Combining knowledge from sport management, marketing, media, leadership, governance, and consumer behavior in innovative ways, this book goes further than any other in surveying current theory and research on the business of women’s sport around the world, making it an unparalleled resource for all those who aspire to work in, or understand, women’s sport.

Featuring international perspectives, with authors from North America, South America, Europe, Asia, and Oceania, and insightful, in-depth profiles of real leaders within different sectors of women’s sport in the global sport industry, the Routledge Handbook of the Business of Women’s Sport offers an integrated understanding of the ways traditional media and social media impact both the understanding and the advancement of women’s sport properties, businesses, teams, and athletes. Innovative case studies show how societal issues such as gender, power, and framing impact the business of women’s sports and those who work in women’s sport.

An essential reference for any researcher or advanced student with an interest in women’s sport or women in business, and useful supplementary reading for researchers and advanced students working in sport business, sport management, mainstream business and management, or women’s studies.

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Contributors

This effort has thus far been focused on examining the financial, educational, and administrative impacts and opportunities for improvement within intercollegiate athletics. Weight has worked with university administrators and faculty senate leaders throughout the country and is an active consultant in intercollegiate athletics.

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Introduction

Nancy Lough and Andrea N. Geurin

The evolution of women’s sports over the last four decades has been dramatic, with indicators showing reason for continued growth. In this era when women’s sport is positioned to break new ground economically and socially, there is a need to focus on the value women bring to sport as athletes, managers, leaders, and scholars. Although the business of women’s sport is thriving now more than ever, theory, scholarship, and education focused on women’s sport are still lacking. Too often academic preparation programs neglect to focus on developing an understanding of women’s sport, despite the likelihood that graduates of both genders will find employment opportunities requiring a knowledge of the unique attributes of women’s sport. In this handbook we bring thought leaders together to engage in discussion on some of the key questions emerging as we highlight the untapped business potential of women’s sport.

Economically, the business of women’s sport continues to demonstrate viability. In 2018, the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) reported record increases in viewership and revenue. In 2017, three teams experienced double-digit growth as well as a new high for average attendance with 7,716 fans per game, and total attendance reaching 1,574,078 (Lough, 2018). In American college basketball, the Women’s Final Four reported a 20% increase in 2017, with nearly four million viewers watching the game live on television (Hobson, 2017). Similarly, viewership of the Women’s College World Series (WCWS) reached 814,000 in 2014 (Bracht, 2015) and had more viewers than the men’s College World Series in 2015 and 2016 (Nyatawa, 2017). In soccer, the 2015 Women’s World Cup championship game set viewership records, eclipsing ratings for other prominent mainstream sport properties.

A survey across eight key markets around the world (U.S., U.K., France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Australia and New Zealand) found that 84% of sports fans are interested in women’s sports. Of those, 51% are male, which confirms that women’s sports engage a gender-balanced audience.

(Nielsen Sports Women’s Sport Research, 2018).

Noting that women are not the only consumers of women’s sport is an important shift within the business of women’s sport. On average, men comprise the majority of fans for the Women’s Tennis Association (WTA), Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA), and
National Pro Fastpitch (NPF) (Mumcu, Lough, & Barnes, 2016), whereas well over a third of all major league sport fans (i.e., National Football League, Major League Baseball) in the United States are women. In terms of mainstream sport fans internationally, 47% of Australian sport fans are women according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), and a 2015 Gallup poll revealed that 51% of females in the United States identify themselves as sport fans (Jones, 2015), whereas approximately 45% of baseball fans in South Korea are female. These are just a few examples of the popularity of sport among women sport consumers globally. Fandom starts most often with socialization from family members and sport participation.

Recent research has found that women comprise 40% of all sport participants in the United States and, since 2009, girls’ sport participation has grown 50% each year (National Federation of State High School Associations, 2016). In the United States, 81% of millennial women played sport in school. In 2014 alone, 19 million girls played volleyball, basketball, and soccer (Sport & Fitness Industry Association, 2014). Female participation numbers are high in other countries as well. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015) reported that 59.4% of Australian females participated in sport in 2014. Sport England reported, in 2015, that the number of women playing sport in that country was increasing faster than the number of men (BBC, 2015). The growth in sport participation rates translates directly to business opportunities, either in development of new apparel and equipment for competition and training, or in marketing potential available to potential sponsors or sport properties.

In a related fashion, the business side of women’s sport has continued to grow. One recent author forecasting future sport business trends stated that “prioritizing women is paramount” for all sports properties (Antoniacci, 2016, para. 10). In 2014, women spent US$15.1 billion on active wear, which represented a 7% increase year on year (Sport & Fitness Industry Association, 2014). Women spend 80% of all sport apparel dollars and account for 85% of all brand purchases. This growing value of women’s sport has not been lost on those who seek beneficial business partnerships. The most recent sponsorship deal signed by the WTA was a 10-year, US$525 million media rights deal, making it the largest deal of this type in history (Sandomir, 2014). In this case, women’s tennis has been the business leader due to its equal broadcasting of events for both the men’s and the women’s major tournaments. This momentum was also evident in a deal signed by Samsung to sponsor the Italian elite volleyball league Serie A, one of the best professional volleyball leagues in the world (Labrie, 2016). The league includes Olympians from several countries, creating worldwide appeal similar to the WTA. Increasingly, marketing investments like these are being made in women’s sport by companies seeking to distinguish their brands in an increasingly cluttered environment.

Women’s sports fans of both genders are progressively using new media to watch games, discuss sports, form communities, and gain insights about their favorite players and teams (Billings & Brown, 2017). As a demonstration of the growing viability of women’s sport-driven business, espnW.com achieved record traffic in July of 2016, with 11.4 million unique visitors according to Omniture, up 24% from the same time the previous year (Glass, 2016). Research also indicated that ESPN Radio’s female audience grew by 42% from 2015 to 2016, one of the reasons being the development of new programming, led by women contributors from espnW. Although most sports media consumption still occurs via traditional outlets (such as radio, television, and newspapers), the proportion is dropping as consumers seek emerging formats like espnW and migrate toward innovative platforms creating new ways to connect with other fans. Never before have the lines between producer and consumer, fan and athlete been more blurred, warranting a need for innovative business approaches and analysis. The internet has provided unprecedented access for fans by making virtually everything available for consumption, which has enhanced the content availability for women’s sport fans while also making the understanding of the business of women’s sports substantially more complex.
Yet, women’s sport continues to face resistance not experienced by mainstream sports. For example, indicators show women’s sport receives only about 4% of all sports media coverage in the UK, and averages less than 10% in the United States (Musto, Cooky, & Messner, 2017). Some suggest that, with men representing 90% of sports editors, and 90% of these men being white, the challenges facing women’s sport to gain media attention and recognition as a viable sport product have been formidable. The Women’s Media Center’s 2015 report on “The status of women in the U.S. media” showed that just 10.2% of sports coverage in 2014 was produced by women. Women of color, who constitute over 70% of WNBA players, are particularly poorly represented in the media that cover them, with a 2014 report showing that just four sports editors at US newspapers were black women, and the numbers of reporters were correspondingly small. Despite the lack of coverage and representation of women in sports media, the 2015 Women’s World Cup championship game set viewership records for both men’s and women’s soccer. With 25.4 million viewers in the United States, the final match between the United States and Japan became the most-watched soccer game – men’s or women’s – in US history, eclipsing the previous record of 18.7 million watching the US men’s team play against Portugal (Deitsch, 2015).

Similarly, during the 2016 Olympic Games, women dominated the media coverage because they won most of the medals for the United States and were sought out by every major media outlet. Still, this pattern has occurred in previous Olympic Games, with media focused on women’s sport fading as the halo of the Games diminished. In this era, when women’s sport is positioned to break new ground economically and socially, there is a need to focus on communicating the value women bring to the business of sport. The momentum achieved from the support garnered during each Olympic Games needs to be sustained after the torch diminishes, because women’s sport today offers tremendous opportunity. From media outlets like espnW, to professional sport organizations like the WTA, to college sport, to mass participation sporting events dominated by women (e.g., Running USA reported that women comprised 57% of all road race participants in 2015), to burgeoning new businesses such as Oiselle, a women’s specialty athletic apparel company that experienced a three-year growth rate of 496% in revenues (Ryan, 2016), the opportunity for women’s sport to thrive as good business is more present now than ever.

Scholarship about women’s sport has evolved to demonstrate the emerging economic viability, while also pointing to the significant challenges that remain. Questions emerging include whether the antiquated approach to women’s sport coverage will be altered in the digital environment in ways that will add value. What marketing distinctions relevant for women’s sport are understood and what remains to be explored? How does “gatekeeping” prevent women from advancing to positions where decision-making authority could significantly impact the relationship between consumers and the product, property, or event? These questions continue to evolve along with opportunities for innovative ways to market and sell women’s sports and for groups previously at the margins to be recognized and valued (Maxwell & Lough, 2009; Messner, Duncan, & Wachs, 1996; Mumcu et al., 2016).

Unique women’s sport scholarship has emerged in the last decade. The significant upswing in the quantity and quality of research in this area has identified new avenues for understanding distinct aspects of women’s sport (Geurin–Eagleman & Burch, 2016; Kane, LaVoí, & Fink, 2013; Mumcu et al., 2016). All seem to agree that a different approach to the business of women’s sport is warranted, yet there is little agreement on what specific strategies are needed to insure a future leading to greater economic viability. In this handbook, analysis of scholarly work and industry trends will frame the discussion in each chapter to point toward strategic approaches that will continue the advancement of theory, as well as the development of women’s sport as a commodity and women as leaders in the business of sport.
Editors’ ambition

Few studies have focused on women sport consumers, their attitudes towards the marketing of women’s sport, and the relationship of their consumption behavior to their levels of fandom. For years scholars have reported that fans with stronger attachment to a sport team attend more events, consume related media more often, and purchase more merchandise than the fans with lower fandom (e.g., Murrel & Dietz, 1992; Wann, 2006; Brown, Devlin, & Billings, 2013). However, these studies focused on mainstream sport, not women’s sport. Similarly, Funk and James (2001) reported that, among sport fans, higher consumption intentions are possible with improved awareness. Increasing awareness has, however, continuously been a challenge for women’s sport due to the lack of traditional media coverage. Currently, interest is emerging in millennials and Generation Z as growing consumer bases. Yet millennials, who are known to have more of an entitlement mindset with regard to gender equity (Rubin & Lough, 2015), are less likely to view their fandom as a means to support their gender or to see women’s sport as a “cause,” which was a centerpiece of fan identity among the Title IX generation of fans. Thus, fan development now requires strategic approaches to identify and appeal to newly emerging market segments, some of which view and consume sport differently to past generations.

Sport business scholars have initiated investigations into these inherently fluctuating questions. For example, scholars have found similarities between women’s sport and mainstream sport, reporting favorable attitudes toward a sport property, whether a team or a league increases fans’ and spectators’ likelihood of attending events, watching games on TV, purchasing sport property products, and online consumption via social media and the internet (Dwyer, 2013; Funk & James, 2006; Lim, Martin, & Kwak, 2010). Important new women’s sport scholarship has emerged in the last decade, with recent years demonstrating a significant upswing in the quantity and quality of work in this area as researchers have identified new avenues for understanding these unique aspects of women’s sport (e.g., Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016; Kane et al., 2013; Mumcu et al., 2016). Although there is agreement that a new approach to the business of women’s sport is warranted, there remains little consensus on what specific strategies will insure a future of greater economic viability.

One solution points to the need to measure and improve the representation of women in sport executive positions, with the power to influence key decisions. The more diverse the set of leaders a business has, the more likely the success of that business (Tulshyan, 2015). Yet, in 2017 women comprised only 22% of the board directors at S&P 500 companies (Spencer Stuart, 2017). The lack of women in leadership roles is no different in sport business. From the 20% of women senior administrators in the NFL to the 13.1% of women executive committee members of International Federations of sport (Lapchick, 2016), women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions in all levels of sport around the globe (Burton, 2015). With men dominating the decision-making roles in women’s sport, and the emergence of an increasing economic value aligned with women’s sport, the need for a resource to educate those who aspire to work in the business realm of women’s sport is clear.

Overview of the book

The Handbook of the Business of Women’s Sport combines knowledge bases from sport management, marketing, media, sport participation, and consumer behavior in innovative ways, and is the most comprehensive resource on women’s sport business published to date. Consisting of 41 chapters organized by subject into 6 robust sections, the book provides a unique focus on the evolution and history of women’s sport business, the management of women’s sport, the
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The first section (Chapters 1–5) takes a deep dive into the history and evolution of women’s sport business, with chapters focusing on the historical and sociological foundations of women’s sport, influential women trailblazers within the field, the impact of Title IX in the US, and a unique perspective on women in professorial roles within the sport management academic landscape. Following this, the second section (Chapters 6–13) builds on the history of women’s sport business in order to examine the current management of women’s sport from a variety of perspectives and contexts. This section offers insights on the biases and stereotypes within women’s sport, the management of women’s sport in countries such as Australia, Canada, and Brazil, the management of women’s professional golf from both US and South Korean contexts, and insights into managing women’s sporting events. In addition, this section features a chapter focused on a unisex sport, equestrian, providing readers with an awareness and deeper understanding of this unique sport context in which women and men compete with and against each other even at the highest levels of the sport.

The third section (Chapters 14–18) examines financial and economic aspects of women’s sport business, with chapters focused on the economic demand for women’s professional sport, labor issues, social entrepreneurship, sports analytics, and the public expenditure on women’s sport in European nations. Following this, the fourth section (Chapters 19–27) examines the leadership and governance of women’s sport, beginning with a chapter focused on the under-representation of women in leadership roles. Next, several chapters discuss the issue of women’s leadership in sport from a wide variety of national and regional contexts, including Europe, Latin America, Australia, New Zealand, China, and the US. The truly global focus within this section provides a unique opportunity for readers to compare and contrast different countries and areas of the world, and to learn from the successes and challenges of other nations/regions.

The fifth section (Chapters 28–34) presents readers with current issues related to marketing and consumer behavior within women’s sport business. These chapters provide examples of successful marketing campaigns by women’s sport organizations, examples of sexism within marketing of women’s sport, the profiles and behaviors of women who are fans of women’s sport, and the areas of sponsorship and endorsements within women’s sport. The final section of the book (Chapters 35–41) discusses media and technology as these areas relate to women’s sport. Topics covered in the sixth section include traditional media representations of women athletes, promotion of women’s sport and women athletes via social media, coverage of women’s sport during the Youth Olympic Games and the Olympic Games, and specific examinations of media coverage of the sport of netball in New Zealand and women who compete in disability sport.

By implementing an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the business of women’s sport, this handbook delivers a contemporary view of the “state of women’s sport” from a business perspective. Analysis of scholarly work in each of the combined areas points toward strategic approaches to continue the advancement of theory as well as the development of women’s sport as a commodity and women as leaders in the business of sport.

Notes

Chapter 3

1 This data came from a SCOPUS search or the terms “women”, “gender,” and “feminism” within the Sociology of Sport Journal as of November 2017.
Chapter 8

1 The authors gratefully acknowledge the financial support of Sport Canada Research Initiative and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
2 For an excellent historical overview of Sport Canada’s policies for women and girls in sport, please refer to Safai (2013).

Chapter 14

1 The history of NBA attendance can be found at APBR.org (2018).
2 The story of the early history of attendance in baseball was told by Berri (2018a).
3 The original Orioles only played in 1901 and 1902. The Baltimore Orioles we know today were known as the Milwaukee Brewers in 1901. In 1902 this team moved to St. Louis and became known as the Browns. In 1954 the team moved to Baltimore and became the Orioles. See Baseball Reference (2018a).
4 Ken Williams and Bob Meusel tied for second in Major League Baseball with 24 home runs.
5 This is the same time period between the NBA after 21 seasons and the NBA today.
6 The American Pro Football Association (APFA) was founded in 1920. After two seasons, that league changed its name to the NFL (History.com, 2018).
7 The data for NFL attendance was noted by Berri, Schmidt, and Brook (2006) and originally appeared in the Sporting News’ Pro Football Guide (Carter, 2000).
8 Technically the NBA shares basketball-related income (BRI) with its players. BRI is not the same as total revenue so the split with players is not quite US$3.7 billion.
9 Berri (2008) details the wins produced model, a model originally noted in Berri et al. (2006). This model built off of what was reported by Berri (1999) and Berri and Krautmann (2006). Wins produced have also been reviewed in Berri and Schmidt (2010) and Berri (2012). It was applied to the WNBA in Berri and Krautmann (2013) and also to college men’s basketball in Berri (2016). Darvin et al. (2017) also applied wins produced to college women’s basketball and the WNBA. Berri (2018) reviewed all of this research.
10 Possession employed and possession acquired were originally derived in Berri (2008). The value of $x$ is derived from a model that determines how many team rebounds change possession. For details, see Berri (2008).
11 As Berri (2008) details, the value of each statistic is determined by taking the derivative of wins with respect to each box score statistic at the point of means.
12 Berri (2018b) reports the same results for NCAA Women’s Basketball and NCAA Men’s Basketball.
13 Berri (2008) also detail the impact of assists, blocked shots, and personal fouls on wins. Berri and Schmidt (2010) adds to the model by incorporating the diminishing returns effect of defensive rebounds.

Chapter 15

1 With one out 17 executive board members being female (5.9%), the German Football Association is below the German average of national sport associations (see Table 15.2).

Chapter 20

2 On managers, their tasks and activities there is a plethora of literature, academic studies, as well as help and guidance books; see, for example, Steinmann and Schreyögg (2000); for the field of sport, see Wadsack (1996), among others.
3 Compare Mascagni Stivachtis (2000, p. 33). See also the IOC’s homepage at: www.olympic.org/uk/organisation/commissions/women/index_uk.asp.
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6 The Challenge of Change (2003), published by the Ministerium für Städtebau contains a comprehensive bibliography on the subject of “Women in positions of leadership in sport.”
8 Compare www.iwg-gti.org/e/brighton.
9 An excellent website with links to relevant groups and organizations is that of the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity, to be found at www.caaws.ca.

Chapter 21

1 Francisco de Miranda (1750–1816) Venezuelan politician, military, diplomatic, writer, humanist, and visionary. He is known as “The First Universal Venezuelan” and “The Great Universal American.”
2 “Por mi parte os recomiendo una cosa sabio legislador: las mujeres. ¿Por qué dentro de un gobierno democrático la mitad de los individuos, las mujeres, no están directa o indirectamente representadas, mientras que si están sujetas a la misma severidad de las leyes que los hombres hacen a su gusto? ¿Por qué al menos no se les consulta acerca de las leyes que conciernen a ellas más particularmente como son las relacionadas con matrimonio, divorcio, educación de las niñas, etc.? Le confieso que todas estas cosas me parecen usurpaciones inauditas y muy dignas de consideración por parte de nuestros sabios legisladores” (Miranda, 1982, p. 124)

Chapter 23

1 According to Fan (2004), many young athletes, mostly girls, trained for 10–12 hours a day in those intensive training centers that primarily focused on athletics, gymnastics, swimming, football, basketball, volleyball, badminton, and table tennis.
2 All-China Sports Federation (ACSF) is a non-government, not-for-profit sport organization in China. It oversees various national sport associations in China.
3 “Small” sports refer to three small ball games—table tennis, badminton, and tennis; the “skill” focuses on the sports that require complicated skills and techniques; the “difficult” focuses on sports with a high level of difficulty; “female” refers to female athletes/sports; “a few” refers to individual sports (Xu, 2013).
4 Deng Yaping (born in 1973) is a famous table tennis player. She won four Olympic Gold medals and 14 other world championship titles. Yang Yang (born in 1976) is a well-known short track speed skater who won two Olympic Gold medals and 28 other world titles. Guo Jingjing (born in 1981) is a renowned diver. She was awarded four Olympic Gold medals and 10 world championship titles.

Chapter 31

1 Female players still receive significantly less prize money in lower-tier (less visible) tournaments than men, however.

Chapter 38

1 New Zealand and Australia are geographically separated by the Tasman Sea. Thus, competitions that include teams from both countries are commonly referred to as trans-Tasman leagues.

Chapter 40

1 Olympiatoppen is an organization that is part of Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports with responsibility for training Norwegian elite sport.
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