



Introduction

Sporting passion and marketing rigour underpin our fragile traditions

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Australians and New Zealanders are often typified as being obsessed with, and obsessive about, sport. The sporting achievements of these two countries often exceed what could be expected given their populations and levels of financial investment in sport; and sports management research, training and practice in this region are also highly active and evolving.

Academic interest is particularly strong. The Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand (SMAANZ) was founded in 1995 with the aim of fostering sport-related scholarly activities. SMAANZ runs an annual conference and has published a journal since 1998. The Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy (ANZMAC) has had a sports marketing stream at its annual conference for over a decade now, and several other sport and non-profit themed conferences make for a vibrant community of researchers.

To characterise the disparate research work being undertaken is difficult, but the sports research agenda is certainly influenced by the key forces affecting sport in this region. Small markets, leading to strong competition for entertainment-based consumer expenditure, participants and corporate support shape the sporting landscape here. These factors, which dominate management practice, also drive the research.

The papers published here reflect current trends and demonstrate the move towards empiricism and rigour, with all involving large-sample surveys. The topics researched include sponsorship, involvement and motivation; these are key areas for Australians and New Zealanders, who must consider the fragility of our sporting traditions both in participation and

commercial terms. Fortunately, there is increasing support for academic research in sports marketing, with major national bodies such as the Australian Research Council providing funds to projects targeting sponsorship and other relevant areas.

Australia's most attended and watched sporting code is Australian Rules Football (as played at the highest level in the Australian Football League, the AFL) – an almost archaic throwback to the days when each country had its own dominant sporting code. This year the AFL negotiated the largest TV rights package deal ever in this country (\$A780m in 2007-11). At the same time, however, 'soccer' ('football' to most) has captured the largest participation rates, especially among school children, and gained a massive boost in support following Australia's successful entry into the World Cup. Irrespective of the Australian team's performance in Germany, the 'world game' looms as a significant challenge to the other major football codes in this region – Rugby Union, Rugby League and Australian Rules.

Encouragingly, all four football codes are thriving at present. The relaunched Football Federation of Australia's A-League (soccer), which includes a team from New Zealand, has been well received in its first season, drawing solid crowds around the country. Rugby Union has expanded into Western Australia, an AFL heartland, and met with strong crowd support. The AFL in particular is in a strong position to meet this challenge, with the TV rights locked away and another year of very high attendances (over 490,000 people attended the eight games played in one weekend earlier this year). The success of these sports is a testament to the sophistication and expertise of



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sports marketers in this region. Add to this mix the dominance of cricket in the summer months, national professional leagues in netball and basketball, strong amateur competitions in just about every sport imaginable and wide TV coverage of international sport, and the picture is of a very crowded market.

It is no surprise then that many sports marketers and researchers are focusing on increasing crowd participation and loyalty. Attracting and retaining supporters of the sports and teams is crucial, especially if, as for the AFL (and unlike soccer), there is little international promotion or branding to leverage.

Two of the papers in this edition address the issue of building involvement in, and attendance at, sporting events. Larry Neale and Daniel Funk extend the now well established research stream looking at the nature and composition of fan motivation and loyalty. Testing the Sport Interest Inventory (SII) for the first time in an AFL context provides further support for both the instrument and the notion that sports fans worldwide are remarkably similar. This work reinforces the belief held by many sports managers and researchers that social, aspirational and entertainment factors are key influences on the attendance and loyalty of modern sports consumers.

John Hall and Barry O'Mahony continue this theme, focusing on whether attendance motives differ across genders. As demonstrated by the Neale and Funk study, where 45% of respondents were female, women are large consumers of live sport in this region. Hall and O'Mahony's findings highlight the similarity in motives across all attendees, but suggest that subtle managerial actions could improve the attendance experience of women. The importance to women of a social experience and of secure, well maintained facilities are highlighted in this paper.

On a different but related tack, the other two papers here focus on sponsorship evaluation and return on investment. Again, the interest in this field of research in this region can be attributed directly to the importance of the financial contribution which

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sponsors make to this fragile sports market. In AFL clubs, corporate funding, including sponsorship and hospitality, constitutes the largest single revenue stream.

Jan Charbonneau and Ron Garland focus on the fit between celebrity athletes and the products they might endorse. The experimental design highlights the complex role that dimensions such as gender, leadership and trustworthiness play in shaping the perceptions people have of what constitutes a good product-endorser fit. Given the all-too-common negative experience that organisations have had with athlete endorsers, research that allows greater insight into how consumer perceptions are formed is very valuable commercially.

Finally, our own paper (Shaw and McDonald) tests the seemingly simple question of whether satisfied fans (club members in this case) respond more favourably to sponsors than those who are dissatisfied. The findings, that indeed a positive (if somewhat weak) relationship does exist between satisfaction and sponsorship outcomes such as brand recall and intention to purchase, provide further support for managerial actions aimed at improving the experience of sports fans.

We would like to thank the authors of the research papers presented here, all of whom have developed their papers substantially since first presenting them at local conferences. Related to that, we acknowledge the contribution made by track chairs and the reviewers of the original papers, and those who have assisted in editing and reviewing subsequent drafts.