

Athletics Life at FIU: The
Three Major Issues
Afflicting the Sports
Program



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Introduction

Sports are an important part to anyone's college experience. They are often meant to help students show off their talents as student athletes, as well as allow other students to show off their school spirit as fans cheering teams on during games. At Florida International University, sports are meant to achieve these same goals. Over the past few years, however, problems have arisen that have deterred the achievement of such goals, and, therefore, have caused sports to become an insignificant part in most students' college life. This sad truth leaves many wondering what has caused sports to become so irrelevant in FIU and how this problem can be solved. The team, through research and much consideration, has come up with three main reasons for why this problem is occurring, along with several proposed solutions to fixing such reasons and the problem in general. The reasons discovered by the group included a cultural problem, a merchandise problem, and finally an overall problem with the sports program. These reasons were chosen since, as seen in the image, they cause a sort of cycle in which the end result is student's not showing much consideration to FIU sports. In the sections below, the team has taken time to decipher these various problems and to present solutions they feel are manageable and helpful in solving this problem.



The Cultural Problem

While Florida International University has built a diverse athletics program over the years, the sentiments and general atmosphere towards these sports remains low; it seems that many students do not take much interest in these teams, and therefore, do not attend games or other events promoting the athletics department. This increasing indifference in regards to athletics has become a hindrance to its development, especially within the last couple of years. While the lack of interest may seem to come from one overall problem, there are actually various different reasons for its emergence.

The first major reason students often have little concern for attending games or events comes from the city life offered in Miami. The attractions held by other local major league sports, events, and night-life frequently out-weigh those held by FIU sports, and, for that reason, usually bring students to spend their time and money at these places. Another major reason FIU often has a hard time fueling the excitement of sports on campus comes from the fact that it is mainly a commuter school. This plays in to the cultural problem since the majority of students are left uninvolved in campus life, which heavily includes the knowledge and excitement of FIU sports. The last major problem impeding the growth of appeal for FIU sports to students comes from the athletic teams not being considered strong contenders in their respected divisions. Unfortunately, many students lose interest in attending games when teams are not doing well, and this leaves an overall negative impact on athletes and mood concerning sports. Several other little problems also contribute to the decline in appeal of FIU athletics, such as little to no information being provided to all students about the various sporting events happening on and off campus.

Our team has examined and analyzed this cultural problem with great attention, focusing in on how such a problem may be fixed and avoided from here on out. Listed below are three different possible solutions to this problem that the team feels will help dramatically increase FIU students concern and awareness about the athletics department. These solutions were created with the help of students from outside universities since a survey was administered to see what other universities were doing to attract

students to games. In all, the team believes that solutions like these will assist in boosting school spirit within students and resolve this unwanted cultural problem.

Solution #1:

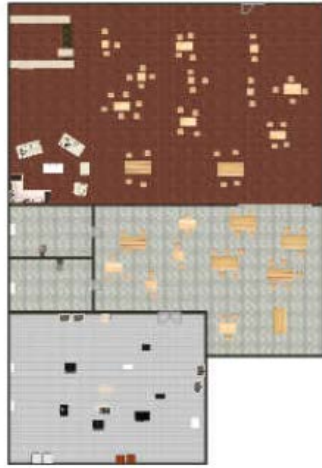
The first proposed solution to this problem is adding a sports grill on the MMC and, if possible, BBC campuses. The idea of placing a sports grill on campus would be an excellent way to deter lack of support in the athletic program at Florida International University since this new area would provide a place where students could unite, eat food and watch FIU sports.

The “Panther’s Den” would be setup like other tradition sports grill with plenty of television sets around the restaurant. It would be the hope that half of these television sets would be playing FIU sports while other sets would be playing other popular sports. The FIU sports grill would promote not only to FIU students, but also to prospective students, important visitors, and members of the Miami-Dade community because it would be an open restaurant to the public, as most FIU dining locations on campus are. It is also the hope that the Panther’s Den will contain a bar to serve alcohol to students of legal drinking age since this will add to the traditional sports grill vibe; this bar located conveniently on campus, would allow of age students an environment where they could drink responsibly and safely, while enjoying sports.

Many could argue that a new sports grill on campus would have disadvantages to the university. One considerable drawback would be that FIU would have to create a new location on campus for this restaurant. Another disadvantage could come from the possible cost of building a new place to house this restaurant; it is for seeable that FIU would have to spend a lot of money in construction and maintenance of a new sports grill. Although these are valid downsides to the forming a possible sports grill, there are also plenty of advantages that prove stronger than the negative consequences provided above. Within this past year, FIU has just acquired land from the Miami-Dade County Youth Fair which lies conveniently closed to the FIU stadium. While it is understood that FIU may already have plans to build certain structures on this new bought land, the team finds it quite probable that a sports grill may be

added; the idea of placing the structure underneath a parking garage or other building may help to keep the plans already made in place but still get this new additive in, as well. As for the disadvantage of the cost, a new restaurant on campus will bring in extreme amount of revenue not only from students who would be eager and curious to try a new experience on campus, but also to outside residents of the Miami-Dade county area. The income the proposed sports grill will bring will most likely over compensate for the amount of money FIU would have to invest in it. Still the true advantage and proposed reason for the Panther's Den would be that it will help in promoting FIU spirit and sports. It is believed that this restaurant will allow students more exposure to FIU sports, and, therefore, a better chance to get involve with the FIU games and sports teams. Overall, these advantages, especially that of which creates better FIU attitude, is something much needed in the university, and rather conceivable with a sports grill on campus

Many may still argue that the sports grill will fail in truly endorsing FIU sports; however, there are certain tactics the new restaurant could use to show full sponsorship for FIU sports. One achievable approach could be that on game days the restaurant may host special deals to promote attendance. These specials could be, for example, \$10 wings on an FIU game day, or special combo deals the day of an FIU away game. These deals could further extend to promote FIU sport wins; for example, the grill can offer a free appetizer two hours after an FIU win, which would encourage members of the community to watch FIU sports, cheer for a win and ultimately come to the grill to get their free appetizer. Another feasible promotion may be formed by incorporating both FIU sports and their corresponding merchandise. An example of this promotion could be a free drink if you come wearing an FIU sports jersey the day of a game. The sports grill can even team up with merchandise and maybe give away random free FIU sports merchandise on big away game wins, or host special contests in which the prize is different merchandise. The possibilities of the promotion capabilities of the sports grill are endless, and the results may lead to overall increases in the FIU community supporting FIU sports, as well as simultaneous increase in revenue for FIU, which may be used towards the FIU athletics department.



Solution #2:

The second proposed solution to the lack of FIU spirit towards sports is to create more awareness and knowledge about all FIU teams and games. This possible resolution comes from the realization by the team that most FIU games are not advertised to the students, especially for those not living on campus; only football and men's basketball games are made known to the FIU student body in large ways (public announcements, emails, posters, etc.). The lack of information on all sports events may be adding to the low disposition towards the athletics department, and, therefore, deserves this recognition and solution.

Since Florida International University holds the idea of global learning and being immersed in all cultures very highly, it is thought by the team that prompting more international sports may be in the university's and athletics departments' best interest; this idea is further supported by the amount of international students (2,573 undergraduate and graduate students) currently enrolled at FIU (stat).

In light of this concept, more sports like soccer, baseball, tennis, and volleyball should be popularized to the students since these sports are more well-known in international countries. From advertising these better known sports to the international students, and all students in general, it is thought that they will be more willing to attend the games and cheer on the FIU teams. With the attendance of students going up for sporting events, the amount of revenue and merchandise also have a possibility of increasing, which is surely another positive from prompting these other sports. This idea may also be taken a step further with the advertising of these sports being made more public reaching larger amounts of people within the Miami-Dade community. Sports like soccer and baseball again may attract these outside visitors to FIU

since the surrounding communities are formed by diverse, global groups of people that may be more interested by these sports. All together, these possibilities and advantages from making better known these other FIU sports is far greater than what is occurring now, and will help to reach more students and people currently not involved in or attracted to FIU athletics.

Different advertising techniques will need to be used in order to appeal to students and people in the surrounding communities. One advertising technique that may be highly productive and is quite simple would be having signs placed around busy areas in campus so as to guarantee that students will see them. Areas like Graham Center and the new MANGO building would be great places to put these posters since they are frequently visited places on campus by students, and, therefore, would be sure to get the news out about the games. Another more innovative idea may be to use social media outlets to get the news out to students; sources like Instagram and Facebook can be great outlets for FIU teams to announce their schedule. Though some forms of this type of advertising exist already (@FIUathletics), this concept can still be utilized in newer ways, such as offering coupons or discounts on tickets to events through this outlet. In this manner, students may be more willing to go to a game and see how much fun they can be. For advertising in the community, a different kind of approach will need to be taken. One possible advertising technique may be to send out flyers to the local neighbors so that families nearby may have the chance to attend sporting events; these flyers could contain one or two discounts, as well, to further promote attendance to such event. All of these advertising techniques will be great ways in which to get students and local community members involved without spending too much money on the process.

Solution #3:

The third and final main solution proposed to help increase the spirit for athletics at FIU is a program known as Athletic Panther Points. Essentially, this is a program that will use a point system in order to award students for coming out to all FIU sports and getting involved with the teams. The team believes that a system like this will help to boost FIU sports and spirits since students will be more open to joining games and events and seeing how much fun they can have there.

The way that the Panther Points system will work is by having students swipe their PantherOne cards at a provide station during sporting events; by performing this swipe, students will be reward with a certain amount of points, for example about ten points, directly on to their cards. This is an easier method of awarding points since students will not have to worry about holding onto another card or piece of paper. Once students have collected enough points, certain awards could be of access to them, such as discounts at the FIU library, FIU eating facilities (including the possible sports grill), and other free merchandise. Specific examples might be that after forty points, students may receive a five-dollar gifts certificate to the bookstore, and that after eighty points they may get a free six-inch sub at Subways. These types of prizes will allow students, at first, to see more reason in attending sporting events, and with time just be casual gifts from going to places they already enjoy being at. The system may also help in get students to attend different sports games by awarding a couple of extra points to less popular sports or sports on the rise. From this viewpoint, it can be seen the many benefits that come from this Panther Point system and how easily it can be implemented.

Some people may still hold some reserve to this idea since systems like this (point systems) already exist at FIU and their programs are not that well known or utilized. While the team has acknowledged these systems, such as that found in the library and the one online called Panther Points, it seems that there are other problems with these programs that relate back to lack of prosperity. An example of these systems problems can be spotted in the ridiculous amounts of points students are required to achieve in order to get what may be considered mediocre prizes. This problem and many others (more on the problems with the point system may be read in solution #1 under the merchandise problem) exhibit why these systems have not gained many students approval, and there for show the team what not to do. From these flaws, the team has created the APP to be a system in which the points are manageable to achieve and the prizes are worthy of such attendance. The team also believes that this system is unique since it will be incorporating the athletic department whereas previous points did not require students to join in on sports. Overall, the APP system will be an innovative way to reel in students

to attending sporting events and showing them the reasons why to attend, even if at first it is just for the points.

The Merchandise Problem

Another one of the major problems concerning the athletics department at Florida International University is funding. The sports teams at FIU aren't of high ranking because they don't have the monetary resources to recruit the most talented players. An important contributor to the improvement and enhancement of the athletics department is the amount of merchandise the university sells. The money FIU receives from selling merchandise such as shirts, sweatshirts, and hats helps improve the athletics department. If the football and basketball teams aren't winning games or competing against well-known schools, nobody is going to have panther spirit or the incentive to buy clothing representing their school. FIU is unfortunately facing this issue because of various reasons. First of all, the price of a sweatshirt or any other article of clothing at the FIU bookstore is extremely expensive. The price for a sweatshirt ranges from \$40-\$80. That is completely out of a college student's budget. In addition to this, students will perhaps consider purchasing more FIU apparel if FIU had fixed the previously mentioned problems with sports (the winning record and games against other known schools). Since the sports at FIU aren't of high ranking, the total amount of merchandise sales is extremely low, resulting in inadequate funding for the athletics department. According to the State Universities of Florida Net Assets for the 2007 fiscal year, FIU only consisted of \$312,889 between supply inventory and goods purchased for resale. University of Florida on the other hand had \$5,031,030 of total inventories and Florida State University had \$3,641,198. This huge gap is due to the fact that UF and FSU teams are more competitive and among the top in college sports; therefore many people enjoy spending their money on apparel to represent the greatness of those teams. There are a few ventures FIU can take in this area in order to help the athletics department become stronger and better, overall.

Solution #1:

Everyone has been to a frozen yogurt shop or a coffee shop that offers customers the opportunity to register for a reward's card that gives them a certain amount of points after every purchase. Once the customer reaches a certain amount of points, they will be given a free coffee or the opportunity to buy one yogurt and get the second free. FIU can take a spin off this concept, and develop their own system that benefits the athletics department, as mentioned before the APP system. This relates back to the merchandise, since students can be given the chance to retrieve specific discounts on clothing items or even miscellaneous items that show off FIU spirit (for example stickers or mugs). As talked about previously, students would receive points by going to various sporting events and receiving points; later when students go to the bookstore they can use their points to retrieve the discounts or free items. The bookstore may be able to allow discounts from 10 percent to even 50 percent off depending on the amount of points each student will like to use. The points could even be taken a step further and be used to gain prizes of free merchandise, such as a new FIU t-shirt, hat, or mug. All of these options, not mention those outside offered the bookstore, will help to boost the revenue at the FIU bookstore, and simultaneously increase the attendance of students at sporting events. The reason why is because if more students are attending games, FIU teams should win more games since they now have the support of students at their games. If more games are won and the ranking of FIU sports increases, more apparel will be sold, ultimately giving the athletics department more funds to improve their department.

Solution #2:

The second solution created to help boost sales on merchandise and apparel comes from a closer look at other universities and their product lines. It came to the team's attention that in order to create more enthusiasm and school spirit many schools develop contracts with various popular brands. By forming these deals, the universities often allow more variety in merchandise to be available to students; as well as provide them with new items that support their school and come from brands they know and

love. Unfortunately, as mentioned before, FIU lacks in these sorts of agreements. For this reason, the team feels that this is an area of much improvement, and therefore, a possible focus and solution to the low amount of sales. The team feels that if contracts with well-known clothing brands were to be made, students might be more willing to spend money on these products, and in turn increase the sum of money that can be allocated to the athletics department.

One company that is extremely well-known for creating these types of deal with schools is Victoria's Secret. In 2002, Victoria's Secret launched Pink, which now provides a line that focuses on the brand recognition for colleges. The Pink collegiate collection slogan is "Game Day Every Day". Believe it or not, this apparel has inspired a significant amount of school spirit in many other colleges around the country. Pink sells sweaters, t-shirts, pants, water bottles, bag, and pretty much anything you can think of, with the logo of many different universities, including those of the University of Florida, Florida State, and University of Miami. With all these schools, and especially Florida schools, working with PINK, it is very clear that FIU should be trying to do the same. In approaching this situation and having FIU form a relationship with PINK, it is required that there be some Pink FIU Campus Reps. According to the Pink website, there are already two FIU students that are college reps; this discovery is a step in the right direction, however, not many students know about this and, consequently, are not able to help out. To solve this problem of lack of knowledge and bring FIU closer to a deal, it is imperative that the news be spread across campus and social media, such as Instagram. With these outlets in use, more girls will likely be influenced by this, and become more involved in trying to get FIU Pink merchandise. One way this can happen is by having photos be taken and posted on Instagram using the tag @pinkfiu; the more tags and likes on Facebook, the more likely it is to raise FIU's chances of having a contract with Victoria's Secret. Deals, like this one, are important to have since they can have effects on other areas of improvement, such as that of FIU sports. The PINK brand, in specific, would be a great thing to have since women would be more likely to wear this clothing in support of FIU athletics; an example of this increase livelihood may be seen in people having a more active role in finding out when game days are in order to have a reason to wear their new Pink FIU clothes. FIU should also get more involved with brands such as Nike in order to

attract men, as well as women to the clothes. Currently if one searches for FIU in the Nike website nothing shows up. Schools such as University of Florida and University of Miami have their apparel all over the websites, and even in the actual stores. This discovery is a huge asset to these other schools since it allows the chance for more people to buy their merchandise and support their sports teams. FIU should truly work on having Nike carry their apparel for both sexes in store since currently it can only be purchased through the FIU website or at the school itself. Along with selling at store there should also be more of a variety of clothing and accessories. With these ideas at work, more students will want to wear their “panther gear” proudly and subsequently wear it at athletic events.

From this explanation, it becomes clear why having these contracts with popular brands is a huge advantage for universities. While the team recognizes that some amount of the profits must go to the company, the benefits gained would be hugely beneficial to the school. Not only would this most likely increase revenue for the bookstore and the school in general, but it would most likely also intensify school spirit. With an increase in “panther pride” students will be more willing and excited to attend games and events put on by the school and the athletic department, in specific.

Solution #3:

One more solution in regards to improving FIU merchandise sales is to sell more affordable clothing. College students are constantly on a budget and buying college apparel can be extremely expensive. This problem can be resolved by creating cheap and affordable clothing that students would be capable of buying without breaking their budget. One example of a product that can be sold to accommodate this demand would be various shirts and tank-tops that used a slogan to represent the school. This idea makes sense since students would prefer affordable t-shirts that they can buy more quantities of and wear to school or the gym, rather than splurge on expensive sweatshirts that are usually useless in this hot Miami weather.

The shirts that will be used won't be Adidas, Nike, or Under-Armour because the cost of these brands exceeds a college student's budget. The goal is to sell shirts that range from \$10 to \$15 which is an

area most college students would be able to afford. On the shirts, slogans, such as, "Hear us Roar", "Paws Up", or "Go Blue and Gold" could be written which would create more choices for students to purchase. These slogans will need to catch the attention of students and make them want to buy one of these t-shirts. Colleges like Michigan State, Auburn, and the University of Alabama have slogans on their college apparel and they have proven to be successful in their yearly merchandise sales. Their slogans boost school spirit by providing the fun "hoorah" in regards to their sports teams. Selling these simple shirts would lead to a rise in overall merchandise sale which could then help fund the athletics department at FIU.

The Sports Program Problem

Who is to blame when fans tailgate outside a football stadium but don't go the game – the fans or the team? Our project will suggest that it's a combination of both, but the sports teams aren't helping their cause, leading to the third and final major problem.

Part of the problem may be that football and basketball have not performed up to par in recent years. In 2013, the NCAA reported an average attendance of 45,192 for Division I FBS football game, the most of any sport. In second place was men's basketball with 4,921. Since 2001, FIU's two sports that are supposed to draw out the largest crowds in college athletics have performed well below average. The average winning percentages for each team was determined by adding the wins from each season together and dividing the wins by the wins and losses. This metric is a reflection of the teams' performances in the regular season, not any sort of postseason action. The football team has posted a winning percentage of 31% since their inaugural season in 2002. The men's basketball team has only been slightly better with a winning percentage of 37% since 2001. Logic says that if a team isn't performing, fans won't come out to watch, and this explains the below average attendance. Not all sports have struggled over the last decade and a half. The women's basketball team has held its own, winning an

average of 51% of its games since 2001. The baseball team has even seen substantial success with an average winning percentage of 57%.

Sports, however, are played at any level for one sole purpose - to win. Sure some games are played to compete, to have fun, but at the end of the day the main objective of sport is to prove that one team/individual is better than the other. To improve the athletics culture at FIU, the school's main teams must win.

FIU, for many years has had athletics as a key extracurricular activity for its students. However, not many of those years have been successful as FIU is not known for its athletics department as it is known for its academia. Through the first half century of its history FIU has not been able to establish a winning culture among its athletics department other than a couple good years in baseball, soccer, and that one good football year where everyone seems to remember when we had T.Y. Hilton spearheading our receiving corp. So the solution is plain and simple: Get Good. However this in itself is a very challenging task that will not happen overnight but yet over the past 50 years we have managed not to have any steady progress on working to become better in athletics.

So for this the solution is proposed, teams become good when they have good players and good chemistry, the players are what is essential to game without them there is no sport. What is proposed is a simple measure that may lead to serious results if taken seriously, that being to hire scouts. Scouts, the people who find these players, approach them with an opportunity to play college sports and attract them to the school. Simple enough task, all the department would have to do is allocate some money to put towards investing in better scouting and that would make the difference. Now better scouts can spot better talent and find what a team needs thus making them good. This is where the scout makes all the difference however with this being said the team being good can create a huge trickledown effect for the university. In theory the team, football/basketball/baseball whatever they case may be, gets good by getting good a lot of X factors now begin to change. More people start going to the games, rather than just the tailgates, more attendance means more seats being sold, more seats being sold can lead to more

money for the department of athletics and ultimately the university. With this raise in profits the department can spend more on their sports program and building on it to make it better.

Additionally, if the team starts getting good it starts building moral across campus spirit weeks now become spirit weeks at FIU. More people start buying FIU merchandise in order to wear and show their pride, which means an increase in profits for the FIU bookstore. Also, with more wins and FIU getting more and more media attention and notoriety people start being drawn to the university bringing in more and more students to FIU. More students even though it means more people already adding to FIU's overpopulation problem also means more money and the more money the university the more it has to spend allocating all over campus.

Which leads us back to where we started, in order to fix this problem of a non-winning culture in the university athletic department, were going to need to invest in better scouting for the sports teams.

Call to Action

As it has been seen from these many problems and solutions, this depression in athletics at Florida International University can be resolved. This seemingly monumental issue, when examined in this perspective, can be seen as something much more manageable, and something that may be fixed in a timely manner. While this new optimism on the topic is vital to have, it does not do anything unless changes begin to be made. The team has taken the first steps in the process by picking out the main issues and proposing possible solutions to solve them; now, however, these solutions must be put into place as students, staff, and other officials take action against this problem. From the team's outline, it seems that the cultural and merchandise problems should be among the first issues to be fixed since effects on these areas will simultaneously affect the overall sports program in a positive way. In all, the team knows that an issue like this will take some time, possibly years, to overcome, yet it is still strongly believed that with just some of these solutions acted on small improvements will quickly begin to appear. These minor advances in the right direction are just what this issue needs to help push it forward. In due time when

most of these solutions and possibly others have been implemented, these three problems will no longer hold such a large grasp on the FIU public, and FIU athletics will be able to prosper and succeed with the students and community by its side.