

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF MEDIA COVERAGE REGARDING
MARLINS PARK AND ITS PUBLIC FINANCING

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By

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Table of Contents

Signature Page	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Abstract	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Statement of the Problem	1
Overview and Significance of This Study	3
Research Questions	4
Chapter 2: Literature Review	5
The Miami Marlins and Marlins Park	5
Construction Allowed	6
Financial Controversy	7
Marlins Acquire, Then Trade On-Field Talent	8
Stadium Economics	9
Public Versus Private	9
Why Go Public?	11
The Non-economic Impact of Sports Stadia	13
The Sport-Media Relationship	14
The Sport-Media Relationship Through the Years	15
Chapter 3: Methodology	19
Sampling	19
The Miami Herald	19

Sun Sentinel	20
Palm Beach Post	20
Research Sample	21
Collection of Data	21
Data Analysis	22
Limitations of Study	23
Chapter 4: Findings	25
Analysis of Non-Sports Articles, 2009-2011	25
Descriptions of Stadium Financing Plan	25
Political Impact of the Financing Plan	29
Descriptions of Marlins Park	30
Analysis of Sports Articles, 2009-2011	32
Descriptions of the Stadium Financing Plan	32
Descriptions of Marlins Park	35
Attendance and Rising Payroll	36
Analysis of Non-Sports Articles, 2012-2013	39
Descriptions of Marlins Park	39
Backlash Following Trades and Losing Season	40
Parking and Other Problems	42
Descriptions of the Stadium Financing Plan	43
Analysis of Sports Articles, 2012-2013	45
Descriptions of Marlins Park	45
Backlash Following Trades and Losing Season	46

Descriptions of the Stadium Financing Plan	48
Chapter 5: Conclusion	51
A Change in Philosophy?	52
References	54
Appendix A: Code Sheet	66

ABSTRACT

QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF MEDIA COVERAGE REGARDING MARLINS PARK AND ITS PUBLIC FINANCING

By

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Masters of Arts in Mass Communication

This study examines how three South Florida news publications, Miami Herald, Sun Sentinel, and Palm Beach Post, covered Marlins Park and its public financing from the beginning of 2009 through 2013. Sports articles and non-sports articles from each publication were examined, and the two types of articles were each analyzed within two time frames -- 2009 through 2011, and 2012 through 2013. A sample of 120 articles was analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The study shows that while both types of articles contained positive and negative coverage on the stadium and its financing, non-sports articles presented more negative or pessimistic coverage toward the stadium's public financing in 2009 through 2011. Sports articles presented more coverage in favor of the financing and were more descriptive of the stadium. Sports articles took a decidedly more negative view toward the stadium's public financing after the Marlins drastically cut payroll following their 2012 season.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The allure of a new sports stadium and everything it can provide to the local economy lead many city governments to think that they can't go wrong in financing a large portion of the stadium's construction. Job creation, increased income from surrounding parking and retail, taxes and other revenue can streams make the idea of publicly financing a stadium appealing to a city. While there is nothing to suggest that building a sports stadium is the best use of government funds (Humphreys & Howard, 2008a), such funds are common and prominent in many stadium projects.

Taxpayer money made up more than 70 percent of the construction costs for the new home stadium of Major League Baseball's Miami Marlins. Marlins Park opened in 2012, and its high construction costs drew criticism and protests from people in Miami, but there was a sense of optimism in the stadium's first year as the management spent more than \$100 million on players to improve the team's chances of winning. Less than a year later, that optimism was all but gone. Most of those high-profile stars had been shipped elsewhere, the Marlins were not competitive, Miami-Dade County was looking at a stadium bill in the billions of dollars, and the organization was under federal investigation. Marlins Park has become a cautionary tale about stadium building and public financing.

Statement of the Problem

It is hard to remember a time when sports and media were not so deeply entwined (Rowe, 1999). Sport and media are everywhere these days -- in print, online, on television. But according to David Rowe, sports journalists "are caught in a particularly

difficult bind because of the different, sometimes contradictory, professional demands made on them; they are expected, often at the same time, to be objective reporters, critical investigators, apologists for sports and teams, representatives of fans ..." (1999, p. 37). And sometimes, sports writers are not seen as being investigative enough when it comes to big stories. There is a perception that the sports section is the "toy department" of a daily newspaper (Raney & Bryant, 2006, p. 47). Raney and Bryant added that in communication studies, sports are seen by many as "deserving of a place at the margins as they were more 'frivolous' than 'serious'" (p. 48).

Sports writers have also been described as "cheerleaders" who take part in "hero worships" of the players and teams they cover (Reinardy, 2003). One such example of this took place in August 1998 during the middle of the baseball season in which St. Louis Cardinals first baseman Mark McGwire was closing in on Roger Maris' single-season record for home runs, set in 1961. Associated Press feature writer Steve Wilstein was preparing to talk to McGwire in the locker room when he noticed a brown bottle in clear sight labeled "Androstenedione" -- "Andro" for short -- sitting in McGwire's locker. Wilstein did some research and found that Andro is a steroid with anabolic properties, is a precursor to testosterone, and had been banned in the Olympics and the NFL but not Major League Baseball at the time (ESPN The Magazine, 2013).

Wilstein asked McGwire about the drug, and McGwire said he had used Andro for about one year, and that "Everybody that I know in the game of baseball uses the same stuff I use" (Wilstein, 1998). Wilstein printed his story about one of the faces of baseball using a substance that was banned by other sports leagues, and it was not well-received by other members of the sports-writing press, including multiple St. Louis

sportswriters. Wilstein was vilified, accused of “snooping” for a story and writing an “unprofessional” piece (Fitzgerald, 1998).

MLB banned Andro in 2004, and the story of steroids in baseball would eventually become one of the biggest issues in the sport with stories such as the BALCO investigation and the Mitchell report. But many sports writers looked the other way years earlier when Wilstein shined one of the first lights on the subject.

Overview and Significance of This Study

The focus of this thesis is the analysis of how articles from the sports section and how articles from the non-sports sections from three local media outlets covered the Marlins’ stadium and its public financing from 2009 through 2013. The researcher has employed qualitative content analysis of articles about or related to the stadium and its financing from the Miami Herald, Palm Beach Post, and Sun Sentinel. The analysis of the articles was broken up into two time frames. First, 2009-2011, which spans the stadium’s approval by the Miami-Dade County Commission up until the final few months before the stadium’s first game is played. Second, 2012 through 2013, which spans the stadium’s debut, and the Marlins’ abrupt restructuring of its roster and payroll. Articles from the sports section and non-sports sections were analyzed in each time frame, giving the study four segments of analysis. A more in-depth description of these methods can be found in the Methodology chapter.

This study is significant in that it aims to show to what level local sports writers supported or opposed the Marlins’ financing deal despite the large amount of taxpayer money involved. It also aims to show how their coverage of the issue compared to those writing news and business articles on the subject, sections much more versed in civic

economics. Lastly, it seeks to analyze how, if at all, writers' opinions on the stadium changed following the Marlins' numerous trades after the 2012 season.

Research Questions

1. How was Marlins Park's financing covered by the Miami Herald, Palm Beach Post, and Sun Sentinel from 2009 through 2013.
2. Was the stadium or its financing described negatively, positively or neutral?
3. What differences or similarities exist in how the stadium and its financing were described in sports articles versus non-sports articles?
4. Was there a change in how the stadium was portrayed by the media between 2009-2011 and 2012-2013?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review will provide background information regarding the timeline of events that led to the approval of the Miami Marlins' new stadium, Marlins Park. It will cover the pros and cons of private and public financing for sports stadiums, the economic and noneconomic impacts of stadiums, and discuss the relationship between media and sport.

The Miami Marlins and Marlins Park

The Marlins' franchise played its first Major League Baseball game on April 5, 1993. At that time, the team was known as the Florida Marlins, and they played their home games in a stadium shared with the National Football League's Miami Dolphins. The stadium, which is currently named Sun Life Stadium, did not have a retractable roof, which led to many rain delays during baseball games played in the middle of Miami's humid summers. As such, the Marlins had a difficult time drawing a high attendance. From 1999-2011, the Marlins had just two seasons in which they averaged at least 20,000 fans per home game, and they ranked at or near the bottom in total attendance for most of those seasons. As the team was getting ready to move into their own ballpark in 2012, Marlins players and opponents alike expressed their displeasure about playing baseball in a stadium made for football (Davis, 2011a).

Jeffrey Loria and David Samson took over as the Marlins' owner and president, respectively, in 2002. They, much like the Marlins' previous management, wanted to move the franchise into its own stadium, one with a retractable roof. After a couple of years of negotiations with no serious developments, the Marlins requested and received

permission from Major League Baseball in 2005 to explore relocation options if a stadium deal could not be reached with Miami-Dade County (Frisaro, 2005). According to Eric Fisher of SportsBusinessDaily.com (2005), Las Vegas, San Antonio, Norfolk, Va., and Portland, Ore. were mentioned as possible destinations for the franchise.

Construction Allowed

In 2007, the University of Miami announced that it would no longer be playing their football games inside the city's 70-year-old Orange Bowl, leaving the stadium vacant. It was demolished in 2008, leaving an area for the Marlins to build their ballpark in a Miami neighborhood named Little Havana. The site had been chosen, but the amount of money that Miami-Dade County would contribute to the project was to be determined. Samson said the team needed public monies to build the new stadium because the team had been losing money and just didn't have the funds to pay for it alone. However, when the Miami-Dade County Commission asked to see the Marlins' recent financial records, Samson refused to turn them over to the Commission. In a 2010 television interview, Samson gave his reasoning for withholding the documents, saying that "in the history of Major League Baseball, books are just kept private. That's just how it is" (Winn, 2013).

The stadium plan was backed by Miami-Dade County mayor, Carlos Alvarez, but not by the head of the Miami-Dade County Commission, Carlos Gimenez. Despite Gimenez's stance against the plan and protests from the public leading up to the final vote, the Miami-Dade County Commission voted in favor of the stadium plan by counts of 9-4 and 10-3 on March 23, 2009 and agreed to have the county supply the majority of the funding for it (Frisaro, 2009a). The Marlins held a ceremony to celebrate the stadium's groundbreaking on July 18, 2009 (Frisaro, 2009b).

Financial Controversy

The overall cost of the facility, including the stadium and the surrounding four parking garages and surrounding parking lots turned out to be \$634 million, about \$500 of which was subsidized by taxpayer money in Miami and Miami-Dade County. The county agreed to spend about \$376 million. The city spent \$132.5 million, including \$94 million for the four parking garages, which the city owns. Marlins owner Jeffrey Loria contributed \$125 million. The Marlins also received a \$35 million loan from the county, which they pay back in yearly supplements, starting at \$2.3 million and becoming slightly more expensive each following year (Rabin, 2012a).

In order to finance the project, Miami-Dade County agreed to borrow about \$400 million by selling bonds to Wall Street lenders and would pay the money back using hotel-tax revenues. However, some sets of those bonds came with high interest rates due to the county putting off large portions of the repayment for decades. The first payment on one set of bonds worth \$91 million is not due until 2026. When that one set is paid off by 2048, it will come at a cost of about \$1.2 billion (Hanks, 2013a). The eventual cost of repayment on all of the money borrowed will be about \$2.4 billion. (Tomer & Kulkarni, 2012).

On Aug. 23, 2010, the Marlins' financial documents, the same ones they refused to show to the Miami-Dade County Commission, were anonymously leaked to the sports website Deadspin.com. Although Samson had said the team was losing money, the documents showed that in 2008 and 2009 combined, the Marlins made nearly \$50 million in profit (Florida Marlins Financial Documents, 2010). That profit exceeded the profits of five other MLB teams whose financial statements had also been leaked around that time.

In March 2011, Alvarez, who had been in favor of the stadium deal, was removed from office through a special recall election and replaced as mayor by Gimenez. It was a move “that was driven, in part, by [Alvarez’s] support for the ballpark plan” (Martin, Albergotti, and Futterman, 2011). On Dec. 1, 2011, the United States Securities and Exchange Commission subpoenaed the city of Miami and Miami-Dade County, ordering them to turn over all documents related to the public financing deal behind Marlins Park, including all documents between Samson and Loria, between Major League Baseball, including Commissioner Bud Selig and MLB President Bob Dupuy and the Marlins, and anything “concerning any payments, loans, campaign contributions, or any offers of anything of value from the Marlins to any member of city, county and/or state governments” (Panahi, 2011). The investigation is ongoing.

Marlins Acquire, Then Trade On-Field Talent

With an improved stadium giving the Marlins new revenue streams, they invested in some high-priced talent leading up to their home debut. During the winter of 2011, the Marlins signed four-time All-Star shortstop Jose Reyes to a six-year, \$106 million contract. They also gave multi-year deals to pitchers Mark Buehrle and Heath Bell that cost another \$85 million. Those players were the main reasons why the Marlins’ payroll for 2012 jumped from about \$57 million in the previous season to \$118 million (MLB Salaries by Team, 2012). The Marlins played their first game in their new home on April 4, 2012.

The high-priced talent didn’t lead to a lot of wins. The Marlins finished that season with a record of 69-93, putting them in last place in their division. The team began to trade its more valuable players during the season, starting with former Rookie of the Year and three-time All-Star third baseman Hanley Ramirez, who was dealt to the Los

Angeles Dodgers. They traded Bell to the Arizona Diamondbacks in October. Then in November, they traded Reyes, Buehrle and other high-priced players, such as pitcher Josh Johnson and catcher John Buck, to the Toronto Blue Jays for cheaper talent. When all of the moves were finished, the Marlins had cut almost \$200 million in future salaries from their roster (Nightengale, 2012).

In 2012, the Marlins averaged more than 27,000 fans per home game, their highest average home attendance since 1998 (Miami Marlins Attendance Data, 2012). Samson said that payroll had to be cut because those attendance figures were lower than expected, and costs were high: “We did, unfortunately, what had to be done, and we’re sorry that it had to be done,” Samson said. “... We were hoping for a better result last year and in the first few years of the ballpark, and we just had to change course” (Downes & Habbal, 2013).

As of May 5 of the 2013 season, the Marlins’ average home attendance is less than 19,000 fans per game (MLB Attendance Report, 2013). According to the Associated Press (2013), the Marlins’ opening-day payroll for this season was about \$40 million, a decrease of nearly \$80 million from the previous season.

Stadium Economics

Public Versus Private

The sheer number of new Major League Baseball stadiums has skyrocketed in recent years. Fourteen of the league’s 32 teams have seen new homes constructed for them since 2000, with Marlins Park being the most recent. Most of those stadiums receive a mix of public and private funding, but the majority of the funding comes from public subsidies (Conrad, 2006). The total investment in sports facilities either in use or

under construction from 1961 through 2006 was \$28.96 billion, of which \$19.5 billion was publicly subsidized (Humphreys & Howard, 2008b).

Private stadiums being funded by public money is a relatively new phenomenon. Prior to World War II, most stadiums were privately owned and financed. Public contributions increased after the war, but the bulk of the monies for stadiums still came from private sources. In earlier decades, most team owners recognized they could share facilities with other teams from different sports, as there was little need for a separate facility for the relatively few football games held each year. The tides began to shift as televised coverage made sports more popular than ever (Finley & Finley, 2006). In 2011, NFL games accounted for 23 of the 25 most-watched television shows among all programming and the 16 most-watched shows on cable in 2012. In addition, a record 37 NFL game telecasts averaged at least 20 million viewers (Byrne, 2011). Nielsen stated that \$13.3 billion was spent on advertising during sports programming in 2012. That accounted for 23 percent of national television ad spending (Grathoff, 2013)

As more expansion teams were added in each of the professional sports, each with sparkling new facilities, existing teams wanted the same. In addition, as free agency and player unionization led to rising salaries, team owners have sought new ways and new sources of income to gain a competitive advantage (Finley & Finley, 2006).

More money supplied by the public means less money supplied by the owner. And although the public “owns” many of these stadiums and arenas, the primary tenant team controls the majority of the revenue. Once the facility opens, the amount of money directly invested by the team is quickly recouped, often within a few years, thanks to

lucrative luxury boxes, club seats, restaurants, state-of-the-art technology, parking, advertising, high ticket prices and other things (Conrad, 2006).

These revenue-generating characteristics of a stadium are a major, if not the main, reason why franchise relocation has occurred in the past 15 years (Conrad, 2006). That is not to say that stadium or arenas were not important in past years, but the revenue potential of a state-of-the-art facility is a crucial component because franchises must find consistent revenue streams to earn an income in an era of record-high player payrolls.

In some cases, the stadium's ability to produce revenue trumps the size of the market. In 1995, the Rams of the NFL moved from Southern California – they played their last five seasons not in Los Angeles, but in Anaheim, Calif. – to St. Louis. It was a move away from being near second-largest market to being in the 12th largest. What enticed the Rams were the proposed stadium and its lease. Specifically, the team received 100 percent of concession revenue, 100 percent of revenue from luxury boxes and club seats, and 75 percent of stadium advertising sales revenues (Conrad, 2006).

Taxpayers, however, are typically committed to up to 30 years of debt payments for a publicly financed stadium (Conrad, 2006). So why do local governments continue to subsidize stadiums?

Why Go Public?

Local governments continue to subsidize stadiums for economic and noneconomic reasons.

Economic reasons as to why billions of public dollars continue to be put into sports facilities include the expected increase in jobs and tax revenues. However, most researchers find no correlation between economic growth and the presence of new sports

facilities (Humphreys & Howard, 2008a). According to Finley and Finley (2006), some research has concluded that a professional sports team contributes only as much to the local economy as a Publix or Meijer supermarket.

On the jobs argument, construction of stadiums produce mostly temporary, part-time, and low-paying jobs more than permanent, high-paying jobs. These jobs might generate no significant effect on the local income (Humphreys & Howard, 2008b). Robert Baade and Allen Sanderson (2008b) investigated the relationship between professional sports and job creation using data for ten metropolitan areas over the period of 1958-1993. The study did not find a positive relationship. The evidence showed that creating jobs through subsidies for sports is inefficient and costly since the return on investment is likely to be quite low in comparison to investment.

According to Victor Matheson (2006, p. 12): “Even if all the monies spent on construction stay in the local economy, there is nothing to suggest that stadium building is the best use of government funds and that the return on sports infrastructure exceeds the return on the next-best alternative. In many cases, sports venues are highly specialized facilities that have only limited use following an event. Plus, the larger the event being held in that stadium, the higher the costs will be on public safety, sanitation, and public transportation.”

Recently, fewer stadium supporters are using economic arguments in an effort to persuade a community to finance a stadium. That is due, in part, to the growing number of people who don't believe that a stadium is the best use of public monies, and more people have realized that the claims of increased jobs and economic revitalization are not true for the most part (Finley & Finley, 2006).

The Noneconomic Impact of Sports Stadia

While the economic impact of sports may be small, Mark Rosentraub (2008b, p. 137) said the importance of sports in a society means that “any city without a team and a first-rate facility is outside the mainstream of Western culture.” Roger Noll and Andrew Zimbalist (2008b) said the cultural importance of major-league team sports in American society exceeds its significance as a business.

Humphreys and Howard (2008b) listed five types of noneconomic impact from a new sports facility. These intangibles are difficult to quantify but are seen as an alternative rationale to justify public subsidies on sports facilities:

1. Public consumption benefits or consumer surplus enjoyed by the attendees.

Customer surplus is the difference between the maximum that consumers would be willing to pay for a good (tickets to a game, for example) and what they actually do pay. A new sports facility can make a person more willing to pay more for a given product associated with the facility than the current market price.

2. External benefits to the non-attendees through the media and daily conversation. A local team can provide conversation and debate for those who don't go to the games, which can help raise support for a public subsidy to a team.

3. “Major-league city” status. Residents of a city or metropolitan area tend to believe that the presence of a major professional sports team validates the worth of their community.

4. Community collective conscience, which is otherwise known as civic pride.

5. Increased community visibility. The presence of a professional sports team in a city can raise that city's profile.

The Sport-Media Relationship

Sport can be powerful. According to Rowe (1999), sport can contribute to nation-building in countries divided by class, gender, ethnicity or other means of identification and help that nation develop its “collective consciousness” (p. 22). This is similar to the effect that war can have on a divided nation. “Sport can be seen as a way of discharging military aggression between countries in a rather harmless way” (p. 22).

But that power is made possible by media exposure. One-fourth of USA Today, the most widely read newspaper in the United States, is devoted to sports, and almost one-fifth of major network television time is devoted to sports (Finley & Finley, 2006). “Virtually every surge in the popularity of sport has been accompanied by a dramatic increase in the coverage provided sport by the media” (Wenner, 1989, p. 49).

Sport and media enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship in which sport enjoys enormous popularity partially due to its large amount of media attention while the popularity of sport helps media bring in tremendous circulation and ad revenues (Wenner, 1989). This leads into the “sports/media complex” that Wenner presents: People do most of their sports spectating through the media, and sports, both professional and collegiate, are dependent upon media money for survival.

As sport has developed into more of a capitalistic exercise, the amount of money generated by the relationship of sport and media has grown immensely. With more than 100 million people watching in just the United States, the cost of a 30-second ad in the 2013 Super Bowl was \$4 million. (Konrad, 2013). Professional sports teams, such as the Major League Baseball’s Los Angeles Dodgers, have reached contract agreements with television stations that range in the billions of dollars, all for the right to broadcast games

(Grathoff, 2013). But it has taken a couple of centuries for the economic relationship between sport and media to reach those levels.

Sport-Media Relationship Through the Years

The bond of sport and media predates the television and the Internet by centuries. Cricket coverage could be found in London newspapers in the middle of the 18th century (Harris, 1998). Harris said this coverage was part of the “widening circle of communication within what might begin to be described as the leisure industries” (p. 24).

The first magazine dedicated to sports debuted in the late 1820s. However, sport did not have a good reputation among much of America’s reading public at that time. The only sport media coverage was spent on more respectable sports, such as horse racing. Many who wrote sports during this time did so under a pseudonym to protect their identity (Wenner, 1989). During the middle of the 19th century, as industrialization swept into the Northeast, populations in major cities swelled due to immigrants, both domestic and foreign. The size of the reading public expanded as well, and there was a growing interest in sport (Wenner, 1989). New education laws as well as those higher populations in cities needed to support professional sports teams aided in the development of sports journalism. Now sports coverage was coming from more media outlets than just William T. Porter’s *Spirit of the Times*, the dominant sport periodical of the 1850s (Raney & Bryant, 2006). The regular, routine reporting of sports in newspapers and magazines helped shift the attitude toward sport in general and during the 1870s through the 1890s, “America’s love affair with sports had begun.” (Raney & Bryant, 2006, p. 25).

By the 1920s, the average amount of space devoted to sports in a newspaper had increased greatly, up to between 12 percent and 20 percent from four percent in 1900

(Raney & Bryant, 2006). “The 1920s was the decade in which sport assumed its modern position as a cornerstone of American Culture” (Wenner, 1989, p. 55). During this time, sport had emerged as a prime source of entertainment and communal bonding for Americans. The emergence of radio broadcasting was crucially important for the sport-mass media relationship as it gave people a new, real-time way to experience sport without being at a live event. By the end of the decade, one in every three homes had a radio. And as sport popularized radio, radio did the same for sport, continuing sport’s nationalization (Wenner, 1989).

By the 1940s, newspapers, magazines and radio were presenting more and more information about sports events and sports celebrities. However, the only people paying to watch the games were those who were physically at the event. According to Rowe (1999), “A vast, untapped audience existed which could, by means of developing audiovisual technology, be relieved of the necessity to travel to sports events – instead, the games would come to the audience” (p. 21). This came in the form of the television, in which people didn’t pay directly to watch the event. Instead, “advertisers would pay for them to watch sport and selected messages” through the screen (Rowe, 1999, p. 21). The first televised sporting event occurred in 1939 as an RCA mobile TV unit showed the Columbia-Princeton baseball game (Raney & Bryant, 2006). Much like with the radio, sport popularized television as television popularized sport during the 1950s and 1960s.

Robert McChesney (1989) said five major developments led to the supremacy of television sports coverage. One, televisions were in the majority of American homes. Second, the advent of color TV and other technological advances improved the in-home viewing experience. Third was the Sports Broadcasting Act of 1961 which “permitted

professional sports teams in a league to negotiate as one unit with broadcasters” (p. 33). Prior to that, such negotiations were a violation of antitrust laws. Fourth was the purchase of sport broadcast rights by TV networks, such as NBC and CBS, directly from the team and the leagues. This allowed the media to sell time to advertisers, which led to huge profits. With that, advertisers realized McChesney’s fifth development: Televised sports, with its desirable young-male demographic, gave advertisers an ideal opportunity to raise their own profile and profits.

By 1979, the first 24-hour television sports network, ESPN, was on the air. Television gave audiences new camera angles, instant replay, in-game graphics and commentary. But the relationship between sport and media changed vastly again with the emergence of the digital age.

“Digital technology ... disrupted aspects of the traditional relationship in journalism between the journalist, the media, and the audience. It has also made a process of information flow transnational and immediate” (Boyle, 2012, p. 95). Digital journalism has broken down the traditional roles of sport media. It has changed the way journalism is practiced. With the growth and success of live blogging, micro-blogging, social media, smartphones, and the broadcasting of news over numerous mediums, the news cycle has been shortened drastically, and news can be reported by someone at the right place at the right time as well as a professional journalist. With the invention of social media, such as Twitter, information is reported and analyzed by the audience immediately. Social media also allows much greater access for fans, athletes and sports journalists to interact. Newspapers have been forced to downsize as they struggle to find a business model in this age of free online content (Boyle, 2012). Sport provides a wide

range of media content that can attract sponsors, advertisers and subscribers to many different digital platforms. As the commercialization and internationalization of the sport-media relationship continues, the roles of sport and journalism continue to be transformed and will continue to be transformed (Boyle, 2012).

Chapter 3

Methodology

This section will describe the methodology chosen for this study, qualitative content analysis. It will include information on how the articles analyzed for this study were selected and also include information on the sources analyzed. It will also describe each category for the study's code sheet and address some of the limitations of this study.

Qualitative content analysis was used to examine how Marlins Park and its financing plan were described by three sources of media. There are many definitions for content analysis. Put broadly, it is "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2012). There is no dependence on counting as with quantitative content analysis. In this study, the researcher utilizes qualitative content analysis to draw objective conclusions about the sample from the words and descriptions contained within.

Sampling

This study is generally focused on local media coverage on Marlins Park and the stadium's financing plan from the year of 2009 through 2013. The media sources chosen for this study were the Miami Herald, Palm Beach Post, and Sun Sentinel. Those publications were chosen because of their relatively high circulation totals and proximity to Marlins Park. Each publication employs reporters who cover the Marlins on a daily basis.

The Miami Herald

The Miami Herald is a daily newspaper that is owned by the McClatchy Company, the third-largest newspaper company in the United States (McClatchy

Company About Us, 2013). David Landsberg is the Herald's president and publisher. The Herald published its first edition on Sept. 15, 1903 as the Miami Evening Record. It did not publish as The Miami Herald until 1910. It has won 20 Pulitzer Prizes and circulates in Miami-Dade, Broward and Monroe counties in South Florida. The Miami Herald's headquarters are located three miles from Marlins Park. With an average weekday circulation of about 147,000, according to the Alliance for Audited Media (2013), the Herald is the second-largest newspaper in South Florida.

Sun Sentinel

The Sun Sentinel's average weekday circulation of about 163,000 is the largest among newspapers in South Florida and second largest in the state (Alliance for Audited Media, 2013). The daily publication began in 1910 as the Fort Lauderdale Weekly Herald. The Sun Sentinel services all of South Florida, including Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties. The Sun Sentinel is owned by the Tribune Company. Howard Greenberg has been its publisher since 2007. The Sun Sentinel's headquarters are located about 30 miles from Marlins Park.

The Palm Beach Post

The Palm Beach Post started out as a weekly newspaper called The Palm Beach County, which was established in 1908. In January 1916, the weekly became a daily, but the change to its current name did not take place until 1989. It is owned by Cox Enterprises (Site Information, n.d.). The Post has a weekday average circulation of about 101,000, making it the third most-popular newspaper in South Florida (Alliance for Audited Media, 2013). The Palm Beach Post's main office is about 70 miles from Marlins Park.

This study analyzes both sports articles and non-sports articles. Non-sports articles include stories that were published either in print or filed on the web in each source's news section, business section or local section – also known as Metro and State. Sports articles had to be published under “Sports” to be eligible for analyzing.

The sampling of the articles was broken up into two time frames. First, Jan. 1, 2009 through the end of 2011, which includes the final couple of months leading up to the stadium's approval by the Miami City Commission and Miami-Dade County Commission, through the final few months before the stadium's first game is played. Second, Jan. 1, 2012 through the end of 2013, which spans the stadium's debut, and the Marlins' abrupt restructuring of its roster and payroll.

Thirty randomly selected articles were drawn from each of the four segments of analysis, 10 articles per publication for each segment:

1. Non-sports articles from 2009-2011
2. Sports articles from 2009-2011
3. Non-sports articles from 2012-2013
4. Sports articles from 2012-2013

That constitutes an overall sample of 120 articles. The results of what was found in each of those four segments can be read in the Findings chapter.

Collection of the Data

All data were collected through the World Access News Research Collection database. The population for each segment was drawn up using the same search terms: “search term, articles containing either of those two words in the lead or first paragraph were found in the population. From there, a sample was collected via random sampling.

The random sample depended upon how many articles were in each population, and then dividing by 10 – the number of articles per source for each segment. For example, if a search returned with 330 articles, every 33rd article would be chosen.

However, some articles that were randomly selected were not eligible to be used for this study. Reader opinions, briefs, repeated articles, articles published outside of a publication's sports, news, business or local section, and articles otherwise not related to the focus of this study were omitted. If such an article was randomly selected, the next eligible article that fit the study's parameters was included in the sample.

Data Analysis

The articles for this study were read and analyzed using a code sheet that was developed by the researcher. The categories on the code sheet, listed below, will help lead to the discovery of patterns in the coverage and provide the information needed in order to answer this study's research questions.

Publication title: The Miami Herald, The Palm Beach Post, or Sun Sentinel.

Article headline, date, author and section: The date and section of each article is critical for this particular study. The focus of this study is to see what is different or similar, if anything, in how different newspaper sections covered and/or described Marlins Park and its financing from two periods of time.

What is the focus of the article? Perhaps it is a rundown of the stadium's features, or public outcry against how the stadium is being financed, etc.

What sources are used in the article? A quoted Miami resident who isn't fond of baseball might have a different view on the stadium than someone who works for the Marlins' organization.

Is Marlins Park described in the article? If so, how is it described? For instance, is it described as a boon for the franchise or a drain of public subsidies? Or both?

Is there a mention of the stadium's financing? If so, how is it described? Even prior to the Miami-Dade County Commission approving the construction of the stadium, it was known that the stadium was going to be built by mostly taxpayer money. This question aims to find out how local writers addressed or described the issue

What is the tone of the article? Is it positive, negative or neutral? How so?

Limitations of Study

In an effort to carry out a very comprehensive study, it may have become more complicated than needed. This study might have been better off focusing on just one section per source – only sports articles or only non-sports articles -- instead of two.

While this study's time frame begins in 2009, the knowledge that the Marlins were looking to fund their stadium with a majority of public money goes back to 2007. Including 2007 and 2008 in a future study may give us a fuller picture of how the local media viewed this stadium's financing.

One reason why the World Access News Research Collection database was used to compile this study's sample is that it produced more search results than other databases under the same search parameters. Yet, with the search parameters of this study including the inclusion of every article in each publication that contains the word "Marlins" in the lede or first paragraph, it is evident to the researcher that the database used didn't show all published articles from each publication. Given that each publication has a daily beat writer for the Marlins, it stands to reason that a search with those search parameters over a two- or three-year time frame would produce thousands of articles, not hundreds as is

described in the Findings chapter. This exclusion leads the researcher to believe that a fuller picture of how the media described Marlins Park and its public financing is possible.

Although the database had a search function that allowed the researcher to include only or omit only sports articles in a search, the database was continuously unable to sift articles from different sections. Thus, the population numbers for sports articles and non-sports articles are the same in each of the two time frames being used. This lack of specificity may have affected what articles appeared in the population.

This study is limited to the coverage of one baseball stadium. Future research could include a broader picture of how stadium financing plans that call for public subsidies in cities other than Miami or sports other than baseball are covered and described by the media.

Though random sampling is required, it does leave open the possibility that the randomness of the sample causes the researcher to miss other articles in the population that could change the findings, albeit perhaps only slightly.

Chapter 4

Findings

Analysis of Non-Sports Articles, 2009-2011

A search of each of the three publications in this time frame resulted in a population of 387 articles from the Miami Herald, 305 from the Sun Sentinel, and 298 from the Palm Beach Post. Needing 10 articles from each publication, every 30th article in each population, beginning from the earliest date, was selected to be a part of this study's sample. If a selected article was not related to the topics of this study, the next article available in the population was chosen. Collection of the sample of sports articles from this time frame followed a similar procedure as it was randomly selected from the same population, as mentioned in the Limitations of Study section of the Methodology chapter.

Descriptions of the Stadium Financing Plan

A couple of weeks before the commissions of Miami and Miami-Dade County voted on whether or not to help the Marlins finance their new ballpark, the financing plan took a "potentially severe hit" when it was reported that in January 2009, Miami's hotel tax revenues, which were being used to cover much of the cost of the stadium, declined sharply to levels not seen since the fallout from Sept. 11 (Dolan, 2009, para. 1). At that time, county commissioner Carlos Gimenez said, "I think we need to punt and come back when we know the numbers are improving, not when we think they are going to improve" (Dolan, 2009, para. 10). A number of Miami-Dade County Commissioners were concerned that if the revenues continued to fall or didn't rebound substantially, Miami would then need to reach into its general public fund to cover some of the costs.

(Talalay, 2009a) Others voiced concerns about pledging so much public money into a private business during a recession (Talalay, 2009a).

In the weeks leading up to voting day – March 18 for the city, March 23 for the county -- there were many pessimistic views expressed concerning the stadium's financing plan. County commissioner Sally Heyman said she supports the idea of keeping the Marlins in Miami but didn't like that the Marlins "want a new home, and they want us to give them their home loan" (Talalay, 2009a, para. 11). Gimenez said that when the county starts considering deals such as this, it is "mortgaging the future" and "tying the hands of future generations of commissions from having any money to do projects on their own" (Talalay, 2009a, para. 13).

City commissioner Tomas Regalado said there should be a Major League stadium in Miami, "but we should get something for the city of Miami, and we don't have enough. We have done everything, we have given away everything and given nothing in return" (Talalay, 2009b, para. 6). Michael Burnstine, co-founder of Coalition Against Marlins Bailout, called the deal an "egregious, onerous business deal" (Talalay, 2009b, para. 13). Palm Beach Post columnist Frank Cerabino said the deal will be a negative for Miami because South Florida's sports fan base isn't passionate about most of its local teams, even when one of those teams would have a brand-new stadium.

"Peel off the born-here 'Dolfans,' and South Florida is basically a haven for fair-weather transplants who will cheer a hometown team when it's winning but find a reason to be apathetic most other time" (Cerabino, 2009, para. 13).

Some optimism was expressed about the financing plan before the voting. One main reason why people supported the deal was that it would create needed

construction jobs in the city and spur economic development (Talalay, 2009a). Some residents attended the meeting in which the city voted on the stadium's approval to voice their support of creating construction jobs and to ask for a job of their own (Talalay, 2009b). Carlos Ruiz, the vice president of the one of the main companies lending out tools for the project, called the stadium's possible approval "a godsend" because without it, he would have to lay off half of his staff since there is "very, very, little" in terms of new construction projects in Miami (Talalay, 2009f, para. 9). Miami-Dade County Manager George Burgess, who also acted as the chief stadium negotiator, dismissed concerns about the falling hotel-tax revenue rates, saying, "you don't want to pull the plug on something if it makes sense in the long term because things look bad in the short term" (Dolan, 2009, para. 6).

The Marlins received the minimum number of votes needed for approval from both the city and county commissions. On March 18, 2009, after hearing the thoughts of 70 supporters and opponents of the deal, the city voted in favor, 3-2. Commissioners Michelle Spence-Jones, Angel Gonzalez, and commission chairman Joe Sanchez cast the votes in favor of the plan. Commissioners Marc Sarnoff and Tomas Regalado voted against it (Talalay, 2009b). The plan then moved to the county commission, which came in session to vote on March 23. Major League Baseball President Bob DuPuy told the Commission, "Today, you have a chance to choose whether or not Miami remains a Major League community ... " (Talalay, 2009c, para. 13). After a long debate between the 13 commissioners, a vote was cast in the early hours of March 24, and the plan received

its nine votes required for approval. Commissioners Carlos Gimenez, Sally Heyman, Joe Martinez, and Katy Sorensen cast the four votes against the plan (Talalay, 2009c).

More negativity toward the stadium's financing came out when it was reported in July 2009 that the stadium project would cost Miami much more than initially thought due to a large amount of back-loaded payments and the relatively small amount of money that the Marlins and owner Jeffrey Loria paid for the project – about 25 percent of the total cost. Some experts said this kind of back-loaded financing could “ultimately bring havoc” to Miami (Haggman, 2009, para. 11), and that, “This is the sort of financing you do when you can't afford it” (Haggman, 2009, para. 12). County Commissioner Katy Sorensen, who voted against the stadium, said, “Who knows what we could have gotten out of [the Marlins] if we had tougher negotiators (Haggman, 2009, para. 7). Mark Rosentraub, a sports management professor at the University of Michigan said he hopes the deal could be refinanced at a later date, once credit markets rebound from the current recession, because public money is paying for too much of the cost (Haggman, 2009).

The county commission did pass a resolution in November 2010 directing Miami-Dade County Mayor Carlos Alvarez to talk to the city of Miami and the Marlins about lowering the public's contribution toward the project. However, odds of any change were slim since the city, county, and the team would all have to agree to restructure the financing. With stadium construction already about 50 percent completed at the time and with the project on time and budget, according to team and county officials, the Marlins weren't willing to make major changes to the deal (Talalay, 2010b).

More disapproval of the deal came in 2010 when Standard and Poor's dropped Miami's bond credit rating two notches, A-plus to A-minus, citing the city's climbing

employee pension costs and unwillingness to raise taxes as reasons for the drop (Mazzei, 2010). A lower bond rating meant it would cost the city an estimated \$15 million more to pay off the nearly \$100 million in bonds being used to finance the stadium's four garages. (Mazzei, 2010). When the Securities and Exchange Commission opened an investigation looking into the Marlins' stadium deal in December 2011, it was written by the Miami Herald that deal was considered by critics to be a "giveaway" to the Marlins (Rabin, Brannigan, and Mazzei, 2011, para. 4).

Twelve of the 30 articles in this segment of the sample included words of pessimism or anger toward the stadium financing plan or the city or county commissions. Five of the 30 articles in the sample included positive or optimistic words on those subjects.

Political Impact of the Financing Plan

On the day that the Miami-Dade County Commission approved the stadium, the Miami Herald's Myriam Marquez wrote that county mayor Carlos Alvarez "deserves credit" for getting the ballpark in Miami that he, county manager George Burgess and Miami Mayor Manny Diaz really pushed for (2009, para. 3). Maurice Ferre was quoted extensively in that article. Ferre served as Miami's mayor from 1973 to 1985, served on the county commission in the 1990s and supported Alvarez in his run for Miami-Dade Mayor in 2008, which was successful. Ferre said he had "mixed feelings" (para. 11) about the financing plan and said Alvarez had "risked political capital" in pushing for such a deal (para. 8). Ferre went on to say:

"If this thing goes bad, the guy who gets the blame is Alvarez. There's no question that if history is written, it's not going to be Diaz, and it's not going to be

Burgess. It's going to be Alvarez, who's taken ownership of it" (paras. 15-16).

An effort to recall Alvarez as county mayor began in October 2010 and was backed by billionaire auto magnate Norman Braman, who had called the financing plan "a travesty" (Rabin et al., 2011, para. 26). The Marlins and team president David Samson contributed at least \$50,000 to the Citizens for Truth Political Action Committee, which was set up to help Alvarez against Braman's campaign to recall him as county mayor. Ballpark contractors and a team sponsor also contributed to the PAC (Talalay, 2010b).

Braman's campaign was successful as Alvarez was recalled in 2011, and the Miami Herald wrote that Alvarez's support of the stadium's financing plan was a "contributing factor" in his ouster (Rabin et al., 2011, para. 4).

Descriptions of Marlins Park

Ground was broken on the site where Marlins Park would stand on July 18, 2009. A wide majority of the articles used for this study contain a reference to some of the stadium's most basic features – capacity for about 37,000 people, a retractable roof, etc. Four of the 30 articles in this segment of the sample focused on the stadium and what will be inside of it once it opens in 2012. The Sun Sentinel's Sarah Talalay (2009e) described the ballpark as a "sleek yet intimate venue showcasing South Florida's distinct flavor" (para. 1), and said the stadium is designed to be "breezy and comfortable" (para. 9). She described how the stadium's palette of primary colors – red, blue, yellow, and green – were used to honor the region's Hispanic heritage (2009e). Earl Santee, senior principal for the architectural firm Populus, which designed the stadium, said Marlins Park will "serve as a centerpiece for the Little Havana community" and "connect the neighborhood" (Talalay, 2009d, para. 2). Talalay and Susan Cocking of the Miami

Herald spoke to a Marlins fan for his opinion on the stadium in July 2010. Long-time Marlins season-ticket holder Herman Russomanno became the first person to purchase his tickets for the new stadium, almost two years before it would open. Through projections of the stadium he had seen, Russomanno described the stadium as having a “spectacular view” (Talalay, 2010a, para. 4) of Downtown Miami, which can be seen through the stadium’s clear, sliding panels behind the left-field stands. Russomanno also said the stadium is “very comfortable and spacious” (Cocking, 2010, para. 1). Cocking added that the design plans for the stadium are “nothing short of flashy” (para. 4).

There were no directly negative descriptions of the stadium. The closest any article in this segment of the sample came to criticizing the stadium was found in two Miami Herald articles that used the word “controversial” upon introducing the stadium (Rabin & Dolan, 2009; Rabin et al., 2011).

Analysis of Sports Articles, 2009-2011

Descriptions of the Stadium Financing Plan

Miami Herald sports writer Barry Jackson wrote an article in February 2009 about how approval of the Marlins' new stadium was seen as likely but not certain. The article quotes multiple city and county commissioners on how they feel about the financing plan up to this point. City commissioner Joe Sanchez said, "There are a dozen things I'm not comfortable with" in the financing plan (2009a, para. 10). County commissioner Joe Martinez said, "Unless something changes, I would be opposed to it. It's way too much money the county is investing" (para. 5). County commissioner Carlos Gimenez said, "In this economy, it's not the time to do this" (para. 6), and fellow county commissioner Javier Souto said, "It would be irresponsible on my part to approve such a deal in which so many things are a question mark" (para. 6).

This article represents one of the two articles in this 30-article sample that includes quotes from city or county officials. The other one cites an anonymous county commissioner as calling upon the Marlins to increase their financial commitment to the project (Rodriguez, 2010).

The Palm Beach Post's Michael Cunningham presented a very sarcastic tone while describing his thoughts on the stadium deal:

"It's always a good time to hand over public money to a private business that is putting up little money but will get nearly all of the profits from increased revenues while the public reaps little to no financial benefit. But it's especially a good time now because even if Miami can't pay for trivial things like urban development, it should find a way to fund a shiny new ballpark. If the stadium

ends up costing way more for the city than the deal indicates, which the history of stadiums built with public money says it certainly will, it's well worth it so hot dog vendors, parking attendants, and ticket takers can have jobs" (Cunningham, 2009, para. 2).

Many other articles in this sample were optimistic about the stadium plan, and most of those words of optimism came from either Marlins owner Jeffrey Loria or team president David Samson. Either person was quoted in 20 of the 30 articles selected. Samson said in February 2009 that "job creation, economic development, economic stimulus, and ongoing community intangible aspects" are all reasons why the city and county commissions should approve the stadium (Rodriguez, 2009a, para. 6). A few days later, Samson said in the Palm Beach Post that this stadium deal "is exactly what we need in these economic times. ... We need places to go, places to work, and places to be entertained" (Capozzi, 2009, para. 8).

The Miami Herald's Greg Cote gave the most positive review of any writer in this sample of the financing plan, writing on the day that it was approved by the county commissioners that it was a "home run" for the team, the city of Miami, and South Florida (2009, para. 4). He called what the city and county were committing to the stadium project "brave and progressive" (para. 25), and that their votes promise that the Marlins will remain in Miami so that they can be "passed from generation to generation like an heirloom, the way baseball is in so many cities among so many families of fans" (para 17). Cote told those who said it's not the right time, economically, to spend so much public money on a baseball stadium that the project "will create a ton of needed jobs and get the money moving. That doesn't sound like a bad thing" (para. 28). Lastly,

Cote wrote, “Time now for the anti-stadium crowd to reconcile its defeat with grace and move on with the community’s best wishes at heart” (para. 29).

The Palm Beach Post’s Dave George wrote that he was not a fan of how the Miami and Miami-Dade Commissions “risked the financial well-being of their community” on a baseball stadium (2009, para. 24). He disliked how the whole plan was approved without letting the citizens of Miami vote on it first, and said he was surprised a deal of this magnitude actually succeeded given the poor current economic climate in Miami. George also said all of those problems are Miami’s and of no concern to his readers in Palm Beach County. He advised that instead of getting “all worked up” (para. 14) about what’s potentially wrong about the financing deal, people should “take the simplest option, which is to congratulate Loria for getting done in South Florida what [former Marlins owners] Wayne Huizenga and John Henry couldn’t” (para. 7). Loria said that unlike his predecessors, he was successful because, “We were willing to work at it, plain and simple. ... It happened because we cared” (Rodriguez, 2011, para. 5).

In a 2010 article, George said Marlins Park will be seen by some as the “Greed Monster” (para. 16) as opposed to the tall left-field wall in Boston’s Fenway Park that is known as the “Green Monster.” To that, George writes, “So what? It’s all temporary, folks” (para. 16).

Juan C. Rodriguez of the Sun Sentinel mentioned the controversy over whether or not the city and the county struck a sound financial deal with the Marlins in the Sun Sentinel’s sports blog. But he wrote that he would leave judgment on that issue up to people “much smarter than I” (2009b, para. 1). Instead, Rodriguez said his hope is that

the money involved “produces not only a beautiful, fan-friendly ballpark, but brings the team some much deserved relevance in the South Florida sports landscape” (para. 1).

Rodriguez asked Jeffrey Loria in 2011 about all of the “black eyes” the team and ownership had been receiving from people questioning the Marlins’ contribution to the stadium project after a 2010 leak of their financial documents showed that the Marlins were earning a substantial yearly profit. Loria said:

“If you’re going to be in an ownership position, you have to be willing to [have people] take potshots at you. We’ve taken our potshots and we’ve prevailed, period. And it’s because we took our potshots and prevailed that the city has this magnificent baseball park adding to the skyline of Miami” (para. 9).

Descriptions of Marlins Park

“Oh, and let’s not forget the best part: the roof!” (Frias, 2009, para. 8).

That is what Marlins owner Jeffrey Loria told the crowd during the Marlins’ stadium groundbreaking ceremony in July 2009. The Marlins wanted a stadium with a roof since many of their games before 2012 were either interrupted or postponed due to the common afternoon thunderstorms during the summer in Florida. A roof would also protect players and fans from the high temperatures and humidity in South Florida. The roof’s importance to the stadium is well represented in this study. The stadium’s roof is mentioned in 72 of the 120 articles that make up this study’s sample.

Craig Davis of the Sun Sentinel said the roof is a “masterpiece” (2011b, para. 1), and that Marlins Park is “shaping up to be a gem of a facility for baseball” (para. 2). Many compliments were paid about the ballpark from various people in this segment of the sample. Carlos Frias of the Palm Beach Post said the stadium “has been a dream for

Marlins fans since the franchise was awarded in 1991” (2009, para. 8). MLB Commissioner Bud Selig told a crowd of people before the stadium’s groundbreaking that Marlins Park “will become the anchor of the city, and Miami will become a greater city because of it” (Frias, 2009, para. 12). Marlins outfielder Giancarlo Stanton talked about how he could imagine how beautiful the stadium was going to look even while it was still under construction (Capozzi, 2011a). The types of food being offered at concession stands and restaurants, the pool and the nightclub beyond the left-field stands, the view of the Miami skyline from the stadium, the 60-foot, moving home-run sculpture in center field, the dual aquariums behind home plate, the two large scoreboards, the expanded number of luxury suites – some or all of these amenities were documented in multiple articles in this sample (Jackson, 2009d; Frias, 2009; Capozzi, 2011a). According to Loria, the stadium is about “creating something spectacular” (Cote, 2011, para. 30).

The only criticism of the stadium presented in this segment of the sample came in an article about how People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals was upset that the Marlins were installing two saltwater aquariums behind home plate. They complained that the bright lights, reverberations, and loud noises in the stadium would be stressful to the tropical fish housed in the aquariums (Spencer, 2010). The Marlins stuck to their plans to install the bulletproof aquariums, and team president David Samson said the fish will be treated as well as any fish can be (Spencer, 2010).

Attendance and Rising Payroll

One other main focus among the articles in this segment is how the new stadium will impact the Marlins’ attendance rates and payroll. The new stadium brought the Marlins new revenue streams that were unobtainable in their previous stadium, Sun Life

Stadium, a complex built in the 1980s that the Marlins shared with the Miami Dolphins of the National Football League (Jackson, 2009b). At Marlins Park, the Marlins would be able to control almost all profits from all events in the stadium. Advertising, concessions, and ticket sales are just a few of the things the Marlins will earn from. This increased revenue would make it possible for the Marlins to operate with a higher payroll and have a better chance of acquiring and re-signing talented players who were once out of their price range (Jackson, 2009b). They could no longer “lean on the low-revenue crutch ...” (Rodriguez, 2009b, para. 3) as they had in previous years when their payroll was at times one-tenth of the league’s highest payroll. Samson said the team’s payroll would reach levels unforeseen by the Marlins once they entered their new stadium (Davis, 2011b). Specifically, the team was reportedly hoping to double their 2011 payroll of about \$58 million (Capozzi, 2011b). And in the winter of 2011, Jeffrey Loria became aggressive in attempting to sign big-name, high-priced players such as Albert Pujols, Jose Reyes, C.J. Wilson, and Mark Buehrle, among others (Cote, 2011). Cote wrote that Loria “was revealing himself as a man at long last prepared to spend hugely to field a winning team” (2011, para. 30).

However, the Marlins made it clear well before their new park had opened that the team’s payroll, attendance rates and on-field performance were all intertwined. Samson put forth some very high expectations for attendance. He said the team “should be able” to sell out every game during its first season at the new stadium (Jackson, 2009c, para. 6). Jackson wrote that a season’s worth of sellouts “would shock fans” since the Marlins had regularly finished at or near the bottom in attendance for many years (2009c, para. 7). Dave George wondered why the city of Miami and Miami-Dade County would

put tax money into a product “that Miami citizens don’t love enough to spend their own salary on very often” (2009, para. 27). But Samson expected yearly attendance figures to reach at least two million in each of the stadium’s first seven seasons even though the Marlins had fallen short of that attendance total every year since 1997 (Jackson, 2009b).

Regardless of the team’s improved payroll or attendance figures, Samson said the team’s honeymoon with the new stadium would only last as much as five innings into the first game (Capozzi, 2011b). After that, he said only a mixture of on-field performance and game-day experience would keep the fans coming back for years to come (Capozzi, 2011b). “If we’re not drawing 30,000 fans [per game], then we haven’t done it right,” Samson said (Capozzi, 2011b, para. 30).

Analysis of Non-Sports Articles, 2012-2013

A search of each of the three publications in this time frame resulted in a population of 301 articles from the Miami Herald, 172 from the Sun Sentinel, and 167 from the Palm Beach Post. Needing 10 articles from each publication, every 30th article in the population of Miami Herald articles, starting from the earliest date, was selected to be a part of this study's sample. For the Sun Sentinel and Palm Beach Post, every 10th article was selected. If a selected article was not related to the topics of this study, the next article available in the population was chosen. The collection of the sample of sports articles from this time frame followed a similar procedure as it was randomly selected from the same population, as mentioned in the Limitations of Study section of the Methodology chapter.

Descriptions of Marlins Park

By the start of 2012, the Marlins were just a few months away from opening their “fancy new digs” (Mayo, 2012, para. 1). Articles published in the first few months of 2012 contained in this segment's sample are very positive in regards to stadium description. On opening night, April 4, the Sun Sentinel's Ben Crandell caught up with fans who expressed their excitement for the new stadium and their early opinion that it is “definitely an upgrade” on the Marlins' previous stadium, Sun Life Stadium (2012, para. 7). The Sun Sentinel's Michael Mayo attended the first game at Marlins Park, and upon first glances of the stadium up close, Mayo said it “looks like the Close Encounters of the Third Kind Spaceship That Swallowed Little Havana” (2012, para. 7). Mayo continued:

“I enter the spaceship. It's glorious inside. The roof is open, and the Miami skyline sparkles through the eastern windows. I've been a fierce critic of public

financing wealthy sports teams, but on this night, I'll suspend my usual cynicism and just enjoy" (para 10).

Marlins owner Jeffrey Loria "looks quite pleased" as he watches the pre-game festivities (Crandell, 2012, para. 6). Player introductions "sound like a party and glow with a Technicolor intensity found nowhere else in South Florida" (Crandell, 2012, para. 4). Less than two months into the season, the attendance figures were "big improvement from years past" (Rabin, 2012b, para. 24). Meanwhile, the stadium's four-acre West Plaza became a shopping destination for fans and residents (Griffin, 2012). Business owners in the plaza were pleased with their early returns as they benefited from thousands of people walking by their brand on every game day, and the businesses were well received even when the Marlins are on the road (Griffin, 2012).

Backlash Following Trades and Losing Season

The Marlins held a record of 31-24 on June 4, 2012 and were tied for first place in their division. But then the team struggled on the field and by late July, they had fallen to fourth place in the division with a 45-53 record, 13.5 games out of first place. Plus, while attendance figures started off strong, the Marlins were no longer averaging 30,000 fans per game. With so much going wrong, the team decided to trim payroll. It began with the trading of star third baseman Hanley Ramirez in July for a couple of young prospects. Then relief pitcher Edward Mujica and first baseman Gaby Sanchez were traded in early August. The biggest move of them all came after the season, in November, when the Marlins sent five players, including high-priced stars such as shortstop Jose Reyes, and pitchers Mark Buehrle and Josh Johnson, to the Toronto Blue Jays for a crop of young players, minor leaguers and players with cheap contracts.

This series of moves caused some fans to burn their Marlins jerseys (Clary, 2012). Tomas Regalado, the once-city commissioner who was elected mayor of Miami in 2009, said the moves indicated that “[Miami] invested in the Marlins, and the Marlins are not investing in Miami” (Clary, 2012, para. 13). The Palm Beach Post’s Frank Cerabino wrote that the Marlins’ unloading of high-priced talent was an example of the team “reverting to its previous business strategy of keeping talent costs to a minimum while banking the revenue-sharing profits gleaned from the rest of the league” (2013, para. 22). The loss of the team’s more recognizable players had a major effect on the team’s ability to find retailers to open up shop in the large retail space located at the base of the stadium’s parking garages (Rabin, 2013b). Rabin wrote on May 8, 2013:

“Four years after city and county leaders crowed that building the stadium would be an economic shot in the arm for the area, not a single business is operating in the 8,500 square feet of retail space available in three of the four garages fronting the ballpark” (2013b, para. 3).

Rabin reported that negotiations with a pizza shop and two national restaurant chains – Firefly and Tilted Kilt -- to use some of the garage space tanked after the November trade (2013b). The two restaurants signed letters of intent to open in the first floor in the parking garages that surround the stadium, but they backed out due to reservations about the dwindling crowds and lack of foot traffic. Arthur Stevens, a leasing agent who was hired by the Marlins to lure potential clients to the ballpark, said in an e-mail that “investors are worried about the negative impact that the new Marlins team will have on overall traffic” (Rabin, 2013b, para. 10). Rabin also wrote that

although three businesses – a Latin café , a cigar shop and a Subway sandwich shop – had all signed 10-year lease agreements, none of the businesses had yet to open (2013b).

Parking and Other Problems

Even before the Marlins began to dismantle their team, they were facing a lot of problems with stadium parking, and these problems were mentioned often in non-sports articles. As the 2012 season approached, parking was “the biggest headache facing the neighborhood and the Marlins” (Sanchez, 2012, para. 7). People griped about the fact that there were only 5,700 on-site parking spots for a stadium able to hold 37,000 and that spots in the stadium’s four parking garages are set aside for those who paid for parking in advance, VIPs, team employees, and media (Rabin, 2012a). After making his way to one of Marlins Park’s first exhibition games, Marlins fan Danny Pou said, “The parking situation really stinks” (Rabin, 2012a, para. 5).

The relatively small number of on-site parking spots meant people would have to find other places to park their car or another method to commute to the games. This included taking mass transit such as a Metrorail train or a trolley to the ballpark, or parking on people’s lawns, as was common when the Orange Bowl held a major event (Turnbell & Rodriguez, 2012). But even fans who weren’t going to the games felt inconvenienced by the stadium’s parking rules, one of which was that residential street parking is banned on days in which the Marlins play at home. This rule to reduce gridlock for people traveling to the stadium upset many locals, including some who said they fear that having to move their car for each Marlins game -- 81 times per year -- would leave them having to park many blocks away from their home and then walking in some of the area’s more unsafe neighborhoods (Sanchez, 2012).

Miami city officials learned, via a reporter who found the evidence, that the Marlins were using about 18,000 square feet of space in one of the four on-site, city-owned parking (Rabin, 2013a). It was unclear how long the Marlins had been using that space as storage, but city officials wanted the Marlins to pay more than \$30,000 in additional monthly rent if they continued to take up that space (Rabin, 2013a).

In May 2012, Miami-Dade County challenged \$1.7 million that the Marlins said should be credited toward their part of the construction bill for the stadium. The county stated that the money was spent on “soft costs” -- or non-construction costs – that were not covered in the financing plan that both sides agreed to in 2009 (Rabin, 2012b). Soft costs were defined in the agreement as “design, consultation, and legal fees” (Rabin, 2012b, para. 8). All of the money spent was related to the franchise’s small sales office next to one of the parking garages. The county challenged every portion of the money spent by the Marlins, everything from about \$33,000 for office furniture and about \$14,000 for ad banners to about \$300 for pillow cases, a \$162 hotel room bill, and \$10,000 spent on wine purchased for a celebration by ownership and some friends at the sales office once construction was completed (Rabin, 2012b).

Descriptions of the Stadium Financing Plan

Once the Marlins began playing in their new stadium, the issue of the stadium’s financing plan seemed to fade in articles found in the non-sports sections. But as the Marlins’ faltered on the field in 2012 and 2013, sold off some of their top players for far-cheaper replacements, and committed some other slipups off of the field, the financing plan for Marlins Park came back into conversation.

A town hall meeting was held in March 2012 as about 200 Miami residents

discussed their problems with the new residential parking rules implemented on Marlins game days, including the banning of residential street parking on game days, with the director of planning and development for the Miami Parking Authority, Rolando Tapanes (Sanchez, 2012) After the meeting, one resident, Xochitl Perez, thanked Tapanes for listening to everyone's concerns and said, "It just seems like the Marlins are laughing at us. It's not you guys. It's the city. It's the Marlins – the ones who have been benefiting from all of our tax dollars" (Sanchez, 2012, para. 20).

The disclosure that the Marlins misspent \$1.7 million in soft costs not covered by their agreement with the county irked some critics of the ballpark "who have complained all along of a lopsided deal" (Rabin, 2012b, para. 18). City commissioner Mark Sarnoff said the disclosure "adds insult to injury" (Rabin, 2012b, para. 11).

Frank Cerabino wrote a column in March 2013 about a local fifth-grade teacher taking his students to a Miami Marlins spring training game to teach them about baseball. But he doesn't talk to them at all about the Marlins. Cerabino said this is wise because:

"I'm not sure children should be exposed to the art of the financial sleight of hand the team use to persuade the public to finance most of the cost of the team's new \$634 million stadium in a deal that will cost Miami-Dade County about \$2.4 billion by the time the stadium loans are repaid" (para. 13).

Analysis of Sports Articles, 2012-2013

Descriptions of Marlins Park

Marlins Park was a big story in South Florida sports sections in early 2012. It was so big, Marlins manager Ozzie Guillen said was he getting tired of the “unending questions” regarding the stadium, and that it was turning into a “distraction” as the regular season approached (Cote, 2012, para. 14). But many were looking forward to the debut of the Marlins’ “shiny new playpen” (Jackson, 2012, para. 3). From the retractable roof and bigger weight room to an 18,000 square foot locker room and life-size projection screens with a touch of virtual reality to help hitters practice during the games, Marlins Park outclassed Sun Life Stadium in terms of technology and amenities (Berardino, 2012). Dave George called it “the most fascinating new ballpark in years” (2012a, para 17). At one of the first baseball exhibitions in the stadium, a father and his son took in the game. The father told the Dave Hyde of the Sun Sentinel that the stadium is “absolutely beautiful” (2012, para.4). The son deemed it “perfect” (2012, para. 5). The Sun Sentinel’s Craig Davis wrote that when the players took the field for the first time, it was “like those ghost figures stepping out of the cornfield in ‘Field of Dreams’” (Davis, 2012a, para. 1). The novelty of the new stadium combined with the arrival of pricey free-agent acquisitions such as Jose Reyes, Mark Buehrle, and Heath Bell meant that the Marlins had become baseball’s newest ‘it’ team” (Cote, 2012, para. 26).

As the 2012 season played out and the Marlins didn’t meet expectations, the stadium still drew “high marks for its distinctive looks and fan friendliness” (Spencer, 2012, para. 5). However, the stadium wasn’t always perfect. Its sound system wasn’t always clear, fans in proximity to air conditioning vents complained that the stadium was

too cold, and four or five small leaks in the roof were discovered early in the season (Spencer, 2012). By the end of the year, Marlins Park was seen as the biggest positive during a season in which so much went “spectacularly wrong” with the Marlins (Davis, 2012b, para. 5).

Backlash Following Trades and Losing Season

Parking was still a topic in the sports section, but not nearly as much in this segment of the sample as compared to non-sports articles of this time. Instead, there was much more talk about stadium attendance. On the day before Marlins Park was to host its first regular-season game, Major League Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig said that Miami’s “chronically fickle support of the Marlins would end” with the birth of the new ballpark (Hanks, 2012, para. 1). Previously, the Marlins had times when so few fans came to their games that players admitted they could hear fans’ cell phones ringing in the upper decks of their former stadium during games (Capozzi, 2012a). After many years of very low attendance figures, the matter of if the team could receive consistently high attendance in the new ballpark was the biggest question facing the Marlins heading into the 2012 season (Hyde, 2012). The first game was a sellout, and many more such games were considered very possible as the team had sold three times as many season tickets at the start of the year as it had sold entering the 2011 season. Team president David Samson said he expected the team to finish in the top-10 in attendance (Jackson, 2012).

The Marlins finished that season 18th in the league in attendance. They did reach two million in total attendance for the first time since 1997, but that number was considered deceiving since official attendance figures count only the number of people who bought tickets, not the number of people who attended each game. The Marlins’

“turnstile” attendance was estimated to be about 1.4 million fans, a total that Samson said was lower than what he and other team executives had considered to be the worst-case scenario for attendance (Hanks, 2013b). Samson said that lack of attendance revenue was one of the reasons why the team had to drastically cut payroll during and after the season. “The attendance impacted everything. We looked at our revenue numbers, and the team has to be able to sustain itself” (Hanks and Jackson, 2013, para. 4).

These moves resulted in many negative reactions from fans and writers alike. Marlins fans Nancy Farrell and Mercy Garcia said the trades upset them and are one reason why it was unlikely they would renew their season tickets for the 2013 season. “Now we don’t even know who is on the field,” Farrell said (Spencer, 2012, para. 14). Other fans threatened to boycott the team (Capozzi, 2013). Palm Beach Post writer Greg Stoda wrote team owner Jeffrey Loria had “alienated” the team’s fan base by taking many of the known commodities off of the roster and replacing them with players “better suited for [minor-league] competition” (Stoda, 2013, para. 5). Marlins fan Dan Barton said, “It’s just sheer selfishness. False promises, false hopes. We’re tired of Jeffrey Loria” (Stoda, 2013, para. 15).

Marlins blogger Michael Jong said the trades hurt Marlins fans because, “They thought things were going to change” (Hanks and Jackson, 2013, para. 8). The team’s fans had already seen the Marlins hold fire sales in which they sold off their best players for cheap, first in 1998, and then in 2005 under Loria’s ownership. Jong said fans got their hopes up that things would be different after the Marlins spent a lot of money adding star players before the 2012 season. As Dave George put it, the 2012 season began with new players, a new stadium, and new uniforms for the team but ended with

the "all-too-familiar Marlins" (George, 2012a, para. 1). Neil DeMause, a blogger who tracks stadium subsidies, said, "It's the same old low-revenue, low-cost scenario they've been running for most of the past 15 years" (Hanks and Jackson, 2013, para. 19).

George called the Marlins' November trade with the Toronto Blue Jays centered around Jose Reyes and Mark Buehrle "a salary-dumping trade that follows a long franchise tradition of kicking dirt in the face of South Florida fans and telling them to like it." (2012b, para. 2). George continued:

"Can't draw up a better in-your-face to fans than to ship off the two supposed faces of the franchise, the same players who were advertised as the cornerstones of a grand new Marlins legacy in a brand new ballpark" (para 7).

Loria printed a full-page letter in local newspapers after the season, defending the moves he made as "tough but necessary" (Capozzi, 2013). Loria said the team's chemistry needed to be fixed and the moves were made in an effort to infuse the organization with more young talent after the veteran team didn't win enough. (Capozzi, 2013). Loria also said the team lost tens of millions of dollars during Marlins Park's first season. (Hanks, 2013b). Samson understood that fans were not happy with the changes. "Fans are reticent and upset," he said. "I so sorry about that" (Hanks, 2013b, para. 23).

Descriptions of the Stadium Financing Plan

Frank Nero was the president of the Beacon Council, a non-profit organization that focuses on job creation and economic growth in Miami-Dade County. He was ousted in 2013, but in 2012, just before Marlins Park was set to open, he sponsored a luncheon with local community leaders to talk about the new stadium, among other topics. At that luncheon, he urged those leaders to embrace the stadium and not concern themselves

with the public dollars being invested into it. “Let’s get over it,” he said. “Let’s celebrate what we have” (Hanks, 2012, para. 7). That quote, and Dave Hyde’s statement that any praise for the design of the stadium should first be directed toward the public for “footing the bill” (2012, para. 18) are the only two references to the stadium’s public financing in the 18 articles contained in this segment of the sample written before the end of the Marlins’ 2012 season. Once the disappointing season ended, with the Marlins finishing with a losing record, stripped of star players and boasting underwhelming attendance figures, seven of this segment’s remaining 12 articles mentioned the stadium’s public financing.

Dave George wrote that the Miami and Miami-Dade Commissioners “look like fools for throwing precious recession-era millions at a company that has just exported its top-quality products to Canada ...” (George, 2012b, para. 6). Miami Herald writer David J. Neal wrote from the stadium’s perspective soon after the Blue Jays trade. He portrayed Marlins Park as a “sentient Death-Star like construct” that was “laughing” at Miami (2012, para. 3).

“My master, Lord Loria, merely dangled a few promises before you to fool you into helping to create me! Now, the mighty tractor beam of my debt will suck the money from your present and future pockets as you slave while I make Lord Loria ever richer and more powerful. BWAAAA-HA-HA-HA” (2012, para. 4)!

Marlins Park’s financing was also mentioned in a couple of articles regarding the Miami Dolphins’ request for public money to assist in the team’s \$400 million stadium renovation. There was “revived ire” toward the Marlins’ deal once the Dolphins began to

pursue public money for help with their own stadium (Hanks, 2013b, para. 13). Dave George said the commissions shouldn't give money to billionaire Dolphins owner Stephen Ross because, "It's too soon after the Marlins' feeding frenzy" (George, 2013, para. 7). Loria said critics of the stadium financing plan should consider that the majority of the public funding is being supplied through hotel taxes that are paid largely by tourists, not residents. Still, George would like to see it spent elsewhere than on a stadium. "Kindergartners will turn into college graduates ... and then into parents. We're talking about an entire generation of Floridians, all of them in need of quality education and other basics" (2013, para. 8).

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Marlins Park is built and has been in use for two full Major League Baseball seasons and began its third in April. The Marlins have a combined record of 131-193, have finished last in their division each year, and have the third-worst record in baseball during that time. After a short-lived spike in attendance in 2012, the Marlins posted the second-lowest attendance in baseball in 2013 and were one of only two teams to average less than 20,000 fans per game. After opening that first season with a payroll of \$118 million, the Marlins' opening-day payroll in 2013 dropped to a little less than \$40 million, second-lowest in the league (Associated Press, 2013). The Marlins' 2014 opening-day payroll is about \$47 million, still second-lowest in the league (Blum, 2014).

The Marlins receive almost all revenue created by the stadium, such as ticket and concession sales, advertising, some parking spaces, gate receipts from any other event that takes place in the stadium when the Marlins aren't playing, etc. A 2013 valuation by Forbes estimated that the Marlins are worth \$520 million, 15 percent more than a year before and slightly more than double the \$256 million estimate in 2008 when the Marlins, Miami and Miami-Dade County had not yet agreed on terms for a new stadium (Hanks and Jackson, 2013). Meanwhile, the first payment on some sets of bonds that Miami and Miami-Dade County sold to finance the stadium project is not due for more than a decade. They will be paying off their debt through 2048. By that time, it is estimated that the city and county will have paid about \$2.4 billion related to the stadium project. (Tomer & Kulkarni, 2012).

Sports writers have a tendency at times to put more importance on a game or what is good for the sport than on a related topic with far more important effects. This study shows instances of that in articles by Greg Cote (2009), and Juan C. Rodriguez (2009b). This study also sports writers weren't blindly in favor of the public financing plan as shown by Dave George (2009), but his opinion was a minority one in the 2009-2011 sample. It wasn't until after the Marlins' unfulfilling 2012 season and after a handful of the team's best players had been traded that the disapproval of the public financing plan from sports writers became more frequent. Non-sports articles, either through quotes from sources within the story or the opinion of the writer, contained more criticism of the plan before the stadium opened in 2012. Mentions of the public financing plan in non-sports articles also were also fairly common once the Marlins' season ended, but sports articles contained angrier language and more disapproval the plan, the stadium and/or Marlins owner Jeffrey Loria during this time. This is shown in articles by Dave Hyde (2012b) and David J. Neal (2012).

A change in philosophy?

As Humphreys and Humphreys noted (2008a), most researchers find no correlation between economic growth and the presence of new sports facilities. Yet, many cities fund these stadiums and then are left paying off their debt for years, perhaps even after the stadium is demolished or abandon by the team for which it was built. The New York Times' Ken Belson wrote in 2010 that major cities such as Indianapolis, Philadelphia, Memphis, Pittsburgh, and Houston are still paying for stadiums with those exact circumstances. In 2010, residents in Seattle's King County still owed more than \$80 million for the Kingdome, the former home of the MLB's Seattle Mariners and

NFL's Seattle Seahawks that was demolished in 2000. At that same time, residents in New Jersey still owed more than \$100 million for Giants Stadium, which was home to the NFL's New York Giants since the 1970s and the NFL's New York Jets since the 1980s until it was closed down and demolished in 2010.

While a substantial amount of public money is still being contributed to the construction of sports stadiums – Cobb County, Ga. agreed in November to contribute \$300 million toward a new stadium for MLB's Atlanta Braves (Klepel, 2013) – there are more and more examples of requests for public money from sports franchises are being turned down. In November, the owner of the MLB's Washington Nationals, Ted Lerner, asked the mayor of Washington D.C., Vincent C. Gray, to approve a proposal for the city to pay for a \$300 million retractable roof over the Nationals' stadium. According to Adam Kilgore of the Washington Post, Gray was “shocked” by the proposal and turned it down (Axisa, 2013). The Nationals' stadium was already built using nearly \$700 of public subsidies. A proposal by the MLB's Chicago Cubs asking for \$200 million from the state of Illinois for stadium renovations was struck down by the state legislature (Sudo, 2010). The Florida State Legislature rejected the Miami Dolphins' proposal for financial assistance in renovating its stadium, as was mentioned in the study (Hanks, 2014).

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Appendix A

Code Sheet

1. Publication title
2. Article headline, date, author and section:
3. What is the focus of the article?
4. What sources are used in the article?
5. Is Marlins Park described in the article? If so, how is it described
6. Is there a mention of stadium financing in the article? If so, how is it described?
7. What is the overall tone of the article?