

Sport Management Ethics and Integrity

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1. Introduction

Six papers are included in this review. Two papers examine the ongoing issue of anti-doping in sport. One article discusses emerging proposals to establish Sports Integrity Agencies. Under the theme of equalities, one paper looks at homophobia in sport and a second paper examines racism in sport. A final article reviews the current state of academic knowledge in respect to online hate.

In this review, two articles are drawn from each of *Communication and Sport*, the *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, and *Sport Management Review*. Scholars included in the review are working in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

2. Anti-doping

Doping remains a critical problem for sports ethics and integrity and anti-doping research and scholarship has often followed the priorities of the World Anti-Doping Authority (WADA) and national anti-doping bodies. These have included changes to the World Anti-Doping Code in 2021 and the consequent emphasis on investigations, sanctions and preventative measures, including biological passports. It is therefore welcome that some researchers are working outside these parameters to investigate other important aspects of anti-doping for sports management. Two articles published in the *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* take, as the subjects of their research, actors who are often overlooked in the anti-doping literature.

Martinelli *et al* (2023) report on research funded by the European Union's Erasmus + programme that has been derived from a ten-year research plan, turning their attention to how self-described 'clean athletes' perceive their own representation and support within the anti-doping system. The purpose of the study examined the ways that clean athletes have been and continue to be personally affected by doping and anti-doping measures. Using a secondary qualitative analysis, the following research question was identified: 'in what ways are clean athletes personally affected by others' actual or suspected instances of doping and anti-doping rule violations, and by aspects of the anti-doping system?' (p. 6). The secondary analysis, an emerging qualitative research technique, was conducted on a multinational parent dataset which examined issues around the meaning of 'clean sport' and the idea of the 'clean athlete'. The study is welcome since it focuses on what ought to be one set of beneficiaries of the anti-doping system – i.e., those athletes that play by the rules.

Using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis, the study found that clean athletes felt that they continued to be harmed through co-existence with dopers. This harm included being denied some of the material gains of sport, such as medals and

prize money. A fascinating aspect of this harm was the unrealistic standards that clean athletes set themselves, and the sense of failure they experienced, as they attempt to compete with other athletes who later turned out to be cheating. The research also found that the anti-doping system itself was not geared toward supporting clean athletes but 'was more regularly experienced as unfair, demanding, inflexible, non-cooperative, and even unsafe' (11). A final theme was that clean athletes experienced significant anxiety in terms of following the rules especially around inadvertent ingestion of a banned substance. Nevertheless, they also expressed a strong desire for the rules to be applied with zero tolerance for any breaches, suggesting that many athletes are somewhat conflicted on this aspect of the anti-doping regime.

In the same edition, Shelley *et al* (2023) investigate anti-doping in elite long distance running from the perspective of agents, sponsors and event organisers, asking the question as to whose job it is to prevent doping offences in the sport. Also using qualitative reflexive thematic analysis to understand the data collected from agents (n=8), race organisers (n=3) and major brand sponsors (n=2) they found that not all commercial sponsors felt responsible for anti-doping measures. Addressing a significant gap in the literature, the specific research questions asked: "1) How is doping in elite distance running perceived by the agents, race organisers, and sponsors who work in the sport?, 2) What actions are taken by the agents, race organisers, and sponsors to influence doping-risk in distance running?, and 3) What future actions could be taken by agents, race organisers, and sponsors to further influence doping-risk in distance running" (p.27). The results of the analysis of the interview data were organised into three main themes. Firstly, the importance of the environmental framework of elite distance running and the contexts in which it takes place and attendant doping risks. Secondly, how long-distance athletes are recruited by agents into the sport was considered critical. Particular criticism was made of agents with funding from major sponsors who did not undertake due diligence in the recruitment of young runners or did not monitor or mentor them effectively. Thirdly, the research participants believed that they had a significant degree of first-hand knowledge and experience with doping cases and anti-doping policies which could be put to good use to help prevent doping violations.

3. Sports Integrity Agencies

Demands for overarching sports integrity agencies to oversee and coordinate the fight against corruption and to promote and protect sports integrity have grown much stronger over the past year. For example, Play the Game, a Danish-based organization that promotes democracy, transparency and freedom of expression in sport, has recently published an experts' report that calls for a global sports integrity body.¹ Underlining the difficulties that might be posed in respect of the development and implementation of such a body, an important intervention by Kihl (2023) in *Sport*

¹ [ClearingSport: Almost 200 experts call for an agency against corruption and crime in world sport \(playthegame.org\)](https://playthegame.org/clearing-sport/)

Management Review foregrounds the complexities of designing national sports integrity systems (NSIS) where there are so many differences in the way sports are governed and managed in each country.

The author takes on the daunting task of presenting a conceptual framework of an NSIS that can be operationalised in different countries and across many cultures. She defines an NSIS as “an intentionally designed set of operational institutions, policies, practices, agencies, and actors responsible for promoting and safeguarding the integrity of an NSO” (p. 32). Focusing on the need for coherence and integrated systems that allow for multiple points of accountability, she argues that “NSOs should possess the flexibility to develop and implement their integrity system based on their country’s guiding principles, sport governance structure, existing institutions, stakeholder input, and the nature of their country’s interactions” (p.32).

Kihl’s detailed analysis has the potential to position an NSIS – or any similar global agency – on clear conceptual principles that take into account the relevant internal and external institutions, their sphere of influence, and the relationship between both practices and processes. What is also clear is that such a system requires a great deal of shared understanding of the scope of an NSIS and how it works within complex governance landscapes and ethical frameworks.

4. Equalities

a) Homophobia in football

Football has often been associated with the construction of a robust and assertive form of heterosexual masculinity and a site of virulent homophobia. Football has traditionally been an important cultural practice through which boys and men could demonstrate a hypermasculinity that was founded on a deep antipathy towards homosexuality. However, in the past fifteen years this research narrative has started to change in complicated, divergent, and often contradictory ways. Harvey (2017)² identified two camps which have emerged within and outside of academia that are publishing significantly different research results. On the one side there are academics and activist groups who continue to find that sport remains a highly homophobic environment that is unwelcoming to those who identify as LGBTQ+. On the other side of the debate are a group of sport sociologists who have been finding much reduced levels of homophobia in sport settings. Different research questions, methodologies and interpretations of data may play a part in the divergence of the research findings. It should be observed that while some researchers find reduced homophobia, they also note the persistence of heterosexism where teammates and others are assumed to be heterosexual.

² Harvey, A. (2017). ‘Academics v activists: making sense of homophobia in male team sport’. In Kilvington, D, and Price, J. (eds.) *Sport and Discrimination*. London: Routledge.

A new study by Cleland *et al* (2023) is a welcome intervention into this debate as it may help to partially answer the question as to why different findings might be found in this space. Their research deployed an online survey of football fans (n=2663) which asked about the presence of, what the writers rather coyly term, 'homosexually themed language' at matches. Usefully utilising theoretical frameworks developed in masculinity studies, notably Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity and Anderson's theory of inclusive masculinity, the authors found a paradox that exists within the community of football fans. While 95% would support a gay player at their club, 41% have heard language they consider to be homophobic, while 37% believe such language is not intentionally hostile but interpret it as playful and humorous banter. Further, a small number of respondents continued to hold extreme homophobic attitudes. The authors attribute this apparent paradox to cultural lag where the use of homophobic language trails behind support for gay players.

b) Racism in sport

Critical race theory (CRT) continues to prove to be a powerful tool to explain the intractability of racial discrimination and prejudice in sport, enabling scholars to unearth the structural conditions and systems that produce and maintain White hegemony in the management and governance of sports. In their document review of equalities policies in four major sports governing bodies (SGB) in the United States (Major League Baseball, National Basketball Association, National Football League and the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee), Gardner *et al* (2023) found that ambitious-sounding statements about race (and gender) equalities to be found on the SGB websites were not adequately underpinned by sufficient attention to the structural causes of inequality. Each of the SGBs framed their equalities policies, programmes and interventions in different ways. As the authors state, "the primary findings indicated that the entities framed diversity as *inclusion* (NBA), as a micro-level, *individual* matter (NFL), as *representation* (MLB) and as the effective *management* of athletes and the workplace (USOPC)" (356). In doing so, the SGBs fail to mention the existence of racism within their sport and fail to challenge the structural inequalities that persist. The authors conclude that the SGBs are primarily engaged with impression management rather than tackling ingrained racism in an effective way.

5. Online hate

Online hate in sports is a significant issue that has gained prominence in recent years. The advent of social media and online platforms has provided a forum for fans and supporters to express their opinions and emotions. While these platforms can be beneficial for promoting team and individual brands, they have also become breeding grounds for hate speech, cyber bullying, and harassment. The possibility of online anonymity, enabling users to create fake accounts and hide behind usernames makes it easier for them to engage in abusive behaviour without facing any consequences. Athletes, especially those in high-profile positions, are often the targets of online hate.

They may receive abusive messages, threats, or derogatory comments about their performance, appearance, or personal lives. This not only may affect their mental well-being but can also have a negative impact on their performance and enjoyment of sport.

Given the recent interest in online hate in sport, a scoping review of existing research by Kearns *et al* (2023) provides a useful benchmark for the present state of academic knowledge and identifies avenues for possible future research. Basing their study on 41 journal articles, the authors found that hate speech was found across different sports, although many papers focussed on association football given its global popularity and the intense rivalries that are a feature of the game. Much of the hate was directed towards athletes although some was also directed towards other fans. Race and other personal identities were often the subject matter of online hate. The issue of anonymity was discussed in many of the papers although the authors offer a nuanced approach, noting that some online hate is perpetrated by users with full transparency.

6. Conclusions

Anti-doping and the problematics that arise in anti-doping policy remain a topic of critical interest to sports management scholars with no indication that this productive seam of enquiry will end any time soon. The same might be said for work in anti-discrimination and equalities. The articles by leading scholars into Sports Integrity Agencies and online hate research show that academics are keen to explore vibrant new territories that are of great interest to policymakers thus demonstrating the relevance of scholarly interventions in these important areas.

Annotated Bibliography

Cleland, J., Cashmore, E., Dixon, K., & MacDonald, C. (2023). Analyzing the Presence of Homosexually-Themed Language Among Association Football Fans in the United Kingdom. *Communication & Sport*, 11(3), 551–569.

The article highlights some of the weaknesses in earlier research that denied homophobic intent when 'homosexually themed language' was used in specific contexts but interpreted as non-homophobic. Those earlier scholars often failed to properly take into account the way such language may be received by those outside of the specific social group in which the language was deployed. This research, which involves a large-scale survey of football fans, helps to complicate the picture, showing that homophobia exists within a matrix of gendered norms and cultural expectations. Overall, the article confirms how social attitudes have changed to become more LGBTQ+ positive while also showing how a homophobic hegemonic masculinity still lingers among a small minority of football fans, while many others remain complicit to the hegemonic project while claiming not be homophobic themselves. The article will

be of use to sports managers and policymakers in refining their efforts to make football a more inclusive space for LGBTQ+ supporters.

Gardner, A., Love, A., & Waller, S. (2023) How do elite sport organizations frame diversity and inclusion? A critical race analysis. *Sport Management Review*, 26(3), 339-360.

The article draws on a wide array of theoretical traditions, notably critical race theory, that enables the authors to expose the superficiality of equalities policies, programmes and initiatives in four major US sport's governing bodies. Framing their equality work in ways that do not address structural or systemic conditions enables those SGBs to appear to take the issue of racism far more seriously than they actually do. Of particular interest is the authors' reference to cultural theorist, Sara Ahmed, who introduced the idea of a 'non-performative speech act' – i.e., speech or text that is not designed to make any real difference but exists purely for pretending to do so.

Kearns, C., Sinclair, G., Black, J., Doidge, M., Fletcher, T., Kilvington, D., Liston, K., Lynn, T., & Rosati, P. (2023). A Scoping Review of Research on Online Hate and Sport. *Communication & Sport*, 11(2), 402–430.

This welcome scoping review of the academic study of online hate in sporting contexts offers an opportunity for sports managers and wider policymakers to obtain an accessible overview of the state of the problem in order to develop measures to confront it. The authors usefully identify a possible future research agenda, namely, “broadening the scope of research beyond Western sporting contexts; further analysis of under-examined prejudices; research that is cognisant of characteristics of specific sports and their relationship with online hate; further focus on more niche and image-based social media platforms; greater use of primary research techniques; and exploration of the links between incidences of online abuse and organised hate groups” (420). It is an agenda that promises rich returns and the possibility to inform effective and necessary interventions into a problem that is challenging sports management and regulators.

Kihl, L. A. (2023) Development of a national sport integrity system. *Sport Management Review*, 26(1), 24-47.

Kihl's article provides a conceptual blueprint for the establishment of national sports integrity systems that can be applied universally. While she focusses mostly on the theoretical frameworks that are needed to ensure that the system is coherent and effective, the article has the potential to help sports and national authorities to develop their own system based on sound principles that consider the nuances to be found in every country's sport and wider contexts. The system clearly outlines the internal sports network and the actors' “suggested operational integrity tasks at strategic, systems and operational levels” (p.41). The article is most insightful in conceptualising the relationships that exist between the definition of sport integrity, integrity management and the overall working of a national system. It is recommended reading

for policy-makers and practitioners who are interested in how to establish an integrity system.

Martinelli, L. A., Thrower, S.N., Heyes, A., Boardley, I. D., Backhouse, S. H., & Petróczi, A. (2023) The good, the bad, and the ugly: A qualitative secondary analysis into the impact of doping and anti-doping on clean elite athletes in five European countries, *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 15(1), 3-22.

The article usefully focusses on the experience of doping and the anti-doping regime of self-described 'clean athletes'. The research found that 'clean athletes' are affected in myriad and sometimes unexpected ways. Critically, the athletes believed that the efforts by anti-doping officials to 'catch cheats' skewed the programmes away from work that support clean athletes who often felt taken for granted. For policymakers, this finding could help them restructure anti-doping measures, including education, to prioritise support for the clean athlete as well as continued efforts to prevent doping.

Shelley, J., Thrower, S. N., & Petróczi, A. (2023) Whose job is it anyway? A qualitative investigation into the influence of agents, race organisers, and sponsors on the risk of doping in elite distance running, *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 15(1), 23-44.

Complementing the article by Martinelli *et al* (*supra*), the piece adds a new layer of understanding to the contextual environment in which doping and anti-doping takes place in elite distance running, a sport that has some of the highest known doping violations. The data collected was from a relatively small sample size which makes generalisations difficult. Nevertheless, the researchers have discovered that the burdens of anti-doping measures are not uniformly distributed across the sporting landscape. Commercial organisations appear not to regard anti-doping as their responsibility despite the commercial value of the sport resting, in large part, on its credibility in the eyes of the public and broadcasters. The authors conclude by hoping that their study will help governing bodies to establish better partnership working with sponsors, agents and event organisers in their work against doping in long distance athletics.