



## **Driving Fan Loyalty**

“It’s important to keep in mind that teams don’t leap to the top of the loyalty roster just because they win a playoff or championship. It adds to the loyalty bond, but you need the complete package,” pointed out Passikoff. There are three other emotionally based factors that must be taken into account when measuring fan loyalty: Authenticity, Fan Bonding, and History and Tradition, with all these loyalty drivers functioning like this:

### **Authenticity**

How well they play as a team. Sometimes a new arena and, often, a new manager, can lift this driver. A new name helped the Hornets. Which brands sponsor the team can matter as well. “Brand support has a lot to do with building concomitant fan loyalty and a larger viewer audience,” noted Passikoff. “It becomes a symbol of genuine teamwork.”

### **Fan Bonding**

Are there players who are particularly respected and admired? More is always better and it helps if that bonding extends beyond a player’s ability to sink a three-point shot. If you have to think about who that might be on your team, or can only come up with one name, your team’s Fan Bonding is likely to be low. “Yes,” noted Passikoff, “we know that all these players are supposed to be the best of the best, but the roster that fans really bond with on individual teams is relatively small.”

### **History and Tradition**

Have the game and the team become part of fans’ and community rituals, institutions, and beliefs? “That’s one of the strongest drivers when it comes to fan loyalty in any Major League sport,” said Passikoff. “For some teams it accounts for the lion’s share of loyalty they possess. Think about a team like the Washington Wizards, only a reasonable level of History and Tradition keeps them out of the bottom five.”

Teams need to meet some minimum levels on all four factors to create reasonable levels of fan loyalty. If one of those drivers weakens, or disappears, so do high levels of loyalty. “Want proof,” asked Passikoff, “look at the Sacramento Kings.”

The NBA again this year ranks third of the four Major League Sports that Brand Keys tracks. The National Football League is first, followed by Major League Baseball. The National Hockey League is last. Overall league and team rankings – no matter which league – correlate with viewership and merchandise and ticket sales and game attendance, and since rankings can be influenced by how loyalty drivers are managed, it’s critical that team marketers act as strategically as the coaches.

“The secret of fan loyalty in basketball?” asked Passikoff. “Have five great and admired players and as many fans as possible.”

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