

BEHIND EVERY GREAT SPORTS FAN...

Baylor's **Center for Sports Strategy & Sales** digs into the data behind sports fans' behaviors to develop new marketing strategies for filling stadium and arena seats

BY / BECCA BROADDUS

Sports fans are good at waiting. Waiting for the season to start. Waiting for that championship title. Waiting in line for tickets... well, not anymore. Thanks to the internet, the days of waiting in line at the ticket office are gone. "Buying behavior has changed," Kirk Wakefield, Edwin W. Streetman Professor of Retail Marketing and executive director of the Center for Sports Strategy & Sales (S3), said. "It used to be that you got tickets by directly contacting the team or walking up to the box office the day of the game. Now, everybody is online and what was the secondary market, like StubHub, is now the primary market. To generate ticket sales, you must understand your customers and the data. The best sellers, if you will, are the ones that have access to the best data and know what to do with it."

In addition to tracking attendance, sports teams track how often fans attend, when they attend, where they prefer to sit, their social media habits, concession spending, income level and more. Armed with data, sales and marketing teams tailor efforts to find fans, retain ticket buyers and, ultimately, increase revenue.

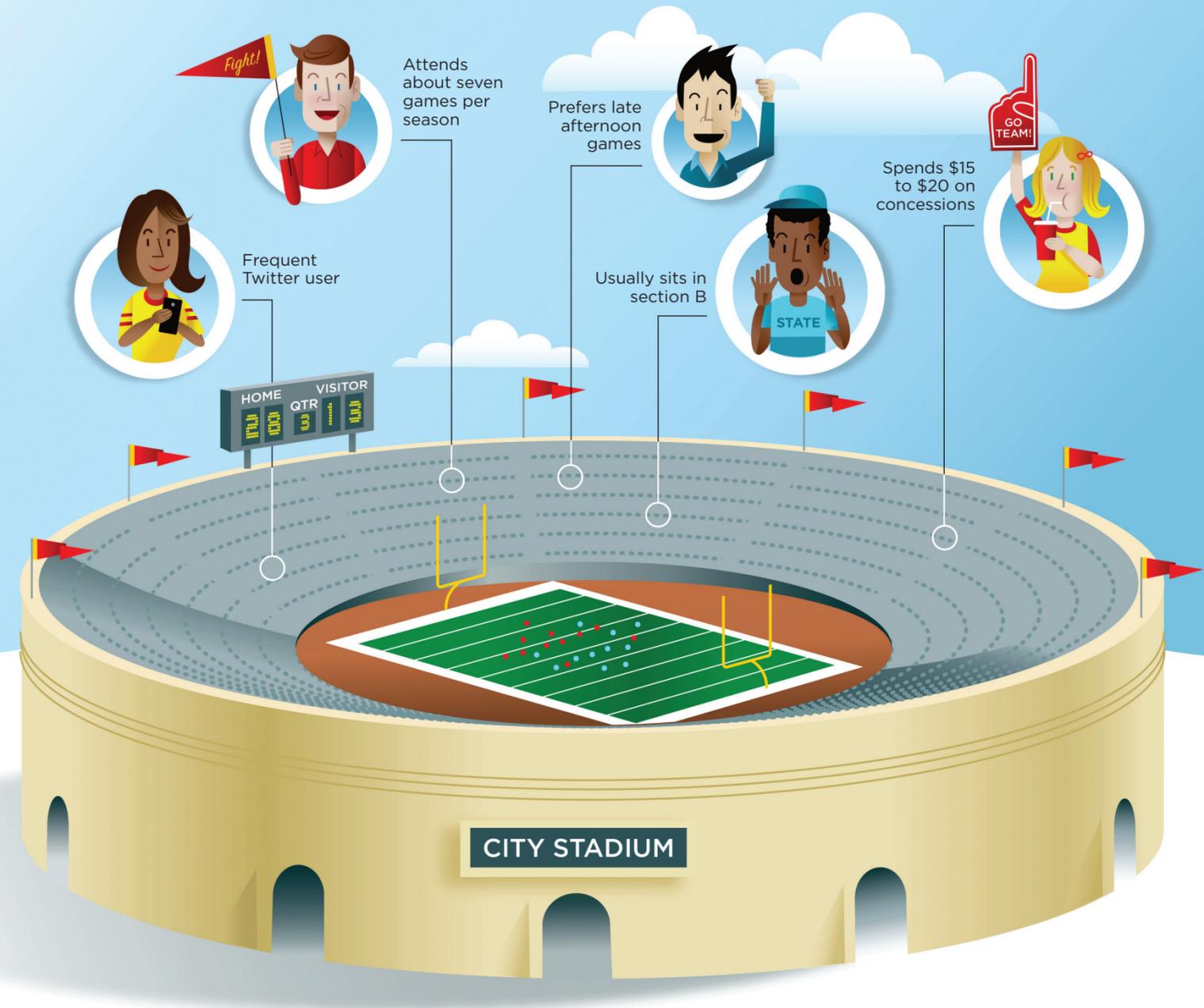
"Growth in sports jobs in data analytics has grown around 10-fold," Wakefield said. "It's still in its infancy. This industry won't do anything but grow."

Baylor S3 has taught the data and digital sales side of sports marketing since 2011, when they added a third major track, CRM & Analytics—now called the data strategy track. (The other tracks are brand strategy and sales leadership.) The coursework includes customer relationship management (CRM) software training, data visualization, database management, reporting, and statistical and predictive modeling. In fact, graduates of the data strategy track simultaneously complete the requirements for the new business analytics certificate offered in the Hankamer School of Business.

The job placement rate for S3 data strategy graduates is 100 percent, and the three tracks combined have a 95 percent placement rate, according to Wakefield. Most of those employers are professional sports teams, including the New York Yankees, Miami Dolphins, Madison Square Garden, Dallas Mavericks, Texas Rangers, Houston Texans, Houston Dynamo and Houston Astros, in addition to other professional teams, corporations and ad agencies.

"We take a 3-D approach to assess demand for a program," Wakefield said. "First, we look at industry demand. Then, we match that with where we think there will be interest or demand from students. Then, lastly, we assess faculty demand or capacity to fill the need."

So where is industry demand shifting now? eSports.



eSports is, essentially, the professional, competitive playing of video games, and it is becoming a lucrative business. According to the Global eSports Market Report of 2017 by Newzoo, the eSports economy grew to \$696 million in 2017, which was an increase of 41.3 percent compared to 2016.

eSports is gaining such popularity that in January, a joint venture between the NBA and Take Two Interactive, publishers of video game NBA 2K, created a professional eSports league. The NBA 2K League's inaugural season began with 17 professional NBA teams publicly and

financially backing their virtual counterparts. In March, S3 hosted its first NBA 2K tournament and had 40 Baylor student participants. Mavs Gaming, the Dallas Mavericks NBA 2K team, and Microsoft sponsored the event. The center is planning another tournament this year, and they anticipate a bigger turnout.

"Every other major I know that connects to eSports is on the game development side," Wakefield said. "We're getting in on the making money side. That's why we've always been unique. We're figuring out how you monetize it." 🎮