

1       **The Impact of Short-Term Mega Sporting Event Experiences on Student Learning**

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4       Keyword: experiential learning, learning outcomes, hands-on learning, field experience, mega

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### Abstract

Short-term mega sporting events provide an opportunity for students to not only gain a memorable career experience, but also enhance student skills and learning. However, very few (if any) researchers have explored students' confidence related to key skills before and after such an event. Thus, the purpose of this study was to assess the effect of experiential learning at the National Football League's (NFL) 2023 Super Bowl LVII mega event on students' learning outcomes. Students ( $n = 103$ ) responded to an online survey distributed to assess their self-confidence across 18 learning outcome skills covering problem-solving, communication, sport industry knowledge, and professional development. Each dependent sample t-test done to examine the students' self-confidence with the individual learning outcome skills were significant ( $p < .001$ ) and had meaningfully increased (Cohen's  $d$  range: 0.47 – 0.97) from pre- to post-event. The results suggest students can experience a notable increase in self-confidence when volunteering at a short-term mega sporting event. From a practical standpoint, the results provide sport management educators with strong evidence of the meaningful student learning related to problem-solving, communication, sport industry knowledge, and professional development that can occur with a single short-term mega event experience.

### 36           **The Impact of Short-Term Mega Sporting Event Experiences on Student Learning**

37           Most individuals in and outside of academia think of experiential learning as a unique  
38 classroom assignment, a volunteer experience, a service-learning project, a practicum/internship,  
39 or an apprenticeship. The teaching and delivery method will vary, but ultimately most would  
40 agree that the goal of experiential learning is to enhance student success, professional  
41 development, and learning. Within sport management programs many experiential learning  
42 options exist (e.g., early practicum experience, employer shadowing, variable credit event  
43 experiences) to provide students with increased opportunities for professional development,  
44 practical experience, and to advance their professional networks (Brady et al., 2018). Although  
45 an immense amount of research has been published on experiential learning in higher education  
46 (see Kolb & Kolb, 2017), there is much to learn about the specific skills and outcomes such  
47 experiences promote in sport management.

48           In a review of U.S. sport management curriculum, more than 80% of sport management  
49 programs offered an experiential learning course (practicum/internship) as a degree requirement  
50 (Eagleman & McNary, 2010; Miller et al., 2023). The overarching goal of an experiential  
51 learning course is to provide students with an opportunity to enhance their educational  
52 experience and advance their professional portfolio. With an increasingly competitive job  
53 market, experiential learning opportunities can provide students with a chance to learn from  
54 experience, develop a professional network, and help to prepare them for professional  
55 employment (Ledford et al., 2018; Pate & Shonk, 2015; Sauder & Mudrick, 2018; Southall et al.,  
56 2003). As a result of the industry growth and increased popularity of sport management  
57 programs, an increasing number of programs are providing additional experiential learning  
58 opportunities, such as volunteering for an event in the community (e.g., Martin et al., 2016;

59 Mathner & Martin, 2012), and/or completing a semester-long hands-on project with a large sport  
60 organization (e.g., Cisek et al., 2023). Volunteering at large mega sporting events (e.g., Super  
61 Bowl, World Series, FIFA World Cup, Olympics, Final Four, Special Olympics) also provides an  
62 extended opportunity for sport management students and is becoming increasingly more  
63 common for sport management programs (Ledford et al., 2018; Pate & Shonk, 2015; Sauder et  
64 al., 2022; Warner & Buenaño, 2024).

65 As the industry continues to transform and sport management programs face exponential  
66 growth (Pierce et al., 2023), educators are finding ways to provide students with additional  
67 relevant experiential opportunities outside the traditional internship/capstone course. Of  
68 particular importance is how these various experiences add to student learning and professional  
69 development. The current literature on short-term mega sporting events and student learning  
70 outcomes is limited (*cf.* Pate & Shonk, 2015; Sauder et al., 2022). Additionally, compared to  
71 more traditional curricular experiential opportunities (e.g., internship/capstone), practical  
72 experiences like volunteering at the Super Bowl, NCAA Final Four, or Olympics often come  
73 with large costs to students, as well as to sport management programs. While educators continue  
74 to be creative, through curriculum or outside experiential opportunities, it is necessary to  
75 understand the value of these experiences and the learning outcomes for students. Thus, the  
76 purpose of this research was to explore student learning outcomes related to a short-term  
77 volunteer experience at a mega sporting event. Specifically, this research sought to understand  
78 the impact a short-term volunteer experience at a mega sporting event can have on a students'  
79 communication skills, problem-solving skills, professional development, and knowledge of the  
80 sport industry.

## 81 **Experiential Learning**

82 Kolb (1984) defined experiential learning as the “knowledge created through the  
83 transformation of experience, while knowledge results from the combination of grasping and  
84 transforming experience” (p. 41). Expanding on this, Stirling et al. (2017) indicated to enhance a  
85 student’s educational opportunities, educational experiences should contain clear learning  
86 opportunities and activities that include practice and reflection, connecting coursework and  
87 practical experience, as well as the implementing of creative ideas for practice. Thus,  
88 experiential learning does not have the same ambiance as a standard lecture and learning  
89 classroom. Rather, experiential learning offers “(1) concrete experience, (2) reflective  
90 observation, (3) abstract conceptualization, and (4) active experimentation” (Kolb, 1984, p. 30).

91 The benefits of experiential learning in the sport management discipline are wide-ranging.  
92 For example, sport management experiential learning benefits include opportunities to improve  
93 problem-solving skills and professional development (Burke et al., 2013), increase collaboration  
94 among students, and practical application (Malouf, 2003), and lead to a greater understanding  
95 and acceptance of diversity-related competencies (Cisek et al., 2023). Because of these benefits,  
96 many educators are motivated to create and integrate transformative experiences and meaningful  
97 experiential learning opportunities that can impact student learning.

### 98 ***Short-Term Mega Event***

99 Increasingly, volunteering at mega sporting events (e.g., Super Bowl, World Series, FIFA  
100 World Cup, Olympics, NCAA Final Four, Special Olympics) for a short-time period has become  
101 an additional experiential opportunity sport management educators provide students throughout  
102 their program (e.g., Cisek et al., 2023; Ledford et al., 2018; Pate & Shonk, 2015). Because mega  
103 sporting events rely heavily on anywhere from 1,500 to more than 10,000 volunteers, no matter  
104 the event, volunteers are an integral part of the event and its success (Chelladurai & Madella,

105 2006). Volunteers contribute nonmonetary services to the organization, worth billions of dollars  
106 (Lachance & Parent, 2021; Tedrick & Henderson, 1989). With the immense labor contributions  
107 of volunteers at sporting events, in addition to the competitive nature of the sport industry,  
108 volunteerism at mega sporting events can provide sport management students with a unique  
109 option to engage in a high-profile experiential learning opportunity. For students that may not  
110 have access or opportunities with professional teams or high-profile events because of their  
111 geographical location, volunteering at a recognizable well-established mega sporting event can  
112 help expand their network and broaden their perspective on job opportunities (Wallrodt &  
113 Thieme, 2020). While sport management students' motives for volunteering vary, Pate and  
114 Shonk (2015) found through a qualitative research project that career empowerment, learning,  
115 and preparation were the motivational factors that led to students volunteering at Super Bowl  
116 XLVII in New Orleans, Louisiana. Similarly, Ledford et al. (2018) revealed through their  
117 quantitative study that students were motivated to volunteer by altruistic motivations,  
118 professional development, and the general experience of volunteering at a mega sporting event  
119 for Super Bowl LI in Houston, Texas. While understanding student motivation for volunteering  
120 for short-term mega events is important, it is equally important to continue to understand the  
121 outcomes of such an experience.

122       **Student Outcomes of Mega Events.** It is clear from the extant literature that students are  
123 motivated by the professional and career development opportunities that a short-term mega  
124 sporting event can provide; however, it is the responsibility of educators to ensure students are  
125 gaining the skills to be successful. While hard skills (e.g., programming, writing) can be  
126 developed over time throughout course assignments, soft skills (e.g., interpersonal skills,  
127 problem-solving) are innate and acquired over time through interactive experiences. Miller et al.

128 (2023) found that less than 10% of sport management programs required a career exploration, or  
129 pre-internship preparation course, where soft skills could be explored. Interestingly, the  
130 researchers also found approximately 70% of sport management programs *required* an  
131 experiential learning course to complete their degree (with more than 80% offering an internship  
132 as a course option). Thus, many students are not provided with the opportunity to learn about or  
133 practice the soft skills needed to help them acquire experiential learning opportunities and  
134 internship opportunities. In an evaluation of sport management students preparedness, DeLuca  
135 and Braunstein-Minkove (2016) discovered students specified a desire for increased guidance  
136 and resources as it pertained to acquiring skills and competencies around professional  
137 development. The researchers also noted the site supervisors indicated students lacked soft skills  
138 in the areas of adaptability/coachability, interpersonal, accountability, and leadership skills.  
139 Consequently, it is important to determine if a single short-term mega sporting event experience  
140 could help fill this gap related to soft skills.

141 A handful of researchers have considered the student outcomes of working a short-term  
142 mega sporting event. Elstad (1996) found 50 student volunteers reported increased professional  
143 development, specifically their social skills, while volunteering during the XVII Olympic Winter  
144 Games in Lillehammer. More recently, Sauder et al. (2022) reported students (N = 54) perceived  
145 an increase in learning transferable skills and career management competencies from  
146 volunteering at a short-term, high-profile sporting event. Notably, few studies have explored  
147 student learning outcomes related to a short-term volunteer experience at a mega sporting event.  
148 Further, those studies involved student participants from one or two institutions. Thus, the  
149 overarching purpose of this study is to understand the impact of one short-term mega sporting  
150 event experience can have on students from more than 20 institutions. Specifically, based on

151 previous research that identified the importance of developing communication skills, problem-  
152 solving skills, professional development, and industry knowledge (e.g., Burke et al., 2013;  
153 DeLuca & Braunstein-Minkove, 2016; Sauder & Dexter, 2017), this study sought to  
154 quantitatively examine how an experiential learning opportunity at a short-term mega event can  
155 improve confidence in these areas. Therefore, the guiding research question is: Does students'  
156 self-confidence related to communication skills, problem-solving skills, professional  
157 development, and industry knowledge increase as a result of a short-term mega sporting event  
158 experiential learning opportunity?

## 159 **Method**

### 160 **Data Collection**

161 After IRB approval was received university students who volunteered to work the Super  
162 Bowl LVII held in Glendale, Arizona, were invited to take part in an online Qualtrics survey.  
163 During the week, Uncommon Sports worked directly with the NFL Teammates Division to reach  
164 out to sport management faculty overseeing student volunteers. Uncommon Sports then reached  
165 out to sport management faculty attending the event, informing them about a student networking  
166 event, consisting of a panel of sport industry professionals, round table discussions with students  
167 from different institutions, and a tour of Chase Field, home of the Arizona Diamondbacks.  
168 Students who registered to attend the networking event were emailed the Qualtrics survey one  
169 week prior to the event at Chase Field, and then received a follow up post-event survey via email  
170 the week after the event. Additionally, to capture a larger sample, sport management faculty  
171 across 25 institutions were asked to distribute the online survey to their respective students who  
172 volunteered at Super Bowl LVII held in Glendale, Arizona, one week after the event. In this  
173 online survey distributed by faculty leaders, students were asked if they attended networking



174 session and about learning outcomes “before” and “after” the experience. Based on ANOVAs  
175 with all non-significant Bonferroni corrected  $p$ -values, the datasets from both methods of  
176 distribution could be combined. Participants were informed that the study had received IRB  
177 approval, their responses would be anonymous and confidential, and participation was  
178 completely voluntary. A raffle for four \$50 gift cards was used as an incentive to encourage  
179 students to complete the survey following the event. In addition to the learning outcome items,  
180 the survey also included basic demographics: identities (i.e., gender, race, ethnicity), year in  
181 school, and GPA.

### 182 *Class Learning Outcomes Items*

183 First, wording of the learning outcome items was informed by the course objectives from  
184 an existing event management/pre-internship seminar course at one of the participating  
185 institutions. Each of the learning outcomes was supported by the existing literature (Burke et al.,  
186 2013; DeLuca & Braunstein-Minkove, 2016) and the Commission on Sport Management  
187 Accreditation (2022). The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on  
188 Colleges (SACSCOC) Criteria for Success has identified Critical Thinking/Problem-Solving,  
189 Communication, Leadership & Industry Knowledge, and Professional Preparedness as outcomes  
190 to assess for reporting by member institutions. The 18 learning outcome items were developed  
191 and approved to assess these four areas for the experiential learning course by both departmental-  
192 and university-level curriculum committees. Furthermore, the items were reviewed by a panel of  
193 experts; the panel included three professors with more than 35 years combined academic  
194 programming and sport industry experience along 10 upper-level undergraduate students. The  
195 students piloted the survey and reviewed each item. This review ensured the items' relevance,  
196 evaluated wording of each item for clarity and readability, allowed for the introduction of new

197 items, and the refinement of items (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021; Warner et al., 2013). The panel of  
198 experts and students suggested minor word changes to reduce redundancy and enhance item  
199 readability. The final step of this review process by the panel of experts was to build face validity  
200 (Field, 2018) of the 18 items by identifying the outcome category – Problem-Solving Skills,  
201 Communication Skills, Sport Industry Knowledge, and Professional Development – each item  
202 measured. Meeting consensus on the 18 items assessing these four areas (4 items for Problem-  
203 Solving Skills, 4 items for Communication Skills, 4 items for Sport Industry Knowledge, and 4  
204 items for Professional Development), all 18 items were used in the study. Participants responded  
205 to the final, refined 18 learning outcome items before and after the event with the response scale  
206 (1) No Confidence to (5) High Confidence. Because of the well-established literature that ties  
207 student's self-efficacy to learning outcomes (e.g., Artino, 2012; Bandura, 1977, 1986), a  
208 confidence scale was specifically used. Each learning outcome was analyzed as a single-item  
209 measured variable.

## 210 **Participants**

211 There were 103 NFL Super Bowl LVII student volunteers who participated in this study  
212 representing approximately a 34% response rate. Data provided by NFL Teammates (i.e.,  
213 volunteer program) organizers indicated that 25 universities had student volunteer representation.  
214 Using news media sources and/or faculty contacts, the number of total faculty-guided university  
215 student volunteers at Super Bowl LVII was determined to be 304. Ten participants did not  
216 provide pre-event or demographic responses. The participants were primarily seniors (n = 42)  
217 and juniors (n = 26), as well as a few freshmen (n = 3), sophomores (n = 6), and post-  
218 baccalaureate students (n = 10); six participants did not report their academic year. Most  
219 participants identified as women (n = 47), followed by men (n = 39), non-binary/third gender (n

220 = 1), and three did not respond. Participants primarily reported identifying as White/Caucasian (n  
221 = 72). The other races and ethnicities participants identified as were Black/African American (n  
222 = 5), Latinx/Hispanic (n = 4), Multiracial/Mixed (n = 3), Asian (n = 1), and Native American (n  
223 = 1). Seven did not report their racial/ethnicity identities.

#### 224 **Data Analysis**

225 First, the data were examined for and passed normality (skew  $\leq |0.5|$ , kurtosis  $\leq |0.5|$ ).  
226 Since 33 participants had a networking experience during the mega sporting event, a test was  
227 conducted to determine if combining was possible for the analyses across whether participants  
228 were in the networking experience or not. There were no significant differences across this  
229 grouping for the students' pre-experience confidence. Therefore, these participants' data were  
230 analyzed as a single sample. Across the full dataset, there was 14.18% missing data, of which  
231 11.33% of missing values were across the outcome and demographic items ranging from 9.7%  
232 (pre-outcome items, n = 10) to 41.7% (current GPA, n = 43). The most common missing data  
233 pattern was for complete data (i.e., 0% missing). Little's (2013) MCAR test was non-significant  
234 (Chi-square = 3531.739,  $df = 3828$ ,  $p = 1.00$ ); thus, the data were missing completely at random.  
235 Therefore, it was appropriate to handle the missing data with a modern technique (Enders, 2022);  
236 specifically estimation maximization (EM) was used. All the aforementioned and subsequent  
237 analyses were conducted in SPSS 29 (IBM, 2022). To address the research question, a dependent  
238 sample t-tests to examine if the students' self-confidence with the learning outcomes  
239 significantly increased from pre- to post-event was conducted. The one-tailed alpha level was set  
240 to .05. Cohen's  $d$  with 95% confidence intervals (95%CI) for each dependent comparison pair  
241 was calculated. This effect size is interpreted as 0.20 (small), 0.50 (medium), and 0.80 (large;  
242 Field, 2018).

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## Results

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Overall, the students reported having some to moderate confidence with respect to the learning outcomes pre-event and moved to “confident” by post-event (See Table 1). All 18 dependent samples t-tests were significant ( $p < .001$ ). See Table 2 for the pairwise comparison results. For 15 of the 18 learning outcomes, the students reported their confidence increasing by at least half a point. All increased by over 0.40 of a point from this experience. Next, the specific pre-post results are organized by the four learning outcome areas.

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### Problem-Solving Pre-Post Increases

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These four Problem-Solving items had moderate to large effect size increases of at least about two-thirds of a point after the mega event (Figure 1). The lowest improvements were for two items assessing students’ “knowledge to help solve a customer or fan’s concern” ( $M_{diff} = 0.65, p < .001, d = 0.79$ ) and “ability to seek out information to help solve a customer or fan’s concern” ( $M_{diff} = 0.68, p < .001, d = 0.87$ ). The two problem-solving outcomes that increased more were for students’ “addressing issues that could arise at an event” ( $M_{diff} = 0.81, p < .001, d = 0.81$ ) and “identifying issues that could potentially arise at an event” ( $M_{diff} = 0.84, p < .001, d = 0.94$ ).

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### Communication Skills Pre-Post Increases

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Of the 18 learning outcome items, only one had a small effect size, which was for students’ “ability to provide exceptional customer service” ( $M_{diff} = 0.40, p < .001, d = 0.47$ ). Two Communication Skills outcome items had moderate effect size increases, which were their “ability to orally communicate” ( $M_{diff} = 0.44, p < .001, d = 0.59$ ) and “starting a conversation with a fan or customer you never met before at sporting event” ( $M_{diff} = 0.57, p < .001, d = 0.75$ ). The two communication skill outcomes with large effect size increases were for students’

266 “talking with other sport management students you’ve never met before” ( $M_{diff} = 0.83, p < .001,$   
267  $d = 0.95$ ) and “starting a conversation with a sport industry professional” ( $M_{diff} = 0.93, p < .001,$   
268  $d = 0.97$ ). These two outcomes had the largest effect sizes across all 18 learning outcomes  
269 (Figure 2).

### 270 **Sport Industry Knowledge Pre-Post Increases**

271 The Sport Industry Knowledge learning outcomes all had moderate effect increases due  
272 to the mega event (Figure 3). The largest effect size was for students’ “understanding of  
273 professional expectations within the sport industry” ( $M_{diff} = 0.66, p < .001, d = 0.75$ ). The other  
274 three effect sizes were for the students’ “general knowledge regarding working in the sport  
275 industry” ( $M_{diff} = 0.65, p < .001, d = 0.64$ ), “understanding of professionalism within the sport  
276 industry” ( $M_{diff} = 0.49, p < .001, d = 0.58$ ), and “putting into practice leadership concepts that  
277 you learned in the classroom” ( $M_{diff} = 0.54, p < .001, d = 0.58$ ).

### 278 **Professional Development Pre-Post Increases**

279 The Professional Development learning outcomes all had moderately large to large effect  
280 increases due to the mega event (Figure 4). The largest effect size was seen for students’ “seeking  
281 new information regarding the sport industry” ( $M_{diff} = 0.84, p < .001, d = 0.88$ ). The other three  
282 Professional Development learning outcomes with moderately large effect sizes were for  
283 students’ “applying for future sport industry jobs” ( $M_{diff} = 0.77, p < .001, d = 0.78$ ), “seeking out  
284 different sport industry professional’s perspectives” ( $M_{diff} = 0.71, p < .001, d = 0.71$ ), and  
285 “applying for future sport industry internships” ( $M_{diff} = 0.74, p < .001, d = 0.70$ ).

### 286 **Discussion**

287 The results of this study indicate a short-term volunteer experience at a mega sporting  
288 event can be a positive experiential learning opportunity. Students reported an increase in self-

289 confidence for each of the 18 learning outcomes as evidenced by the significant and meaningful  
290 increase (i.e., all increased by .4 points) in mean scores before and after the volunteer experience.  
291 The results suggest that students can experience a sizeable amount of increased self-confidence  
292 by volunteering at a short-term mega sporting event in all four broad categories measured:  
293 Problem-Solving Skills (4 items), Communication Skills (6 items), Sport Industry Knowledge (4  
294 items), and Professional Development (4 items).

295         Specifically, a clear improvement in student confidence related to Problem-Solving Skills  
296 was reported by students volunteering at a short-term mega sporting event. All students reported  
297 an increase in self-confidence from “some confidence” to “confident” in each of the four  
298 problem-solving outcomes. The largest increases were conveyed in “addressing issues that could  
299 arise at an event” and “identifying issues that could potentially arise at an event.” Additional  
300 improvements that students noted in their self-confidence was “knowledge to help solve a  
301 customer or fan’s concern” and “ability to seek out information to help solve a customer or fan’s  
302 concern.”

303         These findings are likely a result of students volunteering at the NFL Experience. The  
304 NFL Experience is a large interactive funfair event, featuring a variety of fan-oriented  
305 attractions, football-related activities, and autograph sessions with current and former players.  
306 The event takes place during five days leading up to Super Bowl Sunday and students were  
307 required to volunteer for at least three days. Students are assigned various roles during the event  
308 such as, supervising football-related activities, assisting with main event information, and fan-  
309 oriented attractions. The hands-on opportunities allowed students to assist with consumer  
310 questions and concerns and obtain a front row seat to mega sporting event’s operations.

311 Similarly, a clear improvement in students' self-confidence related to problem-solving  
312 skills during an experiential opportunity was also qualitatively reported by Spence and  
313 McDonald (2015) and through mixed methodology by Sauder and Davis (2017). In both studies,  
314 researchers reported an increase in students' ability to evaluate the organizational environment  
315 and teamwork aspects during their experiential learning opportunity, leading to an increase in  
316 self-confidence. Thus, this finding supports that students' confidence in Problem-Solving Skills  
317 can be enhanced with a single short-term mega sporting event experience.

318 For Communications Skills, students reported an increase in their self-confidence from  
319 "some confidence" to "confident" in all six learning outcomes. The largest effect on their self-  
320 confidence was for "talking with other sport management students you've never met before" and  
321 "starting a conversation with a sport industry professional." It is worth noting, that these two  
322 outcomes had the largest increases across all 18 learning outcomes. As experiential educators, the  
323 chance to provide students with networking experiences is highly encouraged during volunteer  
324 opportunities. In fact, for students it can become a top motivator when deciding to participate in  
325 a volunteer opportunity (Johnson et al., 2017; Ledford et al., 2018). As noted in the method  
326 section, this particular mega sporting event experience included an evening networking event  
327 specific to sport management students. In total, all 28 sport management programs were invited  
328 to attend a networking event held at Chase Field, that included a sport industry panel, round table  
329 discussions with students from various programs, and a stadium tour. This additional opportunity  
330 planned specifically for sport management students likely explains the large benefit for students'  
331 self-confidence as it pertained to their communication skills.

332 All the Sport Industry Knowledge learning outcomes had moderate effect increases due  
333 to the mega event. The largest effects sizes for students that went from "some confidence" to

334 “confident” were “understanding of professional expectations within the sport industry” and  
335 “general knowledge regarding working in the sport industry.” These findings are also supported  
336 by prior studies that revealed students’ general industry-related knowledge increased as a result  
337 of experiential learning opportunities (DeLuca & Braunstein-Minkove, 2016; Spence &  
338 McDonald, 2015). Moderate increases in self-confidence also were indicated in “understanding  
339 of professionalism within the sport industry” and “putting into practice leadership concepts that  
340 you learned in the classroom.” While not articulating what type of professional understanding  
341 students gained during the short-term volunteer opportunity, Pate and Shonk (2015) noted that  
342 students gained their understanding of professionalism from confrontational observations while  
343 volunteering. It is possible that current participants also may have experienced confrontational  
344 observations, leading to a better understanding and important lessons. Most importantly, though,  
345 students reported an increase in self-confidence related to the Sport Industry Knowledge after the  
346 mega sporting event experience.

347         Students also reported a moderately large to large effect increases in self-confidence  
348 (“some confidence” to “confident”) after the short-term volunteer experience for all the  
349 Professional Development outcomes. The largest effect for students’ self-confidence was  
350 “seeking new information regarding the sport industry.” The three additional professional  
351 development learning outcomes with moderately large effect sizes in students’ self-confidence  
352 were “applying for future sport industry jobs”, “seeking out different sport industry  
353 professional’s perspectives”, and “applying for future sport industry internships.” Pate and Shonk  
354 (2015) also determined that students felt more confident in their ability to seek sport industry  
355 jobs (i.e., “applying for future sport industry jobs”) after volunteering at a short-term mega  
356 sporting event. Overall, several studies have discovered that a variety of experiential learning



357 opportunities lead to an increase in professional development (e.g., DeLuca & Braunstein-  
358 Minkove, 2016; Ledford et al., 2018; Sauder & Mudrick, 2018). The findings further contribute  
359 to that body of literature by specifically highlighting those significant increasing increases in  
360 students' self-confidence related to problem-solving, Communication, Sport Industry  
361 Knowledge, and Professional Development were reported after sport management students took  
362 part in a five-day mega sporting event experience.

### 363 **Implications and Practical Application**

364         There are several key implications that arise from this study. First, experiential  
365 opportunities outside of the traditional internship, such as short-term volunteering opportunities  
366 at mega sporting events, can yield positive results. Several studies have identified the range of  
367 benefits from industry knowledge to communication skills to professional development (Johnson  
368 et al., 2017; Lamb, 2015; Ledford et al., 2018; Pate & Shonk, 2015; Sauder et al, 2022).  
369 However, this study is the first to quantitatively capture a sample size large enough ( $N \geq 60$ ) for  
370 the results to be generalizable (Vincent & Weir, 2012). The generalizability of results was also  
371 improved by sampling students from multiple participating institutions thus reducing sample  
372 homogeneity. Furthermore, students' confidence prior to and after a short-term mega sporting  
373 event experience, from multiple institutions around the country, was measured. As a result, this  
374 study further reinforces the importance of providing diverse experiential opportunities for sport  
375 management students because of the impact a single short-term mega sporting event can have on  
376 student learning.

377         Second, students' increase in confidence across all learning outcomes emphasizes the  
378 value for sport management educators and programs to continue to intentionally invest in  
379 meaningful efforts to develop short-term volunteer opportunities at mega sporting events. More

380 specifically, it should be reiterated that the largest increases being in observed in Communication  
381 Skills were likely due to the intentional programming. Researchers have identified intentional  
382 programming as being fundamental to a positive student experience (Berg & Warner, 2019;  
383 Springer et al., 2020; Warner & Dixon, 2013). Thus, students will benefit when educators are  
384 intentional about creating programming surrounding a mega event that will directly impact  
385 student learning, such as a networking event or keynote speech specifically geared towards  
386 students interested in sport industry careers.

387         Third, with the recent influx of sport management programs (Miller et al., 2023) and the  
388 noted drawbacks of internships (McClellan et al., 2020; Odio et al., 2014; Odio & Kerwin, 2016),  
389 the results of this study emphasize that important skills (i.e. professional development,  
390 knowledge of the sport industry, communications skills, and problem-solving) can be achieved  
391 with a single, intentionally designed and faculty-mentored mega sporting event experience.  
392 Similarly, to Springer et al. (2020) findings that short-term study abroad trips provide an  
393 alternative to long-term study abroad trips, this work puts forth that short-term mega sporting  
394 events can provide an alternative to semester-long internships. Both short-term study abroad and  
395 mega sporting events can help to address financial barriers associated with longer trips or  
396 semester-long internships, as well. In summation, the results of this research clearly highlight the  
397 importance of experiential learning opportunities and positions short-term mega sporting event  
398 experiences that can help increase student confidence in key areas of problem-solving,  
399 communication, and industry knowledge while helping them develop as a professional.

#### 400 **Limitations and Future Research**

401         While intentional efforts were made to ensure that students did not feel social pressure in  
402 their responses (e.g., survey was pilot tested with students, completed anonymously online in

403 location of their choosing), response bias could exist. With that said, a strength of this study was  
404 that this was the first quantitative study with a large enough national sample of university  
405 students to be generalizable (Vincent & Weir, 2012) and consider learning outcomes before and  
406 after a mega event sporting experience. It also is acknowledged this study was specific to the  
407 Super Bowl; therefore, caution is recommended regarding broad generalization of the results to  
408 all other mega sporting events. Despite these limitations, several future research insights can be  
409 gained. The data clearly demonstrated the experiential learning experience increased students'  
410 confidence in key areas. Future researchers should consider a research design that compares the  
411 results found in this study to students' confidence after an event management course, non-mega  
412 sporting event, or longer experiences with smaller organizations. Doing so could shed light on  
413 the in-class versus hands-on experience impact while eliminating any BIRG'ing (i.e., Basking in  
414 Reflective Glory) effects resulting from being a part of a mega event. That is, students may  
415 connect and associate themselves to the success of the event or the winning team, even though  
416 they played a minor indirect role (Jensen et al., 2016; Todd & Kent, 2009). Future researchers  
417 also should consider other data collection methods, such as qualitative direct student feedback,  
418 focus groups, or analyzing synopsis/reflections to determine if there were additional outcomes  
419 that may not have been investigated or uncovered in this study (e.g., DeLuca & Fornatora, 2020;  
420 Martin et al., 2016; Vianden & Gregg, 2017). It is also worth noting that the data were collected  
421 one week after the event, and this could also be a limitation as outcomes could lag. Future  
422 researchers should consider a follow-up study to explore the long-term effects and stability of the  
423 observed student outcomes.

424 **Conclusion**

425           The findings revealed students' self-confidence increases by participating in a short-term  
426 mega sporting event volunteer opportunity. Students reported an increase in their self-confidence  
427 in the 18 learning outcome items assessed in all four areas: Problem-solving, Communication,  
428 Industry Knowledge, and Professional Development, after the experiential opportunities they  
429 received throughout the week. Further, while each of the 18 learning outcomes in all four  
430 categories increased during students' short-term volunteer experience, their self-confidence also  
431 was based on the nature of experiences during the week. The offering of additional meaningful  
432 experiences such as a student networking event outside of volunteering during the week, likely  
433 explained the greatest impact on students' confidence related to communication. Thus, ongoing  
434 assessment of students' self-confidence and the importance of additional intentional  
435 programming, provide faculty with necessary knowledge to relay the positive outcomes to event  
436 organizers seeking student volunteers. Additionally, faculty responsible for experiential  
437 opportunities can use this new knowledge to garner future support for short-term mega sporting  
438 events. Through highlighting the outcomes that will help advance students' careers and self-  
439 confidence, this work will hopefully encourage and enable more faculty to explore short-term  
440 mega sporting event experiences for sport management students.  
441

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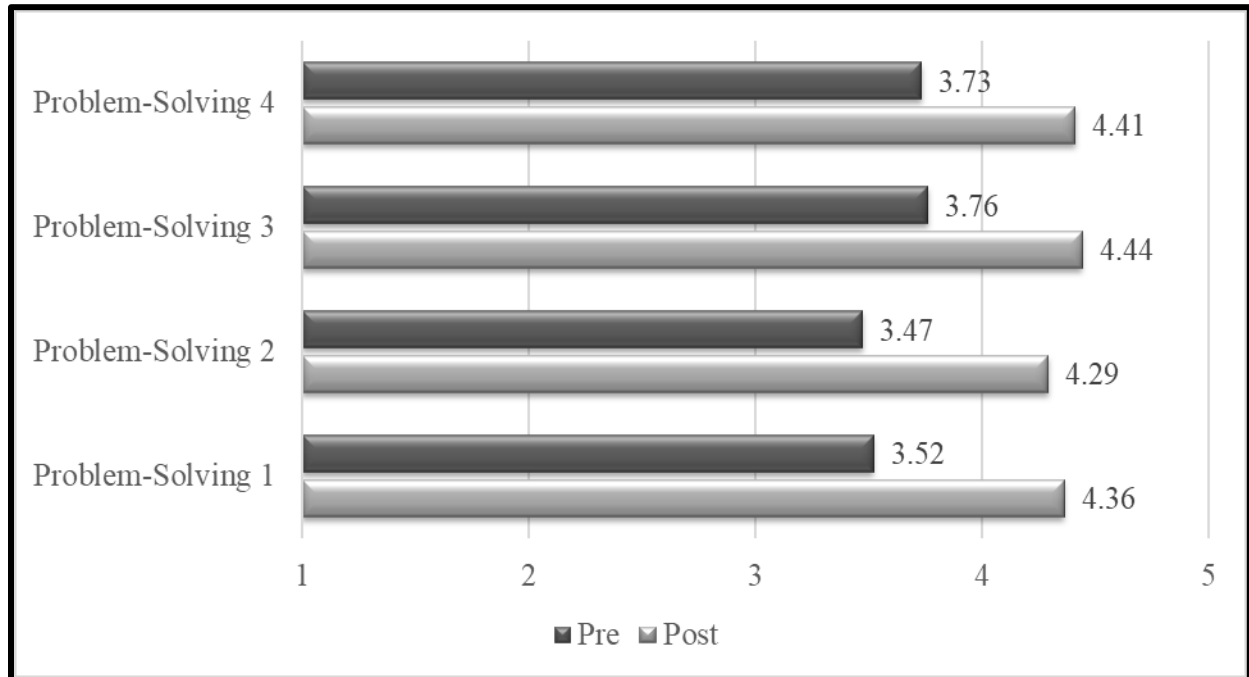
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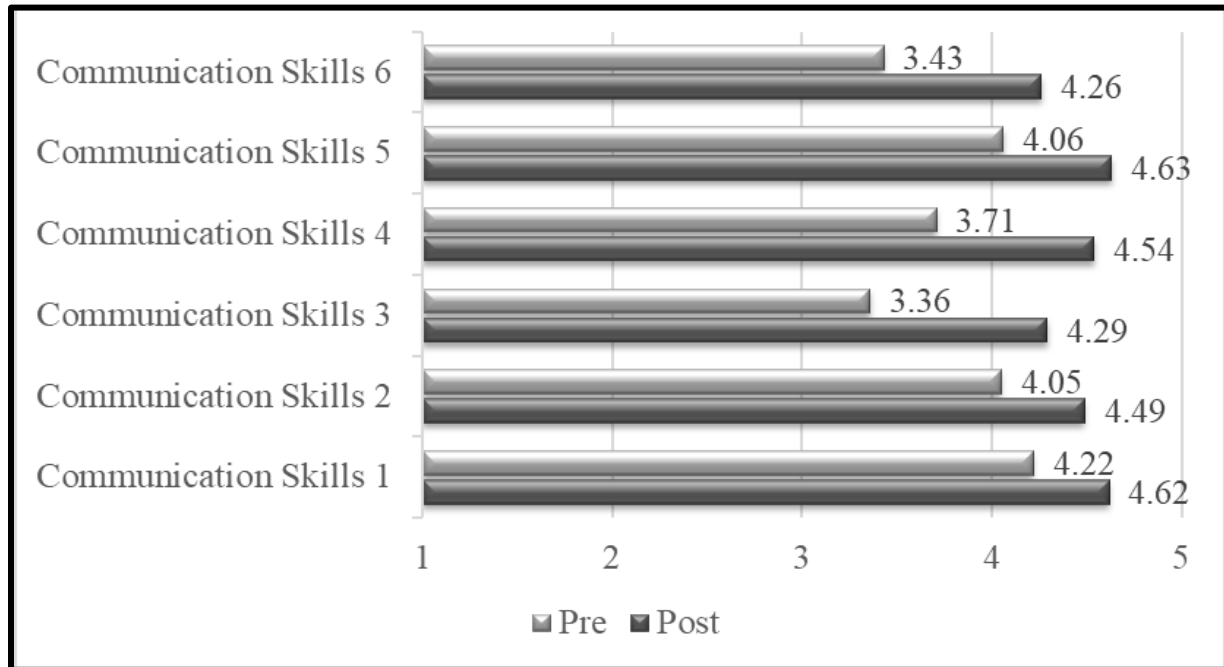
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577 **Figure 1. Problem-Solving Items Pre- and Post-Event Values**

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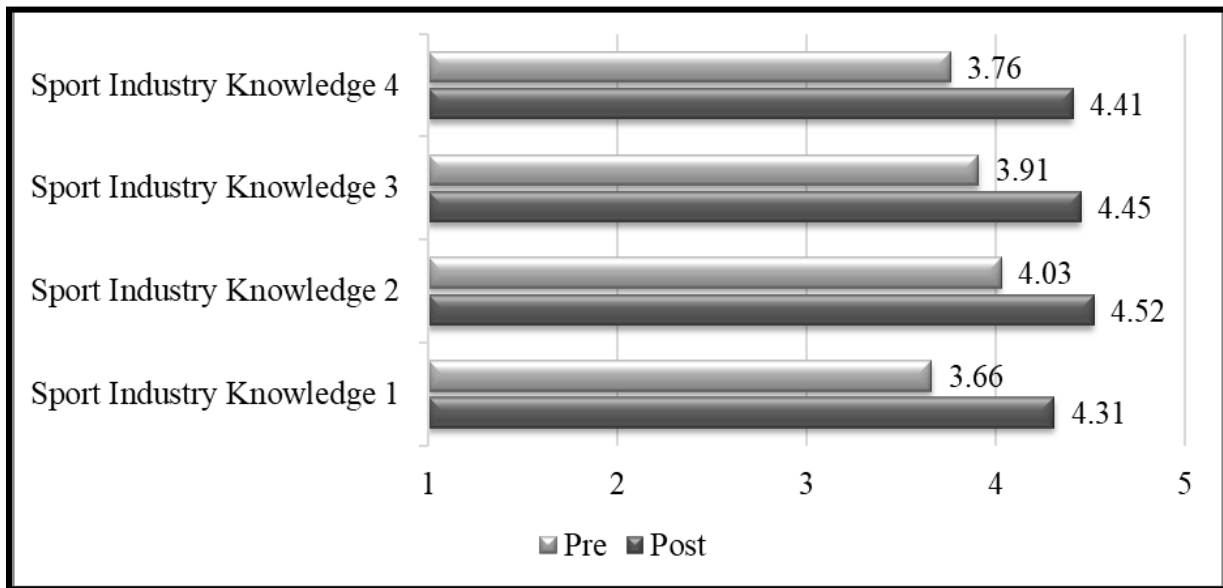
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580 **Figure 2. Communication Skills Items Pre- and Post-Event Values**

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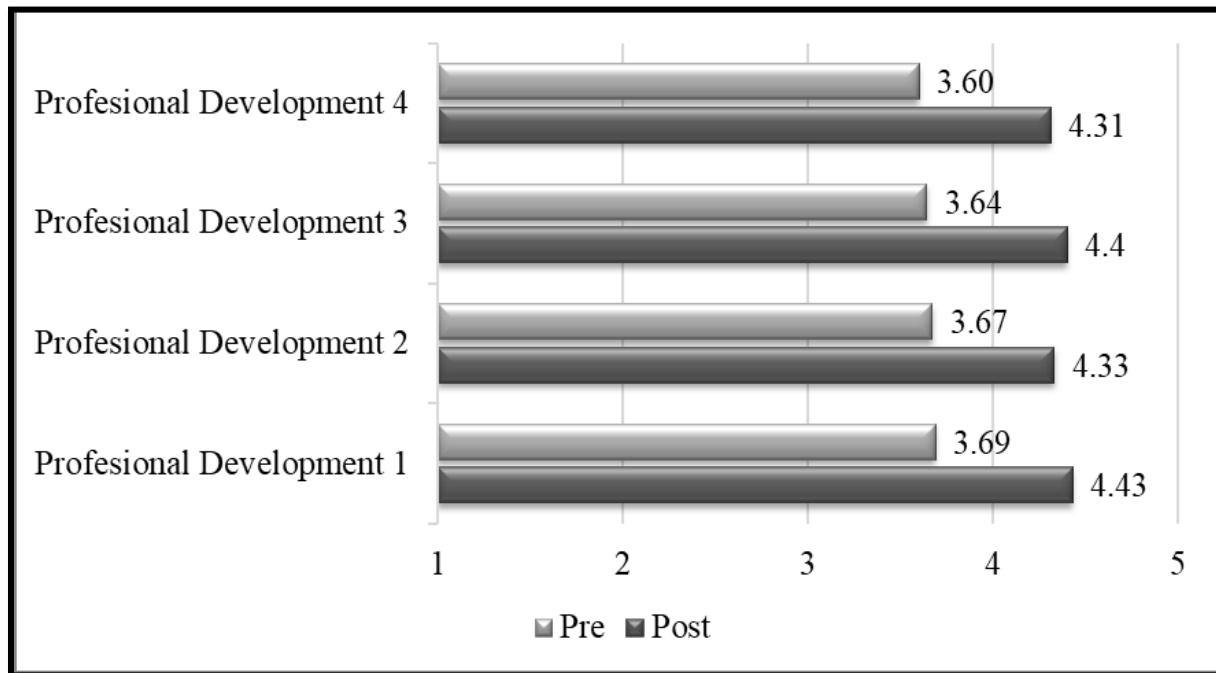
583 **Figure 3. Sport Industry Knowledge**



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**Figure 4. Professional Development**

**Table 1. Mean Values for Pre- and Post-Event Learning Outcomes**

Learning Outcome Item Wording	Pre-Event Values			Post-Event		
	Mean	SD	SE	Mean	SD	SE
<b>Problem Solving</b>						
identifying issues that could potentially arise at an event	3.52	0.93	.09	4.36	0.63	.06
addressing issues that could arise at an event	3.47	1.01	.10	4.29	0.72	.07
your ability to seek out information to help solve a customer or fan's concern	3.76	0.91	.09	4.44	0.63	.06
your knowledge to help solve a customer or fan's concern	3.73	0.86	.08	4.41	0.70	.07
<b>Communication Skills</b>						
in your ability to provide exceptional customer service	4.22	0.80	.08	4.62	0.69	.07
ability to orally communicate	4.05	0.83	.08	4.49	0.71	.07
with starting a conversation with a sport industry professional	3.36	0.93	.09	4.29	0.84	.08
with talking with other sport management students you've never met before	3.71	0.86	.09	4.54	0.70	.07
with talking with a fan or customer you never met before at sporting event	4.06	0.85	.08	4.63	0.55	.05
approaching a sport industry professional	3.67	0.98	.10	4.33	0.79	.08
<b>Sport Industry Knowledge</b>						
your general knowledge regarding working in the sport industry	3.66	1.03	.10	4.31	0.74	.07
your understanding of professionalism within the sport industry	4.03	0.97	.10	4.52	0.67	.07
putting into practice leadership concepts that you learned in the classroom	3.91	0.77	.08	4.45	0.73	.07
your understanding of professional expectations within the sport industry	3.76	0.92	.09	4.41	0.74	.07
<b>Professional Development</b>						
applying for future sport industry internships	3.69	1.04	.10	4.43	0.84	.08
applying for future sport industry jobs	3.64	0.93	.09	4.40	0.83	.08
seeking new information regarding the sport industry	3.43	0.95	.09	4.26	0.75	.07
seeking out different sport industry professional's perspectives	3.60	0.98	.10	4.31	0.80	.08



**Table 2. Post-Event Learning Outcome Dependent T-test Results, Effect Sizes, and Difference Scores**

Learning Outcome Item Wording	Paired Differences								Cohen's <i>d</i>		
	Mean Diff. Post-Pre	SD	SE	95%CI of the Difference		t- statistic	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Effect Size Point Estimate	95% CI of <i>d</i>	
				LB	UB				LB	UB	
<b>Problem Solving</b>											
identifying issues that could potentially arise at an event	0.84	0.91	.09	0.666	1.018	9.490	102	< .001	0.94	0.702	1.165
addressing issues that could arise at an event	0.81	1.01	.10	0.616	1.009	8.195	102	< .001	0.81	0.583	1.029
your ability to seek out information to help solve a customer or fan's concern	0.68	0.78	.08	0.525	0.828	8.860	102	< .001	0.87	0.644	1.099
your knowledge to help solve a customer or fan's concern	0.65	0.81	.09	0.472	0.822	8.017	102	< .001	0.79	0.567	1.010
<b>Communication Skills</b>											
in your ability to provide exceptional customer service	0.40	0.85	.08	0.234	0.566	4.781	102	< .001	0.47	0.266	0.674
ability to orally communicate	0.44	0.74	.07	0.292	0.580	6.006	102	< .001	0.59	0.381	0.800
with starting a conversation with a sport industry professional	0.93	0.97	.10	0.745	1.122	9.814	102	< .001	0.97	0.731	1.200
with talking with other sport management students you've never met before	0.83	0.88	.09	0.658	1.001	9.500	102	< .001	0.95	0.711	1.176
with talking with a fan or customer you never met before at sporting event	0.57	0.76	.08	0.420	0.718	7.582	102	< .001	0.75	0.527	0.964
approaching a sport industry professional	0.66	0.92	.09	0.478	0.839	7.242	102	< .001	0.71	0.496	0.929
<b>Sport Industry Knowledge</b>											
your general knowledge regarding working in the sport industry	0.65	1.01	.10	0.451	0.845	6.528	102	< .001	0.64	0.430	0.854
your understanding of professionalism within the sport industry	0.49	0.85	.08	0.325	0.655	5.888	102	< .001	0.58	0.370	0.788
putting into practice leadership concepts that you learned in the classroom	0.54	0.93	.09	0.357	0.722	5.862	102	< .001	0.58	0.368	.0785

your understanding of professional expectations within the sport industry	0.66	0.87	.09	0.485	0.827	7.628	102	< .001	0.75	0.51	0.969
<b>Professional Development</b>											
applying for future sport industry internships	0.74	1.06	.10	0.535	0.948	7.115	102	< .001	0.70	0.484	0.915
applying for future sport industry jobs	0.77	0.98	.10	0.573	0.957	7.914	102	< .001	0.78	0.558	0.999
seeking new information regarding the sport industry	0.84	0.95	.09	0.651	1.021	8.956	102	< .001	0.88	0.653	1.109
seeking out different sport industry professional's perspectives	0.71	0.99	.10	0.513	0.901	7.215	102	< .001	0.71	0.493	0.926

*Note.* SD = Standard Deviation; SE = Standard Error; LB = Lower Bound; UB = Upper Bound; *df* = degrees of freedom.