

HOW MARKETABLE IS WOMEN'S FOOTBALL IN EUROPE? THE CASE OF THE GERMAN BUNDESLIGA

Marie-Luise Klein, Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany

Context

During recent years, European women's football has experienced a considerable upswing. Apart from the Scandinavian countries with a long tradition in women's football, football has become one of, or even the most popular, women's team sport in Germany and Great Britain (Hong & Mangan, 2003). For the former case, the positive development certainly was supported by the recent sporting success of the women's national team (World Champions 2003 in the USA). Women's football now is for the first time covered by the major media and benefits from increased promotion by the German Football Association, Deutscher Fußball-Bund (DFB).

But this recent success story cannot belie the fact that in particular the economic base for a long-term establishment and sustainable sporting development of women's football in German is by no means secure. So a number of clubs of the two top leagues, the 1st and 2nd Bundesliga, are struggling with structural and financial problems that have already endangered several times their stability. Most clubs are still far away from professional management and marketing.

Methods

These structural economic problems and challenges to the women's Bundesliga are studied in detail in a current empirical research project. Based on a general economic market model of team sports (Hübl, Peters & Swieter, 2002), the key markets and demand groups of the Bundesliga clubs are analysed: the media (broadcasting time, revenue from TV rights), advertising (sponsorship income, types of sponsorships), attendance (gate receipts, ticket prices), and merchandising. In addition, the external organisational network of the league (support by the DFB) as well as the clubs' internal organisational and marketing structures are examined (Schellhaas & Enderle, 1999; Wadsack, 2004).

In this research association and club data, special periodicals on women's football, internet sites of the clubs, press releases etc. were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. In addition, case studies of selected Bundesliga clubs enabled a deeper look at marketing praxis. Structured interviews were conducted with executives of 7 of 12 premier league clubs and of the responsible association DFB. Interviews with 8 out of 24 second league clubs will follow.

The paper will describe and argue this research approach to the marketing of women's league football which has not yet been studied in Germany and will present some preliminary results and working hypotheses.

Results

On the whole, marketing remains much more difficult for women's league clubs than for the German national team, partly because the league and individual clubs are simply not known well enough. A major problem affecting marketing success and efforts is the huge differential both in sporting talent and economic base between various premier league clubs and between the premier and second leagues. Those clubs where the most national female players play are the most successful, both in sports and economically (budgets, number of spectators, sponsors). Interestingly, these are all women-only football clubs. They have evidently managed to establish themselves already in regional football markets and increasingly attract even wider attention.

Discussion

The aim of the project is, on the one hand, to identify and explain the current economic problems in the German market of women's league football by a detailed comparison of clubs. On the other hand, the existing solutions to these problems for clubs and the DFB will be evaluated and benchmarked, like management structures, innovative policies to attract members and spectators, or successful models of acquiring regional sponsorship etc. Moreover, the imbalance of the Women's Football

Bundesliga raises structural questions how to improve the competitive balance and player distribution in women's professional team sports (Kesenne, 2002).

References

- Hong, F. & Mangan, J.A. (eds, 2003) *Soccer, Women, and sexual liberation. Kicking off a new era* London: Frank Cass
- Hübl, L., Peters, H. H. & Swieter, D. (eds, 2002) *Ligasport aus ökonomischer Sicht* Aachen: Meyer & Meyer
- Schellhaaß, H.-M. & Enderle, G. (1999) *Wirtschaftliche Organisation von Sportligen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* Köln: Sport und Buch Strauß
- Kesenne, S. (2002) Improving the competitive balance and the salary distribution in professional team sports pp95-108 in Barros, C.P., Ibrahim, M. & Szymanski, S. (eds) *Transatlantic Sport. The Comparative Economics of North American and European Sports* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar
- Wadsack, R. (2004) Management in Profiligen. Situation und Perspektive in Deutschland pp 289-300 in Krüger, A. & Dreyer, A.A. (eds) *Sportmanagement* München: Oldenburg

Contact: Marie-Luise Klein Faculty of Sport Science, Department of Sport Management and Sport Sociology, D-44780 Bochum, email: marie-luise.klein@rub.de