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The sport industry in growing economies: critical issues and challenges

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110

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to encourage scholarly inquiries to critically examine broad perspectives of marketing and business operations in the sport industry of growing economies.

Design/methodology/approach – A comprehensive review of literature was the primary research method to introduce the following critical questions, “what are the major challenges in the sport industry of developing economies in a globalized market environment and what to do?”.

Findings – Seven articles are selected based on their theoretical and practical contributions.

Originality/value – This special issue is committed to trigger more investigations into sport businesses in developing countries and ultimately advancing theories and seeking solutions.

Keywords Developing countries, Sport development, Market competition, Globalized marketplace

Paper type Viewpoint

Introduction

Since the 1970s, sport has assumed an ever-increasing role within the globalization of business and public events with sports participants, capital, and labor moving around the world. With global sport events like the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup of soccer or the Olympic Games capturing worldwide audiences, sports events have become highly sought-after commodities. Professional sports in developed economies are viewed as a pathway out of poverty; some examples are soccer players in Africa and Latin America or runners from Africa and the Caribbean. Since the 1990s, there has been a dramatic increase in international athletes coming to the USA to participate in intercollegiate athletics in exchange for a subsidized university education. Many countries have or are developing sport tourism and event-driven economies in order to increase the influx of hard currency (Nauright, 2015). However, in the process of global sport and event development, many countries are left behind without the necessary infrastructure or visibility to compete successfully. In countries such as South Africa, regions able to host large-scale events may experience an influx of revenue; yet, most of that does not reach peripheral areas of the country (Giampiccoli and Nauright, 2017).

The process of showcasing a culture in the lead-up to a sport event and during the event itself has had to focus on ready-made markets, thus reinforcing stereotypes about a place and its people that may or may not be beneficial. The sport-media-tourism complex (Nauright, 2004; 2015) driving global sport is multifaceted, uneven, but becoming more universal as cities such as Kazan, Almaty, Beijing, Seoul, Hong Kong, New Delhi, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, and others seek to host major global events. Soccer leagues in South Africa, South Korea, Japan, and most significantly, China, which are all minor players in the latter twentieth century, are net importers of soccer talents from other countries; for example, the Chinese Super League (CSL) is challenging the top European leagues and



teams for the best players from around the world. During the 1980s and 1990s, this process intensified as governments increasingly diverted large sums of money into national sporting programs aimed at succeeding on the international stage. As demonstrated in Australia, countries with the resources to dedicate to elite programs can generate a greater profile through sporting successes in international competition. Sportive nationalism intensified in the late twentieth century (Bairner, 2001; Maguire, 1999) as states sought ways to position themselves in the global hierarchy of nations. The number of nations that can spend the necessary resources on elite sporting programs across the board is limited to a small number of the over 200 participants in the Olympic Games. Nations must choose whether to divert limited state resources into supporting international sporting success or the attraction of international sporting events. Yet, many nations are trying to enhance their internal sport markets as well as their interconnectedness to international events.

During the 1990s and early 2000s, media corporations invested at unprecedented levels in sporting coverage and team/league ownership particularly as commercial television companies became global entities and media corporations sought low-cost and ready-made programming (Williams, 1994). In the case of rugby league, this led to one media corporation (owned by Rupert Murdoch) virtually buying the entire sport globally. In rugby union, the result was near immediate professionalization, while in soccer greater media ownership fostered expanding pan-European competitions, Premier Leagues and the concentration of wealth among high profile European clubs to the detriment of smaller clubs in Europe and leading clubs in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Media magnate Rupert Murdoch, for example, almost succeeded in adding the world's best-known sports brand, Manchester United, to his stable of sports and clubs (Boyle, 2009). Soon afterwards, this club formed a marketing partnership with America's most successful franchise, the New York Yankees, to synergize the global marketing strategies of these two brands. American investors followed by East and Middle Eastern Asians invested heavily in Premier League and other leading soccer brands after 2000 (Nauright and Ramfjord, 2010). More recently, multi-national ownership of sport properties has increased with the same ownership group now controlling the New England Patriots of the NFL in the USA and Liverpool Football Club of the Premier League soccer in England. The City Football Group, with its lead brand Manchester City, has invested in soccer properties worldwide, with similarly branded teams New York City, Melbourne, and Yokohama as lynchpin teams. Qatar Sports Investments owns Paris St Germain soccer club in France and has a global marketing partnership deal with FC Barcelona. The former paid \$270 million to transfer the Brazilian soccer player Neymar from the latter in 2017. The emergence of gigantic clubs and a massive market for players has led talent hunters to scour the developing world for players for European, North American, and now Chinese leagues. Over 5,000 Brazilians play soccer in these developed sport economic regions and few international stars compete in their home countries in major sports if they come from the Global South.

It is evident that sports have emerged out of the twentieth century with significant structural changes. Teams in professional sporting competitions in developed countries no longer generate a majority of their income from ticket and other sales at the stadium while spectating practices are relocated from live viewing to televised consumption. Direct media ownership of clubs and franchises, leagues, events, and tours became common by 2,000 as leading media companies have attempted to corner global communication markets (Herman and McChesney, 1997; Zhang, Pitts and Kim, 2017). At the same time, newer and originally alternative physical activities became increasingly sportized, mediated, and linked to productive and consumptive practices within these new sport forms. The American-based ESPN sport network constructed an audience through its production of the eXtreme Games, launched in 1995, which subsequently developed a global following (Rinehart, 1998). ESPN

drew on accepted television sport coverage practices in constructing a “sport-familiar terrain for viewers” (Rinehart, 1998, p. 100). Several new sportized forms have been included in the Winter Olympic Games in an effort to attract new audiences such as skateboarding that has followed surfing and snowboarding into structured national and international competitions.

The branding of destinations as desirable sites for new investment and tourist consumption has included sport and sporting events as key elements of new economic development strategies. Under this approach, the integration of brands capitalizes on the heightened awareness generated by a major event and focuses on the development of positive experiences for the visitor that synergies between brands can generate. Sporting events are particularly attractive in this context as they can evoke powerful imagery and illicit emotional responses from spectators. This is not an easy process, however, as it is difficult to create a global brand beyond pre-held notions of what the host city is. Countries with a much lower global awareness face an increasingly uphill battle as the global sport-media-tourism complex solidifies. In the twenty-first century, sport is an integral part of an increasingly global sport-media-tourism complex that is vastly uneven within and between societies (Nauright, 2015). While resistance to the global expansion and consolidation of media and event driven sport is possible, and indeed at times successful, it is clear that the international organization and presentation of sport serves the interests of global, national, and local elites – the cosmopolitans – while sport spectators are increasingly removed from the sporting product whether that is caused by spatial relocation driven by the need for newly constructed sporting spaces for major events, relocation of teams to larger cities, increasing continentalization of competitions, or new mediated sport forms (Nauright, 2015; Zhang, Huang and Wang, 2017).

Sports and sporting events have become a noticeable indication and integral component of a globalization phenomenon, which has seen a production shift from developed to less developed societies and an expanding focus in the developed world on the “branding,” “theming,” and consumption of image and lifestyle (Gottdiener, 2001; Pitts and Zhang, 2016). From the restyling of individual matches as entertainment extravaganzas to specialized tournaments like the Olympic Games, sporting competitions have become spectacles as they compete with other leisure activities for consumer interest. In addition, these mega or large scale events have become key factors in local and national development strategies. Sporting events are about much more than merely boosting tourism, local investment, and employment. They can provide opportunities to challenge dominant social structures. Globalization reveals the inadequacy of sameness as communities assert their uniqueness though this process is uneven and is often produced by conservative impulses launched from above. In discussing the concept of “glocalization,” Robertson (1995) argues that what is known as the “local” is “in large degree constructed on a trans- or super- local basis” (p. 26). The assertion that global sports can yield a greater opportunity to reimage the local seems crucial to the importance of hosting prestigious sporting events (Carreras, 1995). As the most fully global example of a localized event, the Olympic Summer Games is championed as a means to entirely reinventing a city as has been argued in the cases of Barcelona 1992 (Millet, 1995), Atlanta 1996 (Rutheiser, 1996), Sydney 2000 (Magdalinski, 2000), and Beijing 2008 (Gibson *et al.*, 2008). Arguably, the values associated with the Olympics – humanity, peace, fair play – are easily transferable between communities. Indeed, this is an important reason why the Olympic Games are able to sustain a collective and unified veneer of support from one city to the next. In principle, the broad liberal values of the Olympic Movement allows for an appearance of a unified community, consolidated by the celebration of sport, culture, and the environment, the three dimensions of Olympism (IOC, 2015). In practice, however, the Olympic Games deal in global values that are external to local communities, which are unable to reflect their particularities at times.

The consequences are an event that is valued more for its financial pay-off than for worldly ideologies although each host city does seek to differentiate itself from previous hosts. Cities employ major spectacles to promote their national and global images, thereby differentiating themselves from other cities in the hopes of attracting new investment and tourism in seeking competitive advantage (Gibson *et al.*, 2008; Godwell, 2000; Waitt, 1999). As with the promotion of host venue uniqueness, diverse traditions are constructed and even invented to sell products and promote tourism (Robertson, 1995).

The spread of technologies is highly uneven and serves to reinforce differences between developed and developing countries and segments of populations within countries; for instance, new technologies of communication can provide the impetus for change; at the same time, sporting organizations and media corporations are also responding to new possibilities in efforts to further commodify spectating practice (McGillivray, 2017). Developing countries have become a prime target market for the expansionary strategies of some of the world's most powerful professional sports leagues, teams, manufacture companies, and media corporations. The influence of transnational broadcasters in these countries and the intensive marketing efforts of Western sport organizations provide European and American-based sports leagues, such as the English Premier League (EPL) and the National Basketball Association (NBA), with great advantage in dominating the marketplace, which at time could hamper the survive and thrive of indigenous sport product development. Sport consumers in developing countries tend to develop a predisposition of choosing globally marketed Western sport leagues, teams, stars, and licensed products over those made locally. The pressures of globalized culture and sport products could weigh heavily on local cultural and sport elements. Local sport traditions and the need to retain sport identity and domestic product scan clash with increasing capitalist ideals (e.g. wealth, status, and stardom). They are in particular facing challenges and dilemmas in protecting local and national sport interests vs generating consumer sport interests through imported sport products, investment in exporting vs investment in inventing and developing sport products, balancing between importing talents (athletes and coach) vs developing talents, balancing between supporting commercial sports vs developing Olympic sports with medal potentials, and dealing with anxieties and struggles between local administrative control vs the sense of loss of control (Zhang, Huang and Wang, 2017; Zhang, Pitts and Kim, 2017).

The critical questions here are “what to do with the situation and how to develop a sport industry in these developing economies?” Thus, it is important to continue to explore the impact of new changes and trends in globalization on the development of a sport industry on growing economies. Formulating a special issue with a focus on these regions would help the *International Journal of Sport Marketing and Sponsorship (IJSMS)* well-positioned to serve a wider range of the global sport industry and the sport management academia. This *IJSMS* special issue focuses on the sport industry in countries with a growing economy and sport industry that are located in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America as traditionally, scholarly inquiries into the sport industry in these developing economies have often been overlooked. In this introduction article, the following two perspectives of globalization are discussed: constructive aspects of sport globalization; and challenges in a globalized sport marketplace. A case analysis is then presented on the role of Major League Baseball (MLB) in Latin America to illustrate the conflict between preserving domestic sporting traditions and importing North American professional sports, which is followed by summarizing remarks to introduce the articles in this special *IJSMS* issue.

Constructive aspects of sport globalization

As globalization has benefited major economic sectors worldwide, sport industry has not been left out of the trend; in fact, it has been one of the industries that benefited the most in developing and expanding into the global marketplace (Zhang, Pitts and Kim, 2017).

Sport teams, leagues, and manufactures in developed economies have taken advantage of globalization to seek new opportunities internationally, specifically targeting to promote their products and service in developing countries. Among emerging economies, Asian markets get special attention with its rapid economic growth and large population that accommodates about two thirds of the world population (Guillaume and Nicolas, 2010). With higher skills and growing competitiveness, many professional sport leagues and clubs from Europe and North America, such as the EPL and NBA, have been able to attract enthusiastic fans globally, have pre-season tours to other continents, and provide coaching for sport clubs and youth programs in other countries, all of which are new revenue sources (Rookwood and Chan, 2011; *The Economist*, 2008). Individual athletes with high performance skills as well as coaches with up-to-date coaching know-how from Western countries look for opportunities in many developing economies that offer beneficial employment conditions such as higher wages. Global sporting goods manufacturers, e.g., Adidas and Nike, have built a large number of overseas affiliate companies in emerging economies to seek cheaper labor forces and lower operation cost over their home country (Zhang, Pitts and Kim, 2017). All of these activities in turn have positive influences on the expansion and advancement of sport industries in growing economies.

In many cases, sporting goods manufacturers in emerging economies face limited financial resources, lack of skilled labor forces and machinery, and lack of overseas market information (Ghuri *et al.*, 2003). Affiliate companies of global sporting goods manufacturers in developing countries are able to provide resources for local companies to gain production skills, managerial knowledge, and technology advancement (Zhang, Pitts and Kim, 2017). Corporations such as Nike and Reebok manage subcontractors in emerging economies by providing substantial knowledge on producing shoes, including training of unskilled workers, assisting equipment replacement, and supervising quality controls that allow subcontractors to meet the industrial specifications and quality standard (Gereffi and Memedovic, 2003; Rosenzweig, 1994). In 1992, Nike was reported to produce only 7 percent of its shoe in the USA while importing the rest of them from Asian countries, 70 percent from South Korea, 16 percent from Taiwan, and 7 percent from Hong Kong, the Philippines, and Thailand (Rosenzweig, 1994). The outsourcing of global brands has become a solid foundation for subcontractors to improve the overall production capacity and efficiency that allowed them to meet required quality and design to export and compete in the international marketplace (Ghuri *et al.*, 2003). Based on the acquired knowledge and skills from the principal corporation, some of the subcontractors were able to build their own local sporting goods brands successfully. For instance, Hwaseung, a South Korean athlete shoe maker, produced shoes for Nike from 1978 to 1986 as an original equipment manufacturer; with the accumulated technology and skills on athlete shoe making, the company dismissed the contract as a subcontractor with Nike in 1986 and successfully launched its own sporting goods brand – Lecaf – in the same year and it has served Korean and overseas sporting goods markets ever since.

The international sport labor movement has increased tremendously under the realm of globalization; specifically, professional sport leagues and clubs in emerging economies are actively accepting talented athletes and coaches who can provide competencies with advanced performance skills and credentials that strengthen the teams and improve the overall quality of the games (Manzenreiter and Horne, 2007). Very importantly, these players and coaches are one of the major sources that lead the development of local players' performance and skills (Dong and Mangan, 2001). CSL, a professional soccer league in China, is a good example of such an occasion of the advancement of leagues and its teams. Over the last few years, CSL has aggressively recruited top world-class players and coaches such as Oscar dos Santos Emboaba Júnior and Luis André Pina Cabral Villas-Boas. In line with this change, at least one of the CSL teams (i.e. Guangdong Evergrande) presented

quarter finals and higher stages in the Asian Football Club Champions League and won two championships since 2013 (FlashScore, 2017).

Hiring a foreign coach to a team comes with other positive changes such as hiring new local talents who might have not been able to be on a squad. The success of the South Korea national soccer team in the 2002 World Cup was mainly attributed to the hire of a Dutch-born Coach, Guus Hiddink, whose coaching style was characterized as openness, global standards, and fair competition (Brady *et al.*, 2008). Not only had he trained his players with advanced coaching technics and adopted effective tactics and formations for the games, but he also abolished the three constraining traditions that relied on social connections of family, origin of hometowns, and trace of soccer school background in recruiting players, which had seriously hindered the best composition of the national team prior to his arrival. Previous local coaches from Korea could not circumvent the social pressures from these unhealthy constraints (Horne and Manzenreiter, 2004). Today, it is not difficult to find talented international athletes and coaches in diverse professional sports such as soccer, baseball, volleyball, and basketball leagues in many developing countries throughout the world although many sport leagues in developing countries have adopted policies to allow limited spots for foreign players in the roster, which is aimed to protect local players.

Although there are domestic professional sport leagues in many developing economies, a large proportion of local sport consumers still follow sport teams and leagues in the Western Europe and the North America as traditional strongholds of sport programs (Guillaume and Nicolas, 2010). Professional sport leagues and clubs from advanced economies are actively seeking global expansion opportunities, specifically focusing on Asia, as the sport businesses in North America and Western Europe have entered maturity stage of business cycle (Rowe and Gilmour, 2010). Sport media played pivotal role in this movement. The advancement of media technology and widespread coverage of sports such as expansion of sport-dedicated cable and satellite channels and broadcasting through the internet and mobile devices enable sports consumers to watch and follow world-best performing teams such as European “Big 5” football leagues and NBA matches regardless of their geographical locations in real time (Szymanski, 2006). Indeed, global media corporations control a large portion of sport broadcasting in emerging countries and utilize their sport networks such as ESPN to provide plenty of opportunities for the consumption of the Western professional sports (Rowe and Gilmour, 2010).

Today, sports consumers in emerging economies have opportunities to attend local stadiums and watch high quality on-field performance of internationally renowned teams from the advanced countries. To attract more satellite fans, many professional leagues and clubs are hosting either pre-season tours or regular season games abroad, specifically targeting consumers in emerging economies. Globally recognized football clubs such as FC Barcelona and Bayern Munich actively participate in the pre-season tours in many Asian countries (Zhang, Pitts and Kim, 2017), MLB have hosted season opening games and regular season games played in such countries as Mexico and Puerto Rico (Fox Sports, 2014), and several NBA teams are engaged in pre-season and regular season contests in China, Mexico, and Brazil (Reynolds, 2015), all of which provide local fans hands-on experience with witnessing world-best athletes in their home country.

In spite of a few criticisms on hosting mega sport events, the economic, cultural, and political impacts of staging such an event are known to be preeminent and there have always been several candidate cities to be chosen as a host (Close, 2010). Among the diverse benefits a mega event can bring, expansion of sport facilities, renovations of urban infrastructure, and introduction of new sports globally are some of the distinctive advantages a host city and country can enjoy. Most importantly, once a city is chosen to stage a mega sport event, the preparation goes with the construction or renovation of sport infrastructure and facilities such as stadia and arenas (Horne and Manzenreiter, 2004;

Kim and Petrick, 2005; Preuss, 2007). New and improved sport facilities that remain after the event are one of the perceived benefits for local residence and can be used for recreational and competitive sports by the local community (Kim *et al.*, 2006). Sport infrastructure is critical for the growth of the sport industry while it is not easy to build them due to the huge financial capital requirements; consequently, hosting a mega event seems the most viable means to secure them, specifically for emerging economies where less sport facilities are available when compared to advanced countries. For instance, in the preparation of 2002 World Cup tournaments, South Korea built seven new soccer-designated stadia, which had long been highly desired by soccer fans in the country. Japan, the co-host of the event, aimed at sport infrastructure development in less developed regions within Japan as one of the major goals in its bidding proposal (Horne and Manzenreiter, 2004).

Olympic Games provide opportunities to promote new sports globally by including them as demonstration sports, which are typically popular sports in the host country or are becoming popular globally. For instance, the 1992 Barcelona Olympics introduced Roller Hockey and Pelota Vasca while 1988 Calgary Winter Olympics included curling and freestyle skiing as demonstration sports. With a growing popularity by sport consumers, five demonstration sports have debuted as official sports of Summer Olympic Games in recent years, including badminton, taekwondo, baseball, handball, and tennis, although baseball lost its official position after the 2008 Beijing Olympics (Stefani, 2016). Some of the demonstration sports would not have gained its fame without its presence as a demonstration sport. For instance, taekwondo was not known globally until the 1988 Seoul Olympics when it gained attention of the general public and sport consumers for the first time; two decades later, taekwondo became a widely played martial art with more than 30 million practitioners over 163 countries (Park *et al.*, 2009).

Challenges in globalized sport marketplace

While benefiting from outsourcing and manufacturing perks, as well as the infusion of foreign capital, talents, and technology, the globalization of sports makes developing economies more vulnerable and less competitive when rivaling with developed sport entities. They are subject to risks, for example, social injustice and unfair working conditions (Moran, 2004; Sage, 2011; Van Tulder and Kolk, 2001). The conflict between the preservation of local sport identity and endemic sport traditions and the escalating demand for imported sport products and services is the major theme in the emerging sport markets, which is manifested in many forms, such as the dilemma in developing local and national sport brands as opposed to breeding sport consumer interests via imported and established sport products, the clash between the dependence on foreign sport athletes and coaches and the cultivation of domestic ones, and the challenges and difficulties encountered in the reform of sport event management and administration (Maguire, 1993; Nadvi *et al.*, 2011; Qian *et al.*, 2017). The landscape of sport industry in these countries is constantly changing and fluid in nature, with the world's most powerful sport leagues, teams, sporting goods manufacturers, and media corporations setting their eyes on the emerging markets. The breadth, depth, and variety of the challenges displayed in front of the key stakeholders present some noteworthy avenues for debates and inquiries (Pitts and Zhang, 2016).

Few would foresee the explosive growth the sporting goods industry has experienced in the past 30 years. In a comparatively short period of time, foreign direct investment and the diffusion of global supply chains have significantly accelerated the evolution and development of the industry, enabling international sporting goods corporations to take advantage of cheap and abundant labor supplies in developing countries, and providing impoverished countries with much-needed capital, direct employment, advanced technology, and most importantly, the access to international markets (Locke *et al.*, 2007). However, the prevalence of child labor in South Asian factories in the 1990s along with the

use of prison labor highlights the ethical and legal challenges the developing countries currently confronted (Chan, 2003). On the flip side, the lack of trademark enforcement and loopholes in copyrights protection in some developing countries has also led to legal issues such as copyright infringement, piracy, and squatting, which are further aggravated by language barriers and cultural differences. Intellectual properties and copyrights are vulnerable and hence, it is urgent and essential to seek solutions to manage and preserve them. The dispute between legendary basketball player Michael Jordan and the Chinese sport shoes and apparel manufacturer Qiaodan Sports Co., Ltd over the unauthorized use of Chinese transliteration of the name Jordan is perhaps one of the most representative cases that demonstrate the complexity and controversy behind international trademark and personal name protection (Baker *et al.*, 2017). As early as 1993, when Nike and the Jordan brand had not officially entered into the Chinese market, knowing the fact that Michael Jordan, whose name has long been known as “Qiaodan” by Chinese media and consumers since the debut of the NBA in China in the 1990s, Qiaodan Sports intentionally registered the transliteration for Jordan (Qiaodan) for trademark protection. Realizing Qiaodan Sports had been exploiting the identity and the name of Michael Jordan by confusing the Chinese consumers with its own flying man logo and shoes resembling Jordan brand products, Michael Jordan and Nike started filing lawsuit against Qiaodan Sports over the use of his name and identity. They did not win a single court decisions until December 8, 2016 when the Chinese Supreme People’s Court finally overturned the previous rulings that favored Qiaodan Sports and ruled that Qiaodan Sports violated the trademark law and infringed on Jordan’s rights to own and use his transliterated name in Chinese characters (Kennedy, 2016). Although Nike and Jordan retrieved the rights to the transliterated name in Chinese characters, it took approximately five years; whereas, Qiaodan Sports, which has developed into one of the most popular sport brands in China with hundreds of millions of dollars of business annually, can still use the word “Qiaodan” in pinyin (the official romanization system for Standard Chinese) or in roman letters. In fact, transliteration is just one of the many facets of trademark squatting. The Jordan case provides a perfect example of how sport branding could be a controversial issue in a globalized marketplace and what international sport companies should be aware when dealing with trademark regulations and copyright protections in an emerging market. Given the growing value of sport brands, it is of great importance for relevant governing bodies and legal entities to be vigilant about potential trademark squatting and brand infringement in order to protect brand equity and other intangible assets.

A variety of studies, articles, and research has recently touched on international sport labor movement in the realm of sport management (e.g. Love and Kim, 2011; Maguire, 1999, 2008; Maguire and Stead, 1996; Schwartz *et al.*, 2015). It is evident that the international exchange of sport talents is now the norm for major professional sport clubs and leagues. With a particular note, the burgeoning Asian professional sports are drawing an increasing number of international sport talents, as illustrated by the rise of Chinese professional soccer. The major growth in the development of the Chinese professional sports and the internationalization of professional sports are largely fueled by the wills of the state that identifies soccer as an international platform to showcase the country’s sporting power and also as a promising business that taps into the expanding Chinese middle class with an ever-growing demand for high-quality sport products and services. Despite the prediction that expenditures in international player transactions will continue to soar in years to come, the rapid growth of professional sport leagues in China is not all peaches and cream, and its “big leap forward” in professional sports is not exempt from problems. The CSL and the Chinese Basketball Association are significantly different from the European “big five” leagues, the NBA, or the MLB, which do not have a quota on foreign players. In other words, all Chinese professional leagues are required to limit the number of foreign players on the

field/court (BBC, 2017) in an effort to cultivate and promote the development of local talents, making it difficult to produce premium products to generate revenue from both domestic and overseas markets. Initial investigation by Gong *et al.* (2015) into the policy, operation, and marketing practices of the CSL found that Chinese sport consumers are not satisfied with the CSL in spite of the fact that some international superstars are featured in the CSL games. Qian *et al.* (2017) further delved into the Chinese younger generation's perception of the CSL and provided interesting insights regarding how the presence of international players has impacted the local sport leagues. They argued that the dependence on imported players is hardly a long-term solution to the sluggish yet money-splashing CSL albeit these big-name imports help improve the quality of the games to a great extent. Without homegrown talents, consumers are more inclined to following the comparatively more professional and competitive European "big five" or North American professional sports instead of domestic leagues and teams.

Sport events and their impacts on the host city have gained enormous administrative and scholarly attentions. Beyond the much-touted benefits of hosting sport events and developing sport attractions, there is a growing body of literature that takes a critical approach and debates the potential impacts of mega sport events and the construction of stadia on local communities. Some scholars cast doubts over the economic impacts of sport events on the host region, especially when the international hallmark sport events are hosted in the developing countries (Deccio and Baloglu, 2002; Dovey, 1989; Kim and Morrision, 2005; Matheson and Baade, 2006; Roche, 1994). In fact, the positive economic impacts, such as increased tax revenues, new employment opportunities, and additional sources of income, may be offset by negative sociocultural and ecological impacts as a result of over-crowded environment and the opposition of local residents (Kim *et al.*, 2006). Failure to address some of the societal problems including traffic congestion, increased crime, and administrative problems can significantly influence future overseas visitors and residents' willingness to support of future event biddings (Collins and Flynn, 2008; Deccio and Baloglu, 2002; Huang *et al.*, 2014; Kim and Morrision, 2005). Unfortunately, there have been cases where host cities with a growing economy failed to effectively plan and organize hallmark events, leading to an excessive waste of public resources and mismanagement of both tangible and intangible legacies. Without a clear and sustainable plan for the 2004 Athens Olympics, Greece's Government spent approximately \$9 billion on building state-of-art sport venues, renovating infrastructure, and upgrading facilities with a majority of the facelift efforts only for one-time use; yet, given the short-lived high flow of foreign tourists and athletes to the host city, the extravaganza only found the country struggling through the financial depression in the post-Olympic era as the world's largest sport celebration brought nothing but unemployment, homelessness, and poverty, leaving the once gleaming Olympic venues unattended and rusted away (Bloor, 2014; Evans, 2014). Regrettably, Athens is not the only host city that is bogged down by the burden of international hallmark events, Rio De Janeiro and Beijing have also been found to be either stuck in financial hardships or confront legacy mismanagement (Branigan, 2012; Worstall, 2016). Consequently, it is critical to evaluate the economic impact of a sport event. Nevertheless, it is also worth noting that the legacies of a sport event, especially a mega sport event would usually outweigh the utilitarian economic benefits. The intangible impacts and outcomes of a well-organized sport event constitute more comprehensive merits than the standard economic indices, oftentimes priceless and invaluable (Chalip, 2006; Huang *et al.*, 2014; Liu and Gratton, 2010). Over the course of the past three decades, policy makers, public interest groups, and professional have been filing oppositions to local governments committing a large amount of public funding to mega sport events and professional sports facilities, citing a number of reasons, most of which are economics-based assumptions, namely, limited economic impact, better spending options, and difficulty in

measuring intangible benefits such as civic engagement and basking-in-reflected-glory (Funk and James, 2001; Wann and Branscombe, 1990). Indeed, these arguments or assumptions are valid concerns to take into account when hosting a sport event or building a new sport facility; however, many of the potential problems can be properly tackled as long as governments focus on long-term benefits and place sustainability as the top priority on the agenda. The 1996 Atlanta Olympics, the 2000 Sydney Olympics, and the 2006 Germany FIFA World Cup are all convincing examples of good event management; whereas, it is expected that China will follow the suit and put on much assessable and sustainable Winter Olympics. Compared to the 2008 Games, Beijing will make full use of the existing facilities, invest in increasing transport capacity with an aim to reduce road congestion, and improve air quality with coal-burning plants being upgraded to reduce emissions and public buses being converted to run on natural gas (IOC, 2016). Today, what residents and governments care about are shifting. Although economic impact is still important, it is no longer the major determining factor for sports infrastructure investment and primary incentive for hosting a sport event. As a matter of fact, relying on a sport event to achieve economic success is now becoming the major restraint. As evident by the sport facility building boom in the USA during the past decade, the ultimate force that drives municipal cities and local residents to chip in sport facility investment is the social impacts as the improvement of life quality is a powerful means to improving economic opportunities that in turn feed social pursuits (Igel, 2017).

Case analysis: MLB in Latin America

The case of baseball evolution and the MLB in Latin America is chosen here to illustrate the on-going process of sport globalization, and the merits and challenges associated with this process. For over a century, the sport of baseball has been popular in Latin American countries, such as Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Venezuela. As early as 1921, the Dominican had a professional baseball league with players playing in front of paying audiences and the sport remains extremely popular to this day. The general understanding is that baseball began in Latin America in the mid-1800s when two wealthy Cuban students were studying in the USA and brought balls and bats back to Cuba for their people to learn the game that was played by Americans. By 1868, they founded the Havana Base Ball Club that led to the sport gaining traction in Cuba. The Ten Years War caused many Cubans to flee to the Dominican Republic and they shared their love of baseball with their new countrymen. Baseball spread to other countries such as Venezuela and Mexico in similar ways where international students brought the game home after learning about it in the USA (Martinez, 2006).

In the 1920s, professional baseball was on the rise in the USA, but was still segregated. The Negro Leagues were competitive and widespread and yet players were not getting the same opportunities and paychecks that their white American players were. During the offseason, in order to stay in shape and earn some extra income, many African-American professional baseball players from the US would travel to Cuba or the Dominican Republic to play in their leagues. This led to leagues in Latin America becoming more competitive as the quality of players rose and more people would come to attend games (Snyder, 2016). This growth continued for over 20 years and this period was referred to as "beisbol romantic" (Morrison, 1987) because the sport was removed from outside influence and local stars gained notoriety and drove the growth of the sport. During this time, the Dominicans cultivated baseball as local and uniquely Dominican phenomenon as they developed various amateur and professional levels of play and nurtured a strong journalist culture that covered the sport. Despite baseball's origins being in North America, baseball was a local phenomenon (Klein, 1989).

When Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in 1947, more opportunities opened up for Latin American players to move to the USA and play professional baseball there, where they had an opportunity to earn a much higher income. By the early 1950s, some of the biggest

stars in Latin America, such as Osvaldo Birgil of the Dominican Republic, began to leave their teams in their home country and play in the USA. Since then, the amount of Latin American players in MLB has steadily increased, especially those of Dominican heritage. This surge of Latin American talents led professional teams from the USA to pay attention to the talents emerging from that region of the world. Today, almost every MLB team has a scouting and training camp or academy in the Dominican Republic where they can identify, evaluate, and train players. For many MLB teams, there has been some noticeable success with these training academies. At the start of the 2016 MLB season, 10 percent of all MLB players were from the Dominican Republic, and players from all Latin American countries made up 24 percent of all players on the opening day (MLB.com, 2016). The quantity alone is notable, but the quality of Latin American players has been highlighted by them consistently earning spots on all-star teams and receiving major awards. MLB teams have found success in developing training academies and recruiting players for their professional teams and there have been some positives for local baseball in Latin America as well. For young men in poverty stricken countries, these MLB training academies offer an opportunity to escape poverty. Although the chances are slim of these opportunities leading to a professional career in the USA, even a few years of being paid to work and train in the academies allow them to earn more than their peers who do not play baseball. In addition to the increased income, membership in the training academies has allowed these young men to have access to top medical care, nutrition, and trainers that would otherwise not be available to them. It is because of this opportunity that baseball is more than just sport or entertainment – many Latin Americans have found it a form of “economic salvation” (Klein, 1989).

In addition to the MLB academies, the impact MLB has had on local baseball stretches back to the early days of professional baseball in Latin America. During the off season, MLB and the Negro League players would play in Dominican professional leagues to stay in shape and earn extra income. These players added relevancy and prestige to the local professional leagues; although the style of baseball was uniquely Latin American, the level of competition rose significantly, making it more enjoyable for fans and profitable for owners. As the local Dominican players began to rise to prominence and develop careers in the USA, it became an expectation they would send money back home from their earnings made in playing professional ball. It is estimated that between player salaries being sent home and jobs generated through the academies and administrative offices, MLB contributes over \$75 million a year to the Dominican economy. Some players contribute beyond just sending money back; they have built their own training academies, purchased professional teams, and helped revitalize local communities through construction and renovations of churches, schools, and community centers. Without the globalization of baseball, this type of economic impact would not have been possible (Klein, 2006).

Although some elements of globalization have benefited Latin America, there have been several controversies and downsides to MLB’s presence in Latin America. The growth and presence of MLB in Latin America has been fairly successful for major league teams; however, it has also led to challenges for the domestic product in these countries. Several scholars have noted that there is a dark side to baseball’s globalization that needs to be explored further (Marcano and Fidler, 1999, 2004; Martinez, 2006; Ottenson, 2014). The first area of concern is the risks young Latin American men take in order to have a chance at becoming a professional baseball player. Oftentimes, these young men will forgo their education in an effort to take a shot at a career in baseball. Some quit school as early as 13 years old to focus on training and better their skills on hopes of being noticed by a MLB recruiter. The reality is that even those who get selected to participate in an academy rarely move onto a professional career in MLB and by 19 years old, many are dropouts with little education and no job experience. Some academies have recognized this issue and incorporated tangible solutions into their training program by implementing educational

programs; even so, it is often not enough to prepare them for a career after baseball (Lagesse, 2016). Consequently, this issue affects the overall quality of the country's working population. As well, these academies have affected the role professional teams in Latin America play in developing talents for the MLB teams. Previous to the academies, MLB teams would compensate local teams to scout and train talents and protect them from other MLB teams. Inevitably, the current practices of the MLB have increased the influence of US teams on Dominican baseball while hurting the autonomy of the local teams (Klein, 1989).

Another concern about these academies is the mistreatment of the youth they recruit. The way in which MLB recruits and retains talents from Latin America is very different from the process they follow for Asian or North American talents. For one, North American amateurs are subject to amateur draft rules that come with certain compensations and protections that are enforced by the MLB Commissioner's Office and the MLB Players Association (Marcano and Fidler, 2004). For instance, MLB has an agreement in place with baseball organizations in Japan and Korea that protect and compensate players who are from those countries. The rules and regulations are looser when it comes to players from countries such as the Dominican Republic or Venezuela (Marcano and Fidler, 1999). It appears that for MLB teams to draft and sign players from North America or Asia, the process is highly structured, but the opposite is true for Latin America, where recruiting players is a free agency system that is comparatively unregulated. According to Marcano and Fidler (2004), the MLB has attempted a reform to this by opening a MLB commissioner's branch office in the Dominican Republic to regulate player recruitment and transfers; but, the administrative system of this branch office is widely perceived as being flawed. The office is understaff and underfunded as there is essentially just one person working there, who has the primary responsibility of overseeing agreements between the MLB and Latin American teams, indicating that "MLB is interested more in successful public relations than in actually stopping the discrimination and exploitation of Latin youth" (Marcano and Fidler, 2004, p. 5). A major problem in the agreements between MLB teams and players in the Dominican academies is that there is not a uniform set of guidelines and regulations for how the contract is structured. Many teams only provided contracts in English to youth who spoke none or little of the language. The MLB has issued "recommendations" for these contracts, such as having them written in both Spanish and in English, but they remain just guidelines and non-binding rules adopted by the league. The only hard rule is that a player may not be signed before the age of 17 (Ottenson, 2014). In addition to the MLB office in the Dominican Republic being ineffective, it has caused frictions with the Dominican government because the governmental officials felt losing autonomy in how they oversaw and managed their baseball operations locally (Klein, 2006). The way in which the MLB governs its organization is in contrast to how Latin America looks to better the lives of people in that region. An example of this is how the MLB demands proper documentation of a player's birth certificate and age before allowing him to enter the USA as organizations in Latin America would sometimes alter the document to make a player appear younger than he really is in an attempt to afford the person a better chance at signing with a team (Klein, 2008). These are the types of discrepancies that must be resolved in order to improve relations, build trust, and build on the globalization of baseball.

In the early 1990s, there was a strong local resistance against the presence of the MLB in the Dominican Republic. Fans preferred to wear local team's merchandise and local baseball teams would get more coverage in the media. However, this has begun to change as the Dominican government and wealthy owners are starting to have more control in how the MLB academies are operated and who profits from them (Klein, 2006). Even so, these positions of power are reserved only for the wealthiest individuals and still lack in regulations and agreements with the US Government and the MLB. Ottenson (2014) suggests that building similar agreements to those of Japan could improve some of the above concerns although it may not be as effective. The main concern is that the political relationship between the USA

and Latin American countries is not as well established as the ties with Japan. The USA would have to strengthen its ties and negotiate with each individual Latin American country, all of which have various political climates, laws, and views on how business should be conducted and how the agreements with the USA should be done. This presents a problem because the MLB does not have any incentives to change its practices to improve moral or human rights issues because of the financial upside. MLB teams can recruit and sign Latin American players for pennies on the dollar compared to their North American or Asian counterparts and gain significant competitive advantage. The Japanese Government noticed the rise of popularity of baseball in its country and acted to protect its own baseball leagues from the MLB (Gould, 2000), something Latin American countries need to take a proactive stance on. As Marcano and Fidler (1999) noted, Latin American countries have larger priorities to tackle, such as poverty, corruption, and political upheaval. Arranging baseball agreements may not be a priority for governments in Latin America. Ottenson (2014) suggests that an international regulatory board, like the FIFA, could be developed in order to oversee and enforce regulations. This could place responsibilities on both public and private entities to work together in globally growing the game of baseball in a responsible manner.

About the special issue

Topics of the sport industry in the developed economies and mechanism for their advancements have primarily been the norm of scholarly inquiries, as evidenced in several leading journals in the field of sport management; yet, contemporary and also critical issues identified above have rarely been studied, which would make this special journal issue unique and most importantly, contributing to the development of the sport industry in developing economies. Through the selection of high-quality research manuscripts, this journal issue is aimed to advance theories, seek solutions for contemporary issues encountered in the sport industry of developing economies, and ultimately advance sport business in developing countries. Consistent with the aims and objectives of *IJSMS*, this special issue has sought contributions that critically examine, debate, and shed light on broad perspectives of sport marketing, sponsorship, and/or business operations in the sport industry of growing economies, and ultimately advance sport business globally. Of the manuscripts submitted to this special issue, seven were selected through the rigorous peer review process and by the standard set forth by the journal. These include studies on using international sport events as part of a destination brand construction strategy in Mexico, assessing competitive balance in the Egyptian Premier League, identifying critical factors affecting the regional strategies for developing and advancing the Chinese sport industry, attracting international spectators to a sport event held in Asia through a case analysis of Formula One Petronas Malaysia Grand Prix, examining sport fans' reaction to resurrected brands of sport organizations in Romania, examining consumer demand for table tennis clubs in the USA in an attempt to advocate for reversing the tide of sport globalization from West to East, and examining service quality and social impact perceptions of the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games. Hopefully, scholars and practitioners would find these articles insightful, constructive, and useful; most importantly, it is expected that this *IJSMS* special issue will help trigger much more scholarly inquiries into critical issues and challenges in the sport industry of growing economies.

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