

## **‘RUN, PHEIDIPPIDES, ONE RACE MORE!’ MEDITATIONS IN THE SHADOW OF THE GLOBAL SPORTS-MEDIA COMPLEX**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*It is more than fitting that the legend of the dispatch runner, Pheidippides – the fastest news medium of his day – would serve as the inspiration for one of the headline events at the modern Summer Olympic Games. The event has become known as the Marathon and today it celebrates the heroic feat of Pheidippides. Not only did Pheidippides exude all the qualities associated with sportsmen today, but his story and the race it inspired also highlights a link that has probably always existed between sport and the media. It is no coincidence that the arrival of the first electronic media in the 18th Century also coincided with the rise of modern sport or that the rise of broadcast media gave rise to the first superstars of sport. In the course of the 20th Century, this symbiotic relationship would give rise to multinational media houses and powerful international sports federations coined as the “Sports-Media Complex” by Sut Jhally. It is a symbiosis that has shaped the destinies of people and nations. It is also a relationship that plays a significant part in fostering the various scandals and crises that engulf sport today. Perhaps the time has come to rethink this relationship and the way in which international sports federations are structured.*

**Keywords:** Sport; Media; Broadcasting; Sports law; Regulation.

### **INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE**

In the year 490 BC, Greek defenders secured a decisive victory over a massive Persian invasion force. According to legend, a dispatch runner named Pheidippides, ran almost 40 kilometres to bring news of the Greek victory to Athenians, who were anxiously awaiting the outcome of the battle. With his last breath, Pheidippides famously exclaimed “Rejoice, we conquer!”, and then, over-exerted, his power spent, Pheidippides collapsed and died.

It is perhaps more than fitting that the legend of this dispatch runner – the fastest news medium of his day – would serve as the inspiration for one of the headline events at the modern Summer Olympic Games. The event, named after the battlefield where the Greeks secured their decisive victory, has become known as the Marathon and today it celebrates the heroic feat of Pheidippides. Not only did Pheidippides exude all the qualities associated with sportsmen today – masculinity, honour, tenacity, perseverance, determination, self-sacrifice, team spirit – but his story and the race inspired, also highlights, a link that has probably always existed between sport and the media.

It seems that sport and the media have always had a symbiotic relationship in which self-interest could be served best by serving the other. (For a more detailed discussion of media rights and sport, see Cornelius, 2014, 2015). Prehistoric rock art seems to portray scenes of prehistoric people participating in sprints, swimming, archery and wrestling, while spectators looked on (Craig, 2002; Womack, 2003) and this interest in sport has evolved to the extent that today sports events are beamed instantaneously to homes across the globe.

The purpose of this article is to consider how the symbiotic relationship between sport and the media came to be, how and whether this relationship has developed to a point where we can confidently speak of the Sports-Media Complex, how and to what extent this relationship has played a part in shaping modern sport and to what extent this relationship contributes to the various problems and scandals that plague sports at various levels today.

### **ENTER THE SPORTS-MEDIA COMPLEX**

Sport is as old as mankind itself and there is evidence that various sports played a significant role in the various ancient empires from Mesopotamia, Sumeria, Phoenicia, Babylonia and Persia to Egypt (Crowther, 2007). The oldest known sports stadium was built around 1500 BC in Amrit, the Phoenician city (Boutros, 2014).

The old Greeks elevated sports to new heights with the celebrations of the quadrennial ancient Olympic Games (Crowther, 2007). But, it was the Roman Empire that would eventually take sport to the level of entertainment spectacle. Where other communities up to that time had practised sports for the sake of fitness and skill for daily survival, preparedness for war or to honour the gods in religious festivals, the Romans largely abandoned these principles and presented sport for the sake of sport with the sole purpose of entertaining the masses (Szymanski, 2009). “The Roman emperors believed they could keep the masses quiet with bread and circuses” (Whannel, 2008:42). The biggest stadium, known as the *Circus Maximus*, could seat 250,000 spectators (Plinius the Elder, 79AD) – more than one quarter of the total population of Rome at the time (Gilliver *et al.*, 2005).

The decline of the Roman Empire in the east and the west brought the large extravagant games in the arenas to an end. But sport survived in various forms during the Middle Ages and eventually provided as much entertainment to spectators. The ancient era of sport stadia, which could hold hundreds of thousands of spectators may have been over, but sports events in the Middle Ages often coincided with fêtes and annual markets and could endure for days or even weeks on end (Johnston, 2011). Knights in shining armour with ornate shields and bright banners participated in jousting (Hopkins, 2004), while other sport like horse racing, archery, sprinting, boxing, wrestling and cock fights also took place (Newman, 2001).

Sport was played mostly in market squares and other public places and no clear lines were drawn to separate players from spectators (Dunning & Malcolm, 2003). This often led to spectators massing together around players and jostling them with the result that fights often broke out between spectators and players (Dunning & Malcolm, 2003). On festival days,

everyone in the town gathered on the communal grounds for a kind of football – to watch and to participate (Guttmann, 2006).

It would be during the industrial revolution in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century that sport would gain new significance in society. The widespread adoption of steam engines brought with it an augmented human potential for manufacturing and transport (Bryant & Holt, 2009). It also brought with it a:

... disconsolate image of industrial work ... inspired by the ‘dark satanic mills’ of the Industrial Revolution. The productive miracle of mechanization was achieved on the back of the worker and the dehumanization of work ... [viewing] the worker as a cog in an unforgiving, ever-relentless, industrial machine. (Fineman, 2012:55)

This provided a fertile breeding ground for the development of sport as workers searched for some escape from:

... the reality that working conditions were dire – relentlessly monotonous, dangerous, with suffocating fumes. Some people lost their lives. Getting through the very long day was a trial, eased only a little by drugs and alcohol taken before arriving at work, and during breaks in shifts. (Fineman, 2012:56)

It would be sport – and not religion as Karl Marx would have it (O’Malley, 1982) – that would become the opium of the people. Whannel (2008:42) explains that:

... it is sport that narcotises the working classes. Traditionally, religion provided elaborate venues, separate from the rest of social life, in the form of churches. Inside, idols and mythical figures were worshipped and a series of rituals, spread through the calendar, were performed. Today the stadiums of sport, equally separate from social life, provide the venues for worshipping stars. Sport has its own rituals throughout the calendar – the Cup Final, the Boat Race, the Grand National and so on.

It would be sport that would provide an immediate distraction from “the efficient tyrannies” (Magdalinski, 2009:22) and pain of the industrial workplace; that would provide the hope of a better future – in this life and not the next – as workers, who showed more skill in sports, saw the promise of a better life outside the factories. Sport:

... provides a chance to step outside of one’s daily routine and become part of the collective ... Sport is catharsis in that it ‘allows the release of emotions in a range of behaviour including pre-game levity, frenzied cheering during the game, and post-game carousing. (Schulz & Sheffer, 2016:2).

As a result of increased urbanisation, market squares had been taken over by more and more business premises and merchants were less tolerant towards the often ill-disciplined games around their shops and stalls (Schulz & Sheffer, 2016). This led to the moving of sport from the market squares and other public places to private premises. By the end of the eighteenth century, betting on sport had become one of the favourite pastimes of the aristocracy and they were more than happy to provide the necessary means for sport to take place (Szymanski, 2009; Hawkins, 2012). In addition, urban societies based on highly organised and mechanised industries could not tolerate unruly, boisterous and often unpredictable hordes, with the result that dedicated sports fields also led to the standardisation of rules. These two factors resulted

in the establishment of sports clubs where enthusiasts could gather to play their favourite sport (Baker, 1988). The founding of clubs in turn led to the creation of leagues and leagues would eventually lead to professional sport where players were remunerated for their services (Szymanski, 2009).

Cricket was in this sense the pioneer that had, towards the end of the eighteenth century, already been played according to standardised rules in England (Pycroft, 1862). A differentiation was made from an early stage between *gentlemen* (usually middle and upper class amateur players) and *players* (mostly working class players who were paid for their services) (Pycroft, 1862). Initially the number of professional players in each team was limited, but in time, especially urban cricket clubs, would make exclusive use of professional players (Pycroft, 1862).

The costs involved in establishing and maintaining sports fields, the fees being paid to professional players, as well as the costs of travelling from one town to the next for league games, presented new challenges to clubs and their owners. Initially, a hat was passed around during a match and donations were requested from spectators. These funds could not provide in the growing need for funds. The clubs quickly realised that sports enthusiasts were so fanatical that they would be willing to pay for the privilege to watch their favourite sport and the clubs could refuse entry to anyone unable or unwilling to buy an entry ticket (Anon, 2014b). Where sport was for millennia played in public places and spectators were always welcome to attend, sport had now moved to playing fields or stadia which were fenced off and where entry was strictly controlled.

In this process the owners of sports clubs, eager to attract as many paying spectators as possible, found a welcome and very willing new ally. Even in the early years of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, newspapers began to report on sports events and thereby effectively gifted the owners of sports clubs free advertising for their events (Bryant & Holt, 2009). By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, newspapers began to run dedicated sports sections and the first sports magazines appeared on the streets of cities. From the outset:

... sports organizations ... depended on the sports media for free publicity. And the sports media have long depended on sports to boost readership, listenership, viewership – and of course to sell advertisements. (Reed, 2015:158)

During this time, the readership of newspapers also began to change as more and more middle and working class people began to consume their daily or weekly news. Newspapers responded by increasing the coverage of sport and expanding on the kinds of sports that were reported (Bryant & Holt, 2009).

But all this came at a cost. The interest shown by newspapers further helped to standardise the rules of sport and shift the focus of sports reporting to detailed statistical analyses of events (Bryant & Holt, 2009). The distraction that was meant to take workers' minds off their monotonous dehumanised work in an unforgiving industrial machine, now itself became organised and industrialised – and perhaps dehumanised.

Games were first shaped by industrial capitalism in its hemispheric imperium ... From the first the football fields, and only a little later the baseball stadiums, were built in the heart of

heavy industry: the huge stands *looked* like factories; the huge, civic crowds were identical with the men pouring through the factory gates; the numbers produced by the game – goals, batting averages, points, numbers of spectators – were analysed like industrial statistics. (Inglis, 2010:220)

Sport became:

... an agent of social control for the urban industrial masses. By codifying sporting practise (regulated participation) and sanctioning cathartic release (mass spectatorship), the patrician-industrialist power bloc ensured that sport helped constrain working bodies to the demands and discipline of the industrial workplace, while simultaneously contributing to the commercialisation of urban leisure culture. (Andrews, 2004:3)

To maintain the façade of catharsis:

... [t]he industrial architecture enclosed the little sacred plot of field, the only patch of green grass for miles; the uniforms the players wore – that unexpected mixture of the nursery and the vacation (those shorts, those bright shirts, those knickerbockers!) – was a deliberate negation of working clothes. (Inglis, 2010:221)

Media interest in sport provided the financial stimulus that drove the commercialisation of sport (Reed, 2015) and “[f]estivity was replaced by specialized work – the work of achievement” (Eichberg, 2009:217).

The successful relationship that the print media had had with sport also attracted other, newer media to the ball. The print media may have established the relationship between sport and the media, but it was broadcasting, and in particular television, that truly established the symbiosis of sport and the media (Reed, 2015). Sports broadcasts originated as a result of the erection of telegraph networks. Operators like *Western Union* kept sports enthusiasts informed about the progress of baseball matches by relaying the score at the end of each innings to telegraph offices throughout the United States of America. The development of telephone networks enabled the more frequent relay of the progress of games per telephone to sports enthusiasts who wanted to phone in (*National Exhibition Co v Teleflash Inc* 24 F Supp 488:489).

It is against this background that radio stations arrived on the scene in the 1920s and started broadcasting live commentary on sports events. It seemed as though sport and radio were made for one another. Ingenious publicity of the boxing match in July 1921 between Jack Dempsey and Georges Carpentier led to 300,000 enthusiastic spectators filling the stadium. It was the first time in history that more than \$1 million had been taken in gate fees at one single sports event. In addition, chain stores in the area reported that their turnover in radio sets in the two weeks before the match totalled approximately \$90,000 and about 500,000 listeners on the east coast of the United States tuned in for the broadcast (Jensen, 2013).

By this time, sports clubs had begun to organise themselves into national associations to manage and monopolise their sports (Allison, 2005). National associations further organised themselves into international sports federations (Forster & Pope, 2001) and the Olympic movement had established itself as the predominant international movement for sport (Foster, 2005).

Sports broadcasts became more and more popular and, in 1922, about five million listeners on three continents tuned in for live commentary during the baseball *World Series* (Jensen, 2013). By 1927 approximately 40 million listeners tuned in on the live broadcast of the boxing match between Jack Dempsey and Jack Sharkey (Jensen, 2013). This was followed in 1936 by the first live television broadcast of sport when sports enthusiasts, at 21 public television halls in Berlin and Potsdam, watched the 100m sprint during the Olympic Games in Berlin and saw how the legendary Jesse Owens won the first of his four gold medals (Beck & Bosshart, 2003).

In the course of the 20th Century, the symbiotic relationship between sport and the media would give rise to an industry dominated by powerful international sports federations and multinational media houses. Andrews (2006:14) explains that:

... [m]ost sporting entities ... are willing participants in the media sport feeding frenzy. There are countless examples whereby popular sport leagues have been willingly manipulated by commercial media outlets in pursuance of the audience demographic most desirable to their corporate advertisers. Moreover, sport franchises, and even entire leagues, have been commandeered by, and integrated into, transnational media corporations seeking to vertically integrate their entertainment economy empires. ... Indeed, the domineering cultural and economic presence of hypercommercial and hypermediated sports spectacles effectively nullifies the perceived viability of alternatives to the commercially mediated sport model. Most sport organizations assert themselves as brazenly commercial enterprises, and make no pretence as to the cardinal importance of delivering entertaining products designed to engage the largest audience possible, and thereby maximize profits.

There is a constant blurring of the divide between sport and the media in which there is an increasing interdependence and integration of business, as more and more media corporations also began to control or monopolise sports organisations (Andrews, 2004). Delaney and Madigan explain (2015:371):

There is an old philosophical question, 'If a tree falls in the woods and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?' With the growing influence of the mass media over sport, we might amend this question to, 'If they hold a sports event and the media is not there, is it really a sports event?' Today, nearly all sporting events are covered by some aspect of the mass media. Whether it is television, radio, newspaper, or social media coverage, the media are there to report sports – and sports at all levels including youth, high school, college and professional. The role of the media in sports has not always been as inclusive as it is today, but the mass media and the mass interest in sport grew together and now enjoy a symbiotic relationship. The results of this convergence between the media and sports ... is worth noting ... that the media have such a pervasive influence on sport that entertainment is now more important than sport competition.

It is this development that Sut Jhally (1984:41) coined the *Sports-Media Complex*.

Some sports, and in particular the Olympic movement, apparently tried to resist the commercialisation of sport for most of the twentieth century (Andrews, 2004), but in reality, they had succumbed to the pressures of capitalist economic forces and the power of the media long before they were ready to admit it openly (Newcomb, 2004). At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the process of globalisation meant that international federations became even more

powerful. This begged questions of governance and compelled international sports federations to confront their commercialised realities and accept their status in the global economy.

The Sports-Media Complex has, over many decades, crafted a carefully constructed global culture of sport and, in so doing, provided the impetus for a global sports industry which is today estimated to be worth in excess of \$1.5 trillion annually (Plunket Research, 2016). Furthermore, the global market for legal and illegal gambling on sport, which is equally fuelled by and at least in part controlled by the Sports-Media Complex, is estimated to be worth as much as \$3 trillion annually (AFP, 2015).

The growth of television on a global scale has accelerated this tendency, creating the society of the spectacle. The world is increasingly dominated by elaborate spectacles which serve to mask the ruthless exploitation of the existing economic order. (Whannel, 2008:43)

Andrews (2004) argues that it may well be misleading to speak of *the* sports industry as the production and consumption of sports goods and services involves various other industries, such as manufacturing, travel, biomedicine, construction and education. But he concludes that it is the influence of the mass media that highlights the cultural significance of sport and grants the sports industry its predominant place as first among equals. As a result, the Sports-Media Complex stands out “as a key *source* of wealth creation” (Andrews, 2004:7) in modern economies.

## NATURE OF INTERNATIONAL SPORT

Over the last 300 years, sport has evolved from old European gentlemen’s clubs to the formation of international federations that have become increasingly powerful (Forster & Pope, 2001) and increasingly profit driven (Sugden & Tomlinson, 2005). These developments have taken sport from the local clubs, through the national associations to the international federations, and from gentlemanly pursuits of leisure to massive profit driven multinational entities (Forster & Pope, 2001). The process and the role which the media played in these developments, have left sport associations and federations with some unusual qualities.

To begin with, almost all the major international sports federations were established as non-profit organisations in a time, when sport was largely viewed as gentlemanly pursuits of leisure. Despite the increasing commercialisation and globalisation of sport, very few of these governance structures have undergone any fundamental change during the past 100 years (Forster & Pope, 2001).

In essence, international sports are governed by a system created at an earlier time for a different clientele ... [b]ased on the notion that only amateurs compete in international events for the glory of their sport and country. (Conrad, 2011:88)

This has left most international sports federations in a dichotomous state. On the one hand, international federations were created by national associations as regulators of sport – they were the means of assuring fair play and good relations among national and regional associations where sport itself was the end. On the other hand, they have become the masters of their creators and sport has become merely the means to an end – the relentless pursuit of profit (Forster & Pope, 2001). On the one hand, their mission should be to preserve the integrity

of and promote participation in sport; on the other hand they strive to maximise profits (Forster & Pope, 2001). On the one hand, international federations should be run by volunteers who act solely out of loyalty to the sport and the interest of stakeholders. On the other hand, international federations are commercial entities where those in charge are handsomely and often excessively remunerated for their services. Consequently, international sports federations may still be seeking to portray themselves as the keepers of the faith – the wise old guardians of their art and the grand ideals of fair play, healthy living, political neutrality and the comity of man. But in reality, they have long since sacrificed the collective soul of sports at the altar of big money.

A significant impact of this dichotomy is that state and regional authorities have often misdirected themselves on the regulation of sport. Even today, the regulation of sport is aimed more at preservation of what is perceived to be the specific and unique cultural values of sport (Allison, 2005). It seems that, in dealing with international sports federations, government authorities saw only the wise old guardians of the arts. They either did not see or they did not wish to see, the underlying greed with which sports federations sought profit. Consequently, governments across the globe have continued to deal with international sports federations as gentlemen's clubs that pursue gentlemanly activities and require little or no interference from government, while in fact, international sports federations have long since become little more than business cartels where the tycoons of national and regional sports association congregate to monopolise segments of the global sports industry. Authorities even came up with a name to justify their lack of interest – they called it the “athletic exception”. That is why no regulatory eyebrows were raised when Sepp Blatter, as president of FIFA, “temporarily” relocated the FIFA head office to office space at the headquarters of Adidas; or when Sebastian Coe, as Vice-President of the IAAF, remained a brand ambassador for Nike.

This unwillingness to exercise regulatory control and the structures of international sports federations, being composed of national and regional associations from across the globe, has effectively located international sports federations beyond the control of national legal systems, which left them largely immune from intervention and unaccountable to any authority (Foster, 2005).

Even where national authorities did have the audacity to hold national or international federations to account, international federations responded, not by reviewing their internal corporate accountability and correcting any ills that may have attracted regulatory scrutiny, but by relocating their head offices beyond the jurisdiction of the meddling authorities. During the 1980s and 1990s several civil law suits in the United Kingdom and Germany went against the IAAF (Chappelet, 2010), which was based in London at the time, and when former 400m runner, Butch Reynolds succeeded with a multimillion dollar claim against the IAAF in the United States, there was a distinct possibility that Reynolds would seek to enforce that judgment against the IAAF in the United Kingdom (Harvey, 1993). The IAAF made little secret of the fact that this concern was one of the major factors which motivated its move to Monaco, where it would be beyond the reach of foreign courts (Harvey, 1993). In this way, the IAAF could avoid judicial and financial oversight (Chappelet, 2012; Connor & McEwan, 2012).

In the wake of the match-fixing scandal involving South African cricket captain, Hansie Cronje, the investigations in India and South Africa revealed a massive web of corrupt activities and created a real likelihood that national authorities in various jurisdictions could pursue criminal prosecutions. The International Cricket Council, based in London at the time, was exposed to both prosecution in the United Kingdom and extradition requests from other jurisdictions. This was again one of the factors which influenced the ICC in its decision to relocate to Dubai (Cully, 2004).

International sports federations also responded to regulatory scrutiny with delusions of grandeur – by entering the realm of global politics and bullying meddling countries into submission with threats of boycotts (Raynor, 2001; Associated Press, 2009; Farrell, 2013), much like state-actors would do on the international stage to protect their interests and enforce their ideologies on other state-actors. So when the football club Olympique de Marseille approached a Swiss court to challenge a decision of UEFA barring that club from the UEFA Champions League following a case of match-fixing, FIFA threatened to deprive France of the right to host the 1998 FIFA World Cup (Chappelet, 2012). When the South African government proposed a judicial commission of enquiry into allegations of match-fixing that took place prior to the 2010 FIFA World Cup, FIFA threatened to suspend South Africa from international football (Raynor, 2001; Associated Press, 2009; Farrell, 2013).

## **PURSUIT OF PROFIT**

The globalisation and commercialisation of sport has had another effect: Sport in and by itself, as industry, produces no tangible output. There are no objects, leaving no production lines and therefore nothing that can be placed in storage and preserved for future generations. Whatever is produced, is produced by industries associated with sport. But sport itself produces nothing. Yet sport is at the heart of a global industry valued at more than \$1 trillion dollars! That begs the question: From what is this incredible value derived?

Jhally (1984) argues that sport produces a valuable commodity which has a material existence and a specific exchange value – an audience whose attention is guaranteed. This is an oversimplification. At the time when a sports federation “sells” media rights, advertising, etcetera, there is no audience yet. There is only the promise of a future audience which may or may not materialise. There is also no guarantee that the attention of the audience can be maintained, particularly where the media or advertising rights for a season long tournament is involved. The sports federation can sell no more than its own perceived ability to attract an audience. As such, the ability to attract an audience, corresponds with the generally accepted definition for the goodwill of any commercial enterprise – the ability to attract custom. Goodwill is the potential audience expressed in economic terms as commodity.

The fact is that, through clever marketing, the global Sports-Media Complex has managed to mine almost every aspect of sport. The annual income that sports federations globally earn from gate fees, sponsorships, media fees and commercialisation exceeds \$100 billion (Plunket Research, 2016). By far the greatest single contributor to this income – more than \$60 billion per year – is the fees that sports federations impose on media networks for sports broadcasts (Andreff, 2008). Yet hardly any jurisdiction explicitly recognises media rights or similar intellectual property rights in sport (Cornelius, 2015).

Even the athletes themselves have become commodities, traded like stocks on a global exchange which, in 2013, was estimated to be worth more than \$3 billion annually (EU Report, 2013). The English Premier League accounted for approximately \$500 million of this total, but by 2016, after four consecutive years of record spending, their contribution to this market had grown to more than \$1.5 billion (Dove & Jimenez, 2016). There is simply no other industry in the world where the leading proponents are traded in any shape or form. Keep in mind that this represents only the fees paid by one football club to another to secure the services of a player – it does not include any signing bonuses or fees paid to the players themselves!

Apart from the services of athletes, the images of athletes are also highly sought-after commodities. If one takes a simple t-shirt and put the logo of a sports franchise on it, or takes a simple pair of running shoes and put the name of Michael Jordan on it, the price one can garner increases exponentially. Or produce a golf club and get Ernie Els to use one, then suddenly all weekend-golfers must have one because clever marketing convinces them that it will improve their mediocre game. The global market for sports goods and merchandise has an annual value of about \$250 billion (WIPO Report, 2014).

In all of this one cannot escape the fact that sports federations and media operators continue to generate billions of dollars without generating any tangible output – sport merely creates a moment, an instant in time like a beautiful sunset or a bright rainbow. But what is the true inherent value of someone running 400 metres faster than anyone had ever done, or placing an odd-shaped plastic ball behind a line of whitewash on grass, or kicking a ball between three posts, or passing a ball through a hoop, or putting a ball into a tin cup? And like a sunset or rainbow, how do you package that run, that score, that moment? But unlike a painting, a motion picture or computer programme in which copyright subsists, hardly any legal system today recognises any intellectual property rights inherent in the sports event itself (Cornelius, 2015).

For all intents and purposes, by generating value where there is none, the Sports-Media Complex has diverted attention from the unique cultural and social values of sport and redirected that attention to the economic aspects of sport.

The growth of television on a global scale has accelerated this tendency, creating the society of the spectacle. The world is increasingly dominated by elaborate spectacles which serve to mask the ruthless exploitation of the existing economic order. Life is seen through television. A world of passive spectators rooted to the screen is pacified by ever more elaborate entertainment, spectacular, yet devoid of real substance. All events become reduced to the same level – coronations, moon shots, assassinations, elections, World Cups, papal visits, Olympic Games, wars – all become part of the great global television show. If social reality cannot be absorbed within the spectacle then it must be excluded. (Whannel, 2008:43)

The incredible ability to create wealth without producing anything tangible means that the Sports-Media Complex is truly “a key *source* of wealth creation” (Andrews, 2004:7) in modern economies.

But is this assessment fair and is it true that there is an increasing disregard of the cultural and social values of sport? Is there really a distorted focus on the economic aspects of sport and the profits that sports federations and media houses can generate from sport? A brief analysis of

the Sports-Media Complex against Elkington's (2009) triple bottom line can shed much light on the veracity of these statements. Elkington (2009) suggests that socially responsible enterprises must consider social equity, the environment and economic factors – people, planet, profit.

As far as social equity is concerned, international sport has a chequered history. The commodification of athletes has at least two dark sides to it. Firstly, the commodification of athletes has contributed to the notion that athletes are expendable resources. Statistics show that sports, especially professional sport, today is one of the most hazardous activities in which a person can participate.

A study of current and former professional football players conducted in 2013 by the *Fédération Internationale des Associations de Footballeurs Professionnels* (FIFPro) has revealed that 32% of current football players have suffered severe injuries and 22% had undergone surgery to repair those injuries. The study also revealed that 17% of players have suffered three or more severe injuries and 18% have had to undergo three or more surgeries. Among former players, 80% have had at least one severe injury during their playing career, while 70% have had to undergo at least one surgery to repair such injuries (Gouttebarga, 2014). A follow-up study in 2014 involving current and former players from eleven countries, revealed that the players had, on average, experienced three severe injuries and two surgeries during their football careers (Gouttebarga *et al.*, 2015).

When the number of injuries that result in a player taking time off from “work” (from training and/or matches) is reviewed, an even bleaker picture begins to form. The injury rate in English professional football is 8.5 “time loss” injuries per 1000 working hours. When only matches are taken into consideration, the injury rate is 27.7 injuries per 1000 hours (Hawkins & Fuller, 1999).

In professional rugby the injury rate is 13.6 injuries per 1,000 hours. During matches, the injury rate is as high as 81 injuries per 1000 hours (Williams *et al.*, 2013). A study of South African rugby players during the 2012 Super Rugby tournament in which professional teams from South Africa, New Zealand and Australia participate, shows that the injury rate among professional rugby players in this tournament is 9.2 injuries per 1000 hours. The injury rate during matches was 83.3 per 1000 hours, while 2.1 injuries were recorded per 1000 hours during training (Schwellnus *et al.*, 2014).

If one considers that the average injury rate in the South African mining industry, which is particularly hazardous because of the depths at which some operations take place, is 2.6 injuries per *one million hours* (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2013) it becomes apparent that the injury rate in sport is unacceptably high. The risk that a rugby player can sustain an injury during a match that will require absence from training and/or matches, is about 4,000 to 5,000 times higher than the risk of a miner sustaining an injury that will require absence from work. If the mining industry would record between 9,000 and 14,000 injuries per one million hours, as professional rugby effectively does if one does the maths, it would not only be viewed as a national disaster, but the mining industry would not be able to bear the economic burden. In addition, it is inconceivable that state authorities would not urgently intervene to improve safety and protect the interests of workers. It is inconceivable that courts should find that mining companies are

not liable to workers for such injuries. So why is the extremely high rate of injuries in sport then seemingly acceptable? As the daughter of professional football player Jeff Astle remarked after his death at a tender age of 54 years:

The coroner ruled industrial disease, dad's job had killed him and in any other profession that would have had earthquake-like repercussions, but not football. It was like [The FA] were trying to wriggle out of it and that's wrong. (Hannon, 2015: Online)

However, this is by no means the full picture. The statistics also show, in contrast to other industries where the safety record has improved, that the number of injuries in sport has increased dramatically over the past decades. In the United States it was found that sports injuries increased disproportionately. In 1955 only 1.4% of all injuries requiring hospital treatment were sports injuries, but by 2001, sports injuries accounted for 16% of all injuries treated in hospitals (Dhillon & Dhatt, 2012). One explanation may be that more people are physically active today and participate in sport, but this cannot explain the full extent of the increase. The same trend is also evident elsewhere.

In Australia, it was found that the number of injuries sustained by international rugby players increased from 47 injuries per 1000 hours during the period 1994-1995 and to 74 injuries per 1000 hours during the period 1996-2000. In Scotland it was found that the percentage of senior players in club rugby who were injured increased from 27% of players during the period 1993-1994 to 47% of players during the period 1997-1998. In addition the injury rate in Scottish rugby during 2008-2009 stood at 100 injuries per 1000 hours. One explanation may be that rugby was an amateur sport prior to 1995, but became a professional sport in 1995 (Williams *et al.*, 2013). However, it can once again not be the only reason for the drastic increase in injuries. And the counter-argument could be that one would expect professional players to be fitter and better conditioned and therefore, less prone to injury.

In addition, a FIFPro study has shown that 38% of current football players and 35% of former players suffer from mental illness. By contrast, less than 17% of the general population show the same symptoms. The study also showed that players who have suffered three or more severe injuries, are four times more likely to report mental problems than other players (Gouttebauge *et al.*, 2015). All of this just confirms yet again the notion that athletes are seen as expendable commodities and injuries are viewed as an acceptable and inevitable by-product of sport (Loland *et al.*, 2006). Lawyers rationalise it with *volenti non fit iniuria*, consent to injury or voluntary assumption of risk. The message remains essentially the same: If you play and get hurt, that is generally your problem.

The commodification of athletes has a second dark side. The annual trade in football players and the FIFA regulations on training compensation, in terms of which junior clubs where players honed their skills can to some extent share in the transfer fees paid in respect of those players when they turn professional, has created a side industry where some clubs, particularly in Africa and Latin America, focus on the production of junior players for the professional market. Olsson (2011:17) indicates:

... [t]he most significant consequence has been the transfer of talented players from other parts of the world to Europe, which in some cases comes close to trafficking young players with very limited social security.

It has been found that some professional football clubs in Europe regularly “test” young football players brought in from Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe at their training centres with only about one in every ten of those tested actually being recruited to the clubs’ junior structures (David, 2005). It is also important to keep in mind that not every youth player who gets recruited to the football academies of big European football clubs, ends up securing a professional contract once their youth contracts expire (Cornelius & Helmchen, 2016). What is more disturbing, is that there is often very little information on the whereabouts of tested youths who have not been recruited (David, 2005) or recruited players who failed to secure professional contracts.

In addition, the commodification of athletes, have created opportunities for criminal syndicates to lure unsuspecting youths into their trafficking operations by promising them and their families the possibility of a lucrative career on the football fields of Europe (David, 2005). It has also created an environment where syndicates can use the smokescreen of football to traffic illegal immigrants, with no expectations of a football career, into Europe and gain immediate sympathy from European authorities (Hawkins, 2015).

To be fair, FIFA has passed regulations on the international transfer of minor players and professional clubs have been sanctioned for violating these regulations (Sparre, 2007; Anon, 2014a). But action has been limited and varied and the regulations on the transfer of under-aged players do not address the fundamental problem, which is the fact that there is a market for the transfer of players in the first place. In addition, the FIFA regulations only apply to youths under 18 years of age and does not prevent the trafficking of young players over the age of eighteen.

The commercialisation of sport has also impacted on other stakeholders. Questions about labour abuses have continued to dog the award of the 2022 FIFA World Cup to Qatar. FIFA had failed to make labour rights a condition for the hosting of the World Cup so that the event will take place on the misery of “quasi-enslaved migrant workers building World Cup stadia” (Grunneau & Horne, 2015:10). The International Trade Union Confederation estimates that as many as 1,200 impoverished migrant workers have already died working on construction projects for the 2022 FIFA World Cup (Burgmann, 2016). But while the case of Qatar may be extreme, workers constructing the stadia for the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil also complained of long working hours, exhausted operators of heavy machinery and unsafe working conditions in which several workers died (Zirin, 2014).

Sponsors and media partners can exert a telling influence on FIFA to address these abuses, but just like FIFA, their silence is deafening. As a result, the commitment of the Sports-Media Complex to issues of social equity is questionable.

The track record of international sport in relation to the environment is equally disturbing. Many sports involve grass playing surfaces. Studies have shown that excessive volumes of water and disproportionate quantities of fertilisers, nitrates, pesticides, herbicide and fungicides

are used to maintain these playing surfaces in pristine condition (Nkhoma, 2007; Guzmán & Fernández, 2015). These are all pollutants that find their way into the environment. Officials, players and managers expect the best playing surfaces and the media can launch scathing attacks on groundsmen if playing surfaces are not up to the highest standards (Lanning, 2013; Anon, 2016; Malyon, 2016).

Miller (2011:230) considers the environmental impact of golf and concludes that:

“TV is a crucial player. Whereas the mythos of golf declares itself a conservationist’s delight, based on rabbits grazing, birds ... and other wild things burrowing in naturally produced St Andrew’s grass, the model TV course for the four majors (conducted in just two countries, and reliant on keeping people off course for months and months in advance of media exposure) has become the standard worldwide. This environmental sublime is named after that paragon of racial and gender inclusiveness, the US Masters: ‘Augusta National Syndrome’ stimulates a chemical fog of cosmic proportions, and the most reckless water use imaginable, both in terms of the courses’ need for it and the way that they fail to store water as effectively as virtually the ecosystems they have displaced”.

Not only is this an environmental concern, but also one of social equity as studies have found that groundsmen suffer disproportionately from cancers which can probably be attributed to excessive exposure to these pollutants (Miller, 2011).

Furthermore, the carbon footprint of major sports events are contributing significantly to the accumulation of greenhouse gasses in our atmosphere. The 2004 Olympic Games in Athens produced half a million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent over 16 days – a disproportionate volume if one considers that it is equivalent to what a city of one million people would produce during the same period (Schmidt, 2006). Studies have shown that the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa produced almost 1 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent, while (mostly European) fans traveling to South Africa for the event contributed almost two million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (GEF, 2012).

The influence of the media on sport today means that there is much pressure to ensure that sports events take place during peak viewing times or at least at times that would ensure sufficient viewership. The result of this is that more and more sports take place at night under floodlights. Each match during the 2006 FIFA World Cup consumed up to three million kilowatt-hours of electricity – enough to power 700 households for an entire year (Schmidt, 2006)!

More and more sports franchises and federations are beginning to take the environmental impact of their sports into account and some positive steps have been taken (Anon, 2013), but the environmental impact of sport goes beyond the event itself. The manufacturing of sportswear and sports equipment also impact on the environment, as does the volume and quantity of used or obsolete equipment (Schmidt, 2006).

While international sport has begun to take note of environmental and some social issues surrounding sport, it seems that there is still far too much emphasis on profit and not enough is being done to promote social equity and concern for the environment.

## CONCLUSION

If one considers the qualities of the global Sports-Media Complex and its various constituent parts, there emerges a somewhat disturbing picture of contradicting personalities, deceitfulness, bullying, an unwillingness or inability to accept accountability, avoidance of scrutiny, disregard for the suffering of others and an almost relentless pursuit of profit. These are all qualities that, if found in a human, would characterise that human as a psychopath (Nixon, 2011). Bakan (2005:28) explains that the corporation, just like:

... at the time of its origin as a modern business institution in the middle of the nineteenth century, has remained a legally designated 'person' designed to valorise self-interest and invalidate moral concern. Most people would find its 'personality' abhorrent, even psychopathic, in a human being, and yet curiously we accept it in society's most powerful institution.

The relentless pursuit of profit means that international sports federations have transcended the realm of guardians of their sport and entered the realm of multinational corporations. We should therefore not be surprised when they act accordingly. "The corporation, like the psychopathic personality it resembles, is programmed to exploit others for profit" (Bakan 2005:69). But corporate structures and the pursuit of profit and success also seem to attract human psychopaths who find the environment accommodating and conducive to the pursuit of their own selfish aims. If left unchecked, these corporate psychopaths and psychopathic corporations tend to feed off each other and each seems to validate the other. The arrest in 2015 of top FIFA officials in Zurich as part of an extensive criminal investigation, led by US authorities, into corruption in international football and the awarding of hosting rights for FIFA World Cup events, is a case in point (Ruiz *et al.*, 2015). And while these actions against the perpetrators must be welcomed, FIFA itself has escaped scrutiny. As Llewellyn (2007:131) warns:

... we cannot inhibit psychopathic companies by controlling the individuals who own (or run) them. ... companies are not just an aggregate of individuals – corporations have a 'life of their own'. Hence, we cannot begin to change companies by focussing only on the behaviour of the individuals within them.

The problem goes much further than the corrupt activities of 35 individuals. The same goes for the French investigation into senior members of the IAAF who were suspected of involvement in the corrupt cover-up of doping by predominantly Russian athletes and of receiving cash for votes to determine host cities of major sports events. While Russian track and field athletes were banned from participation in the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro (Depetris & Stubbs, 2016), the IAAF itself escaped any form of sanction. Surely at some stage, with corruption entrenched at the highest levels of a sports federation, the federation should, as a collective, be called to account for the institutional failures.

The problem with international sport today begins with the very structures that have been established to govern sport. Almost all the major international sports federations were established as non-profit organisations in a time when sport was largely viewed as gentlemanly pursuit of leisure and have largely gone unchanged (Forster & Pope, 2001). And herein lies much of the problems with sport today. Scandals, such as the Salt Lake City bribery scandal, the FIFA corruption matter or state sponsored doping in Russia will continue to plague sports.

What is required is a fundamental overhaul of the global structure for international sport to establish robust structures that can cope with the demands of professional sport. Most importantly, effective mechanisms to hold sports federations and sports administrators accountable should be established. The roles of sports federations and media houses should also be more clearly delineated. The question is: Will the media partners in the Sports-Media Complex be willing to adapt. After all, scandals sell newspapers and attract viewers.

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