Critical Issues in Global Sport Management

Edited by Nico Schulenkorf and Stephen Frawley. Published 2017 by Routledge, Abingdon, UK.

Reviewed by Annemarie Farrell, Ithaca College, USA

A quick glance at sport-management curricula across academic institutions illustrates the popularity of courses with a global and international focus. While the terminology may differ slightly, nearly all programs focus a course with global, international, and/or transnational designations. The inclusion of these courses reflects a desire not only to see sport as truly global product but also to expose students to the impact of management practices on individuals, communities, and economies around the world.

A key strength of Critical Issues in Global Sport Management, edited by Nico Schulenkorf and Stephen Frawley, is the diversity of authors contributing to this product. Any book addressing global perspectives naturally would seek a plurality of voices from around the world. While this may seem obvious, it is not always the case in similar titles. Although the chapter authors largely hail from Europe, North America, and Australasia, their research background is more widespread. Future editions should seek to include additional voices from South America and content from scholars in Africa and Asia.

The book is organized into three areas, each serving as key focus area in both introductory sport-management courses and more advanced classes with a global focus. The structure of this book allows for easy integration into courses, whereas faculty can develop a syllabus with similar organization or merge it into an already-established class.

With Part I, “Governance, Integrity and Welfare,” the editors chose to start at the heart of international sport management, with an analysis of management principles, structures, and policy. Furthermore, chapter authors make direct connections between structures, leadership decisions, and impacts on both the culture of sport and the athletes and communities they serve. Chapters provide key information and case studies that can be further analyzed through class assignments and rich course discussion. The chapter on gender diversity is a good example of this. The authors present an audit of gender makeup of leadership for national sport organizations, international federations, and Olympic committees from 2010 to 2012. The data and analysis that follows provide a good snapshot that can lead to meaningful class discussion and student reflection. For instance, course instructors could create small-group work where students can contrast gender balance in these international organizations with domestic sport bodies.

The remainder of this lengthy section chronicles various current areas of controversy, including doping, concussion management, and match fixing. The inclusion of key definitions and a strong foundation of historical background is
vital, since many of these terms are misunderstood or lack a cultural consensus around them. Moreover, topics like sport betting and doping highlight the complexity of these issues at the international level since a patchwork of laws must be considered (international, national, and state) and often exist in contradiction to other policies. The final three chapters involve an analysis of match fixing, exploration of the WADA and doping policies, and approaches and impact of concussion science in sport. All of these chapters include both ethical and moral considerations, as well as implications for management.

The text does an excellent job of integrating issues of controversy with an analysis of ethical decision making. The use of vertical development as a highlighted concept seems to run directly parallel to the goals of the entire text. Authors present a fundamental question to the reader—What does good governance look like? While there may not be an easy answer to this, four key areas are offered to evaluate governance structures. This again creates an opportunity for student engagement with the text, as an instructor could ask students to evaluate other sport organizations using criteria presented in the book.

Part II of the book, “Globalisation,” begins with the simple statement, “Globalisation is almost a buzzword.” While it is true that this term has become overused to the point of it lacking any substance, the authors are careful to tease out the rhetoric and address fundamental principles behind globalization.

The Olympics and World Cup are examples of events that bring together nations across the globe for athletic competition. While these events bring considerable attention to host nations, increasingly there has been a greater focus on resources needed to stage these events. Recently, the Olympics have found considerable obstacles for willing nations to submit bids for future events, often due to lack of domestic support because of the funding required. Authors discuss these obstacles, as well as providing a critique of economic-impact analyses. They present the London 2012 Summer Games as a case study, including the “plans for impact” crafted by the local organizing committee prior to the event. Instructors could have students use the plan for impact as a criterion to evaluate not only the London Games but also other large-scale sporting events as a class activity. Ultimately, this chapter presents the legacy of sport megaevents in community, culture, and tourism of host nations.

Connected to large-scale sport events are issues surrounding event management and fan engagement. Two chapters touch on these topics, with a focus on soccer event management and fan hooliganism. Authors present a historical framing of the term hooliganism while differentiating it from spontaneous forms of fan violence and deviance. The text examines managerial implications for event management and security, impact of alcohol consumption, and efforts by legislative groups and media outlets to address football-spectator violence.

The organization and topics chosen by the editors are an overall strength of the text. However, the chapters on social media and sport for development (SFD) stand out as confusing and misplaced. While the topic of social media is vital and the authors do a good job defining terms and discussing their importance in fan engagement and sport-brand management, the topic felt out of place and the chapter lacked the depth and substance of other contributions. Future editions may find the last section of the book on technology and social media to be a better fit.