

Organisational Responses to Sport Industry Issues: A Comparison of Sport Governing Bodies in the United States and Belgium

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Sport is widely recognized as a vehicle for achieving social and economic gains (International Business Leaders Forum, 2007). Sport managers encounter complex economic, political, and social issues in today's global sport marketplace, and well-managed sport organisations must be aware of and respond to such issues (Burger, Goslin, & Painter-Orland, 2004). This is true whether the sport organisations are local, national, or international in scope, whether they are based in North America or Europe, or in large or small countries. In addition, unlike many business organizations, sport organizations operate within a unique structure where governing bodies exercise varied levels of control (Arcioni & Vandewalle, 2008; Chalip, Hums, & Kaburakis, 2008). Sport governing bodies may have similar structures, but they are not universally the same (Hums & MacLean, 2008). As such, some organisational responses to economic, political, or social issues may be similar, but others will be unique to the setting in which the organisations exist. It is important to understand the extent to which sport governance structures impact the ability of individual sport organizations to respond and adjust to major global issues. One way to illustrate this is by comparing sport governing structures in different countries, in this case, the United States and Belgium. Sport in the United States is a multi-billion dollar industry (Street and Smith's Sports Group, 2007). Having hosted a number of Olympic Games and currently home to numerous major professional leagues and an expansive intercollegiate sport system, the United States sports landscape is quite complex.

But other countries' sport systems, while operating on different scales, also face increasing stress to respond to global market pressures. One such country is Belgium. Located in the north of Europe, Belgium has a proud sporting history and heritage, having hosted the 1920 Olympic Games in Antwerp, where the Olympic flag and the Athlete Oath were both introduced (International Olympic Committee, 2008a). The current President of the International Olympic Committee is Dr. Jacques Rogge, a three-time Belgian Olympian in yachting (International Olympic Committee, 2008b). Currently, the country is home to professional soccer and basketball leagues, as well as numerous amateur and club level sport organisations, although it does not have a highly competitive intercollegiate sport system. Belgium also has the unique situation of being a country divided by language into three communities. Approximately 6 million inhabitants of the country are Flemish-speaking and 4 million are French-speaking, with a small community of 70,000 German-speakers (National Geographic, 2008).

The purpose of this presentation is to compare sport governing structures in the United States and Belgium and how these different structures affect the manner in which sport organisations can respond to various global issues. Sport governing bodies in the United States can act relatively independently, while sport organisations in Belgium are tied into European Union structures and restrictions. In the United States, there is no one governmental agency, such as a Ministry of Sport which oversees the national operation of sport (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 1996). In Belgium, sport is a responsibility of the communities' governments. This means three different governmental agencies, namely ADEPS (French speaking Community), BLOSO (Flemish speaking Community) and DGS (German speaking Community), are in charge of sport, putting specific orientations on their sport policies.

The strong involvement of public authorities – European, National, and Community - in the organisation of sport in Belgium compared the blend of public and private structures with no central governmental authority over sport governing bodies in the United States, affects the capacity of those governing bodies to respond. As a consequence of this involvement by public authorities in the organisation of sport in Belgium, sport governing bodies lost a major part of the decision making process (Speckbacher, 2003). Nowadays they share the sports "market" with many economic and social stakeholders. The result of such evolution is that they have to organise themselves in an unstable and complex environment where strategic management and a high level of efficiency are required. Moreover, the distribution of power among strategic, managerial, and operational levels in sport governing bodies appears to be quite different in the United States and in Belgium. The reason therefore should be a different level of professionalisation (Thibault, Slack, & Hinings, 1991).

This presentation will focus on the strategic actions of sport managers working in governing bodies in the Olympic Movement and professional sport in two very different countries – the United States and Belgium. Two recent in-depth strategic studies examining the responses by the Royal Belgian Hockey Association (2008) and the Gymnastics Federation (2008) to current global issues illustrate strategic and operational plans that were applied with success (Zintz & Winand, 2008). These cases will be integrated throughout the presentation. In order to effectively respond to current issues, sport managers must establish their

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policies and strategies on many levels. Sport can be a powerful agent for change which can drive progress in social, economic, and political contexts (World Economic Forum, 2008). Sport managers' abilities to help their organisations navigate these contexts are directly affected by the governance structures surrounding them.