
LEAGUE SYSTEMS IN INDIVIDUAL SPORTS – THE CASE OF THE GERMAN GOLF LEAGUE

Submitting author: Mr Andreas Parensen
Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Sportmanagement and Sportsociology
Bochum, D-44801
Germany

All authors: Andreas Parensen, Timo Zimmermann, Marie-Luise Klein

Type: Scientific

Category: 3: Governance of Sport(s) and Sport Organisations

Abstract

Not only in Germany it can be observed that a growing number of individual sports have set up more or less differentiated club league systems in addition to the original single tournaments. This is the case in racket sports like tennis, table tennis, badminton and squash, but also in combat sports like boxing, judo or wrestling. Even in billiards, triathlon or golf team sports leagues have been established. While the literature of league economics provides a number of instructions how to design and optimize leagues in professional team sports, mainly foot-ball (Noll, 2003; Ross & Szymanski, 2010), there is no explicit reference to individual sports leagues so far. But these sports require special attention because of the interlocking and coordination of individual tournaments with a club league system. There are also different expectations of the particular sports organization as well as the players, coaches, club managers, operators or owners and sponsors which have to be taken into consideration for an optimal design and for a sustainable acceptance and attractiveness of the league.

The theoretical background for analyzing the peculiarities of the described phenomenon is, besides the stake-holder approach (Friedman & Miles, 2006), the stimulus-contribution theory (Simon, 1997). Like other organizations sports leagues act as cooperative networks which have to achieve a balance between internal (clubs, play-ers) and external stakeholders´ (spectators, sponsors, media) demands. All stakeholders have individual goals to participate in the league. Their participation is advantageous if they receive net benefits, which they would not generate in alternative projects, for example individual tournaments. For the success of the league as a common outcome it is important that stimuli exist which are at least equal to the stakeholders´ contributions measured in relative terms. Ideally they should be motivated by net benefits for further adequate and proactive contribu-tions to the league. So the aim of this paper is to investigate which stimuli must be set to ensure adequate contributions of the stake-holders and how a –

temporary – stimulus-contribution-equilibrium can be located. Object of investigation is the new German Golf League which started in 2013. The main reason of the German Golf Association for the change was the so called "Vision Gold" for the Olympic Games in 2020. To turn the vision into reality youth and talent promotion and the repositioning of the image of golf from a recreational sport for elderly people towards a high-performance sport is required. It was expected that the establishment of a uniform, attractive club league system would enhance this organizational change and develop new marketing opportunities for golf in general and for the golf clubs in particular.

An online questionnaire was used to investigate the research question. After the first season, main stakeholders of the German Golf League (athletes: n=628, clubs: n=143, coaches: n=93; regional golf associations: n=39 and sponsors: n=44) were asked about their expectations, goals and opinions concerning aspects of the league design, of the local matchday organization, of essential competition rules as well as framework conditions of the league. The results point out a wide acceptance of the league system and its management by the German Golf Association. But also a need for improvement could be identified for some competition rules, the financing of the team's budgets and the event character of matchdays.

Based on the empirical findings stimuli and contributions of the stakeholders can be identified. This enables the analysis of common and private benefits which indicate if a balance is reached or not. The findings already led to appropriate consequences of the DGL league management. They also shed light on the fact that managing club leagues in individual sports requires a different approach than managing team sports leagues. Implications for further research are to examine club league systems and their backgrounds in other individual sports to detect their specific features compared to classical team sports leagues. More general it seems to be necessary to extend theoretical models of league economics to utilize them for individual sports.

References

- Friedman, A. L. & Miles, S. (2006). *Stakeholders. Theory and Practice*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Noll, R.G. (2003). *The Organization of Sports Leagues*. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 19 (4), 530-551.
- Ross, S.F. & Szymanski, S. (2010). *Open Competition in League Sports*. In S. Szymanski (Ed.), *The Comparative Economics of Sport* (pp. 139-173). Chippenham, Eastborne: CPI Anthony Rowe.
- Simon, H. A. (1997). *Administrative Behaviour. A Study of Decision-Making Processes in Administrative Organizations* (3rd ed.). New York: Free Press.