From High-risk Sports to Sports as High Risk:

Crisis, Capitulation and Creativity during COVID-19

Editor
Sadhana Manik

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Foreword

As an academic with particular interest in the field of physical activity and sport practice, I am honoured to write the Foreword to this book. I have been actively involved with physical activity and sport policy development during COVID-19 as well as prior to the worldwide pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted sport, spanning grassroots level up to and including elite sport, and has led to differential outcomes for people from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. While COVID-19 casts a shadow over sport and probably will continue for years to come, this book offers some perspectives and reflections that will inform academic discourses and help to influence sport policy as well as practice.

The book highlights the influences of the pandemic on sports participation and the sports industry predominantly in South Africa. Sport in schools and communities in Zimbabwe are also dealt with, specifically sport as part of the school curriculum and the impact of the pandemic on the livelihood of people who depend on sport events and activities as source of income or revenue.

With contributions from seasoned and novice academics, athletes and researchers, this book offers insight on various levels. The approaches include auto-ethnographic and case studies, using various scales of analysis across a range of topics and practical areas, including neoliberalism in sport and the impacts of COVID-19 on sporting activities and society.

The book will be of interest to academics, researchers, students, practitioners, the media, policy-makers, to name a few. It is a timely addition to the growing body of knowledge regarding the pandemic, and its impact on sport.

I would like to thank the authors, reviewers, Editorial Advisory Committee members, editorial team and administrative personnel who have worked together to ensure the timeous production of this book.

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From High-risk Sports to Sports as High Risk: Crisis, Capitulation and Creativity during COVID-19

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1 Introduction

This book is a response to COVID-19 and its impact on sport in society. COVID-19 has drastically altered daily life since the beginning of 2020 so it's not unusual that it would alter sports. This publication provides a scholarly contribution to the scant literature which is currently available on COVID-19 and sport in Southern Africa by focusing largely on South Africa and to a lesser extent on Zimbabwe (South Africa is host to the largest number of Zimbabwean immigrants) which has been instituting similar if not at times, the same social responses to the disease. Since the declaration of the pandemic, there has been limited literature published with the dual focus of COVID-19 and sport in this geographic region. What has been published, has centered on aspects of sport tourism, a huge financial contributor to destinations, in Southern Africa. Research has indicated that sport events have suffered the brunt of lockdown restrictions with travel bans, curfews and quarantines (Qukula 2020). Significantly, what has remained unreported, is a more localised approach to the impacts of COVID-19 on sport in this context of Southern Africa, tapping into participation and consumption debates and narratives. This book thus takes a more nuanced approach by mining into the phenomenon of sport within a framing of COVID-19 in South Africa and Zimbabwe with theoretical, methodological and empirical insights using an array of popular sport codes, ranging from low risk to high risk sports. All chapters in the book are underpinned by the axiom of sport as risk due to the pandemic, a notion articulated in the editorial. The book offers socio-cultural, political and economic insights into the role of sport at several levels in society

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in both countries from the micro perspective of the individual, to the meso level of a group (club and community) and the macro level of a nation during this time of the pandemic. For example, the South African focus throws a wide net across individual, club and national level sport, covering several sport codes from low to high risk sports whilst the Zimbabwean focus covers urban and rural contexts, delving into the impact of COVID-19 for sport in schools and communities that depend on sport as a crucial part of the school curriculum and sport events to sustain their livelihoods respectively. The book thus concurrently unpacks the impacts of the pandemic on sports participation and consumption in several codes of sport. The chapters highlight the strengths, weaknesses and challenges experienced from several sport vantage points (athletes, clubs, community, business etc.) during the pandemic uncovering and exposing along the way, political pandering and socio-economic inequalities (such as poverty and gender) previously overlooked in pre-pandemic sport commentary and presenting arguments for social transformation in sport. Most significantly, this book provides a critique of selected sport codes with their pandemic afflictions providing creative avenues, physical and digital options, in sport participation and consumption, with a view to mitigating the effects of COVID-19 and facilitating a return to some semblance of 'safe' and transformed sports.

In this introductory editorial to the book, I frame the COVID-19 pandemic as a health hazard and this is aligned to the presidents of South Africa (Cyril Ramaphosa) and Zimbabwe (Emmerson Mnangagwa) announcing a state of disaster due to the pandemic. I then demonstrate the close relationship between the pandemic and sport in society. I present the theoretical shifts in risks and hazards research in sport scholarship that occurred before and during the pandemic. I argue that whilst the literature on sport has remained focused on health concerns, one strand has shifted from a preponderance of studies across two decades (from 2000-2019) on high risk sports with a physiological focus (participant identity aspects and issues, the risks of participation, the nature and assessment of injuries) to sports participation and consumption being perceived as high risk with a psychological focus (from 2020) due to the over-arching impacts and fears associated with the corona virus disease of 2019 (COVID-19).Thus, the nomenclature in sports scholarship related to the pandemic from 2020 has significantly shifted to that contained within risk and hazard management with concepts such as risks, hazards, vulnerabilities, mitigation and resilience regularly featuring in the current sports publications

on the pandemic. A seminal author in the environmental hazards' literature, Cutter, defines several key concepts related to hazards. The concept of 'risk' is perceived as the 'likelihood of an occurrence' (Cutter 1996: 536) whilst 'vulnerability' is seen as 'a potential for loss' (Cutter 1996: 529). Mitigation is explained as 'efforts to reduce the risk' (Cutter 1996: 536). These concepts are frequently utilized in the literature on the pandemic and sports.

2 COVID-19 as a Health Hazard

The disease was announced as a global pandemic by the WHO in March 2020 (WHO 2020a). This should not have taken the world by surprise given that respiratory diseases have been on the increase for some time, for example severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). The latest disease, coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19), set off alarm bells internationally because of the rate of infection and transmission, the extent of its geographic reach and the severity of it as a fatal disease taking the world by storm. In early 2020, the world went on pause given the rising mortality rates; by 30 June 2020, the WHO (2020b) reported 503 862 deaths across the world despite countries going into various permutations of lockdown with regulations enforcing measures such as travel bans, quarantines, curfews, social distancing and promoting hygiene to curtail the spread of the virus (Duddu 2020). Locally, South African president Cyril Ramaphosa announced a national state of disaster for SA given the spread of the virus (Qukula 2020) and the need to contain it stating: 'It is a week since we declared the coronavirus pandemic a national disaster and announced a package of extraordinary measures to combat this grave public health emergency' (SA Government 2020). This status of a disaster has been extended into January 2021. Zimbabwean president Emmerson Mnangagwa similarly announced a state of disaster but it was long before a single case had been reported in an effort to institute measures in advance to prepare for the disease (Africanews 2020). Thus COVID-19 can arguably be perceived as a universal health hazard and one of the most affected spheres of daily life, sport, has been immensely impacted upon.

3 The Significance of Sport and Responses to the Pandemic

Sport has always been associated with multiple benefits regardless of a per-

son's age: the pursuit of fitness and part of an appropriate lifestyle for human beings apart from maintaining the harmony needed for a work-life balance. For the youth, engagement in sport provides mental, physical and social development; sport for younger adults is about attaining 'personal success and future employment' if you are at university or for the older recreational athletes, sport participation is about 'a healthy lifestyle' and managing stressful living (Powell 2001: 307). Gouveia and Pereira (2020;02) maintain that 'the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was felt across the sporting world'. Due to crowds of people at sport events (Evans *et al.* 2020), the continuation of the various codes (disciplines) of sport presents risks for players (or athletes) and spectators at live events during a pandemic. For this book 'sport codes' refers to 'sport disciplines' with the latter being alluded to by Perold, Hattingh, Bama, Bergh and Bruwer (2020; 02) to be 'types of sporting disciplines, such as cycling, cricket, netball, marathons, gymnastics, rugby, weightlifting, football, boxing, tennis, basketball, athletics … as well as disability sport'. There have been varied responses globally relating to sports' participation and consumption over the past 11 months (this being January 2021) with changes to sports' participation and events being influenced by multiple waves of the corona virus, socio-economic and political sentiments and global health advice. COVID-19's impact on sport and fitness was immense and amenities immediately closed upon stringent lockdown measures being announced by countries due to fears of exposure to the virus and contracting the disease. Upon announcement of the pandemic, mega sport events such as the Olympics, Paralympics and Wimbledon amongst others were postponed in 2020 (Gouveia & Pereira 2020). League events in sport codes also ground to a halt and local events considered a boost to the South African economy, by being part of the sport tourism global calendar also followed suit, for example, the Two Oceans Marathon, Super Rugby and the Premier Soccer League (PSL) amongst others. The 'collateral damage' from COVID-19 for sport is phenomenal for example the financial losses due to broadcasting rights, direct and indirect employment (Ray 2020). It should be thus noted that there were varied views, behaviour and at times contradictions in the early days of the pandemic (February to April 2020) about national sports and how various sport codes could and should unfold during the pandemic, both in South Africa and abroad. In an attempt to control the transmission of the virus from one person to the next person, social distancing and other measures, like the use of masks were suggested but not always enforced. In the USA, President Donald Trump chose not to do either

measure in his regular briefings (to be ex-president in 2021) and he further expressed the view for a return to sport. By contrast, Dr Anthony Fauci (advisory expert on COVID-19 in the USA) stated that there should not be any spectators at sport events (SABC News 2020) announcing the need for 'sports free of spectators'. Andrew Cuomo, governor of New York, similarly commented that he could envisage baseball being played in the summer without spectators as well (Eye Witness News 2020).

In Europe, an outbreak of the disease in Spain and Italy was attributed to a super spreader event – the live event of a Champions League football match between Atalanta and Valencia in Milan (Kappel 2020); a second event followed in Valencia behind closed doors and despite this, numerous players were also infected with the virus. In South Africa, Minister Nathi Mthetwa was convinced by the PSL to have events within closed doors which he announced but the head of the South African Football Association (SAFA), Danny Jordaan stopped it from happening a day after the announcement, after receiving health advice about events thus averting a possible outbreak (Ray 2020). As the curve in the spread of the disease flattened after several months of isolation due to lockdown restrictions, sports' role in society was revisited by numerous countries. Hence where some events were initially postponed, they were re-ignited to curb socio-economic losses but with certain restrictions and undertakings of risk management assessments. An example of such was the resumption of the English Premier League on the 17 June 2020 after a 100 day pause. Sports training and facilities such as gymnasiums similarly re-commenced activities across the world depending on a country's health status. With regards to South Africa, re-opening procedures were governed by national legislation accompanied by localised restrictions for hotspots and other areas. Zimbabwe followed similar practices to combat the spread (Daniel 2021). However, months after re-opening, sports was dealt repeated blows due to additional outbreaks of the virus, with waves of the disease more potent than previously leading to further country wide lockdowns and restrictions with extended curfews (Both South Africa and Zimbabwe are experiencing a second wave of the virus in January 2021 with some countries in the global north experienced a third wave) with repercussions for sport inviting fear about the risks of engagement.

4 From Players' Physiology to Fear Psychology

A question that needs to be responded to relates to how risks and hazards in

sport have been previously framed in the literature and what is the current shift? The utility value of current sports knowledge in these times of the pandemic is also valuable. A google search reveals that over the past twenty years, a substantial body of literature has emerged on risks and hazards related to sport codes either when played socially or competitively focusing on players' physiology (especially concerning the participation professional athletes) in the sport (Powell 2001; Bachynski & Goldberg 2014; Barlow, Woodman, Chapman, Milton, Dodds & Allen 2015) with injury reduction and prevention occupying centre stage in the scholarship. These risks and hazards emanate from internal factors related to the nature of athletes' participation, the condition of facilities etc. The research studies steeped in internal factors within the sport, dominates the field of participant/athlete health because of athletes's training schedule and participation in competition. Hence there is a concentrated focus on sports injuries and prevention to maximize athletic ability. Much of the research centers on high risk sports such as ice hockey, American football, downhill skiing, mountaineering, sky diving and the martial arts. High risk sports according to Breivik (1999:100) 'entail all sports wherein the participants are exposed to the possibility of serious injury or death as an inherent part of the activity'. Examples of such studies include Powell's (2001) research which centred on risks of injury specifically cerebral concussion- its causes, effects and risks in sport. A later study by McIntosh (2005) also explored impact injury risks, that is again the concept of concussion/ brain injury. This health hazard is linked to a number of contact sports and Meuwisse *et al*.'s study (2007) two years later was a progression from the previous two studies, namely on the reduction of injuries due to repeated exposure. Bachynski, Castanier, Le Scanff & Woodman's (2010) study explored risk taking behaviour in high risk sports and Goldberg's study (2014) focused on prevention in the sport: a risk assessment of the hazard of brain injury during ice hockey and American Football. Thus, research conclusions in several studies were generally developing and furthering scholarship on the ways to reduce the risks of injury to athletes who participate in high risk sports (Powell 2002; Bachynski & Goldberg 2014).

What is noticeably limited in the literature prior to 2020, is the impact of external factors especially that deriving from environmental conditions. Where there is evidence of studies (see Kellet & Turner 2009; Wicker, Filo & Cuskelly 2013), these have been ringfenced to include the impact of floods, droughts and other such natural disasters impacting on sport participation and

consumption. In a 2018 article, Shipway (2018) draws attention to powerful external influences that can undermine sport. He called for more studies given the global security threats to sports tourism (steeped in terrorist activity to attract world- wide attention) and the limited literature following disasters linked to mega sport events. Citing the Boston Marathon and Paris attacks, he noted several vulnerabilities and honed in on commentary around athlete participation and spectator events. Most valuable was his call on how resilience for sport tourism is a neglected area of research in need of development. Resilience as a key concept in risk assessment and disaster management has once again come to the fore during the pandemic. Resilience has been explained by Cutter (2008: 599) as 'a systems' capacity to absorb disturbance and reorganize into a fully functioning system'.

Thus, whilst there has been this preponderance of health-oriented studies on physiological risk factors in sport activities especially amongst high risk sports athletes, less research attention has been devoted to psychological risk factors in sport. This was cited early as a gap in a physiologically oriented study where Yang, Chen, Zhang, Covassin, Heiden & Peek-Asa (2014:147) concluded that 'injury prevention efforts need to include strategies targeting psychological risk factors'. However, this was six years before the COVID-19 pandemic and the psychological risk factors did not extend to the fear of contracting and spreading fatal respiratory diseases. The outbreak of diseases, infectious and contagious has not attracted research attention for their impact on sport participation until the arrival of COVID-19. Now there are concerns about participants' and spectator safety and welfare. Sport itself has also not been previously perceived or researched as a risky undertaking from a psychological perspective but due to the spread of the disease globally, psychological risks especially elements of fear in sports participation and consumption has clearly taken precedence sports decision-making and it is an emerging area of sports scholarship. There is now this fast-growing body of literature on the juxtaposed phenomena of sport and COVID-19 from a host of perspectives responding to psychological risks, local, regional and global impacts (with numerous papers, special edition journals and books dedicated to this goal- see for example Nauright and Zipp's 2020 special edition, apart from this current contribution). A recent publication by Choi and Bum (2020) focus of sports activities and disease phobia underpinned by whether there would be 'continuous participation' given the continuing pandemic. The forms of sport participation and the ages of the participants, their previous participation in

sport and their perceptions of hypochondriases (healthy people feeling anxious about contracting the virus) were analysed. They found that the patterns for sport activity of people was correlated to their age and the type of sport which they engaged in as a result of their participants' fear of corona virus infections.

5 Developing Resilience in Sports

This fear (disease phobia due to the pandemic) has forced sports organisations and associated sports stakeholders to reinvent the nature of sports, to breathe new life into participation and consumption. Thus, in the wake of COVID-19, one strand of the literature has focused on alternative sport options for participation and consumption due to the pandemic. For example, Mastro-martino, Walker, Ross and Naraine's (2020) study focuses on how the closure of sports stadiums has been impacted upon from three aspects, namely the fan, the organisation and society. He concludes that organisations will have to communicate with their consumers and alter their marketing to adjust to a 'new normal'. They thus present factors for successful online fan communities (Mastromartino *et al.* (2020: 1707). Ludvigsen and Hayton (2020) similarly propose ideas to re start sport events. They suggest organizational aspects focusing on subjects such as volunteering and security. Planning for a future which includes sport rather than excludes it has become a common narrative and *Parnell et al.* (2020) have warned about the need to be 'better prepared in sport and society for similar events in the future'. These studies indicate a positive trajectory in the scholarship aiming to find innovative ways to resume sport.

6 The Chapters

The first chapter by **Francois Cleophas** and **Lesley Le Grange** is a dive into an intense critique. In their **'Critique of Neoliberalism in Sport: Towards Optimistic Sport in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic'**, they assert that sport is interwoven into a global order underpinned by neoliberalism. They reflect on both sport and society, providing an historical analysis of neoliberalism in SA by focusing on several mega sport events. They maintain and argue that sport is part of the neoliberal project which has become entrenched in SA and they demonstrate how participation in sports is skewed socially and how participation by SA sport heroes keep neoliberalism alive.

They present creative ideas advocating for a re-imagined sport in a post pandemic context free from the bondage of inequality in sports participation.

The second chapter continues the critical stance with a focus on sports media. In **'The Conundrum of COVID-19 and the Sports Industry: When Saving Lives is More Important than Entertainment', Sabelo Nxumalo** argues how COVID-19 has exposed neoliberalism in the current sports industry in terms of sports consumption. He hones in on how the sports industry favours the principles of neoliberalism with its emphasis on principles such as free trade and competition. He presents evidence of how sport is elitist. He draws attention to the extent to which sport has become exclusionary by denying access to the average and poor in SA citing the costs of live matches and broadcasted matches on particular television channels. Similar to Cleophas and Le Grange, he also calls for a new paradigm but to address sports' consumption in SA.

The third chapter, **'The Impact of COVID-19 on Chess in South Africa' by Omar Esau** centers on the sport code, chess which is an Olympic sport, from the vantage point of player, club and organizational administrator. Using an array of chess metaphors intersecting with pandemic impacts, Esau outlines the impacts of the pandemic on the game and advances online chess as a viable option for players. He presents a multitude of detailed ideas to protect the sport from crumbling as a result of the pandemic.

The fourth chapter by ***Renuka Ramroop*** **and** ***Jesika Singh*** takes a narrative approach to unpacking the training programme of two fencers (from the South African national team) which included their team members. The participants' home environment is underpinned by natural learning, an approach to life and living which lends itself to absorbing stressors. In **'Natural Learning and Fencing: A Case Study of Two Fencers' Lockdown Training Programme during the COVID-19 Pandemic'** they argue for the fencers' success due to the constructivist philosophy of the natural learning approach which promotes autonomy in learning and development.

The fifth chapter by Sadhana Manik uses an autoethnographic lens into individual and club training and participation by a ranked South African karate athlete. in **'An Auto Ethnographic Optic: Experiences of Migration to Multiple Modes of Training and Participation in Karate during COVID-19',** she provides insights pre-pandemic and during the pandemic focusing on the best practices trialled, tested and honed for individual and group training. She notes the constant challenges affecting the karate ecosystem given the

realities of the pandemic and a lack of digital infrastructure in South Africa.

The sixth chapter by ***Bellita Banda Chitsamatanga, Wayne Malinga*** **and** ***Nqobile Sikhosana***, is titled, **'"Life without Sports": Socio-Economic Impacts of COVID-19 on South African Society from a Football Lens'**. It focuses on the impact of the pandemic on football (also called soccer) for South Africa which has had a rich history of attracting mega events pre-COVID-19. They highlight the popularity of soccer as an international sport that lends itself to sport tourism. Using desktop research and the theoretical insights of functionality, they delve into the role and functionality of sports in society, specifically focusing on the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic .

The seventh chapter by ***Kimara Singh*** **and** ***Rachael Jesika Singh*** is a lesson on government's financial relief promises for athletes and players and the gaps in supporting promising developmental athletes during the pandemic. In **'The Experiences of Selected Professional Women Rugby and Soccer Players, and Sport Administrators during COVID-19**, Singh and Singh note issues of vulnerability during COVID-19, and select two professionalized codes of sport in South Africa, soccer and rugby, which are still at developmental level for female athletes to explore from the perspective of impacts due to COVID-19. Using questionnaires and a twitter poll, they delve in at the microlevel of female athletes and sports administrators and reveal the pandemic outcomes for female athletes such as a lack of job security whilst drawing attention to a sports administration caught in the headlights of a disease.

The eighth chapter by ***Everjoy Munyaradzi, Kudzayi Savious Tarisayi*** **and** ***Alphonce Shoshore***, addresses a gap in the scholarship on COVID-19 regarding school sports and Physical education as a subject in high school. In **'The COVID-19 Pandemic and Sport in High Schools: A Case of Selected Schools in Masvingo District'**, they distil from sports organisers and physical education teachers, using a range of online data generation methods, and zoom, determining the impact of the pandemic on school sports in Masvingo, a community in Zimbabawe, which simultaneously experienced malaria at the time of the pandemic.

The final, ninth chapter by ***Joshua Risiro*** centers on the consequences of the lockdown for stakeholders in sport and the community. In **'Impact of Covid-19 on Sporting Activities and Society in the Mutare Community, Zimbabwe: Negotiating a Bumpy Playground**, he pulls together the ripple socio-cultural and economic effects of COVID-19 on one community in

Zimbabwe where sport came to a grinding halt as a result of the pandemic. Using a sample drawing on stakeholders from a diversity of associated businesses, affected community members and sports participants, he details the impacts for Mutare community. He then suggests strategies that could reduce risk and promote safer sport activities in light of the pandemic given the debilitating effects of the sudden pause on sports for this poor Zimbabwean community.

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A Critique of Neoliberalism in Sport: Towards Optimistic Sport in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on a global scale and is interconnected to society in many ways. Therefore, any study of sport that focuses on the pandemic, cannot ignore this interconnectivity. The 1980s witnessed the re-ascendancy of neoliberalism and since then many governments have adopted neoliberal policies. The effects of neoliberalism are felt in all spheres of social life including sport and consequently, neoliberal values are reflected in sport. What the COVID-19 pandemic has done is to lay bare the acute inequalities that exist in both global and South African societies, which are the effects of the erosion of the welfare state and the rise of neoliberal politics. In this chapter we provide a critique of neoliberalism, how the form and content of sport provide a particular lens on neoliberalism and how it intersects with the COVID-19 pandemic. Our analysis is informed by insights from critical studies on sport. We explore the neoliberal project at work in sport in two fundamental ways. First, we identify the social and cultural inequalities inherent in sport as is evident in recent literature. Second, we attempt to relate these inequalities to the current sport landscape. Finally, the authors present suggestions for possibilities in moving towards a sport practice that is critical, radical and optimistic for the period post the pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, historical analysis, mega sports, neoliberalism, social justice

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1 Introduction

By way of introduction, we make known our positional standpoint about sport. As scholars of critical theories in education and sport studies we are aware of the tension in radical circles between elements that reject sport as a bourgeois capitalist plague and those who engage it to advance critical ideas in the academy and beyond. A popular perception exists which sees the revolutionary left dismiss sport as a site of, and for, excessive nationalism, sexism, racism, homophobia and class bias (Brohm 1978; Rigauer 1981; Beamish 1982). Nevertheless, there is another perspective which argues for the reclamation and reformation of sport (Dart 2012). We support this latter view. However, first a word on the COVID-19 pandemic and sport.

The global spread of COVID-19 has impacted on all spheres of social life including sport and recreation. At a local level we have seen the closure of gymnasia, swimming pools, training centres, downscaling of physical education programmes and in some countries, parks and playgrounds were declared off limits during lockdown periods. This has had an impact on the general well-being of people. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends 150 minutes of exercise of moderate-intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity per week for general well-being, but particularly in times of anxiety and fear (United Nations 2020). Due to the restriction of movement in public places many middle-class people have resorted to exercising at home using fitness demonstrations that are available on social and mainstream media (Stamatakis *et al.* 2020). Very little, if any, information about what working classes and the lumpen proletariat does for exercise and recreation is reported. Despite the ability of humans to adapt, it is unlikely that many would have retained their same level of activity during lockdown periods or the different levels of South Africa's risk-adjusted approach. At an international level we have seen major sport tournaments/events cancelled or postponed such as the Olympic and Paralympic Games, test cricket, Super Rugby, French Open and Wimbledon tennis tournaments, soccer tournaments across the globe, and so forth.

Needless to say, the closure of sport facilities has impacted on human lives; on physical well-being, psyches and livelihoods. Not only have professional sport persons been affected by the pandemic but also ordinary citizens who could no longer enjoy their pastimes of playing social sport or watching sport events on television. Moreover, many people's livelihoods have been affected by job losses in a global sport industry with an estimated annual

value of US$500 billion (Torrens University Australia 2020). Although there were no global or South African statistics available, by the end of May 2020, 1.3 million jobs in the sport industry in the United States of America had been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Burrow 2020). On the positive side, we have also seen individual sport personalities and organisations rally to contribute, in material ways, to fighting the COVID-pandemic and thus contributing to humanitarian effects associated with the pandemic. Among many others, we have seen donations by individual sport persons such as Rodger Federer, Lionel Messi, Christiano Ronaldo, Siya Kolisi and organisations such as FIFA which teamed up with the WHO in a campaign aimed at spreading the message that people should follow the five steps[1] identified that would curb disease transmission. In its Policy Brief No73, the United Nations (2020:4) made recommendations vis-à-vis sport during the COVID-19 pandemic; one being the promotion of positive social attitudes and behaviour through sport education. It states:

> Sport education is a powerful means to foster physical fitness, mental well-being, as well as social attitudes and behaviour while populations are locked down. International rights and values-based sport education instruments and tools, such as the International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport, the Quality Physical Activity and Sport, the Quality Physical Education Policy package and the Values Education through Sport toolkit remain highly relevant references to ensure that many online physical activity modules that are being currently deployed comply, with gender equality, non-discrimination, safety and quality standards.

It is, however, our contention that COVID-19 has also afforded us the opportunity to ask more deeper/critical questions about the role of sport in society as well as what is the purpose of sport. Some of the questions asked in the field of critical philosophy of sport are worth repeating here as they are apposite to our current situation. In his contribution on philosophy and sport in

[1] The five steps are: 1) supporting physical activity; 2) research and policy guidance; 3) technical cooperation and capacity development; 4) outreach and awareness raising; 5) promoting positive social attributes and behaviour.

the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Hyland (1998) raised several critical questions including: whether sport teaches values and if so whether these values are desirable; why social problems such as racism manifest in sport, and why and how sport produces the phenomenon of the athlete as cultural hero? Concerning values, we suggest that the question of whose values sport produces should also be asked. In his book *A philosophy of Sport*, Connor (2011) raises a number of controversial questions as to whether playing sport is indeed ethical and whether it is a form of violence? Concerning the issue of ethics, Gibbons (2020:812) argues that the ethics of competition in sport needs to be subjected to critical scrutiny in particular, 'the epistemological chauvinisms that make it possible to think about winners and losers, competition and rivalry, in particular ways'. Moreover, Peters (2020) and Gibbons (2020) point out that attention needs to be given to the global sports economy and the effects of the marketisation of sport on society. As Peters (2020:809) writes: '… sports today cannot be separated from the capitalist market system for its contemporary form is determined by it and there is little chance that it is going to change any day soon'. Many more questions could be proliferated such as one recently asked by a radio presenter, 'Is sport the opium of the masses?' For example, does sport dupe the masses of Brazil into making them feel that they are all equally Brazilian when their national team plays soccer? And does the euphoria of winning a rugby world cup hoodwink South Africans into believing they are equally South African? In the absence of sport activity during COVID-19 these are questions worth reflecting on.

In this chapter we shall give particular attention to the relationship of sport and neoliberalism and explore how this theme could be used as a point of departure to reimagine the content of sport in troubled times. We do so because sport is entangled in the global neoliberal order as pointed out by Gibbons (2020) and Peters (2020). With many sports events cancelled or postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it now is an opportune time to reflect on the role of sport in/on society. We use the present (COVID-19 pandemic) to reflect on the past so as to imagine a different future for sport post the pandemic. We do so by way of a historical analysis of neoliberalism and sport in South Africa, with a specific focus on mega sport events. The question guiding this chapter is: Could the current interregnum in sport caused by the COVID-19 pandemic be used to reflect on the role neoliberalism has played in the creation of elite sport, its negative impact on society, and how

such reflection could be used to imagine sport differently post the pandemic, free from the fetters of neoliberalism?

This chapter broadly framed within critical studies in sport, which is a description for all studies on sport underpinned within the critical paradigm. Le Grange (2000) argues that research conducted within the critical paradigm aims to detect and unmask beliefs and practices that limit human freedom, justice and democracy and also aim to take actions that will change the conditions of those who are marginalised. This chapter therefore lays bare the neoliberal influences on sport so as to open up a more inclusive and less exploitative culture of sport.

2 Neoliberalism and Sport

Neoliberalism can be traced back to liberal perspectives of the seventeenth century which became marginalised due to the rise of welfare state liberalism of the late nineteenth century and Keynesian economics of the twentieth century. Its revival in the late twentieth century is associated with the emergence of the `new right' in Europe and the United States of America, often referred to as Reaganism and Thatcherism, after two of its key proponents (Le Grange 2006). Although there are different strands of neoliberalism, all neoliberals embrace the following three principles: a commitment to individual liberty and a reduced state; a shift in policy and ideology against government intervention; and a belief that market forces should be allowed to be self-regulating (for a comprehensive discussion on the ascendancy of neoliberalism, see Olssen, Codd and O'Neill 2004). John and McDonald (2019) argue that neoliberalism should be understood as more than merely an economic policy model but a more broader project in which political, cultural and economic forces work together to 're-engineer' the state. The re-engineering of the state marks a shift away from it as welfare provider to being a facilitator of economic growth. John and Mc Donald (2019) also point out that neoliberalism involves the embossing of market-like mechanisms on everyday life whilst at the same time removing the safety-net of the welfare state.

The upshot of the re-ascendancy of neoliberalism has resulted in widening inequalities globally (and within nations) as well as the seizing of social justice by individualism and economic growth. It is largely the wealthy class who are able to afford private healthcare, elite schooling and who gain

access to elite sport. The rest, are subjected to poor public schooling, poor public healthcare systems and limited opportunities to play sport due to lack of state funding. The inequalities in access to healthcare in South Africa is well documented (see Harris *et al.* 2011; Benatar 2013). The link between elite schooling and access to elite sport is demonstrated in a study by Noorbhai (2020) which shows that elite boy's schools still shape the South African national cricket team. He points out that South Africa's national cricketers come from fewer than 50 schools out of about 6000 high schools in the country. Poor healthcare and nutrition received by children as well as poorly resourced schools impact on the ability of a child to excel in sport. But, sport itself advances the project of neoliberalism. Miller (2012:24) has gone as far as stating that sport is neoliberalism's 'most spectacular embodiment, through the dual fetish of competition and control, individualism and government'. Coakley (2011) argues that sport often reaffirms a belief that competition is the principal basis for appraising merit and distributing rewards. Moreover, sport advances the myth that economic success is based on good choices and strong character, whereas economic failure on poor choices and weak character. The exorbitant income earned by elite sports persons promotes the idea that sport is the vehicle to wealth and prosperity and the sponsoring of elite athletes by companies manufacturing sport gear and equipment has contributed to a culture of consumerism in contemporary society. Coakley (2011) argues that sport reinforces neoliberal beliefs about individual responsibility, competition, market and consumerism, into popular consciousness. Moreover, John and McDonald (2019) as well as Andrews and Silk (2012) write about how elite sport fosters and helps to maintain a neoliberal culture through the transformation of cities into sport cities resulting in increased deregulation, privatization and liberalization. John and McDonald (2019) show how Melbourne Australia, which hosts the Formula 1 Grand Prix and a grand slam tennis tournament, has become a sport city and the epitome of urban enterpreneurialism.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which is itself a manifestation of the crisis of neoliberalism[2] provide us with an opportunity to explore the many faces of

[2] One of the reasons why the rapid spread of COVID-19 resulted in a public health crisis is because of underspending on healthcare by governments of many countries because they had adopted neoliberal policies. But, the COVID-19 crisis is also caused by neoliberal capitalist farming practices. McKinley

neoliberalism and whether there are vectors of escape for sport from the fetters of neoliberalism. The question that begs answering is whether sport can play a role in advancing social justice and make a positive contribution to the sustainability of all life on the planet? Although we shall not answer this question directly, we shall reflect on recent pedagogic and popular historical narratives that attempted to expose the underbelly of sport at a time when neoliberalism's multifaceted crisis has deepened. And by doing so we hope that sensibilities towards social justice and sustainability will be fostered.

3 The Neoliberalism Sport Project

Despite claims of creating sport opportunities for broader society, the neoliberal agenda of sport remains fixed around creating an environment conducive to commercial activity (John & Donald 2019). In the 20th and 21st centuries the major commercial activity around which the neoliberal sport agenda pivots, is the hosting of mega events, as was alluded to earlier in this chapter. The first major sport mega event hosted in South Africa in the 20th century was the 1995 Rugby World Cup tournament. It turned out to be an event where the new ruling political elite and previous ruling classes found common ground. This mixture was represented on 24 June 1995 at the much enamoured trophy presentation where Nelson Mandela, as president of the new post-apartheid government wore Francois Pienaar's (captain of a rugby team that previously symbolised apartheid hegemony) replacement rugby jersey. Mandela had thus became a sport hero for the new post-apartheid South Africa. His actions can best be explained by referring to the work of critical theorists who describe the making of sport heroes as being 'identified and promoted on the basis of their utility' (Hendricks 1995:120). Previously Mandela had made much effort in safeguarding the Springbok symbol for rugby against the virulent attacks by the National and Olympic Sports Congress (NOSC) youth

(2020 n.p.) argues that, '… the increased occurrence of largely unknown and ever-more-virulent viruses is directly linked to the nature/character of land use and food production under the neo-liberal model of capitalism; to the contemporary dominance of an 'industrial model' of agriculture that is umbilically tied to the never-ending search for maximum profits, whatever the human, social and/or environmental consequences'.

who favoured the removal of it. Rugby remains the only major South African team sport to have retained the Springbok symbol in post-apartheid South Africa.

According to Penny Heyns, a South African Olympic swimming champion, she like many other sport persons of fame, fell under the spell of 'Madiba Magic' after that moment (Heyns & Lemke 2004). What the tournament did in effect do, was to 'drain South Africa from its history … and a week after the opening ceremony [in Cape Town] … many of the participating black youngsters from nearby townships complained bitterly that they were not compensated for their participation and threatened to disrupt further World Cup proceedings' (Grundlingh 2013:138, 140). The 1995 Springbok captain heralded the World Cup victory an event that helped development and that: 'rugby's image had never been better: the Springboks were well paid, safely contracted and winning' (Pienaar & Griffiths 1999:213). This tournament achieved two things. First, it piloted South African sport into the era of professionalism on the foundations of neoliberalism and second it set in motion a class alienation that was already in practice during the apartheid era. This was an alienation that was camouflaged by the much publicized words of Nelson Mandela that 'sport unites like nothing else can' while the majority of South Africans remain distant from the products, form and contents of sport itself. Conflict theorists would argue that the 1995 RWC was a classic example of how:

> sport perpetuates societal problems by providing people with a temporary high which diverts their attention from the real issues which impact upon their lives directly and by providing subalterns with a distorted frame of reference or identification which encourages them to look for salvation through patently false channels (Hendricks 1995:116).

A new sport elite, supported by the post-apartheid regime, was born in the 1990's and it operated on a class allegiance to the neoliberal logic that alienated working classes (schools and clubs) from their daily experiences. In this regard it is useful to quote a former apartheid proponent of cricket who was welcomed into the ranks of the new elite by the post-apartheid sport authorities: '… schools that are known for good coaching [meaning elite boys' schools] could identify (poor) talented cricketers [from materially poor black schools] and

sponsor their school fees' (translated from Afrikaans) (Die Burger 2011). No thought was given to developing infrastructure and coaching programmes at schools that were historically, materially poor. The 2019 Springbok rugby captain, Siya Kolisi, summed up his situation as follows: 'transformation should start at a grassroots level in township schools. Imagine if I did not go to an English school. I wouldn't have been eating properly, I wouldn't have grown properly, and I wouldn't have had the preparation that the other boys did' (in Mjo 2019 n.p). What the neoliberal sport project does is to re-invent 19th century professional sport that was firmly controlled by an aristocracy who made money from sport, but who could also afford to lose money and frequently did so (McIntosch 1963). As the 19th century sport historian, Joseph Strutt, mentioned that by 1801 there were 'rural exercises practised by Persons of Rank and those Generally Practiced' (Arlott & Daley 1968:14). After the 'success' of the 1995 RWC tournament in South Africa, the country was firmly in the market for hosting mega events, organised by neoliberal capitalist international sport federations. Not surprisingly FIFA courted the South African government successfully in an attempt to host mega events. This was done by utilising the Mandela image and person, in securing South African rights to host the 2010 World Cup soccer in South Africa (Jennings 2006:270). Substantive evidence- based work has since exposed the level of dishonesty and immoral business conduct of FIFA and its officials in organising mega-events (see Blake & Clavert 2016; Cottle 2013).

The new sport elite stretched across the race divide of the 'new South Africa' and alienated working classes not only from professional sport but also from history. Thus, Martin Meredith, could claim in Nelson Mandela's biography that: '[During apartheid] the black population generally ignored rugby, their passion being soccer. Rugby was regarded as a boer game' (Meredith 2014:525). This is of course false and numerous scholars and amateur historians have shown that blacks have played the game from the very start of its public appearance in the media (Odendaal 1995; Booley 1998; Snyders 2015; Nongogo & Toriola 2014). In this way a historical alienation was invented that continues till the present where the current (2020) Springbok captain, Siya Kolisi is championed as the first black captain of a South African national team, ignoring the anti-apartheid history.

But this elitist take off was visible in the last decade of the 20th century already. A post-apartheid state emerged from a negotiated settlement between two key role players, the National Party (NP) on the one hand and the African

National Congress (ANC) on the other. This negotiated settlement facilitated South Africa's entry into international sport. The role of the then existing non-racial sport movement under the direction of the South African Council on Sport (SACOS - an organisation that was a home to all liberation movements) was downplayed as the sports wing of the liberation movement because it resisted the terms for lifting the sports moratorium and it kept to its non-aligned stance towards any political tendency (Brown 2006). Instead, a hastily formed NOSC in opposition to the SACOS, became the preferred negotiating partner for the NP. This enabled the ANC (with the support of the NP) to advise international sport federations to lift any sport moratoriums against apartheid sport federations (Du Preez 2001:65). The NOSC demanded sport development projects in terms of financial, coaching and infrastructure. This was not what big businesses, who started playing an increasingly important role in professional sport through sponsoring mega events, wanted. Yet, according to Paul Hendricks, big business, played an instrumental role in facilitating sport unification (Hendricks 2021:118). Not surprisingly these unification talks were rushed and decades of black marginalisation in sport was 'settled' in a few months.

It was also a decade when two countries, Russia and South Africa, underwent major political and economic changes that was part of a new world order of capitalism. Both countries were led to this order by leaders who became iconic figures. In Russia, it was Mikhail Gorbachev, in South Africa, it was Nelson Mandela. South Africa became the only country in the world to host three world championship sport tournaments in a space of 20 years, including bidding for the Olympic Games. These exclude other continental events it hosted. Shortly after De Klerk's famous 1990 speech, the retail magnate, Raymond Ackerman, visited Manchester University's School of Business in mid-1990, where the idea of Cape Town bidding to host the 2004 Olympic Games was raised for the first time. A bid committee was established, with Ackerman donating R15 million, and losing half after the bid failed (Ackerman 2001:263, 303). This is one example of the intimate relations between sport and capital.

Organisations affiliated to the apartheid regime structures demanded the lifting of the sport boycott by various international sport federations. When the IOC declared South Africa eligible to participate in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, most international federations had already declared that the boycott had worked and sport had triumphed over racism (Hendricks 2021:119). South

Africa competed in this mega event (Olympic Games) without a national flag. A similar development of hasty sport unification, where big capital was central, occurred in cricket. On 29 June 1991 the United Cricket Board of South Africa (UCBSA) was established and this paved the way for South Africa's membership to the International Cricket Council (ICC) (Bryden 1996:13). The *Rapport* newspaper announced that the official unification process took 37 minutes and opened the doors for:

> South Africa's re-entry into international cricket and a sponsorship worth R8 million has been obtained … Geoff Dakin stated that the Basil D' Oliveira storm in 1968 made South Africans realize what Apartheid was doing to cricket … development on all levels is a priority even more than test cricket (Rapport 1991:25, 27).

On 10 November 1991 South Africa played its first ever international cricket match in India at the Kolkata Stadium while the huge divide between elite cricket playing schools (mainly white) and poor township schools (all black) remained underdeveloped (Petersen 2006:131). Schooling became the new gatekeeping instrument for entry into the national rugby and cricket teams. The majority of players in the national 1991 cricket and 1995 rugby were drawn from the previous all-white high schools during the Apartheid era and remain so into the present (Cleophas 2019). These high fee-paying schools have accumulated cultural and material capital during colonial, segregation and Apartheid eras that became sought after commodities after 1994 (Cleophas 2018). Graduates from these schools become 'clear leaders in whatever situation they happen to find themselves in' (Gouws 2000:65).

Included in the South African team were 'four development players who… would not actually play but would participate in all other activities and functions in order to get a feel for conditions in India in preparation for future tours of the Indian sub-continent' (Oosthuizen & Tinkler 2001: 49-50). This type of token representation became part and parcel of neoliberal sport that was driven by powerful commercial interests of multi-national corporations who professed an involvement with a desire to develop communities but with an ultimate objective to utilize the best talent to bolster maximum profit (Ebrahim 2006:175). The core of South African cricket and sport centred around neoliberal economic business practices in the sphere of the politics of globalization (Naidoo 2010:260). In this sphere, black sports people expe-

rienced two options: either keep quiet, conform and possibly become successful or rebel and become an outcast. The account of the African American Wimbledon tennis player, Zina Garrison who defeated Monica Seles in the quarter-finals in 1990 is illuminating and pertinent to our discussion:

> 'For five years, even when I made it to top four in the world, I still had no deal', says Garrison. 'I was very aware of what was going on and I was always told: "If you make it to this ranking, you'll get a deal. If you make it to this [round]", you know? You had white girls behind me, they're making way more money and their ranking or consistency wasn't even there …. Being a black player in the 80s meant that and more. To [me] it was being constantly described as the African-American player rather than one of the many Americans on tour. It was agents who would reason the lack of contracts away by implying she didn't have "the look" (in Carayol 2020: n.p.).

To return to rugby. What happened in rugby is a reflection of other sport codes as well. Transformation of the game in the 1990's and thereafter was largely squandered because of administrative inability to grasp the intricacies of the post-apartheid project and a failure to connect the operations of the South African Rugby Football Union with national imperatives, including issues of demographic transformation, the search for new national symbols and initiatives to reconfigure the heritage and commemorative landscape (Snyders n.d.).

By the turn of the 21st century, sport had become a corporate affair. The culture of community support for national teams in the former anti-apartheid sport structures was something of the past. Natalie du Toit, for example, a South African Olympic swimmer, remarks how she had to pay R8 000 out of her pocket for competing in the national championships (Hawthorne 2006:193). Financial concerns, regardless of talent, have become the overriding factor for parents when encouraging their children to pursue a sport (Heyns & Lemke 2004:177). Many sport administrators and officials would agree with this. What fewer would venture to speak about publicly is that financial scandals are part of the DNA of sport and in particular within neoliberal settings. It is true that corruption and scandal in sport is not limited to the neoliberal period under discussion in this chapter. As early as 1817, William Lambert, the leading cricket professional in England at the time, was

accused of throwing a match and banned from Lord's for life (Oosthuizen & Tinkler 2001:17). But it was since the last quarter of the 20th century that cricket and match-fixing reached pandemic proportions (Oosthuizen & Tinkler 2001:17).

By the second decade of the 21st century South African sport was riddled with financial corruption scandals. Besides the well documented Hansie Cronje corruption scandal, there was also the Majola affair in 2011 where the president of Cricket South Africa (CSA), Mtutzeli Nyoka, was dismissed from his position after a protracted battle with the governing board. However, he continued to call for a commission of inquiry into irregularities in CSA. When the retired judge Chris Nicholson conducted an investigation into CSA, his findings on the corruption and maladministration in the game were damning (Nyoka 2015). When the South African based investment company, Steinhoff, was hit by a financial scandal in December 2017, it was revealed how the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Markus Jooste, used his horse racing business empire to deceive creditors (Stayn 2018:151). Steinhoff of course also sponsored sport such as Maties sport, the Varsity Cup rugby tournament and the Blitzboks (SA's sevens rugby team). But, accounting irregularities at the firm also affected many South Africans who were members of the Government Employees Pension Fund (GEPF), which had lost R24 billion by end of November 2017 as a consequence of the Steinhoff scandal (Ensor 2018). These, alongside features such as democracy abuse, increase in crime and food insecurity, failed economy, rising levels of unemployment and inequality have become consistencies in the period leading up to the first reported case of COVID -19 in South Africa in March 2020 (Johnson 2015:239).

4 Parting Thoughts

This chapter showed how the neoliberal project had infiltrated the social and political fabric of post-apartheid society and sport. The project had also produced sport cultural heroes who keep the neoliberal project firmly intact through displays of political neutrality. A case in point is that of disgraced cricket captain, Hansie Cronje who was 'carelessy naïve of the intricate designs of National Party [racist] politics … he had no inkling of the cause and effects of apartheid and of the international outcry it gave rise to' (Hartman 1997:13). Cronje is not alone in confessing to political naivety regarding apartheid and

an admission in this regard was also made by the 2007 champion Rugby World Cup Springbok coach, Jake White (White & Ray 2007:18). Other South African international sport persons' (who were bestowed with iconic status) biographies reveal an absence of political conviction. Amongst them are Penny Heyns, South African swimming Olympic gold medalist (Heyns & Lemke 2004) and the South African rugby captain of the winning RWC tournament in 1995, Francois Pienaar (Pienaar & Griffiths 1999). Hopefully, a new generation of South African sport activists will emerge that could become part of the few voices of dissent against injustices. Here, for example, we refer to the American athletes Megan Rapinoe and Colin Kaepernick's outspokenness against social injustices that are inherent to the neoliberal system (*The New York Times* 2020). Given the pervasiveness of the neoliberal economy in South African sport that was preceded by three centuries of white settlement – phased by colonial wars, expropriation of tribal lands, slavery, forced labour and industrialism (Simons & Simons 1983:7), any hope for a social revolutionary shift away from the neoliberal sport project after the COVID-19 pandemic seems utopian if not impossible.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed a brutal, structural, social and economic inequality, with callous indifference to suffering (Roy 2020). In many countries, government bailouts have largely gone to corporations and the bosses are already trying to make workers pay for the crisis (*Socialist Worker* 2020). However, the pandemic, with all the tragedy of loss of human life, offers revolutionary minded scholars an opportunity to reflect on the abusive role that sport played through the ages but in particular, in the South African context, in the name of democracy since 1994. Yet, things can be different. We are in agreement with the author Graeme Joffe who makes 5 suggestions for envisaging a corrupt free sport world: A better future and fair chance for all South African sportsmen and women; Justice and an end to the gravy train; sending out messages of never giving up and standing up for truth; a culture of investigative sports journalism in South Africa and finally vindication and closure for victims of exploitation and corruption (Joffee 2019:411). We have to forego a longing for a return to a neoliberal economic world order, we call 'normal'. As we have seen, the 'normal' was plagued by festering corruption and inequalities that bred social viruses in sport and beyond, bursting open in times of crisis. In the context of sport, we can avoid this by pointing out the need for athletes to speak up and to educate themselves about South Africa's sport liberation history and to gain insights from witnessing the anger seen in

the #BlackLivesMatter protests that have swept across the United States of America and the rest of world. In imitation of Henry Giroux (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EpRjHfDXMmY) speaking on an informal social media platform recently, we should be determined to fight harder if we want to remain optimistic about sport after the COVID-19 pandemic. Roy (2020: n.p.) has argued that 'historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next'.

This gateway, we suggest, must be a fundamental shift, by sport federations (local, national and international) and the scientific community, away from sport as a market driven product. We call for new ways of looking at sport where the human body is at the centre of practice. Such practices must not be reliant on expensive scientific gadgets that the capitalist system offers the world of sport to measure bodies that spew out results and that portray black bodies as different to white bodies; male bodies as different to female bodies; middle class bodies as different to working class bodies and so forth (Cleophas 2020). We also suggest that governments should commit to increasing funding for the development of parks and open spaces where sport communities can engage with nature in uncompetitive ways. In turn, university curricula should give more attention to physical education, physical culture[3] and social studies of sport. As scholars of sport studies, we concur with Richard Pringle, who calls for a new materialist approach to sport research that concerns itself with 'epistemologies, ethics and politics …that promotes innovate ways of seeing, thinking and doing research, all of which promote fresh means of understanding existing social issues and the potential for social/material changes' (Pringle 2020:323). We are optimistic of the COVID-19 pandemic serving as a portal to a reimagined sport enterprise, liberated from the shackles of neoliberalism.

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The Conundrum of COVID-19 and the Sports Industry: When Saving Lives is More Important than Entertainment

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Abstract

The advent of COVID-19 has thrown the world of sports into disarray. Far and wide, numerous sports codes, leagues, and federations suspended their activities. They had their operational models adapted as a safety precaution to ensure that minimal human life is lost. Social distancing, one of the critical measures in combating COVID-19, is not always practical for both spectators and participants in sports events. In this chapter, I interrogate the impact of COVID-19 on the sports industry. I argue that COVID-19 has exposed the long-standing neoliberal operational model that has been followed by the world of sports as being flawed and in need of a massive change. I argue that, perhaps, COVID-19 was the necessary chaos that the sports industry needed to usher in a 'new paradigm.' The sports industry ought to keep up with new trends, adapt and embrace new strategies and technologies to continue to offer sporting activities when 'live' game participation and attendance are not an option amid large scale pandemics such as COVID-19. I recommend that the lessons learned from challenges imposed by COVID-19 should transform sports into new frontiers never imagined before, in which saving lives are more important than entertainment.

Keywords: Sports, COVID-19, pandemic, virtual sports

1 Introduction

On the 31st of December 2019, the World Health Organisation (WHO) in China received a report about rising reported incidents of many idiopathic viral pneumonia cases in Wuhan City in Hubei province (Zhu *et al.* 2019; WHO

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2020a). Virologists, geneticists, and epidemiologists argue that the virus' outbreak predates the end of December 2019, when WHO was officially informed. Li *et al.* (2020) and Andersen *et al.* (2020) have reported that the most recent common ancestor (MRCA)[1] of SARS-CoV-2 evolved between 22 and 24 November 2019. Furthermore, to date, using a larger data set, Van Dorp *et al.* (2020) have published a confirmatory study that estimates the date interval of COVID-19 outbreak between the 6th of October and the 11th of December. Less than a month later, WHO declared the outbreak of the virus a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) (WHO 2020a). The nomenclature evolved from novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) to severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), and finally, coronavirus of 2019 (COVID-19). There are over 108 million cases, and 2 396 408 confirmed deaths in 224 countries worldwide (WHO 2020a).

While at first COVID-19 was confined to Hubei province, it quickly found its way to neighbouring Chinese regions. It quickly spread within China, then the neighbouring Asian countries such as the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, central Europe, the United States, and Africa (WHO 2020a; Blocken *et al.* 2020; El Maarouf, Belghazi & El Maarouf 2020). As a global response to an unfolding health crisis, on 10–12 January 2020, WHO published a comprehensive package of documents to serve as guidelines for countries in dealing with COVID-19, which covered several topics about the prevention and the management of the new virus (WHO 2020a). In the absence of a cure or vaccine, WHO (2020a) issued advice for the public on the prevention of the spread of the virus, namely 1) avoiding crowded places; 2) washing hands with an ethanol-based sanitizer or water and soap for at least 20 seconds; 3) maintaining at least a 1.5–2 metre (6 feet) social distance; 4) using a face mask, and 5) and practicing hygiene cough etiquette. Just under three months after the first reported cases of COVID-19, on the 11th of March 2020, WHO became 'deeply concerned by the alarming levels of spread and severity, and by the alarming levels of inaction … assessed that COVID-19 is a pandemic' (WHO 2020a).

The health and safety guidelines issued to the public to control the spread and manage COVID-19 ushered what has become known as the 'new normal'–a new way of living, work, and interactions with other people (Keogh

[1] The most recent individual from which all the organisms of the set are descended.

2020). I agree with Saqr and Wasson (2020), who opines that global pandemics guarantee planetary crises and opportunities to advance planetary wisdom, survival, interconnectedness, collaboration, health promotion, and sustainable ecology. I contend that the concept of calling the current situation the human race finds itself in a new 'normal' might not be the most appropriate term to use as it suggests that pre-COVID-19 conditions were 'normal' and living with COVID-19 in our midst with all the devastation it causes to the innermost fabric that makes us all human is also 'normal.' Therefore, instead of calling this period the 'new normal,' perhaps, we should think of it as the 'new paradigm' (Asonye 2020). I expand on COVID-19 ushering the new paradigm in the sports industry later on in the chapter when I look at how the sports industry needed this 'new paradigm,' a new lens, so to speak, in order go through the much need metamorphosis to remain relevant post- COVID-19 and for future pandemics.

Adhering to WHO's guidelines, many countries suspended many regular activities in people's lives, including businesses, schools, social life, and sports, in an attempt to 'flatten the curve.' The need to reduce the spread of COVID-19 infections led to numerous governments instituting lockdowns, ranging from mild to very severe depending on citizens, cities, and countries (Blocken *et al.* 2020; Ramagole *et al.* 2020). Approximately 20% of the world population is under coronavirus lockdown (Davidson 2020). Social distancing in sports events for both spectators and participants, one of the critical measures in combating COVID-19, is not always practical. Perhaps, it is the opportune moment to provide a brief background on COVID-19 and why social distancing might not be an option for the sports industry.

The most common mode of transmission of COVID-19 is by direct sharing of droplets produced by sneezing, coughing, talking, singing, or merely exhaling that reach the mucosae (mouth and nose) or conjunctiva (eyes) of another person (Blocken *et al.* 2020). The second most common method is indirect or contact route through fomites such as skin cells, hair, clothes, handrails, keyboard buttons, and other objects. Virus transmission is complete after contact with an infected person (Blocken *et al.* 2020). Various authors (Morawska & Cao 2020; Liu *et al.* 2020; Asadi *et al.* 2020) have reported mounting evidence that COVID-19 can also be transmitted by inhalation of microscopic droplets at the short-to-medium range, and the virus can remain in the air for hours. Therefore, the sports industry would become a breeding ground for new cases of COVID-19 as it is likely to accelerate the transmission

of the virus. To this end, numerous sports codes, leagues, and sports federations' worldwide suspended their activities and adapted their operational models. The swift actions were necessary to ensure minimal human interaction customary at sports events leading to unnecessary deaths (Baggish *et al.* 2020). International multi-sports and mega-sports, the Summer and Winter Olympics being the biggest scalps, local and national amateur competitions, world games, world student games, and professional leagues were called off (Blocken *et al.* 2020; Lenzeni *et al.* 2020).

The suspension of various sports codes, competitions, leagues, and sports federations' activities has had an enduring impact on the sports industry. The sports industry needs to find new ways in which to stage sporting events amid pandemics. Sports events require safe conditions that do not compromise the entire sports industry food chain: the athletes/players, owners of the teams, coaches, backroom staff, broadcasters, sponsors, and spectators (Hall 2020; Mann *et al.* 2020). The impact of the sports industry's health restrictions on the lockdown periods is both economic and social. Economically, the inability to stage and attend 'live' games, a source of the primary revenue for the various sports stakeholders, has disastrous economic consequences. Sports teams have not generated revenue from the many other activities associated with hosting live matches with their fans in attendance. I expand on the economic impact of COVID-19 under the sports industry sector revenue-making model section I discuss later on in this chapter.

Socially, COVID-19 has thwarted promoting the social benefits derived from global and regional sporting events (UN 2020). It is a common cause that sports promote social cohesion (Blocken *et al.* 2020). The UN Sustainable Development Goals 2019 Summit declared that sports make a significant contribution to the empowerment of women and young people, individuals, and communities and health, education, and social inclusion objectives (UN 2020; Blocken *et al.* 2020). After all, Nelson Mandela also stated that 'sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does' (Hughes 2013). Thus, sport is an invaluable tool for fostering communication and building bridges between communities and generations (WHO 2020b). COVID-19 lockdowns and the suspension of sports meant the curtailment of social inclusion objectives and platforms in which people could unite are reduced (Majumdar & Naha 2020; Blocken *et al.* 2020). Sports also enhance the social and emotional excitement of fans (Majumdar & Naha 2020). The

accompanying idol-worshipping often observed in sports fans has led to more significant physical activity of previously sedentary individuals (WHO 2020b). For example, basketball as a sports code reached unprecedented appeal levels far and wide from the hero-worshipping of Michael Jordan, presumably the most outstanding athlete of all time. It became a sport of choice in many countries. As a result, more people started to play basketball and continue to even today because of the phenomenon that Michael Jordan is/was.

In this chapter, I argue that COVID-19 has exposed the long-standing operational model followed by the sports industry as flawed and it needs a massive change to keep up with new trends and access its audiences which pre-COVID-19 conditions prevented. The sports industry favours the principles of neoliberalism accompanied by free trade and competition. Over the years, the sports industry's neoliberal agenda excludes most people from fully participating in different sports barred by exorbitant television packages and live attendance, which is nearly impossible due to high costs. I expand on the repercussions of these neoliberal tendencies in the sports industry later on in the chapter. I, therefore, argue that there needed to be a paradigm shift in the sports industry. While COVID-19 has left a social and economic destruction trail, 'new thinking' is necessary and inevitable. To ensure sustainability and relevance of the sports industry post-COVID-19, new strategies and technologies that will allow it to continue to offer sporting activities when 'live' game attendance and participation are not an option amid outbreaks of large scale pandemics are a necessity. Thus, post COVID-19, the sports industry should venture into uncharted waters if it hopes to continue to appeal and remain relevant to the kind of world that is being socially engineered by COVID-19. I argue, how fans consume sports and the nature/type of sports fans that the sports industry will attract post-COVID-19, will change the sports fraternity for years.

I have structured this chapter in the following manner: First, I define physical activity, sports, and exercise, and describe the various benefits associated with them. Second I look at the current sector model used in the sports industry. Third, I discuss the commercial sports industry sector revenue-making model to characterise the nature and extent of the economic impact of COVID-19 on the sports industry. Fourth, I offer a philosophical description of COVID-19 and describe why COVID-19 was the necessary seismic chaos. The sports industry needed to embrace the 'new paradigm'–a new model of doing things–to emerge from this pandemic more relevant and resilient to

future pandemics. Fifth, as part of this new paradigm' I offer new strategies and technologies as alternative options for sports to continue to provide sporting activities when 'live' game participation and attendance are not an option amidst large-scale pandemics. I end this paper with some philosophical and practical reflections on lessons that sports should adopt post COVID-19 era.

2 Definitions and the Benefits of Participation in Physical Activity, Sports, and Exercise

Physical activity, sports, and exercise have different conceptual meanings. However, they are often confused and interchangeably used as though they mean the same (Caspersen, Powell & Christenson 1985). Therefore, it is prudent to clarify differences and perhaps some overlaps in the terminology as our departure point. Physical activity is an umbrella term under which all sub-categories of physical activity fall. Physical activity is 'any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that result in energy expenditure' (Caspersen, Powell & Christenson 1985: p.126). Nature and forms that physical activity may take are often as a spontaneous activity such as in leisure, work, and transport or as an organised activity: 1) physical exercise that is aimed at **health promotion** and improving physical capacity, 2) physical training aimed at **performance benefits**: the physical capacity and performance (Corbin, Corbin, Welk & Welk 2012). Typically, the general public participates in activities that promote health, while athletes tend to engage in activities that would provide them with performance benefits.

Sports is all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competitions at all levels' (Council of Europe 1983). According to the South African White Paper on Sports and Recreation (2013: 10 - 11), sports can be categorised into ***category one*** which are activities that are both physical and mental, passive recreation; ***category two*** is performed purely for fun and enjoyment, and ***category three*** active recreation entails competition, physical, psychological and economic benefits. Exercise refers to physical activity that is 'planned, structured, repetitive, and purposive in the sense that improvement or maintenance of one or more components of physical fitness is an objective' (Caspersen, Powell & Christenson 1985: 128). With worldwide COVID-19

related lockdowns, restrictions to homes, limited or no travel, and the closure of sports facilities, parks, and adventure spots meant reduced physical activities choices. Therefore, almost all forms of physical activity stopped.

The nationwide lockdowns have prevented individuals from leaving their homes to engage in regular physical activities and use community resources (Hall *et al.* 2020). While there is no available literature to assess the lasting impact of COVID-19 on physical activity trends, we could contemplate the possibility of a rise in sedentary behaviour lifestyles. Without COVID-19, the World Health Organization reported that 31% of individuals 15 years or older are physically inactive and approximately 3.2 million deaths per year are due to a sedentary lifestyle (WHO 2020b; WHO 2020c). Okazaki *et al.* (2011) reported a lasting significant decrease in physical activity in children and adolescents over three years following the 2011 earthquake and tsunami that ravaged East Japan. We can anticipate similar patterns post-COVID-19. There needs to be a concerted effort by the sports industry to get individuals engaged as quickly as possible post-COVID-19.

The benefits of participation in physical activity vary (see Malm, Jakobsson & Isaksson 2019). Physical activity practiced as exercise leads to better cardiovascular health (Wilson, Ellison & Cable 2015; Nyberg, Gliemann & Hellsten 2015), prevention and management of diabetes (Conn *et al.* 2014), management of hypertension (Casonatto *et al.* 2016) and improved immune function (Dhabhar 2014). Physical activity in particular sports can lead to psychosocial development for both old and young (Eime *et al.* 2013; Nowak 2014), personal development (Fraser-Thomas & Strachan 2016), better mental health with reduced anxiety (Wegner *et al.* 2014a; Wegner *et al.* 2014b; Bennett *et al.* 2015), insomnia (Lopresti, Hood & Drummond 2013), depression (Schuch *et al.* 2016) stress (Büyükturan, Naharcı & Kırd 2017) and other psychological disorders (Knochel *et al.* 2012).

Sports participation achieved through physical activity can offset the psychosomatic manifestations associated with pandemics. There is evidence that a sedentary lifestyle (currently induced by COVID-19) could have mental health impacts, which can exacerbate stress or anxiety in individuals due to isolation from everyday social life. There is also evidence to indicate that similar to other pandemics before it, COVID-19 and nationwide lockdowns could produce acute panic, anxiety, obsessive behaviors, hoarding, paranoia, and depression post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the long run (Dubey *et al.* 2020). What drives COVID-19 related psychosomatic manifestations is

the pandemic's impact on immediate family members, community, and the general population via different information platforms (Dubey *et al.* 2020). Furthermore, the possible loss of family or friends from the virus and the impact of the virus on one's economic well-being and access to nutrition could compound these effects (WHO 2020a).

The conceptual definitions and the limited literature on the benefits of physical activity presented provide the backdrop for many arguments in this chapter. I argue that the sports ecosystem faces a conundrum of a need to continue to offer opportunities for engagement in physical activity to maintain health and entertain spectators while at the same time trying to save lives. There is a fine line. There is a great need to keep individuals healthy and to engage them amid the gloom. However, exposing people to sports during a pandemic could have the opposite effects of increasing infection and mortality. It is therefore imperative that the sports fraternity strikes a perfect balance between entertainment and saving lives.

3 The Sports Industry Sector Model

To have a conceptual understanding of the impact COVID-19 has had on the sports industry, let us look at what the sector entails (Figure 1). According to the sports industry sector model, three categories of structures frame the sports industry (Pedersen & Thibault 2018). First, government-based units, agencies, and departments make up the first category of the ***public sector***. Public sector structures, facilities, or organisations owe existence to and for the people and the people; hence they are referred to as the public sector. They are usually provided for by the government/municipality of the day. They are in towns, cities, regions, states, provinces, territories, or countries where people serve their immediate needs. In most cases, the governments provide various facilities such as (recreation) parks, recreation centres, and sports areas to their residents, and formulate sport and recreation programmes and policies that cater to the physical activity needs of different strata of the community (Pedersen & Thibault 2018).

The second tier in the sports industry is the ***non-profit sector*** (Pedersen & Thibault 2018). These organisations do not exist to pursue the Friedman doctrine or the shareholder theory, which postulates that its primary responsibility is to its shareholders (Friedman 1970; Smith 2003).

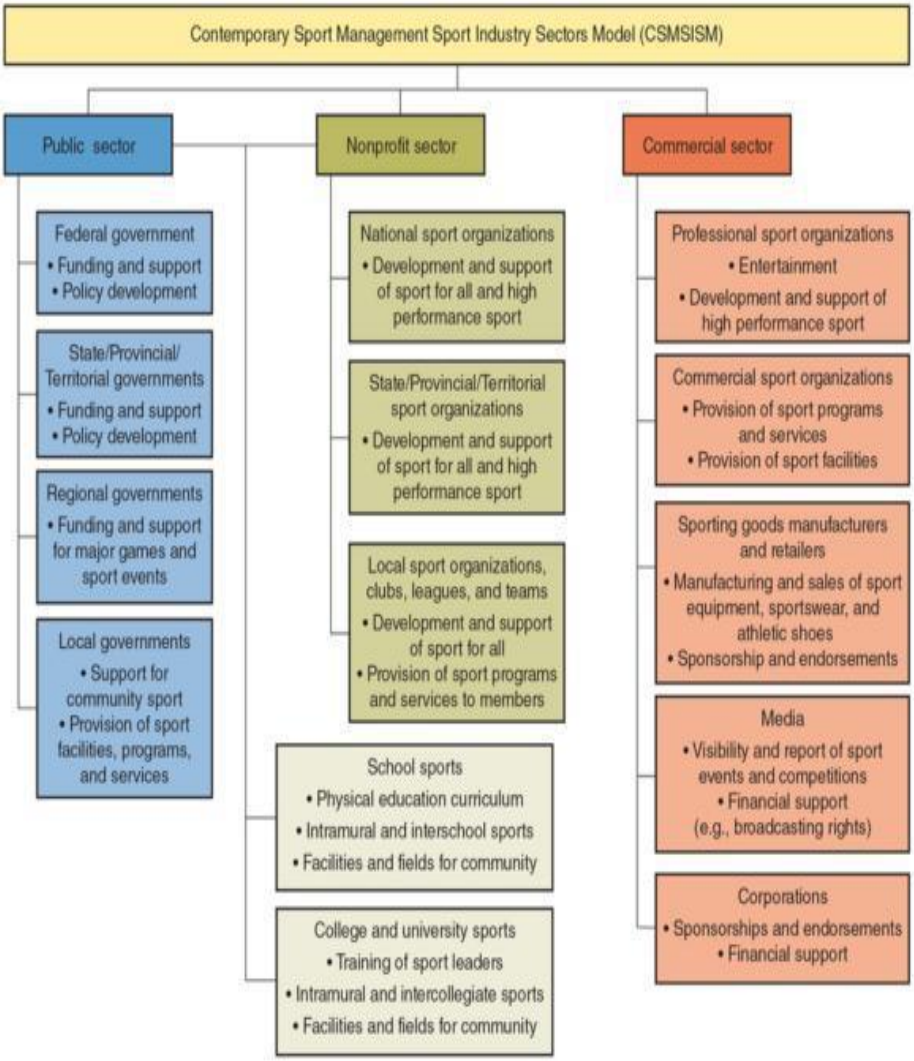

Figure 1: The sports industry sector model (Pedersen & Thibault 2018)

Government-sanctioned and -funded organisations for no-profit causes include primary schools, secondary schools, colleges, and universities

(Pedersen & Thibault 2018). Contrary to the Friedman doctrine, organisations in this category exist for social responsibility: a social cause, a special interest, and the needs of members for non-profit purposes (Pedersen & Thibault 2018). Usually, to serve in these organisations, members are elected to the executive committee and board of directors that craft the strategic direction (Pedersen & Thibault 2018).

The third layer of the sports industry sector is the **commercial sector** (Pedersen & Thibault 2018). It is in this tier where various sports organisations and their supporters operate (Pedersen & Thibault 2018). In this category, stakeholders entail professional sports franchises, leagues, and other sport entities; sports providers; sporting goods manufacturers and retailers; sports media; and corporations that support sports with sponsorship and endorsements (Pedersen & Thibault 2018). Organisations in this tier are the heartbeat of the entire sports industry, and without them, sports products and services to the whole population discontinue (Pedersen & Thibault 2018). Organisations in this tier are answerable to their shareholders, and the more profit they can make for them, the better (Friedman 1970). However, of late, increasingly, commercial organisations are ditching the stakeholder theory. Instead, they adopt the stakeholder capitalism theory, which is stakeholder-driven, to focus on tandem stakeholders within the environmental and social risks and opportunities provided by the context (communities) they operate (Samans & Nelson 2020).

For this reason, the arguments in this chapter will have a bias towards the commercial sector of the sports industry. I have intentionally chosen to construct my observations on the commercial tier of the sports industry since it is the mainstay upon which the whole sector rests. It is in this tier wherein massive COVID-19 related economic meltdowns are happening. The other levels of the sports industry have also experienced losses. However, theirs are primarily social. In forwarding this line of thought, I am acutely aware that both the public and the non-profit sectors have also lost considerable amounts of money. Large portions of the social responsibility government budgets that would ordinarily support the first two layers of the industry are fighting the immediate 'enemy' COVID-19 not catered for in the previous year's budgetary plans.

Moreover, many people are retrenched or not earning an income reducing taxes governments can collect for the fiscus. It is also a common cause going forward, all over the world, governments' future fiscus budgets

will be limited, leading to an urgent need to adapt the funding model for the sports organisation in the first and the second tier. There are inadequate funds to go by with the main priority for various governments to approach international money lending agencies to stimulate their economies during and post-COVID-19. Thus, the sports industry would have to fend off on its own with minimal funding options both from the government and the corporate sector.

At this stage, I would like to turn my attention to the commercial sports industry sector financial model to elucidate further how COVID-19 has led to epic financial losses that the sports industry will take years to recover from or not at all.

3 The Commercial Sports Industry Sector Revenue-making Model

Earlier on, I referred to an argument that nowadays, the commercial sports sector does not only exist to pursue the Friedman doctrine vigorously. However, profit-making is still their primary responsibility. Sports organisations generate profit through revenue by selling products and services (Nufer & Bühler 2010). Thus, a closer look at how they earn profit at this stage is essential (Figure 2). Revenue-generating options include various sources such as matchday/attendance revenue (Nufer & Bühler 2010), sponsorship and advertising (Nufer & Bühler 2010), merchandise (Nufer & Bühler 2010), participation fees, membership fees, concession revenue, broadcasting rights, and donations.

3.1 Matchday/ Attendance Revenue

Matchday/attendance revenue accumulates when fans attend the game live (Coates & Humphreys 2007). Matchday/attendance revenue entails income earned from a combined sale of ticket sales, food, and hospitality packages to fans during live matches (Sports Business Group 2013). COVID-19 social distancing guidelines resulted in the suspension of hosting live games, and this significant source of income stopped. Match ticket sales constitute a large portion of the revenue that sports teams generate (Nufer & Bühler 2010). Ticket prices in European soccer leagues, for example, range from €13–67 for regular games and €15–80 for top games (Nufer & Fischer 2013). Sports

organisations have suffered severe financial losses with the absence of matchday/attendance revenue. Most professional teams also sell season match packages for which they have had to refund fans.

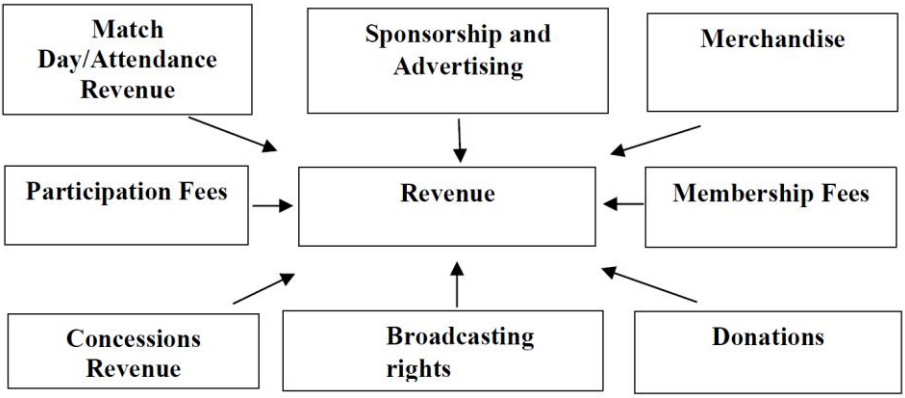

Figure 2: A conceptual revenue-making model for the sports industry

3.2 Sponsorship and Advertising

In 2019, the most prominent investors in sports sponsorships were financial services firms, automotive energy, and airline sectors, all of which have been heavily affected by COVID-19. They have had to slash their sponsorship budgets to ensure survival post the pandemic (Walker & Skelton 2020). Sponsors devote massive funds to competitions, teams, and individual athletes (Walker & Skelton 2020). With no live sports, no coverage on television and other platforms, and sponsors lose the foundations to promote themselves, activate and engage with fans, and conduct all other activities for which their rights and assets have acquired permit (Johan Cruyff Institute 2020). Rough estimates indicate that the sports industry has lost to the tune of £14.1 billion from sports sponsorship revenue this year due to the COVID-19 outbreak (Walker & Skelton 2020).

3.3 Broadcasting Rights

Television rights offer another excellent source of income for sports teams. Television companies invest billions into sports broadcasting rights they

purchase from various sports federations, which are then packaged and sold to viewers at exorbitant monthly subscription fees to recoup the money spent (Walker & Skelton 2020). The absence of live sports has led to mass cancellations for pay television subscription services, meaning less money television stations generate. In some instances, sports leagues have had to repay some of the money made out of selling television rights to pay television stations as a consequence. Added to this, COVID-19 has led to new competitors like Amazon and YouTube TV who offer the same services but allow the subscriber to choose their channel preferences. The flexibility provided by the new players in the broadcasting industry is at a fraction of the prices traditional television companies charge (Walker & Skelton 2020).

3.4 Merchandise

Sports merchandise is any item featuring a professional team's logo, mascot, or name for promotional purposes (Mertes 2020). To supplement match day/attendance revenue, sports teams devote their energies to commercial income, including merchandise. Teams sell merchandise in stadiums or online platforms if a team has a more expansive and global appeal worldwide. Teams have not been able to earn maximum income from merchandise because fans are not allowed to attend live games. On the other hand, the financial strain brought about by COVID-19 has also limited disposable cash that fans can spend, forcing them to weigh what are essential and non-essential amenities. A recent survey by the Federation of the European Sporting Goods Industry revealed that 45% of the sports teams suffered a loss in merchandise turnover of between 50 and 90% (Federation of the European Sporting Goods 2020).

3.5 Participation Fees

Events, activities, tournaments, and competitions hosted by sports organisations are also another good income source. Nowadays, sports teams hold coaching clinics, workshops, conferences, corporate/public tournaments, and umpiring courses to generate participation revenue. Revenue during these events, activities, games, and competitions may come from sponsors, the paying participants, and various exhibitors at the venue. The necessity to promote social distancing has limited sports organisations' ability to maximise revenue from participation fees.

3.6 Membership Fees

One of the most strategic financial resources for sports teams is membership fees (Wicker, Breuer & Pawloski 2010). Individuals sign up for different categories of memberships to access facilities and other amenities that the sports organisation offers. The annual membership fee provides a good source of revenue. While the revenue generated from membership fees is relatively low (compared to the other sources discussed), however, to run a successful enterprise, it nevertheless provides a good cushion for financial challenges that sports clubs experience, such as running costs and overheads. Sports teams have had to stop receiving, or in most instances, they have had to refund membership fees, which have caused many financial strains.

3.7 Concessions Revenue

Food services at the stadium during live games can entice fans to come through the gate to watch matches, and thus, concessions become a pivotal component to bring in revenue for both the sports franchise and the food service provider (Sweet 2013). Concessions sold at a venue constitute a large proportion of income that a sports team generates in hosting a live game (Miller, Washington & Miller 2012). Concessions thus become strategic and innovative sources of revenue to supplement budgets to afford rising player salaries and the expensive costs for owners to operate the team and the sports facility (Levine 2007). Sports teams tend to contract their concessions out to food service providers and still receive a large cut of what they make (Blackshaw 2012). With the outbreak of COVID-19, the suspension of live games' attendance left sports teams deprived of this valuable revenue source.

3.8 Donations

A donation is any form of gratuitous disposal of property (Kempen 2019) and any gratuitous waiver of a right or renunciation of a right, that is, without expecting something in return (Nel & Klopper 2019). Donations can be financial or in-kind (Nel & Klopper 2019). Gifts have become strategic social responsibility artillery for most individual and corporate donors. First, it allows donors to engage with community causes, which can carry financial benefits for the business as customers/clients favour companies that care about their immediate community's needs. Second, donations have some positive

economic benefits, such as tax rebates. In most countries, donors get tax rebates for donations. For example, in South Africa, donors can, in return, gain tax rebates of up to a maximum of 10% of taxable income per year. Covid-19 has forced donors to consider which projects get funding carefully or not. In big companies, 2021 and onwards, corporate social responsibility budgets are slashed or scrapped, meaning that sports teams can no longer access this valuable funding source.

4 COVID-19: The Necessary Chaos for the Sports Industry

I argue that perhaps the sports industry needed COVID-19 as the chaos that accelerates novelty's emergence in thinking about staging sports events during pandemics. Saqr and Wasson (2020) argue that global pandemics guarantee planetary crises and opportunities to advance planetary wisdom, survival, interconnectedness, collaboration, health promotion, and sustainable ecology–newness. According to chaos theory, the human brain is a chaotic system (Holland 2010). Minute changes in our reality as we know it could result in substantial changes in our experience. Our immediate reaction depends on our brains' initial conditions and those changes in reality, and those initial conditions are continually changing. Thus, the human psyche offers a different response because of individual differences and their states that vary from one moment to another. In terms of the chaos theory, our response to 'chaos' entails many energy states called 'hills' because they require high and 'valleys' that use low energy. The whole chaos system tends to gravitate to the valleys. Thus, the human psyche responds to the ever-changing and random demands of reality (chaos) in ways that involve the least expenditure of energy (Holland 2010). The sports industry uses some of the strategies and technologies I suggest in the next section on an *ad hoc* basis. Until now, the sports industry has not developed and expanded its offerings to its broader audience because the tendency has been to fall on the options that require less energy (to push for profits). To a large extent, the reluctance to do this is due to the neoliberal agenda or consumerism that occupies the sports industry's thinking.

Coakley (2011: 75) argues that sports' primary goal is to reaffirm 'a belief in competition as the primary basis for assessing merit and allocating rewards'. Perhaps, the neoliberal sports agenda first came to the fore with Henry Russell's famous assertion, 'Men, I'll be honest. Winning isn't everything', 'Men, it's the only thing!' (Rosenbaum 1950). According to

Miller (2012: 24), 'sport most spectacular embodiment [of neoliberalism], is through the dual fetish of competition and control, individualism and government.' Accordingly, sport perpetuates the notion that 'economic winners deserve power and privilege' while 'economic failure is due to poor choices or weak character' (Coakley 2011: 75). As a result, the sports industry enables a dangerous discourse that 'promotes consumption as a lifestyle (Coakley 2011: 75).' According to Brownell (2019: 16), 'changes like the global political economy have also been expressed in the commodification of the sporting body and sports events.' Perhaps, the biggest question is: what value (applicability and efficacy) does the chaos theory hold for the sports' neoliberal agenda?

To answer that question, we need to look no further than the fact that the sports industry has been on mental blinkers for several years, acting blind and deaf to sports fans' repeated pleas worldwide. The sports industry has been chasing the neoliberal agenda, happy to fill sports arenas with fans every week and ignoring their essential stakeholders' needs: the fans. This arrangement has been the sports industry's cash cow. As a testimony to this, the sports industry's conceptual revenue-making model has not changed in decades. Ticket prices, merchandise, concessions have been skyrocketing, making it impossible for the working class to access and share in sports' full experience. When their pleas fell on deaf ears, sports fans displayed their displeasure by signing up for free-to-air television that holds many sports broadcasting rights packages. The monthly subscription fees for these packages are exorbitant, and many sports broadcasters offer no flexibility to choose the channels that interest subscribers. The emergence of Amazon and Youtube TV with their flexible offerings has been a welcome addition. However, developing countries do not have access to these new players.

The sports industry is steadily increasing television rights prices, and broadcasters are only glad to pass on their subscribers' inherited costs: the sports fans. The subscription fees have been exponentially rising over the years. Even when sports fans watch free highlight packages on platforms such as Youtube or Twitch, the clips are incessantly interrupted by advertisements. The large-scale advertisements on the highlight packages make them an expensive option for sports fans that can not access and afford reliable and cheap internet services such as in developing countries.

Thus, as a response to the chaos in the sports industry necessitated by COVID-19, there is a need to rethink and develop new ways to make sports

more accessible to the fans. While some options I discuss in the next option have high costs attached to them, I argue that they could be a great start to demonstrate the 'new paradigm' desperately needed to survive post-COVID-19.

5 Alternative Strategies and Technologies to Use to Offer Sports during and Post-pandemic

5.1 Biologically Safe Environment/ Bio Bubble

A biologically safe environment/bio-bubble is a strictly controlled bio-secure environment that monitors infection with COVID-19 of players, management, and staff. In general, for the bio bubble to successfully curb the virus's superspreading and supertransmission capabilities, before departure, players, coaches, and the backroom staff are monitored their movement and then tested for COVID-19. The team then travels in a chartered flight to limit interaction with the general public. On arrival at the destination, the team resides in a location or facility that offers all the amenities required, like on-site accommodation, field/court, gym, and a group of medical personnel sealed from outsiders. The intended outcome with this arrangement is to restrict the further spread of coronavirus by testing everyone before entry into the bio-bubble and controlling every person's movement at the facility to monitor and manage a safe environment.

Additionally, a bio-bubble offers regular testing and quarantine zones. Should any team member present any COVID-19 related symptoms or test positive, he/she restricted from interacting with the team members and placed in a quarantine zone with further strict medical procedures imposed (www.sacricketmag.com). Of course, only the big sports teams possess the financial muscle to stage sports competitions under bio-bubbles daily to keep every member in the set-up.

5.2 eSports

eSports, also known as electronic sports, or e-sports, entails 'a form of sports where electronic systems facilitate the primary aspects of the sport; the input of players and teams, as well as the output of the eSports system, are mediated by human-computer interfaces' (Hamari & Sjöblom 2016: 211). Simply put, eSports is a sports competition employing video games. Over the last decade,

eSports has been growing in popularity, with an estimated total audience of 495 million by 2020 and predicted to reach 606 million by 2023 (Rietkerk 2020). In 2020, the global eSports economy will reach $1.1 billion (Rietkerk 2020). Seventy-five percent of eSports revenues this year is made up of 1) sponsorships and media rights, totalling $822.4 million, 2) consumer spending on tickets and merchandise totalling $121.7 million, and 3) game publishers' investments into the esports space via supporting tournaments through partnerships totalling $116.3 million (Rietkerk 2020).

Usually, eSports game offerings are in terms of specific genres, such as multiplayer online battle arenas, first-person shooters, real-time strategy, collectible card games, or sports games (Hamari & Sjöblom 2016). Typically, through eSports, professional or amateur individuals or teams compete against each other through video gaming. The competition organisers coordinate the different e-leagues, e-ladders, and e-tournaments, and where players customarily belong to groups or other 'sporting' organizations sponsored by various business organisations (Hamari & Sjöblom 2016). Since all eSports gaming happens online, there is no physical interaction between the participants even when held on-site. Thus, the regulations related to social distancing are adhered to at all times.

The downside is that eSports equipment such as gaming laptops and platforms such as hardware and software, internet penetration, the internet speed, and the joining fees are quite expensive, making this an option available to a select few.

5.3 Virtual Events and Sports

Virtual events refer to sporting tournaments or activities wherein competitors do not gather at the same geographical location or jurisdiction to participate in the event; however, they compete against each other on a virtual platform (Marshall 2020). Typically, the participants enter the event online on a designated tournament website or use a mobile phone application (app) downloaded from Google Play Store or Apple App Store (Marshall 2020). As a rule, competitors have to carry their smartphones, fitness watch, activity tracker, and smartwatches with them provided that they can independently connect to the cellphone networks while participating (Marshall 2020). The use of technology enables tournament organisers an opportunity to track participants' live'. Naturally, the competitors start simultaneously, and the

mobile app tracks their progress as they complete the course. More often than not, competition organisers make competitors' progress available in real-time for anyone to see. In some virtual events that adopt this format, the 'live' competition reaches a broader audience on television or the internet. Alternatively, the competition organisers may decide against holding the event on a standard date and time. Instead, they may allow the competitors to complete the event in their own time and upload their times using their smartphones or smartwatches (Marshall 2020). After that, players are ranked accordingly, and a winner is declared.

While virtual events are still a viable option in pandemics, some critics have argued that they pose health and safety risks for participants, and serious questions arise about protecting participants' information if a 'live' event is held (Marshall 2020). However, they are here to stay, and they are gaining popularity very fast. As an example, the popular Comrades ultramarathon held in KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa between the cities Pietermaritzburg and Durban was virtual. It proved a resounding success. The other added benefit extended to the Comrade Marathon Association (the organisers) by hosting a virtual event was expanding participation to competitors that would not ordinarily participate in the actual event. There were 5, 10, 21.1, 45, and 90 km events, a first for the 95-year old grueling event.

Virtual sports are electronic games or simulations of sporting events generated by software programmed to comply with a set of rules that mimic real sporting events. Equally, virtual sports do not occur in one common physical space. However, competitors enter the competition and participate in their homes' comfort or a geographical location closer to them. In virtual sports events, athletes compete against each other by and large, attached to technology that measures their output (York 2020). As they compete, an athlete's avatar appears on a computer-generated environment, which resembles the real terrain they would encounter in the actual event (York 2020). After that, the event streams on television and the internet. For example, the 2020 Tour de France moved to the end of August due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the virtual race was in July. Though the virtual version had six stages compared to the traditional 21, professional athletes competed against each other fiercely. The virtual tour also allowed all cyclists to compete, and there was even a woman's race, something that the actual race does not allow.

Similarly, the drawback for virtual sports is that equipment, internet

penetration, internet speed, and the joining fees for these events could become quite expensive.

5.4 Health and Safety Restrictions and the Number of Spectators in Stadiums

Earlier in the chapter, I argue that most sports codes, leagues, and sports federations' suspended or had their operational models substantially modified to limit human interaction is routine in sports events (Baggish *et al.* 2020). Naturally, sports events take place in an outdoor or an indoor arena that offers some ventilation. However, a full spectator attendance capacity leads to the deterioration of circulating air quality, one of the enabling factors for the coronavirus's spread. The number of spectators in a sports arena has a direct bearing on the quality of circulating air. Thus, sports events with poor ventilation can quickly become super spreaders or super transmitters of COVID-19. Adequate ventilation is key to lowering the risk of infection (Copley 2020).

To reduce the number of spectators allowed to attend sports arenas, limit new infections. When the first COVID-19 infection curve had flattened down, some continental and domestic competitions opened up sports arenas for live games attendance with a restricted number of spectators. For example, as of the 1st of October 2020, the United European Football Associations (UEFA) Executive Committee passed and adopted a resolution to allow sports fans back to stadiums with attendance capacity reduced to only 30% (Calli 2020). The English Premier League (EPL) adopted a slightly different approach in using a multi-level tier classification system based on the COVID-19 epidemiological profile of the area in which the stadium is. In **tier one,** where the infection risk is low, stadiums are allowed 4,000, or half the stadium capacity, whichever is lower. In **tier two** areas, the limit is at 2,000 spectators outdoors or half the capacity. No spectators are allowed in the **tier three** regions where COVID-19 infections remain acute (Prince-Wright 2020). Additional health and safety restrictions include opening multiple arena entrances and having spectators seated for the game's duration, which can significantly impact the number of contacts people accumulate (Copley 2020).

5.5 Disinfectant/ Sanitary Tunnels

Disinfectant/sanitary tunnels are portable structures made of steel and poly-

vinyl chloride (PVC) materials found outside venues where many people congregate, such as malls, markets, railway stations, airports, or sports events (Biswal *et al.* 2020). They present in varying distances ranging from 16–25 ft. They come in two forms: 1) **static** whereby a person rotates inside the station for 10–15 minutes, and the disinfectant sprays from nozzles arranged in the whole of the circumference and dynamic types, and 2) **dynamic** whereby a person moves from the entrance to the end of the structure and sprays with a disinfectant throughout the path (Biswal *et al.* 2020). The spray is a mist of sodium hypochlorite solution, a component of commercial bleaches and cleaning solutions, and used as a disinfectant in drinking and waste water purification systems and swimming pools (Sengupta 2020). While the efficacy of disinfectant and sanitary tunnels on COVID-19 is suspect, denounced as providing a false sense of security on individuals (Biswal *et al.* 2020), perhaps, it might be useful as a weapon to fight other pandemics in the future.

5.6 The Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Sports Events

Artificial intelligence (AI) denotes machines programmed to simulate human intelligence by thinking like and impersonating various human actions (Frankenfield 2020). Remarkable technological advances brought by the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has accelerated the machines' capabilities of simulation of human intelligence. Thus, currently, the devices are no longer only capturing 'explicit' knowledge; however, they are now developing a 'tacit' knowledge – the intuitive know-how embedded in the human mind (Crameri 2018). The term also refers to any machine that demonstrates traits associated with a human mind, such as learning and problem-solving (Frankenfield 2020). As a result, the application of AI has transcended several sectors, including sports events.

Several authors (Pacis, Subido & Bugtai 2018; Kuziemsky *et al.* 2019) have reported using AI in telehealth and telemedicine. Telehealth makes use of information and communication technologies to transfer medical information to deliver clinical and educational services (WHO 2009). On the other hand, telemedicine allows sharing medical information through interactive digital communication to perform consultations, medical examinations and procedures, and professional medical collaborations at a distance (Dinya & Tóth 2013). Amongst other roles that IA performs for telehealth and telemedicine include 1) remote patient monitoring, 2) clinical assessment and

evaluation, 3) conversational agents and virtual assistants, 4) delivery of chronic medicine to patients, 5) retrieval and analysis of data to enable patient's self-diagnosis, intelligent assistance, and diagnosis, and 6) the use by medical research and academic training or consultations which enables medical experts from other countries to connect and collaborate to mention a few (Pacis, Subido & Bugtai 2018; Kuziemsky *et al.* 2019). Perhaps the most significant breakthrough in the use of AI is its application on epidemiological transition– the monitoring of infectious and non-infectious disease outbreaks–to stage an immediate response.

The applicability of AI in sports arenas includes 1) to disinfect the field and seats at set times before and during the games, 2) to monitor crowds through overhead cameras and sensors to anonymously track and record the movement of fans in real-time, 3) to monitor individual's exposure to COVID-19 using mobile applications, 4) the ordering and delivery of meals to spectators and 5) enforcing social distancing.

5.7 Shortened Sports Events

On a recent visit to the United States (US) before the outbreak of the coronavirus, I got a rare opportunity to attend a live National Basketball Association (NBA) game between the New York Knicks and Detroit Pistons at the iconic [James] Madison Square Garden arena in downtown New York City (NYC). The off the field festivities associated with a basketball game enhances fans' live experience. While a basketball game is four periods of 12 minutes (48 minutes in total), plus a 15-minute halftime break with entertainment, however, since the game clock stops frequently, games run more than 2-and-a-half to three hours. I am raising this critical point very much aware that reducing time for sports events could kill the essence that attracts sports fanatics to sports arenas; however, it might be the only option. Perhaps, reducing the time that fans spend in the sports arena is ideal in pandemics to reduce contacts per person.

5.8 The Use of Technology in Sports Stadiums

The use of technology in sports stadiums has been in use for some time. The outbreak of COVID-19 has intensified the need for technology to prevent, monitor, and act swiftly to curtail infection spikes in sports events, which can

be superspreading and supertransmission monsters quickly. The application of technology in sports stadiums amid COVID-19 could include: 1) staggered arrivals, 2) the allocation of seats to promote social distancing such as in having different sized 'bubbles' of spectators within the seating arrangement, 3) contactless spectator check-ins, 4) contactless meal, and beverage dispensers, 5) touchless taps in restrooms, 6) digital signage with apparent health and safety instructions and updates, information on catering areas, one-way entrances and exits, 7) the use of wearable technology devices that could help people maintain social distancing at sporting events, 8) contactless sanitising stations, and 9) the overall architectural design of stadia, in particular, the stairs, entrances, natural ventilation and often narrow walkways (Buxton 2020).

5.9 Virtual Fans

The advent of the 4IR with its speedier internet of things enables the sports industry to enhance the fan experience while viewing games amid COVID-19. To a large extent, the sports industry has been content with a *top-down* approach in determining fan experience framed by broadcasters instead of a *bottom-up* praxis whereby the agency of significant stakeholders such as fans dictates the viewing. Most sports codes, leagues, and sports federations have had to rethink how spectators can get involved in games without physical attendance in sports arenas. Virtual sports viewing was born. There are an assortment of ways in which different sports codes have achieved this feat. For example, the NBA allows fans to sign-up online and display more than 300 virtual fans' faces on a 17-foot-tall video screen standing next to the court (Mashayekhi 2020). Soccer leagues such as the EPL in England, La Liga in Spain, Bundesliga in Germany, and the Premier Soccer League (PSL) also beam fans' faces on the television screens. The fans' live reactions to every movement, shot, or diss is 'live.' The Major League Baseball and other soccer leagues allow fans to purchase and display cardboard cutouts of their faces in the stands during games. The National Hockey League used jumbotrons to post humorous messages at strategic moments that reminded fans about different aspects of the game with a twist of sarcasm or locker room banter. The EPL and La Liga teamed with Electronic Arts (EA) Sports company to create a virtual fan experience for television viewers or live streamers using bespoke and team-specific crowd noises and chants (Risi 2020).

7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that COVID-19 presented substantial challenges for the sports industry. The suspension of sports leagues, attendance of live games, and nationwide lockdowns had a profound economic impact and necessitated the emergence of 'new thinking' around hosting sports events amid pandemics. It is essential to accentuate physical activity benefits before and amid pandemics for the population. Thus, there is a need for the sports industry to strike a delicate balance between offering sports events and opportunities for continued participation in physical activity and ensuring the safety of the population. For far too long, the sports industry has been operating in a silo, ignoring the vital stakeholder that is their primary consumer: the fans. The neoliberal profit-making agenda that is the backbone of the sports industry has prevented the imagination and consideration of 'newness' needed for sustainable existence and relevance in a sector like the sports industry. I also argue that perhaps the chaotic seismic conditions that prevail during pandemics such as COVID-19 are what the sports industry required to accelerate the much-needed changes. It remains unclear if the sports industry will not revert to its default high ground and entrench its neoliberal agenda on these newfound strategies and technologies that have been useful when saving lives was more important than entertainment.

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The Impact of COVID-19 on Chess in South Africa

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Abstract

In this chapter I address the question of the way that the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic with its new normal and social distancing, impacts the sport code of chess in South Africa. This pandemic has already drastically altered the fixtures of numerous sport codes including the planned events and outcomes of some elite professional leagues. Chess as an Olympic sport code, although more amateur in South Africa, offers benefits across the socio-economic spectrum in terms of administrators, players, coaches and referees (arbiters). I employ an auto-ethnographic case study methodological approach, which enables one to draw on 'personal and experiential data,' for example, my own observations and experiences as a chess player and administrator. Amidst the uncertainty of the future and in anticipation of perhaps a large-scale devastation, the COVID-19 pandemic imposes the need for innovative and creative thinking to keep future aspirations of chess alive. Drawing on my lived experiences, I employ an auto-ethnographic approach to inspire hope for the future.

Keywords: COVID-19, chess ecosystem, over-the-board chess, online chess, autoethnography

1 Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic has sent shockwaves around the world, leading to a public health emergency that has killed thousands and plunged the global economy into what the International Monetary Fund warns could be the sharpest downturn since the Great Depression (Hall 2020). Not surprisingly,

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COVID-19 has also disrupted the sporting calendar, with professional leagues everywhere suspending their activities to limit the spread of the virus. Even the Olympics which was scheduled for Tokyo 2020, typically one of the world's most-watched sporting broadcasts, has already been re-scheduled for 2021.
The global value of the sports industry was estimated to be $471bn in 2018 – an increase of 45% since 2011 – and before coronavirus stopped play, the only trajectory seemed to be upwards (Hall 2020). Now, every part of the sporting value chain has been affected, from athletes, teams, and leagues, to the media that broadcast and cover games.

There can be little doubt that COVID-19, lockdown, and social distancing have drastically affected the future of sport in the world as we have come to know it. As a sport executive member of a code and as a sports journalist within the sport community, I have experienced first-hand how our daily activities have been displaced into the virtual world, a reality that will inevitably become a feature of the sporting landscape of tomorrow.
Internet connectivity has become a cornerstone of our daily lives. From a sporting point of view, the coronavirus crisis has given new impetus and traction to being connected – with its advantages of instant access to online meetings and the exchanges of innovative ideas. This will advance sports meetings in previously unimagined ways, an exciting prospect that should inspire us for the road ahead.

However, the lockdown period has also highlighted two aspects that we should not lose sight of: the lack of internet connectivity that is still a stark reality for many people in our country and on the rest of our continent; and the light that human connectedness shines on the essence of our humanity in trying times. Volumes have been written about the high cost of data and the lack of internet connectivity over vast swathes of our country, and the impact of these realities on poor communities and the general advancement of our people.

Although many people associate playing chess with computers and hi-tech thinking, it does not necessarily mean that all chess players who normally play over-the-board chess have access to electronic gadgets and data. As a code, we have had to display some grit and innovation during the past few months to ensure that our code was not hampered by circumstances. The code has, by and large, been able to migrate successfully to online playing. Yet this has not gone without challenges as Kenny Willenberg (2020) a Lichess Online Chess organiser reported that only about 30% of the active chess-playing community were exposed to and play online chess. Lichess is an online chess

platform where anyone can play chess or register an account to play rated games.

Today whilst practising social distancing and experiencing lockdown as part of COVID-19 prevention, my thinking about the future of chess as an active over-the-board sport exclusively might have shifted. The question I set out to answer in this paper is: How has COVID-19 made an impact on the code of chess in South Africa?

2 Background

Before expounding about the impact of COVID-19 on chess in South Africa it would be useful to give a background about the chess environment and how the ecosystem of chess works in South Africa. Prior to 1994, the South African sporting system was organised along racial lines and many anti-apartheid activists adhered to the slogan – 'No normal sport in an abnormal society'. The history of chess is documented, but during the apartheid era not much was written about people other than Whites playing chess. It has therefore become necessary to start talking not only about the history of South African chess and sport in decisively different ways, but also about the code in the future. As Brailsford pointed out that, 'Ever since human beings began to live in organised communities, politics and play have been irresistibly entangled' (Brailsford 1991: 45).

The first reference to organised chess in South Africa appears in Men of Good Hope, by Immelman (1955). According to Reitstein (2003:10), 'in 1847 a chess club had the use of a room in the Commercial Exchange building', situated on the Heerengracht in Cape Town. This was almost 20 years before any reference was made to the existence of a chess club in the country. The oldest chess club that still exists to this day since 1885 is the Cape Town Chess Club. However, this is almost certainly not the first club that was formed, as an unknown club met regularly at the Heerengracht in 1847.

Recently, I spoke with the stalwart of non-racial Chess in South Africa, Andre van Reenen (2020) and he told me that he played chess from a young age and officially joined the Salt River Chess Club in the 1950s. He recalls playing with club members Tape Adams and Jamiel Gierdien (SACOS chess stalwarts). They formed the Western Province Chess Association (the first non-racial chess association), of which he became the President in 1964. As a youngster and a founding member of a chess club, I started playing for the

Manyanani Chess Club established in 1976 in the township of Manenberg and today this club is the recipient of the African Club Champs trophy. However, the purpose of this chapter is not to expound the history of chess in South Africa nor to dwell on the plight of Non-White players. My brief is to critically discuss and unpack the impact of COVID-19 on chess in contemporary South Africa. However, it is worth pointing out that with the formation of the new democratic dispensation in South Africa under the leadership of Nelson Mandela and the ANC in 1994, chess, like other codes, also formed a new South African organisation called Chess South Africa or CHESSA, as some members would call it. All national codes of sport were then affiliated to SASCOC (South African Co-ordinating Council of Sport) which became the overall governing organisation that regulated and controlled all codes of sport under the Department of Sports and Recreation.

Chess as a national code is an affiliate to the World Chess Federation (FIDE, in its French acronym). FIDE was founded in Paris in 1924 and consists of over 150 delegates from national chess federations (Blanco 1999). FIDE organises competitions which takes place on a wide variety of levels. Chess events can have a municipal, state-wide, provincial, national, zonal, continental, or worldwide nature. Its championships also embrace all ages, from children (under 8) to senior citizens (over 60). The most prestigious event is the Olympiad that takes place every second year and the World Annual Grandmaster Individual Championship.

It takes a player years of chess practice and competitions to make his/her country's Olympic chess team. One South African Olympic player whom I interviewed recently (2020) took a two-year sabbatical from his studies and his work to train for the 2020 Chess Olympiad, but with the cancellation of the Olympiad because of COVID-19, he was left devastated.

It is not only just the game that has been suffering, but the entire chess ecosystem that has taken a beating. Many players, coaches, administrators and tournament arbiters were left without an income, adding to the extremely high percentage of joblessness and unemployment in South Africa. Coaches and professional players have no income. Regions, provinces and the national controlling body, Chess South Africa, has also been severely affected by this lack of any opportunity to generate income. Most importantly, the players cannot practise and improve their game. The unusual and sudden impact of COVID-19 checked the chess world and they had to find a way to move out of this checkmate position. This paper describes an attempt to move out of check

and to defend and to counter the attack of the impact of COVID-19 in a sequence that would protect the chess ecosystem.

3 Methodology: An Autoethnographic Case Study

This qualitative research is both autoethnographic and a case study. Denzin and Lincoln (2011: 8 - 10) summarize the characteristics of qualitative research in terms of five key attributes:

a) reducing the use of positivist or post positivist perspectives;
b) accepting postmodern sensibilities;
c) capturing the individual's point of view;
d) examining the constraints of everyday life; and
e) securing rich descriptions.

These attributes are commonly exemplified in case study research. In this case study approach, I try to gain an in depth understanding of a situation and meaning for those involved (Henning *et al.* 2004: 41). In this case study design, the case is of importance and the interaction between the context and the case becomes the unit of analysis (Henning *et al.* 2004: 41). Given the focus on COVID-19 and chess in this study, the researcher aims to capture the reality of lived experiences and thoughts in this particular situation (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2001: 182). Data-collection techniques used in this study included reflective and self-reflective accounts, documents and reports. Creswell (2014) suggests that conducting research in environments where you have a vested interest, it can be particularly challenging to analyse incidents of discrimination. When researchers do autoethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about, amongst other things, epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity. Auto-ethnographers must not only use their methodological tools and research literature to analyse their own experience, but also must consider ways in which others may experience similar epiphanies; they must use personal experience to illuminate facets of cultural experience, and, in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders (Creswell 2014). To accomplish this might require comparing and contrasting personal experience against existing research (Ronai 1995; 1996), interviewing cultural members (Foster 2006; Marvasti

2006; Tillman-Healy 2003), and/or examining relevant cultural artefacts (Boylorn 2008; Denzin 2006). In this auto-ethnographical case study I, as an insider in the chess fraternity, specifically look at the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the chess community and how this community intends to respond.

4 How Serious is COVID-19?

Guys, I have decided to share some of my thoughts on the situation right now. I have been very involved in looking after patients with Covid and, unfortunately, I have seen the worst of it in the ICU at Vincent Pallotti. This illness will be mild for the vast majority, but in anyone with risk factors it can be a death sentence. I can tell you that all of our critically ill patients have been diabetic, hypertensive and obese. Some have also been asthmatic. Covid does not hold back in these patients. It does not follow the normal rules. For the patients in the hospital who have not survived, they had walked into the hospital and said goodbye to their families, remaining in hospital for 2-3 weeks and dying alone. No visitors are allowed in any of our hospitals right now. We haven't even reached our peak yet and my colleagues in the state sector describe full ICUs. It will only get worse. So, after painting this picture, I urge you to think twice if you are gathering on Eid or any other time thereafter. Remember, even if you are just meeting direct family, all of you have different exposures and the bigger our gatherings the greater the risk. Look after yourselves and Stay Safe!

From Nabeel Bapoo (Physician/Nephrologist Cape Town) 22 May 2020.

Since this advice by one of our local community doctors, the number of deaths related to COVID-19 has spiked. By (24 June 2020) we had 9 million cases in the world with about 470-000 deaths recorded (COVID-19 SABC 2020). Presently in South Africa 100 000 cases have been identified with an estimated amount of 1450 deaths (SABC 2020). South Africa initially tried hard to flatten the curve of the infections by imposing strict stay-at-home regulations and proclaiming compulsory social distancing and the wearing of masks as part of country's new normal. On 26 March 2020, COVID-19 Alert Level 5 was instituted and a month later this was followed by Level 4. On 1 June 2020 South Africans went into Level 3, with schools being partially opened and some professional sporting codes such as rugby, cricket, soccer as well as some elite individual athletes were allowed to practice. With the

opening of schools in South Africa, there has been a spike in infections amongst educators and learners, resulting in the forced closure of numerous schools. As part of Level 3, places of worship, such as mosques, churches and synagogues were also allowed to have gatherings limited to 50 congregants. Most places of worship opted to remain closed to prevent the spread of the pandemic. Alcohol was initially banned in Levels 5 and 4, but since the selling of alcohol was allowed under Level 3, there has been a spike in violence and accidents due to alcohol abuse. Smokers have been the hardest hit as tobacco sales have been banned, and since 25 March 2020 the cost of a packet of cigarettes has increased from R30 a packet to R230 a packet in the black market. Although a maximum of 50 mourners are allowed to attend burial ceremonies, there have been sad cases of certain people not being allowed to see or visit their family members before they die. What exacerbated the COVID-19 threat was its economic impact, which resulted in loss of income due to job retrenchments and unemployment for many thousands of people. This vividly outlines the seriousness and the devastation of COVID-19. Chess is a recognised sporting code in South Africa and in the world, and numerous people are employed under its wing. Thus, the effect of COVID-19 has been felt in all spheres of society including a game of chess.

5 Checking the Code of Chess Over the Board!

One of the advantages of chess is that you can easily play online unlike other physical contact sport codes such as rugby or soccer. However, migrating from over-the-board play to online chess entails virtually a complete overhaul of the chess ecosystem. The current online play unfortunately does not add much value to the longer game and it also does not sustain the whole chess ecosystem.

Before discussing the new proposed online system, let us first look at the ecosystem of chess and see how it was disrupted by COVID-19. The chess ecosystem of South Africa consists of players, coaches, administrators, tournament arbiters and other entrepreneurs such as sponsors and parents of junior players. Prior to COVID-19, all chess activity took place over-the-board (OTB) and at the annual South African Junior Championships (SAJCC) for example, you will have over 2500 registered young players playing. These players ranging from Under 8 to Under 20 attend this annual event with their coaches, parents, and administrators. The event is organised by an international

organiser and the tournament is supervised by numerous tournament arbiters. Participants are compelled to stay for at least 7-10 days at specific accommodation arranged by the organisers. At senior level we have the South African Open or the World Olympiad where participants also stay for a lengthy period and the financial gains for all stakeholders, are massive. The amount of revenue and income generated is huge for the chess organisers and their various components. The knock-on effects of COVID-19 spells devastation for all who are involved in the chess code, but especially so for the individuals who derive an income from the code.

Competitive chess players normally start playing at schools, tertiary institutions and clubs. Once they excel, they go on to represent their schools, institutions and clubs at various competitions and events. In South Africa you can represent your province, region, district, club or school, or you can participate as an individual in numerous competitions. One of the biggest drivers in the chess ecosystem is rating. Players at a tournament can generally be divided into two groups: those who want to improve their game by improving their rating, and those who are at the top and who cannot gain more rating points but desire other incentives like prize money. In the end, it comes down to a trading system where rating is at the centre of it all. The one group of players are prepared to pay a fee for the opportunity to gain rating points and the other group is willing to risk and lose rating points for the opportunity to win prize money. The chess ecosystem cannot function effectively without games being rated. For players to improve their play and their rating, they are coached, and this comes at a price. A professional coach can earn anything between R500 – R1000 a session. After discussion with a seasoned coach, I discovered that a coach earns about R10 000 – R40 000 per month in South Africa. Players with titles, Candidate Master- CA, FIDE Master – FA, International Master – IM and Grandmaster - GM are paid to play or represent their respective regions, provinces or countries. A player who reaches GM status in chess enters events without paying a fee and if s/he walks away with the prizemoney, it can be a lucrative affair. For coaches and players to thrive in the chess fraternity they need competitions and events to be organised by event organisers and tournament arbiters.

Event organisers and tournament arbiters (chess referees/ umpires) earn regular incomes of thousands of rand monthly. They also get the opportunity to host international or continental events where they attract big sponsorship. The International Chess body FIDE gives them added accolades

by sometimes employing them at prestigious world-class events including the Chess Olympiad. Event organisers and tournament arbiters get graded and become International Organisers (IOs) or International FIDE Arbiters (IA's).

6 Online Chess as a Saving Grace!

Currently the chess ecosystem finds itself in the grip of a challenging situation. To alleviate the crisis and to assist and guide the SA chess ecosystem, South Africa has assembled a committee to investigate the feasibility of including online chess games in the Chess SA rating system. In launching online games as opposed to over-the-board competitions, one can anticipate many teething problems and unforeseen challenges. Initially a new online chess vocabulary had to be introduced. For example, firstly, an organiser is an individual or organisation that organises a tournament. Secondly, a platform handle is the pseudonym a player uses on an Online Platform that hides his/her real name. Thirdly, Online play takes place when a player plays against an opponent over the internet or network on an electronic device. Fourthly, an online platform is any system that provides for online play.

Amongst the advantages of playing online are the following (Du Toit 2020),

a) competitive chess could start again, whilst OTB is prohibited;
b) the players can actively work to improve their game;
c) organisers, coaches and players can start to earn a living again;
d) entry fees could be cheaper because of fewer overheads for organisers;
e) tournaments with longer time controls over several days could be more viable due to absence of accommodation costs and the elimination of travelling costs;
f) It will allow the remote regions to attract more players and get exposure to the top players; and
g) selection tournaments can take place again.

It is crucial for this system to be credible and have the support of the chess fraternity to be successful. Initially there will be a leaning more towards being conservative through abiding by the rules of some of the commercial platforms. The objective of going online is to simulate as closely as possible the pre-

COVID-19 playing ecosystem. In principle, the entire process, from the tournament being publicised until it is rated, must be as close as possible to the over-the-board scenario. The only major difference is that, instead of playing at a common playing venue, the two players can play from their homes.

According to the proposed policy, the objectives are:

a) To mainly serve the SA chess community and extend it to other countries if needs be;
b) To create a fair playing environment and prevent cheating;
c) To create an environment to support the South African chess ecosystem; and
d) To make participation cheaper.

Whilst the objectives of the proposed South African Chess Policy appear quite straightforward, the main challenges facing online play as opposed to over-the-board play have to do with the fair play policy. How do one know that an online player is not cheating? Amongst the challenges are the following:

a) The players can be illicitly assisted by an 'engine' or any electronic means,
b) The player can consult any material during the game,
c) The player can be assisted or consult with any other person,
d) The player impersonates another player,
e) The player submits incorrect or false information,
f) The player is playing with two or more accounts.

In order to promote fair play online, numerous discussions and online workshops were held, from which a number of proposals emerged. Players needed to have a Federation Internationale des Echecs (FIDE) Identity and instead of a pseudonym, the real name of the player must be used as it would be easier to find in Zoom for the arbiters. The International Chess Federation (FIDE) is the governing body of the sport of chess, and it regulates all international chess competitions.

Prior to the actual event organisers must inspect the playing area, check and supervise their screen and see if there is no chess base or other equipment that might assist the player. It will also be forbidden for players to leave their seats during a Blitz online game. FIDE defines Blitz chess as time

controls between 5 and 10 minutes per player.

There was also a suggestion that arbiters make use of red cards and yellow cards. After two yellow cards, a player can be given a red card and automatically lose the game. One Zoom call will be acceptable for 50 participants. In other words, one arbiter cannot be responsible for more than 50 participants. A disconnection will automatically result in a spoilt game. Thus, the proposed online Chess SA policy, which is at present still a discussion document, was geared to outline the rules for online chess and perhaps serve as the saving grace for chess in the immediate future.

According to the President of Chess SA, Hendrik Du Toit (June 2020) there is a lack of online organising experience in the country and, even though it seems far-fetched, there is now a dire necessity to get the chess players to play during lockdown. This is especially important if we intend keeping the ecosystem viable.

Although there appears to be no end in sight yet for the national lockdown and for when society might return to normal, players and coaches should use this time to move beyond their comfort zones (Willenberg 2020). A more virtual and digital approach will have to be adopted. In a recent article on social media the Western Cape Chess President, Andre Lewaks (June 2020), explained that before the lockdown, the Western Cape was the biggest and the most active province in the country based on the national ratings in South Africa, but this will soon count for nothing if the players don't compete. He thus advocated for online chess as it will serve as a saving grace.

7 The Manyanani June 16 Online Blitz Tournament

To experience the challenge of online playing, the Manyanani Chess Club decided to host an online chess tournament. As the club hosted this event annually as part of the Western Cape chess calendar, permission was granted for the club to go ahead with the online tournament. This June 16 Youth Day event was always commemorated to honour the death of Hector Petersen during the Soweto uprising of 1976. A feature of the tournament was that it was always held in a township area to attract poorer communities and to highlight the injustices and inequalities within sport. Although it was acknowledged as a recognised annual event, it was not that popular amongst the previously advantaged in society. Strategically, it was intended mainly to cater for the poor and because of its low prize money for the winners, it did not

attract the players who boasted high chess ratings.

This year's inaugural open online tournament was advertised and entrants for the tournament were received up until just before the commencement of play at 15h00 on the day. Reflecting on the occasion, the same tensions I experience before and during the organisation of a normal over-the-board chess tournament I also experienced during this online tournament. A few minutes before we started play, as an organiser and arbiter, I still had to direct players via my mobile phone on how to link to the tournament that was held on the Lichess platform.

I also experienced the same tensions during the actual play as I joined the platform and participated as a player. After 2 hours of 5-minute Blitz chess, Keith Khumalo – name handle on Lichess – South African Wolf – with an International rating of 2450 won the tournament. The prize money of R1500 was transferred to him immediately after the online prize-giving ceremony.

One of the winners was disqualified because the treasurer of the tournament committee discovered that he had produced a fake payment receipt. After interviewing a few participants and spectators, I realised that this online lockdown tournament was a resounding success. There were many positives; players were stressed out and their adrenalin running high, but the recorded jokes and conversations on the club's WhatsApp chat group indicated enjoyment.

8 Implications for Online Chess as Opposed to Over-the-Board Chess!

Allow me to unpack my experience both as a player and organiser of this event and chart the way forward for chess during COVID-19. As an organiser, I arranged for the advertising by social media via the national, provincial and regional bodies. The advertising was only one day as organisers were sceptical about holding the online competition. We invited players through our media contacts and eventually received responses from 50 participants. The normal annual event attracts 250 players. The reasons for the low turnout included the following.

Lack of Professional Marketing and thorough Planning.

Back in 1776, Benjamin Franklin (1992) who recommended chess as a life skill also reminded us in one of his famous quotes, 'By Failing to prepare, you are

preparing to fail'. In sampling this tournament, we wanted to incur as little expense as possible. We used our own social media connections and we advertised for only one night. We did not get the active support of the national, provincial and regional federations as the tournament was not given the rigorous publicity as initially intended. Some of the members on our committee believed these federations wanted to control the marketing and regulate income. The federations also did not want to market a local club as being the first online event organiser, as this might undermine their authority. While these were sentiments expressed by a few individuals, it is worth mentioning them. The point is that buy-in from all the parties involved is essential for successful marketing.

Lack of Enthusiasm for Blitz Online Chess as Opposed to Classical Over-the-board Chess

Most of the traditional players still prefer the over-the-board style of play. Blitz chess is a quick format of play. So, a 5-minute blitz as opposed to a normal 3-hour game is not in any sense a compromise for your traditional player. This player wants to make a move and maybe sip on his/her coffee, walk around the playing arena and then return to make a carefully calculated and measured move. Most of the fanfare, the socialisation and atmosphere of meeting real people over-the-board are absent from the online blitz format.

Lack of data and competent online equipment

Most of the players have a mobile phone but they cannot afford to buy data bundles. Some players professed that they were busy – on a lockdown June 16 public holiday – but the real problem was probably that they did not have the finances to pay to play or to purchase data to pay for their entry. Normally development players (economically challenged players) are transported to a tournament and given food and free entry. This does not equal to paying an entry fee, forwarding it to the organiser and then to get a mobile or a computer to join the online competition. Thus, the economically challenged players are even more hampered during online competitions.

Lack of Knowledge and Information Regarding Online Play

Some players were too scared to play online as they lacked the basic technological knowledge to get themselves equipped to play. Getting the link

to Lichess, paying the online registration fee, and making a few online calls proved to be too much of an effort for some players. Normally their coaches or managers would do everything for them. So, a fear of the unknown and a little discomfort also impacted on the players' ability to apply basic practical knowledge to get involved in online play (Willenberg 2020).

9 Concluding Remarks

I started this chapter by stating how COVID-19 has impacted on and disrupted the sporting calendar, with professional leagues everywhere suspending their activities to limit the spread of the virus. I then gave a description of the background to the chess world and how the chess ecosystem works in South Africa. This was followed by a discussion and an analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on the chess fraternity. Many players, coaches, administrators and tournament arbiters were left without an income, adding to the extremely high percentage of joblessness and unemployment in South Africa. COVID-19 challenged the chess ecosystem and so Chess SA became proactive, took the initiative and assembled a committee to investigate the feasibility of playing online chess games. The challenges of online chess were experienced when the Manyanani Chess Club initiated and hosted an online chess tournament. The outcome of the online tournament gave the organisers, including myself, deeper insight into, and a more practical understanding of, the challenges associated with online chess games. Players and organisers had to adjust and adapt to the conditions of playing under strict COVID-19 lockdown rules. A further outcome was that we learnt of a decline in participant numbers due to the lack of technological knowledge and information about online play and a lack of data and online equipment. Online playing is new and learning new rules and online skills can take people out of their comfort zone and creates a certain amount of anxiety. So, despite the advertising and online marketing, and even some positive feedback, players and spectators preferred the over-the-board competitions and the socialisation aspects of playing chess.

It could nevertheless be concluded that, in the absence of chess being played over-the-board, COVID-19 has produced a positive outcome. It has presented an opportunity for virtual technologies to grow. But the future of chess will not be without challenges, as politics and play remain part of being human. Allow me to conclude by quoting Grandmaster David Shenk (2007), 'Chess is rarely a game of ideal moves. Almost always, a player faces a series of difficult consequences whichever move he makes'.

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Natural Learning and Fencing: A Case Study of Two Fencers' Lockdown Training Programme during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Natural Learning (NL) as an approach to life and learning is slowly gaining momentum as more families explore alternatives to the current mass schooling approach. This has particular value during the COVID-19 pandemic as the lockdown measures implemented by the Government have impacted all sectors of society, including sport, which is the focus of this study. The study used purposive sampling to select two teenage fencers and explored how the tenets of the Natural Learning Approach (NLA) underpinned their training and development programme during lockdown. A case study design was used to explore and describe how the fencers, guided by NL, used creative strategies to maintain their fitness and skill development. Interviews and documents (reports and a diary) were used to collate the data, and qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the data. The results show that the fencers displayed high levels of motivation, self-discipline and creative-thinking skills that they easily transferred to developing, executing and maintaining their training programme. These results are important as it highlights and soundly embeds NL as a viable educational approach to life and as a philosophy about life and learning. Recommendations on how fencing can be adapted to become a viable sport during the pandemic and how the characteristics of the NLA can be incorporated into broader sporting and learning contexts post COVID-19, are briefly explored.

Keywords: Natural learning, fencing, creativity, motivation, unschooling

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1 Introduction

The current global COVID-19 pandemic has spread all over the world (Evans 2020), infecting millions and causing thousands of deaths. It has brought the whole world to a standstill as many countries, including South Africa (SA), battle to combat the spread of the virus. On 26 March 2020, SA instated lockdown measures that placed severe restrictions on travel and movement, allowing people to only leave their homes to buy food, seek medical help or under extreme circumstances (SA Government 2020). As countries attempt to flatten the curve (curb the spread of the virus), sport and sporting events were not exempt from the stringent measures, thus, bringing sport to a grinding halt. For example, under the national lockdown, all fencing clubs in SA have been closed until further notice and all competitions and events cancelled. Recognising that a single athlete could be the vector for this disease, all sport gatherings have been banned (Mann, Clift, Boykoff & Bekker 2020) and the postponement of the 2020 Olympics can also be seen as a testament to the impact this virus has had on the sporting world (Schinke 2020). Further impact of the lockdown on sport is beginning to emerge as most clubs rely on membership or donor fees for coaches' livelihoods (Evans 2020). The fitness of athletes is also concerning as their exercise routines and athletic careers have been disrupted. This has led to unprecedented changes and online platforms are now being used to continue training programmes to ensure the long-term survival of a particular sport. Evans (2020) states that in sport, where techniques and physical skills are of paramount importance, coaching effectiveness could be limited because of the lack of proximity between coaches and athletes, and therefore, it requires appropriate changes to coaching programmes.

While most sectors seem to be experiencing difficulties adjusting to the lockdown measures, the home education sector has adjusted more easily to these drastic changes because by its very nature it is primarily home-based. Natural learning (NL), an approach to learning and living within the home education movement, is particularly suited to adapting to changes as the home environment is fluid in its day-to-day living and the children in these homes can direct and manage their own learning development.

Fencing is a combat sport with some contact between fencers (Turner *et al.* 2014) which therefore can be seen as a significant risk during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, for fencers, especially the high-performance fencers who are on the national team, the ban on training can have a negative impact

on their skill maintenance and development. Due to this possibility, two fencers who follow the Natural Learning Approach (NLA) came up with an innovative format to train and ensure that skills training and development, as well as club camaraderie continued during the lockdown period. This therefore raised the question: How does NL impact on fencers' ability to develop and maintain a viable training programme during the COVID-19 pandemic?

This paper brings together the concept of NL within the sport of fencing to explain how the tenets of NL helped two fencers develop and maintain a successful training programme during lockdown.

2 What is Natural Learning?

The NLA is broadly embedded in the constructivist approach to learning in that it values the autonomy of the learner, and therefore, 'place[s] the reins for directing learning squarely in the hands of the learner' (Ormrod 2016:174). According to Ramroop (2019:8), NLA is a range of life philosophies 'that centres around the understanding that children have an innate desire to learn and are able to direct that desire and therefore manage their own learning growth'. This approach often falls under the broad category of home education, where children are provided with the space and opportunity to learn through life experiences and through the process of living together (Dewey 2015; Ramroop 2020). NL and home education are not new phenomena as home-based education predates formal schooling (Blok 2004; Gray 2013). NL is commonly referred as 'unschooling', a term made popular by John Holt (1977), a modern pioneer of the idea that children can learn with freedom rather than in schools. In this study, the term NL is favoured as it allows people to reclaim and re-assert the naturalness of learning. Learning in the NL environment is seamless and living and learning happens naturally and authentically. This echoes the view of Hondzel and Hansen (2015) that 'human behaviour need not be shaped and controlled by elders who propose education be conceived as a preparation for life rather than life itself'. Holt (1989) observes that in a NL setting the learning is enjoyable and enduring because the child is learning to satisfy his/her own curiosity. Free play, a tenet of the NLA, is a predictor of individual adaptability to problems and obstacles (Greve & Thomsen 2016).

Parents who implement this approach have the fundamental belief that children are natural learners, capable of learning with little or no adult

intervention (Holt 1989; Gray 2013). The responsibility of the parent is to remain available and to provide a rich home environment and other opportunities that will help optimise the child's learning interests. Thus, parents become the avid supporters of the child's learning interests and partners in their learning trajectory (Ramroop 2020). Parents nurture the quality of curiosity in their child and create a home that supports the holistic wellbeing and development of the child, while ensuring the enjoyment of life and the pleasures it brings. Respect for the child is also fundamental to NL. NL families are generally more open to a democratic family life and respecting the child as one would another adult (Ramroop 2019). It should be noted that traditional subjects and tuition is often included in a NL home if the child requests it as part of their own learning goals.

In general, children who follow the NLA are intrinsically motivated and self-disciplined. According to Huang (2014), since learning is an innate part of living, people learn best when their motivation is intrinsic. Furthermore, intrinsic motivation is also maintained because the fundamental values of freedom and self-decision-making place the desire, the drive and the responsibility in the hands of the child. They show high creative skills and by the very definition of NL, are highly independent learners (Hondzel & Hansen 2015).

3 What is Fencing?

Fencing as a sport has its roots in medieval times and slowly evolved to become a sport, which has spread from the masters of Italy, Germany and France to the entire world. It was introduced to the Olympic Games in 1896 for men and 1924 for women (Pitman 1990). SA first embraced fencing in 1898 and fielded their first Olympic representative in 1908. Since then, although remaining a minority sport, it has grown in popularity and there are clubs in most provinces and universities in the country that regularly participate in international tournaments.

Fencing is essentially a combat sport, with two fencers competing on a piste. The aim is to make a hit on the opponent with an épée, foil or sabre, and the one who reaches five points in a poule match and fifteen points in a direct elimination match wins. Fencing is a high intensity sport that requires intense focus and quick thinking and is often seen as physical chess (Humphrey 2009). To be successful in the sport, a fencer needs to have the

following qualities: physical fitness, speed, quick reaction, coordination, endurance, power, rhythm/tempo, focus, creativity, observation and deduction, mental toughness and self-control (Roi & Bianchedi 2008).

4 Methodology

A case study design was used for this research as a 'basis of a thorough, holistic and in-depth exploration of the aspect' (Kumar 2011:126), which for this study is the link between NL and two fencers' lockdown training programme. Merriam (2009) explains that the key characteristic of a case study design is that it is richly descriptive so that the reader enjoys the vicarious experience of the research. Sampling, according to Kumar (2011), is the process of selecting a few from a bigger group. In this study, purposive sampling was used, using two fencers from one family (who have been following the NLA) and their two coaches. The focus was on how the tenets of the NLA underpinned the development and implementation of their lockdown training programme.

Qualitative methodology provides the researcher with tools to study a complex phenomenon within its own contexts and through a variety of lenses, revealing the multiple facets of the phenomenon (Kumar 2011). In-keeping with this understanding, different instruments were used to collate data; a strategy that also enhances data credibility. Interviews were conducted with the two fencers and with two coaches to help corroborate the data. To ensure confidentiality (Saunders, Kitszinger & Kitszinger 2015), participants were given labels with letters for identification (Enago Academy 2019). Thus, the fencers are referred to as Fencer A and Fencer B and the two coaches are referred to as Coach A and Coach B. According to Merriam (2009), interviews in qualitative research is a common, key data collection instrument because it is a way to obtain feelings, thoughts and intentions from the interviewee (Kumar 2011). Semi-structured and open-ended questions were used for both interviews, as suggested by Merriam (2009). This ensured the flexibility to probe and to allow the natural flow of the discussion to unfold. As recommended by Kumar (2011), documents, a valuable source of information, were examined to get information and gain understanding. The documents used for this study were a training programme, reports and a parent's diary. Triangulation is often used in qualitative research to increase the credibility and the trustworthiness of the findings (Merriam 2009) as it ensures the

corroboration and correspondence of the results from the different instruments, helping to 'confirm and to improve the clarity or precision of a research finding' (Maruster & Gijsenberg 2013:10).

5 Data Analysis

Content analysis focuses on content and the contextual meaning of data (Hsieh & Shannon 2005) and it was therefore appropriate for this research. Content analysis provides the researcher with a flexible and pragmatic way to organise large quantities of data into fewer categories (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). The goal of the study was to determine if there is a relationship between NL and the development of the training programme. With data from each instrument, the analysis began with an immersion into the data to 'obtain a sense of the whole' (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). Raw data was edited so that it was complete and free from inconsistencies (Kumar 2011). Data was systematically analysed by making notes, identifying patterns, forming codes and categories, and noting down impressions and thoughts. From the themes that emerged during the analysis, the data was interpreted to provide explanations.

6 Findings and Discussions

The interviews with the two fencers revealed that when they were faced with lockdown measures, they devised a training programme together which they presented to Coach A.

When asked why a training programme was developed, Fencer A gave the following response:

> *We needed training … so we started thinking about the best ways we could train at home and still involve all the club members …*
> *Fencer B added: …to have a certain level – rather than everyone doing their own thing, focusing on different things on different days … we can coordinate with each other.*

At first Coach A was hesitant about the format, but they asked him to give them a week before a final decision was made, to which he agreed. Children from NL homes tend to be less afraid of trying because failure is recognised as a requirement and driving force for learning (Visser 2001), and these risk

and mistake-making processes are supported by the secure home environment (Priesnitz 2020). On the other hand, failure in schools is met with stress and anxiety because the emphasis is often on standardised tests and conformity, which generally leaves no room for creativity, innovation or individuality (Black 2018).

According to both coaches this training programme was a profound idea. Coach A, proving that this instance of fencers taking the initiative for their training was unique, reacted as follows based on his past experience and what he has seen at other clubs:

> *If the coach forgets, all keep quiet and hope no one reminds the coach. Like in school where no one will remind the teacher about homework … not many people will take the initiative when they see the coach is slacking.*

However, in the NLA, children taking initiative is normal as children are free to choose, explore and develop an interest and then take the initiative to access information and resources, with or without the help of a parent (Ramroop 2019; Holt 1989). The child taking initiative to fulfil his/her learning needs, is the cornerstone of the NLA.

6.1 Innovation, Creativity and Parental Support

According to Hondzel and Hansen (2015), creativity is a fundamental quality and a unique human characteristic. Coach B's response that '*… clearly the fact that they put this training programme together and taken their coach along shows innovation and creativity*' reveals that the fencers were able to adapt to change by using their abilities to combine and improve upon ideas. This is seen in the format of the training programme:

> *… the format is a challenge … each day has a set amount of exercises and repetitions that needs to be completed, either according to time or number of repetitions, as well as fencing-specific exercises, e.g. footwork and/or bladework. For example, between five club members 200 push-ups, 10 minutes of plank, 20 minutes of running, and 10 minutes of footwork needs to be completed … everyone contributes as much as they are willing or able … at the end of the day we tally up*

> *the total … for each day the team (five club members) complete the total you get one point, and for a certain amount of additional repetitions or time you get another bonus point … the aim is to accumulate as many points as possible … challenge format makes it difficult to skimp on repetitions because it is a team effort, meaning that if you let yourself down, you let the team down. It is a fun variation and makes people want to push harder ….*

They used creativity and innovation to consider all aspects of a general training programme: the fitness routine, the fencing-specific techniques, the team spirit, and a challenge element to keep them motivated. In accordance with Evans's (2020) suggestion, the programme focussed on strength and conditioning. The fencers were asked why they used this format and their responses show that they were able to use their knowledge and experience of fencing to develop the programme, while at the same time creating a plan that kept up the motivation and skill level of the members. For example:

> *Fencer A: '… with boring dull exercises like continuous footwork or strength exercises people get demotivated, bored and simply tired'.*
> *Fencer B: '… and start skimping and cheating'.*
> *Fencer A: '… and using poor form …. The idea was to make it enjoyable for everyone … to complete boring but essential exercises without the team and companionship element that normally makes it fun during training'.*

Gute, Gute, Nakamura, & Csikszentmihály (2008) state that creative people grow up in homes where parents encourage uniqueness but also provide stability, are highly responsive to their children's needs while also challenging them to develop skills and pursue their interests. The fencers confirmed the role of their parents with Fencer A stating that '*they play a supportive role. We decide what we want to do and they help facilitate our development by driving us to practise, getting coaches, training camps, discussing issues, watching fencing videos …*'. This view is also supported by Fearon (2013), who states that creativity flourishes in an environment that is supportive and rewarding of creativity. Interestingly, if the environment is well resourced but lacks support, creativity is also lacking. In a NL home, both the psychological safety and psychological freedom of the child are valued. The child is accepted

as having unconditional worth and is understood empathetically. The home is free from external evaluation and the child can engage in unrestrained expression (Fearon 2013). The simple and uncomplicated notion of families spending time together seems to have a key influence on creativity (Gute *et al.* 2008). These traits seem to be evident in the environment of the two fencers. However, this environment cannot flourish at schools because of the structure of schools where standardisation, testing and the need to achieve content standards over and above creative thinking and meaningful problem-solving are entrenched (Hondzel & Hansen 2015).

The fencers also showed their creativity by making their home suitable for training. It was recorded in the diary that they made a pull-up bar in the garden, using their knowledge of sailing knots to keep the bar strong and in place. Fencer B confirmed that '*… we use the equipment we have at home to do the exercises … we use water bottles, beds, bricks, chairs* …'. The coach stated that the fencers are very creative and added that '*everything they present to me is well-researched … they explain to make me understand … give me the pros and cons*'. This extract from Fencer A's planning notes shows their deep engagement in and understanding of the sport:

> *Week 1: General body strength and speed. E.g. agility drills, punches*
> *Week 2: Explosive power. High intensity, low repetition. E.g. skipping, push-ups*
> *Week 3: Muscular endurance. Isometric exercises. E.g. plank, lunges, squats*
> *Week 4: Recovery. Exercising little used muscle groups and stretching for injury prevention. E.g. yoga*
> *Daily: Mindfulness and meditation. Five-minute audio guide provided. Footwork and stretching*

From the above planning notes, it became clear that the fencers have a deep understanding of all aspects of their sport, including the socio-emotional aspect by their inclusion of mindfulness and meditation. According to Gute *et al.* (2008), the fact-finding and deep research that the fencers engaged in are vital stages in the creative process. Furthermore, according to Kogler (1993), fencers need to be observant, creative and innovative in order to successfully overcome their opponent. Thus, the above findings do reveal that the stability of the NL environment helped the fencers to be free to invest in creativity

rather than dealing with unnecessary negative emotions and time-wasting activities that children often experience in institutional environments (Gute *et al.* 2008).

6.2 Motivation

Both coaches confirmed that the fencers' level of motivation for the sport is exceptionally high. Commenting on the fencers' commitment, Coach A said, '*I will give them a solid ten for commitment. They do not get tired of fencing, speaking about it, finding new ways to train, challenging themselves*'. Coach B observed that '*Fencer A was always highly committed … and in recent times Fencer B seemed to have equalled the level of commitment …*'.

The fencers also confirmed that their motivation came from their love and enjoyment of the sport. Fencer A stated that '*I love fencing … fencing is my favourite sport because there is so much in it … its technical, its physical, its mental …*'. Fencer B explained that his motivation also came from enjoyment:

> *Two years ago, … I went to national competitions, got thrashed, but I just enjoyed the sport and continued fencing and training … then I did well … the one time I tried to put pressure on myself to win a medal I did the worst …. After that I just chilled … chose to just enjoy it … went to the African Championships in Algeria … now I work to maintain my place in the national team because I enjoyed it a lot and want to get there again.*

Coach A summed up their motivation quite succinctly by stating that he finds them easy to work with and that '*… they are not people who need to be constantly chased to do anything. They are self-motivated … so I can focus on more technical stuff…*'.

According to Ormrod (2016), motivation is an internal state that spurs a person into action in a desired direction and keeps the person engaged in certain activities. This encapsulates exactly what the fencers did with the training programme. Huang (2014) states that people learn best when motivation is intrinsic. In a NL home, individual choices and interests are nurtured and respected, and thereby, intrinsic motivation is maintained. NL is driven by freedom and self-decision-making and puts the desire, drive,

motivation and responsibility for life and learning in the hands of the learners. The motivation that the fencers displayed in their training programme is therefore not surprising.

It must be noted that during general training, external motivation has some benefits. However, according to Levin-Gutierrez (2015) when external rewards are used to increase motivation, they are more harmful and may lower intrinsic motivation. Apostoleris (2000) finds that motivation declined with age in the average school child, but it remained consistent and even increased in home-educated children. The development of the training programme is evidence of consistent intrinsic motivation in the fencers.

6.3 Commitment and Self-discipline

The coaches were asked if they saw a characteristic in these fencers that stood out from other fencers and they both mentioned that their commitment was impressive. Coach A elaborated as follows:

> *… I see people who are passionate … but their commitment and their training go beyond … determination … they want to do well now … they did not see themselves slacking during lockdown … this sets them apart from the others as they push themselves ….*

Coach B agreed, stating that *'… they are different … dedication to getting it right is impressive …. Fencer A demands an incredible level of performance …'*. To further corroborate the data, they were asked what they see in these fencers that they would like to see in others. Coach A answered as follows:

> *… commitment … dedication … discipline … for two top-ranked fencers they work hard as if they are at the bottom of the ranking. In most cases you will find fencers who reach a certain level tend to lose focus and think they have made it—they don't listen to the coach and start being disrespectful towards others. I wish more fencers were as humble, committed and disciplined as the two fencers … they go the extra mile. I have never seen it anywhere else, so I come to appreciate it even more.*

Coach B agreed that they were disciplined fencers and added the following:

> *They have an understanding of what is required … that to be able to perform at an international level they need to be so much more dedicated – that's an insight a lot of fencers don't have … this helps them in realising what they need to do to be able to compete, and the discipline and dedication to do it.*

Commitment and self-discipline generally go together with intrinsic motivation because 'mastery as a link to intrinsic motivation is having the desire to surpass in excellence at performing a task' (Levin-Gutierrez 2015:37). In other words, as observed in most NL children, once the child is interested in something they delve deeply into the subject matter. Chabot-LaFlamme (2012) describes how one natural learner imposed a six-hour a-day practice regime on himself to perfect his guitar playing and went on to become a musician and composer. This example solidifies the notion that self-discipline cannot be forced but can only be born out of a passionate need to achieve mastery in a chosen field. Both Fetteroll (2019) and Mcdonald (2018) contend that when a child is given freedom of choice he/she embraces the responsibility wholeheartedly and this demonstrates self-discipline. Mcdonald (2018) elaborates further by stating that when people immerse themselves in their meaningful passions they will commit to mastery of skills and content with astonishing enthusiasm and grit. In the same way, the fencers, out of love for the sport, showed commitment and grit by imposing their own discipline in their fencing pursuits. The lockdown training programme stands as one example that encapsulates the three elements (autonomy, mastery and purpose) of intrinsic motivation (Levin-Gutierrez 2015). Moreover, according to Mcdonald (2018) qualities that are epitomised in natural learning are self-discipline, self-direction and self-regulation. These are key attributes for fencing too.

6.4 Personal and Social Development

The fencers were asked if they ever thought of cheating during the lockdown training and Fencer B's response was simple: '*I suppose I could but that would be stupid* …'. Coach A confirmed this integrity by stating that he knows '*they will do it and they will do it properly. I can trust them*'.

The parent diary confirmed that the fencers worked through their programme every day. In week three the parent noted the following:

> *[Sometimes the fencers] spread their training throughout the day. Sometimes Fencer B runs out of time and then does it all between 6 and 7. They always make the deadline of 7pm … watching them train I see that they never cheat—they don't do less repetitions than what is required. They choose to do it properly, yet no one is watching. That's integrity, and it makes me happy to see it.*

Often, children in an NL home will gain impressive expertise in their subject and their intrinsic motivation drives their self-evaluative process. This develops their reflective and critical skills. In other words, NL 'centres on the notion that meaningful learning results from a dynamic process which is driven by both concrete action and reflection' (Sherman 2017:81). The coaches acknowledged that both fencers are aware of and understand where they are and what they could be doing. They further stated that in their experience most fencers do not seem to see beyond where they are at the moment. Coach B gave the following example:

> *Although other people thought Fencer A's recent win was a great win, she was able to contextualise it and say that in the bigger picture it was not much of a win. The ability to see where they are in context and understand—that is so important … they can see beyond just the technical … they think … when you have a fencer who is thinking, your discussion between bouts are more about what options they have because they have the ability to take that information and immediately process to apply it.*

Coach A stated that he saw them as valuable members of the club, not only because they were dependable in all aspects but also because they bring up ideas, encourage others, they take the lead when needed and are very good at peer teaching. He further observed that they are confident in their knowledge and because of NL they are not limited and have freedom in their learning pursuits.

What the fencers brought from their NL into the fencing world was a difficult question to answer because according to Fencer B, '*I wouldn't really know because it's just how I do stuff … I have never known anything different*'. Fencer A explained that they have not been to school and continued as follows:

> *I think we bring a different attitude to training and winning or losing … it is not only the achievement that counts, it's the journey … the training … we are very used to pushing ourselves and being motivated by something within us instead of having a parent or teacher or coach make us do stuff … the wanting to do it comes from us … the coach or parent just helps us to do it when we need help.*

A popular myth is that people who home educate lack social skills, but Fencer A debunked this by stating that in NL '*children are socialised with different age groups and situations, which I think is quite beneficial to fencing because we have to socialise with referees, officials, fencers, parents, spectators in a high-pressured environment*'. Fencer B confirmed this with the following statement:

> *The stereotype might not come from nowhere, but I think in our case it's certainly not the case … we are definitely social, we know people from different countries, we have lots of friends … we always volunteer to help at the fencing hall.*

According to Romanowski (2006) the issue of socialisation in home education is a widely held misconception. NL embraces the notion that 'the process of socialisation usually occurs in a child's daily activities as he or she interacts with individuals, the community and the culture at large' (Romanowski 2006:126). Various studies (Gray 2013; Romanowski 2006; Springer 2016; Rolstad & Kesson 2013) show that home educated children have a more positive self-concept and fewer behavioural problems than schooled children. As stated by Fencer A in the above finding, they socialise with a wide range of mixed-age friends which gives them an advantage to being more socially mature and flexible, as corroborated by Gray and Riley (2015). Furthermore, from the data presented, the fencers developed a training programme that included club members to maintain the team spirit rather than working by themselves. This shows their remarkable social interconnectedness (Mann *et al.* 2020).

The fencers have also developed a reputation as dependable armourers, which entails the fixing of weapons. Their road into armouring further shows their deep engagement with fencing. Fencer A wanted to be able to fix weapons when they broke rather than having to rely on someone else.

Fencer B confirmed that most fencers in the fencing community do not know how to fix their weapons and rely on others. Their knowledge of fixing weapons highlighted their resourcefulness and ability to access information and skills. Fencer A made the following statement:

> *[I] just pestered our ex-coach and senior fencers until they showed me how to fix stuff. We also managed to get an e-manual, and I managed to figure out a lot of stuff from there and of course just trial and error—taking it apart, accidently breaking it and trying again.*

Fencer B added that when they go to national competitions they '*always help with weapons check … people bring their weapons to us to be fixed*'.

An extract from the parent diary also showed that at an international training camp in Germany that hosted fencers from more than 15 countries, the parent was complimented because the fencers were the only ones in the camp who had a proper working knowledge of armouring and offered their help when needed.

These findings clearly indicate that when learning is passionate and self-determined it becomes deep, meaningful and most enduring for the learner (Mcdonald 2019).

7 How can NLA be Incorporated into the Broader Sporting Context?

Coach A realised that giving the fencers the space to develop and implement their training programme was a learning experience for him in terms of working with young people. Incorporating the NL idea of freedom and autonomy (Gray 2013; Holt 2004) by placing the learning and training in the hands of the athlete with the expert guidance of the coach will give the athlete the responsibility for their development. This would increase intrinsic motivation, giving the athlete the space to engage in the sport in ways that will develop the ability to critically assess situations and find solutions for areas which they need to work on. Through this process, Coach A realised the importance of peer coaching, that club members have their own language, and that he needs to give the young athletes space to develop within themselves. This also strengthens the team spirit of the club. Coach A mentioned how the fencers challenged one of his footwork exercises and that when he explained

it, they were far more understanding of why they had to do it. From their questioning he learned that he needs to re-think how he engages with young people in that explanations, rather than an authoritarian style of coaching, seem to be more positively received by the fencers. It is argued that encouraging fencers to bring different ideas to further their training will also help empower them in their own development. This will also increase their intrinsic motivation, which will increase their commitment and discipline (Levin-Gutierrez 2015).

8 Is Fencing a Viable Pandemic Sport?

As fencing is considered a combat sport, it needs various safety measures to be considered safe. Some aspects of safety are already in place as fencers wear 350 Newton clothing, long socks and a glove. A modification to the current protective mask to make it suitable for the pandemic has been developed by leading international fencing brands. Spaces and social distancing measures can be easily controlled by the coach, adapting and ensuring that there is no contact during training. However, on the piste there can be contact, and therefore, the Fencing Federation of SA is currently working on protocols that would further ensure the safety of fencers, allowing it to become a viable pandemic sport.

9 Recommendations from the Study

The results of this study bring to mind a statement by John Holt (1972) that every time we try to teach, coerce and manage the lives of children, we lose the chance to see how they might have managed their lives on their own, and we lose the chance to learn what we might have learned from observing them doing it. Coach A's agreement to let the fencers take the reins for their lockdown training created an enriching experience for everyone. The coach realised the value of peer training and the fencers gained a lot of knowledge and skills. The development of the training programme by the fencers themselves highlight the notion that learning does not always have to be shaped or controlled by elders. Respecting young people and democratising training halls will not only further intrinsic motivation, as seen in the discipline of the fencers in their daily training, but it will also allow creativity to flourish, as seen in the research into the development of the exercises and

the creative use of common items because of the lack of their usual equipment. This, therefore, has implications for all current learning institutions and the home environment. The findings of this study displayed the sound educational principles and values in just one aspect of the fencers' lives. Further research on how the NLA impacts other aspects of young people will deepen the understanding and the acceptance of this approach as a viable and valuable approach to life and learning.

10 Conclusion

This study highlights that NL as a life philosophy can have far reaching advantages for people in different situations, including sport. As stated by Priesnitz (2020), a free learning environment that supports risk and mistake-making, encourages curiosity, exploration and the pursuit of new challenges and knowledge, will develop flexible, resourceful natural learners who live happy and productive lives.

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An Autoethnographic Optic: Experiences of Migration to Multiple Modes of Training and Participation in Karate during COVID-19

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Abstract

Karate, a favoured and glamourized martial art in society with a rich history, was due to make its first appearance as an Olympic sport at the 2020 Tokyo mega event but this was scuppered by the arrival of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Numerous other sports were crafting innovative and flexible ways of training and participation for them to endure as a sport of choice during and after lockdown, however karate has had an intimate relationship with online platforms for some time. This chapter contributes by providing a nuanced autoethnographic optic, by a number one ranked South African master's kata champion, into karate club training and competition participation pre and during COVID-19. Locating my argument within a theoretical framing of program risk and resilience and the notion of 'arrhythmic experiences'(Thorpe 2015), underpinned by the occurrence of a natural disaster, I illuminate the multi-modal training approaches which my club and I used prior to COVID-19 due to extenuating circumstances which created an environment for bolstering resilience during the pandemic. I detail the historical reasoning and approaches to highlight my personal and club experiences over a 3-year period in migrating from a face to face dojo approach to alternative remote training blending multi modal ways of karate training to maximise participation and learning. This has significance in recognizing and navigating the efficiencies and deficiencies of multiple modes of sports training delivery for competitive and non-competitive karatekas (practitioners of karate) amidst a fluid environment demanding adaptation given the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: karate training, participation, program risk and resilience, autoethnography, COVID-19

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1 Introduction

It is valuable to understand the background to karate in order to understand its current role in society. Karate as a sport of choice, has a rich history spanning hundreds of years. The birthplace of karate is suggested as the island of Okinawa (Leo 2018). There is much contestation about the exact origins of karate but what is clear is that the following countries are connected in its birth and early development: India, China and Okinawa, before it moved to mainland Japan. China is said to have influenced karate's development in Okinawa due to the trade between China and Okinawa. One school of research indicates that China's roots itself in the martial arts comes from an Indian monk Bodhidharma who travelled to China around the 6th century (±520), teaching an ancient Indian form of fighting (Vajramushti) and zen buddhism to weak and starving Shaolin monks to strengthen their bodies and minds while living amongst them (Haines 2011) whilst another claims that monks in China were already knowledgeable about the martial arts (Budokai 2014).

Karate, has long been perceived as a favoured sport and martial arts pursuit (Leo 2018) across the world for its link to exercise, a healthy lifestyle, self-defence and discipline. Haines (2011) explains that 'America's ignorance of karate produced an aura around it that is both fictional and sensational' and much of this is evident in the Hollywood movies. Karate spread through the travel of a few Okinawans initially to Japan to promote open hand fighting techniques. At that time, a few Japanese knew of it because it was considered a foreign import –from Okinawa. It is advanced that the Americans similarly learned of it during World War 2. It is said to have launched in its international journey from around the 1950s gaining in momentum. There are four Japanese styles of karate: Gōju-ryū, Shitō-ryū, Shotokan and Wadō-ryū. In the early 1990's conservative estimates indicated that more than 15 million people (Haines 2011) were karatekas (practitioners of karate) but currently it is estimated at closer to 100 million. It must also be recognized that it is a sport that is unfortunately steeped in debate due to its commercialization and I also support Haines who pines the loss of the simple Budhist philosophy of its roots. He decries some instructors' pursuing high financial gains from teaching the sport, quick grading of students for financial goals, the handing out of belts to politicians as leverage, and in fighting over who heads associations and which style is better believing that these pursuits have tainted the sport. Regardless of such views, the resilience of karate as a sport code is accepted. Karate would

have featured for the first time as an Olympic sport at the Tokyo Olympic games in 2020 but this mega event was postponed due to the appearance and global spread of COVID-19, a disease of pandemic proportions, which is engulfing the world and which provided the impetus for this publication.

This chapter presents a discussion into karate participation and training making a scholarly contribution to the training of ranked athletes and program resilience during aberrant circumstances. I share my personal and club training and competition participation pre and during COVID-19 from an autoethnographic optic incorporating my own personal and instructor experiences with the aim of highlighting the characteristics for athlete and program resilience. I also make an academic contribution to identity research within the phenomenon of sports. I insert interactions with selected members of the Karate clubs, an African head of style Kyoshi Nikki Pillay and the president of the national karate Federation of South Africa, Hanshi Sonny Pillay for an extended understanding of the context of karate as a community club sport. In this chapter, I illuminate the multi-modal training approaches which the club and I used prior to COVID-19 which created an environment that prepared me as an athlete and the club for program resilience during the pandemic.

I commenced this chapter with a brief background into the roots of karate and then I extended this to its value at community level before I present the theoretical and methodological foundations for the chapter. I then focus on presenting my own experiences as a karateka (I am a number one ranked South African master's kata champion: 2018-2020), my experiences as an instructor and selected club experiences pre-COVID-19 and during the pandemic. I argue from a bifurcated stance – that of a ranked karateka and an instructor of karate. Herein, I adopt a 'program risk and disaster management' perspective for an ongoing evaluation of training strategies adopted. This I do, for an understanding of the context and for the need for adaptability in developing continuity for myself as an athlete and in a karate program of training for club resilience during an aberrant occurrence such as a natural disaster (the COVID-19 pandemic).

My Choice of Methodology

The perspective I'm using is autoethnographic with narrative inquiry which has been used before in sport research (Zavattaro 2014; Smith 2017) due to its importance for reflexivity and self -identity although there is no documented

use in the sport code of karate. It's also not a common methodology and McMahon, Gannon and Zehnter (2017) advocate for the value of autoethnography for sport management arguing for its benefits. I draw from my 'fresh memories' (Wall 2008) involving verbal communication and a litany of mostly digital communication instruments such as emails, whatsapp messages, zoom and phone/ whatsapp calls. I include elements of thinking and decision-making because ethnographic mining includes 'self-questioning' (Ellis 2004: xvii - xviii), 'fears and self-doubts—and emotional pain' (Tuura 2012: 01). I am mindful of how narrative can be reductive and complexity can be compromised (Kraus 2003).

Similar to Chang (2008: 48 - 49) I focus not on the 'self alone, but about … understanding of others (culture/ society) through self' during a time of sudden change. I also extend autoethnography into 'identity' research in sport studies. I thus offer up a bottom-up approach with a practioner's view of the challenges (Eide *et al.* 2012) related to COVID-19 and karate consumption from a training lens.

Positionality is also an area of my contribution as majority of the studies are undertaken by researchers who are outside of the event under scrutiny presenting an outsiders' perspective (for example, Thorpe 2015) whereas there are few studies that present an insiders' perspective. In Thorpe's study, the residents in the geographical area of the disaster are the participants in the study but in this current chapter, the identity of the author is significant as I write from a self-reflective autoethnographic perspective, with commentary from the umbrella sports federation (Karate South Africa-KSA) in South Africa as well as my own lived karate experiences and that of the karate club.

Theoretical Cilia

The theoretical insights critical for the chapter, are distilled from Lefebvre's (2004) theory of rhythm analysis with his concepts of arrhythmia, polyrhythmia and eurhythmia.

Karate as a Facet of a 'Rhythmic' Society and the 'Arrhythmia' of Lockdown

Karate is one of the sports undertaken at community and school level. Sports

which feature at this level, practiced on a regular basis provide a significant role in the development of the code as well as in contributing to community cohesion. Wicker, Filo and Cuskelly (2013: 510) argue, 'Community sport clubs are critical to the provision of sport' in numerous countries. They provide a crucial role in intergenerational and immigrant integration providing evidence of the involvement of youth and immigrants mingling with older people in community sports clubs. Thus, when a global disaster strikes, as has COVID-19, it has repercussions for the continuity of community sport participation and there is a negative ripple effect created for communities and people due to this 'arrhythmia'. I draw from Thorpe's use of Lefebvre's (2004) theory of rhythm analysis where she alludes to how a natural disaster presents an 'arrhythmic experience' which 'forces people to rethink the importance of sport in their everyday lives' (Thorpe 2015: 301).

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, countries across the world began declaring lockdown. The lockdown heralded a break in the normal rhythm/s of daily human activities. Lefebvre in his 'rhythmanalysis' explains that 'everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm' (Lefebvre 2004: 26) however people in general are not ontologically aware of rhythm in their daily lives. He conceived of rhythms as comprising of three types: 'Lefebvre refers to polyrhythmia as being the composition of diverse and multiple rhythms, eurhythmia as the 'harmony of rhythms' (p.20) and arrhythmia as 'the discordance of rhythms' (p.16)'. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic heralded a shift from eurhythmia to arrhythmia in society. This sudden change brings with it negative emotions such as distress and suffering (Lefebvre 2004: 77) because regular behavior patterns and habits form the architecture of people's lives in society and this maintains their feelings of security (Edensor 2010) which is suddenly disrupted by a disaster. In the current chapter, Lefebvre's work is significant as it allows for an understanding of experiences of arrhythmia over time for myself and the karate club and the most recent pandemic's disruption to the regular karate participation and training rhythm. Significantly, it facilitated a re-thinking by instructors, myself included, of the concepts of time, space and place for karate club training. For me as a ranked athlete, Lefebvre's work revealed the arrhythmia that impacted on me and the polyrhythmia that I harnessed in my own karate 'life' when I experienced various forms of disruption prior to the pandemic as well as during the pandemic.

2 Literature on Relevant Concepts

This chapter's relevant literature is an amalgamation of literature from risk and disaster management, program resilience and multi modal training avenues.

Risk and Disaster Management

The COVID-19 pandemic was a social disruptor with a domino effect for karate training and thus karate club longevity calls for an interrogation from a risk and disaster management perspective. However, risk and disaster management as a discipline is in its infancy with a foothold in a variety of disciplines (Raydugin 2017). In a post disaster study unrelated to sport but valuable for organizational response, Eide, Haugstveit, Halvorsrud, Skjetne, and Stiso (2012) drew attention to the value of communication and collaboration that should have occurred during the disaster as it unfolded. They highlight the significance of disaster management and response by giving value to time that is lost during the event, planning and strategies that should unfold. Risk management in sport appears to be relatively well developed for participants. In the karate literature that is available, risk management pertains to hazards for karate students (karatekas) and spectators interms of injuries, facilities in terms of equipment and lighting and fires but it is rarely from an individual sustained training perspective nor is it from an organizational perspective although the English Karate federation does provide some organizational awareness. A comprehensive document on risk management and a guidelines policy by the English Karate federation (EKF 2009) for member associations and clubs does offer nuanced insights into the main risks that can be faced with a component dedicated to organizations. Collectively EKF presents strategic, operational, financial and external risks to be considered by karate clubs in England. Strategic risks involves organizational risks and it can include planning, leadership and communication. Wicker, Filo and Cuskelly (2013) by constrast, point to key organizational challenges as being largely financial in addition to the recruitment of volunteers to assist.

The EKF also points to operational risks for clubs that include policy, human resources, information (adequacy for decision making), integrity of data, reputation, technological (use of technology to achieve objectives), project (planning and management procedures) and innovation. Financial risks comprise of budgetary, fraud or theft, investment evaluation and liability. Infrastructure risks include both physical (such as transport) and electronic

such as internet use. There are also legal and regulatory risks, political risks and partnership risks. An important point on clubs planning for risks in the future, is made by the Federation. This was a critical component in hindsight because of the swiftness with which the pandemic COVID-19 has spread and shaken the very core of daily living on earth including participation in sport. Unfortunately, numerous sport codes including karate clubs were caught by surprise with little time to plan and react (a mere week) before lockdown took effect in South Africa (This commenced on the 27 March 2020).

Under the auspices of Karate South Africa in June 2020, Roetz and Pillay (2020) undertook a study and presented a risk management plan as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic which was aimed at preparing clubs for re-opening. Again, this was a response document and no other document prior to the pandemic on risk in the sport code could be found using the key words: 'karate South Africa and risk management/ policy' in a google search. A perusal of the KSA constitution did contain a section on safety and security (p. 79) and unforeseen contingencies and force majeure (p. 89). However, the former was largely focused on security at KSA events and the latter on the national executive committee being the decision-making body because the constitution is focused on the protection of the national karate federation and not on athlete and karate club resilience.

Program Resilience

There is a dearth of literature on program resilience research in sport clubs and where there have been studies these have centred on natural disasters such as floods and cyclones (Wicker *et al.* 2013), droughts (Kellett & Turner 2009), earthquakes (Thorpe 2015). Wicker *et al*. (2013) state that most of these have been natural disaster impact studies for organisations and incorporated unpacking the elements that are needed for organizational recovery. Thorpe's (2015) study included individuals apart from community sport clubs and it focused on the 'recovery and resilience of individuals and communities' after the 2011 earthquakes in New Zealand. She explored from residents' perspectives their lived experiences after a natural disaster that has 'damage (d) or destroy(ed) the spaces and places used for participation' (Thorpe 2015: 302). All of the studies on an organization's program and individual resilience have been undertaken after the event, for example on focusing on the recovery period weeks and months after the disaster and not during the hazard event. Thus, program resilience for sports clubs and individuals is generally studied

post the disaster event and not as in the current paper. Here, program and individual resilience is explored during the global disaster event, namely the COVID-19 pandemic as it is unfolding across months with no distinct idea of when it will cease. Herein is where I aim to also make a modest contribution to the literature as well on community sport clubs' program resilience and individual athlete's resilience in focusing on sport resilience for karate during a natural disaster.

Karate, the Internet and Online Training

Karate skills training had long migrated from only face to face dojo (karate school/club) training. Karate, since the invention of the internet, has indeed had an intimate relationship with online platforms such as Google search and facebook for some time as a source of teaching and learning in addition to the face to face instruction in a dojo by karate senseis (teachers). Multi modal teaching and learning comprises of an array of representations to maximize teaching and learning and these include verbal and written language as well as visual and other forms of spatial representation (Papageorgiou & Lameras 2017). Thus, multi modal training opportunities had surfaced long before the pandemic struck. A mixture of synchronous (technology using audio or video where the feedback is immediate) and asynchronous (technology where there is a time lag such as email or a pre-recorded video) communication opportunities (Watts 2016) had prevailed given a multitude of training contexts and club branches across the world. Karatekas, have in general been learning ways of honing their kata and kumite techniques from the internet which has a plethora of pre- recorded videos of competition participation and seminars by world renowned and highly ranked karatekas and grand masters whose knowledge and expertise are then used to grow the sport. For example, in the category of kata competition, Rika Usami and Antonio Diaz, both of whom were world kata (fighting an imaginary opponent) title holders belonging to the Inoue-Ha Shitoryu style of karate (the club to which I once belonged) can be found with ease on the internet doing an array of katas and also teaching these katas at seminars held across the world.

3 Athlete Training, Program Resilience and my Sports' Identity

My discussion below encapsulates the national karate federation's response to

COVID-19, a selected club response (to which I belong) with associated challenges, my individual training program, experiences and challenges as a club instructor**.**

Lockdown in South Africa and KSA's response

The announcement of a national lockdown was accompanied by strict rules and regulations for sports training and participation which were continuously amended as lockdown measures were relaxed across the months (Hassen 2020). Karate was not exempt from the rules and in SA, all face to face dojo training stopped as people had to abide with remaining indoors and only leaving their homes for emergencies or to purchase groceries. During this period Hanshi Sonny Pillay of Karate South Africa (personal correspondence to the author) explained

> *As President of the National Karate Federation Karate South Africa (KSA) I firstly must concede that our karate fraternity were in a state of shock the day the Covid-19 Lockdown was announced as suddenly from being very active in our sport the karate athletes and coaches were grounded to a sudden halt*.

He went on to explain that KSA leadership was instrumental in initiating the migration to alternate modes for workshops, seminars, coaching and training,

> *I have nothing but admiration for our KSA karate Instructors (aka coaches) for rising to the need of the hour (on the recommendation by the KSA leadership) in facilitating online classes for the athletes on various social media platforms such as Zoom You tube etc. KSA applauds the coaches and athletes for successfully engaging in the said online activities viz. daily lessons, Week end Provincial Protea team coaching workshops and referees' seminars amidst other activities*.

It is thus evident that the enormity of the pandemic and its effect was unanticipated but the national karate federation responded and so did instructors and karatekas in migrating to various online platforms for training and other karate activities.

Shito-ryu Karate Club Training during COVID-19

At grassroots level of the community sports club and individuals, there were targeted responses as well. My sensei (teacher) for 29 years, Kyoshi Nikki Pillay, a 7th dan karateka has been based in Australia, from 2010 after emigrating from his home country, South Africa. Australia went into lockdown in the second week of March well before South Africa and Kyoshi Nikki explained the transition from face to face dojo training to virtual dojo via online training that occurred and its impact for him as instructor with fee paying classes:

> *... all group activities indoors and outdoors stopped. Out of desperation in order to keep the interest and the students motivated and still make a living, I took to social media. Zoom was the choice for many coaches at this time. Just to back track a little before the corona epidemic I had seven classes and was doing very well financially. Initially Zoom seemed the perfect way to keep the classes going. Unfortunately not everyone had access to social network.*

He draws attention to the digital divide evident in Australia and I later allude to the same challenge in my class in South Africa. My peers who are instructors and athletes, like me are located in the Western Cape province of South Africa, an epicenter of the pandemic. They were similarly trying to adapt to a new context for karate instruction and their own training. Sensei John Solomon uses online methods to teach, namely zoom and whatsapp. Sensei John is from the Cape Winelands area and he does prefer zoom explaining that '*real interaction is missing in whatsapp*' and he has to rely on parents' feedback via videos to which he responds after viewing the videos. Parents did inform him of obstacles to them undertaking this form of feedback. Sensei Rafeeq Larney is an advocate of zoom which he uses as it allows his students,

> *to feel a bit closer and it has many features such as allowing for many people and the 'chat' function*. He explained, *I feared losing students over the lockdown but this platform has actually opened doors for new members to join in our sessions from a distance*.

It is thus evident that the club's instructors were using multiple digital tools in a disrupted social space to continue karate training despite challenges

and these challenges were demanding and stressful at times. Kyoshi Nikki explained a host of challenges with having a virtual dojo, such as poor online discipline and a lack of parental involvement. He does not advise online karate training as being advantageous to the sport. He explained this,

> *Working online with children is not the way to go. I have been teaching karate now for over fifty odd years working with children and adults alike face to face correcting them as the classes progressed I got the best from them. Online discipline is a major problem when it comes to teaching children because they are at home you don't get their full co-operation. I don't think their parents help to supervise them to make sure that they working. I notice children especially the little ones jumping on the sofas and running out of sight and coming back. Teaching karate online to me is not the way- there are more disadvantages than advantages maybe one on one will be good (but not for children). Online fitness training I think is ok, no proper technique is required but if you want to teach karate it most certainly not advisable.*

It is clear that he draws a distinction between fitness training and karate, stating that the former can be successfully taught online but not the latter due to the requirement of karate needing close attention to the detail in a technique.

My Sports' Identity: Aspects and Experiences of Synchronous and Asynchronous Training Pre Covid-19 and during the Pandemic

I think it's important for me to trace the trajectory of the club to which I belonged as the route had inadvertently prepared me and the club for transition to multi modal karate training during the pandemic. For karatekas in other clubs, the pandemic was a period of training challenges as anecdotal evidence indicated that many karate clubs in the community placed all training on hold due to the pandemic.

Migration has been a feature of my karate life for over 30 years. I am a karate enthusiast. I train regularly (I have experienced some lulls due to work commitments) as I consider it to be part of ensuring my spiritual and emotional well- being and karate is part of my identity. I began martial arts training 30

years ago under the late Bob Davies (who later emigrated from South Africa) and I branched specifically into karate 29 years ago (after being introduced to it and to Sensei Nikki by my husband who was his student from childhood). My most recent affiliation was to the Japanese club, Inoue-ha Shitoryu from approximately 2009 to December 2019, which follows the Shitoryu style of karate. This was after a club migration following the untimely death of Grandmaster Teruo Hayashi (10th dan) in 2004 who led his own style: Hayashi –ha Shitoryu. Soke Hayashi trained under the founder of the Shitoryu style of karate and was his main disciple as well. I was privileged to have also trained under Grandmaster Hayashi who shared a special relationship with my own sensei (teacher) Nikki. It was only when Kyoshi Nikki Pillay emigrated to Australia in 2010 that multi modal teaching using synchronous and asynchronous communication gained a foothold for me and other black belt karatekas in the club as he was unable to regularly travel to South Africa. In addition to our face to face peer training as black belts in the dojo, and hosting our colleagues from other provinces for training sessions, alternate modes of training were sought. As keen karatekas, due to not wanting to lose the expert eye and rigorous training from Kyoshi Nikki, regular communication commenced via watasap and facebook with the club leadership correcting our techniques after viewing sample training sessions. Sensei Nikki would post video clips or send us links to watch details of techniques and katas. He would whatsapp call weekly and sometimes daily to provide feedback on our training and progress if we were preparing for a competition. This became the norm for us karatekas in South Africa and more especially for me as I re-entered competition karate (after more than a 15-year break of non-competition karate) in 2018.

2018 became a critical year for me as I was intent on participating in every KSA league event and reaching number one ranking in the masters' division of kata, my specialization area of karate. Face to face training with my peers and then dedicated coaches Viren Gosai and Rodney Nair was frequent, three to four times in a week. Inaddition, Kyoshi Nikki Pillay from afar, would consult with the club on the katas for competition and advise on karate training using synchronous and asynchronous communication methods (Watts 2016) via wastap, sending kata videos and strength and endurance training ideas. He would regularly source feedback from my lead coach Sensei Viren Gosai. I reached number one ranking in South Africa in kata in 2018, becoming a national gold medalist, winner of the Arnold Swarzenegger Classic and later

in the year represented the country at the Commonwealth karate Championship. I have retained number 1 ranking to present (2020) given the multiple approaches (synchronous and asynchronous) to consistent training for competition. Early in 2020, Kyoshi Nikki informed me that he would be making a trip to South Africa for my face to face grading to third dan black belt. Two months later and into lockdown, I was sent an invitation to participate in an online kata competition where I had to upload a video clip of a kata for the first elimination round of the competition. I didn't feel sufficiently confident about this new system of karate competition for me: I don't have access to extensive space to perform, a state- of- the- art camera phone or the requisite flooring in my apartment. Nevertheless, I do think that this was an innovative way of keeping competition karate alive in difficult circumstances.

Whilst multi modal training has worked for me personally and now during the pandemic: as club instructors, we have formed a zoom training class for regular training sessions which comprise of fitness and kata training in addition to planning for 'post the pandemic'. This class has been inspiring to me during lockdown as it has kept my spirits high, reinvigorated me mentally and is a way of ensuring consistent training as lockdown blues started to take a hold. The arrival of December 2020 heralded the second wave of the pandemic with stage 3 lockdown being announced with the infection rate and deaths spiralling and the looming threat of contracting the new variant of corona virus on everyone's mind, an ever-present worry, sparking arrhythmia when I was just achieving some form of eurhythmia.

My Pandemic Challenges as a Karate Instructor

The arrival of the pandemic in March 2020, presented serious challenges for my newly formed class of 2020 karatekas in terms of developing club resilience. When lockdown initially commenced, I was keen to continue training for my class anticipating that lockdown would not extend beyond a month or two and I did not want the karatekas' performance to drop as I had been grooming them for their annual grading and an upcoming competition. In addition, I had recently commenced weapons training and the karatekas were keen to learn without interruption and on numerous occasions, karate classes extended beyond the normal one hour. When I did a poll for parents as I wanted to immediately commence online training via zoom lessons when lockdown was announced, I found that none of the parents replied to my whatsapp

message to send an email address. When I further queried via the whatsapp group, I found that they preferred the asynchronous communication of videos to synchronous online zoom lessons. I enthusiastically commenced with a 21day lockdown challenge of karate training as this was the initial length of lockdown before it was extended. I thus started making videos (asynchronous training) in advance and posting them on the group. However, I was unhappy because in general, the parents would not send feedback videos of their children training undertaking the different techniques following the lessons I had posted. This was strange because prior to COVID-19, parents- of their own accord would capture their children training after hours at home and send me short video clips to explain their children's enthusiasm for karate. Nevertheless, there was a silver lining from abroad, as a teacher in the Middle east requested for some of my videos to share with his students as he was in a school where no sport initially was being promoted for students during lockdown although there were classes in Maths, English and Science; physical education lessons were later added to the online school curriculum so I then stopped contributing as there are other forms of martial arts which were offered such as jujitsu.

With my local karatekas, parents complained of their children not listening to them. I soon realized that I needed to migrate to zoom lessons (synchronous) to track the karatekas' progress as the videos and lack of feedback indicated a deficiency in the method adopted during lockdown. The zoom class size has also reduced and I'm not sure that online zoom classes is a sustainable way of quality training for children, just like Kyoshi Nikki had pointed out with his classes in Australia and sensei John in the Cape. In addition, there are at times an unstable network connection which interrupts training, parents who can't connect on time due to work commitments which have apparently increased during lockdown and karatekas who sometimes take a 'timeout' by sitting on a nearby chair whilst training is in session, excusing themselves or are interrupted by an activity happening in the home. Additionally, as a sensei, from a teaching perspective, I can't closely see each students' individual techniques and have to request them to adjust their cameras frequently so that I can view their stances, punches and blocks- details are difficult to observe via zoom for each individual student albeit in a small class, a concern also raised by my Sensei in Australia. Time passes rapidly as I ask each karateka to undertake some of the techniques individually and not as a group, to ensure quality training. Currently, after each zoom training

session, I email the video link to all parents for additional training at katareka's lesiure.

Four months into lockdown (June 2020), I was uncertain that zoom as an online training option in a virtual dojo, is a sustainable platform for karate teaching and learning for neophytes: children and adults for several reasons: They may be impacted upon by one or more of the following- either not motivated to attend due to training in a virtual dojo that is generally their lounge with limited space, the lack of a karate instructor in close proximity, parents' activities and their school work commitments, still navigating their arrhythmia or the digital divide. The lack of feedback from the videoclips is also a key deficiency for me (similar to Sensei John) in the training program for the class. Karate training for my class limps on via zoom with the class sizes being small but with individual attention. My personal training continues with asynchronous instruction from my sensei Nikki Pillay in Australia and both synchronous and asynchronous communication within South Africa with fellow karate athletes and instructors: John Solomon and Refeeq Larnee from the Western Cape, although we sometimes pause training due to work commitments which have eaten into our training schedule. Reopening the face to face dojo in 2021, is not possible at present (January 2021) due to increasing infections and deaths in the second wave of the disease and we will consider face to face club recovery upon the 'curve being flattened' which is not currently in sight.

4 Theoretical Understandings and Conclusion

Wicker, Filo and Cuskelly (2013: 510) argue that 'When community sport clubs are impacted by natural disasters, organizational resilience is critical to recovery'. In their study of community sports clubs in Australia, they explain that organizational resilience for their study was 'conceptualized as a function of robustness, redundancy, resourcefulness, and rapidity, and applied to community sport clubs' however, their natural disasters were understood to be cyclones and flooding and certainly not a worldwide pandemic so their findings have to be understood within the limited parameters of a short term localized natural disaster and not a global pandemic of epic proportions, such as the corona virus. However, it is instructive in advancing the importance of the concept of organizational resilience which is critical for the longevity of karate training at community level.

The Pandemic: Disrupted Spaces, Efficiencies and Deficiencies

As Thorpe (2015) has maintained, people in natural disaster areas live in 'disrupted spaces' and SA and the world currently due to the global pandemic is a highly disrupted space and whilst SA appears to have been easing up on restrictions in September 2020, the second wave of the virus affecting SA from December 2020 (and the rest of the world) has led to another lockdown with restrictions. Sport has borne the brunt of the pandemic as close contact codes of sport have been relegated to a different set of regulations (Hassen 2020). Using Lefebvre's notion of 'arrhythmia', one can understand the social and psychological effects of the pandemic on karatekas and possibly their parents. As Thorpe (2015: 307) has contended, 'the sporting experiences of interviewees before, during and after', the natural disaster, 'cannot be separated from the life stresses experienced by participants and their families'. This is significant as it would contribute to an explanation about the poor attendance at zoom karate lessons. However, this does signify time being lost for karate training until 'eurhythmia' is achieved in the community.

Covid-19 demands adaptation for karate club survival, it was instrumental in being the catalyst for remote karate training for many karate clubs including the one I belong to, with the exception of my personal training as I had migrated to multi modal training due to exigent circumstances years ago. There is the need to recognize the efficiencies of each mode of training, to evaluate the progress of each new adaptive strategy and to also try to navigate the deficiencies as they unfold. Resilience for community karate clubs was being tested very early for me as well, as I just formed my own class in late January 2020 as it is a requirement as senior karate level to share knowledge, so the class was not yet a full three months old when lockdown commenced and the physical face to face dojo had to close.

Individual and Club Risks in Attempts to Fashion Program Resilience

Although, I was used to multiple approaches to my own personal training for years and achieving much success, the transition from one mode to another, that is from face to face training in a physical dojo setting to remote/ online dojo training due to the spread of the corona virus was not without challenges for my karate class and my colleagues in clubs in South Africa, karate peers

who are part of KSA and my sensei in Australia. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a migration of my own class to remote teaching and learning to counter numerous club risks. Wicker *et al*. (2013: 510) aver that 'an understanding of organizational characteristics that can assist clubs in recovering is important because natural disasters can often arrive without warning and impact community sport clubs in almost any part of the world'. For my class, the strategic risk organizationally was planning and communication to parents and receiving parents' feedback on the nature of remote teaching which they preferred. The operational risks included a new innovation of using the latest technology that parents had clearly not been exposed to setting up previously (zoom online classes) and a mix of synchronous and asynchronous communication. Thus, initially asynchronous teaching via whatsapp video posts and later, the add on of synchronous zoom teaching were both challenges to karatekas and parents. Asynchronous teaching did exist prior to the pandemic as I would post video clips and links for karatekas to practice before their next class but this was not the sole medium of communication- previously it was used as a supplement face to face instruction.

The 'digital divide' is enormous in the South African context which is one of the most unequal societies in the world and this impacts on access to services especially now during the pandemic when internet access is imperative for karate training in KwaZulu-Natal province. The divide is not simply between those who have access to the internet and those who don't, it extends to people who don't have digital literacy skills and those who lack the finances to optimize internet use (VPUU 2019). Thus, an important financial risk related to the digital divide included electronic risk such as internet connectivity for parents and myself as zoom and videos uploaded require data to send and receive the requisite information. This could be impacting class attendance during zoom sessions. The efficiencies and deficiencies of various training options and multi-modality was illuminated weekly. Changing strategies from videos to zoom with some videos to complement the problem areas has resulted in me being able to try to maximize karate teaching and learning albeit in 'a disrupted space'. Unfortunately, the class size dwindled when lockdown commenced and the migration to zoom from the weekly video posts has reduced karatekas' participation more. Lefebvre's (2004) 'arrhythmia' is clearly evident due to the sudden change in karatekas and parents' routines since the commencement of lockdown. It remains to be seen how and when the South African government will relax lockdown regulations

in 2021 pertaining to sport codes such as karate and when parents will feel sufficiently confident and regain their 'rhythms' to allow their children to return to training, using personal protective equipment and sanitise, without the fear of being infected.

5 Recommendations

Assessing the risks of depleted training as a result of the pandemic is important as a step towards acknowledging that sustained participation in sport is essential for a healthy body and mind. Individual athlete training on a regular basis and the participation of karatekas in group training are the keys to program resilience. In the absence of physical face to face training options, online training options via zoom and other platforms, a previously under maximized avenue, appears to be the only possibility to maintaining social distancing during the pandemic.

However, ensuring commitment to attending group training and participation in karate activities in a virtual dojo can be undermined by the digital divide in SA and home circumstances for karatekas (training space and family members' interruptions). Thus, it is highly recommended that multiple modes of training, using synchronous and asynchronous methods be adopted to safeguard continued participation.

Small classes for synchronous learning and time for individual assessment and feedback to karatekas appear to be critical components for quality training especially for younger karatekas' training and participation, in assisting them to maintain their fitness levels and technical standards.

Conversations (via zoom or whatsapp) between instructors and club leadership in addition to instructor training programs assist in exploring and discussing best practices for online karate training and building club resilience. Inaddition, it assists instructors in coping with the pandemic and its ongoing influence on all karatekas.

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‘Life without Sports’: Socio-Economic Impacts of COVID-19 on South African Society from a Football Lens

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Abstract

Currently, the world is grappling with COVID-19’s effect on the health, social, financial, economic, political and cultural sectors. However, the spread of this pandemic has struck hard other industries such as the sporting industry. This has resulted in the cancellation and suspension of events and gatherings in various sporting codes across the globe. The sporting industry has unprecedented socio-economic effects for the broader population. Football as a sporting code includes ‘big money’ earned from major international events, match attendance, broadcasting and lucrative sponsorship deals. South Africa’s football is thus also generating ‘big money’. Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, all associated football events and gatherings in South Africa were halted for a lengthy period of 5 months, spelling catastrophe for society’s socio-economic activities. This chapter relied primarily on desktop research to capture up –to-date information on football during this pandemic using content analysis. The authors observed that the socio-economic benefits accrued from football were on a downward spiral threatening jobs, social inclusion, entertainment, revenue generation, charitable and community activities. Consequently, the

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continued spread of COVID-19 presents a significant risk to the football sector's survival and its socio-economic benefits for society.

Keywords: COVID-19, sporting industry, football, outbreak, matches, revenue.

1 Introduction

> *Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else can. Sport can awaken hope where previously there was only despair (Mandela 2000).*

These are the famous words articulated by Nelson Mandela the former president of South Africa, liberation hero, Nobel laureate and celebrated global icon who fought against the apartheid regime. To him, sports had a profound meaning which transcended beyond the field of play as epitomised through providing hope to those who were in a state of hopelessness and bringing together (unity) dissimilar groups of people from diverse ethnic and racial divides. Sports according to Mandela meant that the entire world could be changed and unified into a better and peaceful global sphere for all. Furthermore, these words largely resonated with sporting events that transpired soon after the democratic dispensation of South Africa in 1994. Global mega events like the Rugby World Cup (1995) and the African Cup of Nations (1996) that took place on South African soil inculcated a culture and practice of unity in a nation that had largely been divided and embroiled in the shackles of the malignant, divisive, discriminatory and segregatory system of apartheid. Consequently, sports played a pivotal role in uniting a broken and fragile society and moreover, it transformed the racial divides and healed the wounds of the past. These sublime events laid the foundation for South Africa's transition and belief in the existence of a unified social system to cater for all. It is in this moment that Mandela's popularity grew resulting in the idea of *Madiba Magic* capturing the imaginations (Lodge 2003) of a society that had long been divided by apartheid that generated resentment and animosity against one another. It is through the power of sports that differences of ideologies and

beliefs were put aside for the common goal of addressing the ills of the past by paving the way for forgiveness, unity and peace.

However, in recent times the entire world has come to a standstill which has been largely characterised by mayhem and panic due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has witnessed the halting of activities in a myriad of sectors including the sporting industry (Mtshazo 2020). Global mega events such as the first Tokyo Olympics in 2020(Pearson 2019) were part of the major spectacles that were adversely affected by this crisis. With respect to football[1], events of immense proportions and importance such as the World Cup qualifiers were postponed to 2021 (Mtshazo 2020). Meanwhile, continental tournaments such as the Euro 2020 finals and Copa America were postponed to 2021 whereas the 2020 African Cup of Nations to be held in Cameroon was suspended indefinitely and the Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Nations League Finals (CONCACAF) was also postponed. The Big Five Leagues in Spain, England, Germany, France and Italy were suspended (Colluci, Cottrell and Sethna 2020) in fear of the pandemic. This expanded to other football leagues: UEFA federations, Americas, Oceania, Asia and Africa (Colluci, Cottrell & Sethna 2020). However, football has resumed without spectators, after a few months since its suspension with the Big Five leagues kick-starting the world's most watched and beautiful game.

In May, Germany was the first country amongst the Big Five Leagues to do so while other European big leagues in Spain, England and Italy resumed in June. However, in recent times the resumption of football has spread across the entire globe. This has evidently seen the intensification of football activities between the months of June and July across different leagues in Europe and the entire globe, bringing an end to the suspension of the sport. Meanwhile, in the African continent, Tanzania and Burundi were among the first countries to restart their football leagues in June (TRT World 2020) followed by Morocco, Tunisia and Zambia (Mbewa 2020). In the context of South Africa, football resumed on 8 August after a long five-month hiatus (Jackson 2020). The postponed Nedbank Cup kick-started the

[1] The word football and soccer are going to be used interchangeably in the chapter. Football is particularly a term used in the UK while soccer is a popular term in the US. Both terms describe and define the same sporting code.

resumption of matches coupled with a packed line up of PSL and GladAfrica Championship matches to end the season. However, the recommencement of football has witnessed matches being played behind closed doors with no fans/supporters. Additionally, teams have been mandated to adhere to strict hygiene and health practices (Jackson 2020) to ensure the safety of players, match officials, technical staff and broadcasters to mention a few.

The main thrust of this chapter is to explore the under-researched phenomena of sports, pandemics and its impact on societies. The chapter draws on the central role occupied by sports in society with a specific focus on participation, growth, transformation and development. However, recent developments through the outbreak ofCOVID-19 has changed perceptions of the relevance and experiences have questioned the survival of sporting activities through the lens of sporting codes, athletes/players and society. Sporting codes like football were halted through profuse usage of nomenclature such as 'postponement, cancellation and suspension' as part of the precautions to curb the spread of the virus. Therefore, the main argument of the chapter is hinged on the assertion that such drastic actions are not a common feature and the decision to do so clearly showed the nature, extent, seriousness and the threat imposed by COVID-19 on football players, management teams, staff, match officials and everyone involved in this sporting code. Conversely, such a stance did not take into consideration the impact of this pandemic on societies. This has ultimately paved the way and provided an impetus for scholarly debates and engagements on the impact of pandemics on sport from a societal perspective. Therefore, building on this notion and premise, this chapter seeks to interrogate the experiences and challenges of a sport absent South African society as a result of the pandemic.

South African football in recent years has experienced development and enjoyed marketable and profitable growth due to the popularity of the Premier Soccer league (PSL) as purported by Stander and Van Zyl (2016) and Koortzen and Oosthuizen (2012). Moreover, the fan base of PSL teams has grown exponentially over the years, making it one of the most popular football leagues across the African continent. Significant strides made by the Premier Soccer League (PSL), South African Football Association (SAFA) and other actors in growing and expanding football in South Africa are under threat due to the impending cataclysm imposed by COVID-19. Moreover, popularity of football has grown beyond the borders of the country as evidenced by the hosting of major global events such as the World Cup

(2010) and continental events like the Africa Cup of Nations (1996). However, the outbreak of this pandemic threatens to reverse some of the gains made thus far in the football sector in South Africa. Under the lockdown regulations in South Africa, football resumed under alert level three after intensive negotiations between the Ministry of Sport, South African Football Association (SAFA) and Premier Soccer League (PSL) to ensure that health and safety compliances will be prioritised while amateur football is expected to continue under level one. Such developments have provided an impetus for the chapter to examine the impact of COVID-19 on society from a football perspective using the socio-economic paucities imposed by this virus culminating into a crisis of severe magnitude with disastrous consequences. To do so, this chapter presents and analyses the findings from internet sources that include newspapers, blogs, different news network reports, government reports particularly, from the Ministry of Sport, Arts and Culture, Premier Soccer League (PSL) and South African Football Association (SAFA) and any other information deemed relevant for discussion.

The chapter is divided into five parts. The first part begins by discussing the theoretical framework underpinning the chapter with a focus on the correlation between sports and society. The second part presents vast literature on the global popularity of football which places it as one of the most popular sports in the world. The third section provides a historical analysis of the establishment and growth of football in the context of South Africa. It traces the introduction of the sport in the country from the 1800s till the end of the apartheid era up to present, focusing on the challenges and successes associated with the growth and popularisation of football. In the same segment, an analysis of the legacy of the 2010 World Cup in South Africa and the potential of South Africa to host continental tournaments in its shores such as the Africa Cup of Nations (1996), Africa Cup of Nations (2013) and the African Nations Championship (2014) is offered. The fourth part provides a short synopsis on the methodology. The primary focus of this chapter is discussed in the last section which presents the findings and analysis of the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on South African society from a football point of view.

2 Sports and Society: A Theoretical Perspective

The theory underpinning the chapter is functionalist theory which is one of

the most widely used theories in investigating the phenomena of sports and society. Functionalism has been largely credited for providing exponential and vast explanation on the role and functionality of sports in society. It is an ideal theory for the chapter provided the recent turn of events that has witnessed the suspension, cancellation and postponement of sporting activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic with dire social consequences. The theory is informed by the works of different scholars such as Auguste Comte (1851), Herbert Spencer (1860), Emile Durkheim (1973/1914), Talcott Parsons (1966) and Robert Merton (1949; 1956; 1968), Jarvie and Maguire (1994). Society as purported by functionalism is a structure of interrelated fragments that works in harmony with the sole purpose of maintaining stability (Mooney, Knox & Schacht 2007). Additionally, the purpose of functionalism is to provide a leeway for partnership and support of different entities in order to achieve societal necessities (Lv 2015). According to Levin (1991: 76), 'functionalism begins with the idea that any stable system (such as the human body) consists of a number of different, but interrelated, parts that operate together to create an overall order'.

In relation to sports, functionalism offers a thorough social institutional analysis whereby there is a recognition that social systems are embedded within the sporting fraternity as evidenced in interactional platforms between different individuals and group actors (Delaney & Madigan 2009). The main idea of functionalism is to understand how sports contributes to the overall societal system amongst different groups and individuals. There is an assumption that sports can yield positive development and results in social systems through shared values and agreements. For example, functionalism through sports offers societies benefits such as maintaining social systems, achieving goals and promoting social integration (Lv 2015). In the context of South Africa, Hill (2010) argues that most literature and publications on sports in the country have never focused on the discernments and viewpoints of society and therefore, the chapter has adopted functionalism as a theory to understand the ambiguities of pandemics on sports from a societal perspective.

3 'The world's most beautiful game': Global Popularity of Football

Football has a long history (dating back 2 000 years to China, Rome and

Greece), however, the rules of association football (modern football) were developed and codified in 1863 in England in juxtaposition with the English Football Association (FA) (Potter 2010; Dietschy 2013). The rules of the game remained stable after the 1880s (with the term 'soccer' emerging during this period in England) (Potter 2010) and the professionalisation of the sport played a significant role in ensuring that play continued to evolve over time (Kitching 2015). In 1904, the representatives from the football associations of Switzerland, Sweden, Spain, Netherlands, France, Denmark and Belgium came together to form the Federation International de Football (FIFA) in order to give football an international organisation and appeal (Giulianotti *et.al.* 2019). Consequently, this resulted in the development and evolution of the sport which has continued to take place throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Kitching 2015). The growth of football into a global phenomenon was experienced in 1930 in the first ever World Cup competition played between 13 national teams in Uruguay (Taylor 2006).

Football is considered the most popular sport in the world, and its importance is evidenced in 2002 FIFA World Cup was watched by over a billion television viewers worldwide (Hoffman *et al.* 2002), while the 2014 World Cup in Brazil was watched by an estimated 3.2 billion (FIFA 2014) and the 2018 World Cup in Russia was watched by 3.572 billion (which is half of the worlds' population) (FIFA 2018). The popularity of football as a sporting code around the world has witnessed even the participation of spectatorship of different genders (particularly women) and different age groups over the years. According to Biscaia (2016:3);

> *Soccer, in particular, is perhaps one of the greatest phenomena in terms of its attraction for hundreds of thousands of occasional spectators of every age and gender, who come together in soccer stadiums around the globe every week to watch the games.*

The game attracts a lot of viewership from spectators on the field (attending match day in stadiums) and off the field (broadcasting in television and other different digital platforms). Moreover, football has experienced humongous growth over the years resulting in football clubs across the globe being transformed into lucrative brands (Şener & Karapolatgil 2015). In recent times, financial position of football clubs has been identified as a key factor that influences the performance of teams (Şener & Karapolatgil 2015).

This includes the purchasing of teams by wealthy owners accompanied with lucrative media rights (Pifer *et al.* 2017), the building of new big stadiums, technical team successes, lucrative transfer market of popular players, player efficiencies, commercialisation of products and competitive cup competitions across the globe (Şener & Karapolatgil 2015). These different development strategies to grow the sport have contributed immensely to revenue generation by football clubs through streams of sponsorship, broadcast rights and match day ticket sales (Deloitte Football Money League Report 2015).

Taking a closer look at the African continent, football is greatly influenced by a myriad of factors in the political, economic, religious, cultural and social spheres and this has also made football the continent's most common sport (Pannenborg 2010). Furthermore, the sport is characterised by millions of supporters, thousands of professional players, the establishment of football clubs, countless leagues, cup tournaments and competitions across all levels (Pannenborg 2010). Despite the growth of the sport in the continent, no event has surpassed the region's hosting of the first ever World Cup in 2010 in South Africa. The occurrence of 'Football Olympics' bolstered the potential of the continent to host mega events, catapulting South Africa as a dominant force in terms of hosting major competitions. Consequently, it is imperative to trace the historical establishment of football in South Africa up to present, augmenting its suitability as a point of destination for hosting the entire world in a football feeding frenzy of immense proportions.

4 From its Establishment in Colonial Times to Hosting Mega International Events: The History and Growth of Football in South Africa

The growth of football in South Africa was largely influenced and popularised by working class British soldiers, who were brought into the country to partake in the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 (ACCORD 2010). It is from this onset that football activities commenced amongst the different races such as the Africans, Indians, Coloureds and Whites (ACCORD 2010). According to Bolsmann (2010), provincial football organisations were formed in South Africa in the 1880s to early 1890s. Van de Merwe (2010) contends that since its introduction in South Africa, football has always been impacted upon by the prevalence of politics till the end of apartheid. This is

evidenced in the racial divisions and segregation of the sport as epitomised by what transpired in social activities in the country. An earlier history of the sport provided by Parker (1897) traces the introduction of the sport in the Natal region between 1870 and 1880 resulting in the formation of several clubs (e.g. the Natal Wasps Football Club and Pietermaritzburg County Football Club) as reiterated by Hebert (1980) and Gibson and Pickford (1906) in the area and this defined this region as the 'the home of the game in South Africa' (Hill 2010). Subsequently, this led to the growth of the game in other regions such as Johannesburg, Cape Town and eventually the entire country (ACCORD 2010).

Football was institutionalised in South Africa in 1892 with the formation of the Football Association of South Africa (FASA) dominated by whites (Alegi 2004b; van der Merwe 2010). This laid the foundation for the establishment of other football bodies by different races such as the South African Indian Football Association (1903), the South African Bantu Football Association (1933), and the South African Coloured Football Association (1936) (Ngidi 2014). The continued divisions of the sport along racial lines paved the way for the ban of South Africa from FIFA related events such as the World Cup from 1930-1962 and from 1966 to 1992 respectively (van der Merwe, 2010). Meanwhile, this did not deter the growth of the sport locally with the 1930s being characterised by the introduction of cup competitions such as the Bakers Cup (1932), the Suzman Cup (1935) and the Godfrey South African Challenge Cup (1936) that were played in the presence of supporters and crowds based in Johannesburg and Durban (Alegi 2004b). Moreover, the sport became popular amongst black Africans through the formation of teams and franchises such as Orlando Pirates (1937) and Moroka Swallows (1947) increasing attendances in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban in the late 1930s and 1940s (Alegi 2004b).

The period of the 1950s to 1960s was earmarked by politics and race (highly characterised by increasing political tensions between Africans and Whites due to the apartheid social system) that cascaded onto the football field (Bosmann 2010; Alegi 2004b). Consequently, such events in the history of the sport subsequently brought together discriminated races in the form of Indians, Coloureds and Africans to unite in solidarity against the prevalence of apartheid in sport through the formation of the South African Soccer Federation on 30 September 1951 (Ngidi 2014; Alegi 2004b). In 1959 the National Professional Football League (NFL) was founded by eleven clubs

based in Pretoria and Johannesburg (Oates 2008) to expand the popularity of the sport. However, it is during this period that apartheid grew in strength (with white football establishments and administrators in support of this system) adversely affecting South Africa's participation in international football with continuous bans from FIFA (Bolsmann 2010). International football was not in support of the racialisation of the sport in South Africa and thus in 1961, FIFA suspended (Rademeyer 2014) the predominantly white Football Association of South Africa (FASA) even though this was for a temporary period as it was reinstated in 1963 (Field 2010; Sengupta 2019). However, in a bizarre twist of events, FIFA again re-imposed the ban the following year, lasting until 1992 when the country was allowed back into international football (Field 2010) due to prevailing tranquility that would put an end to apartheid in 1994. These tumultuous times gave birth to the popularity of racial integration of professional soccer from 1961-1966 and the growth of the anti-racist South African Soccer League. Ultimately, this paved the way for the rise of football players from segregated and discriminated races into township heroes (Alegi 2004b).

In an effort to gain entry into international football, South African white administrators (during the period of the late 1960s to 1977) endeavoured to reorganise the sport along 'multi-national' (Rademeyer 2014) lines and present a picture to the international football community (especially FIFA) of an all-encompassing and non-divisive racial footballing structure (Bolsmann 2010). Unfortunately, this did not work, slowly leading to the demise of white-privileged football in South Africa (Bolsmann 2010). According to Alegi (2004b), the 1970s and 1980s witnessed significant changes taking place football wise in the world which contributed extensively to the transformation of the beautiful game. Such momentous events within the football fraternity had a huge influence on transmuting the sport in South Africa. Moreover, the broadcasting of football on televisions had a bearing on the popularity and growth of the sport igniting its commercial boom combined with substantial increments in sponsorships. This move paved way for top and professional players to start earning a living through wages (Alegi 2004b). The political landscape during this period was also undergoing transformation widely led by the African National Congress (ANC) which was calling for a negotiated end to the apartheid system and regime. In the same trajectory, hostile football associations were calling for an end to the divisions that existed within the sport. Calls were made for the formation of a

single body (Alegi 2004b) that would cater for all races while putting an end to the dominance of one race in all spheres and facets of life that transcended beyond the field of play. This ultimately resulted in the formation of the National Soccer League in 1985 (Oates 2008; Alegi 2010) that represented the ideologies and principles of non-racialism within the football community. This laid the foundation for the establishment of the South Africa Football Association in 1991 which brought together the different races: Whites, Indian, Coloureds and Blacks to form one union that represented all (Alegi 2004b; Alegi 2010; van der Merwe 2010). The organisation still exists currently and has played a pivotal role in the growth and transformation of the sport in the country.

The 1990s provided a ray of hope to a country that had long been highly characterised by apartheid which segregated and dictated social activities along racial divides and this was the norm in sporting codes such as football. The Confederation of African Football (CAF) laid the foundation for the re-entry of South Africa back into its membership in the Federation of International Football Association (FIFA) in 1992 (Alegi 2010; van der Merwe 2010). Locally, football was growing in stature. The Premier Soccer League (PSL) one of the most prestigious and important club leagues came into being in 1997, growing and developing the sport into a competitive and lucrative league in the country and outside its borders (Oates 2008). In the same decade, South Africa hosted the African Cup of Nations in 1996 and took part in its first World Cup in 1998. This was followed by the hosting of the World Cup in 2010 by South Africa, highlighting the country's potential to host global mega events of this magnitude.

4.1 Africa Joins the Rest of the World in Hosting Mega International Football Events: The Legacy of the 2010 World Cup in South Africa

The world football governing body took a significant decision on 15 May 2004 (Gründlingh 2006; Swart, Bob & Turco 2010) that would change the history of Africa's capacity (developing countries) to host mega-events through awarding South Africa the right to host the 2010 World Cup. Nelson Mandela wept tears of joy and told the audience in Zurich in 2004 that 'I feel like a young man of 15' (Alegi 2004a), expressing his happiness over the hosting of the first World Cup in Africa. All of South Africa, vented

concurrent wild merriment of the big announcement of the hosting of this competition in their country (Alegi 2004a). This was the first major global football tournament to be hosted on the shores of the African continent for the first time in its history of the sport and tournament (Swart & Bob 2012). De Aragão (2015) argues that hosting mega events have traditionally been a privilege of developed nations, but since 2008 developing countries have successfully obtained the right to host those international competitions. In essence, hosting of this competition was loaded with political, economic and symbolic significance for a democratic and globalizing South Africa (Alegi & Bolsmann 2010).

By hosting this tournament, South Africa accrued infrastructure, economic, tourism and social benefits associated with holding a mega-event of this magnitude. Extant literature exists on the benefits accrued by South Africa in hosting the 2010 World Cup socially, culturally and economically (Chukwuebuka & Chinedu 2014; Ferreira 2011; FIFA 2010; Cohen 2012; Luginaah & Otiso 2010; Du Plessis & Venter 2010). During this period jobs were created for local people especially through building of new infrastructure and the renovation of existing infrastructure. This marketed and put South Africa on the map as a tourism destination for the entire world during the hosting of the event and after. Several sectors in the arts, information technology, culture, transport and security benefited immensely from the promotion and development of the country's hosting of this mega international event (Chukwuebuka & Chinedu 2014).

4.2 Hosting Football Events on African Soil: Zooming in on South Africa's Hosting of African Football Tournaments

Apart from hosting a mega event such as the World Cup in 2010, South Africa has hosted continental tournaments such as the Africa Cup of Nations (1996) which it won after beating Tunisia 2-0 in the final. In 2013, the country hosted another leg of the Africa Cup of Nations and unfortunately it could not replicate the heroics of 1996 as it was knocked out of the tournament in the quarter finals. In the following year (2014), South Africa hosted the African Nations Championship, a tournament introduced by the Confederation of African Football (CAF) to promote local players based in Africa who were plying their trade in local clubs within the continent. This tournament again proved South Africa's reputation and prestige for hosting

tournaments of this magnitude. Moreover, the two tournaments in 2013 and 2014 once again showed the whole world the glimpse of stadiums that the country had benefited from as a result of hosting the whole world in its shores (World Cup 2010). Locally, football has grown exponentially over the years and this has boosted revenue through corporate sponsorships, broadcasting and fan base. Most importantly, football has seen a surge in a number of South African players having the opportunity to play for international, regional and local teams. However, these enormous milestones that have put South Africa on the map globally in the past years though the football community hangs in balance since the advent of covid-19. This has also expanded to the socio-economic sphere which looks bleak due to the absence of football in this difficult time.

5 Synopsis on Methodology

During the writing of this chapter, authors competed with a rapid twist and turn of events due to different and ever-changing adoption strategies to mitigate the impact ofCOVID-19 on football and the entire sporting world. Consequently, the significant changes that have occurred and continue to take place due to the pandemic, have had a bearing on sports mainly on football, resulting in the quest to constantly update information on football activities and events. In keeping up with the latest trends and new information, the study relied on desktop research and analysis using secondary data through internet searching for news and articles from reliable websites in the form of newspapers, blogs, different news network reports, government reports from the Ministry of Sport, Arts and Culture, reports and records from the Premier Soccer League (PSL) and South African Football Association (SAFA) reports and any other information deemed relevant. Moreover, the chapter also adopted an historical approach in the collection and analysis of past and present literature on football in South Africa from a societal perspective. The COVID-19 pandemic is currently a topic with a vast influx of information and therefore, reliable sources were used in gathering information for the writing up of this chapter.

6 Impact of Covid-19 on the Socio-economic Sphere of South African Society: A Football Perspective

Sport in South Africa is one of the most popular activities from an involve-

ment and consumer standpoint (Baller 2015; Department of Sport and Recreation 2014). In particular, football plays a combined social and commercial role in boosting the local production and providing satisfactory experiences for its consumers (that is the millions of football supporters across the entire nation) (Stander & Van Zyl 2016). The popularity of this sport has paved way for its lucrative benefits for the supporters, football players and football clubs over the years. This has buttressed the status of South Africa as a 'football loving country' locally, regionally and internationally. However, the outbreak of COVID-19 is threatening the gains made so far from the growth of this sport in the country. Soon after the government declared COVID-19 a national disaster, the South African Football Association (SAFA) followed suit by suspending all football related activities in the country (Makhaya 2020) to protect the health of all football loving fans, players, staff in football clubs (coaches and technical staff), journalists, sponsors, workers in football community activities and initiatives and other sectors that are involved in the football fraternity. Furthermore, the absence of football for five months due to the pandemic imposed a humungous crisis on this sport in a scale never seen before (Said 2020) with a long lasting impact in the foreseeable future. The pandemic has threatened and affected a majority of the people's livelihoods (Ray 2020) and this has presented a multiplicity of challenges for football as a sporting code (Thebus 2020). The following section presents the socio-economic challenges to South African Society imposed by COVID-19 from a football perspective taking into cognisance the different actors in the sport such as supporters, communities, players, football clubs, match officials, broadcasters, journalists and media and Premier Soccer League (PSL) among others.

6.1 Job Losses

The biggest consequence of COVID-19 has been its negative impact on job losses across all sports. With respect to football, one of the impacted are the football match officials (referees and other officials in particular) who are not permanent employees within the footballing industry (Makhaya 2020). Consequently, failure of football matches unfolding means that match officials are not able to earn a living and their livelihoods are under siege, undermining their efforts to feed their families and pay bills through income derived from football (Makhaya 2020). Apart from match officials, the livelihoods of other indirect beneficiaries such as caterers, grounds staff,

media, vendors, security personnel and other industries affiliated to the footballing industry have been greatly affected as well by this turmoil imposed by COVID-19 (Ray 2020). Lack of football activities means a majority of these groups have lost substantial finances usually accrued from match day activities. Zooming in on the media, freelance journalists working on a part-time basis have also been directly affected by the halting of football activities. This has resulted in retrenchments, no work and salary cuts for media personnel within the national broadcaster, South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) with some being slapped with non-renewal of contracts by their employees (Gleeson 2020). Meanwhile, several radio stations have also axed some of its reporters especially in the sports category (Gleeson 2020). The massive jobs losses and income in the footballing industry is reflective of the overall socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on South African Society.

6.2 Dwindling Social Cohesion

The apartheid era in South Africa was vastly characterised by racial divisions that aggravated tensions even in sporting codes such as football (as highlighted in section 3 of the chapter which focused on the history and growth of football in the South African context). Therefore, in the post-apartheid era, sport has been viewed as an opportunity for promoting unity, peace, forgiveness and addressing the ills of the past to bring about positive social change across the divides of geography, gender, class and race (Engh and Potgieter 2015). Sport over time has been used as a catalyst to stimulate reconciliation, nation building and above all social cohesion (Shongwe 2012). Football fans[2] across the races have merged together to create a bond highly influenced by the support and love for their teams and this is the founding principle that informs the idea of a united nation and collective (Shongwe 2012). Moreover, football has been used as a networking tool amongst supporters ranging from the working class to youths in urban areas (Luginaah and Otiso 2010). Unfortunately, the outbreak of this pandemic has shattered the existing networks established between different groups of people in the football fraternity. It is from such events that the characteristics of social cohesion emerged, witnessing the power of sport as a unifying factor. Social football usually played by football fanatics in the form of small children,

[2] The word fans and supporters will be used interchangeably in the chapter.

youth and adults have diminished due to the pandemic. It is from such events that different groups of people were able to discuss business, network, relax and create an avenue for social exchange (Luginaah & Otiso 2010). The unavailability of competitive matches in stadiums coupled with the lockdown regulations have dealt a heavy blow to football from a social perspective. Moreover, this has seen other lower leagues in Amateur football in South Africa halted with a staggering loss of R1 billion (Arends 2020). This has had a detrimental economic and social impact and furthermore, it has destroyed the principle of social cohesion that unites people in sporting events like professional and amateur football despite their indifferences.

6.3 Entertainment Deprivation

The popularity and growth of football in South Africa has also acted as a source of entertainment for passionate fans across the country. However, in recent times fans were subjected to a football blackout (Dube 2020) for a period of five months due to the outbreak ofCOVID-19. This resulted in the withdrawal of football being screened on television and the non-attendance of spectators at football matches during match day. For the first time ever since the dawn of democracy in 1994, fans were subjected to football shutdown. A large proportion of fans in football are vividly viewed as the consumers of the beautiful game although the exact number is not known (both on screen and off screen in stadium attendances) (Adonis 2011; Onwumechili and Akindes 2014). As a result, South African society is now enduring football deprivation as a source of entertainment. This has dealt a heavy blow on avid fans across the country who enjoy the entertainment provided by this great game with societal, financial, and possible mental health consequences. Even though football has returned after a lengthy absence, fans are still not permitted to go to stadiums with live matches being played behind closed doors. Instead they are now being broadcasted for the first time in empty stadiums due to the pandemic. The entertainment side of the sport through interaction of fans during matches coupled with *vuvuzela* loud noises from cheering supporters is still a far-fetched reality in the present and in the foreseeable future. Consequently, future studies should be done to examine the mental health challenges imposed on supporters (entertainment consumers) and football players (entertainers) due to the suspension of football related activities due to theCOVID-19 crisis.

6.4 Depreciation in Revenue Generation

Football over the years has been steadily built into a lucrative business and hence its identification as an industry. In the context of South Africa, commercialisation of football through profitable sponsorship deals has grown its popularity. Large corporations such as Nedbank, MTN, Vodacom and Absa amid others (Adonis 2011; Onwumechili and Akindes 2014) have provided the platform for the glorification of football as a viable business sector. This has paved way for football clubs to generate revenue and unfortunately all of this has been ceased due to the outbreak of the pandemic. This has brought some football clubs on the brink of economic collapse and a calling for the cutting of salaries to keep the football clubs afloat. In support of this notion, recent developments in the football fraternity have seen long standing historic clubs such as the 99-year-old Bidvest Wits being sold. Reasons cited are that the owners were greatly affected by the economic recession taking place in the country due the pandemic and other economic causes, paving the way for a thorough reconsideration of their interest and appetite for the sport (Said 2020). The everyday operations and the payments of players and staff is the biggest economic fallout for these clubs during this difficult time. For instance, most of the football players' contracts expire in June, an indication that their right to social security hangs in the balance. As a result, the business end of football for the both the clubs and the players (revenue generation) is threatening the survival and future of football in South Africa. The situation has been intensified by a lack of live matches in stadiums where some form of revenue mostly for the PSL is generated in gate entrances through the sale of match day tickets. Football clubs such as Amazulu declared at the end of April that they were no longer able to pay full salaries to their players and staff despite having sponsors such as Spar and the PSL grant of 2 million (Said 2020). This is largely due to the slump in business experienced by the owners who rely on other streams of income from their businesses (Said 2020). Another conundrum confronting the football fraternity in general is the fate of fans who had already bought season tickets to watch their favourite teams. Whereas, the large corporation who are the major sponsors have also felt the pinch as a result of the economic stagnation imposed by COVID-19. Traditionally, these corporations use these sponsorship deals to market their business and boost their clientele coupled with their corporate social responsibility mandate.

Even though football has resumed in South Africa, the damages in terms of huge revenue losses have already been experienced.

6.5 Loss in Broadcasting Revenue

In the context of South African football, Supersport is the only contributor to the revenue mainstream in relation to broadcasting (Mtshazo 2020). The PSL signed a big and lucrative broadcasting deal with Supersport in 2007 worth 1.6 billion Rands (Long 2020), giving leeway for the broadcaster to secure the PSL international sports broadcasting rights (KickOff 2011). Even though Supersport promised to continue paying the PSL revenue from broadcasting, there is still another difficult dimension for broadcasters in different media houses whose fate is hanging in the balance (Makhaya 2020). Business has slumped due to the impact of the pandemic on broadcasting, subsequently resulting in less audiences in terms of listenership, readership and viewership (Makhaya 2020). Gumede (2020) asserts that if the football season is not completed, the PSL is at the risk of losing R200 million because its largest share of revenue (approximately 60%) comes from broadcasting rights. Seemingly, a small percentage of its revenue is generated from live match tickets (Gumede 2020). Additionally, the current economic woes experienced in the country due to the pandemic have added another dimension (the question of affordability) that can result in the potential cancellation of subscriptions by viewers for the Supersport Channel as a consequence of job losses for millions of people in the country across different sectors of the economy (Said 2020). Since the advent of the pandemic, substantial financial losses related to broadcasting revenue generation have been experienced, derailing the financial status of both the PSL and football clubs and this led to job losses and non-renewal of contracts.

6.6 Collapse and Loss of Sponsorship Deals

The issue of sponsorship has been identified in the on-going discussion but not at a broader scale. This section provides a detailed discussion. The PSL has been identified as the seventh biggest earner amongst football leagues in the world due to the enormous revenue generated from sponsorship deals (Long 2020). Sponsors in South African football have over the years greatly assisted with the development and growth of the sport from grassroot level

(scouting of young talent) up to the pinnacle (professional level) of the sport. However, in recent times not only have the sponsorship deals been frozen, some are on the brink of collapse due to the economic turmoil caused by the outbreak of the pandemic. So far, the biggest sponsorship deal to collapse is the 'pulling out' of Absa from its 16-year relationship with the Premier Soccer League (PSL) since 2004 in the Absa cup and since 2007 in the Absa premier league (Mbewa 2020 and Sibembe 2020). Even though Absa had signed a new deal with the PSL, it cited financial constraints due to the unconducive economic climate taking place in the country as part of the reasons for 'pulling out' of backing the PSL financially (Sibembe 2020). The economic dividends enjoyed by the PSL over its partnership with Absa has come to an end leaving it during these trying and tumultuous times with no sponsor. Over the years, Absa has managed to assist the PSL to growth the South African league into a very competitive and marketable franchise in the African continent and on the global stage (Mbewa 2020). The prevailing circumstances have left the league without a sponsor, a heavy blow to football supporters, footballers and football clubs. The passion, competetiveness and financial reward of the league has already been diminished by the pulling out of Absa. The PSL has to go back to the drawing board to find a new sponsor while contending with the financial fallout imposed by COVID-19.

6.7 Suspension of Charitable and Community Activities

Apart from providing entertainment for supporters across the globe, football is also viewed as a humanitarian and development tool (Manzo 2011). Several Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have over the years implemented a number of projects in relation to football as a development tool through a combination of sporting activities (UNODC 2018; Giampiccoli and Nauright 2019) that fosters social change and assists vulnerable and marginalised groups. One such initiative in the context of South Africa has been the Grassroots Soccer initiative that has been working with youths in the country. Soccer as a sport has in the process been used as a tool to develop and teach the youths about behavioural change on health-related issues such as HIV/AIDS, violence, drug abuse, crime and life skills (Jack 2018; UNODC 2018; Wigglesworth 2020). Such prudent football driven development initiatives that are positively impacting the lives of youth have been put

on halt due to the pandemic resulting in high rates of violence and crime since lockdown. Consequently, this has derailed the progress made in changing the lives of youth who are deeply engulfed in poverty and unemployment. This success of these community driven initiatives is under threat due to the continued spread of the disease ultimately resulting in persisting implementtation of lockdown regulations.

Additionally, several PSL clubs have over the years been heavily engaged in community charitable programs through corporate social responsibility initiatives to support and develop communities. They have reached out to vulnerable and marginalised groups such as children, women and the less fortunate. Moreover, sponsors in conjunction with clubs have played a crucial role in making some of these development initiatives a reality and dream come true for the impoverished and disadvantaged in society. This assistance has extended to the playing field where some PSL teams conduct tournaments to promote social cohesion in a consolidated effort to grow the sport amongst the youths. All these initiatives by NGOs and the PSL in collaboration with sponsors which brings positive change, have been halted in the midst of this pandemic negatively impacting socially-driven change programs.

7 Conclusion

As iterated in the introductory remarks, the main aim of the chapter is to make a contribution to the under-researched phenomena of pandemics, sports and their impact on societies. In doing so, the chapter has reflected on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on South African society from a football perspective. It has been established that sport has played a pivotal role in promoting social cohesion in a country with a long history of racial subjugation and divisions stimulated and entrenched by the apartheid system. The chapter has argued that the outbreak of Covid-19 has had a negative impact on the wider society in South Africa in terms of enjoying the benefits of football through providing a source of livelihood, entertainment, social cohesion and associated benefits accrued from charitable and community events through football development initiatives by different actors. Moreover, the impact of this crisis has cascaded over to the entire football fraternity through the loss of jobs, sponsorship, revenue and broadcasting rights.

Further, the chapter holds the view that sport in South Africa tran-

scends beyond the field of play. It provides an avenue for positive development in vulnerable and marginalised communities. It is a beacon of hope for a better future amongst the youth. An end to football activities through this crisis has the potential to destroy the progress that has been made thus far in promoting positivity in society from a socio-economic perspective. Therefore, the chapter further argues that a halt in football activities has catastrophic socio-economic consequences for the entire football community in South Africa. The delay in resuming football activities has diminished and possibly rescinded the growth and popularity of the sport amongst supporters, football players, football clubs, sponsors, media fraternity and broadcasters.

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The Experiences of Selected Professional Women Rugby and Soccer Players, and Sport Administrators during COVID-19

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Abstract

Professional rugby and soccer for women in South Africa is still in the early stages of development. Therefore, these codes of sport for women are vulnerable to external influences such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This study focuses on the experiences that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on selected professional women's rugby and soccer players and sport administrators. The theoretical approach that is adopted by this study is change theory whose central tenets are based on the work of Kurt Lewin (1947), considered the founding father of change management, and primarily focuses on approaching change management through the concepts of *unfreeze, change, refreeze.* The chapter also uses the work of Batras, Duff and Smith (2014) who offer a complementary theoretical perspective to Lewin and Rogers' (2003) concept of organisational change. Data for the study was collected from players and administrators. The sample consisted of female players (n=6)[1] and two administrators (n=2) one for each sporting code. The total sample consisted of eight respondents. The data collection tools used were open-ended questionnaires (due to social distancing measures) which were separately designed for each category of respondents and a Twitter poll on whether COVID-19 had a negative impact on women's sport. The Twitter poll was

[1] Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, only six questionnaires for players were administered for the two sporting codes.

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quantitatively analysed. The data from the open-ended questionnaires was qualitatively analysed using thematic analysis and linked to change theory in terms of the experiences of the participants in the face of a pandemic which has changed their normal way of playing and administering the different codes of sport. The findings of the study illuminate the financial impact on players who have contracts; the multiple psychological effect on players and the unpreparedness of administrators of women's rugby and soccer to handle the uncertainties related to a pandemic of this nature. The study recommends the need for change and innovation for professional players and administrators in their approaches to these two codes of sports during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the need for contingency planning measures drawing from the theoretical strands of change theory thinking: *unfreeze, change, refreeze.*

Keywords: COVID-19; women's soccer; women's rugby, change theory

1 Introduction

COVID-19 has been described as the 'latest threat to global health' (Fauci, Lane & Redfield 2020). The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2020) defines COVID-19 as a severe acute respiratory syndrome which is highly infectious through human (and animal) interaction. Parnell *et al.* (2020:1) cite the global reach of the virus, stating that 'the pandemic has no regard for geography'. Whilst COVID-19 is a threat to global health, it has had unprecedented effects on every facet of society. Sport has been severely disrupted at all levels. 'The significant impact of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has extended to sport with the cessation of nearly all professional and non-professional events globally' (Ramagole, Van Rensberg, Pillay, Viviers, Zondi & Patricios 2020:1). This sudden closure of the sporting world has come as a shock to soccer and rugby players, sports organisations, sports journalists and other stakeholders in sporting circles (Mann, Clift, Boykoff & Bekker 2020; Toresdahl & Asif 2020). This has led to sports-related organisations scrambling to find solutions to the problems encountered with the cessation of sporting activities. Parnell, Widdop, Bond & Wilson (2020:1) indicate that a 'learning lesson from this crisis, must ensure sport managers and practitioners are better prepared in sport and society for similar events in the future'.

Sport in South Africa, like the rest of the world, has suffered from the cessation in matches and tournaments. This has had a ripple effect on the sporting fraternity, affecting soccer and rugby players and administrators alike. 'South Africans participating in many codes of amateur and elite sport had scheduled events cancelled or postponed and their ability to train was limited' (Ramagole *et al.* 2020:1). Lockdown restrictions applied to all soccer and rugby players, including female players.

The two codes of sport that this chapter examines are women's rugby and soccer. The rationale for choosing women soccer and rugby players is due to the professionalization of these two codes of sport in South Africa. Although these two codes of sport are played by both men and women, it was interesting to focus on women since many female players have not as yet secured contracts and this places them in a uniquely vulnerable situation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The scope of the study includes female soccer and rugby players from different clubs. Their participation in the study is in the context of their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic as professional players of that particular code of sport. Like most codes of sport (with the exception of netball) in which females participate in South Africa, there is a wide inequality gap between males and females (Ogunniyi 2015). A good example are the respondents in this study who were professional female players at national level in both soccer and rugby but they were not in possession of contracts. Other authors (Clarkson, Culvin, Pope & Parry 2020; Corsini, Biscotti, Eirale & Volpi 2020) have reported on the impact of COVID-19 on female professional players and the likelihood that the impact will be long-lasting given the fragile nature of the players' financial well-being. These findings imply that the COVID-19 pandemic will be around for some time to come and that female soccer and rugby players and sports organisations will need to change and adapt to this 'new normal'. The study therefore addressed the following main research question: what are the experiences of selected professional women rugby and soccer players and sport administrators during COVID-19?

2 Change Theory

Kurt Lewin (1947) is regarded by many as the founder or father of Change Theory (Cummings, Bridgman & Brown 2016). His original theory has been adapted over the years by other change theorists. In fact, Cummings *et al.* (2016:33) put forward the argument that 'change as three steps' model,

commonly referred to as CATS, was never really developed by Lewin, 'it took form after his death'. This model which researchers attribute to Lewin examines the concept of change taking place in the following manner: unfreeze → change → refreeze; as Schein (2010:199) asserts 'The fundamental assumptions underlying *any* change in a human system are derived originally from Kurt Lewin (1947)'. In the development of theories as complex as Change Theory, there have been criticisms over the years of Lewin's original work, which has led to later theorists building on his initial concepts. For example, Cummings *et al*. (2016) assert that Lewin did not write the word 'refreezing' anywhere in his work; he used the word 'freezing'. The word 'refreezing' can be traced back to 1950 in a conference paper that one of his students produced (Cummings *et al*. 2016). Another criticism by Kanter, Stein & Jick (1992:10) links the model to being 'wildly inappropriate' which is a 'quaintly linear and static conception'. Others like Child (2005) point out that the world of today is very complex and therefore the concept of 'refreezing' is to too rigid. However, Lewin's Change Theory did form the basis for other later theorists to build on his original conception of this theory.

Batras, Duff and Smith (2014) present some of the key perspectives from various change theorists which have some bearing on the experiences of soccer and rugby players and sport administrators during this time of change that COVID-19 has brought about. Batras *et al.* (2014:234) sum up Lewin's (1947) contribution to change as follows:

> The status quo is the product of a number of forces in the social environment that govern individual's behaviour at a given point in time. As such casual relations can be analysed. Change initiatives need to destabilize the status quo, implement the alternative and restabilize the environment. The implementation process involves research and performs a learning function.

This view, if applied to the experiences of soccer and rugby players and sport administrators during COVID-19, may not necessarily represent the complexities of the changes taking place. This group experienced numerous destabilising changes brought about by COVID-19. The implication is that they implement the alternative in order to re-stabilize the environment. In this context the alternative is still in the process of being developed. Later change theorists like Rogers (2003) added aspects of organisational change and its

relationship to individuals in terms of innovation; 'an organization's propensity for innovation relates to structural factors within the organization, characteristics of individuals and external factors in the environment' (Batras *et al.* 2014:234). This concept of change resonates well with an external factor in the environment like a health pandemic (COVID-19). Another concept in organisational change introduced by Schein (2010) is the culture of groups and an organisation. Batras *et al.* (2014: 234) sum up Schein's (2010) contribution as follows: 'Culture can be observed and studied through the behaviour of groups and their beliefs, values and assumptions. The culture of a group determines its actions'. The particular view of change that involves the culture of individuals and organisations also has relevance to this study in that people involved in sport are influenced by their personal culture and that of the organisations where they work. The changes required as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic are both immediate and long-term. This implies that there needs to be planning and coping strategies in place which Sniehotta, Schwarzer, Scholz and Schuz (2005:567) refer to as 'action planning and coping planning' for long-term lifestyle change.

3 COVID-19 and Sport

COVID-19 has changed the way the world exists in 2020, with most countries being either in some form of lockdown or restricted movement. 'South Africa, like other countries around the world, has used a lockdown strategy to address the initial phases of the COVID-19 epidemic' (Patricios, Saggers, Van Zuydam & Gelbart 2020:1). The effect of COVID-19 on sport and in particular on female soccer and rugby only began taking effect when the hard lockdown came into effect in March 2020. This meant that literature in this area is only emerging now. This emerging literature is not confined to specific codes of sport. What follows here is a selection of empirical studies that have been conducted; obviously these are limited as they do not expressly cover professional female soccer and rugby.

In many countries, 'sporting calendars, competitions, even practices are suspended' (Begović 2020:1). International sport has also been affected, in particular the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and UEFA Euros competition have been postponed to 2021 (Begović 2020; Gallego, Nishiura, Sah & Rodriguez-Morales 2020; Mann *et al.* 2020; Toresdahl & Asif 2020). The danger of fans spreading a contagious virus is very real as given in the example of the soccer

match between Atalanta (from Italy) and Valencia (from Spain) in February 2020; 'experts assume that the 45 792 fans attending this UEFA Champions League exchanged the virus and contributed to the massive outbreak of the virus in Italy and Spain' (Gilat & Cole 2020:175).

Sporting events and leagues involve not only professional soccer and rugby players; sporting organisations and administrators are equally affected by cancellations caused by COVID-19. It is argued that 'The current COVID-19 crisis spotlights the need to create and codify a rigorous system of checks and balances that ensures greater accountability on the part of mega-event organisers, while ensuring that the athlete's voice is heard' (Mann *et al*. 2020). Various considerations have been touted for professional soccer and rugby players who have to perform in a COVID-19 environment. Toresdahl and Asif (2020) identify some of these considerations as the prevention of COVID-19 in soccer and rugby players, testing players with suspected COVID-19 and the management of soccer and rugby players with COVID-19. Interestingly, mental health support is one of the ways they suggest to manage professional athletes such as soccer and rugby players:

> Suspending seasons and cancelling competitions can cause significant grief, stress, anxiety, frustration, and sadness for an athlete. The psychological impact of COVID-19 on a competitive athlete is potentiated by the removal of his or her social support network and normal training routine, which for some is a critical component of managing depression or anxiety. Sports medicine providers should anticipate the need for additional mental health support for athletes (Toresdahl & Asif 2020:223).

Player well-being, as described by Clarkson *et al.* (2020), is thus seen as a critical factor during the COVID-19 pandemic. FIFPro (2020) reports that the number of footballers reporting symptoms of depression has doubled since the sport shut down.

Evidence about the long-term impact of the virus on sport is only now emerging (Evans, Blackwell, Dolan, Fahlén, Hoekman, Lenneis, McNarry, Smith & Wilcock 2020). Evans *et al.* (2020) advocate an agenda for research into the sociology of sport which should include questions like: What role will sport, exercise and physical activity play in the future? Will the organisational structure of sport change in response to the pandemic? Will the inequalities

highlighted by the pandemic begin to be addressed? How will the lives of athletes and other participants in sport change? Will the virus result in the further exclusion or stigmatisation of 'risky' and marginalised groups? These questions have a bearing on this study as female professional soccer and rugby players and sport administrators are the very people these questions address.

3.1 Impact of COVID-19 on Sport in South Africa

Sport in South Africa and many other countries have been equally impacted by the virus as both professional and non-professional sport came to a halt (Hughes, Saw, Perera, Mooney, Wallett, Cooke, Coatsworth & Broderick 2020; Ramagole *et al.* 2020). The South African government has been responding to the COVID-19 disease with strict precautions, which has had a significant impact on society, businesses and citizens (Begović 2020; Ramagole *et al.* 2020). According to Ramagole *et al.* (2020:1), 'the participation of South African athletes in many codes of amateur and elite sport in scheduled events was cancelled or postponed, and their ability to train was limited'. South Africa was placed under 'hard' level 5 lockdown for five weeks; however, as the lockdown regulations eased in the weeks from May to June 2020, the resumption of sport was contemplated by several South African associations (Ramagole *et al.* 2020). Initially, strict times were put in place for exercise (6am-9am); this was later changed to being able to exercise at any time of the day as long as it was not in a group (Janse van Rensburg, Pillay, Hendricks & Blanco 2020). These regulations had a significant impact on athletes as fitness levels dipped and their mental health worsened due to the 'forced training restriction' (Ramagole *et al.* 2020:2). The regulations included the government regulation concerning the wearing of masks in public places. For athletes, like soccer and rugby players, who exercise at high intensity, Janse van Rensburg *et al.* (2020) caution that face masks can pose possible medical risks. Regulations have eased with training sessions being held under strict conditions at the end of 2020 (September - December), however there has been no confirmation when women's soccer and rugby matches will resume in 2021.

3.2 Impact of COVID-19 and Female Rugby and Soccer

For many of the female soccer and rugby players in South Africa, not playing matches equalled not receiving an income, which added a financial strain on

these players and their families. An example of this is the recent news that the Premier Soccer League (PSL) was set to continue matches behind closed doors while the South African Football Association (SAFA) National Women's League was cancelled, with a champion being named. In England, where professional or competitive women's soccer (also referred to as football) is quite well established, there are concerns being raised about the status of women's soccer (Clarkson *et al.* 2020:2):

> The financial consequences of postponed games and reductions in broadcasting revenue will be significant in men's football; however, there are questions being raised around the extent to which this will be passed on to elite women's clubs, many of which are economically fragile.

They (Clarkson *et al.* 2020) go on to examine other aspects of women's football that will be impacted, such as: organizational and economic repercussions, player contracts, migration and investment, and player well-being. As the resumption of sport behind closed doors approaches, mass gatherings will still be prohibited (Parnell *et al.* 2020). The intention of prohibiting spectators from watching live sport is to restrict the spread of COVID-19 (Gilat & Cole 2020). Contact training sessions in small groups have been allowed for athletes but clubs must follow stringent precautions and set hygiene rules (Janse van Rensburg et al. 2020; Ramagole et al. 2020). Mohr, *et al*. (2020) and Parnell *et al.* (2020:5) argue that the COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed the way the sport industry operates, further stating that at elite or recreational level, the rethinking and role of sport will ultimately 'continue to play an important role in society in the future'.

4 Research Methodology

4.1 Sample

A population is regarded as a group of class subjects, variables, concepts, or phenomena that may be sampled for a study (Oliver 2004). While in some cases research is achieved through the investigation of the entire group, this study used a sample population which is a result of the selection of a sub-section representative of the population (Oliver 2004:27). Purposive sampling, which is a non-probability sampling method, was used in this study. This

sampling method is used in special situations where the sampling is done with a specific purpose in mind (Maree & Pietersen 2007:178). In this case, the purposive sampling technique was used to identify key informants who are involved in South African women's rugby and soccer. These include soccer and rugby players and sport administrators. The sample consisted of players (n=6) and one administrator from each of the two selected sporting codes (soccer and rugby) (n=2). The total sample for this study consisted of (n=8) entities comprising eight participants. Qualitative research lends itself to smaller sample sizes, depending on the data collection method being employed (Neuman 2011). For example, it is common practice that focus groups comprise 6-12 participants (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell 2005). Case studies can have even smaller samples, especially when an individual or institution is being studied in depth (Mohajan 2019). In the case of this study, eight participants contributed to the study, from the three different categories of sport stakeholders. For the Twitter poll, snowball sampling was used (Parker, Scott & Geddes 2019), through sharing and retweets.

4.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The main data collection tool used was open-ended questionnaires (Mohajan 2019) which were separately designed for each category of respondents. A Twitter poll was also used to reach a wider audience (Aspers & Corte 2019). During COVID-19, the data collection tools selected had to be in line with the regulations related to no personal contact with participants. The data was collected using online methods and instruments. There was no physical contact with any of the participants. The open-ended questionnaires with the consent forms were emailed to participants and they were also returned via email. The Twitter poll was conducted online and targeted the opinions of women involved in sport. Social media is an avenue that has been successfully used during the COVID-19 pandemic to ascertain the views of female players.

'Analysis is the interplay between researchers and data' (Corbin & Strauss 2015:13). In the case of this research, qualitative thematic analysis (Eatough & Smith 2017) was adopted to categorise the responses from the selected questionnaires into different thematic areas in order to examine the experiences of COVID-19 on players and administrators in women's rugby and soccer in South Africa. In using qualitative thematic analysis, the open-ended questionnaires were transcribed and common thematic threads were

identified. This is a method used for the systematic search of themes within qualitative data (Eatough & Smith 2017). According to Williams and Moser (2019:45) 'coding methods employ processes that reveal themes embedded in the data, in turn suggesting thematic directionality toward categorizing data through which meaning can be negotiated, codified, and presented', which in this case, related to the financial impact and psychological effects, among others. The Twitter poll was used to obtain a glimpse into how COVID-19 has impacted women's sport. This was analysed quantitatively based on the percentage for the two questions asked.

5 Findings and Discussion

The findings of the study are discussed here, respondents of each category are represented as Res. Res refers to respondents with the corresponding participant's number to uphold anonymity and confidentially (Res 1 to Res 8). Res 1 to Res 6 are the soccer and rugby players; and Res 7 and 8 refer to the administrators. The broad findings of the study were grouped into themes for each category of participants as follows: players - financial impact on players who have contracts; psychological effects on players (mental well-being, self-esteem, fear/ uncertainty of future); administrators - unpreparedness to handle the uncertainties related to a pandemic of this nature.

5.1 Professional Soccer and Rugby Players

The data revealed two major thematic areas in relation to the impact that COVID-19 had on professional soccer and rugby female players: the financial impact on players and the psychological effects on players. These are now discussed. The data from the Twitter poll highlighted the negative impact of COVID-19 on women's sport and was aimed at women in sport. The Twitter poll conducted revealed that respondents overwhelmingly supported the statement that women's sport was negatively impacted by COVID-19. The statement read: 'Has COVID-19 had an impact women's sport'. This was a snapshot poll where a question is asked and the response is either Yes or No. Based on the responses, a quantitative figure was generated which contributed to the data on the impact of COVID-19. The result of the Twitter poll was as follows: 91% indicated 'negative impact' and 9% indicated 'no impact'. The poll received a total of 65 votes, 18 retweets and 7 likes.

5.1.1 Financial Impact on Players

There was evidence of a financial strain on female rugby and soccer players, with little or no game time for a period of four months. Res 4 stated: '*No national team [Banyana Banyana] games means no income*'. The income received of playing matches helped sustain the players, as Res 1 explained: '*As female rugby players, we are still developing … this means that if we don't play then we don't get an income*'. This income dried up due to the pandemic and South Africa being under lockdown (Parnell *et al.* 2020). Only some female soccer and rugby players are afforded the opportunity to sign contracts with their federations/associations, most do not have contracts unlike their male counterparts (Clarkson *et al.* 2020). The lack of available funds in federations such as the South African Football Association (SAFA) and the South African Rugby Union (SARU) for female rugby and soccer players have meant that these players have had to turn to the South African government for assistance in order to apply for social grants (Hene, Bassett & Andrews 2011).

Another financial impact is the loss of jobs by family members during the pandemic, which puts further pressure on players as they become the sole breadwinners in their households. Res 3 explained: '*The financial impact is huge because my mother lost her job, we now depend on one source of income and it's hard to adjust to that especially because I am no longer playing soccer and we are a big family*'. The dynamics of culture and how change is perceived in the situation cannot be ignored (Schein 2010). It is hard to adjust, especially in an environment where extended families are dependent on the player's income. Female-headed households where the only source of income is from games played, suffer. Female players have the burden of providing for the entire family when a disaster such as COVID-19 strikes. The main findings related to the financial impact of COVID-19 may be summarised as follows: selected female soccer and rugby players had contracts, the rest could not secure earnings because they are paid according to the matches played; the female players who participated were often the breadwinners or sole income earners for their families and they had financial obligations to their extended family as well; financial support from other avenues such as the government for players, was in the form of a once-off payment which was inadequate.

5.1.2 Psychological Effects on Players

The psychological effects of COVID-19 are far reaching and only becoming

evident as the pandemic unfolds worldwide (Clarkson *et al.* 2020; Toresdahl & Asif 2020). For players, the psychological effects included their mental well-being, self-esteem, fear/uncertainty of the future and assistance from respective federations. These are discussed in the sections below:

Mental Well-being

The mental well-being of female rugby and soccer players during this pandemic has severely been tested (Clarkson *et al.* 2020; Ramagole *et al.* 2020; Toresdahl & Asif 2020). Mental strength and resilience is one of the traits that female soccer and rugby players rely on to compete at a professional level. The sporting field is a place of escape for most soccer and rugby players and not being able to participate in any sporting activities has impacted their mental well-being (Ramagole *et al.* 2020). Res 2 indicated that '*I find the rugby field as an environment where I can be able to express my feelings and be able to talk about my challenges and problems, it is very hard now as I feel like the environment I am in, home, is not the same as being on the field*'. Day to day living through a pandemic can be a shock to the mental well-being of players and this also brings about a lack of motivation to train for some. However, other players did try to remain positive and keep focused on their return to their sport, like Res 6 who stated: '*This is a test of our character and how disciplined we are as athletes, working behind closed doors when no one sees us'.*

Another issue that both female rugby and soccer players cited was the rise of gender-based violence (GBV) in the country during lockdown and this also instilled fear in the soccer and rugby players for their own safety and that of others (Engh, 2010). Some of the comments from the players in this regard included: '*I live in a community where I see gender-based violence on a daily basis – it has increased significantly during the lockdown*' (Res 3); '*My partner lost his job during the lockdown and he became a different man, moody, argumentative, blaming me for minor issues*' (Res 5); '*My sister was assaulted by her partner during the lockdown; it was so bad and the entire family became involved and traumatised*' (Res 6). These experiences of the female soccer and rugby players indicate that the level and extent of GBV escalated during the lockdown impacting on the players' mental well-being. Women soccer and rugby players have clearly been affected emotionally with one player explaining the extent of her trauma, '*Emotionally the pandemic has been draining, I'm always worried when going out. I'm scared as I was never ready*

for something like this. The first few weeks of COVID-19 were difficult for me as I couldn't cope and couldn't see how we were going to get pass this' (Res 5). This statement emphasizes elements of emotional well-being such as fear and anxiety and the effect it has on players. Another factor is the player's ability to cope with COVID-19, not only the virus but with related factors like fear for what the future holds. Players' comments on the negative effects of COVID-19 on their mental well-being is an indication that the virus has had an impact on both the physiological and psychological well-being of female soccer and rugby players. Clearly, the effects of COVID-19 on the mental well-being of the female soccer and rugby players is still unfolding as the pandemic tightens its grip worldwide.

Self-esteem

It has been found that the level of self-esteem of the female rugby and soccer players have been low due to the lack of fitness training (Ramagole *et al.* 2020). The players rely on sport scientists to help them keep fit however during the pandemic, no direct contact has been unfolding as there are no training sessions with fellow teammates. Res 3 discussed the impact on fitness and weight and inevitably on self-image, '*There has been an impact on my fitness, training alone is not easy because sometimes you don't even know if you are doing the right thing and as a female we struggle with weight gain and this affects my self-image*'. Other aspects of self-esteem experienced by female players include feelings of inadequacy, a loss of self-respect, despair, loss of pride and shame. The ability to provide for one's loved ones gives the players a sense of pride and the inability to do this creates a sense of shame. This was reflected in the data provided by the respondents: '*As a female breadwinner, I provide income for my family and no play equals no money and I feel inadequate like I am of no value to them*' (Res 1); '*I feel so empty and desperate – like a useless female who people shame – she is no good, she is useless*' (Res 4).

It is reported that guidance and direction is often lost when training programmes are sent out and players are unable to follow them with precision (Mohr *et al.* 2020). In the current study, female soccer and rugby players indicated that their responsibilities made it difficult for them to follow training programmes. For example, the programme required certain types of training at certain times and this could not be followed (Res 2 – '*I had to be with my baby and could not run; as a result, I felt like I was failing my baby and being a*

failure as woman – added to that I was letting down my team by not training as hard as I needed to'). This uncertainty in the resumption of soccer and rugby for females is reflected by Res 4: '*The sporting calendar has been put on hold for nearly 3 months and this is affecting the fitness of players. It is difficult for the club to keep track of players who are following the programme and those who are not*'. With both sporting codes postponing/cancelling various events, players are left with no certainty that matches will take place any time soon (Ramagole *et al.* 2020; Hene, Bassett & Andrews 2011). According to Res 1, '*They (SAFA) could have notified the teams in advance about the cancellation of the league, so that teams can prepare their players and their mindsets, instead we saw the news on television or social networks*'. Irregular updates and communication from management has also negatively impacted the female players. In the face of changes occurring with respect to managing the various codes of sport, Rogers (2003) advocates that communication is a key to managing change in this context. Res 6 indicated that '*Since the start of lockdown there was nothing said only recently (July) did SAFA announce on the news that our season has ended due to the pandemic*'. This indicates that communication was a problem area, both the timing and frequency.

Fear/ Anxiety/ Uncertainty of the Future

Women rugby and soccer players have to pursue dual careers, many of them study and play for the national team due to the uncertainty that comes with playing in these sporting codes (Clarkson *et al.* 2020). Res 5 indicated that '*You need something to fall back on, football alone is not enough to secure a future especially on the ladies' side*'. As tournaments are cancelled due to the pandemic, players worry for their futures in the sport (Toresdahl & Asif 2020). An example of this is the cancellation of sponsors in the local PSL, should this fate fall on the National Women's League which is in its debut season, it could herald the end of the professional women's soccer league in South Africa. Further uncertainty was emphasized by Res 3 '*If the male teams are struggling, imagine female teams. It will be tough; we hope we will get support from our association (SAFA) and other companies. Our sporting codes in South Africa are not professional, there are only a few female soccer and rugby players who have contracts with their national teams*'. Furthermore, players who have been contacted to further their professional careers abroad have not been able to sign contracts because of the travel ban which does not allow international travel

during the pandemic (Clarkson *et al.* 2020). Res 5 pointed out: '*With the national team the COSAFA Cup and AWCON has been put on hold and the pandemic has also affected a delay (not only me) in terms of moving to another team to play soccer overseas*'. Female soccer and rugby players who compete nationally attract the attention of overseas clubs and the potential exists for them to be offered lucrative contracts and also for them to become professional players. When these opportunities no longer exist, it causes players to become uncertain for their future careers.

5.2 Sport Administrators

Sportsmen and women do not exist in a vacuum. At the professional level, sport administration is the key driver in all codes of sport. Sport administration covers a vast array of areas that need to function in perfect sync in order for professional sport to exist. Amongst others, these include coaches, trainers, managers, venue and fixture co-ordinators, event administrators and the management of sport organisations. As with sport players, the administration component of rugby and soccer was unprepared to handle the uncertainties related to a pandemic of this nature; they had to adjust to manage the sport and the players (Toresdahl & Asif 2020). This is reflected in the sport administrators' discussions on the impact of COVID-19 on their sporting code, on themselves personally and the future of the sporting code in the 'new normal'.

Excerpts from two sports administrators representing the two codes (soccer and rugby) reflect the adaptation that sports administrators had to make:

> Res 7 (soccer): '*Response has been slow and sometimes directionless. The professional side of football has been very progressive like planning for the resumption of football. However, communication should be better to clubs and members. Implementation of virtual programmes/training sessions could have taken place*'.
>
> Res 8 (rugby): '*It has been business as usual for us since lockdown … For example, virtual work environment – with all staff working from home; virtual sport code management – focus on high performance sport codes, including both football and rugby as well as wellness*

> *initiatives, online training and development (webinars; online training)*'.

The response to COVID-19 by soccer was '*slow and sometimes directionless*' (Res 7), on the other hand, the response from rugby has been '*business as usual*' (Res 8). These two statements show the landscape that each of the sporting codes are currently facing during the pandemic (Gilat & Cole 2020). The action taken by the respective sporting codes shows that the leadership in these structures need to become more inclusive of female players particularly in rugby and soccer (Ramagole *et al.* 2020). It was also noted that sport administrators adapted to this change well by focusing their efforts on online activities. This may be viewed as 'changing and refreezing' in change theory (Cummings *et al.* 2016) because the normal activities involving sport administrators were reviewed with the introduction of online activities. The online activities are likely to continue for the foreseeable future (refreezing). COVID-19 has forced sport administrators to rethink their approach to codes of sport where female players are involved. Unique attributes of females that might affect the way the sport is played and administered have a crucial role in the change process. This change would need to become the normal in the future (refreezing). A good example in terms of the administration of sport for females is a flexible training schedule that takes into consideration that female players have household responsibilities which include parenting (single); picking and dropping children at school. The change management process may also involve constant *refreezing* during the COVID-19 period until a sense of stability is reached. Nevertheless, some aspects have worked and others need to be reimagined should a pandemic of this nature or a similar situation arise again.

A unique feature of women's sport in South Africa is that sporting codes and structures rely on a countless number of volunteers who promote and try to advance women in sport (individual athletes/teams/coaches), these volunteers are often sport administrators who will be lost when communication fails with regard to the future of women's soccer and rugby during the pandemic. This is evidenced in the responses by Res 7 and Res 8. Res 7: '*I think we will lose a lot of female administrators especially in volunteer positions, because they (federations) will now concentrate on income recovery*'. Interestingly, Res 8 points to another feature of change theory, that is, adaptation and reflection (Batras *et al.* 2014) in stating: '*I believe that women are naturally inclined to provide transformative leadership and this is*

rethinking spaces and responsibilities; providing support and listening when needed'. Res 8 points to features of change where sportswomen reflect on their circumstances with the intention of bringing about change.

The sport administrators had some interesting reflections of what the 'new normal' should look like. They shared the following sentiments which have been evident in the literature: strategy planning to accommodate such events; more optimization of digital space; more focus on health measures, role of medicine and sport science on the field of play and at events (Gilat & Cole 2020; Janse van Rensburg *et al.* 2020); adjusted training programmes (Mohr *et al.* 2020; Toresdahl & Asif 2020); facilities management; rethink the role of virtual sport and eSport and restructuring of existing programmes; financial impact on sport (Clarkson *et al.* 2020); rethinking the business of sport (Evans *et al.* 2020).

Internationally, the business of sport has changed drastically over the last ten years (Fauci, Lane, & Redfield 2020). South Africa has been falling behind and the COVID-19 pandemic has reminded the country about the power and importance to effect change when needed. Leadership and governance in sport have been challenged during the lockdown and the time is right now to make changes for the future (Parnell *et al*. 2020). Moreover, the digital era is here to stay, South African sport administrators will need to learn and use it optimally in the future as has been advocated by Boyle (2017).

From a theoretical perspective, there are a few new theoretical insights that this study can offer: sustainability of women's sport during the pandemic is dependent on adapting to a changing environment and embracing online administration; financial insecurity of women soccer and rugby players demand a change in the fundamental aspects of the sporting codes, for example, the role of contracts for all women professional players to ensure job security as women were also the breadwinners in their families and they had financial obligations in their households; the psychological impact of COVID-19 on women in sport also has far-reaching implications in terms of change which is needed in finding approaches to deal with mental health and self-esteem issues for the women burdened with multiple roles in their households apart from their status as professional sportswomen.

6 Conclusion

This chapter has delved into the experiences of selected women soccer and

rugby players and administrators during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given more time and access during the pandemic, the study could have included more participants. However, this was not possible due to COVID-19 and time limitations. In addition, another limitation was the availability of current literature and empirical studies due to the recent emergence of the pandemic. This should change drastically as the impact of COVID-19 emerges over time. Almost all codes of sport have been severely impacted by COVID-19. It is through the sharing of experiences that all concerned with sport can learn from each other and manage the considerable impact that COVID-19 has had on the sporting fraternity. These findings of this study are not meant to draw generalizations but to describe the experiences of professional female soccer and rugby players, and sport administrators for theoretical insight locally. Women's professional sport in many countries has been severely hampered and it is unlikely that it will return to pre-COVID-19 conditions in the near future. Therefore, the challenge for players and administrators is to re-invent themselves and their respective codes of sport to face a future that has been forever altered by this highly contagious virus.

7 Recommendations

Female soccer and rugby players and sport administrators must work together in order for them to 'take the sport' to the public on various platforms. Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic has prevented female players from playing these two codes of sport, it has also prevented sport administrators from doing their work as well. Whilst these two groups of people have experienced the pandemic from two different perspectives, both are linked to the growth and sustainability of the same sporting codes. With most sporting activities being cancelled, it has become necessary for players and administrators to adjust to new ways of doing things, especially technology platforms that will allow players and sport administrators to continue to work from home.

Specific recommendations for female rugby and soccer players include: training programme adjustments and providing psychological support to female players and support staff such as sport administrators; regular check-ins with soccer and rugby players to remain connected with them and to ensure that they are taking care of their well-being; new initiatives to keep soccer and rugby players focused and active for the remainder of the year; online learning and sharing initiatives as teams; future research to include female players from

different race groups. The recommendations for sport administrators include: spending time innovating using different platforms to communicate, report and record their business; reconsideration of communication strategies with female soccer and rugby players, club executives and team members, to ensure regular contact; using every available opportunity to review, revisit and collaborate with everyone involved in the sporting code, to ensure that they are prepared for the 'new normal'.

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The COVID-19 Pandemic and Sport in High Schools: A Case of Selected Schools in Masvingo District

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Abstract

The ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly impacted all aspects of life across the globe. Emerging threads on the COVID-19 pandemic discourse have mainly focused on unpacking implications on the health system, economy, and sports in general, among others. However, there is an apparent dearth of literature focused on the implications of COVID-19 pandemic on sporting activities in schools in Zimbabwe. Sporting activities are an essential component of the updated curriculum. This present study interrogated the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic on sporting activities in high schools in one selected district in Zimbabwe. The researchers drew from Green's (2005) Model of Sport Development to unpack the impact of Covid-19 on sporting activities in high schools. Guided by an interpretivist paradigm, the study utilized a case study research design. The study's data was generated entirely online using semi-structured interviews (WhatsApp video calls) and focus group discussions (WhatsApp group video calls). The participants were conveniently selected from a WhatsApp group of Physical Education teachers and Sports Organisers in the Masvingo district. The findings from the study were analysed using and thematic analysis. The study established that Covid-19 disrupted the high school sporting calendar, affected

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athletes' fitness and led to the marginalization of sporting activities and Physical Education. The researchers recommend the use of the *TrainMyAthlete* application to monitor high school athletes' training during Covid-19 disruption.

Keywords: Covid-19, sporting activities, High schools, Zimbabwe

1 Introduction

It is common knowledge that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic goes beyond mortality and morbidity (McKibbin & Fernando 2020). Numerous theories and perspectives have emerged in unpacking the genesis and spread of Covid-19 since its outbreak in Wahun City in China (Bao, Liu, Zhang, Liu & Jun Liu 2020; Shaw, Kim & Hua 2020). Scientists, medical researchers and researchers across the globe have contributed to the exponential growth in research on Covid-19 mainly focused on vaccine development and trial of various drugs (Lu, Stratton & Tang 2020; Di Gennaro, Pizzol, Marotta, Antunes, Racalbuto, Veronese & Smith 2020; Shaw *et al.* 2020).

Supranational and national agencies have also sought to unpack the economic implications of Covid-19 on the world as well as national economies. The World Bank (2020:01) revealed that 'Covid-19 has triggered the deepest global recession in decades'. The Asian Development Bank projected that the Covid-19 pandemic will cost the world US$ 8, 8 trillion (BBC 2020) and government borrowing around the world is projected to exceed US$ 10 trillion. In the United Kingdom, the government efforts to combat the Covid-19 pandemic have risen to £123, 2 billion. The UNDP (2020) in a policy brief on the socio-economic impact Covid-19 on Zimbabwe revealed that the economic growth will be further depressed from the 8 percent recorded in 2019. Hence, it can be noted from the plethora of economic projections and studies that the Covid-19 pandemic has severe economic impacts globally. However, while there is growing literature on Covid-19 in the fields of science, medicine and economics, there is an apparent gap in the discourse on the effects of the pandemic on sporting activities in high schools in Zimbabwe. Therefore, this study sought to unpack the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic on sporting activities and Physical Education in high schools in a selected district in Zimbabwe.

2 The World under Lockdown

The UNDP (2020:01) reports that Covid-19 was declared 'a public health emergency of international concern on January 30, 2020, and thereafter, a pandemic on March 11, 2020'. Shaw *et al.* (2020:01) state 'On 11th of March 2020, WHO has declared this as a global pandemic, and as of 23rd of March 2020, the virus has affected 172 out of 195 countries'. Efforts to curb the spread of the Covid-19 have necessitated the implementation of full or partial lockdowns around the world. More than three billion people in almost 70 countries were asked to stay at home by their respective governments (Langton 2020). Mohr, Nassis, Brito, Randers, Costagna, Parnell and Krustrup (2020:01) state 'the COVID-19 crisis is somewhat different and has had real and tangible impacts on the sport and football industry'. The Tokyo 2020 Olympics postponement is the biggest sporting event to be affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, soccer leagues, wrestling matches, rugby tournaments among other numerous sports activities have been postponed in the majority of countries across the globe. However, while Covi-19 casualties and ramifications on the economy and professional sport are being projected and quantified, there is an apparent need to unpack the effects on sporting activities in high schools in Zimbabwe. It is interesting to note that the interrogation of disruptions in learning activities in schools around the world in general and Zimbabwe, in particular, neglects unpacking effects on sporting activities in high schools. This case study contributes to the discourse on the ramifications of the Covid-19 pandemic on sport and society in Zimbabwe.

2.1 Zimbabwe under Lockdown

The government of Zimbabwe declared Covid-19 a 'national disaster' on the 27th of March and subsequently imposed a nationwide lockdown on the 30th of March, 2020. Zimbabwe started the 21-day lockdown at a time the country had only seven confirmed cases of Covid-19 and one death. On the 19th of April 2020, Zimbabwe extended its lockdown by 14 days as a way of escalating measures of reducing the spread of COVID-19. The country's extension can be viewed as the government's commitment to contain the country's virus effectively. On the 16th of May the nationwide lockdown was extended indefinitely. The mandatory lockdown in Zimbabwe meant that schools that were scheduled to close on the 2nd of April 2020, were

prematurely shut down on the 24th of March. Consequently, a week of learning was lost in the first term (semester) of the 2020 school calendar in Zimbabwe. On the 15th of July 2020, the Zimbabwean government indefinitely deferred the reopening of schools due to the increase in the number of confirmed Covid-19 cases. Essentially, the deferment effectively means that the second term of the 2020 school calendar in Zimbabwe has been lost due to Covid-19.

2.1.1 High School Sports Coordination in Zimbabwe

This section contextualizes the high school sports coordination and calendar in Zimbabwe. The coordination of the sporting activities in high schools in Zimbabwe is done through the National Association of Secondary School Heads (NASH) (Nhamo & Muswazi 2014). NASH has structures cascading from the national level down to the school level that ensure the smooth running and standardization of competition rules throughout the country. Each school has a sports organizer responsible for coordinating sporting activities at the school level. The school sports organizer is also a committee member of the zonal sports organizing committee. Essentially these NASH structures ensure that there are clear channels of communication and grievance procedures that run parallel to the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education formal structure. Additionally, NASH promotes the coordination of sports activities by teachers and school heads. Sporting activities in Zimbabwean schools are spread evenly across the first two terms of the three-term school calendar. Each school term has an average of three months. Schools in Zimbabwe participate in athletics during the first term of each year while ball games are engaged in during the second term of the school calendar. The third and final term on the Zimbabwean school calendar is reserved for the end of year examinations. There are a few sporting activities, cultural and art activities in the third term, to allow learners and teachers to concentrate on their final exam preparations.

Sports competitions are held at intra-school level, inter-school level (zonal), Inter-zonal level (district), Inter-district level (provincial) and finally at inter-provincial level (National). In between the competitions, the winning teams and athletes/learners go into camp for training. After the national competitions, selected athletes from the country's ten provinces are selected into the national team representing the country at regional competitions.

3 Theoretical Framework

Sporting activities and Physical Education in high schools in Zimbabwe are viewed as part of Sport Development (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education 2015). Therefore, the researchers drew their theoretical lens from Green's (2005) Model of Sport Development to interrogate the effects of Covid-19 on sporting activities in high schools in a selected district in Zimbabwe. Green (2005) identified three critical stages in sports development: recruitment, retention and transition. At the level of recruitment, the central notion is 'mass participation which seeks to develop opportunities for everyone to participate in sport'. (Ghafouri cited in Javadipour, Ali & Hakimzadeh 2014:57). The researchers utilized the three stages of the Model of Sport Development to understand the implications of the Covid-19 on sporting activities in high schools in a selected district in Zimbabwe. Additionally, Green's model strives to explain the factors which are critical to the development of sport and the combination of factors that impact participation rates and the commitment to the sport of individuals. Hence, in this study, the researchers focused on the effects of the Covid-19 on the factors which have a bearing on sporting activities in high schools in Zimbabwe. The role of financial resources and sports programmes/coaching falls under the retention stage whereby support systems are central. The views of the Physical Education and Sports coordinators in this study on their experiences with Covid-19 and sporting activities were therefore informed by the Model of Sport Development.

4 Research Methodology

The researchers adopted an intepretivist paradigm and a qualitative approach for this study. The interpretivist paradigm was chosen because the focus was on 'understanding and explanations' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2018:66). There was a 'fitness of purpose' in this study and the selection of the interpretivist paradigm (Cohen *et al*. 2018:01). Qualitative approaches 'value depth of meaning and people's subjective experiences and their meaning-making processes'. (Leavy 2018:124). Thus, the qualitative approach resonated with the researchers' need to understand the teachers' experiences of Covid-19 on sporting activities in high schools in a selected district in Zimbabwe. Additionally, according to Maxwell (2013:30) qualitative research helps 'understand how events, actions, and meaning are shaped by the unique

circumstances in which these occur'. A case study of the Masvingo district in Zimbabwe was utilized to unpack the phenomenon. Cohen *et al*. (2018:376) argue 'a case study provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles'. The researchers conveniently sampled participants for the study from a WhatsApp group for Physical Education teachers and Sports coordinators. A study by Tarisayi and Manhibi (2017) demonstrated to the widespread use of WhatsApp by teachers in Zimbabwe. Therefore, due to the restrictions imposed by the government because of Covid-19, the researchers utilized WhatsApp for both sampling and data generation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten Physical Education teachers and Sports coordinators using individual WhatsApp video calls. While focus group discussions were carried out using WhatsApp group video calls with 15 Physical Education teachers. The generated data were analysed utilizing emerging themes from both semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The researchers ensured that there was confidentiality, voluntary participation and ethics clearance was obtained by two of the researchers affiliated to a university in Zimbabwe.

5 Significant Findings

This section presents significant findings that emerged from this study on the implications of Covid-19 on sporting activities in high schools in a selected district in Zimbabwe. The emerging themes were: disruption of the sporting calendar, individual athlete's fitness, financial implications, and the new normal and practical activities.

5.1 Disruption of the Sporting Calendar

The Physical Education teachers and Sports coordinators who participated in this study indicated that the school sports calendar was the main casualty of the Covid-19 pandemic. It emerged from the focus group discussions that the school sports calendar was affected by the lockdown. One sports coordinator explained *'The school sports calendar for high schools in Zimbabwe evenly spreads activities throughout the year. The first term is focused on athletics, second term for ball games while third is reserved for external examination.*

Any disruption of say a week is difficult to address, what more the lockdown of more than three months?' Another participant in the same focus group discussion concurred *'The lockdown was necessary but it virtually meant cancelling athletics competitions for 2020. There is no way that athletics can resume after the schools reopen in July'*. The participants revealed that Covid-19 disrupted the athletics calendar. It was unlikely to reschedule the competitions when the schools reopen due to other competitions already scheduled for the second term of 2020. Hence, it can be argued that the disruption of international sports calendars and events such as the Olympics was mirrored in the high school sports calendar in Zimbabwe. On the international arena sporting events were cancelled, postponed due to Covid-19 and the high school authorities were also forced to make the same decision to suspend any sporting activities in schools.

5.2 Athletes' Fitness

The Physical Education teachers bemoaned that the Covid-19 induced disruptions on the sporting calendar also affected the fitness of their athletes and sports teams. One participant noted *'The disparities between high school sporting activities and professional sports have been magnified by Covid-19. Professional athletes have continued to train individually. Our athletes do not have access to training facilities at their homes to keep themselves fit'.* Another participant concurred, *'High school sports are not well-developed and there are no professional training ethics among our youngsters. The majority of our learners only train under our supervision at school. The three months break from school means no training. If professional footballers in Europe are succumbing due to lack of match fitness, one can only imagine our poor athletes'.*

It was noted from the participants that the Covid-19 induced break on the school's sports calendar has impacted negatively on the fitness of the athletes and sports teams in high schools in the selected district in Zimbabwe. The participants noted that the gap between professional and high school sports fitness was exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, the athletes' fitness was further affected by the apparent lack of sports facilities and gyms at the individual learner's homes as well as poor training ethics. Hence, it can be reasoned that high school athletes were deprived of access to sports facilities due to the Covid-19 lockdown.

5.3 Financial Implications for Sports

The disruptions in the sporting calendar also had financial ramifications on the high schools that participated in this study. The lockdown was imposed when high schools in Zimbabwe were scheduled to participate in athletics competitions at the zonal level. The athletics teams were already in camp training preparing for the zonal competitions and had to break up camp in adherence with the lockdown rules. One participant revealed *'The imposition of a lockdown had financial implications for schools. Athletics teams that were in the camp had to break camp. This means that the resources invested in training the athletics were wasted'*. The participants stated that resources committed to preparing athletes by high schools in the selected district were wasted since there was no participation in the competitions due to the lockdown. Another participant *explained 'Most schools had already bought supplies for their sporting teams for the first term. Some of the supplies were perishables and were meant to be consumed in training camps by the athletes. Covid-19 thus caused schools to incur losses as they could not return the purchases to the suppliers'*. It emerged from the participants' contributions that Covid-19 led high schools to incur numerous losses since the lockdown was announced during the high school sporting calendar. The expenses incurred in preparation to either participate or host athletics competitions can be viewed as financial implications of Covid-19 on the sporting activities in Masvingo district.

Participants in the focus group discussions also noted that plans to reopen schools and the eventual resumption of school sports have a financial burden on the high schools and sporting activities in the selected district. One participant stated *'Schools are already overburdened by numerous adjustments in preparation for teaching and learning in the era of Covid-19. Extending these preparations to the school sports facilities, gyms will further burden the struggling schools'*. Another sports coordinator reflected that *'We have observed in the past that when school authorities encounter financial challenges they always sacrifice sporting activities. Covid-19 related expenses will ultimately force the school sports budget to be sacrificed'*. While the effects of Covid-19 are being felt across the board, it emerged from this study that the school sports budget will be cut to channel the funds towards other expenses. Another participant revealed *'Preparatory meetings for the reopening of schools are focusing on the provision of Personal Protective Equipment for use during classes. PPE for sporting activities and Physical*

Education is not be prioritized'. Essentially it can be noted from the above statements that there were fears of the marginalization sporting activities and Physical Education as a subject in high schools in the selected district.

5.4 The 'New Normal' and Sporting Aactivities

On the way forward, participants in both semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were unanimous that the 'new normal' introduced to curb the spread of Covid-19 was largely at loggerheads with the teaching approaches encouraged in Physical Education. One Physical Education teacher explained *'The introduction of the new curriculum in Physical Education and Sport in high schools in Zimbabwe emphasizes practical activities and demonstrations. Essentially learners are supposed to be assessed doing practical tasks. Now the 'new normal' talks about masks, social distancing among others. The 'new normal' complicates the teaching of Physical Education completely'*. It emerged from the study that options being considered to overcome the challenges brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic were reversing the gains made over the years in the teaching of Physical Education. Additionally, the participants highlighted that the Physical Education syllabus was explicit that practical activities were supposed to be prioritized and assessed continuously contributing to the learners' final mark. Another participant even cited sections from the Physical Education syllabus which stated *'The Secondary School Physical Education, Sport and Mass Displays Syllabus will cover theory and practical activities by learners in Form 1 to 4'*. Another Physical Education teacher added in the focus group discussions that *'The Physical Education syllabus can be viewed as standing on two pillars: theory and practical activities. There has to be a balance between the two pillars'*. Therefore, it can be noted from the participants' views that the Covid-19 pandemic and the new normal adversely affected the practical activities in Physical Education. It has been widely recommended that social distancing is crucial in curbing the spread of Covid-19. Thus, the participants noted that social distancing complicates practical activities in sporting and Physical Education.

5.5 Ways of Mitigating the Effects of Covid-19 on Sporting in High Schools

The researchers asked the participants in the study to suggest possible solutions

to ameliorate the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on sporting activities in high schools. One participant elaborated *'We read in the newspapers that governments around the world have devised financial packages to help various sectors of the economy to cope with the effects of Covid-19. Why don't our government provide a similar package for sporting activities in high schools?'* The views were supported by another participant who highlighted that *'Sports governing bodies internationally have also come up with supporting mechanisms for professional sports. There is a need for similar support at the grassroots level like high school sporting activities in Zimbabwe'.* The major suggestion that came from the participants in this study was the provision of a funding package to enable high school sporting activities to resume in the era of Covid-19. Another participant in the focus group discussions observed *'Several strategies are being implemented to ensure that learners continue learning during the lockdown. However, nothing much is being said about sporting in high schools. Why are schools not using technology just like Zoom is being used for meetings and lessons?'*

The above statement reflects the marginalisation of sporting in conversations on mitigating the effects of Covid-19 on high schools in general. Additionally, it can be noted from the statement that one possible way of mitigating the effects of Covid-19 on sporting in high schools was the incorporation of technology such as internet-based platforms to monitor athletes' training at home. Furthermore, another participant suggested, *'Sports coordinators should provide training routines and manuals to athletes to guide individual training at home'.* In cases where it is not feasible to use technology, schools can provide a paper-based training manual to guide high school athletes training individually at home.

6 Discussion and Conclusions

The researchers established from the findings from this study that the effects of Covid-19 on sports and Physical Education in high schools in a selected district in Zimbabwe were microcosmic of effects of Covid-19 on the international sports arena. The International Olympic Committee resolved to postpone the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics Games due to the Covid-19 pandemic on the international arena (Brasor 2020). The same decision was mirrored in the high school sports arena in Zimbabwe. Hence, the researchers argue that the ramifications of Covid-19 on high school sports in Zimbabwe

was microcosmic of effects on international sports. Projections reveal that top professional leagues lost millions of dollars in revenue. Examples of losses incurred due to Covid-19 include the Tokyo Olympic Games (US$6 billion), US major Leagues (US$5.5 billion), English Premier League (US$1.35 billion) according to the Aljazeera report on the 25th of June 2020. However, while it is difficult to project the financial losses incurred by high schools due to Covid-19, reveals that the losses mirrored those of major leagues to a certain extent. Additionally, the study confirmed the view that 'the global sporting community is facing serious challenges due to measures [due to Covid-19] imposed in countless countries around the world' (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020). However, despite mirroring the international arena, the effects of Covid-19 on high schools in the selected district were compounded by a lack of funding. Financial constraints posed on sporting activities in high schools in the selected district by Covid-19 can be classified under the retention stage of Green's (2005) model. Financial challenges negatively impact participation in sporting activities at the high school level and thereby affecting sports development.

The study findings also revealed the marginalisation of sporting activities and Physical Education due to Covid-19. Participants noted that due to budgetary constraints, sporting activities and Physical Education were being sacrificed as high schools in the selected district prioritized prepared to reopen. Sporting activities and Physical Education are sometimes erroneously viewed as play and mainly for dull learners (Nhamo & Muswazi 2014; Wanyama 2011). These views contribute to the marginalization in times of crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic presents a crisis that has increased expenses for schools and therefore funds are being directed to priority areas. Worryingly from the study, sporting activities were not being prioritized in the selected high schools. The marginalization of sporting activities and Physical Education was evident in the allocation of funds in the school budgets suggested by the participants. Chifamba (2019) established that a lack of funding already stifled sports development in Zimbabwe even before the Covid-19 outbreak. Therefore, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic compounded the already dire funding of sporting activities situation in Zimbabwean high schools. Additionally, the marginalisation of sporting in high schools was further evident in the conversations on ways of mitigating the effects of Covid-19 in high schools. Conversations are currently focused only on recovering lost learning time while neglecting sporting in high schools.

Essentially the marginalisation of sporting in conversations can be viewed as restrictions according to Green's model of Sports Development.

The study also established that there was a realization among the participants in this study that the Covid-19 pandemic was here to stay. This realization that the Covid-19 pandemic was long-enduring mean that there has to be a way of continuing with sporting activities while taking precaution. Precautions such as social distancing and Personal Protective Equipment were viewed as the new normal in sporting activities in high schools in the selected district. The study further revealed the need for financial support to enable the participation of learners in high school sporting activities under the new normal era. Thus, it can be concluded from the preceding that the resumption of high school sporting activities requires a substantial financial injection to adhere to the new normal way of life. Thus, the researchers recommend the provision of funding to help high schools prepare for the resumption of sporting activities in the Covid-19 era. Additionally, the maintenance of fitness among individual high school athletes in Zimbabwe during the Covid-19 disruptions can be enhanced through the use of social media and the internet. Efforts to promote online learning that is being implemented should also be replicated in the arena of sporting in high schools. Mohr *et al*. (2020:07) argue 'Football clubs should be aware of that these are special circumstances [Covid-19] and be prepared for a future unlike anything experienced before'. Drawing from Mohr *et al*. (2020) we also argue that school authorities, sports coordinators and all other stakeholders in sporting in high schools should appreciate that Covid-19 provides extra-ordinary circumstances for sporting in high schools which warrant extra-ordinary mitigating solutions. Trainers and coaches can interact with their sports teams and individual athletes using phone applications. Internationally, professional soccer players during the Covid-19 lockdown used the FIFA-backed *TrainMyAthlete* app designed by physiotherapist Liam Hayes (White 2020). Fundamentally, there is a need for reimagining sporting in Covid-19 times and post the Covid-19 pandemic. Other spaces are being reimagined in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, which buttresses the need to be innovative to promote sport in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Hence, we recommend the incorporation of internet-based platforms that can be accessed using phone platforms to ensure constant interaction and monitoring of high school athletes in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, high schools in Zimbabwe can also provide individual athletes with individual training manuals and routines to guide them individually in their respective homes. We

also recommend that stakeholders should include sport in conversations on ways of overcoming Covid-19 challenges in high schools. Internationally, tournaments have been rescheduled while other tournaments and sport codes are amending their rules due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Stakeholders must engage in conversations to amend and adjust sport codes in line with the WHO guidelines for sports.

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The Impacts of Covid-19 on Sporting Activities and Society in the Mutare Community, Zimbabwe: Negotiating a Bumpy Playground

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Abstract

The global spread of Covid-19 created a bumpy 'playground' for different sporting activities and society due to the contagious nature of the disease that requires social distancing. It was imperative for most governments and sporting organisations to postpone or cancel sports tournaments at all levels. The primary aim of this research was to explore the socio-cultural and economic impacts of Covid-19 on the Mutare community, Zimbabwe with the aim of generating strategies that could be adopted to promote sporting activities in view of the Covid-19 pandemic. The sample for this study was purposive consisting of twelve (12) players; four (4) physical education tutors; two (2) sponsors; two (2) sport-related businesses, five (5) sport fans and five (5) informal traders. The interpretive paradigm was relevant for the study and I used a case study research style. Data was generated through telephone interviews, individual WhatsApp interviews and WhatsApp chat group discussions. A thematic approach was used to analyse the data. The study showed that Covid-19 had socio-economic, cultural and health impacts. Strategies that were recommended for sporting activities during a pandemic such as Covid-19, include engaging in individual physical activities that could be performed in and around the home in order to maintain fitness and good health. In addition, testing and sanitising players as well as disinfecting sporting facilities are recommended during this pandemic to reduce the economic impacts for Mutare. Various digital technologies could be adopted to promote sporting activities in view of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Impacts, Mutare community, Covid-19, Sporting activities, Society, Strategies

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1 Introduction

The paper explored the impacts of Covid-19 on sporting activities and society in Mutare in Zimbabwe. Mutare is situated 260 kilometers from the capital city, Harare, in the eastern border of Zimbabwe. The research focused on the socio-cultural and economic impacts of Covid-19 on the sports fraternity and related stakeholders in the Mutare community. The study further examined the impacts of Covid-19 on the economic activities in the Mutare community as a result of lockdown restrictions. Finally, various strategies that could be adopted in order to ensure continuity in sporting and physical activities as well as business practices during the Covid-19 pandemic or such similar contagious diseases were explored.

2 Background to the Study

The background discusses aspects on the nature and characteristics of the coronavirus and its socio-cultural and economic impacts for athletes globally and in Zimbabwe.

2.1 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) Coronavirus

Coronavirus (CoVs) are a family of viruses that causes respiratory disease in humans (Cui, Li & Shi 2019; Whitelaw, Mamas, Topol & Spall 2020). The symptoms of SARS include high fever, dry cough, headache, diarrhoea and respiratory infections (Avendano, Derchach & Swan 2003; Centres for Disease Control & Prevention 2019; Farfan-Cano 2020). SARS can spread through airborne respiratory droplets that may land on another person (Farfan-Cano 2020; Memish, Perlman, Kerkhove & Zumla 2020). Health specialists encourage social distancing; wearing of masks, washing and sanitising hands to reduce the spread of the virus. (Farfan-Cano 2020). The disease from contracting corona virus, is called COVID-19 (Whitelaw, Mamas, Topol & Spall 2020). This disease thus has repercussions for sport.

2. 2 Impacts of Covid-19 on Sport

The active participation in sporting activities promotes body fitness, good sportsmanship, endurance, self-esteem, friendship (Babalola 2010). Active engagement in sport is argued to also reduce depression, anxiety and heart

related diseases (Ajisafe 2009). However, Covid-19 has numerous negative impacts for sport.

2.2.1 Covid-19 and Income

The lockdown and postponement of sport tournaments impacted on the sporting fraternity. In an effort to contain the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic through enforcing social distancing, sport gatherings and activities at different levels including the Olympic games and European football were postponed (Parnell *et al.* 2020). The lockdown had multiplier negative impacts on sport-related businesses, sporting houses and players. There has been a loss of income to sports related-businesses, salary cuts for the players and sporting managers of up to 30% and a loss of employment particularly to those who relied on an income from sports (European Olympic Committees (EOC) 2020; Evans, Blackwell, Dolan, Fahlen, Hoekman, Lennels *et al.* 2020).

Further, agricultural businesses that supply food to the sports fraternity, vendors at sport venues particularly women and children, it is argued, are most likely suffer from extreme poverty due to the closure and suspension of sport business (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) 2020). The informal sector was seen to be at a greater risk of employment losses especially amongst vulnerable groups such as women and migrant workers (FAO 2020; International Labour Organization (ILO) 2020).

2.2.2 Covid-19 and Players' Professional Development

The postponement of sporting activities had a devastating effect on player development in the profession (Evans, *et al.* 2020). The enforcement of social distancing had an impact on the way coaches impart skills to players. Social distancing promoted individual practices within the home premises and in quiet outdoor spaces by players in order for them to remain fit. Individual training had the effect of destroying team spirit amongst the players. However, individual sporting activities in outdoor spaces has since gained popularity in Europe (Evans *et al.* 2020; Scheerder, Breedveld, Borgers 2015). It is envisaged that there is more likely to be a paradigm shift in the way coaching skills are to be imparted in sporting activities in the future. E-sport, online courses on sporting and digitalization has gained momentum during Covid-19 (Evans, *et al.* 2020; Gerrish 2020).

Restricting players to the home due to lockdown and isolation impacted greatly on athlete training. The intensity of each player's training is reduced and it was argued that this may reverse the player's performance attained in the past. It is believed that reduced training by players due to lockdown can reduce the player's strength, endurance and performance (Gondin, Duclay & Martin 2006; Djaoni, Wong, Pialoux, hautier, Da Silva, Chamari & Dellal 2014) as well as decrease the flexibility of the player (Caldwell & Peters 2009) and result in a loss of muscle mass (Mallinson & Murto 2013). In addition, isolation and the quarantine of players may lead to poor nutrition, poor quality sleep, loneliness, stress and anxiety. There could be also an increase in body fat and ultimately an increase in body weight (Ajisafe 2009; Jukic, Calleja-Gonzalez, Cos, Cuzzolin, Olmo, Terrdos *et al.* 2020). Thus, the negative impacts for individual players being in isolation, is extensive.

However, scholarship indicates that there are positive attributes attained from individual training due to lockdown and isolation. It has been contended that the player can concentrate on developing certain physical abilities he/she needs to improve on (Jukic, Malanovic, Svilar, Njaradi, Calleja-Gonzalez, Castellano & Ostojic 2018). Further, lockdown restrictions can allow players to refocus, and recover from certain mental stress and injuries as well (Djaoni, Wong, Pialoux, hautier, Da Silva, Chamari & Dellal 2014).

2.2.3 Covid-19 and Socio-cultural Impacts on Sport and Society

Covid-19 has socio-cultural impacts on society stemming from the lockdown and travel bans that impacted on businesses and sporting activities. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2020) reported certain discernable impacts of Covid-19 for communities. It was reported that there is likely to be skewed access to education as rural children have challenges in accessing e-learning unlike their urban counterparts. Further, women and girls have been exposed to gender-based abuse and violence due to lockdown restrictions. Women are reported to suffer more as they try to fend for the family (UNDP 2020). Covid-19 has increased inequalities especially amongst the vulnerable groups such as the aged, women, migrants, the poor and the disabled according to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA 2020). The aged, disabled and children cannot support themselves while in isolation resulting in anxiety, stress and pain. These categories cannot easily

access health care nor practice hygienic like washing hands and cleaning the home. The UN DESA (2020) reports that, the youth suffers from high unemployment due to Covid-19. The closure of schools and the suspension of sporting activities has also impacted heavily on the youth of school going ages. Collectively, due to inactivity, the youth are said to suffer from mental stress, anxiety and a lack of fitness and income (UN DESA 2020).

2.3 Impacts of Covid-19 in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, total lockdown started on March 30, 2020 and extended initially for a period of twenty-one days (*New Zimbabwe* 2020) but it has since altered, similar to other countries, based on infections and mortality rates. The lockdown started at level four. People were required to stay at home except when one is travelling to obtain essential services such as medication. The Covid-19 induced lockdown led to the closure of learning institutions, industries and the banning of public transport except for Zimbabwe Passenger Company (ZUPCO) buses and Public Service Commission buses which are operated by the Government (*New Zimbabwe* 2020). Attendance at funerals were limited to fifty people in order to adhere to the social distancing rule (*New Zimbabwe* 2020). Stage four lockdown was extended by two weeks to May, 3, 2020 in an effort to curtail the number of infected people (*Times Live* 2020).

In level 3, mining operations were allowed to operate under strict health guidelines and requirements such as regular testing of workers, having their temperature taking and ensuring maximum hygienic conditions such as washing of hands and the use of sanitizers. Lockdown at level 2 gave way to the opening of more essential services such as banks, hardware and retail shops. However, schools, beerhalls, night clubs and sporting activities remained closed. (*The Herald* 2020). The lockdown impacts shattered the economy of Zimbabwe which was already suffering from shortages of foreign currency, power outages and a shortage in food supplies (Thomson Reuters, 2020). Zimbabwe's lockdown was at level 2 since 1 May, 2020 but then it again changed due to increases in infections and mortality. Industries and schools were opened in phases while international borders partially opened to passengers with strict adherence to Covid-19 guidelines on social distancing, sanitisation and putting on of masks.

Despite the initial easing of lockdown restrictions in other sectors, the sporting fraternity suffered. Sporting activities from grassroots level to

professional clubs remained banned (*New Zimbabwe* 2020). Inactivity by players can have health impacts for example it can increase the chances of them suffering from heart diseases, hypertension, diabetes, obesity, anxiety and depression (Ajisafe 2009; Ojeme & Uti 1996). Furthermore, the banning and postponement of sporting activities resulted in the loss of income and employment to the sports fraternity and associated businesses (EOC 2020; FAO 2020) as was earlier reported.

3 Aim of the Study

This study intended to establish the socio-cultural and economic impacts of Covid-19 on sporting activities and society in Mutare community in Zimbabwe during the first six months of the lockdown in 2020. In view of the lockdown restrictions on sporting activities it was also pertinent to explore the various strategies that could be adopted to promote sporting activities in view of the current Covid-19 and any other future contagious viruses.

The research questions were as follows:

1. What is the socio -cultural impacts of Covid-19 on sporting activities and society in Mutare in Zimbabwe?
2. How did Covid-19 impact on economic activities in Mutare community?
3. Which strategies can promote sporting activities in times of the corona virus and other related contagious diseases?

3.1 Research Design and Methodology of the Study

The study is located within the interpretive paradigm, and explored the impacts of Covid-19 on sporting activities and related business activities in Mutare community which is situated in the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) found that the interpretive paradigm is useful in gathering information from participants who may have different perspectives on a phenomenon. The research design adopted allowed the researcher to obtain the views of Mutare community members on how Covid-19 impacted on their socio-cultural and economic lives. The interpretive framing acknowledges that reality emerges from different people who may have

contrasting views about a phenomenon (Mack 2010). Keane (2013) observed that qualitative methods, which were used in this study, were appropriate in generating data where an in-depth study of a phenomenon is required.

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants in the study. Purposive sampling has been described by Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2018) as a situation in which the researcher 'hand picks cases' with particular characteristics being sought based on one's judgment. Physical Education tutors were selected in the study since they are knowledgeable as these tutors teach Physical Education in tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe. Sports fans, sponsors, sports business people and players were purposively selected for their interest and links to sporting activities. These selected participants are likely to express their feelings on how they have been impacted socially-culturally and economically by Covid-19.

A community case study of Mutare allowed in-depth data generation as suggested by Creswell (2013). The study used individual and group WhatsApp chats and telephone interviews to generate data from the participants. An interview guide was used to gather information from the participants. Participants were asked to explain the social, cultural and economic impacts of Covid-19 on the sporting fraternity and Mutare community. The participants were also asked about the strategies that could be adopted to ensure continuity of sporting activities and businesses during Covid-19 to reduce the harsh impact of the disease on the community.

WhatsApp is an instant messaging application that uses digital tools such as mobile phones to connect people on different platforms (Anglano 2014; WhatsApp 2016). Individual WhatsApp chats were used to generate data from five (5) sports fans and five (5) informal traders. The informal traders were useful participants as they expressed how their businesses have been affected by Covid-19. Telephone interviews were used to generate data from two (2) sports sponsors and two (2) sport-related business owners. WhatsApp group chats were useful in generating data from twelve (12) players and four (4) Physical Education (PE) tutors. Players and PE tutors were selected for they have an appreciation and understanding of sporting activities globally. Group chats were useful in generating large amounts of information within a short space of time given the constraints of the pandemic. Patton (2015) and Remler and Van Ryzin (2015) alluded to the idea that more data is generated by participants who add more contributions after hearing what other group members have said. Further, group chats were used to access rich data from

the participants. Krueger and Casey (2000) noted that the participants themselves provide checks and balances on the information articulated by group members thereby eliminating falsehoods. Individual WhatsApp chats were important for further interrogation on the impacts of Covid-19 on sports and sport-related business. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) support the use interviews which can uncover underlying attitudes and personal feelings about an aspect under study. Participants were able to express their feelings on the effects of Covid-19 on their lives and community.

Data was analysed through a thematic approach as recommended by Creswell (2013) for a qualitative study. Verbatim quotations from individual and group chats and interviews with the participants provided an in-depth understanding on the impacts of Covid-19 on sports and Mutare.

4 Findings

The research findings are discussed according to the research questions. For anonymity and ethical considerations, participants were identified using codes for example participant number one (1) was identified as P1 and so on in numerical order. Direct quotes by the participants were presented followed by discussions of the findings.

4.1 Socio-cultural Impacts of Covid-19 on Sporting Activities and Society

A selection of the main socio-cultural impacts of Covid-19 on players and society in Mutare are discussed in this section.

4.1.1 Migration Impacts

The Covid-19 pandemic restricted people to their homes as revealed by participant P1[1]:

> *Covid-19 restricted me here in Mutare yet my family is in Harare. I miss my family and I am now stressed. I have failed to attend the*

[1] For Anonymity and ethical considerations, the participants were identified using codes for example participant number one (1) was identified as P1 and so on in numerical order.

> *funeral of my uncle who passed due to Covid-19 imagine. How do I feel, its painful and stressful?* P1

P1 suggested that lockdown restrictions impeded the movement of people. The lockdown in business both formal and informal in Mutare community forced some of the community members to illegally migrate into Mozambique as illustrated by P13:

> *Some people have resorted to illegal business such as going to Mozambique through illegal points to buy second hand clothes and smuggling illegal beer for sale as people try to survive from the closure of formal business as Flea markets (such as that which operates outside the sport stadium selling sporting goods). Pirate taxis that have been banned are now finding business to ferry illegal goods and returning migrants through illegal points*. P13

The views by P13 shows that, Covid-19, despite restricting movements, it enhanced illegal cross border migration. The closure of informal business activities in Mutare such as banning of taxis and closure of flea markets in order to control the spread of the corona virus prompted some people to illegally go to nearby Mozambique to import goods like beer and second-hand clothes for resale in order to earn a living. Additional economic impacts are discussed later in this chapter.

4.1.2 Psychological Impacts for Players and Businessmen

The Covid-19 pandemic had psychological impacts for players and businessmen. One of the players in a football league team in Mutare explained:

> *Most local league teams are failing to pay salaries for their players. If you could go through the group chats for the players you would realise that there is anger, frustration, despair and anguish. Some players have even relocated to their rural homes after failing to buy food and pay rent for accommodation in the city.* P14

It is evident from P14 that some premier league players were frustrated and in a state of despair after failing to get their salaries due to the suspension

of games. This forced some of the players to migrate to rural areas where life in terms of food and accommodation are affordable.

A businessman, who runs a sporting shop in Mutare urban expressed his anger and despair due to loss of business, he had this to say:

> *Yes, I operate a sports shop and specialise is sporting ware and equipment. I borrowed a loan from a local bank, but I am failing to pay back the loan due to absence of sales caused by a ban in sporting activities and closure of schools that were my major market. I don't know what I can do.* P7

Business people in Mutare dealing with sports ware and equipment were hard hit by the ban of sporting activities. The Businessman expressed despair in saying, 'I don't know what I can do' induced by lockdown restrictions. It is evident that the businessman was psychologically impacted by his failure to repay a bank loan. Similarly, players who could not afford financially to remain in urban areas and meet their economic needs had to migrate back to their rural homes.

4.1.3 Health Impacts Dependent on Restrictions

Covid-19 impacted on the health of players and the general community of Mutare in different ways given the restrictions and later relaxation of restrictions. One of Physical Education (PE) tutors has this to say initially of all sport that was stopped:

> *People are not allowed out in public spaces, hence blocking sports persons and other people who enjoy jogging regularly. This has resulted in an increase in cardiovascular diseases: hypertension, type II diabetes, heart attacks. P3*

The PE tutor thought that, lockdown restrictions confined people in the home thereby restricting people or preventing them from exercising daily. The inactivity by the community can contribute to heart related diseases such as hypertension and diabetes. However, some participants viewed Covid-19 as a blessing in disguise since it promoted a culture of cleanliness as expressed by P17.

> *Covid-19 has promoted hygienic conditions within the sporting community since you are always required to wash your hands and sanitizing your environment. P17*

P17 believed that the Covid-19 pandemic promoted hygienic conditions through a culture of regular washing of hands and sanitising the homes, playing grounds and environments. Further, P17 observed that restricting people to the home and later local surroundings due to a reduction in restrictions, inculcated a culture of jogging among players and the community:

> *Morning jogging was at first painful for me but I now enjoy it. I now feel healthy and strong due to the morning jogging.* P17

P17 seem to suggest that Covid-19 was a blessing in disguise as it promoted a culture of jogging in the Mutare community as a way of overcoming the boredom associated with confinement at the home and needing to remain in the local environment. P17 believed that jogging was keeping him fit and healthy.

4.1.4 Loss of unhu/ubuntu

The loss of income, lockdown restrictions and measures imposed to thwart the rapid spread of Covid-19 impacted on *unhu* values (African values such as respect, integrity, honesty and love) among some Mutare community. A sporting fan explained:

> *The lack of sporting activities increased juvenile delinquency and drug abuse since people had nothing to do. More so, Loss of income by players have prompted some of the players to engage in money games (gambling) in order to earn a living. In some cases, people ended up fighting with each other.* P21

P21experienced that a lack of sporting activities in Mutare had led to young people being inactive resulting in them engaging in delinquent behaviour and drug abuse. Players were also involved in gambling in order to earn a living. These money games often led to violence and the use of abusive

language, an emerging culture which goes against *ubuntu/unhu* values.

One of the netball players added her voice on the loss of *unhu* values due to Covid-19:

> *In our culture we are used to shake hands when we greet each other at a match but this social distancing does not allow us. It's like you are despising someone when you do not shake hands, we share, we eat and discuss together as a family but this Covid-19 is destroying all this culture which is important in developing team spirit in a game.* P18

The Covid-19 induced lockdown enforced social distancing such that people were no longer allowed to shake hands. Among the *Shona* (major tribe in Zimbabwe) in Zimbabwe, greeting by shaking hands is a sign of oneness, respect and love for each other (*unhu*). Hence, enforcing social distancing has resulted in the loss of *unhu* values in sport since greeting by shaking hands is prohibited.

4.1.5 Training and Infrastructure

Lockdown restrictions also destroys other aspects of developing good team spirit in training as was explained by one of the PE tutors:

> *Players are engaged in individual training this destroys team spirit among the players. Team performance is also degraded . P12.*

The PE tutor believed that, team cohesion and team spirit is lost when players train as individuals. The effect would be a lack of coordination and poor performance by the players.

However, another player had a different view:

> *The suspension of sporting activities allowed players to have more time to prepare and improve on their weaknesses through individual training. P10*

Social distancing and lockdown restrictions allowed coaches to carry out individual training for their players which may not have been possible in a team session. The Covid-19 pandemic promoted individualised training and an

opportunity for players to have more time to prepare and improve on their weaknesses through individual training.

Further, the suspension of league games was viewed as an opportunity for sports associations to renovate playing grounds as observed by one of the players:

> *Stadiums can be renovated during the lockdown for example Sakubva stadium has playing grounds, changing rooms, media rooms and a VVIP enclosure which have been renovated.* P13

The postponement of local leagues allowed Mutare city council to renovate Sakubva stadium (a stadium in Mutare), its changing rooms, media rooms and VVIP (Very Very Important Persons) area. It is evident that, though lockdown restrictions prohibited team training, it however allowed, individual players to improve on their weaknesses through individualised training. At the same time, sports associations had time to improve their playing grounds.

4.2 Covid-19 Impacts on Economic Activities

The section extends the initial discussion on the economic impacts of Covid-19 on players and Mutare community.

4.2.1 Impact on Sport-related Business Activities

The Covid-19 induced lockdown caused the closure of sport-related businesses and loss of income. P3 explained businesses that has closed:

> *Everything literally came to a halt and businesses closed, save for a few registered retailers. Covid-19 has also done a great blow to people who work at sport and fitness centres, instructors, trainers, managers, owners, etc. Their source of income has been taken away in an instant.* P3

Business activities in Mutare which were viewed as high risk for the spread of Covid-19 were forced to close by the government. Businesses that closed included sporting clubs, gyms and stadia for different sports to enhance social distancing. This had an effect of eroding the livelihoods of players such

as sports managers and trainers. Professional league matches were impacted, for example Mutare Diamonds which used to play in Sakubva stadium incurred large losses from revenue they use to get from their sponsors and the gate takings.

One of the vendors elaborated on how Covid-19 impacted on different sport related informal businesses:

> *Sport gatherings were banned thus cutting income for vendors who depended on sport gatherings. In addition, flea markets and street vending that relied on sports fans around Sakubva stadium have been illegalized rendering thousands of people jobless*. P9

It was evident that, the enforcement of lockdown restrictions impacted negatively on the source of income for the street vendors and flea market businesses that relied on sport gatherings at stadia such as Sakubva in Mutare. This resulted in the loss of jobs to many people within Mutare community.

4.2.2 Emergence of New Businesses

The lockdown which was put in place by the government resulted in the proliferation of both legal and illegal business in Mutare community. P6 has this to say:

> *There has been emergence of street tuck shops as those informal traders with markets closed due to Covid-19 restrictions established make-shifts markets at their homes. This involved selling of food stuffs usually bought from large supermarkets in town whose access was temporarily suspended. Some smuggled illegal beer from neighbouring countries for sale to the local market.* P6

P4 added:

> *There has been sprouting of backyard agricultural activities including gardening and selling of farm produce at household levels and along streets as people tried to survive. Some produced home-made masks.* P4

It was apparent from the chats that, the closure of formal markets and

designated selling points for various wares including sports related equipment caused the flourishing of street tuck shops, makeshift markets and backyard gardening at homes as people strived to fight poverty induced by the lockdown and business closure. Small gardens sprouted wherever there was space, partly because people had nothing to do. Participants reported a brisk business of selling masks from their homes as it was mandatory to move around using a mask. The smuggling of illegal beer from neighbouring countries also increased as people sought to survive financial ruin after closure of formal and informal business activities in and around the sports stadium.

4.3 Strategies to Promote Sporting Activities

The section discusses the strategies suggested by the participants that could be adopted by players and sports associations during the period of Covid-19 or any other contagious pandemic in future. Many of the participants believed that a full ban on sports events should not continue and made suggestions on sport consumption.

4.3.1 Testing and Sanitising of Players and Infrastructure

In order to promote playing during periods of contagious diseases participants proposed compulsory testing, sanitising of the players and disinfecting players' venues as elaborated by P3:

> *Covid-19 will be around for a while. Sporting activities should resume. Measures have to be put in place to minimise transmission such as compulsory testing for all participants; Use of protective clothing by all concerned whenever possible, before and after, when interacting with fellow athletes, coaches and managers and disinfecting sporting venues.* P3

P3 believed that, Covid-19 pandemic was going to last for some time and this should not derail sporting activities. The participant was confident that, players and sporting managers could be tested and sanitised regularly in order to resume sporting activities. The regular disinfectant of playing grounds and venues was viewed as a panacea to participate in sporting activities during the period of Covid-19 or any other related infectious disease.

The collaboration of various stakeholders towards the fight of Covid-19 was viewed by P8 as a way of ensuring that every player and sport person has access to testing and sanitisation:

> *Test kits for Covid-19 must be availed for free. Government, sports organisations and private sector could partner in securing testing kits for sports persons.* P8

It is evident from P8 that, the partnership of the Government, sports organisations and private sector is crucial in ensuring that sporting activities during Covid-19 take place. The stakeholders are important in securing sanitisers and testing equipment required by players.

4.3.2 Controlling the Number of Spectators at an Event

Participant, P6 suggested that, the number of spectators entering the sports venues could be reduced during Covid-19 to ensure continuity in sporting activities:

> *While playing in empty stadiums is a measure against the spread of the pandemic, it is a hard blow as there are no financial benefits in terms of gate takings. There is need to limit the number of fans entering stadia to a reasonable figure for teams to get something.* P6

In order to enforce social distancing and to minimise the spread of the corona virus, few fans or supporters could be allowed to enter the playing venues so that sports associations could get revenue from gate takings. In order to compensate for the loss of income from the limited number of supporters entering sporting venues, P3 suggested the following solution:

> *To compensate for loss of income broadcasting rights should be enforced as a source of revenue. Advertisers and those few allowed to enter sporting venues should also pay more.* P3

Sports organisations are supposed to ensure that broadcasting rights and advertising charges are paid. Most players during the lockdown in Mutare had their salaries slashed or not paid therefore reducing the number of

participants and spectators, as well as getting additional income from broadcasting rights and advertisers ensures that sports organisations can have revenue to pay players' wages and other running costs.

4.3.3 Individual Training

Players could engage in individual training in order to adhere to Covid-19 social distancing regulations. P11 and P14 narrated:

> *Players could be engaged in individual training particularly in individual sport like boxing and tennis. This has the advantage in that the player can improve his /her weakness unlike when you train as a group. However, for team sport like soccer I feel individual training can affect team coordination.* P11

P14 added:

> *Players can engage in individual physical exercises such as jogging around the home in order to keep fit. Coaches for different sports can prescribe scheduled physical activities to individual players.* P14

It was revealed by the participants that players can engage in individual training and scheduled physical activities from the coach such as jogging in order to enforce social distancing regulations. The participants felt that individual training helps the player to identify his/her own weakness and improve on them. Players can also engage in physical activities such as jogging in order to keep fit. Individual training could be successful in individual sporting activities such as tennis. However, for team sports such as soccer, individual training could destroy team spirit and reduce the performance of the team due to a lack of coordination.

4.3.4 Use of Multimedia and Technology

Sporting activities can be promoted through the use multi-media platforms by coaches of different disciplines during the time of Covid-19. P23 explained:

> *I think for social distancing to be achieved players could be trained as individuals using different platforms for example a coach could give*

> *instructions on physical activity to be performed by a player through phone call, video call, or playing videos whereby the players can learn and acquire demonstrated skill from the coach.* P23

Participant, P23 thought that coaching instructions could be conveyed to the player by the coach through interactive multi-media platforms such as phone and video call in order to avoid physical contact during the prevalence of Covid-19. P23 believed that multimedia platforms allow coaches to demonstrate a skill to the player.

P22 concurred with P23 on the use of multi-media in imparting skills to the player:

> *Coaches can send videos, voice recording as well as holding virtual meetings with players upon which the coach can demonstrate skills to be mastered by the players.* P22

It is evident from the two participants that, the use of multi-media platforms can be an effective strategy by coaches to train players and athletes during the time of Covid-19 whereby social distancing has to be observed to curtail the spread of the virus.

5 Discussion of Findings

Covid-19 had socio-cultural, economic and health impacts on Mutare community which as a struggling poor urban council was further devastated in multiple ways. Covid-19 and lockdown restrictions impacted on sport and society. The Covid-19 pandemic has created a bumpy playing ground characterised by numerous challenges including the loss of income due to closure of some formal and informal businesses and the suspension of sporting activities. The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in the emergence and decline of some business activities. There has been a paradigm shift in the operations of sporting activities. This paradigm shift induced new innovative ideas for businesses and technological developments to promote sporting activities during a pandemic like Covid-19.

5.1 The Pandemic: A Threat to Lives and Livelihoods

There were return migrants from neighbouring countries like South Africa that

flooded into Zimbabwe due to loss of income as businesses closed in SA. Some of the migrants were deported and some returned voluntarily as they felt they would miss their families due to lockdown restrictions. As businesses closed in Mutare some residents on the brink of poverty with little hope of food provision for their families illegally migrated to Mozambique to buy second hand clothes and to smuggle illegal beer for sale in an attempt to survive. Keevy, Green and Manik, (2014) and Manik (2005) in their study of return migrants observed several factors that can force migrants to return home including feelings of isolation from their loved ones as was in this case but with a new caveat, namely that of a spreading pandemic threatening the lives and livelihoods of people. Covid-19 led to the closure of sporting business and agricultural markets. FAO (2020) revealed that lockdown restrictions caused massive losses in agricultural business. Further, scholars (Li Ng &Serrano 2020) noted that, Covid-19 caused the closure of sport-related business forcing most communities into poverty and suffering.

5.2 Sport and the Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic curtailed sporting activities in Mutare community. This caused psychological harm: emotional stress, anxiety, and pain among the sporting fraternity. Ajisafe (2009) observed that inactivity can lead to depression, anxiety and heart diseases. Further, emotional stress resulting from loss of income, loss of employment and boredom as people were restricted within their environs can further promote heart diseases (Jukic, *et al.* 2020; Ojeme and Uti 1996). The study revealed that many people engaged in physical activity in the form of jogging up the mountain terrain around Mutare in order to keep fit and to get rid of boredom from lockdown restrictions. Physical activities such as jogging promotes endurance, self- esteem and generally good health (Babalola 2010).

Covid-19 impacted on the adoption and practice of new models of coaching players and athletes in order to promote sporting activities. Sporting managers across the world coached their players using technological devices such as videos and telephone calls. These sports coaches advanced individual training as opposed to the common team sessions. Sports meetings are now virtual meetings. Evans *et al.* (2020) revealed that e-learning, online training and courses as well as digitalisation are becoming more popular during Covid-19. Further, findings by Evans *et al.* (2020) unveil that, in Europe individual

training has gained in popularity. With developments in technology and communication, e-sport is likely to be an alternative mode of training in sport in view of contagious diseases such as Covid-19.

5.3 Socio-cultural Practices and the Pandemic

In order to reduce the rapid spread of Covid-19, people have been encouraged to put on masks, practicing social distancing and hygiene through regular washing of hands. (Farfan-Cano 2020; IOM 2020). The adoption of these preventive measures impacted on how people communicate and interact as well as people's lifestyles on implementing hygienic conditions. Among the *Shona* (major tribal group) people of Zimbabwe greeting each other is usually done through shaking of hands as a sign of respect, oneness and love. This culture of shaking hands when greeting is no longer being practiced due the impact of Covid-19 that encouraged social distancing and hygiene. The study revealed that culture is dynamic and is now changing due to the influence of the pandemic.

Juvenile delinquency and gender abuse increased as a result of lockdown restrictions on population movement. These immoralities infringed upon *unhu/ubuntu* values that cherishe honesty and integrity amongst Shona people of Zimbabwe. UNDP (2020) reported lockdown restrictions, unemployment, poverty as contributing to gender-based abuse and violence.

5.4 Adaptation to the Pandemic

The study unpacked that people are adaptive to changes in the socio-cultural and economic environment. The Covid-19 pandemic caused the closure of agricultural markets and other businesses. Mutare community adapted through developing backyard businesses such as tuck shops and street vending. Some changed their diet as they opted for cheaper and available substitutes such as *mbambaira* (sweet potatoes) yet some resorted to jogging and home-based physical activities in respond to lockdown that restricted movement of people. Women are the ones mostly engaged in backyard businesses, gardening and street vending in order to survive. The ILO (2020) observed that Covid-19 caused loss of jobs and this was bound to push particularly women to engage into informal activities.

6 Recommendations

The Covid-19 pandemic and the accompanying lockdown restrictions had numerous impacts on Mutare community. People were physically and psychologically stressed and suffered from heart related diseases due to inactivity. The study recommends not just the expansion of hospitals, which all countries have been undertaking, but also that of counselling centres to expand the health system to assist those affected.

The Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on economic activities including the closure of sporting businesses. This resulted in the loss of income and employment for numerous individuals. There is a dire need to put aside funding in order to resuscitate sport businesses. Other sources of income such as advertising should also receive more attention to compensate for their losses in gate takings. The government should partner with private sector to source funds that could be used to support and cushion the informal sector and small-scale enterprises which are most vulnerable to collapsing during the pandemic.

Sporting activities have been affected by lockdown restrictions. Various strategies should be adopted to ensure continuity in sports which has become a delicate sector due to the pandemic. The following strategies are recommended for individuals and organisations:

- Adopt new training models such as online and individualised training using different multi-media platforms to cater for professional sports persons and the community in general.
- Testing and sanitising of people, sports venues and infrastructure regularly.
- Controlling the number of events held and spectators entering sports venues to reduce risk of the virus spreading.

7 Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic had multiple devastating impacts on the community of Mutare in Zimbabwe. The pandemic had serious economic impacts on businesses, related-businesses, schools and players. The lockdown restrictions and consequent closure of businesses resulted in a loss of income and employment. This caused anxiety, frustration and emotional stress within society in general and in the sporting fraternity. Consequently, the loss of

income and employment opportunities is resulting in the mushrooming of illegal business activities such as street vending, illegal tuck shops and illegal border crossing to acquire goods for sale. Lockdown restrictions also confined people to their homes thus prompting inactivity and the emergence of diseases due to sedentary behaviour. Inactivity and frustrations due to lockdown restrictions resulted in loss of *unhu/ubuntu* as some youngsters engaged in juvenile delinquency and drug abuse. In view of the lockdown restrictions, various strategies were suggested for adoption by the participants to ensure the continuity of sporting activities. Some of the strategies proposed included compulsory testing and sanitisation of players, controlling the number of events, officials and spectators at sporting venues, individual training and use of multi-media in sports training.

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