



*Invited Editorial*

---

## **Understanding the Interdisciplinary Discipline: An Introduction to Sport Management**

CALVIN NITE<sup>#1</sup>, and NATALIE BERNARD<sup>†2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Kinesiology, Health Promotion and Recreation, University of North Texas, Denton, TX, USA; <sup>2</sup>Department of Higher Education, University of North Texas, Denton, TX, USA

<sup>†</sup>Denotes graduate student author, <sup>#</sup>Denotes professional author

---

### ABSTRACT

*International Journal of Exercise Science 10(6): 818-822, 2017.* The International Journal of Exercise Science is going to begin accepting articles for inclusion into a new sport management section of the journal. The purpose of this paper is to introduce the sport management discipline to the readership of this journal and provide an overview of the papers appearing in this special issue. Sport management as an academic discipline is concerned with issues such as organizational, managerial, economic, and marketing theories that inform the operations of different types of sport organizations. In this regard, "sport management is all management practice in all of the sport industry" (16).

**KEY WORDS:** Research, sport, sport exercise, sport managers, sport scholars, athletes

### INTRODUCTION

In the Spring of 2017, the editors of this journal took steps to adding a section devoted to sport management research. To launch this new endeavor, this special issue was proposed and the lead author would serve as guest editor. While there are numerous journal outlets for sport management scholars, the International Journal of Exercise Science offers a unique place to publish sport management research for multiple reasons. First, this journal requires student authorship for its submissions. This is invaluable for sport management students who are seeking jobs within an increasingly competitive marketplace. Secondly, this journal is multi-disciplinary in regards to the types of research it accepts. Given the interdisciplinary nature of sport management (9), this seems like a fitting home for sport management research. Finally, exercise science and sport management often pursue similar ends in regards to enhancing the sport and physical activity experiences of people in various societies. As such, the expansion of this journal into the sport management discipline is both timely and relevant.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce the sport management discipline to the readership of this journal and provide an overview of the papers appearing in this special issue. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to sufficiently cover the depth and breadth of the field of sport management or the issues challenging various sport industries, we attempt to explain what the term “sport management” entails along with some of the topics and methods of research for sport management scholars. We then highlight the articles presented in this issue and discuss how they are representative of the diversity of topics and research approaches in the field. Finally, we outline how we believe sport management and exercise science may complement each other in this journal.

#### *What is Sport Management?*

First and foremost, it is important to provide an overview of what actually entails “sport management.” Admittedly, we do not consider ourselves as authorities to speak on behalf of the entire field and do not wish to do so either. There are certainly more eminent scholars than us in this regard. As such, our goal here is to simply provide a broad overview of the field by drawing from the perspectives of some of the leaders in our field. This is by no means meant to be an exhaustive review of the field and the representative sub disciplines.

Sport management is a term and a field that reflects a multitude of disciplines (9), encompassing finance, marketing, management, law, ethics, psychology, and sociology. In the last three decades, sport has transformed into a multi-billion dollar industry worldwide. Sport management research occurs in a variety of sporting contexts such as recreational sport, competitive sport, intercollegiate athletics, professional sport, community sport, interscholastic sport, and club sport. Sport management topics have ranged from understanding sport consumer behavior to measuring economic impact of sporting events to exploring the role of sport in community and nation development. Other topics have included understanding socialization and social phenomena in sport organizations, understanding organizational culture, and measuring motivations of employees. Indeed, “sport management is all management practice in all of the sport industry” (16).

Sport management scholars approach research from a variety of methodological traditions. Some engage in statistic-based quantitative methods where variables such as attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions are measured to test hypotheses or develop psycho-social scales. Others engage in various forms of qualitative research to understand research contexts. These methods might include case studies, phenomenology, ethnography, content analyses, or even historiographic research. Further, many sport management scholars employ multiple methodologies in attempts to better understand their research contexts. Generally speaking, sport management scholars tend to follow other social science traditions by endeavoring to develop substantive theory to explain the underlying mechanisms at work within the sport industry (5, 7).

As a distinct discipline, sport management has roots reaching into the mid 1900s (16). In North America, the first professional academic organization, the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM), formed in 1986 and founded the Journal of Sport Management (<https://www.nassm.com/NASSM/Purpose>). Other academic organizations began popping up around the globe in the 1990s. For instance, the Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand (SMAANZ) and the founding of the journal Sport Management Review occurred in 1995 (17). The European Association for Sport Management (EASM) was founded in 1993 and established the journal European Sport Management Quarterly (<http://www.easm.net/what-is-easm/>). Currently, there are sport management associations in nearly every region of the world and numerous journals dedicated to numerous sport topics and contests serving academics and professionals alike.

*Papers in the Inaugural Issue*

The diversity of research contexts, topics, and approaches is represented in this first issue of sport management papers in the International Journal of Exercise Science. Havard, Wann, Ryan, and O'Neal (12) researched how NCAA conference realignments impacted perceptions of football rivalries and the implications this could have in regards to athletic departments' marketing endeavors. Berg, Fuller, and Hutchinson (3) along with Fuller, Harrison, Lawrence, Eyanson, and McCardle (11) discussed key management issues within university and interscholastic athletics. Berg and colleagues (2) outlined the politics of implementing and sustaining the U.S.' largest steroid testing program for high school athletes and why this program was ultimately defunded. Fuller and colleagues (11) examined how societal shifts have influenced the perspectives of leadership among athletes. Particularly, the athletes in their study noted the importance of social conscientiousness and justice in regards to the development leadership traits.

Other papers in this issue examined issues of culture and diversity. Ahn and Cunningham (1) assessed how the cultural values of a country might impact the representation of females in leadership positions on their national Olympic committees. Jara, Heere, Regan, Blake, and Southall (14) examined how college coaches work to socialize international athletes who might be unfamiliar with U.S. culture into their team and university settings. Bopp, Turick, Vadeboncoeur, and Aicher (3) explored how one's race or ethnicity might impact perceptions of welcomeness in participating in various sport settings. Lastly, Foster and Huml (10) found that college athletes who are socialized into high athletic identities tend to major in less rigorous academic programs. In this regard, the culture of college athletics, especially for male athletes, impacts how athletes view themselves and influences their academic decisions. Each of these studies indicated that culture is an important factor that influences perceptions of proper behavior and acceptance into various sport settings. Finally, Weems, Garner, Oshiro, and Singer (18) offered a provocative essay critiquing various topics and approaches to research that are popular in the sport management literature. Particularly, these authors offer commentary on the shortcomings of topics that fall under the conceptual umbrella of corporate social responsibility (CSR).

*Moving Forward*

As the field of sport management continues to grow and research approaches continue evolve, the International Journal of Exercise Science provides a unique outlet for sport management scholars and their students to engage a variety of topics. While many scholars in sport management have offered their thoughts on the progression of the field, we would like to echo the perspectives Doherty (9) who emphasized the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to research. We believe that sport management scholars and exercise scientists could benefit from a breaking down of academic silos as we often have similar macro-level objectives. Meaning, we often aim to create healthy, physically active societies where people experience the benefits of (broadly defined) sport (5, 19). To this end, there have been notable examples of sport management scholars collaborating with exercise scientists or conducting research that would be particular relevant to an exercise science readership. One such example appears in this current issue with the work Bopp and colleagues (3). Others have included Cunningham and Woods (8), Carter-Francique (4), Cohen and Ballouli (6), Hill and Green (13), and Newland, Dixon and Green (15).

While the research techniques and approaches may be vastly different, exercise scientists and sport management scholars will likely benefit from cross-disciplinary insights that could explain complex problems in both fields. For example, sport management scholars could provide insight into why and how some training techniques for athletes are accepted or rejected by coaches. Further, sport managers and exercise scientists could continue collaborating to understand various factors contributing to the

obesity epidemic in the U.S. It is these types of collaborative efforts that would be particularly suited to this journal as this provides a space for both sport management scholars and exercise scientists to engage in meaningful research. Interdisciplinary collaboration has been a hallmark of sport management research (9) and this journal provides a fitting outlet for sport management scholars.

## REFERENCES

1. Ahn NY, Cunningham GB. Cultural values and gender equity on national Olympic committee boards. *Int Exerc Sci 10(6): 857-874, 2017.*
2. Berg BK, Winsley K, Fuller RD, Hutchinson M. From crisis to de-escalation: An examination of politics in a U.S. high school steroid testing program. *Int Exerc Sci 10(6): 890-899, 2017.*
3. Bopp T, Turick R, Vadeboncoeur JD, Aicher TJ. Are you welcomed? A racial and ethnic comparison of perceived welcomeness in sport participation. *Int Exerc Sci 10(6): 833-844, 2017.*
4. Carter-Francique, AR. Fit and phat: Black college women and their relationship with physical activity, obesity and campus recreation facilities. *Sport Educ Soc 16(5): 553-570, 2011.*
5. Chalip, L. Toward a distinctive sport management discipline. *J Sport Management 20: 1-21, 2006.*
6. Cohen A, Ballouli K. Exploring the cultural intersection of music, sport and physical activity among at-risk youth. *Int Rev Sociol Sport*. DOI: 10.1177/1012690216654295. 2016.
7. Cunningham GB. Theory and theory development in sport management. *Sport Management Rev 16(1): 1-4, 2013.*
8. Cunningham GB, Woods J. For the health of it: Advertisement message and attraction to fitness clubs. *Am J Health Studies 26: 4-9, 2011.*
9. Doherty A. "It takes a village:" Interdisciplinary research for sport management. *J Sport Management 26: 1-10, 2012.*
10. Foster SJL, Huml MR. The relationship between athletic identity and academic major chosen by student-athletes. *Int Exerc Sci 10(6): 915-925, 2017.*
11. Fuller RD, Harrison CK, Lawrence SM, Eyanson J, McCardle. "I will change the world": The intersection of social change and male college athletes' leadership perspectives. *Int Exerc Sci 10(6): 845-856, 2017.*
12. Havard CT, Wann DL, Ryan TD, O'Neal N. Does time heal all wounds? A case study on rival perceptions before and after conference realignment. *Int Exerc Sci 10(6): 823-832, 2017.*
13. Hill B, Green BC. Give the bench the boot! Using manning theory to design youth-sport programs. *J Sport Management 22: 184-204, 2008.*
14. Jara ES, Heere B, Regan TH, Blake CE, Southall R. Understanding how coaches perceive the organizational socialization of international student athletes in NCAA Division I college sports: The effect of cultural distance. *Int Exerc Sci 10(6): 875-889, 2017.*
15. Newland BL, Dixon MA, Green BC. Engaging children through sport: Examining the disconnect between program vision and implementation. *J Phys Activity Health 10: 805-812, 2013*

16. Pitts BG. Sport management at the millennium: A defining moment. *J Sport Management* 15: 1-9, 2001.
17. Shilbury D, Kellet P. *Sport management in Australia: An organizational overview* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Crows Nest NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin. 2011.
18. Weems AJ, Garner JR, Oshiro K, Singer JN. Corporate social responsibility: Considerations for sport management in the age of neoliberalism. *Int Exerc Sci* 10(6): 900-914, 2017.
19. Zeigler EF. Sport management must show social concern as it develops tenable theory. *J Sport Management* 21: 297-318, 2017.

