

Monitoring human rights in sport: How a human rights in sport checklist can assist with best practices

Contact details

Name author(s): Mary A. Hums (1), Anita M. Moorman (2), Eli A. Wolff (3), Amber Morris (4), & Alexis Lyras (5)

Institution(s) or organisation(s): University of Louisville (1, 2, 5); Sport in Society, Northeastern University (3, 4)

City and country: Louisville, Kentucky USA (1, 2, 5); Boston, Massachusetts, USA (3, 4)

Email address for correspondence: mhums@louisville.edu

Aim of paper

While human rights is a subject long studied, research on sport and human rights is relatively recent (Corbett, 2006; DaCosta, Abreu & Miragaya 2006; Donnelly & Kidd, 2006; Roy, 2007; Wolff & Hums, 2007). While this research is useful and necessary, from a practitioner's point of view, the concept of sport and human rights needs to be explained in very concrete terms. In other words, what does "sport and human rights" mean to someone working, for example, in the administration of a professional sport franchise or as an administrator with a sport governing body (Hums, Wolff & Morris, 2009)? The purpose of this paper is to examine and critique the development of a best practices management model for educating and training sport management professionals regarding legal and policy mandates surrounding sport and human rights. A secondary purpose of this paper is to evaluate a proposal in the United States to create a Secretary of Sport and Culture as a mechanism for the United States to comply with human rights initiatives in sport.

Organisational/managerial context

In order to establish the framework for sport and human rights, it is useful to look to existing international documents which address the subject. Numerous United Nations conventions address human rights in sport, including Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, International Convention Against Apartheid in Sports, and International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Hums, Wolff & Mahoney, 2008; Morris, 2008). In countries where United Nations conventions have been ratified, they become legally binding. This paper will examine a suggested compliance mechanism – a Human Rights in Sport Checklist - available to sport organisations, non-governmental organisations, and government entities which are subject to the legal mandates contained in the United Nations conventions.

Organisational/managerial practice/issues

This paper (a) discusses and analyses the development of a Human Rights in Sport Checklist to delineate the rights of all participants in sport and (b) provides various sport industry examples of application of the Checklist. The Checklist clearly outlines the rights of all participants in sport. It can also be used as a tool to raise awareness about the current status of human rights in sport. Sports organisations as well as third parties can use this instrument to better understand the landscape of sport and human rights, looking at both the strides sport organisations have made as well as areas needing improvement (Sport in Society, 2008b).

The development of the checklist was headed by Sport in Society, a Northeastern University Center, and is based on language used in existing human rights checklists. It was established within the framework and guidelines of international treaties and conventions addressing human rights in sport (Sport in Society, 2008b).

The checklist includes the following sections:

1. Social rights;
2. Health and safety rights;
3. Sport and employment rights;
4. Justice in sports rights;
5. Environmental rights;
6. Financial rights.

Each of these sections will be defined and examples of best practices from the sport industry are provided to illustrate the application of the sections.

Implications for sport and sport management

The rights delineated here are meant to provide guidelines for organisations and third parties to consult while examining the state of human rights in sport. The authors envision use of the Checklist will help sport organisations gain a better understanding of the accomplishments in the field of human rights within sport as well as areas that may need more focus and direction. The Checklist will highlight which human rights are flourishing and which may need a helping hand. When referring to sport the authors are referring to not only professional and amateur sports, but also all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being, and social interaction, such as play, recreation and indigenous sports and games. In addition when the Checklist refers to participants it refers to not only athletes but also coaches, managers, officials, and others involved in sport (Sport in Society, 2008a). This paper will also examine the international legal documents that contributed to the checklist and the process utilised to integrate the legal mandate into policy and practice (Sport in Society, 2009). In addition, the paper addresses the potential outcomes of using the checklist, and examines the barriers, challenges, and opportunities with respect to monitoring and implementing human rights within and through sport.

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