



**“It’s not Just a Job, It’s a Passion”: Passions and Motivations of Sport Entrepreneurs**

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It's not Just a Job, It's a Passion": Passions and Motivations of Sport Entrepreneurs

| Reviewer                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Response                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
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| My main concern is the lack of addressing my concerns about the method. Claiming the surveys are just used to identify interviewees but then are used in the analysis and results. Additionally, some serious editing and clarity is still needed.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | We have addressed this main concern in the specific feedback below.                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| However, there remain gaps in our understanding of what drives sport entrepreneurs, and whether their motivations to start and develop their own business differs from what is generally reported in the literature.”<br>When you only cite things at the newest 7 years old, how can you justify a gap in the literature?<br>Restructure that section as that is how it flows at the moment. It seems like you are using the previous sentences to justify the gap but then don't use the most up-to-date literature in that paragraph. | We have included additional recent literature on sport entrepreneurship in the section before the sentence pointed out by the reviewer on page 2. We also referred to González-Serrano et al., 2019 and Pellegrini <i>et al.</i> , 2020 to support the research gap.          |
| There is only one run-on question here and grammatically it makes no sense:<br>“Therefore, the following research questions are addressed: what entrepreneurs’ motivations and passion are to develop a sport business and is passion for sport critical to become a sport entrepreneur?”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | We have rephrased the sentence on page 3 into: “Therefore, the following research questions are addressed: what types of entrepreneurs’ motivations and passion are important to develop a sport business? Is passion for sport critical to become a sport entrepreneur?”     |
| You said you used the surveys to identify the interviewees but then you use the data                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | We have not performed a statistical analysis of the survey data, nor did we intend to do so. We did not formulate hypotheses to test given the qualitative approach chosen. We see the exploratory survey, with open questions, as a prequel of the interview process. It was |

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| from the surveys (see page 28 as an example). That is then part of your data set and methodology. Therefore you did not adequately address my previous concerns.                                                                                                                     | important to collect preliminary information to select interviewees. The information that was collected through the survey was also interesting and part of the research design, as stated in the first line of the data collection section.                          |
| This sentence is awkwardly phrased: It clarifies the special features of sport entrepreneurship which is considered as a life choice to follow one's passion for sport.                                                                                                              | We have replaced this wording by the following on page 4: "By analysing the importance of sport passion in sport entrepreneurship, we extend Hammerschmidt et al. (2022, p.7)'s view that sport is a "determining agent of value creation in sport entrepreneurship". |
| Page 14 – No transition between the first and 2nd paragraph.                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | We have included a transition sentence on page 5: "To address this diversity, Pellegrini et al. (2020) performed a bibliometric analysis which identified...."                                                                                                        |
| Line 33 page 14. You cited Ranfagni and Runfoli incorrectly. You're missing one of the author's names.                                                                                                                                                                               | Thank you, we have corrected the mistake and added Ranfagni to the in-text citation.                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Page 13 – Paragraphs should be minimum 3 sentences, but less than the length of page. Need topic sentences and transition sentences that creates a logical flow to the section.                                                                                                      | We have merged previous paragraph and included transition.                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Page 14 – this doesn't make sense: "understand consumers' view and desire to better meet their needs."                                                                                                                                                                               | We changed the sentence into: "...best understand sport consumers and their needs."                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Page 14 – repetitive phrasing: distinct body of research in sport management by highlighting the distinctiveness of sport entrepreneurship."                                                                                                                                         | We have deleted the repetition.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Page 15 Line 33 – Sentence is grammatically incorrect therefore doesn't make sense: Pellegrini et al. (2020) identified sport entrepreneurship could take a social role by generating benefits for communities through the development of social activities bringing social values." | We have amended the sentence as such: "sport entrepreneurs may generate benefits for communities through the development of social activities and therefore play a social role through the promotion of social values".                                               |

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| Passion for sport first paragraph is disjointed. You transition to entrepreneurs but then add those new sentences which are about sport organization employees. Rework this paragraph to address passion for sport generally in sport and then transition into entrepreneurs in the space. | We have reworked the paragraph on page 5 to accommodate the comment.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Page 19 - Again no transition between the first and second paragraph. (passion for sport section)                                                                                                                                                                                          | We have included a transition sentence on page 11.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Page 20 – “the present study assumes that sport entrepreneurs...” ~ Why would you assume that? Isn’t that what you are exploring in this study?                                                                                                                                            | We have changed the wording to reflect the comment of the reviewer.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Page 20 – I would edit this first paragraph for redundancy. Several sentences are rephrases of the sentence before it.                                                                                                                                                                     | We have removed redundancy by deleting sentences such as:<br><br>“which is more prevalent in other industries (Bhansing <i>et al.</i> , 2018)”<br><br>“the drive for sport entrepreneurs is embedded in the sport culture and social environment.”                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Page 20 - I would add in a visual to frame what you analyzing. It would help refocus for the reader what is your main purpose for this research.                                                                                                                                           | Following another comment from the review, we have added Figure 1 to the paper which illustrates the main focus of analysis. We believe that adding another visual to express the same elements would be redundant and are confident that by adding the Figure, the frame of analysis is clearer as requested by the reviewer in this comment and in the comment below suggesting to “create a visual that highlights the key push-pull factors”. |
| Page 20 – You said previously that no one has explored this before, yet you then end your literature review with this sentence: For these reasons, passion is considered in this study as an important pull factor that shapes the motivations of sport                                    | We have rephrased that sentence as such to avoid any confusion:<br>“Passion for sport may be an important pull factor that shapes the motivations of sport entrepreneurs” on page 11.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

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| entrepreneurs.” That is contradictory to your previous statements about how limited the research is on this. You can hypothesize, you can explore IF this is the case, but how can you already be arguing that it IS an important pull factor?                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Page 21 – Why is this included? “This includes opening Scotland and the UK’s first sport business incubator called The Sport Hive. The Sport Hive focuses on student innovation, supporting Scottish university and college students to develop sport business ideas into tangible businesses.” How does this relate to your research? | We have deleted this information.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Page 22 – ” It was not meant to undertake statistical analysis.” And yet later you draw on your data from those surveys. So your sample was 26 out of 700 then? Was it representative?                                                                                                                                                 | We do not consider that providing information from 26 individuals, who answered open questions about their business, reasons to start it and their passion for sport is a statistical analysis. The survey was not analysed statistically, and we do not infer from the information obtained from the 26 who replied to the survey. The data is purely qualitative and descriptive. We have rephrased text presenting survey data to ensure there is no confusion. |
| Page 22 – Grammar. “The sport business’s entrepreneurs selected have been contacted and agreed to take part in the research and devote time for face-to-face interviews.”                                                                                                                                                              | We deleted that sentence as it was redundant.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Page 22 – When referring to humans and gender, it is preferable to use “men and women” versus “male and female”. Like the way you did in the Table                                                                                                                                                                                     | We have corrected this mistake.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Page 22 – I would rephrase this as it indicates you are biasing your interviewees to                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | We have reworded the sentence to ensure there is no confusion:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

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| focus on their passion for their sport. "...the importance of their passion for sport in their". I'm assuming you asked something like "how passionate are you about your sport or a sport?" or "How does your interest in sport play a role in your entrepreneurship?"                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | "Interviews focused on the sport business and participants' background, their reasons and motivation to start and develop their sport business, their passion for sport and how their interest in sport played a role in their entrepreneurship."                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Page 23 – So if you do a deductive approach, what are your hypotheses? You didn't make that clear in your literature review.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | This is a typo. It is an inductive approach.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Page 24 – So when you say "participants" do you mean the surveyed or the interviewees?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | This is used as a synonym because most interviewees were taken out of the survey participants. The term 'Participant' has a wider scope while interviewees are those we interviewed.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Results – What is the relative importance of all these motivators?<br>I would also create a visual that highlights the key push-pull factors, as that is your main theory present.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | We have included Figure 1 to answer the reviewer's comment.<br>The importance of the push – pull factors could not be established in this exploratory study.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Discussion – So pull factors of passion for sport and inventing were most important?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Passion for sport and for inventing are antecedents of sport entrepreneurship.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 2nd paragraph you jump right into how you extend the literature by existing as a project. Tie your findings back into the literature. Be specific, not just "we extend it because no one has looked at it this way". Talk about which of your findings contrast with the current literature and which ones support it. You do that more in the 3rd and subsequent paragraphs so I would restructure your discussion to highlight those paragraphs vs. what you do in your 2nd paragraph of the discussion. | We have added the following sentence to demonstrate the specific extension of the literature: "The findings of the present study contrasts with previous studies by revealing new relations between passion and motivation in the sport entrepreneurial context. The study therefore provides an extension to the literature by demonstrating the relevancy to employ the push and pull theory of motivation and passion to understand sport entrepreneurs' motivations." |

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| Intrinsic motivation was not found to be a factor in employee creativity in professional sport organizations (Smith & Green, 2020). Why are sport entrepreneurs different?                                                                                                                                                                             | We can't compare employees' creativity in an organisational setting with entrepreneurs' motivation to develop their own business. Although they both work in the sport industry, entrepreneurs have chosen to become self-reliant.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Page 31 – This sentence doesn't make sense. "The concept of sport entrepreneurship introduced by Ratten (2011a) as any form of enterprise in a sport context has still to convince and may also become tenuous." Convince who? Who is saying that?                                                                                                     | We have removed that sentence which was too judgmental, and the whole paragraph which did not add much to the paper.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Page 32 – Where do you mention this is in the results? "showed internal locus of control."                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | We have removed that wording which was indeed an overstatement.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Page 32. - "Only one interviewee..." yes, but that's 1 out of 8 entrepreneurs then.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | We rephrased the sentence on page 23: "One out of 8 interviewees had a particular..."                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Page 34 - Did you ask about harmonious vs. obsessive passions with your interviewees? If so, why not discuss those findings. If not, why not as you mention it being an important aspect of passion.                                                                                                                                                   | The work of Vallerand was used to demonstrate the importance of passion. This study focused on entrepreneurial passion and particularly passion for sport. We did not ask whether their passion for sport and their work as entrepreneurs may be considered harmonious or obsessive. This can be investigated in a further study and was added in the paper.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Page 35 - "...is related to their identification and creativity." Identification of what or toward what? Expand on this sentence.                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | We meant identification with regards to entrepreneurs. However, when considering again this sentence, we acknowledge that we did not investigate identity. Accordingly, we removed that wording from the sentence.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Page 36 – "This is the first empirical study on sport entrepreneurs focusing on their passions and motivations which helps to better understand who sport entrepreneurs are." That is not true. Ratten looked at this related to female athletes as entrepreneurs. Ratten & Miragaia (2019), and Hemme et al., (2017) looked at fitness entrepreneurs' | Thank you for pointing this down? We have toned down this affirmation. To our best knowledge of the literature, we believe this is the first empirical study that investigates sport entrepreneurs' passion and motivation to start a business on their own. Many studies on sport entrepreneurship are non-empirical (conceptual, bibliometric), and very few have interviewed entrepreneurs. However, in light of your comment and in the avoidance of any doubt and to give credits to studies identified in the paper, we have stated the following: "This study expands on the current sport entrepreneurship literature by empirically investigating individuals who have developed their own business in the sport context. This |

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| 1<br>2<br>3<br>4<br>5<br>6<br>7<br>8<br>9<br>10<br>11<br>12<br>13<br>14<br>15<br>16<br>17<br>18<br>19<br>20<br>21<br>22<br>23<br>24<br>25<br>26<br>27<br>28<br>29<br>30<br>31<br>32<br>33<br>34<br>35<br>36<br>37<br>38<br>39<br>40<br>41<br>42<br>43<br>44<br>45<br>46 | <p>motivations. So since your study includes fitness-related products and companies, I would be careful about using this “first” moniker. Instead focus on how your study contributes to both the literature and the industry.</p> | <p>study focuses on the passions and motivations which helps to better understand who sport entrepreneurs are.”</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <p>Page 36 – “Further research on the role of passion for sport in sport entrepreneurship is suggested.” Too vague. Be specific. What are ways people need to extend this literature based on your findings.</p>                   | <p>We changed the sentence as such: “Further research on the harmonious or obsessive role of passion for sport in sport entrepreneurship is suggested.” In addition: “Particularly, whether their passion for sport and for their business changes over time, and whether they would consider changing sector/product, building on the skills and experience they acquired. A longitudinal study of entrepreneurs investing in multiple versus single sector(s) would be of interest to understand sector specific passion.”.</p> |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <p>Page 37 – Grammar, again. Incentivising students to build on their passion for sport to develop a business would be particularly relevant, using business hub’s such as The Sport Hive to allow this to happen”</p>             | <p>We have rephrased the sentence as the following: “They could use students’ passion for sport to incite them in developing their own business ideas through entrepreneurial challenges linked with their sporting interests”.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <p>Your last sentence doesn’t grammatically make sense.</p>                                                                                                                                                                        | <p>We have rephrased the sentence as the following: “At the same time, policymakers may support the development of sport businesses through policy reforms, investment in sport incubators and incentive mechanisms that can support sport entrepreneurs’ passion and motivation to create and develop their business”.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

## “It’s not Just a Job, It’s a Passion”: Passions and Motivations of Sport Entrepreneurs

### Abstract

**Purpose:** The present study analyses sport entrepreneurs’ passions and motivations to start a sport business. It answers calls from the literature to investigate sector specific entrepreneurship ventures and expands the scope of sport entrepreneurship into innovative sport business owners.

**Design:** Twenty-six entrepreneurs based in Scotland who started a sport business have been surveyed and eight entrepreneurs were interviewed.

**Findings:** Participants demonstrated a high inclination for self-employment mainly following pull factor reasons such as career change. Their passion for sport, for inventing and for work played an influential role in their decision to start and grow their business. Some sport entrepreneurs also aimed to pursue higher goals through their innovative sport product or service by contributing to a social cause, which closely aligns with social entrepreneurship.

**Originality/implications:** This study theoretically contributes to the literature by illuminating the specificities of sport entrepreneurship and how passion – as both an antecedent and an outcome - affects the motivational state of sport entrepreneurs.

**Keywords:** *sport entrepreneurship; innovation; sport passion; passion for work; motivation*

## Introduction

Entrepreneurship is a well-established academic field of study. Research on entrepreneurship widely focused on the environmental context (Bhansing *et al.*, 2018; Hessels, Van Gelderen, and Thurik, 2008), the motivations (Baumol, 1990; Fayolle *et al.*, 2014; Shane *et al.*, 2003) as well as on the personality characteristics of entrepreneurs (McClelland, 1987). An entrepreneur's motivational state of mind plays a central role in his/her organisational success (Shane *et al.*, 2003) and context may influence that motivational state (Bhansing *et al.*, 2018). Individual entrepreneurial motivations commonly include the need for achievement, risk taking, tolerance for ambiguity, locus of control, self-efficacy, and goal setting (Shane *et al.*, 2003). Thus far, research on entrepreneurship lacks diversity in sectors (Welter *et al.*, 2016). In light of this call, the present study considers the sport sector as a distinct context driving sport entrepreneurs. Sport entrepreneurs are "people who are innovative, proactive and risk taking in the sports field by developing an entrepreneurial venture" (Ratten, 2011b, p. 44).

Ratten (2010a; 2011b) undertook significant work on sport-based entrepreneurship regarded as individuals or organisations acting innovatively in a business context such as professional sports leagues or teams (Hammerschmidt *et al.*, 2021; Ratten, 2010b, 2011a; Ratten & Jones, 2020), highly successful athletes developing or endorsing sport brands (Aćimović *et al.*, 2013; Ratten, 2012a, 2014, 2015), and sport entrepreneurial brands (Gorse *et al.*, 2010; Miloch *et al.*, 2012; Santomier, 2002). However, there remain gaps in our understanding of what drives sport entrepreneurs, and whether their motivations to start and develop their own business differs from what is generally reported in the literature on entrepreneurship (González-Serrano *et al.*, 2019; Pellegrini *et al.*, 2020).

According to Pellegrini *et al.* (2020), passion has not been sufficiently examined in relation to understanding sport entrepreneurs' motivations. In entrepreneurship research, studies have long highlighted the key role of passion in shaping entrepreneurs' behaviour

(Cardon *et al.*, 2009). Entrepreneurial passion is conceptualised by Cardon *et al.* (2009, p. 517) as “intense positive feelings” experienced through entrepreneurial activities. Entrepreneurs who experience passion benefit from its motivational energy (Cardon *et al.*, 2009; Bhansing *et al.*, 2018). Notwithstanding the countless manifestations of passion in the sport industry (Anagnostopoulos *et al.*, 2016; Swanson and Kent, 2017; Zeimers and Shilbury, 2022), the role of passion driving sport entrepreneurs has not been studied. This is an important gap to address if scholars are to develop a more precise understanding of how sport entrepreneurship takes place. Given the importance of sport in the economy and the substantial impact new sport businesses play in sport consumption, understanding what motivates sport entrepreneurs is of both practical and theoretical relevance to policy makers, educators, and incubators. Therefore, the following research questions are addressed: what types of entrepreneurs’ motivations and passion are important to develop a sport business? Is passion for sport critical to become a sport entrepreneur? Hence, this qualitative study aims to investigate sports entrepreneurs’ motivations to create and develop a sport business, and how their passion for sport played a role in their decision to become an entrepreneur. Adapting Newman *et al.* (2019) concept of passion, we define sport passion as a construct involving a strong motivation to engage and persist in activities related to sport or to specific sport disciplines that is related to intense emotions.

This research uses the Push and Pull Theory (Amit and Muller, 1995; Schjoedt and Shaver 2007) to examine the passions and the motivations of sport entrepreneurs in Scotland. According to Ratten (2016), the important role innovation plays in business growth and survival calls for researchers to investigate innovation management in the sport context. She argues there is a need to develop a new critical understanding that is relevant to the sport context to “build its identity and facilitate interdisciplinary research” (Ratten, 2016, p. 239). Thus, there is value in scholars seeking to understand what influences sport entrepreneurs to

start and develop an innovative business. The study on passion in sport entrepreneurship is interdisciplinary (Newman *et al.*, 2019) and has potential to contribute to a deeper explanation of the antecedents and outcome of the phenomenon. It can also provide valuable insights to the relationship between motivation and passion in the context of sport entrepreneurship.

The present study makes useful contributions to the sport entrepreneurship literature. By analysing the importance of sport passion in sport entrepreneurship, we extend Hammerschmidt *et al.* (2022, p.7)'s view that sport is a “determining agent of value creation in sport entrepreneurship”. The paper further adds to this stream of literature by analyzing the previously unexamined sport entrepreneurs' motivations. Moreover, this study develops new understanding of the sources and outcome of passion of sport entrepreneurs. Therefore, it opens a new field of research in sport passion that has been introduced by Vallerand *et al.* (2006) in the context of recreational and competitive athletes. Finally, this research contributes to the small but growing number of qualitative studies on the phenomenon of entrepreneurial passion (Newman *et al.*, 2019). It theoretically contributes to entrepreneurship passion by uncovering the relevancy to employ the push and pull motivation theory and passion to understand entrepreneurs' motivations.

## Literature Background

### *Sport Entrepreneurship*

Entrepreneurs are individuals who create and develop a new business of any kind (Bruyat and Julien, 2000). They identify and evaluate the feasibility of an opportunity worth pursuing, such as a product or service to be provided to customers and assemble the necessary resources and organisational design to the pursuit of customers (McMullen and Shepherd, 2006; Schneider *et al.*, 1995; Shane *et al.*, 2003). Accordingly, as defined by Ratten (2011a, p. 60), sport entrepreneurship is “any form of enterprise or entrepreneurship in a sport context”. However, despite the contribution of sport entrepreneurs to the development of sport, “academicians have

not focused as intently on sport entrepreneurs as they have other topics” (Nauright and Wiggins, 2020, p. 1422). The literature on sport entrepreneurship is indeed relatively recent and limited (Pellegrini et al., 2020).

Though, entrepreneurship is important for sport as it is a driver of change and innovation in the sector to meet the constantly changing demands of the consumers (Ball, 2005, p. 5). Innovation in sport can appear in many different forms, in products (Desbordes, 2002; Gerke, 2016), processes (Desbordes, 2001; Shah, 2000), technological devices (Hoeber and Hoeber, 2012), services (Winand *et al.*, 2013; Winand and Anagnostopoulos, 2017) or a combination of those (Hoeber *et al.*, 2015; Winand *et al.*, 2016), and is developed by different types of organisations such as sports clubs or governing bodies, or individuals who innovate.

To address this diversity, Pellegrini et al. (2020) performed a bibliometric analysis which identified four main streams of research on sport entrepreneurship which are (1) the internal factors supporting sport entrepreneurship, (2) the external factors impacting sport entrepreneurship, (3) the role of education in fostering entrepreneurship intention, and (4) the social and societal contribution of sport entrepreneurship. Internal factors are associated to the passion expressed by individuals towards an activity, which motivates them to make it their main occupation. This would explain, as Ranfagni and Runfolo (2018) argued, why professional athletes aim to develop a sport business to remain involved in an activity they feel passionate about. They would draw from their expertise, passion, and network to create value for their business, as argued by Kauppinen and Escamilla-Fajardo (2020). Sport entrepreneurship has been widely studied by Ratten (2012a) as the identification, creation and development of new opportunities or innovative activities in a sport context. According to Jones *et al.* (2017), those opportunities and new sport and sport related activities originate from individuals who, with their passion for sport, can best understand sport consumers and their needs.

These studies have contributed to the development of sport entrepreneurship as a distinct body of research in sport management. Yet, motivations explaining the decision to create a sport business remain overlooked. Most sport entrepreneurship studies have focused on how entrepreneurial principles can be applied to professional sport teams, athletes, leagues or sport brands, but a focus on entrepreneurs as innovators who build a new sport business is lacking. This is particularly important given their contribution to the sport industry overall in developing new services and products for consumers.

### *Entrepreneurial Motivation*

Motivation is defined as the purpose or psychological cause of an action (Schacter *et al.*, 2011). A large body of work on entrepreneurship has been written on the motivations driving individuals to become entrepreneurs. Notable differences in motivations have been identified between entrepreneurs. Notably, social entrepreneurs reported different motivations compared to entrepreneurs looking to make profit as a principal objective. Social entrepreneurs aim to achieve social return/goals while becoming financially sustainable (Dorado, 2006). As a motivational factor, a social entrepreneur's ambition is to make a difference for society (Steinerowski *et al.*, 2008; Mair and Marti, 2008).

Pellegrini *et al.* (2020) identified sport entrepreneurs may generate benefits for communities through the development of social activities and therefore play a social role through the promotion of social values. In the sport context, Lüthje (2004) found that contrary to industrial markets, innovators in sport were not anticipating financial profits but expecting to contribute to improving goods and products to enhance enjoyment of their sport. They innovate to fulfil specific needs that are not met by existing market offers. At the same time, while investigating windsurfing, skateboarding and snowboarding industries, Shah (2006) demonstrated that users innovate as they identify new needs and desires for equipment innovations that contribute to the development of their sport. These innovators are highly

committed and closely linked to their sport communities (Franke and Shah, 2003). Shah (2006) identified that most major innovations were developed by users who, with community support or cooperation, may commercialise their innovations, but may not necessarily become entrepreneurs.

### *Push-Pull Theory of Entrepreneurial Motivation*

Motivational theories can be divided into drive theories and incentive theories (Carsrud and Brännback, 2011; Fayolle et al., 2014). Drive theories suggest there is an internal need (e.g., achievement or autonomy) that has the power of motivating the individual. The need for tension reduction resulting from the internal stimulus represents the motivation to start a new business. Incentive theories suggest that people are motivated to do things because of external rewards. For instance, entrepreneurs may be motivated by a combination of incentives such as flexibility, income, or prestige. Overall, in drive theories, push factors dominate, whereas in incentive theories, pull factors dominate (Carsrud and Brännback, 2011).

The push-pull theory has been developed to understand motivations to become an entrepreneur, whether it was by choice or it was forced upon them (Amit and Muller, 1995; Hessels *et al.*, 2008; Schjoedt and Shaver 2007; Segal *et al.*, 2005). Push theory argues that people are ‘pushed’ into entrepreneurship by personal or external forces that are often negative. These forces can include job dissatisfaction, redundancy, missing a promotion in their previous employment, family pressure, and individuals’ general dissatisfaction with their current situation (Brockhaus, 1980; Hisrich and Brush, 1986; Rocha *et al.*, 2015). These factors lead people to seek out other opportunities that are not their first choice, with entrepreneurship being one of these options. Pull theory refers to people who are drawn towards entrepreneurship and become an entrepreneur out of choice. They are attracted to entrepreneurship due to factors such as the need for achievement, recognition, learning, role model, innovation, independence,

improved wealth, a better work-life balance, and opportunities for social and personal development.

Research suggests that independence is the dominant factor explaining entrepreneurship (Benz and Frey, 2008). Therefore, studies have argued that individuals become entrepreneurs more often due to pull factors compared to push factors (Segal *et al.*, 2005; van der Zwan *et al.*, 2016). It is important to note that pull and push factors can be simultaneously present when an individual decides to start a business (van der Zwan *et al.*, 2016). These push and pull factors are respectively associated to extrinsic and intrinsic types of motivation (Carsrud and Brannback, 2011). The push-pull theory can be used to identify whether entrepreneurs want to start a business in the first place, or if it is an option that was forced upon them. The present study considers passion as an important pull factor that might play a key role in sport entrepreneurship. The below section provides the theoretical foundation for this assertion.

### *Entrepreneurial Passion*

Vallerand *et al.* (2003, p. 757) defined passion as “a strong inclination toward an activity that people like, that they find important, and in which they invest time and energy”. Entrepreneurship research has long highlighted the key role of passion (Cardon *et al.*, 2009, 2010, 2015; Cardon, 2015; Chen *et al.*, 2009; Gielnik *et al.*, 2015). Cardon *et al.* (2009, p. 517) conceptualized entrepreneurial passion “as consciously accessible, intense positive feelings experienced by engagement in entrepreneurial activities associated with roles that are meaningful and salient to the self-identity of the entrepreneur”. Cardon *et al.* (2017) identified different sources of entrepreneurial passion: passion for the product or service provided, passion for people, passion for competition or economic gain, passion for a social cause, passion for inventing, founding and developing a business. Baum and Locke (2004) indicated that entrepreneurial passion for work is a love for one’s work, that could be measured in terms

of the emotions of love, attachment and longing, as well as the long hours worked from starting the business to growing it further.

Passion is a strong indicator of how motivated an entrepreneur is in building a business (Baum *et al.*, 2001), whether she/he is likely to continue pursuing goals when faced with difficulties, how well their vision is articulated to employees, and whether they will be able to inspire and lead people growing the business (Chen *et al.*, 2009; Vallerand *et al.*, 2003). As highlighted by Cardon *et al.* (2009), entrepreneurs who experience passion benefit from its motivational energy. In their review of entrepreneurial passion, Newman *et al.* (2019, p. 27) suggested that “passion is a multi-faceted construct, which encompasses a strong motivation to engage and persist in activities pertaining to a certain topic or domain, that is related to intense emotions of either valence and characterized by strong approach motivation/desire”. They argued that, as an affective inclination that motivates individuals to exert time and effort towards entrepreneurial activity, entrepreneurial passion is likely to explain positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship and lead individuals to engage in entrepreneurial behavior (Newman *et al.*, 2019).

Several scholars have argued the theoretical relations between passion and motivations (Curran *et al.*, 2015; Vallerand *et al.*, 2003). Empirical studies have examined the link between entrepreneurial passion and motivations for starting a social enterprise (Bhansing *et al.*, 2018; Hlady *et al.*, 2017; Ruskin *et al.*, 2016). For instance, Ruskin *et al.* (2016) found that social entrepreneurs with high levels of entrepreneurial passion reported to start a social enterprise to maximize their own self-interest rather than for other-oriented motives such as altruism and social justice. Further, Hlady *et al.* (2017) found that the success of a social enterprise in fostering social change was contingent on the entrepreneur’s passion for social change.

Apart from its beneficial and inspiring effects, passion can also be detrimental to one’s life balance when the desire to engage in an activity is not controlled. To capture this duality,

Vallerand *et al.* (2003) introduced the dualistic model of passion building on Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory. This model splits passion into two types: obsessive and harmonious passion. Obsessively passionate individuals have internalized the activity in their identity which leads them to experience an uncontrollable urge to engage in the activity (Vallerand, 2008). This type of passion can lead to burn-out, aggressive behaviour and dissatisfaction as illustrated in the sport context by obsessively passionate athletes or sport fans (Donahue *et al.*, 2009; Gustafsson *et al.*, 2011; Vallerand *et al.*, 2008a; 2008b). In contrast, harmonious passion results from an autonomous internalisation of the activity into the person's identity (Vallerand, 2008, p. 2). This internalisation takes place when an individual accepts that a certain activity is important to them. When this type of passion is taking place individuals can freely take part in the activity. As an example, employees in sporting organisations express a high level of harmonious passion (Anagnostopoulos *et al.*, 2016) which is linked to high satisfaction at work (Papadimitriou *et al.*, 2017; Swanson and Kent, 2016).

### *Passion for Sport*

The sport industry is uniquely characterised by passionate on and off-field fans (Vallerand *et al.*, 2008), employees (Papadimitriou *et al.*, 2017; Swanson and Kent, 2016) and volunteers (Zeimers and Shilbury, 2019). In their study on the passion of sport employees, Anagnostopoulos *et al.* (2016) noted that their desire to work in the sport industry is not guided by remuneration alone. "The passion for sport is the very same that employees experience as passive or active consumers and/or through their identification and involvement with a sport team. Job seekers, therefore, are largely attracted to sport industry jobs because they perceive a good fit between their preferences for future work and the sporting' environment" (Anagnostopoulos *et al.*, 2016, p. 386). Likewise, Oja *et al.* (2019) and Kim *et al.* (2021) have demonstrated the importance of work passion for employees in the sport industry which is related to their identification to their sport organisation and creativity. This finding can be

related to passion sport entrepreneurs have for their work which contributes to increased creativity and innovation. Entrepreneurs' passion for sport may hence trigger their motivation to develop their business.

Sport entrepreneurs may also be regarded as social entrepreneurs whose motivations differ from other entrepreneurs in that they seek social outcomes (Pellegrini *et al.*, 2020). Given the unique features of sport (Smith and Westerbeek, 1999), the present study explores whether sport entrepreneurs are characterized by a different type of passion compared to social entrepreneurs (i.e. passion for sport). As passion in the context of cultural and creative entrepreneurs differs from that in other industries (Bhansing *et al.*, 2018), entrepreneurial passion in the sport industry may differ too as their passion for sport might represent an overarching catalyst in the motivational process. Passion in this sport context not only refers to the passion they have for running a business, but more the love of sport translated in marketable products. This means that passion in this setting includes a continuous connection between the entrepreneur's sport product and his/her sport passion. As pointed by Bhansing *et al.* (2018, p. 2), "context, or in other words, the 'circumstances, conditions, situations or environments that are external to the respective phenomenon and enable or constrain it' (Welter, 2011, p. 167), may be an important factor in entrepreneurial activities". Passion for sport may be an important pull factor that shapes the motivations of sport entrepreneurs.

## Method

### *Research Context*

The research focuses on individuals who have developed their own business in the sport sector in Scotland. Scotland has a history of low levels of business development compared to the rest of the UK and remains one of the least entrepreneurial UK home nations (Mason *et al.*, 2015). However, investment to boost and support Scottish sport business development through an innovation hub named 'Sporting Chance Initiative' has seen an increase in sport entrepreneurial

projects emerging. Between 2010 and 2016, Sporting Chance Initiative has helped nearly 700 Scottish companies to develop sports products and services (Scottish Funding Council, n.d.).

*Data Collection*

The research design relies on two data collection methods: a survey and semi-structured interviews. This combination of methods is used to improve the validity of research and ensures a deeper understanding of the examined phenomenon (Yin, 2014). The survey was mainly used to facilitate the recruitment of participants for the interviews and to collect information about them. It was not meant to undertake statistical analysis.

Participants were recruited from Sporting Chance Initiative’s database of 700 sport business owners who received an invitation to fill out the survey consisting of 19 closed and 3 open questions about their motivation and passion. Examples of close questions related to age, gender, education, status in the organisation, date of birth, year when started business. Examples of open questions included ‘Why did you start your business?’; ‘Why do you continue developing your business?’ and ‘Describe your sporting passion if any’. Twenty-six sport entrepreneurs completed the survey entirely. Each can be categorized into small and medium-sized enterprises counting less than 250 employees and a turnover under €50M, with most being small (less than 50 employees with turnover less than €10M). Respondents were at different stages of business development with the range encompassing businesses as early as first year start-ups to 17 years established (average of 4.07years  $\pm$  3.80). The youngest participant was aged 23 years old and the oldest 55 years old (M=39.85years, SD=7.43). Eighteen of the participants were male and eight were female. Twenty held a university degree, twenty-one held the highest senior position in their respective company and four started the business with someone else.

The second data collection method involved semi-structured interviews to develop richer insights of the entrepreneurs’ motivation to start and grow their sport business. The

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2  
3 interviews informed the research team in understanding the differences in motivations between  
4 the stages of development of sport entrepreneurs (different profiles – developing or mature  
5 were examined). The questionnaire shaped the interview questions by providing guidance on  
6 which factors were relevant in the choice to become a sport entrepreneur and to grow the  
7 business. The theme of passion has been notably addressed further in the interviews. Questions  
8 asked the informants about the role their passion for sport had played in their decision. A total  
9 of eight follow-up interviews have been undertaken. Six survey participants have been selected  
10 for interviews. Two entrepreneurs who did not participate in the survey have been contacted  
11 through Sporting Chance Initiative to expand the diversity of background of interviewees and  
12 type of businesses. Those two entrepreneurs had started their business less than a year before  
13 data collection, contrasting with the other entrepreneurs interviewed.

24  
25 Selection criteria for interviewees included the type of sport product or service  
26 developed, a balance of gender and experience in business development. These criteria were  
27 chosen to ensure as much as possible a wide spectrum of businesses and entrepreneurs involved  
28 in the study, thus improving the studies' range and scope. Innovative sport products or services  
29 developed by and under the business of the interviewees included sport clothing, sport  
30 consumable, sport technology and new media, sport apparel and fitness programmes. Five sport  
31 entrepreneurs interviewed were men and three were women while six had a university degree.  
32 Table 1 shows the profile of interviewees with age ranging from 20 to 54 years old, and their  
33 experience in developing a sport business ranging from less than a year to ten years. Semi-  
34 structured interviews have been undertaken between February and March 2016, and lasted  
35 between thirty-five minutes and an hour. Interviews focused on the sport business and  
36 participants' background, their reasons and motivation to start and develop their sport business,  
37 their passion for sport and how their interest in sport played a role in their entrepreneurship.  
38 Interviews were transcribed verbatim.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

*Data Analysis*

The questionnaire and interview transcripts were analyzed in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) procedure following an **inductive approach**. This thematic analysis method allows researchers to adopt a theory-driven analytical approach. It involves six stages: (a) familiarization with the data through reading and rereading the transcripts; (b) initial coding; (c) searching for themes; (d) reviewing themes to create a thematic map of the analysis; (e) defining and naming themes; and (f) producing the report. The initial themes were derived from the push and pull theory of motivation and from the passion literature. NVivo software was used to assist with the analysis. All members of the research team were involved in re-checking the coding structure to enhance the reliability of the findings (Yin, 2014). The questionnaire was coded first. The coding process involved extracting the descriptive data and then analysing the qualitative data using the initial coding. Subsequently, the interviews were coded following the initial and new codes identified in the questionnaire. As the transcripts were analysed, several subthemes emerged. Under the first order theme push and pull motivational factors subthemes identified were job dissatisfaction, career change, opportunity for self-employment and freedom, and excitement for problem solving. Under the theme passion, subthemes identified were passion for sport, passion for work and passion for inventing. The later was also related to a slightly different theme that was named vision for change benefiting society and their community.

**Results**

The results section is structured to highlight the vision, motivation and passion of sport entrepreneurs that influenced their decision to start a business in the sport industry.

*Sport Entrepreneurs' Vision*

Most participants had higher goals and targets in mind that they were trying to achieve. For example, they aimed at changing the landscape of their field, from creating a product that could help make people's lives easier, or changing the way that people consume and watch sport in Scotland. Most if not all successful businesses had a vision that appeared to drive entrepreneurs which was particularly obvious during the interviews. Interviewee 5 claimed that their passion was "very much passion for change, and it's the most exciting feeling, bringing something that's disruptive to the market".

Interviewees all reported to aim at producing something that is innovative and changes the status quo. Interviewee 1 for instance said "I think it's being able to do something different and maybe changing the landscape for something that's quite big already, and changing it for the better." Sport products ranged from sport drinks to sport devices, but each interviewee sought to provide something that was either brand new or that was different and would improve on what already existed. Interviewee 6 noted that "the opportunity to create something innovative yet really simple was just irresistible. There are very few things in this world that have the reach that we could have, that affects so many people that hasn't been done before." It appeared that this element of pushing the boundaries to create new or improved products was a key motivational factor. Interviewee 3 said

"I think it was more so the fact that it was a unique idea and I truly believed it was going to be beneficial. I think it's really good coming up with an idea and obviously seeing the final product."

What was apparent was that none of the participants did it purely for financial gain. Whilst it would have been a consideration, money was not cited as the main motivating factor for starting the business. Business owners are commonly thought of as profit driven with only self-interest at heart. However, the participants rather referred to focusing on the product or service they are providing and its effects. This ranged from making consumers life's easier, trying to bring

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2  
3 a disruptive product to market, or having an impact on the national sporting scene in Scotland.

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5 Interviewee 6 said that “a lot of things motivate me, generally what our customers say. A lot  
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7 of people describe it as life changing and that’s quite amazing”. Interviewee 4 agreed that the  
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9 difference it makes for customers and their reaction to the product was what drove them by  
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11 commenting  
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15 “I got an email from a nursery teacher saying the [product] are a firm favourite with the  
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17 kids and we have a member of staff who wants to buy them, and I wrote back saying  
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19 this is what gets me out of bed in the morning.”  
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21  
22 Interviewee 3 noted the motivation came from producing something that could be beneficial,  
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24 saying that “just having the final product, the image, just knowing one day this could be very  
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26 beneficial keeps me going”. Interviewee 7 also commented on the attraction of seeing a final  
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28 product taking off and becoming a success was a driver:  
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31 “I think it’s seeing something that you’ve produced start to take off and go is where the  
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33 attraction is for me. That’s just the person I am, I don’t have any great desire to run a  
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35 team of 5000 people, I’d just like to say here’s a problem let’s go solve it.”  
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39 The sport entrepreneurs surveyed aimed to have an impact on the national sport scene or to  
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41 make a product that helps as many people as possible. Participant 26 noted they wanted “to be  
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43 a part of shaping the future of the industry”, or, according to participant 6, to “make a  
44  
45 difference”. Interviewee 1 expanded:  
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48 “I am quite passionate that across the sporting spectrum there’s a lot of sports that don’t  
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50 get the audience they should, which is a shame for the people in those sports. If I could  
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52 make a difference by making people aware of all these other sports that are easily  
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54 accessible, that would be the most exciting thing for me, because that’s what I’m  
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56 passionate about.”  
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58 [Insert Figure I about here]  
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### *Sport Entrepreneurs' Push and Pull Motivational Factors*

Figure 1 highlights the different push and pull factors that impact the decision to start a sport business. Dissatisfaction with their previous employment or wanting to move into a new sector because of dissatisfaction were 'push' reasons mentioned by participants. Dissatisfaction at work was mentioned by interviewee 6 who commented "I had been 25 years in television, I loved every minute of it, but I could see the way it was going. I thought at the time, you know what, I'd like to do something else", and Interviewee 4 said "If I was going to really run my own life, I had to run my own business".

There were a multitude of reasons why people chose self-employment. Many interviewees were pulled by other factors such as looking for a career change and to become their own boss. Some saw an opportunity to put into practice an idea that they may have had for a while, some wanted to solve a problem that they had come across, whilst others looked at the chance to develop a product that could have an impact on people's lives. Some interviewees took a hobby and made it into a viable business idea. Self-employment affords individuals a lot more freedom, and flexibility offers potentially better rewards and allows them to take control of their work. Interviewees answered they preferred being their own boss although some would have considered working for someone or a company they would respect and share values and vision with. Consequently, if interviewees had to go back working for someone else, it would have to be an ideal situation. It would depend on who they would be working for, whether they believed in what they were doing and how much impact they would have on the business. Interviewee 4 commented

I think everyone would say yes. (On being asked if they preferred being their own boss).

[Work for] someone else? Yes, I could for sure. You'd be selective though, if you worked for someone who was bright and driven then of course.

Interviewee 7 noted “I think possibly if it was the right company, maybe if I could potentially work in another start up or a more established start up, and it was a place I could believe in what I’m doing.” The type of person that is attracted to running their own business appears unsuited to working for a company with strict structures and procedures. Interviewee 3 stated “I much prefer being my own boss. [Work for] someone else? Yeah but I think I’d always be gunning for their job”, whilst Interviewee 8 said

I think if I was ever to go back to working for someone else it would have to be after selling the company or being bought out by a larger company and taking a senior management role within that company. That would be the only way I’d consider that.

The problem-solving aspect of entrepreneurship was something that was common amongst all the participants and can be associated to pull factors. Entrepreneurs interviewed have all identified a problem that exists, have developed a solution for that problem, and made a business out of it. The need to solve problems seemed to come naturally to interviewees and represented an incentive to continue developing their business.

The freedom and control they gained was another important motivation, with interviewee 2 saying “I can’t actually imagine doing anything else, I really don’t. I’ve got the freedom to do this, and in Edinburgh there is the demand for it.” Interviewees demonstrated a real belief in what they were creating and were far more interested in building that and helping to grow it. Admittedly with growth comes higher revenues, but those who took part seemed to genuinely care that their business grew into something important, rather than something that could make as much profit as possible. Interviewee 8 said that “I believe that we’re doing something good, that we’re making a difference to sport in Scotland and elsewhere”. The motivations expressed by some sport entrepreneurs relate to those identified in social entrepreneurship.

*Sport Entrepreneurs’ Passion*

From the 26 participants surveyed, 23 identified their sporting passion as directly related to their business. Sport passion may be identified as a central antecedent of entrepreneurship motivational process. The respondents reported a range of passions related to sports originating from their own current or past participation or involvement in one particular sport at different levels of excellence, to their enjoyment of watching sports. Participant 10 illustrated the overall sporting passion of participants by indicating “I love walking/climbing, but also very much enjoy watching golf, tennis, skiing” while participant 24 said “Football has always been the key passion”. The three participants who indicated the product or service was not specifically linked to their passion mentioned it can eventually be used within their sport of affection, and they all seemed either sporty individuals such as participant 15 “I’m very fit. I do a lot of boxing training, marathons, and rowing” or interested in sport in general.

Interviewees mentioned that their passion and enjoyment of sport was a driving factor in starting and developing their business. Interviewee 1 said that they “got to a stage thinking that right, I like sport, and I had this idea in my head, this vague idea of all this sport going under the radar, surely there’s a business opportunity. Basically, I decided to have a career change, I’d spent 13 years in one sector, and I wanted to have a change of scenery”. Interviewee 8 commented:

At the core of it was a passion for working in sport, and a passion for working on the kind of sport that I wanted to work on. Which wasn’t what my previous employer particularly did. And the window of opportunity was meeting the right people at the right time who had a shared vision, it was an unhappiness with my current situation, a feeling of wanting to change that and take some control.

The sport element of the business was crucial for the sport entrepreneurs, with almost all participants referring to it as one of the more important aspects of their company. Interviewee 7 said that they ‘absolutely’ valued the sport element of the business and “making it easier for

people to play sport is absolutely fundamental to what we do, that's our core message, to make it easier for people to play sport. That's fundamental." Only those whose product was not restricted to the sporting sector (e.g. drinks) said that it was perhaps not as important. The fact that, for many, the sport element was so important, suggests that sport and their passion for it played a part in the decision-making process to start their business. Others noted how important sport was to their business. Interviewee 3 said that "I think sport is a huge factor", and interviewee 1 stated that sport is "the key". Their sporting passion motivated them to go forward with the business and making it successful. This suggests that it was more than purely a business opportunity being exploited. Interviewee 4 commented that sport is "a huge motivator, huge motivator. It's almost the most important element".

Sport entrepreneurs also displayed a passion for their work as they were passionately engaged with their work. Passion for work explains their motivation to continue growing the business. The passion that entrepreneurs have for their work can act as a good measure of their motivation for the business and why they continue to work. It can demonstrate the level of commitment that they are willing to put in to make it successful. In general, all interviewees reported to be very passionate about their work and cared about making their business a success. They were driven to achieve their goals, and they set themselves apart from others by relentlessly pursuing these goals, despite the risks. Participant 2 summaries the general feeling by stating "It's not just a job, it's a passion".

### Discussion

The push and pull theory of motivation proved to be a highly effective lens through which to understand the sport entrepreneur's phenomenon. In this context, sport entrepreneurs have showcased different motivations to start and develop their business. The findings show that the sport passion of sport entrepreneurs creates a powerful motivational energy in their endeavour. Passion affects the motivational state of sport entrepreneurs in two ways. That is, passion for

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2  
3 sport and for inventing are antecedents of sport entrepreneurship (pull factors) and the resulting  
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5 entrepreneurs' passion for work is an outcome of sport entrepreneurship passion. Passion as a  
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7 pull factor shapes motivation and eventually leads to passion for work. Such findings are  
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9 important given how little is known about sport entrepreneurs and the underlying mechanisms  
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11 through which they decide to start and develop a business. In doing so, this study importantly  
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13 expands the scope of sport entrepreneurship knowledge into innovative sport entrepreneurs.  
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17 Scholars have given considerable attention to quantitatively measuring entrepreneurial  
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19 passion and its influence on individuals' attitudes and behaviours (Newman *et al.*, 2019). Fewer  
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21 studies have analysed the antecedents of entrepreneurial passion and the outcomes of passion  
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23 from a motivational perspective. In particular, limited research has been conducted on the  
24  
25 sources of passion and how passion represents a motivation for starting a business. Yet new  
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27 research is considered vital if scholars are to develop a holistic understanding of the  
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29 phenomenon and assist in its successful deployment. The findings of the present study contrast  
30  
31 with previous studies by revealing new relations between passion and motivation in the sport  
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33 entrepreneurial context. The study therefore provides an extension to the literature by  
34  
35 demonstrating the relevancy to employ the push and pull theory of motivation and passion to  
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37 understand sport entrepreneurs' motivations. Although existing studies have implied that  
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39 passion is important for entrepreneurs (Cardon *et al.*, 2009), the underlying mechanisms  
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41 through which this shapes the decisions of sport entrepreneurs have not, until now, been  
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43 explicitly uncovered.  
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50 Shane *et al.* (2003) argued that egoistic passion was central to an entrepreneur's  
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52 motivation; that is, they love building an organisation to make it profitable and are motivated  
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54 to only do what is in their own interest. In contrast, the sport entrepreneurs surveyed have other  
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56 aims through their innovative sport product or service, for instance to benefit society and  
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58 people, and this motivates them to continue growing their business. This type of motivation  
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brings them close to the notion of social entrepreneurs with a passion for a social or societal cause (Fayolle *et al.*, 2014; Tan *et al.*, 2003). In line with Mair and Marti (2008, p. 37), sport entrepreneurs may hence be considered as “pursuing opportunities to catalyse social change and/or address social needs” through innovative sporting services or products. They do make financial profits to secure the sustainability of their business, but something greater, beyond self-interest, keeps them going (Rispaal and Servantie, 2017; Ruskin *et al.*, 2016). As Bierly *et al.* (2000) suggested, passion can lead entrepreneurs to want to make a difference and work more for that to happen. Sport entrepreneurs seemed highly passionate individuals who indeed aim to make a difference for people who use their product or service and are willing to work long hours. In line with the research on sport innovators (Lüthje, 2004; Shah, 2006), entrepreneurs see greater benefits to their business, product, or service. Financial gain is not the principal motivating factor, but fulfilling a need and improving the practice of sports are central. This motivation is a common theme identified in sport entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurs (Hlady *et al.*, 2017; Ruskin *et al.*, 2016). This contribution is important because it illuminates the specificities of sport entrepreneurs and further adds to this overlooked stream of the sport management literature. This finding also highlights the differences between entrepreneurs hence reinforcing findings suggesting the importance of context in entrepreneurial activities (Bhansing *et al.*, 2008). In the present context, the sport setting in which the innovative sport business takes place provides a unique social and professional environment to develop a business activity. It reinforces the need to examine the influence of passion on motivations by considering the distinct types of entrepreneurs for a more extensive understanding of their motivations and how contingent on the entrepreneurs’ passion they can be.

Contributing to society was not the only main driver for the sport entrepreneurs surveyed. They also mentioned a strong desirability for self-employment. Participants demonstrated a

reluctance to leave self-employment and were only willing to do so in the correct situation that would, for example, keep intact their ability to make decisions for themselves, without having to report to others. Drive theory (Carsrud and Brannback, 2011; Douglas and Shepherd, 2002; Segal *et al.*, 2005) is relevant to uncover the motivations driving the participants in this study in line with their preference for autonomous decision making, and their desire to make decisions for themselves enabling them to break any internal tension that they had. Data revealed that most respondents were driven by pull factors. In that sense, most of them were drawn towards sport entrepreneurship by choice. They were looking for a career change not out of necessity but rather for a change of scenery. One out of 8 interviewees had a particular unhappiness with their previous employment which can be considered a push factor for changing working conditions. This finding confirms previous studies such as Segal *et al.* (2005) suggesting individuals become entrepreneurs typically due to pull factors, rather than push ones. This finding is important for better understanding sport entrepreneurs' behaviours because it reveals that push factors such as family constraints commonly identified in other types of entrepreneurs are not apparent in this study's context. More research could be conducted to understand the influence of external factors - including the economic and social context - on these decisions. For instance, the Covid-19 pandemic may act as a catalyst for sport entrepreneurship (Ratten, 2020) and may generate more push motivations for self-employment decisions such as redundancies and misfit.

The findings revealed three sources of passion: passion for sport (or a particular sport), passion for inventing and entrepreneurs' passion for work. This study aligns with previous research that have distinguished different domains of entrepreneurial passions (e.g., Cardon *et al.*, 2013; 2017; Huyghe *et al.*, 2016; Murnieks *et al.*, 2014). Individuals develop passion in relation to different activities, such as entrepreneurship, as a result of identifying with such activities. For instance, Cardon *et al.* (2017) found that passion for inventing and growth

(development) were prominent amongst entrepreneurs. This study aligns with these previous findings as the sport entrepreneurs surveyed also demonstrated a passion for inventing a sport product or service that fulfils a need in the market.

Additionally, the present paper introduces a new domain which is passion for sport, an extension of passion for hobby. According to Milanese (2018), entrepreneur's passion towards hobbies predicted the entry of individuals into hobby-related entrepreneurship. Overall, this research contributes to the development of insights on the domains of passion by developing the sport specific passion. Passion for sport has been the subject of multiple researches on fans (Vallerand *et al.*, 2008b), players/participants (Donahue *et al.*, 2009; Gustafsson *et al.*, 2011; Vallerand *et al.*, 2006; 2008a) and organisational employees (Anagnostopoulos *et al.*, 2016; Oja *et al.*, 2019; Kim *et al.*, 2021; Papadimitriou *et al.*, 2017; Swanson and Kent, 2016). However, while previous researchers cited above have investigated harmonious and obsessive passion related to a sport or an activity such as work or supporting a sport team, the present research shows the importance of passion for sport as a key motive to become self-employed. A passion for sport in general or one sport in particular was a central motivation for most participants in this study and is directly linked to their business. Participants highly valued the sport element of their business, and sport played an important part in their personal life and their life as an entrepreneur. They had a passion for sport that they wanted to take further, and saw an opportunity to do this. As underlined by previous studies (Baum and Locke, 2004; Baum *et al.*, 2001; Bhansing *et al.*, 2018; Cardon *et al.*, 2009; Cardon and Kirk, 2015), passion is a strong predictor of persistence and motivation in entrepreneurial action. The types of passion sport entrepreneurs have might explain their involvement and commitment to develop their business.

Admittedly, although sport played a key part in the decision making of sport entrepreneurs, participants were firstly looking for a change of career, and in some instances,

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3 sport was a by-product of this. Nevertheless, the majority of participants identified themselves  
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5 as 'sporty' persons. The fact that they had these sport personalities, and value the sport element  
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7 of their business suggests that sport was very important to them. They had all seen a business  
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9 opportunity and taken advantage of it, and the importance of sport in that decision should not  
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11 be underestimated. Given the long hours and hard work that goes into running a business, it  
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13 was interesting to note respondents said they could only invest themselves in something they  
14  
15 really enjoyed, such as sport. This importantly suggests the dominating influence of passion  
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17 for sport over other passion domains such as passion for work. Passion for sport constantly  
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19 affects the motivational state of the entrepreneur.  
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24 Finally, the findings also showed that entrepreneurs are passionate about their work.  
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26 Sport entrepreneurs' passion for work is predicted by their sport passion and their motivations,  
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28 therefore confirming the influence of entrepreneurs' motivations as antecedents of  
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30 entrepreneurial passion for work (Bhansing et al., 2018; Cardon and Kirk, 2015; Newman *et*  
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32 *al.*, 2020). Further, the results revealed that sport entrepreneurs' passion for work acts as a  
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34 driver of business development. Indeed, the passion that these individuals have for their  
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36 business is important. As Cardon *et al.* (2013) commented, passion is at the heart of  
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38 entrepreneurship, as it nurtures both creativity and the recognition of new information that can  
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40 be critical to the discovery and exploitation of new and promising opportunities. In line with  
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42 Oja *et al.* (2019) and Kim *et al.* (2021), the present findings reveal sport entrepreneurs' passion  
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44 is related to their creativity. Passion for work can therefore be regarded as reinforcing the  
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46 motivations underlying sport entrepreneurs' engagement and persistence despite obstacles in  
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48 the process of founding a business (Baum and Locke, 2004; Cardon *et al.*, 2009). In other  
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50 words, sport entrepreneurs' passion for work provide meaning to everyday work and fuel  
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52 motivation to develop their business. By highlighting the continuous motivational outcome of  
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54 passion for work, this study contributes to developing a better understanding of this relatively  
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underexamined relationship (i.e., the antecedents and outcome of passion for work) in entrepreneurship passion literature (Newman *et al.*, 2019).

### *Limitations*

The first limitation is the number of participants that could be interviewed. Sport entrepreneurs are a group of individuals difficult to reach notably because they value their time to be spent on their business and often travel for business reasons. Nonetheless, a limited but diverse range of participants were able to be interviewed. Secondly, interviewees were contacted through Sporting Chance Initiative's database. All the participants had contact and/or received assistance from the innovation hub which may have influenced the results. This bias was moderated during the interviews which were sufficiently open to enable the participants to reflect and comment on this relationship and during the coding of the pull and push factors. Thirdly, participants were only interviewed once which did not allow to record change in attitudes or behaviours over a longer period, such as motivation and passion to carry on developing and growing sport businesses.

### **Conclusion**

This study expands on the current sport entrepreneurship literature by empirically investigating individuals who have developed their own business in the sport context. This study focuses on the passions and motivations which helps to better understand who sport entrepreneurs are.

Results indicate that although entrepreneurs had traditional motivations such as seeking a career change or becoming their own boss, passion influenced their decision. This paper suggests passion in sport plays a central role in life-changing decisions such as a career change. The majority of participants cited the importance of sport to their business. The present study revealed that sport entrepreneurs are in need of a continuous state of motivation with respect to their work fed by their sport passion and their entrepreneurship passion for work (Bhansing

et al., 2018). In addition, this study shows that the sport entrepreneurs surveyed were more concerned with growing their product or service to affect and help as many people as possible compared to purely financial gains.

This study contributes to better understanding the concept of sport entrepreneurship and identifies sector specific motivations and passion for starting and growing a business that could be the focus of further studies. Despite a limited sample of participants, social entrepreneurship finds resonance in the present study as some sport entrepreneurs seemed to be driven by societal changes. Further research on the **harmonious or obsessive** role of passion for sport in sport entrepreneurship is suggested. Particularly, whether their passion for sport and for their business changes over time, and whether they would consider changing sector/product, building on the skills and experience they acquired. A longitudinal study of entrepreneurs investing in multiple versus single sector(s) would be of interest to understand sector specific passion.

The present research has practical implications as it allows to better understand the extent to which sport influences individuals and entrepreneurs. Investing in or working for a sport business would require individuals (e.g. potential job applicants or investors) demonstrate a high level of passion which participants reported was crucial in their choice to become an entrepreneur as well as in their work relationships. Participants have identified the need to share common values and vision with business partners as an important criterion in healthy relationships, which is in line with the level of commitment and passion these sport entrepreneurs demonstrate. Training programmes on (sport) entrepreneurship could also benefit from this study as it demonstrates the importance of sector specific passion, sport in this case. Educators may more efficiently encourage their students to pursue an entrepreneurial path by identifying the triggers to start a sport business venture. **They could use students' passion for sport to incite them in developing their own business ideas through entrepreneurial**

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challenges linked with their sporting interests. At the same time, policymakers may support the development of sport businesses through policy reforms, investment in sport incubators and incentive mechanisms that can support sport entrepreneurs' passion and motivation to create and develop their business.

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Table 1. Interviewees’ profile

| Interviewee   | Gender | Age | Type of business (years since started business) |
|---------------|--------|-----|-------------------------------------------------|
| Interviewee 1 | Man    | 47  | Sports website (3)                              |
| Interviewee 2 | Woman  | 41  | Personal training company (10)                  |
| Interviewee 3 | Man    | 20  | Sports equipment (0)                            |
| Interviewee 4 | Woman  | 43  | Sports apparel and equipment (5)                |
| Interviewee 5 | Man    | 34  | Sports drink company (1)                        |
| Interviewee 6 | Woman  | 54  | Sports apparel (3)                              |
| Interviewee 7 | Man    | 41  | Sports mobile application (0)                   |
| Interviewee 8 | Man    | 35  | Sports broadcasting company (4)                 |

Figure 1. Sport Entrepreneurs’ Motivations and Passion

