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**Web-based learning for sport administrators:  
The example of the SOMIT project**

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It goes without saying to affirm that since the fifties, sport has become a major political, economic and social phenomenon. It is also nearly as obvious to point out that the professionalism of those who manage it is not always at the same level as the issues at stake therein. The consequences of this lack of professionalism are rather serious for sport and particularly for top-level sport. Means of alleviating this lack of managerial skills must therefore be developed by using all means available, including the most modern among them such as the Internet and the new media.

For some thirty years now, elite athletes are no longer amateurs in the sense meant by Avery Brundage and his predecessors who held office as President of the IOC (International Olympic Committee). They are now professionals, meaning that they perfectly master their (sport) technique. This should also be true of the political and administrative sport officials who manage the ever-increasing infrastructures behind them, i.e. the human, financial and material resources and the information systems. As in other sectors, the general management and daily running of sport requires more and more specific knowledge. Sport administrators must become familiar with management techniques and adapt these to the phenomenon of sport while being fully aware of its particular characteristics.

Since the seventies, sport management developed little by little as an autonomous discipline: first in the United States, then in Europe and the rest of the world. Today, numerous countries offer training in this field at various levels (Chappelet 1996). In Switzerland for example, the author has been providing a sport management course at the Graduate School of Public Administration, associated with the University of Lausanne, since 1995. This course is reserved for students with a bachelor's degree (4 years of university studies) and specializes in the problematics of sport in Switzerland ([http://www.unil.ch/idheap/formation\\_master\\_14.htm](http://www.unil.ch/idheap/formation_master_14.htm)). It was the first course taught in French in this country. A similar course, taught in German, is available at the University of Fribourg's Institute for Association and Non-Profit Management (VMI), [www.vmi.ch](http://www.vmi.ch)). Several courses also exist on a European level, e.g. MEMOS (European Masters in Sport Organization Management). This diploma was developed in 1995 by several universities and sport schools in the following countries: Spain, France, Great Britain, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal and Switzerland. It was initially headed by Jean Camy (University of Lyons 1), and then by the author since 1999. Thirty participants from sixteen countries take part in the MEMOS 2000 program. ([www.unil.ch/idheap/MEMOS.htm](http://www.unil.ch/idheap/MEMOS.htm)).

The large number of university courses in sport management in North America, Europe and Australia is the reflection of a strong demand on the part of students who enter university aiming for a career in sport administration (see [www.unb.ca/sportmanagement/programs.htm](http://www.unb.ca/sportmanagement/programs.htm) for a list of the many programs available). There is also a considerable need for further training for those already employed within in sport organizations. These latter must remain abreast of the latest

developments in the discipline or, more simply, need to gain a better understanding of the specific characteristics of managing sport. Volunteers, who still constitute the vast majority of sport officials (in any case as far as Europe is concerned), are also ideal candidates for training in sport management. In fact, this demand for training in sport management is closely linked with that for management in general (Nohria & Berkeley 1994:130).

In parallel to these developments, the Internet has undergone a boom since the beginning of the nineties. Today, sport is one of the most popular and the most lucrative subjects on the Web (Church 2000). This is hardly surprising since on the one hand, sport is a favorite leisure pursuit for the population in general and on the other, sport activity and competition produces a great deal of information that can be easily diffused via the Internet (see other contributions to this IASI Congress).

The Internet boom has also made it possible to completely renew teaching based on computer technology (CAT Computer Assisted Training/Education or CBT Computer Based Training) whose origins lie in the Plato system by Control Data during the seventies. The arrival of multi-media technology (CD-ROM and CD-I) and of hypertext introduced the notion of interactive and open learning (Barker & Tucker 1990). Today, the terms more widely used are web-based learning/training/instruction, cyber-courses or e-courses, or online classrooms/courses (Kahn 1997). Although the Internet is a technology that is becoming more and more accessible almost everywhere, courses that can be offered in this way automatically create a physical distance between those taking part in them and those providing the teaching. A cyber-course cannot, therefore, simply be a case of providing normal course material on the Internet but must also offer an interactive factor capable of facilitating the learning process (Beer 2000:7). In more general terms, it must take into consideration analysis and reflection on the field of research concerning distance education, an issue that already began with simple correspondence courses introduced well before the Internet was born<sup>1</sup>. The expression 'distance learning' is used for courses where information is transmitted via audio, video or computer technology to off-campus sites. According to a study published in 1999, this type of course was already offered by over 44% of American colleges and universities (Blair 2000).

The aim of this article is to explore the various possibilities offered by the Internet for providing training in the management of sport organizations. First, it presents the extremely few existing university level courses for sport management on the Internet. Secondly, it describes the SOMIT project (Sport Organizations Management Interactive Teaching & Learning) from the Swiss Virtual Campus. As its name indicates, this is a genuinely interactive course for better managing sport organizations. In conclusion, the advantages and shortcomings of distance learning via the Internet for sport administrators are summarized in the light of current experiences and the challenges for management and sport information in the XXIst century.

## **Distance learning in sport management**

Numerous types of management training on the Internet have been in existence for several years. Among these, for example, are several courses taught in English under the label of Harvard University Business School in the United States: Harvard ManageMentor™, High Performance Management, Managing for Performance Series, The On-Line Negotiator, FastTeams

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<sup>1</sup> For several years, the University of Leicester in Great Britain has been offering distance courses in sociology and sport management ([www.leicester.ac.uk/crss/teach/msc.html](http://www.leicester.ac.uk/crss/teach/msc.html)) and without doubt possesses one of the best-developed programmes in the sector.

(Euromangement 2001). The Harvard ManageMentor™ course permits managers to refresh their knowledge on twenty practical key subjects: Assessing Performance; Capitalizing on Change; Coaching; Delegating; Finance Essentials; Giving and receiving feedback; Hiring; Keeping teams on target; Leading a team; Motivating; Making a presentation; Managing difficult interactions; Managing upward; Managing your time; Negotiating; Project management; Running a meeting; Setting goals; Solving business problems; Writing for business. Each subject is presented via eight points: Core concepts; What would you do?; Steps (to follow in order to accomplish a related task); Tips; (practical and ready-to-use computer supported) Tools; Test yourself; Key words; To learn more. The High Performance Management course is more ambitious. It is based on case studies presented with the help of videos and incorporates interactive self-assessment tools. Demonstrations of these cyber-courses are available at the site [www.harvard.nl](http://www.harvard.nl).

Training in sport sciences is also starting to become widely available on the Internet. The company Human Kinetics, for example, the leading American publisher in this area, is proposing its Online Learning Center as of 2001 at the address [www.hklearningcenter.com](http://www.hklearningcenter.com). About a dozen courses are already proposed in two areas: Sport Medicine and Health & Fitness. The goal of this publisher is to offer courses for all professions related to the field of physical activity and to prepare for professional certification, post-certification continuing education, or college and university academic credits with participating institutions. Human Kinetics courses consist of an online study guide, which directs the student through a series of learning experiences to help them understand and use the course content, and a variety of supplemental student resource materials including printed texts, videocassettes and CD-ROMs (these vary according to course, and not all courses include supplemental resource materials). The online study guide is not just printed material transferred into digital form. It is designed to give the students a meaningful opportunity to interact with the course subject matter in a way that will facilitate their learning. This center is an addition to a distance training program developed several years ago, and that notably includes the PASS (Professional Achievement Self-Study) Program intended for coaches and physiotherapists in partnership with the NATA (National Athletic Trainers' Association). To grasp the diversity of the material on sport science now available on the Internet, the following site is also useful: <http://sponet.de>.

Although it is clear that numerous cyber-courses in management and in sport science now exist, there are still very few types of Internet training in sport management. The world's largest distance university, for example, the Open University of Great Britain, is absent here despite a wide variety of management courses available (see the site <http://oubs.open.ac.uk>). We shall examine three existing sport management courses on the Internet which are offered at the University of Lyons 1, France (in French), Complutense University in Madrid, Spain (in Spanish) and the University of Dallas, Texas (in English).

The University of Lyons 1 (Faculty of sport sciences) has been offering a course leading to the DUGOS (University Diploma for the Management of Sport Organizations) since 1996, in co-operation with the University of Limoges Center for Law and Sport Economics and the French National Sport and Olympic Committee. This is a professional training course of a level equivalent to the Baccalauréat (higher school certificate) + 2 years, and includes theoretical training that is systematically linked to practical applications, a practical professional training period and a personalized follow-up (by a tutor). This course is mainly intended for persons working in the associative sport movement (an intake of around 190 for the 2000 cycle), who follow the course from a distance, i.e. by receiving course material and practical exercises by post to be completed for correction every two months. The DUGOS course consists of seven modules: Sport organization and Administration, Strategy and Planning of Sport Clubs, Marketing, Information Technology for Management, Financial and Fiscal Management, Human Resources Management, Organization of a Sport Event. These modules are divided over two years and each requires approximately thirty

hours of work. To this is added an unpaid practical training period in a sport organization, divided over the duration of the studies (around 10 hours per month). Evaluation is carried out via work handed in at the end of each module and marked by the tutors. A meeting is organized in Lyons and in Paris at the beginning of the course in order to permit students to meet each other in person. Since 2000, part of the DUGOS teaching material is available via an Internet portal (<http://nte-serveur.univ-lyon1.fr/nte/dugos>). This portal also makes it possible to contact the course teachers by e-mail and to take part in a forum (chat) open to both students and teachers. This program costs 839 French francs.

Complutense University in Madrid (University Olympic Institute of Sport Science) has been offering a cyber-course by the name of GESDEPOR (<http://gesdepor.sed.es>) since 1998, in co-operation with the University Oberta de Catalunya. This is particularly intended for Spanish and South American university students and as such received financial support from Olympic Solidarity, the institution that manages funds from the National Olympic Committees that are obtained following the celebration of the Olympic Games. This course consists of nine modules: The Sport System, Sport Management, Managing Sport Activities, Economic and Financial Management, Methods of Communication, Sport Marketing, Sport Facilities, Human Resources and Olympism. The modules are divided over a three-month intensive course requiring a minimum of three hours study per day and are concluded by an evaluation in the form of a one-day examination where the candidates are physically present. A certificate plus twelve credits towards a university degree can be obtained. Unlike DUGOS, none of the content is available on the Internet. The teaching material is distributed by the post. However, students registered for the course receive a CD-ROM that permits them to install a communications interface between each other and with the course teachers in the form of an Extranet (closed Internet group for a limited circle of users). The pedagogy of this course is focused on non-planned yet facilitated interaction between teachers and students. Around fifteen teachers / consultants interact via discussion topics they propose to students, a multilateral forum and a bilateral e-mail system. The cost of this program is USD 100.

The University of Dallas, Texas (Graduate School of Management) has been offering an IMBA (Internet Master in Business Administration) in Sport Management since 1999 in parallel with other distance learning programs leading to an MBA in Information Technology, Telecommunications and Electronic Commerce (<http://imba.udallas.edu>). The program is designed for individuals who are involved in team, association, or facility management, as well as coaching, sport education, sport marketing and other career positions. It comprises seven MBA core courses, five specialized courses, four electives, and a standard series of lectures. It is offered in affiliation with the United States Sport Academy whose faculty teaches the following sport-specific classes: Sport Marketing, Sport Administration and Finance, Sport Law and Risk Management, Sport Public Relations and Fund Raising, Sport Business and Personnel Management, Sport Facilities, and Sport Management Capstone (research project to integrate all previous course work). Program delivery is primarily web-based, but also includes study guide materials and a textbook. Although the courses are offered in an asynchronous distance learning mode, classes are scheduled to occur during a 13-week traditional trimester, where each week is considered a major learning module with assignments due approximately seven days after being mailed. All course work, including projects and examinations, takes place online, and all communication (student-to-student and student-to-teacher) may take place via e-mail. The interactive syllabus includes the following key features: Assignment, Frequently Asked Questions, Quizzes, Reading, Threaded Discussion, Video Slide Show. Students may apply for admission online as well as register online for the courses they choose. This program is also available on campus. The price of the program is between USD 15,000 and 20,000 depending on possible transfer credits already obtained.

e-course name	DUGOS	GESDEPOR	IMBA in Sport Management
Academic institution	University of Lyons, France	Complutense University, Madrid	University of Dallas, Texas
On the web since	2000	1998	1999
Course material	Yes, some	No	Yes, most
Language	French	Spanish	English
Intended public	Sport volunteers	University students	Young professionals
Length	24 months	3 months	12 months (minimum)
Cost (in 2001)	Approx. USD 300	USD 100	USD 20,000 (maximum)

Table 1. – Summary of main features of three existing sport management cyber-courses.

From this brief overview of the few cyber-courses that exist in sport management, we note that the level of interaction therein is at present basically limited to the exchange of e-mails or to participation in forums. The Internet is basically used to encourage communication between participants and teachers and to facilitate the electronic diffusion of course material, and sometimes for multiple choice lists (quizzes). Very rarely, students are required to handle questions or problems set by the authors of the course online with corrections/solutions proposed by the system. However, we know that solving problems linked to the subject taught is one factor contributing towards improving the learning process (Beer 2000:153). Such possibilities already exist within online management courses such as those by the Harvard Business School. We should also note the case studies on sport issues that are sometimes used in cyber-courses (see for example the case of Pentastar Motorsports, which can be found on [www.personal.psu.edu/faculty/r/s/rso3/ba422/ARCA/index.html](http://www.personal.psu.edu/faculty/r/s/rso3/ba422/ARCA/index.html) within the framework of the Contemporary Business Seminar from Penn State University). It is therefore not only possible, but also desirable, to create courses in sport management that are more interactive.

### **The SOMIT project**

In October 1999, and in response to a Governmental motion, the Swiss Parliament voted in favor of a credit for thirty million Swiss francs in order to set up a "Virtual Campus". This is a series of university cyber-courses that can be followed via the Internet by students registered at Swiss universities (CUS 1999). The courses must be led by teams of teachers / researchers from at least three Swiss university institutions in order to favor their adoption within the various academic programs. Having received 140 proposals, the Swiss Virtual Campus retained around twenty projects for the period 2000-2003 in 2000. Other projects will be selected in 2001. A list of these projects and other information can be found at [www.virtualcampus.ch](http://www.virtualcampus.ch).

The SOMIT project (Sport Organizations Management Interactive Teaching & Learning) was among the first series of projects selected. It involves the University of Lausanne (INFORGE - Institute of Computer Science and Organization), the University of Fribourg (VMI - Institute for Association and Non-Profit Management), the Swiss Federal Sport School in Macolin attached to the University of Applied Sciences, Bern (HESSM), plus the Conference of the five Swiss Institutes of Sport Science (CDISS) and the Swiss Olympic Association (AOS). The leader of this project is

IDHEAP (Swiss Graduate School of Public Administration). The five partners unite sport management experts in Switzerland (IDHEAP and VMI), specialists in teaching via the Internet (INFORGE and IDHEAP) and most of potential users of such a course (HESSM, CDISS and AOS). The AOS, which is the confederation of sport federations in Switzerland, already offers a classical training program (physically attended by students) for the country's sport administrators ([www.swiss-sport.ch/sov/e/eausbild.htm](http://www.swiss-sport.ch/sov/e/eausbild.htm)). It will use the e-course and its derivatives in order to complete the program.

The SOMIT project is intended to develop an interactive course on the management of sport organizations that can be followed, via the Internet, by students preparing a bachelor's degree (at the level of a 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> year university course). There is a considerable demand for such courses, which do not exist at this level in Switzerland today, whether in the form of classical courses or forms of distance teaching. (IDHEAP and VMI only offer graduate courses). The SOMIT undergraduate course will be available in French and German as of 2001, and in English as of 2002 in order to be offered to international students.

The course corresponds to approximately sixty hours of a normal university course over one semester. It is genuinely interactive, and developed in order to promote exchange between learners and teachers. The course is split in four modules, each corresponding to about 15 hours of regular courses: 1) Sport and Management; 2) Management Model for Sport Organizations<sup>2</sup>; 3) Resource Management for Sport Organizations, 4) Sport Marketing.

Each module is divided into three or four parts and comprises a total of twelve chapters plus a pre-test and a post-test. The pre-test is intended to reveal whether the student needs to follow the module in question and the post-test reveals whether he has now grasped the subject and may move on to the following module. A final examination, with the candidate physically present, is organized in order to acquire the credits associated with the course.

The pedagogical objective is a broad coverage of the management of sport organizations, which is a new discipline combining knowledge in management, economics, marketing, law and in political and social sciences. After this course, students will be able to understand and face up to the management problems inherent to most (associative) sport organizations: non-profit making bodies, the mission of public service, professionalization approach, volunteer work, two-level governance, fund raising, etc.

From a didactical point of view, the course is conceived to promote autonomy among the students during their learning process. We adopt a "service" approach rather than a "product" one. As such, we are not only developing an e-course, but also anchoring our efforts both on a self-training concept and on individually tracking the student in order to follow his progress and provide adequate support. This concept can be adapted while in progress, if necessary, for certain participants (personalization, teaching tailored to needs).

The overall pedagogical approach is a constructivist one: it is the student who builds up what he learns via activities aimed at facilitating his personal progress while constructing his knowledge base (rather than reproducing facts). The role of the teacher is to facilitate the student's progress by helping him build up his own grasp of the subject. A certain number of practical pedagogical solutions are adopted for this purpose.

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<sup>2</sup> Based on the "Fribourg model", see Cf. BUMBACHER U. (1999) – Nonprofit Management Theory and Practice in Switzerland: The Fribourg Management model for Nonprofit Organizations. *ISTR Conference Papers Series*, vol. III, John Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD.

The modular structure of the course makes it possible to personalize the training to some extent and to break it down into small units (chapters) that are easily mastered while maintaining a logical structure perceptible to students. A pedagogy by objective permits the student to know what he should have learned by any given phase of the training and consequently to develop learning strategies in line with requirements right from the outset. Activities such as problem solving, simulations and case studies allow the student to build up his own knowledge. Each chapter of the course is structured around an activity to be carried out and not simply an input of information. To carry out the task in question, the student must refer to a series of resources or course material (copied documents, articles, slides, summaries of works, etc.) made available by the system.

The learning process is thus one of problem solving that is built up throughout the various sessions. To achieve this, remote resources in the form of reference documents, links to relevant sites, methods and persons to consult are provided as needed. Written papers required are returned via e-mail by students at the end of each module, and are taken into account to a significant degree for the final evaluation. The tutors then forward the necessary comments to their students in order to develop their knowledge and skills further. As work progresses, the best contributions are made available to all participants, on the Internet, by using the concept of the Learners' Knowledge Pool (a repository of all documents produced by the learners and organized by modules). Support and remote follow-up for the students are planned throughout the training by e-mail, telephone and forum.

Groups are constituted by language (German, French, and English). All participants within one and the same course and speaking the same language form a group that takes part in the same forum and attends the same physical meetings (if any are organized). Groups are split if necessary.

The SOMIT project relies on the ARIADNE open Internet platform ([www.ariadne-eu.org](http://www.ariadne-eu.org)), which provides both authoring and core tools such as the Knowledge Pool, the Curriculum Editor, the Pedagogic Indexation Tool, the Auto-evaluation Tool, the Pedagogical Hypertext Generator, a Manager and a Learner Interface, etc., plus further tools if necessary: mailbox, HTML documents, PDF, forums, ICQ, white boards, etc (Wentland Forte *et al* 2000).

We are aiming at a "lightweight" approach that does not require the installation of costly specific software that demands considerable computer space and resources, or that requires a high level of training and support for users. We use:

- Standard Internet browsers (*Netscape Communicator* or *Internet Explorer*) and e-mail software.
- Free software (of the type *Acrobat Reader*).
- A single interface, known as AMI (*ARIADNE Manager Interface*), destined for the pedagogical engineer in order to structure the course, to transfer material from the Knowledge Pool and to register the students.
- The students, on the other hand, access both the course and the pedagogical material via ALI (*ARIADNE Learner Interface*), which gives access to the calendar, the list of sessions with instructions and reference books or links, the e-mail addresses of the supervising pedagogical team, the exchange forum, and the pedagogical documents to be read or downloaded, etc. They access the course using their personal password (the creation of course programs and the management of access rights for students are standard functions within ARIADNE).

IDHEAP and the University of Lausanne already possess joint experience in using this platform. INFORGE of the University of Lausanne is in charge of the technical hotline for pedagogues and students and for the administration required of the ALI / AMI server and Local Knowledge Pool.

High quality teaching materials and exercises are developed by IDHEAP and VMI using the most adequate standard software (DreamWeaver, Fireworks, PowerPoint, etc.). Relevant material within the existing ARIADNE Local Knowledge Pool is either reused or adapted to fit the needs of the SOMIT course.

The SOMIT project began in September 2000. After a start-up phase, the course material is now in preparation and will be tested by a team of correspondents from the five Swiss Sport Science Institutes (CDISS) as of October 2001. From March to June 2002, the course will be used, in French and German, by around one hundred voluntary students registered at Swiss universities. A final French and German version will be commercialized as of 2003, together with an English version.

To summarize, we can affirm that the SOMIT project makes it possible to respond to a strong demand on the part of Swiss students and universities. It can also be used by Swiss sport administrators in partnership with the AOS training programs. The project also makes it possible to develop teaching and research into sport management in Switzerland at a university level. It will provide experience that can be used to develop other cyber-courses in sport science and in other areas within the framework of the Swiss Virtual Campus. Finally, the SOMIT project reinforces the role of Switzerland as a sport center from an academic point of view; this country unites a number of sport organizations and specialists and in particular around the Lake Geneva region. Moreover, it is thanks to grouping these academic dynamics together that the SOMIT course can be maintained and developed after the end of the SOMIT project in 2003.

## **Conclusion**

It is still too early to draw conclusions from a practical experience that is still in its initial phases (that of the SOMIT project) or from other cyber-courses in sport management mentioned earlier in this article that are still in their early stages. We can simply reiterate the opportunities offered by the Internet for this type of teaching and the conditions for it to be successful.

The Internet is not, of course, appropriate for teaching motor co-ordination skills (such as striking a golf ball) or attitude skills (such as respecting the etiquette for a golf course) that are so important for the practice of sport (Driscoll 1998:3) and that no doubt will continue to be taught in the traditional manner - unless one day cyber-sport replaces sport as we know it today. On the other hand, however, the Internet appears highly appropriate for teaching cognitive skills such as applying rules, distinguishing between categories or solving problems. These skills are increasingly necessary for managing the practice of both golf and all other sports, given the economic, political and social issues at stake therein today. We must move from the management of practicing sport to managing sport (Loret 1993), and this requires specific skills.

The Internet can represent an incomparable tool for accessing the sport information necessary in the daily lives of sport administrators. However, and in addition to the traditional forms of training that have been developed over the last twenty years, the Internet can also be used for the basic and above all the further training that these (future) administrators will require in order to better fulfil their mission. The usual advantages of web-based education (facility and rapid access, reduced cost, time saving, regularly updated information, regularly renewed and reinforced collaboration between participants and teachers) are in fact particularly important for sport managers. For the most part, these are volunteers who focus on practical tasks and have little time to waste. Moreover, they constitute natural student communities capable of exchanging managerial experience from a given sport (i.e. the one they manage) or from a particular level of management (local club, regional

league, national governing body or international federation). Teaching sport management to these administrators via the Internet therefore has a successful future ahead of it, if it is based on highly interactive cyber-courses. This aspect alone can guarantee a genuine learning process and incite communication among the natural managerial communities present within sport.

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All the Internet links were checked on January 31, 2001.

Any reference to the male gender automatically applies equally to the female gender.