

Sport as a Kingmaker?

How Members of the Ontario Legislature Connect Through Sport

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Abstract:

While there are many possibilities for a politician to connect with his or her constituents, sport offers a unique opportunity to engage with a large intersectional community. In Ontario, an MPP at a rink or football field is a common sight, as is a retweet of a Blue Jays update. However, there is more to be revealed from these simple sights. Upon closer analysis, questions arise as to why the MPP attends the minor league game, and what benefits it provides. In this paper, the value in an MPP associating with sport will be explored along with the potential challenges that can arise from it.

Sport: An activity involving physical exertion in which an individual or team competes against another or others for entertainment or for recreation.

Research Question:

How do Ontario Members of Provincial Parliament (MPP) associate with sport? What significant value does it give them as an MPP? Do MPPs intentionally use sport? If so, how? What are the benefits and challenges in associating with sport?

Method:

A mixed methods approach of primary and secondary research, through a literature review and qualitative interviews. Ten personal interviews from a non-random stratified sample were conducted with Members of the Ontario Legislature. MPPs were selected for interviews from a pool of MPPs that had one or more sport related member statements between July 2, 2014 & December 8, 2016. A formal questionnaire of qualitative, open-minded questions was designed as a guide to structure the interviews.

Results:

Given the responses of the MPPs, they recognize the value in the image of a physically active MPP and that it can provide credibility, relatability and the belief that they are better at their job. MPPs interact with sport by attending events, speaking directly to constituents and building personal connections.

They use members' statements, social media accounts and scrolls to recognize sporting success in their riding. Angry constituents and the possibility of awkward photo-ops can pose as challenges for MPPs when they associate with sport, however blending in with the crowd and celebrating with fans will prevent members from being booed at games. Sport is far too valuable to be avoided by today's MPP.

Sport can help to build a sense of community and high levels of social capital, it has a vast network of active community leaders, and the boosterism of athletic facilities and local talent can have a positive impact on the local economy.

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