

Sport and the Coronavirus Crisis Special Issue: An Introduction

Brody J. Ruidley and Bo Li

Miami University, Oxford

The world experienced a tremendous amount of challenges and change during the year 2020. Having been first reported on December 31, 2019, a novel coronavirus, named 2019-nCoV or COVID-19 by the World Health Organization (WHO), entered the global landscape, altering the daily lives of nearly everyone in its path. During the early months of 2020, cases began to grow in Asia, hitting China the hardest. As the world watched government actions and news updates out of China, Thailand, Japan, and South Korea, the virus began to make its way across the globe. One would think that tracking the spread of this virus would be noticeable based on symptoms, hospitalizations, and subsequent loss of life for thousands of people. However, COVID-19 presented the health profession, and the world community, with puzzle pieces that often were and are still hidden. What made tracking this virus especially difficult was the potential for asymptomatic carriers and transfer, a 2-week window of contagious activity, and the way the virus was affecting differing age groups. Once the virus began to spread, or cases became further known, European countries and the United States developed into hot spots for virus cases and unfortunate death. As months passed, the virus continued into India, Russia, and major regions in South America and Africa.

The period of March 10–13, 2020, is a key timeline of the coronavirus impact, as the sports world came to screeching halt. Leading up to this sport stoppage, many conversations about *fan* attendance were being held for high school, college, and professional competition. On March 10, in a decision that many thought to be premature, the Ivy League college basketball conference canceled its men's and women's basketball tournaments. The events of the next 72 hours would prove the Ivy League correct in their decision, as it would be the first of many cancellations. Wednesday, March 11, is one day that many will remember, as it relates to the coronavirus crisis. During this day, the WHO declared the COVID-19 spread a pandemic, the first professional athlete was diagnosed with the virus (Juventus defender, Daniele Rugani), and Americans were hit squarely with the threat of the virus. In the span of an hour, the President of the United States banned travel to and from most of Europe, well-known actors Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson announced they had contracted the virus, and a National Basketball Association (NBA) game

The guest editors are with Miami University, Oxford, OH, USA. Ruidley (brody.ruidley@miamioh.edu) is corresponding author.

between the Oklahoma City Thunder and Utah Jazz was abruptly canceled and the NBA season eventually suspended after Utah Jazz player, Rudy Gobert, tested positive for the virus.

March 12 did not bring any relief to the sports world, as news only brought on more cancellations and postponements. In this 24-hour span, the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP), U.S. Major League Soccer (MLS), Professional Golfers' Association (PGA), Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA), Major League Baseball (MLB), and the National Hockey League (NHL) all delayed their seasons. In a major decision, the top American college sport governing body, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), canceled all remaining winter and spring season sporting events, impacting thousands of coaches and athletes (Weyrich, 2020). In addition to these delays and cancellations, the newly formed XFL (American football league) canceled its 2020 season, ultimately forcing the league to permanently fold. The virus continued to impact the sports world on March 13, as Arsenal FC manager Mikel Arteta tested positive and the English Premier League, NASCAR racing, the Boston Marathon, and golf's The Masters Tournament were all postponed.

Alongside the cancellation or suspensions of recreational, high school, college, and professional sport activities around the world, including the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, there has been a litany of fan reaction, alternative sport program, social and traditional media coverage of the pandemic, and many variations of the sport experience taking place *without* sport. While the situation is still uncertain, there is a lot to learn about the initial and early impact of the coronavirus crisis on the sport industry. The call for this special issue of the *International Journal of Sport Communication* carried a bit of uncertainty as we, the coeditors of this issue, asked scholars to contribute scholarly commentaries and analyses of an unfortunate, life-altering pandemic. We were uncertain about the type of response or interest that would follow the call for papers. To our surprise and genuine disbelief, we received 125 full submissions from scholars all over the world. With 125 full-paper submissions, comes a need for 375 blind reviews. We received those reviews and are very appreciative of the 100+ reviewers assisting in such a short time frame. The input and generosity to serve this academic community was truly inspiring. Thank you to all that volunteered to review! We would also like to extend our gratitude to the Editor of the *International Journal of Sport Communication*, Paul M. Pedersen, for his organization and commitment to this special issue.

In this issue, we have selected 30 commentaries and 3 industry interviews all providing a wide understanding of how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted and altered the communication, operation, and management of sport industries all throughout the world. These commentaries come in all shapes and sizes when comparing scope, length, methods, topic, level of sport, and COVID-19 implications and discussion. A goal of this special issue, from the outset, was to give voice to many scholars in their own particular niche of sport-based research and provide a venue to discuss how that niche has been impacted by this global pandemic. We are proud that these goals have been met. We are pleased that these commentaries examine the varied aspects of the sport industry, including topics in communication, marketing, management, coaching, media, public relations (PRs), gender, and governance.