ICE League: The First Season

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

By

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Abstract

The ICE Basketball League had its inaugural season starting on February 7, 2015, and it lasted six weeks until March 14, 2015. The league was designed for seventh and eighth graders in Muncie Community Schools. It required students to have at least a 2.5 GPA to be eligible to play all four quarters of a basketball game. If they had a 2.0 to a 2.29 GPA, they could play only one quarter. If they had a 2.3 to 2.49 GPA, they could play only two quarters.

I became the executive producer for a documentary that would feature the ICE League in its first season. The documentary shows the day-to-day events of the league, feature specific student athletes, and reveals whether or not a league could be effective by having a GPA requirement. The documentary's purpose was to show the impact a basketball league can have on a student's education and GPA. I produced this documentary through Ball State Sports Link, an immersive sports media program at Ball State University.

In order to produce this documentary, Sports Link members and I attended all ICE League events such as the draft, practices, and games, and we captured them on video. In addition, we conducted interviews with eight student athletes, ICE League coaches, and ICE League staff. After the ICE League tournament on March 14, 2015, I began the process of putting the documentary together. In the documentary, I chose to highlight specific ICE League events such as Draft Day, the first day of games, and the tournament. I also chose to feature specific ICE League student athletes and tell their personal stories. The topics ranged from how they became a better basketball player to how the ICE League has influenced them to improve their GPA. Through this documentary, I hope everyone who watches sees the positive effect a basketball league can have on encouraging students to think strongly about their education and GPA.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone involved with the ICE League for allowing Ball State Sports Link and I create this documentary. This includes but is not limited to Commissioner Tom Lyon, Project Leadership Director Tammy Pearson, and all the ICE League players, coaches, and their families.

Thank you to everyone in Ball State Sports Link who helped me produce this documentary. This includes Chris Taylor, Alex Kartman, Brad Dailey, Tim Reusche, Braden Schlegelmilch, Drew Duff, Tyler Campbell, and Matt Craig.
Authors Statement

For my senior honors thesis, I completed a creative project that entailed producing a documentary called *ICE League: The First Season*. The final product is a video documentary that is twenty-seven minutes and twenty seconds in length. I was the executive producer for the documentary. Over the course of four months, I produced it along with the help of the people and the facilities of Ball State Sports Link.

The documentary shows the implementation and operation of the Inner City Educational (ICE) Basketball league in Muncie, Indiana. The league lasted six weeks from February 7, 2015 to March 14, 2015. There were eight ICE League basketball teams, four seventh grade teams and four eighth grade teams. They represented four community centers in Muncie: The Boy & Girls Club of Muncie, the Ross Community Center, the YMCA of Muncie, and the Buley Center. The foundation of the league required participants to have a 2.5 GPA to fully participate. If students had a GPA between a 2.0 to a 2.29, they were eligible to play one quarter in each game. If students had a GPA between 2.3 to a 2.49, they were eligible to play two quarters in each game.

The vision for this documentary began in January 2015. At Ball State University, my advisor Chris Taylor and I met with the ICE League Commissioner, Tom Lyon, and three members from Project Leadership, a non-profit organization in Muncie, Indiana, which would be in charge of the operation of the ICE League. During the meeting, we discussed the ICE League and all that it would entail such as the game schedule and other logistics. In addition, we talked in length about the purpose that the documentary. It became clear to me that the ICE League staff wanted the documentary to show the impact that a GPA based league could have on students’ grades and education. The primary focus would be to show how the students’ attitudes about their education changed over the league’s duration.

To fulfill this purpose, we decided that we would feature eight student athletes, one seventh and eighth grader from each community center’s teams. These students would each serve as a poster child for the league’s mission of instilling strong educational principles in them with the implementation of a basketball league. My belief was that if any of these students could explain the value of their education and how the ICE League helped them, it would be the best avenue to fulfill the documentary’s purpose. I believe their influence on their fellow students would be much greater rather than an adult such as their coach, teacher, or parent saying it.

Next, I will explain the process of how I put together the documentary and reveal the creative rationale I used.

The documentary opens with a voiceover that says, “69 student athletes...11 coaches...8 teams...1 mission.” These are the basic numbers of the league’s teams, players, and coaches, but I put this into the open because it gave simple and clear information for the viewer to recognize
how many people participated in this event. Next, it reveals the mission of the ICE League which says, “The most important stat is your GPA.” This informs the viewer of the ICE League’s mission and sets the tone for the entire documentary. It was important to me to make all of the above clear from the very beginning so the viewer is aware of the league’s unique mission; it is designed to almost shock the viewer because a league with this vision and mission is very unique and a new idea.

The next portion of the video is an open created by Ball State Sports Link graduate assistant, Brad Dailey, which I oversaw. The open contains video of two events. The first event was a video candid shoot where we took the eight student athletes we featured in the documentary. The second event was the carving of an ICE League sculpture which was made for the premiere as well as to get creative video from the documentary. This open is designed to hype the viewer’s enthusiasm and to reel them into watching the documentary. The video is editing to the rhythm and beats of the music, which also is pleasing to the eye and makes it more fun to watch.

After the open, the documentary begins with the segment entitled, “Jud Fisher’s Dream.” This segment introduces how Jud Fisher of the Ball Brother’s Foundation came up with the idea for the ICE League. He states in the segment that he wanted to try and improve the grades of youth and show them how to be healthy through a basketball league. In putting together this segment, I wanted to start with a general overview of Muncie and history, which is blue collar, and its love of basketball. This gives viewers unfamiliar with Muncie key information about the league’s birthplace. This leads into Jud Fisher’s comments, which I used because they appropriately tell viewers how and why this league is being started.

The next segment entitled, “Draft Day” tells the story of the ICE League’s first event on February 7, 2015. In this segment, the documentary shows the tryouts that seventh and eighth graders participate in and the drafts that the coaches conduct. This segment is designed to bring the viewer into the full experience of Draft Day. It starts with Tammy Pearson of Project Leadership talking about her team’s thoughts about the event and goes on from there. This is the portion of the documentary where the featured students our introduced. I decided to introduce them this early in the documentary because they are the focus of the ICE League and the video. By getting to know the students, the viewer will have more of a personal interaction with the video, which is more likely to keep them watching. I introduced them by showing video of the candid shoot as well as video of drills. The coaches’ drafts were featured as well. I picked quotes from coaches making picks as well as the draft coordinator, Adrian Barrett, saying well known draft phrases such as, “You are now on the clock.” All of this puts the viewer in the moment, and it makes them feel like they are actually there.

The next segment entitled, “Onnie Adams Gets His Wish,” tells the story of Onnie Adams, a seventh grader on the Boys & Girls Club team. In this portion, Onnie gets a phone call from his new coach, Tony Benford, who tells him he has been drafted to his team. Afterwards, the viewer learns about Onnie Adams the person and gets his take on the ICE League. I chose to feature Onnie because he had a remarkable amount of maturity for a seventh grader. In my opinion, his quote saying, “student in the phrase student-athlete comes first” is proof that he is wise beyond his years. What better way is there for people to hear about the ICE League and its
mission than from a seventh grader? In the segment, I chose dramatic music and use shots of Onnie in slow motion. These pieces help slow down the documentary and puts the viewer "in the zone." The shots were of Onnie at the Boys & Girls Club because it was his dream to play there.

The next segment entitled, "First Practice," gives the viewer an inside look at each of the community center’s practices. It starts with the Boys & Girls Club, then the Ross Center, then the YMCA, and ends with the Buley Center. In each center’s part, the featured students on the teams explain what happened in the practice and how they felt about it. This continues to allow the audience to get to know the kids and to follow them on their journeys in the ICE League. I chose to highlight the first practices because it is an event that most people didn’t see. This is where all the hard work and effort of the students and coaches takes place. It is also the most common event in the League; each team held anywhere from ten to thirty practices during the league while there were only seven different days on which games took place.

The next segment entitled, "First Games," shows the first team all of the ICE League teams play basketball against each other on February 16, 2015. The games take place inside the Muncie Central Fieldhouse. I wanted to show this event because it gives the viewer the opportunity to see some basketball in action and also see how each team fairs. In addition, the featured students give their take on the game and what their roles were. There were four games that took place, and for each one, I chose the best plays we had captured on video. These shots were not necessarily the most important in the game because in any segment, you want to use your best video no matter what. In each game highlight, I incorporate a coach’s huddle, because most of the time, people don’t hear what is going on in those, so it gives the audience a chance to experience that moment with the students. I chose music that had a faster tempo since that is common when show highlights of any sport.

The next segment entitled, "ICE League Montage" show a series of games that took place between the first day of games and the ICE League tournament. This segment was another example of choosing the best video we had available. I wanted this part in the documentary because it gives a snap shot of the five games and three weeks that occur during the league. Obviously in twenty seven minutes, it would be very difficult to incorporate every single game in the documentary. Also, it might have been a little boring just to watch game highlights over and over; however, this provides a small mix of extra game highlights while also not dominating the core of the documentary.

The next segment entitled, “Nick Phillips: The Practice Guru,” the audience gets to follow Nick Phillips, an eighth grader for the YMCA, to his private practice session. I followed Nick from his school to a gym in the school where his mother works. This is a daily after school routine of his. He shoots, dribbles, and does a lot of different drills to keep himself sharp and to get better for ICE League practices and games. Nick explains his routine as well as the importance of the ICE League and how it impacts him. Nick becomes a more in depth feature similar to that of Onnie Adams earlier. I chose to feature Nick more closely because he also showed high maturity for a young student. In addition, his work ethic, basketball IQ, and leadership skills led me to believe he would be a good kid to introduce. The audience once again gets to hear from a student about the ICE League’s mission and its effectiveness.
The next segment entitled, “Tournament Preparation,” is a segment where the audience sees two center’s practices right before the tournament. I chose to show the practices from the Boys & Girls Club and the YMCA because they were days that I got the best sound bites from coaches during practice. It isn’t enough to just see the everyday drills that the students do. I think people would want to hear what coaches say to the players in their pep talks and speeches. It is also fitting to show these practices right before the ICE League tournament because it increases the drama for what is yet to come.

The next segment entitled, “The ICE League Tournament,” shows the entire ICE League Tournament. It begins with semi-finals in the seventh and eighth grade, and then it shows the championship games in each grade. Just like in the “First Games” and “ICE League Montage” segments, I used the best video from all of the games as well as coaches huddles during the games. A new layer that was added was pre-game, halftime, and post-game speeches in the teams’ locker rooms. This is another example of an event that outsiders don’t get to experience. In this segment, I decided not to incorporate any interviews because I wanted the sole focus to be on the tournament. This is what all the students and coaches have worked for over six weeks, and I felt that the entire focus should be on the game play and not a quote from a player.

The next segment entitled, “ICE League Awards,” shows the final awards presented at the conclusion of the league. They included the championship trophies, the MVPs, academic all-star awards, and scholarships. For this segment, we mic the emcee so we could use her audio in the documentary. I felt that using her words would bring back the league’s students, coaches, and fans back to that day and make them feel in the moment.

The next segment entitled, “ICE League Overview,” wraps up the league and the success that it endured. The audience hears from ICE League Commissioner Tom Lyon, Project Leadership’s Tammy Pearson, and the head coach of the YMCA teams, Dennis Trammell. They give their comments that give the documentary’s ending a high note and leaves the audience with a positive and happy overall feeling about the ICE League. The students also gave their takes and said how their attitudes about education and GPAs both improved.

Overall, I thought that this documentary did a great job of showing how the ICE League came into fruition, the entire league year, and the wrap up of the first year. Not only that, but I thought it gave eight student athletes a platform to advocate the ICE League to their classmates and to others. Before I started this project, I had never used my sports videography and producing experience to create something that address a community and something as real as the education of youth. I can say that I will always remember this project, and all that it taught me. I hope that everyone who watches ICE League: First Season realizes how unique and effective the ICE Basketball League was in accomplishing its mission.

Video URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AtKGDeMS3Xe