An Athlete’s Sense of Community as Responsibility for the Hometown: Perspective on Community-Based Professional Sport Organizations

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In Japan, community-based professional sports organizations, which are based in a specific area referred to as a hometown, are increasing. This study focused on players from a team of professional independent Japanese baseball leagues and investigated how these players develop an “appropriate attitude for the hometown” and fostered a “sense of community as responsibility” (SOC-R), a widely discussed construct in community psychology. The purpose of this study was to clarify the antecedents and consequences of players’ SOC-R for the hometown. Current study constructed the SOC-R model that has “passion for the team activity” and “pride in the team” as antecedents of SOC-R for the hometown, and “being a role model” and “maintaining a good relationship” as consequences. The results of structural equation modeling showed that “harmonious passion”, “obsessive passion”, and “pride” had a significant positive relationship with SOC-R, while SOC-R had a significantly positive influence on “being a role model” and “maintaining a good relationship”. As a result of multi-group analysis, it was suggested that the longer the player belongs to the team, the lower the influence on the SOC-R from the obsessive passion, while the higher the influence on the harmonious passion. These results contribute to the existing body of SOC-R and professional sports organization research, and may help sports managers better understand the psychological states of players from community-based professional sports teams.

Keywords: community-based professional sports organization, sense of community, player, hometown

1. Introduction

In Japan, community-based professional sports organizations (clubs and teams) that are based in a specific area known as their “hometown” are spreading in various sports contexts across the country. As stated in the agreement of the Japan Professional Football League (J. League), the hometown is defined as “a town where clubs and local communities develop together, sports fit in their lives, and people can enjoy psychosomatic health and living enjoyment” (J. League, 2018); this approach is becoming increasingly common among a variety of professional sports organizations. As a result, the team’s hometown residents tend to regard local clubs and teams as the symbol or representative of their town. Clubs and teams not only provide high-quality entertainment through their games but are also necessary for the development of highly public business activities (e.g., hometown activities) in their respective hometowns everyday as “social enterprises with highly public mission” (Harada and Ogasawara, 2008). It is thus important for sports organizations to promote hometown activities as their corporate social responsibility (CSR) because it can generate a wide
range of stakeholder engagement (Babiak and Wolfe, 2009).

Additionally, smaller organizations aimed more closely at the community have also increased (Matsunaga, 2016), especially organizations belonging to minor or independent leagues, most of which develop stronger local approaches with less resources. Although the situation varies depending on sports, minor leagues and independent leagues exist not only for players’ development but also as a place to end their careers (Murayama, 2011; Kise, 2016). Players who belong to such leagues generally leave the team or clubs through transfer or retirement after several years. Even in such circumstances, the activities of community-based professional sports organizations are expected to contribute to hometown branding, collaboration among local residents, the creation of connections, enhancement of regional consciousness, and fostering of identity (Hori et al., 2007). According to Walker and Kent (2009), sports organizations must engage in CSR activities in their hometown because the players attract much attention and thus have to maintain a good relationship with their communities. Therefore, it is essential that the organization’s management enhances both players’ positive attitude and the quality of players’ involvement with their hometown during their short terms.

Many researchers have investigated how sports managers decide which CSR activities to engage in, or how fans and local residents recognize and evaluate them (Ohnishi and Harada, 2008; Inoue and Kent, 2012; Anagnostopoulos et al., 2014). Nevertheless, even though players are the main actors in these activities, very few studies have evaluated players’ motives and attitudes in the context of their hometowns. Given this gap in the literature, the current research focuses on the players’ psychological states to examine the appropriateness of their attitudes toward their hometowns. To this effect, we chose “displaying a sense of community as responsibility” — a widely discussed concept in community psychology — as the preferred perspective. The purpose of this study is to examine how professional baseball players of community-based organizations develop an appropriate attitude toward the hometown by focusing on their sense of community responsibility (SOC-R). Specifically, this study will clarify the antecedents and consequences of player’s SOC-R. So far, no study has considered the SOC-R concept in the sporting context. Therefore, this study examined the usefulness of the SOC-R concept for understanding the player’s individual psychological state in the symbolic community “hometown”. We assume that this study will provide new academic and practical contributions to the study of SOC-R and the field of professional sports organization management.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Key concept: sense of community responsibility (SOC-R) theory and model

Sense of community (SOC) as a concept, which was the basis of SOC-R theory, was introduced by Sarason (1974) and defined as “a sense that one was part of a readily available, mutually supportive network of relationships upon which one could depend and as a result of which one did not experience sustained feelings of loneliness”. McMillan and Chavis (1986) further theorized that SOC contained four key elements: membership, influence, needs fulfillment, and a shared emotional connection. However, Nowell and Boyd (2010) argued that McMillan and Chavis (1986) were describing SOC as only an aspect of belonging to the community to satisfy individual needs. SOC-R, which was introduced as an alternative to SOC, describes the additional aspect of fulfilling one’s personal responsibility to a given community (Nowell and Boyd, 2010).

Nowell and Boyd (2010, 2014a) developed the SOC-R model with reference to March and Olsen’s (1989) “logic of appropriateness”. Within this model, individuals determine “what the situation is, what role is being fulfilled, and what the obligations of that role in that situation are” (p. 160) within the community to which they belong. Therefore, in the SOC-R model (Figure 1), when a person belongs to an organization or institution, their personal belief system is developed within a community context, thus leading to appropriate behaviors, i.e., adherence to and the acceptance of, norms, beliefs, values, ideologies, and standards. Individuals develop a personal belief system through various experiences and events as well as educational and institutional socialization in a specific community context, which in turn, act as antecedents of SOC-R. On the other hand, the consequence of SOC-R is
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community engagement, which is “driven by an interaction of one’s interpretation of a community context in relation to personal values and beliefs” (Nowell and Boyd, 2014a, p. 231).

Nowell and Boyd (2014a) developed an SOC-R scale to examine how SOC and SOC-R influence community satisfaction and leadership within the context of a business collaborative. The results of this study suggest that individuals with higher SOC-R were more likely to be considered leaders and have higher levels of engagement with the community rather than those with SOC (Nowell and Boyd, 2014a). Nowell and Boyd’s (2014a) work suggests that an individual’s SOC-R may contribute to the development of a logic of appropriateness in a community. Therefore, in the hometown context, investigating players’ SOC-R within a community-based sports organization may be helpful in understanding the process of enhancing their appropriate attitude toward the hometown. Moreover, this research would contribute to the theoretical and practical understanding of SOC-R, because how SOC-R is fostered has not been clarified and SOC-R as a topic has not been examined within a sporting context.

Based on our review, we applied Nowell and Boyd’s (2010) SOC-R, redefining it as SOC-R towards the hometown of professional baseball players. Although the theory explains that the antecedents of SOC-R comprise a personal belief system and the community context, no study has investigated the factors that could foster this system in the sporting context. Therefore, in this study, we applied the SOC-R model to the context of a community-based professional sports organization based in a hometown and demonstrated the antecedents and consequences of players’ SOC-R towards their hometowns. The framework of the analysis is shown in Figure 2.

This framework can provide a new perspective on the SOC-R studies that have been conducted so far. One of the key limitations of previous SOC-R studies is that they have not considered “nested communities”, where people belong to multiple communities simultaneously (Nowell and Boyd, 2017). Hometowns are the largest communities for a community-based professional sports organization as a marketing and social activity area; therefore, players also belong to the organization and the hometown, meaning that they are fully nested. Such foci have also applied in the field of sport manage-
ment so that employees of a sport organization identify themselves as an employee and a fan in their workplace (Swanson and Kent, 2015). In this study, we also attempted to capture the player’s psychological dynamics of how they foster “SOC-R for the hometown” through their experiences of belonging to the organization.

2.2. Overview of the conceptual model of the current study

This study examined the antecedents and consequences of players’ SOC-R for a community-based professional sports organization. In establishing the conceptual model, we set the “community context” and “socio-historical background” as the personal environment, and the following are respectively referred to as hometown context: players of community-based professional sports organization, events and educational experiences, and organizational socialization.

In constructing a conceptual model, we first examined the structure of the personal belief system, which is an important factor of the SOC-R model. Rokeach (1968) has defined belief as “an unconscious or conscious simple proposition to infer from a person’s mouth or behavior”, while Nishida (1988) defined belief as “cognitive content formed by a relationship between one subject and another object, concept, or attribute”. Furthermore, Rokeach (1968) defined values as an “abstract ideal that is positive or negative, represents a person’s belief in thinking that it is ideal for a person without being tied to a specific purpose or circumstance”, indicating that values lead to broad beliefs. Additionally, Asakura (2016) classified the subjects of a set of beliefs regarding physical education teachers into a class view, a training view, and a work view to examine the beliefs structure. Through a review of relevant literature, we find that the definitions conceptualized in previous studies are similar in nature to the personal belief system outlined by Nowell and Boyd (2010) after which we examined the factors corresponding to each factor.

We first examined the process through which a player of community-based professional sports organization acquires SOC-R. SOC-R is derived from an individual’s passion for the mission of the community and obligation to other members (Nowell and Boyd, 2014a). Swanson and Kent (2017) found that passion and pride among the employees of professional sports organizations influenced their norms and values, which are similar contents to Nowell and Boyd’s (2010) personal belief system within a work context. Because of these, we included both pride and passion as antecedents of SOC-R, that is, the origin of one’s personal belief system. Most players of community-based professional sports organizations cannot choose their team by themselves (players selected by a tryout) and start their careers as professional athletes in a specific area focusing on sport as their business. In other words, they construct their personal belief system based on the passion and pride as an athlete through the daily practice, official games, and hometown activities.

2.3. Passion for the team activity, pride in the team

Passion is defined by Vallerand et al., (2003) as a strong disposition towards an activity that people feel is important and to which they devote time and energy. Furthermore, they explained that individuals foster two types of passion when they face mandatory activity: a harmonious passion that positively pursues the activity and an obsessive passion that makes the pursuit of activity compulsively.

Pride is defined by Smith and Tyler (1997) as “evaluation of the general value of the group to which an individual belongs”; they clarified that recognition of an individual’s work, which involves being evaluated and admired, influences positive behavior. Todd and Harris (2009) suggest that pride in one’s job in a professional sports organization influences identification, job self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and performance.

Swanson and Kent’s (2017) empirical research on employees of professional sports organizations clarified that obsessive passion and pride in the job influence affective commitment, job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational citizenship behavior. Swanson and Kent’s (2017) also hypothesized that obsessive passion represents a negative influence on the positive elements of passion and pride due to the mandatory nature of obsessive passion; however, this hypothesis was not supported by their findings. It has been suggested that working for sports organizations themselves means working with their own strong will, accepting external pressure, obsession, and shifting to positive behavior.
On the other hand, harmonious passion was not used for analysis due to a scale development problem in their study.

When traditionally considering the impact of passion on outcomes, harmonious passion has been found to have a positive effect on compatible elements, whereas obsessive passion has a negative or no effect on them (Vallerand et al., 2003). However, according to the meta-analysis of Curran et al. (2015), which analyzed the accumulation of passion research over 10 years, it was suggested that both harmonious and obsessive passion have a positive influence on adaptive elements in motivational factor (e.g., identified/internal/external regulation, mastery approach goal). In other words, it is necessary to carefully consider that the impact of passion changes within the nature of outcome, the domain, and the context. SOC-R has never been tested as an outcome of passion, but it also has underlying motivational logic and focuses on normative emotions for motivational behavior (Nowell and Boyd, 2014b). Thus, we refer to the influence of passion on the motivational factor.

In this study, hypotheses are set based on the nested community structure according to which the passion for team activity designated in the player’s organization affects SOC-R for hometown. Professional athletes perform team activities as a task to be completed while belonging to a team. The players internalize team activities that include various activities such as games, practices, and hometown activities to develop their passion. At that time, some willingly accept these activities (harmonious passion), while others do them with a sense of external pressure (obsessive passion) (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2016).

Basically, local residents and municipality in the hometown adopt a position of supporting players, and players recognize it in various situations (Cartron et al., 2005). In a context where the hometown is supportive, it is possible that players appreciate the hometown and foster a sense of responsibility with a positive mindset to meet the expectations of the hometown (Chow and Lowery, 2010). Simultaneously, within the context of belonging to a professional sports organization that aims to fulfill social duties and responsibilities for hometown, normative awareness develops to foster a sense of responsibility because the personal belief system contains normative elements (Godfrey, 2009; Nowell and Boyd, 2010). It is considered that the more players are forced to commit to team activities owing to external pressure control, the more they become normatively conscious and responsible. Therefore, responsibility in this context is considered to be fostered both positively and compulsively.

Thus, given the relationship between the player and the hometown, free and strong harmonious passion for the team activity and pride in the team positively affect the SOC-R for the hometown. Obsessive passion for the team activity, which players cannot control, is also expected to have a positive impact on SOC-R for the hometown. We set three hypotheses in which players; harmonious and obsessive passion for the team activity and pride in the team act as a source of beliefs.

H1. Harmonious passion for the team activity has a positive influence on SOC-R.
H2. Obsessive passion for the team activity has a positive influence on SOC-R.
H3. Pride in the team has a positive influence on SOC-R.

2.4. Outcome of SOC-R

According to Nowell and Boyd (2010), SOC-R has a positive influence on community engagement. Nowell and Boyd (2014a) studied the individual’s SOC-R within the collaborative, defining engagement as the attendance rate and duration of participation, the number of roles assumed, and the number of activities performed at conferences. Similarly, when considering the players in the context of community-based professional sports organizations, their hometown engagement can be quantified as the number of hometown activities and the time allotted to these activities. However, it is the general practice that the time spent and the number of activities is not controlled by the players but rather by the front staff. Therefore, we instead used “the emotional engagement for hometown” as a measure of hometown engagement referring to the concept of “athlete brand image” (Arai et al., 2014); this measure will serve as an outcome variable relative to SOC-R.

Arai et al. (2013, 2014) developed a scale designed to explain the consumer’s “athlete brand image”, which consists of three subdimensions: physical per-
formance, attractive appearance, and marketable lifestyle. Within the subdimension of a marketable lifestyle, the players’ awareness of the fans (role model), and mutual interaction with fans (relationship effort) contribute to the figure that the athlete should be. In other words, converting an athlete brand image into an item that defines a self-concept as a form to which an athlete should aim is acceptable for the purposes of this study to derive behavioral intent based on the logic of appropriateness. Thus, we adapted the role model scale developed by Arai et al. (2014) to include the hometown context (e.g., “I am a good role model for hometown”) and the relationship maintenance scale so that it referred directly the hometown (e.g., “I show appreciation for hometown people”). We formulated two hypotheses as a consequence of SOC-R.

H4. SOC-R positively influences being a role model.
H5. SOC-R positively influences maintaining a good relationship

Therefore, an overview of our conceptual model of SOC-R for the hometown of players of a community-based professional sports organization is outlined in Figure 3.

### 3. Research method

#### 3.1. Measurement

We used 29 items meant to capture and measure six factors. Each item used a five-point Likert type scale. “Harmonious/Obsessive passion for the team activity” was measured with seven items each from Vallerand et al. (2003). “Pride in the team” was measured with three items from Todd and Harris (2009). “SOC-R for the hometown” was measured with six items from Nowell and Boyd (2014a). “Being a role model” and “Maintaining a good relationship” were measured using three items each adapted from Arai et al. (2013). All the scales were translated into Japanese and reviewed by sports management and sports psychology experts.

#### 3.2. Pilot study

In order to confirm the validity and reliability of each measurement, a survey was conducted through the direct distribution and collection method using student-athletes belonging to club activities at several universities as our participant pool. In the pilot study, it was assumed that the relationship between

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**Figure 3** The conceptual model of SOC-R for the hometown of players of a community-based professional sport organization
the professional team and hometown in the actual study could be replaced by the relationship between the student-athletes’ club activities and the university. In particular, we collected data only from sports referrals that indicated a sense of responsibility toward the university. Data were collected from December 4 through December 12, 2017. The total number of responses was 235, with 186 of the total responses being valid (effective response rate: 81.9%). In order to confirm the reliability and validity of the measurement scale, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using Amos 25, along with factor loading, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extraction (AVE). Confirmatory factor analysis with the threshold set for factor correlation and factor loadings at >0.55 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007; Comrey and Lee, 1992), 6 factors and 23 items met the criteria (AVE ≥ .50, CR ≥ .60), and the square of the correlation coefficient between factors was lower than the AVE between all the factors (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). Thus, discriminant and convergent validity was confirmed (model fit: χ²/df = 2.142; CFI = 0.91; TLI = 0.87; RMSEA = 0.079).

3.3. Setting of current study and method of analysis

Data were collected from the players of seven teams all belonging to the Japanese professional baseball independent league (Shikoku Island League Plus, and BC League). The Japanese professional baseball independent league is also positioned as the lower league of the top league (Nippon Professional Baseball Organization: NPB). Shikoku Island League (formerly known as the Shikoku Island League Plus) was established in 2005, and Hokkaido Shin-Etsu Baseball Challenge League (currently the Route Inn BC League) was established in 2006. Fourteen community-based professional baseball teams belong to these leagues. However, only a few players are selected for promotion to the NPB, with many players retiring from baseball or looking for their next career in the independent leagues. In these leagues, team management not only manages the game and entertainment, but also the hometown activities that occur in different areas of the team’s hometown. Players may receive education regarding the league and team philosophy while engaging in all of the team activities (games, practices, and hometown activities) designed to foster the appropriate attitude towards their hometown as athletes.

Data were collected from March 2 through May 1, 2018. The total number of responses was 172, with 157 of those responses being valid (effective response rate: 91.3%). In order to confirm the reliability and validity of the measurement scale, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using Amos 25, along with factor loading, CR, and AVE. After that, the hypothesis model was tested using structural equation modeling (SEM). Moreover, t-test and multiple group SEM were conducted for addressing differences between the terms of belonging to the team. The samples were divided into groups of less than one year and groups of more than one year belonging to the team. This is because it was assumed that longitudinal changes would greatly affect the settings of “community context” and “socio-historical background” in the model (Mabry, 1998).1

4. Result

4.1. Basic demographics

The basic attributes of respondents are shown in Table 1. All participants were male and aged between 18 to 36 years with 23 years being the mode (19.7%), and 18- to 24-years-olds making up 85.4% of the total sample. The duration for which a participant was affiliated with a team ranged from 1-3 years with “less than 1 year” being the largest group (39.5%), followed by over 1 year and less than 2 years (28.0%), and less than 3 years (15.9%), suggesting that the period of enrollment is relatively short. Regarding the hometown, only 18.5% were born in the hometown of the team to which they belonged. In regard to team position, pitchers were the most prevalent at 42%, followed by infielder and outfielder (21.7%).

4.2. Verification of reliability and validity of measurement scales

In order to confirm the validity and reliability of the scale, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. These results of the pilot study are also presented in Table 2. Both AVE and CR was calculated for the 6 factors and 24 items; AVE of “harmonious passion” was slightly lower than the set criteria.
Table 1 Profiles of the respondents (N = 157).

| Gender      | N     | %    |
|-------------|-------|------|
| Male        | 157   | 100.0|
| Female      | 0     | 0.0  |

| Age     | N     | %    |
|---------|-------|------|
| 18      | 8     | 5.1  |
| 19      | 16    | 10.2 |
| 20      | 18    | 11.5 |
| 21      | 14    | 8.9  |
| 22      | 30    | 19.1 |
| 23      | 31    | 19.7 |
| 24      | 17    | 10.8 |
| 25      | 9     | 5.7  |
| 26      | 6     | 3.8  |
| 27      | 1     | 0.6  |
| 28      | 2     | 1.3  |
| 29      | 2     | 1.3  |
| 33      | 2     | 1.3  |
| 36      | 1     | 0.6  |

| Years of belonging | N     | %    |
|--------------------|-------|------|
| < 1 year           | 62    | 39.5 |
| 1—1 year 11 months | 44    | 28.0 |
| 2—2 years 11 months| 25    | 15.9 |
| 3—3 years 11 months| 12    | 7.6  |
| 4—4 years 11 months| 9     | 5.7  |
| 5—5 years 11 months| 1     | 0.6  |
| 6—6 years 11 months| 1     | 0.6  |

| Birthplace       | N     | %    |
|------------------|-------|------|
| Inside of hometown| 29    | 18.5 |
| Outside of hometown| 128  | 81.5 |

| Position         | N     | %    |
|------------------|-------|------|
| Pitcher          | 66    | 42.0 |
| Catcher          | 21    | 13.4 |
| Infielder        | 34    | 21.7 |
| Outfielder       | 34    | 21.7 |
| Infielder/Outfielder | 2   | 1.3  |

value (> .50). However, both Cronbach’s α (reference value > .70) and CR (Reference value > .60) met and exceeded the set criteria value for all factors. We accepted this model based on the viewpoint of Jiang et al. (2002) arguing that AVE is a very conservative standard and is often lower than the set criteria value (> .50); moreover, more recently, Swanson and Kent (2017) have reiterated these findings. As shown in Table 3, the square of the correlation coefficient between factors was lower than the AVE between all factors (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988); thus, discriminatory and convergent validity was confirmed in all the measures in this study, and we proceeded to the next analysis (model fit: $\chi^2/df = 1.696$; CFI = .920; TLI = .903; RMSEA = .067).

4.3. Structural model analysis

Next, the hypothesized model was tested using SEM, the results of which can be found in Figure 4. The model fit of the hypothesized model satisfied all the reference values ($\chi^2/df = 1.600$; CFI = .929; TLI = .916; RMSEA = .062). We found that “harmonious passion”, “obsessive passion”, and “pride” had a positive influence on SOC-R acting as antecedents to SOC-R. Specifically, players became responsible to their hometown by recognizing that they are admired and by fostering a friendly and mandatory passion towards the activities. Thus, our hypotheses regarding harmonious passion, obses-
Table 2  The result of a confirmatory factor analysis.

| Factor                              | Items                                                                 | Pilot study (N = 186) | Current study (N = 157) |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
|                                     |                                                                       | λ          | α   | CR  | AVE  | λ          | α   | CR  | AVE  |
| Harmonious passion for the team activity | 1. The team activity allows me to live a variety of experiences.     | .86        | .84 | .47 | .48  | .83        | .85 | .48 |
|                                     | 2. The new things that I discover with the team activity allow me to appreciate it even more. | .61        |     | .66 |     |            |     |     |
|                                     | 3. The team activity allows me to live memorable experiences.        | .59        |     | .76 |     |            |     |     |
|                                     | 4. The team activity reflects the qualities I like about myself.     | .73        |     | .65 |     |            |     |     |
|                                     | 5. The team activity is in harmony with the other activities in my life. | .64        |     | .70 |     |            |     |     |
|                                     | 6. For me the team activity is a passion, that I still manage to control. | .70        |     |     |     |            |     |     |
|                                     | 7. I am completely taken with the team activity.                    | .82        |     | .75 |     |            |     |     |
| Obsessive passion for the team activity | 1. I cannot live without the team activity.                        | .80        |     | .82 |     |            |     |     |
|                                     | 2. The urge is so strong. I can’t help myself from doing the team activity. | .81        |     | .78 |     |            |     |     |
|                                     | 3. I have difficulty imagining my life without the team activity.   | .74        |     | .76 |     |            |     |     |
|                                     | 4. I am emotionally dependent on the team activity.                 | .87        |     | .63 |     |            |     |     |
|                                     | 5. I have a tough time controlling my need to do the team activity. | —          |     | —   |     |            |     |     |
|                                     | 6. I have almost an obsessive feeling for the team activity.        | —          |     | —   |     |            |     |     |
|                                     | 7. My mood depends on me being able to do the team activity.        | —          |     | —   |     |            |     |     |
| Pride in the team                   | 1. I feel especially respected in social settings when I discuss my team. | .72        |     | .73 |     |            |     |     |
|                                     | 2. My team gives me a feeling of importance when talking to others outside work. | .78        |     | .74 |     |            |     |     |
|                                     | 3. In social settings, I feel valued and admired because of my team. | .76        |     | .89 |     |            |     |     |
| Sense of community as responsibility for the hometown | 1. Relative to other town I have belonged to, I feel more strongly about supporting the people in this hometown. | .73        |     | .75 |     |            |     |     |
|                                     | 2. One of the best things I can do to improve community health is to be of service to this hometown. | —          |     | .64 |     |            |     |     |
|                                     | 3. Relative to other town I’ve been involved with, I feel a particularly strong sense of responsibility for the success of this hometown | .80        |     | .85 |     |            |     |     |
|                                     | 4. I am always ready to help out people in this hometown even if it creates hardship for me. | .81        |     | .74 |     |            |     |     |
|                                     | 5. I feel a strong personal obligation to improve this hometown.   | .84        |     | .83 |     |            |     |     |
|                                     | 6. I feel it is my duty to give to this hometown without needing to receive anything in return. | .73        |     | .68 |     |            |     |     |
| Being a role model                 | 1. I am socially responsible.                                       | .87        | .78 |     | .76 | .77 | .63 |
|                                     | 2. I am a good role model for hometown.                            | .83        | .86 |     |     |     |     |
|                                     | 3. I am a good leader in our hometown.                             | .93        |     | .72 |     |     |     |
| Maintaining a good relationship    | 1. I show appreciation for hometown people.                        | .78        | .79 | .56 | .84 | .85 | .65 |
|                                     | 2. I am responsive to hometown people.                             | .76        |     | .76 |     |     |     |
|                                     | 3. I try to interact with hometown people.                         | .83        |     | .83 |     |     |     |
|                                     | 3. I try to interact with hometown people.                         | .64        |     | .82 |     |     |     |

Model fit (pilot study): χ²/df = 2.142; CFI = .901; TLI = .877; RMSEA = .079
Model fit (current study): χ²/df = 1.597; CFI = .932; TLI = .916; RMSEA = .062
CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted
Items were all used in the current study. At the pilot study, “team activity” was set to “club activity” and “hometown” to “university” to describe student athlete’s SOC-R model.

Sive passion, and pride were supported. Additionally, as consequences of SOC-R, “being a role model” and “maintaining a good relationship” were positively related to SOC-R. More specifically, SOC-R for the hometown became a source of action leading to positive behaviors, such as “appropriate athlete attitude for the hometown”. Thus, our hypotheses regarding SOC-R’s influence on being a role model and maintaining a good relationship were both confirmed.
Table 3  The correlation, mean, SD, and AVE of each factor.

| Factor                                      | Mean | SD  | 1   | 2   | 3   | 4   | 5   | 6   |
|---------------------------------------------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1. Harmonious passion for the team activity | 3.81 | 0.60| .48 | .25 | .13 | .28 | .13 | .19 |
| 2. Obsessive passion for the team activity  | 2.85 | 0.92| .50 | .56 | .24 | .32 | .12 | .07 |
| 3. Pride in the team                        | 3.22 | 0.81| .37 | .49 | .62 | .28 | .08 | .10 |
| 4. SOC-R for the hometown                   | 3.59 | 0.74| .53 | .57 | .53 | .57 | .28 | .30 |
| 5. Being a role model                      | 3.19 | 0.75| .36 | .35 | .28 | .53 | .63 | .19 |
| 6. Maintaining a good relationship         | 4.23 | 0.64| .43 | .26 | .32 | .55 | .43 | .65 |

The factor correlation is displayed from the diagonal in the lower left half and the square of the factor correlation is displayed in the upper right half from the diagonal.

$SD =$ standard deviation; All correlation coefficients are statistically significant ($p < .01$).

*a: AVE of “Harmonious passion for the team activity”, b: AVE of “Obsessive passion for the team activity”, c: AVE of “Pride in the team”, d: AVE of “SOC-R for the hometown”, e: AVE of “Being a role model”, f: AVE of “Maintaining a good relationship”

Table 4  Mean differences by length of time belonging to the team.

| Variables                                      | Group A: Less than 1 year belonging (N=62) | Group B: More than 1 year belonging (N=95) | t   | p-value |
|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----|---------|
| Harmonious passion for the team activity       | 3.84                                      | 3.79                                      | .540| .590    |
| Obsessive passion for the team activity        | 3.03                                      | 2.73                                      | 2.012| .046*   |
| Pride in the team                              | 3.28                                      | 3.19                                      | .708| .480    |
| SOC-R for the hometown                          | 3.69                                      | 3.52                                      | 1.429| .155    |
| Being a role model                             | 3.17                                      | 3.20                                      | -.250| .803    |
| Maintaining a good relationship                | 4.24                                      | 4.23                                      | .131| .896    |

*p < .05

4.4. T-test and multiple group SEM

Although all the hypotheses were supported, it is not clear whether they would hold true in a different environment, especially given the differences in belonging periods. Therefore, finally, the t-test and the multiple group SEM were conducted to examine the model difference between the two groups, with less than one year belonging to the team (Group A) and more than one year belonging to the team (Group B).

Table 4 shows the difference in mean between the two groups for each latent variable. The result of the t-test revealed that the players who belonged to the team for over one year had significantly lower obsessive passion for the team activity ($t = 2.012, p < 0.05$).

In conducting the multiple group SEM, it is necessary to confirm measurement invariance about whether each path of the model was operating in the same way for both groups. Various methods and levels have been proposed for the examination of measurement invariance by the multiple group SEM. According to Asano (2014), the procedure for examining measurement invariance begins with the basic model that has no equality constraints (Model 1), and the constraints become increasingly restrictive. Subsequently, equality constraints were imposed on factor loadings only (Model 2). Model 3 then imposed equality constraints on factor loadings, variance and covariance. Finally, factor loadings, variances, covariance, and error variances were subjected to equality constraints (Model 4).

Table 5 shows the result of the invariance analysis tested with a specified set of four models. Although CFI and TLI were slightly lower than the reference value >.90 (Bentler and Bonnet, 1980), RMSEA satisfied the reference value <.60 (Hu and Bentler, 1998), and both models showed values close to the reference value. As a result of comparing the models except Model 4 in which the model fit was obviously reduced, Model 3 was accepted because the lowest AIC indicated the best model application (Asano, 2014).
Finally, Figure 5 shows the estimated structural model for each group. In Model 3, it was suggested that the overall pattern between structures was almost identical between the two groups. Differences were mainly indicated on the path from antecedents to SOC-R. Specifically, it was suggested that while only the obsessive passion for the team activity significantly has a positive effect on SOC-R among players who have belonged to the team for less than one year, both harmonious passion for the team and pride in the team significantly had a positive effect on SOC-R among players who have belonged to the team for more than one year. Although there was no significant difference between the two groups in the one-to-one parameter comparison, the possibility of structural differences is suggested.

5. Discussion

In this study, we aimed to make three academic and practical contributions. First, this study contributed to the body of professional sports organization research. We demonstrated the contribution of SOC-R theory to the process of players’ appropriate attitudes towards the hometown of a commu-
nity-based professional sports organization. SOC-R may be able to illuminate the psychological aspects of players who foster their personal beliefs through engagement with community-based professional sports organization based in the hometown. These results are supported by March and Olsen’s (1989) logic of appropriateness that contributes to SOC-R (Nowell and Boyd, 2010). Furthermore, this study demonstrates the players’ complicated thought processes in a distinctive context of a community-based professional sports organization in the hometown. According to Murayama (2011), who established an independent league in Japan, community had not accepted them because players’ behavior was bad, and sometimes, it caused a brawl at the beginning of the establishment. However, he also described the process of how they were becoming accepted from the community as a result of the fact that the league and team changed the players’ mindset by promoting their mission statement that aimed at community contribution. It indicates that it is clear that the players were involved, both positively and negatively, in activities according to the team policy (harmonious and obsessive passion for the team activity). This supports the findings of Swanson and Kent (2017) who clarified the psychological aspects that influence the employees of the professional sports organization. Furthermore, although further research is necessary, it was interestingly confirmed that those who have belonged for a long time have lower obsessive passion, and that while they have no influence of obsessive passion on SOC-R, their harmonious passion and pride had positively influenced SOC-R. This may suggest that it became possible for players to foster SOC-R positively by engaging with the hometown for a long time. This research also provides a valuable addition to the professional sports organization research.

Second, the current research advances the existing SOC and SOC-R theory and literature. In regard to SOC-R research, this is the first study that examines athletes in professional sports organizations. This study suggests that players fulfill their responsibilities to the hometown regardless of whether their passion for activity is expressed in a positive or negative way and that it forms a behavioral intention to their hometown. The current study also presents research within the context of community-based professional sports organizations. Compared with the research by Swanson and Kent (2017) that suggested that passion and pride are directly involved with an individual’s job, the current study offers further clarification by providing evidence that both passion and pride are mediated by SOC-R. Thus, the results of this study reinforce the argument for the logic of appropriateness (March and Olsen, 1989) and Nowell and Boyd’s (2010, 2014a) SOC-R research.

Third, this study has practical implications showing the benefits and importance of engaging in hometown activities by community-based professional sports organizations and its players, especially for the organization to provide small businesses with resources that contribute to the hometown on a day-to-day basis. An altruistic attitude based on an SOC-R can foster sociocultural behaviors through interactions with hometown people. The findings of this study are also worthwhile from the perspective of human resource management in sports organizations since players often regard the independent league as a place to retire and start their next career. We recommend that sports organizations keep in mind the importance of players’ psychological states and consider the implications in their education.

6. Conclusion

In this study, we focused on community-based professional sports organizations and empirically explain the process through which the behavioral cognition for “what we should do” for their hometown based on the SOC-R theory may be enhanced. We found that passion for the team activity and pride in the team had a positive influence on SOC-R, while SOC-R had a positive influence on being a role model and maintaining relationships. Thus, we were able to describe the organizational socialization of a community-based professional sports organization.

However, there were some limitations to the current research. First, the scales used are vulnerable; in particular, the convergence validity of “harmonious passion” was not confirmed by Swanson and Kent (2017). Although the pilot study demonstrated an AVE that met the set criteria (> .50), the current study had an AVE slightly that was lower than the set criteria (AVE = .48). In the future, it is necessary to reconsider the “harmonious passion” scale...
by conducting more analyses utilizing multiple samples. In addition, the “Being a role model” factor had a limitation in that it converged only two items in the factor, however, it is possible that wording may have had some influence on this. The “Being a role model” scale was adapted to be a subjective self-report measure instead of an objective measure as was the case for the “role model” scale of Arai et al. (2013). Additionally, one item was deleted from the “role model” scale because it did not use the word “hometown” (e.g., “I am socially responsible”). In the future, it will be important to increase the validity of the scales by reconsidering the wording of the questions.

Second, in relation to the first, it is possible that the small sample size may cause some problems. Although there are several criteria for sample size, it is recommended to obtain at least 150 (preferably 200 or more) and more than 10 times the number of free parameters in complex models with several parameters (Ito et al., 2018). The current study only meets this minimum standard. Moreover, collecting 100 samples for each group in the multi group analysis is recommended (Kline, 2005); thus, it is thought that expanding the sample size will improve the reliability of further study.

Third, the consequences of SOC-R were not based on the actual actions of the participants (time spent or number of engagements) as was the case in Nowell and Boyd (2014a). They quantitatively studied consequences of SOC-R by measuring the time spent engaged in activities and the number of roles taken on by the participants. As mentioned above, the players do not have control over the time they spend engaged in hometown activities or how many activities they perform in the context of this study. However, it was suggested that the nature of a player’s behavioral involvement may offer an avenue for comparison. Therefore, in the future, it will be necessary to investigate the kind of behaviors engaged in by players with high SOC-R from a qualitative perspective.

Fourth, this study was conducted only once. The Japanese independent league opens in April every year and closes in September after a break. The gathering of data for this study was near the opening season. Due to the short duration of independence league players in the same team, conducting a longitudinal study may be necessary to clarify more specific changes that may occur within the relevant factors over time and how these changes may reflect interactions between factors and what actual influence these changes may have on players’ behavior (e.g., changes in after the season).

This study set out to clarify the psychological states of players from community-based professional sports organizations from the SOC-R literature and theory, which has not yet been done in this field. We were able to find aspects of socialization for individual players. From the perspective of human resources management in the sports management field, the expectations for professional sports organization in their hometowns is ever increasing, and because of this, research into player management should be advanced. The future of this research aims to clarify the understanding of the psychological states of the players and apply knowledge to their career education. In the NPB survey, more than 60% of young players who participated in the development league during the off-season indicated that they are worried about the future. It is possible that educating the players to play an important role in their hometown communities will enhance their own career transitions and have a positive effect on the hometown as well.

Notes
1. Mabry’s (1998) civic attitude scale, which Nowell and Boyd (2014a) used to develop the SOC-R scale, has two factors: “personal social value” (e.g., one’s self-assessed commitment to devote to your community) and “civic attitude” (e.g., individual’s responsibility for solving our social problems). It was suggested that the value of the civic attitude scale increased when the students, who acquired service learning and provided them to the community, had time to interact with the service beneficiary. Thus, it was expected that SOC-R will increase as the players spend more time with hometown, and there might also be some change in the influence between the antecedents and consequence of SOC-R.

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