

Directions in Fandom and Spectatorship

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Spectatorship and fandom are fundamental to the understanding of sport, as evidenced by the dozens of articles in the *Journal of Sport Management* (*JSM*) researching these subjects. In Parks and Olafson's (1987) editorial introduction to the journal almost four decades ago, the editors reflected on the Games from 11 BC where the "success of such an extravaganza" rested on a range of individuals from "business managers" to "marketing directors" (p. 1). Nevertheless, it would be several more years until a research article devoted to the subject of fans appeared in *JSM* by way of Hansen and Gauthier's (1989) survey examination of factors influencing attendance at professional sporting events.

While many of the items showing differences across leagues would be familiar to academicians and practitioners today, the frameworks, methodologies, and complexity of our contemporary work on spectatorship has evolved and broadened. These have come from varying perspectives, including psychological (Kim et al., 2020; Koenigstoder et al., 2010), sociological (Schellenberg & Gaudreau, 2023), marketing (Ross et al., 2008), and economics (Bradbury, 2020; DeSchrivier & Jensen, 2002; Diehl et al., 2016; Mondello et al., 2017; Salaga et al., 2020; Sung et al., 2019; Tainsky et al., 2020), exploring identity (Hyatt & Foster, 2015; Wear & Heere, 2020), diversity (Delia et al., 2022), phenomenology (Sveinson & Toffoletti, 2022), policy (Mills, 2021), culture (Su et al., 2024), consumer behavior (Fujak et al., 2018; Kim & Trail, 2010; Ko et al., 2017), well-being (Berg et al., 2021; Delia et al., 2021; Gordon et al., 2025; Inoue et al., 2022; Kim & James, 2019), and innumerable other dimensions of fandom. The current issue of *JSM* is emblematic of the varied, compelling approaches to fandom that feature in this research.

The findings of Park and Lee (2025) suggest that effectance (e.g., empowerment perceptions) should be included in the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM). Specifically, they outline that "identified fans (attachment) may seek effectance to develop a sense of ownership over their teams, thereby shaping their behaviors (allegiance)" (p. following page assignments from publisher). Their findings also emphasize that social identity theory, along with stakeholder theory, provides a strong foundation for the psychological ownership framework. Moreover, psychological ownership is an overarching explanation of the underpinnings of fans' BIRGing behavior. The study states that sport fans have evolved over the last decade. They now take psychological ownership of teams within their fandom, and this ownership influences their behaviors. The authors conclude by articulating the need to continue to explore the outcomes of psychological ownership in a variety of sport contexts and the importance of examining the experiences of contemporary sport fans.

Fans increasingly look for sport organizations and athletes to take political stances aligning with their viewpoints. That notwithstanding, there is a gap in the literature when it comes to how fans' political identity shapes fan loyalty. The current work by Larkin (2025) presents two studies demonstrating the nuances of these relationships. In study one, the authors establish that conflict in political identity negatively impacts attitudinal but not behavioral loyalty. In study two, they uncover differences between conservative and liberal fans, specifically that right-leaning fans are less receptive to politics infiltrating sport.

Human flourishing, defined as a state of positive functioning in one's individual and social life, is the focus of Gordon et al. (2025). The authors examine how spectatorship can contribute to well-being in the promotion of flourishing in life. In studying Japanese baseball fans over two years, they find strongly identified fans who actively engage are more likely to feel flourished in the future. Supporting a team enhances fans' physical, mental, and social well-being.

The usage of augmented reality (AR) in spectator sports has increased substantially in recent years. For example, the National Football League (NFL) has integrated AR technology into its broadcasts for selected games. Using the habituation and sensitization framework, Ahn and Ko (2025) assess how individuals viewing NFL content perceive the visual effects of AR and how broadcasting format shapes viewing experiences. The authors demonstrate patterns of sensitization and habituation differ based on the consumer's level of sport involvement. Highly involved consumers exhibit preference for brief AR highlights, while low involvement consumers exhibit sensitization by watching both brief and extended AR highlights. The results indicate enjoyment of AR technology is dependent on the sport-specific involvement level of the consumer.

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) games are immensely popular live televised content in the United States, routinely generating viewership in the millions and even tens of millions. Its organizational structure, however, creates scheduling complexities as conferences individually negotiate distinct television contracts with broadcast partners. Park et al. (2025) develops a model for predicting viewership which can be used to improve scheduling efficiency and optimize media revenues for conferences and affiliate members. The authors demonstrate the comparative importance of relative contest quality. In other words, the authors illustrate the importance of relative quality for a given game in comparison to the other live broadcasts it is scheduled against. This relative quality measure also differs in importance between higher-quality and lower-quality games.

To conclude, *JSM* scholarship has built from Hansen and Gauthier's (1989) initial account of factors influencing attendance at professional sporting events to a more robust and thorough understanding of fandom and spectatorship. The articles in this issue contribute to the development of various theories related to fandom and spectatorship, and outline the complexity of the sport consumer

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today. These results emphasize the varied and broad perspectives of spectatorship that must be continually embraced as we navigate our design of sport management research into the future.

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