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Ratten, Vanessa and Ratten, Hamish 2011, International sport marketing : practical and future research implications, *Journal of business and industrial marketing*, vol. 26, no. 8, pp. 614-620.

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International sport marketing: practical and future research implications

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Abstract

Purpose – Sport is a global product and service that many people around the world enjoy playing, watching and participating in. Whilst there has been an abundance of global media attention on sporting events such as the Olympics and World Football Cup, there seems to be a lack of integration between the sports marketing and international business disciplines both from a practical and also academic standpoint. This paper aims to discuss international sport marketing and why it is an important attribute of business-to-business marketing.

Design/methodology/approach – The aim of the paper is to provide practical implications and research avenues for those seeking to further investigate international sport marketing as a unique area of academic research. The introduction to the paper focuses on the importance of sport to the global economy and how entrepreneurship is ingrained in many sport businesses and organizations. Next, different areas of international business management that relate to entrepreneurial sport marketing ventures are discussed in terms of future research directions and practical implications. These include how entrepreneurial sport ventures affect internationalization, branding, corporate social responsibility, tourism, regional development, marketing and action sports.

Findings – The paper concludes by finding that there are numerous research avenues for future research on international sport marketing that combine different areas of marketing together with the sport marketing and international business literature. In addition, there is enormous potential for linking the sports marketing and international business literature through focusing on entrepreneurial sport ventures that occur worldwide.

Research limitations/implications – The authors demonstrate the need to take an international perspective of sports marketing and business-to-business relationships.

Practical implications – The paper discusses how and why sport firms interact in the international marketplace and how future competition will benefit from more sport-based business-to-business partnerships.

Originality/value – The paper examines the important area of international sports marketing and how businesses that are both profit and non-profit orientated collaborate.

The paper explores the concept of international sports marketing, and discusses the practical and future research implications of this exciting new field of marketing research.

Keyword(s): Sport marketing; Sports; International; International market trends; Future research; Entrepreneurship; Sport business ventures; Entrepreneurialism.

Introduction

International sport marketing ventures occur worldwide as numerous companies and organizations involved in sport focus on the global market as a prelude to achieving economic and financial success. The worldwide appeal of sport is due to the sport industry being worth an estimated \$141 billion (Klayman, 2009). Moreover, sport as a business offers massive potential for revenue generation on a global scale for all parties involved (Klayman, 2009). Goldman and Johns (2009, p. 125) state that the business of sport is “a significant economic sector at the individual, organizational and national levels and is an important contributor to economic activity and wealth creation”. Sport has become increasingly commercialized and has internationalized over the past decade (Bauer *et al.*, 2005), which has been a result of entrepreneurial marketing ventures created within sport. Sport companies in today's global market need to be progressive service sellers in order to compete with other leisure activities (Bauer *et al.*, 2005) and entrepreneurial sport ventures that do this succeed in the competitive marketplace.

Globalization and technological advances have greatly advanced the business opportunities for sport organizations, marketers and entrepreneurs involved in sport. The increased number of people traveling worldwide in addition to international migration has meant that marketing innovations within sport travel quickly. Different types of sport are played worldwide depending on a person's cultural background and educational level. For example, many ethnic immigrants from Italian and Greek backgrounds play soccer in Australia instead of the more traditional Australian Football League. College students in the United States usually from middle to high income class families play lacrosse as part of their educational experience.

In the international environment sport companies and players need to be entrepreneurial to stay ahead of the competition and at the forefront of their respective sport. Entrepreneurial sport ventures in the international context are business activities involving sport that comprise risk taking, innovation and competitive aggressiveness that occur in multiple countries. Entrepreneurship is inherent in many sporting activities because of sports universal global appeal. Sport is often referred to as a global language as most people understand the rules of the game and in many cases no verbal translation is required (Meenaghan and O'Sullivan, 1999).

Most internationally orientated entrepreneurial sport ventures involve a sport product. A sport product is defined as a “good or service or any combination of the two that is designed to provide benefits to a sports spectator participant or sponsor” (Shank, 2005, p. 216). The practical implications of sports products within the sports management and marketing fields are important as sport and the activities surrounding it are based on uncertainty of outcome (Chadwick, 2005). The aim of this paper is to further investigate the

fertile research and practical opportunities for entrepreneurial sports ventures in the broader context of the international business management discipline.

Sports marketing are an important aspect of international sport ventures as it is necessary to the businesses growth and survival. Many sports teams collaborate with corporate sponsors worldwide through their international marketing campaigns. Chadwick (2005, p. 7) defines sports marketing as a “process through which a contest with an uncertain outcome is staged, creating opportunities for the simultaneous fulfillment of objectives among sport customers, sport businesses, participants and other related individuals, groups and organizations”. From an international perspective, sports' marketing is defined further as the opportunity for a corporation or organization to advertise their services in a sports-related context. This could include buying the naming rights to a sports stadium, sponsoring individual athletes or providing clothing and sports equipment. As international sports marketing includes both products and services it is important to distinguish how these operate in the business environment.

Broadly defined sports marketing can be divided into two categories: the marketing of sports and marketing with sports (Shannon, 1999). The marketing of sports includes marketing sporting events and equipment to fans and participants (Goldman and Johns, 2009). This type of sports marketing is inherent in the introduction of new sports such as action sports and innovative new sports products. The marketing with sports includes the promotion of non-sporting products or services at sporting events and the use of athletes to endorse non-sport products and services (Goldman and Johns, 2009). Athletes such as David Beckham, Greg Norman and Tiger Woods are examples of how corporations are involved in international marketing with sports as these athletes have become international sports brands that have a number of sports products under their corporate umbrella. David Beckham has utilized his sports celebrity appeal to play soccer in Europe and the United States in addition to marketing his own brand of perfume. Greg Norman has utilized his sports business knowledge to create Greg Norman Enterprises, which develops and markets golf courses, clothing and restaurants. Tiger Woods has become a global brand by being involved in large marketing campaigns for companies including Nike, Gatorade and Accenture. The next section will further discuss the role of sport marketing in the international marketplace by focusing on how the internationalization of sport.

Internationalization of sport

International sport marketing is a rich area for academic and practitioner research because of the cross-cultural ability of sport to appeal to different generations of people from multiple geographic locations. An increasing amount of people are now able to view sport events from the internet, which has helped to globalize a diverse array of sports including cricket, football and surfing. However, as the ability of people to play and watch professional sport is influenced by the socio-economic conditions of their country, the research on international sport and in particularly professional sports such as the National Basketball Association, National Hockey League and Major League Baseball have come from North America, Europe and Oceania. This has meant that most contributions to international sport marketing have been from developed economies and less is known about an emerging market perspective (Goldman and Johns, 2009). Most international

marketing efforts of large corporations have focused on professional sport in developed countries. However, recently with the increased economic advancement of Eastern European countries, China and India, more effort is now being placed on attracting more people to professional sport leagues. In addition, the amateur sport leagues that operate internationally have to a lesser extent been studied in terms of how they operate in the global marketplace.

The internationalization of sport has been seen in professional sport teams focusing more on the international market instead of their home country market. The large increase in middle class households in China and India together with their large population have attracted more professional sport teams to these countries. In addition, the declining birth rate and ageing population of countries in Northern Europe and the United States has spurred professional sports leagues to focus on these regions. The National Basketball Association has one of the most aggressive international expansion strategies as their home market has seen a decrease in ticket sales and there is increased interest in basketball from other countries outside of the United States. Teams in the National Basketball Association have been internationalizing by focusing on the international marketplace in order to broaden their fan base and sponsorship appeal. An example of this is the Houston Rockets in the National Basketball Association who have a Mandarin version of their web site and a weekly Mandarin radio show (Clarke and Mannion, 2006).

Entrepreneurial sport ventures have also internationalized by focusing on their entertainment appeal. Sport is often seen as a form of entertainment, which has been referred to as "sportainment" (Goldman and Johns, 2009). Moreover, the global appeal of American movies and television shows has meant that many professional sports teams from the United States receive a form of free marketing when people watch this form of entertainment. Examples of entrepreneurial sport ventures that have internationalized include the recently established Indian Premier League. The Indian Premier League has newly formed the International Champions League, which invites players from around the world to play in domestic teams (Goldman and Johns, 2009). Overseas leagues have also built interest in foreign markets through "grass-roots" development in which participation in the sport is encouraged through promotional activities such as expanded broadcasting of games. An example of this type of entrepreneurial international sport venture is the National Football League and National Hockey League recently expanding into Europe and attempting to build the league through television viewership.

The international law surrounding sports licensing is also another interesting research avenue that has a large practical significance for sports agents and law firms involved in sport. Revenues from global licensed sports apparel and other goods were \$US19.9 billion in 2008 (Moorman and Hambrick, 2009). Protecting a sports teams trademark and ensuring royalties are paid has become more important due to the piracy and trademark infringements seen in some parts of the world. In addition, sports leagues and other sports-related companies have five of the top 20 positions among global licensors (Moorman and Hambrick, 2009). Most recently, the licensing activities of the National Collegiate Athletic Association are the target of two pending cases (Keller v. Electronic Arts, Inc (2009), O'Bannon v. NCAA (2009)) because of the use of likenesses of student-athletes in computer games. These two pending cases illustrate the financial incentives for global companies to

protect their investments whilst increasing their reputation in the international market with loyal consumers that follow professional sport and also college sport.

More research is needed on international sports management to determine how sport is being built, developed and extended internationally through entrepreneurial ventures. Other international perspectives on sport marketing are warranted that take into account different cultures, institutions and society. Typically sport has been studied from an Anglo-American view that has influenced the way academics and practitioners have addressed emerging sport-related issues (Chadwick, 2007a). Researching sport marketing from a global perspective will help to understand different socio-economic and geographic factors that influence the development of sport (Chadwick, 2007b).

Sport-based entrepreneurship

Sport in the international context is fundamentally entrepreneurial as it constantly changes to suit adapting business needs. Sport has been studied from a number of different academic disciplines including psychology, economics and marketing but it has only recently been discussed from an entrepreneurial paradigm (e.g. Ratten, 2010). Sport-based entrepreneurship is any kind of sport activity that is innovative, opportunity driven and vision orientated. Entrepreneurship in sport can exist in a number of different international contexts including the individual, organization or team. Sports players, agents and team owners can be entrepreneurial when they are involved in a novel risk taking activity that is different to what has been done before. When an organization or individual involved in sport demonstrates initiative and innovates then they are being entrepreneurial. George Foreman is an example of a sport entrepreneur as he gained recognition as a boxer and then started selling internationally his barbeque grill using his name as the selling point, which is called the "George Foreman Grill".

The benefit of entrepreneurship is that it offers direction to business leaders who want to increase their companies' social and economic performance (Wolcott and Lippitz, 2007). A broad definition of entrepreneurship is the development of enterprise and economic development (Hisrich, 1990; Schumpeter, 1965). Enterprising individuals who apply sport business practices to solve problems are sport entrepreneurs. These individuals use their entrepreneurial principles to organize, create and management a venture to induce some kind of change in the business environment. The primary goal of a sport entrepreneur is to make a beneficial business impact that might also affect other areas of the economy through its social and environmental influence.

Branding in sport

One of the most important assets of a sports organization is its brand (Bauer *et al.*, 2005). Many brands particularly sports brands have transcended geography by focusing on the global appeal of the sport (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). The most successful sports teams team in Europe are those that have been successful on the field such as Manchester United (\$259 million brand value), Real Madrid (\$155 million brand value) and Bayern Munich (\$150 million brand value) (Bauer *et al.*, 2005). Other professional sports leagues have formed separate business units in order to expand their global reach. National Basketball

Association International has created a department to spread the National Basketball Association as a global brand (Forster, 2006). The German Bundesliga football league has internationalized through their international branding effort and increasing the television coverage of their sports games so they are watched in 206 countries (Cutler, 2009). Other sports teams have been focusing on international branding efforts by building a global fan base. Real Madrid football club recently did this by arguing for earlier play times so Chinese fans could watch the games. In addition, research by Koble and James (2000) found that the fans of Cleveland Browns in the National Football League liked the worldwide community of fans and this stemmed from the branding efforts of its football franchise operators.

Sport teams globally generate millions of dollars in ticket sales and official merchandise and much of this comes from the brand. Professional sports teams are the most visible example of sport as a marketable product (Metcalf, 1987). The most valuable sports franchise in the world is the Manchester United brand worth approximately \$1.8 billion USD (IEG, 2009). Due to globalization sports fans are less likely to support a sports team brand based on geographic connection and more likely to support them for personal reasons (Lewis, 2001). Major professional football teams like Real Madrid and Manchester United each have more than 100 million worldwide supporters (Estridge, 2007). As many people live and work in countries different to their birth country, supporting these sports teams act as an “overseas sweetheart” as they live far away but the sport team is close to their heart (Ben-Porat, 2000).

In the global marketplace overseas supporters of sports teams becomes increasingly important because of the reputation of different sports institutions. Sport is controlled by a number of global sport organizations including the International Federation of Football Associations (FIFA), the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) and the World Anti-Doping Authority (WADA) (Forster, 2006). Other less prominent global sports organizations include the World Arm-Sport Federation (WAF-arm wrestling), the International Federation of Sports Acrobatics (IFSA-Acrobatics), the International Federation for Robo-Soccer (FIFA-robot soccer) and the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF-ice hockey) (Forster, 2006).

Corporate social responsibility and sport

Corporate social responsibility involves companies incurring a responsibility to society beyond financial returns. In the sport context, corporate social responsibility is increasingly becoming important in shaping business, economic, political, environmental and social policies in the global marketplace. Corporate social responsibility is integral in the global business environment but it has only recently been discussed with professional sports teams (Walters and Chadwick, 2009). Most professional sport leagues have incorporated corporate social responsibility into their business models with the National Football League having a relationship with United Way and the National Basketball Association developing the “National Basketball Association Cares” campaign that encourages players to partner with social institutions.

The United Nations has promoted sport worldwide as a means to promote education, health, development and peace. Sport has a number of unique factors including mass media

distribution and communication power, youth appeal, positive health impacts, social interaction and sustainability awareness (Sheth and Babiak, 2010). Little empirical research has been conducted on corporate social responsibility and sport despite most professional sport teams highlighting their commitment to corporate social responsibility (Sheth and Babiak, 2010). Sport is an important vehicle for corporate social responsibility as it can influence the quality of life of employees, customers, shareholders and residents of local and global communities (Pava and Krausz, 1997). Sport can help shape corporate social responsibility activities in businesses around the world by focusing on the changing role and perception of society (Baughn *et al.*, 2007). Increasingly more professional sports teams and sports-related businesses are using corporate social responsibility as a key part of their overall business operations. Many organizations sponsor local sporting clubs and encourage employee involvement in sport as a way in which to engage in their local community. Due to the concern about the growing social divide between lower and higher classes of society, many companies have refocused their policies on how they can contribute to regional development (Sagawa and Segal, 2000). In addition, philanthropic activities offer sports teams a way to increase their social standing in a community and at the same time partner with organizations who wish to reinforce their commitment to socially responsible projects.

All types of organizations involved in sport whether they are for-profit or not-for-profit have a responsibility to act in a positive way that enhances overall social welfare. Many organizations in the international environment have the added incentive of helping developing countries with their social policies and a way that transcends language and social barriers is sport. Organizations therefore need to engage with their stakeholders and community in order to facilitate social change (Sagawa and Segal, 2000). Sport has a direct connection to social issues as it can provide guidance to organizations on health, the environment and a diverse workforce. In addition, more sustainability initiatives involving sport are being utilized as a form of corporate social responsibility as many sports utilize a large amount of infrastructure from sport stadiums to playing fields and practice areas.

Tourism and sport

Global interest in sport has been encouraged through mega sporting events like the Olympics and Football World Cup (Rowe, 2003). The largest world countries now include the BRIC economies consisting of Brazil, Russia, India and China, which have large populations (Wilson and Purushothaman, 2003) but do not have developed professional sports leagues as is common in the United States and Europe. In order to encourage the adoption of professional sports teams in these BRIC countries a large number of sporting events have occurred in Asia. FIFA held the 2002 World Cup in Korea and Japan and the FIFA Club World Cup is shared on a biennial basis between Japan and Doha. Malaysia hosted the 1998 Commonwealth games and India will host the 2010 games. The English Premier League also proposed as international round, which would be played in international locations outside the United Kingdom including Asia but was not pursued. In Formula One motor racing events four of the seventeen events are in Asia (Japan, China, Malaysia and Singapore). This increased internationalization of sporting events has encouraged sport tourism as people plan holidays and work events around sport.

Professional sport has rapidly developed into a mainstream operation (Noll, 2003). Global recognition of sport is found in revenue, governance, entertainment dollars and dynasties (Hunter and Mayo, 1999). Many governments around the world invest heavily in sport with the expectation that it will aid in economic and social development (Hoye *et al.*, 2006). FIFA has a global vision with its motto "For the Game, For the World" (FIFA, 2008). FIFA was one of the first professional sport organizations to be international when it was established in 1904 by the football governing bodies of France, Sweden, Belgium, Denmark, Switzerland, Spain and the Netherlands (Sugden and Tomlinson, 1998). Currently FIFA now has 208 member country associations, which is second to the International Athletics Association Federation and the International Basketball Federation that both have 213 member countries. These three sport organizations have more members than the International Olympic Committee and the United Nations and frequently dictate to governments and businesses around the world business terms (Millet *et al.*, 1999). FIFA also has partnerships with many large multinational firms including Adidas, Hyundai, Coca-Cola, Emirates, Sony and Visa (Sugden and Tomlinson, 1998).

Regional development and sport

Many sports businesses are now going into emerging countries as their traditional markets represented by North American and Western European countries are maturing (Nys, 1999). As there is a general trend of economies towards internationalization, entrepreneurial sport ventures are actively looking for new profitable international markets. Many sport teams are expanding to foreign markets particularly Asia to capitalize on the rapid economic development of these countries. Manchester United has established foreign outlets to sell merchandise and many of these outlets are in Asia (Hill and Vincent, 2006). Asia is a strongly targeted market by professional sports teams as they are highly populated (1.4 billion people for China), they have increasing levels of purchasing power reflected in their per capita income and are high consumers of sports merchandise and media. Many Asian sports fans have developed their interest in sport through watching foreign movies and keeping up to date with developments on the television and through the internet. In addition, some Japanese fans of Major League Baseball have developed their interest by watching Japanese players in the United States (Hong *et al.*, 2005). In China, many Chinese have developed an interest in the National Basketball Association by watching Yao Ming play in the United States (Associated Press, 2007).

Team sport is characterized by its multi-level production structure (Bauer *et al.*, 2005). The first level includes other team members, the second includes another team and the third is the championships that connect single teams to a larger competition. Sport is an important component of leisure time activity in society (Moutinho *et al.*, 2007) and in a region's international development strategy. Sport is a competitive and dynamic activity that can be individual or team based depending on the international context. Some sports communities around the world can be described as a tribe because of rituals and feelings about sacred sporting places (Moutinho *et al.*, 2007) that contribute to the development of a country or city based on a sports team. This is particularly evident in Spain where football clubs like Real Madrid sell 1.5 million shirts outside of Spain (Davila *et al.*, 2007).

Marketing and sport

Internationalization of the global economy has meant that many sport marketers now look to the global market instead of one region in their marketing efforts. Innovative international marketing techniques provide a way to support sport and at the same time enhancing a company's image. Technological innovations have encouraged entrepreneurial practices and the use of better products and services (Schumpeter, 1947). In addition, interactive marketing approaches that encourage innovation, risk taking and proactive behavior of entrepreneurs encourages novel ideas to flourish (Covin and Slevin, 1991). Sports marketers are utilizing internationally interactive marketing mediums to connect with consumers in real time. Cell phones, iPads and iPhones have enabled people to watch sport games interactively and this has been encouraged through social networking sites. Technological innovative media made possible by Web 2.0 has enabled marketing to be more interactive and socially complex (Cooke and Buckley, 2008). Social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter have encourage marketers to aim at technologically savvy consumers (Junco and Mastrodicasa, 2007). An example of an entrepreneurial sports marketing campaign is the AT&T laptop card with pitchmen and sports figures (AT&T LaptopConnect, 2009). Other sports marketing ideas have utilized Twitter, blogs and professional networking groups like LinkedIn to target particular types of consumers.

Action sports

Action sports have also been referred to as alternative, lifestyle, extreme, whiz, panic, post-modern, post-industrial and new sports (Wheaton, 2004). Actions sports include risky, individualistic and alternative sports such as surfing, BMX bike riding and wakeboarding (Bennett and Lachowetz, 2004). Snowboarding and skateboarding are considered the fastest growing sports in the United States and form part of the action sports family (National Sporting Goods Association, 2006). Action sports have increased in consumer and corporate interest during the past decade (Cianfrone and Zhang, 2006). The growth in the action sports industry has been encouraged through increased media coverage of sporting events such as the ESPN X-Games and the Mountain Dew Action Sports Tour shown on NBC. Action sports offer a practical solution for sports managers and marketers wanting to see the direction that future sport will take and how they can enter emerging types of sports that will appeal to different demographics and international markets. Sports that were once considered cutting edge such as windsurfing are now mainstream sports so it is an interesting research avenue for sports practitioners to consider what the next type of action sports are and whether changing international demographics such as the ageing of the population will affect the uptake rates in these new types of sport.

Conclusion

Sport is an international business activity that is entrepreneurial in nature. This paper has discussed the internationalization of sport with a focus on how to combine the sports management and international business literature more so that the practical implications of international sport can be identified and strengthened. Sport-based entrepreneurship was discussed that highlighted the many international sporting endeavors that both amateur and professional sports organizations are involved in. More research should focus on case studies of sports entrepreneurs and how they have internationalized. In addition, longitudinal studies of the innovation process that made these international sport

entrepreneurs successful would help to see the practical implications of starting and maintaining a sport-related international business venture. The role of branding in international sport was examined that illuminated how important reputation and image is in the international marketplace. More empirical work is needed on comparing different sports brands internationally and the origins and expectations of the entrepreneurial sport founders in creating these sports brands. Future research questions might ask: What is the role of a sports brand in expanding an organizations market reach internationally? How can sports celebrities can or hinder a sports brand? Corporate social responsibility was identified in this paper as being a cornerstone of an international sports venture. As more people and businesses worldwide are becoming more concerned about sustainability and environmental initiatives it is important that firms focus on how encouraging sport-related activities can add value to their bottom line.

The role of sport tourism was discussed as being part of the international business environment. In particular, the changing economic conditions of many countries worldwide in changing sport tourism were highlighted and this will be a continuing interesting research avenue of inquiry as global superpowers such as India and China continue their dominance of the international business landscape. Future research could examine whether professional sports leagues like the National Basketball Association will be started in these countries as separate business entities or if the existing professional sports leagues will continue to expand in these countries. It would also be novel to study whether different types of sport popular in Asia such as martial arts and taichi will gain in popularity worldwide at the expense of traditional sports such as baseball and basketball. The role of sport to a regions development was proposed in the paper as being a unique starting point for understanding international sport business activities. More research work is required on how regions can harness their economic and social potential internationally by finding ways to encourage people to participate in specific sporting activities and events that are endemic to a particular region. For example, how has the Tour de France bike race internationalized the sport of road cycling? International sport marketing was discussed as it is an important communication vehicle for the globalization of sports teams and organizations. The last section of the paper discussed the role of action sports, which incorporates new types of sports such as kite surfing as being the new vehicles of international sport marketing.

Practitioners in the sports management area need to take advantage of the international marketplace for both their business activities and marketing strategies. As the shift in international business has focused more on Asia due to the rapidly advancing economies of China and India it is important for professional sports teams to spend more money on these emerging markets. It is also important for practitioners in sport to encourage a form of “glocalization” in the branding of these sport teams so that the well known international sport brand reputations such as the New York Yankees can be retained as part of their globalization efforts but at the same time developing some localization strategies to appeal to the Asian market. These strategies may relate to clothing or colors used that appeal more to Asian consumers. For example, the color red and the number 8 is a sign of good luck in China, whilst the color white symbolizes funerals in Japanese culture. Knowing the right sports marketing campaigns in these burgeoning markets will increase the successful globalization rate of professional sports teams from the North American and European

markets. Merchandise and ticket sales could be altered to suit the culture and tastes of different cultures in Asia and different religions.

Overall, this paper has focused on the various different practical and research avenues for international sport marketing. As the world continues to globalize it is vital that more practical and research inquiry is focused on how to combine both the sport marketing and international business literature in order to establish a robust research agenda for future international researchers from around the world to focus on international sporting developments.

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