Earle F. Zeigler began advocating for the use of case studies in sport management more than fifty years ago. Taking his cue from educators in schools of medicine, law, and business, Zeigler (1959) authored the first known case studies in our field to help physical educators and athletics administrators develop and sharpen their decision-making skills. Fast-forward more than half a century, and case-based pedagogy in sport management has never been more popular. In classrooms and at conferences (in the form of case study competitions) around the world, the case method is commonly used to help students ‘bridge the gap’ between theory and practice (Clawson & Haskins, 2006; Ellet, 2007; Mauffette-Leenders, Erskine, & Leenders, 2005) and “…renew the sense of fun and excitement that comes with being a manager” (Corey, 1996, p. 2).

As defined by Mauffette-Leenders et al. (2005), a teaching case study “…is a description of an actual situation, commonly involving a decision, a challenge, an opportunity, a problem or an issue faced by a person (or persons) in an organization” (p. 2), that requires students to identify and address these problems in a manner consistent with those faced by managers on a daily basis (Corey, 1996; Ellet, 2007). “Case studies cut across a range of companies, industries, and situations, providing an exposure far greater than what students are likely to experience otherwise” (Corey, 1996, p. 1).

Problem-based teaching cases are distinguished from their cousins, the research case study and the business case study, by their functional effects and desired learning outcomes. Specifically, research cases are ‘objects’ that enable students to develop unique, in-depth, disciplinary knowledge about particular events, organizations, or other phenomena based on analyses carried out by researchers (Slick, 2016). According to Andrew, Pederson, and McEvoy (2011), research cases are “…one of the most commonly used qualitative methodological approaches in sport management research” (p. 130). Alternatively, business case studies are seen as ‘tools’ that describe ‘best practices’ and/or advocate successful examples based on information presented within the ‘case’ (Slick, 2016). While business cases can make for interesting reads, they rarely enable students to think or act in innovative ways, and can lead to mimetic isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Dixon & Chalip, 2017). Teaching cases are distinctly different from these other forms in that they engender deductive thinking and reasoning skills, and provoke the application of foundational knowledge among students (Slick, 2016).

In contrast to our medical and law school colleagues, (sport) management educators do not have a public record of cases to draw from in teaching their students (Corey, 1998; Leenders et al., 2001). Instead, we must rely on one another to establish a catalogue of case studies (and their accompanying teaching notes) that are specific to our discipline (Dixon, 2008). With several sport management-related case textbooks (e.g., Chadwick & Arthur, 2007; Chadwick, Arthur, & Beech, 2017; Foster, Greyser, & Walsh, 2006; McDonald & Milne, 1999; Pitts, 1998, 2016), journals (e.g., Case Studies in Sport Management), and specialized online case collections (e.g., McCormack Case Study Collection at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst) emerging in recent years, there is now a plethora of sources from which sport management educators can locate teaching cases. With over 1,000 disciplinary-specific cases at our disposal, derived from dozens of published sources and case clearinghouses, one of the greatest challenges facing today’s sport management educators is finding cases that are relevant for their specific pedagogical needs. While those who teach with the case method on a regular basis may be familiar with the broad range of case study sources, those who are new or are irregular users may find the process of locating and comparing suitable cases both tedious and time-consuming.
For more than a decade, Jess Dixon has been compiling a list of teaching case studies that are relevant for sport management education (Dixon & McDonald, 2006). These case studies cover a wide variety of functional content areas, industry segments, and global contexts that are appropriate for a broad range of courses and levels of sport management education. He has found these useful for his own teaching practice, and has received numerous enquiries from colleagues to share the contents of his list over the years. However, as the list has grown, the ability to find and compare cases has become increasingly difficult.

In order to address these problems, we have created the Sport Management Case Studies Repository. The aforementioned list of sport management teaching case studies has been converted into a database format, supporting keyword searching and topical browsing. A web interface enables broad access and distribution to sport management educators. The repository provides a unified and curated collection of information drawn from disparate sources, presented in a format that is easily accessible. The repository does not provide the cases themselves, but instead presents links to the specific pages within the case publishers’ websites where educators can access the actual case content for use in their courses. This is done in order to preserve the copyright of the publishers, while still enabling sport management educators to identify and locate case studies that may be used in their teaching.

Searching for pedagogical case study material can be characterized as a complex search task (White, Kules, Drucker, & Schraefel, 2006), where searchers’ information needs may be vague and underspecified, and there may be many resources that satisfy the needs to varying degrees. While keyword search is preferable to browsing a large list of information, it requires that searchers be able to accurately and unambiguously describe the information they are seeking. This may not be feasible when searching within complex information spaces, or when there is a breadth of terminology that could be used to describe the same fundamental concept. Faceted browsing interfaces have been proposed as an alternative for when keyword search is not effective (Tunkelang, 2009), enabling exploratory search (White & Roth, 2009) and serendipitous discovery (McCay-Peet & Toms, 2015). Rather than requiring that searchers recall terms to enter into their queries, they are provided with a search interface that allows them to recognize and select relevant terms. Critical to the success of such interfaces are the organization and orthogonality of the facets categories. The Sport Management Case Studies Repository uses source (e.g., Harvard Business School), industry segment (e.g., sporting goods), content area (e.g., marketing), global context (e.g., North America), and year (e.g., 2016) as the key facets. The case studies in the repository include this information, along with other important details such as the title, author, length, availability of teaching notes, topical keywords, and abstract. In order to support searchers who may have difficulty indicating their search criteria via the faceted browsing interface, keyword searching is provided which not only searches within the facet categories, but also within all other available information (e.g., authors, abstracts). Providing the search criteria in these ways empowers sport management educators to easily construct complex queries that enable the discovery and comparison of teaching case studies that match specific content or learning outcomes.

The goal of this presentation is to highlight the value of case studies for sport management pedagogy, and illustrate the ease of searching, exploring, and discovering cases to support specific learning goals. The Sport Management Case Studies Repository can be found at http://www.sportmanagementcasestudies.com/. The task of verifying and updating the information about the cases in the repository is ongoing and will continue on a regular basis.