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People with disabilities and sport: An exploration of topic inclusion in sport management

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ABSTRACT

Sport management curriculum standards (COSMA, 2016) require sport management programs to prepare students to work in a “diverse sport management environment” (p. 54). People with disabilities in sport is a growing segment of the sport business industry with viable jobs and careers for graduates. There is also a movement to include people with disabilities in “mainstream” sport. Sport management professionals must be informed of these current trends and issues. Thus, it is crucial to examine course content in relation to diversity, specifically disability sport. This study explored if sport management faculty included any content about people with disabilities and sport, what topics or content is included, and how it is included. Specifically, this study was limited to the one course in which an overview of the sport business industry and the study of sport management are introduced, the traditional introduction to sport management course. Result show inclusion of topics such as the Paralympic Games or Paralympic sport, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Special Olympics International, and inclusion/integration of disabled athletes. A total of 16% of respondents indicated they do not include disability sport content in their introduction class. The connection of this content to sport management curriculum standards, methods of teaching disability sport, and implications for curriculum development are discussed.

1. Introduction

In organized and commercialized sports, the negative effects of stigma, disempowerment and social and economic marginalization experienced by individuals with disabilities are often amplified because persons with disabilities have been denied opportunity and access (United Nations, 2015). The United Nations, other world associations, and individual countries all formally include action plans to develop and encourage adoption, development, and support for sports activities for rehabilitating, educating, training, and improving the quality of life for persons with disabilities (Beacom et al., 2016; Depauw & Gavron, 2005; Parnes & Hashemi, 2007; United Nations, 2015). Within educational settings, an investigation by the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that school age students with disabilities participated in sports at a much lower rate than students without disabilities (United States Government Accountability Office, 2010). Supporters stated that the report was historic because it provided statistics for the first time on the status of sport and physical education for students with disabilities in American public schools (Toppo, 2013). In response, the National High School Athletic Association and the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association published a best practices document in adapted team sports for state athletic associations across the United States to examine their individual policies and practices with regard to equal opportunities for extracurricular athletics for students

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with disabilities (NFHS.org, 2015). From a rehabilitation perspective, a renewed focus has been on sport and recreation opportunities for military veterans with disabilities returning from service deployments (Smith, 2014; Smith & Pitts, 2014; Smith, Pitts, & Mougianis, 2017). This trend includes supporting military veterans with disabilities in a wide array of sports through such organizations and events as The Department of Veterans Affairs, Paralyzed Veterans of America, National Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, the Wounded Warrior Games, and Warfighter Sports (Disabled Sports USA, 2015; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015). Many of these veterans are qualifying for the Paralympic Games, the latter of which in the past decade has grown exponentially in the number of athletes, countries, sports, spectators, sponsors, and media coverage (International Paralympic Committee, 2014).

The term disability sport tends to be used synonymously with adaptive sport or parasport (Disability World, 2015). Disability sport, used throughout this paper, describes the broadest entity and context of sport, physical activity, recreation, and leisure for and including individuals with disabilities (DePauw & Gavron, 2005). Opportunities for sports, recreation, and fitness for people with disabilities are increasing in number and diversity, and are becoming identified as part of a growing industry in the United States and around the world (Disabled World, 2015; Shapiro & Pitts, 2014). Disability sport is a growing segment of the sport business industry with viable jobs for graduates of sport management programs. Such growth and development of disability sport begs the question of who is organizing and managing these sports organizations, businesses, and events? One would assume these individuals are enrolled in curricula that train and educate them to be able to apply professional and successful sport management, sport business, sports event management, and sports programming knowledge. As other segments and businesses in the sport business industry, one would assume that many of these individuals are sport management graduates. While there is no data to support these assumptions, the field of sport management is the academic discipline that provides the foundation for specially educated sport business professionals to perform such roles and responsibilities (Pedersen & Thibault, 2014; Pitts, 2001; Pitts & Stotlar, 2013).

Sport management education programs at colleges and universities in the USA and around the world have grown in number over several decades, but in the past 20 years in particular (Zhang, Wang, Min, Chen, & Huang, 2016). Curricula and course work in sport management should reflect its curriculum standards, as well as be current to industry needs. Many sport management scholars have pushed for academia to offer quality and comprehensive curricula and challenged the lack of scope in the sport management literature (Barber, Parkhouse, & Tedrick 2001; Danylchuk, 2011; Quarterman, Hwang, Han, Jackson, & Pitts, 2013). Minten and Forsyth (2014) determined that a “key role of HE (higher education) was actually exposing students to the breadth of opportunities in sport” (p. 98). Minten & Forsyth further stated their research “suggests that when students enter HE many are only at the point where they are beginning to understand the range of opportunities available within the sport industry” (p. 98). A clear implication is that university educators, particularly those in sport management should be determined to offer curricula containing presentation of the multitude of job and career opportunities to at least be sure the student is introduced to the array.

The current organization focused on developing sport management curriculum standards and accreditation is the Commission on Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA). This organization, evolved in 2008 from the original NASSM-NASPE Accreditation Task Force that was begun in 1986, produces the current rendition of curriculum standards and accreditation protocol. The COSMA standards stipulates “excellence in sport management education requires that the design of each program offered...be consistent with current, acceptable practices and the expectations of professionals in the academic and sport management communities” (p. 13). In regard to disability sport, the words are not found in any COSMA documents. However, COSMA has a section titled “Diversity in Sport Management” which states: excellence in sport management education includes “diversity in its many forms” and that sport management students should be prepared to function effectively in an increasingly diverse sport industry” (p. 62). COSMA further states that the academic sport management program “...should ensure that students possess the knowledge, skills, and experiences to understand and operate effectively in a diverse sport environment ... and with a wide-range of people” (p. 62). Moreover, COSMA states that it “...expects its accredited members to be leaders in educating students to effectively function in a diverse sport environment...” which may include a wide variety of experiences or “the promotion of student/faculty diversity training” (p. 17). Although the current COSMA-produced documents offer no definition or description of diversity, one would assume COSMA includes addressing persons with disabilities and disability sport as it does other diverse groups based on race or gender, for example (Whitelaw, 2010).

Research conducted in sport management programs in attempts to determine if curriculum standards are being met is practically nonexistent. A search of the literature reveals merely five studies whose efforts were to examine curriculum and/or course content. Three of those studies collected course syllabi and reported on common elements offered according to the syllabus. Eagleman and McNary (2010) examined which courses were most frequently offered in undergraduate programs in sport management in the USA. They did not, however, include an examination of the actual literature/content being used in those courses. Determining what is and what is not being offered in the sport management classroom, then, needs attention. This type of research can be similar to the new area of research in which the sport management literature is being examined. There are now several studies analyzing sport management journals for content looking for what is and what is not covered. Such analysis can provide vital insight into the content of the classroom today, and forward an agenda for missing content to pave a path for tomorrow. In the studies examining the literature, most include an analysis of the published research to determine inclusiveness of the common sport management content areas, such as sport marketing, sport finance, and sport law; and if research produced in the body of knowledge is inclusive of the many different industry segments in this vastly diverse sport business industry, such as sporting goods retail or manufacture, girls sports, sport governance businesses, as well as the usual college sports and professional sports businesses (Pitts, 2016). Pitts (2016) also notes that in a young field such as sport management the body of knowledge is incomplete and in a state of constant improvement. In that article Pitts writes “a body of knowledge comprises the complete set of core concepts, terms, information, skills, and research in a field, is the foundation for the curriculum of programs, and is the set of knowledge needed by professionals to competently perform their jobs with best practices” (p. 1). The field of sport management should give attention to what is happening in classrooms in

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