Expanding the Impact and Scope of Sport Management Inquiry by “Thinking in Time”

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Over the years, sport management scholars have called for expansion of the paradigms (Gillentine, Baker, & Cuneen, 2011), methods (Olafson, 1990), and applications (Weese, 1995) for sport management scholarship. These calls have recognized sport management as an inherently multidisciplinary field of research and application (Doherty, 2011). The key insight has been that by embracing our multidisciplinary nature through multiple paradigms and methods, we can better advance sport management theory, and consequently enhance our relevance to sport management practice.

Sport management scholars have occasionally turned to historical data in order to explore and test sport management theories and methods. For example, analysis of the processes leading to formation of the Amateur Sports Act in the United States illuminated the roles that frames and attributions play in sport policy processes, thereby enabling a model for interpretive methods in the analysis of sport policies (Chalip, 1995). Historical analysis of the management and marketing of the Harlem Globetrotters enabled detailed exploration of branding tactics and challenges for a sport product (Fielding, Miller, & Brown, 1999). Examination of the evolution of television broadcast regulations from the 1930s to the mid-1980s provided insight into the ways that sport organizations respond to technological innovations (Nite & Washington, 2017). In their study of institutional challenges and controversies in the formation of collegiate basketball, Washington and Ventresca (2008) concluded that effective decision-making requires sport managers and policymakers to incorporate analyses of the historical context and consequent institutional environment of their sport.

Learning to “think in time” (Neustadt & May, 1986) is useful for a number of reasons. It can enable insight into social, cultural, and political forces that shape phenomena. It can illumine trends and cycles. It can expose taken-for-granted presuppositions. It can provide analogies that enable creative insights and solutions. It can de-mythologize the past.

Thus, sport history and sport management can (and should) find common ground. But that requires a somewhat different approach to sport history than one typically finds in traditional sport history scholarship, and it requires sport managers to learn means and methods for learning through history. It requires sport history scholarship that examines sport management concepts and issues, and it requires historically informed work in sport management. For example, there has been substantial interest among sport researchers and practitioners in sport trends (e.g., Harris, Nichols, & Taylor, 2017; Mahony & Howard, 2001). That work has examined current directions and changes. Historical analysis of longer trends and cycles can enhance insights into trends, and the accuracy of predictions (cf. Kroeber, 1944; Sorokin, 1957). Similarly, studying the history behind policy choices clarifies assumptions and problem definitions that might otherwise hinder effective judgment and choice (Chalip, 1996). For comparable reasons, historical analogies are useful particularly useful when undertaking scenario-based planning, (Chermack, 2011), because they enable the construction of well-elaborated scenarios. Historical analyses also allow researchers and practitioners to identify mythologies about the past that render polarized reasoning about the present (Hibbing, Hayes, & Deol, 2017).

This session addresses ways that thinking in time can be useful for sport management inquiries. It begins with an exposition of core ideas and methods, after which there is a facilitated session through which participants explore potential contributions of historical analysis and reasoning in their own sport management research and practice.