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## A Content Analysis of U.S. Interscholastic Sport Management Research

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Despite nearly 8 million student participants, and millions more stakeholders in the form of parents, administrators, and coaches, interscholastic sport research is scarce. To determine the scope of existing interscholastic sport research, the current study used a meta-synthesis content analysis to investigate all sport management journals listed on the NASSM list of Journals Serving the Community of Sport Management Scholarship. Results indicated that of the 37,107 journal articles on the NASSM list, 931 focused on some aspect of interscholastic sport. The number of sport-specific studies totaled 348, which is less than 1% of all sport management publications. Although results demonstrate research growth from the 1970s to 2024, particularly in the amount of qualitative research, the scale of research is strikingly small. Fortunately, newer journals appear to welcome interscholastic inquiry. The practical implication is that much knowledge has yet to be discovered which could aid in policy development, best practices, and administrative decisions. There is ample opportunity for interscholastic research, especially given the large number of stakeholders in a variety of different roles.

According to the most recent National Federation of State High School Associations' participation statistics (NFHS, 2024), the total number of United States interscholastic athletic participants in 2023-2024 was 8,062,302. There was a relatively even distribution of participants based on gender with 4,638,785 males and 3,423,517 females, with female participation rising the last 40 years in large part due to Title IX legislation (Franklin, 2021). Prior to enactment of Title IX in 1972, there were fewer than 300,000 interscholastic female sport participants. Additionally, the number of interscholastic administrators, coaches, and athletes far exceeds that of intercollegiate and professional sport within the U.S. (Fraina et al., 2022).

Given the massive number of participants and stakeholders, interscholastic sport was described as the "single most significant dimension" in the entire sport industry (Robinson et al., 2001, p. 21). Although Robinson's quote may be worth revisiting given the rapid growth of the private/club/travel youth sport industry that includes nearly 60 million participants (Aspen Institute, 2024), it does call attention to the massive number of people involved with interscholastic sport. Moreover, the interscholastic and youth sport athletic domain is unique in terms of amateurism and eligibility, and certainly merits further exploration (Sawyer, 2015). Yet, the number of peer-reviewed publications involving interscholastic athletics pales in comparison to U.S. college and professional sport environments who have less participants, but more attention from scholars

(Forsyth, et al, 2022; Johnson et al., 2019).

Perhaps more important than evaluating the scope of interscholastic sport management research is the potential implications/opportunities from revealing a limited body of knowledge. The capacity for building theoretical contributions in the form of qualitative work, and ultimately testing theory through quantitative means, would benefit interscholastic stakeholders in the same ways that sport management research has benefitted U.S. college and professional sport. Much of the work that has been done in these areas could be applied to interscholastic research, expanding the overall body of knowledge of sport management, and specifically addressing issues unique to students in a critical developmental window. Whether it is research on financial practices, administrative decisions, policy development, ethical issues, mental health, or a whole host of other topics already investigated more thoroughly at other sport levels, knowing the breadth and depth of interscholastic sport management research is warranted.

## Review of Literature

Interscholastic athletics are regulated by the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association (NIAAA, n.d.). According to their mission statement, the NIAAA is entrusted with preserving, enhancing, and promoting educational-based athletics through the professional development of interscholastic athletic administrators (NIAAA, n.d.). The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS, n.d.) also provides professional development and regulation for state high

school associations, particularly the rules of each sport.

Both the NIAAA and the NFHS have been promoting High School Activities for more than 30 years. Educational outcomes, positive youth development, healthier behaviors, post high school results, developing better citizens, as well as school and community benefits are all lauded as positive ramifications of interscholastic sport (NFHS, 2024). Empirical research has largely supported these benefits and found improvement in fitness and metabolic health in adulthood (Angeli et al., 2017), school belongingness (Jones et al., 2020), and academic achievement (Veliz and Shakib, 2014; Wretman, 2017).

Although there are anecdotal and empirically-supported benefits to interscholastic participation, noted sport sociologist Jay Coakley illustrated the emerging issues that offer potential research opportunities. Many local and state associations implemented a pay-to-play policy, which then led to added participation fees for student-athletes and their families (Coakley, 2021). This policy could cause a divide in participation rates based on socioeconomic status. Furthermore, Coakley (2021) has noticed an increased pressure to win facing interscholastic athletes. Some of this may be attributed to increased parental or coaching pressure. Another trend is early sport specialization, in which “the age or point in time in an athlete’s development when sports training and competition is restricted to a single sport in the pursuit of elite performance” (Capranica & Millard-Stafford, 2011, p. 572). With athletes becoming specialized at younger ages, they may face

positive and/or negative consequences through interscholastic sport. It is also noteworthy that the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) indicates that of the approximately 8,000,000 interscholastic athletes, only 495,000 will compete at NCAA institutions (NCAA, n.d.). These are but a few examples of areas where research could help to solve or understand what is happening. Unfortunately, the research is limited, but it is clear many of these anecdotal issues could be empirically studied.

The aforementioned topics are certainly worth researchers’ time, but there are several reasons why interscholastic research may be more difficult to conduct. For example (a) access is difficult due to parental permission and child assent, which can be time consuming, challenging to schedule, and usually requires a gatekeeper to approve; (b) high schools are plentiful but isolated to unique communities – not nationally consumed like college or professional sports; (c) individual state associations make consistent policies unlikely, and consistency difficult; and, (d) commercialization, popularity, and digital consumption is low in comparison to collegiate, professional, and Olympic sports (Johnson et al, 2023).

### **What Do We Know?**

Despite the relatively limited amount of research, as well as the challenges of collecting interscholastic data, some patterns have been identified. Findings related to interscholastic sport can be generally broken into the following categories: administrative issues, coaches’ issues, decision-making issues, ethical issues, offi-

cials' issues, parental issues, participation issues, policy issues, media issues, and student-athlete issues (Johnson et al., 2019; Fraina et al., 2021, 2022; Forsyth, Fraina et al., 2020, 2021; Forsyth, Whisenant, et al., 2020).

A study conducted by Forsyth, Whisenant, et al. (2020) revealed that the most prominent administrative issues were concussions, risk minimization, safety issues, and maintaining an educational focus in a post-recession environment. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, created new administrative challenges and opportunities for interscholastic administrators (Ratts et al., 2022), specifically the impact on communication and technology. Interscholastic sport programs have been forced to adopt online live streaming and digital ticketing without much preparation. Similarly, athletic directors face a range of decision-making and policy issues such as understanding concussion symptoms (Cranmer & LaBelle, 2018). Interscholastic athletic directors have also been found to value committees for hiring searches and policy decisions (Zdroik & Veliz, 2020). Fraina, et al. (2022) categorized 14 of the most important interscholastic issues in the ethical area. Of these, sportsmanship, behavioral issues, emphasis on winning, and dealing with outside sport organizations were deemed the most important ethical considerations by athletic directors. These are but a few of the areas by which administrators are the focus of the study.

Media is another example where research exists. For example, ethical considerations also overlap with media coverage

of interscholastic sport in which Winemiller et al. (2022) found the most prominent media issues included:

- (a) incessant contact of high school athletes by media members, (b) lack of institutional oversight by parent companies over school-specific sites, (c) ambiguous methodology behind player evaluation, (d) conflicts of interest inherent in recruiting media outlets hosting evaluation camps, and (e) lack of institutional protection from unethical pressures by members of college athletic departments (p. 456).

Coaches, officials, and parents are among the most influential and studied stakeholders in interscholastic sport. Forsyth, et al. (2021) found the three most salient coach concerns in interscholastic sport following an economic recession were coaches' education, finding coaches, and retaining coaches. The acquisition and retention of coaches is particularly important and found to be dependent on emotional intelligence (Lee & Chelladurai, 2018). Regarding officials, the items identified as most important were lack of officials, recruiting officials, and treatment of officials (Forsyth et al., 2021). Occupational turnover indicators of officials have been strongly predicted by affective occupational commitment and sport commitment (Barnhill, et al., 2018). These findings indicate that recruitment and retention of coaches and officials remains a concern in interscholastic sport. Parents also play a crucial role, particularly inspiring communication with athletic di-

rectors. The top three parents' issues in a 2019 study were educating parents, keeping athletics in perspective, and treatment of coaches (Johnson et al., 2019). There is a clear overlap among these categories that must be prioritized by athletic directors.

Other interscholastic issues focus mostly on students (e.g., participation issues [enough students to fill a team], student-athletes' issues [academic eligibility], and social media issues). One of the earlier seminal studies investigating interscholastic sport participation uncovered the factors that lead to maintaining or terminating sport participation (Martin, 1997). The primary factor that contributed to athletes' continuing participation were feelings of personal fulfillment. Conversely, those who had withdrawn from sport stated their action was due to interference from other activities. Motives for athletic participation has been studied numerous times since Martin's work especially with the emerging trend of youth sport specialization that has been correlated with interscholastic sport participation rates (Brgoch et al., 2022). Interview participants suggested the tendency toward devoting oneself to only one sport could have an adverse impact on overall participation rates. A study by Fraina et al. (2021) yielded similar results. The three most important student participation issues cited by athletic directors were pressure to specialize, sport specialization, and having an educational emphasis. From a broader perspective, high school athletes have reported the various factors that shape their participation including difficulty bal-

ancing commitments, feeling conflicted in their roles, facing external pressure, and facing a stigmatized environment (Bates et al., 2024).

Within the past decade, social media usage has created issues for athletic directors and student-athletes alike (Price et al., 2022). Administrators have struggled to identify the nature of social media policy training and review of policies. Participation is also impacted by eligibility where many state associations have implemented strict academic "no pass, no play" rules. Many of these rules require maintaining specific grade point averages and have age restrictions. Additionally, complicating the issues surrounding adolescence and interscholastic sport participation is the COVID-19 pandemic. In a study conducted by McGuine et al. (2023), interscholastic athletes from a Spring 2021 cohort reported lower rates of depression, higher physical activity, and better quality of life than those during COVID in Spring 2020. Specifically, the percentage of participants who exhibited moderate to severe depression symptoms increased from 5.3% pre-COVID-19 to 22.5% during COVID. The confluence of this evidence supports the value of further research into interscholastic athletics, particularly the participants themselves.

### **Importance of Studying Interscholastic Sport**

According to Soucie and Doherty (1996), researchers are often influenced by what other researchers are doing within their respective fields. Forsyth et al. (2022) suggested within the field of sport



management, interscholastic athletics has drawn the least attention among all sport segments. In fact, researchers have focused their interests more toward collegiate and professional sport. This observation is consistent with Pedersen and Pitts (2001) as well as Mondello and Pedersen (2003) who noted the sport industry is much broader than what most journals include in their printed articles, which often isolate particular parts of the sport industry. Moreover, many sport management students wanting to work in sport often envision themselves working in the collegiate or professional sport segments. This desire aligns with the commercialization and media attention highlighted in those segments (Forsyth et al., 2022).

Although national media may not cover interscholastic sports extensively in comparison to collegiate or professional segments, the interscholastic sport segment should not be underestimated. In terms of growth potential, career opportunities, and economic influence, one can reference the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. From 2019 to 2029, the interscholastic sport segment is projected for a seven percent growth in employment opportunities. A significant amount of this growth will occur in the more than 24,000 athletic departments in public and private high schools. As a financial segment, interscholastic sports contribute over U.S. \$15 billion, and directly employ more than 300,000 administrators, coaches, and officials. Indeed, the interscholastic sport segment is a powerful participatory, financial, and developmental segment of the sport industry that has some foundational

research but demands to be understood better.

### **Catalyst**

The current study was inspired by Johnson et al. (2019). As partial justification for their study about high school parents, Johnson et al. engaged in a cursory review of eight journals in Sport Management: *International Journal of Sport Management*, *International Journal of Sport Marketing and Sponsorship*, *Journal of Amateur Sport*, *Journal of Applied Sport Management*, *Journal of Sport Economics*, *Journal of Sport Management*, *Sport Management Review*, and *Sport Marketing Quarterly*. These journals spanned from 1987 to 2014 with *Journal of Sport Management* being the oldest and *Journal of Amateur Sport* being the newest. Johnson et al. found only 22 of 3,752 articles broached the topic of interscholastic athletic issues, which amounts to five-tenths of 1 percent of research focused on interscholastic sport research. This finding demonstrated how far behind interscholastic research was compared to U.S. professional and college sport research (Forsyth et al., 2022). Unfortunately, the Johnson et al. (2019) finding was a simplistic assessment, limited to a few journals, and lacked nuance relative to the type of research within the entire sport management field. The current study expanded on Johnson et al. (2019) to offer an overdue, yet comprehensive, understanding of interscholastic sport management research. Thus, the current study intends to provide an aggregated account of the research published in

sport management journals to answer the following research question.

RQ – What research encompasses the interscholastic sport management body of knowledge?

## Method

The current study utilized a two-phase analysis to determine the scope of interscholastic sport research. Phase One was a traditional content/document analysis (Drisko & Maschi, 2016) employing a combination of root words and paired extensions. Phase Two implemented meta-synthesis, a sub-study of content analysis in which themes were created by identifying core concepts of the publication (Calik & Sozbilir, 2014). Meta-synthesis allows a more detailed understanding of content beyond identification of key words. As described by Finfgeld-Connett (2018), meaning is given by categorizing components of the publication through interpretation of the research. This analysis requires the researchers to evaluate each publication to determine which pre-determined categories describe the research. In this study, the researchers chose participant and topic categories as these are logical and established ways to categorize research (Zorluoglu et al., 2022). Through this process, inclusion and exclusion of individual publications is possible because more discernment of the content can be achieved (Finfgeld-Connett, 2018). Meta-synthesis also allows a more comprehensive descriptive analysis of data beyond traditional content analysis (Calik & Sozbilir, 2014; Finfgeld-Connett, 2018).

## Procedure

Phase One utilized all sport management journals identified in the Journals Serving the Community of Sport Management Scholarship list for the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM) website (NASSM, 2020). The list of 100 journals included publications from the following categories: comprehensive/general (12 journals); economics, finance & operations research (4 journals); law (18 journals); marketing & media (5 journals); policy and development (3 journals); school & university sports (9 journals); teaching (3 journals); associated industries (10 journals); psychology, sociology, & history (36 journals). Only peer-reviewed research publications printed in English and focused on interscholastic sport within the United States were included. The search included all peer-reviewed publications up to April 23, 2024.

Four root words were used in Phase One that were searched individually in both the title and abstract for each journal: Interscholastic, High School, Secondary Education, and Scholastic. Each of the root words were paired with one of six extension words using the Boolean operator “and” so that the words did not have to be in consecutive order. The extension words were sport, athlete, coach, recreation, adolescent, and athletic. Using a combination of root and extension words in the title and abstract ensured that results were comprehensive for each journal. On many occasions, a publication was found under multiple combinations of words, which was expected, but each pub-

lication was recorded once. The search engine utilized was EBSCOhost. There were eight journals not available through the EBSCOhost process. In those cases, the individual website of the journal was used by directly searching their archives. Two journals - *Detroit College of Law Journal of Entertainment & Sports Law* and the *International Review on Sport and Violence* – were excluded from the analysis because no data existed or was unobtainable.

Phase Two involved an evaluation of each result to determine a theme of the research by participant or topic and was categorized accordingly. Because the purpose of this study was to evaluate the amount and type of interscholastic sport research, it was imperative to distinguish among studies that were primarily about sport rather than studies that had a focus outside of sport but used the context of sport as the place to conduct their study. For example, numerous medical case studies found in the keyword search (Phase I) utilized injured high school athletes as their participants, often in single case studies that focused on a specific medical procedure or physical therapy practice. These types of medical studies are outside the scope of sport management research and were excluded from the analysis because the focus was on medical intervention rather than the interscholastic environment. Thus, the current meta-synthesis distinguished among sport studies by isolating peer-reviewed publications in the categories designated by the NASSM list of journals with a focus of identifying the participants or topics as themes/categories. For each phase, an investigator

located and coded the articles, and the primary author confirmed the findings at the end of the collection phase. If there was a discrepancy of the coding the investigator and primary author reviewed the source material together and the primary author made the final decision.

## Results

Phase One resulted in a total of 931 individual articles found that included any combination of root and extension words and were identified as interscholastic sport research of some type. Of the 931, 426 were identified as sport studies. Of the 426 sport studies 78 were law publications that dealt specifically with a legal issue that was related to interscholastic sport. Although the intention was to include law studies in this content analysis, it became clear that legal articles would best be served to have their own analysis that included parameters beyond the ones identified in this study. For example, level of court (e.g., district, appellate), legal precedent, common sport management concepts (e.g., negligence) are some types of content often unique to sport law journals. Removing the 78 articles from the NASSM list of “Law” journals - with an intention to review those articles in a future study - was necessary. After removing law studies, 348 interscholastic sport studies have been published on participants or topics specific to sport management research (e.g., administration, players, media, coaching, officials, parents/fans, etc.). The 348 interscholastic sport management publications account for .0094% of the 37,107 available articles published



**Table 1***Root Word and Extension Word Cross-Tabulation by Total Search Results*

	Sport	Athlete	Recreation	Adolescent	Athletic
Interscholastic	312	142	5	240	994
High School	13,507	10,574	571	60,631	6355
Secondary Education	1,019	148	120	3,558	112
Scholastic	376	305	20	1,367	576

in these journals. Thus, less than 1% of sport management publications within the NASSM journal list focus on interscholastic sport.

Table 1 provides the search results in a cross-tabulated format showing the number of peer-reviewed search results for each combination of words used in Phase One. It is noteworthy that many studies were found multiple times using different iterations of the root and extension words. It is also noteworthy that many of the studies in the results were not related to interscholastic sport, which are not included in the final data, and resulted in the cross-tabulated totals often adding up to more than 931. For example, the root word “high school” and extension word “sport” yielded 13,507 results, but the vast majority of these research articles were not associated with interscholastic sport research. The combination of high school and adolescent yielded 60,631 results, but given the nature of the words it is clear these words yielded broad results and did not include sport. After ensuring that each study was about interscholastic sport, and duplicates were eliminated, the total number of peer-reviewed

interscholastic sport publications was 348.

Table 2 displays the number of interscholastic sport research articles by publication date and type of methodology. Each decade from the earliest publications in the 1970s to the most current research through April 23, 2024, was examined. The most recent four years in the 2020s are included as individual years and demonstrate specific trends in the past five years. The number of qualitative, quantitative, mixed-method, and conceptual/commentary publications are included to identify patterns in research design.

Similar to Table 2, Table 3 demonstrates the type of methodology. Instead of time period, however, Table 3 demonstrates the number of studies by the type of participants or topic based on the meta-synthesis of Phase Two. The most publications were quantitative empirical research on athletes (115) followed by quantitative studies on coaches (45), qualitative studies on athletes (35), and qualitative studies on coaches (21). Publications focused on parents/fans (5) and officials (8) were far fewer than studies on players and coaches.

**Table 2***Totals of Interscholastic Sport Research Publications by Decade/ Year Cross Referenced with Method*

Decade/Year	Total	Qualitative Method	Quantitative Method	Mixed Method	Conceptual or Commentary
1970s	6	0	5	0	1
1980s	26	4	18	2	2
1990s	46	8	32	0	6
2000s	78	28	44	1	5
2010s	130	39	73	5	13
2020	11	3	4	4	0
2021	14	8	6	0	0
2022	18	9	7	2	0
2023	17	7	8	2	0
2024	2	1	1	0	0
Total	348	107	203	16	27

**Table 3***Totals of Interscholastic Sport Research by Participants/Topic Cross Referenced with Method*

	Total	Qualitative Method	Quantitative Method	Mixed Method	Conceptual or Commentary
Admin	34	11	17	3	3
Coaches	72	21	45	0	6
Media	13	4	5	3	1
Officials	8	3	3	2	0
Parents/Fans	5	3	1	1	0
Athletes	154	35	115	2	2
Policy	36	12	16	1	7
Other	26	5	14	1	6
Total	348	94	216	13	25

**Table 4***Top 10 Sport Management Journals by Total of Interscholastic Sport Publications*

Journal	Number of Total Articles in Journal	Number of Interscholastic Articles	Percent of Articles in Interscholastic Sport
Applied Research in Coaching and Athletics Annual	465	50	10.7%
Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport	5275	17	0.3%
International Journal of Sport Psychology	773	16	2.1%
Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education	257	16	6.2%
Sport, Education and Society	1,098	15	1.4%
Sport Psychologist	1042	14	1.3%
International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology	794	13	1.6%
Journal of Amateur Sport	89	13	14.6%
Journal of Contemporary Athletics	293	13	4.4%
International Journal of Sport Management	585	12	2.1%

Table 4 displays the number and percentage of articles from the ten journals with the most total interscholastic sport publications. The percentage of articles relative to the total number of publications by the journals are also listed. *Applied Research in Coaching and Athletics Annual* (ARCAA) had the most interscholastic sport articles with 50, which is 10.7% of the publications in ARCAA. This total number of interscholastic sport publications in ARCAA more than double interscholastic sport publications in any other journal with the next journal having 17

publications (*Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*). From a percentage perspective, the *Journal of Amateur Sport* demonstrated the highest percentage of publications in a specific journal devoted to interscholastic sport yielding 13 of the 89 (14.6%) total publications on interscholastic sport.

## Discussion

Certainly, the most striking takeaway from the results is the dearth of interscholastic sport research relative to other types of sport management research. This notion holds true across journal,

sub-topic, and year, although there has been a slight increase in interscholastic sport articles published in recent years in addition to a slight embrace of qualitative studies relative to previous years. Growth after the turn of the century was apparent, and quantitative methodologies occurred most frequently, nearly double that of qualitative methods. Recently, however, qualitative methodologies have kept pace with quantitative methods and demonstrated more total publications than quantitative methods in 2021 and 2022.

The lack of interscholastic sport research is surprising in large part because so many U.S. high school students participate in interscholastic sports, which serves to shape their formative development. Furthermore, the number of individuals directly and indirectly involved in, and affected by, interscholastic sport is staggering (Fraina et al., 2022; NFHS, 2022). Some of the key stakeholders include; players, coaches, parents, superintendents, principals, athletic directors, administrators at the state level in governing athletic associations, athletic trainers, volunteers, and alumni, among others. Any of these stakeholders could benefit from research. For example, findings on the behavior of parents relative to coaches or officials could aid in event management policies. Research on administrators has already revealed issues they believe are imperative (Forsyth et al. 2024a, 2024b), but further research could isolate any of the issues to better understand how specific topics are different based on region, administrative level, or resource allocations.

From a theoretical perspective, more research could expand on existing con-

cepts like distributive justice relative to competitive balance policies (Johnson et al., 2015), or the uncertainty of outcome hypothesis and its impact on parity (Fort & Maxcy, 2023). Theoretical approaches from sport psychology (e.g., motivation theories) could be particularly important as Dorsch et al. (2021) noted in their scoping review on youth sport parents. Given the profound amount of development that occurs during the teenage years, the theoretical implications for a variety of psychological or sociological sport concepts are ripe for exploration.

It is also surprising that athletes themselves serve as the subject far more often than individuals in other roles, given that high school athletes under 18 years of age would require parental assent to participate in such a study, whereas individuals (adults) in many other roles would not. As Table 3 demonstrates, it is also curious that adults are not at the center of more studies given the widespread shortage of coaches and officials (Forsyth et al., 2021) as well as the critical roles held by school administrators and teachers. The emerging discourse about negative parent behaviors while attending sporting events (Dorsch et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2019) also begs the question why more adults have not been investigated.

One might argue that perhaps the intended audience for many sport management journals are other academics, and not interscholastic leaders (e.g., coaches and administrators) with the most direct ability to put the research into practice. If this disconnect between research and practitioner is true, as has been a critique of sport management in the past (King,

2013), one might ask, “why *aren’t* practitioners the primary intended audience of these journals?” This question is especially salient given that medical and legal studies appear to be written for medical and legal practitioners, but sport studies may not. If practitioners are not aware of the sport-related knowledge being created through research, the amount of research may be irrelevant and important practical applications may be lost. A deliberate attempt to connect interscholastic leaders with knowledge published in sport management journals is a potential solution to maximize the little interscholastic research that does exist. There have been some journals with a focus on application (e.g., *Applied Journal of Sport Management*; *Sport Innovation Journal*), but many sport management journals still offer research that may be costly to acquire or too complex to be practical.

Regardless of who the intended audience is, the lack of interscholastic sport research is still curious given how many important and timely topics are directly or indirectly related to interscholastic sport. These topics include (in no particular order) physical health (Angeli et al., 2017), mental health, academic performance (Wretman, 2017), equity, school climate, school leadership, community relationships, sense of belonging (Jones et al., 2020), pay-to-participate models (Coakley, 2021), teacher/student (or, in this case, coach/athlete) dynamic, and more. The state-governed nature of interscholastic sport also lends itself to study as a way of identifying exemplars. That is, state associations have varying policies with regard to

transferring, academic eligibility, playing rules, coach training and certification, and funding. Studies could be incredibly valuable to the field by identifying exemplar state associations or best practices with regard to promoting positive outcomes in one or more of the aforementioned areas.

The notion of identifying exemplar practices through interscholastic sport research could also extend beyond the United States. The connection between sport and school is vastly different in the United States compared to many other countries where city/club sports are more prevalent, but developmentally the athletes are similar. Interestingly, multiple international journals (*International Journal of Sport Psychology*, *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, and *International Journal of Sport Management*) appear in the top 10 (see Table 4) by total number of interscholastic sport publications.

Perhaps more important with regard to journals is the information presented in Table 4, which has implications for the broader sport management academic landscape. It is clear that some sport management journals are a more accepting home (or a more attractive submission location) to interscholastic sport research based on the percent of articles in the journal devoted to interscholastic sport (e.g., *Applied Research in Coaching and Athletics Annual* [10.7%]; *Journal of Amateur Sport* [14.6%]). It is important to note, however, that Table 4 is primarily based on the total number of interscholastic articles published. If percentage of articles was the focus, there are some younger journals that would have made the top ten. For ex-



ample, *Sport Innovation Journal* (4.2%), *Sport and Entertainment Review* (4.1%), *Journal of Physical Education and Sport Management* (3.4%), and the *Journal of Athlete Development and Experience* (3.2%) had fewer total articles than journals in Table 4 but had a higher percentage of interscholastic publications relative to total articles in those journals. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that only one of the journals in the NASSM “comprehensive/general” group of journals is listed in Table 4 (*International Journal of Sport Management*). This point is notable because this list is where some of the industry’s top journals reside (e.g., *Journal of Sport Management*; *Sport Management Review*). While the highest-rated journals do have a few interscholastic publications, most interscholastic research is limited to the journals in Table 4, and those listed above with percentages over 3%. Fortunately, it appears many journals are open to accepting interscholastic research, but the aims/scope of the journal dictate the outlet.

Finally, in addition to the topics mentioned earlier in this section – each of which could justify a greater share of sport management research devoted to interscholastic athletics – there are several other timely topics that would validate an even greater share. Table 2 clearly shows an increase in interscholastic research over recent history, but the following topics appear to be more and more prevalent in the social discourse of today: school choice, mental health, sport specialization, transgender competition, and emerging technology. Although such emerging topics would seem to point towards increased

attention for interscholastic athletics research, there might be other compelling topics in the U.S. college and professional segments working against such a trend. For example, U.S. collegiate sport research might divert even more attention away from interscholastic athletics research given the interest in conference realignment, future of the NCAA, transfer policies, name, image, & likeness, and the ramifications of the May 2024 multi-billion dollar settlement between the NCAA and former/current athletes. Indeed, the media attention and commercialization of the U.S. college and professional sport segment will likely continue to dominate research attention.

### Limitations and Future Research

Although the current study provides the most comprehensive analysis of interscholastic sport research to date, there are a few limitations and subsequent suggestions for future research. First, this study omitted legal studies after it became clear these types of studies focused more on legal concepts. It was necessary to deem a comprehensive review of legal studies beyond the scope of this study, but it is certainly advisable to address this limitation by conducting future research specifically on sport management law studies. Articles from law journals provide important tangential elements to more direct sport management concepts and deserve their own inquiry as a natural extension to this research. With an evaluation of specific legal concepts following the findings from the current study, additional insights on interscholastic research could be gleaned.

A secondary limitation is the specific list of journals and type of analyses conducted. While there are nearly endless ways to categorize publication content, this study focused on date, research type, participants, and journals within the NASSM list of sport management journals. These research areas provide a foundational understanding, but they are limited depending on additional types of information desired. For example, future research could determine the percentage of published sport management studies that address U.S. and international intercollegiate and professional sport while comparing those percentages to that of U.S. or international interscholastic sport. Moreover, conducting an analysis of journals beyond the NASSM list, or in other fields like education, could help determine if a significant number of interscholastic sport studies exist beyond the parameters of this study. Journals like the *Physical Educator* or *The High School Journal* would be places to start.

## Conclusion

Until now, an aggregated summary of interscholastic sport management research did not exist. The current study provided an analysis of sport management research according to the NASSM list of sport management journals to determine that interscholastic research is less than 1% of all sport management sport publications. The dramatically low amount of research is disheartening considering nearly 8 million students participate in high school sports as well as the tens of millions more stakeholders involved.

Although interscholastic research has increased in the past decade, and some journals appear to welcome studies on amateur sport, the low amount of research in all facets of interscholastic sport may suggest the difficulty of gaining access to these environments or a low demand for rigorous scientific inquiry at the interscholastic level. It appears the incentives for researchers and stakeholders who stand to benefit from greater theoretical and empirical research are currently insufficient. If granting agencies, educational organizations, or individual school boards understood the dearth of U.S. interscholastic sport management research, perhaps more resources could be made available. Or perhaps interscholastic governing bodies could provide practical summaries of relevant research to bridge the gap often found between academic research and practitioners. Finally, where U.S. professional and college sport have more of a commercial incentive, interscholastic sport research may need to move toward a more applied approach with tangible outcomes if practical implications are to become reality.

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