

# **PLAYERS' IMAGE MANAGEMENT IN THE UK FOOTBALL INDUSTRY**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The UK professional football industry generates large amounts of revenue both in the UK and in foreign markets. They achieve this by promoting their brands to vast fan bases via both traditional and new media marketing. Liverpool Football Club, for example, has millions of fans around the world and receives over 2.9 million visitors to its website each month, generating in excess of 65 million page impressions (Sport And Technology, 2006). The widespread popularity of football teams (such as Liverpool Football Club) has been achieved by the aggressive marketing of the brands of clubs and their players.

To maximise the value of their assets, football clubs generally demand the exclusive right to control the commercial use and exploitation of a player's photographs, name, voice and likeness (collectively called his 'image') in publicity and advertising. The surge in value of the UK and European football leagues, through ever growing broadcasting financial agreements and strong marketing of international football brands, has led increasingly to questions being raised about the ownership of image rights. Indeed, according to Braithwaite (2003), an intellectual property lawyer: "recent cases in various countries raise questions about the ownership of image rights and whether it should be the individual, the team or the league that they play in, or the federations in charge of the sport".

## **PROJECT OR PLAN**

This paper focuses on footballers' image management (i.e. the control of the commercial exploitation of a footballer's name, photo, voice and any likeness) in the UK football industry. The main aims of the paper are to discuss: the ownership of football and its commercial value; the balance of power between footballers and their respective clubs; the nature of image rights and abuse issues regarding image rights management; and conflict management. The paper will further explore how conflicts of interest between stakeholders can be addressed and solved using a Scenario Planning Approach (Johnson, Scholes, Whittington, 2005) versus a Five Conflict-handling Orientations Model (Thomas, 1983).

## **RESULTS OR EXPECTED RESULTS**

The paper will give an insight into: the ownership of football; the balance of power between footballers and their respective club; image rights management; and conflict management. The paper will also make recommendations for best practice in the area of image rights management in the UK football industry.

## **DISCUSSION**

The ownership and management of image rights has often been a subject of conflict between footballers and their respective clubs. Some football clubs like Arsenal and Manchester United demand a player's image rights as part of their contract. Other clubs are happy to negotiate a share of profits from the commercial exploitation of a player's image rights. The control of a footballer's image rights is an important issue in any negotiation between the footballer and his club, as both parties are increasingly becoming aware of the potential for substantial financial benefits. In 2006 as part of his negotiations with the Spanish football club Real Madrid David Beckham demanded that they relinquish their 50% share of his image rights, thus giving him 100% of

all proceeds from the commercial exploitation of his image. Real Madrid refused, leading to David Beckham leaving the said club. He later signed a five year contract worth £128 million with the US club LA Galaxy which also included full control of his personal image rights (Wallace, 2007).

The case of David Beckham is significant in that he is now able to control how and when his image is used especially in endorsements and sponsorship deals. This represents a shift in power between the footballer and his club. As footballers become more famous or achieve celebrity status, the financial value of their image increases, therefore the control of the rights to their image also becomes increasingly important. The issue of image rights may always be a subject of conflict in the football industry and therefore, appropriate conflict management mechanisms need to be in place to address such an issue.

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