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THE POWER OF PLACE

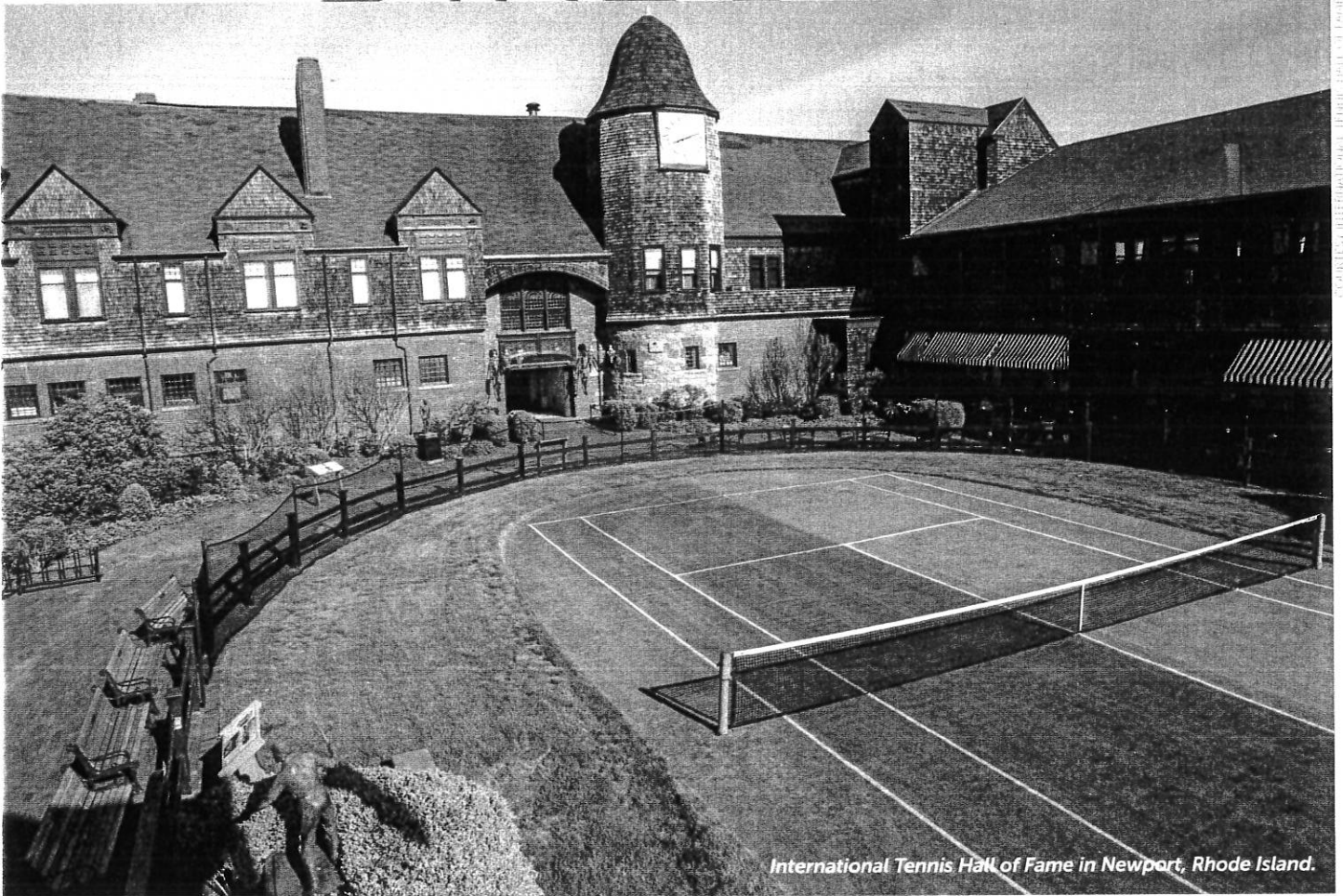
MORE THAN A FEELING:
Measuring the Impact of
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**SPACES THAT TELL
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NEW DIRECTIONS



International Tennis Hall of Fame in Newport, Rhode Island.

for Interpreting Sports at Museums and Historic Sites

By Douglas Stark

If you have ever visited a sports museum or hall of fame, you've probably had this experience: you begin walking the galleries. You stop at a few exhibits. You see great athletes and victory moments in the team's history—a Super Bowl win or World Series home run. Rows of old bats, clubs, balls, uniforms, and black and white photographs adorn the walls, reaffirming your image of a museum as a repository for old stuff. Statistics are presented with anecdotal content about your favorite team. You nod as you remember a famous moment, but your connection or interest stops there. You gloss over the content, which seems irrelevant to what you were seeking.



Visitors to the museum at the International Tennis Hall of Fame engage in a trivia game on a five-foot touch table.



COURTESY, INTERNATIONAL TENNIS HALL OF FAME

If you have had that experience, you would not be alone. Sports interpretation, though, is growing up.

While much of the focus in previous decades has been on great moments and athletes, sports museums and halls of fame have made a concerted effort in recent years to reimagine their visitor experiences. New interpretive models move away from glorification and towards placing great moments and individuals within a historical context. How did Jackie Robinson breaking baseball's long-standing color barrier give voice to the burgeoning civil rights movement? How did the rivalry between golfers Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus in the 1960s parallel the existing Cold War atmosphere between the United States and the Soviet Union? In what ways does tennis's multinational participation reflect the world's globalization?

By incorporating multimedia presentations steeped in research and scholarship, sports museums and halls of fame are making their experiences more modern and engaging. Comprehensive sports educational programming is an outgrowth of more balanced interpretation and fan-friendly environments. Leveraging the stories of their hall of famers, these institutions can explore issues of race, class, gender equity, civil rights, globalization, and STEAM education in depth. By

creating interdisciplinary programs, character education lessons, health and wellness programs, distance learning opportunities, participatory experiences, and stadium tours, sports institutions are trying to create more relevant experiences and foster conversations that are more central to the education of their communities.

Interdisciplinary Programs

How can tennis be used to explore topics such as math, science, arts, history, foreign language, and literacy? This is a question that the museum staff at the International Tennis Hall of Fame in Newport, Rhode Island, has been tackling since it renovated the museum experience in 2015. Since then, the museum has been developing education programs that allow students and teachers to explore the history of tennis and the impact champions have had on the game's growth and development. Innovative programs designed around curriculum-based learning encourage the exploration of the Hall of Fame's world-class museum collection and multimedia exhibitions. The museum staff builds lessons around Hall of Famers as well as contemporary players. Their lives and accomplishments form the basis for each lesson with the goal of incorpo-

rating their stories into a larger narrative thread. Exploring the stories of Althea Gibson and Arthur Ashe can open a window into a discussion on civil rights. Billie Jean King's story is used as the centerpiece for lessons around gender equity and equal pay. Rhode Island schoolchildren combine these lessons with a field trip to the museum, which culminates their learning experience.

The National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, takes a similar approach to developing interdisciplinary programs. Utilizing statistics, educators at the Baseball Hall of Fame can create mathematical lessons focusing on whole numbers, decimals, fractions, percentages, and problem solving. Study of baseball field dimensions, which varies for every stadium, presents an opportunity to discuss geometry. Popular culture is explored through lessons on food at the

tour the museum and participate in project-based activities, tour Levi's® Stadium (where the 49ers play their home games), explore technological innovation and environmental sustainability, and procure curricula specifically tailored to their classroom learning. The program is so successful that the museum is closed to visitors Monday to Friday so that schoolchildren can visit exclusively during the week.

Participatory Experiences

As new sports museums sprout up across the country, they now intentionally include social participatory experiences during the design process. Museums want visitors to engage not only with the content, but with each other. At the International Tennis Hall of Fame, visitors are encouraged to share experiences. In the "Popular Culture" section of the museum, there is a five-foot touch table that allows visitors to participate in a trivia game scored like a tennis match. Visitors are able to select a player avatar and serve questions back and forth from categories such as technology, pop culture, and social history, among others. Players have twenty seconds to select an answer from three choices. This experience allows visitors to learn the game's history in a fun and often competitive environment. In addition, there are four stations on the table's two long sides that allow for more in-depth exploration on similar topics, and visitors can pass that information to one another across the table. Up to six people can be interacting with the table and each other at any one time and the questions can be updated internally. In addition, the touch table offers an education mode that can be custom designed to work with schools.

This kind of personalization effort is not just *part* of the Atlanta, Georgia-based College Football Hall of Fame—it is the centerpiece of the guest experience. Upon entering the facility, fans are asked to create their own personal credential that is tagged using radio frequency identification (RFID), connecting it to the fan's favorite college football team. Upon entering the museum, visitors sign up at a kiosk and receive a press lanyard with an RFID chip inside. This allows the Hall of Fame to tailor content to each individual guest during their visit. With one hundred RF readers at the exhibits, the entrance, and throughout the facility, fans can easily retrieve content that specifically interests them by using their lanyard. Visitors have the opportunity to collect images and videos of their visit and then share that content with friends through multiple social media platforms.

While participatory experiences can be high-tech in some museums, in others, low-tech options offer a uniquely entertaining and educational experience. At the United States Golf Association (USGA) Museum in Far Hills, New Jersey, visitors are treated to a museum experience that showcases the history and role the USGA has played in the game's development. Key periods and events in the game's history are highlighted and told through the evolution of equipment and other memorable objects. Ultimately, however, all golfers and

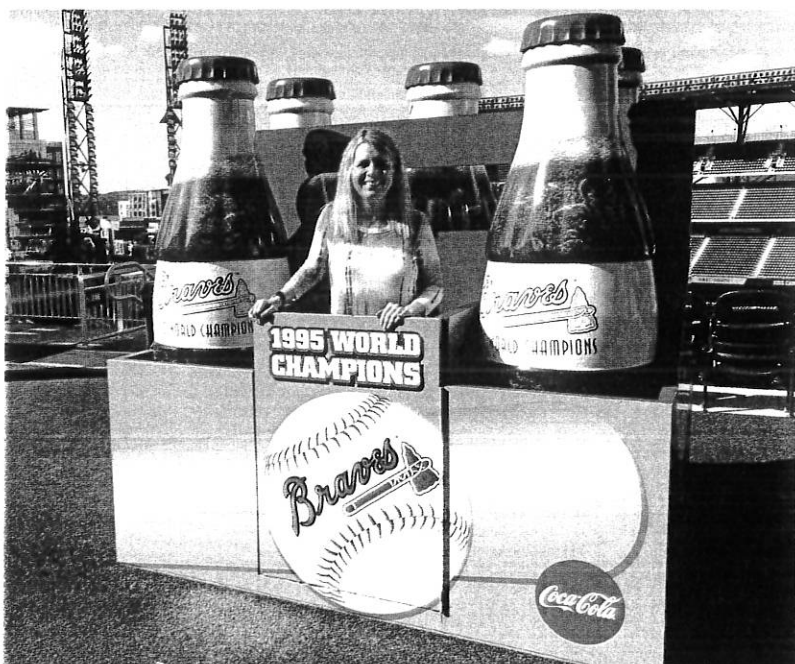


PHOTO BY BRUCE BARBER

"Coca-Cola Corner" is one of the many stops on guided tours of the Atlanta Braves' SunTrust Park.

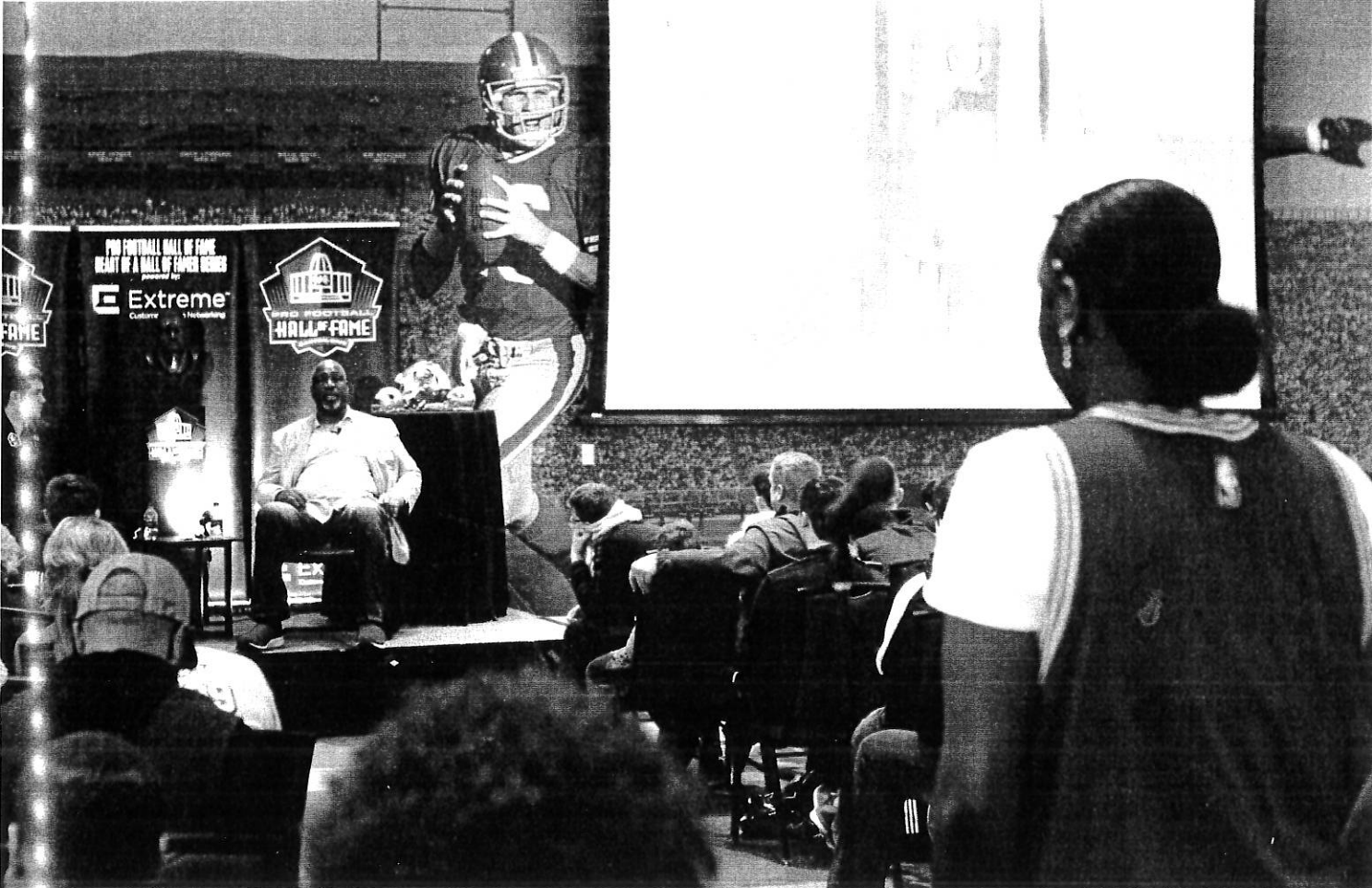
ballpark, the song "Take Me Out to the Ballgame," and ballpark idioms. As such, the Baseball Hall of Fame is creating opportunities for visitors to explore multiple subjects through the lens of baseball.

STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) education is currently a hot topic in museum education and is the centerpiece of the educational programs of the San Francisco 49ers Museum. When the team built its new stadium and museum, the organization decided to develop and implement an enriching and comprehensive education program from the ground up. Aligned with Common Core and Next Generation Science Standards, the STEAM program is innovative in its use of technology to encourage students to problem-solve. Students have opportunities to



Above: Gold Jacket (a living Hall of Famer) Charles Haley speaks to students from all over northeast Ohio as part of the Pro Football Hall of Fame's "Heart of a Hall of Famer" series.

Below: As part of the program, students get the chance to interact with each Gold Jacket, asking them questions based around the Pro Football Hall of Fame's Core Values of Commitment, Integrity, Courage, Respect, and Excellence.



golf fans want the opportunity to swing a club. The USGA Museum offers a unique opportunity for visitors to hold and swing reproductions of old hickory-shafted clubs. Located behind the museum is a sixteen-thousand-square-foot green inspired by the humps and swales of the world-renowned Himalayas putting course in St. Andrews, Scotland. Visitors can putt using replica antique clubs and balls, providing them a unique way to experience the game's early years.

Distance Learning

Not all students and teachers can travel to a museum to participate in education programs. Sports museums and halls of fame have been doing a better job of making their museums more accessible to students around the globe. The Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio, has made great strides in providing distance learning opportunities that fans can access from any part of the world. Through video conferencing, schoolchildren have an opportunity to learn from a Hall of Fame staff member. With eleven lessons available, including "Movement and Motion," "Careers in the NFL," "African American Trailblazers," and "Team Nicknames," to name a few, students and teachers have access to a variety of information and lessons from the Hall of Fame. In a question and answer format, students have an opportunity to learn about the Hall of Fame and the game's history even if they cannot visit the museum.

Character in Education

Sports museums and halls of fame are uniquely positioned to discuss the values of the game and to incorporate character education into their offerings. Children of all ages can explore values such as determination, sacrifice, grace, perseverance, dedication, discipline, courage, focus, integrity, spirit, athleticism, and sportsmanship. The Pro Football Hall of Fame also offers the "Heart of a Hall of Famer" program, which provides students the opportunity to learn first-hand the effort required to achieve Hall of Fame-level success on and off the football field. The program focuses on the Hall of Fame Values of Commitment, Integrity, Courage, Respect, and Excellence. Through this program, students can interact live with a Hall of Famer through video conferencing. Some of these programs originate from Canton, Ohio, while others are broadcast from the featured Hall of Famer's community. The discussion is moderated by the Hall of Fame staff and allows students from around the United States to hear and ask questions of a Hall of Famer about the values, off-the-field stories, and triumphs that contributed to the inductee's success.

In the social media age, cyber bullying is a growing concern for children of all ages and their parents. The Sports Museum of New England in Boston, Massachusetts, developed and implemented an extensive anti-bullying program entitled "Boston vs. Bullies" in conjunction with anti-bullying legislation passed in Massachusetts. With involvement from the

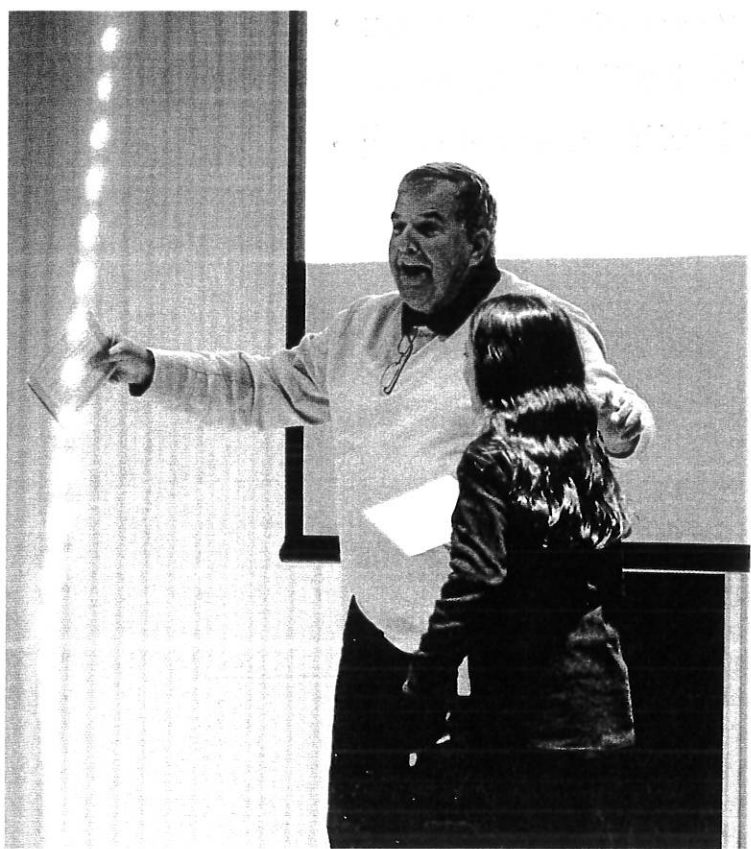
Celtics, Red Sox, Bruins, Patriots, Revolution (men's soccer), Cannons (men's lacrosse), Breakers (women's soccer), and a local representative of USA Gymnastics, the "Boston vs. Bullies" program discusses what a bully is, with additional lessons on helping students identify personal bullying behavior, if they are being bullied, how to know if they are witnessing bullying as a bystander, how to help stop bullying, and how to recognize cyberbullying. With participation from the athletes, a facilitator guide, and discussion questions, the museum provides schools around the Commonwealth the opportunity to discuss and role-play issues surrounding bullying and good bullying prevention.

Stadium Tours

In recent years, many professional and collegiate teams have either designed and built new stadiums or renovated existing ones. Many organizations have taken that opportunity to become more fan-friendly, create environments that appeal to visitors of all ages and levels of sports interest, and find different and unique ways to integrate their team's histories into a new building or renovation. In some instances, teams create a separate hall of fame either attached to the stadium or adjacent to it. Others have incorporated their histories into the stadium, interweaving objects and memorabilia into the concourse, stairwells, plazas, fan zones, concessions areas, and entrances. Fans are now able to get close—but not too close—to vintage items from their team's past and to connect with the history throughout their time at the game.

Fenway Park, home of Major League Baseball's Boston Red Sox, has interspersed the team's century-old history throughout the stadium, allowing fans to see items used by Ted Williams, photos of storied World Series moments, and stadium memorabilia. The Detroit Pistons (basketball) and Detroit Red Wings (hockey) both share Little Caesars Arena in downtown Detroit, and display nearly a thousand historical objects throughout the arena. Overall, teams are finding





"Boston vs. Bullies" facilitator Ed Donnelly role-plays with students on how to respond in a bullying situation.

ways to forge deeper and longer lasting connections with fans while helping to build greater brand awareness and affinity. Developing fans for life and encouraging a multi-generational connection to the team is a paramount goal for these organizations.

Stadium tours are an additional way to offer fans an educational and meaningful experience. When the Atlanta Braves baseball team opened its new stadium at SunTrust Park, they reimagined their fan experience. Instead of operating a separate museum as they did at Turner Field, their former ballpark, the team decided to incorporate their museum and history throughout the new facility. The stadium exhibits include objects and stories told in exhibits on Braves history, Cy Young Award winners in team history, Braves who have been elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, no-hitters in team history, and team managers. Guides provide tours prior to games and escort fans through the park to premium clubs, suites, the Hank Aaron Terrace, and the concourses. Some of the exhibits and memorabilia are located in these areas, which are only open to tours or ticket holders. Many areas include opportunities for fans to take selfies or capture unique photographs of the surrounding areas. Coca-Cola, whose headquarters reside in Atlanta, has a small sponsored exhibit allowing fans to take their photo inside a six pack of Coke with the ballpark in the background. The team believes that sprinkling these exhibit tours throughout the stadium helps fans enhance their knowledge of the team while providing an experience that hopefully encourages them to return to see another game.

Parting Shots

Interpretation and education at sports halls of fame, museums, and even ballparks, stadiums, and arenas, has grown considerably in the past two decades. As the museum sides of these institutions have professionalized, so too have the interpretations and presentations of their histories and the ways in which they offer educational programs. With more research to provide greater context, sports halls of fame and museums are able to transition from history that was based around great players and moments to situating that history into a larger historical narrative.

Sports halls of fame and museums have a unique advantage in that they are able to utilize the presence of athletes and hall of famers to communicate stories and themes and to connect to larger, modern-day contextual issues. As an example, a discussion of equal pay can include the desire of the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team for pay commensurate with their male counterparts. This shift provides an exceptional opportunity that sports institutions can leverage into an immediate and contemporary connection to present-day issues. This ongoing relevancy is an advantage over most other types of museums.

While sports education and interpretation is maturing, it has yet to reach the adult stage. These types of institutions can still make a greater effort to foster discussions around difficult topics. Sports offer a unique way of connecting people and illuminating controversial issues. In recent years, labor issues, sports business, the effects of concussions, performance enhancing drugs, cheating, domestic violence, and kneeling during the national anthem are all topics that have largely dominated the sports media discussion. These conversations have extended the sports consciousness beyond traditional fans and now include those less attuned to on-field achievements and more interested in the social, economic, political, and moral ramifications of sports.

These institutions could do much more to address serious and controversial issues. However, as museums find creative ways to incorporate contemporary issues, even when controversial, into education and interpretation programs they will foster a more comprehensive understanding of sports and its impact on society while also promoting a more inclusive sporting culture. Although that is clearly the next step for these institutions to take, the current trends in improved educational opportunities and interpretative experiences at sports museums and halls of fame offer many lessons for all museums to incorporate.



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