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Paper:

Harvey, A. & McNamee, M. (2019). Sport Integrity: Ethics, Policy and Practice: An Introduction. *Journal of Global Sport Management*, 4(1), 1-7.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/24704067.2018.1542606>

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Introduction

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Abstract

There can be little doubt that integrity in the playing and management of sport is becoming one of the critical issues in global sport and its governance. This special issue aims to contribute to the scholarship that is emerging in this important field for policy makers and managers in sport. The articles reveal the breadth of topics that are located within the scope of the term ‘integrity’, ranging from sport governance, athletes’ rights, match-fixing and sports’ organisational management practices. The approaches taken to the study of these critical issues by the authors is necessarily multidisciplinary, incorporating ethical theory, empirical studies and historical analysis that encourage an holistic understanding of the problems under investigation.

1. Background

There can be little doubt that integrity in the playing and management of sport is becoming one of the critical issues in global sport and its governance. A growing body of academic work is emerging, which has identified a number of areas of concern that policy makers and sports managers must address in order to protect sport. Recent interventions include, but are by no means limited to, corruption in governance (e.g. Bayle, 2015; Boudreaux, Karahan & Coats, 2016; Nunkoo, Ribeiro, Sunnassee & Gursoy, 2018); sports and sports betting manipulation (e.g. Harvey, 2015; Hill, 2013;

Nowy & Breuer, 2017), doping (e.g. Bloodworth & McNamee, 2017; Hemphill, 2016; Hughes, 2017) and human rights (e.g. Adams & Piekarz, 2015; Giulianotti & McArdle, 2014; Schwab, 2017). Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the breadth, complexity and diversity of sport integrity issues, approaches to the study of integrity emanate from many different parts of the academy, including economics (e.g. Forrest, 2012), legal theory (e.g. Serby, 2017); governance theory (e.g. Geeraert & Drieskens, 2015) and ethical theory (e.g. Gardiner, Parry & Robinson, 2017). In the latter article, Gardiner, Parry and Robinson ask ‘where’s the integrity?’ in an industry that is rapidly expanding and which now encompasses the United Nations, the European Union, national governments; international non-governmental organisations such as Transparency International (TI) and the International Centre for the Security of Sport (ICSS); the major sports governing bodies, notably the International Olympic Committee (IOC); and a battalion of private integrity companies, including Sport Radar and Perform Group. In response institutional academia has recently entered the fray with the development of specialised master degree work in Sports Ethics and Integrity.¹

2. Aims of this special issue

This special issue, *Sport Integrity: ethics, policy and practice*, aims to contribute to the understanding of sports integrity from a multi-disciplinary perspective that will inform scholars and practitioners alike. At the professional level, sports integrity underpins the commercial, social and cultural value of sports. Fans will only be prepared to buy into

¹ In Europe, Swansea University has launched an *Erasmus Mundus* Joint Master Degree in Sports Ethics and Integrity (<http://www.maisi-project.eu/>) in partnership with Charles University, Johannes Gutenberg University, Pompeu Febra University, Katholieke University of Leuven, and University of the Peloponnese. Separately, Victoria University, Australia runs a Master in Sport Business and Integrity degree.

the drama of sport if they are assured that the contest is of the highest integrity and is a product they can trust. Actions that undermine the integrity of sport run the risk of simultaneously undermining the very practices of sport themselves, but also put the business of sport sector in jeopardy. Losses are not reducible simply to economics though as threats to the integrity of sport threaten to loosen deeply held socio-cultural ties: beyond the franchise model, sport is often said to hold a particular place in culture and society with life-long and generational attachments often made to clubs and sports. Promoting the integrity of sport is a high priority endeavour and one that is essential for policy makers to draw together complex and disparate agendas. Our aim for this special issue is to contribute towards that endeavour from a series of global examples and cases, pursued through a broad array of disciplinary lenses.

3. Introducing the articles

In the opening article, ‘Maintaining professionalism in semi-professional sport: are we asking too much?’ Deborah Agnew makes use of mixed research methods to investigate the threats to integrity at the sub-elite level of the South Australian National Football League (SANFL) competition. Usefully, Agnew commences her article with a survey of the emerging concept of “integrity” as it applies to sport, predicating her research on an account of integrity that is defined in terms of sport as social practices that meet expectations regarding ‘the fairness and quality of competition’. Agnew notes that League rules relating to player conduct often encroach from the playing field and into players’ private lives raising important questions for how sport is organised and administered at non-professional levels. For example, she reveals that gambling and recreational drug use are pertinent personal behaviours that may impact on sporting integrity. In addition, the article reveals an array of organisational integrity issues

affecting the SANFL, including: elite reserve teams competing in the sub-elite League; a lack of collective voice for sub-elite players; levels of pay and poor terms and conditions of employment; the length of the playing season; inconvenient (for players) scheduling of matches; and recurring vilification of players by spectators. While one may query whether the concept of sport integrity has undergone conceptual inflation here (Cleret, Page, and McNamee, 2017; Lopez Frias and McNamee, 2019) these disparate issues reveal the breadth of the ethics and integrity agenda which, as the author comments, ‘indicates that responsibility for the integrity of the SANFL lies with governing bodies as well as players.’ It is a conclusion with which we wholeheartedly agree.

Reinforcing the notion that sports integrity spans a wide and disparate array of problems and concerns Hans Erik Næss chooses to focus on the highly politicised question of the relationship between sport and human rights. His article, though conceptual in nature, draws on documentary evidence from international political institutions. Næss poses the fundamental question as to whether global governing bodies or international sports associations (ISAs), genuinely engage with the notion of human rights. Critically, he places the responsibility for that failure on organisations such as the UN, EU and OECD that promote the idea that ISAs should take human rights seriously. Næss focusses on the leading ISAs of the IOC, FIFA and FIA, which operate in the fissure between a much vaunted political ‘neutrality’, an often aggressively defended ‘autonomy’, and their dependence upon political goodwill and acquiescence in order to stage their highly prized global competitions. He draws out the tension inherent in such arrangements to examine how ISAs are influenced by global political bodies to include the promotion of human rights as a core objective when organising their competitions. Yet, Næss argues

that the political bodies fail to clarify what human rights mean or what the sporting bodies should be doing to promote them even if they were so minded. He concludes that there is ‘no easy answer ... [but] what is clear is that the complexity of organising large sporting events requires governance considerations which go way beyond the competitive aspects of the event itself.’

Making use of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) as a ‘conceptual setting’, Adam Pfleeger, Brian Soebbing and Chad Seifried focus on sports’ institutions role in the prevention of corruption in their article entitled, ‘Corruption, Rule-Breaking, and Sanctions: The Case of the NCAA’. They utilise ethical climate theory (ECT) to show how organisations might facilitate corruption by their own standards, structures and behaviours. They then proceed to question the place of sanctions in the prevention of corruption and propose a framework to help understand what sanctions are necessary to prevent organisational misdemeanours. The article moves beyond the discourse that focusses on the either the macro (e.g. political level) or micro (e.g. individual player) levels and instead looks at the meso level of institutions while maintaining the necessary insight that organisations can only act through people such as administrator and coaches but are, at the same time, subject to pressure from external parties, including boosters and sponsors. The article is a welcome intervention in sports integrity work from an organisational ethical standpoint while offering pragmatic policy and practice solutions to recurring problems of rule-breaking by sports organisations. The effective punishment of sports bodies that break the rules must make up part of the policy recipe that is needed to promote compliance, but, as the authors state, ‘understanding the factors that influence rule violations and corruption is necessary to analyze sanctions that may be given to the organization (i.e., NCAA member institutions) by an

independent regulator (i.e., NCAA Committee on Infractions).’ In making explicit the links between ethics, policy and practice the article is a critical contribution to the theory and practice of sports management.

Also focussing on the role of sports organisations, specifically, in this case the International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF), Jörg Krieger argues that an historical analysis of governance reform is critical for a full appreciation of the multiple and diverse contingencies that help to explain how corruption may have been allowed to emerge within the federation. Making use of unique access to the IAAF archive and Carl and Liselott Diem-Archive marks this piece out as a wholly original contribution to the literature on sports integrity and adds substantial empirical data to an understanding of the problem of corruption. Krieger’s article also acts as a timely reminder that historical approaches to understanding corruption is a vital component to the project of promoting integrity in sport and which can add substantial value to existing management literature. As Marx famously argued, it is only by understanding the past can we hope to appreciate both the limitations and possibilities of the present.² For Krieger, the present incorporates many critical issues facing sports governance, including gender equality, athlete representation in governance structures, anti-doping and financial management, thus also helpfully scoping out part of the terrain that is now encompassed by the term ‘integrity’.

In 2011, former IOC President, Jacques Rogge, declared that ‘there is a new danger coming up that almost all countries have been affected by and that is corruption, match-

² ‘Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.’ (Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*)

fixing and illegal gambling'.³ Rogge's words marked a call to arms from sports bodies and their partners in every country to take urgent steps to confront a serious threat to the integrity of sport. It is now trite to state that sport relies on the fundamental principle of uncertainty of outcome and that anything that undermines that uncertainty hollows out the very meaning of sport. In their article, 'Portuguese Fight against Match-fixing: Which Policies and What Ethic?' Marcelo Moriconi and João Paulo Almeida examine how the struggle against match-fixing is being organised in Portugal. Drawing on legal and regulatory measures they pose critical questions in respect of the preventative actions that have been introduced, arguing whether many of these are designed to protect interests other than sport's own. Identifying as problematic the top down processes that have driven many of the education programmes that have proliferated in recent years, it is argued that the focus on player behaviour may obscure wider problems of sports governance that need also to be addressed if the integrity of sport is to be effectively protected. The authors note that the fight against match-fixing is often underpinned by a complex array of interests and any solution needs to be holistic if it is to be successful. They point to the wide-ranging measures developed by the IOC as a possible template that might be adopted at the national level in the future to overcome what they see as currently a fragmented orientation to a global problem.

The 2018 FIFA World Cup, staged in the Russian Federation for the first time, was, for good or ill, something of a public relations triumph for both the organisers and host country. As, arguably, the most grandiose of all the major sporting mega events, the tournament attracted global television and digital media audiences that were counted in

³ http://www.espn.co.uk/olympics/story/_/id/6768358/jacques-rogge-says-match-fixing-gambling-big-fights-sports

billions. In a World Cup year, it is timely for Martin Hölzen and Henk Erik Meier to ask, ‘Do consumers care about sport governance?’ To answer the question, they employ an innovative methodology to examine social media outputs by fans and fan groups that have been set up to try to influence how football is governed. Focussing on the well-reported scandals that have beset FIFA in recent years, the authors conclude that fan interest in governance is often fleeting and can undermine attempts to leverage the economic power of fans to impact significantly the way global sport is managed and organised. The paper usefully points up the limitations of fan power without significant changes to the ways that fans engage with groups that attempt to exert some degree of influence on global governing bodies.

4. Conclusion

Sport integrity is still an emergent concept in the world of sport ethics, economics, governance and management, and its research bases. The developing literature of sports integrity and its authors must, therefore, both shape the contours of the concepts that comprise the problem while, at the same time, suggest solutions to the significant difficulties that are posed by integrity threats. We hope that the breadth of topics covered and the diverse approaches taken to the study of sports integrity presented here will encourage other scholars to enter a burgeoning field of enquiry. We also hope that the pieces published will be of practical use to policy makers and sports managers alike.

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