In 2019, millions of civilians across the world engaged in “climate strikes” (Kaplan et al., 2019), raising collective concerns and demanding immediate and accountable actions from governments and corporations to tackle the looming existential crisis (UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2018). Building upon the growing research of sport and climate change as well as literature in Indigenous Environmental Studies, this conceptual paper argues for a recontextualization of the topic with a framework that foregrounds historical accountability and Indigenous worldviews.

While many sport activities require appropriate climate conditions, sport’s entanglement with climate change manifests in two other major ways. First, sport events, products, and activities create considerable carbon emission (Lenskyj, 1998; Pfahl, 2015). Second, thanks to its enormous appeal, sport can be used by fossil fuel industry to “greenwash” (Johnson & Ali, 2017; Miller, 2017) but also is a sector that holds potential to inspire and engage a wide range of stakeholders on climate and environmental issues (United Nations, 2018). Still small in numbers, research that connects sports with climate change has grown in recent years (Mallen, 2017; Trendafilova & McCullough, 2018). Some studies examined the mainstream sustainability practices taken by sport organizations (e.g., Johnson & Ali, 2018; Sartore-Baldwin & McCullough, 2018; Trendafilova, Babiak, & Heinze, 2013). Some others critiqued (Millington et al., 2016; Wilson, 2012) the tendency for economic incentive to prevail when environmental measures are taken in sport industry. Still others focused on the direct impact of climate change on sport organizations and proposed temporary solutions (e.g., Dingle & Stewart, 2018; Orr & Inoue, 2018; Spector et al, 2012; Scott et al., 2015).

While this literature (mostly authored by scholar situated in the Global North) has greatly enhanced our understanding of sport, management, and climate change, I consider two important perspectives that further add to its strength. First, there is a need to contextualize sport and “climate change” with a lens of historical accountability. That is, “climate change”, rather than merely a biophysical phenomenon, is also a result and continuation of inequitable social relations inseparable from global history of colonial and industrial expansion (Simms, 2009; Srinivasana et al., 2007). Therefore, groups (e.g., powerful sport organizations in the Global North) that have historically benefited from this process should undertake more responsibility in addressing the problem. Second, this literature needs to include critical perspectives from Indigenous communities, who have experienced environmental crises since the start of colonialism (Davis & Todd, 2017). As Yuchi scholar Daniel Wildcat (2010) noted, today’s presence of climate refugees is a déjà vu of historical relocation and displacement of Indigenous Peoples.

Drawing from ecological economics, and Indigenous environmental studies (Gilio-Whittaker, 2019; Martínez-Alier, 2012; Whyte, 2017; 2018), this paper will discuss why sport research on climate change and environmental sustainability will benefit from taking into consideration, first, the perspective of historical accountability, and second, the alternative perspectives (e.g. those deeply rooted in Indigenous cosmologies) outside mainstream environmentalism. It will then discuss the implications for solutions that might be offered by sport sector and powerful sport-related organizations in the Global North.