

Introduction: State of Literature Special Issue

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Thirty-five years have passed since the first issue of the *Journal of Sport Management (JSM)* was published, and the literature in sport management, including the theory produced and applied, has advanced considerably over the years (Cunningham et al., 2021). Given this advancement, this special issue was structured differently, by design, from past special issues in the *JSM*. We asked for teams of scholars that were international, a mix of more established scholars and junior scholars, and scholars who possessed divergent views on a topic to engage multiple perspectives, all traits that point to a maturing field of study—such teams would be difficult to assemble in an undeveloped field of study. In structuring the special issue in this manner, we sought a collection of manuscripts that highlight and critique the state of the sport management literature for a range of different topics to extend conversation and provide guides to future research, research that may address more immediate questions as well as research that may move the study of a topic in entirely different directions.

Sport Management's Maturity and Advancement

The fact that we could make such a call is testament to the founders of the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM), the professional society that established *JSM*, and the vision of its early influential scholars (e.g., Parkhouse et al., 1982; Paton, 1987; Zeigler, 1987). They implored scholars in the field to focus on producing strong theoretical research to bolster our academic literature and solidify our status in the academy. Strong theoretical research is critical for advancing a field of study. In speaking about the status of sport management in the first issue of *JSM*, in 1987, 2 years after NASSM was founded, Earle Zeigler proclaimed, “We must keep in mind that a recognized profession needs an organized body of knowledge,” and “Despite positive efforts by some (e.g., Parkhouse in the United States, Chelladurai in Canada), general awareness of the theoretic literature has increased only marginally in the past 20 years” (p. 10). The focus on the significance of sport management scholarship relative to our place in the academy remained consistent in the early years of NASSM as Chelladurai (1992), Parks (1992), Olafson (1995), and Slack (1996) each acknowledged it in their Zeigler lectures.

This early consistent dialog had a strong impact on our field. Cuneen (2004) noted that NASSM had moved from a field of potential to one of merit and recognized that “our scholars have shaped our meritorious place in the academy by holding sport to a high level of scientific scrutiny and expectation” (p. 2). Approximately another decade later, Cunningham et al. (2015) served as editors of a 33 chapter book highlighting theory in sport

management (Cunningham et al., 2021) and classified the theories into four categories: managerial, economic, marketing, and socio-cultural, denoting the extensive nature of the field and the embedded nature of theory-driven scholarship. The breadth and depth of the theories covered suggested “considerable theoretical advances, and with them, the advancement of sport management as an academic discipline” (Cunningham et al., 2021, p. 2).

Contributions to This Special Issue

Given the maturation of our field, we thought it important to delve even more deeply into the sport management literature. The articles in this special issue cover a wide array of topics. In each article, the team of authors review and critique the literature in the given area and offer suggestions for moving that literature forward. Consequently, this special issue contains seven thought-provoking manuscripts, which, we believe, can guide us in strengthening research in our field.

In their timely piece, Singer et al. (2022) call attention to how anti-Blackness has pervaded the academy, explore the missed opportunities in sport management, and provide several action items to undo anti-Blackness in our field. Pizzo et al. (2022) provide a synthesis of the ever-growing esports industry and offer an agenda for future research with an emphasis on interdisciplinary work. Sveinson et al. (2022) take an innovative look at women in the sport industry with a mesolevel analysis and the invisible labors of women and draw upon Bohnet's (2015) DESIGN frame to propose future areas of research. Baker et al. (2022) synthesize the sport brand literature, suggest specific methodological and theoretical advances, and create a new framework, the Sport Brand Ecosystem and Environment, to organize future brand research. Delia et al. (2022) utilize institutional theory to assess the sport consumer behavior literature and discover a woeful lack of diversity in participants and settings, suggesting how future researchers can disrupt these norms. Misener et al. (2022) use a critical social science perspective to review the interorganizational relationships literature, examine the effect of interorganizational relationships on amateur sport and how unique settings impact these collaborations, and challenge assumptions regarding the value of interorganizational relationships in amateur sport. Finally, McDonald et al. (2022) critically review the customer engagement literature in sport, which leads to the creation of six “future direction” statements along with an innovative conceptual model of customer engagement in sport, which combine to provide specific direction for future research in this area.

The topics covered in the special issue are broad, and yet collectively, they highlight consistent recommendations to enhance the literature in sport management. Although each team of authors was tasked to critique the state of the literature regarding their *specific topic*, many of the limitations identified, and suggestions

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for improving the state of the literature in those topics, actually *generalize* across areas. For example, authors contributing to the special issue note that we need to be much more thoughtful about the demographic characteristics of the participants in our research, and the impact of intersectionality of those characteristics, to ensure that we have a full understanding of *all* involved in the sport industry. Similarly, they encourage us to undertake our inquiries in a broader array of contexts as much of our research is still situated in narrow settings (e.g., men's commercial sport, global North). Furthermore, they encourage us to embrace a wider variety of epistemologies, research methodologies, and foundational theories as many of the areas examined in the special issue exhibit homogeneity relative to these cornerstones of the research process. Finally, they ask us to be sure to enter into our research in sport with a critical eye so that we do not only focus on the positive consequences of the phenomena of interest but also ensure that we recognize any negative impacts as well. We realize that many of these recommendations have been offered by others (e.g., Berg et al., 2021; Frisby, 2005), but we believe it is particularly compelling that many of them are mentioned across the different areas of research.

Conclusion

The field of sport management has “come a long way” over a relatively short period of time (Doherty, 2012, p. 5), and our organized body of knowledge has played a crucial role in this advancement. The contributions to this special issue offer us guidance not only specific to each of the topics reviewed but also recommendations that could serve to further strengthen our literature more broadly. We hope that this special issue delivers on the vision that led to the call for papers—namely, to encourage conversation, provide specific guidance for future research, and, consequently, further enrich our body of literature.

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