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PROFESSIONAL SPORTS TEAMS AND FAN RELATIONS:
A PUBLIC RELATIONS CASE STUDY OF THE 1998-99
PHILADELPHIA EAGLES FOOTBALL TEAM

by
Laura Elizabeth Litrenta

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree of The Graduate School at
Rowan University
June 30, 1999

Approved by _____

Date Approved June 30, 1999

ABSTRACT

Laura E. Litrenta
Professional Sports Teams and Fan Relations:
A Public Relations Case Study of the 1998-99 Philadelphia Eagles Football Team
1998
Advisor: Dr. Suzanne Sparks FitzGerald
Public Relations Graduate Program

In professional sports, the field of public relations helps organizations foster positive relationships with their fans. But, when teams suffer losing seasons, recording more losses than wins, these relationships become strained.

The purpose of this study was to reveal how losing seasons affect the bond between professional sports teams and their fans. The results encourage sports relations practitioners to recognize fan needs and develop techniques that can help organizations maintain a more positive relationship with their fans during a losing season.

To examine the relationship between a professional sport team and its fans, this researcher traced the performance of the 1998-99 Philadelphia Eagles Football Team. Recording three wins and 13 losses, the organization clearly illustrated the effects of a losing season on sports fans. This researcher conducted content analyses of print and audio media and brief surveys to evaluate fan attitudes and behaviors during the season.

Findings indicate that fans experience frustration, lose team interest and become personally affected as their favorite team records a losing season. If employed, public relations techniques may effectively improve the strained bond and create a more positive relationship between sports organizations and their fans.

MINI-ABSTRACT

Laura E. Litrenta

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This study determined how losing seasons affect the bond between professional sports teams and their fans. To examine this bond, this researcher traced the 1998-99 Philadelphia Eagles Football Team to evaluate fan attitudes and behaviors during the losing season. The findings indicate that fans experience frustration, lose team interest and become personally affected as their favorite team records a losing season. If employed, public relations techniques may effectively improve the strained bond and create a more positive relationship between sports organizations and their fans.

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I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Larry and Mary Litrenta. It is my father’s love of sports that truly inspired this study’s purpose while my mother’s love of research helped complete it. I am grateful for their inspiration and assistance, and I thank them for not only believing in me, but for teaching me to believe in myself.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Public relations fosters relationships between organizations and publics. It provides various communication methods that allow organizations to effectively explore, manage and maintain positive relationships with their target audiences. In the sports world, various relationships must exist to maintain the growth and prosperity of sports organizations. Consequently, sports relations, a type of public relations, focuses on developing direct and interactive communication channels between sports organizations, team owners, management, coaches, players and fans. Seth Abraham (1995), guest columnist for *USA Today*, writes, “So, it becomes the responsibility of all of us involved in sports to remember that the manner in which we conduct our businesses affects tens of millions of fans who know more about box scores than bottom lines.” This responsibility becomes the primary task of the sports-relations practitioner.

In 1996, Terence Monmaney, a *Los Angeles Times* medical reporter wrote, “Sports teams are one way of creating cultural identity across lines of race, ethnic background and class.” He adds that, “people develop an identity with sports teams that produces a common thread unifying a city or nation.” This unification can only exist through the maintenance of communication between these sports teams and their supporters, the fans. Therefore, sports relations becomes a necessity for sports organizations. Forging positive

relationships between a sports organization and its publics, sports relations functions as the communication device between a franchise and its client, the spectators.

Monmaney (1996) says, "Researchers have long puzzled over the bond of spectator to team." Some researchers have tested the biological and emotional similarities of spectators and athletes. As a result, these scientists learned that diehard fans consider sports as a lifestyle, a part of daily activity. Since sports fans value the challenge and outcome of sporting events, sports-relations practitioners must strive to produce winning, profitable teams and a strong bond with their fans. Forming these successful bonds helps sports organizations retain their publics and remain strong, corporate competitors.

In 1991, Georges Magnane, a French newspaper columnist, wrote,

Sporting events constitute a system of evaluation which is offered to the public. The sporting public is wildly generous in its enthusiasms; it offers its applause without reservations because it has complete confidence in what is happening. Spectators feel they are taking part in something real.

Generating enthusiastic, spirited and continuous responses from spectators is a practitioner's primary goal. To achieve this goal, the practitioner must develop effective communication between the organization and the fans. Pat Croce, president and part-owner of the Philadelphia 76ers Professional Basketball Team, continuously strives to build and retain communication within his organization. In a recent article, author Bill Cramer writes, "Croce believes the most important aspect of any business organization is communication." (*Sales & Marketing Management*, April 1998)

As a public-relations practitioner, forming close bonds between these publics can become challenging. Sports-relations obstacles often emerge when organizations fail to satisfy their primary audience, the fans. In these instances, fan dissatisfaction can cause

organizations' reputations and profits to plummet. Thus, a relationship between a sports organization and its clientele erodes and a demand for additional public-relations counseling rises.

Problem

This researcher will examine the many ways sports organizations can create communication methods to sustain customers' attention, interest and satisfaction. Concentrating on professional-sports organizations, this researcher will attempt to detail fan motives for and expectations of sports organizations.

Gaining a better understanding of sports fans' opinions, attitudes and lifestyles, sports-relations practitioners can outline fan-loyalty cause and retention. Among the elements that contribute to fan loyalty, Monmaney explains how one study relates a person's self image to the cause of fan loyalty. He says, "Central to intense fanship is what psychologists call identification, the longing to belong that helps explain why, say, Atlanta Braves followers brandish foam-rubber tomahawks." Based on findings from psychological studies, scientists argue that the lower a person's self-image, the greater that person's tendency to identify with a sports organization. Robert Cialdini, a researcher at Arizona State University, termed this tendency "Basking in Reflected Glory" in the mid-1970s. He found that this search for identification explains the attraction of sports teams to fans. He says, "Whole municipalities go into minor periods of mourning after defeat in a close game."

Identifying fan needs may alleviate the challenge of maintaining fan interest during an organization's hardships. According to *Boston Globe* reporter Web Nichols (1998),

“Today, an owner senses he must provide an experience for the spectator that is greater than the sum of any aggravation the spectator has had to endure, including rising costs, inconvenience, even losing.” Among the many trials a sports team may face, a losing season defines a professional-sports organization’s most serious plight, because when teams lose, fans feel they too lose a part of themselves.

Ultimately, this thesis will test and recommend sports-relations techniques for managing the relationship between a professional-sports team and its fans during a losing season. Cramer (1998) quotes Pat Croce when he writes, “When your team is losing--and we are --you have to do anything you can to build loyalty in the fan.”

Delimitations

This thesis question fails to consider several sports-relations areas. Because the topic focuses on professional sports, this thesis cannot offer insights on high school, college, amateur and other sports organizations’ relationships with their fans.

Also, fan opinions and attitudes hold great relevance to an organization’s success. Because these thoughts may change depending on a team’s annual performance, a team’s losing record may greatly affect fan judgment and behavior. Therefore, during a losing season, when a sports team loses more competitions than they win, organizations must analyze fan satisfaction. The outcome of this researcher’s analysis cannot represent identical conditions for teams that experience a winning season since the research is limited to only a losing season’s consequences.

The theme of this thesis focuses on professional-sports organizations’ fans. Exploring this subject, this researcher will include information concerning team owners,

coaches and players but will not dwell on teams' internal communications. Instead, this thesis will reveal a relationship between these parties and their fans based on the organization's and fans' perspectives.

In addition to question delimitations, the thesis procedures will also include several restrictions. The research procedures will incorporate both quantitative and qualitative methods, including two content analyses of a professional sports team's media coverage and intercept studies that explore attitudes and opinions of a specific sports organization. Because these research techniques define data of a present time period, they fail to represent past or future conditions. From the gathered data, sports-relations practitioners can form guidelines for solving future problems, but cannot assume that identical outcomes will prevail.

This researcher analyzed the elements of a professional sports team case study. Recently, the 1998 Philadelphia Eagles Professional Football Team recorded a losing season. Finishing the season with three wins and 13 losses, the team suffered a defeating season both on and off the football field. As many National Football League teams dominated the Eagles, the Philadelphia and surrounding-area fans faced a year of great upset and disappointment.

This researcher will examine the relationship between the Eagles team and its fans by determining the level of fan loyalty, satisfaction and overall interest existing within the organization. This specific research method causes several conflicts. Among these problems, practitioners may not generalize the presented information but can only evaluate the situation, study the results and consider multiple solutions.

Purpose

According to Daniel L. Wann (1992), a doctoral candidate in social psychology, professional organizations rely on their fans for revenue. He says that high fan identification leads to significant profit increases. Evidently, a relationship exists between professional-sports organizations and their fans. Social psychologist James Dabbs produced evidence of this relationship through a biological study. He concluded that fans experience physiological changes similar to those felt by the players for whom the fans root. Therefore, sports fans relate to the teams they watch.

This thesis originated from the researcher's strong interest in public relations and sports. Combining these two interests, this topic will provide original research to the field. This relationship-management study will contribute valuable information to sports-relations practitioners. **The results will reveal techniques that may affect the strained relationship between an organization and its fans during a losing season.**

Several hypotheses form the basis for this research.

H1: It is expected that the fans of a professional-sports organization will experience frustration during a losing season. Fans will express a sense of disgruntlement, annoyance, disappointment and defeat when discussing views of their favorite team's losing record. Wann (1992) says, "Sports fans can literally live and die with each play their beloved team makes in any given season." He adds, "Highly identified individuals show the most pronounced reactions to their teams' successes and failures, with those high in identification exhibiting the most derogation following a loss." In great contrast, Wann also found that low identified persons distance themselves from a sports team when it fails. Here, it is expected that highly identified Eagles fans

will offer strong responses while low identified fans will attempt to distance themselves from the football team. Through Wann's research, it is expected that not all fans will be equally frustrated by the team's defeat. He says, "It is quite likely that the loss is upsetting only for those subjects highly identified with the team."

H2: It is expected that the fans of a professional-sports organization will lose team interest during a defeating season. Fans will begin to follow or support other NFL teams, will participate in non-football activities, will stray from the stadium, television and radio (announcing the games) or will pursue different hobbies.

H3: It is expected that certain fans of professional-sports teams will become personally affected during a losing season. Team followers will feel angry, embarrassed, stressed, depressed and exhausted following a team's recorded loss. According to Monmaney, dozens of Kansas City Chiefs fans signed up for a group therapy session, "Chiefs Grief," after the team lost a close NFL playoff game in 1996. Perhaps Eagles' fans will express the desire to seek professional therapy, take a vacation, avoid conversation with family or friends, take a day off from work, eat more or eat less or deny their association with the team.

H4: It is expected that if a sports-relations practitioner employs certain techniques, a professional-sports organization could maintain a more positive relationship with its fans during a losing season. Researching the causes and solutions for spectator aggression, Wann writes,

It would be quite difficult, if not impossible, to reduce the spectators' desire to raise their level of self-esteem after their team has been defeated. Organizations may want to attempt to raise the spectators' self-esteem artificially in some way. For example, many organizations give away food and other prizes if their team

wins. They may want to try such an endeavor when the team loses as well. Also, teams may want to try and focus on the “spirit of the game”, allowing and encouraging fans to feel good simply because they witnessed such a fine sporting event. (1992)

Clearly, Wann suggests these techniques to boost self-esteem within sports fans. Although this thesis does not focus on sports fan aggression, these techniques may help alleviate Eagles fans’ dissatisfaction during the losing season and maintain a positive relationship between the organization and its publics. In addition to these activities, the sports-relations practitioner may urge team management to develop a visual, extroverted and sincere personality during the season. The fans may appreciate and value a team owner, coach or player who continually presents himself to the public, answers fan and media questions and works to produce an actual relationship with the fans.

Procedure

In testing these hypotheses, the researcher included both quantitative and qualitative research. Two content analyses of Philadelphia media provided quantitative research focusing on the 1998 Philadelphia Eagles’ status during the early, mid and late periods of the season. Articles appearing in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* issued information on the football team’s record, game summaries, player analyses, coaching opinions and news-conference comments, ownership and management comments and fan perspectives. Sports-talk radio also provided research data. The Philadelphia sports-talk station, 610-WIP, provided fan commentaries, opinions, suggestions and beliefs on the football team’s

ability, talent, performance and future. This researcher recorded the immediate post-game radio shows and calculated the various fan responses.

In addition to the content analysis, this researcher conducted qualitative research, namely, intercept studies. The informal survey gathered the opinions of 60 football fans who followed the 1998-99 NFL season. This researcher questioned random fans at two local sports bars during the Superbowl game and fans who have contributed to the Eagles' website message boards. The study measured fans' level of identification, support, loyalty, attitude and conduct during the 1998-99 season.

Terminology

Understanding the purpose, research, recommendations and overall content of this thesis requires the researcher to define key terms incorporated within the study.

Sports Relations- a type of public relations that fosters a relationship between a sports organization and its publics, including the media and the fans, through research, counseling and other communication methods.

Fan (spectator)- short for fanatic, a person who holds interest in a sport or sports team. Fans follow and support a sport or team by watching games on television or in person, listening to games on the radio, reading articles in newspapers and magazines, visiting team websites, tracking player statistics, purchasing team apparel and merchandise and participating in conversations and debates about their favorite team. Wann writes, "Spectator identification is defined as the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as fans of the team, are involved with the team, are concerned with the team's performance, and view the team as a representation of themselves." (1992)

Fan Frustration- a feeling or emotion experienced by fans that produces a sense of disappointment, discontent, discouragement, disgruntlement, irritation or annoyance due to team management, players, performance, attitude, game outcome or overall experience.

Fan Interest (fan involvement)- the level at which a fan follows or supports a team. For example, a highly interested football fan may plan his weekend schedule around the team's weekly game; however, a less interested fan may only watch the weekly game if his schedule permits.

Fan Loyalty- A bond formed between a sports team and its fans. William Allman, author of an evolutionary psychology book, says, "Loyalty to a clan appears to be one of the most primordial human emotions." (Monmaney 1996) Fans faithfully and continuously follow, support, and attend or watch their favorite teams through victorious and defeating seasons. Jean Mitchell, manager of the Cleveland Psychological Assn., says, "The outbreak of gridiron grief [from Browns fans after the team moved to Baltimore,] suggests that some Americans have a surprisingly complicated bond with their home teams." (Monmaney 1996) This researcher considers this bond as loyalty. *Sports Illustrated* staff writer Kostya Kennedy writes, "The NFL has the most dedicated TV audience of any U.S. pro league." (Kennedy 1997)

Fan Psychology- the study of the mind of the fan. Kevin Quirk, an author and support-group leader, says, "Sports may become our only emotional release. We jump for joy, scream at the referee, pray that kick through the uprights-but we shut off our emotions any other time. Some sports addicts react more strongly to their local team losing a key game than to being denied a promotion." (Quirk 1998) Tim Curry, a

sociology professor, says, "Sports fanaticism is 'one of the last ways you can be excited and get carried away emotionally.'" (Narciso 1996)

Losing Season- when a team records more losses than wins during the regular season (excluding post, or playoff, season). In professional football, teams play 16 games. A football team records a losing season when they lose 9 games or more. The 1998 Philadelphia Eagles recorded a losing season, losing 13 of the 16 regular season games.

Personally Affected- A fan who becomes personally affected by the performance of his favorite team may feel stressed, depressed, shocked, ashamed, embarrassed, exhausted or angry. Jack Lesyk, director of the Ohio Center for Sport Psychology in Cleveland, says, "An estimated 75 percent of my patients have used therapy time to discuss football. Anger is probably the predominant emotion I've seen." (Monmaney 1996)

The 1998 Philadelphia Eagles Professional Football Team- the Philadelphia, Pa., based professional-football team belonging to the National Football League (NFL). During the 1998-99 season, Jeffrey Lurie owned the Eagles, Ray Rhodes coached the team and local fans spanned three states: Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware.

Professional Sports Organization- a sports team that belongs to a national league of competing teams and profits from ticket and merchandise sales and through the interest of its fans. David Murphy, contributor to the Information Access Company, writes, "In recent years, as increasing amounts of money have flowed into football, the sport has had to come to terms with the fact that it is now a huge business." (Murphy 1996) The Philadelphia Eagles are a professional-football sports organization and compete in the National Football League (NFL).

Sports Organization Management- a division of the sports organization consisting of the team owner, advisors, administrators and coaches.

Sports Talk Radio, 610-WIP- a Philadelphia based radio station comprised of all-talk programming that highlights local sports organizations with caller (fan) perspectives.

Content Analysis- Author George V. Zito writes, “A content analysis is a methodology by which the researcher seeks to determine the manifest content of written, spoken, or published communications by systematic, objective, and quantitative analysis.” (Berger 1998) This thesis contains a content analysis of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and discussions featured on 610-WIP talk radio.

Intercept Study- A short survey probing a random, non-scientific sample’s attitudes, opinions and feelings toward a particular issue.

Chapter 2

Sports Relations

In order to define and examine sports relations, this researcher must illustrate how professional sports teams serve as corporations. Jean d'Ormesson (1991) says that money invades sport. He explains that with the help of technology and advertising, money became sport's primary distortion, causing pastimes and hobbies to transform into an enterprising industry. Webb Nichols (1998) adds, "Professional sports has always been about making money." He explains that as professional sports teams increase costs, the game's adrenaline and the thrill of competition rapidly disappear. David Murphy (1996) agrees as he explains how money flowed into football, turning the sport into a huge business. Therefore, pro sports teams evolved into corporate headquarters for an enticing, entertainment industry.

Robert Scheer (1995) says that as businesses, sports franchises depend on taxpayers to fund expensive team improvements and building renovations. Since sports organizations contribute to a city's economic status, Jason Vest (1997) traced their impact and influence on local communities. Vest says that many economists conclude that pro sports teams contribute minimally to local economies. Furthermore, he claims that local governments consistently strive to attract and maintain sports teams, sustaining these corporate welfare systems. Similarly, Mark S. Rosentraub (1997) discusses how governments fail to realize sports teams' minuscule economic impact. He says that

although sports teams serve as small to medium-sized firms, political leaders ignore the empty promises of jobs, reputation and wealth that these organizations make. He adds that these representatives invest little time in weighing welfare-system benefits and vices and clearly fail to understand that only team owners reap substantial profits.

In great contrast to these economists, John McCormick (1997) presents the perspectives of the corporate CEOs known as sports franchise owners. He claims that owners argue that sports teams boost economic development and raise tax revenues, thus contributing to the wealth of local cities. Voters and taxpayers may agree with these views, however, they may not prefer dominating owners.

Vest says that, recently, cities began to strongly oppose greedy, controlling team owners. He adds that many communities prefer to experiment with various forms of team ownership due to owners' attitudes and actions. Vest says, "The drive for public ownership is likely to continue—unless owners stop behaving like Don Corleone." Similarly, Scheer reveals fans' perspectives that wealthy owners care nothing for fan loyalty and dedication. He says that, instead, owners concentrate on the success of their bottom lines since, "major league sports has become an owner's game." Scheer suggests that team owners consistently collect huge profits and demand new, extravagant stadiums, even if their teams rank low in the standings.

In great contrast to this image, Bill Cramer (1998) presents the portrait of a beloved sports team owner. Pat Croce, part owner and president of the Philadelphia 76ers Professional Basketball Team, depicts the concept of an ideal team owner. Cramer discusses how Croce handles his team and his fans saying, "No, this isn't your ordinary owner." Turning around a losing basketball team, the organization uses significant

marketing, advertising and public relations techniques. The most important factor, though, is the owner. David Closky, the 76ers' vice president of marketing says, "Croce runs this team like a small business where everybody has a say in what goes on."

In addition to ownership issues, management plays an important role in sports organizations. One study explored the short- and long-term effects of mid-season changes in management and leadership. McTeer, White and Persad (1995) reported that new coaches and managers, who join the team during the mid-season, force a significant short-term and an insignificant long-term impact on a team. The study also revealed that a new manager can improve team performance through inducing a renewed motivation within players and by avoiding previous coaching mistakes. The study recommended that future research should include a study that explores the relationship between coaches and players during winning, losing and transition seasons.

Every corporation produces a product that leads to sales and profits. In the sports industry, organizations yield team performance. Nyla R. Branscombe and Daniel L. Wann (1992) confirm that research demonstrates that competition outcomes directly impact fan entertainment. In a recent study that explores scientific ways to rate team performances, Gilbert W. Bassett Jr. (1997) reports that past performances can estimate a team's ratings. Two additional studies examined home team performances. Mary Brophy Marcus (1997) tested the perception that home teams hold an advantage over the traveling team. The studies indicate that West Coast basketball and football teams, traveling east to compete, score more points and win more games than East Coast based teams.

In addition to products, corporations also consist of their clientele, or audience. In professional sports, the fans define the role of the customer and become the organization's primary audience. Dean Narciso (1996) says, "The word fan is a short version of fanatic." Supporting studies of sports fans, Branscombe and Wann examined the role of identification with a group and the aggressive behavior within spectators. They define spectator identification as, "the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as fans of the team, are involved with the team, are concerned with the team's performance, and view the team as a representation of themselves." Categorizing fans as highly-identified and low-identified individuals, these researchers detected that more involved fans show greater reactions to team wins and losses. In 1997, Wann found that highly identified fans who observe their team win consider the experience more enjoyable than low identified persons. Similarly, low identified fans tend to distance themselves from teams that fail in competition. In addition, Branscombe and Wann stressed that, "when studying spectator behavior the most involved spectators may display the most intense reactions." Researcher Cialdini argues that individuals with low self esteem tend to identify strongly with sports teams. In a recent study, Cialdini found that college students wore more school paraphernalia when their teams won competitions and distanced themselves from the teams suffering losses. Lawrence Wenner (1996) notes that fans keep an identity with local sports teams because they develop a common thread with the community. This thread offers fans a sense of belonging and security within their domestic environments.

In addition to these definitions of fan identification, Wann, Tucker and Schrader (1996) say that fans perceive many factors as important identification sources. These

elements include: team success, geographical location, the athletes and affiliation. James Nuechterlein (1998) offers an even simpler explanation of fan identity. He says, “There are those whose preoccupation with sports becomes so all-consuming as to constitute a moral disorder, but for the majority of us, sports provides a pleasurable interlude in life...for which we should be grateful.”

Tracing the development of professional sports organizations into corporations, this researcher must outline the need for and purpose of public relations. Clearly, a relationship exists between sports teams (corporations) and their fans (customers). Terence Monmaney (1996) notes that Americans possess a surprisingly complicated bond with their home sports teams. Social psychologist James Dabbs found that sports fans may experience physiological changes that directly relate to the observed athletes’ hormone levels, demonstrating that a valid, even physical, relationship exists between the two parties. Because of this relationship, public relations becomes an integral element in the success of the sports industry. Thus, the field of sports relations emerges.

Terence Monmaney (1996) says that for years, researchers studied the bond between fans and teams. He adds that these bonds, usually formed in sports stadiums and bars, attract and command the male gender. Margaret Duncan (1996) says sports, especially football, serve as an outlet for the expression of male emotion. She adds that the problem unfolds when city officials forget that sports become a primary source of entertainment for community members. Monmaney says that as these leaders, “tackle economic impact questions,” fans begin feeling abandoned, depressed, and angry. Therefore, a liaison becomes a necessary communication means between sports teams and their fans.

David Murphy (1996), a British writer, explores communication, or public relations, between European football teams and their fans. He found that teams reap the benefits of wealth and popularity, however, lack awareness and regard for their fans. Terming the task 'customer relations,' Murphy questions sports teams' marketing and communication methods. Paul Hawkes (1996) confesses that teams feel no need to cater to fans in the way other businesses regard their market. Marcus Evans (1996) agrees. He says that teams make little effort to assess and understand fan needs. Arguing this same theme, David Lacey (1996) proclaims that because of this attitude, teams may suffer a distancing between clubs and fans because of an uncontrollable obsession with money and profits.

Monmaney targets the football industry. He says that football teams gladly pay players excessive salaries, but refuse to reward fan loyalty and support. Jean Mitchell (1996) says, "Many people look at football not just as a sport but as a tradition. Football has been a way of life for many people for many years." And according to a recent Harris Poll (*Potentials in Marketing*, 1998), football is the fastest growing spectator sport among women. The results reveal that the industry's audience consistently increases so teams must learn to keep and maintain these interests.

Branscombe and Wann (1992) suggest several techniques sports teams can implement to communicate and cater to fans. They write,

Organizations may want to attempt to raise the spectators' self-esteem artificially in some way. For example, many organizations give away food and other prizes if their team wins. They may want to try such an endeavor when the team loses as well. Also, teams may want to try and focus on the "spirit of the game," allowing and encouraging fans to feel good simply because they witnessed such a fine sporting event.

Ned Barnett (1999) says the Cubs implemented a number of strategies to maintain a strained relationship between the team and its fans, since the baseball team suffered 45 consecutive losing seasons. In general, the team strives to build and sustain fan loyalty by urging the excitement of baseball. “They foster a notion that going to a game is an event, a win, lose or draw situation, and to a lesser extent, watching television games, too.” The Cubs also attract fans by focusing on the anticipation of unknown game outcomes, player identities and stardom (even from opposing teams), pageantry and conducting entertaining special events.

Clearly, public relations plays a predominate role in the maintenance of fan satisfaction and loyalty. As sports teams suffer defeating challenges during a losing season, their fans experience a sense of devastating loss as well. Therefore, sports teams must identify and recognize their fans and develop positive relationships that help dissolve the frustration of a losing season and retain interest in and support for the organization.

This thesis will contribute to the profession of sports relations since it strives to define fan emotions and behaviors during a team’s losing season. The study will help sports-relations practitioners develop guidelines for maintaining a positive relationship with fans and outline effective techniques for retaining fan interest and support throughout the season.

Fan Psychology

Psychologists Steve Wilson and William Allman (1996) say that humans need feelings of inclusion, belonging and loyalty to a clan. Wayne Scanlan (1997) adds that

these needs stem from psychology. He adds that these needs play a significant role in modern sport. Since fan is a short version of fanatic, sports-enthused individuals must fit criteria defining their train of thought, feelings and attitudes. This researcher considers these criteria as the foundation for fan psychology.

Leslie Baldacci (1998) declares that the psychological theory of cognitive dissonance applies to sports fans. She and psychologist Mary Halpin say that gratification generates from the idea that individuals can become a part of something larger than themselves and sports creates that body of participation. They add that events can bring various people together and allow them to relate through a common factor. For some, sports defines that common thread between fans.

Anthony Mander and George Masterton (1990) hypothesized and declared that sports spectating may benefit human mental health. In a recent study of psychiatric records, these researchers found that before three World Cup soccer matches, an increase in men diagnosed with schizophrenia and neurosis entered the tested hospital. During the final matches, however, the admission rate plunged and continually decreased during the months following the soccer season. From the study, the researchers concluded that although stress and anxiety significantly contribute to mental illness, and among sports fans the game itself induces these psychological factors, sports draw individuals together and allow mentally-affected people to cope with stress and crises. Mander adds that sports provide people with a common ground for social communication so that, "they feel less isolated."

A study conducted by Tim Curry (1996) concluded that sports fanaticism allows individuals to feel excited and emotional. One form of fan psychology reveals the belief

in superstition. Martin Miller (1994) says that irrational beliefs, defined as superstitions, stem from a human need to control the uncontrollable. Therefore, sports fans may become quite vulnerable to believing in superstitions since they attempt to confuse cause and effect. Psychologist Steve Chandler explains that fans often experience a highly charged energy and excitement during sporting events. Because of this powerful sensation, fans often develop invalid connections to explain common, coincidental events. With great faith and hope in team competitions, fans create and foster patterns of thought and action to help create the desired outcome. Ed Susman (1995) reported that even physiological connections exist between the mind of the fan and the athlete. In a recent Georgia State University study, researchers concluded that testosterone levels in male sports fans significantly and consistently increase and decrease with their favorite team's successes and failures.

Kevin Quirk (1998) acknowledges the study of fan psychology. He even expands the concept by including sports addiction in his research. Quirk says sports addiction lacks the dangers associated with drug or alcohol abuse but does seem harmful to an individual's ability to communicate and socialize. He says, "within addicts, sports becomes the only way individuals release emotions causing them to shut-off emotions at all other times." He adds that some sports addicts may elicit stronger reactions when their favorite teams lose than when their bosses deny them a promotion or raise. Curry and Michael McKee (1996) concluded that unlike addicts, many ordinary fans do not suffer from clinical depression after a team loss, but do feel angry and betrayed. These feelings may emerge as a result of fan support, and more importantly, loyalty.

Franz Lidz (1992) says a distinct difference exists between fans and fanatics. He describes fanatic Ronnie Wickers, who, every 17 seconds, chants “Cubs, woo! Cubs, woo! Cubs, woo!” Wickers says once the baseball season ends, he counts the days remaining until next season’s opening day. The thought of the approaching new season helps him cope with everyday life.

Lidz defines this train of thought as fanatical and an absolute exertion of fan loyalty. He claims that since sports commercialized, he finds difficulty understanding how fans consistently root for teams year after year. He adds that although team owners and players fail to acknowledge or reward this loyalty, fans remain supportive in an effort to remain essential to the team they crave. In great contrast to Lidz’s beliefs, *U.S. News & World Report* (1998) issued an article explaining how sports owners, players and commercialization greatly impede fan support and loyalty. “No one expects die-hard fans to quit watching, but signs of shifting allegiance away from big-money sports show. For example, minor league baseball records the highest attendance levels since the 1940s.”

Lidz argues that Freudian theory explains fan loyalty through a recognition of fan needs. He says that fan loyalty provides individuals with a false sense of identity since sports teams allow fans to feel included in the thrill of victorious outcomes. Describing three distinct fan categories, Lidz explains the traits of the heckler, the couch-potato and the groupie. The heckler defines a fan that heckles the opposing players, coaches or owners. Constantly yelling, screaming, name-calling and insulting, this fan promises to stir up trouble both on and off the playing field. The couch-potato category defines a fan that views games at home. Spewing statistics, current standings, averages and other information, this fan lives and breathes sports. Glued to the television and showing

disregard for all other life elements, the couch-potato loses communication and social skills and gains a sense of purpose through the team's efforts. The groupie category defines a fan who possesses an obsession for particular players. Almost harassing, these fans express traits similar to entertainment stalkers. Following players to and from various locations, these fans buy gifts, cards and other tokens for favorite players in the hopes of gaining personal attention and recognition. These loyal fans yearn for their favorite players to personally know and connect with them on a private level while striving to experience what one groupie calls, "a frozen moment in time."

Seth Abraham (1995) says that sports most valuable players are the fans. He says that fans remember and can instantly recall statistics, box scores, momentous events, crushing defeats and long-standing records. These abilities, he says, "cement fans' loyalty," to a sports team. Abraham adds that this loyalty forces the sports industry to reevaluate the importance of fans, since, "tens of millions know more about box scores than bottom lines." In 1998, Smith's *SportsBusiness Journal* conducted a study determining that the Toronto Blue Jays maintain the most loyal fans in professional baseball. Researchers based the ratings on several factors, including team record, market size and weather conditions (Zwolinski, 1998). Although this team has suffered a losing record for the past four years, two million Jays fans have attended the games each year since 1984, a telling sign denoting loyalty of spectators. The team communications director says, "They've (the fans) been through a lot, and they've stuck with us. In this industry, you can't press the panic button too soon, you have to totally respect the fans, and I think we do that." The Jays hired a new marketing agency and implemented several innovative

promotional ideas to help attract and maintain their customer's devotion. Although the strategies seem effective, the director added, "Winning is your best promotion."

Kostya Kennedy (1997) says that the National Football League successfully attracts the couch-potato fan and holds the most dedicated television audience in any United States professional sports league. Although this record seems impressive, football's primary problem is selling-out stadium seating. Kennedy notes that some factors leading to empty seats include: rising ticket prices, inconsistent team rosters and a lack of competitive visiting teams. These elements seem to dampen fan loyalty and consequently, the industry must confront and alter the threatening obstacles.

In 1997, Robert Passikoff declared that sports teams maintain fan loyalty based on four concepts: entertainment, authenticity, tradition and fan bonding. The entertainment category blends the value of pleasure and satisfaction with a team's speed, action and power. Authenticity tracks fans' decisions of accepting a game as meaningful and produce outcomes that reflect a team's genuine efforts. Tradition measures fan's value of team history and legacy. Finally, fan bonding specifically targets the relationship between athletes and fans. Passikoff concluded that the National Basketball Association ranked high in entertainment and fan-bonding while the National Football League scored best in authenticity and tradition. He also noted that sports marketers must realize the importance of fan loyalty while specializing in satisfying the average fan. He recommends that, "leagues and team owners must manage the components of fan loyalty more consciously."

In 1995, Wayne M. Barrett explained how sports fans continue to support teams even though owners and players treat them with great disrespect. Barrett rigidly declares that

the purpose of sports solely lies in the interest of the athletes and the owners who pay them. He calls fans, “the moronic suckers who provide the gold that all the well-publicized greed is about.” He notes that certain trends help to define the existence of fan loyalty. Soaring attendance, merchandising and television ratings literally trace fans’ sense of devotion toward their favorite teams. And these factors help created the most popular source of entertainment ever—sports.

In 1996, Mark Perryman announced that fan loyalty is the key ingredient in a team’s success, especially in football. More important than advertising and sponsorship deals, Perryman says that fans spend extravagant amounts of money per season on tickets, programs, snacks and travel arrangements. He adds that sports teams and management must seriously recognize these important assets.

When it comes to merchandising, Sue Okasanedn (1997) says that sports officials know the importance of team merchandise to teams’ bottom lines and fan loyalty. Some officials believe that to keep fan support alive, teams must make gradual changes to remain fresh and innovative, but fans prefer tradition. One official says, “Fans develop a love for tradition. People want to hold on to the familiar. It’s risky to play around too much with tradition.”

Fan loyalty begins with the interest and attention of fans. In 1996, a Maclean’s/CBS Newsworld poll indicated that fans’ interest in and love of pro sports has remained the same or grown since recent strikes and lockouts. The results proved different. According to Corelli (1998), of the polled Canadian fans, 32 percent said they seem less enthusiastic about baseball while 26 percent spend fewer hours watching hockey. The poll shows that although many fans vocalize their hostility or displeasure with sports teams, a notion

exists that team owners and players devalue their fans, concentrating on increasing revenue rather than striving to earn championships. Sociologist Phil White (1996) says that fans will remain interested in their favorite teams because the industry romanticizes and markets sports to develop identity within communities. The poll measured the following variables:

- the excitement and skill of the game.
- the game's ability to share the experience.
- the chance to escape from daily stress.
- teams' contributions to civic pride.
- ticket prices.
- players' abilities to serve as role models.
- media influences.
- government involvement.
- level of fan enjoyment.
- owners' and players' responsibilities and interests in making money.
- fans' expectations for future seasons.
- fans' spectating frequencies.

In 1997, Allen Barra assessed that U.S. pro football attendance dropped profusely as fans expressed frustration due to coaches, constant franchise changes and player injuries. Aristides (1996) reported that because of this lack of sportsmanship among pro sports teams, fans refuse to follow sports any longer even though the pastime feeds an addiction. Dan McGraw (1998) agrees, noting that increasing commercialization alienates many fans who continue to lose interest in favorite teams because of skyrocketing ticket prices and antitrust attention. Rick Reilly (1998) says one way to develop fan attention and

interest within sports organizations is through giveaways. In 1998, at Tiger Stadium in Detroit and Wrigley Field in Chicago, free Beanie Babies caused a significant increase in sports fan attention and interest. The Philadelphia 76ers sold out a game against the Golden State Warriors by giving away Baldy the Eagle, a free Beanie Baby.

Robert Madrigal (1995) says millions of people engage in watching competitive sports. He notes that in the U.S., a recent survey revealed that fans consider themselves either intensely interested or fairly interested in watching sports. In 1991, pro baseball, basketball, hockey and football attendance totaled nearly 106 million. Media time also offers more convincing evidence of the increase in fan interest. Madrigal studied how sports fans process cognition and affective reactions related to sports outcomes. The researcher concluded that team identification, expectancy disconfirmation and quality of the opponent each held a positive effect on fan interest and ultimate satisfaction, or enjoyment. He recommends that future studies explore the relationship between fan expectations and the concept of “wishful thinking” or the influence of individuals’ preferences on future outcome predictions. Madrigal adds that highly-identified fans will predict game outcomes more effectively than low-identified spectators.

In 1979, Gaskell and Pearton asked, “Since sport is, by definition, competitive, doesn’t sport have a built-in capacity to frustrate?” James Nuechterlein (1998) describes his experiences as a frustrated sports fan. “With my favorite sports team, the University of Michigan football team, matters are quite out of control. The Wolverines are the most frustrating of teams, almost always in contention but seldom quite at the top. The questions was always the same: would Michigan break my heart by losing to Ohio State, and thus not make the Rose Bowl?” Because defeat spawns fan frustration, the

researchers suggest that highly-involved fans feel their self-esteem becomes threatened and decreases. They added that team losses seem most upsetting to highly identified fans.

Cialdini agrees, noting that groups of fans experience a spell of mourning when their favorite teams lose a close competition. Fans experience frustration in a variety of ways for many reasons. Erik Brady (1998) names the following reasons: ticket prices, mobile franchises, stadiums built with taxpayers' incomes and greedy owners and players. Brady forgot to mention losing seasons, but he says that fans should feel disgruntled. He offers these tips to frustrated sports fans: do not allow the pros to imprison the fans, develop tastes for other teams and attend amateur competitions like high school or elementary school games. Brady notes that these activities fail to compare to the grandiose sensation that pro sports offers to its fans, since "they pull us together in a musketeerish all-for-one-and-one-for-all way like nothing else does."

This thesis will further the study of fan psychology since it attempts to measure how the emotional level of fans changes during a team's losing season. As the team disappoints fans with each passing week, the study will reveal how fans experience feelings of frustration, anger and embarrassment. The study will determine ways sports organizations can counter these negative feelings while maintaining a more positive relationship between the team and its fans.

Fan Conduct

Psychology drives sports fans' behaviors, or conduct. James Nuechterlein (1998) declares, "Sports nuts express their nuttiness in a variety of ways."

Quirk says that fans practice many different behaviors to express their excitement. These actions include: jumping for joy, screaming at the referee or praying that a field goal kick passes through the uprights. Martin Miller (1994) adds that following a specific pre-game routine or ritual is common. Some fans swear that superstition works by wearing “lucky” attire during specific games, dressing in a meticulously ordered fashion, crossing their fingers, counting along with the time clock, chanting a supporting cheer, sitting in a particular seat or watching from a regular location. Mann (1979) suggests that highly identified fans are more willing to wait in long ticket lines and spend more money for tickets than low identified spectators.

At Dodger Stadium, Mary Ann Hudson (1991) says early departures define one typical form of fan conduct. These notorious exits do not stem from fan disinterest or dissatisfaction, but occur because of fan fears of traffic and congestion. Evidently, this behavior may cause problems for teams that experience identical conditions. Sports teams must identify inconvenient situations that may cause serious problems for fans. Jack Woody (1991) says this behavior illustrates how the game itself becomes secondary to the fan. Hudson says that fans may depart for other reasons, including long commutes, long days, long games, early morning priorities and other responsibilities. Tommy Lasorda commented on the early departures saying, “We like to have them there, pulling for us until the end.” Hudson noted that season ticket holders make up the majority of early departers.

Recognizing and acknowledging fan behavior helps teams target their particular audiences. Michele Kort (1997) says that women, especially lesbians, hoot, holler and yell at referees during their favorite sport, women’s national basketball. Alice McGillion,

WNBA director of communications, says the league markets to three audiences: the female fan, kids and the hard-core male basketball fan. She notes, "We welcome everybody."

Violence and aggressive behavior often assumes an important role in fan behavior. Branscombe and Wann found that fans associated with a losing team exhibit more derogation than do fans of winning teams. They also claim that fans behave more aggressively if their team suffers a defeat rather than recording a victory. Paul Dean (1990) reported facts regarding fan violence. He says the increase in sports violence fails to surprise many psychologist, sociologists and behaviorists. "Sports becomes a medium to express identification with a team and others. Sports rioters act with an audience that provides them with a meaningful sense of acceptance and belonging." Attorney Leslie Abramson blames sports management saying that teams need to take responsibility for the aggressive images they promote. She says, "I think they encourage poor sportsmanship and hatred instead of good sportsmanlike rivalry." Psychologist Lister agrees, saying that professional sports management needs to understand that aggressive images detract the attention of sophisticated and educated fans.

Monmaney explains that fans occasionally seek therapy to discuss sports. He notes that dozens of Kansas City Chiefs football fans sought a group therapy session following a team loss in a competitive game. The group coined the term, "Chiefs Grief." Jack Lesyk (1996) estimated that 75 percent of his patients sought therapy to discuss football while Michael McKee (1996) recorded a number of men who expressed feelings of disappointment and depression due to a football team's relocation.

Steve Jacobson (1994) claims that the U.S. transformed sports into an ideal that reeks importance beyond watching and enjoying. Because of this perfect vision, some spectators feel they must participate in the success of their team. So, they attempt to influence the outcome of their favorite team's competitions. He says this urge to participate created the concepts of rotisserie baseball, fantasy football, basketball and hockey and virtual video games. These interactive systems create the illusion of fan influence and involvement in game outcomes, allowing fans to participate, to a degree, in their favorite teams' effort. Some fans attend games carrying objects to throw at the opposing team's players. Jacobson says these fans think that if they can force a player to make a mistake, they, in turn, help their team win. Specific instances that illustrate fans' involvement in sports includes: the stabbing of Monica Seles, a letter threatening Steffi Graf, a death threat sent to Tonya Harding, obscene letters and photographs sent to Katarina Witt, a thrown pocketknife striking Wally Joyner at Yankee Stadium, an attack on the Italian Soccer Team at practice and assaults on stadium and team officials. Jacobson notes, "Today the lines are blurred between fans and players and it sets up a whole different set of expectations."

Michael Farber (1996) agrees that fans enjoy direct involvement in sports competitions. He explains the traditions of throwing objects onto playing surfaces to recognize particular players, records, successes and failures. In Montreal, Expos baseball fans tossed Oh Henry! Candy bars onto the field when Henry Rodriguez performed a noteworthy play. Since 1952, Detroit Red Wing hockey fans have thrown octopuses onto the ice when the team scores a playoff goal. Also in the National Hockey League, fans throw hats of all kinds onto the ice when a player records a hat trick, scoring three goals

in one game. Farber offers a list of acceptable tossing objects. The list includes: coins before kickoffs, ceremonial first pitches, the towel of the beaten boxer and hats to commemorate hat tricks. One thing not mentioned on Farber's list is garbage. Tom Verducci (1995) says garbage served as the fans' most favorite item to toss at Yankee Stadium during the playoffs. One Philadelphia Phillie commented that the trash-throwing fans illustrate a societal problem that shows a lack of respect for authority and others. Verducci proposes the question that so many others asked before, "Why must fans now be a part of the action and do more than cheer for their team when they can simply buy a ticket?"

Many fans chose to use communication means to follow their favorite teams. In 1995, *The Economist* (1995) noted how sports fans expanded their team interest through franchise websites on the Internet. Now, fans can digest team information through sports links and cyber fan club membership opportunities. Last season, the Yankees and Padres used email to enhance fan interest in their teams. The multimedia coordinators used UnityMail, a system that helps organizations manage electronic mail, to create a sense of fan club membership and instant information access to the teams. The easy-to-use email system allowed over 93,000 fans to subscribe to the service and remain informed on how to buy scarce tickets and directly talk to Yankees' management and players during online chat sessions (Jim Henry 1999). For fans, the instant team association successfully enticed followers while allowing sports teams to contact thousands of fans.

In addition to the Internet, fans use more conventional systems like talk radio to express their thoughts, feelings and opinions. Pamela Haag (1996) says sports talk radio appeals to fans because of hosts' personalities, the ability to freely discuss team issues

and the way the channeled community members can relate to one another. In 1987, WFAN in New York became the first all-sports radio station (Austin Murphy 1996). Lee Hamilton describes the pros and cons of talk radio. He says talk radio provides dynamic stories that constantly change and maintain a sense of freshness for radio. In great contrast, sports radio often becomes too tabloid since remarks seem derogatory. Steve Lopez (1997) adds to these vices saying that sports radio became the “lead paint of the 1990s and may cause brain damage.” He compares talk radio to a fraternity party atmosphere filled with testosterone, insults and senseless gabble.

This study will use data collected from a content analysis of local audio media. The study will offer research that reveals how fans feel toward their favorite team and act when the team loses. From the analysis, this researcher will trace the reactions of fans immediately following a team competition. The research will help show practitioners the importance of sports radio while revealing the value of the comments presented through audio media.

The 1998-99 Philadelphia Eagles Football Team and Its Fans

In 1998, prior to the start of the Eagles’ 1998-99 season, *Philadelphia Magazine* reported on the expectations of owner, Jeff Lurie, management, coaches, players and fans. S.A. Paolantonio asks readers, “How did the Philadelphia Eagles, your often maddening but always beloved football team get so screwed up?” He describes Lurie’s attitude toward the Eagles as a promise of winning championships, discipline and order. Lurie told *Philadelphia Magazine* that he, “feels your (fans’) pain.” Lurie confessed that he spent many nights tossing and turning in bed, confused and vexed about the team’s state.

The owner discussed his daily ritual, “Every night before I would go to sleep, I would say to myself, ‘What can I do and what are we lacking?’” Lurie admitted that the Eagles made many mistakes hindering the team’s status and progress, a fact that NFL franchises rarely disclose. In Paolantonio’s interview with the Eagles’ owner, Lurie recognized that the team’s primary weakness seemed to lie in talent evaluation. Interrogating the role of coach Ray Rhodes, Paolantonio suggests that he serves as a tough coach who works in an environment where machismo seduces the fans. He adds that, “In Philly, there’s nothing worse than a dog that’s all bark and no bite.”

In Lurie’s first four years with the Eagles, the team recorded 33 wins, 30 losses and one tie, maintaining a .515 winning percentage. In the case of this researcher’s definition of a losing season (recording more losses than wins), the Eagles seemed a winning team. Kevin Fullman says that the 1997 Eagles experienced their worst season since 1986 under owner, Jeff Lurie, recording six wins, nine losses and one tie. Since Ray Rhodes maintained the most influential say in draft picks that held empty promise, Lurie hired Tom Modrak to lead the front office. When asked how Rhodes can keep his job after the season, Lurie responded, “He has my confidence. He’s as embarrassed and frustrated at the 6-9-1 season as I am. We see it so similarly—a combination of some bad decisions and some horrendous injuries.” Lurie added that he will decide the future of Ray Rhodes at the end of the ‘98-‘99 season.

The November/December issue of *The Fan* featured a direct interview with new front-office coordinator Tom Modrak (Spadaro, 1998). When asked what fans can expect from Modrak as the director of football operations, he replied, “We’re looking to continue to put together an organization that brings in the best players possible. We want

players who will come here, stay here and compete for the Philadelphia fans.” Spadaro also asked Modrak how long it takes a team to turn a losing situation into a winning one. Modrak responded, “Football is the ultimate team sport and you need a lot of good players to be a good team. Building on a team means continuing to add players and building consistency. Some teams appear to turn things around very quickly, when in reality they aren’t that far away to begin with.” Modrak also added that starting a season poorly put the Eagles in a tough position to redeem themselves. He emphasized the importance of working hard and remaining positive. He says that the Eagles’ bottom line is player productivity and performance. When Spadaro introduced the idea of fan frustration, Modrak replied, “Football fans don’t feel good about losing. At the same time, I’ve seen these fans get very excited and positive when things are going well. That’s something to build off of. When we win here, it’s going to be very exciting. But, I can feel their frustrations.”

In 1999, the Philadelphia media swarmed over the issue of a new stadium for the city. One article issued in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* described the community’s priorities. Lucia Herndon discussed the way the city yearns to serve as “a world-class metropolis,” and cries out for new stadiums. She compared this desire for new complexes to the dying need for better libraries. She writes, “Last week, the governor agreed to oversee an allocation of \$32 million over two years to the 485 public libraries. But contrast that with an even more recent allocation: \$320 million to build new sports arenas.” Clearly, Herndon presents the idea of a community that cares more for professional sports than books. That community is Philadelphia and its citizens are sports fans.

Lastly, the *Philadelphia Business Journal* issued a study of National Football League fan support ratings. Among the 31 teams, Philadelphia fans ranked third behind Green Bay and Cleveland. Research defined fan support by measuring average home-game attendance levels, percent of stadium available-seat capacity, 1989-98 team winning percentage, ticket cost and average-high December temperatures. Fan support ranged on a 100-point scale. Philadelphia Eagles fans scored a 95.2 recording an average attendance of 64,295, .99 capacity level, .541 winning percentage, \$13.22 ticket cost, and 43 degree December temperatures. Journal reporter John George says that the Eagles set a team record for losses this past season yet scored higher than almost all other teams in fan allegiance. Dave Spadaro said the findings failed to surprise him especially since Eagles fans display great loyalty over the years. "It just shows you how...zealous they are. Now all the Eagles need is to get some more wins. You hear it a lot, Eagles fans deserve better than 3-13. This study proves it." He adds that Philadelphia fans get extremely upset when the Eagles lose, however, they still attend games to express their frustration. One season ticket holder agreed with the study saying that Philadelphia fans support the team no matter what conditions it faces. He says, "This was one of the first years I can remember people leaving early, but there were some games that were already out of control by halftime."

This thesis will determine Philadelphia Eagles fans' attitudes toward their favorite football team during the 1998-99 season. It will measure fans' emotions and detect the ways fans behaved to express their frustration, anger and disappointment with the team. It will also define various techniques that the sports organization can employ to maintain a more positive relationship with fans during a defeating season. Furthermore, the study

will help improve the relationship between the sports team and its fans and significantly contribute to the field of public relations.

Chapter 3

Study Design

This researcher collected data from various sources, including print media, audio media and intercept studies. The data explores the relationship that exists between a professional sports organization and its fans during a losing season. The researcher used this collected information to prove or disprove hypotheses concerning sports fans' opinions, attitudes and behaviors. Through an intricate analysis of media coverage and intercept responses, this researcher can define sports fans' expectations and interest in sports organizations. These findings will allow sports-relations practitioners to create effective guidelines for building and managing positive relationships between their organizations and their associated fans during a defeating season. In addition to this data, the thesis also offers techniques practitioners can apply to boost fan satisfaction and morale.

Research conducted for this thesis stemmed from intercept study respondents and content analysis data from face-to-face communication as well as print and audio coverage, respectively, of the Philadelphia Eagles Football Team. Sources for the data include: intercept studies questioning local football fans' attitudes and behaviors during the season, articles published in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and fan comments and responses aired on 610-WIP, a sports-talk radio station.

The intercept studies gathered qualitative data from 60 local football fans. Conducted during the first half of the 1999 Superbowl, the surveys questioned fans in two local sports bars about their opinions of the Eagles. The survey measured how fans identify themselves with the Eagles team, their feelings and behaviors during the losing season and opinions of the owners and management (see *Figure 1*).

The content analyses of both print and audio media channels provide a scientific, quantitative perspective on the sports organization. Tracing The 1998 Philadelphia Eagles Football Team's media coverage, this researcher conducted a content analysis of one newspaper and one local sports-talk radio station. Articles appearing in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* created the basis for the sports organization's and the fans' perspectives. This researcher collected the newspaper's sports section over a span of 17 weeks, from September 7, 1998 through December 28, 1998. A total of 16 sports sections constituted the content-analysis print material, one for each week of the season excluding the Eagles' bye week. These sports sections originate in the newspaper issued on the day following each Eagles game.

The content analysis of print media examined the team's performance, image, owner, coach and fans. The study traced a total of 70 articles with an average of four articles per week. This researcher organized the articles into early, mid and late season categories. Weeks one through five define the early season, weeks six through 11 define the mid-season and weeks 12 through 17 define the late season. The study measured fan perspectives with a positive, negative and neutral rating system.

Figure 1. Eagles Intercept Study Tool

Thank you for participating in this brief survey about the EAGLES. Your opinions will be used as research for a graduate thesis about professional sports.

1. Do you consider yourself an Eagles fan? Yes No

2. How do you feel about this past Eagles season?

3. During the season, did you turn off a game or leave a game early? Yes No

If, yes... what did you do instead?

4. What do you think the Eagles could have or should have done during the season to help keep your attention and interest focused on the team?

(Check all that apply.)

_____ lower ticket prices _____ sponsor giveaways and contests during games

_____ schedule half-time concerts _____ schedule half-time youth football games

_____ lower stadium food prices _____ lower stadium parking prices

_____ provide more owner accessibility

(Lurie could walk around stadium, speak to fans, speak at news conferences, conduct t.v., radio and Internet interviews, participate in "chat" Internet time, host fan parties and other special events...)

_____ provide more player accessibility

(Players could guest-host on radio, news, t.v. and Internet programs [Irving Fryar].)

_____ other

Thank you for your time.

The print media analysis measures the following:

In general-

- the total number of games
- the total number of articles printed about the Eagles
- the average number of articles per week
- the overall team performance
- the overall organizational image
- the overall article tone
- the overall article subject.

For the team owner-

- the total number of owner comments
- the average number of owner comments per week
- the overall tone of the owner each week
- the percentage of negative and positive comments made by the owner.

For the coach-

- the total number of coach's comments
- the average number of coach's comments
- the overall tone of the coach each week
- the percentage of negative and positive comments made by the coach.

For the fans-

- the total number of fan comments and actions
- the average number of fan comments and actions per week

- the overall tone of the fan comments and actions
- the percentage of negative and positive comments made by the fans

In addition to the newspaper articles, this researcher conducted an analysis examining Eagles fans' responses given during sports-talk radio programming. A local radio station, 610-WIP, provided the fan commentaries. This researcher recorded seven hours of sports-talk radio programming, one hour during each game-day. Following each game, 610-WIP produced a post-game show encouraging listeners to call and offer opinions and game analyses. This researcher traced these comments over a span of seven weeks, from November 2, 1998 through December 28, 1998 excluding December 7 and 21. The span begins with the week following the Eagles' open date and ends at the completion of the season. The NFL grants one open date to each team nearing mid-season. The Eagles' open date occurred on October 25. Thus, the researcher began recording post-game shows the following week knowing the open date marks the Eagles' mid-season standing. As the open date passed, this researcher considered the Eagles as a losing team since it clinched only one win in seven games. Therefore, the weeks of November 2, 1998 to December 28, 1998, the season's end, constitute the audio content-analysis material.

The audio analysis measured fan attitudes, behaviors and suggestions. This researcher examined the comments of 56 call-in fans with an average of eight callers per week. The study measured a total of 379 fan comments, an average of seven comments per caller.

The audio media analysis measures the following:

In general-

- the total number of callers
- the average number of callers per week.

For fan attitude-

- the total number of fan attitude comments
- the average number of fan attitude comments per week
- the percentage of fan attitude comments
- the overall tone of fan attitude comments
- the number of times fans express anger, frustration, disappointment, dissatisfaction, satisfaction, excitement and sympathy.

For fan behavior-

- the total number of fan behavior comments
- the average number of fan behavior comments per week
- the percentage of fan behavior comments
- the overall tone of fan behavior comments
- the number of times fans continued to watch a game, stopped watching a game, refused to watch a game, watched another game, etc.

For fan suggestions-

- the total number of fan suggestion comments
- the average number of fan suggestion comments per week
- the percentage of fan suggestion comments

- the number of times fans suggested lowering ticket prices, acquiring players, firing the coach, penalizing players, etc.

The results of these studies will be presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Results

The results of this study reveal Eagles fans' attitudes toward and behaviors during the team's losing season. Several hypotheses formed the basis for this research. This researcher assumed that fans will experience frustration, lose team interest and become personally affected as their favorite team records a defeating season. In addition, this researcher expected that if an organization practices certain techniques, it could maintain a more positive relationship with its fans.

H1: It is expected that the fans of a professional-sports organization will experience frustration during a losing season. Fans will express a sense of disgruntlement, annoyance, disappointment and defeat when discussing their views of their favorite team's losing record.

Intercept studies showed that during the 1998-99 Philadelphia Eagles football season, fans generally felt frustrated and unsatisfied with the team's performance and structure. Some felt cheated since they failed to enjoy the games, noting that the team is inept. Although frustration affected many, some fans expressed relief when the season closed, since the Eagles gained a favorable position in the annual players' draft. In general, most fans complained about team performance during the weekly games as many cited the competitions as dull and unimpressive. In addition, fans complained about overall team and individual player performance. They cited the quarterback as a major contributor to

their dissatisfaction with the team. Fans also felt frustration because the coach and owner generated vast problems between the organization and failed to remedy the situation.

A content analysis of print media showed that during the early season, weeks one through five, the media printed 21 fan comments, averaging four per week. All of these comments were negative. Fans voiced complaints concerning the team's poor performance and their dissatisfaction with the owner. They began feeling intense frustration and anxiety about the remainder of the season. One reporter wrote, "To charge money to see this team play constitutes consumer fraud."

Weeks six through 11, or the mid-season, showed an increase in fan comments by seven percent. The media printed 29 comments, averaging six per week. Of these comments, nine out of ten (90%) were negative and 10 percent were positive. These positive comments emerged when the team recorded two victories. One article encouraged fans to give the team credit for a winning performance and to continue to support the players the following week.

During the late season, weeks 12 through 17, fan comments increased by 26 percent. The media incorporated 56 fan comments, averaging nine per week. Of these comments, seven out of ten (70%) were negative while 30 percent were positive. During this time period, the team won one more game and acquired prime position in the annual draft. These actions helped the organization increase the positive comments by 30 percent from the beginning of the season. However, fans still felt tremendous frustration with team and player performance and deep anger toward the owner. Some even felt frustrated when the Eagles won a game since fans felt the victory would jeopardize the team's position in the draft.

In a content analysis of audio media, this researcher studied fan attitudes and reported a total of 152 sentences focusing on fan reaction and emotion after the game. This number also decreased dramatically with each passing week (see *Table 1*).

Table 1. Fan Attitudes in Audio Analysis by Percentage

<i>Week</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Angry</i>	30	18	27	40	17	25	0	23
<i>Frustrated</i>	40	27	55	80	17	0	0	32
<i>Disappointed</i>	30	0	27	0	17	13	60	20
<i>Unsatisfied</i>	20	0	9	20	0	0	0	7
<i>Satisfied</i>	0	18	9	0	50	38	0	16
<i>Excited</i>	0	36	0	0	17	0	0	9
<i>Sympathetic</i>	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	2

Overall, two out of five caller comments (40%) described a fan attitude and were generally negative. Nearly one third of all callers expressed frustration over the game outcome, the team's performance, the coaching, management and ownership. Nearly one in four callers (23%) expressed anger while one in five (20%) felt disappointment. Less than one in ten (7%) expressed a sense of dissatisfaction with the team and organization. Some fans felt more positive than others. Nearly one in six callers (16%) felt satisfied at one point in the season while nine percent experienced a sense of excitement occasionally. Fan satisfaction generally stemmed from the team's gaining a better draft position or through watching another team play. Only two percent of the callers expressed sympathy for the team, the organization or the fans.

The data and results support this hypothesis.

H2: It is expected that the fans of a professional-sports organization will lose team interest during a losing season. Fans will begin to follow or support other NFL teams, participate in non-football activities, stray from the stadium, television and radio or pursue other hobbies.

The intercept studies revealed that seven out of ten respondents refused, at one point in the season, to watch an Eagles game. Some activities fans did instead include: watching another team play, working, shopping, doing chores, watching movies, exercising, sleeping, and complaining about the team.

The print analysis analyzed fan actions and behaviors throughout the duration of the football season. This researcher detected 86 fan actions within the 16 weeks, an average of five behaviors per week. Overall, fan behavior was negative. Specifically, more than eight in ten fan actions (85%) were negative while 15 percent were positive. A further breakdown of these numbers revealed 24 percent of these actions occurred in the early season, 35 percent in the mid-season and 41 percent in the late season.

In the early season, the media reported 21 fan actions with an average of four per week. All of these behaviors were negative. Although the season was young, fans left games early, rooted for other teams and booed and jeered the team owner. In fact, in the final minute of the first game of the season, Philadelphia fans remaining in the stands chanted, "Let's go Flyers" (The Philadelphia Professional Hockey Team).

During mid-season, the number of fan actions increased by nine percent. The media noted 30 fan behaviors, an average of six per week. Overall, the behaviors were negative. Specifically, nearly nine out of ten fan actions (87%) were negative and 13 percent were positive. Positive actions resulted from the fans' loyalty and commitment to the team.

Fans credited the performance of key players during some games, however, fans still remained negative. Fans held banners and signs describing their attitudes toward the team and its owner. One read, “We deserve better.” In addition, a stadium fan wore a skunk suit and held a banner that read, “We stink.” Fans joined together to yell lurid chants at the owner. Stadium brawls broke-out in the stands, fans left early or stayed home and cheered on players from the opposing team. One reporter noted, “For some strange reason, 13,379 no-shows passed up the game to pursue something more exciting, like sorting a sock drawer or reading the phone book.”

In the late season, fan actions increased by another six percent. With a total of 35 behaviors, the media reported an average of six actions per week. The majority, 74 percent, were negative while 24 percent were positive. Positive comments stemmed from an Eagle win and a quarterback change, which ignited some excitement with fans. Fans also praised the performance of one Eagle player, celebrated in a record-breaking special event in the parking lot of the stadium and accepted the team’s draft position. But, the negative actions greatly outweighed the positives. Fans left games early or refused to attend them causing one game to be blocked-out by the local television station. With each game, the stadium appeared half-full and emptied out earlier each week. Fans criticized the owner, coach, managers and players for the team’s inability to win and for their extreme disappointment in the season.

The audio analysis also measured fan behaviors. This researcher recorded 55 comments callers made describing fan actions, an average of one behavior per caller. Fifteen percent of all caller comments focused on fan actions and the general tone was neutral (see *Table 2*).

Table 2. Fan Behaviors in Audio Analysis by Percentage

<i>Week</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Continued Watching</i>	20	45	9	20	50	13	60	27
<i>Stopped Watching</i>	10	9	36	20	0	0	0	13
<i>Refused to Watch</i>	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	2
<i>Watched Another</i>	0	0	0	0	0	25	0	4
<i>Booed Made Signs</i>	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	2

Three weeks produced negative behaviors, three produced positive behaviors and one week was neutral. Two in seven callers (27%) said they continued to watch an Eagles game regardless of the score, while more than one in ten (13%) stopped watching a game due to the score or the team’s performance. Fewer than ten percent of callers refused to watch a game (2%), watched another game (4%) or booed and made signs at the games (2%). One caller said he boycotted an Eagles game and enjoyed watching an ex-Eagle play instead. A fan who attended a game said he shut the windows of a penthouse suite at the stadium because other fans were cold and the game was pointless to watch. He added that shutting out the game and the fans by closing the windows was not a big deal since the game was horrible and the fans were quiet. In addition, the windows were dirty.

These percentages do not equal 100 because many of the 55 comments emphasized one single idea or action. This hypothesis was also supported by the data.

H3: It is expected that certain fans of professional-sports teams will become personally affected during a losing season. Team followers will feel stressed,

depressed, angry, exhausted and embarrassed following a team's recorded loss. Perhaps Eagles fans will express the desire to seek professional therapy, take a vacation, avoid conversation with family or friends, take a day off from work, eat more or less or deny their association with the team.

All three studies revealed that fans felt angry, depressed, embarrassed and betrayed by both the team and its owner. The print analysis pinpointed fan shame in the team. During the mid-season, the team recorded two wins that sparked positive comments. However, fans felt extreme embarrassment on a national level. At one point in the early season, owner Jeffrey Lurie considered the season an official disaster. He called the game embarrassing to the team and its fans. In addition, the Eagles loss to the Dallas Cowboys on Monday Night Football disgraced fans. The nation deemed the Eagles hopeless and incapable of winning. Fan pride and loyalty continued but fans felt neglected and cheated.

The audio analysis revealed that nearly one in four callers (23%) expressed anger toward the organization. Callers labeled the team as pathetic and inept. One fan said his embarrassment in the team was caused by their heartless performance. He declared, "I'm so sick of this. Take action. Rhodes should be gone tomorrow." Although data supports the notion that fans will become personally affected during a losing season, this research failed to show that fans sought therapy, vacations or isolation from others.

H4: It is expected that if a sports-relations practitioner employs certain techniques, a professional-sports organization could maintain a more positive relationship with its fans during a losing season. Fans may appreciate and value a

team owner, coach or player who continually presents himself to the public, answers fan and media questions and works to produce an actual relationship with the fans.

The intercept studies showed that to increase the fans' enjoyment during the Eagles games, the organization could take several actions. These actions include: lowering stadium prices, offering bottled water and scheduling half-time concerts at the games. More than three out of seven respondents (45%) said the Eagles should lower stadium food prices while nearly two out of five respondents (39%) said the Eagles should have lowered ticket prices. One in four respondents (25%) said the Eagles should lower parking prices while one in six (16%) said they should sponsor giveaways during the games. Other techniques include: acquiring better players, firing the coach, being honest with fans, discouraging poor player attitudes, spending more money and improving leadership on the field.

In the audio analysis, callers made 82 suggestions, averaging one suggestion per call. Overall, two in nine callers (22%) expressed a fan suggestion. Of these offerings, fewer than ten percent of callers suggested that the Eagles should lower prices or give tickets to fans. However, 18 percent said the Eagles should acquire better players, especially a quarterback. More than one in ten thought the coach should have been fired (11%) or individual players should have been penalized or fined for their attitudes and actions (13%). One in five callers suggested other actions, including drafting wisely, providing more owner availability to the media and fans and even moving the team to another city (see *Table 3*).

In addition to these suggestions, 27 percent said the organization should have increased owner, coach and player accessibility throughout the season. Overall, fans

noted that they would feel more positive toward a sports organization during a losing season if these techniques were employed. Thus, the data supports this hypothesis.

Table 3. Fan Suggestions in Audio Analysis by Percentage

<i>Week</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Acquire Players</i>	10	0	18	40	17	13	60	18
<i>Fire Coach</i>	40	0	9	0	17	0	0	11
<i>Penalize Players</i>	30	0	18	0	0	13	20	13
<i>Lower Prices</i>	0	0	0	0	0	13	0	2
<i>Other</i>	40	36	9	20	17	0	0	20

Findings for Team Ownership

The print analysis measured owner accessibility. This researcher recorded 104 comments by team owner, Jeffrey Lurie and found that that the team owner averaged six comments per week. Overall, the owner made negative comments throughout the season. Seven in ten (69%) of Lurie's comments were negative. A further breakdown of these numbers shows Lurie made 28 percent of his comments in the early season, 36 percent in the mid-season and 37 percent in the late season (see *Table 4*).

Table 4. Owner Comments in Print Analysis

	<i>Early Season (5 Weeks)</i>	<i>Mid-Season (5 Weeks)</i>	<i>Late Season (6 Weeks)</i>	<i>Total (17 Weeks)</i>
<i>Total</i>	29	37	38	104
<i>Average/Week</i>	6	7	6	6
<i>Overall Tone</i>	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative
<i>% Negatives</i>	59%	95%	53%	69%
<i>% Positives</i>	41%	5%	47%	31%

In the early season, the media reported 29 comments from Lurie. Of these comments, three out of five were negative and two out of five were positive. Lurie calls the team's failure to win a game an embarrassment. By week five, Lurie says the only thing the Eagles could do was to try to make gradual progress each week.

During mid-season, Lurie made 37 reported comments, averaging seven per week. Almost all of Lurie's comments (95%) were negative. Lurie received significant criticism from fans and the media and responded with little sympathy. He said the criticism didn't faze him and he takes nothing personally. Referring to a recent loss, Lurie said, "Today is a day you'd rather watch paint dry than our team play."

In the late season, the media reported 38 owner comments, averaging six per week. More than half (53%) were negative while 43 percent were positive. Most of Lurie's negative comments reflected the performance of the team. However, the positive comments reflected the emotions of the fans. Lurie said he understood fan frustration and wished the team played better.

Findings for Team Coaching

In addition to owner comments, this researcher also analyzed head-coach Ray Rhodes' comments throughout the season. Overall, the media reported 267 comments from Rhodes with an average of 17 per week. In general, these comments were negative since three out of four (76%) are negative and 26 percent are positive. Of the 267 coaching comments, the media recorded 26 percent in the early season, 17 percent in the mid-season and 57 percent in the late season (see *Table 5*).

During the early season, Rhodes made 69 comments and averaged 14 per week. Of those 69 comments, nearly all (97%) were negative. Only three percent were positive. Rhodes said the first weeks of the season were the most frustrating he's ever experienced as a coach. He said the bottom line was that the team was losing and he failed to offer solutions to break the winless streak.

Table 5. Coach Comments in Print Analysis

	<i>Early Season (5 Weeks)</i>	<i>Mid-Season (5 Weeks)</i>	<i>Late Season (6 Weeks)</i>	<i>Total (17 Weeks)</i>
<i>Total</i>	69	46	152	267
<i>Average/Week</i>	14	9	25	17
<i>Overall Tone</i>	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative
<i>% Negatives</i>	97%	67%	69%	76%
<i>% Positives</i>	3%	33%	31%	24%

In the mid-season, Rhodes' comments decreased by nine percent. The media reported 46 comments by Rhodes, an average of nine per week. Of these 46 comments, two out of three (67%) were negative while one out of ten (33%) were positive. Rhodes' positive comments stemmed from the two wins the Eagles recorded during this time. Although Rhodes acknowledged the wins, he said the victories were unimpressive. Rhodes defended his decision to keep his quarterback as a starter and refused to instigate a controversy. He criticized play-calling methods and admitted that he had few answers to the Eagles' problems.

During the late season, the coach's comments increased dramatically by another 40 percent. The media reported 152 comments by Ray Rhodes, an average of 25 per week. Of the 152 comments, nearly seven out of ten (69%) were negative while 31 percent were

positive. The positive comments stemmed from praise for specific player performance and the single team win recorded during this time. However, the majority of coaching comments referred to the future of Rhodes as head coach of the team. Rhodes' failures were explored, but his honor, pride and dignity was also acknowledged.

General Findings

The print analysis showed that the team's overall performance for the year was negative as the media reported 11 negative weeks, four positive weeks and one neutral week for team performance. In addition, the Eagles' image as an organization was negative. Specifically, the media portrayed the team negatively for 13 weeks, positively for two weeks and neutrally for a single week (see *Table 6*).

Table 6. Team Performance, Image and Article Tone in Print Analysis

	<i>Early Season (5 Weeks)</i>	<i>Mid-Season (5 Weeks)</i>	<i>Late Season (6 Weeks)</i>	<i>Total (17 Weeks)</i>
<i>Performance</i>	3 Negative 1 Positive 1 Neutral	4 Negative 1 Positive	4 Negative 2 Positive	11 Negative 4 Positive 1 Neutral
<i>Image</i>	5 Negative	4 Negative 1 Positive	4 Negative 2 Positive	13 Negative 2 Positive 1 Neutral
<i>Article Tone</i>	4 Negative 1 Positive	4 Negative 1 Positive	4 Negative 2 Positive	12 Negative 3 Positive 1 Neutral

In the early season, all five weeks formed a negative image of the organization. The mid-season softened the image a bit as four weeks were reported negatively and one week neutrally. In the late season, four weeks portrayed the team negatively while two weeks

saw the team in a more favorable light. This researcher also found that the overall tone of the articles was negative during the season. Specifically, the tone was negative for 12 weeks, positive for three weeks and neutral for one week.

When examining the attitudes of fans, this researcher detected 106 fan comments within the 16 weeks of the football season. Therefore, the media incorporated an average of six fan comments into the articles each week. Overall, the tone of these comments was negative. Specifically, the study revealed that eight out in ten fan comments (81%) were negative while two in ten were positive. Additionally, the media reported 20 percent of these comments in the early season, 27 percent in the mid-season and 53 percent in the late season (see *Table 7*).

Table 7. Fan Comments in Print Analysis

	<i>Early Season (5 Weeks)</i>	<i>Mid-Season (5 Weeks)</i>	<i>Late Season (6 Weeks)</i>	<i>Total (17 Weeks)</i>
<i>Total</i>	21	29	56	106
<i>Average/Week</i>	4	6	9	6
<i>Overall Tone</i>	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative
<i>% of Negatives</i>	100%	90%	70%	81%
<i>% of Positives</i>	0	10%	30%	19%

In addition to fan comments and actions, the print analysis measured the frequency of article topics. The most popular topic was the game, itself. Nearly two in seven articles (26%) focused on the weekly game, including team performance, play-calling and overall competition. One in five articles (19%) focused on individual player performances while one in six (16%) discussed the quarterback specifically. One in seven articles (14%) focused on the entire team's performance and slightly less (13%) discussed the coach in

particular. One in ten articles discussed the fans (9%), the owner (6%), the annual draft (4%), individual player attitudes (1%) and player injuries (1%). The total percentage exceeds 100 because some articles concentrate on more than one topic simultaneously (see Table 8).

Table 8. Article Subject in Print Analysis

	<i>Early Season (5 Weeks)</i>	<i>Mid-Season (5 Weeks)</i>	<i>Late Season (6 Weeks)</i>	<i>Total (17 Weeks)</i>
<i>Total Articles</i>	20	23	27	70
<i>Game</i>	7	6	5	18
<i>P. Performance</i>	2	7	4	13
<i>Quarterback</i>	5	1	5	11
<i>T. Performance</i>	3	4	3	10
<i>Coach</i>	3	2	4	9
<i>Fans</i>	1	2	3	6
<i>Owner</i>	1	2	1	4
<i>Draft</i>	0	0	3	3
<i>P. Attitude</i>	0	0	1	1
<i>Injuries</i>	0	0	1	1

Other Findings

In the print analysis, this researcher recorded open-ended responses fans made during the season. During the early season, the media reported fans leaving games early, rooting for the opposing teams and booing the team and its owner. By week five, the team, media and fans considered the season an “official disaster.” Owner, Jeffrey Lurie deemed the season embarrassing and the future of the coach and the team was questioned.

Throughout the mid-season, fans’ attitudes and behaviors remained consistent. One article defined the Eagles problem. It read, “No one seems to know what to do or what anyone else is doing. Coach Rhodes says he won’t change quarterbacks and there will be

no controversy.” Another story explained how the Eagles’ off-week will give tired fans a break from watching the Eagles’ ineptitude. One reporter asked, “Could any fan who remembers good football have endured punishment more cruel and inhumane than sitting through yesterday’s dreary match-up without a remote? Will the Eagles win a road game this season? any season?” In spite of the negative coverage, the Eagles’ two victories did allow fans to feel somewhat excited during the season. Fans credited the performance of key players and felt some satisfaction due to the ending of the winless streak.

By the late season, the Eagles’ image was destroyed. One article labeled the team speechless, hopeless and clueless. In another article, a reporter revealed a solution for the Eagles. He says, “The team should administer a mercy firing to Ray Rhodes and a mercy benching to Bobby Hoying. Iggles fans are accustomed to suffering, but this is beyond what they should have to tolerate.” One story addressed fan behavior and talked of ticket holders who rather “shopped at the mall, stayed home, popped a beer and watched another game” since lack of stadium attendance forced a black-out. By the season’s closing, fans did express satisfaction, mainly due to the acquisition of prime position in the player’s draft.

In the audio analysis, callers described their reactions to game outcomes, attitudes and behaviors during the season and suggestions for team improvement. One caller said the team does not blame the owner enough for failing to spend money properly. He suggested acquiring better players and drafting well next season. Some callers felt Irving Fryar’s television contract hindered his performance on the field. One caller said, “Fryar should stop doing the news and commercials and work on catching a football.” Callers complained that the team played with little heart and pride. Some suggested that players

should be penalized for their mistakes on the field. Other callers expressed sympathy for Eagles fans and disgust with the team's inability to win more games. One caller said that during a game, people were distributing Pepto Bismol samples saying that fans will need it during half-time when they begin feeling nauseous. He added that no security guards were stationed in the stadium's 700-level giving the impression that the team cares little about the presence of the fans. Some callers expressed sarcastic excitement over the team's victories while others felt angry toward the wins since they hindered the team's draft position.

Overall, the fans felt frustration and disappointment during the entire season. Some felt anger and embarrassment while others seemed satisfied due to the team's eventual draft position. While many fans continued to watch each game, some stopped watching the Eagles, refused to watch them or watched other teams instead. Fans also make suggestions for team improvement. These offerings include: acquiring better players, firing the coach, penalizing players and providing more owner accessibility. All of these fan attitudes and behaviors were detected through the print and audio analyses and intercept studies.

The researcher will explain the data and recommend ways sports organizations can maintain a more positive relationship with fans during a losing season in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5

Discussion

By conducting both quantitative and qualitative studies, this researcher concluded that sports fans will experience frustration, lose team interest and become personally affected as their favorite team records a losing season. Furthermore, the data supports the notion that if a sports organization employed certain public relations techniques, it could maintain a more positive relationships with its fans during a losing season. Content analyses of print and audio media and intercept-study responses generated the findings that support these hypotheses. In addition, these findings serve as the basis for this researcher's discussion of the study and recommendations for future research.

H1: It is expected that the fans of a professional-sports organization will experience frustration during a losing season. Fans will express a sense of disappointment, disgruntlement and defeat when discussing their views of their favorite team's losing record.

Intercept studies revealed that fans generally felt frustrated, disappointed and shattered during the Eagles' losing season. At times, fans felt cheated by the owner, coach and players. As noted in Chapter 2, fan loyalty stems from an individual's need and desire to identify with an entity larger than himself. This study supports the idea that professional sports serves as this entity. The data show how the bond between a team and its fans exists while proving that fans experience significant frustration when the team

suffers a losing season. As they offer loyalty to the team, fans feel cheated since the organization fails to reward them by performing successfully. Therefore, fans lose confidence in the team and feel general disgust during the entire season.

These intercept studies illustrate the need for sports relations practitioners to recognize fan loyalty and create techniques that reward fans for their constant support and desire to identify with the team. The public relations professional must counsel team management to take necessary actions to improve the team's performance and ability to entertain its primary audience, the fans. To recognize fan loyalty, management could hold fan appreciation days, sponsor giveaways and contests during games and offer discounts on stadium prices.

In addition to the qualitative research, the print analysis tracked fan feelings in the early, mid and late periods of the football season. Within the initial weeks, fans began feeling significant frustration as the team recorded five losses and zero wins. Fans felt anxious about the ability of the team and the outcome of the season. More importantly, fans wanted team management to provide reasons for the season's defeating start. Fans began regarding owner Jeffrey Lurie and management executive Joe Banner as liars. One banner read, "Lurie/Banner—Liar/Liar." Another read, "Lurie/Banner—Dumb & Dumber." Evidently, fans began distrusting the team owner, eventually leading to fan frustration, disappointment and an ultimate sense of betrayal.

As the season progressed, both the print and audio analyses found that fans remained disappointed in and frustrated with the team. They directed their negative feelings toward the owner and stressed dissatisfaction with management's failure to take responsibility

for poor player performance. Although Lurie admitted that he understood fan frustration, team followers felt that he gave no direct and logical reason for the team's ineptitude.

Clearly, the sports relations practitioner must counsel the team owner and other management members to directly address the needs and concerns of fans. To achieve this task, the practitioner should encourage the team owner to increase his accessibility to the fans. Accessibility can be attained through many channels, including the media, special events and face-to-face meetings with fans. Encouraging team management to personally connect with fans will allow team followers to develop a more trusting relationship with the owner and eventually maintain a more positive relationship with the team. An example of excellent owner accessibility is Pat Croce, president and part owner of The Philadelphia 76ers Professional Basketball Team. The team itself has suffered defeating seasons for multiple years, however, by building a personal relationship among fans, Croce earned fans' trust and respect while increasing loyalty and support for his team. He consistently decreases fan frustration by offering clear and precise reasons for team decisions and explaining the position and status of the club to the fans. Therefore, the practitioner should help the team owner craft a persona modeled by Pat Croce to increase fan accessibility and ultimately reduce fan frustration.

H2: It is expected that the fans of a professional-sports organization will lose team interest during a losing season. Fans will begin to follow or support other NFL teams, participate in non-football activities, stray from the stadium, television and radio or pursue other hobbies.

The intercept studies revealed that the majority of Eagles fans refused, at one point in the season, to watch a game. Similarly, the audio analysis showed that fewer than one in

three fans watched a game to its completion. Fan interest decreased dramatically with each passing week because of fan dissatisfaction with overall team and individual player performance. Fans cited weekly games as dull and unimpressive. Interest declined as the team failed to show improvement as the season progressed. Although fans attended games, they also left early. These findings indicate that although fan loyalty and support are strong, they are conditional. Fans did pursue other activities, including watching and supporting other teams, leaving games early and straying from football altogether.

The print analysis showed that throughout the season, fan actions were mostly negative. However, the late-season showed the highest number of positive actions. These actions stemmed from a recorded win and a quarterback change. More importantly, fans, when invited to celebrate in a record-breaking special event, formed a larger crowd in the parking lot than the game drew within the stadium.

When a team suffers a losing season, and fan interest decreases, it becomes the task of the sports relations practitioner to attract fans and maintain their interest in the team. These findings are significant since they stress the importance of public relations techniques that can help foster a more positive relationship between a team and its fans. In addition, the findings support the need for special events that target the interests of sports fans. Clearly, the sports relations practitioner must plan and implement innovative and creative events that will draw fans to the game since the team's ability, performance and record cannot. If the organization implements events that draw crowds to the stadium, then fans may stay for the game regardless of the team's overall record.

H3: It is expected that certain fans of professional-sports teams will become personally affected during a losing season. Team followers will feel stressed,

depressed, angry, exhausted and embarrassed following a team's recorded loss. Fans may express the need to seek therapy, take a vacation, avoid conversation with family or friends or deny their association with the team.

The most significant finding, illustrated through the print analysis, revealed a sense of fan shame in the team. Fans felt extreme embarrassment on a national level when the Eagles suffered a crushing loss to the Dallas Cowboys on Monday Night Football. As the nation deemed the team hopeless and inept, the owner considered the season an official disaster. Fans continued to show loyalty, but felt neglected and cheated. Fans felt disgraced and became angry with the team and management. The organization made no improvements to the team and further angered fans.

The audio analysis also demonstrated fan anger toward the team. Callers labeled the team pathetic and felt that heartless player performance caused major embarrassment to the organization and the fans. Callers demanded management to fire the coach, replace the quarterback and penalize players for poor performance and attitude. Again, fans felt neglected since the team failed to address their requests and offer reasons for team decisions. No changes were issued and fans felt unessential to the team.

To prevent fans from becoming personally affected during a losing season, the sports relations practitioner should counsel management to take several actions. These actions include: publicly addressing fan concerns and questions, altering team elements (players, coaches, management) to induce overall improvement, enforcing consequences to players who demonstrate poor performance and attitudes and offering formal apologies to irate and unsatisfied fans. Most importantly, the practitioner must train management to regard

fan attitudes, actions and suggestions and to value them as crucial aspects of the entire organization.

H4: It is expected that if a sports-relations practitioner employs certain techniques, a professional-sports organization could maintain a more positive relationship with its fans during a losing season. Fans may appreciate and value a team owner, coach or player who continually presents himself to the public, answers fan and media questions and works to produce an actual relationship with the fans.

Intercept studies revealed that fans would have liked the organization to fire the coach, acquire better players, discourage poor player attitudes, improve team leadership, provide owner accessibility and remain honest with fans.

The audio analysis emphasized the intercept findings. More than ten percent of callers wanted the coach fired. More importantly, 40 percent of fans wanted him fired by week nine, mid-season. As management waited for the season to end before terminating the head coach, fans became more irritated and dissatisfied with each passing week. Callers suggested that the team spend more money to acquire more talented players, penalize players by fining or benching them, draft wisely and move the team to another city. Minor actions include: lower stadium prices for food, parking and tickets; sponsor giveaways; schedule half-time concerts and sell bottled water. In addition, fans noted that player contracts outside of football are wasteful. For instance, Irving Fryar, an Eagles wide receiver, contracted with WCAU-Channel 6 to appear on the news weekly to preview each upcoming game. Fans felt that this contract hindered Fryar's performance. Therefore, fans did not approve of the organization's attempt to increase player accessibility; however, they would like more owner accessibility.

The sports relations practitioner should counsel team management to employ these techniques to effectively maintain a more positive relationship with fans. For instance, to increase owner accessibility, the practitioner can schedule a weekly television or radio interview between the media and the owner following each game. To generate more positive feelings within fans, the organization could sponsor frequent giveaways. For example, each week, all fans (of a certain age) could receive free promotional items, raffle tickets for new cars or exotic trips and coupons for merchandise sold at the stadium. If carried out effectively, these techniques could help an organization maintain a more positive relationship with its fans even though the team suffers a losing season.

Future Research

Further study is needed to assess the most effective ways of developing and maintaining positive relationships between sports organizations and their followers. Since this study focused on fans of a particular National Football team, data may only reflect the feelings of these team followers. Therefore, this researcher suggests that a future study replicates this thesis purpose, but spans the entire nation. Researchers should examine fan attitudes, behaviors and suggestions throughout each region and then compare and contrast the findings to identify the various bonds that exist between teams and fans.

In addition, the researcher should test certain public relations techniques, implemented during the season, to determine how these actions change the attitudes, behaviors and suggestions of frustrated fans during a losing season. For instance, a sports organization could fire the coach during the team's mid season instead of waiting for the

season to end. This action could relieve fan frustration, restore team interest, prevent fans from becoming personally affected and maintain a more positive relationship with the team. When examined, the data may reflect a fan and team bond that differs from the relationship detected in this thesis.

When conducting the research for further study, the researcher should interview members of the studied sports organization. This researcher attempted to conduct in-depth interviews with the owner and other members of team management to gain their views on Philadelphia fans concerning their knowledge, attitudes and behaviors toward the Eagles. However, the team executives denied the request. Therefore, this researcher suggests in-depth interviews and other forms of qualitative data to enrich the findings and form a more detailed analysis of the team, its fans and the relationship between them.

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Appendix

- I. Intercept Study Results
- II. Content Analysis of Print Media
- III. Content Analysis of Audio Media
- IV. Letter Requesting In-depth Interview

Intercept Study Results

Total responses- 60

92% consider themselves Eagles fans.

8% don't.

Concerning this past season, fans felt: shattered, disappointed, disgraced, relieved that it's over, depressed, disgusted, lost confidence in team ability, not entertained, dissatisfied, lousy, frustrated, betrayed, cheated, ashamed, angry and awful.

Of the 92% of Eagles fans, 73% refused, at one point, to watch a game.

Activities they did instead: nothing, anything, played video games, watched other teams, worked, shopped, chores, watched movies, exercised, slept, cooked, complained, drank, left stadium and talked to neighbors about the team.

Consequently, of the 92% of Eagles fans, 27% watched every game.

Of the 44 respondents questioned at a sports bar: (16 were email responses)

39% said the Eagles should have lowered ticket prices

9% said schedule half-time concerts

45% said lower stadium food prices

16% said sponsor giveaways

4% said schedule youth football games during half-time

25% said lower parking prices

27% said increase owner accessibility

27% said increase player accessibility

Other responses include: get better players, sell bottled water or allow it in the stadium, fire the coach, win a game, produce a better product, be honest with the fans, lower beer prices, improve leadership, draft better, discourage poor attitudes, get a good quarterback and spend more money.

Content Analysis of Print Media

Overall Findings

Total Weeks	16
Total Articles	70
Articles/Week	4
Team Performance	Neg.
Owner Comments	104
Owner Comments/Week	6
Owner Comments Tone	Neg.
Neg. Comments %	69
Pos. Comments %	31
Total Coach Comments	267
Coach Comments/Week	17
Coach Comments Tone	Neg.
Neg. Comments %	76
Pos. Comments %	24
Fan Comments	106
Fan Comments/Week	6
Fan Comments Tone	Neg.
Neg. Comments %	81
Pos. Comments %	19
Fan Actions	86
Fan Actions/Week	5
Fan Actions Tone	Neg.
Neg. Comments %	85
Pos. Comments %	15
Organization Image	Neg.
Article Tone	Neg.

Content Analysis of Print Media

Early Season Findings—Weeks 1-5

Total Weeks	5
Total Articles	20
Articles/Week	4
Team Performance	Neg.
Owner Comments	29
Owner Comments/Week	6
Owner Comments Tone	Neg.
Neg. Comments %	59
Pos. Comments %	41
Total Coach Comments	69
Coach Comments/Week	14
Coach Comments Tone	Neg.
Neg. Comments %	97
Pos. Comments %	3
Fan Comments	21
Fan Comments/Week	4
Fan Comments Tone	Neg.
Neg. Comments %	100
Pos. Comments %	0
Fan Actions	21
Fan Actions/Week	4
Fan Actions Tone	Neg.
Neg. Comments %	100
Pos. Comments %	0
Organization Image	Neg.
Article Tone	Neg.

Content Analysis of Print Media

Mid Season Findings—Weeks 6-11 (Excludes Week 8, Open Date)

Total Weeks	5
Total Articles	23
Articles/Week	5
Team Performance	Neg.
Owner Comments	37
Owner Comments/Week	7
Owner Comments Tone	Neg.
Neg. Comments %	95
Pos. Comments %	5
Total Coach Comments	46
Coach Comments/Week	9
Coach Comments Tone	Neg.
Neg. Comments %	67
Pos. Comments %	33
Fan Comments	29
Fan Comments/Week	6
Fan Comments Tone	Neg.
Neg. Comments %	90
Pos. Comments %	10
Fan Actions	30
Fan Actions/Week	6
Fan Actions Tone	Neg.
Neg. Comments %	87
Pos. Comments %	13
Organization Image	Neg.
Article Tone	Neg.

Content Analysis of Print Media

Late Season—Weeks 12-17

Total Weeks	6
Total Articles	27
Articles/Week	5
Team Performance	Neg.
Owner Comments	38
Owner Comments/Week	6
Owner Comments Tone	Neg.
Neg. Comments %	53
Pos. Comments %	47
Total Coach Comments	152
Coach Comments/Week	25
Coach Comments Tone	Neg.
Neg. Comments %	69
Pos. Comments %	31
Fan Comments	56
Fan Comments/Week	9
Fan Comments Tone	Neg.
Neg. Comments %	70
Pos. Comments %	30
Fan Actions	35
Fan Actions/Week	6
Fan Actions Tone	Neg.
Neg. Comments %	74
Pos. Comments %	26
Organization Image	Neg.
Article Tone	Neg.

Content Analysis of Print Media

Week 1—September 7, 1998

Game Outcome	Loss
Total Articles	5
Team Performance	Neg.
Owner Comments	1
Owner Comments Tone	Neg.
Coach Comments	20
Coach Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Comments	10
Fan Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Actions	10
Fan Actions Tone	Neg.
Organization Image	Neg.
Article Tone	Neg.

Summary

Players and coach call game embarrassing and ugly. No one provides answers, not even the coach. Most fans left game early. The rest chanted, "Let's go Flyers." Coach discussed the quarterback status. Players express sense of failure and say there is much work to be done. Fan's banner reads, "Lurie/Banner—Liar/Liar." Another read, "Lurie/Banner—Dumb and Dumber?"

Quote of the Week

"In the final minute, those few fans who remained chanted: Let's go Flyers."—Lyon, reporter.

Content Analysis of Print Media

Week 2—September 14, 1998

Game Outcome	Loss
Total Articles	3
Team Performance	Pos.
Owner Comments	0
Owner Comments Tone	n/a
Coach Comments	10
Coach Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Comments	2
Fan Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Actions	2
Fan Actions Tone	Neg.
Organization Image	Neg.
Article Tone	Neg.

Summary

Stadium was half-empty. Coach says, “It’s driving everybody crazy. All losses hurt. You try to look at some of the positives, but bottom line is, we lost the game.” Team performance improved, but not enough to win. The loss is disheartening. Quarterback says, “It’s tough to build off a loss.” The second half proved doom, something the fans know too well. The game drew 46,456 fans, about 25,000 short of a sellout.

Quote of the Week

“All losses hurt. Bottom line, we lost the football game.”—Rhodes, coach.

Content Analysis of Print Media

Week 3—September 21, 1998

Game Outcome	Loss
Total Articles	4
Team Performance	Neg.
Owner Comments	0
Owner Comments Tone	n/a
Coach Comments	10
Coach Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Comments	7
Fan Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Actions	7
Fan Actions Tone	Neg.
Organization Image	Neg.
Article Tone	Neg.

Summary

Article explains that before a national television audience, the Eagles and Cardinals played a game that was the aesthetic equivalent to sausage-making. The records of the teams didn't help draw fans, neither did the heat. The stadium was half-empty.

Quote of the Week

“This is as frustrated as I've ever been. This is getting to everyone.”—Rhodes, coach.

Content Analysis of Print Media

Week 4—September 28, 1998

Game Outcome	Loss
Total Articles	4
Team Performance	Neutral
Owner Comments	0
Owner Comments Tone	n/a
Coach Comments	8
Coach Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Comments	1
Fan Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Actions	1
Fan Actions Tone	Neg.
Organization Image	Neg.
Article Tone	Neutral

Summary

It was a good defensive day, something Eagles fans are not accustomed to seeing. One article explains that weary at last of being embarrassed, the Eagles roused themselves right to the brink of upset, and as they always do, backed away. Individual players are praised for performances, but the effort adds up to a frustrating loss.

Quote of the Week

“The game was very frustrating.”—Duce Staley, player.

Content Analysis of Print Media

Week 5—October 5, 1998

Game Outcome	Loss
Total Articles	4
Team Performance	Neg.
Owner Comments	28
Owner Comments Tone	Neg.
Coach Comments	21
Coach Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Comments	1
Fan Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Actions	1
Fan Actions Tone	Neg.
Organization Image	Neg.
Article Tone	Neg.

Summary

Season is considered an official disaster. Owner calls game embarrassing to team and fans. One article demanded the owner to take action against the coaching staff before he loses the little fan faith that's left. Owner says there is nothing to do this season but to try to make gradual progress.

Quote of the Week

“To charge money to see this team play constitutes consumer fraud.”—Lyon, reporter.

Content Analysis of Print Media

Week 6—October 12, 1998

Game Outcome	Win
Total Articles	4
Team Performance	Pos.
Owner Comments	0
Owner Comments Tone	n/a
Coach Comments	23
Coach Comments Tone	Pos.
Fan Comments	3
Fan Comments Tone	Pos.
Fan Actions	3
Fan Actions Tone	Pos.
Organization Image	Neutral
Article Tone	Pos.

Summary

Coach and players say the win isn't spectacular, but it's a victory. Coach call the game the best defensive effort so far. One player performed admirably and coach scolds players who took unnecessary penalties.

Quote of the Week

"It'll just be nice not to feel lousy all week,"—Kevin Turner, player.

Content Analysis of Print Media

Week 7—October 19, 1998

Game Outcome	Loss
Total Articles	4
Team Performance	Neg.
Owner Comments	0
Owner Comments Tone	n/a
Coach Comments	14
Coach Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Comments	2
Fan Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Actions	2
Fan Actions Tone	Neutral
Organization Image	Neg.
Article Tone	Pos.

Summary

One article explained how next week's open date will give tired fans a break from watching the Eagles' ineptitude. Coach refuses to change the quarterback. One article asks if any fan who remembers good football could have endured punishment more cruel and inhumane than sitting through the game. It asks if the team will ever win a road game this season, or any season.

Quote of the Week

"A coaching change and weak opponent still brought an Eagles loss."—Sheridan, reporter.

Content Analysis of Print Media

Week 8—Open Date

Game Outcome	0
Total Articles	0
Team Performance	n/a
Owner Comments	0
Owner Comments Tone	n/a
Coach Comments	0
Coach Comments Tone	n/a
Fan Comments	0
Fan Comments Tone	n/a
Fan Actions	0
Fan Actions Tone	n/a
Organization Image	n/a
Article Tone	n/a

Summary

Data was not recorded for Week 8. The team did not play, therefore, this researcher found the print coverage invalid and excluded it from the calculations.

Quote of the Week

None.

Content Analysis of Print Media

Week 9—November 3, 1998

Game Outcome	Loss
Total Articles	5
Team Performance	Neg.
Owner Comments	0
Owner Comments Tone	n/a
Coach Comments	0
Coach Comments Tone	n/a
Fan Comments	20
Fan Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Actions	20
Fan Actions Tone	Neg.
Organization Image	Neg.
Article Tone	Neg.

Summary

Eagles are shut out by Cowboys in front of entire nation on Monday Night Football. The nation deems the team hopeless and incapable. Fans feel betrayed, cheated and embarrassed by the team and owner. They begin a lurid chant directed toward the owner. They even jumped, cheered and rooted when a Cowboy scored. An article excuses the non-traditional behavior saying that the fans have no choice but to root for opposing teams. *A fan's banner read, "We deserve better." One fan wore a skunk suit and held a sign that read, "We stink." Fans broke out in stadium brawls and negative chants during the second half of the game.

**Quote of the Week*

Content Analysis of Print Media

Week 10—November 9, 1998

Game Outcome	Win
Total Articles	5
Team Performance	Neg.
Owner Comments	16
Owner Comments Tone	Neg.
Coach Comments	5
Coach Comments Tone	Pos.
Fan Comments	4
Fan Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Actions	2
Fan Actions Tone	Neg.
Organization Image	Neg.
Article Tone	Neg.

Summary

Coach calls the game a step forward, giving the team a win. Many fans cheered when the quarterback was sacked and lay hurt on the field. The defense gave the fans reason to cheer but the owner is criticized for being unavailable to the media.

Quote of the Week

“As a fan, I understand the frustration. The obscenities don’t faze me. The great thing about sports is, when you win, everyone is a hero. When you lose, everybody is a bum. I really don’t take it personally.” –Lurie, owner.

Content Analysis of Print Media

Week 11—November 16, 1998

Game Outcome	Loss
Total Articles	5
Team Performance	Neg.
Owner Comments	21
Owner Comments Tone	Neg.
Coach Comments	4
Coach Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Comments	0
Fan Comments Tone	n/a
Fan Actions	3
Fan Actions Tone	Neg.
Organization Image	Neg.
Article Tone	Neg.

Summary

Coach offers no explanation for the loss. Owner used the word 'pitiful' 12 times in a three-minute speech. He says decisions will be made at the end of the season. One article asks fans to think about the team's record and point total before considering how much sales tax should increase to buy a new stadium.

Quote of the Week

"Today was a day you would rather watch paint dry than watch our team play." –
Lurie, owner.

Content Analysis of Print Media

Week 12—November 23, 1998

Game Outcome	Loss
Total Articles	5
Team Performance	Neg.
Owner Comments	4
Owner Comments Tone	Neg.
Coach Comments	27
Coach Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Comments	3
Fan Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Actions	3
Fan Actions Tone	Neg.
Organization Image	Neg.
Article Tone	Neg.

Summary

One articles says the Eagles need to fire the coach, bench the quarterback and realize that fans are accustomed to suffering, but this season is beyond what fans should have to tolerate. 13, 379 no-shows passed up the game to pursue something more exciting like assorting a sock drawer or reading the phone book.

Quote of the Week

“It’s a catastrophe.”—Irving Fryar, player.

Content Analysis of Print Media

Week 13—November 30, 1998

Game Outcome	Loss
Total Articles	5
Team Performance	Pos.
Owner Comments	6
Owner Comments Tone	Pos.
Coach Comments	18
Coach Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Comments	1
Fan Comments Tone	Pos.
Fan Actions	0
Fan Actions Tone	n/a
Organization Image	Pos.
Article Tone	Pos.

Summary

A quarterback change sparked life within the team and fans.

Quote of the Week

“At least it was fun. At least it was football.”—Sheridan, reporter.

Content Analysis of Print Media

Week 14—December 4, 1998

Game Outcome	Win
Total Articles	3
Team Performance	Pos.
Owner Comments	7
Owner Comments Tone	Neg.
Coach Comments	7
Coach Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Comments	11
Fan Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Actions	7
Fan Actions Tone	Neg.
Organization Image	Pos.
Article Tone	Neg.

Summary

Eagles show life and win. Fans cheer for the return of former coach. One article describes how Philadelphia has long held a reputation for providing harsh criticism to coaches, managers and players.

Quote of the Week

“Well, it’s a win.”—Rhodes, coach.

Content Analysis of Print Media

Week 15—December 14, 1998

Game Outcome	Loss
Total Articles	4
Team Performance	Neg.
Owner Comments	3
Owner Comments Tone	Pos.
Coach Comments	11
Coach Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Comments	7
Fan Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Actions	5
Fan Actions Tone	Neg.
Organization Image	Neg.
Article Tone	Neg.

Summary

Stadium half-full. Eagles exhaust all possible ways of losing. Article explains how fans skipped the game to stay home, watch another game or even go to the mall, since the game was blacked-out.

Quote of the Week

“I feel for our players and our fans.”—Lurie, owner.

Content Analysis of Print Media

Week 16—December 21, 1998

Game Outcome	Loss
Total Articles	4
Team Performance	Neg.
Owner Comments	3
Owner Comments Tone	Pos.
Coach Comments	7
Coach Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Comments	1
Fan Comments Tone	Pos.
Fan Actions	0
Fan Actions Tone	n/a
Organization Image	Neg.
Article Tone	Pos.

Summary

Articles bash team performance but rave over the gaining of a prime draft pick. Fans show excitement for the draft position.

Quote of the Week

“Constant losing has some privileges. A good draft pick.”—Lyon, reporter.

Content Analysis of Print Media

Week 17—December 28, 1998

Game Outcome	Loss
Total Articles	6
Team Performance	Neg.
Owner Comments	15
Owner Comments Tone	Neg.
Coach Comments	82
Coach Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Comments	33
Fan Comments Tone	Neg.
Fan Actions	20
Fan Actions Tone	Neg.
Organization Image	Neg.
Article Tone	Neg.

Summary

Coach will be fired tomorrow. Fans say owner should discount tickets for next season. Some expressed sympathy for the team, others felt relieved the season was over and that the draft pick is prime. Most felt tremendous disappointment. A special event in the parking lot drew a large crowd.

Quote of the Week

“It’s been a miserable season.”—Bobby Hoying, quarterback.

Content Analysis of Audio Media

Overall Findings--General

Total Weeks	16
Total Callers	56
Callers/Week	8
Total Comments	379
Comments/Caller	7
Comments Tone	Neg.

Content Analysis of Audio Media

Overall Findings—Fan Attitude

Attitude Comments	152
Attitude Comments/Caller	3
Attitude Comments %	40
Attitude Comments Tone	Neg.
% Angry	23
% Frustrated	32
% Disappointed	20
% Unsatisfied	7
% Satisfied	16
% Excited	9
% Sympathetic	2

Note

Percentages, when added, may exceed 100 because fans expressed multiple attitudes.

Some don't equal 100 because comments could not be placed in the Fan Attitude category.

Content Analysis of Audio Media

Overall Findings—Fan Behavior

Behavior Comments	55
Behavior Comments/Caller	1
Behavior Comments %	15
Behavior Comments Tone	Neutral
% Continued Watching	27
% Stopped Watching	13
% Refused to Watch	2
% Watched Another	4
% Booed, Made signs	2

Note

Percentages, when added, may exceed 100 because fans expressed multiple behaviors.

Some don't equal 100 because comments could not be placed in the Fan Behavior category.

Content Analysis of Audio Media

Overall Findings—Fan Suggestions

Suggestions	82
Suggestions/Caller	1
Suggestions %	22
% Lower Prices	2
% Acquire Players	18
% Fire Coach	11
% Penalize Players	13
% Other	20

Note

Percentages, when added, may exceed 100 because fans expressed multiple behaviors.

Some don't equal 100 because comments could not be placed in the Fan Behavior category.

Other

Drafting wisely, providing owner accessibility and moving team to another city.

January 25, 1999

Mr. Jeffrey Lurie
The Philadelphia Eagles
Veterans Stadium
Broad St. & Pattison Ave.
Philadelphia, PA 19148

Dear Mr. Lurie:

Hello. My name is Laura Litrenta and I am a graduate student at Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ. Recently, I began working on my thesis and discovered that I cannot complete my degree without your help.

As a public-relations student and a Philadelphia sports fan, I hold great interest in sports and the field of sports relations. My thesis examines sports fans and techniques that sports organizations can employ to effectively maintain a more positive relationship with their fans during a losing season.

Using the 1998 Philadelphia Eagles' season as the foundation for this thesis, I conducted primary research that includes an intricate analysis of local print and audio media. Sources for the thesis data include: *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and 610-WIP sports-talk radio programming.

In addition to the scientific research, I would like to briefly interview several key representatives of the Eagles organization, including your public-relations, media-relations and fan-relations executives. These interviews will enrich the thesis data and will help enhance the purpose of the study.

I would be happy to send you a copy of the final research findings and the completed thesis if I may speak with members of your management. Please call me at (609) 589-3536 to discuss my requests. Thank you for your time and congratulations on your appointment of Andy Reid as the Eagles' new head coach.

Sincerely,

Laura E. Litrenta