

Editorial: The COVID-19 Pandemic: Impacts of the Coronavirus on Sport and Society

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The Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19), is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. It has had and continues to have devastating impacts on almost every aspect of life globally. The sports sector, in particular, being closely linked to travel and tourism, has experienced devastating impacts given that most of the world's global (and domestic) travel had come to a halt with travel bans, shutdowns, lockdowns and various other forms of travel restrictions. Travel had almost come to a standstill globally with cancellation of flights and events/ activities (Hoque *et al.* 2020).

Chinazzi *et al.* (2020) and Hoque *et al.* (2020) assert that travel restrictions and social distancing were imposed and continue to be enforced globally primarily to curb and stop the spread of the virus, which remains a socio-economic and health threat. Sectors such as the sport industry are particularly impacted because they are associated with social gatherings in terms of consuming and participating in events and activities (Glebova *et al.* 2022; Parnell *et al.* 2020). Several sporting events and activities were and continue to be cancelled or postponed/ suspended, include-ing major sports events (the most notable being the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics Games) as well as sport exhibitions and conferences.

Gough (2020: 1) states that the COVID-19 pandemic had 'wreaked havoc to the sporting calendar'. It is also important to note that training was severely disrupted, that substantially impacts on athletes at different levels, as shown by Wiltshire *et al.* (2022) in relation to COVID-19 impacts on the economic viability sports sector and athletic performance. They caution that

several sports companies will not be able to survive, which will have severe impacts economically since sports is a major economic contributor in many parts of the world. The extent to which sports organisations and businesses have been supported to deal with the pandemic disruptions is, therefore, also an important aspect to consider. Additionally, sports businesses, organisations and personalities (especially players and athletes in the sports sector) contributed to raising awareness about the virus, leveraging funding and resources, and using facilities to deal with the pandemic.

The COVID-19 impacts are wide-ranging and include socio-economic, political, environmental and health-related effects. The sports sector, which has several codes at different levels (professional, amateur and recreational), has experienced varied impacts. The disruptions to sports continue. As Glebova *et al.* (2022) note, the COVID-19 pandemic has created both challenges and opportunities for professional and social sports events and activities to transform and grow. They assert that the pandemic has initiated new sporting and exercise lifestyles, particularly noting the importance of the sports sector in responding to the demand for new technologies and services. For example, Martins *et al.* (2022) indicate the growing prominence of e-sports. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed considerably how people view and engage in sports activities. Additionally, several stakeholders are affected, such as spectators (including how the pandemic will influence future travel plans), players and athletes, employees, supply and demand-side sports businesses, sports agencies, managers and owners of facilities and sports clubs, sports public sector/ government departments, etc.

The sports sector (especially as a sub-sector of tourism with sports tourism being a major motivation for travel) is directly and indirectly impacted on by major global events such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States of America (USA), the 2008 economic recession and other health outbreaks such as the 2002-2003 severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV) noted by Strielkowski (2020). Thus, the tourism and sports sectors are not unfamiliar with responding to global upheavals and catastrophes. However, the COVID-19 pandemic poses challenges and impacts not experienced previously, with devastating impacts on the sports sector.

This AASBS Special Volume adopts a multidisciplinary and inter-sectorial stance to examine the range of sports-related impacts, responses and challenges to the COVID-19 pandemic adopting varied methodological approaches, including ethnographic and empirical research.

Key questions that frame the volume are:

- What do the current experiences reveal about the sports sector's preparedness to deal with the pandemic, and how can COVID-19 inform future levels of preparedness and dealing with risk? This is an important consideration since there is growing consensus that there are high levels of unpredictability and disruptions that will characterise the world today. These can be linked to social, health, economic and environmental (including the extreme weather events being experienced globally as a result of climate change) crises.
- How is the COVID-19 pandemic likely to change the sports sector? What innovations and interventions are emerging? The responsiveness of a sector links to long-term sustainability and the ability to adapt to changes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted participation in sports activities, including sport therapy. Measures to curb the spread of the virus (including the lockdown and social distancing) has placed persons with disabilities at a higher level of risk of being further excluded from participation in sport-related activities, which are often central to maintaining their health and well-being. In '**Sport Participation among Persons with Disabilities during the COVID-19 Pandemic**', **Suveshnee Munien** presents a desktop analysis approach to examine how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted persons with disabilities in relation to the requisite sporting activities, inclusion and participation, types of activities involved, and identification of specific needs. Additionally, the closure of specialised sports facilities, lack of access to trainers and sports therapists and the concomitant effects on physical and psychological health and well-being are assessed. While many trainers have been offering online training, this poses challenges for persons with different disabilities, which are examined as well. Responses to address the sporting needs of persons with disabilities are also identified. Finally, the chapter forwards recommendations about how the needs of persons with varying disabilities should be catered for as restrictions ease, including how to ensure their safety as facilities re-open and facilitate opportunities to encourage participation in sports activities.

Many people believe that as long as they are healthy and asympto-

matic, their conditioning programme may begin where they had left off before the coronavirus lockdown. This is fallacious thinking, as this long layoff may lead to injuries, overtraining and staleness. It is, rather, a progressive process where the principles of exercise science need to be heeded when athletes start a training programme after the layoff, as well as preventative measures. Further, it is not only fitness that needs to be considered, but also the conditioning skills that may have also regressed with lockdown as a result of COVID-19. The psychosocial factors of not training may also impact progress towards total fitness. In **‘Guidelines for Physical Activity and Return to Training during and After Lockdown’**, **Yoga Coopoo** and **Habib Noorbhai** provide such guidelines for athletes and recreational persons who have had a layoff or have been injured for a prolonged period of time. They provide fundamental principles that need to be considered. Finally, guideline tables are provided to assist all stakeholders with risk and gauging where to begin (with respect to the intensity and duration for a safe return to activities, match training or performance). Players, coaches and support staff are encouraged to take cognisance from the guidelines and recommendations in this chapter for prevention from COVID-19 and return to athletic and fitness activities.

The chapter, **‘Heroic Actions by Sports Personalities, Clubs and Associations in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic’**, by **Sogo France Matlala**, focuses on the heroic philanthropic, educational and socially responsible responses to the COVID-19 pandemic by sports personalities and sporting bodies in the African context. Heroic actions can take the form of messages of encouragement, material donations from personal resources, fundraising, the mobilisation of other resources and behaving in a socially responsible way so as to model expected behaviour such as hand washing, physical distancing and respecting lockdown rules. Fans and spectators see sports personalities as celebrities and role models. This places an obligation on celebrities to return the favour. Some fans support their favourite sports personalities and their clubs even when they experience poor performance as it happens even to the best sports teams or clubs. Through narrative review of both news media and scholarly literature, the chapter identifies and describes philanthropic, educational and responsible behaviours by sports personalities, sport clubs and sport associations in the African context.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating consequences for the sporting sector with cancellations and postponement of sporting events and activities globally. There are dire predictions pertaining to the economic im-

pacts of the pandemic on the sports sector, including the inability of specific sports codes and more locally-based sports clubs and federations to survive. Despite the challenges faced, the sports sector has emerged as a major contributor to efforts to fight the pandemic as well as provide assistance to those most impacted but least likely to respond effectively to the pandemic. In **‘Sports Sector Philanthropic Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Evidence of Global Inequalities’**, **Rivoni Gounden** and **Amanda Gumede** discuss the philanthropic efforts of the sports sector, which include fundraising efforts, procurement and donations of personal protective equipment (PPE), the use of sports facilities (including stadiums as health facilities and to house the homeless) and assets (such as airplanes to transport PPE and health personnel), and the involvement of sports personalities in educational and awareness-raising efforts. The chapter concludes that as the sports sector re-emerges, it is imperative that the philanthropic culture is sustained and inequalities are addressed.

The COVID-19 pandemic (and the concomitant measures to stop the spread of the virus) has had devastating impacts on the lives of the elderly. There is consensus that the elderly is the most vulnerable group, with high levels of risk and associated disproportionate rates of infections and deaths. There is, therefore, a considerable focus on the health impacts of the virus on the elderly. An important aspect of overall health is also participation in sports and physical exercise activities among the elderly. Limited attention has been paid to how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted participation in sport. In **‘Social Isolation, Sport and Exercise Disruptions, and Impacts on the Elderly as a Vulnerable Group’**, **Vadivelu Moodley** and **Dinolen Gounden** draws on secondary sources to examine impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the elderly, with a specific focus on their ability to participate in sports and exercise activities, and their social isolation due to severe restrictions on their mobility and closure of facilities. The chapter concludes that participation in sport and exercise are important for the overall health of the elderly, including addressing social isolation, which needs to consideration during this crisis.

When Zimbabwe introduced the COVID-19 induced lockdown on the 30th of March 2020 as a World Health Organisation (WHO) recommendation to curb the spread of the pandemic, it meant that no football matches were going to take place until the lockdown was over. All along, the Highlanders Football Club (Highlanders FC) fans have been gathering at stadiums across the country, particularly Babourfields Stadium in Bulawayo to support their

team. However, when the matches were banned the supporters conceived a new paradigm where they increased their engagement as fans on Facebook to discuss issues that relate to their team in particular and soccer-related issues in general. **‘From the Terraces to Social Media: Reflections of Highlanders Football Club Supporters’ Engagement on Facebook during the COVID-19 Lockdown**, by **Raphael Nhongo** and **Baba Primrose Tshotsho**, adopts an interactionist theory approach, and was carried out by analysing topics and discussions that appear on the 3 High-landers Facebook platforms. The conclusion is that Highlanders FC supporters are a community that lives its life even beyond the terraces and its culture is not only limited to football but also other social activities of humanness.

Terence Tapiwa Muzorewa and **Aaron Rwodzi**’s **‘Southern Africa Pandemic Management in Sports: Observations from the 1918 Influenza and Covid-19’**, evaluate pandemic management systems adopted by southern African sporting communities in responses to the 1918 ‘Spanish’ Influenza and the novel Corona virus pandemic. The two pandemics which occurred in two different historical epochs disrupted sporting activities world-wide, upset social relations, triggered community anxieties, and resulted in shutdown of all sporting activities. This study serves as a litmus test of the current sporting communities in southern Africa to adopt, in unison, effective and timely disaster response mechanisms in order to save human lives from devastating natural phenomena while guaranteeing livelihoods of sports women/ men. Following a comparative analysis of the two pandemics, the chapter argues that although the pandemics occurred during two astronomically different periods, there have not been many significant changes in pandemic management systems.

The Coronavirus outbreak has had wide-reaching impacts on society globally. Nowhere is it more apparent than in sport, and sporting events in particular. In an effort to limit the spread of the virus and to conform with social distancing regulations, major and mega-sport events across the globe have been cancelled, postponed or rescheduled including the biggest sporting event to have been hosted in 2020, the Tokyo Summer Olympic Games. While the other sport mega-event of a similar magnitude as that of the Olympics, the FIFA World Cup is only scheduled for 2022 in Qatar, it has also been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Qatar Airways International Tournament featuring four European countries which was due to take place before Euro 2020 was cancelled. **‘Planning a FIFA World Cup amidst a Pandemic –**

The Case of Qatar 2022', by **Kamilla Swart** and **Rauf Mammadov**, explores some of the challenges of planning a sport mega-event amidst the pandemic. It draws on both primary and secondary data. Primary data included an online interview schedule with key informants regarding how they are adapting to planning the 2022 World Cup within the current context. Challenges and opportunities are also explored.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating and widespread impacts on the sports sector, ranging from professional and amateur to recreational sports as well as from local to global levels. Cancellations and rescheduling of sports events and activities, as well as the closure of sports facilities and gyms are aimed at enforcing social distancing measures to reduce and stop the spread of the virus. Different types of sports activities have had differential impacts and responses which have brought to the fore that the sports and exercise sector is a key job creator and contributes socially and economically in a number of ways. The general public has responded to the changes brought about by the pandemic in different ways. **Urmilla Bob's 'Differences in Levels of Participation and Responses to the Lockdown among Selected Sporting Codes in South Africa'**, draws on primary research undertaken, based on public online survey results. A sub-set of 546 surveys where respondents indicate that they regularly participate in selected codes of sports was extracted. The sporting codes were purposively selected to represent codes that have high participation and consumption rates that are team and spectatorship-based (soccer and rugby), is a more individual-orientated sport (golf), and a sport that has high participation rates that include moving geographically (running). The demographic profiles of the respondents are presented. Thereafter, participation and consumption trends in relation to the different sporting codes are discussed. This is followed by comparative analyses that are undertaken to examine if and how participation rates have changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic disruptions. Thus, the study is aimed at exploring how the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted on different codes of sports in terms of participation and consumption patterns.

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