

Now You're Speaking My Language:  
An internship to NFL China

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### **Executive Summary**

Being a professional football player is a rarity. Speaking fluent Mandarin Chinese as an American is also rare. However, being an active player in the NFL who speaks Mandarin Chinese fluently is nearly unparalleled. In fact, currently, there is only one, me. Being this “one” opened the door for me to complete an internship with NFL China. This internship allowed me to travel to Shanghai, where I worked with the NFL’s executive branch responsible for growing the American football market in China. The project I created and executed was a social media plan. This plan was designed to increase the NFL’s fan base in China, targeting both Chinese and English speaking audiences. Research was compiled to evaluate the audiences and determine the most appropriate content to achieve optimal results. The social media plan was implemented and yielded excellent results. In this document, the method we used to address both English and Chinese speaking audiences, the plan created, and the results are all discussed. At the conclusion of this report, suggestions for continued success of NFL China’s social media presence are included.

### **Now You're Speaking My Language: An internship to NFL China**

The National Football League (NFL) is the most popular sport in America, and has held that position for over 30 years (Shannon-Missal, 2016). The NFL does whatever it can to help their players see great success on the field; however, they are also working to help them once their playing days are over. The NFL has begun to offer off-season programs to give players experience and knowledge in various career areas in which they may be interested. After being told I was being required to join an offseason program, I examined the programs offered and found none of the options (i.e. finance “boot camp,” business “boot camp,” and CrossFit certification) to be the right fit for me. Therefore, I decided that I needed to look inward and decide, based on my interests and education background, what I really wanted to pursue. It was after this examination that I asked the Oakland Raiders to make a few calls and request an internship for me with the NFL.

Interestingly, my specific request for an internship was rare because it did not involve any company in America. This internship was offered through the NFL at their satellite department, NFL China. The standard NFL offseason programs are designed to help players learn “core competencies necessary for growth and development into corporate environments” (National Football League, 2017). Although this internship was similar to existing NFL programs developed to give current players the chance to get out into the workforce and experience potential careers first-hand, this particular opportunity had to be dealt with in a slightly different manner. This deviation from normal NFL offseason programs was due to the unique fact that my status as a current NFL athlete who speaks Mandarin Chinese had opened doors to the Chinese people that no other player has been qualified to access.

The idea for this internship and my accompanying pitch was initially rejected by NFL China because they felt that the cultural and language barriers were too great for a player to overcome in such a short time span. However, once there was an understanding of my status as an active NFL athlete who had lived in Asia and spoke Chinese, the internship was enthusiastically approved. The scope and responsibilities of this internship were more challenging to develop, and also acquire corporate financial approval, than most off-season programs and internships the NFL offers. Different needs such as acquiring a business visa, airfare, food, and hotel seemed initially difficult to meet. While the NFL viewed the chance to have an active NFL athlete who speaks Chinese as an extremely intriguing possibility, once my academic background and potential to contribute from a professional and business standpoint was fully understood, they determined this internship was too rare of an opportunity for them to reject.

Based on my personal experiences in China and education background, I proposed initial content ideas to NFL China via e-mail about what I felt would be most effective toward building a solid social media plan once I arrived in China. From this preliminary groundwork, once in Shanghai, I met with both English and Chinese social media content companies to create individual plans and map out daily schedules to meet their respective content capture needs. Although there would be some crossover, it was deemed most effective to separate the two different language audiences. There would be unique activities and content captured which would be catered specifically to the wants and needs of the two different audiences.

Another problem which had to be addressed was the difference in social media platforms. The two different audiences had to be separated, in-part, due to the restrictions

of the Chinese government, which does not allow most American social media platforms to be freely accessed by local Chinese people. The Chinese government has restrictions on the major social media platforms found in America such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Therefore, plans had to be made to fit the needs of these platforms, as well as the different platforms that are predominantly used in China.

According to the National Football League (2017), more specifically NFL China, the main goals of this particular internship program were to help me broaden and deepen my knowledge of the league's international business, raise awareness for the NFL, promote ongoing local media and marketing initiatives via engaging with local media and community groups, and interacting with local fans at promotional events. Due to time constraints of an NFL athlete's schedule, the goals of this internship and all social media content responsibilities had to be accomplished in just under three weeks.

Because of these time constraints, a 20-day plan was formulated which called for a variety of tasks including: developing content for social media for both English and Chinese audiences, consulting with NFL China executives about marketing strategies, discussing the potential of holding an NFL game in China, including the needs to play from a player's perspective, assisting in local league development, participating in interviews, fan forums and other media events, running and participating in camps and clinics, and meeting with local football coaches.

While still realizing most of the goals found in traditional internships, this particular internship had a unique additional dimension which allowed for a more hands-on experience. Instead of only helping to create and orchestrate plans, this internship allowed me to be the focus of said plans as well. This rare position meant that I could not only be

involved in all behind-the-scenes work, but could also be the on-camera mouthpiece and public face of NFL China. This unique depth of involvement allowed me to be personally engaged in every aspect of creating and executing a social media plan.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Social Media**

Social media has become an important part of modern life. The Internet is accessible and integral to people's day-to-day communicative practices (Nansen et al., 2017). From simple communication to very specific goal-oriented projects, social media is a key tool. Even when it comes to important life decisions, like politics, people use social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and reddit, to discuss platforms and even directly talk to political leaders (Howard et al., 2016). Social media is very unique because not only does it allow strangers to meet and see what each other has to say, but it also allows them to have authentic communications. This level of communication can result in connections between different people across the world that would have never been possible, prior to the rise of this technology (Haythornthwaite, 2005).

It is the ability to facilitate enhanced levels of interaction between people that sets social media apart from types of media that were used in the past. Traditional forms of media are one-way in nature and disseminate messages from a single point to an intended audience (Collins, Shiffman, & Rock, 2016). For example, TV commercials are messages sent to a target audience. The audience sees the message and interaction stops there. Social media sends messages and information effectively as well, however, social media also allows for two-way interactions between message sender and receiver. The

message sent can also allow for the intended information to spread and grow within the groups on the social media platforms they have chosen (Collins, Shiffman, & Rock, 2016).

More and more, businesses are turning to social media to spread their information and messages (Scott, 2015). While traditional media sources, such as newspaper and television, are still being used, social media provides unique ways for companies to interact with those they want to receive their messages. These advances fall in line with the book, "New Rules of Marketing," outlined by Scott (2012) which discusses that as technology, and consumers as a whole, make natural adaptations and changes, companies have to change as well. Marketing and the content produced must be unique and interesting to keep the attention of their audience. Scott went on to say that marketing rules have changed, and if companies do not keep up with the advancements, they will be left behind.

As Dietrich and Livingston (2012) write, "people do not choose to watch commercials, but they will watch, and share, videos that are clever and interesting" (p. 121). When watching YouTube, there is typically a five second period one must watch an ad before one is allowed to skip it. Appropriate content is about giving the audience useful information, however it is only effective if the content created is both useful and interesting (Dietrich and Livingston, 2012). In other words, appropriate content means that content produced must be communicated well, be interesting, and get its point across quickly or else the audience might lose interest. In order for these messages to be delivered and accepted, the content producers must know their audience and adapt their message directly to them. This need to know the audience is a serious issue which had to be

addressed when we were developing a social media plan directed at two audiences, in two countries, with two languages.

### **Communication Accommodation Theory**

China is a country on the opposite side of the world from America with its own distinct culture and language. It is important to understand how people from different backgrounds respond to social media in order to be able to communicate with them effectively. Social media can allow us to directly reach millions of people we could not have reached even ten years ago, yet we need to reach them in ways they will accept if we want to be successful. There are many theories written which discuss successful communication. However, Communication Accommodation Theory directly addresses changes made in speech which will either draw the audience closer, or widen the gap. Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) is meant to provide a broad framework that would attempt to predict and explain the changes people make in their personal style of communication when communicating with others (Giles & Ogay, 2006). These changes are made when people either make, maintain, or decrease social distance in interaction (Giles & Ogay, 2006).

Communication Accommodation Theory seeks to explain how people use changes in communication to reveal how they feel about those with whom they are in communication (Giles, Coupland & Coupland, 1991). It also can be used to determine the amount of social distance between both parties. It is these changes in distance in conversation and behavior which CAT labels accommodation (Giles & Ogay, 2006). The closing of the distance between parties is called convergence, and increasing the distance is called divergence.

Convergence is where one person in a conversation chooses to alter his or her personal communication behaviors to better match how the person on the other side of the conversation converses. It is done with the intent to lessen the social differences between groups in communication (Gallois & Giles, 1998). In these changes, a person will try to imitate or reciprocate the other person's means of communicating, both verbal and nonverbal, in order to be more like them. Convergence is all about trying to be liked and fitting in with others. On the opposite end of the spectrum, divergence tries to accentuate the differences between the two parties. As said before, both verbal and nonverbal mannerisms are utilized in order to show a clear difference (Giles, Coupland & Coupland, 1991). Although divergence is an important part of CAT, because this internship wanted to decrease social distance, most forms of divergence were avoided. The only times divergence was used was to show initial differences between the Chinese audience and me to increase interest.

Effective communicators do not communicate the same way in all situations; rather, they adjust the style and content of communication to suit their goals in context (Pitts & Harwood, 2015). In other words, when people want to get their point across, they make changes to fit their audience. They are able to assess the ways in which their audience communicates, and then they make minor adjustments to their own communication approach to mirror the other party's mannerisms. It is through these changes that people maintain and mediate interpersonal and intergroup relations (Gallois & Giles, 1998).

Gallois and Giles (1998) go on to say that CAT says speakers make these changes in their communication with others based on two factors. The first factor is their personal

**Commented [Office1]:** Since this is plural, maybe keep the previous sentence plural too.

**Commented [Office2]:** Keep this either singular or plural all the way through.

desire to have the other party like them, so they will make communication changes that they feel the other side will appreciate in order to maintain a positive social identity. The second factor is, as discussed earlier, matching the other party's communicative characteristics to appear similar in nature to the other party. For example, they may attempt to change their audience's perceptions about how well they speak the language, how well they know the subject matter, or how much a part of the group they actually are (Gallois & Giles, 1998).

When using convergence, these adjustments in communication are not done without a purpose. In fact, there are two main purposes for these adjustments: to keep control over the social distance (including relationships between both groups and people), and to help increase levels of understanding between groups (Dragojevic et al., 2015). Dragojevic et al. (2015) claim that an important aspect of CAT is that the listener's perception is critical. Dragojevic also suggests that the listener will only accept the changes made in the speaker's communication method when these adjustments are determined to be appropriate, desirable, and facilitating interaction. This subjectivity means that if the listener feels that the changes are inappropriate or do not fit the other criteria, the attempts at convergence will actually have a negative effect on the communication. Therefore, we had to be very careful with our word selection in the making of each video.

Because of these potential negative effects, there is said to be an optimal level of adjustment (Giles & Smith, 1979). There can be far too much adjustment or even too little adjustment, even though an appropriate effort was made, which could be considered as

non-accommodative (Giles & Smith, 1979). This temperamental nature of trying to accommodate your communication to your audience makes it crucial that you fully understand your audience.

The CAT literature goes on to say that the perceived motives for speakers' changes in style can be defined as "the content, and by extension valence, of perceived intentions when behavior is seen as purposeful" (Gasiorek & Giles, 2012, p. 312). There is indication that the success of speakers' accommodation relies on the listeners' perceptions of the motivations behind the adjustments (Griffin, 2015). These motives behind the change could be considered both positive (e.g., thought to be helpful or used to increase communication) or negative (e.g., thought to be trying to get personal gain or showing off) (Hummert & Ryan, 1996).

CAT is a theory which looks at communication between unique groups of people and looks to predict and understand these interactions (Gallois & Giles, 1998). Interactions between cultures provides excellent context for understanding this theory. This understanding comes because there are so many nuances and intricacies between languages and cultures that allow for others to adapt or diverge (Gallois, Ogay & Giles, 2006). It is through these cultural interactions that CAT can be used to effectively communicate.

With the CAT research in mind, I started to address how to best accommodate the ways in which Chinese communicate with each other. While language is a major factor to be considered, because this is a social media plan, the ways Chinese use social media also has to be studied. Learning their social media habits is the only way I would best be able to

adapt my communication to achieve the greatest amount of success possible. Although there might be some in my target audiences that will not respond positively to me and my social media plan, based on the CAT, it is likely that most will be drawn to me if I execute my plan properly. Understanding how Chinese use social media is also incredibly important because regulations concerning Chinese platforms is different than regulations on American platforms.

### **Chinese Social Media**

Because many differences inherently exist between communicating in English and Chinese, to make positive changes, you must understand the landscape in which you will be conversing. Xia and Pedraza-Jiménez (2015) state that it has been found that the unique Chinese social media landscape is very different from its Western equivalents. This unique landscape is due to the restrictions from the Chinese government on typical western social media platforms. As expected, the Chinese users have their own unique Internet behaviors and habits which result in different internet customs and cultures. They went on to state that it is worth noting that western companies face some fairly large challenges when they run social media campaigns in the potential Chinese market. Most significantly, they are not familiar with how Chinese use their platforms, and they make the mistake of thinking that these platforms' users are all the same.

Most Americans are familiar with the major social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube that dominate much of the world, including many Asian countries. However, without going around the firewall placed by the government, these platforms are inaccessible to the public in China. Xia & Pedraza-Jiménez (2015) gave a

brief summary of the history of Chinese social media in order to help us more fully understand the convoluted Chinese social media landscape.

The first bulletin board system (BBS), a style of platform we partnered with to live stream, was built in 1994 and Chinese netizens quickly began to engage within online forums and communities. In the beginning of the 1990s, computers were luxury products to the ordinary people of China—there were few Internet users. The real Internet boom in China began with the emergence of instant messaging (IM) with QQ, which was launched by Tencent in 1999. Millions of young people and college students started to chat with friends, or to make new friends, via the QQ platform, which was similar to ICQ (I seek you). BlogChina (blogchina.com), another revolutionary tool [sic]. In addition to IMing, Chinese netizens were enthusiastic about blogging, social network sites (SNS), microblogging platforms, and other social media applications. Relevant examples include the attractive social networking service Kaixinwang (kaixin001.com) in 2008; the popular microblogging channel Sina Weibo (d.weibo.com) in 2009; and the fascinating mobile app Wechat platform (Weixin in China) in 2011 (p. 202).

As you can see, the social media world in China has gone through many changes and updates which have led to the platforms available today. The two most popular social media platforms in China are Weixin (Wechat), which has 355 million monthly active users, and Sina Weibo, which has 129 million monthly active users (Xu, 2014). Chinese social media applications are not just carbon copies of what we have access to, but instead they are their own unique inventions that were made specifically to meet Chinese social media user's habits and behaviors (Sullivan, 2014). Although there are some similarities between

popular social media platforms in American and Chinese social media platforms, they each have their own unique attributes. Wechat is most similar to Facebook, but has far more options. People use Wechat to post to their wall (limited to one post per day), make payments, make phone and video calls, send files, call taxis, and much more. For perspective on how well used this platform is, during my time in China, I never saw someone use a text message, instead they always used a Wechat message when they wanted to talk to someone. Sina Weibo is most similar to Twitter. Weibo actually means micro-blogging which, as seen in history, is very popular in China. However, just like Twitter, you are limited in the number of characters you can use, and you can only post files of a certain size.

Chinese social media users typically have several social media accounts, and they try to bring together as many aspects of blogging, microblogging, online picture sharing, and online video sharing as possible (Lim, 2014). This ability to bring together so many different communication modes probably is a key factor as to why Wechat has so many users. Chinese and foreign companies are starting to catch onto the trends in China, and are using social media to deliver their messages and advertisements in ways that the Chinese people accept (Lim, 2014). Although there still are many changes happening constantly in the Chinese social media world, the landscape is opening up for companies to take advantage of technology to reach large numbers of people.

### **Social Media Plan Creation**

For the content creation to be efficient and yield the greatest results possible, social media plan creators must adapt their strategies to fit the individual needs of their consumers (Scott, 2015). In the past, marketing typically appeared in the form of a

disturbance from what the audience were enjoying in whatever medium the audience was consuming. Whether an advertisement appeared as a radio or TV commercial, billboard on the road, or even an ad space on a Formula 1 racecar, its presence was a disturbance from the main feature. As Scott (2015) describes in *The New Rules of Marketing & PR*, companies should work toward being helpful to new and recurring customers. This is not the case with these disturbance strategies since they are highly inefficient due to their inconvenient nature. Social media has provided an environment where companies can circumvent this problem by making the advertisement itself the main feature.

When it comes to social media plans, providing your audience with useful information is key. However, these plans are only effective if the content created is both useful and interesting. Content must capture and hold the audience's attention. Vaynerchuk (2013) argues that instead of interrupting entertainment, marketers should work to become entertainment. This need to provide interesting yet informative content is one of the most challenging aspects of creating a social media plan. However, if done correctly, the results can be very successful. Therefore, effective content production is vital to a good social media plan.

Content marketing is a form of marketing which provides valuable information to audiences. Pulizzi (2014) defines content marketing as, "the marketing and business process for creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and acquire a clearly defined audience with the objective of driving profitable customer action" (p. 5). When it comes to the NFL China social media plan currently in place, the great majority of marketing being done is content marketing (Stephanie Hsiao, Personal Communication, February 26, 2017). NFL China uses content marketing because of its

ability to allow social media creators to listen to and engage with the audience as they promote their product. This approach falls in line with the teachings of Dietrich and Livingston (2012). In other words, through utilizing social media and content marketing, NFL China can adapt to their audience's desires, respond to them directly, and still deliver the product information they want to present to the public. This marketing style is a much better alternative than buying ad space on the side of a bus or in a subway station.

Beyond this retroactive listening and adapting approach, which is needed for a good social media plan, strong social media plans today are also highly focused on being proactive—anticipating what the consumer desires. When creating a social media plan, there must be a strong understanding of the audience being targeted. With this knowledge, content can be created based on what it is believed the audience wants to hear or see. Once you have an idea of what your audience would respond positively to, you can then integrate your desired message and information. This compromise of what you want to tell your audience and what your audience wants to see is what gives social media plans their power. When you effectively connect with your audience's interests and desire, you unleash a whole other level of marketing potency. As Dietrich and Livingston write, "people don't choose to watch commercials, but they will watch, and share, videos that are clever and interesting," (2012, p.121). If your social media plan has been well planned and executed, spreading your information will be done by the audience on their own.

There are many different ways to use social media, however, Vaynerchuk (2013) outlined a few ideas for creating a solid social media plan. First, he states that the content must be native, which means the post is optimized for a specific social media platform. Just as no two audiences are alike, no two social media platforms are alike either. Therefore,

plan creators must adapt what they are doing to fit their particular platform and audience. Successful posts are varied to suit each of the platforms utilized - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WeChat, Weibo, etc. It would be bad social media planning to take specific content and then copy and paste it to every single platform being used. As Vaynerchuk (2013) says, "content is king, but context is God," (p. 17). This statement means that in addition to creating good information and content, you must also adjust this content to fit the platform you are using and the audience who will receive it. Second, Vaynerchuk goes on to say that the content must not be disruptive, as discussed earlier. Third, he then points out that the content must not make demands. With social media, content must be able to thrive on its own without asking much of the audience. A solid plan can leverage pop culture, using what is on the audience's mind, to find a way to utilize what is already on the public's mind. Fourth, a social media plan is micro, which means the content needs to be short and concise.

Fifth and finally, it is important to make sure that the social media plan is consistent and self-aware (Vaynerchuk, 2013). There will be ever-changing content over the days and weeks that the plan is being implemented. These variations are necessary; however, the overall theme, voice, and message must remain the same to develop an effective online presence. People online are not interacting with you in real life, so it is very important to consistently convey your message clearly over time because you rarely have the opportunity to explain yourself.

Achieving this consistency was the most difficult aspect of our NFL social media plan due to the fact that I had to leave Shanghai and return to work in Oakland after my

internship. However, there are plans put in place to continue implementing the plan in a manner that allows the message to remain consistent over time.

Based on the information gleaned from our research, the social media plan was designed. Never before has an NFL player gone to China and utilized social media platforms. In the past, there have been players who visited and were ambassadors for the game. However, none of them made social media pushes to extend their reach and expand the Chinese fan base for the NFL.

In addition, having an active NFL athlete who spoke Chinese was also a first-time experience for the NFL China staff. They were not experienced in working with both American and Chinese social media platforms and creating appropriate content for each audience. Through the principles found in AT and private research conducted on the Chinese NFL fan base, we were able to identify ways in which we could adapt our communication to try to reach these two diverse fan bases. This research was especially helpful when creating content for Chinese only audiences. Due to the unique nature of Chinese internet, many problems were avoided because of proper research and planning. Ultimately, we were able to create audience-specific content on both American and Chinese platforms.

### **Method**

Before I started creating a social media plan, I held preliminary discussions with NFL China concerning target demographics. It is important to “create and distribute valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and acquire a clearly defined audience” (Getting Started, n.d.). It was critical that we had a clear picture of who we were addressing; otherwise our efforts may fall on deaf ears. Demographics were briefly discussed in the normal fashion (i.e. age, race, income); however, since out of 1.4 billion people in the country, only around 19 million identify themselves as football fans, most of the demographic talk was concerning three different, specific groupings of people.

These groups were identified and suggested for targeting in the MEC Global research (2015). The first group, which is by far the largest, is the “non-fan.” These are the people who would not self-identify as fans of the game. They do not consume NFL games or products, (or any form of American football) in any way. This group comprises the majority of the Chinese population. The next group of fan is the “real fan.” These are the fans that call themselves fans of the game, but they do not buy product and only occasionally watch the NFL. The last group is the “avid fan.” This is the fan that buys product, watches the game regularly, and is very self-motivated to be involved with the sport.

We concluded it was in our best interest to not target the avid fan, because they will enthusiastically consume whatever content we put out and will actively seek information, games, and products on their own. We determined that the majority of content would be created with the real fan, and especially, the non-fan as the target audiences. Because of the non-fan’s current lack of interest in, and exposure to, the game we wanted to capture

their attention and draw them in to see what NFL China has to offer. While most of the content was created with non-fans in mind, most of what was developed also kept in mind what real fans would desire to see. Meaning we tried to have different levels of depth throughout our posts, to keep all levels of fans returning. For example, post where there are new insights, fun stats, or unknown facts would have more depth than a post explaining the rules of the game. The purpose of levels and depth in our posts helps fans of varying levels develop deeper knowledge, interest, and participation in the NFL. A lack of this depth in the current social media content was a weakness, which will be discussed later in this section.

#### **Audit of Current State**

Private research, done by the MEC Global (a consumer research company that is a part of Group M), was commissioned by NFL China to discover the best ways to expand their brand in China. Much research has been done about social media plans in America; however, it was critical to understand the unique outlook of the NFL in China and what specific needs would have to be addressed. Gathering this data helped us to determine where to focus our efforts in creating an effective social media plan specific to the Chinese people. In the MEC Global study (2015), they found that different tactics should be used to reach the different types of fans. "Sports channels are important for targeting sports fans, but mass media (especially social media platforms) are key to attracting fans and driving bigger volume" (MEC Global, 2015).

It was also discussed that "fans receive American football info often mainly from Weibo, OTV, Forums, and local TV" (MEC Global, 2015). While we did not have access to any local TV outlets, we were in direct control of access to social media and forums.

Through utilizing these popular social media channels, we could easily guide all fans to options for watching the sport and buying product. We were also going to get more interaction with the real fans who regularly utilize these platforms, allowing us to draw them into deeper involvement with the sport.

In making any social media plans, the current state of social media content and its weaknesses must be assessed (Schaffer, 2015). Shaffer (2015) suggests that “a social media audit based on your brand’s current presence is essential to create baseline metrics for your social media strategy” (p. 740) In the MEC Global research (2015), flaws and limitations of the NFL China’s social media concerning Chinese fans were assessed. The research found that current information channels are limited. There are only a few options for NFL fans and those investigating fandom to grow and develop. They also determined that there are not many types of content provided, there are not enough inspirational stories, there is a lack of instructions on how to play the game, and the content produced for China is repetitive.

The MEC Global researchers also discovered that the quality of content was sub-par. The current format is not attractive; it needs more pictures, videos, and animations. Many of the videos which are utilized are not viewable in high definition, and the accompanying Chinese commentary is weak. In addition, many English language videos do not have Chinese subtitles. Finally, there is not enough content done completely in Mandarin Chinese.

MEC Global (2015) found current content is also not specific enough, meaning content is not tailored to meet the diverse and evolving needs of different types of fans. For example, non-fans and avid fans have different needs in content. For example, non-fans

need more explanation and general content, while avid fans need more detailed, highly specific content that might go over a non-fan's head. However, the current content is still quite focused only on new fans. As evidenced by the amount of content which still explains basics of the game. Also, the current state of social media content does not allow for and foster the ability of fans to learn about and grow in their knowledge of the sport. For example, a few years ago, NFL China tried to communicate what American football is, but nothing developed from these posts. There was no more in-depth content that would keep fans interested. They would just repeat similar content. As a result, fans get stuck in their understanding and have to turn to outside sources for additional information if they desire to continue their fandom.

Finally, it was found that NFL China was not updating their social media platforms frequently enough. In a world of ever-changing information, that is the NFL, being slow by even a week means that you are far behind what is actually happening. They also had not been responding in a timely way to the wants and needs of their fans. Fans would reply and voice interest in certain content, yet there would be no follow up or related content posted. Instead, they were found to be very routine in their delivery of content and stagnant in the information provided and delivery methods used (even when fans expressed their desires for new and innovative content). Most content would just be predetermined on a set schedule. This may be, in part, due to the fact that the NFL China staff is relatively small, and they hire a third party to manage their accounts. This third party is doing well, but not putting the needed effort into listening to fans to be as fully effective as possible.

#### *General Plan*

Based on this information, we created a social media plan in which we worked with three major companies: Hupu (for Chinese content) and Dragon media and the Oakland Raiders (for English content). Hupu and Dragon media were both already using NFL China's official pages under their respective language's social media platforms. All planned content was created with the intent of addressing the weaknesses of NFL China's current state while also delivering what was determined to best fit the wants and needs of the Chinese audience. This social media plan can be found in Appendix A.

The Oakland Raiders were using their official pages. They had a clear view of what social media contributions they wanted to receive from my internship, so specific plans were made with them in order to fit what they felt Raiders fans and NFL fans in general would most appreciate. Upon the Raiders' request, I also periodically posted on my personal verified accounts to add authenticity and interest. However, these personal posts and interactions were not included in their social media results, only for supplemental support.

The social media plan for NFL China included a daily schedule for all social media content planning, times of when the content was going to be created, and guidelines on when the content would be released. It is important to note that in this social media plan, release of all content would be as immediate as possible due to two main factors.

The first major factor was that my time in Shanghai was limited. We were looking for responses and actions to be taken immediately based on the audience's reactions to our posts. Schaffer (2013) clearly stated that engagement and listening were core elements in social media strategies. Based on this assumption, if content were to be released after I had returned to America there would be almost no way for me to be able to engage with and

listen to the fans. Therefore, there would also be almost no opportunity to actually respond to what we have heard from our audience and adjust our plans to their wants and needs. For example, if I was gone, I would not be able to film new video based on the feedback we received, therefore missing a critical facet of a social media plan.

Although our plan was well thought out and calculated to fit each of the identified audiences, a few of the more popular posts we created were actually additions that were not included in the original plan. These changes were incorporated because, in order to be effective, those producing content have to change plans to fit the needs of their consumers (Scott, 2015). There were a few changes made to the plan for each language audience. First, the Chinese audience showed that they really enjoyed when I displayed that I have a previous knowledge of their culture. Therefore, we added additional videos such as me singing Chinese songs that I knew. These videos showed the fan's interest because of the larger number of views and engagements than other content posted (see Appendix B). English audiences enjoyed learning about major differences between America and China, especially regarding the cuisine, based on views and engagement. Consequently, we added a few additional food oriented videos.

The second factor in the decision for immediate release of content was the desired quality level of posts could still be achieved even with the quick turnaround time required. There was a rigorous discussion about the potential loss of quality that might result with the quick turnaround from content capture to posting on the various social media outlets. There would be less edit time and almost no room to return and do re-takes if there were problems discovered in a post. However, as Schaffer (2013) described, social media is a far more personal way for companies to be able to reach their audiences than

traditional commercials or advertisements. It was determined that, although we may be giving up “grand production quality,” our content would hold a desired level of professionalism while still retaining the personal feel that comes with social media.

Spending less time on production and script allowed for the fans to feel like it is just James Cowser the actual person talking, rather than James Cowser the personality. This lessened amount of production dovetailed perfectly with our “helmet-off” philosophy. Helmet-off meaning fans got to see who the player is as a person, not just an athlete (S. Hsiao, personal communication, March 18,2017). This decision to do more helmet-off content came from the recommendation by the MEC Group (2015) which found that Chinese people prefer to attach themselves to someone they can have a personal connection with, rather than an organization. This is echoed in the philosophy outlined by Dietrich and Livingston (2012) when they spoke of how companies in the United States are using strategies, specifically content marketing strategies similar to the plan we are using, because it is an effective method in which they can build a trusting relationship with their customers. The key to creating a successful content marketing strategy is to create valuable content that customers are searching for and is not blatantly sales speak.

The philosophy of spending less time on production and editing, however, required more attention to detail in preparation and filming of the content than would normally be required if there were more time to edit post capture. Meaning mistakes in the words I said, and problems in video and sound had to be identified and resolved immediately. This quick release approach for our social media plan and the accompanying schedule provided structure for the limited time we had, yet still allowed for plans to be adaptable to

accommodate any necessary changes. (See the social media schedule included in Appendix A for more detail.)

### **Shared Content**

As discussed previously, the social media plan contained unique content determined to be most effective for accomplishing the goals for each language audience. One place, however, where content for both language audiences overlapped extensively was in coverage of my football work with local athletes. A critical focus of the plan was to showcase me working with Chinese athletes on the football field. This emphasis on interacting with local football leagues and clinics was determined to be an important contributor to the growth of NFL China (McKinsey & Company, 2016).

In another independent study, McKinsey and Company (2016) found that through a local league, NFL China would start “cultivating awareness and knowledge of the sport, especially given the technical nature of football and current perception as a foreign sport. Making investments into the sport to create long term talent pipeline and loyal fan base (e.g. gaining access to more infrastructure, creating superior fan experience at games). Finally, laying groundwork for further enables to take hold (e.g., digital marketing, live games) (p. 30).”

Therefore, these grassroots efforts to build local leagues and develop local talent became an important part of my time spent in Shanghai; and it was critical to effectively show these efforts through the social media platforms. Both English and Chinese content would share these posts because of the universal nature of sport. It was believed that both audiences would very much enjoy seeing the Chinese people work with a professional athlete out on the football field.

**English Content**

For the English audience specifically, the focus for NFL China was not transforming non-fans to real fans, or even making real fans avid fans. That is the responsibility of the NFL. Instead, our goal with NFL China was to raise awareness of the fact that the NFL has a branch in China and to bring as much attention to this department and to the Oakland Raiders as possible.

Oakland Raiders content was dealt with directly through their social media team. In August 2016, I had worked with the Oakland Raiders in writing personal memoirs about what life is like for a rookie during an NFL training camp. There was a great response to this type of memoir (E. Pascal, personal communication, January 26, 2017). Due to the previous success I had with these diary entries, we wanted to continue building on the momentum started back then. Since fans enjoyed this style of blog entry, we set up three blog entries over the 20 day period which allowed for people to get insight into my feelings and experiences as an athlete working in China.

The Raiders also wanted me to engage fans in a more personal manner. Therefore, I did daily video entries recapping what happened throughout each day. These entries would include interesting facts, feature Raiders fans in China, and explain the business aspect of growing the NFL brand in a foreign country. These videos allowed for a personal connection, while still illuminating interesting facts about China. This dual approach was determined to be an effective way to draw fan attention.

As for NFL China English content, multiple meetings were held between myself and the NFL China staff to determine what content would best fit the research previously discussed. These meetings were followed by discussions between us and the social media

content company, Dragon Media, which runs the English content social media platforms for NFL China. MEC Global (2015) stated that NFL China should focus on young males (18-34) who are interested in sports, different cultures, and new experiences. From this suggestion, we planned to showcase Chinese culture and the interesting differences between these two Eastern and Western nations.

The feature content chosen for filming included food fun facts (a favorite being that fortune cookies do not exist in China), having a one-on-one Kung Fu lesson with a martial arts master, making Xiao long bao (a popular Shanghai style dumpling), special video shoots of me lifting weights and training, performing position specific field work, and going to the Shanghai marriage market (where parents and grandparents try to find matches for their loved ones, see Appendix D).

### **Chinese Content**

For the Chinese audiences, as discussed earlier, the key goal was to get non-fans to become real fans, and help spur real fans to become avid fans. MEC Global (2015) outlined how to go about developing this specific audience. They stated that we should, “Attract our target audience at different stages” (p. 47). They suggest that NFL China should “be more timely in updating American football (AF) information to maintain/increase their passion, e.g. - More channels and contents - More video resource on OTV sites - More translated resources - More offline Face-to Face activities” (p. 49). Then, we should “promote more AF’s spiritual fulfillment with bigger fan base to increase loyalty (incl. positive energy, mentally [sic] inspiration, exercise willpower, address pressure, etc.) through content/story, etc. Provide more social opportunities among fans & enlarge the fans pool, e.g. - Online and offline social opportunities for fans. Create more buzz in the social

media. Finally, optimize the channel/content to simplify information seeking process and make fans know about AF more easily.

With this information in hand, we focused my social media presence on addressing these needs the best we could. In the same manner utilized for determining English content, meetings were held, both pre and post arrival in Shanghai, to discuss which content would best resonate with Chinese audiences. Instead of meeting with Dragon media, Hupu was the company involved in working with the creation and capture of all Chinese content. They control NFL China's official Weibo page, as well as run a very popular online sports forum page.

Based on the previous success of other athletes who spoke some Mandarin, it was assumed that my ability to speak the language would also be very popular with the Chinese audience. Even though the language aptitude of the other athletes was fairly poor, the relative popularity of their social media posts was still high. Therefore, because of my ability to speak the language well, our plan was expanded to incorporate various content that was believed would be very exciting to the Chinese people. Activities like interviews, speeches, language challenges, and Mandarin oriented games were all added to the plan to increase audience exposure and interest.

The feature content that showcased me speaking Chinese included videos of me singing my favorite popular Chinese songs, reciting a "Xiang sheng" which is a famous form of comedy similar in style to the famous English "Who's on First?", and participating in a lightning round "this or that" session where I had to choose between two options presented. Any excuse for me to utilize my Chinese was filmed and used as content as we

went forward with the schedule. It was decided to film most of my interactions with others in Chinese, especially if it included me interacting with locals in any way. (see Appendix B).

In order to develop a rapport and feeling of connectedness with the Chinese people online, Q&A sessions were held on two different platforms (Hupu's online forum and Weibo). I created videos approximately a week in advance, in Mandarin Chinese, announcing the Q&A sessions as well as inviting fans to start asking their questions so that when the time came, I would have plenty of their questions to answer. On the Hupu forum, there is an option for the fans to "up-vote" their favorite questions and answers. The algorithm in the software makes it so the more up-voted questions and responses appear at the top of the page. This software allowed me to be able to answer the questions that fans found most interesting. It also helped reduce the amount of repeated questions and made it easier for fans to find the more interesting answers.

Although we decided that short videos would be an efficient approach to utilize in most cases, we also felt that this approach would create a level of disconnect between the fans and me. It would be hard to truly discover who I am as a person through minute long videos. If we were to give a truly "helmet-off" experience, something needed to be done to overcome this disconnect. We determined that longer filmed sessions would also be needed. This format would allow me to relax and be myself. It would showcase who James Cowser truly is, much like if you could sit down one-on-one with me.

To create these expanded segments, we teamed up with the company Something Big, who are the producers of the major NBA and NFL fantasy games found in China. I was the signature guest for a 30-minute live broadcast which was held completely in Mandarin Chinese. The broadcast included an introduction of who I am, a discussion of diverse topics

like my interests and hobbies outside of football, multiple prize give-away games based on fans guessing trivia about me, my playing their fantasy game and other online games, and simple sports discussion. This personal, extemporaneous, extended format allowed the fans to interact and connect with me and get a feel of who I am as a person.

### **Results**

Success for the various content produced during this internship was determined by the numbers of views and engagement with the videos and posts. These different criteria were chosen to be the measure of success because they best reflected fan's interaction with and awareness of NFL China. Increased interaction and awareness of NFL China were the main goals for each of the language audiences from the onset. For clarity, views are defined as times individual users saw a particular piece of content (e.g., video, tweets, etc.). This action has a different word across some platforms. In this report the action can be referred to as "views" on the majority of platforms, "reads" on Q&A sessions, and "impressions" on Twitter. Views were the most important statistic in this plan because it best reflected how well our content was being accepted and spread among the people of the different language audiences.

Though there are different types of views, such as "organic" or "direct," these were not counted separately in the results because they were irrelevant to the goals of this plan. Wainwright (2013) defined organic views as when users view content directly from results from a search engine (Wainwright, 2013). He went on to describe the other views such as: Social views, which are any traffic derived from any social media outlet ranging from Facebook and Twitter; And direct views which are any views outside of organic, social, referrals, paid search, and email marketing (Wainwright, 2013). Although they may

be useful in future plans, promoting overall interest was the goal more so than learning how the fans were finding out.

Engagements, also known as interactions, are actions when the user likes, comments, or shares content created by us. These interactions are important because our reach is only as large as our followers. However, the more individual users engage with the content, the more likely it is that other users, who do not follow us, will be able to see our content. More engagements mean that our content will be able to reach users we could not have normally reached on our own, which helps users begin to follow our accounts themselves.

### **Content Uplift**

Content from the James Cowser Trip to China on NFL China social media platforms over-performed in new follower acquisition and off-season engagement per post on both Chinese and English social media. All following results compare the 14 days in which this plan was in place with the 14 days before and 14 days after I left China.

For perspective on the numbers accomplished in this internship, the recently retired Super Bowl Champion and future Hall of Fame quarterback Peyton Manning made a China tour in September 2016. There were 2.63 million total reads of the hashtag #NFL 球员在中国# (NFL player in China) launched on Sina Weibo. This number exceeded the number of reads associated with 2016 Peyton Manning's China trip unique hashtag (2.60 million). More views and reads were had, as well, with the English social media in this internship in which the results were overall six times more than Peyton Manning's content (See Tables 1 through 4).

Table 1  
NFL China's Official Account Results

Platform	Posts	Reads/ Impressions	Engagement	Followers Gained	Total Views
Sina Weibo	20	15 million	2,230	15,000 (+1,600%)	3.45 million (23,000 avg)
WeChat	3	17,543	257	-	-
Facebook	5	4,418	646	20 (+15%)	-
Instagram	7	5,341	630	34 (+12%)	-
Twitter	8	513,000	9,975	103 (+63%)	-

Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter had a combined Average Engagement per Post of 1,247 which is a 12,400% increase.

Table 2  
Miscellaneous

Platform	Reads/ Views	Engagements	Reposts
Hupu Sports BBS Q&A	112,000	556	-
Weibo Q&A	-	159	46
Qi'E TV live stream	24,000	-	-

Table 3  
*Raiders' Official Facebook Account Results*

<u>Post Date</u>	<u>Reach</u>	<u>Impressions</u>	<u>Engagements</u>
2/20/2017	200,697	306,669	2,761
2/20/2017	206,693	313,465	2,491
2/23/2017	212,825	312,741	1,990
3/1/2017	118,259	183,985	1,138
3/4/2017	159,684	249,472	2,079
3/14/2017	240,890	364,968	2,780

Table 4  
*Raiders' Official Twitter Account Results*

<u>Post Date</u>	<u>Impressions</u>	<u>Total Engagement</u>	<u>Link Clicks*</u>
2/20/2017	83,922	3,641	92
2/23/2017	79,096	2,890	147
2/28/2017	63,853	779	29
3/4/2017	42,654	685	150
3/14/2017	95,912	4,800	328

*\*Link Clicks meaning how much traffic was redirected from Twitter to Raiders' official website.*

### **Local Awareness**

This internship gained the interest of different local media groups as they produced their own social and digital coverage of my story. Xinhua News Agency, China's largest nationwide newswire with over 8 million followers on Twitter, did a fully story and tweeted about my time spent developing local players (see in Appendix I). Toutiao, News mobile app with 700+ million total users and 175 million monthly active users, did a similar story as well. When guest teaching at a local high school, JiangXi local news came in and did a personal interview and story.

#### *Major United States Coverage*

This internship was picked up by many major media outlets, and correlating stories were produced. Some of the more notable outlets and stories were *247 Sports* (2/18), *USA Today* (2/20), *CBS Sports* (2/21), *247 Sports* (2/21), *247 Sports* (2/26), *ESPN Baton Rouge* (3/1) (see Appendix G), *Fansided* (3/1), and *Yahoo Sports* (3/2).

### **Discussion**

When assessing the results, the numbers which we accomplished were all positive as far as increase from what NFL China had previously seen. Even in the weeks following my trip, once the plan had run its full course, numbers started to drop off back to the regular results NFL China had been seeing with their posts. Though it would be preferred that a plan which NFL China could continually use over the course of the year could have been created and implemented, the results returning back to their original state helps show the efficacy of the plan used during my internship.

As seen with the Peyton Manning trip, which was not planned out like this internship's plan was, even having a relatively unknown player be the featured personality

can be successful if the plan is a good one. It must be acknowledged that correlation does not equal causation, and that there are many factors which could play into the fact that this plan's content drew more attention than the extremely famous Peyton Manning's. However, it should be noted that many of the factors, such as me speaking their native language in our content, can be attributed to knowing our audience and executing a well thought out plan.

Though they are not clear quantifiable numbers, our content showed other signs of being successful. When walking in the streets of Shanghai, in full pads for a photo shoot, I was recognized, by name, by a couple of strangers. They were questioned if they had googled who I was on the spot, because the photo shoot was drawing a crowd at times. To our surprise, they said they recognized me because of what they had seen on social media. (See in Appendix K).

Similarly, there were two public events I attended in which a few personal friends contacted me directly to inform me that I had been featured on their friend's social media accounts (Wechat and Weibo). The first event was the Shanghai Sharks basketball game where I made an appearance at halftime and spoke to the crowd in both Mandarin Chinese and the local Shanghai dialect (see Appendix C). The second event was when I rode around on the subway in full game-day gear including pads, jersey, and helmet. Although this response was not quantifiably measurable in our plan, it still was evidence that what we were doing was successful.

Moving forward, it would be recommended that future plans be structured to allow more preparation time before the intern arrives in China. The schedule we used was very time intensive, demanded a lot from a small amount of people, and was very difficult to

keep in continual motion. In our best attempt to address this issue, NFL China staff and I have been in contact, and we are planning different content which we could post during various times of the year and football season. Trying to somewhat keep the momentum rolling from this internship is important, but it will be a difficult task. If we could spread out the content a little better, there might not have been as heavy of drop off in results once I left Shanghai.

Another suggestion I gave to NFL China is for them to make special yearly events where active players will come over. This way, the event is the feature rather than the player. This set event allows the player to be anyone who has interest in working internationally for a few weeks. It does not simply have to be me, mainly because I am the only known active player who speaks Mandarin Chinese. Though this still is not the best plan on permanently improving the NFL China social media platforms, it does give them a way to increase traffic to their accounts during the usual low-points in the offseason.

### **Conclusion**

In addition to the New York and China offices, the NFL has Mexico and London offices as well. It is important to note that even though it is located in the largest country in terms of population, the NFL China office is the smallest one. This limited number of staff means that those in the NFL China office, in their terms, have to “wear many hats.” Because of their heavy workload, the NFL China staff frequently expressed their appreciation that I came into my internship with clear direction and a willingness to work. One significant result of having so much to do is that the NFL China office outsources their content responsibilities to third parties. Even though the office carefully monitors the content

produced, they realize there is quality lost when you delegate this responsibility to others—especially to those who do not fully understand the game of football.

When looking strictly at population numbers, the China market is seen to hold incredible potential. It must be remembered, however, that not all 1.4 billion people are sports fans or would enjoy the NFL. Just as all of America does not necessarily enjoy and consume the NFL, China should be viewed the same way. Even significantly reducing the market figure estimates from the originally staggering 1.4 billion people, the number of possible fans still could easily be more than the entire population of the United States. The amount of people in China is an incredible potential market to tap. In our efforts to break into this market, we faced a few key issues.

It is incredibly hard to judge the success of what we have done through this social media plan in relation to how much it will actually help NFL China's business revenue, which is their ultimate measure of success (R. Young, personal communication, March 25, 2017). We have done our best in looking at total views, outreach, and percent increase. However, immediate results will not necessarily be reflected in Chinese consumers of NFL games and products. It is very hard, through social media, to see how much success your efforts are bringing to your company (Xia & Pedraza-Jiménez, 2015). This inability to fully understand results is a problem for companies across the globe, not just in regards to this internship. According to Social Media Examiner's social media marketing industry report, 87 percent of marketers have no idea how to measure their "Return on Investment" for their social media campaigns (Stelzner, 2013). Although it was not the outright goal of this specific internship, it would have been nice to discover the

direct contribution this social media plan made in regard to NFL China's goal of increased revenue.

Another major limitation we ran into with this internship was obviously time. Our ability to solidify a detailed plan for the internship was impacted by many variables that affected when I would arrive in Shanghai. There were multiple problems when applying for a visa, which delayed and reduced the trip by a week. Flight plans had to be changed and paid for many times. Also, league approval took a fair amount of time to acquire. Because of these factors, it was difficult to make solid decisions and create concrete plans. This lack of time meant that all the meetings and planning sessions had to be done quickly, necessitating a quick turnaround into the content capture phase.

As discussed earlier, listening was a big part of this social media plan. The short amount of time that I was in China did not allow us to make as many adjustments to the plan and schedule as we would have liked. One example is found in the Hupu forum Q&A. It was originally planned that I would spend 30 minutes answering questions. However, there was a greater response than expected. This call for more answers meant that during my short, 20 minute breaks between camps or during travel to different venues, I was on the forum answering questions on my phone. Had we allotted more time, I could have had more time to answer these questions.

An additional limitation faced was the spontaneous nature of this particular internship. Had this been an established internship which had regularly brought in athletes, we could have had a template that would have outlined what to do and how to go about making decisions. However, since it was my idea to have this internship, a lot of the

responsibility was placed upon my shoulders to lay the foundation for what could happen for future athletes. Because of my language aptitude, it will be difficult for another athlete who does not speak Chinese to use my internship as a template for creating and implementing a plan working for the NFL China office. However, the NFL could use the information gathered from me and apply it to plans for their other offices in Mexico and London.

There was much learned in this internship that allows for interesting discussion about how to move forward from what was accomplished. As discussed earlier, getting a group of people to accept a foreign sport is incredibly difficult. The director of NFL China told me an excellent analogy when he said that people in China see football the way that we Americans see Cricket. The majority of people do not hate the sport, it is just not a sport we play. There are no kids out in the street practicing their bowl. Rules are not generally understood, and it is considered to be just a sport “other people play.”

This idea of football being something that “other people play, but we do not” was very common in the personal discussions I held concerning the sport. An even more common phrase that I heard, explaining why football is not popular in China, was “we Chinese,” followed by a generalization about the differences between Chinese and Americans. These discrepancies between cultures are an obstacle that needs to be addressed for football to take hold in China. These cultural differences are not simply a matter of a few people acting differently than others from a different country, but are quite common responses. In fact, cultural differences are not just discrepancies in actions that different societies perform, but more importantly are the motivations behind these actions

(Finkelstein, 2012). This information helps us understand that the Chinese culture has a significant impact on what their citizens accept into or dismiss from their lives.

The Chinese are categorized as a collectivist society, while Americans, on the other hand, are termed individualists. As the name implies, collectivists are generally more swayed by cultural norms (Hofstede 1980). People tend to assume group identities, even if they are made-up reasons, and discriminate against out-group members (Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel et al., 1971). Chinese people are tied so heavily to their cultural group that it is easy for them to naturally fall into “in-group/out-group” ways of thinking. This attitude made it difficult, in many cases, to convince those I came across that this sport played by “out-group” members was a good fit for them as well. There were many times when I was clearly told that I was not the same as the Chinese, and that they do things differently. As if to tell me that bringing football to China would never work.

It is important to note that by no means is one way of thinking, collectivism vs individualism, “correct,” they are simply two approaches to address situations in life. Although there is no “correct/wrong” way, these roots of thinking may make it difficult to convince Chinese people that this American sport is suited for them.

It is commonly accepted that beliefs, including individualism and collectivism, are shaped by cultural contexts (Chen et al. 2013; Oyserman et al. 2002). From this information, it may be easy to deduce that the two cultures may have difficulty adopting ideals from the other mindset. Since working with NFL China, I have been constantly barraged with the question, “Do you think the Chinese people could ever accept such an American sport?” The answer I give every single time is a resounding, “Yes!” However,

many would still doubt, despite the confidence I held in my answer. In spite of the doubt of those who still hold onto their beliefs that football is not a sport for “us Chinese,” critical research has been done that can bridge the eastern/western gap through American football.

Japan’s government recently has decided to renew their elementary school physical education program. In this update, they decided to commission a study that looked at which sports would best teach their children the values they want to instill into their youth (Machita, 2013). In the same report, Machita (2013) stated that Japan found American flag football to be a sport that best expressed what the Japanese government wanted their children to learn. The sport of football teaches many life lessons through the playing of the game which go hand-in-hand with what collectivistic cultures value. These values include: a strong work ethic, the denial of self-gratification, and sensitivity to others’ needs (Hofstede, 1980).

Machita (2013) gave specific examples of what the Japanese decided they wanted to get from football.

The so-called United States, is the world’s original success in which a group of people came together and created an independent country. Therefore, they believe in the idea that every individual has the meaning and value in their existence, and everyone deserves respect. No matter who you are, as long as you can reach an ‘agreement,’ you can become a friend. People come in every shape and size. Everyone’s values and abilities are different, and this is what they call “freedom.” Based upon these ideals, football was created. Football allows players to

realize their strengths, get along with each other, and get (be assigned) their own personal responsibility, within the whole. Everyone on the field is giving their all to complete their division of responsibilities. It is because everyone, as a group, agrees upon these division of tasks, the player not only is a member of a team, but becomes an 'independent individual.'

The United States is a country that is committed to building a "strong society" on the premise that "freedom = a shared agreement of values and appreciation of differences in ability." Football will teach that: 1. No matter who you are, and no matter what kind of person you are, open doors saying 'welcome' are encouraging your participation. 2. Based on information, groups are forced to collectively define 'dialogue and discussion,' 'goals and achievements,' and the concept of 'strategy.' 3. In order to create an appropriate strategic objective for each individual team, there must be a proper division of work based on the abilities of each individual member. [Meaning, every individual must be recognized for who he or she is in order for the larger group to have success.] 4. Adaptable responses to new information and the ability to analyze problems faced which force you to change what you're doing. Then you must implement these flexible and tactical changes. 5. Once all have completed their own division of responsibilities, everyone can be regarded as a great hero" (p. 7-8).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I personally translated the quote, and made the quote authentic and grammatically accurate for English speakers

The Japanese government liked these values so much so that they are “aiming to establish Flag football as a standard sport category at elementary schools in Japan nationwide, ensure [sic] it to be included in the next Ministry’s Education Guide (2021-2030) for the second time in a row” (Machita, 2013, p. 2). To prove their commitment, the Japanese government’s plan is: “By the time when the next Ministry’s Education Guide (2021-2030) is finalized in 2017-2018, install Flag football as a gymnastic program at 65% of elementary schools in Japan. To stimulate to spread among schools, widely promote Flag football in Japanese society to obtain more understanding and empathy. Strengthen its organization and finance to correspond to sustained expansion” (p. 2).

Eastern culture, and the collectivist way of thinking, is actually well suited to the team oriented thinking found in football. A common phrase heard around football meeting rooms and practices is “football is the ultimate team sport.” There are 11 players per team on the field at once. Every single member of the team has a role, and he or she have to execute their role or the chance of success diminishes. Players must think of the team first, before themselves, or else they will hurt their team’s chance of success. This needed mindset of “team first” is well-suited for Chinese people because collectivists already tend to view in-group members, even those they do not know, as part of a greater whole (Parboteeah, Cullen, and Lim 2004). In basketball, which is a very popular sport in China, one can isolate himself or herself from the rest of the team and still have tremendous individual and team success. One great basketball player can continually isolate him/herself, take the ball into his hands, dribble the length of the court and score all alone. This is not the case in football. Their group-oriented focus means that collectivists are

already primed for team games. Mix football with this mentality, and you have an excellent combination for success both on and off the field.

Japan's study shows that there does not have to be a clash of cultures between the sport of football and what the Chinese people know and embrace. The more Chinese people understand what Japan is doing, and more importantly, why they are doing it, the more likely it is that this sport will catch on in China as well. It is important for NFL China to have as large a social media reach as possible, because no one else is actively, effectively promoting awareness and understanding of football. It is through social media plans, like the one I created and executed, that football will gain the exposure and acceptance that is needed for it to become embraced by the Chinese people.

Through this internship, I was able to take on an incredibly large task of bringing football to a people who know nothing about the sport. The social media plan was done to try to raise awareness of the sport and NFL China. We saw more success, in numbers, than we were initially expecting. Although there are many cultural and educational barriers still in the way, the foundation has been set for the ultimate team sport to find a new home.

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## Appendix A

### *Social Media Content Schedule*

#### **Thursday, February 16:**

5:00 p.m. – Film the initial hype video for all American and Chinese English/Chinese sources. This video is a call to Raider fans, and the Chinese people, to get ready and to follow our social media accounts to see more videos and content.

#### **Friday, February 17 – Saturday, February 18:**

8:00 a.m. – Film first video for American sources in the cockpit of the plane with the pilot to announce the trip to Shanghai and for everyone to follow for more cool videos.

9:30 a.m. – Fly to Shanghai, China.

6:00 p.m. – Record first diary log for Raiders.com. Topics include initial expectations, how I got the internship, what I am looking forward to with the upcoming internship and projects.

7:00 p.m. – Initial meeting with NFL China's Stephanie and Cuz to map out next day's activities.

#### **Sunday, February 19:**

11:00 a.m. – Begin exploratory day to find different sites to film English content, as well as taking a few pictures to show what life in Shanghai looks like to a foreigner.

1:00 p.m. – Film Chinese food (Hot Pot) video for Raider fans.

1:05 p.m. – Film first video daily log update.

- 3:00 p.m. – Film first video speaking half in full Chinese and half in English as well for both English and Chinese content. Topic is little known facts about differences between American versions of Chinese food and actual local Chinese food.
- 3:30 p.m. – Take pictures of sites around city for initial Instagram and Weibo accounts at popular tourist sites.
- 5:30 p.m. – Initial meeting with Richard on NFL outlook in China and tactics they are using to help expand the NFL.

**Monday, February 20:**

- 10:00 a.m. – Welcome presentation with Richard and Stephanie discussing the general ways they attract and develop Chinese fans.
- 11:00 a.m. – Marketing meeting with Stephanie about the responsibilities and daily workings of her position.
- 12:00 p.m. – Media director meeting with Roy about what he does in his role and the current deals he is in the middle of negotiating.
- 12:45 p.m. – Lunch with NFL China staff to get to know the members of staff and feel out the dynamic between the different employees.
- 1:45 p.m. – Social media meeting with Jen about the strategies and plans they have in place with their different social media outlets.
- 2:30 p.m. – Broadcast and content meeting with Dan Dan about NFL China’s broadcasting deals and workings as well as how they decide which content is best.
- 3:15 p.m. – Local Football League meeting with Leo (conducted in Mandarin Chinese) about the importance of local leagues, and how they go about their “grassroots” projects to develop interest in playing football.

- 4:00 p.m. – Beijing game conference with Jennifer Sun about the potential of playing an NFL regular season game in China and the problems and needs that come with this task.
- 4:30 p.m. – Initial social media content meeting with Stephanie and Cuz to decide which activities and content I would be comfortable with and found acceptable for me to be filmed doing.
- 5:00 p.m. – Hupu meeting for Chinese social media content scheduling (conducted in Mandarin Chinese). Discussion of what we want to produce and which content will resonate with Chinese market the best.
- 8:00 p.m. – Film daily log for Raiders recapping the daily activities and meetings.

**Tuesday, February 21:**

- 7:30 a.m. – Film daily log for Raiders on bullet train introducing what a high speed bullet train is. Also include description of upcoming daily activities.
- 9:00 a.m. – Travel to Suzhou with Memo and discuss the needs of the international school to which I will be lecturing.
- 10:30 a.m. – Begin community event day.
- 11:00 a.m. – Give lecture at Ulink College of SIP (Initially conducted in Mandarin Chinese, later switched to English due to inability to keep student's focus because of their disbelief a foreigner is speaking their language. The students twice gave a standing ovation, and would not stop cheering and talking amongst themselves when they heard me speak Mandarin. It would take too long to calm them down to the point they would listen, so we just finished in English.)

- 12:00 p.m. – Run minicamp/training at Ulink teaching the basics of throwing and catching a football, blocking and block shed, and scoring (conducted in both English and Mandarin Chinese).
- 1:00 p.m. – Lunch with students and faculty.
- 1:45 p.m. – Travel to Wuxi and discuss upcoming events with Memo
- 3:00 p.m. – Give assembly lecture at WUIS about overcoming obstacles in life and perseverance no matter the situation you are given in life.
- 4:15 p.m. – Interviews at WUIS with local school journal.
- 5:30 p.m. – Visit Buddhist Temple for meeting and exhibition to film content with the Temple Master (conducted in Mandarin Chinese).
- 9:00 p.m. – Make promotional video for upcoming Q&A on Weibo and Hupu forums (conducted in Mandarin Chinese).

**Wednesday, February 22:**

- 8:00 a.m. – Film buying local street food videos and pictures of local buildings.
- 9:00 a.m. – Guest teach P.E. classes.
- 2:00 p.m. – Run minicamps (4) Flag football (conducted in Mandarin Chinese).
- 2:30 p.m. – Film running drills with local students for Weibo content (conducted in Mandarin Chinese).
- 4:00 p.m. – Local Jiangxi news interview (conducted in Mandarin Chinese).
- 4:30 p.m. – Give speech for school at WUIS about American football and personal stories, as well as Q&A session.
- 5:45 p.m. – Film daily log at the speech recapping daily activities.

6:00 p.m. – Return to Shanghai on bullet train. Capture speed of train for English content.

8:00 p.m. – Film content eating “crazy food” (brain) video (conducted in Chinese and English).

**Thursday, February 23:**

9:00 a.m. – Meet with Dragon Media for English content scheduling and decision making.

12:00 p.m. – Go to Tianzifang with Master Zhang to learn KungFu and content filming.

3:00 p.m. – Go to Beast Lab to film weight training content.

4:30 p.m. – Film field drills content.

8:00 p.m. – Film daily log

**Friday, February 24:**

9:00 a.m. – Hupu Chinese content filming day (Everything done in Mandarin Chinese).

9:30 a.m. – Get tour of Hupu and learn what they do with all their different jobs.

10:15 a.m. – Film nflchina.com interview.

11:00 a.m. – Film what a meal consists of for NFL player video.

11:30 a.m. – Film singing Chinese songs video.

12:00 p.m. – Film Xiangsheng video.

12:30 p.m. – Lookalike pictures.

1:00 p.m. – Weibo Q&A takeover.

2:00 p.m. – Answer questions on Hupu Q&A.

6:00 p.m. – Film daily log.

**Saturday, February 25:**

8:00 a.m. – Film Marriage Market content (conducted in Mandarin Chinese).

- 9:00 a.m. – Film daily log at marriage market.
- 11:00 a.m. – Skyway youth football clinic at Luwan stadium.
- 1:15 p.m. – Q&A for youth (conducted in Mandarin Chinese).
- 1:30 p.m. – Speech to all at Luwan (conducted in Mandarin Chinese).
- 3:30 p.m. – UrGAME youth and parent clinic (conducted in Mandarin Chinese).
- 5:30 p.m. – Film importance of sport and family video content (conducted in Mandarin Chinese).
- 6:00 p.m. – American Football Academy guest coach.
- 8:30 p.m. – Wai Tan content capture with personal gear.
- 10:00 p.m. – Film daily log.

**Sunday, February 26:**

- 8:00 a.m. – League development meeting with local coaches.
- 9:00 a.m. – American Football Academy clinic coaching and film study with local youth athletes.
- 9:45 a.m. – Guest lecture to mini's (really young children).
- 11:00 a.m. – James Cowser's official Adult Tackle Football Camp (conducted in Mandarin Chinese).
- 2:30 p.m. – Q&A session with athletes (conducted in Mandarin Chinese)
- 3:00 p.m. – Speech (conducted in Mandarin Chinese).
- 6:00 p.m. – Meeting with Richard on growth of NFL.
- 7:00 p.m. – Shanghai Sharks game appearance and halftime cheer (Conducted in Mandarin Chinese and Shanghainese).
- 10:00 p.m. – Daily log filming.

**Monday, February 27**

- 8:30 a.m. – Record Raiders.com journal 2.
- 10:30 a.m. – Geared up around town content day (all content in Mandarin Chinese).
- 11:15 a.m. – Take pictures at many different popular sites in Shanghai in full football gear.
- 1:00 a.m. – Film “Do you know American football” content.
- 3:00 p.m. – Film eating local cuisine content.
- 3:45 p.m. – Taking flyers from street vendor video.
- 4:00 p.m. – On the train pictures encouraged from other train passengers.
- 4:45 p.m. – Riding local bikes content.
- 6:00 p.m. – Record audio for recap videos.
- 8:45 p.m. – Film daily log.

**Tuesday, February 28:**

- 10:00 a.m. – Chinese culture and marketing as content meeting with Stephanie.
- 12:00 p.m. – Office project work.
- 3:00 p.m. – Gear signing and authentication pictures.
- 5:30 p.m. – Raider super fans in Shanghai dinner and content filming.
- 9:00 p.m. – Daily log.
- 12:00 a.m. – ESPN Baton Rouge interview.

**Wednesday, March 1:**

- 10:30 a.m. – Live feed show with Something Big (conducted in Mandarin Chinese).
- 2:00 p.m. – Meeting with Stephanie on future of NFL China needs.
- 4:00 p.m. – Meeting on personal feelings of what is needed from NFL players to promote NFL in China.

6:00 p.m. – Shanghai tower content capture.

10:00 p.m. – Daily log with Jayme.

**Thursday, March 2:**

10:00 a.m. – Making xiao long bao with Chef Michael content capture.

1:00 p.m. – Debrief with AFA and others on local league development.

3:00 p.m. – Debrief with members of NFL China staff.

4:00 p.m. – Debrief with Dragon media and record final thoughts and feelings.

6:00 p.m. – Debrief with Hupu and record final thoughts and feelings (conducted in Chinese).

**Friday, March 3:**

8:00 a.m. – Final debrief and give exchange with office members.

11:00 a.m. – Travel Day back to Utah.

2:00 p.m. – Record final Raiders.com journal.

9:00 p.m. – Record daily log in Utah.

**Saturday, March 4:**

2:00 p.m. – NFL PE interview.

4:00 p.m. – Final log and call to follow up.

5:00 p.m. – Data gathering for reports.

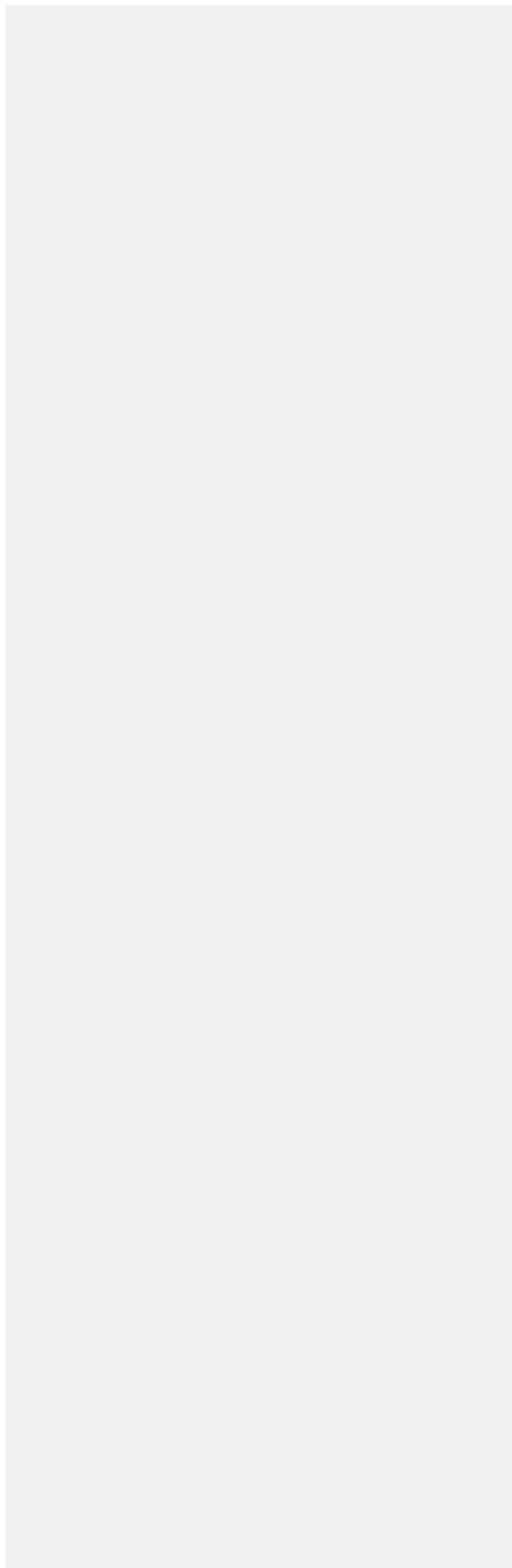
### Appendix B

*Weibo:*

All content can be found at this link to #nfl 球员在中国#:  
<https://weibo.com/p/10080871f1cf13d320828649ac80172f0f2abf>

*Screenshots of select Weibo Posts:*





Appendix C

CBA Appearance:

<http://weibot.com/tv/v/ExmlfdWrY?fid=1034:1286e81f15e270c6975966438037edeb>

@人人都爱JJ瓦特:据说大鲨鱼队新来了一个橄榄球运动员 还能说上海话 你们信吗? 😊 @CBA官网 @上海大鲨鱼官方微博 @NFL橄榄球 @Cowser 秒拍视频.



25 1 5

### Appendix D

English Content:

*Instagram:*

\*Select pieces shown. All content can be found on Instagram at @nflchina.



*Twitter:*

\*Select pieces shown. All content can be found on Instagram at @NFL\_China.



## Appendix F

### Raiders Content:

#### *Journal Entries*

Journal 1: <http://www.raiders.com/news/article-1/Offseason-Journal-James-Cowser-Travels-To-China/517981ab-1b38-434c-b067-aa0744a2d7a0?sf57437912=1>

Journal 2: <http://www.raiders.com/news/article-1/Offseason-Journal-James-Cowser-Travels-To-China/95445855-d54c-49cd-a2a9-b0eee44cff00?sf59256296=1>

Journal 3: <http://www.raiders.com/news/article-1/James-Cowser-Wraps-Up-Internship-Experience-With-NFL-China/e2c17802-38ef-4caa-9a04-a15a62c8e507?sf62406508=1>

*\*This link includes many videos and photo gallery.*

#### *Daily Logs:*

<http://www.raiders.com/media-vault/videos/Cowser-In-China-First-Day-Of-Orientation/78047c15-9230-4f5a-b3dd-8c9d1462b6ff>

<http://www.raiders.com/media-vault/videos/Cowser-In-China-Kung-Fu-Training-/821b80cc-9924-4f82-9df1-f5c588022ea0>

<http://www.raiders.com/media-vault/videos/Cowser-In-China-Youth-Football-Camp/cd447ac3-423a-438e-addd-8e0b87c9b68f>

<http://www.raiders.com/media-vault/videos/Cowser-Raider-Nation-Is-Truly-International/5e1fd2fd-8459-4503-99d4-2256c29442b3>

Twitter Posts:

\*Select pieces shown. All content can be found on Twitter at @RAIDERS.



**Appendix G**

ESPN Radio Interview:

<http://1045espn.com/james-cowser-on-afr-02-28-17/>

## James Cowser on AFR 02-28-17

A screenshot of a tweet from the Cleveland Raiders (@ClevelandRaiders) asking "What's @cowstovm been up to in China? #RaidersInChina". The tweet includes a video player showing a football player in a Raiders uniform and a link to "rdrs.co/WIAmx4". To the right of the tweet is a logo for "AFR Review" on "104.5 FM" with the text "Weekdays 3pm - 6pm".

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Appendix H

Hupu Q&A:



The screenshot shows a forum post on the Hupu website. The header is red with the '虎扑体育' (Hupu Sports) logo. The post title is '终于轮到我了！我在美国NFL打美式橄榄球，大家有什么想问的' (Finally it's my turn! I'm playing American football in the NFL in the US, what do you all want to ask?). The post is by user 'J\_Cowser' and is dated '24天前' (24 days ago) with 11,000 views. The text of the post reads: '你好！我是James Cowser. 我是奥克兰突袭者的防守端锋。今年26岁。我是在美国的犹他州出生的。我毕业大学了。我这个学期硕士毕业。我暂时没有女朋友。我有自己车。马自达6. 在美国有房。我1.91m高。114公斤。每天都会举重大概3个小时。我年薪超过30万。' Below the text is a photo of James Cowser smiling, wearing a black Oakland Raiders jersey. At the bottom of the post, there are navigation options: '124' replies, '上页' (Previous page), '1/28' (Page 1 of 28), '下页' (Next page), and a share icon.

Appendix I

Xin Hua News:



**Appendix J**

NFL Player Engagement Article:

<http://www.nflplayerengagement.com/life/articles/cowser/>

Photo: © Getty

# Oakland Raider Rookie James Cowser Spoke Volumes as NFL China Intern



By John Spodisby, Player Engagement Insider

### Appendix K

*Miscellaneous:*

Article about of being seen on train: <http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/g0uyeyIt75zAGLeID0GUtA>

*Personal Posts:*

*Instagram:*

\*Select pieces shown. All content can be found on Instagram at @cowstown1.



*Twitter:*

\*Select pieces shown. All content can be found on Twitter at @cowstown.

