

## Scholarship: The Other "Bottom Line" in Sport Management

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"The Calf Path," by Sam Walter Foss

One day through the primeval wood, a calf walked home, as good calves should;  
But made a trail all bent askew, a crooked trail, as all calves do.  
Since then three hundred years have fled, and I infer the calf is dead;  
But still he left behind his trail and thereby hangs my moral tale.  
The trail was taken up next day by a lone dog that passed that way!  
And then a wise bellwether sheep pursued the trail o'er vale and steep,  
And drew the flock behind him too, as good bellwethers always do.  
And from that day, o'er hill and glade through these old woods a path was made;  
And many men [folks] wound in and out, and dodged and turned and bent about,  
And uttered words of righteous wrath because 'twas such a crooked path.  
But still they followed . . . do not laugh, the first migrations of that calf!  
This forest path became a lane that bent and turned and turned again.  
This crooked lane became a road, where many a poor horse with his [her] load  
Toiled on beneath the burning sun and traveled some three miles in one.  
And thus a century and a half, they trod the footsteps of that calf.  
The years passed on in swiftness fleet; the road became a village street.  
And this, before men [folks] were aware, a city's crowded thoroughfare.  
And soon the central street was this of a renowned metropolis;  
And men [folks] two centuries and a half trod in the footsteps of that calf.  
A hundred thousand men [folks] were led by one calf near three centuries dead.  
For men [some] are prone to go it blind along the calf paths of the mind;  
And work away from sun to sun to do what other men [folks] have done.  
They follow in the beaten track, and out and in and forth and back,  
And still their devious course pursue, to keep the path that others do.  
They keep the path a sacred groove along which all their lives they move;  
But how the wise old wood gods laugh who saw the first primeval calf!  
For thus such reverence is lent to well-established precedent.

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### **Sport Management Scholarship**

Those of us in sport management—administrators, faculty, and students alike—have chosen not to walk down that well-worn calf path. Instead, we have made a path of our own. We freely acknowledge that we share commonalities with other areas within the academy, but we also insist that we have our own unique characteristics and contributions that set us apart from them.

When we decided to strike out on a path of our own making, we knew that we would need to create structures to accommodate our professional and academic pursuits. Therefore, we established a professional association, the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM), and a scholarly journal, the *Journal of Sport Management*, in an effort “to promote, stimulate and encourage study, research, scholarly writing and professional development in the area of sport management” (from Article II of the NASSM Constitution).

In his President’s Address at the first NASSM conference, Bob Boucher (1986) noted that “sport management is a field that cannot divorce itself from practical *and* professional concerns. In effect, the proof of administrative theory and practice is in the pudding, and therefore we should make every effort to bridge this ‘gap’ whether it be real or mythical” (Boucher, 1986, p. 5; italics added). The underlying assumption was that sport management academics would approach the development of theory and practice in sport management through involvement in scholarship, each of us pursuing the advancement of the body of knowledge in ways associated with our own particular research focus.

During the past several years, there has been quite a bit of discussion about the definition of scholarship and how it should be manifested in the study of sport management. At times, it appeared that we were divided into two camps: On one side, it was rumored, we had researchers who wanted to “develop theory in a vacuum”; on the other side, we had practitioners who wanted to “tell sport managers how to sell more tickets.” Presumably, individuals in the theory group were concerned about functioning as members of the academy, and those in the practice group were concerned about what is commonly called the bottom line.

In reality, neither of these camps ever actually existed. An examination of the literature reveals that our colleagues who have called for research with a theoretical base, for example Parkhouse (1987), Parkhouse and Ulrich (1979), Paton (1987), Slack (1991), and Zeigler (1987), have consistently emphasized the importance of *applying* in a practical setting the knowledge gained from this research. Furthermore, most articles published in the *Journal of Sport Management* clearly exist within a theoretical framework. The symbiotic relationship between theory and practice in sport management scholarship has, therefore, already been established in the literature—but the question remains how best to translate sport management theory into practice.

### **Boyer’s Four Styles of Scholarship**

In his well-respected book, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professorate*, Boyer (1990) provided a perspective on scholarship that may be useful

to us in reaching our objective of enhancing this relationship between theory and practice in sport management—in effect, bridging the gap between the functions of the academy and the realities of the bottom line. Boyer's perspective on scholarship could appropriately be adopted by sport management scholars to examine the contemporary landscape in sport and to investigate many of the concerns with which we are all familiar. Some of these concerns have their genesis in the bottom-line approach whereby anything that is legal and makes money must, by definition, be acceptable. I am certain I am not the only academic who has heard that rhetoric from a multitude of students. Given that frame of reference, I have chosen to title this paper "Scholarship: The Other 'Bottom Line' in Sport Management."

Boyer (1990) suggested that "the work of the professoriate might be thought of as having four separate, yet overlapping, functions. These functions are: the scholarship of *discovery*, the scholarship of *integration*, the scholarship of *teaching*, and the scholarship of *application*" (p. 16). The scholarship of discovery asks, "What is to be known, what is yet to be found?" (p. 19). We generally use a number of terms to describe this type of scholarship—terms such as *original research*, *basic research*, or *the pursuit of new knowledge*. The scholarship of integration asks, "What do the findings *mean*? Is it possible to interpret what's been discovered in ways that provide a larger, more comprehensive understanding?" (p. 19). In addition to bringing "new insight to bear on original research" (p. 19), the scholarship of integration "also means interpretation, fitting one's own research—or the research of others—into larger intellectual patterns" (p. 19).

With respect to the scholarship of teaching, Boyer (1990) stated that "the work of the professor becomes consequential only as it is understood by others" (p. 23). He further asserted that "Without the teaching function, the continuity of knowledge will be broken and the store of human knowledge dangerously diminished" (p. 24). In the scholarship of application, we ask, "How can knowledge be responsibly applied to consequential problems?" (p. 21). It is in this context that we can add *our* question: In sport management, can original research and other forms of scholarship coexist with the demands of the fiscal bottom line?

If we accept the notion that scholarship can, in fact, be expressed in a variety of ways, the challenge then becomes, How can the sport management professoriate utilize these four styles of scholarship to expand the body of knowledge associated with our field of study? Although Boyer's perspective is applicable in most areas of inquiry within sport management, the behavioral domain is a particularly appropriate area in which to explore the possibilities.

### **The Behavioral Domain in Sport**

A number of academics, myself included, have become increasingly interested in the sport experience as it reflects various aspects of the behavioral dimension of our culture. The following recent phenomena are among those that have captured my attention.

1. A controversy has emerged about the use of images and sacred objects of Native Americans and Native Canadians in the promotion of sport. It is interesting to note, however, that we abandoned similar images of other ethnic groups several decades ago and now find them quite shocking.

2. In spite of evidence of a disproportionate number of male athletes being involved in sexual assault crimes (Melnick, 1992), reports have surfaced of some athletes, coaches, and administrators who responded to the Anita Hill–Clarence Thomas hearings and other instances of sexual misconduct with lighthearted jokes about sexual harassment.

3. The abuse of Lisa Olson by members of the New England Patriots football team was trivialized and diminished by some fans and journalists, to say nothing of the owner of the team himself.

4. The fourth concern is the disturbing use of the military metaphor whereby "one team's success can only be achieved by the opposing team's destruction" (Melnick, 1992, p. 35). This metaphor has traditionally flourished in the male sport experience and is now being adopted by leaders of women's sport. Confrontational phrases such as "generals in our army," "we must organize the troops," and "get more soldiers" are beginning to appear in the literature, thus relegating sport to the same arena as armed combat.

5. Women's athletic achievements continue to be subjected to ambivalent coverage in the media. For example, in a recent photo spread of Lisa Leslie, the first woman to dunk a basketball, the image of a competent athlete was counterbalanced by the image of a feminine campus personality (Taylor, 1991, p. 78). The accompanying article, "A Model Role Model," further emphasized that Leslie is more than "just an athlete" because she "cuts as dashing a figure on court as she does on the USC campus" (Taylor, 1991, p. 79).

6. Twenty years after the passage of Title IX, women are still grossly underrepresented in coaching and administrative positions (Acosta & Carpenter, 1992). Further, a recent NCAA study revealed a shameful degree of sex discrimination at all levels of intercollegiate sport (NCAA, 1992).

7. Afro-Americans are grossly underrepresented at the managerial and administrative levels of sport, and there is not one Afro-American head football coach at any of the 106 Division I-A institutions.

8. At least one men's basketball coach is known to place tampons in his players' lockers to suggest their femininity (i.e., to underscore their weakness) after a poor performance. This same coach has been reported to advise women that "If rape is inevitable, relax and enjoy it."

9. A women's basketball coach announced that she would never knowingly allow a lesbian to play on her team.

10. Aggrandizement of violence has continued to be used to promote some sports. For example, a recent ad for the Columbus Chill ice hockey team offered the hockey game as a way to help attendees "with all that unresolved anger you have for your mother." The ad went on to state, "She was overbearing. Controlling. Hypercritical. And deep down, when she was at her worst, didn't you want to check her real hard into the boards?" (Columbus Chill, 1992).

A typical reaction to these scenarios is to lament the sad state of affairs and to develop elaborate, and frequently helpful, programs to modify the behavior of athletes. However, each of these situations calls into question the value systems and behaviors, not of the athletes, but of the people responsible for the sport environment—managers, coaches, journalists, administrators, and marketers—the people whose shoes our graduates will fill some day. This is why I believe the students sitting in our classrooms today are the people to whom our scholarship can be the most meaningful. They are the individuals who can apply our theoretical information in the sport environments of the future, hence becoming change agents for the improvement of sport.

### **Application of Boyer's Perspective**

Although Boyer (1990) stressed that scholarship does not necessarily progress in a linear fashion, linearity can be useful in illustrating how his perspective could be applied to the study of the behavioral dimension of sport. First, with regard to the *scholarship of discovery*, we might ask, "What new knowledge is needed in sport management, and how do we discover it?" Some of the papers presented at the 1992 NASSM conference are illustrative of the types of research that will provide new information that sport managers can use to improve the sport experience. For example, Slack and Hall (1992), Hums (1992), and Frisby (1992) discussed their findings relative to gender differences at the management level, and Evangelopoulos (1992) reported on his investigation of the influence of lifestyle and physical and social surroundings on the consumption of professional sport. Additional original research that could be conducted might include

- interviewing athletes, coaches, and administrators about their sport experiences to determine if there are ways we could structure the sport environment differently to better demonstrate its place in the totality of life;
- conducting content analyses of print and broadcast media associated with sporting events, not just to discover gender or race differences, but also to investigate other characteristics of media treatment of sport;
- conducting participant observations or making audiotapes or videotapes of locker-room or athletics residence-hall environments, along the lines of Curry's (1991) work; and
- using the survey method as a way to test in the sport setting hypotheses from other disciplines, although Gordon Olafson (1990) has quite properly alerted us that we tend to conduct an inordinate amount of survey research.

Next, the *scholarship of integration* asks, "What do the findings mean?" According to Boyer (1990), there is a trend among contemporary scholars to "move beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries, communicate with colleagues in other fields, and discover patterns that connect" (p. 20). This trend is becoming more evident in sport management as researchers discover isolated facts and then

give meaning to them by placing them in the perspective of the bigger picture. For example, Kane and Parks (1992) reported an investigation of gender differences in media portrayals of athletes and interpreted the findings in light of theories associated with hierarchy and ambivalence. Armstrong and Soucie (1992), Lawrence-Harper (1992), and Slack and Berrett (1992) applied theories developed in management in general to a variety of scenarios in sport management.

Through the scholarship of integration, we know that sociology theory informs our understanding of the power of images to influence attitudes and actions. Theoretical constructs also help us understand how socially ingrained negative attitudes toward women may contribute to violence against women and that using women to illustrate weakness perpetuates a dangerous stereotype. Research about homophobia helps us understand why some coaches might reject nontraditional sexual identity among their players and why some sport marketers might prefer to publish images of female athletes in nonathletic roles as opposed to images of strong, self-confident, physically active women. As academics, our understanding of sport must be undergirded by knowledge of such theories and of their use in interpreting the sport experience. Such knowledge not only has potential for improving the sport experience but makes our professional lives infinitely more interesting than just telling people how to sell more tickets. Indeed, it makes us worthy of the designation *academics*.

Third, the *scholarship of teaching* implies sharing our knowledge with students. As Boyer (1990) stated, "Inspired teaching keeps the flame of scholarship alive" (p. 24). I would add that, in its turn, scholarship keeps the teaching aflame. From my perspective, students are the greatest beneficiaries of our scholarship because they will be in positions to use their understandings in shaping the sport culture of the future.

The curriculum accreditation standards developed by the NASPE/NASSM Joint Task Force (1991) include the behavioral dimension as one of the content areas that must be present in the curriculum. Among the indicators identified for the behavioral dimension are (a) students "must understand how sport mirrors the society in which it exists," (b) they must "gain an appreciation of sport as a medium for integrating gender, ethnic, religious, and disabilities interests," and (c) they "must understand sociological phenomena and how they affect participation and behavior" (p. 6).

It is through the scholarship of teaching that such knowledge and values are transmitted to students, and it is through this transmission and acceptance by students that we can hope to have an impact on the ways sport is managed in the future. Many professors are already involved in this type of teaching. For example, Blann and Mosher (1992) have given us suggestions about presenting information associated with the behavioral domain to sport management students. Cuneen (1992) has reminded us that we need athletics administration curricula that include a sensitivity to social issues. We need to apply such ideas at our own institutions.

An athletics administrator recently stated that in the contemporary sport scene, "We don't need theory, we need action!" Of course we need action, but informed, consistent action cannot exist in the absence of a theoretical framework.

It is not enough to tell students what to do and how to do it. They must be equipped with theoretical constructs to serve as standards for action in new situations. By studying the “whys” of human behavior, students can begin to develop strategies for action.

For example, if students understand the concept of hegemony, in which oppressed groups accept their lot in life as the natural order of things and consequently collaborate in their own oppression, they may understand why some Native Americans and Native Canadians choose to have their caricatures used as logos for sport teams and why such choices might be self-destructive. If students understand the nuances of different worldviews (Highlen, 1992), they may understand why issues of gender equity create so much conflict and may begin to develop strategies based on that understanding. If students know about Metheny’s (1965) theories of sex-appropriate and sex-inappropriate sports, they will understand the origins of sanctions against sex-inappropriate sports for women and may begin to explore ways those sanctions might be countered.

If students understand that violence against women is rampant today, they won’t *need* anyone to tell them why an ice hockey ad glorifying brutality against mothers isn’t funny or that it shouldn’t be used to sell tickets to a sporting event. If they are aware that many people use violence as their first choice of action in conflict resolution, they will understand why the military metaphor is inappropriate to describe the sport experience. If students develop their critical-thinking skills, they will recognize that an “issue” such as female journalists in the locker room is, in fact, a straw person and that the real issue is whether athletes have the right to abuse individuals who are going about their jobs.

We have been extremely successful in teaching students about values believed to be inherent in sport. For example, even in the absence of empirical evidence, we have convinced generations of students that the sport experience will build good character. Surely, when working with theoretical foundations and scholarly documentation, we can teach students how to improve the sport experience and increase the likelihood that it might contribute to the development of a “kinder and gentler” society.

Last, through the *scholarship of application*, we can make another major contribution. Boyer’s (1990) concept of application revolves around the fourth obligation of the professoriate—service related to one’s area of scholarship. As the sport management professoriate, we can use the scholarship of application in two ways: (a) we can *send* these understandings into sport settings with our graduates (Chouinard, Pelletier, & Soucie, 1986), and (b) we can *take* theoretical understandings into sport settings through consulting activities.

With respect to our graduates, we can hope that good teaching will translate into wise application in the practical setting. With respect to consulting, however, our application becomes a more direct process. As Zeigler (1987) stated, “A manager on the job is typically confronted with real-life problems. To resolve the problem effectively, something better than trial and error is needed in our increasingly complex society. That something should be the most tenable theory available” (p. 19).

Those of you who are asked to consult with the sport industry have a unique opportunity to help sport managers make theory-based decisions that reflect an awareness of contemporary social thought. For example, intercollegiate and professional sport teams could benefit from current theory regarding messages inherent in the use of images of different cultural groups to promote sport. Sport journalists could begin to understand that they not only reflect the interests and attitudes of their readers but also contribute to the development of those interests and attitudes. Sport marketers might be interested in recent research on violence and the relationship of the sport experience to the perpetuation of violence. And homophobic coaches and athletics administrators would benefit from research on homosexuality as well as from information gleaned from interviews with gay athletes.

### Synthesis of Scholarships

Individuals who are called upon to be consultants are typically expected to provide information that will assist a particular agency or organization toward the realization of a healthy bottom line. I suggest that through the scholarship of application, we can take into the sport industry a synthesis of the scholarships of discovery, integration, and teaching. At that point, the two bottom lines of sport management will merge because, as Boyer (1990) reminded us, "Theory surely leads to practice. But practice also leads to theory" (p. 16). Through this merger, each bottom line will inform the other, and we can take advantage of yet another opportunity to express our independence and to reject the old calf path for a more enlightened path of our own making. The bottom line of scholarship can coexist with the fiscal bottom line, and their mutually beneficial coexistence has the potential to enhance the quality of the sport experience for future generations.

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