Chapter 9
The Marketing Implications of International Sports Rating Systems

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ABSTRACT
Recognized world sports federations appear to have chosen their official rating systems with marketing in mind. 87% of the 105 official rating systems involve the simple accumulation of points, which encourages top competitors to enter as many tournaments as possible. Most of those systems recognize a seasonal champion. A marketer can exploit the importance of the end-of-season events and the appearance of top athletes. To be successful in a combat sport like wrestling, boxing, and judo, physically overcoming the opponent is intensely personal. Top competitors can be advertised in personal terms to encourage the awaiting audience to buy into the upcoming contest on an equally personal level. In other sports such as running, swimming, and rowing, each competitor performs unimpeded by the opponent. Often the best performance for a season is used to crown a yearly champion. A rating in seconds and meters is more tangible than one in points. A marketer can illustrate the small gap between top competitors making every stride important to potential ticket buyers. Some of the object-control sports like basketball, cricket, ice hockey, rugby, soccer, and tennis are rated by point accumulators and some are rated by more sophisticated systems that self adjust, based on the relative strengths of the opponents. Mind sports such as chess and bridge are included because these competitions are recognized by the International Olympic Committee and by SportAccord. The specifics of those rating systems are provided in this chapter as are suggested marketing opportunities.

INTRODUCTION
In spite of the amount of money at risk, organizations may approach a sports competition with no marketing plan in mind, Stotlar (1993). On the other hand, effective marketing evolves when a brand actively aligns itself with a favorite team, Mitre and Ordonez de Pablos (2009), when an affinity can be

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The Marketing Implications of International Sports Rating Systems

established between a company and a sport, Bloom et al. (2006), and when fanship can be exploited as motivation to attend a sports event, Kahle and Close (2011). This chapter suggests strategies for the effective marketing of sports, based on the special attributes of each type of sport, made clear by the types of rating systems chosen by the stakeholders of recognized international sports federations.

It would be a marketing dream to handle a match between the two top-ranked players in the world. It is not nearly as obvious that the rating system itself could discourage or encourage that matchup. Suppose a world governing federation creates ratings by averaging points earned per tournament, based on the most recent 52-week period. Player A has earned 1000 points on 10 matches for a rating of 100 while player B has acquired 900 points on 9 matches for the same rating. The two are tied as the best in that sport. A marketer wants to promote a small tournament in the home nation of Player B. The marketer invites Players A and B. Unfortunately for the marketer, Player A declines, realizing that his worst score of 10 points happened 52 weeks before. By doing nothing for one week, the 10 points will “age out” and his rating will become 990/9 or 110. His rating rises 10% by doing nothing. Player B wants to help promote the match in his own country. Unfortunately for the marketer, the end of the season is fast approaching and Player B wants to win the top honors in his sport. He realizes that if he wins, he would only earn 30 points for the minor tournament. His rating would become 930/10 or 93, a drop of 7% while winning. Both players are discouraged from entering because of the averaging system.

Suppose the federation recognizes the above flaws in the averaging system. The federation votes to rate players based on the sum of all points accumulated in the last 52 weeks. Had that been true prior to the tournament, by not entering, Player A’s rating would drop from 1000 to 990, punishing him for inactivity. Player A might as well enter the tournament. Player B could have a rating increase from 900 to 930 should he win in his native country, a bonus for his loyalty. Point accumulation systems encourage entries by top players in as many competitions as possible, aiding in the marketing of those competitions. Such was the marketing-based motivation of the men’s Association of Tennis Professional, the ATP, when they changed from an averaging system to the current point accumulation system. The women’s tour, the WTA, followed suit. After the change, both organization expressed satisfaction that more top players were entering tournaments under the new point accumulation system than under the old averaging system.

There is another feature of a point accumulation rating system with huge marketing implication. Many sports crown an end-of-season champion by using a 52-week moving total. A marketer can chronicle the battle among top players in the tournaments leading up to the finale. If the scoring system is understood, then it’s possible to build up interest in a tournament, advertising what is needed for a player to overtake another or for a player to gain enough points to be guaranteed becoming the seasonal winner. The media will publicize that competition, providing free advertising of the sport and creating excitement for the following season.

A marketer’s career may begin with one sport, but that person may later become involved in other sports. If marketing is done for a sports venue, that job will require an understanding of all sports that may be played there and the rating systems that need to be understood and exploited to keep the seats filled. This chapter will serve as a resource into world sports and into the official rating systems for those sports, as published by the federations that organize competition. I will compare and contrast the various rating systems, giving marketing implications and advice.