

A FUTURE IN  
**SPORT LEADERSHIP  
& MANAGEMENT**







## WHAT IS SPORT LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT?

Sport has the power to connect people, drive change and shape futures. Whether through global events, community programmes, or everyday participation, sport plays a vital role in supporting wellbeing, building identity and strengthening communities.

The business of sport never stands still. Participation trends are shifting. Digital tools are transforming fan and athlete experiences. Sustainability pressures and changing expectations are reshaping how sport is delivered and consumed. Globally and locally, sport is evolving, and leaders are expected to honour diverse voices, build community trust and lead with integrity. There is an increasing value placed on inclusion, ethical leadership, and flexible, accessible models of participation.

Sport generates not just economic capital but also social and cultural value. Those who pursue a career in sport leadership and management are trusted to recognise and activate that potential. In Aotearoa New Zealand, Sport NZ Ihi Aotearoa is committed to “upholding the mana of Te Tiriti o Waitangi”, a

call to action for sport leadership to centre equity, partnership and Māori perspectives in their work.

Sport leadership and management is vital to the future of the sport sector. Knowledge and skills are needed to lead people, manage organisations, and make thoughtful, future-focused decisions. From sponsorship and strategy to governance, event management and digital marketing, you will create opportunities to contribute to solving problems, creating impact and ensuring the significance of sport both locally and globally, continues to develop.

Are you interested in helping shape the future of sport and recreation? Would you enjoy leading initiatives that grow participation, strengthen club culture, or make sport more inclusive and accessible? Maybe you're passionate about athlete development, event delivery, or using digital media to share stories that reflect diverse voices in sport. If so, sport leadership and management may be the career focus for you.

## OUTLOOK AND TRENDS

**Investment remains strong** – Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa is prioritising participation and equity, while High Performance Sport NZ has committed \$162.8 million over four years in preparation for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Sport leaders and managers need to navigate funding pressures and opportunities, embrace digital engagement, and ensure sport remains accessible, resilient and impactful for all New Zealanders.

**Digital engagement** – With over 80% of New Zealanders on social media, digital engagement is essential for sponsorship, athlete branding and fan engagement. Streaming platforms have boosted access to non-mainstream sports, creating new commercial and community opportunities as traditional TV declines and fans engage through content and storytelling.

**Climate change and sustainability** – Climate change is already affecting sport in Aotearoa New Zealand, with extreme weather disrupting games. In response, organisations are focusing on sustainability in facilities, events and athlete preparation to keep the sector resilient amid environmental challenges.

**Diversity and inclusion in sport** – There is a focus on prioritising greater inclusion for women, young people, culturally diverse communities, and disabled athletes, with targeted investment in distinctive programmes and pathways.

**Indigenous worldviews** – In Aotearoa New Zealand there is a growing commitment by sport and recreation organisations to respect, reflect and uplift Māori and Pacific participants, members and whānau. Te Ao Māori and Mātauranga (Māori knowledge) perspectives are being embedded in sport teams, clubs and organisations, ensuring recognition and honour of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

**Informal participation** – More New Zealanders are choosing flexible, social, and low-cost ways to stay active, shifting away from traditional competitive sport. Sport organisations are adapting and offering affordable, inclusive opportunities that keep participation growing across all demographics.

**Wellbeing and sport** – As sport becomes more integrated into health strategies, the sector must offer accessible, engaging opportunities that support individual and community wellbeing. Community-led programmes can help people stay active, reduce stress and build social connections.

**Major events and legacy** – Major events drive economic impact, social change and global visibility – like the \$109.5m benefit from the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023. Aotearoa is now leveraging Brisbane 2032 to attract events that boost participation, infrastructure and community engagement.

## WORK SETTINGS

Sport leadership and management graduates typically find careers in three key sectors: Government, non-profit and commercial.

**Government:** Provides funding and governance. Sets long-term sport strategies, ensuring sport remains accessible, equitable and impactful. Graduates contribute to sport policy, funding allocation, infrastructure planning, school and community sport initiatives. Includes Sport NZ Ihi Aotearoa, High Performance Sport NZ, local councils, government agencies, iwi organisations and schools (sport coordinators/directors).

**Non-profit:** Focuses on participation, athlete pathways and grassroots development. Graduates work with national and regional sporting organisations, local clubs and sport trusts to support coaching, leadership development and community programmes. Examples include Netball NZ, Waka Ama Aotearoa NZ (national), Counties-Manukau Rugby Football Union, Harbour Basketball (regional), local clubs, Sport Auckland, Sport Waitakere (sport trusts), and community recreational organisations.

**Commercial:** Sport meets business through sponsorship, fan engagement, digital media and major event operations. Graduates work with professional teams, leagues, event organisations and media agencies to ensure sport remains financially sustainable, marketable and globally connected. Includes professional teams and leagues, such as New Zealand Breakers and New Zealand Warriors, major event organisations, sponsorship agencies and sports media.

## CAREER ROLE EXAMPLES

**ENTRY LEVEL: Sponsorship coordinator or commercial partnerships assistant** – help activate sponsorships, manage partner assets, support matchday delivery, track contract obligations, assist with pitches and reports.

**WITH EXPERIENCE: Sponsorship manager, commercial partnerships lead, or head of corporate partnerships** – develop major brand relationships, negotiate deals, lead activation strategy, and drive commercial growth.

**ENTRY LEVEL: Community sport coordinator or inclusion and diversity officer** – support delivery of inclusive programmes, engage with diverse communities, organise local events, collaborate with schools and clubs, and help increase participation among underrepresented groups.

**WITH EXPERIENCE: Sport development manager, inclusion and participation manager, or head of community sport** – lead strategic initiatives to grow community engagement, design inclusive policies and programmes, build partnerships across the sector, and advocate for equity and access in sport.

**ENTRY LEVEL: Marketing officer, social media coordinator, digital content producer** – support day-to-day content creation, schedule posts, capture behind-the-scenes moments, assist with promotions.

**WITH EXPERIENCE:** Digital media manager, fan engagement lead, or marketing manager – lead content strategy, use data and insights to understand audience behaviour, shape brand messaging, and design campaigns that deepen fan connection and grow engagement.

**ENTRY LEVEL:** Event coordinator or game day operations assistant – set up venues, coordinate run sheets, assist with logistics, manage volunteer teams, ensuring everything from signage to crowd flow runs smoothly on game day.

**WITH EXPERIENCE:** Event manager, fan experience lead, or director of events – oversee event strategy, design memorable fan activations, lead cross-functional teams and deliver large-scale experiences that build connection and drive attendance.

## SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

- Analyse challenges, make informed decisions, and develop solutions that enhance sport management, sponsorship and community engagement.
- Work effectively across interdisciplinary teams, managing relationships with athletes, coaches, corporate partners and stakeholders across the spectrum from grassroots to high-performance settings.
- Confident in written, verbal, and digital communication, engaging diverse audiences through social media, fan engagement strategies, sponsorship activations and public relations.
- Understanding of sport law, governance structures, and ethical leadership, ensuring compliance, fair play, and inclusivity in sport organisations and events.
- Knowledge of sponsorship, event planning, sport marketing and commercialisation to ensure financial sustainability and growth within the sport industry.
- Ability to use sport analytics, fan engagement metrics, and digital content strategies, leveraging insights to grow audiences and optimise performance.
- Ability to interpret and evaluate sport and recreation research, applying evidence-based insights to inform decision-making, strategy development and best practice across leadership, participation and performance contexts.

## PERSONAL QUALITIES

- Personable and a great communicator
- Inclusive leadership abilities
- Self-motivated and focused
- Good planner and organiser
- Able to reflect, think and act professionally
- Culturally competent

## SALARY GUIDE

Salaries vary based on experience, organisation and location. Many roles require flexible hours due to game schedules, tournaments and major events. Contract and seasonal work are common, particularly in events, community sport and athlete development.

	Salary (per year)
Graduate	\$45,000-\$65,000 (entry-level)
After 5 years	\$70,000-\$110,000 (mid-career roles)
Senior sport leadership roles	\$100,000+

Additional benefits, eg KiwiSaver, medical insurance, travel opportunities and industry perks, vary depending on the employer.

This information was accurate at the time of publication (mid 2025) and should only be used as a guideline.

Keep up to date with salary data by visiting websites, including:

**Careers NZ**  
[careers.govt.nz/jobs-database/](https://careers.govt.nz/jobs-database/)

**Sport NZ Ihi Aotearoa**  
[sportnz.org.nz](https://sportnz.org.nz)

## THE AUT APPROACH

Work integrated learning fosters creativity, leadership and hands-on expertise and culminates in part-time placements in Year 3 in national sporting bodies, professional teams, community clubs and high-performance centres.

Coupled with projects on programme delivery trends and innovative sport development, this applied learning experience equips students with leadership, management and strategic insight.

The Youth Development and Coaching minor fits well with this major, focusing on an applied understanding of the role sport organisations and coaches play in creating quality sporting experiences.

## FURTHER STUDY OPTIONS

Postgraduate certificate, diploma, master’s and PhD study is available. Postgraduate coursework focuses on advanced leadership and management, sport marketing, sport development and sport events. Research includes sports leadership, digital media, sport governance, sports and event tourism, interorganisational relationships and event leveraging and legacies.





## ANDREW TARA

Sport Integrity Commission Te Kahu Raunui – Cultural Lead  
Bachelor of Sport and Recreation in Sport Management\*

"I really believe in the integrity of sport and recreation and the benefits for tamariki, rangatahi, whānau and communities.

The Sport Integrity Commission Te Kahu Raunui was established 10 months ago to protect the integrity of sport and recreation. I've been in my role since December 2024.

As cultural lead I engage with Pacific and Māori communities to ensure services we deliver are culturally appropriate for those communities. My role is to ensure our services and staff are culturally confident and capable when we deliver services to them. It's been exciting setting up something new, ensuring things are done correctly and are engaging.

I did my co-op at New Zealand Rugby League, then got a part-time contract there for a little while after I graduated. I was behind the scenes, observing operations and management and rubbing shoulders with some of the world's best league players.

I moved to a full-time role at Water Safety New Zealand, a regional learn to swim and survive programme for South Auckland low decile schools. Then I went to Sport Auckland where I was project managing a region-wide swim programme. After that I did the same role at Aktive – Auckland Sport and Recreation. Over this time, I was building project management skills and gaining great insights into the uniqueness of different community sport and recreation areas.

A beautiful thing about sport is that it draws together so many different communities – it doesn't really matter about your background. It unites us globally too – look at the Olympics, the World Cups etc. In 2017 I moved to New Zealand Cricket and then to the Sport Integrity Commission."

\*Now the Bachelor of Sport, Exercise and Health in Sport Leadership and Management



## SOPHIE PARKER

New Zealand Major Events Advisor, Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment (MBIE)

Bachelor of Sport and Recreation in Management and Physical Activity and Nutrition\*/Master of Business with Honours (specialising in Sport Leadership and Management)

"After graduation I was accepted onto Sport New Zealand's Graduate Programme – a unique opportunity that included placements with Wellington City Council and New Zealand Cricket. These two years provided a thorough understanding of the sector and the political landscape of sport in New Zealand. I then got a contract with Aktive (Auckland Sport & Recreation), and I'm now with MBIE.

As an MBIE advisor I oversee a portfolio of arts, culture and sports events, managing investments from expression of interest to assessing applications, advising ministers and producing post-event reporting. I work closely with stakeholders to deliver strategic outcomes for government through leverage and legacy programmes.

This includes reviewing financials and negotiating legal agreements – skills I was introduced to through my study. The degree delivers skills and knowledge that are applicable day to day, such as leadership, management, marketing, facilities and events courses.

I really enjoy how no two days are the same! I am constantly working on different projects with awesome people. I have supported events including Women's Rugby World Cup 2021, the VinFast IRONMAN 70.3 World Championships 2024 and the New Zealand Open 2025.

New Zealand is small, and our sector is even smaller so your network is everything! Don't be afraid to approach people and ask for 30 minutes of their time, then make the most of the opportunity to ask about themselves, their experiences, and advice for a new graduate."

\*Now the Bachelor of Sport, Exercise and Health with majors in Sport Leadership and Management, and Health and Physical Education

## USEFUL WEBSITES

### **Sport NZ Ihi Aotearoa**

[sportnz.org.nz](http://sportnz.org.nz)

### **Sport Integrity Commission Te Kahu Raunui**

[sportintegrity.nz](http://sportintegrity.nz)

### **AKTIVE**

[aktive.org.nz](http://aktive.org.nz)

### **High Performance Sport NZ**

[hpsnz.org.nz/about-hpsnz/about-us](http://hpsnz.org.nz/about-hpsnz/about-us)

### **Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand (SMAANZ)**

[smaanz.org](http://smaanz.org)

### **AUT Sports Performance Research Institute New Zealand (SPRINZ)**

[sprinz.aut.ac.nz/areas-of-expertise](http://sprinz.aut.ac.nz/areas-of-expertise)


## FURTHER INFORMATION

For the most up-to-date sport leadership and management information visit our website:  
[aut.ac.nz/sportrecreation](http://aut.ac.nz/sportrecreation)

For other Future Career Sheets visit:  
[aut.ac.nz/careersheets](http://aut.ac.nz/careersheets)

### **EMPLOYABILITY & CAREERS**

For employability and career support, AUT students can book an appointment through  
[elab.aut.ac.nz/](http://elab.aut.ac.nz/)

 [@AUTEmployabilityandCareers](#)

### **FUTURE STUDENTS**

Contact the Future Student Advisory team for more information: [aut.ac.nz/enquire](http://aut.ac.nz/enquire)

[futurestudents@aut.ac.nz](mailto:futurestudents@aut.ac.nz)

 [@FutureStudentsofAUT](#)

### **CURRENT AUT STUDENTS**

Contact the Student Hub Advisors team for more information: 0800 AUT UNI (0800 288 864)

[aut.ac.nz/enquire](http://aut.ac.nz/enquire) | [studenthub@aut.ac.nz](mailto:studenthub@aut.ac.nz)

### **NORTH CAMPUS**

90 Akoranga Drive, Northcote, Auckland

### **SOUTH CAMPUS**

640 Great South Road, Manukau, Auckland

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