

Bridging the dialectic between economics and ethics: Reconceptualizing sport management through philosophical theory

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Abstract 170**

While sociological theory has been utilized by sport management scholars and is of key importance to the management field, the largely unmediated appearance of sport ethics and wider moral philosophy ought to be of equal, if not greater concern. While the term "ethics", and to a lesser degree "morality", are thrashed around minimally in scholarly circles of sport management, they have yet to be identified in sport management as central tenets of discussion.

Bryant's (1993) article on the interdependence of sport sociology and management has come closest to identifying the need for the respective scholars to embrace ethics as one component of the sociological discipline in management decisions. Moreover, scholars such as Frisby (2005), Amis and Silk (2005), Chalip (2006) and Zeigler (2007), are calling for change in management research and application after recognizing that social implications of management decisions can no longer be pushed to the wayside.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, I suggest that these scholarly appeals should be pertained to, not only through sociological theory but also through philosophical theory in order to ensure ethics and morality are identified as key precepts to research in sport management. Second, I propose that while "ethical management" is widely regarded as oxymoronic due to the polemical nature of profit maximization and ethical decision making (Schmidt, 2007), there are means of weighing business decisions with ethical practice which should be explored through philosophical theorizing.

Perhaps the historical reasoning for "praxis-oriented" approaches to scholarly work in sport management is largely due to the pressures on the academic discipline to meet the profit motive of the practical management profession (Rinehart, 2005, p.498). Hence as Rinehart concedes, sport management scholars, while no less "intellectually oriented, find themselves under pressure from sport management practitioners" (2005, p.498). In contrast, sport philosophers, who have less pressure to conform to practical needs-based approaches to research, have been granted more slack in embracing the ethical implications of economic involvement in sport through looking at underlying philosophical theory.

Though ethical implications are often implicit in what can make or break a business deal, whether ethical misconduct is avoidable is dependent on its credence in a company's or a governing body's value system. Ethical actions become something of a reactionary duty in business decisions rather than a precursory part of the decision making process, of which scholars have recognized in sport sociology and philosophy settings (e.g. Brown & Walsh, 1999; Conn, 1997; McNamee, 1994; Morgan, 1983; Simon, 2001; Tamburinni & Tanssjo, 2000; Walsh & Guilianotti, 2007), yet sport management scholars have, arguably, failed to go beyond paying lip service to. In discussing the ethical dimension of sport management, both as a field of research and as applied in practical decision making, I hope to show that philosophical theorizing can have practical and not just esoteric implications for management decisions.

For the auxiliary part of my paper I will explore the dialectic between the economic motivation behind sport management and its conflicting need for ethical conduct in the context of the National Basketball Association's economic involvement in the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. I will discuss Cleveland Cavaliers player, Ira Newble's, campaign against China's human rights abuses as an example of the sport, ethics and economics nexus that should not be overlooked in favor of profit maximization. Further discussion will center on LeBron James' reluctance to support Newble's campaign, most likely due to the NBA's business interests in China and James' higher media profile. The NBA's links to ethical and human rights related issues could have significant implications for sport management and, therefore, warrant close attention. The reputation of the league and the sociological and moral effect on the fan base of basketball are examples of such issues which could potentially spiral into economic repercussions.

Within this paper I do not intend to cement a new theoretical perspective, as previous innovative approaches have (e.g. Markula & Friend, 2005; Rinehart, 2005; Skinner & Edwards, 2005), but to look at multiple conceptual frameworks that best suit ethical decision making and how these can be applied to practical management scenarios. It is hoped that this paper will serve as a foundation of discussion on the ethics-economics nexus and will provoke greater discussion of the ethical dimension of sport management through the utilization of philosophical theory.

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