

**Sport Management Digest**  
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## State of Sport Management Research in 2025: An Overview

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The current issue of the Sport Management Digest (SMD) provides a bibliometric analysis of the research published in the 10-sport management journals during the year 2025. The four thematic sections that follow cover in sufficient detail research pertinent to different aspects of sport management. Owing to some editors stepping down and the time needed to replace them, we were unable to include a review of sport management theoretical developments, ethics research, leadership and marketing. These sections will be made available as soon as possible. Bibliometric analysis is the main tool used in science mapping, which allows to reveal the social, intellectual and organisational structure of sport management as a discipline. Bibliometrics is an established computer-assisted quantitative review methodology which identifies core research or authors, as well as their relationships. It provides valuable relational information on the topic, which helps significantly enhance our understanding of the overall state of the sport management discipline.

Following the established review format, the present overview of research in the field of sport management focuses on three interrelated areas, including a bibliometric analysis, the theoretical and practical appeal of research, as measured by the funding received by different studies, and the democratisation of knowledge, as exemplified by the number of studies published under the Open Access (OA) regime. In 2025, the ten sport management journals combined published 54 issues with 419 articles. This is a significant number of outputs, which exceeds the number of published articles in previous years. These outputs were produced by a diverse group of researchers, including established and upcoming scholars as well as PhD students. For example, the 37 articles in the Journal of Sport Management were produced by 88 authors, 158 authors were responsible for 54 articles in the Sport Management Review, and the European Sport Management Quarterly published 79 articles written by 150 scholars. These numbers are indicative of the collaboration between scholars in tackling the complex issues facing sport management. It is also worth noting the dominance of the USA-based scholars. Except for two journals, including the International Journal of Sport Finance and the International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics, where German and the UK-based authors were in the majority, publications in the rest of the journals were

overwhelmingly dominated by scholars based in US institutions. This is understandable, given the large number of sport management programmes in the USA.

Table 1 shows the ten journals and the number of articles per journal, including those published OA. In 2025, out of the 419 articles across the ten journals, 144 were published OA, which represents 10% of the total output. The International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics (33 articles), Journal of Sport Economics (33 articles), and the European Sport Management Quarterly (31 articles) have been well ahead of the rest of the journals in this regard, with 62%, 92% and 39% of their content published OA, respectively. Xiaoyan Xing's article in the previous SMD issue offers a detailed analysis of the geography of sport management publications.

Table 1. Total number of articles and Open Access ones published in the 10 sport management journals in 2025

Journal	Founded	Publication frequency/year	Impact factor 2023	Articles No	Open Access No/%
Journal of Sport Management (JSM) <a href="https://journals.humankinetics.com/view/journals/jsm/jsm-overview.xml">https://journals.humankinetics.com/view/journals/jsm/jsm-overview.xml</a>	1987	5	3.7	37	4/16
Sport Management Review (SMR) <a href="https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rsmr20">https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rsmr20</a>	1998	5	4.1	54	7/13
International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship (IJSMS) <a href="https://www.emerald.com/insight/publication/issn/1464-6668">https://www.emerald.com/insight/publication/issn/1464-6668</a>	1999	4	3.4	53	N/A
European Sport Management Quarterly (ESMQ) <a href="https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/resm20">https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/resm20</a>	2001	5	3.9	79	31/39
International Journal of Sport Finance (IJSF) <a href="https://fitpublishing.com/journals/ijsf">https://fitpublishing.com/journals/ijsf</a>	2006	4	1.1	19	10/52
International Journal of Sport Communications (IJSC) <a href="https://journals.humankinetics.com/view/journals/ijsc/ijsc-overview.xml">https://journals.humankinetics.com/view/journals/ijsc/ijsc-overview.xml</a>	2008	4	1.8	42	4/9
International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics (IJSPP) <a href="https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/risp20">https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/risp20</a>	2009	4	2.8	53	33/62
Journal of Sports Economics (JSE) <a href="https://journals.sagepub.com/home/jse">https://journals.sagepub.com/home/jse</a>	2011	6	2.1	36	33/92
Communication and Sport (C&S) <a href="https://journals.sagepub.com/home/com">https://journals.sagepub.com/home/com</a>	2013	6	2.8	27	4/15

Journal of Global Sport Management (JGSM) <a href="https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rgsm20">https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rgsm20</a>	2016	4	2.2	19	8/41
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As discussed in previous issues, the OA publication policy reflects an important imperative for the democratisation of knowledge, which suggests that all publicly and privately funded research ought to be made freely available for users. The challenges of the OA policy have been addressed in earlier issues of the SMD, including its prohibitive cost for many researchers and institutions. Nonetheless, it is important to keep stressing this issue as it plays a critical role in shaping the knowledge in the field and its utilisation for teaching and research purposes. Readers can check out the OA policy of their targeted journal by using the 'Journal checker tool'

<https://journalcheckertool.org/>. Advances in digital technology and publishing have made it possible for journals to change their publication policy, particularly those published by Taylor & Francis (5 of the journals in the table). Editors and authors have now been instructed that there is no longer a cap on article word count, which is typically between 8,000-10,000 words. This means that authors could use the greater word allowance to expand on different sections of their papers, including the use of more illustrations.

Journals' special issues serve the important role of trailblazers because they submit for discussion topical issues likely to shape research and policy agendas in the field of sport management. The positive impact of journals' special issues in sport management and sociology was analysed by Scelles (2021) and discussed in previous issues. Four out of the ten journals reviewed in the current issue of the SMD have published special issues addressing the economics of combat sports, the politics of sport communications, and the new technologies and artificial intelligence in sport business. Thirteen editors were responsible for soliciting, reviewing and editing these special issues. Individually and collectively, these special issues make a significant contribution to advancing our knowledge and the field of sport management in general.

Table 2 shows the journals, special issues and guest editors.

Table 2. Special issues published by selected sport management journals in 2025

Journal	Special Issue Topic	Editors
Journal of Sport Economics 2025, 26 (2)	The Economics of Combat Sport	Robert Butler
International Journal of Sport Communications 2025, 18 (3)	Politics, Sport, and Communication: A Global Perspective	Alex C. Gang, Mahdi Latififard, and Michael Mirer,
Journal of Sport Management 2025, 39 (2)	Reflexivity in Sport Management	Scott Tainsky Shannon Kerwin, Jon Welty Peachey
International Journal of Sport Marketing and Sponsorship 2025, 26 (2)	Promises, Paradoxes, and Perils: The Current State and Future Directions of Web3 Technologies and Brand Innovation in Sports Business	Yiran Su; Bo Li; Olan K.M. Scott; Jerred Junqi Wang
International Journal of Sport Marketing and Sponsorship 2025, 26 (4)	Artificial Intelligence and Sport Business	Jerred Junqi Wang; Lunhua L. Mao; Brandon Mastromartino

A new and growing trend has emerged in the publications across the ten journals concerning the relationship between sustainability and sport management. Previously, sport management education has been criticised as being built around the twentieth-century supposition that sport managers' main responsibility is private accumulation and revenue generation, and for failing to address issues related to social justice, sustainability, and community empowerment (Chen, 2022; Ličen & Jedlicka, 2022). Existing sport management education perpetuates the growth model of sport and is thus part of the sustainability problem (Gammelsæter & Loland, 2022; Hautbois & Desbordes, 2023). Without exception, all journals published articles addressing some of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) as follows: JSM (19), SMR (31), ESMQ (21), IJSF (1), IJSC (26), IJSPP (38), JGSM (6), C&S (61) and JSE (9).

Table 3 shows the four dimensions of sustainability and the relevant SDGs

Table 3. Dimensions and Sustainable Development Goals

Ontology	Sustainable Development Goals
Human	3. Good Health and Well-Being; 5. Gender Equality; 17. Partnerships for the Goals.
Society	1. No Poverty; 2. Zero Hunger; 4. Quality Education; 16. Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions.
Economics	8. Decent Work and Economic Growth; 9. Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure; 10. Reduced Inequalities; 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities; 12. Responsible Consumption and Production.
Environment	6. Clean Water and Sanitation; 7. Affordable and Clean Energy; 13. Climate Action; 14. Life below Water; 15. Life on Land.

A measure of the conceptual and practical relevance of sport management research to policy makers, practitioners and various public and private bodies is the funding provided to different research projects, which underpin the empirical studies published in the SMD. Naturally, the funding picture of current research is by no means complete due to a lack of information about the external funding behind the research, but it does allow us to note the geography and institutional support of sport management scholarly activities. The research published in 2025 was supported by several public and private agencies, including the EU Horizon 2000 call, the Innovation Fund Denmark, Australian Research Council, Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Arts and Humanities Research Council UK, German Institute of Sport Sciences, the Academy of Finland and others. A proxy measure of the relationship between external funding of sport management research and its theoretical and practical appeal is the increased impact factor of most sport management journals in the sample, including citation as a powerful measure of establishing the impact of journals on the research field (see Lis, 2020 analysis). However, as Scelles and Downward (2025) argued, the current ranking of sport management journals, including their impact factor, does not adequately reflect the quality and advances in the field, as no sport management experts sit on the Academic Journal Guide Scientific Committee.

The bibliometric analysis was conducted using the Scopus database, which provides access to all ten journals included in the SMD. As with previous issues, science mapping and visualisation were achieved with the help of the VOSviewer software (van Eck & Waltman, 2020). The aim was to examine the strength of the links between sport management research by looking into the co-authorship links (i.e., the number of publications two researchers have co-authored), co-occurrence links (i.e., the number of

publications in which two terms occur together), and the bibliographic coupling links (i.e., the number of cited references two publications have in common). The strength of the link is represented by a positive numerical value, where the higher the value, the stronger the link. The results are visualised in Figure 1 and capture the co-authorship and co-occurrence links of all articles published in 2025.

Figure 1 below depicts the co-authorship links where two or more authors have worked together on a publication. Out of 785 authors who published in the ten journals, 39 met the threshold of working together on three documents, and the different colours in Figure 1 help see those collaborations. As can be seen, there have been five clusters of authors who have collaborated on various projects and publications. However, it is worth noting that not all authors have actually collaborated, while the rest of the clusters do not appear to be connected. Breuer, Feiler and Lee have the strongest links of 7, 7 and 5, respectively.

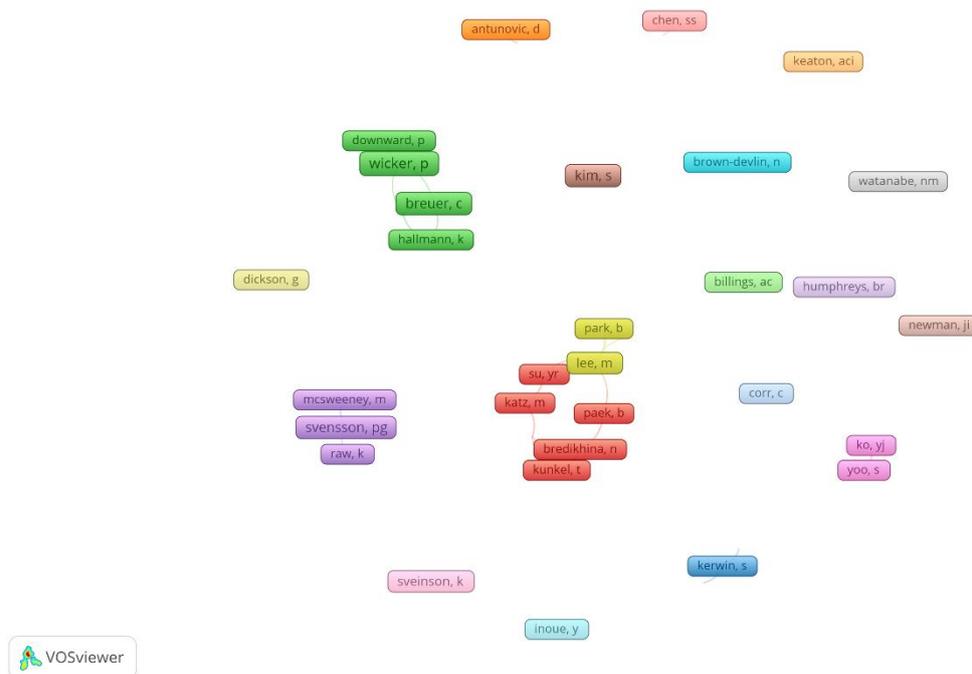


Figure 1. Co-authorship network visualization across ten sport management journals in 2025

The power of the different types of networks and the author co-citation (ACC) analysis lies in their ability to reveal the intellectual structure of the sport management discipline.

Naturally, the SMD does not claim to provide a comprehensive analysis of sport management research globally, as many studies are published outside the selected 10 journals included in this review. We do hope, however, that the Sport Management Digest offers a valuable guide to scholars, practitioners and students of sport. The high-level summaries included in this issue can serve as an entry point for understanding the intellectual structure of the discipline, the authors and centres responsible for producing the studies, as well as the topical issues discussed. It is hoped that it will help in stimulating debates and in informing decisions about research projects and teaching strategies.

Enjoy exploring the Sport Management Digest!

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## Sport Governance and Policy

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### Introduction

This section highlights selected papers published in sport-related journals since the last issue that are relevant to the topics of sport policy and/or sport governance. It is fair to say that sport organisations worldwide face intensifying pressure to reform their governance. In recent years, scandals ranging from FIFA corruption to safe sport failures and bidding controversies have eroded public trust and sharpened calls for transparency, accountability, and representation. Governments and sponsors increasingly condition support on demonstrable governance improvements. Advocacy groups demand equity in leadership and participation. Athletes expect policies that support their welfare across career stages. The focus has therefore shifted towards a more demanding test: whether sport organisations can translate reform aspirations into practice.

These tensions are reflected collectively in this section review. Across eight selected articles, the authors examine this translation challenge. A central thread runs through the evidence: governance reforms are widely advocated but inconsistently implemented. Ethiopian federations, for example, score low on governance despite sustained global advocacy. Canadian organisations often espouse values that remain absent from their diversity, equity, and inclusion policies. In Australia, only one-fifth of sporting organisations have policies that support pregnant and parenting athletes. At the community level, some sports clubs engage in defensive organising to resist state-level gender mandates.

At the same time, I read this collection as doing more than diagnosing failure. It also highlights what can plausibly bridge the implementation gap. Transparency emerges as a demonstrable driver of organisational innovation, particularly when it strengthens scrutiny and learning. Strategic management appears to shape governance outcomes most effectively when it is aligned with organisational structure, rather than treated as a standalone exercise. Stakeholder engagement in policy development improves policy relevance and, in turn, the prospects for meaningful uptake. Gender diversity can strengthen board processes, but the evidence suggests that this is most likely when a critical mass is achieved rather than token representation. Finally, several studies point to the importance of policy entrepreneurs, namely committed individuals

in leadership positions who can drive agenda-setting where external mandates are weak.

Let's dive into the detailed argument of each article.

## Papers in This Section Review

### ***Sport policy-related articles***

Sport policy scholarship has focused heavily on policy processes, i.e. how policies are made and implemented, using frameworks like the Advocacy Coalition Framework and Multiple Streams Approach. Yet as Lindsey, Whigham, and Keech (2025) observe, this focus has left a gap: we lack robust approaches for analysing policy content, that is, the actual goals and means expressed in policy documents. Through searches across leading journals, the authors identify four disciplinary approaches: (1) Sport-oriented frameworks (such as SPLISS and the Physical Activity Environment Policy Index); (2) discourse analysis approaches (drawing on Foucauldian and critical traditions); (3) political science policy design frameworks; and (4) political philosophy theories. The authors argue that combining approaches, for instance, discourse analysis with political philosophy to explicate the values underpinning critique, could address individual limitations.

Analysis of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion-related policies continues to be a prominent focus within sport policy scholarship from last year. Lachance, Kerwin, and MacCharles (2025) examine this topic, specifically asking the question: when EDI policies are not grounded in organisational values, whether they risk remaining symbolic gestures rather than drivers of meaningful change. Looking across 757 Canadian nonprofit sport organisations using management-by-values theory, through document analysis, they reveal a disconnect: of 210 unique values identified in strategic plans, 162 were absent from EDI policy content. Values like accessibility, community building, and trust appear in strategic documents but not in policies that should operationalise them. Furthermore, most EDI policies remain at the "institutional" level—internally focused without extending across the federated system. Only four sport systems—Volleyball Canada, Squash Canada, Special Olympics Canada, and Ringette Canada—reached the "inspirational" level where values are communicated inter-organisationally. The study suggests that despite external pressures from government funding requirements, many organisations have not integrated stated values into policy design.

Elite athletes increasingly compete during pregnancy and return to high-performance sport postpartum, yet athletes consistently identify insufficient

organisational support as a barrier. Titova and colleagues (2025) conducted the first systematic mapping of pregnancy and parenting policies across Australian sport, searching 90 national sporting organisations and 17 major leagues. This led to a total of 22 policies from 20 organisations and 2 leagues were included in the final review. The results revealed that: only 22 organisations (21%) had policies with specific provisions. These cover five categories: paid parental leave, job transfers to non-playing roles, "pregnancy pause" provisions protecting athlete categorisation, facility access including breastfeeding support, and travel support for infant and carer. Cricket Australia, Rugby Australia, and Swimming Australia emerge as exemplars. Notably, no policies included childcare provisions despite childcare being identified as a critical barrier in existing research.

Looking into environmental sustainability-related policies, Piller and Nagel (2025) examine what drives environmental policies onto national sport federations' agendas, drawing on the Multiple Streams Approach. They identify two distinct agenda-setting processes with different drivers. Nature conservation policies are predominantly reactive, triggered by national regulations threatening access to outdoor spaces. When protected areas restricted sport practicability, federations had to engage as credible negotiating partners, placing conservation on the agenda by necessity. Climate action policies, by contrast, are predominantly proactive, driven by policy entrepreneurs, committed officials who champion environmental issues from positions of influence. As one official reframed the conversation: "I was no longer talking about sustainability. I was emphasising that if you want to exist, it is a 'licence to operate!'" Agenda-setting depended on executive and board officials willing to invest their resources in promoting change. Where such champions are absent, environmental policies rarely reach federation agendas regardless of broader societal pressure.

### ***Sport governance-related articles***

Governance reform advocacy has intensified following scandals across sport, yet the positive impact of better governance on organisations has been largely assumed rather than demonstrated. Lefebvre and colleagues (2025) address this gap by examining the impact of better governance on innovation. Analysing 150 Belgian regional federations using publicly available data on 32 governance indicators and the Sport Innovation Scan, they employed a two-step cluster analysis followed by regression. The findings provide important validation: better-governed federations were significantly more innovative than poorer-governed ones (mean innovation scores .52 vs .28;  $F=78.85$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Among *transparency*, *democracy*, and *accountability*, only

*transparency* significantly predicted innovation ( $\beta=.44$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The authors theorise that transparency, in terms of publishing strategic plans, sharing financial information, and enabling external monitoring, creates conditions conducive to innovation by fostering information sharing, stakeholder trust, and organisational learning. This suggests transparency functions not merely as an accountability mechanism but as a catalyst for organisational development. The cross-sectional design cannot establish causation, and the findings from Belgian regional federations may not generalise to other levels or contexts. Nevertheless, this study provides some interesting evidence linking governance principles to concrete organisational outcomes in sport.

Another good governance-related study is led by colleagues from Ethiopia. Garmano, Haddera, Tola and Jaleta (2025) pointed out that, despite global advocacy for good governance in sport, implementation remains weak in developing countries where governance challenges are pronounced but empirically understudied. They therefore examine Ethiopian Olympic sports federations, where athletics faces "lack of genuineness" in youth projects, and football is characterised by "public wrangles for power" and "widespread mismanagement." Using structural equation modelling with 265 officials across six federations, they find strategic management and organisational structure have positive and significant direct effects on good governance in sport, and organisational structure also significantly mediates the influence of strategic management on good governance in sport.

Relevant to board performance, McLeod and colleagues (2025) examined how gender diversity affects board outcomes. Through 36 interviews with board members across 22 Victorian State Sport Organisations operating under the "Balance the Board" policy mandating 40% minimum women representation, they find that gender diversity enhances board performance through specific pathways. Women are perceived to bring cooperative values that moderate the "testosterone base" and "wildly passionate commentary" characteristic of sport governance. Additionally, the scholars find that gender diversity broadens perspectives in decision-making, enhances conscientious documentation, and improves stakeholder engagement through more empathetic, emotionally intelligent communication. However, impacts vary across board roles: effects on strategic planning and risk management are evident, but impacts on CEO supervision are minimal.

The gender quotas may improve governance at targeted organisations, but what happens beyond them, specifically when looking at the community clubs level, where they have substantial autonomy to adopt or deflect state-level initiatives. Bakhsh and colleagues (2025) examine how Victoria's (Australia) Balance the Board policy affected

community clubs not directly targeted by the mandate. Using event system theory and 125 interviews (14 state association leaders, 111 club leaders), they identify three organising processes. Desired organising occurs when clubs with low representation but perceived capacity actively enhance women's leadership through recruitment, policy changes, and pipeline development. Inspired organising extends further: clubs that achieved gender balance began pursuing broader diversity dimensions, countering research suggesting gender initiatives produce only gender outcomes. Most concerning is defensive organising: clubs experiencing "overwhelming anxiety" about meeting expectations engage in deflection ("our constitution requires full membership"), diffusion ("we don't see gender, just people"), and ultimately isolation from the evolving sector. Defensive clubs used low capacity as justification for inaction. The authors recommend graduated expectations, reward systems, and evidence-informed resources to shift clubs from defensive to desired organising.

## Conclusion

A key theme across this collection is the persistent gap between governance aspiration and implementation reality. The evidence suggests that formal policy adoption is rarely sufficient on its own. Effective governance reform depends on alignment between policy goals and organisational structures, credible accountability arrangements, sustained stakeholder engagement, and leadership that is willing and able to carry reform through to practice.

Several papers clarify what enables implementation. Stakeholder engagement emerges as a consistent, cross-cutting mechanism. When policies are developed without meaningful input from those they are intended to govern, they are more likely to be perceived as irrelevant, to face resistance, or to be implemented superficially. It is also worth noting that, if organic adoption is unreliable, reform may require stronger forms of imposition. That prospect raises questions about legitimacy, compliance, and local ownership that warrant more explicit analysis.

The collection further highlights the limits of purely top-down mandates. Where external requirements are weak or inconsistently enforced, change is often driven by policy entrepreneurs, namely committed individuals in leadership positions who invest time, credibility, and organisational resources to advance reform agendas. This reliance on individual agency can accelerate change, but it can also make reform uneven and vulnerable to leadership turnover.

Future research might examine how organisations shift from defensive organising to more constructive and desired forms of organising, and should track

governance reforms longitudinally to assess whether apparent improvements are sustained over time. It is also necessary to test whether findings derived largely from Western contexts transfer to developing country settings where governance capacity and resource constraints may differ substantially.

### Annotated Bibliography

**Bakhsh, J. T., Raw, K., Faulkner, E., Phillips, P., & Rowe, K. (2025). Investigating the cascading effects of board gender quotas: An event system theory perspective. *Sport Management Review*, 28(5), 903-929.**

This study adopts an event system theory perspective to investigate how state-level gender-focused initiatives cascade to affect community sport clubs. The authors conducted interviews with 14 state sporting associations and 111 community sport club leaders regarding Victoria's Balance the Board policy, which mandated 40% women on state boards. Using an interpretative-constructivist lens and inductive approach, the analysis identified how the initiative influenced club behaviours, shaped organisational features, and triggered subsequent events including club gender quotas and election of women presidents. The authors developed a process model illustrating desired, inspired, and defensive organising responses. Findings counter claims that gender initiatives are limited to gender-based outcomes while also revealing negative cascading effects. This research contributes to understanding how policy effects extend across federated sport systems.

**Garmamo, M. G., Haddera, T. A., Tola, Z. B., & Jaleta, M. E. (2025). The relationship between strategic management, organizational structure, and good governance in sport in selected Ethiopian Olympic sports federations. *Journal of Global Sport Management*, 10(4), 582-603.**

This study examines the influence of strategic management on good governance in sport via the mediation of organisational structure in Ethiopian Olympic sports federations. Employing a cross-sectional survey design, the authors collected data through structured questionnaires from 265 respondents randomly selected from six sports federations, analysing data using descriptive statistics and structural equation modelling (SPSS AMOS 23.0). Results indicate that both strategic management and organisational structure have positive and significant direct effects on good governance. Furthermore, organisational structure significantly mediates the strategic management-governance relationship. The findings signify the need for alignment between strategy and structure to enhance governance implementation. This study

contributes empirical evidence from an underrepresented African context, demonstrating that effective strategic management, supported by appropriate organisational structures, can improve governance standards in national sport federations.

**Lachance, E. L., Kerwin, S., & MacCharles, J. D. (2025). Diversity, equity, and inclusion policies in Canadian nonprofit sport organisations: A management-by-values approach. *Journal of Sport Management*, 39, 434-448.**

This study examines Canadian nonprofit sport organisations' diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies through a management-by-values (MBV) approach. Using document analysis, the authors consulted websites of 757 national and provincial/territorial organisations, collecting DEI policies and strategic plans from 69 organisations. Data were analysed thematically to assess whether espoused values are represented in DEI policy content areas. Results demonstrated that values within strategic plans are not adequately leveraged in DEI policies. Most policies remain intraorganizational and at an intuitive level of MBV, with few examples reaching the inspirational level where policies transcend organisational boundaries. The findings reveal a gap between organisational rhetoric and policy practice, contributing to sport management literature by demonstrating that Canadian NPSOs are not strategically embedding values into DEI policy content.

**Lefebvre, A., Zeimers, G., Helsen, K., Corthouts, J., Scheerder, J., & Zintz, T. (2025). Better governance and sport innovation within sport organisations. *Journal of Global Sport Management*, 10(2), 235-251.**

This study examines the impact of better governance on sport innovation within non-profit sport organisations. Using observational desk research, the authors collected publicly available data on governance principles (transparency, democracy, accountability) and innovation from 150 regional sport federations in Belgium. A two-step cluster analysis identified two groups by governance level, followed by ANOVA and multiple linear regression analyses. Results indicated that better-governed federations were significantly more innovative, with transparency emerging as a significant positive predictor of innovation. These findings provide the first empirical evidence of a relationship between better governance and sport innovation. The study contributes to sport governance literature by moving beyond assumptions about governance benefits to demonstrate measurable organisational outcomes, strengthening the case for sport organisations to embrace good governance principles.

**Lindsey, I., Whigham, S., & Keech, M. (2025). Analysing the content of sport policies: Disciplinary approaches and new directions. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 17(1), 43-59.**

This article addresses a significant gap in sport policy research concerning the analysis of policy content. Through a comprehensive literature review across eleven leading sport journals, the authors identify and critically appraise four distinctive disciplinary approaches: sport-orientated analytic frameworks (e.g., SPLISS, PA-EPI), discourse analysis, political science frameworks for policy design, and political philosophy theories. The findings reveal that while sport policy research has predominantly focused on policy processes and implementation, analysis of policy content remains underdeveloped. The authors recommend expanding usage of different approaches suited to specific policy types and combining approaches for more substantive analysis. This study contributes to sport governance literature by providing a foundational resource for researchers seeking to advance methodological rigour in sport policy content analysis.

**McLeod, J., Phillips, P., Rowe, K., Reddan, S., Raw, K., & Swanson, S. (2025). How does gender diversity impact board performance? Insights from Australian sport. *Sport Management Review*, 28(3), 549-574.**

This study investigates how gender diversity impacts board performance in sport organisations, focusing on Victoria, Australia's 40% gender quota effective from 2019. Drawing on resource-dependency theory and self-categorisation theory, the authors conducted 36 in-depth interviews with board members operating within this policy context. Findings indicate that a critical mass of women on boards leads to stronger values promoting collaboration, risk awareness, and stakeholder orientation. Board processes—particularly decision-making and dynamics—benefit most from gender diversity, fostering more respectful and productive interactions. The impact on board roles manifests through enhanced stakeholder engagement, more considered risk management, and stronger focus on welfare issues in strategic planning. This study contributes nuanced qualitative insights into the mechanisms through which gender diversity enhances sport governance effectiveness.

**Piller, S., & Nagel, S. (2025). What makes national sports federations consider environmental sustainability: A conceptual framework on the agenda-setting process based on a multiple case study. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 17(3), 375-400.**

This study explores the key drivers of environmental policy agenda-setting processes in national sports federations. Based on a multiple case study involving eight Swiss federations varying in sports arena, size, and human resources, the research applies Kingdon's Multiple Streams Approach to develop a conceptual framework. Findings suggest that nature conservation policies were predominantly initiated through dealing with national regulations, while climate action policies were pushed by committed federation officials acting as policy entrepreneurs. Sports arena type, organisational size, and available resources influence how environmental policies gain relevance. This study contributes to sport policy literature by addressing how environmental sustainability policies emerge in non-profit sport organisations, providing insights for federations seeking to advance environmentally sustainable sports development.

**Titova, J., Davenport, M. H., Williams, S., & Hayman, M. (2025). What support do Australian sporting organisations' policies provide to pregnant and parenting elite athletes? A scoping review. *Journal of Sport Management*, 39, 227-245.**

This article explores the nature and extent of organisational support available to pregnant and parenting elite athletes within Australian sporting organisations. Using Arksey and O'Malley's five-step scoping review framework, the authors searched for policies from 90 national sporting organisations and 17 major sporting leagues, identifying 22 relevant policies. Five categories of support emerged: paid parental leave, flexible work environments, eligibility protection, access to facilities and services, and travel support. Notably, only 12 policies were developed with stakeholder engagement. The findings reveal significant variability across sports and highlight the need for evidence-based policy development. This research contributes to sport management literature by mapping the current policy landscape and offering nuanced examples that can guide future policy development for pregnant and parenting athletes.

## Sport Communication

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The sport management research community continued to demonstrate strong interest in sport communication scholarship throughout 2025. During this publication year, research in sport communication appeared predominantly in two communication-focused journals, namely *Communication & Sport* and *International Journal of Sport Communication*. Collectively, these two journals published a substantial body of sport communication research (n = 88 articles). Across this corpus, scholars examined a range of interrelated topic areas, including gender and sport media, sport journalism, activism and politics, mental health and risk communication, social media and digital platforms, mega-events and broadcasting, governance and policy, and emerging sport technologies.

Most of these topic areas have been addressed in previous issues of the *Sport Management Digest*. The 2025 publications extend this work by offering new empirical contexts, methodological approaches, and theoretical lenses. From the full range of topic areas identified across the 2025 corpus, this digest selects three themes for focused synthesis: (1) gender, feminism, and mediated (in)equity; (2) sports journalism, metajournalism, and professional practice; and (3) activism, politics, human rights, and moral legitimacy in sport communication. These themes have been selected because they recur across the 2025 publications in both journals and, taken together, represent a large share of the year's sport communication scholarship. The present issue synthesizes 18 articles organized under these three themes.

*Gender, Feminism, and Mediated (In)Equity in Sport Communication.* A set of articles published in 2025 examined gender as the primary analytic focus, addressing how gendered power relations are constructed, reinforced, and contested through sport

media, journalism practices, and digital communication platforms. Across these studies, gender is examined through women's sport coverage and visibility, the framing of motherhood and sexuality, and gendered inequalities in sport journalism and broadcasting. Theoretical frameworks referenced across these studies include feminist media theory and related gender-focused perspectives, as well as gender schema theory, where applicable. Specific theoretical or conceptual frameworks adopted in these studies include feminist narrative inquiry, symbolic annihilation, media feminism theory, and the theory of tokenism. Methodologically, the studies employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Qualitative methods included feminist narrative inquiry, in-depth interviews, and qualitative content/discourse analysis of media texts and social media content. Quantitative approaches included experimental designs and survey-based studies. Across this body of work, the authors reported several recurring insights: (a) women athletes and women's sport remain vulnerable to marginalization through selective framing and limited recognition; (b) motherhood and sexuality can operate as double binds that shape how audiences evaluate women athletes; (c) gendered exclusions persist within sport journalism and broadcasting cultures; and (d) social media environments can both expand visibility and amplify marginalization through platformed discourse.

*Sports Journalism, Metajournalism, and Professional Practice in Transition.* A second cluster of articles examined sports journalism and professional practice as the primary focus. These studies analyzed journalist–organization relationships, athlete–media dynamics, metajournalistic boundary work, and the professional identities and working conditions of sports media workers. The research relied predominantly on qualitative methods, employed data collection methods including in-depth interviews, the collection of media stories, and survey research. To analyze the collected data, the studies adopted data analysis methods such as thematic analysis, textual analysis, and critical discourse analysis. Conceptually, the studies drew on metajournalism,

professional identity perspectives, and critical frameworks used to interrogate journalistic routines and norms. The Sport Communication Model (SSCM) and uses and gratifications approach have also been adopted. Collectively, the studies highlight that: (a) professional roles and authority in sports journalism are being renegotiated; (b) access and control remain key sources of tension between journalists and sport organizations; (c) metajournalistic discourse functions as a mechanism for articulating responsibilities and boundaries; and (d) changes in working conditions shape professional identity and career sustainability.

*Activism, Politics, Human Rights, and Moral Legitimacy in Sport Communication.*

A third set of articles examined activism, politics, human rights, and moral legitimacy as the primary analytic focus. These studies analyzed athlete activism and social justice communication, media construction of human rights narratives in mega-events, and the rhetorical and discursive dynamics through which political meaning and legitimacy are negotiated in sport contexts. Methodologically, these studies employed qualitative content or discourse analysis and textual analysis, with some drawing on social movement, critical rhetoric, and postcolonial perspectives to interpret mediated sport politics. Across the theme, the authors report that: (a) athlete activism is contested through media and institutional framing; (b) human rights and political narratives around mega-events are constructed through divergent discursive strategies; and (c) rhetorical framing can shift attention from structural politics toward individualized identity and branding.

### **Annotated Bibliography**

#### **Theme 1: Gender, Feminism, and Mediated (In)Equity**

McGannon, K. R., Kulkarni, S., Hladun, W., Bundon, A., & Pegoraro, A. (2025).

Exposing a motherhood penalty in sport: A feminist narrative inquiry of media stories of

Canadian athlete mothers' journeys to the 2020 Tokyo Games. *Communication & Sport*, 13(1), 99-120.

This study examines sport media discourses surrounding elite athlete mothers, focusing on how motherhood and discrimination are socially constructed in sport contexts. Using a feminist narrative inquiry approach, the authors extend existing media research on athlete mothers by interrogating discrimination meanings associated with motherhood in sport. The study analyzes North American sport media stories about two Canadian athletes—boxer Mandy Bujold and basketball player Kim Gaucher, documenting their journeys to the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games after experiencing discrimination related to their motherhood status. A thematic narrative analysis of 103 media stories identified three recurring narrative motifs linked to discrimination meanings: last shots, forced to choose, and more than us. The last shots and forced to choose motifs are discussed in relation to a motherhood penalty narrative associated with sexism and discrimination in sport. The more than us motif is discussed as reflecting the athletes' resolution to compete, connecting this narrative to maternal activism and social change. Collectively, the three motifs exposed and challenged maternal discrimination in sport through what the authors describe as a feminist consciousness linked to a neoliberal feminist status quo. The findings highlight the pedagogical potential of sport media stories for raising awareness about athlete maternity rights and structural change, while also emphasizing the need for intersectional feminist reform in relation to athlete parents and post-pandemic recovery.

Rodríguez-de-Dios, I., & González-de-Garay, B. (2024). Motherhood and Sexuality in Women's Football News: Effects on Interest in the Article, Engagement, and Perception of the Player. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 18(1), 32-46.

This study investigates how a footballer's motherhood status and sexuality shape audience responses to news coverage in women's football. To examine these

influences, the authors conducted a 2 (sexuality) × 2 (motherhood status) between-subjects online experiment (N = 395). The study assessed effects on interest in the news article, engagement with women's football, perceptions of the footballer (expected performance, impression, and perceived commitment), and attitudes toward lesbian athletes. The results indicate that portraying the footballer as a mother increased interest in the article. However, motherhood status had a negative effect only on perceptions of the lesbian footballer, who was expected to show lower performance compared with her counterparts. The authors note that these findings may help journalists and community managers understand the impact and ethical implications of how they present sexuality and maternity in news coverage.

Ayhan, B., & Demir, Y. (2025). Systematic sexism: Women's sports news in a circle of gatekeepers and users on Twitter. *Communication & Sport*, 13(3), 419-441.

This study examines how women's sports news is presented and circulated on Twitter by conventional and digital sports content producers in Turkey, as well as how users engage with and respond to this content. The research analyzes "how much, where, how, why, and when" women's sports news is shared, alongside "who" the users are and "what" they express in their comments. To address these questions, the authors reviewed a sample of Twitter accounts and tweets posted between June 25 and July 31, 2022. The findings show that only 3.41% (n = 612) of the 17,932 sports news items examined were dedicated to women's sports. The analysis indicates that news gatekeepers used language emphasizing failure, sexism, and personal life, alongside instructive and successful expressions, when presenting women's sports news. In addition, 85.54% (n = 888) of the comments contained references to women's bodies, sexist stereotypes, and negative comparisons. Most comments on women's sports news (n = 1,038) were posted by male users (n = 962). The authors conclude that the

language used in comments on women's sports news on Twitter supports and reinforces patriarchal and dominant structures within sport and sport media.

Boling, K. S., Walsh, J., Petrotta, B., & Stamm, J. (2025). "Perjurers, rapists, and zealots are ending abortion": Sports journalists' symbolic annihilation of women athletes on social media during the national loss of abortion rights. *Communication & Sport*, 13(2), 321-344.

This study examines how sports journalists used Twitter (now X) to discuss off-field social justice issues, with a specific focus on reactions to the Roe v. Wade decision in the summer of 2022. As athlete activism and social justice movements have gained visibility and legitimacy, the authors situate journalists' social media activity within broader conversations surrounding issues such as the gender pay gap, Black Lives Matter, and #MeToo. Using a content analysis approach, the study analyzed 880 tweets posted by sports journalists that referenced Roe v. Wade. The findings contribute to scholarship on sports journalists' opinion expression on social media and to research on the symbolic annihilation of women athletes. The analysis indicates that journalists affiliated with large or elite news organizations were largely absent from the Roe v. Wade discussion on X. In addition, the relationship between media professionals' roles (including editors, reporters, broadcasters, and writers) and the expression of opinion was moderated by their influencer score.

Harris, A., & Bowes, A. (2025). Still the Outsiders? Women in Sport Journalism. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 18(2), 213-223.

This study investigates the workplace experiences of women sport journalists in the United Kingdom within a profession long characterized as male-dominated. Using interview data from 10 women sport journalists, the research explores how women navigate professional environments in which they are often positioned as outsiders. The

analysis is grounded in Kanter's theory of tokenism to examine how numerical underrepresentation shapes workplace practices and experiences. The findings indicate that women working in men's sport encounter workplace conditions that reinforce outsider status, including harassment, gendered online abuse, and numeric inequality. Participants also described the additional labor required to fact-check, prove competence, and minimize perceptions of marginality. The study further reports that concerns about career jeopardy discourage women from raising issues within their organizations. At the same time, participants noted that the increasing mediatization of women's sport may signal the emergence of new journalistic cultures with the potential to foster greater acceptance of women in sport journalism.

Sadri, S. R., Buzzelli, N. R., Payne, J. L., & Billings, A. C. (2025). Navigating Gender Roles From the Sports Sidelines: Gender Schemas and Industry Expectations of Female Sideline Reporters. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 18(2), 233-243.

This study examines factors influencing news credibility perceptions and the likelihood of sharing artificial-intelligence (AI)-generated sports news articles. To address this purpose, the authors conducted a national survey of U.S. adults (N = 355) using a 3 (authorship: human, ChatGPT, Google Gemini) × 2 (byline: human author, AI) factorial design. Participants evaluated the credibility of a sports news article and assessed their likelihood of sharing the article on social media. The findings indicate that participant predictors of article credibility, source credibility, information accuracy, and article-sharing likelihood differed significantly based on demographic characteristics, identity factors, and cognitive heuristics. Authorship (human versus AI) did not significantly influence perceptions of credibility or sharing likelihood. Across both human- and AI-authored articles, level of sport fanship significantly influenced perceived information accuracy and sharing likelihood. In addition, article credibility and

source credibility were significantly influenced by positive attitudes toward AI, suggesting potential shifts in how audiences evaluate and engage with AI-generated sports news content.

Ishengoma, D. J., Munisi, T., & Slater, K. (2025). Discrimination and Deterrents Affecting Female Sports Journalists and Sports Coverage in Tanzania. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 18(4), 484-494.

This study examines the experiences of women sports journalists in Tanzania within a profession that has traditionally been male dominated. Grounded in media feminism theory, the research explores how female sports journalists perceive sports reporting, identifies the barriers they encounter, and examines the role of editors in supporting women's participation in Tanzanian newsrooms. The study is based on interview data collected from sports editors and female journalists working at 10 media outlets located in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The findings indicate that, although sports editors are making efforts to promote equal opportunities and empowerment for women in sports coverage, negative public perceptions of female sports journalists remain widespread. The study further reports that female sports journalists continue to face challenges when interviewing sources and experience sexual harassment and gender-based violence. The authors conclude that these barriers continue to limit women's participation and advancement in sports journalism within the Tanzanian media context.

## **Theme 2: Sports Journalism, Metajournalism, and Professional Practice**

Stamm, J., & Boatwright, B. (2025). 'Deteriorating our relationship for no good reason': Collegiate beat writers' perceptions of their PR counterparts. *Communication & Sport*, 13(2), 218-244.

This study examines the contemporary relationship between sport journalists and media relations personnel within the context of collegiate athletics. The research

focuses on how a relationship historically described as “symbiotic” has become strained as sports information directors (SIDs) and media relations personnel increasingly occupy internal roles aimed at producing content similar to that traditionally created by sports media. Using in-depth interviews with 16 beat writers, the study identifies three salient themes related to beat writers’ perceptions of their relationships with SIDs and media relations professionals representing the athletic programs they cover. These themes include frustration over the control of information, misperceptions regarding the value of sports media to the organization, and growing uncertainty about the future of the relationship between beat writers and media relations personnel. The authors state that these findings contribute to both theory and practice within the context of the Strategic Sport Communication Model (SSCM).

Mirer, M. (2025). “The Media Answer”: How Athletes Conceptualize Their Relationship to the Press in the Players’ Tribune. *Communication & Sport*, 13(2), 245-265.

This study examines interactions between athletes and journalists as a foundational component of the sports-media system, with particular attention to how these relationships are being renegotiated in the context of social media and athlete-driven storytelling platforms. The research situates the study within a media environment in which athletes increasingly communicate directly with fans outside traditional journalist–athlete interactions, challenging the professional authority of sports journalists and altering long-standing mediated routines in sport. Using textual analysis, the study analyzes 110 stories published on *The Players’ Tribune*, an athlete-sourced storytelling platform. The findings reveal mixed perspectives on athlete–press relations. Some narratives highlight the limitations of journalists’ knowledge and access, while others explicitly question journalistic practices and decision-making. The study concludes that these athlete-authored messages are significant because they contribute

to shaping audience perceptions of the sporting press among individuals who are likely consumers of sports journalism.

Hull, K. (2025). Loved it, miss it, would never go back: Why US local television sports broadcasters are leaving the industry. *Communication & Sport*, 13(2), 303-320.

This study examines factors contributing to sports broadcasters' decisions to leave local television news stations. The research is situated within the context of declining job satisfaction and increased employee burnout in U.S. newsrooms, noting that sports departments have experienced similar challenges, including high turnover. To address the study's purpose, the authors conducted a survey of sports broadcasters who had left positions at television stations to pursue employment outside of broadcasting. The findings indicate that former sportscasters felt overworked and underpaid and frequently attributed their dissatisfaction to newsroom management. The study highlights organizational and managerial factors as central influences on career exit among local television sports broadcasters.

Küpper, L. M. (2025). Representatives, Reflection, Roles, and Responsibilities: The Metajournalistic Discourse on the Press Boycott of Naomi Osaka. *Communication & Sport*, 13(2), 345-366.

This study examines metajournalism, defined in communication science as the public discussion of journalism, within the context of sports journalism. Noting that reflexive reporting in sports journalism has received limited scholarly attention, the research focuses on the metajournalistic discourse that emerged after tennis player Naomi Osaka announced her decision to skip press conferences during the 2021 French Open to raise awareness of psychological pressures faced by elite athletes. Using qualitative content analysis, the study analyzes 102 online articles published across quality, tabloid, and sports media outlets. The findings indicate minimal self-criticism within the discourse, with journalists primarily attributing responsibility for

mental health concerns to the competitive sports system rather than to journalistic practice. Differences in both the quality and quantity of reporting were observed across media genres. Across all genres, Osaka's own representation occupied a significant portion of coverage, and media outlets tended to present arguments from non-media representatives—particularly those from the tennis world—rather than articulating their own positions. The study contributes to understanding how roles and responsibilities in sports journalism are publicly negotiated.

Peña, V., & Bock, M. A. (2025). Questioning sports journalists: Stereotypes, work routines, and color-blind racism in sports press conferences. *Communication & Sport, 13*(2), 285-302.

This study investigates the origins of stereotypes in sports media and how these stereotypes influence journalistic practice—an area that has received limited scholarly attention. The research focuses on sports journalists' work routines, their perceptions of stereotypes in sports, and the relationship between these routines and the reproduction of stereotypes in sports media coverage, particularly in college sports contexts. The authors conducted a critical discourse analysis of in-depth interviews with 13 sports journalists from across the United States. The findings show that journalists are sometimes aware of the presence of stereotypes but tend to downplay their own role in perpetuating them. The analysis also indicates that journalists frequently engage in color-blind rhetoric when discussing stereotypes in sports media coverage. In addition, participants described job-related constraints that may limit their ability to build rapport with athletes, which could increase the likelihood that stereotypes are reproduced. The authors emphasize the need for further scholarly inquiry into sports press conferences and the relationship between journalistic practice and ideology, particularly in relation to race.

Oelrichs, I., & Ludwig, M. (2024). All the Same? Expectations and Evaluations of Sports Journalistic and Sports Organizations' Instagram Channels by Young Adults. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 18(1), 81-93.

This study examines how young adults perceive sports journalistic channels and sports organizations' channels on Instagram, focusing on whether these two sources are evaluated as interchangeable. The research is situated within the context of social media as a primary information source for young adults and addresses concerns that journalistic outlets may lose relevance if their content is not clearly differentiated from that of sports organizations. Grounded in the uses and gratifications approach and models for conceptualizing journalistic quality, the study investigates (a) what gratifications young adults seek from and obtain through sports journalistic and sports organizations' Instagram channels, and (b) whether their assessments of these two types of channels differ. To address these objectives, the authors conducted a survey with 687 participants in Germany. The findings indicate that sports journalistic and sports organizations' channels are perceived in largely similar ways. The study highlights the implication that sports journalism may need to further differentiate its content and practices to maintain relevance in social media environments.

### **Theme 3: Activism, Politics, Human Rights, and Moral Legitimacy**

Ferguson, T., Frederick, E., Brown, L., Kluch, Y., Hancock, M., & Siegfried, N. (2025). "I Was in a Position to Enact Change:" College Athletes' Use of Social Media for Racial and Social Justice. *Communication & Sport*, 13(4), 686-712.

This study examines Division I college athletes' engagement in athlete activism within higher education, with particular attention to how social media functions as a platform for racial and social justice advocacy. Situated within the context of increasing societal activism, the research focuses on athlete activism through the lenses of self-authorship and self-presentation on social media. The study builds on existing research

that highlights the importance of social media in athlete activism, including issues related to access barriers, advocacy efforts, and resistance to inequality. Using an exploratory study design, the authors investigate how college athletes' processes of self-authorship and self-presentation relate to their engagement in social media-based activism. The findings identify three overarching themes: social media as an activist tool, empowerment, and social media as a starting point for advocacy. The study suggests that these insights may help college sports administrators facilitate dialogue, better understand the strategic use of social media in athlete activism, and recognize college athletes' desire for greater involvement in creating meaningful change within their communities. The authors conclude that the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of college athletes' roles in social discourse and racial and social justice initiatives.

LeJeune, H. J., & Workneh, T. W. (2025). The construction of human rights narratives in the 2022 World Cup: A critical examination of US and Qatari news coverage. *Communication & Sport*, 13(3), 484-510.

This study examines tensions in the representation of human rights discourses surrounding the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar. Drawing primarily from postcolonial approaches, the research investigates how human rights narratives were constructed and deployed by two leading publications representing different viewpoints: The New York Times (United States) and the Gulf Times (Qatar). The study focuses on how each outlet represented and portrayed Qatari cultural, political, and socio-economic contexts in relation to the tournament. Using qualitative content analysis, the study analyzes coverage from the two publications to identify patterns in narrative construction. The findings indicate that The New York Times emphasized the exotic "Otherness" of Qatar and framed the country as lacking legitimacy to host the World Cup. In contrast, the Gulf Times displayed what the authors describe as a paradoxical stance characterized

by both resistance to and a desire for Western validation. Overall, the analysis reveals an ambivalent relationship between Western and Qatari perspectives on human rights, situated within a historical context of colonialism and reflective of an ongoing, reciprocal dialogue between English-language publications.

Ali, A. E., & Ross, M. (2025). "Criminals" and "Killjoys": An Exploratory News Media Mapping of the Environment-Security Politics at the Olympics. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 18(3), 320-329.

This study examines news media coverage of the relationship between the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) environmental initiatives and the expansion of security and surveillance surrounding the Olympic Games. Situating the analysis within critiques of the IOC's environmental turn, the research addresses how environmental and security approaches—often treated as separate—may operate synergistically to serve the interests of the IOC and its partners while marginalizing environmental activists. To address this objective, the study maps news media coverage from the Sydney 2000 Summer Games through the lead-up to the Paris 2024 Games. The analysis explores connections between environmental discourse and Olympic-related security and surveillance, as well as what this coverage reveals about relationships among the IOC, host cities and nations, corporate sponsors, construction firms, and environmental activists. The findings indicate that environmental and security strategies align in ways that protect institutional and commercial interests, supported by extensive surveillance infrastructures that suppress activism. Media portrayals frequently characterize environmental activists as criminals, killjoys, or oppositional to Olympism, contributing to the marginalization of alternative environmental perspectives.

Butterworth, M. L. (2025). Eileen Gu, Global Politics, and the Rhetoric of Athlete Branding. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 18(3), 290-299.

This study examines the public representation and rhetorical positioning of freestyle skier Eileen Gu during the 2022 Winter Olympic Games. Focusing on Gu's decision to compete for China and the scrutiny surrounding her identity, the research explores how her athletic success, public persona, and stated aspirations to inspire young girls and promote unity through sport were articulated amid competing claims over national and cultural affiliation. The analysis considers Gu's use of language associated with social justice advocacy and evaluates how these rhetorical choices function within contemporary sport discourse. The study argues that, although Gu's messaging may appear aligned with recent trends in athlete activism, her emphasis on visibility and representation avoids overt political engagement. These rhetorical strategies are described as effective for personal branding but limited in political substance. The authors suggest that Gu's case offers insight into what they characterize as a postactivist moment in sport, occurring alongside the philosophical aims of the Olympic Movement.

Wallace, B. T. (2025). Sport, Social Movements, and New Media: Digital Sporting Pedagogy in Kaepernick's Know Your Rights Camp. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 18(3), 380-389.

This study examines how social movements and alternative or activist media initiatives mobilize sport within digital messaging to frame social critique, reach broader digital publics, and solicit resources for counterhegemonic action. The research focuses on how sport is strategically used within digital media to support social movements and highlights both the opportunities and challenges of adapting Gramscian and Freirean models of critical pedagogy to contemporary digital environments. Using textual analysis, the study analyzes two digital documents produced by Colin Kaepernick's Know Your Rights Camp. Through this analysis, the author identifies what is described as the emergence of a digital sporting pedagogy,

defined as the strategic use of sport for political conscientization across digital media. The study positions Know Your Rights Camp as a case study of a progressive articulation of sport that contrasts with increasingly conservative and corporatized forms of sports media. The author concludes by advocating for a “bottom-up” approach to sport communication, emphasizing how everyday people and communities construct and assign meaning to sport at the grassroots level.

## Sport Economics and Sport Finance

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### Introduction

All papers considered in this section of the digest come from issues dated in the year 2025 and were published in the pre-selected journals. Of these journals, two are exclusively dedicated to sport economics-related research, the *Journal of Sports Economics* (JSE), which is the official Journal of the *North American Association of Sports Economists* (NAASE) and the *International Journal of Sport Finance* (IJSF), which is the official journal of the *European Sport Economics Association* (ESEA). Furthermore, sport economics research is regularly published in four sport management journals, the *European Sport Management Quarterly* (ESMQ), the *Journal of Sport Management* (JSM), the *Sport Management Review* (SMR) and the *Journal of Global Sport Management* (JGSM). The following list provides a summary of eighty-one identified papers covering sport economics-related research that have been published in any of these seven journals, from issues dated January through December 2025:

*JSE* (V26 Issues 1-8): 40 papers, with all 40 covering sport economics-related research,

*IJSF* (V20 Issues 1 - 4): 16 papers, with all 16 covering sport economics-related research,

*ESMQ* (V 25 Issues 1-6): 50 papers, with 9 covering sport economics-related research,

*JSM* (V39 Issues 1- 6): 29 papers, with 3 covering sport economics-related research,

*SMR* (V28 Issues 1- 5): 38 papers, 6 covering sport economics-related research,

*JGSM* (V10 Issues 1- 4): 32 papers with 7 covering sport economics related research.

The eighty-one sports economics-related papers are classified in seven categories:

**Labor markets** (such as league restrictions on player mobility; player and coach hiring, dismissal and contracts, performance and incentives; transfer markets; salary determinants; discrimination): 19 papers.

**Performance Analysis** (such as effects of home advantage, tournament effects, and behavioral sport economics, such as the effect of travel, training techniques, etc. on performance): 11 papers.

**Demand for Sport** (the determinants of stadium attendance, TV viewing): 16 papers.

**Sport and Vice** (financial analysis of sports gambling markets, effects of law and policy on sports wagering, doping and sport outcomes): 9 papers.

**Finance & Ownership** (such as the financial returns to investment sport, sport and financial markets, public finance and the economic impact of sports): 22 papers.

**Miscellaneous:** (other not classified topics): 4 papers.

### **Journal of Sport Economics Special Issue: James Quirk and the Economics of Combat Sport, Volume 26 (2), February 2025**

The academic disciplines of sport management and sports economics are relatively novel, and in many cases, the original writers and researchers are still active, many still in their prime. Consequently, it is unusual to observe postmortem honours to the pioneers in our fields. Nonetheless, the *Journal of Sports Economics* devoted a special issue honouring the noted economist James Quirk, who passed away in June 2020.

James (Jim) Quirk was one of the most important writers and researchers on sport economics from its formative years through the time it became recognized as a legitimate field within economics and adjacent to sport management. Professor Quirk is deceased as of 2020, yet his legacy as a formative sport economist is undeniable. Jim' Quirk's contributions to the field of economics and sub-discipline of sports economics span almost half a century, and he can rightly be considered one of the architects of sports economics.

Quirk's first published sports economics paper, "An economic model of a professional sports league" co-authored with Mohamed El-Hodiri in 1971, remains

perhaps the most important paper on the unique economics of team sport leagues. The paper, according to *Google Scholar* has been cited more than 900 times and, along with Rottenberg's (1956) and Neale's (1964) papers, is foundational to the discipline of sports economics.

Jim's long association with the noted sports economist Rod Fort is rich with some of the most important and highly cited sport economics publications to date. The Quirk and Fort collaboration began in the 1980s at Cal Tech where Fort was Quirk's PhD student and continued through and after Jim's retirement. Quirk and Fort collaborated on the distinguished sport economics books *Pay dirt: The business of pro team sports* (1992), and *Hardball: The abuse of power in pro team sports* (1999).. They also co-authored the important literature review and analysis in 1995, "Cross-subsidization, incentives, and outcomes in professional team sports leagues", published in the *Journal of Economic Literature*, among many other papers and book chapters listed by Fort (2025).

Fort contributes a chapter to the special issue titled James Patrick Quirk: An Academic Obituary. Here, he reviews many of Jim's most important papers and details their relationship, which has had a profound effect on the study and analysis of the economics of sports. As an aside, Professor Fort was the doctoral advisor of this writer. Thus, James Quirk was essentially my academic grandfather. I owe much to both James Quirk and Rod Fort.

Last, as Robert Butler points out in his fine introduction to the special issue, Quirk was perhaps the first economist to consider the economics of "combat" sports. In Quirk's Day combat sports primarily focused on boxing. However, the ever-increasing popularity of mixed martial arts and related sports in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is drawing more interest from sports economics and sport management researchers. As Butler maintains, Quirk's 1978 working paper "Economic Policy Analysis of Boxing, Wrestling, and Karate: A Data Management System for the California State Athletic Commission", is probably the first sole-focused exploration into the economics of combat sports. Likewise, a second paper in 1981 "The Economics of Boxing Regulation in California" focused only on boxing and explored regulation and the impact that regulatory rules had on the welfare of athletes and the competitive performance of the boxing industry. Three additional papers in the special issue represent new economic research on combat sports. These papers include Anderson (2025), who considers evidence of

compensating pay differentials for the risk of reinjury in boxing. Watanabe et al. (2026) who evaluate the rise in popularity of mixed martial arts and its effect on the demand for boxing. And Butler et al. (2026) who evaluate the impact of uncertainty of outcome on the demand for boxing telecasts.

### **Annotated Bibliography**

1. Anderson, Peter. (2025). Compensating Differentials for the Risk of Reinjury – Lessons from Professional Boxing. *Journal of Sports Economics*, 26 (2), 148-171.

#### **Abstract**

A neglected area in the compensating-differential literature is how wages compensate workers for the risk of reinjury, specifically the risk of a subsequent mild Traumatic Brain Injury (mTBI). Using a new, unbalanced panel of 1,211 professional boxers, this paper finds that boxers' purses price for the risk of knockout reinjury risk while those that have never lost by knockout earn economically and statistically insignificant knockout-risk premiums. These results are consistent across three measures of previous knockout loss and three robustness tests, implying that current values of a statistical injury (VSI) underestimate previously injured workers' willingness to pay for safety.

2. Butler, David, Butler, Robert, Maxcy, Joel., & Woodworth, Simon. (2025). Outcome Uncertainty and Viewer Demand for Basic Cable Boxing. *Journal of Sports Economics*, 26 (2), 196-213.

#### **Abstract**

We examine the uncertainty of outcome hypothesis and consider direct demand for professional boxing using a new dataset for basic cable broadcasts. Our analysis covers 103 broadcasts in the United States from February 2017 to February 2021 for Premier Boxing Champions (FOX) and Top Rank Boxing (ESPN). Using a generalized linear model, we estimate a demand function for basic cable broadcasts and place specific emphasis on adopting alternative measures of outcome uncertainty. We find no evidence that increasing balance between boxers increases viewership figures on basic cable broadcasts. Consistent with pay-per-view boxing viewership, our results demonstrate that bout quality impacts demand for cable broadcasts. Furthermore, we find no

evidence of a declining viewership trend, a finding relevant to the industry given the general decrease in viewership trends for main events and pay-per-view broadcasts. Fans continue to demonstrate a preference for the welterweight division.

3. Butler Robert. (2025). An Introduction to the James Quirk Special Issue and the Economics of Combat Sport. *Journal of Sport Economics*, 26 (2), 135-138.

#### **Abstract**

The purpose of this special issue is two-fold. Firstly, it is a celebration of the contributions and life of James (Jim) Patrick Quirk. Jim's contributions to the field of economics and sub-discipline of sports economics span almost half a century, and he can rightly be considered one of the forefathers of the subject. The second is to consider an area that, to date, has received little attention in sports economics and is deserving of greater exploration – combat sport.

Appropriately, two of the earliest working papers considering combat sport were co-authored by Jim Quirk, and therefore, it is fitting that this area is explored in the realization of this special issue.

4. El-Hodiri M., Quirk J. (1971). An economic model of a professional sports league. *Journal of Political Economy*, 79, 1302–1319.

#### **Abstract**

This paper investigates the economic structure of professional sports to determine the extent to which the current operating rules justify exemption of professional sports leagues from some aspects of antitrust statutes. We construct a formal decision-making model incorporating certain fundamental features of the industry. Within the context of the model, we find that, under current rules of operation, equalization of playing strengths is generally not consistent with profit maximization by teams. However, we suggest a rule that guarantees convergence to a path of equal playing strengths under decentralized control of teams. As an example, we study baseball leagues. Some refinements of the model are introduced, for example, incorporating time lags and training costs that result when teams train their own players.

5. Fort, Rodney F. (2025). James Patrick Quirk: An Academic Obituary. *Journal of Sport Economics*, 26 (2), 139-147.

#### **Abstract**

The work summarizes the contributions of James (Jim) Patrick Quirk to the field of economics, and sub-discipline of sports economics. It also provides a personal account of Jim Quirk as both a mentor and friend.

6. Watanabe, Nicholas., Soebbing, Brian, Chahardovali, T., & Huang, Y. (2025). The Emergence of Mixed Martial-Arts and the Future of Boxing: An Analysis of Consumer Interest and Compensation. *Journal of Sports Economics*, 26 (2), 172-195.

#### **Abstract**

Despite its long-standing history as the most popular and mainstream combat sport, boxing has been confronted with increased competition from mixed martial arts (MMA) in recent decades. The dominant organization in the MMA market, the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), has grown to become a multibillion-dollar organization. In this article, we directly compare consumer interest and fighter compensation between boxing and the UFC to consider the economic potential for these combat sports into the future. Overall, our conclusions indicate that boxing has continued to be more lucrative as a whole, with the key factor being the presence of superstar athletes.

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