

Utilizing mock trials to teach sports law to sport management students

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Aim of paper

Traditionally instructors of the law use the case method as the predominant mode of legal instruction in the classroom. Lectures are structured to provide students a basic legal knowledge in sports law from a historical context with little, if not any, emphasis on developing the skills needed in the everyday life or the professional careers of graduates. The purpose of this presentation is to provide instructors who teach sports law a guide to utilizing mock trials as a supplemental exercise to enhance the student learning experience and to foster creative and critical thinking abilities similar to skills required in the workplace.

Organisational/managerial context

Although the law is an important part of the sports industry, many students have no interest in the law. Instructors are often seeking teaching strategies to foster interest in the subject matter without compromising course objectives. For this exercise, students select a real world case and are then assigned roles as lawyers, judges, witnesses, jury, and media. Each role has specific duties and assignments throughout the semester. Most classroom lectures mirror a case method format that focuses on how others solve legal problems. By incorporating mock trials into sports law classes, students learn to solve problems by actually identifying and analysing issues themselves.

Organisational/managerial practice/issues

Although research shows that the mock trial process aids students in understanding legal concepts and the entire legal process, many instructors are sceptical regarding implementation. Sport Management instructors are concerned about the time commitment for the mock trial, how the students are evaluated, and the level of expertise needed for effective implementation. Since a real world case is being used, instructors must have at least a minimal understanding of the trial process and be able to identify potential legal claims. Each role has specific responsibilities and assignments, and instructors who conduct a mock trial must be aware of potential problems in the perception and existence of fairness in grading.

Implications for sport and sport management

Incorporating a mock trial as a teaching strategy for sports law allows students to be active participants in learning the law rather than being passive observers. Students receive a hands-on approach to learning in addition to traditional lectures. Students are also given the opportunity to develop a variety of the core skills needed to achieve success in academia and in life such as public speaking, critical analysis, persuasion, and teamwork.

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