

SPORTS OF ALL SORTS

Year Features Intriguing Stories

By Tom Schuman

Sports are big business. Few would argue with that statement today. The only contention might be at what point do youthful games turn into an emphasis on dollars and cents.

We'll leave that argument to another day. During the past year, *BizVoice*[®] focused on the adults and delivered a wide-ranging series on the Business of Sports. Among the feature stories were a spotlight on:

- Individuals – former Pacer Jonathan Bender and his transformation from injuries to entrepreneur
- Fan experiences – MainGate merchandising and dynamic pricing
- Teams – the new Indy Eleven professional soccer franchise
- Organizations – the four Olympic governing bodies that call Indianapolis home
- Two wheels – cycling and biking through the eyes of a community, university, company and business leader
- Athletes off the field – partnerships to help professionals with their education and language skills

What follows are summaries of those lead stories (you can read for the first time or re-read the full articles in the archives section of www.bizvoicemagazine.com), including brief updates on recent developments in some areas.

In coming years, we'll be back with occasional Business of Sports features. Your comments and suggestions are always welcome at tschuman@indianachamber.com.

November-December 2013 Nothing but Net (Profits?)



Growing up in Picaune, Mississippi, Jonathan Bender didn't think much about the quest for profits or the aches and pains of launching a start-up business. Now, he's pounding the pavement in an effort to sell the JB Intensive Trainer – a device he's created to help users build leg strength without stressing their knees.

Though he had a thin frame, Bender ultimately grew to be seven feet tall. His towering height, coupled with his athleticism,

garnered a great deal of attention. He became the fifth pick in the 1999 NBA draft (selected by the Toronto Raptors but immediately traded to the Indiana Pacers). After a career plagued by frequent knee injuries in between flashes of encouraging play, Bender left the game and ultimately retired in 2010.

Bender on attributes shared by athletes and entrepreneurs: "Determination, consistency and being able to stay focused on one thing even if you've failed in some areas over and over – and the work ethic."

UPDATE: Among those telling the Bender story in 2014 – *Fortune*, *Forbes*, *Sports Illustrated* and *Fox Business*. The product, now known as the JBIT MedPro, has experienced 5,000% sales growth over the past 18 months.

January-February 2014 Bouncing Ball of Revenue



If you've ever wondered why professional and college sports teams charge the same ticket prices when the best rivals and the not-so-great opponents come to town, you're not alone. In fact, those very sports outlets are now taking a closer look at the process – and some are employing a dynamic pricing system in hopes of garnering maximum returns.

Digonex, an Indianapolis-based company that specializes in ticket sales strategy, has developed its own

mechanism – the Sports and Entertainment Analytical Ticketing System (SEATS). It uses complex algorithms to help teams earn maximum revenue by adjusting prices.

Digonex CEO Jan Eglon on the growing dynamic pricing trend in sports ticketing: "You don't always have to increase prices in order to increase revenues. You need to price smarter. Sometimes, you can drop prices to get more people in the seats, and make more money on the ancillaries like merchandise, food and parking."

UPDATE: In June, Emmis Communications purchased a controlling interest in Digonex. Emmis Chairman and CEO Jeff Smulyan says: "We are certain that dynamic pricing is the future of all inventory management. As a company that sells hundreds of millions of dollars in advertising units, we believe that this acquisition will help us find the optimal price for our entire inventory and increase revenue opportunities."

March-April 2014
'Pitching' the World's Game



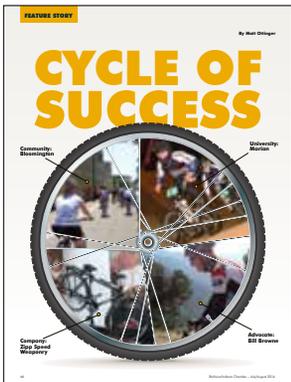
One year after the announcement of its formation, Indy Eleven – Indiana’s professional soccer team – is scoring with fans. Before the first season kicked off, a whopping 7,000 season tickets had been sold. The team capped sales because its temporary field – Carroll Stadium on the campus of Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis – only seats 11,000 and the organization wants to allow group and single ticket sales.

Indy Eleven Owner Ersal Ozdemir: “This is the wealthiest

country in the world. We think we can have one of the best soccer leagues in the world. We can be competitive and as fan support grows, we can get better and afford to pay more for players and hope to get to the same level as European and South American soccer.”

UPDATE: While the team suffered a number of close losses throughout its inaugural season, it continued to shine at the box office and in the community. It led the North American Soccer League in attendance with more than 10,400 fans per game (through September) – double the average of seven of the 10 teams in the league – and made its mark through a variety of sponsorships and partnerships.

July-August 2014
Cycle of Success



Bloomington earned a silver-accredited “Bicycle Friendly Community” recognition from the League of American Bicyclists in 2010. Its B-Line Trail – a 3.1-mile multi-use trail that cuts through downtown – has benefited the area in many ways.

Marian University’s cycling team boasts 26 national championships since 1992. The Knights are among the nation’s leading cycling programs and compete in many disciplines,

including track, road, mountain biking, cyclo-cross and BMX.

Indianapolis’ west side is home to one of the world’s most notable cycling companies: Zipp Speed Weaponry – and its parent company, Chicago-based SRAM. They boast high-profile clients such as 2008 Tour de France winner Carlos Sastre (of Spain).

Bill Browne, founding principal/president of RATIO Architects, Inc. in Indianapolis, has mixed business with pleasure to enrich Central Indiana’s biking community. Browne was instrumental in designing PowerBooster (Marian University’s indoor cycling training business, which helps fund the team).

May-June 2014
Strategic Fit: Sports Organization at Home in Indy



The story of Indianapolis becoming known as the amateur sports capital is a well-documented journey that began more than 35 years ago. The leaders of four Olympic national governing bodies are first-hand witnesses to the special qualities that still make the city a desired destination.

USA Track & Field, USA Gymnastics, USA Diving and USA Synchro have all called Indianapolis home since the early 1980s. Meetings, competitions, Indiana business partners

and more contribute to an ongoing economic and cultural impact.

Steven Penny, president and CEO of USA Gymnastics: “What makes a city special is when you feel like you own the town. You can showcase sports here because you can own it. That’s not always the case in bigger cities.”

Don’t miss the sidebar on the thrill of “hitting the wall” at the Indiana University Natatorium.

UPDATE: It’s noted in the story, but more major events are on the horizon. They include the 2015 P&G Gymnastics Championships (the premier competition in the coming year) and the 2016 Olympic Diving Trials.

September-October 2014
Rounding Out the Pros



Three years ago, Venus Williams decided to enroll at Indiana University (IU) East to pursue her bachelor’s degree. That led to a partnership between the Women’s Tennis Association (WTA) and the school.

As of fall 2013, IU East is the exclusive partner of the WTA for online bachelor’s degrees for professional women tennis players. Approximately 20 WTA athletes currently are enrolled in the program, which offers 10 different bachelor’s degrees.

Williams: “There has to be life after the sport. As an athlete, you end so early ... and you have to figure out who you are and what you do. I’m excited that these other players are figuring that out.”

Since 2009, Indianapolis-based Language Training Center (LTC) has had an agreement with the Ladies Professional Golf Association to offer language and cultural training. It’s also served a variety of other professional athletic groups.