

GUEST EDITORIAL: TAKING SPORT SERIOUSLY

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"Some people believe football is a matter of life and death. I am very disappointed with that attitude. I can assure you it is much, much more important than that"

Bill Shankly, Manager, Liverpool
Football Club, 1960-1974

There are two problems with Bill Shankly's words. The first problem is that he was wrong. Plain wrong. No matter the rewards or medals for the winner, the depths of passion felt by the supporters or the competitiveness of the players, no sport is worth that much. The sport of Shankly was not strengthened by the murder of Andres Escobar, nor boxing served by the death of Johnny Owen. Another world championship was not worth the price paid by Ayrton Senna. No sport should ever be taken that seriously. In any case, the second problem is that Shankly probably never said it. Before close inspection, it is plausible, it does sound like something he might have said. Shankly took his sport seriously; he took his team, that "*bastion of invincibility*", more seriously still. His passion was never in doubt but he was just too smart ever to say something so clumsy and crude. His wit was more than sharp enough that he would never have needed the hyperbole. Bill Shankly said many things but the thing he is most famous for saying is, paradoxically, not one of them.

So, this special edition of Management Decision begins with a paradox. The first words in it are a lie. A lie that was never actually spoken but a lie that is frequently quoted and often believed. That's the way it is with sport much of the time; the myths frequently matter as much, if not more, than the truth. In a post-modern, post-reality world of high technology action replays, what we think we saw is still what often keeps the interest going long after the action has finished. Ali's phantom punch, Hurst's second goal, Drummond's false start, Cueto's try, Kasprovich's dismissal, Maradona's hand, Jordan's flight, Schumacher's motives, Jones Junior's decision and a thousand more from every sport that has more than two people watching it. We should not be afraid of the paradox, we should embrace it. The joy of sport is that the baseball fan can be entranced by the numbers and the statistical analysis of home runs, RBIs and shut outs and, at the same time, be captivated by the sport when it is experienced by all the senses. Sport lends itself to the positivist striving for scientific rigour and the phenomenologists who just know greatness when they see it. Sport has something for the poet and something for the census taker.

But the question remains: should something so honest and deceitful, predictable and unimaginable, clear and opaque, exact and ephemeral should be taken seriously. Management Decision is a serious academic journal. Does sport, with its glory and its winning, belong in this intellectual space? In editing this special edition, we started with the a priori assumption that sport should be taken seriously and asked for contributions that would either support us or damn us. It may be accident rather than design and the result of methodological impurities in sample selection but we think we've garnered some pretty compelling evidence that sport should be taken seriously, that in a whole series of different ways, sport does matter. Together the articles in this special edition produce evidence of not only why sport should be taken seriously but also how sport is taken seriously by those who spend all or part of their professional lives investigating it. Sport should be taken seriously and this special edition provides 11 reasons why.

Those 11 reasons are grouped around three central themes. The first of these is that sport should be taken seriously because it has a significance which goes beyond the pitch or the field of play. This wide, and increasingly international, significance covers the social, economic and political role of sport, it covers the passions generated by sport which serve to both bring people together and drive them apart and it covers the popular culture dimension of sport from the global ubiquity of Premiership football to the Indian cricketer's image spread across south Asia to the role it plays in helping to establish national identity. Our second theme is that of the transformation from the base metal of sport as a pastime into the gold of sport as a business. For good and ill, those paradoxes again, sport has become a commodified activity which both creates and consumes significant amounts of wealth. Does this turn athletes into drug cheats? Possibly. Does it make cricketers want to risk their international future by playing in the Indian Premier League? Probably. Does it make Premiership football clubs attractive targets for acquisition by any apparently *right and proper* person? Definitely.

Our final theme concerns the intellectual space usually occupied by journals like Management Decision and covers the ever closer relationship between sport and management in both theory and practice. Full time cricketer and part time intellectual, Ed Smith, suggests that sport is important because it can teach us every lesson we need to know about life. We don't, and wouldn't, make such lofty claims. We would, however, point out that sport is increasingly used as a context for management research and as a laboratory for management experiments (Espitia-Escuer and Garcia-Cebrian, 2006). In doing this, sport is increasingly used as a vehicle for advancing the theory and practice of management in areas as diverse as organisational behaviour, strategy and planning, leadership and

teamwork. Similarly, the relationship is often discussed in terms of whether sport is a unique or specific context which will require its own unique or specific set of management theories or whether what we already know about management will serve us well in the context of sport. This special edition makes a contribution to all of these debates and we begin the contribution with a discussion of the wider significance of sport.

In 1995, South Africa, playing in the tournament for the first time, won the Rugby World Cup. In itself this is only of sporting significance in a non-global game played seriously by little more than a handful of nations. For South Africa, a country just one year past its first post-apartheid election, the victory had a much deeper political and social significance: Nelson Mandela, then president, dressed in a South African rugby shirt presented the trophy to the winning captain Francois Pienaar. The iconography of the moment carries the significance: A black President celebrating the success of a team whose sport had long been a symbol of the apartheid establishment focused attention on the transformation of South Africa into the rainbow nation. When sport has this kind of significance it is often through the images and their interpretation rather than the action on the field of play. For example, the American civil rights movement of the 1960s is powerfully represented by images of Tommy Smith and John Carlos's protest at the 1968 Olympics. Similarly, the same movement is captured in the famous *Esquire* magazine front cover which pictured Muhammad Ali shot by 6 arrows for refusing to take his fight to the Viet Cong.

If sport does have this kind of significance then nowhere does it matter more than in the Olympic Games which have always been about much more than sport. The Olympics have been the mechanism through which political statements have been made at a national or international level as witnessed by the African boycott of 1976, the American boycott in 1980 and the Soviet boycott in 1984. If you are going to make a political statement then the lesson seems to be to make it when the whole world is watching such as through the massacre of Israeli athletes at the 1972 games in Munich. The Olympics is also about personal statements which transcend sport like Cathy Freeman running simply '*cos I'm free* in Sydney in 2000 or Muhammad Ali throwing his gold medal into the Mississippi. The real significance and importance of the Olympics, however, ultimately lies in its global dimension; the Olympics are globalisation writ large with, in theory at least, everyone playing by the same rules on the same level playing field. In their paper on who should report the Olympics, Kuei-Lun Chang and Sen-Kuei Liao point out that twice as many people will report on the games as will take part in the games in Beijing and so, given this international significance, how the games are reported will really

matter as only a fraction of those who watch the competitions will be there in person (and not withstanding the \$3 billion worth of TV rights). How do you report something as complicated, and loaded, as an Olympic Games? It requires, according to Chang and Liao, a combination of many things such as description, explanation, expertise, experience, attitude and language.

Internationally, the idea of sport as a common language is a powerful one. Britain and America were once described as two countries divided by a common language; what is said may sound the same on both sides of the Atlantic but the words are used for different purposes with different meanings and in very different styles. Speech Act theorists point out that language is important because it provides a common foundation from which many different route maps can be created. Sport is very much the same: the rules of football (or soccer), golf, tennis, track and field are universal but can be interpreted to suit many different circumstances from the efficiency of German football compared to the effervescence of the Brazilian approach to the power and work rate of Spanish tennis players compared to the technical excellence of their Russian counterparts. The starkest example of a common language open to different interpretations is in one of the few truly global sports, football. Nnamdi Madichie's paper discusses the globalisation of football in the specific context of the English Premier League and examines the growth in the number of foreign players playing in England. The paper discusses the import of foreign players, all speaking the same sporting language but with different intonations, and raises a whole bundle of challenges. Inter alia, Madichie's paper demonstrates the possibilities of globalisation in sport and the outcomes, good and bad, when diversity meets a common set of rules which govern behaviour. Simon Chadwick and Geoff Walters also use football to evaluate the significance of sport but do so from a very different perspective to that discussed so far. The starting point for Chadwick and Walters' paper is the economic and social role played by football clubs, not in a context of globalisation, but in their local communities. They offer an interesting discussion of how models and approaches to corporate citizenship can bring benefits to both the clubs and the communities in which they operate.

At an elite level, those who do sport, from the Olympic athlete to the Premier League footballer, are just a small fraction of the story. Their significance and their influence go further, much further, than the boundaries of the fields of play. More people report on elite sport than do elite sport, hence the debates and discussions that most spectator sport generates. Millions more watch, listen and are influenced by sport and that influence goes way beyond the sport itself; Ali was an inspiration as much for what he gave up in his sport as for what he achieved in the ring. This may place a special responsibility on sport

that few other activities or professions have to bear. Whether we like it or not, sport matters because it is the vehicle for some pretty serious things. An interesting question is whether this significance will be enhanced or diminished by the shift from a pastime to a business that we have witnessed in many sport over the past two decades.

Citius. Altius. Fortius. The natural order of sport is change and improvement. One of the hottest debates in sport is who is the greatest? Across different eras, who is the best of all time? Would Tiger Woods get the better of Jack Nicklaus or Ben Hogan? Federer, Sampras, McEnroe, Borg or Laver? What is the value of Carl Lewis's four gold medals in 1984 compared to Jessie Owens in 1936? Would Don Bradman have coped with the bowling of Muttiah Muralitharan? The usual answer to this question is that it is not possible to make such comparisons across eras are impossible to make; advances in technology, improved training techniques and changes to the rules make any inter-era comparison meaningless because the sport has moved on and you are never going to be comparing like with like. In rugby union, for example, players at the 2007 world cup were, on average, nearly 30lbs heavier than their counterparts less than a generation earlier in 1991. At a minimum, the game has become citius et fortius. This special edition, however, is not so much concerned with changes within sport as changes in the nature of sport itself. Is sport now little more than big business and, if so, what are the implications for supporters, managers, players and all the other stakeholders?

Was there ever a time when sport was all about the Corinthian amateur spirit? Was playing the game ever the most important thing, more important than winning or losing and certainly more important than the rewards, individually and corporately, that ever came from winning? The answer to this is clearly 'yes' and, in some sports, it still may thrive. However, in many sports, this has not been the case for a long time, maybe not even in the lifetime of the guest editors of this special edition. The articles which cover this theme, discuss it from a whole series of different stakeholder perspectives. How, for example, has the commercialisation of sport changed the attitude of supporters; should we now just call them consumers and be done with it? Dae Hee Kwak and Joon-Ho Kang examine this issue from the perspective of the fan and ask what it is that drives their support for certain sports teams, in this case Korean basketball teams, and so motivates them to buy the team's merchandise. The suggestion from Kwak and Kang's paper is that sports teams should look to align their values and brand as closely as possible with those of their supporters. What are these supporters values in this new commodified world of sport? Do you support your team because of its sporting characteristics to do you support your team for its business characteristics? Much of the evidence would

seem to suggest that supporters will chant the name of their favourite player long before they pay homage to the club's accountant.

One of the main implications of sport becoming more like business is the introduction of new stakeholders. In the case of football this is mainly reflected in the growing number of clubs becoming listed on their national stock markets and the subsequent introduction of the shareholder stakeholder. Mainstream management theory suggests that the key issue raised by this is likely to be the introduction of a stakeholder whose interest is purely economic. How have these new stakeholders done out of the transformation of the sport? Is football in Europe, where the phenomenon is most prevalent, a safe bet for investment? This is the issue discussed in the paper by Ramzi Benkraiem, Wael Louhichi and Pierre Marques who consider the relationship between on field performance and off field performance in terms of stock market reactions and share price changes. The key issue in this paper is the importance of on field performance for the value of the sporting business across a number of European football clubs. The classical academic answer of 'depends' is the result. If the team does badly then so does the share price but the reverse is not true; if the team does well, the share price remains largely unaffected. If these new stakeholder are powerful then maybe the purpose of sport changes from simply participating or winning to one of just avoiding defeat.

As a sport becomes more of a business, the inevitable outcome is that the dynamics of stakeholder relationships will change fundamentally. As the special edition shows, this is likely to happen in two ways. First, there will be changes in the demands and expectations of stakeholders and, second, there will be shifts in the location and exercise of stakeholder power. In terms of demands and expectations clubs may change their perception of their support base and view it simply as an economic resource to be exploited through ticket and merchandise sales which may create conflict as the supporters perceptions and motivations to support remain the same. In terms of power, do the new breed of shareholder-owner exercise power in ways never seen under more traditional forms of ownership? But, what of the players, perhaps the most important stakeholder group of all. How has this commercialisation changed their behaviour in terms of demands and power? Mike Mondello and Joel Maxcy's paper looks at the player as stakeholder and examines the relationship between reward and performance in American football. The paper draws important and interesting implications for both on and off field performance and, like many other papers, revisits the notion of paradox. Large differentials in pay between high and low performing players seem to work to improve the bottom line. Small differentials in pay between players seem to improve on field performance. How teams in the NFL

reward their players may well, therefore, depend on how teams in the NFL perceive themselves. As businesses, they would, in a rational economic world, make one type of decision. As a sports team they would maybe make a different one altogether. This is not the only management conundrum that has to be dealt with in the NFL as Mondello and Maxcy's paper also demonstrates a clear link between on and off field performance.

Given this combination of the competitive on field imperative with the off field economic imperative, is it still realistic to still refer to all this as sport? Have things changed so much that sport now occupies an entirely new industry space? This is the issue examined by Michael Goldman and Kate Johns who consider the biggest change in the nature of cricket since the Packer revolution of the late 1970s; the development of the 20/20 game. Goldman and Johns' paper examines the development of this form of the game in South Africa and looks at how this represents a shift in the nature of cricket, not just into a more businesslike activity but also shifting the game from sport to entertainment. The conclusion of the paper is that this form of the game represents the triumph of new forms of sponsorship as the game becomes ever more a commercial commodity. If the conclusion is that the management of sports like cricket must change, then what exactly is the relationship between the study and practice of sport and the study and practice of management?

The literature on the relationship between sport and management is growing rapidly, indeed pretty much all of the contributions to this special edition contribute, implicitly or explicitly, to that literature. There are a number of possible explanations for this growth in sports management. For example, sport can operate as a metaphor for the world of business in which the goal of galvanising a team to achieve victory in a match or a championship can be mapped onto the strategic goals of an organisation. But, it may also be seen as a kind of laboratory for business in which new techniques can be tried and their impact assessed within the relatively simplified environment of a sporting contest. Furthermore, sport has accessibility that business and management studies may not have, certainly for the non-specialised audience. Much of the literature, for example, on the purpose of management research stresses the importance of engagement for communication (Shugan, 2003) and sport maybe an idea vehicle for this. Sport often has a familiarity and even those who follow sport at the most shallow of levels will often have a favourite player, team or sport in a way that both students and scholars of business and management will not have a favourite CEO, company or industry.

One of the main manifestations of the relationship between sport and management is discussions of how, in practice, sports managers can

learn lessons from business and managers in businesses can learn lessons from sport. For example, the former CEO of General Electric, Jack Welch, and the coach of the England rugby team which won the World Cup in 2003, Clive Woodward, both released autobiographical books entitled "Winning" within a couple of years of one another. In his book, Woodward's suggestion is that the techniques and skill set he brought to managing the England rugby team were imported extensively from business and Welch attributes his business mindset to lessons he learnt from sport. In this special edition, the paper by Fabrice Burlot, Julien Pierre and Lilian Pichot considers a similar set of issues and examines how sport can be used within organisations as a general management tool in areas such as training, motivation and communication. In examining the role of sport in ten different companies in France, Burlot, Pierre and Pichot argue that sport may be reflective of a new style of management which focuses on empowerment and entrepreneurship.

One of the main similarities between sport and business which may further explain the growing prominence of the literature is multi-dimensionality. In both contexts, outcomes are the product of a number of different factors from both within and outside of the competing organisations and teams. For example, our own work on the competitive dynamics in rugby union suggests that the result of matches in major tournaments like the Rugby World Cup is the product of two things: First, how teams perform internally and, second, how teams compete externally. The outcome is usually the result of how these two elements are combined together in the most effective manner (Adcroft and Teckman, 2008). Through these two orientations, it is possible to simplify the determinants of success in such a way as to enhance and aid understanding in the same way as strategic decisions in mainstream management can be understood through the prisms of, say, positioning approaches to strategy, resource based views and competence analysis. It could be argued that the main purpose of management theory, and the concepts derived from it, is to simplify complex phenomena and so develop useful and valuable knowledge. One way of testing the relationship between sport and management is to examine whether management theory allows for a better understanding of sport. This is the central theme of the paper by Jose Martinez and Laura Martinez who offer a very different perspective on sport to that of many of the papers in this special edition. Whereas most of the other papers have looked at sport at an elite level, this paper examines the provision of sports facilities at a local level, in this case from city councils in Spain. The paper examines the extent to which customer loyalty is an important consideration in the management of such facilities. Using a systems dynamics approach, Martinez and Martinez demonstrate the complex nature of customer

loyalty in this sports context and draw a number of interesting conclusions about how customer loyalty can be enhanced.

Ridderstrale and Nordstrum (2001) have developed a leadership model which argues that successful leadership is based on three factors: envisioning and creating a compelling vision of the future; engaging and how a team or group is motivated towards achieving that vision; and executing to make sure that resources are aligned in order to put it all into practice. A frequent question that is raised in the sports management literature is whether, as sport is a unique context and activity, it is easier or more difficult to deliver successful leadership. In dealing with this issue, we can begin by noting that one of the main ways in which sport is usually seen as being different to other activities is in the degree of attachment felt by consumers and employees. For example, whilst we all may have our own favourite supermarket, most of us do not wait with eager anticipation for their half-yearly trading reports and feel levels of sadness when pre-tax profits are not as high as we had hoped. If the consumption of sport is based, therefore, on intangibles such as emotion and passion rather than on simple and hard-nosed rationality, what of employees in sports organisations, how are they affected by such issues? Aubrey Kent and Samuel Todd, in their paper, use social identity theory to examine the extent to which sport is a distinct context in which management theory can be applied. The conceptual basis of their paper suggests that the psychology of employees may be the key issue in understanding the distinctiveness of the sports context; using illustrations from, for example, football in Germany and basketball in the USA, Kent and Todd show how an employee's identification with the team they work for can have a significant impact on their working lives.

Sport and business are, therefore, the same but different and also different but the same. There are, and there should be, no emphatic dogmas which seek to either use sport as a direct explanation for business or business as a direct explanation for sport. In order to avoid such clumsy social science, we would draw attention to the fact that whilst both sport and business are about how organisations and individuals deal with competition, there are many differences in the nature of that competition. Similarly, whilst the management of sport and business both deal explicitly with concepts like strategy and organisational behaviour, how they manifest themselves in the two different contexts will differ fundamentally. None of this, however, is to say that lessons cannot and should not be learnt between the two; they can and they should. Our point is simply that those lessons should always take account of the differences. The final paper in this special edition, the Afterword by Simon Chadwick, deals with many of these issues and places them into two important contexts. First, discussion of sport management is placed into the context of the existing literature

and how it has developed in recent years. Second, what happens next? What are the future directions for research into sport, management and the relationship between the two?

In an episode of Aaron Sorkin's 'The West Wing', President Bartlett argues with a populist senator who believes that sport is only for blue collar America. For Bartlett, the love of sport, the passion for the game, goes beyond class boundaries and is universal: The New York Yankees short stop can be a classical pianist of some distinction and a classical pianist can have a passion for the Yankees that goes beyond reason. In asking whether the seriousness of sport is still an oxymoron, we knew the answer we wanted to get. If this editorial began with a lie it must end with a confession; there has been a degree of intellectual sophistry in the presentation of the evidence as to why sport should be taken seriously. Of course sport has its wide and international significance and some of that significance is illustrated and argued for in this special edition. The same goes for the transformation of sport into a business and for the relationship between sport and management but, no matter how compelling the evidence, this is not why we think sport should be taken seriously. We think sport should be taken seriously because it is something for which we have a deep and abiding passion because of the emotions it engenders. Few things can raise emotions in the way that sport can and that applies at all levels from England's Ashes victory in 2005 to Northampton Town's promotion with a last minute goal in 1997. Sport has, and will retain, its ability to captivate as a partisan contest involving skill, talent, competitiveness and daring regardless of political or economic motive, how much money is involved or what theoretical and empirical analysis is applied to it. Sport will, in the final analysis, always be taken seriously.

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