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Jeffrey Petersen
Baylor University, jeffrey_petersen@baylor.edu

Lawrence W. Judge
Ball State University, lwjudge@bsu.edu

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Sport Facilities Planning, Design, Operation, and Management Trends: An Introduction to the Special Issue

Jeffrey C. Petersen

Baylor University

Lawrence W. Judge

Ball State University

Please send correspondence to: Jeffrey C. Petersen, Jeffrey.Petersen@baylor.edu and

Lawrence W. Judge, lwjudge@bsu.edu

Facilities form a fundamental aspect of the sports industry, serving as foundational elements for athletic competition, training, and support functions. These venues play a crucial role in hosting sporting events and enhancing the experiences of athletes, spectators, and management personnel. Not only do they provide the physical space for these events, but they also have a lasting impact that extends beyond the duration of a single competition. In fact, some sport facilities can stand for many decades or even centuries. It is important to recognize that sport facilities require substantial financial investments. The costs associated with constructing, maintaining, and renovating these venues often rank as one of the highest expenses for sport organizations, often only surpassed by human resources expenses. This underscores the significance that organizations place on creating top-notch facilities to meet the needs of athletes and spectators alike.

Despite the enduring lifespan and substantial financial implications of sport facilities, the academic field of sport management has paid relatively little attention to facilities in its research literature. Recognizing this gap, this special issue of the *Journal of Applied Sport Management* aims to shed light on the importance of facilities by providing a platform for thought leaders with a strong connection to sport facility research to share their insights with a wider audience.

Our primary objective is to bolster the research focus on sport facilities and foster a greater emphasis on this critical factor within the realm of sport management. This special issue endeavors to stimulate further exploration and investigation into sport facilities, enabling the advancement of knowledge and the development of innovative approaches within this field. We seek to elevate the discussion surrounding facilities and foster a deeper understanding of their impacts, challenges, and opportunities for the benefit of

practitioners, scholars, and stakeholders. The main objective of this special issue is to expand the existing academic literature on sport facilities by presenting a diverse range of perspectives from both established and emerging scholars in the field. Our aim aligns with the overall mission of the *Journal of Applied Sport Management* to publish research and conceptual contributions that bridge the gap between scholarly work and professional practice in sport business. In addition to five thought-provoking pieces contributed by 12 authors, we have included a practitioner interview to offer insights directly from professionals engaged in sport facility planning and design.

The first paper from Kellison and Hong explores the innovation of diffusion theory and its application within the sport industry regarding how innovative ideas and practices are adopted and accepted. Beginning with a futuristic projection including Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based image generations from architect and designer Pouria Babakhani (2022) of a potential London football stadium, these authors explore what possible future innovations may soon arise with a particular focus on environmental sustainability. From the sport facilities perspective, the impact of factors such as economic incentives, green building certifications, and sustainability initiatives are examined in relation to the diffusion of sustainable sport venue design. Kellison and Hong foresee continued growth and transformation within sport facility design, and they note early adopters endorsing green building standards like TRUE and LEED. They conclude with a call to expand sport facility sustainable design research beyond the sport organization's owners and executives to external influencers ranging from fans and community members to policymakers, regulators, and energy providers. This includes expanding research teams in this area to include expertise from political scientists, urban planners, and environmental engineers.

The second manuscript from Downs and Seifried examines modernization theory and the influence of the political economy on contemporary major professional facility design, construction, and renovation. With nearly \$10.96 billion slated for planned or approved new construction or renovation across the NFL and MLB before 2030 documented by these authors, they highlight modernization and the influence of the political economy for both sport managers and for sport facility management. This includes the application of modernization to interpret the evolution of sport facilities in relation to opportunities from economic, technological, and social developments. Elements of the contemporary sport venue are indexed including average costs, capacities, and luxury amenities, and a call for the adoption of seven future design elements was made for NBA and NHL venues. From the perspective of sport facility management, leaders will need to address both operational risks through strategies like reflexive modernization and adapt to changing climates through approaches like ecological modernization. From a scholarly research standpoint, financial modernization can aid in predicting the future of sport facility construction and anticipating future funding.

Environmental sustainability within sport facilities and events is the primary focus of the third article from McCullough, Dietrich, Rocha, and Bae from the Laboratory for Sustainability in Sport at Texas A&M University. This piece focuses upon three aspects of sustainability that must be considered holistically and in relation to each other: (a) the environmental impacts of sport facilities and events, (b) the progress that can be made through strategic sustainability initiatives, and (c) how these entities engage fans and their surrounding communities to embrace sustainability. They note sport practitioners might more easily develop forward-facing initiatives to mainly signal spectators' environmental concerns. However,

these practitioners would be better empowered with information to approach environmental sustainability initiatives more systematically including frameworks or certifications like ISO 20121, Council for Responsible Sport, the UN Sport for Climate Action, or IUCN Sports for Nature. Sport facility management researchers are called to work more closely with practitioners to address both current and projected issues regarding facility and event sustainability. These academicians are also called to expand the inclusion of environmental sustainability within sport facility and event management texts and courses.

The special issue's fourth paper by Fried and Grant delves into the topic of venue safety and risk management through a detailed examination of guardrails within sport stadiums and arenas. Beginning with a broad frame of safety and risk management within the sport venue setting, this piece provides a detailed review of railing-related fatalities along with potential action to mitigate these risks. Specifically, this article provides the current standards or code requirements from the IBC including the 26" sightline exemption. It also considers the need to revise the minimal railing heights for sport settings given many atypical behaviors and movements of sport fans. Last, this piece examines the exacerbated potential for railing collapse with multiple people pressing on a railing at the same time within unique sport settings. The call for proactive change by sport facility managers is made for these railing issues, and such proactive change would align with recent proactive changes in protective netting coverage in Major League Baseball. Sport venue operators must continue to consider the safety and security of their fans both from large-scale incidents like terrorist action to small-scale incidents like individual falls to prevent foreseeable injury.

The fifth manuscript by Petersen and Judge explores the use of the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) as a potential model for venue usage reform within the Olympic Games. The Olympic Games remain the largest and most iconic global sports festival in the world. Numerous Olympic venues have emerged as architectural and sporting icons, while others, such as Athens, have unfortunately fallen into disrepair. In the context of the Olympic Games, costs associated with venue construction and infrastructure have been increasing significantly. As a result, it is worth exploring the model established by the newly established YOG as a way to reduce venue construction costs. The philosophy of the YOG is centered around the principle that new permanent facilities should not be constructed exclusively for hosting YOG events. Instead, the emphasis is placed on retrofitting existing facilities to meet the necessary requirements. One aspect of the YOG approach is to focus on constructing housing or Olympic Village projects, which can be transformed into community legacies after the Games. Although the venue reform aspects remain the primary aspect of this new YOG model, this proposed reform also touches on all four elements from Müller's (2015) mega-events definitional model including transformation (capital investment), visitor attractiveness (tickets sold), mediated reach (broadcast rights fees), and cost (total cost). By implementing these changes, it is hoped that the overall costs and long-term impact of the Olympic Games infrastructure can become more manageable and sustainable.

The final component of this special issue is an interview with Earl Santee, a founding partner of Populous, one of the leading architectural and design firms within the sport venues context. In this interview, Santee explores the connection between trend-setting stadium designs of the past with the facilities of the present and of the future. This includes Earl's views on the "Joe Robbie Revolution," which introduced luxury suites to stadium and arena design and how this revolution impacted the facility construction

boom of the 1990s and beyond. Changes to the stadium and arena design process in relation to the trends of embracing both player and fan experience were also delineated. The interview covers the rise of specialized design firms such as Populous and where this specialization may lead within the next boom of venue construction. Regarding the said boom, Santee comments on when and how this boom may play out as well as how environmental sustainability will be included in this next round of construction.

These six contributions to the special issue of the *Journal of Applied Sport Management* collectively advance the subdiscipline of sport facility planning, design, and operation within the broader field of sport management. Each of the five scholarly manuscripts offers ample areas for further future research, and the Earl Santee interview establishes a solid connection between high-level practitioners and the sport management academic community. This combination of scholarly work and professional practitioner insight in the special issue continues to uphold the objectives of the *Journal of Applied Sport Management* and the Applied Sport Management Association. Whether you are a sport management academician or a sport facility management practitioner, we hope you both enjoy and find value in this special issue.

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