Chapter I

Digital Technologies and the Intensification of Economic and Organisational Mechanisms in Commercial Sport

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ABSTRACT

One of the major forces shaping modern sport is the application of digital technology. This is transforming the mass consumption, distribution, production, and organisation of sport. A set of frameworks, theories and models for understanding these forces and transformations is presented. Nonetheless, digitisation did not create modern sport. Instead it follows a series of forces and adoptions that have already occurred. Consequently, its impacts can be regarded as evolutionary rather than revolutionary. Three associated aspects of modern sport are examined in this chapter. These are: the phenomenon of superstars; the consumption of sport entertainment in the household; and the competition for the attention of consumers. The events that preceded digitisation are described and analysed, especially in the area of home entertainment, but also in the structures of sports competition, such as leagues and tournaments.

INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter considers the role of computer technologies in the distribution and consumption of commercial sport. It considers the economic forces that have promoted and guided these changes. Equally importantly from both methodological and applied viewpoints, it considers the economic forces that these changes have, in turn, unleashed. The more indirect relationships of the technology with some major organisational forms of competition are also placed in context. A primary interest of this chapter lies in determining whether or not
the impact of digitisation has been revolutionary or evolutionary.

The concern of many of the chapters in this volume is with the impact of digitisation on the enhanced production of sports, but how does sport come to be digitised and how does that digitisation operate? The schematic shown in Figure 1 is adopted in the present analysis. It shows the central concerns and something of the methodology, which is not biased towards economic and technological mechanisms, but considers social and cultural issues.

In the first instance, the creation of computer technologies and electronic networks is not dependent upon sport. Thus in Figure 1, the block “Digital Technologies and Frameworks”, recognises that the development of computer technologies is dependent not only upon purely technological and scientific frameworks, but that these operate within, and are crucially influenced by, societal and economic forces. Within this block are an enormous number of forces and relationships. Sport may be regarded as part of these, but on its own has little influence. This was especially the case in the earlier days of computer technology where the interaction with sport was close to zero. Given these considerations, digitisation is shown in Figure 1 as if it was a *deus ex machina*.

The middle block of this framework shows the areas of present interest. The examination concentrates on the most easily recognised relationship: that of computers and especially computer networks to the distribution of sport. This emphasis allows a very important evolutionary point to be

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**Figure 1. The major mechanisms in the rewards to sport digitisation**
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