

ADDRESSING ENGLISH FOOTBALL'S STADIUM NAMING RIGHTS DILEMMA: TOWARDS A MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE

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Context

To many English football fans, the names of stadiums such as Highbury (the home of Arsenal) and Anfield (the home of Liverpool) are sacred. These stadiums and countless others like them are located at the centre of the urban Victorian sprawl and are an integral part of the communities from which football clubs have traditionally drawn their support (Conn, 2004). Even in more recent times, when commercial influences have had a significant effect on English football, stadiums constructed in the early part of the twentieth century have continued to form the backdrop for one of the country's most established social institutions (Inglis, 1996).

But English football no longer functions in a vacuum; the impact of legislative and regulatory change has been dramatic (most notably the EU Bosman freedom of player movement ruling) and this has been accompanied by a consequent rise in player power, increasing salaries and inflated player transfer values (Greenfield and Osborn, 2001:39-60). At the same time, some football clubs have become publicly quoted corporations on the London stock exchange, media interest in football has developed on an unprecedented scale and sponsors increasingly recognise the benefits of being associated with England's national game (Chadwick and Thwaites, 2004).

Many clubs have thus come under pressure to abandon their traditional homes in order to move to new stadiums where more revenue can be generated through greater capacity, enhanced retail outlets, high quality conferencing facilities and so on. Football clubs such as Middlesbrough and Sunderland have already moved to new, purpose built facilities, but their fans have not necessarily been happy. When Arsenal recently announced that it was to move from the government protected confines of its art deco stadium to a new 65,000 seat facility (Ashburton Grove), dissenting fans expressed their contempt at the move. Liverpool now finds itself in the same position – to compete with Europe's best football teams and to raise money for squad development, the club's owners feel they should move (Hall and Owen, 2004).

But problems in overcoming the cynicism and concerns associated with moving from an old to a new stadium have been exacerbated by the now seemingly inevitable naming rights deals that accompany such moves. This would seem to be a peculiarly English phenomenon because evidence from, for example, Germany suggests a more fans adopt a more pragmatic view (Sylt, 2005). But when Arsenal announced that Emirates International Airline is to sponsor the club's new home (as well as the team's shirts), there was a massive outcry. At an ideological level, some complained that it was nothing more than commercial exploitation and have questioned the loss of identity this will inflict on the club and its supporters (Hadsley, 2004). Travelling to the Emirates Stadium will say more about the club's commercial affiliations than the fan's geographic identity (a vital part of many fan's association with 'their' club). Even business commentators have expressed worries about the deal. Despite being one of the biggest ever sponsorship deals in British sport (valued at £100 million), some remain concerned that there are few, if any, natural links between the club and its new sponsor (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2004).

Now Liverpool is seriously considering a move away from its Anfield home. This is one of the most evocative stadiums in sport, long associated with a culture and fervour little seen in English football, let alone in other sports. To compete with the biggest football clubs in the world, many people associated with the club nevertheless seem to be reluctantly acknowledging that a move is necessary. However, if one surfs the various Liverpool fan sites on the web, one thing is clear: they believe any new stadium must retain its name: Anfield must stay as Anfield even though it may be located in another part of the city, and the name should certainly not be available for purchase to prospective sponsors (see for example, *This is Anfield*, 2004).

In theory, the Arsenal/Emirates deal should have signalled a new era in naming rights deals in the UK. But such is the history and tradition of football that Arsenal, Liverpool and those who follow them in moving will have to carefully consider the advantages and disadvantages of naming their new stadia. Football fans may want their teams to do well, but at what cost? One of the problems Arsenal seems to have created for it self was its acceptance of the most financially lucrative deal rather than the 'best' one. Whilst sport and business in England now seem to be inextricably linked, local fans and communities and national followers of the game remain important stakeholders in the sport. If clubs and sponsors are to maximise the benefits of their association, naming rights deals in the future will therefore need to embrace the complex array of interests that appear to be vested in them. If they do not, cynicism will rise, support for clubs may decline and the big name brands associated with naming rights may ultimately become negatively associated with the country's favourite game.

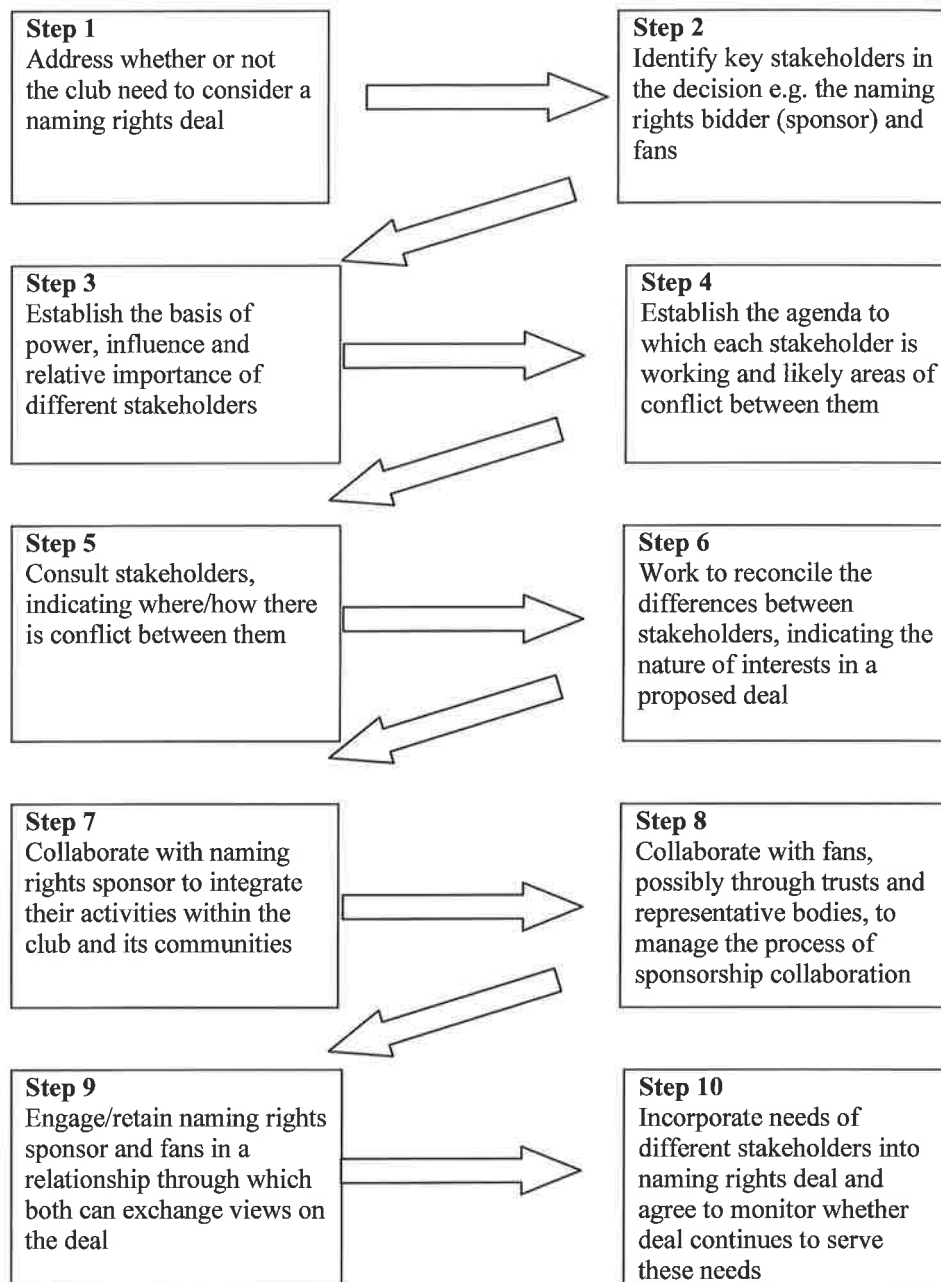
Drawing from observations made by Arthur et. al (1998) and Thwaites and Chadwick (2004), this working paper therefore proposes that the model shown in Table 1 is one football clubs, in conjunction with their important stakeholders, should adopt in order to reconcile the often disparate interests in football stadium naming rights deals.

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Appendix Table 1: A model of good practice in managing football stadium naming rights deals



MANUFACTURE OF AFFORDABLE LEATHER BALLS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Jim Cogan, Alive & Kicking, UK

Context

All over the world children and young people love playing games and taking part in organised sport. That this is good for their physical and psychological health as well as their social well-being, nobody would question. But in sub-Saharan Africa these basic rights are denied the great majority because the imported balls and other sports equipment are completely unsuited to local conditions and are prohibitively expensive.

Project / Partners

The Alive & Kicking model is designed with dual aims:

1. Local Manufacture of Footballs/Revival of the African Leather Industry

Alive & Kicking is developing an infrastructure for making affordable, durable and repairable leather balls to supplement the imported non-repairable synthetic balls which are too expensive for the vast majority of Africans. Costing just under £4 to make, Alive & Kicking balls have the competitive edge in meeting consumer needs – durability and affordability. Initially production will focus on standard footballs, but we will soon manufacture balls suitable for younger children, and for other sports.

Agreement has been reached with Bata International Shoe Company to make available split leather in bulk for cutting into ball panels. These panels are then dispatched via Alive & Kicking headquarters in Nairobi to local stitching centres – in rural or disadvantaged areas – which assemble the final product. Each centre employs twenty workers, providing skills and employment to people who need it most. The establishment by Alive & Kicking of a framework for local manufacture of balls is thus a catalyst for grass roots economic development. In turn, the increased availability of affordable balls means that sport becomes more accessible to disadvantaged youth as their schools and sports clubs become better equipped.

2. Preventive Health Programmes

The AIDS epidemic in Africa has reached devastating proportions and the vulnerability of young people in particular to HIV infection is widely documented.

All Alive & Kicking balls carry HIV warnings. Further, it is the aim of Alive & Kicking to use any profit from the sale of balls to fund a sport-based preventive health programme. Health materials specifically targeting adolescents – including hard-hitting poster campaigns featuring sporting heroes – will focus on HIV/AIDS and other diseases of poverty such as malaria, and will be provided in conjunction with the sale of Alive & Kicking balls to any school or youth organisation.

Alive & Kicking also wishes to take advantage of the unique position held by sports coaches as a natural focal point for the discussion of health issues with youngsters, and will implement training programmes to this effect.

Partners

The Football Association, UK Sport, Bata International Shoe Company, BBC World Service, Department for International Development (DfID). In Nairobi the project enjoys the support of the Kenyan Ministry of Gender, Sports, Culture and Social Services and the National AIDS Control Council. Locally-based development agencies such as UNICEF and OXFAM are equally supportive. In the UK, the Minister for Sports, Richard Caborn, has given Alive & Kicking his personal backing, and the FA and UK Sport are strong supporters of our efforts.