

International Sports Management: Current Trends and Future Developments

By

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The aim of this special issue on international sports management in Thunderbird International Business Review is to highlight the current trends and future developments occurring in sport. Sport is watched and played globally and impacts business management practices in a number of ways, including through sponsorship, recruitment, and manufacturing. In order to compete globally, managers of sport organizations need to work proactively to build and maintain an international presence. This special journal issue examines different types of sport, including professional, amateur, and recreational, in order to see how they occur in the international environment. The aim of this article is to discuss the most important issues facing sports management practitioners and researchers worldwide. The findings of this article are that it extends our understanding of international sports management by examining different types of businesses involved in sport to offer practical implications for sport practitioners who have internationalized or are considering global expansion. © 2011 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Introduction to the Issue

Sport as a business means different things to different people depending on the context and country. Some people see sport as a means of recreation and fitness, while others see it as a venue for gambling and socializing.

Athletes see sport as a means to achieve personal achievement and to achieve international fame. Governments around the world see sport as a way to capitalize on tourism and to educate people about healthy living alternatives.

The different meanings of sport make sport a global social phenomenon as it combines economic, commer-

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cial, and sociocultural aspects. Despite the existence of sport and sport-related activities in the international marketplace, a prevailing management theory and practice to explain how sport operates on a global level has yet to emerge. Sport clubs and associations are similar to other international companies because of their financial, tangible, and intangible assets that are managed and marketed. However, most sports management research is limited to sport practitioner journals, and there is a need for more international comparisons that take into account other research paradigms such as entrepreneurship to understand international sports management. Currently, international sports management research and practice is in a state of flux as more research is required to understand how sport is adapted and integrated into different global environments. The aim of this article is to contribute to the gap in the literature on international sports management by bridging the sports management and international business literature.

As the internationalization of sport continues, management ideas from other industries can be applied more in the sports sector. Additional information is required on the impact of internationalization activities on sport organizations. In this article, I use a conceptual exploration of the current theoretical and practical situations occurring in international sports management to examine this gap. The overall objective of the article is to contribute to the practical nature of international sports management by providing a discussion of the major issues faced by sport practitioners.

Internationalization of Sport

Sport is followed by people around the world through radio, television, printed publications, face-to-face interaction, and word of mouth. The sport industry is complex, as it includes equipment, apparel, and footwear. In addition, a large proportion of the workforce in developed countries such as Japan, the United States, and Canada rely on the sport industry as their main source of income. The global sport industry is constantly changing as personal tastes, games, and technology evolve and become more interactive. The sport industry has grown substantially over the past decade, with more sports becoming professionalized and increasing amounts of people becoming more interested in leisure activities (Carter & Rovell, 2003).

Sport comprises a large part of the global economy and contributes domestically to a variety of other industry sectors. In the United States, sport spans 8 of the 20 industry sectors (Howard & Crompton, 2004). The sport

industry is globally one of the fastest and largest industries. In the United States, the sport industry is more than twice the size of the automobile industry and seven times the size of the movie industry ("About Us—The Sports Industry," 2007). In addition, sport has become a major part of global businesses' marketing expenditure and is one of the largest costs for many companies. Despite the global economic slowdown in the past year, North American sponsorship spending on sport increased by 11.4% in 2008 (IEG Sponsorship Report, 2009).

The sport industry, like the manufacturing and service industries, has been largely impacted by globalization (Miller, Lawrence, & McKay, 2001). Globalization of sport has occurred through the process of ideas, people, goods, and services flowing into the integration of a country's economy and society (Aninat, 2002). Sport has internationalized and helps to define cultures around the world (Miller et al., 2001). The internationalization of sport has meant that many sport organizations operate in a saturated market and from necessity are involved in developing new revenue streams. New markets that create additional market opportunities allow sport organizations to develop global fanbases using international markets.

Sport organizations like NASCAR have been utilizing their international fanbase to innovate existing services. NASCAR developed the TrackPass service online, which allows subscribers to access live streaming of races and hear real-time commentary from drivers. NASCAR has also been developing websites in the languages of their major fan markets. The National Basketball Association (NBA) has changed its website, NBA.com, to be more international by including 12 different languages on their site. NBA.com also is encouraging international fans to follow players from their home country on a separate weblink detailing the player's accomplishments in the NBA.

Many sport organizations have globalized through sponsorship but many have also sought out international corporations. The New York Yankees signed international agreements with Japanese-based Komatsu and Yomiuri Shimbun and the Chinese-based Yili Group. In 2009, the NBA branched out internationally by holding basketball development camps (called Basketball Without Borders) in China, Mexico, South Africa, and Taiwan. These international agreements allow sport organizations to extend their fanbase by encouraging promotional strategies in multiple countries. Sport organizations have also internationalized by recruiting international players to their teams. Foreign players enable sports teams to promote their teams in overseas markets (McGovern, 2002). The English Premier League has a large number of international players, which has encouraged worldwide television

coverage by people wanting to watch individuals from their home country play professional sports (Madichie, 2009). In addition, sport organizations have been developing partnerships with international sports teams to encourage information sharing in training and resource allocation. These international sports partnerships allow sport organizations to grow their sport in a different country and help in developing potential players for their teams. An example of an international sport partnership is the one between the New York Yankees and the Chinese Baseball Association to sign players like Kai Liu and Zhenwang Zhang ("Yankees Sign Two Chinese Teenagers," 2007).

Culture and Sport

Sport organizations are impacted by the culture of a country, which influences the types of sport played and the participation levels (Yiannikis, 1989). While sports like baseball and football are popular in the United States, other types of sport, including badminton and volleyball, are more popular in Asia. The diverse nature of international sports management means that it draws upon a diverse interdisciplinary background. Sports management influences international business sociology through ethics, economics, ethnicity, marketing, and research (Bryant, 1993). It is important for academics, practitioners, and researchers to understand the international role of sport and the positive relationship between international business and sports management. Sport as both a social and business element leads to a better ability to understand knowledge and theory in the sports context (Cuneen & Schneider, 2001). Sports management plays an important role in the global economy by enhancing the business and social aspects of sport as joint entities in promoting globalization. In this article, I focus on the important role sport plays internationally in developing business opportunities. In the global business environment, sports management and marketing have become significant professions in the sport business and entertainment industry, and it is expected that this trend will continue as the population ages and people place more emphasis on leisure activities.

One of the major ways sport impacts business is through sponsorship activities. Many multinational companies sponsor sporting events in order to reach a larger international audience. The World Sponsorship Monitor estimates that sport sponsorship accounts for approximately 84% of the \$30 billion spent worldwide on sponsorship (Sports Marketing Surveys, 2007). Sport dominates most international sponsorship contracts.

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The International Events Group (IEG, 2002) estimated that 69% of all sponsorship money is related to sporting events. Bühler (2006), in a study on sport sponsorship in the English Premier League and German Bundesliga, found that most sponsors are involved in football sponsorship because of commercial reasons. However, due to the personal attachment some company directors place on their favorite sports teams, there are some noncommercial reasons for sport sponsorship (Brassington & Pettitt, 2003).

Global sporting events such as the Olympics and World Cup draw people from diverse countries and cultures together because of their interest in sport. These global sporting events put a country on the map and provide significant international exposure to the host country. Global sporting events also sometimes are seen as political events that showcase the economic, political, and cultural power of the host country. They act as a signal that a country has arrived on the international market and is a global power. Examples of the use of politics in global sporting events include the 2008 Beijing Olympics and 2010 South African FIFA World Cup.

The internationalization of sports is evident in the growth of the Olympics and other worldwide sporting events that are watched by billions of people worldwide. The Olympic Partners Programme was created in 1985 to develop a revenue base for the Olympic Games and has grown from \$95 million in 1988 to \$866 billion in 2008 (International Olympic Committee, 2008). The total worldwide television audience for the 2006 World Cup was 26.29 billion viewers (FIFA, 2006). This large international audience watching international sporting events

like the World Cup enables companies to globalize their marketing efforts (Bruhn, 2003).

Sports teams around the world generate money from ticket sales, sponsorship, and merchandise sales. In many countries, local residents can be seen wearing New York Yankees baseball caps or Manchester United shirts. In addition, technology such as YouTube has meant that more people around the world can watch sporting events free. This has led to sport organizations adapting their marketing strategies as a result of this technology globalization. The long-term viability and survival of global sport organizations will hinge on providing superior coverage of sports games and service to their fans by capitalizing on international technology developments.

Internationalization of Professional Sport Leagues

The professional sport leagues best known worldwide are the National Football League (NFL), National Hockey League (NHL), National Basketball Association, and Major League Baseball (MLB). In 2009, there were at least six professional sport leagues in the world worth at least a billion dollars (Van Riper, 2009). These large professional sport leagues, including the NBA, have been focusing on the international market as a way to increase their revenue stream. The NBA has globalized through developing NBA Europe Live, which includes several teams from the league conducting exhibition games in Europe. This has enabled the NBA to build its brand in the global marketplace (Apostolopoulou,

2005). The NBA has entered the Asian market and has opened offices in Beijing, Shanghai, and Hong Kong (M. Lee, 2007). For professional sport organizations like the NBA, it is imperative that if they want to globalize, they need to focus on the development of their brand. In addition, sport organizations should offer alternative services to people outside their home market (Balmer & Gray, 2003).

Sport has globalized in the last decade due to more professional football leagues focusing on international markets (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2007). International sports managers need to focus on global issues such as economic conditions, new technology, expansion of playing seasons, and broadcast rights (Howard & Crompton, 2004). Ice hockey is a good example of an international sport that is played worldwide through numerous geographic-specific leagues, including the North American Hockey League, Russian Continental Hockey League (Kontinentalnaya Hokkeinaya Liga), and the International Champions Hockey League, which is part of the International Ice Hockey Federation.

Sports management differs internationally because of media changes. For example, American consumers are more highly predisposed to visual imagery as part of media advertising than consumers in other countries (Andrews & Lysonski, 1991; Green, Cunningham, & Cunningham, 1975). Visual imagery utilized in advertising is dependent on a country's level of economic growth, religious norms, and legal system (Dunn, 1976). The television as an advertising tool is used more in the United States than in Europe and Asia (W. Lee & Tse, 1994). Other countries' media environments, such as Russia's, are characterized by print media such as newspapers and books rather than imagery-intensive television campaigns (Baker, 2005).

The media environment of a country is also impacted by technology such as sport games played online. Sport video games are an increasingly popular method for companies to promote their brands internationally. The sport video game industry is a large part of the international entertainment industry with sales of general video games in excess of \$11 billion in the United States (Entertainment Software Association, 2009). Sport video games comprise approximately 15.3% of total game sales and are among the top-selling category (Entertainment Software Association, 2009). Sport video games allow people around the world to play against one another. In addition, the decreasing international communication costs have enabled more people to play online sport games, including fantasy sports (Ivan, 2009). Fantasy sports involve a person choosing a professional sports player to be

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on a pretend “fantasy” team. Annual global revenues of fantasy sport are more than \$500 million, with more than 19.4 million people playing fantasy sports (<http://www.plunkettresearchonline.com/ResearchCenter/Trends/display.aspx?Industry=30&index=10>). Online communication mechanisms, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Twackle, and blogs, increase the social networking that is inherent in many sport video games.

Issues Discussed in This Special Journal Issue

The first major issue discussed in this special issue is recruitment practices in sport. Recruiting the best players for a sport often involves looking to the international market rather than focusing on the domestic market. Recruiting the best sporting talent, whether it be players or coaches, is a critical competency of an effective organization. Many corporations spend a large amount of money recruiting people to their organization, and often the search process is international in scope (Popper, 2001). Human resource management in international sport organizations is vital in retaining and attracting the best employees. Previous studies have argued that people are the most important assets of an organization and affect organizational performance (e.g., Huselid, 1998; Schneider, 1987). The recruitment process for a sport organization focuses on marketing both the reputation of the organization and the talents of recruiters in promoting the strengths of the organization.

Recruiting sports players is an international business, with many professional sports teams in the United States focusing on recruitment as a driver of their organization's future performance. In addition to professional sports recruitment, there is the recruitment of amateur sports professionals who come from various countries to participate in the American college sport system. The American college system enables international athletes to play competitively their respective sport and to be signed to a professional American sports team or play in the professional league of their respective sport. Many golfers, baseball players, and basketball players utilize the American college system as a way to enter the lucrative American sport industry.

The second major issue discussed in the context of international sports management in this special issue is the economic impact of sporting events. In the international business environment, there are different approaches to evaluating sporting event economic impact. The major approaches are the top-down and bottom-up perspective. The top-down approach examines the economic impact

prior (ex ante) or after (ex post) the sporting event. This might involve looking at the number of people staying at hotels or the change in a company's revenue before and after a sporting event. The top-down approach uses secondary data to measure sporting event economic impact, which might include sales receipts, motel occupancy rates, and event attendance (Baade, Baumann, & Matheson, 2008). The bottom-up approach estimates the number of athletes and spectators coming to a sporting event and the resources they will utilize while the event takes place. Both the top-down and bottom-up approaches are the most common forms of evaluating sporting events through economic impact studies. Most economic impact studies of mega-sporting events like the Olympics or World Cup also take into account regional development, such as the building of new stadiums and the jobs this created as a measure of economic performance (Maennig, 2007).

The third major issue discussed in this special issue is international sport sponsorship. Global sport sponsorship and the revenue generated by the sponsorship have grown exponentially in the past decade. In 2008, the global sponsorship industry was estimated to be worth \$43.5 billion. A related issue associated with sport sponsorship is ambush marketing. Ambush marketing is a way that marketers associate themselves with sporting events without contributing financially to the sponsorship of the event. Ambush marketing has emerged as a threat to traditional forms of international sport sponsorship, such as the Olympics and World Cup, by devaluing existing sport sponsorship.

Sport sponsorship is a major contributor to a sport rights holder's revenues. Most global sport governing bodies are reliant on sponsorship deals for their overall revenue. The contract values of corporate sport sponsorship have increased by international sporting organizations such as the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) developing exclusive and commercial rights to specific sporting events. An early example of this type of sport sponsorship was the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, when Coca-Cola spent \$22 million to become the exclusive drinks category sponsor.

The fourth major issue discussed in this special issue is corporate social responsibility (CSR) in sport. CSR has become increasingly important to sport organizations in bridging their business, political, and moral agendas. Sport is a platform and agent for positive social change. As there is an increasingly higher demand for social and ethical behavior by people involved in sport, CSR offers a way for organizations to maintain their reputation and relationships in the community. CSR offers a variety of

benefits for sport organizations, including improved trust between stakeholder participants in a region and better risk management of environmental safeguards. While CSR has been applied to a variety of industries, it is only recently that it has been examined in the context of sport (Walters & Chadwick, 2009).

More sport organizations (especially professional ones) are integrating CSR into their overall strategic performance. Sport leagues, clubs, and associations are utilizing CSR to help manage their resources and participate better in international activities. CSR enables organizations to integrate their international focus through partnering with public institutions, regulators, nongovernmental organizations, and community groups on societal issues that help to legitimize and support their efforts. In addition, many independent club supporter groups of professional sports teams have utilized grassroots initiatives to link society at large to sport. These grassroots initiatives include public health initiatives that sports teams want to include as part of their overall CSR investment. Large international institutions such as the United Nations have also been encouraging the use of sport as part of their peace and restoration initiatives that fall within the CSR umbrella. Sport organizations need to continue to adapt to CSR challenges and align their business activities to social issues confronting the global community.

The fifth major issue in this special issue regards sponsorship and branding experiences by sport organizations. Sport acts as an emotional agent in creating an atmosphere of excitement (Kiendl, 2007). The emotions surrounding sport often are linked to the brand of the sport organization, which differentiates it from other sports teams. Sports-related sponsorship provides the opportunity for sport and nonsport organizations to utilize their brands by creating an emotional attachment to the sport. By presenting their brand in a sport context, organizations can utilize the platform of sport to associate themselves with winning teams and famous athletes. Sport brands are particularly important in the international environment, as consumers associate with brands they know and trust. Sporting events enable consumers to be more receptive to brand messages (Nicholls, Roslow, & Dublish, 1999). These brand messages enable sport sponsorship activities to occur worldwide as a means of connecting with an audience. Brand equity can be developed long term in the international environment through careful consideration and integration of local tastes and culture.

The sixth major issue discussed in the special issue is international sport law. As an increasing number of orga-

nizations—not just sport-focused but also sport-related—are involved in international business transactions, it becomes more vital for these organizations to know the law and how it applies depending on the international context. International sport law comprises many subtopic areas, including recruiting, branding, and intellectual property rights. Due to the increase in usage worldwide of the Internet, one of the most important growing areas of international sport law relates to gaming. The US market for sports gaming is a large industry segment, with legal horse racing bets in the United States estimated at US \$12.3 billion in 2009 (Angst, 2010). Illegal sports gaming is also a large industry segment, with many college sports fans being involved in fantasy game betting that often does not occur through a traditional betting agency. Most of the illegal fantasy sports betting activity occurs around football, basketball, and baseball. It is estimated that approximately \$1.5 billion annually is spent on fantasy sports and sports-related betting (Spaeder, 2009). In the United States, the only state with unrestricted legalized sports betting that occurs in Europe and Asia is Nevada, which focuses on horse racing. As more people are involved in sports gaming internationally, there is confusion between what laws apply to United States- and European Union-based businesses that operate globally. The World Trade Organization has been involved in settling international law disputes regarding sports gaming, such as horse race betting, but there is no universal law that international companies can follow regarding sport law, as they need to comply with individual country jurisdictions in addition to bilateral trade treaties.

The seventh major issue discussed in this special issue is practical implications and future research suggestions for international sports management. The increase in the internationalization activities of sports-related organizations is a key activity that has increased the international outlook of most firms. Internationalization of the sport industry has occurred as a result of entrepreneurial initiatives that focus on issues such as branding, corporate social responsibility, tourism, regional development, marketing, and action sports. As sport is a global product often watched without any verbal translation needed, it is important to investigate further how it is internationalizing and what companies involved in sport can do to increase their global presence. Despite the large media attention on sport in the international business environment, the sports management and international business disciplines are still not yet fully integrated. More research is required particularly in theoretical development that links both disciplines together in a practical way that helps people, businesses, and organizations involved in

international business. Many governments around the world are also interested in how they can use their sporting power as a way to attract more foreign direct investment (FDI) and interest from overseas. By focusing on the international aspect of sport, more entrepreneurial sport ventures can occur that link FDI in developed and developing countries.

Conclusion

This article has examined the current trends and future developments in international sports management. The role of sport in the international environment was discussed in terms of its economic, commercial, and sociocultural influences. As sport transcends culture and language differences, its role in the international marketplace has increased. In particular, the influence of professional sport franchises in developing cross-cultural exchanges has changed the way sports organizations recruit and promote their brands. The globalization of

technology was highlighted, which illustrated the importance of communication in promoting sport worldwide. The major issues showcased in this special journal issue on international sports management were then discussed. These included the international aspects of recruitment practices in sport, economic impact of sporting events, sport sponsorship, corporate social responsibility, branding, sport law, and future research directions. It is hoped that the issues discussed in this special journal issue will encourage more research to examine international sports management. In addition, practitioners can read the articles discussed in this special journal issue as a way to stay up to date with current international business issues related to sport.

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