

## SPORTS

# Company helps people build new careers in sports

By CYNTHIA SCANLON  
Special to The Business Journal

Phoenix-based Sports Careers, the only sports career development organization in the nation, grossed more than \$1 million last year and has grown to 10,000 members.

"We're a sports marketing firm whose whole mission is to help people find a position within the sports industry," says Jay Abraham, president of Sports Careers.

"Our success ratio is 15 to 20 percent, which we feel is very good for the industry. We've helped people get jobs with ESPN, the Atlanta Braves, the San Diego Chargers, the Detroit Redwings and the Phoenix Suns. The jobs ranged from public relations to marketing to sales to being on-air personalities," says Abraham.

Owned in part by Jerry Colangelo, Sports Careers offers a wide range of vocational programs including conferences, seminars, educational products and publications.

"With our seminars, we bring the industry to our members," Abraham says. "Who you know is important, so our seminars offer individuals the opportunity to network and begin to build relationships. We've found this to be the most successful way to help people."

On average, 400 to 600 people attend Sports Careers seminars, he says.

"We have more than 100 speakers for every 500 people," he says. "You won't have the time to meet them all, but there are a lot of people there at the level of a Jerry Colangelo. You have the opportunity to ask questions and find out first-hand how to break in. And there isn't anything that can replace meeting people who are actually working in the field and finding out how they did it."

Individuals join Sports Careers by paying a membership fee of \$199. Annual dues are \$95. Each member receives a self-assessment kit, an audiocassette package, a résumé kit and a six-month subscription to the firm's biweekly newsletter, *Career Connections*. Sports Careers also publishes *Sports Market Place*, a directory listing more than 7,500 entries, including teams, leagues, broadcasters, trade associations, agents and promoters.

According to Abraham, people desiring a sports career don't have to have a sports background, but they do have to have marketable skills that can be transferred. He says many people come to Sports Careers because they played sports as kids, loved sports as adults, and now want to work in the field. But Abraham warns there is more to it than that.

"It would be like me telling Dial that I love soap," he says. "We try to re-educate them that this is like any other industry. You must have transferable skills. Someone who is a great salesman with Xerox could transfer their skills and be a great salesman in the sports industry."

According to Abraham, sports is a \$100 billion industry, and the demand for qualified people will grow ever larger. "Five years ago, there was only one sports radio station. Today, there are 52," he says. "There are more than 6,000 sports manufacturing firms in the world. One hundred and sixty colleges offer sports management degrees."

He continues, "The industry has really come into its own in the last 15 years, and that's primarily from all the exposure on television. Sports is the only industry in the country that has 24-hour-a-day dedicated cable channels. Regional and national programming are growing at incredible rates. We now have team tennis, continental indoor soccer, rollerblading, arena football and

beach volleyball. Even MTV is going into sports programming. All of this creates a market that wasn't there before."

And all of this translates into jobs. Abraham says most sports-career seekers are attracted to teams sports and on-air personalities because they are so visible. But Sports Careers shows its members the vast potential hidden behind the scenes. "Everybody sees only the tip of the iceberg," he says. "We try to educate everybody as to what's below.

Below the iceberg is more money and more opportunity."

Sports Careers has helped bank presidents, judges and sports enthusiasts of all kinds who are tired with their jobs. "More and more people are asking themselves why they are doing what they are doing," Abraham says. "Guys call us who are at the top of their careers, but hate their jobs. Our contention is that they can break into the sports industry by transferring their skills."

He says those people who ultimately succeed go the extra mile: They volunteer, check into internships and, most importantly, prepare themselves.

Abraham says, "When the opportunity presents itself, you don't waste time by saying, 'I love sports.' They've heard that. If you can show someone how you can make money, you're probably going to get an appointment."

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