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Communication and Sport, Where Art Thou? Epistemological Reflections on the Moment and Field(s) of Play



Lawrence A. Wenner¹

Abstract

In this editorial essay, *Communication and Sport* Editor-in-Chief Lawrence Wenner considers the state of scholarly inquiry on communication and sport at an important moment. The moment features complementary and competing scholarly journals, a notable advance in institutional formations in scholarly organizations that have helped legitimize inquiry in the area, and the strategic rise of academic programs, institutes, and centers in communication and media studies that focus on sport. In assessing the state of scholarly play on communication and sport, competing questions are considered: (1) “Is there ‘a’ field and, if so, what is it? and/or (2) “Are there many ‘fields of play’ with offset objectives, priorities, and levels of development?” An epistemological assessment is made of three dispositions to the study of communication and sport: (1) a “Media, Sports, and Society” disposition, (2) a “Sport Communication as Profession” disposition, and (3) a “Communication Studies and Sport” disposition. The essay closes with summary characterization of these dispositions and points to the challenges ahead for the scholarly study of communication and sport to develop as a coherent field.

Keywords

epistemology, media and sport, communication and sport, sport communication, scholarly agenda

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At the 2015 International Association for the Communication of Sport Summit, I had the privilege of joining a group of colleagues on a plenary panel to reflect upon the now 40-year legacy of a seminal article published by Michael Real (1975) in the *Journal of Communication* entitled “Super Bowl: Mythic Spectacle.” Here, there was much consideration and appreciation of how one small article both broke the ice for scholars to legitimately examine the nexus of communication and sport and also showcased a range of concerns and questions that would chart much of the road ahead for a research agenda. There is little question about the importance and significance of that article. Indeed, before Real’s “Super Bowl,” it was clear that the scholarly study of communication and sport was not much a part of the disciplinary conversations in either media studies or sport studies. Afterward, the door had at least been opened and consideration of sport in the communicative context had standing, even if it took a surprising amount of years to gain much traction, and only more recently, legitimacy (Wenner, 1998, 2013).

Some 40 years after the publication of Real’s article, much has changed. There is considerable play on the field of communication and sport and there is a sense that a coherent, or at least increasingly stable, field may be emerging. Building on such sensibilities, after consideration was given to the diverse influences that Real’s “Super Bowl” had on scholarly development in the area, panelists were asked to consider the present state of play on scholarly inquiry about communication and sport and where we *seem to be presently* and *should be headed*. It strikes me that considerations of this sort are always important in a scholarly area and periodic stocktakings, to assess the contours and sensibilities of any scholarly community sharing common interests can be seen as both essential and preventative maintenance should the field’s “heading” need some adjustment.

Reflections on the Moment

A good case can be made that the present moment is particularly ripe for such considerations. Evidence for legitimacy has reached a tipping point with a collective set of institutionalized developments. Foremost, we now have three scholarly journals in the area, the *Journal of Sports Media*, the *International Journal of Sport Communication*, and more recently *Communication and Sport*. While it strikes me that each is open to the breadth of possibilities in the sport and communication intermix, each seems to have a core disposition. One bloomed from focus on journalism and public relations practice, another from communication as it relates to strategic sport management, and the third from concern with the social and cultural dynamic of communication and sport.

Further, institutional formations and recognition of “sport comm” and “media-sport” have reached an important moment. Catching a late draft on the heels of “media and sport” working groups and area formulations in the early 1990s by the International Association for Media and Communication Research, on one hand, and the International Sociology of Sport Association, on the other, as well as the regular

seeding of mediated sport topics at meetings of the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport and the North American Society for Sport Management, the larger and more mainstream scholarly organizations in communication and media studies have more recently made a place at the table for scholars focused on sport. Here, the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, the Broadcast Education Association, the International Communication Association, and, most recently, the surprisingly laggardly behemoth, the National Communication Association (NCA) have instituted varying permutations of interest groups, divisions, and the like focused on sport, media, and communication.

In tandem with, and in good part spurring on, these more recent developments in the larger scholarly organizations in communication and media has been the relatively recent formation of the International Association for Communication and Sport (IACS). The organic coming of IACS was an outgrowth of a series of summit conferences (the first in 2002) that strategized the advance of an inclusive “communication and sport” and its institutionalization and saw the need to further its legitimacy, most especially in communication and media studies, where the resistance had been historically more notable than was the case in sport-centered disciplines.

Added to these institutional and scholarly journal formations as evidence of this being a unique moment, it is worth mentioning an evident “snowballing” of interest in featuring sport in communication and media studies programs, seemingly anointing the sport space as a new “hot area,” even though such programs had been, up until recently, notably resistant to legitimizing sport in their stables. In the past five or so years, commitment to growing curriculum and new institutes and centers dedicated to the sport nexus may be seen in U.S. communication and media studies programs at universities and colleges that include Penn State, Texas, Southern California (USC), Alabama, Clemson, Georgia, Maryland, Bradley, and Marist.

Reflections on the Field(s) of Play

Having made a case for the significance of the moment, let me return to the question that was posed to the panel, and explain why *the way in which* the question was posed stimulated my reflections about the state of play concerning the scholarly study of communication and sport. This may be seen as the case of the ambiguous “(s),” a phenomenon that has become both more common and annoying in scholarly writing. The question as framed by panel chair Simon Ličen was intriguingly vague on whether we have a field or a number of fields before us at this moment. The question poses “Where do you think the field(s) currently stands? and which direction(s) is it/they headed?” Putting aside the necessary syntactical challenges of the question, there is little denying that it puts forward both a big question and an important question. As such, it strikes me that, perhaps because of its structural ambiguity, the answer begs at least two clarifying questions and two distinct answers.

Two Questions

First, let's consider the questions. Question 1: "Is there 'a' field and, if so, what is it?" Question 2: "Are there many 'fields of play,' with offset objectives, priorities, and levels of development?" While I am quite aware that there is an implicit "or" separating these questions as alternatives to each other, let me build on the overarching ambiguity implicit in the "(s)" in the original query that drives this bifurcation and offer, if you will, two answers to both questions at once, in recognition that this may be a particularly messy, albeit important, state of affairs. As you will see, the weight of my answer is anchored in Question 1 although I think Question 2 lingers in an ever-present shadow.

Two Answers

Answering Question 1 with an affirmative "Yes!" presumes that yes indeed a coherent statement of "a" or "the" field is possible and further that this is or can be desirable. Still, such a position necessarily requires a characterization of that field, and generally this takes the form of either "communication and sport" or "sport communication." Regardless of the character of the statement of "a" field, and admittedly there is a lingering "devil in the details" to any such characterizations, either of these characterizations necessarily presuppose two larger statements that entail important assumptions. First, they express an implication of inclusivity that is not seen in more delimited characterizations of the field of play as "mediated sport" or even mediasport, a neologism that speaks to the merged character of two cultural forms (Wenner, 1998). Second, there is a larger and, to my mind, far more important assumption in such characterizations. It is the firm assertion that "there" is a "there there." And regardless of the term that is used to express the characterization of the "there" that is "there," the expression signs a totality that drives an overarching statement that there "is" (or "must be") a field. But is there really? At the very least, at what may be seen as a critical moment, we need to consider whether there may be a more realistic answer.

Answering Question 1 with a firm "No!" asserts that, although there may be some shared interest in the component parts at play, there is not "a" field, but rather a set of "dispositions" and "stances" to the study of communication and sport. While there are likely risks of reprisal from those looking to unify scholarly study of communication and sport, a case may be made that this answer, presently, is the more honest appraisal. Indeed, there is much evidence in support of such an assessment and it may be that the cart of unification is, at the moment, ahead of some quite different horses. In a simple accounting, there are three main dispositions, quite different in key ways, and there is a state of affairs where two of these dispositions are more developed than the third.

The "Media, Sports, and Society" Disposition

The first disposition might be called the Media, Sports, and Society disposition. This characterization harkens back to the title of an early edited collection (Wenner,

1989) that attempted to chart the terrain and demonstrate the contours of the scholarly study of media and sport. This disposition grew from rising concerns about how media played in the social and cultural dynamic *in* and *around* sport and was clearly influenced by the more mature sociology of sport tradition that began its own disciplinary definition in the mid-1960s.

As it was seated in the larger field of communication, the Media, Sports, and Society disposition was anchored in understanding communication processes. Here, research was often structured within one of the three main components of the communication process: (1) senders/institutions/production/encoding, (2) messages/content/texts/representation/signification, and (3) receivers/audiences/fandom/consumption/decoding. In the field of communication, it is fair to say that the Media, Sports, and Society disposition dominated sensibilities on the disciplinary terrain as a complementary communication studies approach, which embraced interpersonal, group, organizational, and other “non-mediated” communicative concerns, was late to engage with sport.

Even with its focus on media, rather than on non-mediated communicative concerns, the Media, Sports, and Society disposition has considerable breadth. Still, a discernable “center” may be found in the “glue” that holds the disposition together around an overarching concern with the social and cultural dynamics at play in the media and sport intermix. This core is most evident in concerns about inequities in gender and racial portrayals in mediated sport content, but also is seen in questions about the political economy of the “marriage” of media and sport institutions and organizations, the values of and pressures on sport communication workers as “producers,” and the joys, distractions, and dysfunctions of audience engagement with mediated sport.

It is also fair to say that there are two “houses” with distinct “sensibilities” that, in too often “alone together” fashion, comprise the Media, Sports, and Society disposition. Each house has its own unique tendencies as well as shortcomings. On one hand, there is the media studies/cultural studies side to the house. Here, in critical appraisals of the “media–sport–culture complex,” there is particular focus on the inequities of representation, hypercommodification, and political ramifications of mediated sport in both local and global contexts. Here too, perhaps necessarily so, comes the too often reliance on obtuse continental social theory and inaccessible jargon, with a politicized patch worn on the critical sleeve.

The other side of the house, in engaging a more detached “scienticized” approach to many of the same social and cultural issues to be found in sport’s communicative path, bends more to the traditions of “mass communication research” and social psychology, not only in terms of methods but also in terms of a tempered distancing of answers to processural questions from their (necessarily) politicized context in the cultural dynamic. While this is a perhaps necessary trade-off in the course of using the tools and tactics of empirical social science, there are other shortcomings as well. These range from the building of standardized scales in a fluid and changing media and sport ecosystem to the challenges of doing surveys and

experimental manipulations in ways that may be generalizable. Surveys, in particular, in the mediated sport space (and more generally across the academy), have become increasingly pragmatic, reliant on responses from undergraduate student populations or on self-selecting respondents polled online through services such as SurveyMonkey. Unfortunately, in both instances, the “convenience” of such sampling compromises reliability and validity in essential ways as statistical inference, stable only when reliant on random sampling, is inherently destabilized.

Having two (very different) houses at play within the Media, Sports, and Society disposition complicates answers about the field(s) that is (or are) at play in scholarly inquiry about communication and sport. While the fissure that is evident, simply put one between the cultural/critical humanities and the empirical social sciences, is seen across the scholarly landscape, there is little question that it induces its bit of “babble” into the Media, Sports, and Society disposition such that, in spite of much common interests and sensibilities, dialogue may too often take place *within* rather than *between* houses and there is a risk of *talking past* rather than *talking to* each other.

In companion with such issues of coherence come some shared deficiencies, the most striking of which has been the disproportional preoccupation with mediated sport content. Certainly, it is understandable that in the pragmatic and increasing pressures of a scholarly career, we “do the easy things first.” Consequently, there is an appeal to analyzing and critiquing mediated sport content that is abundant and readily accessible, just as there is a temptation in reaching for low-hanging fruit. Indeed, there is an understandable seductive draw to content and texts where socio-cultural inequities and harms that concern sport are *so often* and *so vividly* evident. A focus on cultural inequities and social harms, it seems to me, is an essential feature of the Media, Sports, and Society disposition. Still, to get at better understandings about how inequities and social problems may be facilitated by mediated sport content, we need to look beyond content to why, how, and under what conditions that content is created and how it may be received, embraced, and/or resisted. Thus, more attention must be given to studying institutions, professions, and practices, on one hand, and audiences, reception, interpretations, and measuring effects in a stable and generalizable way, on the other, if we are to come to meaningful understandings of those equally important components of the communicative process.

Further, it is clear that research from the Media, Sports, and Society disposition (mirroring an ongoing deficiency on the broader media studies and mass communication research playing fields) needs to better put together the pieces and dynamism in the communication process and attend to the exhortations that scholars such as Anthony Giddens (1984) has made in his arguments for a structuration model or Stuart Hall (1973) has made in his advocacy of an encoding/decoding model. Along with this tall order, there is a ready need in both houses of the Media, Sports, and Society disposition for a more applied, “real world” orientation that, in looking to advance change in equity and representation and to limit harm in effects, needs to get more practical and realistic about change in a set of structurally entrenched logics *in sport* and our cultural understandings and expectations *of sport*.

The “Sport Communication as Profession” Disposition

A second, and increasingly vibrant, disposition to the communication and sport playing fields might be called the Sport Communication as Profession disposition. In direct, and sometimes stark, contrast to the Media, Sports, and Society disposition, this sensibility is very much anchored in valuing a real world orientation. However, in contrast to Media, Sports, and Society disposition, with its core questions about the social and cultural problems inherent in the institutions, content, and reception of that real world, the Sport Communication as Profession disposition takes that real world largely as a given in a received view and shifts the focus to the pragmatics of practice, strategies, and effectiveness in the sport communication marketplace.

The roots of this disposition may be found in concerns with the professional practice of sports reporting, broadcasting, public relations, and advertising as seen in journalism and broadcasting programs and a tradition of strategic sport communication that embraced many of those same things but with focus first on sport institutions and organizations, and grew and flourished with the rise and success of programs in sport administration and management. Sport management broadly and sport communication as a more specific focus within it were and are pockets of success in departments framed as physical education, kinesiology, exercise and sport sciences, and the like, as well as others situated in leisure and recreation studies and management.

As seated in sport management, the Sport Communication as Profession disposition necessarily brings an administrative, managerial, and professional effectiveness lens to inquiries about sport communication and its practice in service to sport and media organizations. Still, it is important to recognize that in the Sport Communication as Profession disposition there is also a concern with “communication processes” and much room for theoretical engagement, but much of this is driven by strong overlain concern with “effectiveness,” with this measured as value to sport and media organizations and the advancement of brands, franchise, and, at the end of the day, profit. This is not to say that there is no room for critical/analytical or empirical/social science scholarship driven by interest in the social and cultural dynamic in sport management programs, on one hand, or those focused on the development of professional skills and careers in journalism, broadcasting, public relations, or advertising as seen in programmatic settings in communication, on the other, but rather that such concerns are more often dwarfed by concerns with developing skills and strategies to advance reputable and effective professional practice that will be well received in and grow marketplaces around sport and its communication.

In the context of professional education, the priorities of the Sport Communication as Profession disposition are eminently defensible, just as the “cultural/critical” is within humanities education and as the “scientific” is within social science education as they are articulated the two houses of the Media, Sports, and Society disposition. But there is a key difference that may make a difference. It is a difference that is both strikingly obvious and may seem trivial or artifactual to some. This

has to do with the “signing” of the disposition. And this may be seen in answers to the question of “what comes first?”

In the Sport Communication as Profession disposition, and two scholarly titles, the *Journal of Sports Media* and the *International Journal of Sport Communication*, sport comes first. In the Media, Sports, and Society or mediasport disposition and the scholarly title *Communication and Sport*, media or communication comes first. And it may be argued that “what comes first” matters.

Sport management as a field is ultimately about sport and its institutional and marketplace advancement.¹ Thus, sport communication, as it is situated in sport management programs, is part of the management toolkit, something to be understood and used strategically within sport. In sport journalism, sport broadcasting, or sport public relations courses and specialty programs, now on the rise in broader journalism, media, and communications programs, answers to the what comes first question and its relevance are more complex. In sport public relations programs, it is easy to see that the tools of the trade are largely applied to advancing the interests of sport organizations and events, and along with that, their “sponsors.” Sport is seen as not so much seen as sociocultural practice, but as a given and a naturalized product to be advanced not interrogated.

But if one takes a step back, this is also very commonly true of sport journalism and broadcasting programs and inherent in professional practice. There is little place in the day-to-day practice of sport journalism to question the logic and importance of sport. In fact, to do so risks compromising “access” to the “inside dope” and gossip that fuels the fires of fandom, and consequently enables the market for sport journalism to be well received and grow. There can be no sport journalism without sport, and the bigger, better, more important, and more well-received sport is all the better for sport journalism. Sport is, after all, the “toy” in the “toy department” characterizations of sport journalism. Here, there is recurring irony in professional practice whereby there is the tendency in news organizations to farm out stories with a sociocultural angle, or those where something goes wrong in the kingdom of sport, to journalists whose stock in trade is *not wedded to not soiling* that kingdom.

In sport broadcasting, the disposition changes from just being *in* a journalistic toy department that is stocked with sport, to necessarily being a “partner” with sport. Broadcast organizations, having purchased costly rights to broadcast sport contests and to sell that product, for the highest price possible, to both consumers and marketers, have a structural imperative not to diminish the appeal, and consequently “soil the sell,” of sports. Here, the necessity of “being in bed” with the sport organization is a given, just as is a “sport first” obligation that underlies the transaction and drives its value. The closeness of the bedfellows becomes even more obvious when the broadcaster is actually paid by the sport organization rather than the media partner, which happens frequently in professional sports.

Finally, a further feature of the Sport Communication as Profession disposition is worth mentioning. This is a matter that ultimately stems from the “geographies”

of scholarly communities. Scholars working from the Sport Communication as Profession disposition are, on average, more likely to be distanced from concerns seen in a “communication studies” approach to interpersonal, group, organizational, and other non-mediated communicative dynamics as journalism-centered and sport management-centered programs have historically not had such matters much on their palettes. While such concerns have admittedly not been central to the Media, Sports, and Society disposition, and they have been slow to develop, it may be said that they are likely to be more proxemic to scholars working from that disposition than to those with a Sport Communication as Profession disposition.

The “Communication Studies and Sport” Disposition

The third, less developed, disposition might be called the Communication Studies and Sport disposition. However, it really needs the “impossible” modifier—non-mediated—to differentiate and frame what is meant by a Communication Studies and Sport disposition. All in all, this is a relatively new, albeit obvious, and important disposition that is in the process of defining its contours, proclivities, and concerns, most of which are little featured in the Media, Sports, and Society and Sport Communication as Profession dispositions.

Coming out of a “personal” or “human,” rather than “media,” orientation to the study of communication with speech acts, speech communication, and communication sciences traditions, the Communication Studies and Sport disposition features core concerns with interpersonal, group, and organizational communication dynamics and related consideration of leadership and management communication (see Kassing et al., 2004). In comparison to the other two dispositions, the Communication Studies and Sport disposition brings concerns over the use of language and symbols to the fore. Thus, studies focused on language and symbols in communication *in* and *about* sport, and those that study their necessary employ in fashioning rhetoric in sporting contexts, are genealogically anchored in the communication studies orientation. Still, as the study of rhetoric is relatively agnostic relative to forms of delivery, rhetorical criticism has left its imprint as well on the “media and culture” side of the Media, Sports, and Society disposition as much sport-related rhetoric reaches the public sphere through media channels.

It is interesting to ponder why the development of the Communication Studies and Sport disposition lagged behind the first two, heretofore, more prominent dispositions. Answers likely lie in a variety of places. For the Media, Sports, and Society and Sport Communication as Profession dispositions, the institutionalization, growth, and impact of industries—the mediated sport industries in the former and the sport industries in the latter—were clearly evident. In the contexts of those dispositions, sport and its communication were “big time,” and legitimacy was aided by the interest of “sport studies”—in the guises of both the sociology of sport and the sport management—in the mediation of sport. Thus, in consistent ways, scholarly attention by organizations and outlets in sport studies helped clear the path for

legitimizing the study of mediated sport in scholarly settings in communication and media studies. But the pathway that was cleared was not inclusive in seeking the interpersonal, group, and organizational communication lenses that might be offered by communication studies. This “oversight” is likely to be remedied in the future as the non-mediated concerns that arise within the Communication Studies and Sport disposition have much to offer in understanding sport as a social and cultural process. This realization, along with the increased visibility and legitimacy of studying sport on the media studies side of the communication discipline, has enabled new organizational structures in scholarly associations in communication to be inclusive of a Communication Studies and Sport disposition, where in the past there were few places in organizations such as the NCA that hosted work on sport out of the communication studies traditions.

Yet, even while less advanced in its development, this third tradition holds much promise in bridging a notable chasm that can be seen to divide the Media, Sports, and Society and Sport Communication as Profession dispositions. Indeed, there are many reasons that scholars in those offset, but more developed, camps should look forward to the maturation of the Communication Studies and Sport disposition. It can, under one roof, be concerned with social and cultural communication processes, but it can also study leadership, organization, and management styles without being preoccupied with the effectiveness and bottom line concerns of the strategic advance of enterprise, which, to the mind of most critical/cultural scholars, and many working within a social-scientific paradigm, taints too much of the drive of research from the Sport Communication as Profession disposition, most particularly that fueled by some of the sensibilities of sport management.

While there is considerable promise to the Communication Studies and Sport disposition, much will have to take place for it to play a more key role. It is evident that the Communication Studies and Sport disposition has much to learn from two developed areas of sport in particular—the sociology of sport and sport psychology—that have bearing on its central concerns about the non-mediated communicative dynamics within and about sport. Here, important work in the sociology of sport about sport organizations and cultures are key, on one hand, and work that looks the psychology of performance optimization and motivation, on the other, seen not only in sport psychology but also in the culture and psychology of coaching, are important starting points.

This is not to “call out” the Communication Studies and Sport disposition for any special “deficiencies” in their understanding of developed lines of inquiry in adjacent fields, but rather to point to the rich potential for interdisciplinary engagement to set the stage for communication scholars to bring meaningful new perspectives to understanding interpersonal, group, and organizational interactions in sporting contexts. Certainly, it would be equally fair to chastise many scholars working in the Media, Sports, and Society and Sport Communication as Profession dispositions for not gaining requisite background in the sociology of sport and not transacting regularly enough with that scholarly community.

Some Final Reflections on the Field(s)

The epistemological reflections in this essay have been aimed at characterizing, hopefully in a fair but candid way, three interlocking but distinct dispositions that are at play in the communication and sport scholarly space. In closing, let me make some summary observations that may be important along the road(s) (there is that ambiguous “(s)” again) we seem to be headed with regard to the scholarly study of communication and sport.

The dispositions that are at play in scholarly inquiry about communication and sport are not only interlocking, but they are competing. Their ultimate compatibility remains to be seen and the degrees of overlap among them may be seen as a fluid, ever-changing set of Venn diagrams characterizing points of intersection. At each of these intersections, there is real opportunity to advance the prospects for the development of “a” or “the” field of scholarly play around communication and sport. However, to make the most of each intersectional opportunity, we need to recognize that there will be essential tensions, as each disposition, in a way, brings a different worldview.

The Media, Sports, and Society disposition sees denizens of the world as “citizens.” Its concerns, meshed in its two houses of critical/cultural inquiry and social scientific concerns over dynamics and effect, ultimately embrace philosophical questions about “how best to live.” Underlying this is an essential ethical “impulse,” with concerns over the greater good for the greater number, virtuous action, fairness, justice and an underlying duty for media, and communicative practices to limit harm. With such lofty goals, it is easy to see how the Media, Sports, and Society disposition is open to criticism for the need to recognize the “realities” of the world and to be more applied in its focus.

The Sport Communication as Profession disposition ultimately sees denizens of the world as “consumers.” Its concerns focus on optimizing consumer experience so that communication and the stories put forward about sport may be enjoyed and valued. However, it is clear that underlying such inquiry about “optimizing” the sport communication experience for consumers, or practicing sport communication more “effectively,” are both explicit and *de facto* concerns over the “health” of sport and media organizations. Thus, in the end, the focus of the Sport Communication as Profession disposition must be on how to use sport communication as an engine to advance market reception of sport as a product and to grow the influence and bottom lines of sport and media organizations that transact in that marketplace. This is not to say that knowledge about social or cultural concerns have no bearing here, or that sport or media organizations have no conscience, but rather such knowledge is sought to advance markets through understandings of consumers. Driven by the overriding concern over “consumer experience” and the advance of the marketplace for sport and its communication, it is easy to see how the Sport Communication as Profession disposition is open to criticism for being too much “in bed” with administrative and managerial effectiveness.

The characterization of the Communication Studies and Sport disposition shows the need to expand the scholarly space concerned with communication and sport to include important omnipresent communication dynamics that may not fall into the purview of the Media, Sports, and Society or Sport Communication as Profession dispositions. As differentiated from those dispositions, it might be said that the Communication Studies and Sport orientation can be characterized as a “persons” disposition. If you will, with its focus on individuals as interpersonal, group, and organizational “actors,” it tends to see denizens of the world as persons or “people,” rather than in more limited roles as citizens or consumers. Perhaps this characterization is wishful thinking or projection on a “disposition” that is not yet fully developed. But it may be helpful as a “heuristic” to temper and meld sensibilities about how best to approach inquiry about communication and sport and to begin thinking about bridging the gap that is often vividly seen between the Media, Sports, and Society and Sport Communication as Profession dispositions. Certainly, there is reason to think that there may be place at a temperate middle between the equities and rights that we have and seek as citizens and the role of the consumer that is always responding to a communicative and sporting market that is constantly seeking advantage and market growth.

In the end, of course, we are all, all at once, citizens, consumers, and persons in our transactions with communication and sport. This reminds us that ours is a messy playing field, and to my mind, that it is a promising and important one. Still, it is essential to recognize that the present state of affairs *does not a field make*, at least not at this moment. Yet, recognizing the conflicts, tensions, and differing world-views in the dispositions that are at play may not be a bad thing. Indeed, recognition of the fissures, allegiances, and traditions at play may be helpful, fruitful, and even essential as we move forward in a quest for a definable “there” that can actually hold a coherent field together.

One purpose of this essay has been to reflect on the “something” that has clearly “been happening here” with regard to the scholarly study of communication and sport. In such reflection, it may be useful as well for scholars to really take an honest look at where they stand in relation to *what fuels their interest* in the communication and sport nexus, to assess what their core dispositions *really are*, and, in a way, what they *should be*. Sport is an appealing and seductive cultural artifact and scholars can be blinded not only by their enthusiasm for and affinities with sport but also to where they are actually standing in their scholarly inquiry. In recent years, as I have watched the exponential growth of scholarly work on communication and sport, I have been puzzled more than once by scholarship voiced as seated in a Media, Sports, and Society disposition being fueled both by assumptions and the pragmatic market concerns more readily associated with a Sport Communication as Profession disposition. And the converse has been seen as well, with scholars seated in sport management abandoning pragmatics to cast a critical eye on social and cultural dynamics. While scholars can have many reasons for fluidity in their dispositions, it is essential in building a scholarly community to

have, as John McPhee (1965) said of the basketball player Bill Bradley, *A Sense of Where You Are*. Just as good team play necessitates players knowing their roles and where they stand on the court, so too does an emerging field. As such, communication and sport needs to have players who know where they stand in terms of their dispositions if those dispositions are to meaningfully be negotiated in framing the contours of a coherent field.

In closing, it is clear that we are at a critical moment for the development of inquiry that considers communication and sport. For all the fissures and offsets in our worldviews and priorities, the possibilities for “a” field that can successfully meld critical engagement, scientific observations, and the advancement of practice remain promising. As we move ahead, there is no short order for the changes that are needed on the road ahead if we deem it important that the “(s)” in what we are beginning to think of as a field should be dropped. Presently, the three fields of play, with offset dispositions, have much work to do in understanding and not speaking past each other. Such understandings, along with coming to better engage with other disciplines that have long engaged sport, will hold the keys to the future for communication and sport as a coherent field and to the role that this journal, *Communication and Sport*, will have its development.

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Note

1. I make this claim as one who headed the largest sport management graduate program in the United States for almost 10 years, participated in North American Society for Sport Management and other professional organizations, and sits, even today, on journal editorial boards in sport management.

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