

Friday Night Lights



Overview

Clubs across the country are beginning to consider playing one or more of their fixtures during the season on a Friday night, instead of the traditional Saturday afternoon. They have found that by creating a “Friday night event” they have attracted a wider audience to the games and the attendances have increased. As a result they have experienced a substantial increase in the monies taken at the game as compared to a Saturday afternoon game and a great atmosphere has been generated at the ground.

If a club makes the decision to run a game on a Friday night then in order to optimise the outcomes (income, new customers to the club, new sponsors, motivated players etc.) it will need to develop a plan.

The notes below will provide the club with a sample plan to follow as well as the choices it can make about who to target, how to attract them to the game and the outcomes they want to achieve.

Building the Plan

What is the objective of “Friday Night Lights”?

At the beginning of the planning stage the club will need to decide why it wants to play on a Friday night and what the outcomes are that it wants to achieve. These outcomes could include;

- Income generation
- Brand Building
- To attract new “customers” to the club
- To stage an event to which potential sponsors could be invited
- To motivate the players
- Data Collection – this is a great chance to collect data from individuals who visit the club for the first time. This could be achieved through the running of a competition on the night with a really good prize that is presented on the night after the game

What is the structure of “Friday Night Lights”?

Before the structure of the event/evening can be decided upon the club will need to decide who it is trying to attract to the game. If it is only individuals who are interested in watching rugby then putting on pre match entertainment won't be important. However, if they one of the target audiences they are trying to attract is groups of friends for a night out then they may need to have some entertainment on the pitch and even a drink/food offer pre match to get them to the ground early. Once this has been decided then the club will need to decide the prices it is going to charge at the gate (if any), over the bar, in the hospitality room if there is one etc.

Marketing “Friday Night Lights”

Once the club understands who the customers are that it is trying to attract then it will need to build up a marketing plan to ensure that the optimum amount of customers know about the game and are influenced to come along.

The delivery of “Friday Night Lights”

The “customer experience” on the night is critical. If they enjoy the evening and if the club “fulfils their expectations” they will stay late, tell everyone they meet what a great night they had and come back another time.

Review

It is essential that the club reviews the evening so that it knows what went well, what didn't and why.

Background Decisions

Which game should we choose?

When making this decision the club should consider certain things. Firstly, it is important to “make the big games bigger” and don't try to build the crowd at a game which isn't important or that the club will win easily. A greater crowd will be attracted to

http://www.irishrugby.ie/club/welcomingclubs/welcoming_clubs_index.php

IRFU Welcoming Clubs Programme; An IRFU initiative which provides clubs with a road map and training for the “team off the field” to assist them in running their sports club as efficiently as possible.

watch the top teams or a local derby match. If the club does choose a local derby match they will be able to attract a greater away support than if the team was from 2 hours away. Secondly, consider what else is on in the community/region on the same night, the least amount of competition you have the better. Thirdly, weather is difficult to predict but you know that a December evening has a greater chance of having poor weather than one in October or March.

Who could be attracted to the game and why?

Regular Supporters – the regular supporters will certainly come to the evening game and since they will be great advocates of the club you could ask them to encourage friends to come along with them.

Occasional supporters – it is important that the publicity about the game is sufficient to let everyone who has an interest in the club and who has been to the games knows about it.

Groups of friends – many groups of friends go out together on a Friday night. They go out to be entertained, to spend time with their friends and to enjoy a drink or two. If the club can reproduce this at the Friday Night Lights game then they could get groups along to the game. To achieve this, the club might be able to have some entertainment in the bar pre and post-match, and/or there may be some entertainment on the pitch pre game.

Families - Friday nights aren't the best time to attract families because of the children having a late night. However, it is worth considering that if there are 40 juniors playing tag at half time on the pitch all of their parents will come to watch them. Alternatively, if the club is able to deliver a package of entertainment on the evening including music, dancers, face painters etc. families could be attracted for a "family night out" together, especially if the children play rugby.

Sponsors– Friday night could be a great opportunity for sponsors to a) bring along their suppliers if there is a hospitality room or b) bring along a group of their employees to thank them/ reward them for their work with a few drinks and a buffet.

Students – if there is a local University or College the rugby playing/loving students could be attracted for a night out.

Opposition –especially if the opposition team is relatively local a group of their supporters could be attracted to the game if the promotional material for the game is sent to the opposition to put onto their web site

Entertainment at the Game

It is important that the club develops an event if it wants to attract a new audience (as well as its traditional audience) it creates a fun night. The problem is that this costs money. However, it could be that there is a College of Performing arts locally with groups of individuals who are looking for a "Stage" to perform. The local school could have a swing band or a jazz band that could be attracted to perform.

Also since the club is aiming to attract a large audience to the game with publicity being generated throughout the community, there may be a local business that may see the benefits in sponsoring the evening. This might provide a small amount of income to pay for one or two "professional" acts.

Promoting "Friday Night Lights"

Once the club has decided on which groups of individuals it wants to attract to the game then it will need to a) build up some basic marketing messages for the individual targets b) decide on a budget c) decide on which marketing channels it can afford to use.

As an example - if there is some entertainment on in the bar and if there are promotional offers on between 6 o'clock and 7 o'clock then this information will need to be promoted to a) the local community and b) the opposition. The promotion will need to start three to four weeks away from the event to ensure that everyone knows about it and also that they don't make alternative plans for the evening.

Channels of Communication

- Social Media – this is a really effective, easy and economical way of communicating with large groups of people. This will be especially effective when contacting the groups of young adults who could be attracted to the game.
- E mail – if the club has an e mail data base this should be used but we do know that only around 22% of e mails from sports clubs are opened.
- Press – the "Friday Night Lights" game will be a newsworthy item for the local press, especially if there are local children performing pre game or if some local celebrity can be attracted to the game.

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- Posters – effective around the club and the local community but can be expensive.
- Web site – your web site and the web site of the opposition are essential marketing tools.

Delivery on the Night

It is essential that all of the people who are attracted to the game a) enjoy themselves and b) have their needs fulfilled. For example – are their sufficient bar staff working, is food available if the customer wants to buy some without being in a queue for 20 minutes, are the ladies toilets clean, are there signposts to tell the customer where to go, can they hear the entertainment on the pitch and are the staff they meet personable/welcoming.

Review

If the club is to run these evenings on a regular basis then it will need to know what went well and what didn't. This information can be collected from the club officials who were there on the night and from any feedback received from the "customers" who visited the club.