



Original Research

Handling Ethical Misconduct in Sport: *Aufarbeitung* as a Comprehensive Conceptual Approach

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Abstract: The sport industry has faced numerous crises involving ethical misconduct, ranging from sexual abuse and corruption to match-fixing, doping, and financial mismanagement. Despite the implementation of governance principles and compliance mechanisms, many institutional responses have been superficial and largely ineffective. We argue that both academic and practical approaches have focused too narrowly on prevention, often neglecting the critical importance of examining and addressing past failures. This article introduces the concept of *Aufarbeitung*, a German term rooted in confronting the legacy of the Nazi regime, as a more holistic approach to dealing with ethical misconduct in sport. Lacking a clear theoretical foundation, we first develop a model of *Aufarbeitung* by drawing insights from disciplines beyond sport. The process begins with an investigation asking: What happened? How could it happen? How was it addressed? On this basis, institutions can adequately handle the past, meaningfully manage the present, and shape the future. We test our model against five diverse cases of ethical misconduct in sport, analyzing how institutions have responded, and the roles played by victims, secondary victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and other stakeholders. These case studies demonstrate the model's potential to broaden perspectives and enhance institutional learning. Our findings suggest that effective responses to ethical misconduct require more than governance reforms. They demand a deep cultural engagement with past wrongdoings. *Aufarbeitung* offers a valuable foundation for developing more comprehensive and sustainable strategies in sport ethics. To move forward, sport organizations must first confront and learn from their past.

Keywords: *Aufarbeitung, Ethical Misconduct, Integrity, Crisis Management, Good Governance, Prevention*

Introduction

The world of sport has been shaken by high-profile crises and integrity breaches, including cases of sexual abuse, corruption, financial mismanagement, match-fixing, and doping (Verschuuren 2023; Geeraert 2022). Many other instances of misconduct have occurred without significant public attention. Initial responses to these crises often involve deflecting institutional accountability, placing the blame instead on individual actors (de Cima and Moriconi 2022). At the same time, growing academic and practical engagement with sport governance has led to the formulation of good governance principles (Chappelet and Mrkonjic 2019) and the adoption of various compliance policies and institutional reforms.

Despite these developments, the effectiveness of such measures remains questionable, with critics pointing to a degree of performative implementation, or “window dressing,” and the continued emergence of new crises (Verschuuren 2023; Chappelet 2018). One possible reason is the emphasis on general principles or isolated measures rather than a holistic approach to handle ethical misconduct. Recent contributions have attempted to address this gap, focusing on integrity concepts. Kihl (2021) proposes a sport integrity system as a comprehensive framework, while McNamee and Moriconi (2025) conceptualize sport integrity as an ecosystem of interdependent relationships at the micro, meso, and macro levels, advocating for an integrated, interdisciplinary response.

The academic discourse remains partially misdirected. Much of the literature prioritizes preventive measures while insufficiently engaging with the actual events of ethical misconduct. Similarly, sport organizations frequently fail to investigate the root causes of past violations, leading to ineffective reforms and increasing the risk of recurrence. Many ethical failings are not isolated incidents but are deeply embedded in organizational culture and institutional history (de Cima and Moriconi 2022; Verschuuren 2023). It is essential to begin by understanding and addressing past misconduct as a foundation for building effective future prevention strategies. As Hesse and Appelbaum (1998, 44) famously noted in *Siddhartha*: “Everything that is not suffered and settled to the end will come back.”

While some studies have surveyed incidents such as match-fixing or sexual abuse (Hartmann 2023; Rulofs et al. 2019), we argue for a new, holistic approach that integrates an analysis of the past as a prerequisite for tackling the present and future. A promising conceptual lens is the German notion of *Aufarbeitung*, a term with no direct English equivalent (Zollner 2022). Originally developed in response to the crimes of the Nazi regime, *Aufarbeitung* has been applied to various fields, including institutionalized sexual abuse and the COVID-19 pandemic. At its core, *Aufarbeitung* seeks to understand how a particular situation evolved by asking fundamental questions such as: “What happened?”, “How could it happen?”, and “How was it addressed?” (Weber and Baumeister 2023).

Despite its growing use, *Aufarbeitung* remains a loosely defined concept that lacks theoretical clarity. Our aim is to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework for *Aufarbeitung* by drawing on insights from disciplines beyond sport. This framework will encompass three interrelated dimensions: handling the past, managing the present, and shaping the future. In a second step, we apply this conceptual model to five instances of ethical misconduct in sport to assess its practical relevance. The central research question guiding this article is: How can the concept of *Aufarbeitung* help address ethical misconduct in sport?

Methodology

This article is conceptual in nature, and its purpose is to prompt reflection and insight (Hirschheim 2008). Conceptual papers concentrate on assumptions and assertions that must be made explicit for them to be evaluated (Gilson and Goldberg 2015). As MacInnis (2011, 140) asserts, “conceptual thinking is the process of understanding a situation or problem abstractly by identifying patterns or connections and key underlying properties.”

A theory synthesis (Jaakkola 2020) was conducted to define *Aufarbeitung* using a multidisciplinary approach, integrating existing theories from diverse fields, including National Socialism, Transitional Justice, the Catholic Church, Corporate Governance, Compliance Management, and Crisis Management. This helped establish a link between existing theories that can be applied across different disciplines, providing multi-level insight to summarize, integrate, and broaden the understanding of *Aufarbeitung* and its application to sport (Gilson and Goldberg 2015; Jaakkola 2020).

Then, a multiple case study approach based on document analysis (Gustafsson 2017) was implemented to test the proposed *Aufarbeitung* model on different instances. These cases were selected to be intentionally heterogeneous, ensuring they represent a wide spectrum of ethical misconduct, such as sexual abuse, corruption, match-fixing, doping, and financial mismanagement. The logic was to demonstrate that the model is not limited to one specific type of misconduct but can be applied across different contexts within sport. The sampling prioritized cases that involved different types of actors and organizational levels, which allowed for an analysis of how *Aufarbeitung* functions from different perspectives, including: national federations, independent governing bodies, external actors, athletes, etc.

Exploring real-life cases provided detailed data from multiple sources for further description (Creswell and Poth 2016) and model adaptation to the sport context. Information from multiple case studies is strong and reliable (Gustafsson 2017). By including instances of both successful institutional reform and persistent organizational resistance, the sampling logic facilitates a comprehensive test of the model’s adaptability and practical relevance across varied and complex contexts of international sport. Data was gathered from online news articles, official investigative reports, court transcripts, and governance documents.

Conceptualization of *Aufarbeitung*

In this section, we develop a conceptual model of *Aufarbeitung* that serves as a basis for its application in the context of sport. Since there is no established theoretical foundation for this concept, we begin by gathering insights from various fields of research and then turn to a more detailed examination of the concept of Transitional Justice, which shares important parallels with *Aufarbeitung* and offers a valuable point of reference for our model.

The term *Aufarbeitung* was coined in Germany in connection with the guilt and grievances of society after the Nazi era.¹ This process has lasted almost eighty years and is ongoing. There have been ongoing discussions on how to deal with social and institutional grievances related to major ethical lapses, both nationally and globally. However, there is no clear or uniform definition, understanding, or translation of the term *Aufarbeitung*, neither in German nor in other languages (Andresen 2023; Zollner 2022). Definitions often speak of reappraisal, processing, or coming to terms with, but these are not sufficient to capture the full meaning and process of *Aufarbeitung*.

There are pieces of *Aufarbeitung* in fields as diverse as political science, religion and theology, and business management (see Table 1). Sport is missing from this analysis due to a gap in research that can come close to the complexity that needs to be considered in this area; therefore, we will attempt to fill this gap in theory in Figure 1. The first step is to develop a comprehensive understanding of *Aufarbeitung* in order to later apply it to the sport context.

Table 1: Theories, Concepts, and Criticisms of the Conceptualization of *Aufarbeitung*

Theories	Main Concepts	Criticisms Regarding <i>Aufarbeitung</i>	Citations
<i>Political Science</i>			
<i>National Socialism</i>	▪ Continuous 80-year process ▪ Inclusion of individuals, organizations, and society ▪ Interdependence of legal and social efforts ▪ Sequential priority of legal over social measures	▪ Lengthy duration ▪ Emergence of new aspects from constant debates ▪ Perpetual “Final Stroke” debates	▪ Brechtken (2021) ▪ Sauer (1967)
<i>Transitional Justice</i>	▪ Accountability, truth recovery, institutional reform, and reconciliation ▪ Societal response to serious human rights violations ▪ Focus on victims’ rights and dignity	▪ State-led initiatives ▪ Focus on state/regime violations ▪ Dilemma between reconciliation and prosecution ▪ Revictimization through lack of recognition	▪ Boraine (2006) ▪ Fischer (2011) ▪ ICTJ (n.d.) ▪ Mendez (2001) ▪ Teitel (2017)

¹ Since the 1980s, the term *Aufarbeitung* (“working through”) has increasingly replaced the formerly used term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (“coming to terms with the past”), which was often criticized as inappropriate and incomplete (Brechtken 2021; Wolff-Powęska 2015). For an overview of the evolution of vocabulary related to addressing the Nazi past, see Wolff-Powęska (2015).

<i>Religion and Theology</i>			
<i>Catholic Church (Case: Germany)</i>	▪ Extensive prevention concepts and training ▪ Defined processes for new report management ▪ Increased social sensitivity and practical experience	▪ Post-disclosure uncertainty ▪ Non-delegable nature of leadership ▪ Top-level responsibility ▪ Internal institutional dilemmas	▪ Andresen (2023) ▪ Weber and Baumeister (2023) ▪ Zollner (2022)
<i>Business Management</i>			
<i>Compliance Management</i>	▪ Adherence to legal and internal company policies ▪ Principles and measures for rule violation avoidance ▪ Focus on prevention and intervention	▪ Secondary status of non-compliance handling ▪ Lack of cultural integration and credibility ▪ Limitations of compliant behavior ▪ Absence of moral foundation or intrinsic motivation	▪ Abdullah et al. (2016) ▪ Ramezani et al. (2012)
<i>Crisis Management</i>	▪ Threats to the existence of the company goals ▪ Risk analysis and management ▪ Operational and strategic crisis management stages	▪ Historical lack of research attention prior to COVID-19 ▪ Focus on prevention and intervention over sustainable resolution ▪ Emphasis on quick handling over a deep understanding	▪ Coombs and Holladay (2012) ▪ Khodarahmi (2009) ▪ Kouzmin (2008) ▪ Preuß (2022) ▪ Schu and Preuss (2023)
<i>Corporate Governance</i>	▪ Regulatory framework for management and supervision ▪ Stakeholder interest alignment ▪ Fairness, accountability, responsibility, and transparency	▪ Lack of a clear definition ▪ Predominantly preventive in nature ▪ Requirement for continuous evaluation	▪ Claessens (2006) ▪ Khan (2011)

From a political and historical perspective, the case of National Socialism helps us understand how the question of how society deals with guilt and responsibility in the aftermath of ethical wrongdoing, such as that under the Nazi regime, is at the heart of the Aufarbeitung process. This long process has taken different forms and focuses, including the distinction between legal and social Aufarbeitung (Brechtken 2021). New aspects continue

to emerge and debates persist, demonstrating that *Aufarbeitung* is a complex and ongoing process that requires time to be carried out effectively.

Continuing in political science, transitional justice is relevant to *Aufarbeitung* because of conceptual proximity. Teitel (2017, 69) defines transitional justice as “the conception of justice associated with periods of political change, characterized by legal responses to confront wrongdoings of repressive predecessor regimes.” This is done to come to terms with the past as a precondition for building peace and fostering future relations in the aftermath of humanitarian crises (Fischer 2011). Alexander Boraine, founder of the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), argues that retributive justice must be complemented by restorative justice for a holistic understanding of transitional justice. This understanding is based on five ideas: accountability, truth recovery, reparation, institutional reform, and reconciliation (Boraine 2006). Like *Aufarbeitung*, transitional justice is often only possible with external support, requires the involvement of stakeholders, and relies on context for defining measures.

From religion and theology, the idea that *Aufarbeitung* is a lengthy process is further reinforced. As Weber and Baumeister (2023, 1029) state, “to adequately deal with the past, you first need to be willing to deal with it.” Organizations need to develop an internal drive to understand what happened and to put measures in place to prevent a recurrence. It is crucial to recognize that *Aufarbeitung* is a top-level responsibility that cannot be delegated. The case of the Catholic Church highlights the importance of thorough investigations to gain a clear understanding of what happened within an organization (Weber and Baumeister 2023). However, many efforts have stalled after the publication of investigative reports, leaving the critical question of “What comes next?” unanswered. Hence, the *Aufarbeitung* process remains incomplete.

In business administration, we explore the theory of compliance management. Negative publicity surrounding non-compliance motivates organizations to ensure compliance with requirements (Abdullah et al. 2016). Compliance is the adherence to both legal regulations and internal company policies; therefore, compliance management systems comprise the full set of principles and measures designed to avoid rule violations within an organization. These systems are often in place but not embedded in the organization’s corporate culture; hence, there is a lack of seriousness and credibility (Ramezani et al. 2012). Systems are based on what is allowed and what is not allowed, rather than on an intrinsic value of doing the right thing, especially when reputational damage is at stake. Compliance management is mostly focused on prevention and intervention. How non-compliance is handled is not a priority. Having guidelines is appropriate for *Aufarbeitung* if they are backed by an investigation into why those rules are in place and why it is necessary to follow them.

Moving to crisis management, crises typically share the following characteristics: serious threats, high degree of uncertainty, and a time pressure (Kouzmin 2008). According to Comfort (1988), a model for dealing with a crisis includes four stages: prevention and

mitigation; preparation and planning; response and decision-making; and recovery, consolidation, and change. While numerous crisis typologies exist, they often focus on external events or internal management failures rather than on issues such as non-compliance (Coombs and Holladay 2012). While crisis management considers prevention, intervention, and *Aufarbeitung*, the focus is generally on intervention and prevention rather than comprehensive crisis resolution, often due to resource constraints (Khodarahmi 2009). This lack of focus on thorough investigation leaves the process incomplete. Accepting and analyzing what has happened, as well as taking ownership and accountability, are essential to reassure the public and maintain trust in the organization. These steps are frequently insufficiently addressed, resulting in *Aufarbeitung* falling short of being comprehensive (Khodarahmi 2009).

From corporate governance, we find a trace of *Aufarbeitung*. Corporate governance has no specific definition. It is a broad term “that describes the processes, customs, policies, laws, and institutions that direct the organizations and corporations in the way they act, administer, and control their operations” (Khan 2011, 1). Good corporate governance should include performance indicators and accountability to create a harmonious, beneficial, and ethical relationship between shareholders, managers, and all other stakeholders. For corporate governance to be “good,” it must consider all stakeholders and have ethical implications (Claessens 2006). These are also important foundations for *Aufarbeitung*.

In these fields, we find different ways of understanding *Aufarbeitung*. All have lessons to be learnt but also shortcomings. Looking at the past is considered in all fields but not as a priority. This may be due to the time and resources required. *Aufarbeitung* is a lengthy process that is constantly updated and debated. In the business world, due to reputational threat, the focus is often on acutely dealing with a crisis before irreparable damage is done rather than investigating why the crisis occurred and what it means for the organization. Prevention is highly considered and recommended, but for prevention to be effective, it must be based on an *Aufarbeitung* process that provides a comprehensive understanding of what happened. Based on the previous analysis, we believe the most insightful and parallel to our goals is transitional justice.

Transitional Justice

Following an analysis of literature on transitional justice, six key areas were identified as contributing to a holistic understanding of *Aufarbeitung*: truth seeking, recognition of justice, accountability, compensation and reparation, remembrance politics and reconciliation, and constitutional and legal reform. Truth seeking is the basis for further action, as it involves documentation, and the clarification of facts based on different narratives. In some states, “Truth Commissions” have been established to find out what happened after a human rights violation (Hayner 2002). While this process may be

complicated and at times biased, the search for truth should be the basis for all subsequent action. Answering the question of “What happened?” is essential to move forward.

Acknowledging justice is a moral imperative and a commitment to societal values and norms. Once the truth has been established, the state must acknowledge its responsibility for what happened. This also helps to recognize that the investigation conducted was based on historical truth and factuality (Hasgall 2018). Accountability refers to a legal imperative. When a human rights violation occurs, precedent dictates that there must be some form of criminal prosecution (Straßner 2018). This process is often a political compromise between criminal prosecution and the reconciliation process. If a victor’s justice goes too far in prosecution, then the reconciliation process will be difficult and long. It is a difficult balance to strike, but one that is necessary for moving on and for the future.

Compensation and reparations are linked to restitution. This could be rehabilitation, such as physical and psychological support, or financial compensation for the damage caused. Then, there is the concept of satisfaction, which can be achieved in different ways. For example, an apology may be sufficient for some, but not for others. Giving property rights to land that was seized and financial compensation can also contribute to satisfaction (Vandeginste 2003).

Remembrance politics and reconciliation are about social reintegration, education, and awareness raising being prioritized (Straßner 2018). Building collective memory and avoiding collective amnesia comes at the price of a permanent process of confrontation between past and present and constant communication. It is important that an investigation of what happened is carried out and accepted by all relevant parties in order to prevent history from repeating itself. Remembrance monuments or commemoration days are good examples of this concept.

Finally, good governance requires constitutional and legal reforms. Lustration, or the removal of accused officials from office, is often a common practice in these cases (Mihre et al. 2018). The aim of these reforms is to create legal and structural guidelines to prevent the recurrence of violations. Therefore, all necessary means for prevention should be implemented within the legal framework.

While *Aufarbeitung* carries significant historical weight, its application to sport is bounded by a focus on ethics and reconciliation of systemic failure rather than moral equivalence. Unlike crisis management, *Aufarbeitung* is a victim-centric process demanding a thorough investigation as a prerequisite for resolution. It is analytically distinct from integrity systems, by emphasizing intrinsic motivation for change. This establishes a culture that prevents collective amnesia and ensures the rationale for ethical reforms is preserved despite the particularities of the sport context.

One area does not define *Aufarbeitung* in its entirety. Based on the work of Weber and Baumeister (2023) on the Catholic Church in Germany and reflecting on the literature, we propose a first sketch of a model for a holistic understanding of *Aufarbeitung* (see Figure 1).

The model reflects the six key points from the field of transitional justice and is adapted to institutional requirements.

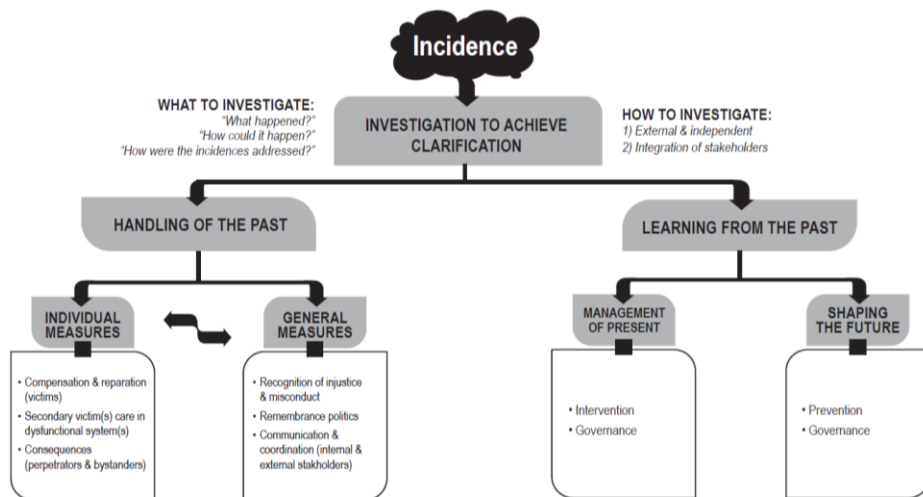


Figure 1: *Aufarbeitung* as an Integrated Approach Model

Every *Aufarbeitung* process must begin with investigation and clarification, guided by three central questions: "What happened?" focuses on gathering data and facts about incidents of institutional misconduct. "How could it happen?" examines the ex-ante conditions and circumstances that made the incidents possible or that failed to prevent them. "How were the incidents addressed?" assesses, ex post, how managers and insiders addressed the incidents, including their actions or inactions. Investigation and clarification require external support to ensure credibility and the involvement of all relevant stakeholders.

Our first attempt at the model shows that after a comprehensive and transparent investigation, an institution can develop ways to address the past through both individual and general measures. Individual measures include compensation and reparation for victims as well as consequences for perpetrators. It is essential to address the role of bystanders, those who stayed silent or looked away, and provide support for secondary victims, meaning individuals who suffer from the incidents or are deeply unsettled, particularly within the institution. General measures involve the institution's acknowledgment of injustice and misconduct, the implementation of remembrance policies, and effective communication and coordination with both internal and external stakeholders. An organization's first actions should ensure the physical and psychological well-being of victims and other stakeholders involved through individual measures before moving to image repair or general measures (Coombs and Holladay 2012).

Investigation and clarification also serve as a foundation for learning from the past to manage the present and shape the future. Without an adequate approach to handling the past, *Aufarbeitung* cannot fully succeed. Learning from the past involves defining processes for potential interventions and implementing measures for prevention. Even more critical in many cases is a fundamental change in the institution's governance, which is closely tied to its corporate culture. Effective prevention of ethical misconduct requires embedding proper conduct deeply within the governance, strategy, and culture of the institution. Figure 1 is based on findings from non-sport sciences. In the following section, we will apply our model to five cases of ethical misconduct in sport to assess its suitability and illustrate its importance and then design a final model (see Figure 2).

Aufarbeitung in Sport: A Multiple Case Study Approach

To assess the applicability of our *Aufarbeitung* model, we examined five cases of ethical misconduct in sport. We selected a diverse set of examples that reflect a wide range of contexts, victims, perpetrators, and stakeholders. This heterogeneity allowed us to explore the model's relevance and adaptability across different scenarios and evaluate its potential as a framework in sport.

Case 1—Sexual Abuse in Gymnastics

Introduction

The 2016 USA Gymnastics (USAG) sexual abuse crisis led to the conviction of Larry Nassar, who was sentenced to 40 to 125 years in prison (Sommerland and Baio 2023). The catalyst was a local newspaper's investigation into how USAG mishandled sexual abuse allegations (Kwiatkowski et al. 2016). IndyStar published an article detailing USAG's failure to report sexual abuse to local authorities, allowing coaches to continue working and assaulting children. This inspired two victims to speak out, leading to over 150 more coming forward (Evans et al. 2016). More than 250 athletes were abused by Nassar, the perpetrator, and failed by a system, USAG, with multiple bystanders, such as Michigan State University. To test our model, we focus on USAG's role as a national governing body.

Investigation to Achieve Clarification

This phase of the case is multifaceted because the initial allegations came from an investigation by a local newspaper. While the purpose of the investigation was to expose USAG's corrupt system, it led to the conviction of a criminal and provided peace to many of the system's victims. The original investigation found that USAG failed to report sexual abuse allegations by its athletes to the authorities. As a result, several coaches remained active and continued to torment young athletes. The IndyStar investigation led to victims speaking out about Larry Nassar. As

high-profile athletes spoke up about their experiences, authorities were forced to act. However, a U.S. Department of Justice investigation (Office of the Inspector General 2021) found that USAG knew about the abuse but did not report it and if they did, they tried to cover up or colluded with FBI agents so that the crisis was not made public.

USAG had a corrupt system for dealing with sexual harassment and abuse. This system allowed coaches, doctors, and staff to systematically abuse hundreds of young athletes for years. Officials were more concerned about their reputation than athletes' safety. The incidents were not properly addressed and were being purposefully hidden. The crisis came to light because of a newspaper investigation and the courage of the victims to speak out and seek justice.

Handling of the Past

Sexual abuse cases often show a clearer distinction between victims and perpetrators compared to other ethical misconducts. In sport, however, perpetrators can involve multiple individuals, as shown in this case. It took years for USAG and the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) to acknowledge or apologize for the abuse (Lenthang 2021). Victims pursued individual measures through lawsuits, receiving monetary compensation, but they carried the burden of the case. Without their bravery to speak up, the authorities would likely not have acted.

This pressure led to the resignation of USAG's former president in 2017 with a one-million-dollar severance (Sommerland and Baio 2023) and no criminal charges. By January 2018, USAG board members resigned under USOPC threats to revoke the federation's recognition. Despite these actions, no bystander faced prosecution or jail. USAG's crisis management was far from ideal, marked by obstruction of justice and deceit. While claiming to prioritize athletes' welfare, its actions proved otherwise. Forced resignations revealed a lack of accountability. USAG lost major sponsors (Bieler 2017) and filed for bankruptcy before settling with its victims.

Learning from the Past

Despite internal changes at USAG, victims remain dissatisfied with the organization's efforts. While USAG seeks to move forward, some victims have called for a federal investigation into USAG, USOPC, and the FBI. The process of *Aufarbeitung* appears incomplete, as past issues remain unresolved, and survivors still question how these events were allowed to happen. As Alexandra Raisman testified before the U.S. Senate (C-SPAN 2021), "We cannot believe there is a safer future for children unless we fully understand every single thing that happened."

Though USAG continues its role in the sport system, its future is uncertain if victims feel unanswered and preventive measures seem insincere. Trust between athletes and the organization has been severely damaged, requiring years and major reforms to be rebuilt.

While Nassar is in prison, former president Steve Penny and the FBI agents who mishandled the case remain free.

Case 2–Corruption in Biathlon

Introduction

Anders Besseberg served as president of the International Biathlon Union (IBU) for 25 years (1993–2018). Accused of several ethical misconducts, he resigned, prompting an external investigation (Gillen 2021). The IBU’s External Review Commission (ERC) conducted a two-year inquiry into allegations of doping, fraud, and corruption (Biathlon Integrity Union 2021). We focus solely on the corruption charges. The investigation led to the creation of the Biathlon Integrity Union (BIU) to ensure ethical issues in the sport are handled independently (International Biathlon Union, n.d.). During a Norwegian trial, evidence of Besseberg accepting gifts in exchange for favors resulted in his conviction and a three-year, one-month prison sentence for corruption (Daffunchio 2024). Accusations against Besseberg were compelling enough for the international federation to initiate an external investigation.

Investigation to Achieve Clarification

The ERC conducted an independent investigation concluding that Besseberg violated IBU rules via corruption, among other practices (Gillen 2021). He was accused of protecting Russian interests and accepting expensive gifts such as watches, hunting trips, and sexual favors in exchange for loyalty (Daffunchio 2024). The investigation provided sufficient evidence for conviction in Norway, his country of birth, in which he could be prosecuted as an individual for aggravated corruption.

Handling of the Past

When the victims are an organization and its stakeholders rather than an individual, individual measures such as compensation and reparation take a different form. In this case, the IBU suffered reputational damage due to its leader’s actions, prompting the organization to act to ensure its continuity. The investigation’s evidence and transparency led to Besseberg’s conviction (“IBU Corruption: Besseberg Sentenced to Three Years” 2024). In terms of general measures, the IBU was transparent about recognizing the misconduct and welcoming the results of the investigations, from both Norway and Austria, the federation’s headquarters. Current IBU president, Olle Dahlin, stated that during the investigation, the organization implemented significant internal reforms to address governance issues (Gillen 2021). These measures reflect care for the organization’s systems and stakeholders, aligning with the intervention stage of our *Aufarbeitung* model.

Learning from the Past

This case stands out because the *Aufarbeitung* process led to the creation of the BIU to prevent future misconduct. Before the investigation concluded, the IBU proactively reformed its governance. In 2019, it adopted a new constitution, introducing an integrity code and establishing the BIU to investigate and regulate ethical compliance (International Biathlon Union, n.d.). The creation and implementation of the BIU can be considered both intervention and prevention. The implementation of the BIU is part of the intervention and management of the present, but the functioning of the unit serves as prevention and contributes to the shaping of the future. It investigates ethical violations and ensures compliance with the World Anti-Doping Code and IBU rules (International Biathlon Union, n.d.). These measures exemplify a successful *Aufarbeitung*, showing how the IBU turned a crisis into a framework for ethical reform and future prevention.

Case 3–Financial Mismanagement in Olympic Boxing

Introduction

The International Boxing Association (IBA), formerly AIBA, lost recognition from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 2019 due to issues in governance, ethics, financial management, and refereeing (International Olympic Committee 2019). The IOC detailed how the IBA had made efforts to address its problems but failed to meet the standards required to retain IOC recognition, jeopardizing boxing's place in the Olympics (International Olympic Committee 2019). We will focus on the financial mismanagement aspects of this incident.

The debt, of approximately \$16 million (Owen 2019), was attributed to poor management under former President CK Wu. A key concern for the IOC was that funds provided to the IBA would be used to repay the debt instead of fostering the development of boxing and its athletes as stipulated by the Olympic Charter (International Olympic Committee 2019). By 2021, the IBA had not made sufficient progress, and the IOC Executive Board outlined specific tasks to be completed by 2023 (International Olympic Committee 2023). IBA's contradictory actions and lack of compliance hindered its reinstatement, unwilling to do *Aufarbeitung*. To help boxing stay in the Olympics, the IOC, an international governing body, had to intervene.

Investigation to Achieve Clarification

The investigation by the IOC revealed that two Swiss banks had closed IBA's accounts, and no other financial institution in Switzerland would open accounts for the association. Consequently, IBA relied on a Serbian bank linked to entities and individuals under U.S. sanctions for weapons of mass destruction (International Olympic Committee 2019). Current

IBA President Umar Kremlev, then Secretary General of the Russian Boxing Federation, claimed he could personally cover the debt, but it was doubtful that he had sufficient funds (Owen 2019). With \$16 million in debt, transparency regarding the source of the funds became a priority.

In February 2023, the IOC appointed Ernst & Young (EY) to evaluate IBA's finances since 2021. Initially cooperative, IBA later imposed a non-disclosure agreement restricting EY from sharing findings with the IOC. EY had to rely on publicly available data to complete its assessment (International Olympic Committee 2023). Despite settling some debt, IBA's financial stability remained unclear. As of 2023, IBA is the only federation expelled from the Olympic Movement (Palmer 2023). The investigation to achieve clarification included IOC reports and correspondence detailing IBA's breaches of the Olympic Charter. Although given a clear roadmap for reinstatement, IBA did not adhere to the IOC's requirements (International Olympic Committee 2023).

Handling of the Past

The IOC handled the past primarily through reports, correspondence, and investigations outlining the origins and extent of IBA's debt and attempts to resolve it. In this case, Olympic boxing and its athletes are the primary victims, and the IOC a secondary victim. IBA is the perpetrator. As individual measures, the IOC had to assign other bodies to organize qualifying events and Olympic competitions, ensuring athletes can still compete despite IBA's expulsion. However, the expulsion puts boxing's Olympic future at risk, potentially affecting athletes worldwide. IBA's lack of accountability complicates broader measures. It has criticized the IOC's actions and the organization of qualifying events since losing its role ("IBA President Demands Thomas Bach Resignation" 2024). Despite its previous open communication with the IOC, IBA has shifted to a defiant stance, refusing to address known issues. Unwillingness to change impedes efforts to resolve the situation.

Learning from the Past

While the IBA acknowledged its challenges, it has only made superficial changes to its governance structures that do not meet IOC standards. This reluctance has led the IOC to encourage National Olympic Committees to sever ties with IBA and explore alternative international bodies to represent boxing in the Olympic system (Muñana 2024). Without a commitment to reform, the Aufarbeitung process is ineffective, as there is no genuine willingness to change. Boxing's future in the Olympics remains uncertain, leaving athletes in limbo while their governing body fails to take meaningful action. For Aufarbeitung to succeed, there must be a willingness to implement changes that benefit all stakeholders.

Case 4–Match-fixing in Tennis

Introduction

Grigor Sargsyan, an Armenian citizen based in Belgium known as the “Maestro,” led a match-fixing ring involving 181 tennis players and more than 375 matches (Matthews 2023). Arrested in 2018 after a two-year investigation (Sieff 2023a), Sargsyan, with no tennis background, made millions by fixing games and points. This scheme paid athletes more than tournament wins and allowed them to continue competing professionally. Players outside the Top 100 often struggle financially, spending more than they earn to sustain their careers (Sieff 2023b).

To address integrity concerns, the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) focuses on education, prevention, investigation, and prosecution (ITIA, n.d.). Tennis, being particularly vulnerable to match-fixing, needed measures to control the issue and protect its reputation (Sieff 2023a). Its investigation provided crucial leads to Belgian police, stalled in their inquiry into a betting ring. This collaboration led to Sargsyan’s arrest and a five-year prison sentence in Belgium (Sieff 2023a). While many players were suspended, none faced criminal charges. The ITIA concentrated on player sanctions rather than legal action against Sargsyan. This case stands out because of its external perpetrator.

Investigation to Achieve Clarification

Tennis’s vulnerability to match-fixing stems from spot fixing, where players manipulate specific points or games without throwing entire matches (Rascoe 2023). The investigation to achieve clarification involved two parties. Inside the tennis tour, a player’s phone was seized to reveal Sargsyan’s identity and location. Externally, the police worked with tennis authorities, resulting in Sargsyan’s arrest and 181 player suspensions (Matthews 2023). Although the investigation answered what happened and who was involved, it failed to address how it could happen. With 60,000 professional matches played annually, lower-ranked players struggle financially, earning barely enough to cover costs (Rascoe 2023). The reasons why 181 athletes were swayed and wanted more money to cover their tournament costs leave a significant gap in the Aufarbeitung process.

Handling of the Past

Unaffiliated with tennis, Sargsyan exploited the sport for financial gain. While he was jailed and players were sanctioned, clean athletes received little support. The primary victims, tennis organizations like the ITF, ATP, WTA, and Grand Slams, faced reputational damage and had to implement measures to prevent future vulnerabilities. Athletes are both perpetrators and victims. While they participated in unethical practices that harmed the organizations, it could be argued that they felt the need to participate in illegal activity

because the organizations do not have a sustainable model that allows them to earn money to keep participating in their tournaments.

The handling of the past was largely addressed through the investigation's outcomes. Sargsyan was jailed, and the corrupted athletes were sanctioned, though none faced criminal charges. Tennis organizations, as the primary victims, achieved closure through the investigation but were left with significant challenges to rebuild their reputation and implement safeguards against future match-fixing. The issue has not been widely communicated or remembered, likely to protect the organizations' prize-money system. Instead of addressing the systemic flaws that allowed such extensive corruption, the focus was placed on moving past the crisis rather than understanding its causes.

Learning from the Past

This incident also led to the creation of an independent integrity body. The Tennis Integrity Unit (TIU), formed in 2008, and became the ITIA, an independent body established in 2021 by all affected parties (ITF, ATP, WTA, and the Grand Slams) to oversee anti-corruption and anti-doping programs and emphasize prevention through education (ITIA, n.d.). Its initiatives include the Tennis Anti-Corruption Program (TACP) and the Tennis Anti-Doping Program (TADP), promoting ethical conduct among players, coaches, and officials.

While the investigation, sanctions, and institutional reforms mark progress, a critical aspect of *Aufarbeitung* was overlooked: understanding why Sargsyan's ring operated on such a scale. Journalistic accounts highlight systemic flaws in athlete remuneration, yet organizations have neither acknowledged nor fully reformed their structures to address these vulnerabilities. This neglect leaves tennis exposed to similar issues. Without addressing the root causes, history is likely to repeat itself, underscoring the incomplete nature of this *Aufarbeitung* process.

Case 5— The World Anti-Doping Agency Fights Doping with Education

Introduction

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) was established in 1999 in response to a major doping crisis (World Anti-Doping Agency, n.d.) and positioned itself as an international organization, composed of sport-governing bodies and governments, promoting health and integrity with a focus on punishing doped athletes. Its existence supported anti-doping efforts in sport, but did not sufficiently address why athletes take drugs. WADA is refocusing its strategy on education (World Anti-Doping Agency 2021a) to break the culture that has developed and allowed athletes and those around them to accept doping as normal. This comes twenty-two years after WADA was founded and is the result of recognizing that part of the problem stems from a lack of education.

Since its inception, WADA has been rocked by crises ranging from doping among elite athletes to state-sponsored doping. Despite WADA's testing program, athletes continue to use performance-enhancing drugs because the low detection rate and sanctions are not enough of a deterrent. WADA's Code (World Anti-Doping Agency 2021b) states that education programs should raise awareness, provide accurate information, and develop decision-making skills to prevent Anti-Doping Rule Violations (ADRVs) and Code violations. Signatories must develop and justify education plans, which must be made available to other signatories upon request. The International Standard for Education (ISE) (World Anti-Doping Agency 2021a, 4) establishes education as part of WADA's prevention strategy to "promote behavior in line with the values of clean sport and to help prevent athletes and other persons from doping." WADA emphasizes that the basis of this strategy is that the athlete's first contact with anti-doping should be through education and not through testing.

Investigation to Reach Clarification

In the beginning, WADA only focused on the "What happened?" question. The "How could it happen?" remained unanswered. By later examining their own strategy and the question "How were these incidents addressed?", it got a deeper understanding of the situation and helped lay the groundwork for *Aufarbeitung*. WADA was created in response to a crisis and did not have a fully thought-out strategy from the outset. The doping situation in sport was and is more complex than originally thought. WADA has evolved over the past twenty-two years to try and prevent doping, placing more emphasis on education. There was no external investigation nor was the stakeholder "athlete" involved; rather, WADA did an internal examination of the three questions, and now believes that anti-doping education should come before testing.

Handling of the Past

While noting that the victim in this scenario is WADA, since this crisis is internal, there is no need for compensation; rather, there is a need to redirect core institutional strategies, as reflected in the changes made to its Code. The lack of knowledge about why athletes dope and the role of their environment were factors that distanced them from achieving their goals of clean sport. Secondary victims in this case are the athletes, and they benefit from the new focus on educational systems put in place by WADA. Perpetrators or bystanders, which could include athletes, have been dealt with by bans from sport, disqualification from competition, or other sanctions.

General measures ensure that WADA recognizes its mistakes and takes action to correct them. While there is no official statement claiming that WADA recognizes that its initial strategy failed, it has taken action to repair or improve its action plan. WADA introduced its ISE in 2021, which solidifies education as a pillar strategy to prevent doping, which was

communicated to all signatories and stakeholders in various ways, such as online and conferences. Since there is no single statement in which WADA states that its initial approach was not successful, there is no possibility for remembrance politics. WADA does acknowledge past high-profile cases and how the organization is taking steps to prevent them from happening again.

Learning from the Past

For the management of the present, it can be argued that since 2019, WADA has been trying to change the narrative on doping by focusing on education. It approved the ISE in 2019, and the 2021 Code Implementation Support Program Guidelines for the ISE were published in 2020 (World Anti-Doping Agency 2020). This document supports the main ISE strategy. WADA tells anti-doping organizations how to implement educational programs in their regions. The educational programs must focus on values-based education, awareness, information, and anti-doping education (World Anti-Doping Agency 2020). This intervention by WADA identifies the root of the problem and how it has been dealt with in the past, allowing the organization to correct its ways and combat doping with more specific measures, such as structured educational programs.

The development and implementation of these educational programs, now required by WADA, is the first step in shaping the future. The nature of these programs is to “prevent unintentional doping” (World Anti-Doping Agency 2020, 2). While the results of this intervention will be seen in the future, we can conclude that WADA demonstrated significant progress toward the process of *Aufarbeitung* by changing strategies in hopes of preventing athletes from doping.

Discussion

Our developed model (Figure 1) has proven applicable across five highly diverse cases, highlighting its robustness and adaptability. When applied to cases of ethical misconduct in sport, the model revealed that in certain instances, processes of *Aufarbeitung* failed to achieve their intended outcomes, instead only addressing the handling of the past without deeper resolution and learning from the past. There were cases demonstrating that interventions had occurred, including preventive measures. By applying the model, we found a critical shortfall in adequately compensating victims and secondary victims through individual measures. Often, the central focus was to save the reputation of the federation. The findings emphasize a significant gap in remembrance politics within the context of ethical misconduct in sport, pointing to the need for more systematic and institutionalized approaches to historical accountability and victim acknowledgment. In this discussion, we will reshape the initial model (Figure 1) from above with learnings from the five case studies (Figure 2).

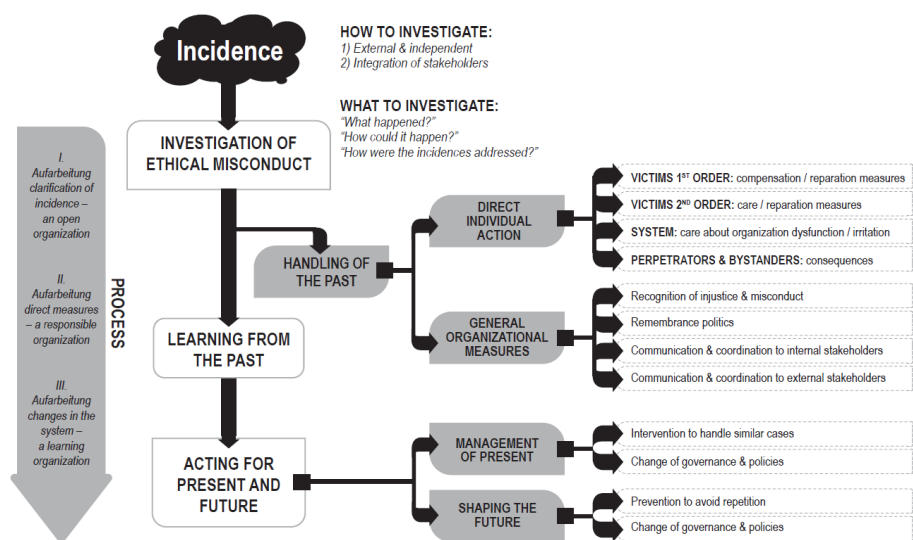


Figure 2: Sport Aufarbeitung Model as a Process

Overall, the culture of remembrance politics in sport is underdeveloped. When organizations prioritize the protection of their own interests, demonstrate minimal commitment to justice, and focus primarily on preventing reputational damage, such an approach is too short-sighted. An authentic and robust culture of remembrance politics serves as a critical mechanism for preventing similar ethical failures in the future. Frequent changes in personnel often lead to a loss of institutional memory, including an understanding of past ethical misconduct and the rationale for implementing certain policies or governance systems. As a result, remembrance politics is essential within the framework of shaping the future, serving as a foundation for changed governance practices and policies that promote sustainable ethical standards.

In the context of sport, a major challenge is the complexity and multiplicity of first- and second-order victims, which can include both individuals and organizations. This complexity is exacerbated by cases where a victim may also be a perpetrator in another context. For example, an athlete who dopes acts as a perpetrator but can also be considered a victim, influenced by the high-performance sport system and its environment. Similarly, an organization with poor governance that fails to actively protect its athletes may suffer reputational damage, positioning the organization itself as a collective victim. Identifying victims becomes even more challenging in cases involving multiple stakeholders, where responsibilities and impacts are diffused, requiring nuanced approaches to determining accountability and support.

In all the cases observed (see Table 2), we assessed the different parts of the Aufarbeitung process. Inadequacies found were primarily due to board and senior management, whose

intrinsic motivation to address all issues of *Aufarbeitung* thoroughly appears to be limited. Organizations are often implicated as either perpetrators or victims; hence, the resulting processes tend to be brief and one-sided. To address this, reconciliation efforts should be led by independent and external entities to ensure impartiality and comprehensiveness.

The success of the proposed *Aufarbeitung* model is evaluated via an organization's progression through the various phases of the framework. Initial success metrics focus on the quality of the investigation, specifically its independence and active integration of all relevant stakeholders. Regarding the handling of the past, success is measured by the adequacy of direct individual action, including care for first- and second-order victims. Appropriate implementation requires general organizational measures such as a formal recognition of injustice and the establishment of remembrance politics to prevent collective amnesia. In the long term, effectiveness is shown by systematic reforms and a commitment to integrity deeply embedded in governance and organizational culture. Success in *Aufarbeitung* moves beyond image repair to address the root causes of misconduct.

Table 2: Five Case Studies and Their Shortcomings in *Aufarbeitung*

	<i>Sexual Abuse Gymnastics</i>	<i>Corruption Biathlon</i>	<i>Financial Mismanagement Boxing</i>	<i>Match-Fixing Tennis</i>	<i>Anti-Doping WADA</i>
<i>Investigation</i>	+	++	0	+	–
<i>Direct individual action</i>	0	++	—	0	–
<i>General organizational measures</i>	+	+	–	0	+
<i>Management of present</i>	+	++	–	0	0
<i>Shaping the future</i>	0	+++	—	0	++

Note: +++ | ++ | + | 0 | – | — | — (+ means positive and – means negative).

While our model offers a holistic framework for addressing ethical misconduct through *Aufarbeitung*, its implementation in sport contexts faces structural and political hurdles. *Aufarbeitung* is a lengthy process that requires time and resources. Organizations often operate under resource constraints leading them to prioritize a quick handling of crises to maintain operations, rather than committing to thorough and long-term investigations. Furthermore, political and institutional resistance can stall progress. Because *Aufarbeitung* is a top-level decision, internal dilemmas arise when leaders lack intrinsic motivation to

adequately address the past. This resistance is often linked to the desire and need for reputational repair. Organizations must navigate a political compromise inherent in transitional justice, balancing the need for criminal prosecution with the broader goal of reconciliation and institutional change. For *Aufarbeitung* to succeed, sport organizations must move beyond superficial reforms to ensure a genuine commitment is embedded within their organizational culture and governance structures.

Our model shows that actions such as compensation, care, and punitive measures are responsibilities that do not necessarily require autonomy from external autonomous investigators. Instead, these actions need to be carried out by the organization itself, often in close cooperation with public authorities, especially in cases involving criminal offenses. Overall, we analyzed five distinct cases, each emphasizing a different aspect of the *Aufarbeitung* process. Except for the case of the IBU and WADA, none of the cases demonstrated a truly effective approach to addressing past issues.

Conclusion

This article argues that the effective management of ethical misconduct in sport requires a comprehensive process of *Aufarbeitung*. Both academic discourse and institutional practice have largely focused on prevention and intervention, often neglecting the critical importance of addressing past incidents in a systematic and meaningful way. Such an approach must encompass both general and individual measures and actively involve all relevant parties, victims, secondary victims, bystanders, perpetrators, and other stakeholders.

The sport *Aufarbeitung* model we propose offers a foundation for a more holistic strategy to confront ethical misconduct in sport. However, its successful application depends on adapting objectives and methods to the specific institutional context and embedding them within the organization's culture, strategic priorities, and governance structures. With this contribution, we aim to broaden the perspective on ethical misconduct and provide impetus for further research into the role of *Aufarbeitung* in sport. We see our model as a potential starting point for developing more nuanced and effective crisis management approaches. Further research encourages the development of institutional guidelines for the practical application of the sport *Aufarbeitung* process with evidentiary steps and success metrics.

In conclusion, ethical misconduct cannot be adequately addressed through compliance mechanisms or good governance principles alone. A genuine commitment to *Aufarbeitung* embedded in organizational culture and inclusive of all stakeholders is essential. Only by rigorously examining and responding to past failures can we build a credible and sustainable foundation for future integrity in sport. To deal with the future, one must learn from the past.

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Informed Consent

The authors declare that informed consent was not required as there were no human participants involved.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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