

Branding a women football club: “LdB FC for Life”

Contact details

Name author(s): Bo Carlsson & Gun Normark

Institution(s) or organisation(s): Department of Sport Studies, Malmö University

City and country: Malmö, Sweden

Email address for correspondence: Bo.Carlsson@mah.se ; Gun.Normark@mah.se

Aim of paper and research questions

Swedish football clubs work in the periphery of European football, when it comes to men’s football, despite a strong national team. However, women’s national league in Sweden is most likely one of the best in an international perspective. Still, women’s football clubs in Sweden exist in the periphery of men’s football, when it comes to media attention as well economical conditions. In this respect, Women Football has developed as an appendix in the wake of Men’s Football. Consequently, Women Football has not received a comparable support from the Swedish Football Association, regardless of the foundation in the, governmentally financed, Swedish Sport Confederation/ Sport Movement.

The thesis in this paper upholds that Women Football has to become increasingly commercialised in order to develop, due to the fact the Swedish Football Association, for historical and patriarchal reasons will not progressively support and direct women sport. Football, in light of the administration of Swedish Football Association, is a “men’s world”. Consequently, women’s football has to find support on the market.

LdB FC, a women football club in Malmö, stands out as a good example on this increasing commercialisation and its impact on the condition of a women football club. LdB FC started in 2005, as a radical turn. Up to this date, the club has been a part of Malmö FF. However, the males in the club decided to get rid of the women’s section. Albeit an alarming situation, the divorce becomes the start for a new “brand”. An entrepreneur in the cosmetic industry decided to support the club economically, starting by changing the name of the club to LdB FC, indicating the clubs connection to the cosmetic industry. This was the start for a new way of branding football in Sweden, with very close connection to the market. Nevertheless, this branding incorporates different values, very dissimilar from men’s football. There is a huge emphasis on different ways to strengthen women’s position in sport, as in society in general, through different project; for instance, a supplement to the local newspaper (“Attitude”), an international centre for women sport (“World Village of Women Sport”), as well as a developmental project in South Africa (“School for Life” and “Stars for Life”). No doubt, the club appears to be radical when it comes to branding and marketing.

Literature review

In the academic literature of sport management we find a minor focus on women sport. This means that the theoretical departure has to be an amalgam of traditional literature in sponsoring and marketing and gender theory. This theoretical construction will be supported with literature related to corporate social responsibility.

Research design and proposed data analysis

The research design is based on a “case study”, with an ethnographic case-methodology including surveys and interviews, with players, sponsors, marketing people, players and the audience.

Discussion of progress

The intention in this paper is to discuss this development and the phenomenon in light of processes of transition; for instance, an increasing commercialisation, a focus on globalisation as well as Social Corporate Responsibility. Questions that will turn up: Can an increasing commercialisation strengthen women’s position in sport, particularly in context with a low degree of commercialisation in general (as in Swedish sport)? Will women’s connection to the market develop new social and/or ethical values, not normally related to sport? Can this process change the image and the brand of Women Football?

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Global brands in football

Contact details

Name author: Pedro Garcia-del-Barrio (1) & Francesc Pujol (2)

Institution(s) or organisation(s): Universitat Intenacional de catalunya and ESI (Economics, Sport and Intangibles research group) (1); Department of Economics, University of Navarra and ESI (Economics, Sport and Intangibles research group) (2)

City and country: Barcelona, Spain (1); Pamplona, Spain

Email address for correspondence: fpujol@unav.es

Aim of paper and research questions

This paper features one of the leading football team in terms of media value in countries outside Europe. In contrast with results produced in European countries where local teams are normally the more powerful in terms of media value, results outside Europe show the most valuable teams are the ones with higher international visibility. Which are the leading European teams abroad is a key issue for football as business, as many individual team broadcasting contracts and sponsorship deals with multinational firms depend on how global a football brand is.

Literature review

The process of becoming a global brand has been subject to study, and has also been applied to the field of football (Holt, 2004; Richelieu et al., 2008; Couvelare & Richelieu, 2005; or Hills & Vincent, 2006). Studies have been also been conducted under the banner of brand equity (Richelieu, 2004; Ross, 2004). Some studies analyse the marketing aspects of this process (Desbordes, 2006) or the use of new media (Santomier & Shuart, 2008). We provide a complement to this literature with an empirical analysis of which football teams can actually be considered as global brands in season 2008/09.

Research design and data analysis

The results presented are relevant even if they refer just to the first half of the season. It is true that media value is concentrated in the second half of the season. Paradoxically, this is why the results we show here are relevant and representative as the international media impact of the UEFA Champions League teams is not substantially “contaminated” by present season sport performance, as at the cut off time of data collection (end of January 2009), all teams have played the same amount of games locally and internationally. In fact, all leading teams have classified for the first knock-out round of the UEFA Champions League. In this sense, the results of this study reflect the brand power of the teams before they benefit from the impact of the present season sport successes. This allowed us to identify which are the teams with true international brand and presence. Our data set comprises media coverage regarding the analysed teams from news providers with sources from almost every corner of the globe. We counted news items coming from some 190 countries and territories. Inside each country, we separated news from different regions, for example from the 50 different States of the United States of America. We counted for each one of the countries in our dataset the news that was reported in regard to a team throughout the season that referred to each one of the 600 football players from the 32 teams competing in the 2008/09 UEFA Champions League. We have shown in precedent studies how team media value as estimated by ESI-rg is strongly related with team sport performance, as well as economic and commercial power. Following this approach we established a team media value ranking for each country.