

Professional careers in the sports management labor market – empirical results from the German Bundesliga

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Introduction

In Germany, football has an outstanding economic importance in comparison to all other sports. This importance is underlined by the total turnover of the DFL which is close to 2.5 bn. EUR in 2013/14 (DFL, 2015). Compared to other sports like basketball and hockey, football has reached by far the highest degree in professionalization including but not limited to the club's management workforce.

This professionalization is reflected by the number of offered jobs in top management of the 36 Bundesliga clubs (Bundesliga, 2nd Bundesliga). As far as known by the authors, up to now there exists no paper, which examines systematically if there is any standardized and/or promising career path (including education) for football top managers. Thus, the paper at hand might open a new discussion in research and help to further develop sport management education.

Research question

The present paper is focused on the following research question: Is there one or are there several ideal, typical curricula vitae, which can be found at the level of Bundesliga top managers? Can any evidence be found that highly specific human capital formation (as gained in, say, academic education in sports management) is crucial for obtaining a job in top level football management?

Theoretical background

Following the human capital theory workers (i.e. all kind of employees) can be regarded as assets and that investment in people will generate returns (Baron/Armstrong, 2007). According to Becker (1993) education – including but not limited to higher education at universities – are the most important investments in human capital. Against this background well-educated employees will be able to earn higher wages since their marginal return for the organization is greater than the return generated by unskilled workers.

Focusing on (professional) sports it can be claimed that the greatest assets of sport organizations lie in their own human capital (Bravo/Shonk/Won, 2012). At a physical level performance (and thus returns) decline by age (Healy/Baruch/Gregoriou, 2011). In contrast human capital in sports management generally does not decline by age but could even increase due to an increased working experience, a better network, improved negotiation skills, etc. In contrast to athletes that have to fulfil certain (physical) criteria for a successful career there are no comparable criteria for management staff. However, appropriate education (i. e. university degrees, off-the-job trainings, etc.) might be helpful to become a successful sport manager.

Methodology and data set

The examination is based on an analysis of curricula vitae of top managers of the 36 clubs in the Bundesliga and 2nd Bundesliga. According to the legal form, there has been an examination of the careers of managing directors ('GmbH') and executive board members ('AG', 'e.V.'). In each case it was tempted to identify the crucial decision makers. The analysis was based on public available information as curricula vitae, which were published on club homepages, in press releases etc. So far no interviews etc. collecting qualitative data were conducted.

The public available information about the curricula vitae were analysed by a sequence pattern analysis. Among others, the following sequences were defined:

- Duration of the own professional career as a (football) player
- General education (e.g. training within the dual system or studies)
- Sports management related education (e.g. relevant course of studies)
- Practical activities in (professional) clubs
- Practical activities in a sports management related field (e.g. sporting goods industry, marketing agency)
- Practical activities beyond sports management
- No employment (family activity, unemployment, etc.)

The sequence pattern analysis as an explorative instrument is rather ranked in the 'context of discovery' than in the setting of 'context of justification' (Kelle, 1994 cited by Erzberger, 2001). Hence, it is exclusively the goal to identify particular patterns. Any determination of causal connections respectively a review of hypotheses is neither possible nor required in the present context.

Indicative results and outlook

Currently, the indicative results are subject to restrictions. Data collection is difficult since not all clubs offer public information on the careers of their board members and/or directors. Especially for those managers, who have not passed a career as a professional player, there is partially only rudimentary data available.

Nevertheless different patterns can be recognized. A large proportion of the examined curricula vitae are provided by managers, who have completed their professional player career. The transition from player to manager generally took place quickly; sports management related education respectively further education can often be recognised.

The examined persons, who were not acting as professional players, have predominantly completed an economic course of studies, partly with reference to sports management (e.g. at universities in Cologne, Bayreuth). Graduates of other disciplines, especially sports science and law can only be found sporadically. Before being employed in the club, these persons are typically active in fields of auditing /tax consultancy/management consultancy. Unemployment certainly plays a role for former professional players but not for sport management professionals (having graduated at a university).

Currently, there might be different approaches for further examinations. One approach is to roll out the survey to other sports (like handball). Due to the increase of the sample size one may be able to confirm first results respectively to encourage new directions of thought. However, the availability of required data and the impact of a low degree of professionalization (and thus, a low degree of comparability) in

other sports has to be considered. Moreover, the consideration of qualitative informative (to be surveyed by semi-standardized interviews) might help to gain deeper insights on the core success factors of sport management careers. Based on the completed data set it will be possible to examine further questions, such as whether a club's success depends on the management's qualification, or whether highly specific education of the management increases the club's success. Finally, the results could help to provide new stimuli for higher sports management education and might be able to define core competences that have to be considered in university programs.

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