

Editorial: Transitioning, receiving the baton, and collaborating

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Transitioning

We have become increasingly used to describing things around us as being in a state of transition. This can be in reference to individuals, organisations, or institutions. With regard to individuals, life now seems to be full of transitions - from adolescence to adulthood, from university and schooling to work, from work to retirement, and many more. Significant stages of development are all around us and must be celebrated with specially designed greeting cards. Organisations that must adapt to remain relevant have almost permanent staff involved in transition management for their latest restructure. Even institutions, which form the bedrock of stability in our societies, are periodically faced with transition challenges. For example, Great Britain and many Commonwealth countries now face a future without Queen Elizabeth II as their head of state following the end of a reign of seventy years. Such transitions are reminders that nothing in our world is forever and that all things will, in time, change.

Nonetheless, it is undeniable that in recent times we have been brought increasingly, and often uncomfortably, to a greater familiarity with the existence of change. Fifty years ago, in warning us of the need to prepare our world for rapid transformation, Alvin Toffler alerted us to the death of permanence. He even used a word describing a permanent transition state - 'transience.' Although we will always hope that with change will come improvement, it can nonetheless be a challenging and sometimes painful concept for us humans to face. Many of us will have spent most of our lives striving to achieve long-held goals and meet the expectations of our forebears and ourselves. Yet, when we get there, rather than the opportunity to enjoy and wallow in our achievements, whatever they may be, for the rest of our lives, we find that this stage, too, is transient. It is somewhat like achieving a PhD. - the award that is widely recognised as the pinnacle of academic achievement. At the end of a life, which until that point may have been dedicated to steadily climbing the recognised steps of academic accreditation, we have finally reached the top of the stairs. Indeed, now is a time when we can sit back and enjoy the fruits of our labour. Alas, we soon come to realise that this moment of pause and celebration is just a brief hiatus leading to the next phase, whether it be along the academic pathway or in the broader world of work. With barely a break, we need to build up our publication list to ensure our application for tenure will succeed. Alternatively, the requirement may be to show our colleagues how our academic knowledge can apply to real-world skills and justify the advantage it has given us on entering the professional or commercial workplace.

So, it is with our journal! After a decade of stability in the editorial team, the time has come to transition to new leadership. Transitions can be smooth, or they can be disruptive. They can be planned, or they can be haphazard. The changes they involve can be adaptive or reactive. Clearly, our transition is intended to be smooth, planned, and adaptive. However, changes will become necessary as even in the last ten years; the academic publishing environment has changed considerably - perhaps more even than in the preceding three-

plus decades back to the journal's launch. The goal of both outgoing and incoming editors is that recognising and adapting to these changes will be a part of the continuing evolution of *International Sports Studies*, the scholars and professionals it serves, and the professional association that supports it. So how do we ensure that a transition endorses a process of evolution and underpins not just the survival but the ongoing growth and development of the journal? In Darwinian terms, how can we ensure that in a world with increasing competition and multiple potential threats, our journal will not just survive but prosper and outlive its potential enemies?

The answer lies in continuous 'environmental scanning.' We need to be very clear and informed about what is happening and, in particular, what changes are occurring out there in our areas of interest and expertise. To give an example – in 1978 and the years immediately following, nearly all of the members of that small group of professionals who banded together to form the International Society for Comparative Physical Education and Sport had a core interest in Physical Education, with a particular emphasis on preparing teachers to teach in primary and secondary schools. Physical Education as an academic subject, though with a longer tradition in some settings such as the US and some European countries, was a relative newcomer on the periphery of university study. Major changes have occurred in universities and the community since that time. Significant among these have been the extent of the growth in universities and the expansion of access to university education from a privileged proportion to the majority in many populations. The study of sport has been a major benefactor in this process. Graduates in the area have moved into new employment opportunities far beyond school teaching. They include, among others: coaching; sports administration; exercise prescription; injury rehabilitation and prevention; recreation, and sports tourism. At the same time, the knowledge disciplines underpinning the understanding of human movement have changed considerably. The sports sciences have become dominant, and those that underpin sport management have also become strong. The pedagogy of physical education has frequently become sited in Education departments. The humanities applied to sport and physical education, i.e., history, philosophy, and sociology, have often dispersed into various 'sympathetic' departments and widely diminished in importance. Inevitably, the implications of such changes will be reflected in the content of a journal such as ours.

However, the core question we must always ask is who our 'customers' are and what their background knowledge and interests look like. My answer in broad terms would be that we aim to provide a quality forum for academics and professionals in the broad field of sport with a particular interest in global and international knowledge and practice. That is, by any measure, a broad church. It is one whose diverse *specialist* needs it would be impossible to meet. So, by definition, the knowledge we deal with must be broad-based – both in disciplinary and geographical terms. Our goal in recent volumes has been increasingly to provide awareness – so that readers may feel they are being informed about current developments and practices both in a wide range of different forms of enquiry and in other locations and cultures. The hope is that this can lead to increased interest in and awareness of our broad and still-growing field. It can also lead to informed debate around the place of, for example, data analytics or e-sports in the education of professionals or the delivery and promotion of sport as a public good.

Then there is another crucial question relating to how we can best fulfil our mission and serve our customers. For the last ten years, we have remained faithful to our foundation as a printed scholarly journal serving the goals of our professional association and its members. We have been loyally supported in that process by our independent publisher

and our resolute backer. However, the publishing field has seen dynamic changes in recent years. Major international publishing houses have come to dominate the arena with the considerable distribution and editing resources that their size can command. They have become involved in publishing academics' papers and supporting them professionally by compiling metrics and disseminating profiles. They have been joined by web-based organisations such as ResearchGate and Academia.edu. Universities have also joined the throng in the interests of publishing and promoting the work of their own staff members. In the midst of this and in the arguably legitimate cause of the timely and free flow of up-to-date knowledge, a number of duplicated sources of information in the form of preprints and post-prints have emerged. These are only sometimes, not always, appropriately mapped by using digital object identifiers. Finally, many commercially oriented publishing enterprises have seen the opportunity created by the pressure placed on a growing number of academics to publish. They, therefore, offer almost guaranteed publication at a fee to the anxious academic with little or no review process attached to it. Sadly, such publications are rarely, if ever read, a travesty of the peer-reviewed process and serve only to enhance the bank accounts of the entrepreneurs who run them!

Given the extent of the disruption consistently occurring through the digital revolution, the task of creating, managing, and distributing information appropriately - in a quality form to an identified and appreciative audience - must currently be among the most demanding of those on the planet. However, I am pleased to say that my successor Dr Maria Luisa Guinto, and I have been working closely together on our transition. I am also much heartened by the continuity provided by the Associate Editor, Martin Holzweg, and our publisher Dr Volkhard Buchholtz who have been an integral part of the process over the last ten years. I am thus able to say with more than a bit of confidence that I believe the process of evolution, which has enabled this journal to adapt to new challenges and new forms of competition, will continue under her stewardship. However, I am in danger of saying too much, and so I would like to end my contribution to this joint editorial simply by borrowing the words of the incomparable T. S. Eliot (Little Gidding, 1942):

*For last year's words belong to last year's language.
And next year's words await another voice.
And to make an end is to make a beginning.*

John Saunders

Receiving the Baton

Transitions are integral to any field, whether in academics or sports. They come in the form of shifts, alterations, modifications, changeovers, and evolution over time. In academic publishing, transitions are vital in forwarding knowledge and expertise from one generation of scholars to the next. Similarly, passing the baton is crucial in sports to ensure that teams can compete at the highest levels. Despite the differences in these fields, there are many similarities in navigating transitions in academics and sports. Academic publishing is a complex and nuanced field that requires careful attention to detail and an understanding of the broader academic landscape. Publishing academic work involves multiple stages, from researching and writing to peer review and publication. Transitions within academic publishing can occur in various ways, including the retirement of senior scholars and the entrance of junior scholars. Managing these transitions can pose challenges, primarily as it demands balancing the needs and expectations of scholars from diverse generations.

Passing the baton is the term in sport parlance for handing off a rod in a relay race. Four runners compose a relay team. The first runner carries a baton and, after having run their specified distance or "leg," this runner hands the baton to their teammate awaiting their turn to take responsibility for the next leg. The critical exchange occurs within a specified zone limited to a few metres in length. Precision is of utmost significance between the athletes involved, as any fumbling might result in losing in a race where every millisecond counts, and dropping the baton could even result in disqualification. All members of the team must contribute to the essential elements of passing and receiving the rod to maximise their chances of victory. It is not necessarily the team with the fastest runners that wins the race, as the efficient passing and receiving of the baton within the limits of the exchange zone can make the difference. Races are won or lost in the passing and receiving of the rod.

Moreover, runners must master their distinct roles and responsibilities, dedicate meticulous attention to timing and technique, and adapt to changing circumstances on the fly, or better said, on the run. Much planning goes into the practice and performance of these races. Hundreds of hours are invested in this split-second transition to ensure that teams can compete at the highest levels, allowing runners to collaborate in maximising their unique abilities and running their fastest time. Undeniably, elite athletes relentlessly rehearse this handoff process to ensure efficiency in leaving the platform within microseconds of the tag and optimising the race strategy.

By analogy, the handover process in scholarly publishing entails careful preparation. It sits within established norms and procedures for the processes by which knowledge is passed down from one generation of scholars to the next. These can include mentorship programs, institutional support for junior scholars, and publishing opportunities for early-career researchers. The challenge lies in balancing tradition with innovation. Senior scholars may be deeply invested in time-honoured practices and approaches, while junior scholars may be raring to explore new ideas, systems, and technologies. Finding a way to reconcile these competing requirements can be tricky, as it necessitates careful navigation through complex power dynamics while promoting evolution and progress in the field. Just as athletes must adapt to a rapidly changing sports scenario with the participation of younger competitors, the modernisation of equipment, and continuing advancements in technology, while still depending on tried-and-tested methods that have given them success in the past, such an endeavour requires the willingness to experiment and take risks while maintaining discipline and focus on performing at the highest level.

One of the complexities to be addressed in academic publishing transitions is securing that the knowledge and expertise generated over time are effectively passed from one generation of scholars to the next. This situation may present incredible challenges when senior scholars retire or leave the field, given their wealth of knowledge and experience that are difficult to replicate. At the same time, junior scholars offer novel ideas and approaches that must be seamlessly incorporated into the field to assert its continued growth, development, and advancement. In the arena of editorial transitions, the underlying concern centres around the extent to which recruits assimilate the wisdom of their predecessors. In a sense, the handover process can also be likened to a relay race of ingenuity. In athletics, runners depend on time-tested techniques to increase their chances of winning the competition. Nonetheless, they must likewise rely on their intuition, grit, and experience to make instantaneous decisions during the race. At the commencement of the editorial changeover, we are entrusted with a baton of knowledge and responsibility. Still, before imparting it to those who will follow, it becomes imperative to internalise and

personalise the learning and commitment. Thus, as athletes receive the baton and nurture it as their own before passing it on, we must imbibe the essence of our predecessors' labour in assuming this editorial mantle and making it an integral part of our unique editorial journey.

Finally, the transition process commands excellent teamwork and coordination in both athletics and academic publishing. The relay race is a team event involving runners who take turns carrying a baton around an oval track. The objective is to complete the race in the shortest possible time, with each team member running at maximum speed while handing over the baton within the critical zone without dropping it. The team's victory rests on each runner's ability to sustain the desired momentum and timing while accurately passing the rod. Similarly, academic publishing requires a tremendous team effort to produce high-quality research. The authors must collaborate to accomplish the research and write the manuscript clearly and concisely. The entire process usually involves a steady stream of authors, a dedicated editorial team, and a network of peer reviewers. The editorial team takes responsibility for examining manuscripts that adhere to scholarly standards, following appropriate format and style, and making suggestions for improvement. The peer reviewers provide feedback on the manuscript, ensuring it meets the academic community's standards. The dynamic interaction among members and stakeholders of academic publishing offers a synergistic effect in achieving common goals.

International Sports Studies has been in a significant transition over the past months, with the baton passing from Dr John Saunders as the outgoing Editor-in-Chief to me as the incoming one. We have been rehearsing the handover technique for some time. I am most fortunate to receive the rod from an eminent "Team Captain" who has served ISS over the last ten years. Although I have significantly benefited from his wealth of wisdom, I still have much to learn while discovering my unique approach and contribution to this journal. Nonetheless, I am encouraged by the abiding dedication of Associate Editor Martin Holzweg and ISS publisher Dr Volkhard Buchholtz, both of whom have been integral to the journal's success over the last decade.

Moreover, I appreciate the other editorial team members, particularly Dr. Klaudia Rafael, who agreed to serve as Guest Associate Editor for this journal issue. It is truly a great privilege to steer this publication. As we acknowledge the legacy of excellence built by ISS, let us work in partnership to create a fresh platform for innovative research and thoughtful discourse. Indeed, I am eager to begin this journey with all of you, anticipating what we can achieve as a team.

Maria Luisa M. Guinto

Collaborating

The selection of papers in this issue continues to reflect this journal's commitment to 'inclusivity' and 'diversity' in international sports studies. The 'sports' covered include the world's most popular sports – basketball and football – played at the highest level at the American NBA and the regional and community level by rural youth. Yet our concern with sport also embraces the role of recreation, sport, and movement in human well-being. Further, the studies involved emanate from around the globe, in this case - Asia, Australia, the Middle East, Europe, and North America.

The paper of Karin Volkwein-Caplan features her keynote address delivered at the 21st Biennial Conference of the International Society for Comparative Physical Education and Sport hosted by the Lakshmibai National College of Physical Education, India. Her topic is healthy ageing and its significance in a world where, despite the considerable progress made towards better health and well-being among the world's population, humanity's development has brought its problems. These can impinge not just on the interests and quality of the journey of its population as it progresses through life but also on the planet's health. Most recently, the world has faced the challenge of the Covid 19 pandemic, and Volkwein-Caplan's address covers suggested strategies for ensuring that movement and healthy activity can become part of the means whereby healthy ageing can be maintained even in this most challenging context.

Sapto Adi's investigation focuses on the challenges presented by the COVID pandemic. In this case, the population of concern is at an earlier stage in the academic development process: students at the university level. Adi's case study of how a sample of Indonesian students was impacted by and coped with the physical activity restrictions provides an interesting example of the impact of the pandemic on this age group. The difficulties these students faced during the pandemic may have been similar to their peers in different countries and cultures during this same time. Readers might find value in comparing the experiences of these young people with those in related situations in their own settings.

Billymo Rist, Anthea C. Clarke, Tony Glynn and Alan J. Pearce address a current concern with elite athletes' mental health and well-being. Working in an environment that has become increasingly mindful of the stresses suffered by young athletes, the research team explored the value of using salivary cortisol measures to monitor and, therefore, better manage stress experienced by Australian professional athletes. They also measured personality profiles to identify individuals at particular risk of stress-induced ill health. Although their findings failed to establish any relationship between personality variables and baseline levels of cortisol, their enquiry is encouraging in its scope and commitment to increasing understanding of the relationship between personality, stress, and the contemporary athletic environment.

Timothy Urban's study on the value of the home advantage for NBA teams who reach the advanced stages of the competition provides a current example of the increasing number of insights provided in and to sport using data analytic techniques. The notion of uncertainty is a critical element in retaining the unique nature of sport. Fans and competitors alike can accept the premise that the odds might be stacked against them going into a competitive situation. However, once those odds become overwhelming, the event ceases to be a sport in the true sense of the word. Instead, it becomes a much-diminished example of entertainment. Today's scientists have increasingly vast and comprehensive databases available to query historical events and use them to predict the likelihood of future outcomes. Urban uses the details of "elimination games in the National Basketball Association (NBA) from 1955 through 2019 (65 seasons) and the American Basketball Association (ABA) Playoffs from 1968 through 1976 (9 seasons), encompassing 242 games" to make his predictions. Nonetheless, he recognises the need to include additional variables to the home or away status in an effective model. He also acknowledges other features that may affect the model, such as the difference in 'quality' between the teams.

Ensuring that competition remains fair such that the outcomes are not entirely predictable is interestingly also a theme behind the work of Christian Fischer. Far from the commercial heights of the NBA, his concern is with competitive youth soccer teams in

rural areas of Italy. He identifies the problem of difficulty in fielding complete teams of the same age on account of the lack of numbers of potential participants. His study calculates the effect of average team age and size differences on match outcomes as measured by goal difference. Often, sport clubs are forced to pool children and adolescents into multi-age teams that are made to play with fewer (substitute) players than their opponents. The impact of participating in an imbalanced competition is perhaps even more critical for young participants experiencing unfair competition than for team owners and gambling companies working in a highly professional sports environment! Fischer's suggestion to introduce statistical corrections for team age and size and apply that to the match result is one that competition organisers faced with intractably unfair results may wish to consider.

Finally, from Iran, Akbar Jaberi introduces the concept of 'plogging', specifically enquiring into the motivations of those engaging in this novel activity that brings together physical and environmental activities. Affirming the potential of this eco-friendly activity to promote physical activity among those who may not be attracted to typical forms of sport and exercise, the author interviewed seventeen ploggers from seven countries. Findings from his qualitative study revealed five motivational themes reflecting environmental, social, physical activity, psychological, and personal values. Given the global concern over physical inactivity as a threat to public health, the author suggests considering forms of physical activity that incorporate values beyond those of just physical health alone.

We invite you to enjoy and learn from the varied contributions of the authors. Please feel free to share your feedback and suggestions with us to collaborate in enhancing future journal issues. We hope, however, that you might share with us an appreciation of just how broad the scope of our field is, how vibrant the methodologies are, and how varied the geographies and cultures within which we share our interests.

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