Preface and acknowledgements

Sten Söderman and Harald Dolles

It started in Stockholm at a conference in international business more than ten years ago when we, Harald Dolles and Sten Söderman, together visited a Swedish football match between Djurgården IF and Malmö FF, and discovered a shared interest in how management concepts could be applied and might function (or not) in sports. Before this evening at Råsunda Stadium we had met at several conferences. Our backgrounds were rather similar, focusing on sensitivity and pre-understanding of sports based on own experiences combined with several years of academic research, writing and teaching on international business and industry experience from working abroad, especially in Asia. We agreed that despite the well-documented economic impact of sports in media and the mismanagement at club level often reported by journalists, academic research papers on sports management were rarely seen at top management conferences. Sport management and research on the nexus between business and sports simply had not made its way to well-established business schools’ management curricula and research agendas.

Our early ambition was to bring sport management research from a specialist niche market and focused conferences into international management conferences as the industry increasingly developed towards internationalization, professionalization and commercialization. By doing so, we aimed to develop and establish research on sports and business as a serious new stream of management research in the hope that it would later be broadly accepted in leading business schools. We have been fully aware that a lot of qualified research in sports has been done and is visible, for example, in economics, sociology and physical education, but not within business administration. In the following years we presented our research on sport and business with posters, interactive and competitive papers not only at sports conferences (in order to get feedback from sports specialists) but also at various highly ranked management conferences worldwide (to relate to the latest theoretical research in the field). We also organized well-received panels, for example on ‘Sport businesses and sport: facing the challenges of internationalization’ in 2008 (Academy of International Business Conference, Indianapolis) and on ‘Targeting the international audience: challenges facing sports managers’ (Academy of International Business Conference 2009, Milano). Special issues on ‘Megasporting events in Asia: impacts on society, business and management’ (Asian Business & Management, just ahead of the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008) and ‘Developing International Sport’ (International Journal of Sports Marketing & Sponsorship, 2008) were published by us subsequently.

In 2008 our competitive proposal to organize an academic track on ‘Sport as a business: internationalisation, professionalization, commercialisation’ was accepted for the European Academy of Management (EURAM) Annual Meeting at the University of Liverpool, Liverpool (UK). For the first time in the history of EURAM a track on the business and management aspects of sports was accepted. At the actual conference
in spring 2009 the track was well received, far beyond our expectations. Plenty of high-profile papers, interesting discussions and a stimulating atmosphere during the conference constituted the most important platform in our knowledge-development endeavours. This achievement and the fulfilment of the organizational requirements stated by EURAM has led to the founding of a strategic interest group (SIG) named after the initial track on ‘Sport as a business’. By encouraging this development, the EURAM board concluded that the main topics chosen for the track (‘internationalization, professionalization and commercialization in sports’) were promising emerging areas of research. In a seemingly parallel development we have been approached by Francine O’Sullivan from Edward Elgar about editing this research handbook about sport and business.

The EURAM SIG on ‘Sport as Business’ was renamed in 2012 into ‘Managing Sport’. The group has in the meanwhile defined itself as a network of academics, practitioners, athletes and sport officials whose interests revolve around aspects of internationalization, professionalization and commercialization of sports in theory and in practice. The group, which is chaired since its inauguration by ourselves, functions as a catalyst for building and disseminating new ideas around the business of sports, by particularly aiming at: (1) promoting research and education in the fields of sports business and management in Europe, with special emphasis on international comparisons; (2) fostering an understanding of the role of professionalization and commercialization of sport in European economy and society; (3) encouraging the exchange of research results, practical experience, and ideas; (4) supporting the development of international research collaborations; and (5) disseminating research results through a variety of channels. This Handbook on Research on Sport as a Business is one of the outcomes and the result of three years of hard work.

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