




HOW TO APPROACH SPORTS DEBATES

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(with thanks to Seamus Dove)



“In 2018, the United Nations for the first time reaffirmed the importance of sport as an enabler of sustainable development through a resolution. This was accompanied by a call to member states and other associations to further promote sport and its practice for the benefit of all.

Now that the COVID-19 pandemic has limited the opportunities for sport worldwide and major sporting events such as World Championships and Olympic Games have had to be postponed, the UN has once again emphasised the importance of sport. It calls on member states to ‘include sport and physical activity in COVID-19 recovery plans, integrate sport and physical activity into national sustainable development strategies and promote safe sport as a contribution to the health and well-being of individuals and communities’.”

[UN resolution reaffirms the importance of sport in global crisis management \(ispo.com\)](https://ispo.com)

TYPES OF SPORTS DEBATES

Sports & economics

- Common issues: ownership structures, salary caps, drafts, sports unions, pay for college athletes, TV revenue division
- Examples:
 - THW, as the Bundesliga, scrap the 50+1 rule (i.e. a club must hold a majority of its voting rights)
 - THBT US college athletes should be paid as professionals

Sports & IR:

- Common issues: international events and hosting rights, national teams, boycotts, nationalism, the politics of decisions, i.e. doping bans
- Examples:
 - THW abolish the Olympic Games
 - THBT FIFA should reallocate the 2022 World Cup from Qatar

TYPES OF SPORTS DEBATES

Sports & social justice

- Common issues: activism in sport, gender pay gap, trans athlete participation, quotas for local players
- Examples:
 - THW establish quotas for immigrants on national sports teams
 - THBT sports associations' ultimate goal should be the integration of women into mixed teams rather than achieving parity between male and female teams

'Pure sport':

- Common issues: why people enjoy sport, excellent vs. parity, athletes vs. fans
- Examples:
 - THW, as a new follower of a major sporting league (i.e. EPL, NFL), choose to follow a less successful team from one's local area than a more successful but not geographically close team
 - THW allow doping in all professional sports

KEY SPORTS TRENDS TO BE AWARE OF

1. Growth of sports

- Industry estimated to be worth over \$500 billion worldwide
 - Growth averaging at 4.3% since 2014
- Includes: TV distribution, ticketing, betting, advertising, merchandise, etc.
- 'Participatory' and 'spectator' – the latter having higher growth
- Highest market share: 1) Football, 2) American football, 3) Baseball, 4) Formula One, 5) Basketball
- Biggest companies: 1) Nike, 2) ESPN, 3) Adidas, 4) Gatorade, 5) Sky Sports
- Growth attributed to 1) new markets (such as China and India), 2) urbanisation, 3) increased women's participation, 4) fitness boom and 5) new digital technologies

2. The rise of e-sports

- COVID context
- Exceeded \$1 billion industry revenue in 2019
- Blurred lines between traditional sports and e-sports (i.e. Formula One)



KEY SPORTS TRENDS TO BE AWARE OF

3. Increasing use of technology and analytics

- AI-enabled robot umpires in baseball
- Real-time player data in the NFL
- Digital engagement pattern detection

4. Refined gameplay and metrics

- The NBA's 3-Point Revolution
- Sabermetrics research in baseball (i.e. how often a team should try to 'steal')

KEY SPORTS TRENDS TO BE AWARE OF

5. Progressivism/activism in sport

- BLM – taking the knee
- LA Clippers owner Donald Sterling banned for life from association with the Clippers or the NBA, fined, and co-owners urged to force him to sell
- Cleveland Indians and Washington Redskins renaming themselves
- But not without controversy – i.e. LeBron James + Hong Kong protestors

6. Growing ticketing and broadcasting for women's events

- 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup
- Women's T20 Cricket World Cup
 - One of the few global sporting events uninterrupted by COVID
 - Explicit decision to hold it separate to the men's tournament



KEY SPORTS TRENDS TO BE AWARE OF

7. Archival content

- COVID context
- Includes reruns, analysis and throwback infographics
- Storytelling used to overcome knowing the outcome

8. Increased sports gambling

- Around 70% of global gambling revenue
- Expected to reach nearly \$155 billion by 2024
- Emerging formats like fantasy sports (i.e. virtual teams with proxies of real players)



KEY SPORTS TRENDS TO BE AWARE OF

9. New Olympic sports

- 2020/21: Surfing, sport climbing, skateboarding, karate and baseball/softball
- Breakdancing to be also added for 2024 (Paris)

10. Decline in children's participation

- The average child today spends less than three years playing a sport and quits by age 11 – vs. age 14 three years ago (Aspen Institute)
- Common reasons: inadequate coaching / resulting stress, cost barriers
- Exacerbated due to COVID

KEY SPORTS TRENDS TO BE AWARE OF

11. Athletes branding

- Thanks to social media, athletes have more control than ever
- Many athletes launching their own brands (i.e. Serena Williams, David Beckham)
- The importance of a 'clean' image/reputation (i.e. Maria Sharapova losing endorsements with Porsche, TAG Heuer and others after taking a banned substance)
- 'Lifetime deals' (i.e. LeBron James & Nike, Lionel Messi & Adidas)

12. The rise of 'super teams'

- A franchise with two to three (or more) elite players, which are in or near their prime
 - i.e. in the NBA: LA Lakers, Golden State Warriors, LA Clippers
- Reasons for this:
 - Sport becoming more profitable and salary cap bloating (where they exist)
 - Increased player agency including player unions

KEY SPORTS TRENDS TO BE AWARE OF

13. Organisation, oversight and governance issues

- Increased profitability raises concerns about corruption and accountability in sports
- US officials accusing FIFA officials of bribery from Russia and Qatar to win hosting rights for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups
- Continued cases of match-fixing, even in less popular sports (i.e. table tennis)
- Increased dependency on sports managers

14. Continued focus on athlete safety

- Consideration of concussion substitutes in football
- Increased scrutiny for child athletes, i.e. USA Gymnastics sex abuse scandal
- However – significant politics at play – i.e. Russia's World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) ban recently halved + individual athletes can still compete



STRATEGIC ERRORS TO AVOID

1. Not sufficiently impacting!

- Source of fun and enjoyment
- Myriad of health benefits
- Provides community
- Informs your identity (often tied to culture, nation, etc.)
- A large part of many economies
- The capacity to advance political causes (i.e. through boycott)

2. Not unpacking the incentives of different actors

- Actors include: fans, athletes, management, shareholders and owners, sponsors, governments, etc.
- What do they care about? i.e. profit, morality, the sport itself?

STRATEGIC ERRORS TO AVOID

3. Not talking about a wide range of contexts

- Women's sport often operates very differently to men's sport
- Developing countries can have different constraints
-what should we care the most about?

4. Assuming all leagues operate the same way

- No salary cap and drafts in most Euro-leagues, but many in NA sport
- Other differences: access to funding, regulation, etc.
- Even the way that champions are determined

STRATEGIC ERRORS TO AVOID

5. Forgetting alternatives

- Revenue sharing agreements to help smaller teams (e.g. in the NBA)
- Consortiums to pool together funding and expertise (e.g. IBM)
- Drafts (counter-balancing for large team dominance)

6. Freaking out when you don't know specific facts

- There is always a case that is not dependant on technical knowledge
- Go back to the lists of impacts + stakeholders and see if anything comes from that
- E.g. *TH, as Lionel Messi, would choose not to leave Barcelona*

SPORTS DEBATES TO WATCH

HWS Round Robin 2019, R5

TH opposes the centrality of sport to national identity

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qIsDkxJyDJc>

IBA Nations League 2020, R2

TH, as fans of the club, supports a takeover by the Saudi Arabian Public Investment Fund

Info Slide: A professional sports club of a city in the West which has a glorious past but is currently struggling to compete at the top. A group of investors, led by Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund, the Public Investment Fund, launched a bid to purchase the club. PIF has almost US\$400bln under management, with multiple times the resources of any other sports club owners.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R78MMTX06Ic>

Monash Australs 2020, R3

That we prefer a world where sports are not commercialised

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Qr_aHL4o6o

LUMS Online Pre-ABP, Open Quarter Final

TH, as Lionel Messi, would choose not to leave Barcelona

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1bWt4hNgaSQ>

OTHER TRAININGS

Brent Schmidt

Sports Aren't Low Impact (2020)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3546X9ETOC0>

Janko Djordjevic

Winning sports motions (2017)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8V49kKy-r4>

Liam Tomlinson – Monash Association of Debaters

Sports in Debating (2014)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gv4Wwde5pGU>

SPORTS RESOURCES

1. Join debating sportsball:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1329360053784869>

2. Follow sports media: e.g. ESPN, Fox Sports, Sports Illustrated

3. Read key literature:

- [2021 Sports Industry Outlook | Deloitte US](#)
- [Why the Sports Industry is Booming in 2020 \(and which key players are driving growth\) | Torrens University](#)
- [Global Corruption Report: Sport - Publications - Transparency.org](#)