


Integrity and Transparency in Sports: A Survey Review



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Abstract:

Over the years, integrity and transparency have become the fundamental pillars of ethical conduct in sports, ensuring equal and fair competition. However, in recent years, concerns about various ethical issues and misconduct in sports have emerged and garnered considerable attention from researchers. In response to these issues, this article aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the literature, attempting to identify fundamental indicators of integrity and transparency in sports that can be measured and assessed. The research methodology employed a set of search terms that were combined in multiple ways with various keywords, including "sports," "determinants," "indicators," "integrity," "transparency," "responsibility," and "governance." The period of analysis spanned from 2000 to the present day. A filter was applied to remove duplicates, incomplete documents, studies prior to 2000, and studies in other fields. Finally, after using these specific criteria, a total of 38 articles were selected for further analysis. The results indicate that a total of 15 indicators can be measured and controlled for the world of sport to prosper in terms of integrity, ethics, and transparency.

Keywords: Integrity, Transparency, Governance, Accountability, Governance model, Mini-review.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The credibility of sports as a social phenomenon is currently the subject of unprecedented debate [1, 2]. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance to maintain integrity to ensure that sport remains a safe, equitable, and inclu-

sive activity for the countless individuals around the world who actively participate in and follow sport [2]. At the same time, there are several implicit challenges (such as management inaction) and explicit threats (such as match-fixing, vote-rigging, and doping) that pose risks to the integrity of sports [1, 3].

The concept of integrity in sport, both in terms of how the game is played and how it is governed, is becoming an increasingly important issue in global sport and its governance. A growing body of academic research has identified several areas of concern that policymakers and administrators of sports organizations need to address in order to safeguard the integrity of sports [4-6], such as manipulation of sports and sports betting [7-9], doping [10-12], and human rights concerns [13-15].

Sports-related social sciences and investigative sports journalism have historically emphasized the exposure of financial corruption in sports. In recent years, corruption has been a persistent problem in several sports. The issue gained notable prominence in the early 20th century, particularly in sports such as boxing and baseball [16, 17]. Corruption remains a contemporary issue in sport and is often intertwined with other forms of irregularity, such as electoral fraud, nepotism, and misappropriation of funds [18-28].

A recent issue gaining attention is match-fixing and its connection to unregulated gambling, known as “narrow sport integrity,” which is distinct from broader ethical concerns in sports [29]. In May 2013, the world’s sports ministers met in Berlin to discuss key challenges in international sports policy. They have addressed issues such as match-fixing, illegal betting, doping, and corruption in sports, with the aim of strengthening the capacity of national and international sports federations.

Major sports organizations have struggled with internal integrity issues. Tackling unregulated gambling and its links to match-fixing requires cross-border cooperation, the involvement of law enforcement and international agencies such as Transparency International, Europol, and Interpol. The establishment of robust governance structures appears to be crucial. Regional differences in tolerance of unregulated gambling underscore the need for consistent global quality assurance policies, but this is a significant challenge [30].

Against this backdrop, transparency has been of increasing interest to researchers, both as a broad concept [31-35] and with a specific focus on nonprofit organizations [36-38]. In relation to sports organizations, transparency has been described as “clarity in processes and decision-making, especially when it comes to resource allocation” [39]. This definition emphasizes the question of what information is being provided. It goes on to expand on the dimensions of transparency to include who it is for and how organizations should demonstrate it. Transparency is defined as “making information readily available to those who will be affected by decisions and presenting that information clearly and understandably” [40].

Within this framework, some authors present a comprehensive, value-based concept of transparency and integrity in sports that encompasses essential facets of integrity (corrupt and unethical behavior) in sports rooted in philosophical and psychological principles [41]. The concept of sports integrity is defined as the capacity to

assume responsibility for one’s actions and commitments, as well as to safeguard one’s reputation.

Integrity requires ongoing and diverse critical dialogue among stakeholders about individual and organizational core values, purpose, and alignment with decisions and practices. Sports integrity is comprised of four dimensions: the integrity of the sport itself, where stakeholders recognize and defend fundamental values such as fairness, respect, excellence, and competition; personal integrity in sport, where individual professionals (athletes, coaches, managers, directors) take responsibility for defending their personal and professional reputations by representing themselves and their commitments; organizational integrity in sport, which consists of maintaining the organization’s reputation, embracing its values and identity, and fulfilling its obligations; and procedural integrity in sports events, which concerns the reliability of specific sports competitions.

Interest in sports governance, particularly as it relates to transparency and integrity, has not only grown significantly in academic circles in recent years [39, 42, 43] but has also garnered increasing attention from policymakers at the international and national levels. The recent emergence of trends such as increased commercialization, greater professionalism, expanded government involvement, and increased funding in the field of sports management [44] highlights the need for the implementation of more structured systems, processes, and governance principles [45]. Recently, the governance structures and decision-making processes of sports governing bodies have come under intense scrutiny.

This challenge is not unique to national or international sports organizations; they all face various risks related to ethically sensitive issues. Several of these organizations have been criticized in the past for the way they have handled various issues. The considerable autonomy that sports organizations enjoy, the highly regulated environment in which they operate, and the increasing commercialization of sports [46, 47] have raised questions about the legitimacy of these organizations. This should result in the development of criteria and indicators that define optimal governance practices and ethical conduct within the context of sports organizations. Given the growing concern about moral issues and misconduct in the world of sports, this article aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the literature, attempting to identify fundamental indicators of integrity and transparency in sports that can be measured and assessed to serve as a mechanism for measuring and regulating the integrity and transparency of sports organizations.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Search Strategy

A narrative review of the literature on sports integrity and transparency was conducted in the Scopus and Web of Science databases between April 29 and May 6. The search strategy involved combining relevant keywords

using the Boolean operator “sports AND “determinants” OR “indicators” AND “integrity” OR “transparency” OR “accountability” OR “governance”. This initial search yielded a total of 12,367 documents. The PRISMA guidelines were then applied to improve transparency and systematic review [48]. To ensure methodological rigor, four researchers independently reviewed the abstracts using pre-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. This was followed by a consensus discussion to finalize the selection of articles, ensuring alignment with the objectives of the study.

2.2. Selection Criteria

The articles considered for inclusion in this review were required to meet the following criteria: (1) articles on transparency, integrity, and sport; (2) articles related to sports ethics and governance models in sports organizations; (4) full text available in English. The exclusion criteria included: (1) other areas of research; (2) documents prior to 2000. To ensure the accuracy of the dataset and to avoid redundancy, duplicate records (2,348) were meticulously removed. This resulted in a refined dataset of 10,019 unique documents. To narrow the focus of the study, the articles published before the year 2000 (148) and those unrelated to the topics of the study (9,775) were excluded. This left 96 articles for

further consideration. Further refinements were made by evaluating the titles of the 96 articles, which resulted in the removal of 21 articles that did not match the research focus. This process resulted in 75 articles. The abstracts of all remaining articles were then carefully reviewed by a group of researchers, and, within this subset, 13 articles were found that focused on different topics. At the same time, 24 were not available in full text. Consequently, the final set of articles included in this study consisted of 38 publications. The final PRISMA subset included 38 articles.

3. RESULTS

The results of the study are presented in the following chart (Fig. 1).

Despite the efforts of scholars who have conducted literature reviews on the subject, there is no consensus on the number of governance principles in sports [49]. In addition, this article identified fifteen governance-related principles that are common to several articles. In connection, the 38 articles were subjected to a rigorous analysis, during which a number of common indicators and determinants were identified. These included governance models and standards, financial reporting, evidence of general assemblies, annual general activities,

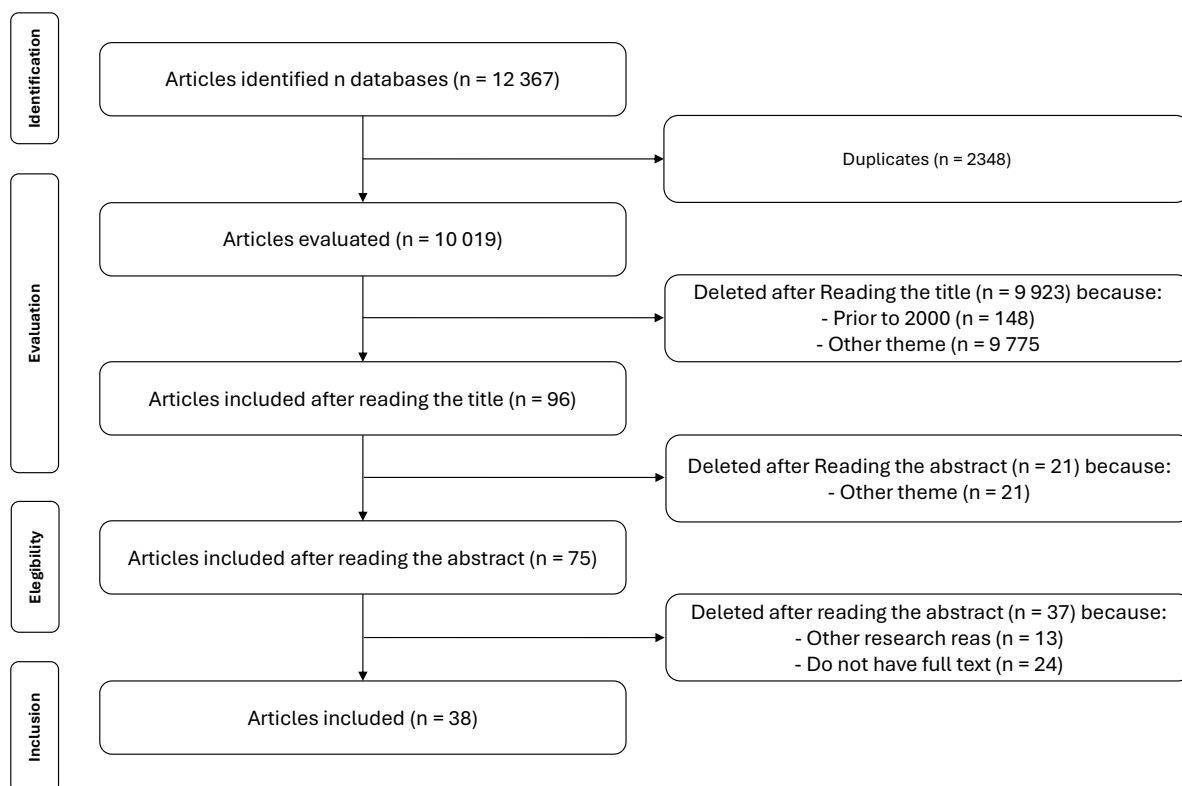


Fig. (1). PRISMA flowchart of included articles.

Table 1. Identification of common indicators and determinants.

Author(s)/Refs.	Integrity and Transparency Indicators
[15]	Financial Reporting; Policies and Processes
[17]	Policies and Processes; Governance Models/Standards; Code of Conduct; Ethics and Compliance; Policies and Processes
[21]	Financial Reporting; Ethics and Compliance; Democratically Elected Leadership; Policies and Processes
[22]	Code of Conduct; Policies and Processes
[26]	Governance Models/Standards; Organizational Structure; Board Members; Policies and Processes
[31]	Financial Reporting; Democratically Elected Leadership; General Assembly Evidence; Sponsorship/Partnership; Policies and Processes
[35]	None of the above
[36]	Governance Models/Standards; Ethical Codes; Financial Reporting; Policies and Processes
[42]	None of the above
[47]	Democratically Elected Leadership; Ethics and Compliance; Policies and Processes
[52]	None of the above
[53]	Governance Models/Standards; Code of Conduct; Policies and Processes
[56]	Governance Models/Standards; Code of Conduct; Ethics and Compliance; Policies and Processes
[59]	Policies and Processes
[64]	Governance Models/Standards; Democratically Elected; Leadership; Ethics and Compliance; Policies and Processes
[67]	Leadership Team; Policies and Processes
[69]	Governance Models/Standards; Financial Reporting Code of Conduct; Ethics and Compliance; Policies and Processes
[72]	Governance Models/Standards; Financial Reporting; Code of Conduct; Ethics and Compliance; Policies and Processes
[77]	Policies and Processes
[41]	Ethics & Compliance; Financial Reporting; Code of Conduct; Policies and Processes
[79]	Governance Models/Standards; Annual General Activity; Board Members; Financial Reporting; Policies and Processes
[80]	List of Members; Code of Conduct; Policies and Processes
[81]	List of Members; Policies and Processes
[84]	Policies and Processes; Annual General Activity; Policies and Processes
[85]	Governance Models/Standards; Policies and Processes; Stakeholder Engagement; Policies and Processes
[87]	Ethics & Compliance; List of Members; Policies and Processes
[90]	Code of Conduct; Vision & Mission; Policies and Processes
[91]	Ethics & Compliance; Code of Conduct; Policies and Processes
[92]	Financial Reporting; Policies and Processes
[102]	Board Members; List of Members; Democratically Elected Leadership; Policies and Processes
[104]	Policies and Processes; Board Composition; Policies and Processes
[105]	Policies and Processes
[106]	Code of Conduct; Policies and Processes
[107]	Financial Reporting; Policies and Processes
[109]	Ethics & Compliance; Governance Models/Standards; Policies and Processes
[111]	Financial Reporting; Code of Conduct; Policies and Processes

organizational structures, constitutions, visions and missions, codes of conduct, board membership, sponsorship and partnership, membership directories, ethics and compliance, leadership teams, elected democratic leadership, and policies and procedures. The most frequently occurring term in these documents was “Policies and Processes” (35 mentions), followed by “Code of Conduct” (12 mentions), “Governance Model/Standards” (12 mentions), and “Financial reporting” (11 mentions). As previously noted, there were several references to other terms, including “Ethics & Compliance” (seven mentions), “Democratically Elected Leadership” (five mentions), “Annual General Activity” (five mentions), “List of Members” (four mentions), “Board Members” (three mentions), “Board Composition” (one mention), “General Assembly Evidence” (one mention), “Leadership Team” (one mention), “Organizational Structure” (one mention), “Sponsorship/Partnership” (one mention), and “Vision &

Mission” (one mention). The aforementioned information is shown in the table below (Table 1).

4. DISCUSSION

The sports governance model is one of the primary indicators of integrity and transparency in sports, and it has become a significant concern for sports organizations [42, 43, 49-54]. Therefore, it can be stated that a governance model or standard in the context of a sports organization implies that the organization publicly discloses a well-defined organizational structure accompanied by an official constitution and a governance model. This concept includes the accessibility and transparency of the organization's bylaws, as well as the dates and minutes of board and committee meetings to all members.

Some investigators have suggested that accountability is also a relevant indicator. In a strict sporting sense, accountability refers to a link between an individual or

entity and a sports organization [55-57]. In this context, the individual bears responsibility for clarifying and validating their actions, while the organization retains the authority to investigate, make judgments, and potentially impose consequences on the individual. Some authors have argued that a lack of commitment to financial reporting and accountability integrity can give rise to corruption, concentration of power, lack of democracy, and low effective governance [55, 58, 59]. Other authors have advocated for a systemic approach to integrity, emphasizing the necessity for holistic and integrated accountability mechanisms to oversee the exercise of power [60]. Thus, it can be argued that authors defend the transparency of accountability in order to prevent corruption and maintain ethical governance and sports justice. Furthermore, research focusing on fiscal transparency supports the notion that increasing fiscal transparency also contributes positively to promoting good governance [61]. Other authors also innovatively highlight the interaction between transparency and taxation, emphasizing its importance for good governance [62].

Another crucial aspect of organizational transparency is the organizational structure. A clearly delineated structure within a sports organization defines the roles and functions of its various components, thereby enhancing the transparency of the organization's operations. This information is typically made available to the public via the organization's website, which allows interested parties to gain insight into the organizational structure and the roles and responsibilities of various individuals within the organization. This transparency helps to foster trust and accountability by enabling stakeholders to gain an understanding of the organization's internal dynamics and the individuals responsible for key functions.

The membership listing is also considered a relevant indicator, whereby the sports organization catalogues its members and subsequently makes this information publicly available on its website. A classification framework was provided for sports organizations involved in governance, categorizing them based on their membership (individuals *versus* legal entities) and the benefits associated with membership (limited *versus* significant) [63]. Thus, it can be argued that it is crucial to have a clearly defined organizational structure, as well as a transparent and well-documented hierarchy. In the current climate, where the actions of boards of directors and other stakeholders are increasingly subject to scrutiny from the media, the general public and various other stakeholders, it is vital to ensure that these structures are transparent and well-documented. The concept of good democracy and governance can only be achieved when performance, accountability, but also transparency, and integrity are combined [64].

In addition, the existence of an ethics and compliance office or committee within the sport organization is a further indicator of the institution's commitment to ethical conduct and compliance with regulations. Furthermore, the organization's website should clearly display the contact details of the ethics and compliance office or

committee, as well as any publicly available information regarding the office's activities. Although various types of financial corruption fall under the purview of anti-corruption conventions established by bodies such as the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, corruption within private sports organizations can manifest itself in a variety of ways. These actions have the potential to impact the integrity of sport negatively, undermine its credibility. They may include offering incentives to manipulate the allocation of sporting events [65].

According to some authors, sports organizations must have a leader or group of leaders to promote transparency and integrity. Studies have indicated that effective collaboration may involve multiple leaders, such as a board of directors, a CEO, or a combination of both [66, 67]. According to some authors, sports organizations must have a leader or group of leaders in order to promote transparency and integrity. The role of leadership in setting the tone for ethical behavior, ensuring that organizational practices align with ethical standards, and fostering a culture of transparency and integrity throughout the organization is of crucial importance. It is the responsibility of leaders to establish clear guidelines, communicate expectations, and model ethical conduct for others to follow. Additionally, effective leadership can facilitate the establishment of trust among stakeholders and demonstrate a commitment to upholding the values of transparency and integrity within the organization.

One of the fundamental principles of an effective governance model in a sports organization is also a democratic process, which encompasses free, fair, and competitive elections for a leader or leaders and council members [59, 68, 69]. Some investigators have stated that the separation of powers and decentralization are key principles of good governance in the business world and corporate sports [70, 71].

Budget transparency has been identified as a fundamental need by policymakers around the world due to its role in promoting accountability, fostering public trust, and ensuring effective governance. By providing transparent and accessible data regarding budgetary priorities and expenditures, policymakers can demonstrate their commitment to responsible fiscal management and fortify public confidence in the integrity of government institutions. In essence, budget transparency is crucial for fostering good governance, enhancing democratic participation, and achieving sustainable development goals [41, 72-114].

In addition, it is essential to consider indicators such as general assembly records, annual general activities, and bylaws, as they also play a pivotal role in promoting transparency and integrity in sport. First, the evidence presented at the General Assembly serves as a cornerstone for ensuring accountability within sports organizations. It serves as a documented record of the decision-making processes, governance structures, and key policies adopted by these organizations. It allows them to examine

and evaluate fairness and equity in sports administration thoroughly. The annual general activity report provides a comprehensive overview of an organization's activities, financial status, and strategic objectives. Such transparency is essential for the detection of any irregularities or potential conflicts of interest, which is necessary for the maintenance of the credibility of sports organizations. Furthermore, it enables effective communication between sports organizations and their various constituencies, which in turn builds trust and secures support from stakeholders. Finally, a well-defined constitution delineates the fundamental principles and regulations that govern a sports organization. This constitution not only provides a legal framework for the organization but also establishes ethical standards that should guide its actions. It delineates the boundaries of acceptable behavior and ensures that sports organizations adhere unwaveringly to the principles of fairness, equity, and integrity.

The capacity to measure and assess the fifteen indicators delineated in this study is of paramount importance for the integrity and transparency of the field of sport. The application of these indicators to sports organizations, such as clubs, associations, and federations, can facilitate the promotion of good governance and the establishment of a solid foundation for ethical practices and fair play in the world of sports. The importance of these measures cannot be overstated, as they provide

interested parties, including athletes, fans, and regulators, with the opportunity to examine the actions and decisions of sports organizations. Moreover, these indicators are regarded as playing a pivotal role in preventing and combating corruption, ensuring accountability, and upholding ethical standards, which are essential for the credibility and reliability of sports institutions. Following this, Table 2 will present the 15 identified indicators.

Table 2. The fifteen indicators identified.

Fifteen Indicators Identified	
1	Governance model/standards
2	Financial reporting
3	Evidence of general assembly
4	Annual general activity
5	Organizational structure
6	Constitution
7	Vision and mission
8	Code of conduct
9	Board membership
10	Sponsorship/partnership
11	Membership Directory
12	Ethics and compliance
13	Leadership team
14	Elected democratic leadership
15	Policies and procedures

Table 3. Practical recommendations for applying the 15 indicators of integrity and transparency in sports organizations.

Fifteen Indicators Identified		Actionable Steps	Real-world Example
1	Governance model/standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish a governance charter outlining roles and responsibilities. - Publicly disclose governance models on official websites. 	To implement governance standards with independent oversight and public disclosure of decision-making processes.
2	Financial reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct annual external audits and publish financial reports. - Use user-friendly formats (e.g., infographics) for better understanding. 	To publish financial statements online to foster transparency and trust.
3	Evidence of General Assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintain detailed records of general assemblies, including minutes and decisions. - Share these records with stakeholders. 	To provide comprehensive annual congress reports, including video summaries and key highlights.
4	Annual general activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Publish an annual report summarizing key activities and achievements. - Ensure accessibility in multiple languages. 	To include governance updates, financial summaries, and strategic priorities.
5	Organizational structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create an organogram showing clear reporting lines and roles. - Update regularly to reflect changes. 	To include a detailed organizational chart with executive profiles and areas of responsibility.
6	Constitution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a comprehensive constitution outlining principles and ethical standards. - Regularly review and amend as needed. 	To constitute explicitly addresses issues like diversity and inclusion.
7	Vision and mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clearly define and communicate the organization's vision and mission statements. - Align strategies with these principles. 	To use mission statements to promote inclusion in sports initiatives.
8	Code of conduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a code of conduct for all stakeholders, emphasizing ethical behavior. - Provide mandatory training on adherence. 	To enforce the code of conduct with strict penalties for breaches, promoting fair play.
9	Board membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diversify board membership to include independent members. - Limit terms to promote accountability. 	To implement term limits to strengthen governance.
10	Sponsorship/partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish transparent criteria for selecting sponsors. - Publicly disclose all sponsorship agreements. 	To ensure all sponsorships align with their values of gender equality.

(Table 3) *contd.....*

Fifteen Indicators Identified		Actionable Steps	Real-world Example
11	Membership directory	- Maintain and publish a directory of members, ensuring data privacy compliance. - Provide classifications of member types.	To publish its member club directory for transparency.
12	Ethics and compliance	- Create an ethics committee to oversee compliance and address misconduct. - Implement whistleblower policies.	To have an independent ethics panel to manage breaches of its code.
13	Leadership team	- Appoint leaders with strong ethical track records. - Conduct leadership training on integrity and decision-making.	To provide leadership development programs to align executives with organizational values.
14	Elected democratic leadership	- Ensure transparent election processes for leadership positions. - Involve independent observers for validation.	The International Paralympic Committee uses independent auditors to oversee election processes.
15	Policies and procedures	- Develop comprehensive policies on anti-corruption, conflicts of interest, and data protection. - Regularly review for updates.	The Commonwealth Games Federation updates policies annually to reflect global governance trends.

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study underscores the critical importance of governance principles in sports organizations, highlighting the necessity for transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct. To implement these principles, we propose practical recommendations aligned with the fifteen identified indicators, providing a roadmap for enhancing integrity and transparency. These recommendations address key organizational elements such as governance models, financial reporting, democratic processes, and ethical leadership. This structured framework outlines actionable steps and real-world examples, offering sports organizations clear guidance to implement best practices and strengthen their governance structures, as shown in Table 3. By adopting these measures, organizations can promote accountability, build stakeholder trust, and foster an ethical culture that supports both financial sustainability and athletic success.

This study highlights the critical role of governance principles in sports organizations, emphasizing the importance of transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct. Researchers have underscored the necessity for comprehensive governance models that combine elements of the public and private sectors. It is widely acknowledged that transparency in financial reporting and robust accountability mechanisms are essential for effective governance, as well as the promotion of fiscal transparency. It also highlighted the incorporation of various organizational indicators, including structural elements, membership lists, vision and mission statements, codes of conduct, and a clear definition of the board's functions, with the objective of enhancing the effectiveness of governance. It is similarly important to emphasize the significance of democratic processes in the selection of leaders and to implement robust policies for policy evaluation. Ethics and compliance, along with the cultivation of reliable and credible leadership teams, are fundamental elements that contribute to the overall integrity of sports organizations. The assessment also highlights the importance of balancing financial success with athletic achievement and the critical role of internal governance structures in achieving that balance.

In conclusion, this brief report elucidates the intricate nature of governance in sports organizations. Moreover, it is imperative to underscore the importance of using the fifteen indicators as a means of assessing the integrity and transparency of sports organizations. These indicators not only provide a solid framework for analyzing the performance of organizations but also serve as a reliable barometer for measuring their commitment to ethical conduct. The application of these indicators enables the conduct of a comprehensive and objective assessment, which identifies areas of strength and opportunities for improvement. This not only promotes accountability and stakeholder trust but also strengthens the ethical integrity, fairness, and accountability foundations of sports organizations. While this study provides a rigorous analysis grounded in scientific literature, it is important to acknowledge that the scope of the topic extends beyond purely scientific knowledge, encompassing practical, cultural, and contextual dimensions that merit further exploration in future research.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

A.S., R.F., S.C.: Study conception and design; T.D., R.R., R.F. and A.S.: Data collection; S.C., D.M., N.B., C.A., M.A., R.F. and A.S.: Draft manuscript. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest, financial or otherwise.

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