

## Performance management in professional team sports

The management of any given team in any given industry/sector is a challenging task. This is complicated further by attempting to deliver optimum levels of performance against agreed management objectives. Ultimately, the achievement of these objectives requires actors to work effectively within a team and align themselves as one functional unit. Berlin's (2014) notion of teamwork implying that working together in the first place involves collaboration between different actors over time fits nicely with this message and the overall scope of the journal *Team Performance Management*. Additionally, several authors have stressed the importance of common incentives for a team to function effectively alongside the following components: common responsibility (Thompson and McHugh, 2002), adaptability (Barker, 1999), trust (Moreland and Levine, 2002; Morita and Burns, 2012), communication (Berry, 2011) and co-operation (Schuman, 2006). It is also important to note that common incentives are not primarily about pursuing one's own interests, but instead they focus on the organisation's goals and objectives (Sorauren, 2000), thus, in turn, contributing to the effective functioning of the team.

This narrative leads nicely into this special issue on *Performance management in professional team sports*. Part of our argument is that the notion of managing teams in professional sport, and elite sport generally, is even more complex than general businesses as individual teams operate in individual leagues that often form part of a bigger collection of leagues. We have argued in the past (Ramchandani *et al.*, 2018) that in this sense it may be that a league is perceived as a "team" with a responsibility to ensure that its members (clubs) are sufficiently homogeneous in terms of quality and resources to generate competition, as organisations in other sectors may look for a sufficient homogeneity between their members in terms of status, pay and incentives to favour cohesion and sustainability. However, even within this analogy, each league (team) has individual clubs (members) within it that all have their individual goals but also require all other clubs (members) to buy into a shared vision to aid competition. Thus, any study that focuses on professional sport teams and leagues also has to consider the broader literature on co-competition (defined as simultaneous cooperation and competition (Brandenburger and Nalebuff, 1996)). A more recent paper by Scelles *et al.* (2017) supports this stance. Here, the authors state that the concept of co-competition in sport is highly relevant in the sense that if opponents are competitors on the field, they need each other to produce the competition and, as such, they are economic partners.

Much of the extant literature regarding professional team sports focuses on the "joint nature" of production (Vrooman, 2015) and comparisons between the economic environment of professional team sports and that of more traditional commercial businesses (Leach and Szymanski, 2015). The general consensus is that, in professional team sports, it does not pay for one team to establish a dominant market position as this will dilute competition. This sport economics framework has been strengthened further in recent years by a growing body of academic literature that covers performance measurement in professional team sports and cites professional team sports' dilemma with managing "twin objectives" (Plumley *et al.*, 2017) or "multiple institutional logics" (Carlsson-Wall *et al.*, 2016). These umbrella terms of "objectives" and "logics" are essentially very similar in nature. Indeed, the terms *sports logics* and *business logics* cited by Carlsson-Wall *et al.* (2016) are closely aligned to the financial and sporting variables outlined by Plumley *et al.* (2017). The former paper



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states that while sports and business logics sometimes compete with each other, in other situations they are in harmony, whilst Plumley *et al.* (2017) suggest that financial and sporting performance are not dichotomous variables but a continuum along which clubs place themselves and move backwards and forwards to a greater or lesser extent.

Consequently, sport, and, in particular, the management of professional team sports has become the ideal “laboratory” in which to test some of these metrics and our special issue attempts to further this debate and strengthen the critical narrative around the subject area. It also helps to build on a previous special issue edited by Wilson and Anagnostopoulos (2017) in *Sport Business and Management: An International Journal* titled *Performance strategies for meeting multiple objectives: The Case of Professional Sport Teams*. Our intention with this special issue is also to bring the professional team sport debate to a more mainstream audience by publishing in a broader business and management journal. The discipline of sport management has evolved considerably and the performance of professional sports teams should now be measured against much broader management literature such as cooperation and multiple institutional logics/objectives.

Indeed, recent research in this area has encompassed aspects such as measuring performance (e.g. financial and sporting dimensions), examining the impact of factors that affect performance (e.g. management systems) and wider performance related issues (e.g. competitive balance, uncertainty of outcome and home advantage) (Bullough *et al.*, 2016; Plumley *et al.*, 2017; Ramchandani, 2012; Wilson *et al.*, 2016). It is this growing academic narrative that provides the context for this special issue on the theme of team performance management in professional team sports. The papers collected in this issue primarily focus on football and challenge how we measure and manage performance and how we can understand the impact of regulation. The following section offers a brief overview of these contributions.

### Overview of contributions

In the first study, Ramchandani, Plumley, Preston and Wilson investigate the impact of league size on competitive balance in football using the English Premier League (EPL) as a case study. They explore at what league size competitive balance reaches its best level through a longitudinal study. Their findings indicate that the current league structure of 20 teams compromises the overall level of competitive balance in the EPL in comparison with a league comprising between 10 and 19 teams. The findings of this study has practical relevance for league organisers and the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) who have stated that competitive balance will be a big challenge for the European football industry in the coming years.

The second paper by Omondi-Ochieng uses resource-based theory to predict the role of football talent in the FIFA rankings of men’s national football teams in the Copa America zone. The paper found that the stocks of professional footballers and football officials are valuable sources of competitive advantage (CA) in national football team rankings. It also highlighted the uniqueness and distinctiveness of a nation possessing large stocks of professional footballers which can boost CA and rankings of Copa America national football teams.

Bullough and Coleman’s study also draws on the context of player development outputs, this time in European football, posing questions such as which clubs produce the most “home grown” talent and, more importantly, which clubs provide the most top-flight opportunities. This research is timely given the introduction of UEFA legislative intervention around the “home grown” player quotas which came into effect in 2006/07. Their findings point towards more opportunities offered for young “home grown” players in

Spain, The Netherlands, France and Germany compared to England and Italy and challenges the UEFA legislation as in some ways it has been a key weakness in influencing meaningful change.

The fourth study by Yilmaz, Aksezer and Atan examines football team performances through dynamic frontier estimation. Specifically, they investigate how predictions of football league standings and efficiency measures of teams, obtained through frontier estimation technique, evolve compared to actual results using the Turkish first division football league as an example. They find that the model they have used incorporating expert knowledge tends to estimate the performance better. Although the prediction accuracy starts out low in early stages, it improves as the season advances. They advance previous metrics in the field by analysing weekly performance rather than just seasonal. In doing so, they argue that managers get a chance to confront their weak performance indicators more regularly and achieve higher ranking by improving on these inefficiencies as a result.

The final contribution of this special issue shifts the focus away from football and professional team sports and analyses the medal markets at the Winter Olympic Games. Weber, De Bosccher, Shibli and Kempf introduce an index to analyse the market potential of sports disciplines. In this paper, the concept of market potential analysis, which is commonly applied in economics, is proposed as a method to enable investment decisions in specific Olympic sports at a country level to be based on sound evidence. Using Winter Olympic sports as the context they draw on strategic management literature to analyse the changes in market potential in relation to the market-governing organisations, also discussing the role of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the respective International Federations. They argue that decision-makers who understand the underpinning governing mechanisms of the competition at the Olympic Games can exploit this intelligence strategically to develop a sustainable competitive advantage over their rivals.

### **Concluding thoughts**

These papers provide a small sample of recent and ongoing work in the subject field and outline just how difficult the management of sport teams becomes based on the different measurement indices of performance and balancing multiple objectives. It also highlights how issues such as governance regulation in respective sports are intertwined with these objectives and how the regulations themselves impact performance of individual teams as a result. As the articles in the present special issue illustrate, there are many complex and interesting avenues of inquiry that warrant further investigation. We very much hope that these papers, both individually and collectively, will encourage further significant theoretical, methodological, and empirical advances.

As a final note, we would like to express our sincere appreciation to all contributors to this special issue, including the authors of the articles, the anonymous reviewers who devoted their voluntary time to provide valuable feedback to the authors, and the editorial team at Emerald that was helpful throughout the process.

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