

SPORTS INNOVATION INSTITUTE

The Sports Innovation Institute vision is to be a key driver in helping establish Indianapolis as a hub for global sports. Fostering interdisciplinary collaboration to tackle industry-specific challenges is the goal—alongside inspiring leaders, faculty, and students with an entrepreneurial spirit.

BACKGROUND

Indianapolis has innovated around sports since 1909—beginning with motor sports, where a lab for test cars evolved into the premier racetrack in the world (think ‘greatest spectacle in racing’). However, after hitting a cultural and economic low in the 1970s, the circle city again found that a sports-centric strategy would be key to revitalization efforts.

City leaders wanted to reinvent the brand around the common language of sports. So when the Amateur Sports Act of 1978 decreed the Indianapolis-based American Athletic Union could not govern all sports and each formed its own governing body, Indianapolis worked hard to keep the individualized organizations right here.

This sports-centric strategy has and continues to generate success. The headquarters and pro franchises have added panache, and the development of myriad peripheral businesses like Sports Graphics and The Registration System have contributed greatly

to the economy. Recently, IUPUI has become a contributing partner in all of this.

The road to partnership started three years ago when Dean Jay Gladden began investigating a mutually beneficial link between campus and community initiatives. “I wanted to find practical ways to leverage IUPUI’s strengths to support the sports economy,” he said.

MELTING POT OF OPPORTUNITY

There was keen interest across the board because sports applications include a wide variety of disciplines, such as exercise science (kinesiology), sports management, and tourism management. Other schools and departments were interested as well—like informatics, because big data applications in sports are many and varied. “Data analytics is a fast-growing field of opportunity in the sports space,” says Gladden. “Just think about how all great sports products have a layer of engineering and technology.”

Take informatics. On December 5, all Twitter conversations were captured and ran through an informatics program to look at themes, see what kinds of insights could be gleaned, and what actions could be taken. (e.g. How many positive mentions has Indy received because it hosted the NCAA? How many times are Big 10 sponsors recognized?)

