Introduction to Sports Management

Sport is the unalienable right of every person

*European Sports Conference*

Sport is the most precious commodity we can hand on to the next generation

*Ron Pickering*

The level of participation and degree of excellence attained within a given sport is dependent, at least in part, on how that sport is organized. Sport has traditionally been organized in an *ad hoc* way, relying on volunteers who are committed to their particular sport. It is now clear that to encourage higher levels of participation and international excellence, new ideas about organizing need to be diffused to those involved in the management of sport

*Sue Newell and Jackie Swan from Warwick University Journal of Sports Management, 1995, published by Human Kinetics*

It is to be emphasized in this introduction and throughout the book, that this text is written from a practitioner’s and not an academic’s point of view. The contents are meant to be of assistance to the student and practitioner of the business of sports administration and management—it is to be hoped that all practitioners continue to be students of their business as well.

The contents cover a number of areas selected by the faculty and authors of this course from their combined experience in sport. They are a personal selection of issues thought to be important and relevant to sports administration in the United Kingdom and beyond. It is felt that UK lessons apply in most other countries of the world as far as management and organization are concerned, even though many countries are more advanced than the UK in sports participation levels and standards of performance. No list of contents would be comprehensive enough to cover such a sizeable area in a relatively new occupation or study as diverse as sport, which has well over a hundred governing bodies and many thousands and millions of participants, at a wide variety of levels.
The faculty and authors of this course have been involved in sport as a volunteer, an employee, a participant, a coach, a local authority official, a national governing body official, a tutor, a trainer, an official, an administrator for a national organization, an administrator for a local league, a co-ordinator for an industry training organization, a member of a professional institute—almost every conceivable role available. Such experience has led to a fairly accurate impression of what knowledge is useful to people involved in delivering sport in the UK at this time.

While it could be seen as a moveable feast, certain common requirements are likely to persist over the next decade or more as sport undergoes major changes influenced by television, money and increasing professionalism, as well as the increasing pressure on volunteers in terms of time and our societal changes in terms of job roles and commitments.

Someone else coming from a specific interest area or from an academic viewpoint might well come up with quite different contents and emphasis in a book on the same subject, but this does not invalidate this text which offers a personal preference and rank of importance of the subjects included.

Sport is the most unifying influence in the world today

*Sir Dennis Follows*

As stated, this book is written by a practitioner to be of practical help to practitioners working in the field of sport and physical recreation, as well as to students of sports management and administration. It is not intended to be an academic reference, but more of a managers’ handbook applied to the sports management and administration business. Very little has previously been written in the UK on the subject and many people come to the work with no prior knowledge and little guidance—merely a great deal of the essential ingredients—enthusiasm and energy, or administrative experience gained elsewhere.

The consideration of the history and the social structural context of sport is merely to give a background to the situation in which the sports manager or administrator works. As in any practical management situation, it is essential for the practitioner to be aware of his environment.

Sport is a preserver of health

*Hippocrates*

A manager who ignores this environment and the specific setting in which they operate is in danger of producing unrealistic practices unsuited to the situation in which they operate. This contextual understanding is vital but
need not be a theoretical concept—rather, it entails a realistic analysis of the organizational and external environment which guides good practice.

It is also to be hoped that a good manager will be able to apply the suggested practices, procedures and thinking to a variety of situations. For example, a recently identified weakness in the implementation of the compulsory competitive tendering process has been that many operating direct services organizations saw their role as being solely to manage their facilities, while the client side was regarded as the agency which would develop sport and consequently increase the usage and numbers in the facilities. This approach has proved to be flawed and it is clear that facility managers must allocate time to developing usage, and consequently the development of sport if they are to see a sustained increase in user figures. It is quite wrong for sports facility managers to concern themselves only with the present and solely with facility and procedure management, forgetting about the developmental role of the facility. They must think more broadly and take a longer term strategic view if substantial progress is to be achieved and sustained.

As we move towards the millennium there is no doubt that the base of sport is still very much with the volunteer. However, the future must change if we are to genuinely treat our sport more like a business—in a more professional and full-time manner. This surely is the only recipe for success. The administrators and managers of sport must take it as seriously as the participants and have the same full-time commitment, and receive payment if they are to progress to the proper level of administrative support and managerial practice. This book aims to assist in this area and be a step towards genuine achievement of better standards in the management of administration and sport, so that the participants can benefit from effective back-up service, whoever the supplier.

There is a massive voluntary effort put into sport. Its importance should not be diminished; rather, it should be boosted by a growth in the numbers of full-time professional managers.

On occasions, specific reference is not made to the voluntary sector but it is assumed and believed that the principles of good management practice from other sectors of industry can correctly be applied to the voluntary sector and that, while volunteers bring their own commitments and technical expertise to the field, they will benefit largely by following proper business practices.

It is certainly constantly recognized and emphasized that the ethos of sport is the fundamental background to beneficial management practice and should never be forgotten; however, this is not a reason for not following business practices, rather an even stronger reason for grasping such ideas. If, at the end of the day, such practices are not followed then the ultimate sufferers will be the participants—who are after all, what the business is all about.
Sport is our lifeblood

John Major

The book will also cover a range of issues related to the knowledge required for the National/Scottish Vocational qualifications and, in particular, will attempt to cover the key areas identified for the sports administration vocational qualification. The information will hopefully give some increased knowledge and understanding to those interested in proceeding with the workplace assessment required for this qualification.

The last twenty-five years has seen significant growth in the area of Sports Council(s) initiatives, as well as local authority development officers being appointed to promote and administer sport. It is likely that the next twenty years will see a significant growth of professional sports administration, at a national and local level, and that the training of these professionals, coupled (hopefully) with a constantly growing band of volunteers, will be crucial to improving the performance of our sports people throughout the world at all levels of competition.

The development of vocational qualifications will mean that practitioners will be able to become qualified in sports administration as well as sports development, facility management and operations, and coaching. This will mean a considerable improvement in the potential for on-the-job training and assessment leading to a qualification. This too will fuel the growth of a strong profession in sport and recreation.

This book is written at a level which will hopefully prove useful to administrators and help them in their work—after all there is plenty for all such personnel to do.

Sports administration will never be the highest paid occupation, and it will always require a tremendous amount of commitment and energy; but it can be very rewarding and will be done better by people given necessary training and support, as well as all the background knowledge that is available. This book is a step along the road to help the hard-pressed individuals and organizations involved in sports administration, with a view ultimately to making things more efficient and effective for the sports performer.

This text does not deal specifically with facility management in sport and recreation, although many of the principles outlined will be of value to facility managers and relate to management in almost every sporting situation, because, while the details may differ in specific instances, the principles and guidance offered will remain the same.

The emphasis of this publication is to look at the management of the sporting process in the UK, and the people and practices involved in it (or at least those who should be involved in it). In particular, management of the voluntary sector is an integral part of the target market, as well as the management of professionals working within their own operation or, as often happens, in close partnership with the voluntary sector. Indeed, the
management of the relationship between the paid professional and the volunteer is referred to on many occasions. The whole dynamic of this relationship can be fundamentally improved if everyone involved takes a professional attitude (regardless of payment) and adheres to the principles outlined in this text.

Sport is a means of providing pleasure to people—it is like offering clothes to those who need them

_Abdul Rahman Bukhatir_

The object of this book is to encourage a rise in the management and administrative standards, bringing an increased standard of facility and opportunity provision for everyone participating in sport regardless of the context in which this provision is made. The benefits to everyone involved in sport will be enormous if serious consideration is given to the processes suggested. Ultimately everyone involved will be able to increase their enjoyment and, if they wish, their standard of participation significantly, due to improved organization.

Sport has been defined (by Alison in 1986) as ‘the institutionalization of skill and prowess’. It has further been defined (by Coakley in 1986) as ‘an institutionalized competition that involves vigorous physical exertion or the use of relatively complex physical skills by individuals whose participation is motivated by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors’.

Such definitions go to some lengths to distinguish sport from recreation, play and spectacle. This book does not make such a fine definition, feeling that many aspects of sports participation are for recreation, play and spectacle, and sheer fun and enjoyment often come long before any form of institutional competitive activity for performers at many levels.

Certainly sports administrators and managers (aside from team managers) should not see their role and input limited to ‘competitive’ sport, at least in the narrow sense.

**IT IS NOT EVERYBODY’S CUP OF TEA**

There is something for everyone in sports

_Arnold Beisser_

Managers, administrators, coaches and participants involved in sport must always remember that sport is not for everybody. Just because so many people are enormously committed to sporting activity doesn’t mean that 100 per cent of the population will find it appealing.

Some of the following quotations might help put such a belief in context:
Organised sport is an occasion of pure waste—waste of time, energy, ingenuity, skill and often money

*Roger Caillois, Men Play Games*

Sports and games are entirely non-creative; no game yet played had any lasting effect on human well-being

*H Campbell*

Like every other instrument Man has invented, sport could be used for good and evil purposes. Used badly, it can encourage personal vanity and group vanity, greedy desire for victory and even hatred for rivals, an intolerant *esprit de corps* and contempt for people who are beyond arbitrary selected pale

*Aldous Huxley*

**SPORT AND POLITICS**

There have been many famous examples in recent years of sport being involved in politics and of major international conflicts or controversies affecting sport. For example, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 led to the boycott of the forthcoming Olympic Games in Moscow in 1980 by many countries. Further, and perhaps more famously, there has been the boycott of South Africa at national sporting level, even in traditional sports like cricket and rugby, in order to affect the South African policy on apartheid. There can be little doubt that ultimately this, allied with sanctions, had a fundamental impact in changing South African policy. It is intriguing to venture that South African whites had such a desire for sports involvement that they would eventually give away the right to govern their country in order to take part in sport at the highest level.

It is also quite ironic that events such as South Africa winning the World Rugby Cup in 1995 have proved to be unifying factors in identifying the soul of the new South Africa. The appearance of Nelson Mandela in a Springbok jersey was, in itself, a remarkable statement about the change in political and social attitudes in South Africa.

Many more traditional sports thinkers and participants have felt that politics should not be involved in sport because it is about some of the more idealistic aspirations of the human race, rather than the less than tasteful activities of politicians and politics. However since both affect mankind so fundamentally, it is difficult to separate them. This is proved true right through from Olympic to local level.

The role of local authority politicians in the UK should not be underestimated in terms of the control they have over a significant spend in the support of sport, in terms of facilities, staffing and performance. Local authority funding is crucial to sport in the UK and ultimately the decisions as
to where this funding is allocated are made by local politicians for political reasons. It is naïve to believe that at a local level sport is not tied up with politics.

Equally, there are some ‘political issues’ that need to be considered in terms of relationships with sponsors or other funding sources. For example, it may be that certain sponsors would not be happy to be associated with a sport where drugs were seen to be prevalent, or where there was the potential for child abuse, or indeed, in past days where some performers, e.g. the occasional rogue rugby player, would go and play in South Africa.

There is also a significant debate over ‘the politics of sport’ which exists in the UK about the relationships between sports and within sports themselves. This is certainly non-party-political, but there can be major clashes between certain lobbies or interest groups over how sport as a whole, or particular sports should be run.

On a number of occasions such behaviour has been seen in paid and voluntary situations to the severe detriment of the particular sport and its participants.

Additionally, quite a significant number of issues like gender equality and racism are political issues in society as a whole and therefore become significant issues within sport itself.

Funding from the National Lottery is now being used as another weapon to encourage clubs (especially the more traditional ones, such as bowling and golf clubs) to introduce an equal opportunities policy, and not to display traditional discriminatory positions, particularly against women.

The issue of racism in sport is perhaps more clearly seen on the football pitch and on the terracing, but is often used by groups with other interests to pursue their bigotry, using sport as a vehicle to display their views—shouting abuse at particular individuals or devising racist chants where they feel they are hidden by the mass of the crowd.

Issues such as nationalism and patriotism can also be linked substantially to sport, sometimes positively and sometimes negatively. There can be no more classic case of negative nationalism affecting sport than the 1936 Olympics and the vehicle that Hitler tried to make them for furthering his Aryan superiority views.

Equally, as mentioned earlier, the unifying effect of South Africa’s Rugby World Cup or World Cup victory, or Scotland’s Grand Slam title in 1990 can be a significant force in bringing people together. The feel-good factor generated in Sunderland by the team’s FA Cup win in the 1970s was significant for the whole community at a time of economic recession.

The role of central government in sport in the UK is principally concerned with providing the policy framework and establishing financial guidelines. It does not concern itself with the direct service delivery, leaving that instead to the local authorities and sports bodies, with the Sports Councils setting the strategic direction.
The UK is one of the few countries that does not have the full post of Minister for Sport, although there is within the Department of Culture, Media and Sport a post for a junior minister with this title. Most other countries have this post clearly identified and given cabinet rank, perhaps linked with education, youth or culture.

It is interesting to note that with the arrival of John Major in Downing Street, the policy involvement of the top rank of Government, i.e. the Prime Minister, altered significantly. Through his personal interest in sport he had some influence on the national curriculum in schools through the Department of Education and Employment, where he felt that team games were not sufficiently included—a belief he shared with the then Minister of Sport, Ian Sproat. This has led to several initiatives throughout the UK, such as the Youth Sports Trust, where significant government policy and resource direction has been involved—although often no additional funding has been granted, except through the National Lottery.