

## **Street Racing in the Windy City: Dreamscape or Logistical Nightmare?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This case study explores the challenges faced during NASCAR's inaugural stock car street race, the Grant Park 220, in Chicago. It delves into the logistics, partnerships, and community impact of hosting such an event in an urban setting. Through the lens of NASCAR veteran Jamie Bishop, students gain insights into the complexities of organizing and executing a street race, including traffic management, accessibility issues, and coordination breakdowns. The case study prompts students to analyze the event's success, identify key challenges, and propose strategies for improving future street races.

Keywords: NASCAR, Urban street racing, Logistical challenges, Event planning, Stakeholder collaboration

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## BACKGROUND

On July 1, 2023, the streets of Chicago were alive with the sound of revving engines and the hum of excited spectators anxious to witness the start of the first-ever stock car street race in NASCAR's history. The idea for the Grant Park 220 originated from a computer-generated simulation racetrack for eNASCAR and a subsequent partnership between the City of Chicago and NASCAR. Marketing for the first stock car race of its kind took place over the previous year and focused on the innovation of a new type of NASCAR racing as the circuit looked to increase their fan base and interest in the sport. The racecourse used actual streets in downtown Chicago and passed many iconic city landmarks in hopes of exposing spectators and racing fans to a new sport experience and to provide a positive community impact.

However, logistics of the race proved to be a challenge and threatened to negatively impact the overall experience for spectators, competitors, and the local community. Jamie Bishop, a 35-year veteran of NASCAR agreed to be interviewed for this case study and offers a professional's viewpoint and a behind-the-scenes perspective of this inaugural race weekend.

On a rainy Friday morning, Jamie Bishop, a 32-year veteran of professional stock car racing, walked the streets of downtown Chicago near Grant Park. There was no traffic, however, because the park and surrounding streets had been closed for a first-of-its-kind event. NASCAR had come to the streets of Chicago with the first-ever stock car street race in its history. Jamie, , serving as fuel man for DGM Racing during the 2023 race weekend, walked the race route in search of a competitive edge. City streets were sure to be different from the well-worn ovals so familiar to NASCAR and their legions of fans. However, it turned out that city streets would not be the only challenge NASCAR would face over the race weekend. As Jamie stood there surrounded by the iconic Chicago skyline and streets that had been transformed into a racetrack, he considered what led to an event like this.

## COMPANY BACKGROUND

Though motorsports in the United States initially became a popular spectator sport in the Midwest following the first open-wheeled race at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in 1911 (Reed, 2005), the area of the nation most synonymous with auto racing is the South. However, this region did not have an officially sanctioned sport until 1948 when Bill France founded the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) series. France's vision was to create a racing circuit that featured common American passenger cars. Unlike open-wheeled cars designed specifically for racing at high speeds on such tracks as Indianapolis, stockcar racing originally consisted of full-sized American sedans whose parts were required to be listed in auto manufacturer's catalogs. These automobiles were available to drivers at a lower cost than traditional racecars and were more familiar to the average American spectator, increasing the chances that average Americans would demonstrate interest in both racing and supporting brand loyalty to preferred car manufacturers (Hagstrom, 1998).

Since NASCAR's first sanctioned race at the Daytona Beach Road Course in 1948, the sport grew in fan interest and loyalty over the next several decades. Though NASCAR's nascent beginnings launched from "bootleggers trying to outrun authorities with illegal alcohol" (Hembree, 2000) and a long tradition of running races on small dirt tracks almost exclusively in the South (Fleischman & Pearce, 2004), the sport would eventually grow to compete with other professional sport offerings. Citing fan friendliness, fairness, and lower costs among its

aspirational values, stockcar racing evolved through the creation of super speedways, televising races, attracting corporate sponsorships, and holding races in other areas of the country (Lee & Pedersen, 2009). By 2008, NASCAR had become the second most popular sport in the United States in terms of television ratings, rivaling the National Football League and surpassing other professional sports including Major League Baseball, the National Basketball Association, and the National Hockey League (Spanberg, 2008).

However, by the mid-2010s and after years of competing at the same venues, fan interest had begun to wane. In response, NASCAR began to make significant changes to its schedule to reinvigorate fan interest in the sport. These changes included holding an exhibition race inside the Los Angeles Coliseum, the creation of the Roval (part road course and part superspeedway) in Charlotte, and competing on dirt during the annual Spring race in Bristol, TN.

The latest innovation for developing fan interest in the sport occurred in 2023 with the running of NASCAR's first-ever street race in Chicago, IL. As the Formula One and Indy Racing League (IRL) series had seen great fan interest in watching open-wheeled races on the city streets of Miami, Nashville, and Las Vegas, NASCAR looked to create a similar event among the skyscrapers and along iconic Lake Shore Drive in downtown Chicago (Stern, 2022).

While Chicago may not seem to have a direct geographical or cultural association with NASCAR, the city hosts multiple professional sport teams, served as the United States entry in bidding for the 2016 Olympics, and has experience hosting other large-scale events in the downtown area, such as the Chicago Marathon, the World Musical Festival, and multiple parades. Additionally, NASCAR has a long history of competing in Windy City, including two decades of racing at the Chicago Speedway and three stockcar races in the 1950s being held inside Soldier Field, home of the Chicago Bears (Reardon, 2023). Thus, in a combination of providing homage to the sport's history and to technology-driven simulation technology that developed eNASCAR iRacing, Chicago was chosen as the site for the circuit's inaugural street race.

## **RACING IN THE WINDY CITY**

### **Preparation**

On March 24, 2021, NASCAR announced that a simulated street course in the Chicago Loop would be the track for the fifth and final race of the 2021 eNASCAR iRacing Pro Invitational Series. However, NASCAR was soon rumored to be in exploratory conversations with city officials in the pursuit of a real version of the virtual course and, on July 19, 2022, the Grant Park 220 was announced as part of the 2023 NASCAR Cup Series.

NASCAR was reported to have negotiated a \$500,000 flat fee for the course, plus an additional \$2 per ticket sold to the event and 15% of all merchandise, food, and beverage sales. The permit fee was to be far lower than charges for similar major events involving the closure of Grant Park. The rationale of this low fee is the opportunity to include a myriad of spectators that have not had the opportunity to attend a NASCAR event before.

While the purpose of the race made sense, the logistics of such an event were cause for concern. Residents critical of the event expressed concerns over the closure of major roads and Grant Park over the busy Independence Day weekend, the noise from the event, and the potential

danger to nearby residences. In response, NASCAR hosted several promotional events with city institutions and neighborhood groups in leading up to race weekend.

On July 1, 2023, the course hosted its first official race as part of the Xfinity Series while the Cup Series Grant Park 220 took place on the following day. Though both races were held, each had to be shortened due to severe thunderstorms which persisted throughout the weekend and caused flooding on multiple parts of the racecourse. Weather also caused the cancellation of multiple concerts scheduled as part of the race weekend event, including performances by Miranda Lambert and The Chainsmokers.

Highlighting the uniqueness of this event, the Grant City 200 was won by Shane van Gisbergen, a driver from New Zealand with street racing experience competing in his first-ever NASCAR race. He became the first racer to take home the checkered flag in their first race since Johnny Rutherford in 1963 (De la Fuente, 2023).

NASCAR has a contract with the city of Chicago to cover three years, lasting through the 2025 NASCAR season. However, following the 2023 race, the Office of the Mayor stated that the course's future remains under evaluation and that community input is being sought.

### **Race Day**

As the designated fuel man for DGM Racing in the Xfinity Series in the coming weekend, Jamie Bishop arrived in Chicago on June 30. With over three decades of experience in professional auto racing, Bishop walked the street course to evaluate how different it would be in comparison to a typical road or oval track in order to help his team during the competitive racing over the weekend. In a personal interview after the event, Bishop indicated three distinct challenges the Grant Park 220 faced in comparison to other NASCAR events.

- **Traffic Management “Nightmare”:** With the race route spanning several major roads and neighborhoods, managing traffic flow proved to be a logistical nightmare. City officials struggled to coordinate with the race organizers to ensure that roads were closed at the right times and reopened promptly after each race. This led to severe traffic congestion and frustration among locals and businesses who were left stranded or unable to access essential services during the event. Michigan Avenue was shut down to traffic one way and vehicles had to be routed around the one-way street and through Grant Park.
- **Parking and Accessibility Problems:** Chicago’s already scarce parking availability was put to the test during the street race as spectators and participants struggled to find suitable parking, causing delays and congestion around the event perimeter. Additionally, accessibility for individuals with disabilities was limited, as race organizers failed to adequately provide sufficient accommodations or transportation options. Pit crews for race teams were asked to set up in sections of parking areas around the perimeter of the racecourse and carry necessary equipment, including tires, fuel, tools, and other extra parts for the racecar, to the area designated as Pit Row.
- **Logistics Coordination Breakdown:** A well-executed street race requires precise coordination among various stakeholders, including organizers, law enforcement, medical teams, and local businesses. According to Bishop, this race experienced a severe breakdown in communication and coordination. Timelines were not adhered to, essential

resources were misallocated, and crucial information failed to reach relevant parties on time.

Overall, the event was viewed as a success from the fanbase but also as a hardship for the City of Chicago. The contract with NASCAR is scheduled to cover three years through the 2025 season. However, on July 3, 2023, the Office of the Mayor issued a statement that the course's future remains under evaluation and that community input is being sought. Thus, NASCAR veteran Jamie Bishop, race organizers, and the city of Chicago are left wondering what could be done to create a better experience for fans, the local community, and for participating race teams.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) What were the primary logistical challenges faced by NASCAR and city officials in organizing the Grant Park 220 street race, and how did these challenges impact the overall event experience?
- 2) Discuss the implications of hosting a street race in an urban environment, considering factors such as traffic management, accessibility, and the event's impact on local businesses and residents.
- 3) How did NASCAR collaborate with various stakeholders, including city authorities, sponsors, and local communities, to ensure the success of the street race? What strategies were employed to address potential conflicts or concerns among stakeholders?
- 4) Evaluate the marketing and promotional strategies used to attract spectators, enhance fan engagement, and create a unique experience for attendees at the Grant Park 220 street race. How effective were these strategies in achieving their objectives?
- 5) Discuss the ethical considerations involved in organizing large-scale sports events, particularly in urban settings. How should organizers balance entertainment value with community well-being and environmental sustainability?
- 6) Based on the case study, what lessons can be drawn regarding best practices for managing sports events in urban environments? What recommendations would you propose to improve future street racing events, considering both logistical challenges and community impact?

## FURTHER READING

Association of Event Management Education

Website: <https://www.aeme.org/>

City of Chicago - Special Events Resource Guide

Website: [https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/dca/supp\\_info/resource\\_guide.html](https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/dca/supp_info/resource_guide.html)

Ethics in Sports Management: Why are they so Important?

Website: <https://www.apu.apus.edu/area-of-study/nursing-and-health-sciences/resources/ethics-in-sport-management-why-are-they-so-important/>

Event Planning Guide

Website: <https://www.cvent.com/en/blog/events/event-planning-guide>

NASCAR Official Website

Website: <https://www.nascar.com>

Sports Business Journal

Website: <https://www.sportsbusinessjournal.com/Daily.aspx>



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## Teaching Notes for Street Racing in the Windy City

### Case Synopsis

On July 1, 2023, the streets of Chicago were alive with the sound of revving engines and the hum of excited spectators anxious to witness the start of the first-ever stock car street race in NASCAR's history. The idea for the Grant Park 220 originated from a computer-generated simulation racetrack for eNASCAR and a subsequent partnership between the City of Chicago and NASCAR. Marketing for the first stock car race of its kind took place over the previous year and focused on the innovation of a new type of NASCAR racing as the circuit looked to increase their fan base and interest in the sport. The racecourse used actual streets in downtown Chicago and passed many iconic city landmarks in hopes of exposing spectators and racing fans to a new sport experience and to provide a positive community impact. Jamie Bishop, a 35-year veteran of NASCAR agreed to be interviewed for this case study and offers a bird's eye view of the race and the behind the scenes look. However, logistics of the race proved to be a challenge and threatened to negatively impact the overall experience for spectators, competitors, and the local community.

### Case Objectives and Use

This case highlights the logistical challenges of conducting a unique sporting event for the first time while using existing infrastructure as part of the competition and fan experience. As such, students are asked to consider the viability of such an event, explore potential issues surrounding this competition, and create a mock presentation to the sport's governing body (NASCAR) and the Chicago Mayor's Office providing considerations and recommendations in regard to a future race.

### Student Learning Outcomes

In this case study, students will delve into the complexities of organizing and executing a high-profile sports event within an urban environment, focusing on NASCAR's inaugural street race, the Grant Park 220, held in Chicago. By examining the challenges faced and strategies employed during this event, students will develop a deeper understanding of key concepts in sports management, event planning, and community engagement. Through critical analysis and practical application, students will gain valuable insights and skills to navigate the dynamic landscape of sports event management and stakeholder collaboration. By the end of this case study, students will achieve the following learning outcomes:

- 1) Analyze the logistical challenges faced by NASCAR and city officials in organizing the Grant Park 220 street race.
- 2) Evaluate the impact of street racing events on urban infrastructure, traffic management, and community engagement.
- 3) Identify strategies for addressing traffic congestion, parking limitations, and accessibility concerns in urban race settings.
- 4) Discuss the role of partnerships and collaboration between sports organizations like NASCAR and city authorities in event planning.



- 5) Propose recommendations for enhancing the overall experience for spectators, participants, and the local community in future street racing events.
- 6) Develop an action plan outlining steps to improve coordination, communication, and stakeholder engagement for successful urban street races.

This case study provides a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in organizing large-scale sporting events in urban environments and equips students with practical skills for event management, stakeholder collaboration, and community impact assessment.

### **Applicability**

This case can be effectively evaluated and discussed in an undergraduate sport management facilities, logistics, or administration course. However, with increased instructor guidance, the case could also potentially be suitable for an entry-level business managerial course or marketing class. Additionally, this can serve as a stand-alone activity and be implemented within approximately two hours of class time, which would include evaluation and discussion. Finally, with the inclusion of an in-class presentation from small groups, the instructor would have the capability of extending case analysis to renew or evolve the recommendations, solutions, and discussion over time.

### **TEACHING PLAN**

#### **Enhancing Sport Management Education Through Case Studies: Bridging Theory with Real-World Application**

Sport management education is an emerging study of personal and societal growth, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and the acquisition of knowledge. As educational methodologies evolve, educators are constantly seeking innovative ways to enhance learning experiences. One such effective approach is the incorporation of case studies into the curriculum. Case studies offer an immersive method to bridge theoretical concepts with real-world applications to foster deeper understanding and engagement among students (Boyce, 2009). This essay delves into the significance of using case studies in sport management and how they contribute to a well-rounded and practical learning experience (Morse and McAvoy, 2014).

1. *Real-World Application*: Case studies provide a tangible connection between classroom theories and practical situations. They allow students to witness how theoretical knowledge translates into real-world scenarios. By analyzing cases relevant to their field of study, students gain insights into the complexities and challenges they might encounter in their professional careers. This bridges the gap between classroom learning and the professional world, enabling students to be better prepared for the challenges ahead.
2. *Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving*: Case studies stimulate critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Students are required to analyze situations, identify key issues, and develop strategies to address them. This process encourages active engagement and the development of analytical skills, as students must weigh evidence, consider alternatives, and make informed decisions. Navigating through the complexities of a case study promotes a deeper level of understanding and encourages students to think beyond the surface level.

3. *Multidisciplinary Learning*: Incorporating case studies from various disciplines exposes students to a wide range of perspectives. This multidisciplinary approach encourages students to think holistically and consider diverse viewpoints when approaching complex problems. It also mirrors the collaborative nature of many professional environments where individuals from different backgrounds work together to find comprehensive solutions.
4. *Engagement and Application*: Case studies captivate students' interest by presenting real-world situations that are relatable and interesting. Students are more likely to be engaged when learning through stories, as they can connect emotionally to the characters and situations presented. The active involvement required for analyzing cases also enhances student participation and involvement in class discussions, fostering a dynamic learning environment.

In conclusion, the use of case studies in education offers numerous benefits that contribute to a comprehensive and practical learning experience. By providing a bridge between theoretical concepts and real-world applications, fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills, promoting multidisciplinary learning, enhancing engagement, and addressing ethical dilemmas, case studies empower students to become well-rounded and capable individuals. Educators should continue to leverage the power of case studies to prepare students for the challenges and opportunities they will encounter in their academic and professional journeys.

### **Pedagogical Techniques**

From a technical standpoint, instructors may find it beneficial to revisit prior concepts with students prior to case discussion. Depending on the course level, maturity and knowledge base of students, reexamining key concepts can better prepare students for analysis, evaluation, and answering of case questions.

Several pedagogical techniques such as using varying perspectives, interactive classroom techniques, peer teaching, and written and oral teaching and assessment can be utilized in the classroom to enable case learning to be beneficial for student learning objectives. Consistent with the aforementioned discussion, as proposed in this current case, students would have an opportunity to evaluate and respond to a real-world experience individually and collectively. As an initial recommendation, the students should adopt the role of Jamie Bishop (the external NASCAR professional tasked with the analysis) with the instructor assisting students as questions arise. Students can be divided into groups to discuss the recommendations and potentially also assume the role of the Mayor's office to consider recommendations made. This case is used to encourage students to: 1) place themselves in the real-life role of a logistics manager for a professional sport event to analyze and accomplish goals, 2) use creative thinking techniques to analyze and address a client's needs, as well as identify the issues that impact each alternative, and 3) use the results of the analysis to develop a written report and/or multimedia presentation to provide recommendations to multiple entities.

### **Recommended Implementation and Use of the Case**

The external consultant (groups of students) is hired by a joint committee/task force of the Office of the Mayor of Chicago (OOMC) and NASCAR to create a written and oral report suggesting alternative approaches to future street races regarding the areas of concern provided.

In this scenario, the instructor plays the role the committee/task force and assigns teams of students to assess the situation and provide a written report and oral presentation of their findings to the discussion questions provided in the case.

For undergraduate classes, the author recommends that students be required to answer discussion questions 1-6 in a written report and address them in an oral presentation. The written report will consist of their individual answers to each discussion question. The final paragraph can be a collaborative effort from the team.

The oral presentation would consist of the following:

- Introduction slide
- Overview of the race concerns
- Strategies for mitigating the concerns with supporting information (drawings, maps, etc)
- Recommendation to joint committee/task force regarding the 2024 Grant Park 220.

### **Data Collection and Methods**

Data for this case study was provided by NASCAR professional Jamie Bishop through an extensive interview. Contact was made through a mutual colleague and Mr. Bishop offered to share his experience, perception, and analysis of the race from his viewpoint as a fuel man for a race team competing in the Xfinity Race during the 2023 Grant Park 220 race weekend. This method of analysis is commonly used by academics and practitioners in the field of Sport Management (Rinehart, 2005).

### **Potential Discussion Questions**

- 1) What were the primary logistical challenges faced by NASCAR and city officials in organizing the Grant Park 220 street race, and how did these challenges impact the overall event experience?
- 2) Discuss the implications of hosting a street race in an urban environment, considering factors such as traffic management, accessibility, and the event's impact on local businesses and residents.
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