

ABSTRACT

The City of Saints: Realizing Sports' Positive Potential for Communities Following Disaster

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There are numerous observable relationships between sport and community. By adhering to the external identity of the community, a sports franchise creates strong team identification with its community, increasing the loyalty and impact of its relationship. In the first several chapters, this thesis explores how and why these relationships are created between a team and its community. It examines the implications of the relationships between the team and the community, a player and the community, and fans of the team with one another. This thesis explores the effect of the relationships between sport and the community and how these relationships change after the community experiences a disaster.

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THE CITY OF SAINTS: REALIZING SPORTS' POSITIVE POTENTIAL FOR
COMMUNITIES FOLLOWING DISASTERS

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Baylor University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Honors Program

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Waco, Texas

May 2020

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Dr. Meyer, thank you for being willing to guide me through this process. I would not have even been able to even get started without you, and I am so very thankful for the countless hours you have spent talking with me about these topics and pointing me in the right direction. You have changed the way I view sports. I cannot thank you enough.

To my roommates at the Pantry, thank you for being willing to listen to my constant ramblings of thoughts and ideas that eventually created this thesis. You guys have supported me through it all. I couldn't have done it without all the support you all showed me.

To my family, thank you for your constant love and support throughout this process. You continually push me to give my best and never settle. These lessons I will take with me wherever I go.

To Dr. Parrish and Judge Wright, thank you for serving on my committee and supporting me during this step of the process. It means the world to have your support.

To Carter and Tommy, I love you guys more than anything and your constant support is something I am eternally grateful for.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

On September 21, 2001, the New York Mets began a regular season series against the Atlanta Braves at Shea Stadium. The emotional meaning surrounding the game that night was anything but normal. This game was the first sporting event held in New York City following the terrorist attacks ten days earlier. Instead of wearing their normal team hats, the Mets opted to wear hats representing the New York police and fire departments, signifying their appreciation, respect, and *strong-tie* to these and all members of the New York City community. In dramatic fashion, Mike Piazza, who had already donated \$68,000 of his own personal money to the 9/11 relief efforts, hit the game winning homerun in the game, and he commented, “I’m glad I could give people a diversion from the sorrow, to give them a thrill” (Consolazio, 2019). For the New York City community, the game was not just about baseball; the event had a deeper meaning that night. As a suffering community, New York found hope and identity with the Mets as a team, Mike Piazza the player, and with each another as sports fans, all of which gave the grieving members of this community something to cheer for despite their external realities. This example points to the focus of this thesis, highlighting a seldom occurrence in which sport, a city’s team, and the players on the local team change the often-one-sided nature of their relationship with a community and have a ‘real’ and positive impact. As I will argue in this thesis, we notice many of these positive shifts in the relationships between sport and the community following a disaster or painful moment for that teams’ local community.

This thesis will examine the connections between a sport team and their surrounding community can be observed in three distinct relationships. The first relationship is one between a team and the city (as a whole), which incorporates team symbols and rituals that link to the identity and emotion of the external community. The second is a relationship between an individual member of the team and the surrounding community, seen through the support of a players on and off field behavior. Lastly, we see the relationship between individual members of a community created through the shared fan experience with the local sports team. The effects of these relationships on the community can be positive or negative, shifting based on the contemporary context and interpretation of the relationships unique to each individual observer. This thesis will explore the impact that disasters have on the often-one-sided relationship a sports team normally has with a community through the lens of these three relationship dynamics. I argue that with the occurrence of a disaster, natural or otherwise, sports teams, their symbols, players, and relationships among fans changes to reflect a positive, mutually beneficial relationship for both the community and the sports franchise.

Looking at the first of the three relationships, many sport scholars have examined the relationship a sports team can build with a community through the sharing of significant rituals and identifiably distinct symbolism. In general, communities are defined by the common sharing and interpretation of rituals and symbolism (Cohen 15), such as a college football team use of traditional songs, dances, and mascots. Arguably, all sports team attempt to connect with its community by creating shared rituals and symbols. According to Heere and Jeffrey (2007), however, for these common rituals and symbols to be meaningful, they must identify with the community's demographic

category or membership organizations (Heere and Jeffrey 322). For instance, the adoption of a team name, identification of a mascot, or development of signature cheer will be enhanced and thus more meaningful if there is an attempt to associate that name, mascot or chant with the external community's identity, in part or as a whole, deeply forging the team in a relationship with the identity widely shared among community (Heere and Jeffrey 331). Depending on the strength of these rituals and symbols, teams can create strong relationships with the community which ultimately results in the community experiencing team identification and showing strong team loyalty.

The second relationship, those between a member of the team and the community, also has an important impact on the effects of sport in the community. As a sports team is made up of a collection of individual players and coaches, relationships are created between the community of fans with individual members of the team over time (Heere and Jeffrey 321). For example, when a new coach is hired, or a new player is drafted to the local team, fans in the community begin to develop a relationship with those individuals, some are negative, perhaps by those who had a perceived 'strong' relationship with the old coach, or positive by those who were happy to see them go. Furthermore, certain athlete's association with political movements, religions or causes can impact the perceptions of the community of fans toward the player or coach, and ultimately the team. Perhaps fans will ultimately come to determine that because of some external affiliation a player or coach has, they 'do not reflect who we are as a community' and limit their support of that player or coach. (Coombs and Cassilo 427). While this idea has garnered mixed attitudes, this is an example of how an individual player or coach receives individual attention, positively and negatively, that foster or

sever additional ties with the community beyond the team atmosphere (Coombs and Cassilo 429). There are many examples though, of individual athletes who create charities or engage in community service (whether on their own free-will, or because of team/league mandates), giving back to their communities. This connection may influence a community of fans' opinion of certain players or coach, influencing if they will buy and wear the player's jersey (Heere and Jeffrey 323). The relationships created between members of a team and the community as a whole provide important implications on the overall impact of a sports impact on the external community.

My third observation on the relationship between teams and their surrounding community focuses on the impactful relationships that exist between individual members of a community with each other. The shared interpretation and understanding of different symbols and rituals are important aspects when considering the creation of an individual's community. One of the major similarities between all sports teams is how the sharing of specific rituals represent a team's identity (Heere and Jeffrey 327). Whether it's a phrase, cheer, or a fight song (official or not), rituals connect diverse individuals of a community with one another. For example, following the bombing at the finish line of the 2015 Boston Marathon, Neil Diamond sang his famous song "Sweet Caroline" at a Boston Red Sox baseball game. This song became a ritual at Red Sox games for the following season, and seasons since, where all members of the Boston community, and especially diverse fans at the Red Sox games could participate in and share their common identity of *Boston Strong* (Slane, 2017). Through this shared ritualistic connection, individuals of a community experience a sense of belonging and connection with their community's sports team. Research suggests that through the creation of a strong tie of

identity to a sports teams, the connection experienced between individual fans is actually increased as well, giving diverse individuals tangible rituals and symbols that bring them together (Smith and Ingham 256). This common ritual and symbolism allow individuals to relate and identify with diverse others in their community, highlighting a positive relationship that emerges from a shared sense of community fandom for their sport teams within the community as a whole.

While there are multiple relationships created by the presence of sports teams in a community, the consequences of these relationships, as stated above, can be both positive and negative to the community. For example, the way in which a community is represented by a sports team name and mascot can foster positive team identity as well as harmful identification. In application, the use of Native Americans symbols and representations as mascots for sports teams can result in racist and stereotypical representations of Native Americans, creating “bitter and persistent debate” over the appropriateness of these symbols and mascots (Connolly 528-529). For example, the University of Illinois’ previous mascot, Chief Illiniwek, dressed up in a feathered head dress and performed a spirited dance at halftime of football and basketball games. The members of the University of Illinois community had a strong emotional tie and connection to the mascot, viewing the symbol as ‘their teams’ mascot, holding that symbol in high regard. However, Native Americans understood this mascot as a mocking representation of sacred symbols in their indigenous communities, deeming the mascot to be disrespectful and marginalizing (Sydnor 2). This example demonstrates how individuals, and individual communities interpret the symbolism and ritualistic meaning of a mascot to be positive or negative. What emerges is often a robust conversation

around the differing of opinions potentially leading to miscommunications about the mascot's representation, *who* gets to claim the symbolism of the mascot, and *who* does the mascot represent (the team, the school community/alumni, or the indigenous community) (*In Who's Honor*, PBS, 1997). While a mascot may seemingly represent positive aspects of one community, there are many instances when other communities also find representations of the same symbol to be problematic.

I am not claiming in this thesis that a positive and negative outcome, within the relationship between sport teams and the community, are only observable before and after a disaster. What I am claiming is that both outcomes are ever present among these relationships. However, following disasters to a community, the overwhelmingly positive nature of the relationships emerges, revealing a relationship between the team, individual players and coaches, and the community, which we, ideally, tend to believe always exist. It is often through the lens of disaster that communities can see and feel the true benefit of a relationship and team identification with its sports team. I also assume in this thesis, that communities come to intimately identify with their teams, and see themselves as 'members' of the team, blending the community identity with the team identity. Fans often hang on tight to the performances of their teams, allowing the outcome to affect their individual as well as collective mood and schedules (Heere and James 323). Fans feel an undying loyalty to their sports franchise, and this is heightened when a community shares in that collective loyalty. But I also suggest throughout this thesis that the loyalty a community of fans express towards sport teams is *one-sided*, meaning that the desperate loyalty fans bestow on a team is not reciprocated. Sports teams today are often concerned about bottom-lines, size of their fan-base market, and eager to relocate

(often using this threat as leverage) in order to secure more lucrative financial opportunity and support (Smith and Ingham 262). Fans often feel a deep representation and connection to their local franchise by adhering to demographic characteristics of the team and see themselves as part of the organizations membership because they live where the team resides. However, individual players, coaches, and team owners do not share the same sense of identity with individual community members nor are motivated by the same sense of loyalty, focusing rather on indicators performance successes and financial benefits with little regard for local fans (Smith and Ingham 261-262). This disparity can be observed in the language used by fans who have experienced their team relocate to another city. For example, when the Hartford Whalers relocated out of Connecticut and became the Carolina Hurricanes, many Whalers fans felt like “fans of a team that no longer plays” (Hyatt 10). These differing levels of loyalty and expectations are another example of how the contemporary relationship between teams and communities is often one-sided and carried positive and negative outcomes for all parties involved. Because of the inherent uneven relationship between a community and their sports teams, I identify in this thesis how apparent the positive, *mutual* relationship emerges when both the city and the sport team are negatively impacted by a disaster to the community.

The consequences also carry over to the *created* relationship between an individual player or coach and the community. As explained above, with fans loyal to their hometown teams, they often feel and exhibit a *one-sided* loyalty to individual players and coaches, which is not reciprocated by the members of the team (Smith and Ingham 261-262). These one-sided relationships have been discussed through the imbalanced lens of sport role-models and how the idealized version of an athlete

regularly falls short of a fan's expectation, representing an icon who is bound to 'fail'. May (2009) explored the consequences of young black male basketball players choosing professional black male basketball players as role models and he found that often, role models were selected by their 'admirable' characteristics outside of the court (May 458). This highlights the shifting consequences of forged relationships between members of a team and the community. The actions, on and off the 'court', of a player are highly scrutinized by a fan, creating a bond between the player and a member of the community. When a player does not live up to the expectations of the community, whether in the context of the sport or outside of it, it can cause a strengthening of the ties or if the actions are deemed to be disappointing, ties can weaken. However actions are viewed, the bond between the player and the community is one-sided with all expectations coming from the fan onto the athlete, and the player caring little, and knowing even less, of individual community members and their perceptions of individual athlete or coach. This highlights the *weak-tie*, one-sided nature of the relationship between members of a local sports team and the community.

Finally, this thesis explores the relationships between individual members of a community that is developed through the shared sense of identifying as a fan of the local sports teams. Through these developed relationships *among* community members, we again can observe and detail the influence sport teams have in positive and negative ways. In a broad sense, a sports team's adherence to ritual and symbolism generally allows a wide swath of individual community members to find an identity in the local sports team, something that is shared regardless of their sociodemographic status within the community. Participation in shared rituals can transcend the geographical

representation and connect individuals who do not share sociodemographic status or are even geographically near each other (Delanty 144). Therefore, sport creates connections among and between individuals in a community, local or displaced, that may not have been there in the past. However, research by Smith and Ingham (2003) indicate that this connection between individuals in a community may only increase division among and within communities based upon their already “situated interests” (Smith and Ingham 252). This research suggests that sport only seeks to make it easier for *like* people to connect with each other and does not help create community outside of already selective demographic categories and membership organizations. But following a disaster that affects the entire city, may turn these claims around, once again highlighting the positive and negative outcomes of a sports team relationship with a community.

This thesis explores and details instances of the positive and negative relationships developed between a local sport team and the community which they represent (geographically, culturally, etc.) and how these connections provide more positive, mutually beneficial, and *strong-tie* benefits to a community following some shared disastrous event to the city community at large. I argue that in the wake of a disaster, a positive shift in the relationship between a sports team, individuals on that team, and the community of fans occurs, providing glimpses of what many believe the relationship ideally *should* always be. There are many examples of communities rallying around a sports team following a disaster, and it is my argument that during these times, the idealized relationship naturally emerges, in order to provide a sense of hope and solidarity for the impacted community, and reflects the idealized relationships generally provided when arguing for the existence and benefit of sports teams for a community.

One example previously mentioned, the September 11, 2001, terrorists attacked the Twin Towers in New York City devastated the city and the nation as a whole. This attack left the nation aghast, picking up the pieces and looking for something to place their hopes and aspirations for a better future, to regain a sense of a harmed and broken community identity. This attack, however, coincided with one of the more memorable postseasons for the New York Yankee baseball team. Brown (2004) recalls the significance of the Yankees' games in the wake of this disaster. He states, "the games took on more of an air of importance than ever before. [...] drawing huge audiences of both fans of baseball and curious viewers interested in the recovery of New York and the nation as a whole (39). This indicates that in the wake of a disaster, the city of New York and the nation recognized that the Yankees were more than *just* a team, representing something more important than *just* a game in the wake of disaster. This example provides evidence of how a team may help its community heal from a shared disaster (Brown 41).

There are multiple examples of how the New York Yankees fostered community and relief in the wake of 9/11. Specifically, the Yankees were able to create connection between the community and the team itself. One way in which they were able to do this was through the symbolism of their jerseys and rituals used before and during the games. As noted earlier, the Yankees and Mets wore baseball hats with the acronyms of the police and fire departments (Kraus 91). This represented the teams support of the city and the community shared in the symbols and rituals in its attempt to move on following the disaster. All baseball games after the 9/11 attack had emotional renditions of songs such as "God Bless America" and "The Star-Spangled Banner" (Kraus 91). Specifically, for

the New York Yankee games, along with these patriotic songs, they played the song “New York, New York,” reminding the community of their identity and encouraging the connection to the individuals of the community and the sports team.

Furthermore, the relationship between the individual players of a sports team and the community shifted toward a mutually benefiting one, where the team engaged in less one-sided practices and increased instances of mutually beneficial community interaction, making direct relationships with community members and fans. Yankee players took a vested interest in helping the city in its clean-up efforts, and where they could not help, they made powerful efforts to support and comfort the helping heroes (Kraus 92). Along with these efforts, specific players took strides in order to befriend the family members of fallen heroes and provide financial aid and support to the hurting community of New York. For example, Derek Jeter, the Yankee shortstop, reached and created an actual relationship with a young girl whose father was one of the firefighters lost in the attack (Kraus 91). Examples such as these demonstrate how disasters cause the typical one-sided sport relationship structures to devolve towards mutually beneficial relationships, providing an increased benefit to the community in times of hardship.

The New York Yankees also helped to foster relationships between members of the community themselves. In the wake of this disaster, the Yankees provided the community to come together for some relief to the real-life reality of their despair. The games became a space to escape the reality of a damaged city, in which the entire community of New York could come together and share in a common experience of celebrating their hometown team (Brown 39). The Yankees and their postseason run allowed the community to connect with one another over something positive and forget

for a while the reality of the recent disaster. While still representing weak ties of community as stated by Ingham and Smith (2003), perhaps any form of connection becomes that much more important following pain, loss, and despair.

Sport create relationships with, and within, communities, commonly observable through relationships between the symbols of the sports team and the community, individual players and coaches and the community, and individual members of the fan community with each another. While the effect of these relationships can be positive and negative, depending on the context and importance of the created relationship (i.e. weak- or strong-ties), the constant factor is that sport has an essential and beneficial role in the healing and connection of a community following a disaster.

In this thesis, community and sport are explored to provide insights into the contemporary nature of their relationship, as well as highlight the idealized version of these relationships, which are most notably seen in the wake of a disaster to the community. Understanding the way in which individual's create and participate in community, provides opportunities to observe the implications of the presence of professional sports teams in the community and the meaningful role they have for communities and individuals in those communities who develop identities intimately connected with the symbols and rituals of those teams. Even without disasters, these are implications of the powerful presence a sport team has for the external identity of a community. By understanding the nature of the relationships between sport and the community, it is possible to observe how the effects and implications of these relationships change following a shared disaster to the collective community. Ultimately,

this thesis highlights the idealized relationship between sport teams and the community they reflect.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The effect of the relationships between sport and community can influence the individuals of a community based on the context and understanding of these interactions. A community connects with a sports team through feeling represented by the team's symbolism and ritual. Individuals also develop one-sided relationships with players and coaches of the team by relating to his/her character or background. Sport creates a sense of community among mutual fans. To explore the effects of these relationships, it is necessary to understand what community is, how community is experienced by the individual, and how a postmodern social context effects the way individuals experience community. Postmodern community is difficult to define and observe because it is experienced rather than observed in an institutional or spatial way (Delanty 136-137). While many experts disagree in how postmodern community is encountered, Delanty (2003) explains, "[... postmodern] community is experienced in a communicative relationship and not in a common bond as such, it does not take a concrete form" (Delanty 136-137). Therefore, the participation in postmodern community breaks the boundaries of traditional community, creating a highly unique identity for each individual. This chapter of the thesis will explore how community is created and experienced by an individual in the postmodern era and how a community is affected by its relationship to sport before, during, and after a disaster.

Definitions of Community

Prior to examining the evolution of community into postmodernity, it is beneficial to highlight the boundaries of community regarding the overarching definition of the word. By doing this, it is easier to see how postmodern community effects the individual's experiences of community. Cohen (1985) states, "Community is that entity to which one belongs, greater than kinship but more immediately than the abstraction we call 'society'" (Cohen 15). It may be helpful to define community by building criteria around the attributes of this shared kinship found in the concept of community. In a fundamental sense, Cohen states that a community exists in the shared boundaries, rituals, and symbolism of individuals (Cohen 15). As with language, symbols of a community do not inherently possess meaning, but they allow a community to interpret meaning from them. Because the meaning of the symbols of a community are unique and specific, its interpretation must be created, promoted, accepted and then taught to others in and out of the community. By application, this implies that the sharing and participation of a community's symbols and rituals must be valued and taught to individuals.

According to these boundaries of community, an individual learns to participate in community. In this learning, an individual understands the significant symbolism of a community in order to relate and participate with that group. Cohen suggests that a community shares several common factors that create the boundaries of this interpretation of symbolism in a community. The first boundary is that the individuals of a community must have something in common with one another. The second is that this

similarity must distinguish these individuals from other members of society (Cohen 12). In other words, a community should have a feature or shared interpretation of symbolism that is commonly shared in the community and sets it apart from other communities. Members of the community and other communities must be able to point to a distinguishable feature that identifies theirs as unique. While this distinction is concrete, its perception may vary between individuals in the community. Cohen explains, “[...] the boundary may be perceived in rather different terms, not only by people on opposite sides of it, but also by people on the same side” (Cohen 12). In application, community exists for a shared group of people; however, the meaning and symbolism of this community takes on individualized importance. An individual’s past experiences and current understandings influence his/her experience of the community around them, deriving meaning from how he/she learned to participate in community.

This perceived interpretation of symbolism allows individuals to derive meaning and connection from an other’s behavior. As with a community’s symbolism, behavior does not carry implications, but rather it is the interpretations of behaviors which allows individuals to communicate to one another (Cohen 19). Therefore, as an individual observes the behavior of a community, he/she participates in the community through the shared communication of meaning and not the action itself. This interpretation of symbolism is highly individualized and is a byproduct of each individual’s background and learned experiences. As the perceptions and importance of a community can shift from person to person, the experience and importance of community can also shift as

individuals learn to interact differently, which can be observed through the emergence of the postmodern community.

Postmodern Community: Implications on Connection

In postmodernity, individuals experience community outside the common confines and boundaries of earlier times. Delanty suggests community in the past heavily relied on the support of the people in close vicinity to one another, often family. As the confines of community are shifting, the role of family and its relationship to community is shifting as well (Delanty 144). A greater emphasis has been placed on friendship, and the duties of friendship have supplanted many of the basic functions of the classic family (Delanty 144-145). Community has shifted from a tangible connection between closely connected people like family into a “constitutive of personal bonds and has given rise to ‘personal communities’” (Delanty 145). In general, postmodern community challenges the typical avenues in which people associate. The known boundaries of community are destroyed and rearranged to create a deeply individualized experience of connection with others. While it is impossible to provide a concrete definition of postmodern community based on the fluid, individualized nature of its experience, it is important to understand how and why individuals experience community in this way.

The first explanation of postmodern community explored in this thesis is proposed by Jean-Luc Nancy (1991). He explains that postmodern community exists in the loss or absence of community in one’s life (Nancy xxxiv-xi). The idea of this community suggests all individuals recognize the void of connectedness in their life, and their community exists in the recognition of the ‘lost’ community that they once had. In

postmodernity, Nancy proposes that the existence of this lost community is a romanticized idea, similar to the romanticism of a relationship of a deceased person. Once someone has stopped experiencing the community, he/she begin to create an illusion of the identity experienced from the lost community. In this definition of postmodern community, “community is the experience of a loss but not a loss of something that was ever possessed” (Delanty 136). In its application to society, individuals consistently strive to experience connection as they had in the past. However, these connections are impossible to realize because they never truly existed; it was a myth created in the mind(s) of the individual(s). This may suggest that the realization of community may forever be an unfillable craving, inherently creating dissatisfaction no matter where one is connected.

However, Greg Urban identifies postmodern community differently. While he agrees that an individual’s understanding of a community exists in an unattainable attempt for connectedness, Urban suggests individual’s experience community with one another in the recognition of the unfilled connection society provides. Therefore, it is the communicative relationship between individuals which creates his/her community in postmodernity (Delanty 136). Delanty summarized that “community expresses the incompleteness of society, the knowledge that society cannot realize the promise of a community to come” (Delanty 137). It is in this understanding that individuals connect to one another, constantly hoping that their connections materialize into a perfected society. But they are constantly disappointed by their failure to experience such bonds because a perfected community never exists.

Another important interpretation of the impact of postmodern community comes from Blanchot (1988). He expresses that “community derives from the experience of friendship but can never be actualized, since it is always interrupted, broken or destroyed in some way” (Blanchot 46-47). This idea suggests that community is fluid, not static or concrete, as it is always shifting. Individuals try to form lasting community in postmodernity, but their community is consistently broken by the insufficient ability for society to sustain connection (Delanty 137). Ultimately, individuals and groups always seek new opportunities for connection and the hope of a new community; however, they are left with feelings of loss and disappointment because the form of connection they are seeking is unattainable in the postmodernity.

The French sociologist Michel Maffesoli provides an understanding of postmodern community which adds a new sociological dimension to the experience. For Maffesoli (1996), an individual experiences postmodern community through his/her participation in “emotional communities” (Maffesoli 76). He indicates that individuals experience community in an open, structureless way more in the perception than sharing of symbolism (Delanty 139). Maffesoli recognizes that community is shifting and unstable, constantly changing how it effects each individual and how that individual interacts and connects with others.

The development and increased use of social media across all human cultures has contributed to the further transition away from traditional senses of community (local, family) into postmodern concepts of community. Elliot and Lemert (2014) explore the way in which the increased presence of media contributes to the experience of

postmodern community. Through analysis and summation of the studies of Jean Baudrillard, they are able to draw important conclusion of how an individual's community is affected through media culture. They state, "The scandal of postmodernity for Baudrillard lies in its conversion of codes, models and signs in to seductive excess, a rendering up of radically ambiguous simulations that at once cut to the core of common experience yet somehow remain aesthetically distant from everyday life" (Elliot and Lemert 339). Essentially, current forms of social media in what was already the postmodern era has now allowed individuals to participate in an even wider range of thought and experience traditionally associated with community. These interactions are interpreted with symbolistic code which seem to have an important effect on life and reality. However, these media simulations do not affect the day to day survival of an individual, or their community, which highlights the importance placed on cultural activities that do not *truly* have an impact on an individual's daily life. By this, I point to the frivolousness of sporting competitions and the true impact they have on people's lives; or really lack thereof.

Postmodern community has varying levels of depth to the connection which individuals experience. Based on the purpose and context of the community, the strength of the community is can be 'thick' or 'thin' also known as 'strong' or 'weak' social ties. In postmodernity, the strength of a connection with someone in the community is dependent on circumstances within the relationship (Delanty 144). A strong connection is one which deeply ties an individual to its community and generally supersedes other weaker connections of community. For example, an individual's connection with a parent

who provides shelter and food will be stronger than with a stranger who he/she shared pleasantries with standing in line at the grocery store. In postmodernity, one's community is made of these strong and weak ties of community, constantly changing and shifting in their strength. Dotson (2017) supports the idea that individuals experience "thicker" ties to some communities over others as he explores the reconstructed nature of community in our digitized times (Dotson 33). Dotson suggests that all of community is found in a web of social ties; however, the depth of these ties may vary based on an individual's unique experiences and perceptions, complicated by the media culture and the use of social media (Dotson 34-35). In conjunction with the line of reasoning behind Baudrillard's interpretation of postmodern community, social media culture seemingly creates strong ties of community, but in reality, provides weak, short-lasting ties. In the next section, the relationships created by sport in a postmodern community will be defined and the implications will be explained.

Sport As Postmodern Community

As mentioned above, the shared interpretation of ritual and symbolism create an individual's sense community (Cohen 12). According to Tajfel (1978), these communities create one's group identity, which he defines as "knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel 63). The conglomeration of these social networks which connects individuals of a community to one another is called an external group identity. According to Heere and James, individuals use professional sports teams to further identify with a community (Heere and James 319). This can be seen through

team names such as the Los Angeles Angels or Arizona Diamondbacks, where the city and state names are used to connect fans in the area to the team and one another. By adhering to the external group identity of the city, a sports team creates a strong sense of team identity in its fans, ultimately leading to strong team loyalty (Heere and James 324). Because a sports team influences the external group identity of a community, “a team has the potential to strengthen the bond between organizations and its members” by linking the team with the external group identities of its community (Heere and James 324). Therefore, sport can have a significant impact on the creation and participation of an individual’s community based on its ability to adhere to the external group identities of that community.

A sports team can create a stronger team identification with its community by trying to align with the external group identity of the city. Research indicates teams can link identities with its community by observing the social and demographic categories of the community. For membership organizations, sports teams may be able to conjure team identity and loyalty by mirroring the group identity of a communities vocational, university-based, corporate, religious, and/or political identity (Heere and James 327). For example, the Pittsburgh Steelers received their name because Pittsburgh was known for its large production of steel, aligning with the external identity of the city of Pittsburgh. Sports teams also adhere to the demographic categories of a community’s external identity by including the city, state, or region of its location, such as the New England Patriots (Heere and James 322). Therefore, the interpretation of symbols and rituals of a sports team can link the external group identity of a community with the

sports team, creating strong team identification and ultimately team loyalty. This symbolism is represented through team name, mascot, stadium, and special cheers and ritual surrounding the team.

Heere and James (2007) indicate it is beneficial for sports teams to align to a community's external group identity because it increases revenues from sponsors, broadcasting, and merchandise sales (Heere and James 323). They state there are three main ways a team can develop strong links with the external group identity of its community, fostering a strong team identity and loyalty. The first proposition is that team identity is found when "members of the group possess a degree of exclusivity to the team" (Heere and James 331). This means that a community believes their *true* identity is reflected in the team as a whole, and the attitude of the community is also reflected in the team's attitude. Secondly, a sport team creates strong team identification when cheering for the team is viewed as an extension of being a part of the community (Heere and James 331). For example, many university football teams experience strong support from the student body because it is seen as a part of the college experience to support the team and go to the games. Finally, Heere and James suggest that the in-game success of the team is essential in building strong team identity and team loyalty (Heere and James 331). By cheering for a winning team, the external group identity of the community is giving a positive boost in its esteem, enhancing the team identity and loyalty.

The effect of sport on the community can be observed through three main relationships. The first of these relationships is the between the franchise and the community, including all team ritual, symbolism, and infrastructure which links the team

to the external community (Heere and James 334). For example, teams attempt to pick a mascot which corresponds and unifies the external group identity of the community. This can be observed in teams such as the San Francisco 49'ers, which pay homage to the gold miners who came to the San Francisco area in 1849. Furthermore, the demographic location of the team is also incorporated into the logo of the team. These are symbols to the external community. This can be observed for logos such as the New York Mets show the New York City skyline. The New England Patriots again, illustrate the blending of historical and regional identifiers as part of their teams attempt to build a fan community. Sport teams can also use symbolic rituals in efforts to connect with a fan community. For example, it is common ritual for the students at the Baylor football games to do a “sic ‘em” gesture during the kick offs of the football game. This encourages individuals who identify as members of the fan community, in this case Baylor University (fans, students, alumni, etc.) to connect with the Baylor football team. These examples illustrate how the relationship between sports teams and the community reside in attempt to promote strong team identification.

Another aspect of this relationship between sports teams and its surrounding community is evidenced through individual players and coaches and how they are perceived by that community. Because all teams are made up of individual coaches and players with diverse backgrounds and experiences, there is a vast diversity of how these popular caches and players can create links with differing demographic populations of a given community, as well as with the various membership organizations found in a community as diverse as a modern city. Heere and James state, “What makes sports

teams unique is that they *are* a particular community of players, coaches or managers, owners, and fans, but they might also symbolize or represent other communities” (Heere and James 334). Wider connections between the community and individual coaches and players within the sport franchise, are more complex given the postmodern context of community, but also allows for more individualized experiences of these individual within a contemporary community, even allowing for the possibility of direct connections between players and fans through social media. Thus, differing identities can be created in the postmodern context that link individuals of a sports team with individual identities and individuals within the fan community surrounding the team. In this sense, even if a player leaves one team and joins another, their individualistic identity can be transplanted into another location and with another team, especially if that player is identified for traits that are beyond their playing performances. For example, former quarterback Tim Tebow embodied certain religious ideals and values that meant he could have fans beyond the confines of the city in which he played. Another example is found with Shohei Ohtani, a Japanese baseball player for the Los Angeles Angels. Ohtani has linked his team’s identity to the racial identity of Japanese baseball fans, creating a strong team loyalty among this demographic category. Former NBA player Jeremy Lin also did this in his sport.

Furthermore, strong team identification can be created by the character and personality of the players on the team. Individual players can become seen as ‘heroes’ of the community based on the nature of their actions off the field and encourage the external group identity to coincide with that of the team (Heere and James 327). For

example, J.J. Watt, a Houston Texans football player, used his platform to provide relief to those struggling in his community following the devastation of hurricane Harvey in 2018. This stimulated among Houston Texan fans a strong identity with J.J. Watt, and in turn the Texans, especially within the people of Houston. These examples highlight how individual members of sport teams can develop and maintain a sense of postmodern community by adhering to the external group identities of the fanbase.

One last point I wish to address here is how sport creates thin or weak connection between individual members of a community through shared fandom. As mentioned previously, when a sports team adheres to the external group identity of a community, strong team identification results as an extension of the group identity of the community (Heere and James 331). In its application, individual fans connect with others in their communities through their shared experiences as fans of a team. This shared fandom creates postmodern community as individuals engage in shared discussions, victorious experiences, and heartbreaking losses. They create postmodern community as they talk about, purchased merchandise, and relate to one another around the context of the team. For example, when individuals discuss a game with coworkers or discuss the implications of a trade with someone at work, thin ties of community are created based on the interpretation of the sports team's performance and symbolism. These thin ties are created and maintained so long as the individuals maintain them, thus are evidence of a social tie of community that is fleeting. Therefore, the very existence of a local sport team creates relationships among members of the community. These members among the community may or may not have any other socialized connection, but are brought

together, however thinly, through the shared fan experience of the local sport team. Based on the adherence of the different external identities, the impact of these created relationships can seem to be stronger, as they usually are widespread, but truly reflect thin or weak ties among members of the teams' community.

Consequences of Sport as Community

Within the context of postmodern communities, the implications of sports teams' influence on community is based on individual experiences and interpretations, as a singular member of a community (Delanty 145). The effect of these relationships between sport and the external community can be positive or negative, as discussed in chapter one, depending on the way in which individuals interpret relationships, symbols, and rituals surrounding the connection. Therefore, it is difficult to speak definitively about the effect of sport on the community. However, in general, it is easier to observe the negative effects of sports impact on the community, highlighting the potential problems an individual can experience when his/her community and group identity is influenced by a sports team.

One of the major negative impacts of the relationship between sport and the community is when a sport inappropriately links an external identity of the community with the team. As previously mentioned, sport uses ritual and symbolism to create a strong team identification with the external identity of the community (Heere and James 327). While this can foster strong team loyalty from the community, the misrepresentation of the external identity can cause disaster and conflict. An example of this miscommunication can be seen in certain team's use of mascots as representation.

Specifically, the ex-team name of the University of Miami in Ohio represents this form of disrespect. The University of Miami in Ohio sports teams used to be called the “Redskins,” highlighting its “unique relationship with the Miami Tribe” as justification for the use of this nickname (Connolly 516). However, the Miami Tribe felt their culture was disrespected by the nickname and representation and in 1996 withdrew the endorsement of the nickname (Connolly 516). While the initial use of the nickname was not overtly intended to be racist and was even supported by the Miami Tribe for a while, this is an indication of how certain symbolism can be interpreted by different communities. In these instances, instead of promoting community, sport creates schisms between communities, promoting discord rather than connection.

Another negative consequence of the effect of sport on community is the longevity of the connection created through sport. As mentioned earlier, in postmodern community, sport creates connection by linking to the external group identity of its community (Heere and James 319). As I have suggested earlier in this thesis, the effects of any of these community connections may have no *real* long-lasting effects on individuals in the community. In fact, Smith and Ingham (2003) suggest that “professional sport is not an effective means for re-building any lasting sense of community” and that sport “may further divide residents depending upon their situated interests” (Smith and Ingham 252). Smith and Ingham indicate that, with all things considered, a professional sport’s team does not create any meaningful ties with or within a community. Rather, sports teams link to preexisting community identities based on demographic categories and membership organizations such as race and socioeconomic

status which exists regardless of a team's existence, much less its performances. Their research indicates the connections created in and through sport is "spontaneous and short-lived," creating no long-lasting benefit of connection between members of the community (Smith and Ingham 259). Therefore, sport may in total have a negative effect on the community because the connections it supposedly creates are, at best, thin/weak and at worst, only help to further deepened preexisting schisms in the external community.

Another negative outcome that can emerge as a result of the relationship between sports team and its local community is the betrayal a community experiences when a team acts in its own self-interest rather than returning the support of the community. A result of linking a sports team with the external group identities of the community is creating strong team identification which ultimately leads to the community supporting the sports team (Heere and James 325). However, many researches find this relationship between a sports team and a community to be manipulative and one-sided. In their case study on the NFL team Bengals and the city Cincinnati (2003), Smith and Ingham suggest "the bond is emphasized in an attempt to combine economic capital with the symbolic capital of civic pride in order to get the various constituencies of an urban space to invest in the 'community-as-a-whole' while ignoring their own constituent needs" (Smith and Ingham 258). In other words, sports teams manipulate their external community with the expressed goal of financing their stadiums and salaries, while claiming to be invested in the city. This false narrative drives fans to feel betrayed when a franchise reveals itself to be more interested in economic gain, even threatening to

abandon its community fanbase in search for economic capital. There is well documented devastation on the side of the fans who have strong team identification and loyalty. The results of this one-sided relationship can be observed for example when the Hartford Whalers left Connecticut to become the Carolina Hurricanes. Craig Hyatt's (2007) study on Hartford Whalers fans after the relocation indicated the community felt as if the Whalers were disloyal to them (Hyatt 8). Many of the interviewees used language indicating there was an "injury" which needed time to heal, and one participant even compared this loss to the feelings after a "divorce" (Hyatt 8-10). This shows the harmful result of the one-sided relationship which is often created by sport in the community.

The Shift of Sport as Community During and After a Disaster

In conclusion, sport creates connection in a community by adhering to the external identity of the community. This linking of the sports team and the external group identity of the community creates strong team identification, which eventually leads to a strong sense of team loyalty from the community (Heere and James 325). However, the result of this team loyalty is often one-sided and can in fact be harmful towards the community. Research indicates that the external group identity of a community can be misrepresented, further increasing divides across group identities (Smith and Ingham 252). In general, sport promises to benefit the community but often leaves the community splintered, connecting the community for a while but truly focusing on the sports franchise economic and on-field success (Smith and Ingham 258). However, the occurrence of a disaster can change the effects and consequences of the relationship between sport and the community.

In the wake of a disaster, the relationships between sport and the community shift to impact the community in different ways. In fact, in these instances, it is possible to observe how sport provides numerous benefits to the community as a result of the effects of the relationships between sport and the external group identity of the community. In general, when a community is experiencing and recovering from a disaster, sport can play an instrumental role in providing a spirit of hope and rebirth to a city (Brown 41). Sport can symbolize rebirth, hope, and a reminder of the cyclicity of life. Furthermore, the symbolism and ritual of the sports team can also shift in order to more accurately represent the feelings and external group identity of the city after a disaster (Burns 152). As the external group identity of the community is changed from the disaster, sport can act as shifting representation of the attitude and identity of the city. Finally, the often-one-sided relationship between members of the team and the community can shift to become more mutually beneficial with the occurrence of a disaster. In these instances, the members of the team support the city with financial support, emotional support, and returning loyalty experienced from the fans. This provides tangible benefits from the relationships created through sport in the community, providing relief to a community when it has been devastated from a disaster.

In the next chapter, the relationship between the Saints and New Orleans will be examined in the context of Hurricane Katrina. Through this study, it is possible to observe how the relationships between sport and the community shift during and after Hurricane Katrina. As the city of New Orleans was torn down and then rebuilt, the detrimental aspects of the effects between sport and the community were also torn down

and rebuilt to provide benefits to the community of New Orleans. The changes in these relationships are observable from the symbolism and ritual of the team, the relationship between member of the team, and the way in which individual fans interact with one another in the context of the Saints.

CHAPTER THREE

Case Study of Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Saints

The shifting relationships between the New Orleans Saints football team and the city of New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina provides many insights on the connection of sports franchises and their external communities, in the wake of a disaster. While many symbols and ritual remained constant throughout the disaster, the interpretation of these symbols and rituals shifted, taking on new meanings. As a community, New Orleans learned to interpret the symbols of the Saints franchise as a representation of the city. By understanding the relationship between the Saints football team and New Orleans before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina, it is possible to draw conclusions that disasters experienced by communities can alter the lens of how sport teams function as positive symbols of hope, stability and support for the city. Specifically, three relationships; between the Saints franchise and community of New Orleans, individual Saints' players and the community of New Orleans, and the community of the Saints fans with one another reveals this changed symbolic relationships because of Hurricane Katrina, which came to take on new meaning and providing benefit to the external community.

Sport's Effect on Community

The effects of the created relationships between sport and the community, as seen through the franchise, members of the team, and fans in the community, are dependent on the lens from which community is observed and defined. In general, the shared

interpretations of ritual and symbolism between individuals create community, fostering a sense of boundaries which dictate membership in the group (Cohen 15). In application, a community is a group of people which share a common interpretation and understanding of certain symbols or behavior, learning how to derive meaning from one another (Cohen 19). However, in postmodernity there has been a shift in how individual's experience community. In a postmodern community, a person experiences community in a fluid, relational way (Delanty 139). For example, individuals experience community through a wide range of personal friendships rather than the concrete form of community like family or demographic region. As a consequence, an individual's community often takes on a much more informal tone, creating a network of "personal communities" rather than deeper, more concrete experiences (Delanty 145). The abstract nature of postmodern community complicates a straightforward definition, and community in this era is seen as an attempt to reconcile the loss and incompleteness of one's current experience of their community, often disillusioning the idea of true connection. Due to the consistently shifting relationships that form postmodern community, the strength of an individual's connection with his/her community depends on the context and interpretation of symbols, and thus the symbolism, of various aspects of their community (Delanty 144). Sport is one of these symbols which creates connections within a community, and in postmodernity, the context of the interpretation of a franchise's symbolism changes the way it influences the community.

By linking to the group identification of an external community, a sports team creates a strong team identification with its fanbase (Heere and James 320). If a team can

create a strong perceived fit between the team's identity and its surrounding community, the overall team identification among the fanbase will be strengthened, which in turn will bolster team loyalty (Heere and James 331). The manner in which community is formed, in general, assists this connection as it is built by adhering to the demographic categories and membership organizations of the external city. Therefore, mascots, cheers, and stadiums help strengthen a relationship between communities and its sports team through symbolizing a shared identity. The relationship between a player and the external community can also strengthen team identification by representing different demographic categories and membership organizations important to the external community (James and Heere 324). Finally, sport can create relationships between fans of the team in the community "if fans perceive an opportunity to enhance a particular external group identity through the team" (James and Heere 331). These relationships all provide context to the way in which sport can catalyze the experience of community.

While these positive aspects of team symbolism and community identity are often thought of as being positive, the actual relationships between a professional sport team and members of the community often exist in a 'one-sided' relationship, with the sports franchise gaining more than the community and its members. There exists a "false bond between a sport franchise and the city in which it plays its home contests" (Smith and Ingham 258). While the team may use the city name and adhere to the external identity of the community, the sport franchise uses the city as its revenue stream for its performances and its fan base, rarely providing support (financial, or otherwise) to the local community (Smith and Ingham 258). The relational ties created in the community

from being a fan of the same team are weak and often only enhance preexisting divisions in the community (Smith and Ingham 252). In general, while the relationships create community, this connection is short-lived and one-sided, leaving the community exposed to financial and emotional ruin. However, the nature of these weak-tie relationships can change following a disaster (natural or otherwise). By studying New Orleans and the Saints before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina, it is possible to observe how these weak-tie relationships shift toward creating a more strong-tie relationship with observable benefits to the community.

Weak Ties: The Saints and the People of New Orleans Before Katrina

As suggested by Heere and James, professional sport teams can create links to their surrounding community if they adhere to the external identity of the community (Heere and James 327). Therefore, it is important to understand how the team history, its name, and even its logo has shaped the way a community connects to a sports franchise. The Saints' name, logo, and establishment day are all signs of an initial attempt to link the team with the demographical identities of the people of the city. Firstly, the actual logo of the Saints was an attempt to adhere to the external demographic identity of New Orleans as a whole. New Orleans was originally founded as a French colony in 1718, and the Saints logo, the *fleur de lis*, represents the French culture of the city. Next, the decision to name the team the Saints was an attempt to associate the team with the religious identity of the external community. New Orleans has a large catholic community in the city. Therefore, the team was created on All Saints Day, November 1, 1966, a catholic holiday. Furthermore, it was named after the religious song "When the

Saints Go Marching In” (Layden, 2007). All of these aspects helped to foster the strong team identification.

This adherence to the cultural and demographical identities of the city of New Orleans created a strong team identification for the people of New Orleans. Even as the Saints struggled through the early seasons of their franchise, the team experienced strong support from the New Orleans’ community. “The Saints have been perennial losers, winning just 40% of their games in 38 seasons. For years they were dubbed the ‘Aints.’ But their fans have stood by them” (Fatsis B5). The undying loyalty and support of the Saints football team despite the lack of success is an indication of how powerful the incorporation of demographic categories and membership organizations can be to the building of strong team identity. Even when the team was unsuccessful, the Saints experienced loyalty from the community.

The Saints were not a winning franchise, and Saints’ fans knew the team had little chance of postseason success. In his memoir *Coming Back Stronger*, Drew Brees admits, “When you thought of New Orleans, you just didn’t think of a great atmosphere conducive to winning and building a championship caliber team” (Brees 92). In order to show the communities displeasure with the Saints on field performance, fans wore bags over their heads (Pope and Nolan, 2010). Even as the Saints began to perform better, the relationship between the Saints franchise and the people of New Orleans seemed to be one sided. In the first case, New Orleans was an undersized city to host a professional sports franchise. Out of the 40 cities which have professional sports teams, New Orleans ranks 36th in size (Baade and Matheson 592). For this reason, there were numerous

rumors that the Saints were shopping the market to relocate their franchise to a different city. With the news of the possible relocation, the relationship between the Saints and New Orleans was strained. In this scenario, the community strongly identified with the Saints, but as seen with most sports franchises, the team was concerned its own financial gain and success rather than supporting its home city, highlighting the often-one-sided relationship between a sports franchise and the community.

In general, a team's stadium acts as an important symbol that connects a team to its fan base. The shared home between a sports franchise and a fanbase can act as an alignment of shared identity. While sports franchises promise that stadiums bring financial benefit to a city, Smith and Ingham (2003) speculate, often times, stadiums do not deliver the promised benefits and are actually often financially harmful based on increased taxes, highlighting the one-sidedness of the relationship between sports franchises and the community (Smith and Ingham 259). When it was first constructed in 1975, the Superdome was seen as an architectural masterpiece. Its location and architectural design were extremely important for its acceptance by the community. These issues were hotly debated, and finally, the decision to construct the stadium in the heart of downtown New Orleans was made. This decision changed the economic nature of the city. All members of the community were affected by the implementation of this stadium in the center of their community. Some scholars have pointed to the construction of the Superdome as indicating a shift in the city's perception, from old and conservative to modern and progressive (Kingsley 721). The Superdome was the city's new symbol of modernity, representing the hope and dreams of a city's future. The perceptions of the

Superdome indicate how fans can interpret symbols of a team to align with the identity of the city as a whole. The people of New Orleans interpreted the architectural grandeur of the Superdome to symbolize the innovative and up-and-coming nature of their growing city.

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, the relationship between members of the Saints organization and the community were strained as well. From 2000 to 2005, Jim Haslett coached the Saints, and he led the team to its first ever playoff victory, having the second-best winning percentage of any Saints coach up to that point. However, even with a glimpse of playoff success, rumors were swirling that the Saints franchise planned to abandon New Orleans. In fact, only a few months before the start of the 2005 season and Hurricane Katrina, the Saints upper management and Louisiana suspended negotiations for renovations to the Superdome, signaling a step towards the franchise relocation (Silver, 2015). All these tensions and pressures existed in the weeks and months prior to the devastating Hurricane Katrina on the city and people of New Orleans in 2005.

Shifting Relationships: The Saints and the People of New Orleans After Katrina

When Hurricane Katrina destroyed the city of New Orleans, the community's perceptions of the Saints changed drastically. Eighty percent of the city was flooded, and 188,000 occupied housing units were damaged during the disaster (Baade and Matheson 596). The impact and devastation of the people of New Orleans was wide-spread and prolific. To compound the issue and heart break, the government failed to quickly and adequately respond to the damage (Eikenberry 167). Many citizens of New Orleans felt abandoned and forgotten, viewed as refugees, and left on their own to survive. After this

disaster, the people of New Orleans began to interpret the Saints' ritual and symbolism to reflect the feelings and identity of the city at its lowest point.

As disaster swept over New Orleans, the Superdome was no longer perceived as a representation of the hope and modernity of the city, for the structure itself was in ruins. The Superdome had been a symbol of New Orleans' progress, but now, "the Superdome stood as the emblem of all that went wrong" (Kingsley 721). The people of New Orleans viewed the damaged Superdome as a representation of the nation's failure to support New Orleans and the heartbreak which New Orleans was experiencing. The Saints team was displaced from their home, just as many of the individuals were displaced from their own homes. It was a symbol of abandonment, and as the New Orleans Saints were forced to relocate their home games, many fans believed that the team would never return to play in the stadium again (Fatsis B5).

Furthermore, the relationship among the fans of the Saints shifted during Hurricane Katrina. The people felt as if they had lost their home and their identity. New Orleanians attempted to weather the storm, recognizing that they needed to be encouraged and share hope with one another. Joe Horn, Saints wide receiver from 2000-2006, remembers that as he spent time with the displaced families, many of the people longed to feel normal and a sense of belonging. He states that he spent a lot of his time with the evacuees reminding them that the city of New Orleans will rebuild, and things would go back to normal. Surprisingly, Horn remembers that many of the evacuees wanted to talk about the Saints during this period of time. He claims, "It was all they had" (Silver, 2015). This indicates that in the wake of disaster, this community clings to

sport in order to connect with one another during a disaster. For the city of New Orleans, the Saints symbolized what their lives had been and will return to being once the water subsided and people were able to return home. Because the Saints identity aligned with the external identity of New Orleans, the team symbolized an aspect of home for the greater community.

Consequently, during the Saints' first game of the 2005-2006 season, played against a Super Bowl favorite North Carolina Panthers, the Saints stunned the Panthers in an unlikely fashion. While this was just a game, additional meaning was imbued with this win, as it served as a symbol for the people of New Orleans that there is always hope and even the underdog can rise from the ashes and win (Silver, 2015). Unfortunately, the Saints did not give the people of New Orleans much more to cheer about for the remainder of the 2005-2006 season, winning only three games the entire year. However, the initial win demonstrates how cities and fans hold on to their teams to provide a sense of hope and community following shared strife and struggle (natural or otherwise). To cap off the feelings of devastation and abandonment, head coach Jim Haslett was fired at the end of that season. However, with his firing, an opportunity for a new future between the Saints and city of New Orleans emerged.

In general, the shifting relationship between the Saints and New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina indicates how pivotal a community's identification with a sports team can influence the rebuilding process. As seen with the people of New Orleans, the Saints represented the hope of what their home would be after the rebuilding process. The rumors of relocation and abysmal record faded into the background as the people of New

Orleans banded together to hope and help each other regain control of their city and lives. This is an indication of how sport can align with the external group identity of a community. Even with all the devastation and governmental failure, the people of New Orleans wanted to talk about their Saints with one another. In the face of devastation, sport can serve as symbol of hope to the community, serving as a symbol of the *cyclicity* of life.

Recovering from the Storm: The Saints and People of New Orleans

As New Orleans continued to recover and the 2005-2006 NFL season ended, the relationships between the city and the Saints really began to shift away from the traditional, one-sided relationships commonly observed between sport and the community. The typical symbols and rituals of the Saints were interpreted differently by the community. One of these symbols was the Superdome. As the 2006-2007 season began, the repaired Superdome stood as symbol to New Orleans of resilience and renewal of the city (Kingsley 722). Although battle scared with a damaged roof, the Superdome was one of the only famous architectural landmarks that survived Hurricane Katrina. It also served as an evacuee safe haven, housing many people whose homes were devastated by the storm and subsequent flooding. During the rebuilding process, the people of New Orleans viewed the Superdome as a symbol of the renewal New Orleans will experience when they come together. As the Saints returned to play in the Superdome a little over a year after Hurricane Katrina for the 2006-2007 season, the community interpreted the Superdome as a symbol of the city's resilience, shifting this symbolism and once again to match its external identity.

During the 2006-2007 season, the Saints were able to return to the Superdome for their third game. In this game, the Saints routed the Atlanta Falcons, winning 23-3. One of the big plays of the game was a blocked punt by Steve Gleason. This play is what many consider to be the start of the rebirth of the Saints winning culture in New Orleans. A statue of this play now stands outside the Superdome. Engraved on this statue is the word 'Rebirth' explaining "that blocked punt. That season symbolized the rebirth of the city of New Orleans." (Landry, 2019). Signifying the hope of a fresh start, the Saints turned around from their three-win season in 2005-2006 to play in the NFC Championship game, the farthest the team had ever made it in the postseason. During this 2006-2007 season, the rebuilt Saints symbolized the resilience of the people of New Orleans. The way in which the New Orleans Saints were able to rebuild their team and turn a brutal season of loss and relocation into Super Bowl champions in four years served as an inspiration for the city. Stephen Moret, secretary of economic development for Louisiana at the time, dictates the way in which the Saints allegorically represented the recovery of New Orleans by saying, "Unlike the Saints, we're not necessarily at Super Bowl level, but we're clearly headed in the right direction" (Mowbray C11). In this instance, the team served as a symbol of the rebuilding of an entire city and her community from the previous year's disaster, cultivating hope and renewed sense of pride and identity. The team's success became emblematic of the city's successful recuperation.

In the wake of a disaster, the relationship between players, coaches and the teams' community shift as well. As previously mentioned, players and coaches effect a

community's identification with a team by adhering to distinct demographic categories and membership organizations (Heere and James 324). With Hurricane Katrina, a unique set of instances forged a special relationship between the city New Orleans and starting quarterback Drew Brees. As the Saints ended their losing 2005 season, the management team made an important decision to hire Sean Payton as the team's new head coach. One of the first actions Payton took in his first year was to try to sign Drew Brees as a free agent (Brees 94). As the story goes, Payton was looking for coaches and players who were willing to come and be a part of the rebuilding process of the team and the city. Drew Brees was recovering from a severe shoulder injury and entering the free agent market as negotiations with the Chargers broke down; however, teams still recognized the potential talent he possessed. While giving the Brees family a tour of the city, Payton accidentally made a wrong turn and drove Brees through one of the neighborhoods which had been severely damaged by Hurricane Katrina. In that moment, Drew Brees said, "This decision was much less about football than it is about being a part of the resurgence of a city" (Bessinger 3:03-3:10). Drew Brees choosing the city of New Orleans shows how disaster can uniquely affect the relationship between a player and the community of his team's city. While the nature of the relationship between a player and the external community is often a one-sided relationship, Brees represents an example of how a player can have a mutually beneficial relationship with the external community when valuing the fandom for reasons outside of themselves.

Drew Brees made a conscious effort to become a New Orleans Saint when the city was at its lowest point. He wanted to invest in the city and the team. There were a lot

of reasons to stay out of New Orleans, but Brees chose to see the good. Reflecting on this decision in his memoir, he states, “I was trying to rebuild my shoulder and my career, the organization was rebuilding its reputation and reestablishing itself, and the city was restoring not only the homes but also the lives of the people. Why not do this together and lean on each other in the process?” (Brees 105). In unique cases of disaster, players can participate in a relationship with a city, shifting the confines of a typical one-sided relationship between a player and fan base. This loyalty did not go unnoticed by the New Orleans community. In an interview, Brees mentioned that when running into fans on the streets of New Orleans, fans rarely comment on his on-field performance, but rather, they thank him for believing and investing in the city of New Orleans (Jenkins 30). Brees’ investment in the city of New Orleans served as a reminder to the people of New Orleans that their city was worth an investment.

Furthermore, it is possible to observe the changing relationship between Saints fans in the community after Hurricane Katrina. Before the disaster, the Saints had little on field success, and being a fan was viewed with shame. However, the team began to experience unprecedented success for the city after the 2005-2006. This success culminated in winning the Super Bowl in 2009, four years after the natural disaster, and remains the Saints’ first and only Super Bowl. The success of the Saints and the revitalized relationship between the Saints and New Orleans changed the interpretation of being a Saints fan. Instead of being correlated with shame and embarrassment, fans were proud to be a part of New Orleans and be a Saints fan. According to a study by Elizabeth Burns, the Saints’ Super Bowl victory increased the fans positive self-perception (Burns

158). Furthermore, in the recovery period of Hurricane Katrina, the Saints provided the community and easy outlet to connect to one another without having to address the crippling devastation of the city. This is an example of sport acting as a way to connect people with one another and align with the external group identities of a community. While this connection may not be a strong-tie of community which satisfies truly tangible needs of belonging, in the face of despair and hopelessness, it is important for people to experience any form or connection. Even if the connection is short-lived and spontaneous, sport can act as the connection to community, providing a community with a sense of belonging and hope when it has been stripped from them by a disaster.

Conclusion

Due to the adherence to the external identity of the community of New Orleans, the Saints were seen as the true representation of the people of the city. Therefore, while the government was failing, the people turned to the Saints in order to find their hope and representation. During the disaster, the symbolism and ritual of the New Orleans Saints shifted to represent the emotions and identity of the people of New Orleans. At first, the shift of these interpretations was seen as negative, but this was a result of the desperation and devastation of the people of New Orleans. As the city began to rebuild, these relationships began to change to represent the benefits of a positive relationship between a sports team and their city.

First, in rebuilding a city after a disaster, the symbolism of a team can represent the hope and promise of recovery prior to actually seeing this hope in the true rebuilding

process. In the first game after the hurricane, the people of New Orleans were able to see the hope of an underdog beating the odds and winning a game. Secondly, a disaster often allows for more beneficial individual relationships between members of a team and the community. As seen through Drew Brees investment in the city despite its devastation, players play instrumental roles in delivering hope to a city by believing in the city despite the devastation. It is this loyalty that often provides the most value to fans during the recovery process. Finally, a strong relationship between a sports team and the external identity of a community can align the external group identities of a community after a disaster.

As seen with the people of New Orleans, maintaining a positive outlook on the Saints seasons and finding hope in these games was a way in which the community stuck together throughout the disaster and during the rebuilding process. In general, there are many signs which indicate that the traditional relationships between sports teams and their external communities existed prior to Hurricane Katrina. However, during and after the disaster, these relationships changed providing unforeseen benefits which helped restore hope to a devastated city, reminding them of who they are and who they will continue to be.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

The many relationships between sports teams and communities change following the wake of a disaster, natural or otherwise. In general, these relationships have positive and negative consequences based on the actions and perceptions of the individuals invested in a team and community. However, during and after a disaster, these relationships often shift toward positive, if not clearly beneficial for both sides. I have detailed instances where communities lean on pre-existing relationships with its sports team, revealing positive support for the community and with individual during and after a disaster.

Communities turn to relationships with sports franchises to find a sense of hope and experiences of escape during and after disastrous circumstances. These 'hometown teams' symbolize a sense of normalcy as well as serve as an image for the collective community to cling to through their recovery efforts and often interpret on-field game success to be an indication of fulfilled promises of recovery and relief. For example, when baseball returned after 9/11, there were many significant symbols surrounding games played in New York, ranging from uniforms respecting first responders to special performances of "God Bless America." In these instances, "Ballparks became home to sacramental ceremony. It seemed natural to salute and sing and cry and then settle in for a game that meant exactly nothing and everything all at once" (Brown 41). Furthermore, in the presence of a disaster, relationships between the community of sports fans often move towards more mutually beneficial ones. First of all, members of a sports team are able to

provide tangible support and relief to a community, signifying loyalty and care. Secondly, by maintaining loyalty with a community despite its suffering, a player can return the undying loyalty and support which is experienced from the fan base. As an example, Mike Piazza quickly donated money to relief efforts of New York after 9/11 and took time to visit hurting members of the community, signifying his loyalty to New York during this disaster (Consolazio, 2019). Finally, sport can create relationships between sports fans in a community which is increasingly important in the wake of a disaster. As seen after the disaster of 9/11, baseball and the symbolism around the games and teams were used to send “messages to re-enforce unity amongst Americans and remind everyone that life must go on” (Brown 41). While sport creates shallow community, it can be a platform to connect each other when the community has no other positive things to connect to each other outside of circumstances created from a disaster. In these ways, the shifting relationships between a sport team and a community are beneficial in the wake of a disaster.

Communities' Relationship with Sports Franchises

A sports franchise can create a strong relationship with the community through shared ritual and symbolism. By linking to the external identity of the community, a sports team can create strong identity and symbolism within a community (Heere and James 327). However, this symbolism does not always have a positive connotation. Even if a sports team is connected to the identity of the external community, the interpretation of this symbolism by the community is often one-sided, and loyalty is not reciprocated to the community from the franchise (Smith and Ingham 258). In general, sports franchises

are more focused on profit than the needs of the community, valuing lucrative stadium deals, selling more merchandise, and signing larger television contracts over the interests of the community (Hyatt 2). Therefore, communities can feel abandoned by a sports franchise when it decides to relocate to seek increase profits over the interests of the community (Hyatt 8). This relationship between sports team and its external community can be harmful and very one sided.

However, as seen with the Saints football team and their relationship with the city of New Orleans, the nature of their relationship changed following the disaster of Hurricane Katrina. The stakes of the relationship deepen, and the community begins to perceive the symbolism of the sporting team in a different light, shifting to link with the external group identity of the city. The team begins to operate as a rallying symbol for a recovering community looking for something to cling. The team and the community become connected by the shared experiences of loss, pain, and need of hope. This new relationship bestows the sporting team a purpose beyond financial, entertainment, and on-field performances which primarily drive its actions. A sports team comes to represent hope and growth for the hurt community, and while this sense may only last for a period of time, the communities' need for hope and support can in part be found in the actions and symbol of a sports team, reminding communities (even if only subliminally) of the cyclicity of life binding all members of a community together to help it cope through disaster.

For the Saints and the people of New Orleans, the Superdome became an example of how the symbolism of the team can change to represent the thoughts of the

community. As mentioned in the previous chapter, during Hurricane Katrina, the Superdome was a visible symbol of the physical devastation, heartbreak of the storm and the failure of relief problems (Baade and Matheson 596). The people of New Orleans' interpretation of the Superdome as a symbol of devastation was indicative of the state of their city. At that time, the stadium took on new symbolic significance, relating to the external identity of the city as a whole. In this example, the community viewed the Superdome as more than a football stadium, embodying the community's collective hurt. As New Orleans began to recover, the symbolism of the Saints also grew in order to represent the pulse of the community of New Orleans. As hope returned to the city, the Superdome represented the resilience and renewal of New Orleans (Baade and Matheson, 599). Once again, the community was interpreting the symbolism of the Superdome, but the people of New Orleans saw the stadium as a representation of city pride and the growth of New Orleans. Through sport, the people of New Orleans were able to find community and representation when many other parts of their identity and community were destroyed and failing.

Communities' Relationship with Members of Sports Teams

The relationship between members of sports team and a community is generally one sided (Smith and Ingham 258). While it is important for teams to adhere to the external of a community, all teams are made up of individual players and coaches, and often times, members of sports teams can connect to specific external group identities of a community (Heere and James 324). Therefore, a sport team can represent some aspect of a community's identity, but a specific player can represent a different community for

another set of individuals. A fan can experience loyalty to a player and can feel a sense of closeness to them, but in reality, there is not real relationship. Fans can sacrifice time and money to support a specific player by buying his/her merchandise or learning about his/her upbringing. Unfortunately, players are often more focused on in-game success and a paycheck than relating to a fan base. The effects of this mindset can be seen through player hold outs, contract disputes, and trade requests. Fans feel betrayed by players who decide to leave a team to find more success and money. In reality, players rarely show reciprocating loyalty to a community because they are more focused on their own interests than the interests of the external community.

However, when a community is harmed in some way, such as by a natural disaster, the relationship between individual players or coaches can shift towards a more mutually benefiting arrangement. In these instance, tangible opportunities for player and coaches to give back become available, clearly giving back to the relief of the community. Often in the wake of a disaster, the efforts of individual players are highlighted in order to indicate how they are aiding in the relief, as notable members of the community. Also, players spend their time giving back to and supporting the community. For example, many players make efforts to socialize and thank the service heroes of the relief projects and console hurting members of the community. Rather than being a one-sided admiration on the part of individuals in the community, we observe the participation and sacrifice that a player lends to their city. These players begin to serve the community in positive, helpful and observable ways (beyond athletic performance son the field), reciprocating the dedication received from the fans. Furthermore, players

can exhibit loyalty by choosing to be with a team, as Drew Brees did, despite the city's sufferings, spreading a sense of worth and hope. When an athlete is willing to build this tie to its community after a disaster, he/she can hold a large, symbolic role in the identity of the city. This shifts the fan's focus away from on-field performances and highlights tangible ways in which the player serves and remains loyal to the community.

As described in Chapter 3, we see this shift exemplified with Sean Payton and Drew Brees's commitment to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, the New Orleans Saints did not experience much success. After Hurricane Katrina, the city of New Orleans was in ruins, and many of the members of the community were displaced from their homes (Baade and Matheson 596). When Sean Payton accepted the head coaching job, New Orleans and the Saints were in a demoralized state. However, the new head coach Sean Payton was able to implement his vision for what the New Orleans Saints could be. Over time, the community was able to adapt his ideas, sharing in his vision for the potential of the city and franchise. In a similar fashion, Drew Brees made a commitment to the city of New Orleans even though the city was struggling to rebound after Hurricane Katrina. This symbolized a mutually beneficial relationship where Brees and New Orleans leaned on each other during their roads to recovery (Brees 105). Through Hurricane Katrina, the nature of the relationship between individual members of the Saints and New Orleans changed in a beneficial way. The community of New Orleans was able to experience the loyalty in which they usually place in these individual players. As mentioned earlier, many members of the community valued Brees' commitment to the city rather than his spectacular on field performance

through which he established a stronger bond with the identity of the city as well as its inhabitants (Jenkins 30). Through disaster, the player and community relationship shifted from traditional one-sided to a more equitable mutual relationship in which both player and community show faith and loyalty to one another despite the struggles of rebuilding that needed to take place, but perhaps because of it.

Relationship Between Communities of Sports Fans

The relationship among individual members of a given community about their local sports teams also has positive and negative manifestations. Sport is a stimulant to community and allows people to connect to one another. It is through these connections and shared interpretation in which individuals can experience community (Cohan 15). However, these connections are often spontaneous and represent *weak ties* of community. For Smith and Ingham (2003), the weakness of these ties to community get overrun when there are other more pressing, deeper things tying individuals to community in a city (Smith and Ingham 271). Furthermore, research indicates that sport stimulates community among individuals, but this community only deepens lines of division based on the other influences of these individual's identities (Smith and Ingham 252). In application, individuals connect with one another through sports fandom, but this community often does not break preexisting schisms of community based on characteristics such as demographic or socioeconomic status. In general, while sport creates a sense of community among individuals, the strength and benefit of this community often creates no long-lasting benefit.

However, when disaster strikes a city, the effect of these relationships between fans in a community can fulfill a different purpose, providing perceived benefits. Other schisms in a community which may override the connection between sport are often overlooked in the wake of a disaster because survival and relief are more pressing. In these moments, sport can act as a connector between hurting individuals in community. It gives the community a diversion from their reality, connecting people to each other through something outside of their shared suffering. Transcending action is an avenue of escape, and sport can act as reminder to the hope and rebirth of a community after disaster. In the recovery following a disaster, sport can remind a community about the cyclicity of their own lives, give them an opportunity to hope and look forward to the future. While the effects of this hope can be fleeting, and the relationship created from sport may not last, it is important for a community to have something to cling after a disaster. In many instances, sport has acted as a constant in a continually shifting landscape of disaster and loss.

As seen with New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, the Saints football team was a common connector for many people in the community during the storm and throughout the recovery process. People who were displaced from their homes and experienced so much loss literally lived in the sports arena and then later clung to the Saints the following seasons (Silver, 2015). When Hurricane Katrina took so much away from the people of New Orleans, the strength of the *re-created* community had a lasting effect of this connection. the community needed something to keep them together and provide a

sense of hope, and as I have detailed, it was the New Orleans Saints football team that provided a sense of comfort and community.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis has argued that sport creates relationships with the community. The effect of these relationships is often one-sided, only benefiting the sports team and its members; however, with the occurrence of a disaster, these relationships shift to provide mutual benefits to both the sports team and the community. Through disaster, sports teams are often able to give back to their community in tangible ways beyond their usually athletic performances and provide a sense of relief and hope which would not have occurred without that disaster. The loyalty often shown to sports teams is reciprocated back into the community, and the result is the creation of a stronger identity with the team among community members, that goes beyond the often on-sided relationship for sports teams and athletes. While these benefits are temporary, the relief and hope in which they provide are invaluable to the restoration of a community's identity. For these reasons, the occurrence of a disaster shifts the relationships between sport and the community providing benefits not previously experienced by the community.

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