

# The role of the diaspora in international sport entrepreneurship

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## Abstract

Sport is one of the most international industries in the world and relies on entrepreneurship to ensure its competitiveness. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the sport industry had to rapidly change and adjust to international border closures and reduced physical contact activity. Many people involved in the sport industry are located outside of their home country and form part of the diaspora network of sport professionals. The diaspora is highly active in the sport industry in terms of disseminating ideas and utilizing their social networks for international entrepreneurial purposes. The aim of this article is to examine the impact of the diaspora on international sport entrepreneurship thereby contributing a novel approach to the international entrepreneurship, sport entrepreneurship and diaspora entrepreneurship fields in a way that has not been contemplated before. A qualitative research methodology is employed to interview sport entrepreneurs about their diaspora and international entrepreneurship activities. This enables a holistic understanding about the role of international public/private partnerships for the success of innovative and futuristic entrepreneurial sport activity. A theoretical framework based on the interview data was developed that incorporated a three-level process of international drivers, diaspora types and sport entrepreneurship outcomes. A number of research propositions were then derived from the data that highlight how the sport industry is highly international and relies on internationalization to foster new business activity. Policy and managerial implications about the role of diaspora for international sport entrepreneurship are highlighted together with future research suggestions.

## KEYWORDS

diaspora, international entrepreneurship, internationalization, networks, sport, sport entrepreneurship

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship in a diaspora and sport context has received scarce attention, despite having relevance to the global economy. This is unusual as the sport industry often utilizes the global talent pool to attract the best players and coaches (Ahonen & Persson, 2020). In addition, the social networks and contacts that sport people have are

often international in nature and enable them to implement innovative ideas (Steinbrink, Berger, & Kuckertz, 2020). This helps keep the sport industry entrepreneurial in terms of developing innovations but also acting in a proactive manner regarding future trends (Ansari, Khoo, & Ismail, 2020).

The sport industry is unlike other industries due to the emotional attachment people have with sport, which makes it interesting to

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consider how entrepreneurship in the sport industry differs to that occurring in other industries (Hattink & Wichers, 2021). Moreover, the use of the diaspora by sport entrepreneurs can add another dimension to the entrepreneurship experience. This is in terms of utilizing international networks to facilitate sport-based business ventures (Hayduk & Newland, 2020). In recent times there has been increased emphasis on entrepreneurship to rapidly respond to urgent grand challenges (Bacq, Geoghegan, Josefy, Stevenson, & Williams, 2020). The sport industry has been amongst the most affected industries from the COVID-19 pandemic due to travel restrictions but been entrepreneurial in terms of responding to this challenge (Wright, Wiersma, & Ajiee, 2021).

Sport entrepreneurship has a multidisciplinary character that enables the advancement of two contemporary topics: sport and entrepreneurship (Ratten, da Silva Braga, & da Encarnação Marques, 2021). However, within the wider entrepreneurship literature, sport entrepreneurship has received limited consideration despite the sport industry being highly innovative and international (Ratten, 2018). Moreover, with the large number of sport people travelling overseas for work there is a high number of transnational sport entrepreneurs that utilize their connections with others in their home country for business purposes (Juhanis, Hasmyati, & Badaru, 2020).

With this study, we are looking more closely at the intersections between international, diaspora and sport entrepreneurship. This will enable a contribution to the existing comprehensive body of literature on international entrepreneurship based on emerging new theoretical findings (Jafari-Sadeghi & Biancone, 2017). International entrepreneurship is a research field that is particularly relevant in today's global society with much progress being made generally on it as a field of study (Jafari-Sadeghi, 2019). However, it has not been studied much from a sport perspective despite the sport industries international characteristics (Lawrence, Strode, Baker, & Benedict, 2020). Although the role of diaspora communities for entrepreneurship is well known, there is a lack of knowledge from the sport context. This means there is very little descriptive research about how sport entrepreneurs utilize diaspora communities. We know that sport is an international activity that benefits from collaboration, but we do not know how sport people utilize their diaspora contacts in business endeavors. Since sport entrepreneurs are increasingly global, their entrepreneurial linkages in times of crisis are of central importance (McSweeney & Safai, 2020). Thus, the research question for this study is:

RQ1: How do diaspora ties foster international sport entrepreneurship?

The rest of this article is structured as follows. Next, the literature on diaspora entrepreneurship, international entrepreneurship and sport entrepreneurship is stated. Then the methodology and data analysis procedure are explained. This leads to the discussion section that is followed by managerial policy and theoretical implications. Finally, limitations and future research suggestions are stated.

## 2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 | Sport entrepreneurship

Sport-based entrepreneurship theory was developed by Ratten (2011a) as a way of understanding entrepreneurial behavior in the sport sector. The initial theory was premised on the idea that the sport sector has more innovation and risk-taking activities than other sectors due to the emphasis on competitiveness (Pellegrini, Rialti, Marzi, & Caputo, 2020). Over the past decade, the literature on sport-based entrepreneurship theory has continued to grow with Hemme, Morais, Bowers, and Todd (2017) utilizing it to study fitness entrepreneurs. More recently, a number of studies have been premised on sport-based entrepreneurship theory in order to understand the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Escamilla-Fajardo, Núñez-Pomar, & González-Serrano, 2020; Hammerschmidt, Durst, Kraus, & Puumalainen, 2021; Ratten, 2020; Ratten et al., 2021). Deuece, Peris-Ortiz, and Rueda-Armengot (2016) suggested that more entrepreneurial organizations perform better following a crisis. This is due to their ability to navigate new terrain.

Entrepreneurial sport organizations unlike other types of organizations are focused on innovative, risk taking, proactivity, and futuristic thinking (Ratten, 2011b). This means they are able to create value in a way other organizations are not able to due to the collaborative nature of the sport industry (Ratten & Jones, 2020). This collaborative nature typifies the sport industry as there is a proliferation of public/private partnerships. This enables profit, non-profit, and government agencies to work together on projects of mutual gain. Snelgrove and Wood (2021) suggested that this co-creation facilitates societal change due to the influence of sport-based social entrepreneurship on business activity. A recent study by Schyvinck, Babiak, Constandt, and Willem (2021) suggested that entrepreneurship facilitates a better understanding about the social nature of the sport industry. In addition, more sport companies are deriving a substantial proportion of their revenue from international markets (Nite, McLeod, Beldon, & Nauright, 2020).

### 2.2 | Diaspora entrepreneurship

The term "diaspora" refers to individuals "whose identity and sense of belonging have been shaped by their migration experience and background" (McAuliffe & Ruhs, 2017, p. 305). Diasporas continue to have a psychic link with their homeland that can influence their entrepreneurial intentions (Kyle, 1999). Diaspora maintains and sustains connections with their home country, which means that individuals in the diaspora draw on resources and advice from their community. Zapata-Barrero and Rezaei (2020, p. 1959) refer to diaspora entrepreneurs as "immigrants who are engaged in border crossing business activities involving their country of origin and destination." This means unlike traditional entrepreneurs, diaspora entrepreneurs utilize the international market in order to develop business activities (Njoku & Cooney, 2020). This enables them to utilize their cultural connections in a positive way that promotes entrepreneurship.

Drori et al. (2009, p. 1) suggests that diaspora entrepreneurs are involved in a “social realm of immigrants operating in complex, cross-national domains with dual cultural, institutional, and economic features that facilitate and require various entrepreneurial strategies.” Thus, the diaspora are connected to others via societal and financial factors that influence entrepreneurial activity. This means that diaspora entrepreneurship is a characteristic of the international market environment but it is a fluid concept that is based on current trends and also historical patterns (Osaghae & Cooney, 2020). Furthermore, diasporans can settle in one place or constantly move in search of new conditions, which implies it is linked to broader societal changes such as internationalization and migration (Williams, 2020). This means some can disperse over time and then regroup depending on environmental conditions. Due to the increased easiness of moving, diaspora are in a continuous state of reformation. This has meant due to technological advancements they can be geographically distant but close through information technology communication (Varma, 2020). Diaspora entrepreneurs create different types of businesses from small local stores to multinational trading enterprises, which enable them to create economic and social value in their country of residency (Schmutzler, Andonova, & Perez-Lopez, 2021).

Diaspora entrepreneurship is closely linked to family obligations due to cultural conditions as families bring distinct social advantages with them that can help in entrepreneurial business ventures (Riddle, Hrivnak, & Nielsen, 2010). This includes support in terms of time and financing. This is due to the way entrepreneurship is viewed in these groups and the business patterns that have influenced entrepreneurship. In addition, diaspora entrepreneurs have a market advantage due to their knowledge of different cultures (Dana, 2008). This can assist them in analyzing market opportunities and ascertaining new growth trends. Having a common cultural bond does not guarantee solidarity as it can also cause tension (Fraccastoro, Gabrielsson, & Chetty, 2021). This means the cultural bond can be more relevant for social activities that have a non-business nature although the bond can be used for an entrepreneurial purpose when it involves sharing information (Nyame-Asiamah, Amoako, Amankwah-Amoah, & Debrah, 2020). The community driven behavior can lead to diaspora members supporting others in their community. This can be reflected in informal relationships based on social standing. Diaspora act as information sources and knowledge agents but they operate in a complex way due to the interplay of cultural and business needs (Etemad, 2018).

Diaspora interacts with their homeland and host country, which enables them to obtain help from both countries and enhances business relationships (Elo, 2016). Diaspora retains links with their home country for many reasons including cultural attachment, personal interest and obligation (Lee, 2009). This means the motivation for the connection varies and can include wanting a sense of reciprocity. Diaspora has increased their visibility in the marketplace and can capitalize on their cultural knowledge for business opportunities. To do this diaspora entrepreneurs prepare for international market entry by utilizing their knowledge and connections in other countries (Bolt, 1997). This means diaspora entrepreneurship is an ongoing and dynamic learning process that changes over time. Furthermore, diaspora entrepreneurial learning

is a cumulative process based on acquiring knowledge. Thus, prior accumulated skills and experiences can shape a diasporas entrepreneurial intention.

## 2.3 | Diaspora and international entrepreneurship

The economic influence of diaspora on international entrepreneurship patterns is well documented (Karayianni, Hadjielieas, & Glyptis, 2021). This is due to the need for multiple stakeholders to collaborate on joint projects using embedded network relationships (Jafari-Sadeghi, Nkongolo-Bakenda, Anderson, & Dana, 2019). The diaspora is socially interdependent, which means information tends to be circulated in a frequent manner based on business need (Dana & Morris, 2007). Business-based diaspora represent a spatially dispersed community enabling common social ties to provide binds that create common commercial goals (Nuhu, Owens, & McQuillan, 2021). Diaspora has traditionally been considered as a minority group due to their unique cultural and social ties (Dana, 2009). This has meant they commonly share business interests due to dietary prohibitions and religious requirements (Zapata-Barrero & Hellgren, 2020). The terms diaspora and transnational entrepreneurship are used interchangeably in the literature to refer to “a social realm of immigrants operating in complex, cross-national domains with dual cultural, institutional, and economic features that facilitate various entrepreneurial strategies” (Elo, 2016, p. 128). In this article, we refer to diaspora broadly as meaning individuals that are connected due to cultural similarities with some ethnic groups being viewed as being more entrepreneurial than others (Dana, 2000).

International entrepreneurship is the intersection of two research streams: entrepreneurship and international business (Chowdhury & Audretsch, 2021). There has been increased emphasis on international entrepreneurship due to most businesses being involved in international activity either through their supply chain or consumer demand. International entrepreneurship differs depending on the industry context (Etemad, Gurau, & Dana, 2021). This is due to entrepreneurship being a contextual phenomenon that depends on the environment in order to understand its meaning (Welter, 2011). In the context of diaspora entrepreneurship, Honig (2020) highlighted the need for interdisciplinary study. This is due to the way international entrepreneurship has been viewed as a way to reduce inequality in society. Increasingly entrepreneurs are developing new ventures in order to access international markets (Etemad, Wright, & Dana, 2001). International new ventures are defined as “business organizations that, from inception, seek to derive significant competitive advantage from the use of resources and the sale of outputs in multiple countries” (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994, p. 49). Inexpensive travel and communication have enabled international entrepreneurs to flourish. Researchers to date have focused on the cultural effects of international entrepreneurship without taking into consideration specific industries (Ibeh, Wilson, & Chizema, 2012). The incorporation of international entrepreneurship as a new area of sport entrepreneurship represents a novel contribution. This is due to the field of international

entrepreneurship having been neither theorized nor incorporated into studies by sport entrepreneurship researchers (Hayduk, 2020).

Entrepreneurship is viewed as a way to deal with the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 and to creatively solve social problems (Kuckertz & Brändle, 2021). In particular, digital based entrepreneurship has been viewed as a way for international communities to communicate in COVID-19 times (Secundo et al., 2021). This has meant that in times of crisis the nature of international entrepreneurship has altered and become more dynamic in nature (Servantie, Cabrol, Guieu, & Boissin, 2016). Zahra (2021) suggests that international entrepreneurship in the post COVID-19 world will have to change in order to accommodate new societal conditions. Oviatt and McDougall (2005, p. 538) define international entrepreneurship as “the discovery, enactment, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities—across national borders—to create future goods or services.” This definition is adopted in this study as it enables a consideration of international entrepreneurship from a broad perspective. This means acknowledging that international entrepreneurship can occur via a range of international activities including that via diaspora communities and through sport entrepreneurship.

The international entrepreneurship field has changed from focusing on new ventures and their internationalization process to more generally on how international entrepreneurial behaviors are embedded in business strategies. Moreover, during the COVID-19 pandemic there has been more emphasis on social initiatives in the international business community (Weaver, 2020). This has led to a shift in research to understanding the role entrepreneurship plays in discovering then evaluating international opportunities. Jafari-Sadeghi, Nkongolo-Bakenda, et al. (2019) suggest that there currently is an underdevelopment in the literature about the roles opportunities play in international entrepreneurship. This means international opportunities need to be analyzed in different and new contexts including through the diaspora and sport communities. This will enable more information to be obtained about how context, entrepreneurial action and opportunities interact in international markets (Tabares, 2021).

### 3 | METHODOLOGY

The research process of this study was designed to assess and understand the role of international sport entrepreneurs in times of crisis. A qualitative research approach was adopted because the study explores a current phenomenon in a real-life context that is relevant to international business practice (Andersen & Wagtman, 2004). The individual entrepreneur can be considered as representative of the firm with respect to internationalization decisions (Jantunen, Puimalainen, Saarenketo, & Kyläheiko, 2005). Therefore, in this study the focus of the data collection is on the individual international entrepreneur, which follows the approach used by Jafari-Sadeghi, Biancone, Anderson, and Nkongolo-Bakenda (2019). To help understand in detail the phenomenon under study, 20 interviews using an in-depth semi structured approach were conducted. The number of interviews was determined based on theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). We used an inductive approach that has previously

been used to explore how questions regarding entrepreneur's experience (Drencheva, Stephan, Patterson, & Topakas, 2021).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted as they enable a flexible way to discuss emerging themes and to arrange the order of questions (Granow & Asbrock, 2021). An interview protocol was used so that the same questions were asked in each interview (Sandelowski, 2000). The content of the interview protocol focused on international, sport and diaspora entrepreneurship. Given the importance of the topic to international business and the exploratory nature of the study both an inductive and deductive approach was utilized by the research (Doz, 2011). This enabled prior suggestions to be utilized but also new views to be incorporated into the research design (Kvale, 1996).

The interviews were supported by more than 152 pages of secondary data that was collected from company websites and press releases. The secondary data contextualized the interpretation of the interview data due to the ongoing nature of the sport entrepreneurship. It also provided an external check that complemented the data analysis that is required in international business research (Singh, Benmamoun, Meyr, & Arikan, 2021). The names of the respondents have been changed because of privacy and confidentiality reasons (Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2004). Twenty interviews were considered to be appropriate given the homogeneous nature of the population (Saunders & Townsend, 2018).

#### 3.1 | Sample selection and participants

The participants for this study were selected from personal networks based on a purposeful sampling approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This enabled participants to be identified based on the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 1990). As the topic of the study was of critical and ongoing importance, a small sample was justified (Cope, 2005). We selected international sport entrepreneurs as a strategic sample in order to understand how they were utilizing their international networks for the purpose of sport entrepreneurship. Selecting a narrow context is appropriate given the focus on the sport industry and international entrepreneurship. This enables more theoretically rich data to emerge that helps in theory building because it provides specific data that is only relevant in certain contexts (Langley & Abdallah, 2011).

Twenty sport entrepreneurs were interviewed (see Table 1 for more details with pseudonyms used to protect identities). The sport entrepreneurs were sent a message via email or phone a message asking them to participate in the study. All interested individuals were then screened to ensure they were involved in the sport industry and had international experience (Holt, 1995). The individuals who met this criterion provided an informed consent in order to be interviewed. Once this had been completed data collection began with data analysis being performed at the same time (Hemme et al., 2017). This enabled us to reach theoretical saturation that occurred when no additional data found any substantially different experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

**TABLE 1** Respondent details

Interviewee number	Home country	Year of business establishment	Number of employees	Main type of sport focus	Main international markets	Length of interview (min)
1	United States	1970	42	Tennis	United States/Europe	58
2	Germany	2004	30	Football	Europe	32
3	United Kingdom	1985	7	Swimming	Worldwide	40
4	Spain	2006	23	Athletics	United States	37
5	Canada	2000	17	Athletics	United States	23
6	United States	1960	More than 100	Tennis	Worldwide	52
7	Malaysia	2010	24	Swimming	Europe	41
8	Spain	1972	17	Swimming	United States	30
9	Germany	2010	67	Football	Europe	19
10	United Kingdom	2005	23	Tennis	Worldwide	33
11	United Kingdom	2015	10	Football	Europe	41
12	Austria	1982	12	Football	Europe	52
13	Germany	1990	More than 20	Tennis	Worldwide	33
14	Denmark	1962	15	Football	Europe	31
15	United Kingdom	1948	8	Lacrosse	North America	39
16	Canada	1973	5	Lacrosse	North America	34
17	Canada	1960	30	Football	Europe	48
18	United Kingdom	1964	15	Tennis	Worldwide	32
19	Spain	2005	40	Football	Japan	47
20	United Kingdom	2010	33	Football	Asia	33

### 3.2 | Data collection

Due to the ongoing nature of the sport entrepreneurship, the data from the 20 semi-structured interviews came at different time points. Primary interviews were started with a view to understanding the impact of the diaspora networks on international sport entrepreneurship. We asked participants to describe in detail the way their diaspora network has affected their international sport partnerships. By focusing on the use of diaspora networks at the time it was occurring, we captured significant experiences by the sport entrepreneurs. It was important to capture memorable experiences and feedback at the time it occurred as it can provide for more fully detailed experiences (Gibbert, Ruigrok, & Wicki, 2008). Therefore, interviewing sport entrepreneurs was the most appropriate data collection method for three main reasons. First, interviews can provide instant information at the time of a crisis about the current conditions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This enables rich data to be collected from the direct individuals that have been affected, which enables real time detailed accounts to be collected and that is not easily done via other data sources that have a time delay (Creswell, 2014). Second, interview data enables real time interpretations about how diaspora networks were influencing the sport industry. This was important in order to understand emerging challenges, how they made sense of the change and how they altered their behavior. This information cannot be obtained through other data sources that ask individuals to think of past experiences after they have occurred (Crick, 2021). Third, the

interviews enabled a more personal and reflective approach to gaining data. This enabled a caring approach to be applied to the interviewees that is important in international business research (Brannen, 2021). This meant the interviews were less direct than observation, which could have been uncomfortable for the participants (Charmaz, 2006). Interviewers enable open ended questions to be used that can help in understanding the phenomenon. This enabled probing and elaboration of answers in order to further understand the information (Doz, 2011). The data was supplemented by internal and external sources such as websites and company reports.

### 3.3 | Analysis

The analysis procedure for the study is as follows. First, the interviews were transcribed into Microsoft word. Notes that were made during the interviews were added to the transcripts. Once this had been done then parts of the interview were coded in a systematic way in order to provide generalizable results that is useful in international business research (Birkinshaw, Brannen, & Tung, 2011). These codes were then assorted into thematic groups based on specific topics. The themes were constantly refined in order to ensure a coherent analysis that is important in analyzing themes (Angus, Rintel, & Wiles, 2013). In addition, the transcripts were checked for meaning and to ensure the main themes were being identified. This involved a process of reading each transcript then encoding the data based on certain

topics. If the transcripts did not include enough detail further topics were then created. After all the topics had been reviewed an overview of the main topics was then analyzed to see if it reflected all the data (Charmaz, 2006). This meant a single interviewee could not lead to one topic but rather a number of interviewees had to have the same remarks (Brannen, 2021). This led to the main themes of international entrepreneurship, diaspora entrepreneurship and sport entrepreneurship to be identified. The data was then analyzed by a number of researchers in order to provide different viewpoints, which enabled the data to be interpreted based on the data collected (Creswell, 2014). The most relevant examples and statements were extracted and then used to write the findings.

The coding system was based on our interview protocol. Extended questions enable a free flow of responses. This helps in obtaining rich data and the complexity of the process and this enabled the linking of concepts to the data being provided (Creswell, 2014). The coding structure was adjusted as new codes emerged. This helped in identifying differences, similarities and patterns in the data. The second level of analysis involved further breaking the data into specific sub-themes, which enabled the data to be linked to the key themes (Kvale, 1996).

We followed a partially grounded approach in terms of starting from existing concepts found in the literature. We checked our emergent insights with the existing literature to identify complementarities and new information (Doz, 2011). When reading the data, we made several interpretative notes in order to build our understanding of the topic, which led to more qualified and refined information to be obtained (Granow & Asbrock, 2021). Memos or interpretative notes provide a way to analyze data (Danneels, 2011). We tested the validity of our findings by discussing the results with interviewees in follow up calls or emails. This enabled us to contextualize the findings in light of the information being supplied and we then further contrasted the findings with the current literature (Gibbert et al., 2008). We followed

the coding approach suggested by Saldana (2013) to categories the data into subcategories and to find key themes. Table 2 below shows an illustration of the coding process.

### 3.4 | Trustworthiness of the findings

We took a number of steps in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings that are suggested by Sinkovics, Penz, and Ghauri (2008). This included the first author who interviewed the participants also coding the data. This enabled a more participatory approach that balanced lived experiences with research relevance (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interview transcripts were reviewed and data rechecked with the participants to clarify meanings (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). We also confirmed previously shared insights in order to check the meanings and to help build theory (Welch, Piekari, Plakoyiannaki, & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2011). This enabled participants to give more feedback to ensure we had captured the meaning of their experiences (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

### 3.5 | Findings: Developing our conceptual framework

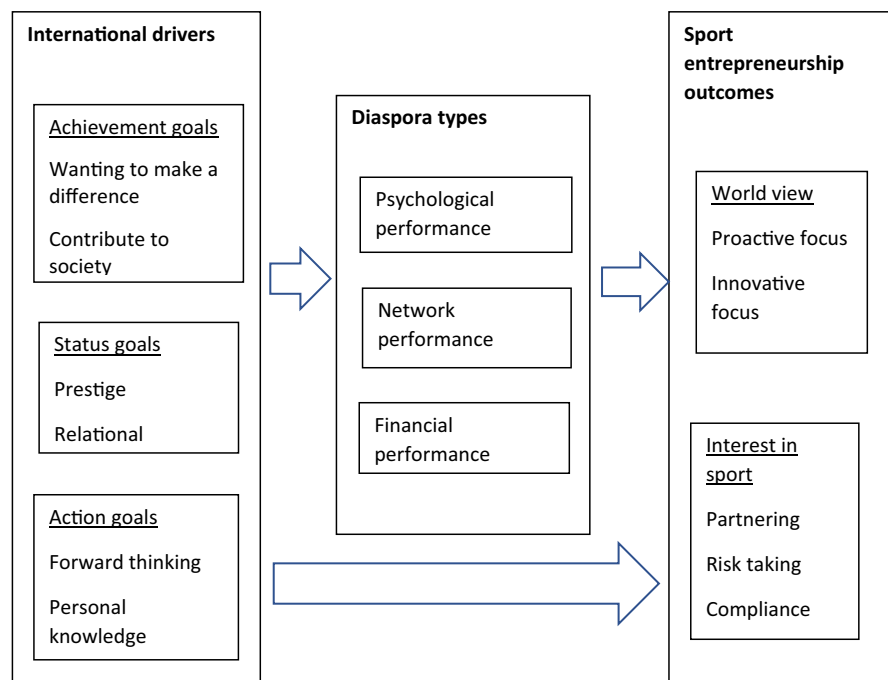
Based on the literature review but also iterating with the data, a conceptual framework was built which is shown in Figure 1. Each section of the conceptual framework will now be discussed. We found that there is a three-level hierarchy of diaspora types. In our case, the three levels are (a) achievement, (b) status, and (c) action. We define achievement goals as a higher order long term goal regarding the use of diaspora connections for positive outcomes. Status oriented goals are at the center of the hierarchy. We define status-oriented goals as an interest in increasing the prestigiousness or relational benefits of

**TABLE 2** Illustration of the coding process

Category	Subcategory	Code	Transcripts with evidence	Coded text passages	Examples of coded text and abbreviated interview number
International	Global outlook Overseas Foreign influence	Internationalization Interest in international affairs Global patterns	20	43	"... to create a sport business I need to focus on the international market" (I2) "In my opinion, the sport industry is global in nature" (I4)
Diaspora	Family connections Overseas networks Cultural identity	International connection Cultural connection Geographic connections	20	32	"I continually stay in contact with people from my home country" (I17) "I maintain a cultural connection to those with the same heritage" (I12)
Sport entrepreneurship	Entrepreneurial sport behavior Sport technology innovation Sport project development	Idea development Business interaction Starting a business	20	52	"I clearly see my idea for this sport product to gain traction in the marketplace" (I19) "I have developed an idea for a new sport app that enables others overseas to connect" (I1)



**FIGURE 1** Conceptual framework of international drivers and diaspora types on sport entrepreneurship outcomes [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



being a member of a diaspora community. We define action-oriented goals as measurable activities that are forward thinking and incorporate personal knowledge usage. Examples of action-oriented goals include thinking about new sport products tied to a personal culture or utilizing a person's heritage in a sport way.

The diaspora types are impacted by the international drivers related to sport entrepreneurship. This includes the world view of the sport entrepreneur and their interest in sport. The world view includes how proactive an individual is regarding implementing new ideas into the marketplace. The innovative focus refers to the willingness of an individual to introduce new behaviors or actions. The interest in sport refers to the level of partnering an individual does with others regarding sport projects. The level of risk taking can also lead to more interest in an individual's diaspora connections. Individuals also need to make sure they comply with any rules and regulations in the international marketplace.

The end result of the international drivers influencing the diaspora types is the sport entrepreneurship outcomes. This involves different levels of performance in terms of financial, social, psychological, and network results. The financial performance refers to the monetary results of an individual utilizing their international diaspora network to create new sport products. The social performance refers to any not-for profit or community related sport products developed from the diaspora ties. This can include international sport for development programs that are started in developing countries. The psychological performance refers to the feel-good factor a sport entrepreneur derives from utilizing their diaspora connections in the international marketplace for sport purposes. The network performance refers to how well a sport entrepreneur managed to derive benefits from their diaspora connections. We will now discuss the emerging themes derived from the interviews in the form of

narratives and quotes. Quotes represent a way to understand themes based on their insightful comments and can be helpful in regarding the context behind international business research (Welch & Piekkari, 2017). The use of quotes has been advocated as a way to provide compelling information.

### 3.6 | International drivers of sport entrepreneurial behavior

We found evidence in our interviews of two main drivers of internationalization: (a) world view and (b) interest in sport (see Table 3). The world view suggests that sport entrepreneurs are interested in the international marketplace for their goods and services. This confirms the view in the literature that sport entrepreneurs focus on the international market first instead of just the domestic market (Ratten, 2020). Within the world view the interview data suggested that there is a proactive way that sport entrepreneurs focus on the international marketplace by actively seeking entry into foreign markets. There is also an innovative perspective in how they do this by trying to implement new ideas quickly in the international marketplace. The interest in sport driver suggests that sport entrepreneurs show their dedication to business activity by partnering with others, taking risks but also being compliant in terms of assuring the relevant regulations are followed.

Entrepreneurship is part of the sport industry and much of this activity takes place in an international context. The interviewees discussed the role that internationalization played in their entrepreneurial endeavors and the impact of the COVID-19 crisis. As Interviewee 3 stated "the restrictions on international travel have certainly curtailed our activity. This is evident with discussions related to an international partnership breaking down due to nobody being able to

**TABLE 3** International drivers of sport entrepreneurship with illustrative examples

International drivers	With illustrative examples
World view	<p><i>Proactive focus</i></p> <p>"I am proactive about utilizing my international network for sport purposes" (Interviewee 2)</p> <p>"I try to use the people I know in terms of helping me for business purposes" (Interviewee 4)</p> <p>"I try to stay positive and actively look for ways to engage my network" (Interviewee 19)</p> <p><i>Innovative focus</i></p> <p>"There is a constant need in sport to think about new ways of doing this. I try to focus on doing this" (Interviewee 8)</p> <p>"I am always thinking about new ways of improving our game"</p> <p>"My intention is to make sport equipment better by doing things in a better way" (Interviewee 2)</p>
Interest in sport	<p><i>Partnering</i></p> <p>"My colleagues in other countries give me knowledge about potential opportunities" (Interviewee 17)</p> <p>"Sport is a team approach and I need to monitor how others in other countries are doing things" (Interviewee 4)</p> <p><i>Risk taking</i></p> <p>"Without trying there is no reward, so I try to take a chance and hopefully it pans out" (Interviewee 6)</p> <p>"I think as sports people we have to be risk taking to win" (Interviewee 8)</p> <p><i>Compliance</i></p> <p>"Every country has different restrictions with how they implement change, so we need to make sure our ideas are okay in terms of government needs" (Interviewee 6)</p> <p>"Sport is regulated and any kind of change in the international arena is going to mean some kind of compliance with regards to the right laws and regulations being followed" (Interviewee 11)</p>

travel. For us, we are so used to travel that not to travel has made us change in an unthinkable way. We can still communicate via digital means but the direct person to person contact is needed to communicate clearly. Whether this changes, only time will tell." Other interviewees expressed the same belief that entrepreneurship particularly with international partners still took place but was not in the same intensity as before or with the same levels of enthusiasm. For example, Interviewee 17 said "I am reliant on conversing with my international colleagues for ideas. Nothing happens in a vacuum. In sport, everything is connected in some way or another. People move around a lot. This is part of being in the sport industry. People are now staying put. Thus, the level of entrepreneurship related to sport is still there but at a different scale. It is mostly related to digital training and fitness apps or how to circumvent COVID-19 barriers."

The role of networking in an international context was discussed as being a core part of sport entrepreneurship by the interviewees. As Interviewee 1 suggested "I am part of an international community in sport. Nothing happens without others in the same sport either knowing about it or partaking in the change. Our competition is international. Not domestic. Sure, we have domestic partners, but the main players are international." Another Interviewee 12 echoed this view by stating that "I network like crazy when I go overseas. Trying to listen and hear what is going on. That is part of my business. I am interested in what is happening but also connecting with others who share that same view with me. COVID has changed this. Hopefully things will get back to normal and we can forget this."

### 3.7 | Diaspora types and international entrepreneurship

The interview data suggested that the main diaspora types could be characterized as being related to three main types of goals: achievement-oriented goals, status-oriented goals, and action-oriented goals. The achievement-oriented goals focused on wanting to make a difference and to contribute to society. The status-oriented goals related to a desire to increase prestige and related benefits associated with being a member of a diaspora group. The action-oriented goals focused on forward thinking and personal knowledge usage. Table 4 below states the different diaspora types and provides illustrative examples.

The international context in which the interviews were situated emerged as a key factor impacting their entrepreneurial behavior. In particular, international orientation, ties, structures, and linkages were deemed important indicators of the international context. This finding is useful in acknowledging the role of international partnerships in sport and to international entrepreneurship and sport entrepreneurship research. This means that the international context has a role in the decision making and evolution of the sport enterprises. Our findings reveal that international orientation is deeply embedded in the sport industry and is prioritized in sport entrepreneurship. As Interviewee 3 stated, "our products and services are oriented to the international market as the sport sector itself is international." Moreover, Interviewee 3 stated "everything is international in nature. Nothing happens in sport without considering the international marketplace." This view of the international market dominating all decisions in the sport industry was echoed by other interview participants who said "you can say that we develop ideas based on international demand" (Interviewee 10) and "if the idea is good and novel it will quickly be adopted in the international marketplace" (Interviewee 17). This means more effort was placed on international market potential by the interviewees.

The interviewees expressed their desire to utilize international ties to further develop ideas. This is evident with Interviewee 2 suggesting that "we take care of each other and help each other out in the international market." Furthermore, there was a perception that having ties with others in the international market would lead to



**TABLE 4** Diaspora types of sport entrepreneurship with illustrative examples

Diaspora types	With illustrative examples
Achievement oriented goals	<p><i>Wanting to make a difference</i></p> <p>“My family connections overseas are important to me and I try to help them by including them in sport ideas preferably those that can then help others” (Interviewee 7)</p> <p>“I want to stay connected to my family overseas and one way to do this is by finding ways to connect with them through sport in a positive and social way” (Interviewee 17)</p> <p><i>Wanting to contribute to society</i></p> <p>“As an athlete I think we have a social duty to make a difference to society so the new sport technologies I invent I try to invest money back to my community overseas” (Interviewee 8)</p> <p>“There is a need to build grassroots programs that incorporate new ideas but help build the next generation of sport stars” (Interviewee 10)</p>
Status oriented goals	<p>Increased prestige</p> <p>“My relatives overseas are happy I am a famous athlete. That brings them prestige in their community” (Interviewee 9)</p> <p>“I have invented some ground breaking products that enable others to increase their performance and that has given me reputational effects with others overseas who know my name” (Interviewee 12)</p> <p><i>Relational benefits</i></p> <p>“I hope to invent sport products that whilst are useful also make a difference to the sport community” (Interviewee 14)</p> <p>“From my relationships with others of a similar culture I try to encourage others to play sport by starting new sport programs” (Interviewee 18)</p>
Action oriented goals	<p><i>Forward thinking</i></p> <p>“For my sport, many people of my culture do not play it. I try to make new sport ideas fun and inclusive, so more people play” (Interviewee 7)</p> <p>“The technology is changing so fast we must make plans as to how to incorporate this into sport” (Interviewee 11)</p> <p><i>Personal knowledge usage</i></p> <p>“I know what people from my culture like and how new sport business ventures might appeal to them” (Interviewee 12)</p> <p>“I have been playing this sport since I was 3 years old! I know what to do and how to make a difference to sport. that is why I invested my time and effort in new ideas” (Interviewee 1)</p>

success. For example, Interviewee 4 said “my colleagues overseas try to give help when needed as they know they will receive help in the future” and Interviewee 12 saying “my contacts overseas treat me

not just as a business contact but also as a collaboration due to the mutual need.”

Interviewees expressed the view that the sport industry had an international structure that influenced collaboration. As Interviewee 6 stated “businesses in the sport industry have a very strong need for collaboration due to the international nature of sport.” This view was echoed by Interviewee 3 stating “we are a big family as we share a common interest in sport. I discuss developments with others in the sport context and we often discuss future needs.”

The need for preserving international linkages was discussed as a key need for ensuring the sport industries competitiveness. Interviewee 18 said “we like those who know the value of partnerships in the international arena as it enables us to succeed.” Other interviewees suggested that loyalty was important in ensuring international collaborators were trustworthy. For example, Interviewee 14 stated “we deal with others because of need but also because of their truthfulness in ensuring our knowledge is not shared with competitors.” Interviewee 11 said “the most important characteristic of our international parties is honesty in their dealing with us. We need to know what they are doing and they need to know how we are coping with the COVID-19 pandemic.”

### 3.8 | Diaspora and sport entrepreneurship outcomes

Sport entrepreneurship can have a number of outcomes and the interview data suggested that these related to financial, social, psychological, and network performance. Financial performance has long been studied from an entrepreneurship perspective due to the interest in how entrepreneurial activities can lead to increased profitability. Social performance is a more recent phenomenon in entrepreneurship research although it has existed in practice for a long time. Normally social performance in sport relates to how a sport entrepreneur contributes to their community (Ratten, 2018). This can be through philanthropic or mentoring activities. The psychological performance is related to emotional matters associated with being a sport entrepreneur (e.g., Steinbrink et al., 2020; Toledano, 2020). This perspective is less studied as sport entrepreneurship in general is a new field and the addition of a psychological perspective is very recent. Network performance relates to the continued way many sport entrepreneurs utilize one entrepreneurial project to lead into another entrepreneurial project. Table 5 below states these outcomes with some illustrative examples.

The diaspora emerged as instrumental in facilitating international activities. This was due to family and social connections based on ethnic ties facilitating cooperation. Further analysis revealed that ethnic bond/cohesion was an enabler of international entrepreneurial activity. As Interviewee 15 remarked “because of my ethnicity I have a strong connection with others from the same background. This includes others who are overseas.” This view was supported by Interviewee 8 stating “my ethnic ties are helpful overseas in terms of connecting with others with a similar sport interest.” These comments were supported by a desire of the interviewees to help others during

**TABLE 5** Sport entrepreneurship outcomes with illustrative examples

Sport entrepreneurship outcomes	With illustrative examples
Financial performance	<p>“Money. I want to make a lot of money from my sport business” (Interviewee 6)</p> <p>“To be frank, this is about capitalizing on my knowledge of the international market to introduce this new sport business to the global community of sport followers” (Interviewee 13)</p>
Social performance	<p>“Whilst I need to make money, I think I also have a social goal in terms of making this sport more inclusive for others” (Interviewee 11)</p> <p>“My business idea is around the use of different age groups in society. Thus, it is financially motivated but there are some social goals there too” (Interviewee 14)</p>
Psychological performance	<p>“Many people when they get older do not play sport. I want to change people's mindsets around what they can and cannot do” (Interviewee 18)</p> <p>“The ability to do some moves in sport is in the mind of the individual and is psychological often and not age related” (Interviewee 1)</p>
Network performance	<p>“Sport is a group thing. I need help from others and in this business venture I use my contacts overseas to help with this” (Interviewee 3)</p> <p>“I am just the idea person. I have a marketer, a manager and an accountant” (Interviewee 4)</p>

the COVID-19 crisis. This is evident with Interviewee 1 saying “we are dealing with COVID but in different ways. We are in this together” and Interviewee 15 stating “the COVID pandemic has certainly impacted the sport industry most notably in travel restrictions but also in social ways. I think of what others are going through overseas and consider myself lucky.”

Social bonds provided a harmonious way of fostering entrepreneurial ventures. As interviewee 2 stated “I have a very supportive network that helps me overseas.” Strong social bonds were considered as a way of facilitating further communication. This cohesion meant there was a unified sense of purpose in the sport venture. Good communication channels were considered as integral to the diaspora ties. This helped in developing business relationships. For instance, Interviewee 12 remarked “I have been offered sport projects because of my diaspora ties and market knowledge.”

The COVID-19 crisis had made all interviewees aware of the travel restrictions that limited their mobility. In the past, the interviewees stated that they had become use to travelling for business purposes that it was a major life change not been able to do that. This is evident with Interviewee 14 stating “I often go home once a year but sometimes more. And this helps me in developing my business ideas and connecting with potential suppliers. The face-to-face contact is essential as there is so much more to learn from direct communication.” This view about the need to travel to further business interests was echoed by Interviewee 6 who said “the sport industry develops so quickly that I need to stay current with developments. The way I do this is through interacting with my international counterparts.” Most of the interviewees felt that the COVID-19 crisis had significantly affected their ability to discuss new sport ideas with their contemporaries. This was important in linking in with the international sport community that often required partnerships for success. Interviewee 2 suggested that “COVID-19 is a crisis like no other. We do not know when it will finish and if it will. This has significantly disturbed the sport industry more than any other industries. We have to rethink what to do. How to innovate.”

## 4 | DISCUSSION: FORMULATION OF RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS

In this study, we sought to examine the role diaspora and international entrepreneurship plays in sport entities. We found that sport entrepreneurs utilize their international connections to recognize and develop international opportunities and therefore suggest a number of research propositions. This has been complicated with the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the ability of sport entrepreneurs to travel. Our findings contribute to the sport entrepreneurship and international literature in several ways. First, our research extends the scant literature on sport entrepreneurship using diaspora and international entrepreneurship literature. This provides a way to answer Dana and Ratten's (2017) call for international entrepreneurship to take more industry and contextual approaches. Even though there have been studies on sport entrepreneurship and COVID-19, only recently has there been an interest in focusing on complementary areas such as knowledge spillovers (e.g., Ratten, 2021), sport team behavior (e.g., Hammerschmidt et al., 2021), and entrepreneurial intensity (e.g., Escamilla-Fajardo, Núñez-Pomar, & González-Serrano, 2020). This study has contributed to the development of the sport entrepreneurship field by integrating it with the new research fields of diaspora and international entrepreneurship. Whilst the influence of international markets on sport entrepreneurship has been alluded to in past research (e.g., Bjärsholm, 2017), no prior studies have specifically tested the relationships. Due to the COVID-19 crisis more attention has been placed on international aspects of entrepreneurship due to the limited travel capabilities of sport athletes and other individuals. This has meant sport entities have had to engage in new international collaboration methods (Clarkson, Culvin, Pope, & Parry, 2020). We suggest that sport entrepreneurship is a very important component of international entrepreneurship in times of crisis and is a viable way for entrepreneurs to maintain and enlarge their international markets. This leads to the first research proposition:

**Research Proposition 1.** There is a positive relationship between internationalization of the sport industry (in terms of achievement, status, and action goals) and the sport entrepreneurship outcomes (in terms of a world view and interest in sport).

We have utilized the sport context as a way of understanding how diaspora can be used for international entrepreneurship. This is in line with previous research calling for the use of diaspora entrepreneurship in new research contexts (Elo, 2016). Based on our knowledge of the diaspora entrepreneurship literature, there are no studies analyzing the role of international entrepreneurship in the sport context. Thereby this study has focused on the need for sport entrepreneurship theory to incorporate new international perspectives (Ratten, 2018). This would help to understand the dramatic policy shift of sport entities in the international marketplace. Due to the COVID-19 crisis there is a renewed focus on sport entrepreneurship to help alleviate social problems (Escamilla-Fajardo, Núñez-Pomar, & González-Serrano, 2020). This means scholarly attention needs to highlight how sport entrepreneurs engage in the internationally constrained business context. This includes examining ingenuity of sport entrepreneurs in crisis situations and how this leads to innovation. Therefore, our results contribute to the literature by encouraging more focus on the sport context in diaspora research and leads to the second research proposition:

**Research Proposition 2.** There is a positive relationship between sport entrepreneurs utilizing different diaspora types (psychological, network, and financial) and sport entrepreneurship.

International entrepreneurship has flourished in the past decade due to more companies incorporating an international orientation to their entrepreneurial activities (De Cock, Andries, & Clarysse, 2021). Recently with the COVID-19 crisis, sport entities that act in international markets have had to be entrepreneurial to cope with market changes (Ratten et al., 2021). We believe our qualitative study initiates some steps in understanding how crises affect sport-based international entrepreneurship. We have contributed to the literature by extending international entrepreneurship to a sport and crisis perspective. While many different sport entities engage in international entrepreneurship, this study has offered a more complicated view of how this occurs. This means focusing on the causes and consequences of international entrepreneurship for sport entities. At the moment the linkages between international entrepreneurship and sport entrepreneurship are not well understood. Our study suggests that these linkages are impacted by the diaspora. Thereby highlighting how the internalization of the sport industry has occurred via social networking and international connections. Our results suggest that international entrepreneurship: (a) enables sport entrepreneurs to utilize the diaspora in new venture creation and (b) helps foster the identification of international sport opportunities that leverage diaspora.

Therefore, we contribute to the international entrepreneurship literature that focuses on understanding new contexts by incorporating a sport and diaspora context. This leads to the next research proposition:

**Research Proposition 3.** The diaspora network performance of sport entrepreneurs leads to an increase in sport entrepreneurship.

## 4.1 | Managerial implications

Our study found that sport entrepreneurs are influenced by their diaspora network and international network in their business pursuits. This is useful for sport entrepreneurs who want to develop new products or services for the global marketplace. They can utilize the personal knowledge of athletes and other members of the sport community to incorporate culturally sensitive ideas. This will help encourage sport entrepreneurs to think of the cultural connections with their products and the way they can internationalize their ideas (Ratten, 2018).

Many professional sport teams have members from a range of countries so this ethnic diversity can come in handy with sport entrepreneurship. Having a diversity of cultures can help sport entrepreneurs to utilize cultural connections to come up with new ideas; thereby utilizing their personal knowledge of sport and culture in an entrepreneurial way. This will help increase social cohesion and encourage others to share their personal views of connections in order to facilitate new product development.

## 4.2 | Policy implications

This study recommends several realistic approaches to enhance support for international sport entrepreneurs. First, we advise the need for greater transparency in government support for the sport industry. This would enable more fairness in the system in terms of funding programs and results. We suggest a help desk or group of people devoted to the sport sector that can help them to foster international connections. This can incentivize sport entrepreneurs to share their ideas and international networks with others. By having a value co-creation emphasis then sport entrepreneurs can develop their international sport ecosystems. Second, in order to prevent delays in processing ideas for sport entrepreneurs the operational guidelines of sport regulatory agencies should be advised. This means permits and laws relating to internationalization can be fast tracked in order to facilitate growth in the sport industry. New guidelines should prioritize international projects in the sport industry. This can be supplemented with good quality training about international markets. Thereby helping to develop social networking and working relationships with international people. This can ensure that international efforts are prioritized in the sport industry.

## 5 | LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study focused on a topic that will continually influence the sport industry. As a result, we believe that the research approach adopted in this study provides the best way to understand an ongoing phenomenon, although acknowledge that there are some weaknesses. The study was based on interview data that we believed provided the most quick and efficient way to gather data about the use of diaspora networks for international sport entrepreneurship. However, it would also be helpful for future research to gather longitudinal data at different time points by placing more attention on the psychological as well as economic effects of diaspora networks on international sport entrepreneurship. Future research could study different geographic diaspora networks based on ethnicity or location to examine how this affects sport entrepreneurship. Recent research by Ahonen and Persson (2020) found that social entrepreneurship and corporate social responsibility is important in sport entrepreneurship. Therefore, future research could extend the findings of this study on diaspora networks by including a social responsibility perspective to how diaspora contacts influence social forms of sport entrepreneurship.

The participants in this study were from a number of different countries, which means there may be some restrictions on generalizability. In addition, there may be specific cultural traits of sport people that differ to individuals from other industry contexts (Ratten et al., 2021). Therefore, it would be useful in the future to include different data from other geographical contexts and researchers could include comparative studies to understand in more detail cultural effects. For example, future research could compare developing and developed countries in terms of the way they utilize diaspora networks to facilitate new sport innovations. Research by Ansari et al. (2020) found that education is a way to facilitate sport entrepreneurship so future research could introduce a diaspora context to understand how this influences sport entrepreneurship performance.

The unit of analysis for this study was the individual sport entrepreneur. This person was considered the best person to interview as they were the most knowledgeable about the industry (Escamilla-Fajardo, Núñez-Pomar, Calabuig-Moreno, & Gómez-Tafalla, 2020). However, other individuals could also be interviewed in future studies such as those involved in different tasks within the sport industry such as athletes, club members, educators, government advisors, and coaches (Pellegrini et al., 2020). Future research should focus on different levels of analysis as well including the individual, sport organization and national federation to understand how sport entrepreneurship emerges from ideas found in diaspora networks.

## 6 | CONCLUSION

Our study gives new insights into the international, sport, and diaspora entrepreneurship literature. It demonstrates the importance of internationalization in the sport industry and the need for new forms of international entrepreneurship to emerge.

Implications for international sport entrepreneurs were offered based on a diaspora and international entrepreneurship lens. This makes an important contribution to the practice and literature on international sport entrepreneurship as it is the first known study to incorporate diaspora types with international drivers and sport entrepreneurship outcomes. It is hoped that this will enable a more holistic view of the importance to focus on a sport entrepreneurs diaspora contacts in terms of their achievements, status, and action goals.

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