6-6-2018

The Evolving Institutional Work of the National Collegiate Athletic Association to Maintain Dominance in a Fragmented Field

Nite Calvin
University of North Texas

Ige Abiodun
University of Alberta

Marvin Washington
Portland State University, marvin6@pdx.edu

Citation Details

Nite, C., Ige, A., Washington, M. (2019). The evolving institutional work of the National Collegiate Athletic Association to maintain dominance in a fragmented field. Sport Management Review, 22 (3) 379-394

The evolving institutional work of the National Collegiate Athletic Association to maintain dominance in a fragmented field

Abstract

High-profile sport governance associations tend to remain intact despite numerous issues that would predict their demise. As such, these types of associations offer valuable contexts for understanding institutional maintenance work. The authors conducted a historical case study of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in the U.S. More than 7000 pages of documents spanning more than 100 years were analyzed to document how the NCAA rose to dominance in a contested field and cemented its governance as the taken-for-granted model of collegiate and amateur sport in the U.S. despite numerous issues that would predict the association's demise. Findings suggest that the NCAA evolved its methods for controlling institutional boundaries, practices, and cognitions as means for maintaining its dominance. By expanding its boundaries, adjusting its practices, and framing member and public cognitions, the NCAA has been able to create an institution that is responsive to members and defensible against legitimate contestations.

Keywords: Institutional theory, Institutional work, College athletics, Sport Governance

1. Introduction

Sport tends to be organized by associations that provide structure and rules for competition, regulate transactions among organizations, and provide frameworks of cognition within a given sport context (Kikulis, 2000). The governance of these associations tends to become institutionalized with the actual governing bodies becoming institutions in their own right. That is, they become "organization[s] infused with value" (Selznick, 1957, p. 17) that provide "shared rules and typifications that identify categories of social actors and their appropriate activities or relationships" (Barley & Tolbert, 1997, p. 96). Especially at the highest levels of competition, sport governing bodies tend to remain in control of their various domains for extensive periods of time. In fact, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), International Cricket Council (ICC), and World Rugby have all governed for well over 100 years and have become dominant institutions within their contexts. This pattern is interesting and somewhat unusual as institutionalized associations and governance structures tend to be somewhat volatile and prone to change (Hinings, Greenwood, Reay, & Suddaby, 2004).

The inclusion of institutional theory in sport management research has proven useful for both explaining sport phenomena and for extending understandings of institutions (Washington & Patterson, 2011). Sport management scholars have examined various institutional topics, such as organizational responses to shifting institutional logics (Nite, Singer, & Cunningham, 2013; O'Brien & Slack, 2003, 2004; Skirstad & Chelladurai, 2011; Washington & Ventresca, 2008), impacts of institutional change (Heinze & Lu, 2017; Kikulis, 2000; Skille, 2011; Slack & Hinings, 1992), and institutional work (Dowling & Smith, 2016; Edwards & Washington, 2015; Nite, 2017; Nite & Washington, 2017; Woolf, Berg, Newland, & Green, 2016). Given their

longevity and seeming resistance to institutional upheaval, the institutional structures and processes of engrained sport associations offer interesting contexts of inquiry. Arguably, many of the most high-profile sport associations have even sown what Garud, Jain, and Kumaraswamy (2002) termed "seeds of self-destruction" (p. 196). That is, they have been embroiled in legitimacy crises (e.g. Wagner, 2011; Wagner & Pedersen, 2014), scandals (e.g. Donaghy, 2010), and contradictory logics (e.g. Nite & Bopp, 2017; Southall, Nagel, Amis, & Southall, 2008). However, many high-profile sport governance associations tend to endure and maintain their dominance, which seems to counter popular organizational theorizations of institutional change (see Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009; Hinings et al., 2004; Seo & Creed, 2002).

One governance association that has become an institution in its own right is the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), which governs the majority of intercollegiate sport in the U.S. Whereas sport is structured somewhat differently in the U.S. compared to most international settings, the case of the NCAA offers insight into how an association builds institutional structures and maintains those despite elements that organizational theorists have suggested should result in substantial changes of governance in the field. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine how the NCAA has remained intact despite predictors of institutional change. We detail the processes whereby the NCAA seized control of a fragmented field, institutionalized its governance in the field of intercollegiate athletics in the U.S., and remained institutionalized despite contradictory logics, divergent internal interest groups, and vociferous contestations from external contenders. Drawing upon the tenets of institutional work, we collected nearly 100 years of documents spanning various periods of growth and instability of the NCAA within U.S. intercollegiate athletics. In doing so, we provide a more complete understanding of how institutions maintain despite seeds of change.

The results of our historical examination suggest that the NCAA learned to maintain control over the field of college athletics by learning how to control boundaries, practices, cognitions of the institutional properties. Our research offers extensions to a burgeoning body of institutional work research within sport management. We move beyond recognizing the importance of institutional work in building and maintaining sport institutions (see Dowling & Smith, 2016; Edwards & Washington, 2015; Nite & Washington, 2017; Woolf et al., 2016) by outlining the how institutional work evolves in to address various tensions. Although the specifics of our research are contextually bound, we contend that the evolution of institutional work exhibited by the NCAA provides relevant insights for understanding the endurance of other dominant sport governing bodies.

2. Theoretical framework

We draw from the traditions of institutional theory and the emergence of institutional work (Washington & Patterson, 2011). We understand institutions as "more or less taken-for-granted repetitive social behavior that is underpinned by normative systems and cognitive understandings that give meaning to social exchange and thus enable self-reproducing social order" (Greenwood et al., 2008, pp. 4–5). Whereas early work in the institutional theory tradition examined how social order was self-reproduced, recent research has drawn upon concept of embedded agency (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009; Holm, 1995, Seo & Creed, 2002, Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006, Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Embedded agency entails, "how actors whose thoughts and actions are constrained by institutions are nevertheless able to work to affect those institutions" (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010, p. 189). Built on this notion, scholars have described institutional work as "purposive actions carried out by individual and collective actors to create, maintain, and disrupt institutions" (Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2011, p. 52). Some

institutional scholars have regarded maintenance as the uncontested, taken-for-granted reproduction of institutional scripts (Jepperson, 1991), yet the institutional work lens indicates that maintenance may not be a stable property of the institutional order and various forms of work are necessary to ensure institutional continuity and stability (Micelotta & Washington, 2013).

Scholars have theorized the fleeting stability of institutionalized structures and patterns of governance (Hinings, Greenwood, Reay, & Suddaby, 2004). Instability can be attributed to a host of factors, such as changing political environments (King & Pearce, 2010), evolving industry standards (Ahmadjian & Robinson, 2001), conflicting logics and interests among stakeholders (Seo & Creed, 2002), along with scandals and organizational corruption (Misangyi, Weaver, & Elms, 2008). These may result in fissures in the institutional fabric that may be exploited by change agents seeking to create more favorable arrangements better suited to their interests (Battilana et al., 2009; Hardy & Maguire, 2008; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). In this regard, institutional change may seem unavoidable; however, dominant organizations and powerful institutions do not simply yield to change efforts. Actors benefitting from existing institutional arrangements work to maintain prevailing institutional practices and norms (Fligstein, 2001; Hardy & Maguire, 2008; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Yet, some have even shown that efforts to maintain and institutionalize result in "seeds of self-destruction" (Garud et al., 2002, p. 196; see also Seo and Creed, 2002). Lawrence (1999), as well as Zietsma and Lawrence (2010), noticed that efforts to control institutional boundaries and membership created tensions that could result in the instabilities. This pattern would then suggest an inevitability of an institution's demise. Theoretically this might be true. However, conceptualizing institutional change as an unending cycle is problematic, considering anecdotal evidence that suggests some

institutions have sustained despite inherent instabilities. In short, as was argued more than 20 years ago, "We need better information about the life course of institutions" (Scott, 1995, p. 146) to better understand why some institutions overcome challenges and persist despite opposition while others falter.

The sport industry is well positioned to offer insight into institutional longevity. Globally, numerous sport organizations, leagues, and institutions have remained in operation despite engrained elements and various circumstances that would predict change. For instance, the IOC and FIFA have endured embezzlement and bribery scandals (Maennig, 2005; Pielke, 2013). The IOC has also faced legitimacy crises with numerous athlete doping scandals that led to the formation of the World Anti-Doping Agency (Wagner, 2011; Wagner & Pedersen, 2014). U.S. sport leagues have endured issues of illicit gambling of officials and players (Donaghy, 2010; Ostertag, 1992), performance enhancing drugs (Mitchell, 2007), and issues related to player safety (Sagerian, 2012). Other sport organizations, such as the NCAA in the U.S., are influenced by conflicting institutional logics and stakeholders with divergent agendas (Nite & Bopp, 2017; Southall et al., 2008; Washington & Ventresca, 2008). These types of issues constitute seeds of change that may provide opportunities for other sport institutions to be established; yet, many high-profile sport entities have been able to maintain institutional dominance in their respective contexts. With the current study, we endeavor to provide insight into how and why some sport institutions have endured despite institutional elements that would predict institutional upheaval.

3. Empirical context

Our research was situated within the context of intercollegiate and amateur sport in the U.S. Specifically, we examined the NCAA and the actions taken to solidify its dominance within this context. We argue that the NCAA has evolved into an institution. The NCAA is a collection

of processes and practices that result in the taken for granted notion that colleges should engage in sport. The notion of the NCAA gives rise to sport conferences, rules with regards to amateurship, revenue sharing among college conferences as well as who is eligible to play and organize college sport. In short, we argue that the NCAA defines the appropriate activities and relationships among member colleges in regards to collegiate athletics (Barley & Tolbert 1997, p. 96).

Within the sport management literature, research on the NCAA has become somewhat commonplace, especially among those studying sport institutions (see Nite, 2017; Nite & Washington, 2017; Southall, Nagel, Amis, & Southall, 2008; Walker, Seifried, & Soebbing, 2017; Washington 2004; Washington & Ventresca, 2008). Despite its common usage as an institutional research context, the NCAA was particularly suited for this inquiry for multiple reasons. First, there is an abundance of internal and external documentation of its history as it has taken place in the public eye. Secondly, the NCAA's dominance is particularly interesting because institutional theorists have noticed that institutional change is predictable given the types of challenges the NCAA has faced throughout its history. Scholars, media pundits, watchdog organizations, and even the U.S. government have levied harsh criticisms on the NCAA's governance and underlying philosophy of amateur college athletics. The NCAA has faced various calls for reform (e.g. Benford, 2007; Gurney, 2009), litigation of its rules (e.g. *NCAA v. Board of Regents; O'Bannon v. NCAA*), organizations attempting to institute new forms of governance (e.g National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics; Amateur Athletic Union), and scathing attacks to its core ethos (e.g. Southall et al., 2008; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013; Sperber, 2000; Staurowsky & Sack, 2005). Despite these challenges, the NCAA has remained the primary governing body of college athletics. As we trace the life-course of the NCAA, it is

necessary to account for the early history of amateur sport and intercollegiate athletics in the U.S.

Although colleges were engaged in intramural as well as intercollegiate athletics before the founding of the NCAA, the NCAA became the typification of the "collegiate way" in terms of how colleges should engage in sports. Intercollegiate athletic competition first occurred in the mid-1850s when Harvard competed against Yale in crew. Colleges and universities, along with their alumni and student bodies, recognized the benefits of pride and visibility associated with athletic competitions. One writer suggested in the 1864 Yale literary magazine that winning the crew championships was "sacredly connected with the glory of alma mater herself" (as cited in Smith, 1988, p. 13). Colleges and universities began to utilize their athletics programs, primarily football, as means for increasing visibility and esprit de corps (Washington, 2004).

As athletics continued to grow, numerous entities (e.g., conferences, councils, and individual universities) attempted to organize competitions yet were confronted with tenuous debates regarding implementation of rule structures for football and other sports. Yale and Princeton played under rules that were more similar to soccer while Harvard used rules that were more similar to rugby. During the first football game between Harvard and Yale in 1875, Yale conceded to using Harvard's rules (Washington, 1999). Although Yale won that game and the next 14 in a row, the Harvard rules became institutionalized during the creation of the Intercollegiate Football Association. Some schools resisted and eventually left the IFA (Falla, 1981), resulting in different universities operating with different rule sets. In efforts to consolidate, Cornell, Harvard, Navy, Pennsylvania, Princeton, and Yale formed the American Football Rules Committee. However, the committee was met with resistance, as schools in the West did not like the rules from this entity. The discussion led to seven schools forming what is

now the Big Ten Conference (in 1895 and the Ivy League formed in 1898; Stagg, 1946). The primary concern with the rules was the violent nature of early football, with some seasons had as many as 44 deaths (Leifer, 1995). The early attempts at quelling the violence resulted in less entertaining football for the fans (Stagg, 1946). Ultimately, schools reverted back to more entertaining styles of football despite the occurrence of more player deaths.

In 1905, U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt had called a meeting with Yale, Harvard, and Princeton to discuss rules for curtailing the violence in football (Smith, 1988). President Roosevelt also warned these schools of government intervention if the brutal play was not addressed, yet none of the institutions followed his suggestions. By the end of that year, numerous serious injuries, including the death Harold Moore of Union College led to a meeting between 62 colleges and universities with President Roosevelt to discuss brutality in football (Flath, 1963). In addressing the attendees, President Roosevelt stated,

> [H]e liked the game (football), but felt that something should be done to reform the rules, especially in the interest of fair play and discouragement of rough play, and asked them to undertake to start a movement to that end (front page New York Times October 10, 1905).

The meeting ultimately led to the formation of the Intercollegiate Athletic Association which, in 1910, changed its name to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (Stagg, 1946).

Since establishing its authority, the NCAA has defended both its governance and the legitimacy of the intercollegiate model from various challengers on multiple fronts. The earliest contestations to its authority emerged from a rival organization, the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU). The AAU and the NCAA battled for control over high-profile amateur sporting events (i.e. men's college basketball) and Olympic endorsement (Flath, 1963). Other organizations,

namely the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), competed with the NCAA for membership from universities. Further, technological advances endangered the revenue streams and led to extensive legal issues between the NCAA and its members, thereby endangering the viability of the field (Nite & Washingon, 2017). Despite these numerous contestations from different challengers, the NCAA has maintained its position of power through strategic actions. As such, our study was guided by the broad research question of how has the NCAA remained the dominant institution in U.S. intercollegiate athletics despite elements that would predict institutional change?

4. Method

We designed the research as a historical case study of the NCAA's dominance in collegiate and amateur sport within the U.S. The approach is especially appropriate when studying institutions, as scholars have advocated for studying the life course of institutions (Scott, 1995). Indeed, previous researchers have recognized the utility of this approach for understanding various facets of institutionalization within different fields, including college athletics (see Lounsbury, Ventresca, & Hirsch, 2003; Washington, 2004; Washington & Ventresca, 2004, 2008). These methods were particularly appropriate because understanding of social actions requires researchers to consider how social contexts in which actors are embedded evolve over time (Kieser, 1994). Historical case study methods capture the evolving contours that characterized the different stages of institutional developments.

4.1 Data sources

To understand the maintenance work of the NCAA, we compiled archived documents and numerous historical accounts of the NCAA, college athletics, and amateur sport in the U.S. from various sources. Consulting multiple sources from various authors was necessary

considering historical accounts often reflect the biases of the narrators, and records might not provide complete accounts of events due to the scope and focus of authors (Kieser, 1994; Hargadon & Douglas, 2001). As such, triangulation of the data for this inquiry required multiple data from unrelated sources (Berg & Lune, 2004; Glaser & Strauss, 2009). Data were drawn from the postgraduate works of Flath (1963), Hoover (1958), and Land (1977); yearbooks and conference proceedings from the NCAA archives (years from 1951-1986); and various other accounts of the NCAA's history such as Dunnavant (2004), Rudolph (1962), Byers (1995), Shulman and Bowen (2011), and Smith (1988). In total, we consulted more than 7000 pages that documented the evolution of the NCAA's rise to power and maintenance of its dominance (see Appendix A). Given that this research spanned a period of more than 100 years, pragmatism dictated focusing on key moments of struggle in the field of collegiate sports that challenged the primacy of the NCAA as an institution. Theorized as "seeds of change," we began by examining the early years of the NCAA and its work to establish legitimacy, struggles of managing television broadcasts, implementation of Title IX, and continuous debates of amateurism. The data snowballed to include the consequences of organizational actions (e.g. the NCAA's restructuring in the 1970s that was a result of struggles between small and large schools). Although historical accounts may never be fully reconciled, we are confident that the diverse and abundant sources consulted yielded accurate, theoretically sound insights into the NCAA's work to maintain dominance in college and amateur athletics.

4.2 Data analysis

Data analysis for this study entailed an inductive grounded theory-building approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012). The analytic process commenced following the recommendations and examples provided by Langley (1999) and Zietsma and

Lawrence (2010). By engaging in the process of abduction (see Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), we were able develop new theoretical insights within known theoretical traditions (Gehman et al., 2017). Following the recommendations of Gioia et al (2012), data coding commenced with the identifying of first order concepts. During the coding process, we met regularly to discuss the emergent constructs and to refine the analytic process. Data were continually scrutinized to ensure a comprehensive compilation of concepts. While identifying first order constructs, we simultaneously theorized relationships among concepts to establish second order themes. Like most qualitative research, this process was recursive, wherein coding and relationships were continually adjusted and revisited until a final data structure was identified. For example, the first order concepts "rivalry between NCAA and NAIA" and "NCAA and AIAW vie for control of women's sport" comprised the second order theme of "size and identity of membership." Given the substantial history covered in this study, it is not surprising that overlapping ideas required attention and extensive theorizing. These instances were debated among the researchers and were often discussed with colleagues to confirm the team's analysis. Ultimately, four aggregate theoretical dimensions emerged from the second order themes that provided insight into how the NCAA has been able to avoid institutional upheaval despite embedded elements of destruction (see Figure 1).

[insert Figure 1 approximately here]

Given the challenges of bias with historical research and issues of theoretical applicability due to contextual specificity, various strategies were employed to address trustworthiness and transferability. First, thick description of the research context and positions of actors within the context was provided so that readers could locate roles and constructs in similar contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Further, the findings and constructs of this research

were discussed with people who were familiar with both the context and theoretical framework of this study. These disinterested individuals provided insight into data interpretations and challenged the researchers' theoretical assumptions. Additionally, scholars with expertise in other sport institutions were consulted regarding the applicability of the findings. Doing so often resulted in us refining and further theorizing the data. As such, we are confident in the rigor, transferability, and credibility of the findings beyond this study's specific context.

5. Findings

As outlined in previous sections, the emergence of the NCAA as the dominant institution in the field of intercollegiate athletics occurred through vociferous contestations from numerous entities. Here, we present a chronology of the institutionalization and persistence of the NCAA. In the following subsections, we discuss how the aggregate dimensions from our data evolved over time. We recognized three broad time frames within which the NCAA worked to establish and maintain dominance in the field. The first time frame encompassed the actions from the inception of the NCAA in 1905 until 1942. It was during this period that the NCAA grew from its initial 38 member schools to 314 schools in 1942 and included "nearly every college or university of importance in the country" (Stagg, 1946, p. 81). The second time frame was 1942 to 1973. It was during this period that the NCAA dealt with issues, such as expansion of membership to small universities, the impacts of the Sanity Codes, and the rise of televised football, that would lead to the major restructuring of the NCAA's governance structure in 1973. The final time period was from 1973 until 2011. The modern challenges to the NCAA have been most legal contestations that have resulted in certain changes such as loosening of governance restrictions. Indeed, the NCAA's modern strategies of managing contestations reflect the struggles of the past by allowing the NCAA to know which battles to fight and which ones to

ignore. As such, we provide insight into how some institutions survive when others succumb to destruction by suggesting that governance associations like the NCAA learn to control the boundaries, practices, and cognitions of institutions.

5.1 1905-1942: Instated to institutionalized

The NCAA's rise to power was characterized by tempestuous development within both the intercollegiate athletics and amateur sport in the U.S., which presented challenges to coalescing the field of intercollegiate athletics. In its early years the NCAA struggled to establish legitimacy while simultaneously creating and defending its boundaries of authority. College and university officials were conflicted by the contradictory logics of the commercial appeal and the educational identity of athletics (Chu, 1989). The general public and the U.S. government were questioning the existence of college football given the game's brutality. External organizations, like the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), were vying for dominance in amateur athletics and would continually seek to undermine and delegitimize the NCAA. Even after the NCAA's dominance in intercollegiate athletics had become institutionalized by the 1940s, the head of the United States Olympic Association was quoted in the *New York Times* suggesting, "college athletes who receive scholarships because of their ability in sports become, in fact, professionals" (New York Times, Dec 12,1949). The early legitimacy struggles were complicated by the fact that many of these battles were highly publicized, sometimes becoming issues that required intervention from Congress and other arms of the federal government.

Perhaps the most notable and public contestations occurred with the AAU. In the early years of the NCAA, AAU was the foremost amateur athletic organization in the country. The AAU, whose stated aim was control of all amateur athletics (Flath, 1963), governed lacrosse, track and field, and basketball (Stagg, 1946). Affiliated with international amateur athletics and

the Olympic Movement, the AAU attempted to invoke rules regulating amateur eligibility by mandating the teams or schools with which its members could compete. Garnering an endorsement from the International Olympic Committee recognizing it as the U.S. representative, the AAU was a source of significant tension as it worked to undermine amateurism within intercollegiate athletics. Although the AAU's initial eligibility rules were aimed to quell amateurs from competing against professionals, these rules became tools in the organization's fight against the NCAA. The AAU and its affiliates generally controlled the U.S. Olympic organization, yet the NCAA had the highest numbers of amateur athletes on the US Olympics teams. In addition, NCAA athletes, won more Olympic medals than athletes from the AAU or any other organization U.S. amateur sport organization. Despite the AAU's attempts to delegitimize the NCAA, the NCAA's legitimacy was strengthened by the success of its athletes.

Whereas stakeholders of intercollegiate athletics seemed to have divergent interests, there seemed to be an implicit consensus that college sports should be played by amateurs (using definitions similar to those of the AAU). The subscription to rules of amateurism in intercollegiate athletics should have meant that the NCAA should have been subjected to AAU rules. However, the NCAA and its members objected to this and set to establish their own rules (Flath, 1963). Of its initial charges, perhaps the most difficult task for the NCAA was building an association that could accommodate the interests of various constituencies while also adhering to amateur values. Prior to the NCAA, intercollegiate athletics had gone from periods of student organizing to tenuous partnerships between schools to disjointed conferences with differing rules (Rudolph, 1962). As the association sought to expand its membership, the NCAA began to codify rules that governed all aspects of intercollegiate athletics, including rules of gameplay, membership, and organizational structure. The organization created various rules committees

that worked to create a semblance of order within the field. With these committees, the NCAA had established legislative and judicial entities for managing member grievances (Falla 1981), thereby fostering stability within the field that had been foreign to not only intercollegiate but also amateur athletics before the emergence of the NCAA.

The NCAA's expansive governance was outpaced by the growing popularity and commercialization of the field (Smith, 2000). As the popularity of college athletics grew, the NCAA continued to face questions of legitimacy, especially in regards to amateurism. The increasing revenues and desires to win football games led to corrupt recruiting practices of athletes. In 1929, the Carnegie Foundation released a scathing report condemning these practices. However, this report gained minimal traction with the public and resulted in only minor rules changes from the NCAA. The reaction to the report was described as follows:

> The Carnegie Foundation's indictment of schools that subsidized athletes received front page attention wherever big-time football was played, but it appeared on a Thursday (October, 24), followed by the local university's denial or a shrug of indifference, after which the newspapers refocused their attention on what really mattered—how the local home team would fare in Saturday's game. (Oriad, 2012, p. 8).

Although this report was seemingly ignored, it had brought to light issues that would be exacerbated as more universities sought to add athletics programs to tap into the well of athletic revenues. The recruiting excesses continued and the increasing public interest had also resulted in a rise of gambling on college football (Smith, 2000). As college football became increasingly popular, the NCAA had new issues to address that would test its ability to control the institution it had created.

From the time of its initial commissioning to 1942 when it was noted that the NCAA was indeed dominant within the field (see Stagg, 1946), the NCAA's evolution entailed three encompassing and overlapping activities. First, the NCAA strategically worked to establish itself as the primary, legitimate governor of intercollegiate athletics and delegitimize the other organizations that vied for control in the field. The NCAA established institutional boundaries while creating the meaning of what entailed both collegiate and amateur sport in the U.S. A key function of these efforts was also the work of instituting practices that would rally support from key actors in the field. Similar to previous findings, this practice work complemented the boundary work of the NCAA (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Whereas this created inevitable tensions with external amateur organizations (i.e. AAU), the subsequent battles of supremacy strengthened the NCAA by forcing the organization to solidify its governance in the field. As the NCAA cemented its external legitimacy through superior practice and outputs (i.e. college athletes' success in the Olympics), external organizations that attempted to control intercollegiate sport were diminished to playing fringe roles. The manner in which the NCAA controlled practices, boundaries, and cognitions evolved as its governance and the field matured.

5.2 1942-1973: Regulation to restructuring

As consumption of games became more tenable with the advent of television, the NCAA was experiencing a new legitimacy issues created by the uncovering of questionable recruiting tactics. In 1948, the NCAA sought to address recruiting issues by enacting the "Sanity Codes." These were sweeping rules that expanded the NCAA's authority to enforce punishments for inappropriate behavior from its membership. However, the Sanity Codes were eventually repealed in 1952 due to the rigidity of the punishments (the only punishment was expulsion) and later replaced with rules that allowed for more reflexivity (Smith, 2000). Despite its initial failure

with the Sanity Codes, the NCAA had laid the framework of its ability to regulate inappropriate behavior, which ultimately strengthened the legitimacy of its governance.

In addition to creating mechanisms for sanctioning, the NCAA sought to expand its boundaries to encompass all of intercollegiate athletics. Yet, the NCAA was again faced with vanquishing another competing organization, the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). The NAIA was founded in 1938 as the organization for marginalized universities that had been excluded from both NCAA and AAU tournaments, particularly basketball tournaments (Hoover, 1958; Land, 1977). The NAIA's membership was composed of liberal arts colleges, teachers' colleges, and historically Black colleges that had traditionally been ignored by the NCAA (Hoover, 1958). As the NAIA began to grow and attract media attention, it presented a legitimate threat to the NCAA given its large membership and on-court successes. By 1955, the NAIA's membership had ballooned to 435 members (just four fewer members than the NCAA) and had one of its members represent the U.S. in the Pan-American Games (Hoover, 1958).

To address the small college concerns, the NCAA organized a small college committee in the late 1930s and instituted a college division in 1952 that was designed to accommodate the interests of the previously marginalized colleges and universities (Falla, 1981). The NCAA made this division attractive by creating small college post-season tournaments that offered national championships for the members of this division. Further, the NCAA created different levels of membership wherein some small colleges could be affiliated with the association while paying minimal dues (Falla, 1981; Stagg, 1946). Then by the 1960s, the NCAA began to accept memberships from and allowed historically Black colleges to compete in sponsored events. These strategic actions had begun the process of making the NCAA an attractive association for

the less prestigious colleges and universities in the U.S., thereby resulting in the growth of the NCAA and marginalization of the NAIA.

As the NCAA was working to expand the scope of its control, a new technology threatened to topple the entire sport industry. The advent of television and televised broadcasts presented significant challenges for the NCAA. This emerging technology necessitated action from the NCAA given that the unregulated broadcasting of football games was negatively impacting gate receipts for universities. As noted in the 1951 NCAA yearbook,

> The concern of the colleges of the country with the effects of television upon football attendance and thus upon the future of intercollegiate and intramural athletic and physical training programs became more and more evident as sets began to saturate important collegiate areas…One important conference, the Big Ten, went so far as to ban live television during the 1950 season and other conferences have followed suit.

In 1952, a television committee was commissioned to develop a plan for managing televised broadcasts of football games that would not only prevent extensive revenue losses but would also monetize the broadcasts for the association. This committee, working in conjunction with data from the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), developed an encompassing plan of rules that were designed to limit the adverse effects of television. By 1960, the NCAA membership had settled upon a revised proposal that allowed the NCAA to negotiate all television contracts and limit the number of broadcasts per school. By 1973, the NCAA's television contracts had reached $6.75 million per year and had resulted in the cancellation of the NAIA's most lucrative television contracts.

Though television would ultimately prove to be an abundant source of revenue for the NCAA and its members, this new technology also exacerbated issues between the smaller

colleges and the larger universities. The most influential universities, which had shifted from the elite academic institutions of the northeast to major football universities in Southern and Midwestern geographic regions of the U.S., believed that their revenue earning potential was being stifled by the NCAA's limitations placed upon television broadcasts. The non-elites were primarily concerned with the financial strains of trying to compete with the larger universities. These divergent concerns presented a significant challenge to the NCAA, as satiating the concerns of all its constituents was seemingly unfeasible. Concerns regarding the scope of NCAA governance authority resulted in conflicts with high status stakeholders. In an unprecedented move, the NCAA called its 1st Special Convention in 1973 wherein the NCAA restructured into three separate divisions that would be more reflexive to the diverse needs of its growing membership. Colleges and universities were able to align themselves with other members that operated within similar constraints and had similar interests while also being able to compete in postseason competitions for championships in their respective divisions. Under this new structuration, members of each division were allowed to establish criteria for membership and bylaws for governance. This measure eased internal conflicts among the membership as small school interests were still protected while the larger elite universities were unburdened and allowed to pursue their own interests.

Further, it was during this time period of restructuring that the NCAA gained supremacy over the NAIA. Prior to 1974, colleges were permitted dual membership with the NCAA and NAIA, which allowed them to choose which postseason tournament they would attend (Land, 1977). This adversely affected the NAIA, as the best teams in its membership were needed for its tournaments if it hoped to draw media attention and generate revenue. Given the higher status of the universities affiliated with the NCAA, the declarations of fringe universities did not impact

the sustainability of its postseason competitions. In what turned out as a strategic blunder in 1974, the NAIA began requiring its members to declare prior to the start of the athletic seasons within which post season tournaments they would participate (those of the NAIA or NCAA). This rule change resulted in many NAIA schools defecting to join the NCAA. Although the NAIA remained operational, it was no longer a threat to the NCAA's dominance as the organization's membership had been substantially reduced.

The NCAA's institutional work during this time period reflected the maturation of both its governance and the field. The NCAA was no longer forced to justify its existence within the broad field of amateur athletics and was tasked with solidifying its governance of intercollegiate athletics. It strategically worked to expand its boundaries to include lower status colleges. It developed means for enforcing regulations. Finally, the NCAA was forced to manage a substantial regulatory crisis with the invention of television. The NCAA had become dominant to the point that contending organizations such as the NAIA and AAU were no longer threats. However, as detailed subsequently, the primary challenges emerged from diverse internal interests (see Seo & Creed, 2002).

5.3 1973-2011: Crises of control and new legitimacy concerns

Much of the first half of the 20th century had been dedicated to solidifying the legitimacy and scope of NCAA regulatory influence. By the 1970s, the NCAA had reached maturation as the dominant institution in the field of intercollegiate athletics and had established itself as the primary purveyor of amateur athletics in the U.S. The NCAA had successfully vanquished competing organizations and had created a reflexive structure for managing issues among its membership. With its legitimacy cemented and no real competition, the NCAA's strategies for addressing challenges evolved and the organization became emboldened. The 1970s-1980s

presented issues that showcased this evolution, as new legislation, an economic downturn in the U.S., and internal litigations tested the NCAA's governance. The NCAA employed differing strategies for addressing new challenges depending on the perceived legitimacy of the threat. Broadly, legitimate challenges, meaning those originating from powerful internal or legislative entities, would be addressed (Nite, 2017). Conversely, issues originating from illegitimate sources were ignored or minimally acknowledged, as the potential for institutional damage was minimal.

The NCAA's restructuration in 1973 had gone a long way toward addressing conflicts between the large and smaller members. However, the ire of the membership shifted to the NCAA's policies as the larger elite universities vied for further loosening of television broadcast negotiation restrictions. These universities sought flexibility to negotiate individualized broadcast contracts, a move that would require the NCAA to relinquish its sole-control of these negotiations. Given the dearth of viable competing organizations, the NCAA adopted the brazen approach of ardent defense of its rules, even against legitimate internal stakeholders. Despite dissention from its larger members, the NCAA refused to relinquish its control of broadcast negotiations. By the late 1970s and into the early 1980s, the NCAA would be mired in litigation with the University of Oklahoma and the University of Georgia, two large stakeholders in the field, wherein these universities took their fight with the NCAA to the courts (*NCAA v. Board of Regents*). Ultimately, the courts ruled that the NCAA's rules violated anti-trust agreements and the organization was forced to adjust its rules accordingly. Individual universities and conferences were allowed to negotiate their own television contracts but the NCAA remained in control of negotiations for broadcasting rights for championship events. These court cases ultimately resulted in the NCAA relinquishing control of the financial aspects of football bowl

games. However, it preserved its control over which schools could play in bowl games, the number of practices, and athlete eligibility. Despite the contemptuous litigation and loss of revenue control, the NCAA retained the majority of its regulatory powers in sports other than football.

The 1970s also provided another challenge for the NCAA and its membership: the passage of Title IX. Passed in 1972, Title IX of the Educational Amendments decreed that educational entities receiving federal funding were prohibited from discriminating on the basis of sex. The law had profound effects in athletics as essentially all levels of schools, including colleges and universities, were legally mandated to provide women and girls with opportunities comparable to their male counterparts to participate in athletics (Staurowsky, 2003). As reflected in the numerous roundtables of the mid-1970s NCAA conventions, NCAA member representatives expressed consternation regarding the implementation of the new legislation. The fear was that the inclusion of women's sports would financially cripple many schools, requiring them to abandon intercollegiate athletic competition altogether or drastically reduce the number of sports universities would sponsor (Staurowsky, 2003).

The NCAA's initial responses to Title IX reflected its maturity. Similar to the internal issues of television contracts, the NCAA avoided making substantial changes and protested the implementation of the new federal statute. Specifically, the NCAA passed resolution No. 133 that included the following wording, "[the NCAA] shall oppose any [Department of Health, Education and Welfare] standard or administrative enforcement method which would require the [Department of Health, Education and Welfare] to monitor and dictate in detail the financial operations of the nation's colleges and universities with respect to athletics." Secondly, the NCAA lobbied for support from powerful allies with former NCAA president John Fuzak

soliciting the support of President Gerald Ford in opposition to Title IX. In his letter, he claimed that the Title IX could potentially destroy big-time men's intercollegiate athletics (Staurowsky, 2003). The NCAA and its membership avoided substantial changes until a series of lawsuits that had reached the U.S. Supreme Court forced the NCAA and its membership into Title IX compliance. At this point, the NCAA absorbed the fledgling organization, the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW), and brought women's athletics under its governance structure. Whereas some had feared that Title IX would topple the field, the NCAA and intercollegiate athletics were cemented in American lore and continued with minimal interruption.

In addition to Title IX, the NCAA was forced to defend its dominance in amateur sport when the United States Senate Commerce Committee drafted a proposed bill in 1973 that would have put the federal government in control of at least 30 amateur sports. This bill was introduced in response to Congress's increased frustrations of U.S. Olympic performances and the issues between the NCAA and AAU. In fact, the NCAA had formally withdrawn from the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) amidst concerns of the organization's structural issues (Nafziger, 1983). Although the bill eventually passed as The Amateur Sports Act of 1978, substantial opposition from the NCAA resulted in the NCAA maintaining control over intercollegiate sport. The NCAA rejoined the USOC through a series of negotiations and compromises wherein the USOC agreed to numerous changes specified by the NCAA. As noted in the 1978 volume of the NCAA news:

> The NCAA's withdrawal, along with the discontent expressed by many closely associated with the Olympic effort, led to the formation of the President's Commission

> on Olympic Sports. Many of the recommendations from the [President's Commission on Olympic Sports] were incorporated into the USOC's reorganization. (p. 7)

The NCAA's influence and legitimacy were bolstered through this process as its defense of its power resulted in a victory over a federal agency.

Finally, the NCAA's evolution is seen in its responses, or lack thereof, to illegitimate challengers. Noticeably, the NCAA had learned to turn a deaf ear to the yammering of external organizations that would periodically protest the NCAA's practices and governance. In the tradition of the Carnegie Foundation reports, organization such as the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics and the Drake Group have issued several reports and op-eds criticizing the NCAA and calling for reform in intercollegiate athletics. Whereas the earlier Carnegie Foundation report had received moderate attention and resulted in some alterations to NCAA policies, these later renditions were met with minimal response. The NCAA and its membership have recognized that these types of contestations posed minimal threat as they originated from entities that had no authority within the field. Consider the following excerpt from an open letter penned by the Director of Athletics at Virginia Commonwealth University wherein he dismissed the significance of the findings of a recent report from the Knight Commission that criticized excessive spending:

> The article, which ran initially without any input from VCU athletics, focused on an increase in Athletics spending from 2005-2011…From the beginning of my tenure last year we developed and implemented a strategic plan that in part focused on fiscal responsibility and improving the experience of our student-athletes. It is my belief that the facts show that this focus has paid dividend…VCU Athletics is winning while

spending efficiently. (see http://forums.vcuramnation.com/threads/response-to-the-knight-commission-report.12559/)

After more than a century of challenges, the NCAA and its members had learned to ignore illegitimate challengers. In the rare instances wherein challenges from non-core stakeholders would result in litigation, the NCAA would revert to the method of defending its practices and only adjusting when forced to do so.

As the field and its governance matured, much of the NCAA's maintenance work entailed creating and adjusting rules of practice while making the internal structuration more responsive to members. This responsiveness, coupled with strengthened boundaries and legitimate institutional cognitions, allowed the NCAA to respond to potential damage from internal contestations. This evolution can be noted in the NCAA's easing of restrictions regarding food allotments and scholarship structures for athletes. Further, the NCAA learned that contentions from challengers outside of the boundaries of the field often did not warrant responses. In the beginning, the NCAA had heated struggles with external organizations (e.g. YMCA, AAU) over who would dominate amateur sport in the U.S. As the NCAA evolved, it learned to coexist with these and similar organizations by focusing on internal issues. In this regard, it has avoided the creation of unneeded tensions, having established legitimacy and solidified its boundaries to the extent that rogue challengers (e.g. media pundits and watch dog organizations such as the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics) can be ignored. The NCAA has relied primarily on discursive framing strategies to combat legitimate external challenges (Nite, 2017). As such, the NCAA evolved its defense strategies over the years to reflect its dominance within the field that it first created and now is tasked with maintaining. This evolution is depicted in Figure 2.

[insert Figure 2 approximately here]

6. Discussion

Given the number of indicators of institutional change, the case of the NCAA is theoretically intriguing as it offers an exemplary illustration of institutional maintenance work as the NCAA has remained dominant despite elements predicting change. Starting from concerns over the violence in football, 62 universities were invited to a meeting. Out of this meeting, the NCAA was created and 110 years later, the NCAA has grown to 1281 member schools (the NAIA as the second largest governing institution in college sports has 250 members), governing 460,000 athletes and hosting 89 championships. In addition, more than 1000 of its athletes represented 107 countries participated in the 2016 Olympic Games. Overcoming conflicts with the AAU, YMCA, Olympic Committee, federal legislation of Title IX, and internal conflicts with and among its member colleges, the NCAA represents a counter-narrative to theories of institutional change as it has resisted the seeds of change and survived. There is much that can be learned from the NCAA that informs both extant theory and practice beyond the context of this study.

6.1. Theoretical contributions

We sought to understand of how a dominant sport institution endured despite elements that would predict institutional upheaval. The primary strength of our study is that it provides an account of how institutional work that spans the progression of a field from fractured infancy to matured dominance. In this regard, we were able to draw from the life course of the institution to understand the actions and consequences of those actions to provide answers to our research questions (see Scott, 1995). We offer numerous extensions to the burgeoning institutional work literature within sport management (see Dowling & Smith, 2016; Edwards & Washington, 2015;

Nite, 2017; Nite & Washington, 2017; Woolf et al., 2016). Notably, we provide nuanced detail to Dowling and Smith's (2016) research, which outlined the importance of institutional work for creating and maintaining sport institutions. Specifically, we move beyond recognizing that institutional work occurs and detail the evolving nature of institutional work in congruence with the maturation of a field (see Figure 3).

[insert Figure 3 approximately here]

Emerging fields generally exhibit fewer controlling mechanisms and less engrained practices (Hardy & Maguire, 2017). Similar to previous research (see Battilana et al., 2009; Currie, Lockett, Fin, Martin, & Waring, 2012; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010), we found that institutional entrepreneurs (in our case the NCAA) endeavor to bring order to the field by establishing legitimate institutional structures (i.e. boundaries, practices, and cognitions) to address various internal and external tensions (see Figure 3). For example, the NCAA had to define what it meant to participate in intercollegiate athletic competition while simultaneously negotiating the rules of competition, thereby developing the cognitive structures and boundaries of the institution. We argue that similar processes can be noticed in other sport and non-sport contexts. Consider the sport of rugby which currently operates with three different codes of competition (i.e. Rugby Union, Rugby League, and Ruby 7s). Actors within each code have undergone processes similar to the NCAA. Rugby entities have worked delineate the boundaries, create practices, and develop cognitions that create institutional structures that would allow them to become dominant within the sport of rugby. When Ruby League split from Rugby Union, Rugby League advocates had to create unique and agreed upon practices, establish delineating boundaries, and develop cognitive structures, all of which were important for considering Rugby League as a legitimate institution (Collins, 1998). Thus, we theorize that in emerging sport fields,

643 institutional work entails the simultaneous creation of legitimate boundaries, practices, and
644 cognitions.

645 Through our analysis, we recognized outcomes that counter current understandings of
646 institutional change and stability. Early tensions, both internal and external, had profound effects
647 on institutional boundaries and cognitions. Previous scholars have highlighted that conflicts and
648 tensions among institutional members and from external challengers can be potentially
649 destabilizing to institutional structures (see Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Nite, 2017; Welty
650 Peachey & Bruening, 2011). However, we found that institutional structures may actually be
651 strengthened through tension and conflict. Especially in the earliest stages of field maturation,
652 we contend that internal issues among institutional members requires flexibility among member
653 interests. We found that as the field of intercollegiate athletics continued to evolve, the NCAA's
654 flexibility to adjust to member interests allowed it to remain dominant. When the NCAA
655 attempted rigidity with its regulation of television, it suffered irreparable damage (Nite &
656 Washington, 2017). Institutions that have adapted their structures and regulations in a flexible
657 manner may actually be more enduring as flexibility gives space for multiple interests to exist
658 without destabilizing (see also O'Brien & Slack, 2003). Lok and De Rond (2013) recognized this
659 in their account of the Cambridge University Boat Club. The IOC adopted a similar approach in
660 allowing professional athletes to compete at the Olympic Games. The IOC had resisted the
661 inclusion of professional athletes across all sports for years. Some argued that this allowance was
662 made to increase television audiences which would be integral to maintaining the popularity of
663 the Olympics (Greene, 2012). In this regard, the IOC became flexible in its practices to
664 strengthen its institutional structures. Thus, we add nuance to Seo and Creed's (2002)
665 theorization that competing interests create opportunities of change. We propose that flexible

institutional structures born of internal contestations would be positively related to institutional stability in sport contexts.

We found that external tensions impacted institutional boundaries, practices, and cognitions in somewhat different manners. First, we noticed that external challenges provided impetus for the NCAA to strengthen its practices and solidify its cognitions. In this regard, the membership of the NCAA united in the bolstering of these structures. Similar processes occurred in Micelotta and Washington's (2013) study of Italian professionals who united to rebuff government interference. Sport player associations may also provide a relevant example of the utility of our findings. The Major League Baseball Player Association, a powerful union of professional baseball players in the U.S. which one could argue has become an institution, used the external threat from Major League Baseball's collective ownership as a means for solidifying their dominance in governance issues. Specifically, the league's ownership endeavored to alter the labor environment by instituting a salary cap for player salaries. The player's union united to resist this external threat and coalesced around agreed upon practices for fair labor standards, ultimately leading the cancellation of the Major League Baseball World Series in 1994. To this day, Major League Baseball labor standards are dominated by the player's union (Lowenfish, 2010). Therefore, we propose that external contestations and tensions would be positively related to strengthened institutional practices and cognitions.

We noticed that external contestations and tensions had different impacts on institutional boundaries. We contribute to the existing arguments around boundary and practice work regarding boundary permeability. Zietsma and Lawrence (2010) showed that permeable boundaries allowed for innovation and combatted the alienation of marginalized stakeholders. We recognized two different types of external challengers: those operating in similar fields (i.e.

universities and colleges with membership in other associations) and those seeking to influence the field (i.e. watchdog organizations, media pundits). The NCAA's boundary work differed with both groups. For those operating within the same space (i.e. college and university athletics), the NCAA maintained an open view of membership and expanded its boundaries of influence. The act of expansion solidified the NCAA's dominance and diminished the capacity of competitors. The boundary expansion of the NCAA seemed to mirror those of other dominant sport entities. For example, others have documented the expansion of FIFA and have shown similarities in the approach to expansion (see Sugden & Tomlinson, 1998). The notion of expansion challenges existing research that has suggested restricting access from outsiders serves to maintain institutional arrangements (Siebert, Wilson & Hamilton, 2017; Woolf, Berg, Newland, & Green, 2016). In their examination of a mixed martial arts gym, Woolf and colleagues (2016) outlined how creating entry barriers helped control membership and maintained institutional arrangements. Instead, we propose that open membership boundaries for those operating within similar institutional spaces would be positively related to institutional maintenance and control.

Regarding external challengers who seek to influence the field, the NCAA evolved its understanding of how to address contestations. During its infancy, the NCAA was forced to address external challenges by developing legitimate practices and cognitions. As it matured and became institutionalized, the NCAA evolved its responses to reflect its established legitimacy. The NCAA no longer had to adapt to external threats beyond the realm of its influence. It has learned to coexist with entities competing in similar realms (e.g. YMCA, AAU) as they no longer posed threats to the NCAA's dominance. Other externalities such as media pundits and watchdog organizations are generally addressed through benign defense measures such as discursive framing (Nite, 2017). Finally, we should note that legitimate threats, those being

challenges that have potential to drastically alter institutional arrangements (Clemens & Cook, 2009), still necessitated action. We noted that shifting attitudes toward player safety concerns were addressed by changing practices (see also Heinze & Lu, 2017). It is likely that institutions learn to recognize which threats necessitate changes and which ones may be addressed through defensive techniques such as framing. Thus, we contend that as institutional fields evolve from infancy to maturation, institutional actors' understanding of threats and defense strategies reflect congruent evolution.

Finally, we contribute to understandings of institutional work and institutional complexity. Considering the growing research in pluralism and institutional complexity suggesting that there are multiple institutions and logics competing for dominance in a field (Greenwood et al., 2011; Kraatz & Block, 2008; Pache & Santos, 2010), it is important for institutional entrepreneurs to theorize which institutional arrangements require attention. The NCAA is a classic case of institutional complexity wherein it must balance interests based in multiple, often competing, logics (see also Nite, Singer, & Cunningham, 2013; Southall et al., 2008; Washington & Ventresca, 2008). We suggest that learning to strategically adapt boundaries, practices, and institutional cognitions may be key to maintaining institutional dominance in these scenarios. This extends previous notions that have suggested that maintenance is achieved by deference to actions rooted in dominant logics (Nite et al., 2013). Our findings are similar to Skirstad and Chelladurai (2011), who showed that soccer clubs could be structured to accommodate multiple logics. Further, O'Brien and Slack (2003) detailed the process of adopting professional logics within English Rugby Union. Although professionalization was counter to its traditions, English Rugby Union incorporated professional practices to maintain legitimacy and dominance in the field. Indeed, O'Brien and Slack (2003)

noted, "effective leaders must develop the capability to anticipate cognitive shifts in their environment" (p. 444). As such, we propose that institutional maintenance is positively related institutional adaptability in instances of institutional complexity.

6.2. Practical implications

Although the specifics of our research may be contextually bound, we contend that concepts discussed here have practical utility for other sport entities seeking to preserve authority, address conflicts, and maintain institutional structures. First, we emphasize the importance of remaining flexible inside institutional boundaries. We found that flexibility of practices had become a source of strength for the NCAA as it allowed for multiple interests within the institution to coexist and evolve with changes in the field. Indeed, plasticity of practices may be particularly for relevant for league executives dealing with issues such as playoff formatting, regulation of gambling, managing player interests, and even approaches to integrating technological advances. For instance, the National Basketball Association (NBA) has reportedly discussed changing it playoff structure to address concerns of league stakeholders and fans (Axson, 2018). NBA Commissioner, Adam Silver, has voiced support for legal sport gambling in order to align the league with fan interests (Purdum, 2017). As such, the NBA has seemingly provided support for our findings that flexibility is important for maintaining institutions. In the case of the NBA, the league is seemingly working to preserve its place as one of the world's most popular sporting leagues and being able to adjust to changing environments may be key in that endeavor.

Our research may also be informative for emerging leagues and fields. Particularly, the eSports phenomenon has evolved within an interesting space that provides challenges to sport practitioners and sport management scholars (see Cunningham et al., 2018; Funk, Pizzo, &

Baker, 2018; Hallmann & Giel, 2018). Drawing from our findings, we suggest that practitioners and sport management scholars should theorize field boundaries when considering how to approach eSports. We outlined how expanding boundaries to encompass those competing in similar institutional spaces works to strengthen institutional arrangements. It appears that other sport entities may be adopting similar approaches. For example, Jerry Jones, owner of the Dallas Cowboys, became part owner in a gaming company as a sign that he is embracing the potential for eSports as an extension to the Dallas Cowboys brand (Wolf, 2017). Similarly, universities such as the University of North Texas (see Carter, 2017), have started investing in eSports and are considering whether to regulate these programs under current athletic department structures. Thus, we suggest that being open to expanding boundaries may work to strengthen sport institutions.

Finally, we highlighted the evolution of the NCAA learning how and, importantly, which battles were important to fight. In this regard, the NCAA seemed to become adept at distinguishing between the types of tensions and challenges that warranted adjustment to its structures and those that required defense tactics absent of change. Effective theorization of issues is especially important given changes within institutional environments. Sport organizations and other governing bodies have been at the visible forefront of important issues such as racial and gender equality, player safety, and corporate social responsibility. For instance, professional athletes in U.S. have engaged in various peaceful forms of demonstration against social injustices. The impact of athlete demonstrations for sport leagues is “complicated” (Ho, 2017) and likely requires effective theorization by league officials regarding effective practices and management of cognitions to address controversial issues.

7. Future research and conclusions

In sum, our research outlined the evolution of a dominant sport association that has become and institution in its own regard. Researchers have noted that "how institutions survive beyond the lifespan of their creators is often seen as remaining in the realm of 'the mystery' of institutions" (Siebert et al., 2017, p. 3). We sought to answer our focal question of how a dominant sport association survives despite predictors of change. We found that evolving institutional work of managing practices, boundaries, and cognitions were key to for the NCAA's dominance. The primary limitation of this study is that it was isolated to one particular setting. We took steps to aid in the transferability of our findings, however, the nuances of our study were contextually bound. Scholars should consider interrogating the viability of our findings and theorizations in other relevant sport settings. Further, our study documented the accounts of the winning governing body. The accounts of those who were adversely impacted by the growth of the NCAA would strengthen our assertions. Scholars should consider questions such as, how do fields evolve due to the presence of dominant sport associations? How do long-lasting, conflict-winning dominant institutions shape entrepreneurial activities in the field? Answers to these questions would offer deeper understanding to how dominant sport governance associations remain in power.

References

Ahmadjian, C. L. & Robinson, P. (2001). Safety in numbers: Downsizing and the deinstitutionalization of permanent employment in Japan. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 46*, 622-654.

Axson, S. (2018, February 22). Report: NBA discussing postseason play-in tournament. *Sports Illustrated.* Retrieved from https://www.si.com/nba/2018/02/22/playoff-format-changes-tournament.

Barley, S. R., & Tolbert, P. S. (1997). Institutionalization and structuration: Studying the links between action and institution. *Organization studies*, *18*(1), 93-117.

Battilana, J., Leca, B., & Boxenbaum, E. (2009). How actors change institutions: Towards a theory of institutional entrepreneurship. *The Academy of Management Annals, 3*, 65-107.

Benford, R. D. (2007). The college sports reform movement: Reframing the "Edutainment" industry. *The Sociological Quarterly, 48*(1), 1-28.

Berg, B. L., & Lune, H. (2004). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (Vol. 5). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Carter, C. (2017, August 21). UNT hops on the eSports bandwagon with $200k competitive gaming facility. *Dallas Observer.* Retrieved from http://www.dallasobserver.com/arts/unt-invests-200k-in-esports-facility-9778975.

Chu, B. (1989). *The Character Of American Higher Education And Intercollegiate Sport*. Albany: State University Of New York.

Clemens, E. S., & Cook, J. M. (2009). Politics and institutionalism: Explaining durability and change. *Annual Review of Sociology, 25,* 441-466.

Collins, T. (1998). *Rugby's great split: Class, culture and the origins of Rugby League Football.* London, UK: Routledge.

Cunningham, G. B., Fairley, S., Ferkins, L., Kerwin, S., Lock, D., Shaw, S., & Wicker, P. (2018). eSport: Construct specifications and implications for sport management. *Sport Management Review, 21*(1), 1-6.

Currie, G., Lockett, A., Finn, R., Martin, G., & Waring, J (2012). Institutional work to maintain professional power: Recreating the model of medical professionalism. *Organization Studies, 33*(7), 937-962.

Donaghy, T. (2010). Personal foul: A first-person account of the scandal that rocked the NBA. Clerisy Press.

Dunnavant, K. (2004). *The fifty-year seduction: How television manipulated college football, from the birth of the modern NCAA to the creation of the BCS.* New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.

Edwards, J. R., & Washington, M. (2015). Establishing a "safety net": Exploring the emergence and maintenance of College Hockey Inc. and NCAA Division I hockey. *Journal of Sport Management*, *29*(3), 291-304.

Falla, J. (1981). *NCAA: The Voice of College Sports*. Mission, KS: The National Collegiate Athletic Association.

Flath, A. W. (1963). *A History Of Relations Between The National Collegiate Athletic Association And The Amateur Athletic Union Of The United States*. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Michigan.

Fligstein, N. (2001). Social skill and the theory of fields. *Sociological Theory, 19*, 105-125.

Funk, D. C., Pizzo, A. D., & Baker, B. J. (2018). eSport management: Embracing eSport education and research opportunities. *Sport Management Review, 21*(1), 7-13.

Garud, R., Jain, S., & Kumaraswamy, A. (2002). Institutional entrepreneurship in the sponsorship of common technological standards: The case of Sun Microsystems and Java. *Academy of Management Journal, 45,* 196-214.

Gehman, J., Glaser, V. L., Eisenhardt, K. M., Gioia, D., Langley, A., & Corley, K. G. (2017) Finding theory-method fit: A comparison of three qualitative approaches to theory building. *Journal of Management Inquiry,* doi: 10.1177/1056492617706029

Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2012). Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research: Notes on the Gioia methodology. *Organizational Research Methods, 16*, 15-31.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (2009). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research.* London, UK: Aldine Transaction.

Greene, B. (2012, July 23). What changed the Olympics forever. *CNN*. Retrieved from http://www.cnn.com/2012/07/22/opinion/greene-olympics-amateurs/index.html.

Greenwood, R. & Suddaby, R. (2006). Institutional entrepreneurship in mature fields: The Big Five accounting firms. *Academy of Management Journal, 49*, 27-48.

Greenwood, R., Oliver, C., Sahlin, K., and Suddaby, R. (2008). Introduction. In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, K. Sahlin, and R. Suddaby (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of organizational institutionalism* (pp. 1-46). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Gurney, G. S. (2009). Now we must reform athletics reform. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *56*(9), A34.

Hallmann, K., & Giel, T. (2018). eSports – Competitive sports or recreational activity? *Sport Management Review, 21*(1), 14-20.

Hardy, C., & Maguire, S. (2008). Institutional entrepreneurship. In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, K. Sahlin, and R. Suddaby (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of organizational institutionalism* (pp. 198-217). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hardy, C., & Maguire, S. (2017). Institutional entrepreneurship and change in fields. In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, T. B. Lawrence, & R. E. Meyer (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism* (2nd ed., pp. 261-280).

Hargadon, A. B., & Douglas, Y. (2001). When innovations meet institutions: Edison and the design of the electric light. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *46*, 476-501.

Heinze, K. L., & Lu, D. (2017). Shifting responses to institutional change: The National Football League and player concussions. *Journal of Sport Management, 31*(5), 497-513.

Hinings, C. R. B., Greenwood, R., Reay, T., & Suddaby, R. (2004). Dynamics of Change in organizational fields. In M. S. Poole & A. H. Van de Ven (Eds.), *Handbook of Organizational Change and Innovation* (pp. 204-324). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Ho, S. (2017, September 27). Do protests by athletes turn off viewers? Experts say it's complicated. *NBC Chicago.* Retrieved from https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/national-international/Politics-and-Athletes-Kaepernick-Trump-447823393.html.

Holm, P. (1995). The dynamics of institutionalization: Transformation processes in Norwegian fisheries. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 40*, 398-422.

Hoover, F. L. 1958. *A History Of The National Association Of Intercollegiate Athletics.* Unpublished Master's Thesis. Indiana: Indiana University.

886 Jepperson, R. L. (1991). Institutions, institutional effects, and institutionalization. In W. W.
887 Powell and P. J. DiMaggio (Eds.), *The new institutionalism in organizational analysis*
888 (pp. 143-163). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
889 Kieser, A. (1994). Why organization theory needs historical analyses—and how this should be
890 performed. *Organization Science*, *5*(4), 608-620.
891 Kikulis, L. M. (2000). Continuity and change in governance and decision making in national
892 sport organizations: Institutional explanations. *Journal of sport management*, *14*(4), 293-
893 320.
894 King, B. G., & Pearce, N. A. (2010). The contentiousness of markets: Politics, social
895 movements, and institutional change in markets. *Annual Review of Sociology, 36,* 249-
896 267.
897 Kraatz, M. S., & Block, E. S. (2008). Organizational implications of institutional pluralism. In R.
898 Greenwood, C. Oliver, K. Sahlin, & R. Suddaby (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of*
899 *organizational institutionalism* (pp. 243-275). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
900 Kraatz, M. S., & Flores, R. (2015). Reinfusing values. In *Institutions and ideals: Philip*
901 *Selznick's legacy for organizational studies* (pp. 353-381). Bingley, UK: Emerald Group
902 Publishing Limited.
903 Land, C. B. (1977). *A History Of The National Association Of Intercollegiate Athletics*.
904 Unpublished Master's thesis California: University Of Southern California.
905 Langley, A. (1999). Strategies for theorizing from process data. *Academy of Management*
906 *Review, 24*(4), 691-710.
907 Lawrence, T. B. (1999). Institutional strategy. *Journal of Management, 25*, 161-188.

908 Lawrence, T. B., & Suddaby, R. (2006). Institutions and institutional work. In S. R. Clegg, C.
909 Hardy, T. B. Lawrence, and W. R. Nord (Eds.), *Handbook of organization studies* (pp.
910 215-254). London: Sage.
911 Lawrence, T., Suddaby, R., & Leca, B. (2011). Institutional work: Refocusing institutional
912 studies of organization. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, *20*(1), 52-58.
913 Leifer, E. M. (1995). *Making The Majors: The Transformation Of Team Sports In America*.
914 Cambridge: Harvard University.
915 Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.
916 Lok, J., & De Rond, M. (2013). On the plasticity of institutions: Containing and restoring
917 practice breakdowns at the Cambridge University Boat Club. *Academy of Management*
918 *Journal, 56*(1), 185-107.
919 Lounsbury, M., Ventresca, M., & Hirsch, P. M. (2003). Social movements, field frames and
920 industry emergence: a cultural–political perspective on US recycling. *Socio-Economic*
921 *Review*, *1*(1), 71-104.
922 Lowenfish, L. (2010). *The imperfect diamond: A history of baseball's labor wars.* Lincoln, NE:
923 Bison Books.
924 Maennig, W. (2005). Corruption in international sports and sport management: Forms,
925 tendencies, extent and countermeasures. *European Sport Management Quartely*, *5*(2),
926 187-225.
927 Micelotta, E. R. & Washington, M. (2013). Institutions and maintenance: The repair work of
928 Italian professions. *Organization Studies, 34,* 1137-1170.
929 Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook. *Beverly*
930 *Hills: Sage Publications*.

Misangyi, V. F., Weaver, G. R., & Elms, H. (2008). Ending corruption: The interplay among institutional logics, resources, and institutional entrepreneurs. *Academy of Management Review*, *33*(3), 750-770.

Mitchell, G. J. (2007). *Report to the Commissioner of Baseball of an independent investigation into the illegal use of steroids and other performance enhancing substances by players in Major League Baseball.* Office of the Commissioner of Baseball.

Nafziger, J. A. R. (1983). The Amateur Sports Act of 1978. *BYU Law Review, 1,* 47-99.

Nite, C. (2017). Message Framing as Institutional Maintenance: The National Collegiate Athletic Association's Institutional Work of Addressing Legitimate Threats. *Sport Management Review, 20*(4), 338-351.

Nite, C., & Bopp, T. (2017). Conflicting prescriptions for 'ethical' leadership in complex institutions: Perspectives from U.S. collegiate athletic administrators. *Leadership, 13*(3), 368-387.

Nite, C., Singer, J. N., & Cunningham, G. B. (2013). Addressing competing logics between the mission of a religious university and the demands of intercollegiate athletics. *Sport Management Review, 16,* 465-476.

Nite. C., & Washington, M. (2017). Institutional adaptation to technological innovation: Lessons from the NCAA's regulation of football television broadcasts (1938-1984). *Journal of Sport Management, 31*(6), 575-590.

O'Brien, D., & Slack, T. (2003). An analysis of change in an organizational field: The professionalization of English Rugby Union. *Journal of Sport Management, 17,* 417-448.

O'Brien, D., & Slack, T. (2004). The emergence of a professional logic in English Rugby Union: the role of isomorphic and diffusion processes. *Journal of Sport Management, 18,* 13-39.

954 Oriard, M. (2012). NCAA academic reform: History, context and challenges. *Journal of*
955 *Intercollegiate Sport, 5*(1), 4-18.
956 Ostertag, T. J. (1992). From Shoeless Joe to Charley Hustle: Major League Baseball's continuing
957 crusade against sports gambling. *Seton Hall Journal of Sport Law, 2*(1), 19-49.
958 Pache, A. & Santos, F. (2010). When worlds collide: The internal dynamics of organizational
959 responses to conflicting institutional demands. *Academy of Management Review, 35*, 455-
960 476.
961 Pielke, R. (2013). How can FIFA be held accountable?. *Sport Management Review*, *16*(3), 255-
962 267.
963 Purdum, D. (2017, November 30). "I'm not pro sports gambling. I'm just a realist." *ESPN.*
964 Retrieved from http://www.espn.com/chalk/story/_/id/12262502/gambling-issue-adam-
965 silver-wants-sports-gambling-legalized-other-leagues-join-him.
966 Rudolph, F. (1962). *The American College and University: A History*. New York: Alfred A.
967 Knopf.
968 Sagerian, R. M. (2012). A Penalty Flag for Preemption: The NFL Concussion Litigation,
969 Tortious Fraud, and the Steel Curtain Defense of Section 301 of the Labor Management
970 Relations Act. *Thomas Jefferson Law Review*, *35*, 229-272.
971 Scott, W. R. (1995). *Institutions and Environments*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
972 Selznick, P. (1957). *Leadership in administration.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
973 Seo, M. & Creed, D. (2002). Institutional contradictions, praxis and institutional change: A
974 dialectic perspective. *Academy of Management Review, 27,* 222-248.
975 Shulman, J. L., & Bowen, W. G. (2011). *The game of life: College sports and educational values*.
976 Princeton University Press.

977 Siebert, S., Wilson, F., & Hamilton, J. R. (2017). "Devils May Sit Here:" The Role of
978 Enchantment in Institutional Maintenance. *Academy of Management Journal*, *60*(4),
979 1607-1632.
980 Skille, E. Å. (2011). Change and isomorphism—A case study of translation processes in a
981 Norwegian sport club. *Sport Management Review*, *14*(1), 79-88.
982 Skirstad, B., & Chelladurai, P. (2011). For 'love'and money: A sports club's innovative response
983 to multiple logics. *Journal of Sport Management*, *25*(4), 339-353.
984 Slack, T., & Hinings, B. (1992). Understanding change in national sport organizations: An
985 integration of theoretical perspectives. *Journal of Sport Management*, *6*(2), 114-132.
986 Smith, R.A. (1988). *Sports and Freedom: The Rise of Big-Time College Athletics*. New York,
987 NY: Oxford University Press.
988 Smith, R. K. (2000). A brief history of the NCAA's role in regulating intercollegiate athletics.
989 *Marquette Sports Law Review, 11,* 9-22.
990 Southall, R. M., Nagel, M. S., Amis, J. M., & Southall, C. (2008). A method to March madness?
991 Institutional logics and the 2006 National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I
992 men's basketball tournament. *Journal of Sport Management*, *22*(6), 677-700.
993 Southall, R. M., & Staurowsky, E. J. (2013). Cheering on the collegiate model: Creating,
994 disseminating, and imbedding the NCAA's redefinition of amateurism. *Journal of Sport*
995 *and Social Issues*, *37*(4), 403-429.
996 Sperber, M. (2000). *Beer and circus: How big-time college sports is crippling undergraduate*
997 *education.* New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company.

998 Stagg, P. (1946). *The development of the National Collegiate Athletic Association in relationship*
999 *to intercollegiate athletics in the United States.* Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation. New
1000 York, NY: New York University.
1001 Staurowsky, E. J. (2003). Title IX and college sport: The long painful path to compliance and
1002 reform. *Marquette Sports Law Review, 14,* 95-121.
1003 Staurowsky, E. J., & Sack, A. L. (2005). Reconsidering the use of the term student-athlete in
1004 academic research. *Journal of Sport Management*, *19*(2), 103-116.
1005 Sugden, J., & Tomlinson, A. (1998). *FIFA and the contest for world football: who rules the*
1006 *people's game?* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
1007 Timmermans, S., & Tavory, I. (2012). Theory construction in qualitative research: From
1008 grounded theory to abductive analysis. *Sociological Theory, 30*(3), 167-186.
1009 Wagner, U. (2011). Towards the construction of the world anti-doping agency: Analyzing the
1010 approaches of FIFA and the IAAF to doping in sport. *European Sport Management*
1011 *Quarterly*, *11*(5), 445-470.
1012 Wagner, U., & Pedersen, K. M. (2014). The IOC and the doping issue – An institutional
1013 discursive approach to organizational identity construction. *Sport Management Review,*
1014 *17*(2), 160-173.
1015 Walker, K. B., Seifried, C. S., & Soebbing, B. P. (2017). The National Collegiate Athletic
1016 Association as a social-control agent: Addressing misconduct through organizational
1017 layering. *Journal of Sport Management.* Doi: 10.1123/jsm.2017-0197.
1018 Washington, M. (1999). The role of status and institutional pressure on organizational change:
1019 Sports as a visibility strategy of colleges and universities 1891-1995. Unpublished Ph.D.
1020 Dissertation. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University.

Washington, M. (2004). Field approaches to institutional change: The evolution of the National Collegiate Athletic Association 1906-1995. *Organization Studies, 25*, 393-414.

Washington, M. & Patterson, K. D. W. (2011). Hostile takeover or joint venture: Connections between institutional theory and sport management research. *Sport Management Review*, *14*, 1-12.

Washington, M., & Ventresca, M. J. (2004). How organizations change: The role of institutional support mechanisms in the incorporation of higher education visibility strategies, 1874–1995. *Organization Science*, *15*, 82-97.

Washington, M., & Patterson, K. D. (2011). Hostile takeover or joint venture: Connections between institutional theory and sport management research. *Sport Management Review*, *14*(1), 1-12.

Washington, M., & Ventresca, M. J. (2008). Institutional contradictions and struggles in the formation of US collegiate basketball, 1880–1938. *Journal of Sport Management*, *22*(1), 30-49.

Welty Peachey, J. & Bruening, J. (2011). An examination of environment forces driving change and stakeholder responses in a Football Championship Subdivision intercollegiate athletic department. *Sport Management Review, 14*(2), 201-219.

Wolf, J. (2017, November 6). Jerry Jones, John Goff buy majority stake in compLexity gaming. *ESPN.* Retrieved from http://www.espn.com/esports/story/_/id/21309068/dallas-cowboys-owner-jerry-jones-john-goff-buy-majority-stake-complexity-gaming.

Woolf, J., Berg, B. K., Newland, B. L., & Christine Green, B. (2016). So you want to be a fighter? Institutional work and sport development processes at an elite mixed martial arts gym. *Journal of Sport Management*, *30*(4), 438-452.

Zietsma, C. & Lawrence, T. B. (2010). Institutional work in the transformation of an organizational field: The interplay of boundary work and practice work. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 55,* 189-221.