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Sport-based entrepreneurship: towards a new theory of entrepreneurship and sport management

Vanessa Ratten

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Abstract The entrepreneurship and sport management disciplines have grown significantly in the past decade. Sport is an entrepreneurial process as innovation and change are key elements of sport. The aim of this paper is to develop a theory of entrepreneurship in sports management by investigating the relationship between entrepreneurship and sport. The rapidly growing and developing sport marketing discipline provides a basis in which to understand how entrepreneurship occurs through innovation, proactiveness and risk taking activities. This paper discusses the connection between the entrepreneurship and sports management fields and argues that there needs to be more integration with the two fields of study and traditional entrepreneurship theory. A theory of sport-based entrepreneurship is developed and different types of entrepreneurship that occur in sports management are examined. Suggestions for future research and implications for practitioners are discussed.

Keywords Sport · Entrepreneurship · Innovation

Introduction

In the rapidly changing global business environment, innovation and change is a fundamental focus of sport. The complementary nature of the entrepreneurship and sport management disciplines has not been frequently discussed in previous research. However, as global competition increases it is through innovation that sport organizations will evolve to gain a better competitive advantage. One way that sports marketers remain competitive is by being entrepreneurial. Entrepreneurship offers direction to businesses who want to increase their overall performance (Wolcott and Lippitz 2007). Despite many sport management scholars focusing on different aspects of entrepreneurship such as international and technological, there is

V. Ratten (✉)
A.J. Palumbo School of Business, Duquesne University, 464 Rockwell Hall, 600 Forbes Avenue,
Pittsburgh, PA 15282, USA
e-mail: vanessaratten@gmail.com

a limited integration between the entrepreneurship and sport management literature. Although sport has been studied from a variety of disciplines such as management, marketing, philosophy, psychology and sociology (Olivier 2006), there is a lack of studies focusing on the entrepreneurship discipline. In addition, the entrepreneurship field is still defining itself as a discipline that has a lot of linkages to other areas of management inquiry (Bruyat and Julien 2001). This paper seeks to address this research gap by connecting the sports management and entrepreneurship disciplines. Sports marketers can deliver better value to their organizations and customers by focusing on entrepreneurship. In this paper it is proposed that sports entrepreneurship is a means for growing sports organizations.

Entrepreneurship is an integral part of sports management and creates a competitive advantage for people and organizations involved in sport. Changes in sport have necessitated entrepreneurship. The rapid development of technology such as the internet and digital television has meant that sports marketers have had to change the way they advertise through the media (Sweeney 2007). In addition, as the global economy has weakened, sports marketers have had to reinvent their advertising and marketing strategies (Futterman 2008).

Entrepreneurship is a vehicle to increase economic efficiencies (Ball 2005). The promotion of entrepreneurship is necessary for a healthy economy and for sustaining economic prosperity through job creation (Henry et al. 2003). Entrepreneurs improve the competitiveness of an economy and create new wealth (Spencer et al. 2008). As industries change and develop it is through entrepreneurship that the economy continues to grow. Thus, entrepreneurship is particularly important for those involved in the marketing of sports-related activities.

An entrepreneurial approach in sport can provide a mechanism for weathering economic crises. Declining economies provide a catalyst for the emergence of entrepreneurship (Peredo and Chrisman 2006). Entrepreneurship is also often greater during times of economic crises (Harper 1991). Economic benefits from entrepreneurship include employment generation, productivity improvements and increased regional growth rates (Van Praag and Versloot 2007). Entrepreneurs are more likely to be alert to opportunities and willing to assume risk (Schneider et al. 2007). Therefore, when entrepreneurs recognize opportunities then desirable outcomes may result (Yusuf and Schindehutte 2000),

An entrepreneur is someone who demonstrates initiative (Hisrich 1990). Bolton and Thompson (2000) further define an entrepreneur as someone who habitually creates and innovates. In a similar vein, Baumol (1993) defines an entrepreneur as an individual that locates and puts new ideas into effect. Most definitions of entrepreneurship include three major functions that entrepreneurs perform, which include discovering and meeting unfulfilled needs, assuming risk with uncertainty, including risk related to reputational, emotional, and financial, and assembling networks capable of undertaking change (Schneider et al. 2007).

Entrepreneurship allows for an understanding of the factors that affect entrepreneurial activity and studies on the topic have grown significantly in the past decade (Turan and Kara 2007). The term 'entrepreneurship' has become a buzzword and is used in a variety of contexts (Spencer et al. 2008). Most contexts of entrepreneurship focus on the need for achievement (Turan and Kara 2007), opportunity seeking (Shane and Venkataraman 2000) and being a visionary (Kao

1989). However, there is no one accepted definition of entrepreneurship (Spencer et al. 2008). Most commonly it is referred to in economic terms related to the development of enterprise and economic development (Drucker 1995) and includes an element of innovation and the recognition of opportunities (Spencer et al. 2008).

Entrepreneurship can be seen as a result of a team of individuals that have a willingness to expand their organizational efforts (Terjesen 2008). The seminal work of Schumpeter (1965) provides one of the first definitions of entrepreneurship as individuals who exploit market opportunity through organizational or technical innovation. This definition has been adapted by Wennekers and Thurik (1999) who define entrepreneurship as the “ability and willingness of individuals, on their own, in teams, within and outside existing organizations, to perceive and create new economic opportunities” (p. 46).

Most contemporary definitions of entrepreneurship focus on the formation and development of new ventures (Wiggins and Ruefli 2005) and the creation of organizations (Gartner 1988). Opportunity recognition is a common theme of entrepreneurship definitions and Shane and Venkataraman (2000) define entrepreneurship as involving the discovery, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities. Peredo and Chrisman (2006) similarly focus on opportunities by defining entrepreneurship as the need to recognize opportunities that lead to better outcomes.

The structure of this paper is as follows. First, the nature of entrepreneurship and importance for business is explained. Next, the concept of sports entrepreneurship as a distinct form of entrepreneurship is justified. The characteristics of sports-based entrepreneurship in terms of innovation, proactiveness and risk taking is then identified. Finally, suggestions on how future research can utilize sports-based entrepreneurship as a theoretical framework to examine sports management is discussed. In addition, implications for sports management practitioners is examined.

Towards a theory of entrepreneurship in sport

Entrepreneurship is common in knowledge intensive industries, new ventures and technology based sectors (Burgel and Murray 2000). Most of the research in the past decade on entrepreneurship has focused on these areas and to a much lesser extent the sports sector. However, some previous research has investigated the link between sport and entrepreneurship. Hall (2006) found that the development of sports mega-events is linked to urban entrepreneurship. Spilling (1996) also examined entrepreneurship in the context of a sports mega-event and found that sport is inherently entrepreneurial. Ball (2005) found that entrepreneurship is critical to the sports sector as it allows for changing consumer demands together with increased emphasis on innovation. Maritz (2004) in a study on rugby examined sporting performance through the use of an entrepreneurial scorecard.

In sports management periodicals such as *The Sport Journal*, reference is made to a sport entrepreneur who is defined as a person that organizes, operates, and assumes the risk for a sport-related business venture (www.thesportjournal.org/sport-supplement/vol115no2). Entrepreneurship periodicals such as *Inc* and *Entrepreneur* often include articles on sports firms and mention entrepreneurship in some of these articles (Goldsby et al. 2005). Often practitioner articles on entrepreneurship focus

on the sport (Berrett et al. 1993). Berrett et al. (1993) in a study on small businesses in the sporting sector noted that entrepreneurial characteristics such as the ability to find a market niche affected the success rate of the businesses.

Hardy (1996, p. 357) suggests that entrepreneurship provides a unique way to view sport and that further research should explore sport from an entrepreneurial perspective. In a similar vein, Goldsby et al. (2005) states that “the dimension of physical fitness and its relation to the entrepreneurial outcomes has yet to be examined” (p. 79). Hence, in this paper I address this research gap by proposing sport-based entrepreneurship as a category of entrepreneurship that fosters economic development in the sports management field. Sport-based entrepreneurship is defined as any form of enterprise or entrepreneurship in a sports context. Thus, the process of entrepreneurship that incorporates the entrepreneur is included within this definition. This new form of entrepreneurship takes an interdisciplinary perspective in highlighting how sports management often incorporates areas of entrepreneurial studies and vice versa. By proposing a theory on sports-based entrepreneurship a new theory that links the sports management and entrepreneurship literatures is developed that can pave a way for more future research work and practitioner interest in the sports management field to focus on entrepreneurship. In addition, by focusing on sport as an enterprise and incorporating entrepreneurs then new ways of examining entrepreneurship in sport can be discovered.

Sport-based entrepreneurship

The main characteristics of entrepreneurship are innovation, proactiveness and risk taking (Holt et al. 2007). In the sport context, Hardy (1986) proposed that these characteristics are important in both profit and non-profit types of sport. These characteristics are utilized in this paper to understand sport-based entrepreneurship. Sport-based entrepreneurship is defined as when an entity in sport acts collectively to respond to an opportunity to create value. Entities involved in sport can include individuals, organizations or communities. Each of these characteristics of entrepreneurship in sport is discussed below and examples given.

Sports innovation

Innovation is an essential part of entrepreneurship (Hitt et al. 2001). Entrepreneurial firms utilize innovation to compete in the global marketplace (Johannisson and Monsted 1997). Previous research has discussed the importance of innovation to sport (e.g. Mullin et al. 2007; Schwarz and Hunter 2008). Innovation in sport occurs in numerous ways including through sports teams, sports organizations and by sports players. Sports teams often develop new strategies to increase their performance. The major innovations during the past decade have been the use of computer statistics to help with better team performance and the internationalization of sports leagues. Professional sports leagues such as the National Football League in America created the World League of American Football. This involved granting franchises to teams in the Canada, Great Britain, Germany, Spain and the United States.

Changes in technology have driven much of the innovation in sport. The advances in technology in terms of engineering and new materials have led to increased sporting achievements (Castonguay 2008). Web-based sports betting, sports blogs and sport club webpages have changed the way sport is viewed and utilized. New technologies such as sport video games have innovated sport (Mullin et al. 2007). Sport video games are the third most popular type of video game. Technological innovations have also been spurred by sport games such as signature style animation in the National Basketball Association. Innovations in equipment and technology has led to new sports such as extreme sports being developed such as bungee jumping, paragliding, mountaineering, rafting, rock climbing, scuba diving, storm chasing, surfing and whitewater kayaking (Olivier 2006). Sport tourism has also benefitted from the innovation occurring in extreme sports (Kurtzman 2005).

Sport has encouraged innovation in promotional approaches such as web-sales and packages (Mullin et al. 2007). Moreover, the internet has provided for new ways in which people can play sport such as online basketball (Fuller et al. 2007). Innovation has also occurred through fashion with sports companies such as Adidas paving the way for new materials and types of clothes worn by sportspeople. In addition, higher priced clothing labels are utilized to target older customers interested in action sports (Tran 2008). The use of sport clubs logos and branding in fashion have also innovated many sports organizations (Mullin et al. 2007).

Social innovation has also increased through the actions of sports stars and sports organizations. The partnering of Lance Armstrong with Nike to create the LiveStrong campaign has resulted in more philanthropy in sport. In addition, non-profit organizations such as Ashoka have partnered with Nike to promote sport as a way to encourage social change by increasing participation rates in sport.

Sports-based proactiveness

Sport organizations are proactive in managing their teams and developing better overall team performance. Part of managing a sport team is ensuring there is adequate marketing. However, recent sports management techniques have made sports organizations more proactive to ensure they get recognition for their efforts. Ambush marketing in which organizers use sports events as promotional tools without paying money directly to the owners of the sports facilities have increased in recent years. Ambush marketing techniques means that organizations other than the official sponsors of a sporting event piggyback on publicity (McKelvey and Grady 2008). Particularly in mega sporting events such as the Olympics, organizing committees have been proactive in tackling the issue of ambush marketing.

The emphasis on the environment by sports organizations has increased in recent years as consumers place more emphasis on sustainability programs and are more proactive in their involvement (Falt 2006). Sustainability allows for the environment to be taken into account by society, individuals and organizations (Elkington 1998). In professional sports leagues such as the NFL organizations have been proactive in incorporating environmental responsibility into overall profits (Falt 2006). The profitability of sports teams and their impact on the environment both in terms of sustainability and economics has been a major reason why cities throughout the world fight and are proactive to keep sports teams (Euchner 1993).

Sport organizations have been proactive in going after new business opportunities. In Rugby Union, the Australian, New Zealand and South African Associations created a tri-nation competition that allowed for a higher sale of television rights. In the Japanese Baseball Central League each team is owned by a separate television company, which allows for more television coverage to increase merchandising and corporate sponsorship. Other sports companies have been proactive in utilizing stadiums for a variety of usages. For example, the Toronto SkyDome is utilized for a variety of sports such as baseball, basketball and football and non-sporting activities such as conferences and conventions. The multiple usage of the Toronto SkyDome has allowed for sports organizations and corporations to work together proactively to make the most out of the stadium usage.

Sports risk-taking

A characteristic of entrepreneurs is their emphasis on risk taking. It is generally accepted that people participating in sport are risk-takers. Risk-takers in sport include athletes, sports events organizers, officials, coaches and sports administrators. The level of risk taking behavior in sport depends on personality traits that include emotional and physical risk. Adventure sports such as big wave surfing and free diving have a higher risk taking propensity (Olivier 2006).

Risk taking in sports is not just confined to people who play sport. Sports organizations are involved in a number of types of risk such as business, innovation and social (Kedar-Levy and Bar-Eli 2008). Business risk is often taken by owners of sports teams offering multimillion dollar contracts to athletes based on future potential. In addition, expansion costs of sports stadiums and increasing franchise fees influence risk in business. Many sport team owners assume financial risk in the hope of returns in the form of fun and power (Zimbalist 2003). News Corporation invested in a risky business strategy by spending a lot of money on sports. News Corporation purchased the broadcasting rights to the National Football League in the United States and the Premier Soccer League in the United Kingdom and they also purchased the Los Angeles baseball team. A recent innovative risk taking activity has occurred in cricket with the Indian Premier League been formed, which is forecast to generate revenues over \$US 1 billion over a 5 to 10 year period. By innovating the way that cricket is watched and played around the world, the Indian Premier League has assumed some risk in terms of the amount of money invested in establishing the new league. Social risk in sport often involves the extra curricular activities that individuals who play or watch sport participate in. Alcohol at sports events has a degree of social risk as people who consume alcohol may adversely affect the image and reputation of the sport.

The importance of entrepreneurship in sports

Entrepreneurship can thrive in a variety of settings as it is not constrained by cultural and social settings (Dana 1995; Holt 1997). Sport transcends both cultural and social settings and is played in numerous contexts throughout the world. Hardy (1996) asserts that in a sports context, entrepreneurs provide the basis for innovative

activity. Through sport new ideas can thrive and provide the basis for entrepreneurship to occur. Sport entrepreneurship is dynamic and impacts a number of management areas such as business strategy, crisis management, new sport development, performance management, product innovation, promotional strategies, social issues, sustainability concerns and technological developments (See Fig. 1). There are numerous types of entrepreneurship that occurs in sports including community-based entrepreneurship, corporate entrepreneurship, ethnic entrepreneurship, immigrant entrepreneurship, institutional entrepreneurship, international entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, technology entrepreneurship and women’s entrepreneurship (see Fig. 2). Each of these different types of entrepreneurship in the context of sport will now be discussed.

Community-based entrepreneurship involves a community acting corporately both as an entrepreneur and an enterprise in pursuit of a common goal (Peredo and Chrisman 2006). In the sports context, community-based entrepreneurship occurs when sports teams, organizations or players partner with community organizations. Community organizations include schools, colleges, universities, non-profit organizations and local government organizations. Entrepreneurship in sport is dynamic and impacts the economy and society through community development. Sports events and teams encourage the development of a community by encouraging participation in sport and sport-related activity such as tourism. Sports teams partner with local business and government agencies to develop sporting stadiums and promote sporting events.

New types of sport such as fantasy sport have encouraged entrepreneurship through online communities (Roy and Goss, 2007). Online communities are often involved in entrepreneurship by developing new ways and statistics to analyse both team and individual performance. Online communities are also advocates of sports blogs and encourage development of sports news. Most professional and amateur sports leagues have websites that encourage fans to discuss their ideas. Sports websites also offer a unique platform for merchandise and ticket sales to occur and through online communities more sports organizations gain access to new ways of promoting their sport.

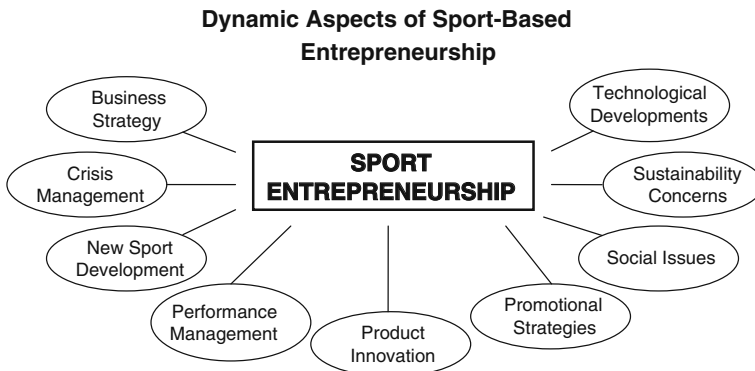


Fig. 1 Dynamic aspects of sport-based entrepreneurship

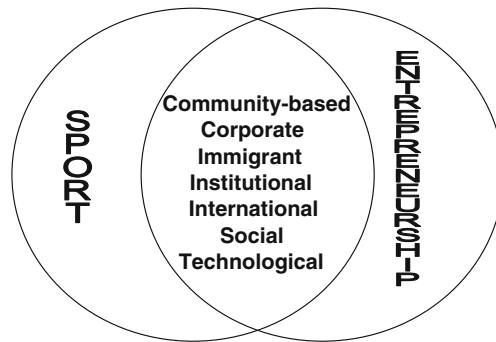


Fig. 2 Sport-based entrepreneurship categories

Community-based entrepreneurship also involves philanthropy and social responsibility in which sports organizations partner with local community groups to encourage more focus on social issues such as childhood obesity. Organizations in sport such as the National Basketball Association have increased their efforts to be seen as caring organizations that help the community. The National Basketball Association has done this through their ‘We care’ campaigns that are designed to encourage young people to be involved in their local community through basketball associations. Corporations have also been involved with community-based entrepreneurship that encourages corporate social responsibility in the sports context. In Canada, Bell Canada in partnership with the True Sport Foundation has invested in community sports such as hockey and soccer through its ‘Connected to Communities’ program initiative.

Corporate entrepreneurship occurs when businesses are involved in innovation. Innovation in sport can be product or process-based and often incorporates both. In sport sectors that are expanding and growing such as snowboarding there is more product innovation by corporations whilst declining sports such as skiing have more process innovation by corporations (Desbordes 2002). Innovation by corporations involved in sport often relates to the way sports products and processes are marketed. In college sport corporations advertise their products in innovative ways to capture the youth market. In addition, many community events at college sport settings involve corporations utilizing new marketing techniques (Chalip 2004). These new marketing techniques can include a corporation sponsoring a sport team that allows the corporation to piggyback off the sports relationship with the media and in the process gain access to publicity and press coverage. In professional sports such as ice hockey, corporate entrepreneurship occurs through risky activities that marketers engage in such as market capitalization, operating history, competition, experience, team competitiveness, credibility, relocation and business activities (Friedman and Mason 2007).

Ethnic entrepreneurship in sport has been one of the most important drivers of social change. Ethnic or immigrant entrepreneurship occurs when individuals from specific nationalities are involved in change. Sport provides a way in which ethnic groups can excel in their chosen occupation without being discriminated against

because of their social status. The most well-known example of ethnic entrepreneurship has been in 1947 when Jackie Robinson became the first African-American to play Major League Baseball. Entrepreneurs have utilized the best players in sports such as basketball and baseball regardless of their ethnicity to produce superior competitive results (Goff et al. 2002). Countries around the world have also focused on ethnicity to promote sport. In the United Kingdom, Sport England has partnered with the Commission for Racial Equality to produce Sporting Equals. Sporting Equals goal is to utilize ethnic entrepreneurship in the sporting field so that all ethnic minorities can participate in sport.

Institutional entrepreneurship occurs when institutions pursue projects of institutional change (Dimaggio 1988). In sport there are a number of institutions particularly in professional sport that have changed the way organizations are structured. Examples of sports institutions that are involved in entrepreneurship include the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the New York Athletic Club, Los Angeles Athletic Club and university athletic programs such as the Texas Longhorns. In the European Union the landmark Bosman ruling meant that all sporting institutions in the European Union are forbidden to impose nationality quotas in sports leagues.

In Major League Baseball institutional entrepreneurs have introduced innovations and pushed others to adopt these innovations (Chacar and Hesterly 2004). Some of these innovations have included the trading of players and the introduction of free agent status to baseball. As institutions in sport including the International Olympic Committee have a large amount of power in how they market sport, it is important for them to stay up to date with current developments in sport. A way in which they have done this is by the introduction of new sports such as beach volleyball and taekwondo into the Olympics.

International entrepreneurship occurs when organizations expand into new international markets. International entrepreneurship is evident in sport as many sports internationalize by tapping into new overseas markets. The National Basketball Association and Major League Baseball have expanded to China in search of new market opportunities. In United States based professional sports leagues there has been an increased emphasis on commercialization and professionalism of team sports to appeal to a more wider global audience.

International entrepreneurship in sport also occurs at the individual-level. Some sports players such as David Beckham have been entrepreneurial by encouraging the globalization of different types of sport such as soccer. Major League Baseball has innovated by increasing the number of foreign born players, starting the World Baseball Classic, running the China Series in Beijing and starting the regular season in Japan. Other professional sports leagues have internationalized by recruiting international players and focusing on international fans. In recent years, the National Hockey League started their season overseas in Prague and Stockholm in order to recruit new international fans. The National Basketball Association has preseason games in China and Europe to encourage people to watch basketball.

Social entrepreneurship or civic entrepreneurship occurs when non-profit goals or objectives are partnered with business ideas. Social entrepreneurship in sport encourages change in existing social issues. Sports events and the marketing that goes with these events have been used to address social issues. The pink ribbon

campaign that Reebok sponsors to support breast cancer awareness is an example of social entrepreneurship in sport. People and organizations are involved in social entrepreneurship by contributing to society in a positive manner through sporting philanthropic endeavours or sport-based charitable organizations (Hardy 1996). Entrepreneurs such as T. Boone Pickens have innovated the sports college sector by donating money to Oklahoma State University's athletic department. Organizations such as UNICEF have encouraged entrepreneurship in social programs by encouraging the rebuilding of communities through sport in countries such as Uganda.

Technology entrepreneurship is when innovation occurs in technology. The advances in technology over the past decade such as the use of the internet and podcasts have innovated the way people participate in sport. Fantasy sport and online sport gambling sites have created new opportunities for sport through sponsorship and merchandising opportunities. The National Hockey League has been entrepreneurial through sponsoring a glow puck that makes it easier for television viewers to watch the game. Other technology advances that have been entrepreneurial in sport include the advances in digital recording, which allows viewers to watch sporting games from a number of different player perspectives. Umpire decision making has also been made easier through digital recording technologies that enable a post-play evaluations.

Women's entrepreneurship occurs when women are involved in the innovation of business. In the sporting context women's entrepreneurship has been encouraged by Title IX in the United States that has encouraged innovations in sports played by females. Women's entrepreneurship is evident in many sports management campaigns that have focused on women as a way of capturing new market segments. Sportswear companies such as NIKE and Under Armour are now marketing clothing particularly suited to females. New forms of sport such as fantasy sports have been driven by women who want to be involved in sport. In NASCAR car racing the female market has been a strong advocator for the organization to release more statistical data so that they can use this for fantasy NASCAR racing (Roy and Goss 2007). More recently, a group called Atlanta-Sydney-Athens Plus campaigned for female Muslim athletes to compete in the Olympics (Garvie, 2006). Another innovation spurred by entrepreneurship by females is Ahilda, which is an Australian owned company that has designed the "burkini" for Muslim females to wear as a swimming costume.

Implications and suggestions for further research

This paper has identified sport-based entrepreneurship as being a useful theoretical framework for understanding sports management. The literature on entrepreneurship was discussed and then linked with the reasons why an entrepreneurial lens for understanding sport is important. Sport incorporates a number of different perspectives from athletes, coaches, community, corporation, country and region. Hence, it is useful to have an entrepreneurial orientation to sports management so that these different perspectives can be understood. This paper has proposed that sport-based entrepreneurship involves proactive, innovation and risk taking behavior

in the sporting context. These behaviours incorporated within sport-based entrepreneurship enable governments to better analyse how sport is changing given the current economic climate. In addition, this paper has identified a number of different types of entrepreneurship affecting sport such as social and international entrepreneurship. The major contribution of this paper is to illustrate how there are various aspects of sport-based entrepreneurship and how sport-based entrepreneurship is a useful theoretical framework for understanding sport marketing.

This paper has implications for public policy planners who are interested in the link between sport and local development. Although research has been conducted on the economic impact of sport, less is known on how various types of entrepreneurship contribute to the development of sporting communities and facilities. For example, ethnic entrepreneurship has influenced the innovation of sports that are popular by certain ethnic groups and the way that sports marketers market their products to this market.

In this paper a variety of different types of sport-based entrepreneurship such as community-based entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship were discussed. More research in the sports management and entrepreneurship fields needs to focus individually on each of these types of entrepreneurship. By focusing on how each different type of entrepreneurship affects sports management more detail and understanding of the dynamic nature of sports-based entrepreneurship can be investigated. In addition, more interdisciplinary research is required that takes a theoretical perspective of sports-based entrepreneurship. By taking this perspective future research can investigate in more detail how innovation, proactiveness and risk taking behavior underpins sports activity.

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