JOURNAL OF AMATEUR SPORT
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Motives and Points of Attachment Influencing Adult Spectator Attendance at High School Football Games

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In the United States, high school sports are a growing industry segment with a rise in attendance, media coverage, and increased revenue opportunities through ticketing and sponsorship deals. Football is among the most popular sports, gaining much of this attention. As such, high school athletic staff and partnering companies can benefit from understanding spectators' attendance motives to inform decision-making. Past literature points to distinct differences in spectator motives by level of play, yet high school spectators remain relatively unexplored. This study leveraged a survey (57 items) of high school football attendees' (N = 564; representative of 217 cities across 22 states) motives (i.e., excitement, family, nostalgia, role model, skill, social, and vicarious achievement) and attachment points (i.e., identification with the community, players, and the team) influencing their attendance behavior, while accounting for differences by event type and participant gender. Multiple regressions tested the proposed research questions, and MANOVA isolated differences based on event type and gender. Results indicated differences in factors affecting attendance among the groups considered. Findings add to the limited literature exploring interscholastic sports and will prove valuable to industry professionals (e.g., athletic directors, coaches, marketing professionals, sponsors).

Keywords: interscholastic sports, attendance, spectator motivation, attachment points

High school interscholastic athletics are popular among the students participating and the respective communities, with approximately 350 million attending high school sports annually in the United States (Niehoff, 2020). High school football is the most popular sport in terms of number of participants and among the top five sports among schools that offer interscholastic athletics (NFHS, 2025). Football also garners some of the largest attendance in interscholastic athletics. Cases of high school football games with high attendance and subsequent revenue for the school can be found across the US. In Georgia, the 2024 high school football/flag football championships set national attendance records with games played in Mercedes-Benz Stadium, a professional sports stadium. Over the eight football and three flag football games across the various school levels, the record attendance was 51,588 (Fisher, 2025). Whether during pre-season, regular season, or postseason, game attendance can affect revenue generation for the schools through ticket sales, sponsorships, or digital streaming partnerships. Thus, scholarship on high school sport spectators and their motives to attend is valuable information for administrators, but it is currently limited.

The large number of attendees at high school sporting events, such as football games, suggests that high school students are not the only fans, highlighting the need to examine the range of spectators at high school athletic events. Understanding what motivates individuals to attend high school sporting events would allow athletic directors to formulate targeted marketing and ticketing plans. As pointed out by Trail (2019), it is imperative that those working for sport organizations and sponsors better understand why spectators consume and how to motivate them to buy more.

Consumer motives have been studied extensively on various sport levels (i.e., collegiate, professional, national) and types (i.e., traditional to niche) to predict sport consumer behavior (e.g., Funk, 2016; Funk *et al.*, 2009; Robinson & Trail, 2005; Trail *et al.*, 2000; Trail & James, 2001; Wann *et al.*, 2008). Researchers indicate that an individual's motives to attend may differ by sport, type, or level, suggesting that high school sports can spark different reasons than other levels. Cianfrone *et al.* (2015) examined the market demand factors associated with consumers at a regional high school basketball tournament. However, researchers have not considered the attendees' consumption patterns for non-playoff events (i.e., regular season or pre-season) nor attempted to measure the intrinsic or psychological factors influencing the spectators' decisions to attend, highlighting the importance of this work. Moreover, studies on the differences in motivations by spectator gender in the high school space are non-existent. Although factors affecting attendance at other levels of sporting events have received ample coverage in the literature, high school athletics are uniquely positioned and warrant study. The purpose of the study is to examine the factors (i.e., motives and points of attachment) influencing adult spectators' attendance at high school football while accounting for differences by event type and spectator gender.

Literature Review

High School Football Marketplace

Historically, across the nation, varsity high school football games are played on Friday nights in the fall season (August–December) and are considered community-focused and local events. The most recent numbers estimated by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) suggest more than 7 million spectators attend high school football games weekly, which amounts to around 165 million fans attending per season (Niehoff, 2019), accounting for almost half of the 350 million fans attending high school athletic events during the 2020–21 season (Niehoff, 2020). These games are typically ticketed events, ranging in price, but often serve as a revenue source for the programs.

The popularity of high school football, coupled with an increase in business investments and media coverage, has bolstered high school athletic department budgets and made the strategic management of high school athletics essential. Coakley (2017) noted that the focus on winning has increased at the high school level, resulting in an arms race like that in college athletics. High school athletic departments compete to provide better facilities, equipment, and coaches' salaries. This competitive nature is particularly true for ticketed sports (e.g., football, basketball) across certain states (e.g., California, Florida, Georgia, Texas). The competitiveness has placed added pressure on high school athletic departments to generate revenue through ticketing, creative private fundraising (e.g., advertising, sponsorship, television/digital streaming rights), and even "pay to play." High school athletes are also included in name, image, and likeness legislation, allowing students to profit. While this creates an opportunity for students to earn money through sponsorships and other partnerships, high school athletic administrators should arm themselves with more data about how the consumers (spectators) are attending, showing sponsors the value of their partnerships. High attendance numbers help athletic departments generate revenue, so understanding those who attend high school sporting events is critical to financial success. The rise in digital viewing options is also worth considering when examining attendance.

Perry (2021) presents the rise of online streaming of high school events because of restrictions to live attendance brought on by COVID-19; however, this mode of consumption is here to stay—the number of streaming options has reached double figures with the NFHS Network (partnerships between the NFHS, membership state associations, and PlayOn! Sports) leading the way, reaching over 10,000 high schools by the end of 2020–21. Live streaming is offered as an opportunity to maximize revenues of high school football—one of the most popular sports in America (WSN Live Blog, 2023), with fans paying between $10 and $50 per viewing across the various platforms (e.g., FuboTV, Striv TV, WSN Live, IBM Video Streaming, PlayStation Vue, YouTube TV, Vimeo Livestream). The NFHS confirmed the streaming of over 100,000 high school sporting events during the 2020–21 season (Niehoff, 2020). Thus,

school officials must understand what influences spectators to attend in person.

Despite the popularity of high school athletics, very few researchers have attempted to focus on marketing elements to understand high school athletic event attendees. Cianfrone *et al.* (2015) assessed market demand factors (i.e., event attractiveness, economic consideration, local attractions, and venue accessibility) when determining spectators' decisions to attend high school basketball tournaments. Marquez *et al.* (2020a, 2020b) explored factors affecting the adoption of digital ticketing by spectators and administrators in high school athletics. Previous research has examined sport team identification and the social well-being of high school students, linking fandom to psychological health (Reding *et al.*, 2011; Wann *et al.*, 2015). However, these studies did not explore the effects that spectators' motives and points of attachment may have on attendance of high school athletic events, nor did they explore the non-student marketplace (i.e., adult attendees).

Spectator Motivation

The motivation for sport consumption theory proposes that spectators have different underlying psychological motives for consuming specific sports (Cottingham *et al.*, 2014; Karakaya *et al.*, 2015; Stander & van Zyl, 2016; Trail & James, 2001). Funk and colleagues (2016) present a sport consumer behavior model that depicts four factors influencing sport consumption (i.e., personal, psychological, social, and contextual). Because people are unique, their motives for following their sport will differ (Karakaya *et al.*, 2015; Shank & Lyberger, 2014). The following motives were included for non-student spectators attending high school football events.

Excitement

Ridinger and Funk (2006) define this construct as "the extent to which an individual is attracted to the exciting atmosphere at games" (p. 166) and reflects the motives some sport spectators exhibit to experience positive stress and arousal from uncertainty in the outcome that some sport events bring. Excitement represents a desire for stimulation, where individuals find motivation in their seeking arousal from the uncertain conditions associated with sport participation and spectatorship (Kim *et al.*, 2019). Excitement includes motives of thrill-seeking, previously connected to a higher likelihood of watching sports (Kim *et al.*, 2008), team support (Funk *et al.*, 2003), identification (Fink *et al.*, 2002), and attendance (James & Ridinger, 2002; James & Ross, 2004). Intuitively, one can assume that some people find this excitement when attending high school football games.

Family

Measuring family as a construct finds support in several theoretical frameworks (e.g., family systems theory, social learning theory, and theories of social influence). These frameworks highlight the influential role families play in shaping individual behaviors, attitudes, and choices related to sport consumption. Cranmer (2021) recognizes the roles and importance of families in people's uncovering meaning during and through sporting endeav-

ors. Fink *et al.* (2002) define this motive as the opportunity to spend time with one's family doing something everyone enjoys. The environment experienced at a Friday night football game may allow families to grow closer together while cheering for their local team. Trail and James (2001) initially included "family" as a motive in their Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC). However, researchers excluded the construct from the modified version of the MSSC (Kim & Trail, 2010; Trail *et al.*, 2003; Robinson & Trail, 2005) based on research of collegiate and professional sports. James and Ross (2004) found statistically significant differences for the "family" construct when comparing motives for consumption across multiple sports at the collegiate level. More recent studies (Kruger & Saayman, 2019; Pizzo *et al.*, 2018) consider spending time with family and friends as part of the socialization and escape motives, measuring one item for this construct. The "family" motive warrants exploration in this study, given the lack of examination at this level of sport. Moreover, high school athletes are students, so their parents or family units are likely to attend with the rest of their family, creating an opportunity to spend time with each other. The environment experienced at high school athletic events is considered more family-friendly when compared to collegiate or professional sporting events due to the absence of alcohol in the concession stands and potential pre-existing relationships among individuals expected to be in attendance.

Nostalgia

Funk and James (2006) define this motive as the feelings and fond memories conjured by a sport team. As Gordon (2013) explained, nostalgia is "the nexus of sport, emotion, and memory" (p. 119), emphasizing the importance of place, which, when combined with memory, evokes nostalgic sentiment (Cho *et al.*, 2014). Past research has linked nostalgia to team allegiance (Funk & James, 2006). More recently, Slavich *et al.* (2019) highlight that the social nature of attending live sporting events may evoke nostalgic feelings, complementing those inspired by the facilities. Adult (non-student) high school football spectators may be reminded of their high school days while attending football games on the school premises, regardless of whether they played football.

Role Model

In the present study, role model refers to the belief that high school football players positively influence others, such as younger players. Kim and Trail (2010) considered it an external motivator urging spectators to attend specific sporting events. Kim *et al.* (2019) highlight the need to consider this motive, which has the potential to influence consumer behavior but lacks exploration in previous research. Spectators may view high school football players as role models who provide an example to be followed by younger football players.

Skill

The skill factor refers to spectators' appreciation of the level of physical superiority displayed by the athletes (Stander & van Zyl, 2016). Kim *et al.* (2019) present

that this hedonic motive may stimulate pleasure-based interests of sport consumers, influencing their behavior. Smith and Stewart (2007) argue that sport spectators develop a broad sense of pride in the superior abilities of their favorite athletes and relate this to their own identity. This motive can influence spectators of teams that may not have a successful season yet have some very talented players (Trail *et al.*, 2003). The skill displayed at high school football games is worthy of praise. Friday night games allow spectators to see future collegiate and professional athletes in the making. Games featuring top recruits can result in peaks in attendance and even national media coverage. For example, the ESPN High School Football Kickoff returned in 2024 for its 15th year, featuring a six-game slate with 28 top-ranked players aired on ESPN, ESPN2, and the ESPN App (Blum, 2024).

Social Interaction

Social interaction refers to the need to interact with others who share the same interests as oneself (Stander & van Zyl, 2016). Sport provides a powerful platform for people from diverse backgrounds to unite in their shared interests and exchange ideas. Attending sporting events provides opportunities for human interaction (Ridinger & Funk, 2006), satisfies the need to fit in (Neisser, 1967), and enhances social status (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Previous research has linked this motive to team support (Funk *et al.*, 2003) and team identification (Fink *et al.*, 2002), and it has the potential to influence consumption and attendance behavior (Silveira *et al.*, 2019). Slavich *et al.* (2019) found that the spectator's social interaction positively influenced pleasure, ultimately impacting behavioral intentions. High school football nights can provide a unique environment for social interaction, where non-student spectators can come together and socialize with other members of their community. Some of these interactions may not come to fruition if not for the local high school football game.

Vicarious Achievement

Vicarious achievement describes an individual's desires for social prestige, self-esteem, and empowerment that come from associating with a specific sports team, player, or community (Stander & van Zyl, 2016). Vicarious Achievement has been found to explain a significant portion of the variance in spectator attendance (Ridinger & Funk, 2006). This motive may aid in connecting teams with their spectators, increasing team support (Fink *et al.*, 2002; Robinson & Trail, 2005; Robinson *et al.*, 2004). Funk *et al.* (2009) found that this motive explained 9% of the variance in past attendance. The association with high school football, a team, or even a player can give spectators a sense of achievement. Local community members may feel closer to their local high school football team and players than, say, a college or professional team. Spectators can identify as parents, neighbors, or friends who helped the high school football players and team succeed.

Points of Attachment

Tajfel (1982) defines social identity (identification) as "that part of the indi-

vidual's self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance of that membership" (p. 255). Lock and Heere (2017) highlight that such a definition applies well to groups of all sizes and external communities where consumers share a common category membership with players, coaches, staff, and other fans. In sport, identification refers to "an orientation of the self in regard to other objects including a person or group that results in feelings or sentiments of close attachment" (Trail *et al.*, 2000, pp. 165–166). Trail (2012) presents the Points of Attachment Index (PAI), a series of items designed to measure spectators' identification with players, teams, coaches, communities, sports, universities, and levels of sport. Previous studies have explored the points at which individuals form a meaningful psychological connection (e.g., Funk & James, 2006; Madrigal & Chen, 2008; Trail *et al.*, 2003). Some argue that "team and/or individual athlete identification may be the most important psychological factor affecting attendance" (Wann *et al.*, 2001, p. 59). The identity processes strengthen the allegiance spectators may have toward their sport team and may believe that if they were to disassociate from the team, they would disassociate from their hometown (Heere & James, 2007). Madrigal and Chen (2008) found, in contrast to studies on motives, that the level of identification strongly impacts consumer behaviors. Therefore, the present study considered spectators' self-identification with characteristics or performers of the event, more specifically their attachment to the players and the team, while also deeming important the unique community dynamics found at high school athletic events.

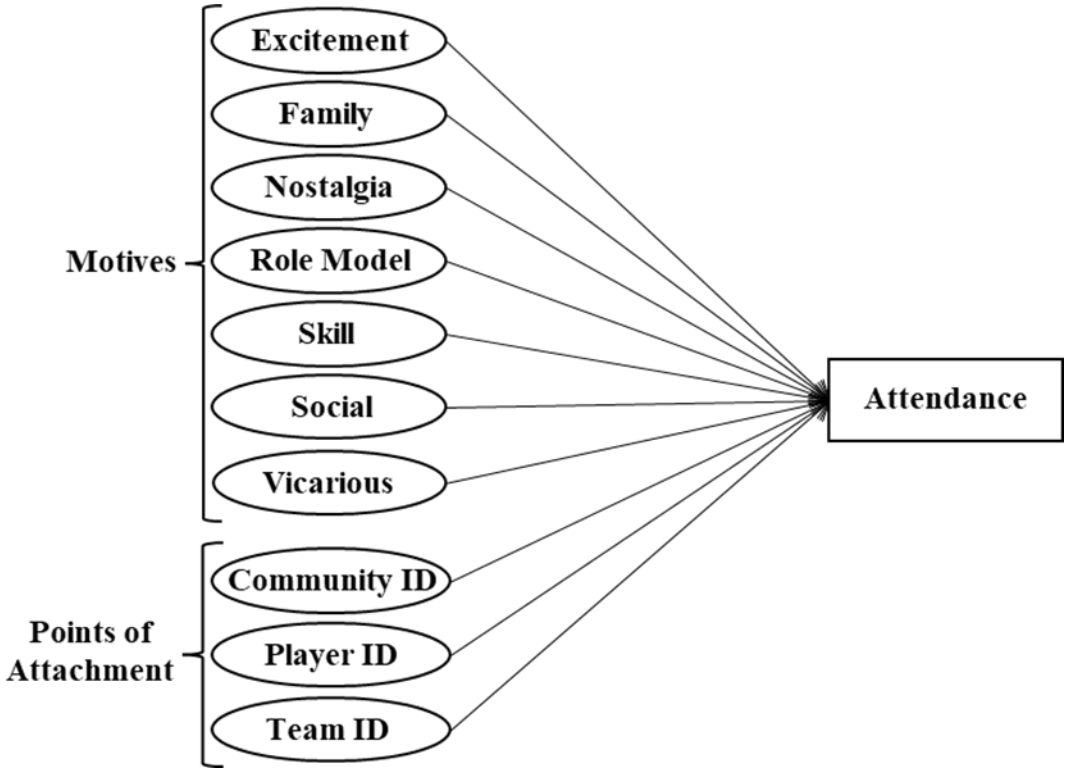
Community Identification

Community identification points to relating with the local community and supporting its teams. Researchers have hypothesized that fan community identification influences team brand equity and fan community-related consequences in the spectator sport context (Yoshida *et al.*, 2015). Heere and James (2007) argue that team identification intertwines with the social identity process people maintain with a larger community. The most notable external community is the geographic location in which people live because people believe the team represents this larger community (Collins *et al.*, 2016). High school football nights are gatherings of the local community; for some, they can feel like a chance to show their support. Niehoff (2024) highlights key differences between high school sports and other levels, pointing out that school spirit—the bond between school and community—sets this level of sport apart from all others.

Player Identification

Player identification refers to the orientation of the self toward another person, which results in attachment (Trail *et al.*, 2000). Described as the love for the players, it influences spectators' attendance (Farrag & Althawadi, 2022), confirming findings from Chmait *et al.* (2020), who found a strong relationship between players' status and ticket demand. Past

Figure 1. *Relationships Tested*



research has measured spectators' attachment to players and coaches. In the case of high school football spectators, player identification was operationalized to include identifying with any participant in the event—player, coach, cheerleader, band member, or any other person playing a role in the execution of the event. In other words, spectators' perception of attaching themselves to individuals "playing" a role in the execution of high school football games. This novel approach is based on the uniqueness of community sport.

Team Identification

Heere (2017) defines this construct as "that part of an individual's self-concept, which derives from membership in a community anchored around a sports team, based on the emotional value attached to that membership, and the knowledge of, engagement with, and evaluation of the community itself" (p. 216). Team identification involves the extent to which a fan feels a psychological connection to a team or the degree to which the team is felt like an extension of the fan and comprises a central place in their social identity (Wann, 2006; Wann *et al.*, 2001). Trail and James (2019) ground their work on identity theory (Stryker & Burke, 2000) to account for within-group differences among fans. Merten *et al.* (2024) found that fans identify more with their favorite team than with their favorite player. Some high school spectators may consider themselves true fans of their team and show their support regardless of any direct ties to individuals within the school.

The Role of Event Type

Within the high school space, many preseason classic football games occur in August each year. These games are typically off-site (i.e., held at larger municipal, collegiate, or NFL stadiums) with multiple teams playing over a 1–3-day period. These events vary by state, but often showcase top teams within the state in matchups that may not be on the regular season schedule. For example, the NFL's Carolina Panthers host the Keep Pounding High School Classic in their stadium (Panthers, 2025). Previous sport management research has explored differences in market demands for pre-season versus regular season matches, highlighting that the level of importance can influence attendance (e.g., Braunstein *et al*., 2005; Valenti *et al*., 2024). Cianfrone *et al*. (2015) recognized that event type may yield differing factors influencing attendance at high school athletic events. This study explores differences in motives and identification between participants who attended regular season games and those who attended a preseason game. Identifying differences based on event type can provide valuable information to athletic administrators and marketing companies devising appropriate messaging to attract spectators.

The Role of Spectator Gender

Additionally, based on previous findings, it was deemed appropriate to explore differences in motives and points of attachment by spectator gender. In the sport consumer behavior model presented by Funk *et al*. (2016), demographics, under personal factors, influence sport consumption. James and Ridinger (2002) explored differences in sport consumption motives for male and female consumers of college basketball (men's and women's). They found higher overall ratings for male spectators, with significant differences on five of the nine motives measured. However, the highest-rated motives for both groups of participants (action and escape) were not significantly different. Ridinger and Funk (2006), while exploring differences among consumers by gender in the same context (NCAA basketball), found that women rated higher on seven of the fifteen Sport Interest Inventory Factors considered. As reported by Özdipçiner *et al*. (2021), gender impacts motives for attending live sporting events, and such insights have the potential to contribute to event design and management processes. Professional sport organizations have recognized the need to attract female consumers and have invested resources to target this segment specifically. High school athletic departments would benefit from understanding potential differences in motives and points of attachment among spectators based on gender, as they seek to maximize their revenues from attendance and sponsors and target audiences through advertising.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: Which factors (i.e., motives and identification) positively impact adult attendance at high school football games?

RQ2: Are there significant differences among the factors (i.e., motives and identification) positively impacting adult

attendance at high school football games based on event type (i.e., pre-season tournament versus regular season)?

RQ3: Are there significant differences among the factors (i.e., motives and identification) positively impacting adult attendance at high school football games based on spectator gender?

Method

Participant Recruitment

Participants (N = 564) were adult high school football spectators who had attended at least one game during the data collection season. Responses were collected using two methods:

1. Paper and pencil survey (n = 218) collected on-site at preseason kick-off games (hosted across multiple days and venues in one state in the southeast of the US) by one member of the research team during the pre-game and half-time intervals.
2. Electronic survey (n = 346) distributed via email to individuals who purchased digital tickets to attend regular season games (across 22 states).

Participants were incentivized with a prize drawing and provided their email addresses. Emails were checked for repeat participants to ensure there were no independence violations. Leveraging both mechanisms allowed for a broad participant base of spectators across multiple teams. That is, participants supported a range of schools across multiple states in the US.

Instrument

Expert academics (who responded via email) and industry professionals working in sport marketing of high school athletic events (who responded via in-person meetings) helped narrow down the elements warranting inclusion in the survey. The IRB-approved survey included 57 items. Seven motives to attend (i.e., excitement, family, nostalgia, role model, skill, social, and vicarious achievement) were measured using 21 items of a modified version of the Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (Trail & James, 2001; Trail *et al*., 2012; Woo *et al*., 2009). Points of attachment (identification with the community, players, and the team) were assessed with nine items from the Points of Attachment Index (PAI; Trail, 2012; Trail *et al*., 2005; Trail & James, 2001). The survey items were adjusted to include the language 'high school'. For example, the original item for *Family*— "Being with my family is why I enjoy sport games"— was changed to read "Being with my family is why I enjoy high school football games." Following recommendations from previous research, all motives and points of attachment were measured using a seven-point Likert scale anchored by *Strongly Disagree* and *Strongly Agree*. Additionally, items were collected for nine demographic and 21 attendance-related (e.g., number of games attended previous season, number of games planned to attend in current season, distance traveled to high school games, effects of winning record, and with whom they attend games).

Data Analysis

First, measurements of descriptive statistics for game consumption variables assessed participants' attendance patterns during the previous season and expected attendance during the season in progress at the time of data collection. Descriptives and reliability analyses were conducted to assess the appropriateness of the data prior to investigating the research questions. Normality was inspected via examination of skewness and kurtosis values. Hair *et al.* (2018) suggest that skewness indexes greater than 3 and kurtosis values greater than 7 are extreme. To assess reliability, Cronbach's alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR) were checked to meet the .70 benchmark (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Fornell & Larcker, 1981), while factor loadings (β) were checked to meet the minimal acceptance level of ±.4 (Hair *et al.*, 2018). The measurement model's discriminant validity, which is the degree to which the measures of two constructs are empirically distinct, was assessed (Chin, 1998). Discriminant validity is supported when the square root of each construct's AVE is higher than its correlation with other constructs. Additional tests indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern (Tolerance ranged from 0.342 to 0.915 and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) from 1.090 to 2.922).

To address the first research question, multiple linear regression allowed us to measure the variance in attendance (i.e., dependent variable) explained by motives and points of attachment (i.e., independent variables) when included simultaneously in the regression model. Four additional multiple linear regressions tested the relationship between the dependent and independent variables for regular season, pre-season tournament, female, and male participants separately, and Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) isolated differences across motives and points of attachment based on event type and gender.

Results

A total of 564 usable surveys were obtained (Online: n = 346; Paper: n = 218). The sample of respondents was representative of 217 cities across 22 states. Demographic results revealed that the mean age of respondents (non-high school students over 18) was 45.7 years (SD = 10.0) and reported travelling an average of 21.6 miles (SD = 32.9) when attending high school football games. Participants were primarily women (58.7%), Caucasian (73.8%, compared to 17.9% African American, and 5.1% reporting Hispanic heritage), married (73.6%, compared to 14.9% single), and self-identified as high school parents (27.3%), family member of a protagonist (i.e., player, cheerleader, bandmember) in the game attended (39.2%), alumni (12.8%), high school representative or staff (3.7%), and other (17%).

Spectators reported actual attendance for the previous season (M = 7.9; SD = 5.6) and expected attendance during the season of data collection (M = 9.0; SD = 5.3), with an average of 8.5 total games (SD = 4.9) for the two seasons. More than half of the spectators (62.1%) attend other high school athletic events, and the ma-

Table I. *Demographics*

Characteristic	All Participants *N*=564	Pre-Season Event *n*=218	Regular Season *n*=346
Gender			
Male	233 (41.3%)	102 (46.8%)	131 (37.9%)
Female	331 (58.7%)	116 (53.2%)	215 (62.1%)
Age (years)	*M*=45.7	*M*=44.8	*M*=46.3
Ethnicity			
Caucasian	416 (73.8%)	147 (67.4%)	269 (77.7%)
African American	101 (17.9%)	53 (24.3%)	48 (13.9%)
Hispanic/Latino	29 (5.1%)	11 (5.0%)	18 (5.2%)
Other	18 (3.2%)	7 (3.2%)	11 (3.2%)
Relationship Status			
Single	84 (14.9%)	41 (18.8%)	43 (12.4%)
Married	415 (73.6%)	154 (70.6%)	261 (75.4%)
Divorced	61 (10.8%)	20 (9.2%)	41 (11.8%)
Widowed	4 (0.7%)	3 (1.4%)	1 (0.3%)
Education			
High School	37 (6.5%)	24 (11%)	13 (3.8%)
Bachelor's Degree	343 (60.8%)	137 (62.8%)	206 (59.5%)
Post-Graduate Degree	163 (28.9%)	28 (12.8%)	127 (36.7%)
Don't want to answer	21 (3.7%)	21 (9.6%)	0 (0.0%)
Family Yearly Income			
<$35,000	29 (5.1%)	10 (4.6%)	19 (5.5%)
$35,000-74,999	103 (18.3%)	50 (22.9%)	53 (15.3%)
$75,000-99,999	74 (13.1%)	29 (13.3%)	45 (13.0%)
$100,000<	310 (55.0%)	112 (51.4%)	198 (57.2%)
Don't want to answer	48 (8.5%)	17 (7.8%)	31 (9.0%)
Driving Distance (miles)	*M*=21.6	*M*=32.3	*M*=14.8
Average Attendance (games)	*M*=7.95	*M*=7.88	*M*=7.99

Note: Percentages in parentheses

jority conveyed that the team's winning record does not affect their attendance at high school football games (78.4%). Parties in attendance were composed of adults and children (49.8%), while others attended with just adults (41.5%) or on their own (8.7%). See Table I for demographic breakdown.

Measurement Validation

Individual item evaluation ensured convergent validity and item reliability, with all items loading above the recommended threshold of $\beta = .4$ (Hair et al., 2018). All items (30) were retained for further analysis. The factor loading (β) ranged from .49 to .91 for Excitement, .78 to .94 for Family, .87 to .91 for Nostalgia, .71 to .76 for Role Model, .57 to .77 for Skill, .89 to .93 for Social, .59 to .81 for Vicarious Achievement, .56 to .90 for Community ID, .82 to .96 for Player ID, and .82 to .89 for Team ID. Given the multi-item scales used, composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha (α) were tested, ranging from .74 to .93, above the acceptable standard of .70 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). When assessing the measurement model's discriminant validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) did not meet the recommended level of .50 for two motives (Skill and Vicarious Achievement both scoring .48). However, discriminant validity was supported as the square root of each construct's AVE was higher than its correlation with other constructs (Chin, 1998). See Tables II and III.

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression was employed to explore the predictive ability of the seven motives and three points of attachment. The regression model labeled All Participants presented in Table IV indicates that 25.0% of the variance in attendance was explained by Excitement, Nostalgia, Player ID, and Team ID ($R^2 = .250$, $F(10, 553) = 18.41$, $p < .01$). Excitement, Player ID and Team ID had a significant positive influence on attendance, while Nostalgia had a negative association with the outcome variable.

Differences by Event Type and Gender

Table IV presents the results of the regression models for pre-season tournament and regular season attendees. For pre-season event participants, 17.1% of the variance in attendance was explained by Team ID ($R^2 = .171$, $F(10, 207) = 4.28$, $p < .01$), while for regular season participants, 32.1% of the variance in attendance was explained by Nostalgia, Player ID, and Team ID ($R^2 = .321$, $F(10, 335) = 15.81$, $p < .01$). Upon further examination, the MANOVA results presented in Table V show that those attending the pre-season event reported statistically significantly higher levels in five of the seven motives and two of the three identification variables than regular season participants. Despite pre-season event participants reporting higher levels of Nostalgia ($M = 5.77$, $SD = .09$) than regular season participants ($M = 5.22$, $SD = .07$), this motive only influenced attendance for the latter group. Differences were also observed for Player ID and Team ID, with pre-season event attendees reporting higher levels ($M = 4.82$, $SD = .12$; $M = 5.62$, $SD = .09$) than regular season spectators

Table II. *Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliability of Responses*

Adapted Scales	α	CR	AVE	*M*	*SD*	*β*
EXCITEMENT	0.78	0.82	0.59	5.48	1.02	
Excitement 1				5.01	1.36	0.49
Excitement 2				5.85	1.06	0.90
Excitement 3				5.58	1.20	0.91
FAMILY	0.90	0.90	0.75	5.67	1.23	
Family 1				5.75	1.38	0.87
Family 2				5.65	1.38	0.94
Family 3				5.62	1.26	0.78
NOSTALGIA	0.93	0.93	0.81	5.43	1.33	
Nostalgia 1				5.72	1.33	0.87
Nostalgia 2				5.36	1.43	0.91
Nostalgia 3				5.21	1.56	0.91
ROLE MODEL	0.78	0.78	0.54	5.50	1.05	
Role Model 1				6.01	1.10	0.76
Role Model 2				5.10	1.31	0.71
Role Model 3				5.41	1.26	0.73
SKILL	0.74	0.74	0.48	6.12	0.82	
Skill 1				6.25	1.15	0.57
Skill 2				5.97	1.05	0.77
Skill 3				6.16	0.91	0.73
SOCIAL	0.93	0.93	0.82	5.65	1.20	
Social 1				5.73	1.31	0.89
Social 2				5.68	1.26	0.93
Social 3				5.54	1.31	0.89
VICARIOUS	0.75	0.74	0.48	5.54	1.13	
Vicarious 1				5.56	1.46	0.59
Vicarious 2				6.02	1.10	0.81
Vicarious 3				5.05	1.52	0.68
COMMUNITY ID	0.81	0.83	0.61	5.90	1.01	
Community ID 1				6.20	1.21	0.56
Community ID 2				5.65	1.26	0.90
Community ID 3				5.85	1.17	0.88

PLAYER ID	0.92	0.93	0.82	4.64	1.74	
Player ID 1				4.60	1.86	0.82
Player ID 2				4.67	1.90	0.96
Player ID 3				4.65	1.88	0.94
TEAM ID	0.90	0.90	0.75	5.45	1.33	
Team ID 1				5.51	1.44	0.82
Team ID 2				5.53	1.40	0.89
Team ID 3				5.29	1.57	0.88

Note: α: Cronbach Alpha; *β*: Factor Loadings

Table III. *Correlations – Motives, Points of Attachment, and Attendance*

Adapted Scales	EXCI	FAMI	NOST	ROLE	SKIL	SOCI	VICA	COMM	PLAY	TEAM	ATTE
EXCI	1										
FAMI	0.368*	1									
NOST	0.430*	0.390*	1								
ROLE	0.572*	0.435*	0.428*	1							
SKIL	0.577*	0.369*	0.400*	0.586*	1						
SOCI	0.381*	0.464*	0.413*	0.405*	0.341*	1					
VICA	0.572*	0.330*	0.441*	0.562*	0.552*	0.368*	1				
COMM	0.383*	0.376*	0.404*	0.423*	0.448*	0.557*	0.433*	1			
PLAY	-0.014	0.228*	0.003	0.069	0.002	0.089*	0.076	-0.031	1		
TEAM	0.732*	0.431*	0.451*	0.623*	0.508*	0.437*	0.689*	0.522*	.039	1	
ATTE	0.322*	0.194*	0.035	0.215*	0.162*	0.089*	0.253*	0.114*	.122*	.432*	1

Note: * Correlation is significant at .05 level (2-tailed)

Table IV. *Multiple Regression Models of Attendance (DV) based on Motives and Points of Attachment (IVs) by Spectator Groups*

	All Participants *N*=564		Pre-Season Event Participants *n*=218		Regular Season Participants *n*=346		Female Participants *n*=331		Male Participants *n*=233	
IVs	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
Excitement	0.554	0.038*	0.951	0.054	0.217	0.493	0.824	0.018*	-0.293	0.512
Family	0.299	0.106	0.328	0.367	0.201	0.351	0.315	0.219	0.461	0.100
Nostalgia	-0.661	<.001*	-0.587	0.073	-0.763	<.001*	-0.751	<.001*	-0.438	0.126
Role Model	-0.254	0.310	-0.155	0.737	-0.469	0.129	-0.048	0.885	-0.381	0.308
Skill	-0.160	0.602	-0.501	0.340	0.294	0.450	-0.695	0.091	0.312	0.514
Social	-0.307	0.120	-0.157	0.679	-0.228	0.326	-0.545	0.034*	0.078	0.809
Vicarious	-0.143	0.551	-0.166	0.712	-0.320	0.274	0.220	0.502	-0.595	0.107
Community ID	-0.358	0.138	-0.383	0.413	-0.302	0.290	-0.289	0.329	-0.638	0.136
Player ID	0.256	0.019*	-0.033	0.874	0.409	0.002*	0.370	0.010*	0.061	0.717
Team ID	1.989	<.001*	1.649	<.001*	2.347	<.001*	1.644	<.001*	2.758	<.001*
F	18.406		4.281		15.813		11.589		8.899	
R^2	0.250		0.171		0.321		0.266		0.286	

Note: B: Unstandardized coefficients, *$p < .05$

(M = 4.53, SD = .09; M = 5.34, SD = .07), respectively. However, Player ID significantly influenced attendance only for regular season participants, while Team ID influenced regular season and pre-season event participants.

Table IV also presents the results of the regression models for female and male participants. For female participants, 26.6% of the variance in attendance was explained by Excitement, Nostalgia, Social, Player ID, and Team ID (R^2=.266, F(10, 320)=11.59, p < .01), while for male participants, 28.6% of the variance in attendance was explained by Team ID (R^2=.286, F(10, 222)=8.90, p < .01). Upon further examination, the MANOVA results presented in Table VI show that those female participants reported statistically significantly higher levels in four of the seven motives and two of the three identification variables than male participants. Despite lacking statistically significant differences in Excitement and Nostalgia between females (M=5.43, SD=.06; M=5.48, SD=.07) and males (M=5.55,

Table V. *Motives and Points of Attachment Mean Differences by Event Type*

				95% Confidence Interval		
Adapted Scales	Event Type	Mean	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Sig.
Excitement	Pre-Season Event	5.67	0.07	5.54	5.81	<.001*
	Regular Season	5.36	0.05	5.25	5.46	
Family	Pre-Season Event	5.89	0.08	5.72	6.05	0.001*
	Regular Season	5.54	0.07	5.41	5.67	
Nostalgia	Pre-Season Event	5.77	0.09	5.59	5.94	<0.001*
	Regular Season	5.22	0.07	5.08	5.35	
Role Model	Pre-Season Event	5.76	0.07	5.63	5.90	<0.001*
	Regular Season	5.34	0.06	5.23	5.45	
Skill	Pre-Season Event	6.08	0.04	6.00	6.17	0.129
	Regular Season	6.19	0.06	6.08	6.30	
Social	Pre-Season Event	5.67	0.08	5.51	5.83	0.821
	Regular Season	5.64	0.07	5.52	5.77	
Vicarious	Pre-Season Event	5.80	0.08	5.65	5.95	<0.001*
	Regular Season	5.38	0.06	5.26	5.50	
Community ID	Pre-Season Event	5.93	0.07	5.80	6.07	0.525
	Regular Season	5.88	0.05	5.77	5.99	
Player ID	Pre-Season Event	4.82	0.12	4.59	5.05	0.049*
	Regular Season	4.53	0.09	4.34	4.71	
Team ID	Pre-Season Event	5.62	0.09	5.44	5.79	0.017*
	Regular Season	5.34	0.07	5.20	5.48	

Note: *p < .05

SD=.07; *M*=5.36, *SD*=.09) respectively, these two factors only influenced attendance for females.

Female participants scored statistically significantly higher on Social, Player ID, and Team ID (*M*=5.76, *SD*=.07; *M*=4.82, *SD*=.10; *M*=5.57, *SD*=.07) than their male counterparts (*M*=5.49, *SD*=.08; *M*=4.39, *SD*=.11; *M*=5.27, *SD*=.09), respectively. However, all three elements influenced attendance for female participants, while only Team ID influenced male participants' decision to attend.

Discussion

The present study extends our understanding of sport consumer motivators and points of attachment in high school athletics, a level of sport where these factors have received limited attention. While researchers studying motives for sport spectatorship have expressed challenges with connecting theory to actual behavior (e.g., Kim *et al*., 2013), the proposed model explained 25.0% of the variance in attendance when considering all participants, which is

Table VI. *Motives and Points of Attachment Mean Differences by Gender*

				95% Confidence Interval		
Adapted Scales	Gender	Mean	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Sig.
Excitement	Female	5.43	0.06	5.32	5.54	0.170
	Male	5.55	0.07	5.42	5.68	
Family	Female	5.87	0.07	5.74	6.00	<.001*
	Male	5.39	0.08	5.24	5.55	
Nostalgia	Female	5.48	0.07	5.34	5.62	0.295
	Male	5.36	0.09	5.19	5.53	
Role Model	Female	5.58	0.06	5.47	5.70	0.034*
	Male	5.39	0.07	5.26	5.53	
Skill	Female	6.14	0.05	6.05	6.23	0.530
	Male	6.10	0.05	5.99	6.21	
Social	Female	5.76	0.07	5.64	5.89	0.007*
	Male	5.49	0.08	5.34	5.64	
Vicarious	Female	5.66	0.06	5.54	5.78	0.004*
	Male	5.38	0.07	5.24	5.53	
Community ID	Female	5.95	0.06	5.84	6.06	0.203
	Male	5.84	0.07	5.71	5.97	
Player ID	Female	4.82	0.10	4.63	5.01	0.004*
	Male	4.39	0.11	4.16	4.61	
Team ID	Female	5.57	0.07	5.43	5.72	0.007*
	Male	5.27	0.09	5.10	5.44	

Note: *$p < .05$

considerable explanatory power for social sciences (Cohen, 1988).

When testing the influence of motives and points of attachment on the attendance of all participants, Excitement, Player Identification, and Team Identification were the only factors positively influencing attendance, while Nostalgia was found to have a negative effect. Similar to previous research (Kim & Trail, 2010), Team ID explained the bulk of the variance in the model (18.7%). The prominence of Team ID in our model underscores the unique community-centric nature of high school sport, aligns with findings from other sport levels but appears even more pronounced in the high school context, suggesting that community-centric identity plays a heightened role compared to professional or collegiate settings.

Past research found Nostalgia to account for possible variations in consumers' commitment and behavior (Funk & James, 2006). In the present study, although Nostalgia significantly influenced attendance, explaining 3.2% of the variance, it had a negative impact. In other words, those participants who reported higher levels of Nostalgia attended fewer games. This finding contrasts with previous literature that typically found positive or neutral relationships between nostalgia and sport consumption. In our study, those participants who reported the highest levels of Nostalgia (i.e., 7 out of 7) attended, on average, almost two games fewer than those who reported the lowest levels (i.e., 1 out of 7). This unexpected finding suggests that the role of nostalgia may function differently in high school athletics, where nostalgic feelings might be associated with occasional rather than frequent attendance patterns. An alternative explanation is that individuals attending fewer matches, such as alumni, may have less direct ties to the current team and, therefore, less motivation to attend, experiencing the nostalgic effect when attending special games, such as for homecoming night.

The study also found differences in motives and identification based on event type. For pre-season event attendees, Team ID was the only factor influencing attendance, explaining 12.5% of the variance in attendance. However, for regular season participants, Nostalgia, Player ID, and Team ID were statistically significant, with Team ID explaining 22.7% of the variance in attendance. Again, the relationship between Nostalgia and attendance was negative for this group, and the trend reported for all participants between this motive and attendance holds, meaning that those scoring higher on nostalgia attended fewer games. It is also interesting that pre-season event attendees scored statistically higher on eight of the ten factors considered, with the other two not being statistically different. As expected, those attending special events reported higher levels of motivation and identification, exemplified by displays of higher commitment, such as paying higher prices and traveling further to be present at high school football games.

Differences in motives and points of attachments based on spectators' gender

found differing results consistent with previous college athletics research (e.g., James & Ridinger, 2002; Ridinger & Funk, 2006). Our findings aligned with Ridinger and Funk (2006), where female spectators scored higher on motives and points of attachment than their male counterparts. When considering male participants, Team ID was the only factor influencing their attendance, explaining 24.4% of the variance in attendance. This singular focus contrasts with the more complex motivational profile found among female participants, where Excitement, Nostalgia, Social, Player ID, and Team ID all played influential roles.

It is worth highlighting that Nostalgia and Social elements were negatively associated with attendance. Those who attend fewer games may have experienced higher levels of Nostalgia when attending high school football games. Perhaps they live out of town, and when they do attend, those feelings are more intense, yet their reported attendance is still low, perhaps attending special nights such as homecoming. Again, when considering female participants, on average, those who reported the highest levels of Nostalgia attended fewer games than those who reported the lowest levels. Similarly, when the motive labeled Social received a higher score, the reported attendance was lower. In this case, those who value the social aspect of attending the events may face obstacles when coordinating with friends and family, as they reported attending fewer games than those attending for other reasons. This was also supported by our data, as those with the highest social motive scores reported lower game attendance than those at the higher end of the scale.

A final noteworthy finding is that Skill and Community ID, although the highest-rated motive and point of attachment factor, respectively, for male and female spectators, did not influence participants' attendance. The results suggest a potential disconnect between what spectators value about high school football and what actually drives their attendance decisions—in this case, appreciation for athletic skill and community support may be necessary but not sufficient conditions for regular attendance.

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

The exploratory nature of this research provides a foundation for future investigation of individuals' motives and points of attachment influencing the high school sporting event consumption. This study addresses a significant gap in the literature by examining an underrepresented sport level while also considering less commonly studied motives, such as role models (Kim *et al.*, 2019) and an expanded conceptualization of player identification that includes all event participants.

From a theoretical perspective, the present work provides evidence that consumption patterns differ by level of sport. The study provides empirical support for including Family as a distinct motive in high school athletics research, separate from general socialization factors, thereby

demonstrating context-specific relevance of constructs that may have been prematurely dismissed in other sport settings. The unexpected negative relationship between nostalgia and attendance frequency challenges existing theoretical assumptions and warrants further theoretical development.

Meanwhile, Player Identification, the lowest-rated factor, appears to lack importance at this level of amateur sport. Considering many high school athletes are on a football team for two years (i.e., appearing on the varsity team during junior and senior years), roster turnover occurs annually, and teams do not receive as much media exposure for people to know who is on the team, spectators may not be drawn to attend to watch one player. The initial assumptions presumed spectators were mostly parents or connected to specific athletes. However, our findings revealed that these large audiences identified with more than one particular athlete or participant (e.g., band member, cheerleader), and it did not influence their attendance. As pointed out by previous work (e.g., Kim *et al.* 2013), motives and attachment points may explain why spectators attend sporting events but not determine the number of games in attendance. Given the adoption of scales in interscholastic athletics, the present study provides a starting point for future research to expand the limited literature researching this level of sport.

From a managerial standpoint, the study has identified motives influencing adult, non-student, high school football spectators' attendance. Understanding that Team Identification was the most influential factor affecting attendance can help high school athletic departments, booster clubs, administrators, marketing specialists, and sponsors tailor their events to improve the attendees' experience. From a promotional standpoint, marketing efforts should highlight the team while accounting for the positive influences of Excitement and Player ID on attendance. If attempting to improve female attendance, athletic departments can seek to highlight the excitement of the event, supporting protagonists beyond the players (top recruits, coaches, cheerleaders) and the team. Previous research (Koronios *et al.*, 2020) highlights the importance of social media as a strategic tool for sport managers seeking to engage with target audiences and potentially increase team identification (Meng *et al.*, 2015).

Limitations and Future Research

This study focused on adult spectators of high school football games in a cross-sectional design, thereby limiting findings. It is important to recognize that high school students make up a large percentage of high school game attendance, but have not been examined, and future research should address their motives. Moreover, motives and points of attachment may differ among spectators across different sports, and the popularity of high school football may limit the generalizability of the results to other high school athletic events. Although a significant portion of the participants in this study reported attending high school ath-

letic events of different sports, it would be wise for future research to explore other sports.

This study is a first step towards understanding high school athletic event attendees and the factors that influence their decision to attend week after week, which are both vital to improving high school athletic departments' capabilities of tailoring the overall sport experience and, ultimately, their financial survival. Future research may compare the motives of high school students versus non–students, season ticket holders versus non-season ticket holders, or regular season game attendees versus postseason attendees, completing the analysis of high school athletic event consumers. It would also be interesting to look at attendance patterns on a longer timeline to answer questions such as what happens to high school parents' attendance after their child graduates or what influences students' decision to return for sporting events as alumni.

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