a 1-day Baseball Fantasy Camp on Father's Day each year (Myrtle Beach Pelicans 2012). The Charlotte Bobcats (and majority owner Michael Jordan) introduced a one-day fantasy camp for premium season ticket holders only (Swanson 2011). There are also 'road-show' fantasy camps where the camp is brought to participants. Rowdy Gaines, Olympic Champion and NBC Swimming broadcaster has delivered numerous stroke clinics for children and master swimmers across the Southeast United States (Gaines 2013).

In addition to the camps outlined above, many active and retired players host individual one-day camps. These camps are usually provided for free and target children. Many use an umbrella organization such as ProCamps to organize and market their camps. Steve Smith, of the Carolina Panthers (NFL), provides such a camp for youth in Charlotte, NC (Smith 2013).

Many universities run "Ladies Clinics" to teach female fans more about the games, teams, and programs (Zullo 2011). These events tend to be single-day and even partial-day experiences (such as an Evening gathering). Here is an overview of the Dabo Swinney Ladies Clinic held at Clemson University. For the most recent year, \$15 of the \$60 registration fee goes to support breast cancer research. (Swinney 2013).

- Presentations by Coaches in the West End Zone facility including the Tiger weight room, locker room, team meeting room, and Death Valley.
- Meet and Greet Photo w/ Coach Swinney.
- Interaction with all the Tiger Football Coaches and families.
- Shopping with Clemson Tiger vendors.
- Lunch provided by Wendy's.
- Silent and Live Auction items.
- Special Guest Speakers and Entertainment.

Prices reflect the exclusivity of the fan experience. Many Sports Fantasy Camps are expensive in relation to other sports experiences (such as a single game ticket) and, therefore, appeal to a smaller segment of the overall consumer base. This smaller number of fans creates a 'private club' feel where members are privy to the exclusive experience, knowledge or networking opportunities provided by the camp. The Coach K Academy at Duke University, for example, notes that enrollment is limited to 80 participants and participants must be 35 years of age or older (K Academy 2013).

An Opportunity for Fundraising and Revenue Growth

The providers of Sports Fantasy camps have a wonderful opportunity to promote and achieve goodwill among their fan base. By doing so, they are encouraging fans to become or remain brand loyal. This higher level of brand loyalty may lead to increased sales opportunities for the organization (Fullerton 2007). For example, a partial season ticket holder may upgrade to a full season package. Or, a ticket holder may upgrade to a different type of ticket, such as box seats, floor level, or a suite (depending on the sport and stadium configuration). To reward fan loyalty, many sports camps provide discounts to alumni campers returning for another year.

Providing Fantasy Camp experiences can create fundraising opportunities for the school as well (Fullerton 2007). For instance, a collegiate ticket holder may increase their level of athletic donation as a result of the increased connection they feel to the University as a result of their Fan Fantasy experience. For the Coach K Academy, \$4,000 of the \$10,000 participation fee represents a charitable contribution to Duke University. Dabo Swinney's Fantasy Camp raised money for Clemson's Call Me MISTER ("Mentors Instructing Students toward Effective Role Models") Program, an effort to increase the diversity of teachers working in the state's elementary schools (Swinney 2013).

The Fantasy Camp itself may serve as a fundraiser for an organization outside the university or athletic department (Watkins 2012). Dabo Swinney directs a portion of each entry fee for his Ladies Clinic to Breast Cancer awareness and treatment (Zullo 2011).

Caution to Fans

Attending a Sports Fantasy Camp can be expensive. The camps profiled here tend to cost from \$2,000 to \$12,500 for a multi-day immersion experience. As noted earlier, spots are often limited so interested fans must act quickly to ensure their participation. The K Academy of Duke University accepts only 80 participants per year at a cost of \$10,000 per participant in 2012.

As noted earlier, Sports Fantasy Camps offer participants more rigor than Summer Camps but less rigor than Training Camps. Injuries do occur (Montvalo 2011). For example, attendees to Sankey Rodeo Schools do ride bulls and can be injured. The Andrews Institute (2012) recommends participants should train for 12 weeks before attending such events.

FACILITY TOURS IN THE AMTP REGION

Public tours of sports stadiums, race tracks, and arenas have become very commonplace as fans get a behind-the-scenes experience with their favorite venues. Many of the sports facilities in the AMTP region offer tours for interested fans. The University of South Carolina (Columbia, SC) and Coastal Carolina University (Conway, SC) have auctioned off pre-game stadium tours for interested fans for their respective teams. A list of sports facilities available for public tours in the AMTP region is provided in **Table 2**.

Table 2
Facility Tours in Close Proximity to this AMTP Meeting

Facility	Location	Website
Georgia Dome Atlanta Falcons	Atlanta, GA	http://www.gadome.com/about/Dome_Tour.aspx
Turner Field Atlanta Braves	Atlanta, GA	http://atlanta.braves.mlb.com/atl/ballpark/tours/index.jsp
Everbank Field Jacksonville Jaquars	Jacksonville, FL	http://www.jaguars.com/everbank-field/stadium-tours.html
Marlins Park Florida Marlins	Miami, FL	http://miami.marlins.mlb.com/mia/ballpark/marlins_park_tours.jsp
Bank of America Stadium Carolina Panthers	Charlotte, NC	http://www.panthers.com/stadium/tours.html
Sun Life Stadium Miami Dolphins	Miami, FL	http://www.sunlifestadium.com/sun-life-stadium-tours
Daytona Speedway NASCAR	Daytona, FL	http://www.daytonainternationalspeedway.com/Tours/Tours.aspx
Darlington Raceway NASCAR	Darlington, SC	http://www.darlingtonraceway.com/About-Us/Museum-Giftshop.aspx
Charlotte Motor Speedway NASCAR	Charlotte, NC	http://www.charlottemotorspeedway.com/tours/
Atlanta Motor Speedway NASCAR	Atlanta, GA	http://www.atlantamotorspeedway.com/fanzone/tours/
Memorial Stadium: A Virtual Tour Clemson Tigers	Clemson, SC	http://earlycommit1.com/clemson360/vtour-fb/tour.html
Kenan Stadium: A Virtual Tour UNC Rams	Chapel Hill, NC	http://digitour360.com/unc/football/?SPID=108097&DB_OEM_ID=3350

Source: Original.

Some area University Football programs provide virtual tours on their facilities online which appeal to both prospective student-athletes and hardcore fans. For example, Clemson University (2013) provides a virtual tour of Memorial Stadium (commonly known as Death Valley) on their website as does the University of North Carolina (2013) for its Kenan Stadium. While the focus is the field-level view for (assumedly football recruits), fans can also get a virtual birds-eye view of the player's experience.

Some tour operators organize fan fantasy trips to allow baseball fans to catch a series of games on consecutive days but in different cities. In fact, there are websites and books dedicated to helping fans plan the most efficient route to catch a game in all stadiums in defined periods of time (Ball Park Chasers 2013). Baseball Pilgrimages (2013) is dedicated to baseball fans and their desire for sports-related travel. They note the uniqueness of the Carolinas and minor league baseball:

“The great thing about spring training is that there are many teams located within a short drive of each other and you can see many stadiums with a short commute. Although most of the games are in the afternoon, there are just enough at night to make it possible to take in a day-night doubleheader between different teams at different ballparks.”

*“Fast forward to summer, after the majority of Major League teams have left Florida and Arizona behind, **and the best place for a baseball pilgrimage is North Carolina, where 11 minor league teams are spread over five leagues, and ten of those teams are located within a 275-mile radius.** Plus, minor league prices reflect savings over the discounted, but increasing, MLB prices in March.”*

Though NASCAR's head office is located in Daytona Beach, FL, most of the Race Shops can be found in North Carolina. In fact, about 90% of Sprint Cup teams, 72% of Nationwide Series teams and 55% are located in North Carolina with a concentration around the Northern Charlotte area (Charlotte Metro Chamber of Commerce 2013). Examples teams (and locations) include:

- Earnhardt Ganassi Racing (Concord, NC)
- Hendrick Motorsports (Charlotte, NC)
- Joe Gibbs Racing (Huntersville, NC)
- Michael Waltrip Racing (Cornelius, NC)
- Penske Racing (Mooresville, NC)
- Richard Childress Racing (Welcome, NC)
- Richard Petty Motorsports (Statesville, NC)
- Roush Fenway Racing (Concord, NC)
- Stewart-Haas Racing (Kannapolis, NC)

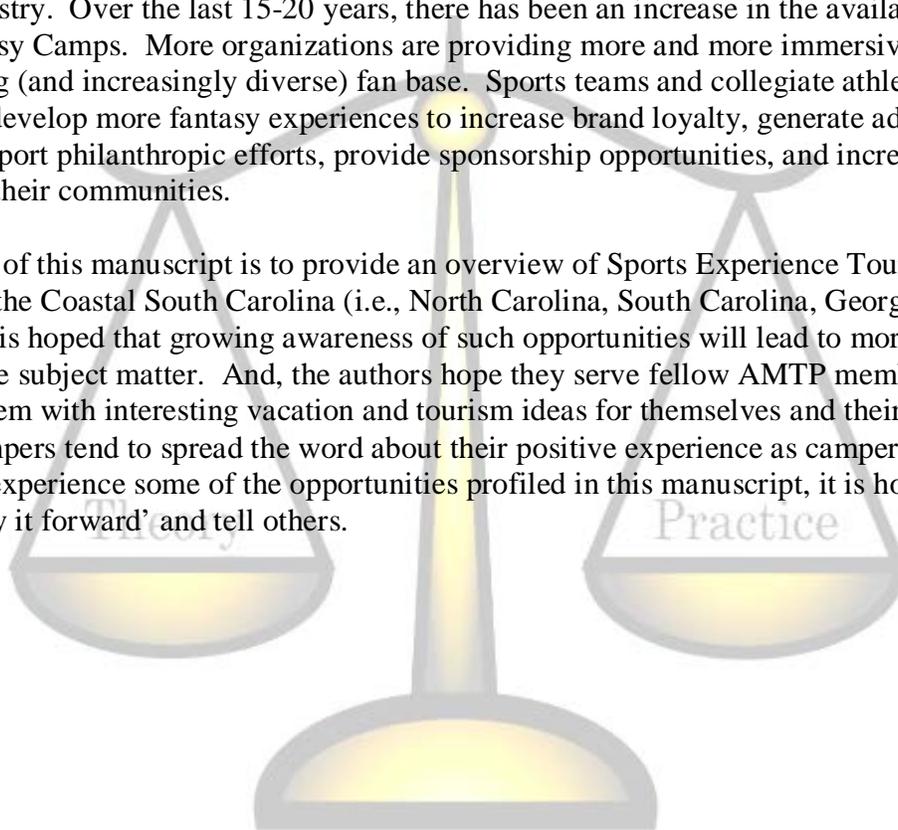
Golfers interested in playing a round on the courses used for professional events have many options in the area. For example, interested golfers can play the Ocean Course at Kiawah Island Golf Resort (just outside of Charleston, SC). The Ocean Course has hosted numerous PGA events, including: 1991 Ryder Cup; 1997 and 2003 World Cups; 2001 UBS Cup; 2005 PGA Championship; 2007 Senior PGA Championship; and (most recently) the 2012 PGA

Championship (Kiawah Resort 2013). The No. 2 course at Pinehurst (NC) will host the 2014 U.S. Open Championship. It is available for public play (Pinehurst 2013). Indeed, the entire Florida swing of the PGA Tour is played on public-access courses: TPC Sawgrass – Players Stadium Course; Innisbrook Golf Club – Copperhead Course; Bay Hill Club; Doral Golf Resort & Spa – TPC Blue Monster; and Walt Disney World Resort – Magnolia. It should be noted that Augusta National (Augusta, GA) is NOT available for public play nor are public tours provided. In fact, the course is not visible to traffic on perimeter streets.

CLOSING REMARKS

As noted earlier, Sports Tourism is one of the fastest growing areas of the global travel and tourism industry. Over the last 15-20 years, there has been an increase in the availability of Sports Fantasy Camps. More organizations are providing more and more immersive experiences for a growing (and increasingly diverse) fan base. Sports teams and collegiate athletic programs continue to develop more fantasy experiences to increase brand loyalty, generate additional revenue, support philanthropic efforts, provide sponsorship opportunities, and increase visitor spending in their communities.

The purpose of this manuscript is to provide an overview of Sports Experience Tourism in the area around the Coastal South Carolina (i.e., North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida). It is hoped that growing awareness of such opportunities will lead to more academic interest in the subject matter. And, the authors hope they serve fellow AMTP members by providing them with interesting vacation and tourism ideas for themselves and their families. Fantasy Campers tend to spread the word about their positive experience as campers. As you (hopefully) experience some of the opportunities profiled in this manuscript, it is hoped that you, too, will ‘pay it forward’ and tell others.



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