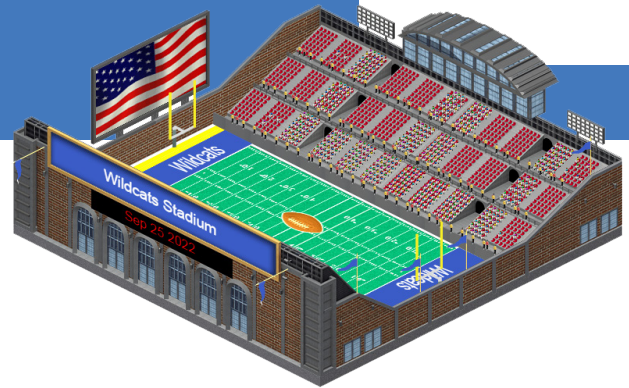


Case Briefing

Marketing Ethics



The Situation

The Reno Wildcats, a professional football team, has a losing record and poor attendance. They are extremely eager to improve their on-field and business performance. They have recently learned that they have the opportunity to sign several players who could likely help the team win. More wins will mean better attendance and better financial performance. However, they have heard that the player's off-field activities include actions that some people would consider immoral or offensive. They are unsure what to do from both an ethical and a business standpoint.

Your Role

You have been brought in as the General Manager. The decision on these players is yours. You also own the responsibility for the business performance of the franchise, specifically, meeting the owner's attendance targets.

Learning Phase

In this phase, you will evaluate players and make personnel decisions for a 'practice' franchise. Step-by-step instructions show you how to sign two players with different sets of off-field issues that you will read about in a sports news journal. You will then analyze the effect of each hiring on the team's success, fan comments, and overall attendance. Based on this, you will begin to understand the ethical norms of the community your team operates in and the constraints that places on you as a GM.

Challenge Phase

The Wildcat's owner is frustrated and looking for wins and improved attendance. Based on what you've discovered in the Learning Phase, you will make player personnel decisions for the team. Your goal is to achieve a specific attendance target for the remainder of the season. To do this, the team will have to win more while avoiding hiring players whose behavior violates community norms. The critical personnel decisions are up to you. As you make your decisions, consider your personal ethical feelings about right and wrong.

At the option of your Professor, you may be able to retry the Challenge Phase multiple times. Only your best grade will count.

Marketing Ethics in the Simulation

In the simulation model, thousands of simulated fans decide each game on whether to buy a ticket. They consider many factors including price, win/loss record, and their opinion on the behavior of players on the team. As in the real world, fans have a range of what they find ethically acceptable behavior. Some fans will not care at all about bad player behavior. Other fans will absolutely refuse to attend games. Fan comments in the post-game Event Reports within the simulation give feedback on fans not attending due to player issues.

Discussion Questions

Considering the information you learned about the players, did you consider it personally unethical to sign any players?

How do your personal ethical feelings relate to your role and duty as an employee of the organization? Which ethical standards should be most important? The owner's, fans', employees', players', your own?

If there is a trade-off between financial success and ethical decisions, how should a company approach the decision? Is it black and white?

What real-life examples from professional sports, particularly the NFL, show similar ethical dilemmas for teams? What decisions did the teams make and how did fans react?