

A Multidimensional Analysis of Mechanisms for Establishing Micro Sports Institutions:
Integrating Entrepreneurial Theory and Institutional Frameworks

تحليل متعدد الأبعاد للآليات الخاصة بإنشاء المؤسسات الرياضية الصغيرة:
دمج النظرية الريادية والأطر المؤسسية

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Abstract The global sports industry has undergone a profound structural transformation over recent decades, shifting from a predominantly volunteer-led, amateur-facing sector toward a highly commercialized ecosystem in which small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and micro-institutions have assumed an increasingly central role. This study examines the multi-faceted mechanisms implicated in the establishment of micro sports institutions—defined here as small-scale sports startups or organizations distinguished by high innovation intensity and specialized service delivery. Drawing on institutional theory alongside Vanessa Ratten's sports entrepreneurship framework, the research synthesizes evidence from Scopus-indexed literature spanning 2018 to 2026 in order to map the legal, financial, managerial, and marketing pillars that undergird institutional formation. The findings suggest, with some important caveats, that successful establishment hinges on an entrepreneur's capacity to navigate the "publisher-centric" legal architecture characteristic of sectors like esports, to leverage digital crowdfunding and venture capital in the absence of conventional financing pathways, and to internalize Lean Startup methodologies as instruments of strategic agility. Social media's role in fan development and the structural imperative of transparent governance emerge, across the reviewed literature, as recurring success determinants—though the evidence, as discussed below, is not uniformly conclusive. The paper closes by proposing a practitioner- and policymaker-oriented model for cultivating sustainable conditions for sports entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Micro sports institutions, Sports entrepreneurship, Institutional theory, Lean startup, Crowdfunding, Sports governance, SMEs.

المخلص: يعتبر شهدت صناعة الرياضة العالمية تحولاً هيكلياً عميقاً على مدار العقود الأخيرة، حيث انتقلت من قطاع قائم بشكل أساسي على المتطوعين وموجه للهواة إلى نظام بيئي تجاري إلى حد كبير تلعب فيه الشركات الصغيرة والمتوسطة

والمؤسسات الصغيرة دوراً مركزياً متزايداً. تبحث هذه الدراسة في الآليات متعددة الأبعاد المتعلقة بإنشاء المؤسسات الرياضية الصغيرة—المعرفة هنا على أنها شركات ناشئة أو منظمات رياضية صغيرة الحجم تتميز بكثافة عالية في الابتكار وتقديم خدمات متخصصة. استناداً إلى النظرية المؤسسية إلى جانب إطار زيادة الأعمال الرياضية لفانيسا راتن، يقوم البحث بتوليف الأدلة من الأدبيات المفهيرة في سكوبس التي تغطي الفترة من 2018 إلى 2026 من أجل رسم ملامح الركائز القانونية والمالية والإدارية والتسويقية التي تدعم تكوين المؤسسات. وتشير النتائج، مع بعض التحفظات المهمة، إلى أن النجاح في التأسيس يعتمد على قدرة رائد الأعمال على التنقل ضمن البنية القانونية التي تتمحور حول الناشر والتي تميز قطاعات مثل الرياضات الإلكترونية، واستغلال التمويل الجماعي الرقمي ورأس المال الاستثماري في غياب المسارات التمويلية التقليدية، واستيعاب منهجيات الشركات الناشئة الرشيقة كأدوات للمرونة الاستراتيجية. يبرز دور وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في تطوير قاعدة المعجبين والحاجة الهيكلية للحوكمة الشفافة، عبر الأدبيات المستعرضة، كعوامل نجاح متكررة—على الرغم من أن الأدلة، كما هو موضح أدناه، ليست حاسمة بشكل موحد. تختتم الورقة باقتراح نموذج موجه للممارسين وواضعي السياسات من أجل تنمية شروط مستدامة لزيادة الأعمال الرياضية.

- الكلمات المفتاحية : المؤسسات الرياضية الصغيرة، زيادة الأعمال الرياضية، النظرية المؤسسية، الشركات الناشئة الرشيقة، التمويل الجماعي، حوكمة الرياضة، المؤسسات الصغيرة والمتوسطة.

1. Introduction

The contemporary sports landscape resists reduction to the familiar binary of amateur clubs on one end and elite professional franchises on the other. Between and beyond these poles, a burgeoning sector of "micro sports institutions"—comprising sports startups, niche fitness SMEs, and digital sports service providers—has become a primary driver of economic growth and social innovation (Ratten, 2020). These organizations are defined, at least in part, by their agility, their deep technological integration, and their fundamentally entrepreneurial orientation; they tend to occupy service gaps left open by larger, more institutionally rigid sports federations (González-Serrano et al., 2023). The path from concept to functioning institution is, however, far from straightforward. Restrictive regulatory regimes, the precarious character of sports-specific financial markets, and what one might describe as a persistent

"legitimacy deficit" in the eyes of established governance structures all conspire to raise the cost—in time, capital, and expertise—of entry.

As Ratten (2025) has recently argued, sport startups occupy a distinctive intersection of physical culture and business innovation, one that demands a managerial competency set not easily derived from general entrepreneurship theory alone. The rapid commercialization of sports has, in parallel, sharpened questions around the legitimacy and long-run sustainability of micro-entities operating at the margins of established institutional architectures (Integrity and Transparency in Sports, 2024). The discourse surrounding sport's economic dimensions remains disproportionately oriented toward large-scale spectacle events—the FIFA World Cup, the Olympic Games—while the "micro" stratum, where local community engagement converges with digital entrepreneurship, receives considerably less systematic scholarly attention. This is, arguably, where the most consequential institutional formation is occurring.

Against this backdrop, the present article sets out to provide a structured analysis of the mechanisms governing the creation and early development of micro sports institutions. By synthesizing recent literature from roughly 2018 to 2026, the study traces how institutional pillars—regulatory, normative, and cognitive, in DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) canonical tripartition—shape the entrepreneurial trajectory in sports. It is worth stating at the outset that this synthesis does not claim to resolve long-standing debates in the field; rather, it seeks to chart the terrain, flag the unresolved tensions, and offer a provisional roadmap that entrepreneurs and policymakers might adapt to their specific contexts. The study's scope, necessarily limited to English-language Scopus-indexed sources, means that certain regional and linguistic traditions of sports entrepreneurship scholarship remain outside our frame—a limitation we return to in the discussion.

2. Literature Review

2.1 What Counts as a Micro Sports Institution?

Any attempt to theorize micro sports institutions must grapple, first, with definitional ambiguity. Drawing on Moore and Levermore's (2012) foundational typology—as revisited and refined by Hammerschmidt (2024)—these organizations can be broadly characterized as SMEs within the sports sector that employ fewer than fifty individuals and concentrate on specialized value propositions: wearable performance technology, personalized coaching platforms, esports team management, community-based facility operation, and analogous niches. The fifty-employee threshold is, admittedly, a somewhat arbitrary heuristic; what matters more is the combination of scale, specialization, and entrepreneurial intent. Unlike traditional non-profit clubs, micro sports institutions typically operate under a commercial mandate, even when their stated strategic priority resembles "win maximization" rather than straightforward profit maximization—a distinction Garcia-del-Barrio and Szymanski (2009) identified in the context of professional football but which carries surprising applicability to smaller, commercially oriented ventures.

The picture is complicated, however, by the heterogeneity of forms that fall within this category. A community-based padel club of twelve staff members in a mid-sized European city shares little surface resemblance with a three-person esports analytics startup operating entirely remotely from Southeast Asia, yet both fit within the definitional boundaries sketched above. This heterogeneity is not merely a taxonomic inconvenience; it has direct implications for which theoretical frameworks travel well across the full range of cases and which apply only to specific sub-segments.

2.2 Sports Entrepreneurship: Theoretical Foundations and Their Limits

The dominant theoretical lens for understanding micro sports institutions remains, by some margin, **Sports Entrepreneurship Theory** as developed and systematized by Ratten (2020). In her rendering, sports entrepreneurship denotes "proactive, innovative, and risk-taking behavior" that is embedded in, and in turn reshapes, a sporting context. This framework has proven generative, not least because it resists the temptation—common in early sports management scholarship—of treating sport as simply a sector to which generic business theory can be applied wholesale. Bjärsholm's (2026) more recent proposal of a "house of sport entrepreneurship" as a conceptual architecture for understanding the interplay between the two domains extends Ratten's foundational contribution by mapping the multiple floors and load-bearing walls of this structure.

The **Lean Startup Model**, popularized by Ries and subsequently adapted to sports contexts by several scholars (see Ratten, 2025), introduces a complementary operational logic. The "Build-Measure-Learn" feedback loop it prescribes is particularly well suited to micro-institutions, which—lacking the buffer of large financial reserves—cannot afford to commit sustained resources to unvalidated product concepts. One might argue, though, that the Lean Startup approach presupposes a degree of market responsiveness and data infrastructure that many sports-sector micro-entities, especially those in developing-market contexts, do not yet possess. The framework's applicability is thus real but bounded.

2.3 Institutional Theory in Sport: Pressures, Isomorphism, and Legitimacy

Institutional theory furnishes a complementary and, in some respects, more critical vantage point. DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) three mechanisms of institutional isomorphism—coercive, mimetic, and normative—map with

considerable precision onto the pressures confronting emerging sports organizations. Micro sports institutions face coercive isomorphism from national governing bodies that set the formal rules of affiliation and competition; they face mimetic pressure to replicate the business architectures of elite clubs, which serve as *de facto* benchmarks of organizational legitimacy; and they face normative pressures from professionalization trends that increasingly demand credentialed staff even in roles that have historically been filled by capable volunteers. As Smirnova (2025) demonstrates in a recent scoping review, the autonomy of sport as an institutional field is itself contested, rendering these pressures neither uniform nor predictable.

Particularly instructive for understanding the emergent esports segment is the concept of institutional work—the deliberate effort by actors to create, maintain, or disrupt institutions (see the Analytical Review on E-Sports, 2024). Esports organizations occupy an especially ambiguous institutional position: they are commercial entities, but the "sport" they organize is owned by a private corporation; they seek recognition from established sports bodies, but the criteria for such recognition remain contested. This, of course, assumes that esports organizations actually want the kind of institutional legitimacy that recognition would confer—an assumption that several practitioners in the field have explicitly questioned, on the grounds that such legitimacy comes bundled with regulatory constraints they would prefer to avoid.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a multi-dimensional analytical framework that integrates **Institutional Theory** with the **Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Approach**. The core premise is straightforward but consequential: a micro sports institution does not exist in isolation but is embedded in a complex web of actors—venture capitalists, fans, regulatory authorities, technology providers,

community stakeholders—each of whom exerts distinct pressures and creates distinct opportunities. The table below summarizes how each of the three institutional pillars operates at the level of micro sports institutions, along with the primary source anchoring each dimension in recent literature.

Pillar	Application to Micro Sports Institutions	Key Source
Regulative	Legal structures, IP rights in esports, licensing for facilities.	Braverman (2024)
Normative	Ethical standards, integrity in governance, sports values.	Integrity & Transparency (2024)
Cognitive	Entrepreneurial mindset, social media literacy, fan culture.	Ratten (2025)

By holding these three pillars in simultaneous view, one can identify the specific "mechanisms"—legal, financial, managerial—that bridge the conceptual gap between an entrepreneurial idea and a functioning, legitimate institution. The framework also leaves room, importantly, for the kind of institutional contradiction and tension that characterizes real organizational life: the regulative and normative pillars are not always aligned, and entrepreneurs routinely navigate gaps or conflicts between them. The integration of **Historical Institutionalism**—which draws attention to path-dependency and the weight of inherited organizational arrangements—further illuminates why certain sports facilities remain dominated by long-established clubs even as the broader

market shifts toward individualized, commercially driven use (Iversen, 2025). In our reading of the evidence, this path-dependent inertia represents one of the most consistently underappreciated obstacles facing would-be founders of micro sports institutions.

4. Mechanisms of Establishing Micro Sports Institutions

4.1 Legal and Regulatory Mechanisms

Legal architecture is the first—and, for many founders, the most immediately constraining—dimension of institutional formation. In established sports disciplines, the legal foundation involves registering as an appropriate entity (an LLC, a non-profit association, or a cooperative, depending on the jurisdiction and the institution's mission) and aligning its statutes with those of the relevant national governing body. These requirements, while burdensome, are at least well understood. The digital sports environment presents a categorically different challenge. As documented in careful technical-legal detail in "The Legal and Economic Aspects of the Esports Illusion" (2024), the "publisher-centric" model of esports has entrenched a structural asymmetry in which the intellectual property underpinning competitive play is owned entirely by game developers—companies like Riot Games or Activision Blizzard—rather than by any neutral sporting authority. Micro institutions entering this space must navigate licensing conditions and broadcasting rights arrangements that are explicitly designed to favor the publisher, and which can be revised unilaterally at any time.

It remains to be seen whether the gradual interest of traditional sports governing bodies in esports will eventually produce a more balanced legal environment, or whether publisher control will remain the structurally dominant arrangement. For now, legal literacy in intellectual property and digital rights management is a non-negotiable competency for any founder targeting the

digital sports space. Physical facility development, by contrast, raises a different but equally demanding set of legal considerations—zoning compliance, occupational health and safety obligations, and increasingly stringent accessibility standards that vary considerably across national and subnational jurisdictions (Chen, 2025). The practical implication is that legal counsel with sector-specific expertise represents a genuine structural investment rather than an optional overhead.

4.2 Financial and Investment Mechanisms

The financing landscape for micro sports institutions has changed considerably over the past decade. Traditional bank lending, historically the default option for small enterprise formation, tends to perform poorly in the sports context: collateral requirements are difficult to meet for institutions whose primary assets are intangible (brand, community, talent relationships), and loan officers rarely possess the sector knowledge to evaluate risk accurately. Against this backdrop, **crowdfunding** has assumed genuine strategic importance. Giachino's (2023) careful empirical analysis of reward-based crowdfunding in the esports context demonstrates that this mechanism serves a dual function—raising capital while simultaneously stress-testing market demand and building an early community of invested supporters. The "pre-selling" logic of reward crowdfunding effectively compresses the validation phase that the Lean Startup model prescribes into a single financing event.

Venture capital flows into sports-tech SMEs have also grown, with investor appetite concentrated particularly in data analytics platforms and wearable performance devices—sectors where the underlying technology has clear cross-industry applicability and thus a credible exit pathway. Hammerschmidt (2024), drawing on evidence from professional football clubs operating as SMEs, argues that financial sustainability in this sector turns on a

structural shift away from what he terms the "win-at-all-costs" model toward a "sustainability-first" revenue architecture, in which diversified streams—sponsorships, digital content subscriptions, licensing fees—collectively reduce dependence on any single volatile income source. While X contends that VC capital flows primarily to platforms rather than to service-oriented micro-clubs (Shirali et al., 2024), Hammerschmidt offers the more cautious reading that the distinction is blurring as clubs increasingly operate as media properties in their own right. The overall picture, in other words, is one of genuine financing opportunity alongside persistent structural disadvantage—and founders who conflate the two do so at considerable peril.

4.3 Managerial and Organizational Mechanisms

Managerial success in micro sports institutions is, almost by definition, inseparable from **strategic agility**—the capacity to reconfigure resources and redirect effort faster than larger competitors can respond. The Lean Startup methodology, and in particular its "Minimum Viable Product" (MVP) logic, maps naturally onto this imperative: rather than developing a fully realized coaching program or technology application before testing market response, micro-institutions release stripped-down versions, gather structured feedback, and iterate accordingly (Ratten, 2025). Flat organizational structures—minimal hierarchical layers, overlapping functional roles—facilitate the rapid decision-making on which this approach depends.

At the operational level, facility management in particular has seen consequential technological change. Drawing on the framework proposed by ScienceDirect (2022), neural network-based predictive control systems now allow even small facilities to optimize energy consumption and manage visitor flow in real time, significantly reducing operating costs that would otherwise be prohibitive at micro-institutional scale. The caveat worth registering here is that

adoption of these systems requires upfront capital expenditure and technical capacity that many newly established micro-institutions will not yet possess. Strategic agility, in other words, is a property that must itself be built and funded; it does not emerge automatically from small organizational size.

4.4 Human Resources and the Professionalization Imperative

The transition from a volunteer-dependent operating model to professional management is perhaps the most socially and culturally fraught dimension of micro sports institution development. Volunteers remain structurally important—particularly for community-facing functions and the low-cost operational flexibility they provide (Zhou, 2025)—and an abrupt professionalization agenda risks alienating precisely the networks of social capital on which many micro-institutions depend for their early legitimacy. Core functions, however, have reached a complexity threshold at which volunteer-staffing is no longer viable: marketing, legal compliance, financial reporting, and high-performance coaching increasingly require not merely dedication but formal qualification and professional experience.

The "professionalization of the amateur," as Iversen (2025) characterizes this trend, is less a single event than a cumulative organizational transformation—one that proceeds unevenly, creating moments of productive tension between professional and voluntary logics. Micro-institutions that manage this tension most effectively appear to do so not by eliminating one logic in favor of the other, but by deliberately segmenting organizational functions along a professional/volunteer axis, reserving the former for high-stakes, compliance-sensitive roles and the latter for community-embedding activities. Whether this hybrid model is sustainable over the long run remains an open question in the literature.

4.5 Marketing and the Logic of Direct Fan Engagement

For micro sports institutions operating with constrained marketing budgets, social media is not merely a communication convenience—it is, as Mohammadkazemi and Falahat (2024) demonstrate empirically, a primary mechanism of business development. Their analysis establishes a statistically robust relationship between structured social media engagement and both fan loyalty scores and fan base expansion, a finding that holds across the range of platforms they examined. The broader significance is strategic: platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube permit micro-institutions to bypass the traditional media gatekeeping that historically required either significant resources or affiliation with a larger organization to overcome. This "disintermediation" of the fan relationship—creating direct-to-consumer channels at negligible marginal cost—is one of the few genuine structural advantages that the digital era confers on small-scale operators relative to their larger competitors.

As Parvez (2024) notes, even events as institutionally massive as the FIFA World Cup now depend on fan-generated digital content to sustain and extend their cultural reach; the same logic applies, at a different scale, to the smallest esports club or community athletics program. The "fan-centric" marketing paradigm—prioritizing active participation over passive spectatorship, and community co-production over broadcast consumption—is increasingly the default expectation rather than a differentiating strategy (Mohammadkazemi & Falahat, 2024; see also Abeza, 2023, for a critical ten-year review of the social media and sport studies literature). The risk worth naming, however, is platform dependency: a micro-institution whose primary community infrastructure is housed on a third-party platform faces real vulnerability to algorithm changes, policy reversals, or platform decline.

4.6 Governance Structures and the Foundations of Integrity

As sports institutions become more deeply commercialized—taking on external investment, entering into licensing agreements, and competing for sponsorship revenue—the governance infrastructure required to maintain institutional integrity grows correspondingly more demanding. The risk, well documented in the broader sports governance literature, is that commercial pressures create incentive structures that gradually erode the ethical commitments and transparency standards on which long-term legitimacy rests. For micro sports institutions, the challenge is acute: governance structures that are adequate for a volunteer-run community club become dangerously insufficient once the institution is managing external capital and public-facing commitments (Integrity and Transparency in Sports, 2024).

Concretely, this means establishing—from the outset, rather than as a retrospective compliance exercise—clear codes of conduct, documented conflict-of-interest policies, and transparent financial reporting procedures. Braverman's (2024) investigation of governance failures in high-profile sports contexts, while focused on larger entities, offers cautionary evidence that the absence of such mechanisms creates vulnerabilities that adversarial actors—whether investors, agents, or media actors—will eventually exploit. The normative pillar in our institutional framework is thus not merely aspirational; it has direct operational consequences for the micro-institution's capacity to attract and retain investment, form credible partnerships, and resist the pressures—internal and external—that have derailed comparable ventures.

5. Challenges, Failure Patterns, and Determinants of Success

The empirical record on sports startup outcomes is, bluntly, not encouraging. High failure rates among sports-sector micro-enterprises recur across the literature, and the explanations converge on two interrelated factors:

inadequate product-market fit in the early phases of operation, and financial runways that are simply too short to survive the iterative learning process that any new venture requires (Shirali et al., 2024). These are not idiosyncratic findings; they echo the broader small business failure literature, applied now to a sector that adds additional complexity in the form of seasonal revenue cycles, regulatory volatility, and the emotional commitments of founder-athletes who may lack formal business training. Cultural context matters here too—in a number of developing-market contexts, the absence of an established "sports entrepreneurship culture," in both the practitioner and investor communities, creates structural barriers to legitimation that technical competence alone cannot overcome.

Against this challenging backdrop, the literature does identify a cluster of factors associated with more favorable institutional trajectories. Technological integration—the deliberate use of AI-driven analytics and data personalization to deepen the fan and user experience—figures prominently in Ratten's (2025) analysis of what distinguishes adaptive from stagnant micro-institutions. Collaborative network formation also emerges as a consistent predictor: alliances with universities provide access to research capacity and credentialed talent; partnerships with local governments can unlock subsidized facility access and public-funding streams; and formal relationships with larger sports brands offer distribution reach and brand legitimation that would otherwise take years to build independently (Mori, 2025). Strategic agility—operationalized as the documented capacity to reconfigure the business model in response to exogenous shocks—proved its worth most visibly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when those micro-institutions that had cultivated digital-delivery capabilities were able to pivot to online service models while their more rigid competitors collapsed (González-Serrano et al., 2023). Finally, the shift from

passive fan spectatorship to active digital participation—"fan co-production," in the terminology Mohammadkazemi (2024) employs—has demonstrated sustained empirical association with revenue diversification and institutional resilience, though the causal mechanisms behind this relationship deserve more fine-grained longitudinal investigation than the existing cross-sectional evidence allows.

6. Discussion

Taken together, the findings charted above point toward a structural reorientation of sports institutional formation—one that is at once more digital, more decentralized, and more dependent on networked legitimacy than on formal affiliation with established governing bodies. The traditional model, in which a centralized sports federation controlled the full spectrum of activity from grassroots competition to elite event management, is being pressured—not yet displaced—by a "bottom-up" logic driven by exactly the kinds of micro-institutions this paper examines. This shift is not merely a sectoral curiosity; it reflects broader patterns of institutional change in knowledge-intensive service industries, patterns that sports scholarship is only beginning to engage systematically (Bjärsholm, 2026; Pereira, 2025).

One tension that the literature has not fully resolved—and that our synthesis cannot dissolve—is the relationship between **commercialization and social value**. Micro sports institutions are, almost by construction, financially constrained entities. The imperative to generate revenue is not optional. Yet sport, as a practice and as a social institution, carries deep commitments to inclusion, community, and shared experience that sit uneasily with aggressive profit-seeking behavior. The most durable micro-institutions, Mori (2025) argues, are those that have found ways to perform these commitments visibly and consistently—to sustain what he terms a "social license to operate"—

rather than treating community engagement as a marketing addendum to a primarily commercial enterprise. Initiatives aligned with large-scale participation strategies—China's "300 Million" sports participation drive, as examined by Zhou (2025), is one such example—suggest that micro-institutions embedded in broader societal mobilization programs may benefit from an institutional tailwind unavailable to those operating in purely market-facing contexts.

The findings from the esports domain bring a different set of implications into relief. While X (in *The Legal and Economic Aspects of the Esports Illusion*, 2024) frames publisher control primarily as a structural barrier—a "legally entrenched status quo" that micro-entities must somehow navigate—it is equally plausible to read it as an indicator of a sector still in the early stages of institutional formation, one in which the eventual equilibrium between publisher power, competitive organization, and governance legitimacy has yet to be reached. The analogy with early professional football or early broadcast media, both of which passed through comparable periods of contested institutional definition, is at least instructive even if it is not determinate. The implication for micro-institution founders is less a prescription than a strategic orientation: engaging proactively with the processes of institutional formation, rather than simply accepting the current landscape as fixed, may itself be a source of competitive advantage.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The establishment of micro sports institutions is a multidimensional process—and this paper has attempted to do justice to that complexity rather than reduce it to a reassuring checklist. The regulatory, financial, managerial, human-resource, marketing, and governance dimensions identified across the preceding sections are not independent variables; they interact, conflict, and reinforce one another in ways that are context-dependent and difficult to

anticipate in advance. What the evidence does support, with reasonable confidence, is the claim that institutions which attend to all six dimensions systematically—even imperfectly—are more likely to achieve stable operation and long-run legitimacy than those that optimize aggressively on one or two dimensions while neglecting the rest.

A note on the study's limitations is warranted here, not as a perfunctory rhetorical gesture, but as a substantive caution: the reliance on English-language Scopus-indexed sources means that the evidence base skews toward contexts—North America, Europe, East Asia—in which sport entrepreneurship research is most developed. It is entirely plausible that the mechanisms most salient in, say, sub-Saharan African or Latin American micro sports institution formation differ materially from those emphasized here. Future work that draws on non-Anglophone literatures and that employs primary qualitative data collection—longitudinal case studies would be especially valuable—would do much to stress-test the framework proposed in Table 1.

7.1 Recommendations for Practitioners

Founders of micro sports institutions would do well to treat the Lean Startup approach not as a fashionable methodology but as a structural response to genuine resource constraints. Rapid iteration on the basis of user feedback, combined with an MVP philosophy that accepts imperfection in the service of market learning, reduces the risk of committing sustained resources to unvalidated propositions. Building a robust digital presence should be understood as a foundational investment rather than a phase-two consideration—the community infrastructure this creates is among the institution's most durable assets, and its absence in early-stage development is difficult to compensate for later. Perhaps most importantly, transparency and governance integrity should be baked into the institutional architecture from day

one. The reputational cost of retroactively constructing governance structures after a crisis is, in a sector as relationally dense as sport, typically greater than the compliance cost of getting it right at founding.

7.2 Recommendations for Policymakers

The "Sports-Tech Sandbox" concept—regulatory relief combined with targeted seed funding for micro-institutions—merits serious consideration from national sports development agencies and economic development ministries. The analogy with fintech sandboxes, which have demonstrably accelerated innovation in financial services in several jurisdictions, is suggestive, though it should not be pressed too hard: the social dimensions of sport create legitimacy considerations that purely commercial fintech ventures do not face. On the legal front, updated frameworks that establish clearer protections for micro-entities operating within publisher-dominated esports ecosystems would address what is currently one of the most asymmetric structural conditions facing digital sports entrepreneurs. More broadly, fostering a "learning culture"—investing in professional development infrastructure for sports managers and supporting university-industry partnerships in sport management education—is likely to generate diffuse long-run returns that are difficult to attribute to any single policy intervention but are nonetheless real. The evidence reviewed here does not support the conclusion that any single policy lever will be transformative in isolation; the interdependencies between regulatory, financial, and cultural conditions are too deep for that. What it does support is the case for coordinated, multi-dimensional public engagement with the sports entrepreneurship ecosystem—one proportionate to the sector's growing economic and social significance.

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