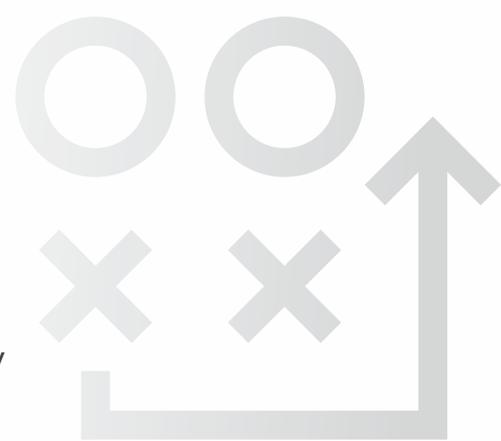




# 20 THE SPORTING LIFE: INFLUENTIAL N.C. ATHLETICS EXECUTIVES

BY HARRISON MILLER & DAVID MILDENBERG

Sports are a pillar of North Carolina's economy and culture. Ranging from youth leagues to the professional level, sports fuel rivalries, fill hotels and restaurants, and become centerpieces of development projects across the state. North Carolina is home to three major league professional sports teams; two annual PGA Golf tournaments; 11 minor league baseball clubs; 18 Division 1 collegiate athletic programs; and one of the greatest basketball players of all time. Billionaire David Tepper paid \$2.3 billion for the Carolina Panthers, while the Charlotte Hornets and Carolina Hurricanes are valued at \$1.3 billion and \$420 million, respectively, by *Forbes* magazine. Here are 20 sports executives in North Carolina responsible for ensuring that the games ultimately pay off.



## KICK-STARTER

# STEVE MALIK

owner, North Carolina Football Club  
Raleigh



Soccer wasn't a big deal in North Carolina when Steve Malik helped start the Kinston High School soccer team in 1978. His family had moved to Lenoir County from Wales when he was 4 years old, however, so the world's most popular sport was in his blood.

Forty-one years later, the medical-records software industry veteran has become the state's most prominent soccer executive, having built an organization that covers the gamut from preschoolers to professional ballers. The only missing element may be a Major League Soccer team, and he's working on that. But Malik's goal of landing an MLS team faces high odds because of a competing bid from Charlotte, financed by multibillionaire David Tepper, who has no soccer lineage.

While no match for Tepper's wealth, Malik has enjoyed considerable entrepreneurial success. After earning a bachelor's degree from UNC Chapel Hill in 1985, he worked at software ventures in Baltimore, Durham and Salt Lake City. Returning to Cary in 1996, he launched MedicalWeb.com, which developed and managed websites for physicians. Four years later, he started another software company, Medfusion Inc., to help medical clinics set up patient appointments, pay bills, refill prescriptions and make virtual visits. Medfusion's biggest break came after the 2007-09 recession when federal legislation offered \$35 billion in incentives to physicians for automating their health records.

By 2010, Medfusion had 65,000 physicians using its solution. That's when Intuit Inc., the owner of TurboTax and QuickBooks, acquired the company for \$91 million. Malik was named general manager of its rebranded Medfusion unit.

Boosted by the launch of the iPhone and the growing popularity of mobile apps, the new Intuit Health Group became Intu-

it's fastest-growing unit. By 2012, it had revenue of \$16 million and 11 million patient users.

But the rapid growth wasn't as profitable as hoped, and Intuit's strategy shifted to focus on financial information. Malik bought back the unit and renamed it Medfusion in 2013. Since then, the company has grown to 14 million users in all 50 states. Malik is now executive chairman of the company, while the chief executive officer is Kim LaBow, a former Medfusion executive who rejoined the company in 2015.

With his team in place, Malik stepped up his involvement in his favorite sport, buying the Carolina Railhawks, a minor league soccer team, in 2015 and moving the Western New York Flash professional women's soccer team to the Triangle in 2017. The renamed N.C. Courage has enjoyed great success in the top U.S. women's professional league, winning three championship titles. Malik chairs the National Women's Soccer League's executive committee and is a director of the U.S. Soccer Federation, the sport's main overseer.

His broadest impact may be rebranding the Railhawks as the North Carolina Football Club, or NCFC, and helping engineer the creation of the largest U.S. youth development academy, North Carolina FC Youth. Nearly 14,000 players ranging in age from 4 to 19 years old are part of NCFC Youth, which has gained a national reputation for excellence with its teams regularly winning major U.S. competitions. In North Carolina, Triangle-area teams have won significantly more state high school soccer championships than their Charlotte or Triad rivals.

To fulfill his MLS dreams, Malik is partnering with Raleigh developer John Kane on a proposed \$1.9 billion entertainment district in the capital city. The 55-acre Downtown South project calls for a \$180 million, 20,000-seat multipurpose stadium surrounded by more than 1.6 million square feet of office, restaurant and retail space and thousands of hotel rooms and apartments.

Charlotte and Tepper have more money and corporate appeal: Several companies have committed to buy \$6 million luxury suites, and 60 others have pledged to pay \$100,000 in support. But Malik argues Raleigh may be better suited for a franchise because NCFC has arguably the best women's team in the world and the largest youth academy in the U.S.; the club doesn't compete with the Carolina Panthers, and soccer enthusiasm is rampant.

Still, the entertainment district hinges on city and county support. Malik and Kane are seeking as much as \$330 million from tourism taxes over the next 25 years, which they say will help create \$2.7 billion in economic activity, 5,900 new jobs, \$20 million in property taxes and \$3.7 million annually in tourism taxes. A poll paid for by NCFC showed 74% of respondents support the tourism tax investment. The plan is "absolutely perfect for Raleigh and Wake County," Wake County Commissioner Sig Hutchinson told *WRAL Techwire*. Votes on the tax increases are scheduled within the next few months, with Malik and Kane hoping to break ground next year and complete the stadium by 2023. ■

## PATH-SETTER

### **TERA BLACK**

**chief operating officer, Charlotte Checkers**  
Charlotte



It was literally a banner year for the only female chief operating officer in the American Hockey League, the sport's highest minor league. The Carolina Hurricanes' affiliate won the AHL's Calder Cup for the first time, while averaging 6,700 fans per game. Black, who grew up in California and is of Cherokee Indian descent, joined the team in 2006 and was promoted to her current post two years later. The graduate of San Diego State University oversees game operations, sales, public relations and community involvement. In 2016, she was the first woman to win the AHL's Outstanding Executive award. The Checkers are owned by Charlotte beer and wine distributor Michael Kahn.

## STEADY DRIVER

### **Mark Brazil**

**tournament director, Wyndham Championship**  
Greensboro

It was called the Greater Greensboro Chrysler Open, and Tiger Woods was dominant when Brazil took over as chief of the Triad's annual professional golf tournament in 2001. Eighteen years later, he's sustained a competition that annually fights to attract top-tier golfers despite a purse topping \$6 million. Time-share operator Wyndham Rewards is signed on as title sponsor through 2026. Brazil grew up in Asheville and earned a bachelor's degree at Baylor University. Before his Greensboro move, he spent eight years with the American Junior Golf Association. Under his leadership, tournament oversight converted from the local Jaycees chapter to a new foundation supported by many regional businesses.

## KICK-CRAZED

### **Gary Buete**

**chief executive officer, N.C. FC Youth**  
Raleigh

An All-American soccer player at Lander University in Greenwood, S.C., Buete joined the nation's largest youth soccer organization in 2014 and oversaw the merger of the Capital Area Soccer League and Triangle Futbol Club Alliance. The nonprofit includes more than 13,500 players on teams that range from recreation to the top-rated Elite Clubs National League. This year, NCFC teams have won nearly 50 tournament championships. Before coming to North Carolina, Buete led the Baton Rouge Soccer Association in Louisiana for 14 years. He has a master's degree in sports management from East Tennessee State University.

## SCANDALS? WHAT SCANDALS?

### **Bubba Cunningham**

**athletic director, UNC Chapel Hill**  
Chapel Hill

Over the last year, UNC Chapel Hill Athletic Director Bubba Cunningham has helped beat back scandals and maintain the elite success of the university's athletic programs. In 2018, UNC faced allegations that 13 football players committed NCAA infractions by selling shoes, investigated racial allegations involving former women's basketball coach Sylvia Hatchell, and reported that the university's academic scandal cost \$21 million in legal expenses. The news was better on the field: national championships for the women's field hockey and tennis teams, a Sweet 16 appearance in men's basketball, and a baseball College World Series appearance. To fix the ailing football program, Cunningham hired former coach Mack Brown.

## DEACON DREAMS

### **John Currie**

**athletic director, Wake Forest University**  
Winston-Salem

Twenty-six years after he started his college athletics career working for the Wake Forest Demon Deacons, the Chapel Hill native returned to North Carolina to succeed Ron Wellman, who had the job since 1992. Currie comes from Tennessee, where he was fired after eight months as athletic director over a controversial hiring of a football coach. He was previously AD at Kansas State from 2009-17, earning a reputation as a strong fundraiser. A challenge at Wake is reviving the basketball program under Danny Manning, whose teams have a 65-93 record over the last five years. The former NBA star's contract runs through 2025. Wake's enrollment is the smallest of any Power Five conference university.

## TURNAROUND TIME

### **JON GILBERT**

athletic director, East Carolina University  
Greenville



With football attendance plummeting after nine victories in the last three years and mounting athletic department losses, former Chancellor Cecil Staton hired the Lenoir-Rhyne College graduate as Mr. Fix-it. Gilbert promptly signed ex-James Madison University coach Mike Houston and implored Pirate alumni and fans to recommit to the program. About 12,500 season tickets had been sold as of mid-August, while Gilbert is shooting for 15,000. (The peak was 22,830 in 2011.) After 22 years in Tennessee and Alabama athletic departments, Gilbert spent two years as AD at the University of Southern Mississippi before returning to North Carolina.

## ROCKING THE ROCKERS

### **Ken Lehner**

president, High Point Rockers  
High Point

Past experience with the NHL's Tampa Bay Lightning and Carolina Hurricanes and running his own sports marketing business made the Duke MBA an obvious choice to lead the new minor league baseball team. The Rockers sold out their seven corporate suites and hit 70% of the season-ticket goal before the \$36 million BB&T Point ballpark opened in downtown High Point. The team was averaging 2,115 fans per game as of mid-August. The Rockers are part of the Atlantic League, which is independent of the official Minor League Baseball organization.

## RACE-TRACKER

### **Steve O'Donnell**

executive vice president, NASCAR  
Charlotte

As the executive face of NASCAR, Steve O'Donnell is working to turn around a sport facing declining TV ratings and race attendance. He's instituted a variety of rules changes and new marketing efforts. He's worked for the France family-owned racing circuit for 22 years after stints at the Florida Citrus Bowl and a minor league baseball team. He oversees day-to-day operations at NASCAR's headquarters in Charlotte, receiving praise for his leadership style, listening skills and devotion to the sport. O'Donnell is active on social media, interacting with news outlets, fans and drivers. He grew up in Massachusetts and Egypt, then earned a bachelor's degree at Rollins College in Winter Park, Fla.

## BEYOND THE COURSE

### **TOM PASHLEY**

president, Pinehurst Resort  
Pinehurst



Efforts to broaden Pinehurst Resort's appeal beyond golf devotees — a key part of Pashley's agenda during his five years leading one of the nation's oldest golf resorts — are paying off. The new 160-seat Pinehurst Brewing Co. microbrewery and The Cradle 9-hole par 3 course, which is targeted at occasional golfers, have attracted strong followings. The Duke MBA has worked for the Dedman family-owned business since 1997 and became president in 2014. While beer and short-game courses are fun, Pashley isn't forgetting Pinehurst's key strength: Its new No. 4 course was named the "Best New Course You Can Play" by *Golf* magazine last year. The resort hosted the prestigious U.S. Amateur Championship in August.

## TAKE ME OUT TO THE BALLGAME

### **DAN RAJKOWSKI**

**chief operating officer, Charlotte Knights**  
Charlotte



In the initial five years of BB&T Ballpark's existence, the minor league baseball team's attendance ranked first nationally four times and achieved annual revenue of \$18 million. Rajkowski, in his eighth year as the team's chief operating officer, invested \$500,000 to replace different seating sections, add TVs, and upgrade sound and video equipment. He's also boosting spending on promotions and marketing by 20%. Season ticket sales fell from 5,000 to 3,600, but the Knights say that's OK because it creates more availability for walk-up purchases, *Charlotte Business Journal* reports. Rajkowski has spent more than 30 years in baseball, including 14 years with the Knights.

## GOING PRIVATE

### **Marcus Smith**

**chief executive officer, Speedway Motorsports Inc.**  
Charlotte

Headwinds face NASCAR racing, including declining attendance caused by retirements of star drivers, changing rules and economic strife of the middle-class workers most associated with the sport. But the speedway operator, led by founder Bruton Smith's son, sees lots of value, offering to buy the company for \$806.6 million, or \$19.75 per share. That's 42% higher than the share price before bidding commenced, but below the record level of \$43.63 in 1999. The Smith family owns a 71% stake and believes it can better handle NASCAR's challenges as a private company. The deal is expected to close in the third quarter of this year. Marcus Smith joined the business in 1996 after attending UNC Chapel Hill and was named CEO in 2015.

## CHIPPING FOR CHARITY

### **Gary Sobba**

**tournament director, Wells Fargo Championship**  
Charlotte

The Kansas MBA runs day-to-day operations of the PGA Tour's Wells Fargo Championship, a post he's held since 2017. This year, Sobba helped secure a five-year sponsorship extension with Wells Fargo. Charlotte's Quail Hollow Club will continue hosting the event as it has since debuting in 2003. Over the last 16 years, the Wells Fargo Championship raised \$22 million for Charlotte-area charitable organizations. Before coming to Charlotte, Sobba had spent the previous 15 years at Learfield Communications Inc., including a lengthy run as general manager of Tar Heel Sports Marketing in Chapel Hill.

## RETURNING HOME

### **Meredith Starkey**

**chief marketing officer, Carolina Panthers**  
Charlotte

An Edenton native who grew up in Lexington, S.C., Starkey came home to the Carolinas in March to serve as the first chief marketing officer for the Panthers. Starkey started her role as owner David Tepper looks to boost the organization's revenue and bring professional soccer to the Queen City. She has more than 20 years experience building brands, most recently as vice president of sponsorship and events for T-Mobile. She helped secure the telephone company's naming rights deal for Las Vegas' arena, home of the NHL's Golden Knights, and she worked on the NBA and Major League Baseball sponsorships. While she's new to professional football, Starkey is a major Clemson University football fan; she earned a bachelor's degree in marketing there.

## REVVING COLLEGE SPORTS

### **Ben Sutton Jr.**

**founder, Teall Capital Partners LLC**  
Winston-Salem

The Murfreesboro native and Wake Forest University School of Law graduate became a leader in college athletics media licensing at ISP Sports, which he started in 1992 and sold to entertainment giant IMG College in 2014. Over the last three years, he's led a private equity company that raised about \$70 million and has made 14 acquisitions of sports, entertainment and beverage companies. Teall helps university athletics departments maximize game-day and merchandising revenue, which is needed as college football attendance wanes at many schools. His family has made more than \$50 million in philanthropic commitments, much of it involving his alma mater in Winston-Salem.

## YOUTH-BOOSTER

### **QUE TUCKER**

**commissioner, N.C. High School Athletic Association**  
Raleigh



In 2015, the Rockingham County native became the second African American woman to lead a state high school athletics association. She had joined the group in 1991 after teaching and coaching basketball in Reidsville. The association is grappling with declining participation in several sports including football, which is a key financial contributor, and considering adding a fifth classification made up of the biggest schools. It reported \$4.2 million in revenue in the 2018-19 fiscal year. Tucker has a bachelor's degree from Mars Hill College and a master's degree from UNC Greensboro. She has officiated basketball, softball and volleyball.

## PUCK POWER

### **Don Waddell**

**general manager, Carolina Hurricanes**  
Raleigh

Last year, Waddell was named general manager of the Carolina Hurricanes after five years as president. It was widely considered a last-resort option, following the departure of franchise icon Ron Francis. Waddell quickly restructured the team by trading a few top veterans and adding nine key players through the draft or acquisition. Average attendance increased 17% to 13,320 as the 'Canes became the league's lovable villains, branded a "Bunch of Jerks" for their postgame celebrations. The team reached the Eastern Conference finals, ending a decade-long playoff drought. The Detroit native played minor league hockey for a decade before entering the sport's business side in 1988.

## NO SLAM DUNK

### **Fred Whitfield**

**president, Charlotte Hornets**  
Charlotte

The Campbell University graduate has his work cut out for him after the NBA team's superstar, Kemba Walker, left to join the Boston Celtics. Who will buy a ticket to watch a team with no big star? But Hornets' owner Michael Jordan has shown confidence in Whitfield, who joined the team as president in 2006 and remains in charge of business operations. He helped attract the NBA All-Star game to Charlotte and the Republican National Convention next year. He has enormous community respect and has been named a Citizen of the Carolinas by the Charlotte Regional Business Alliance and earned UNC Charlotte's Distinguished Service Award.

## STARTUP-STALWART

### **Mark Zarthar**

**president, Fayetteville Woodpeckers**  
Fayetteville

Compared with selling Natural Light beer, promoting minor league baseball may be a snap. That's the story for the leader of North Carolina's newest professional team. His work for beer giant Anheuser-Busch InBev included a stint overseeing the Natural Light brand as it gained market share for the first time in a decade. More recently, he headed Anheuser-Busch's global sports marketing, overseeing partnerships with FIFA, Wimbledon and others. Zarthar, who has an MBA from Northwestern University, helped develop the \$40 million 5,252-seat Segra Stadium in downtown Fayetteville. In early August, the Woodpeckers' average attendance of nearly 3,700 ranked fourth in the 10-team Carolina League.

## GOING NATIONAL

### **Amy Yakola**

**executive associate commissioner and chief of external affairs, Atlantic Coast Conference**  
Greensboro

The Clemson University grad is helping oversee big changes this year at the collegiate athletic conference, which partnered with ESPN to launch the ACC network, which plans to televise 1,300 events a year. The runup to its August start was marred by tough contract negotiations with some cable and satellite providers. TV rules at the ACC, where revenue increased 17% to \$465 million last year. About 60% of that total came from TV contracts. Yakola joined the ACC in 1999 and worked in public relations and marketing jobs before taking her current post in 2014. She's the highest-ranking woman at the ACC, earning more than \$280,000 a year.

# Moneyball, N.C. style

Anyone who has bought a \$12 beer or an \$8 hot dog at a professional sports game knows there's big money in athletics. Here's a snapshot of where some of that big money is flowing and who are the financial winners in sports-crazy North Carolina.



## Highest paid college coaches (Total Pay)

Mike Krzyzewski	Duke University	basketball	\$7 million
Roy Williams	UNC Chapel Hill	basketball	\$3.9 million
Mack Brown	UNC Chapel Hill	football	\$3.5 million
Dave Doeren	N.C. State University	football	\$3 million
Kevin Keatts	N.C. State University	basketball	\$2.7 million
David Cutcliffe	Duke University	football	\$2.5 million
Dave Clawson	Wake Forest University	football	\$1.8 million
Danny Manning	Wake Forest University	basketball	\$1.8 million
Mike Houston	East Carolina University	football	\$1.3 million
Joe Dooley	East Carolina University	basketball	\$900,000



## Highest paid pro-team athletes

Nick Batum	Charlotte Hornets	\$25.6 (million)
Cam Newton	Carolina Panthers	\$23.7
Terry Rozier	Charlotte Hornets	\$19.9
Kawann Short	Carolina Panthers	\$17
Bismack Biyombo	Charlotte Hornets	\$17
Marvin Williams	Charlotte Hornets	\$15
Cody Zeller	Charlotte Hornets	\$14.5
Michael Kidd-Gilchrist	Charlotte Hornets	\$13
Mario Addison	Carolina Panthers	\$10.7
Luke Kuechly	Carolina Panthers	\$10
Dontari Poe	Carolina Panthers	\$9.3
Shaq Thompson	Carolina Panthers	\$9.2
Trai Turner	Carolina Panthers	\$8.8
Sebastian Aho	Carolina Hurricanes	\$8.5
Jordan Staal	Carolina Hurricanes	\$8

## Major league professional team financial snapshots

### Carolina Panthers (December 2018)

Team value	\$2.3 billion
Revenue	\$396 million
Operating income	\$62 million
Players expenses	\$218 million
Average ticket price	\$80

### Carolina Hurricanes (December 2018)

Team value	\$420 million
Revenue	\$109 million
Operating income	(\$3.9) million
Players expenses	\$62 million
Average ticket price	\$62

### Charlotte Hornets (February 2019)

Team value	\$1.3 billion
Revenue	\$75 million
Operating income	\$22 million
Players expenses	\$127 million
Average ticket price	\$37



## Highest paid race car drivers -2018

Jimmie Johnson	\$17.5 million
Kyle Busch	\$15.8 million
Denny Hamlin	\$14.2 million
Kevin Harvick	\$13.1 million
Joey Logano	\$11 million
Brad Keselowski	\$10.4 million
Chase Elliott	\$9.5 million
Kyle Larson	\$9 million
Kevin Truex	\$8.2 million
Clint Bowyer	\$7.3 million

## PGA Tour golfers closely associated with North Carolina

	2019 winnings	career totals	
Billy Andrade	\$872,801	\$5.8 million	Wake Forest University graduate
Bill Haas	\$730,806	\$30.1 million	Charlotte native, Wake Forest University graduate
Chesson Hadley	\$1.4 million	\$7.6 million	Raleigh native and resident
Mackenzie Hughes	\$1 million	\$3.9 million	Mooresville resident
Davis Love III	\$271,216	\$44.9 million	Charlotte native; UNC Chapel Hill graduate
Scott McCarron	\$2 million	\$8.6 million	Charlotte resident
William McGirt	\$933,327	\$10.7 million	Fairmont native
Grayson Murray	\$125,511	\$2.7 million	Raleigh native and resident
J.T. Poston	\$2.3 million	\$3.9 million	Hickory native, Western Carolina University graduate
Webb Simpson	\$4.5 million	\$35.1 million	Raleigh native, UNC graduate, Charlotte resident
Johnson Wagner	\$597,792	\$12.4 million	Charlotte resident
Harold Varner III	\$997,779	\$1.2 million	East Carolina University graduate, Gastonia resident

sources: 24/7Sports; USA Today; Forbes; sportstrac.com; overthecap.com



— BEN C. SUTTON, JR. —

## NORTH CAROLINA'S GAME CHANGER

Ben C. Sutton, Jr. pioneered the college sports media business when he founded ISP Sports in 1992. After becoming the market leader in collegiate sports marketing, broadcast, publishing, sponsorship services, and stadium seating, ISP Sports merged with IMG College in 2010.

As Chairman and President of IMG College, Ben spearheaded building the core businesses of IMG College into four national market-leading companies. With an entrepreneurial spirit, Ben left IMG College in 2017 to found Teall Capital, where he serves as Chairman. In just over two years, Teall Capital has built a diverse portfolio of lifestyle brands.

## T E A L L C A P I T A L

Teall Capital is a privately held set of investments in innovative, high-growth potential lifestyle brands and services.

The company's leadership has extensive experience in sports, media, marketing, and entertainment. Teall's portfolio includes Accorin, Complex Sports and Entertainment, Dyehard Fan Supply, Riddle & Bloom, Sunshine, Tailgate Guys and Teall Properties Group.

