

Modernising snooker: institutional change and governance issues

Authors: Benoit Senaux & Jed Vaughan
Institution: Coventry Business School, UK
E-mail: b.senaux@coventry.ac.uk

Keywords: institutional change, governance, stakeholder, snooker

Abstract:

Snooker is usually considered as having been created in 1875 by British officers stationed in India, as a variation of billiard. Though the first professional world championship took place in 1927, snooker only became really professional in the late 1970s. The creation of the Professional Billiards Players' Association (now World Professional Billiards and Snooker Association, WPBSA) in 1968 marked a rupture from the game 'paternalistic amateur base' and allowed for a better representation of the players (Bury, 1986:54). WPBSA is the governing body for professional snooker worldwide and organises and owns the rights of the sport main events. TV broadcasting (since 1969) and the introduction of a world ranking system in 1977 helped popularised the sport. The 1985 World Championship final attracted an audience of more than 18 million viewers in the UK alone. However, tensions emerged in the late 1990s with decreasing audience, lost of sponsorship with the ban of tobacco advertising and threat of competitive tour (e.g. TSN in 2001).

In December 2009, the chairman of WPBSA was ousted and replaced by Barry Hearn, who has been managers of several successful players and chairman of the Professional Darts Corporation, one of darts' two governing bodies. Hearn introduced innovative ideas and soon convinced WPBSA to let him takeover 51% of World Snooker Ltd, its commercial arm which runs snooker main events. He subsequently introduced power snooker, a new, shorter form of snooker, multiplied the number of tournaments, leading to a drastic increase in prize money. World Snooker also launched a qualifying school allowing

amateur players to compete for places in the professional tour.

Using literature on institutional change (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Gammelsaeter and Senaux, 2011) and stakeholder theory (Rowley, 1997; Senaux, 2008), this paper aims at analysing the dynamics behind these changes. This is particularly interesting as snooker is one of the very few professional sport which was, until recently, fully controlled by its players. This is also interesting as the recent evolution somehow mirror changes which have been made in other sports: creation of a professional tour (like golf), takeover of the commercial arm by an individual (like formula one), introduction of shorter, more dynamic version of the sport (like cricket with T20).

This analysis relies on archival data covering key events since 1968 (e.g. emergence of PBPA and WBPBSA, tensions with TSN etc.) with a particular emphasis on the most recent events since 2009 (appointment of Hearn, takeover of World Snooker Ltd etc.). Historical analysis is used to identify patterns; and press articles, interviews and other archival documents are mobilised to understand the dynamics of change, coalition building and power games amongst stakeholders.

Data collection is closed to completion and the analysis is expected to be finished by mid-June.

References:

- Bury, M., (1986) 'The social significance of snooker: sports-games in the age of television', *Theory Culture Society*, Vol. 3, 49-62. Sage: Nottingham.
- Gammelsaeter, H. & Senaux, B. (2011) *The organisation and governance of top football across Europe*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Powell, W.W. & DiMaggio, P.J. (1991) *The new institutionalism in organizational analysis*. University of Chicago Press.
- Rowley, T.J. (1997) 'Moving beyond dyadic ties: A network theory of stakeholder influences', *Academy of Management Review*, 22(4):887-910.
- Senaux, B. (2008) 'A stakeholder approach to football club governance', *International Journal of Sport Management & Marketing*, 4(1):4-17.