

BIG DATA AND THE SPORTS INDUSTRY

“Information is the oil of the 21st century, and analytics is the combustion engine”-Peter Sondergaard.

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Until recent times, big data was not as prevalent in discussions as has been the case in recent times. Big data could be referred to as a collection of massive and complex data sets and data volume that include the huge quantities of data, data management capabilities, social media analytics and real-time data. Big data analytics is the process of examining sizeable amounts of data. With the increased use of computers, mobile phones, cloud computing and data storage tools, the growth in big data has catapulted in the last few years. As a result, players in diverse industries have embraced big data and its analysis as part of their mandate moving forward.

Data has been collected in sports since time immemorial albeit in more traditional ways. However, collection of data without analysis would be of no use. It is very important that harvested data is stored safely, securely and processed properly with the final goal being monetization. With big data being the new fad, the sports industry should be keen to tap into this as well.

One of the ways big data analytics comes in handy is where teams/management can understand fan preferences better which could help them tailor make communication to fans based on their preferences. Teams could also monitor their fans' social media engagements and find a way of engaging them even more which leads to more ticket sales and increased revenue. Marketing has gone digital and big data is at the heart of this.

With more use of social media, more fans are involved actively in their teams more than before. The use of smartphones and increased phone apps is also an area to tap into especially on match days and during major sporting events. Fans could benefit more from cloud and analytics technologies on such days by having easier access to parking, food and beverages as well as instant replays just on their phone which is an aspect of advanced interactivity with elements of augmented reality.

Data can also assist coaches in their jobs. They can select the best players and make more informed decisions during team selection to get the best outcome. Further, they can evaluate their past decisions, identify past mistakes, analyze opponent teams' styles and do much more based on data analysis from actual data.

Data amassed from wearable technology is another way the sports industry is tapping into big data. Trainers and team doctors could use this to determine athletes' fitness and advise the team management. Further, this could help reduce the number of injured players as the devices offer real time statistics on athletes' heart rate, acceleration and speed amongst others. It is no surprise that more technology providers are tapping into the wearable technology business.

With increased need for technology, there will certainly be a need for specialists in the field of data analytics to handle the data collected. This means more jobs and especially in the current world of millennials and technology. More teams will need to hire permanent data analytics and also invest more in big data analysis.

A major risk in big data is where there is a breach in security and the data leaks or falls into the wrong hands. This could lead to unprecedented consequences not just to the management but also to the athletes. For instance, where data leaks regarding a certain athlete's physical condition or perhaps that they are injury prone, this could not only jeopardize the athlete's standing but also earnings where a team plans to sell him/her. There are also more common concerns in big data such as hacking which cannot be ignored. What remains is for the 'owners of data' to ensure proper encryption and put in place security measures and hope for the best since big data is here to stay.

As Geoffrey Moore said, *'Without big data analytics, companies are blind and deaf, wandering out onto the web like deer on a freeway.'*

