Environmentalist and Non-Environmentalist Attitudes Toward an NFL Team’s Sustainability Initiatives

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I send greetings to all those marking the inaugural Green Sports Day.

America is leading the fight against climate change, and our favorite sports teams, athletes, and their fans have stepped up to the plate—taking significant steps to reduce their carbon footprints and educate people about sustainable solutions. On Green Sports Day, we celebrate these efforts and recommit to building a cleaner, safer, and healthier planet for all.

While captivating audiences in the thrill of the game, stadiums and venues around our country have become beacons of excellence in sustainability through the use of innovative strategies and cutting-edge technologies. Athletes have also demonstrated their commitment to shaping a brighter future by speaking out about climate change.

The Federal Government is proud to work with America’s sports community to promote sustainability. Embracing renewable energy, the National Hockey League is currently the 25th largest user of green power in the Environmental Protection Agency’s Green Power Partnership. The Department of Energy has ongoing partnerships with professional sports leagues to support clean energy technologies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions while enhancing competition and bettering the fan experience—including through improving the performance of NASCAR vehicles and track lighting. And the Department of State has been sending former and current professional athletes and coaches around the world to develop green sports events in communities abroad.

As we recognize these accomplishments, we rededicate ourselves to seizing opportunities that will advance clean energy, improve energy efficiency, and increase our resilience to climate change. On this inaugural Green Sports Day, let us rededicate ourselves to safeguarding the one planet we share and strive to encourage sports fans across the globe to do the same.
The concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive.

2:15 PM - 6 Nov 2012

In three years people won’t be building wind turbines anymore - they are obsolete & totally destroy the environment in which they sit.

2:19 PM - 23 Apr 2013

We should be focused on clean and beautiful air-not expensive and business closing GLOBAL WARMING-a total hoax!

7:30 AM - 28 Dec 2013

The rescue icebreaker, trying to free the ship of the GLOBAL WARMING scientists, has turned back-the ice is massive (a record). IRONIC!

7:30 AM - 28 Dec 2013

This very expensive GLOBAL WARMING bullshit has got to stop. Our planet is freezing, record low temps,and our GW scientists are stuck in ice

7:39 PM - 1 Jan 2014

Give me clean, beautiful and healthy air - not the same old climate change (global warming) bullshit! I am tired of hearing this nonsense.

1:44 AM - 29 Jan 2014

Windmills are the greatest threat in the US to both bald and golden eagles. Media claims fictional ‘global warming’ is worse.

3:19 PM - 9 Sep 2014

Just out - the POLAR ICE CAPS are at an all time high, the POLAR BEAR population has never been stronger. Where the hell is global warming?

4:15 AM - 29 Oct 2014 from Manhattan, NY

I will be announcing my decision on Paris Accord, Thursday at 3:00 P.M. The White House Rose Garden. MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!

8:05 PM - 31 May 2017
OVERVIEW

With few exceptions, professional sport organizations have not engaged in comprehensive sustainability campaigns to promote their pro-environmental initiatives.

(Casper & Pfahl, 2012; Casper, Pfahl, & McSherry, 2012; Trail & McCullough, 2017)
OVERVIEW

A lack of guidelines on how to create sustainability marketing campaigns has led to haphazard implementation.

OVERVIEW

Teams with comprehensive environmental programs may benefit from new sponsorship opportunities and outreach to new fans.

(Cornwell & Koenigstorfer, 2017; Edwards, 2017; Huberty, 2017; Kellison & Kim, 2014)
OVERVIEW

Although the current politicized nature of climate science and environmental protection may discourage sport organizations from actively engaging in pro-environmental promotion, there is little empirical evidence to suggest that sport consumers would have particularly strong reactions (positive or negative) to a team’s pro-environmental marketing campaign.
PURPOSE

To examine consumer attitudes toward a professional football team’s environmental initiatives. Specifically, we focused our analysis on fans with contrasting environmental dispositions (i.e., self-identified environmentalists vs. non-environmentalists).
METHOD

Survey
Dissemination
Coding
ABOUT THE SAMPLE

167 comments were analyzed
94% of respondents considered themselves fans of the team
74% male / 26% female
65% White / 28% Black / 7% other
M age: 51.2
ABOUT THE SAMPLE

74% had a college degree

Median household income: $150,000–$199,999

When asked to rate their level of environmentalism:

- 15% self-identified as active environmentalists
- 41% self-identified as passive environmentalists
- 40% were not environmentalists
- 4% declined to answer
Theme 1: Considering Environmental Action

**Politicization of Environmental Issues**

**Exaggerated Crisis** (38% ENV / 50% NON)
“I am adamantly opposed to the so-called environmentalists who produce doom and gloom based on bogus computer generated information to suggest draconian nonsensical controls of our lives.” – MALE, 70, NON-ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=7/7

**The Liberal Agenda** (0% ENV / 100% NON)
“Keep the tree hugging hippies out of the stadium!” – MALE, 42, NON-ENVIRO., TEAMID=6/7

**Overly Political** (0% ENV / 100% NON)
Theme 1: Considering Environmental Action

**Prioritizing the Environment**

**Responsibility to Act** *(56% ENV / 33% NON)*

“Conserving natural resources is everyone’s responsibility. Especially those that have a great opportunity to do so.” – MALE, 36, ACTIVE ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=7/7

**The Most Important Thing** *(100% ENV / 0% NON)*

“Environmental initiatives are the most important for me because if we don’t take care of our environment for future generations, will anything else matter?”

– FEMALE, 38, ACTIVE ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=5/7

“It’s obviously important to win games and eventually win a championship, but a lasting imprint the team can make on our environment and community may be a little more important.” – MALE, 41, PASSIVE ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=7/7
**Theme 1: Considering Environmental Action**

**Pro-Environmental Practices**

**Baseline Behaviors** (40% ENV / 50% NON)

“Recycling is an important part of my life. I just wish others were as active in recycling.” – FEMALE, 52, ACTIVE ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=7/7

“I am not a good example for environmental discussion. Don’t make much of an effort.” – MALE, 61, NON-ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=7/7

“I personally don’t litter, pollute or waste natural resources—not for any save-the-planet reasons—it is because I am and most everyone I know or associate with are just responsible. We throw our trash away, put cans and bottles in the blue bags at the tailgate, and leave things better than when we arrived.” – MALE, 59, NON-ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=1/7
**Theme 1: Considering Environmental Action**

**Pro-Environmental Practices**

**Moving Fans to Act** *(50% ENV / 50% NON)*

“While I strive to be less impactful to the environment myself, I am the first to admit I don’t do the best job. That doesn’t mean I don’t care about it though. Supporting an organization that really cares (like the [team]) makes me feel like I am doing more to help. Even if costs go up a bit as a result—I am still supportive of those efforts.”

— MALE, 37, PASSIVE ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=1/7

“I am not an environmentalist. However, I do make the effort to recycle. If folks are going to the effort to provide me with separate recycle bins, I’m willing to make the effort to use them correctly.”

— FEMALE, 58, NON-ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=7/7
Theme 2: Setting Team Priorities

Business Considerations

Re(Comitting) to the Community (50% ENV / 50% NON)

“Try [a survey] on supporting the country, our military, and whether players taking a knee should be banned from football.” – MALE, 64, NON-ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=7/7

“I love the community outreach and touching lives of families, kids, and the military. Environmental issues are further down on my list of priorities. I am not saying it is not important; I just think more energy could be placed on other things.”
– MALE, 55, NON-ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=7/7

“I’m slightly concerned about this survey. I know the [team has] been engaged with environmental efforts around the … stadium and this survey makes me feel like the team may be backing away from its commitment to the community around them because others may not really understand and value environmental sustainability.”
– FEMALE, 38, PASSIVE ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=7/7
Theme 2: Setting Team Priorities

Business Considerations

Focus on Winning (43% ENV / 50% NON)

“It is good, but winning games is more important.” — MALE, 44, PASSIVE ENVIRO., TEAMID=7/7

“The entire purpose of having a team to begin with is to be successful. You can’t have an argument with a Saints fan and say, ‘Well at least my team has LED lights in our stadium.’” — MALE, 43, NON-ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=7/7

“Worrying about using team money for things other than on-field performance should be avoided until the product on the field is where we would like it to be.” — MALE, 38, NON-ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=7/7
Theme 2: Setting Team Priorities

**Business Considerations**

**Support of Sustainability Initiatives** (63% ENV / 31% NON)

“The fact that you are doing this survey is inspiring. Thank you for caring about the environment.” – MALE, 75, PASSIVE ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=7/7

“I applaud the [team] for being environmentally aware.”
– MALE, 51, NON-ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=7/7

**Greenwashing** (33% ENV / 67% NON)

**Sustainability is Good for Business** (50% ENV / 50% NON)
Theme 2: Setting Team Priorities

Improving Pro-Environmental Initiatives

**Fan Engagement** (100% ENV / 0% NON)

**Fan Experience** (80% ENV / 20% NON)

**On-Site Recycling** (91% ENV / 9% NON)

**Stadium Design** (50% ENV / 50% NON)

**Tailgating Recycling** (40% ENV / 60% NON)
Theme 2: Setting Team Priorities

Improving Pro-Environmental Initiatives

**Fan Awareness** (69% ENV / 31% NON)

“I pay close attention to this football team, so [I] was surprised there were environmental initiatives underway that I wasn’t aware of. The marketing team needs to step up efforts on this front.” — FEMALE, 44, ACTIVE ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=7/7

“You need to be more vocal about conservation efforts.”
— MALE, 36, PASSIVE ENVIRO., TEAMID=7/7

“I don’t recall seeing much marketing for the [team] around this topic. Interesting that environmental impact is an area of interest for the team.”
— MALE, 48, NON-ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=7/7
Theme 3: Impacting the Fan Experience

Concerns with Promoting Pro-Environmental Initiatives

Restrictive Policies (0% ENV / 100% NON)
“I try to do my part recycling [and] trying to be energy efficient but I don't like someone or something else telling people what kind of car they can have or how much energy they should use.” — MALE, 45, NON-ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=7/7

Sport as an Escape (17% ENV / 83% NON)
“I hope environmental or social causes do not begin to be forced upon us at a football game. We just want to watch a good football team play and win games. We do not need to be preached to at a football game.”
— MALE, 69, NON-ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=7/7

“[I know in the world we live in now—]you need to deal with this but it still doesn't belong in the NFL.” — MALE, 61, NON-ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=7/7
Theme 3: Impacting the Fan Experience

Costs of Initiatives

Concern for Rising Costs (33% ENV / 33% NON)

Hope Savings Will be Passed Down to Fans (0% ENV / 100% NON)

Supportive, Unless Costs or Quality are Compromised (38% ENV / 63% NON)

“It’s great to put these things in place, but not at [an] extra cost.”
– MALE, 57, PASSIVE ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=6/7

“I believe everyone should be environmentally responsible within the limits of economic common sense.” – MALE, 87, NON-ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=7/7
Theme 3: Impacting the Fan Experience

Fan Identification with Pro-Environmental Team

Apathy for Pro-Environmental Initiatives (0% ENV / 100% NON)

“These issues have no effect on my thoughts of the [team].”
— MALE, 61, NON-ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=7/7

“I don't look to the [team] to lead an environmental effort. If you can be environmentally sound in your decisions, that's nice, but not necessary.”
— MALE, 64, NON-ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=7/7
Theme 3: Impacting the Fan Experience

Fan Identification with Pro-Environmental Team

Source of Pride (86% ENV / 14% NON)

“Proud of what you are doing with the stadium … and surrounding area in an environmentally conscious manner. Well done!”  — MALE, 56, PASSIVE ENVIRO., TEAMID=7/7

“Very proud of the sustainability efforts on the … stadium. I have shared the info with many others.”  — MALE, 60, ACTIVE ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=7/7

“I'm very proud to be a season ticket holder of a team that is aware of it's environmental impact and is taking steps to reduce it.”  — MALE, 35, ACTIVE ENVIRONMENTALIST, TEAMID=7/7
DISCUSSION

Contrasts between environmentalists and non-environmentalists

Clear role politicization of climate science is playing

Wide range of concerns

Limitations and future research
Thank you.

stadiatrack.org/sustainability
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