Developing a Framework to Formulate a Balanced Approach to the Development of Data

Analytic Technologies in Sports

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Cameron Greene

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On my honor as a University Student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid

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Advisor

Pedro A. P. Francisco, Department of Engineering and Society

STS Research Paper

Intro

The intersection of data analytics and sports marks a pivotal evolution in how sports are played, game strategies are developed and how athletes are evaluated. This shift has sped up exponentially in the last 20 years and has fundamentally changed the cultural landscape of sports. In doing so, it raises critical questions about the balance between traditional wisdom and data-driven decision-making. As data analytics begins to increasingly embed itself in sports, from enhancing game management and player performance to changing the way fans view sports, it prompts a reevaluation of the effect this transformation is having on the identity and culture of sports itself. This paper aims to explore the complex dynamics at play within this transformation, focusing on the central question: How is the rise of data analytics influencing the cultural landscape of sports, and is it leading to a transition from traditional wisdom to a reliance purely on data?

Consider the 2016 NBA Finals where the Cleveland Cavaliers were down 3-1 to the Golden State Warriors. The Cavaliers were being exposed by the high efficiency shooting of the Warriors and their defense had no answer. By analyzing game data, the Cavaliers decided to adjust their defense to use a "small ball" lineup to effectively match up with the Warriors potent and fast offense. This strategic use of data not only influenced the outcome of the finals, as the Cavaliers were able to come back from down 3-1, but it also highlights how widespread the use of analytics are in sports. And it sets a precedent that will continue to be used to influence strategies across sports.

There are many actors involved in this narrative such as athletes, coaches, analysts, tech companies, and fans. Each of these groups interacts with data analytics in unique ways, from athletes who train using simulation strategies or use sensors to prevent injuries, to fans who

now use statistics to validate their loyalties. The widespread use of these technologies offers many opportunities to increase competition and player well-being; however, it also encourages the reduction of the human element in sports and brings forth many data privacy concerns.

Historically, sports have celebrated the unpredictability and passion of the human competitive spirit. However, the introduction of data analytics threatens to take over these human qualities and replace them with a sort of calculated objectivity. There is no doubt that sports analytics is improving sports tactics and understanding fan behavior, and this will continue to grow as billions of dollars are being poured into these technologies. For instance, the global sports analytics market is expected to grow significantly, in 2021 it was valued at 1.9 billion USD and this number is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 21.8% from 2022 to 2030. (GrandView Research, 2023) This economic shift signifies the potential risks of over-reliance on the data and diminishing the essence of sports. In the next few years, it will be crucial to be cautious about losing sight of the invaluable role of human judgment and the emotional connections that define sports.

The thesis of this paper aims to prove that while data analytics offers unprecedented opportunities for enhancing performance and fan engagement, it also poses a significant threat to the cultural values of sports. There is a delicate balance between the data-driven sports rise and the traditional elements of passion, intuition and unpredictability. Preserving this balance is crucial to ensure that the soul of sports remains as the industry continues to evolve. This paper will show that while data analytics can complement the competitive nature of sports, it is more crucial than ever to maintain a balance that ensures the survival of the spirit of sports.

Background and Significance/Motivation:

Over the last decade and a half the sports landscape has been dramatically changed with the introduction and rise of sports analytics. This growth can be seen with the widespread adoption of analytics to help improve player performance, team strategy and even fan engagement. This new age signifies a departure from the traditional methods that were based on human judgment and experience. The driver of this technological shift is based on every team's willingness to gain a competitive advantage.

The integration of data analytics is significant in many ways. On a performance level, teams use various data technologies to help simulate and prepare their athletes for games. Meanwhile on the health side, data is used to personalize training to help prevent and even predict injuries (Smith, 2018). This technology is incredible as it can possibly extend an athlete's career for many years. On the coaching level, deep-learning models have allowed coaches to use data from previous games to help develop a strategy and gameplan almost instantaneously (Givenchy, 2023). Beyond the physical game, data analytics has reshaped fan experiences by offering new ways for fans to engage with sports whether it be through fantasy football or a vast amount of advanced statistics (Sleep and Thomas, 2023).

However, the rise of data analytics is not without controversy. Moruzzi (2014), argues that the continuing over-emphasis on data is spoiling the qualities that make sports compelling, such as passion and unpredictability. People nowadays care more about the box score than how the players actually played. Furthermore, the increasing reliance on athletes' data, especially in the health sector has produced some ethical concerns regarding privacy and consent (Doshi 2023). Athletes have a right to confidentiality and these developments are making it harder and harder for the athletes to maintain it.

The motivation for this research stems from the growing imbalance between traditional sports culture and the technological data revolution in sports. It is clear that the sports analytics market will continue to grow. (Grandview Research, 2023) However, the implications of this research question are important because sports serve as a representation of our society, often reflecting cultural, and ethical trends (Stevens, 2020). And it is as crucial as ever because our society as a whole is experiencing the same data revolution that the sports industry is facing. The insights that can be gathered from this question could possibly be useful in helping to navigate societies complex future relationships with data and AI.

Framework:

Answering the question of the influence of data analytics on the cultural landscape of sports requires an approach that can cover all aspects of the relationship between technology and culture. This research uses a mixed-method approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative analyses to ensure a comprehensive and thorough exploration of how data analytics impacts sports culture.

The qualitative component of the research will consist of public interviews and opinions of a variety of stakeholders throughout the sports ecosystem. This will include athletes, coaches, analysts, reporters, upper management, fans and technology providers. This wide range of viewpoints will help to capture varying experience and opinion regarding the use of data analytics in sports. The differing perspectives will offer many personal positions that will help to clearly envision the change that is happening. It will also provide insights into where experienced actors see this technology going in the future. This analysis is crucial as it will illustrate the humanity involved that the statistics cannot reveal.

Complementing this, the quantitative analysis focuses on the technologies that are driving the data revolution. This consists of statistical data related to sports performance, injury rates, fan engagements and many other relevant indicators. The providers of this information are sports analytics firms, health technology firms, public databases and academic studies that employ statistical tools to gather patterns and correlations that showcase the impact of data analytics. The quantitative approach is essential to prove the transformative effects of data analytics on sports.

Guiding this approach is an STS analytical framework, which offers a lens to observe the complex relationship between science technology and society in sports. It helps to capture how intertwined the technological and societal developments that have occurred due to the data-analytical revolution. In the context of sports it will show not only how technology has affected sports but how sports have driven innovation in technology.

Navigating between perspectives of technological determinism and the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT), the research acknowledges data analytics as a potential cause in redefining sports practices and cultures. At the same time, it considers how the integration of data analytics is influenced by the social, cultural, and institutional culture of sports. Furthermore, employing Actor-Network Theory (ANT) allows for an exploration of the complex network of interactions between humans and non-human actors(technology), such as data analytics tools and wearable devices. This approach is particularly useful for understanding the multifaceted impacts of data analytics, from performance enhancement and ethical considerations to changes in fan engagement.

The use of a mixed-methods approach, combined with an STS framework is designed to address the research question in a comprehensive manner. The qualitative and quantitative

analyses join the human experiences and cultural shifts with the data analytics to provide a full picture of the changes undergoing in the sports world. The STS framework provides a look at the interdependencies between technology and society. By applying concepts such as technological determinism, SCOT, and ANT, the research examines the dynamic relationship between data analytics and sports culture, recognizing that technology's integration into sports is not a one-sided process but involves complex interactions among multiple actors, technologies, and social factors. This approach not only aims to answer the central research question but also contributes to the discourse on technology's role in society, offering insights into the evolution of science, technology, and society.

Literature Review

The rise of data analytics in sports marks a significant shift in the sports landscape, influencing not just performance and strategy but also ethical considerations and fan engagement. This literature review gathers insights from a variety of sources and aims to provide a complete overview of the sports world's current state and its connection to broader research themes.

The transformation brought about by sports analytics is tied to the rapid evolution of data science itself. Data science has evolved rapidly and become more accessible and understandable to the general public, leading to AI and predictive models now being used in sports analytics. (Dhar, 2013) Echoing this, multiple NFL teams have embraced data analytics for player evaluation and game strategy. The teams use these technologies in a myriad of ways to enhance team performance, decision-making for player personnel and injury prevention. (Givenchy, 2023) All these illustrate the real-world applications of data analytics in the sports industry.

The use of data analytics in sports raises significant questions, particularly regarding privacy and data use. A Deloitte Insights study explored the utilization of athlete data analytics, emphasizing the importance of protecting the sensitive information gathered from athletes. (Jarvis and Westcott, 2020) This discussion is crucial for finding the balance required between leveraging data for performance gains and safeguarding athletes' rights, underlining the ethical aspects of sports analytics. The impact of data analytics extends far beyond the pitch, as it has begun to transform fan engagement and the general consumption of sports. Fantasy sports serve as a prime example of how data analytics are changing the way sports are viewed, making sports more accessible while creating a more analytical and individualized approach to fandom as they are more inclined to root for an individual player instead of a team. (Sleep, Thompson, and Thomas, 2019) This shift challenges traditional fan loyalty dynamics and suggests that future fan loyalty may look significantly different. Additionally, another perspective that showcases the over-reliance of data analytics in futbol, argues that analytics transforms the beautiful game into a game of numbers, where style and beauty are replaced with analytics, highlighting the cultural implications of this shift. (Moruzzi, 2014) Similarly, new AI technologies are affecting the way that sports management is approached, suggesting that these technologies could supplement or even replace decision-makers in sports organizations, which could potentially further eliminate the human element and culture of sports.(Shapiro and Velte, 2023)

This literature review highlights the multifaceted impact of data analytics on the sports industry, including its effects on performance enhancement, ethical considerations, fan engagement, and the ongoing balance between traditional wisdom and technological innovation. As data analytics continues to evolve, future research will need to address these challenges, exploring sustainable ways to integrate analytics into sports culture without undermining its inherent human aspects. This body of work lays the groundwork for a comprehensive examination of

sports analytics, offering insights that extend beyond the sports field into broader discussions about data's role in society.

Discussion/Results:

To fully understand the impact of data analytics on the competitive nature of sports and the passion that makes it special a comprehensive analysis is required. This analysis uses Science, Technology and Society (STS) frameworks such as Technological Determinism and the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) and Actor Network Theory, to help address the complex relationship between data analytics and sports. This analysis proves that it is possible to balance the human element and rising technology to ensure that technology enhances sports instead of destroying its essence.

Billy Beane's "Moneyball" approach, which revolutionized baseball by placing an emphasis on on-base percentages instead of traditional scouting, woke up the sports world to the potential of sports analytics. Beane, who was in a position with many budgetary constraints, leveraged analytics to create a team that won the AL west as massive underdogs.(Lewis , 2012) This season shed a whole new light on the world of data analytics as it was proven that teams could accomplish more with less. Beane shows here that analytics is a nuanced approach that uses a balance between statistical evaluation and traditional scouting methods to ensure success. The potential shown in this space has led to an exponential growth in the space. This growth signifies the growing impact of sports analytics and the importance to monitor its progress

closely. Employing Actor-Network Theory, this analysis can trace how analytics tools, decision-makers, and traditional methods form a network where each actor influences and shapes the outcomes in sports, highlighting the interconnected roles that sustain this balance.

Technological Determinism views technology as the primary driver of societal change. In sports, the increased adoption of data analytics has led to change in almost every sport such as the NBA's increased focus on 3-point shooting, showcasing how statistics can define competitive strategies (MAclaughlin, 2018). These changes have led to significant advantages, for teams who properly use them. Brad Stevens, the former Boston Celtics coach and Daryl Morey the General Manager of the Houston Rockets have both emphasized the usefulness of analytics for team management and scouting.(King, 2015) This increased use of analytics has led to an arms race of sorts to create technology that helps teams harness data the best. This can be explained by the SCOT principle of humans creating technologies to achieve an advantage over their competitors. Inventions such as Oura Rings or Whoop straps have been developed as a result of this revolution. These advancements are extremely accessible to the public and provide a lot of useful information to help improve people's health. The technologies that are not readily available to the non-athlete are much more technologically advanced and comprehensive. These technologies, while beneficial for performance and health, raise questions about privacy, consent, and the extent of surveillance athletes are subjected to. The balance between leveraging this data for improvement and respecting that athletes privacy is crucial. (Jarvis and Westcott, 2020) The integration of analytics into sports reflects a complicated relationship that can be described in a myriad of ways by Technological determinism and SCOT. Through the lens of Actor-Network Theory, the relationships between technologies like the Oura Rings, team strategies, and athlete performance can be seen as a dynamic network of interactions. These tools do not merely serve passive roles but actively

participate in shaping sports practices and outcomes, facilitating a complex web of influence that defines competitive advantage.

It is essential to maintain the human aspect of sports in the future with the continuous and rapid integration of technology. Eric Bradlow of Wharton suggests that the potential of analytics are nearly limitless, as they can improve nearly every facet of sports health and management. However, the ethical handling of this data is paramount to ensure responsible use. In the future policies and safeguards are going to have to be explicitly stated so that the rights of the athletes data can be safeguarded. "We're going to have an era where public policy will have a lot to say about who owns the data, and who gives up rights to use their data for our analytics engines," Bradlow states, highlighting the intersection of analytics, ethics, and policy (Knowledge at Wharton). Actor-Network Theory further helps to elucidate how policies, ethical considerations, and the technological tools themselves interact within the sports ecosystem. This theory aids in understanding how these diverse elements coalesce to form a regulatory network that governs the use of data analytics, emphasizing the need for a balance that respects both performance enhancement and privacy.

Despite the many advantages that data analytics has to offer, the importance of maintaining the human element in sports cannot be overstated. Sports are a reflection of our culture, as they represent the passion, and unpredictability of being human. The use of data analytics should complement these aspects and even enhance them. Billy Beane while at the forefront of the data revolution said this, "It's about getting things down to one number. Using stats the way we read them, we'll find value in players that nobody else can see". Beane highlights that analyzing does in fact make sports a numbers game, however, making it a numbers game allows more people to flourish in new ways in the sports world. Our generation is at the precipice of this change and it is crucial that we harness the change to make sports safer and more accessible

but also to ensure that the spirit of sports remains intact. The application of Actor-Network Theory reveals how the advancements in sports analytics, represented by figures like Billy Beane and the technologies they employ, are nodes within a larger network that includes cultural values and the inherent human spirit of sports. This networked interaction ensures that while sports evolve through analytics, the fundamental aspects of passion and unpredictability are re-interpreted and preserved within this new context.

Conclusion:

The exploration of data analytics in sports within this paper reveals a complex relationship where technology's potential to revolutionize the industry is both promising and frightening. At its core, the research highlights the tension between the advancements offered by data analytics which can enhance player performance, help to engage fans, and advance injury prevention methods, and the imperative to preserve the essence of sports: its unpredictability, passion, and human spirit. This balance is crucial for ensuring that the integration of data analytics respects the cultural aspect of sports. Key takeaways include the necessity for ethical frameworks that safeguard athlete privacy and data use, and future works that emphasize the development of policies that address data ethics, and further research into how emerging technologies can be used responsibly. Ultimately, this paper supports a vision for the future of sports that leverages the benefits of data analytics while maintaining the intrinsic values that make sports so special. It aims to ensure that technological advancements enrich rather than diminish the spirit and integrity of sports.

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