PART III

The marketing of sport

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CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN SPORT MARKETING

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From sport changes to sport marketing

The question of whether sport marketing is unique and clearly distinct from mainstream marketing has been a long-lasting debate and will probably be an ongoing one for many years in the future. It is, however, likely that the reader of this book and this marketing section might be convinced that sport marketing represents a distinctive field of practice and research, and that textbooks such as those of Mullin, Hardy and Sutton (2000), Desbordes, Ohl and Tribou (2004) and Beech and Chadwick (2007), academic journals such as Sport Marketing Quarterly, International Journal of Sport Marketing and Sponsorship and International Journal of Sport Marketing and Management, as well as the tremendous number of sport marketing publications, represent enough justifications for such a distinction. This is also an opinion we share and for this reason we are glad to propose to the reader an up-to-date presentation of the level of knowledge of the field.

However, acknowledging a uniqueness of the sport object in relation to marketing should not eclipse the fact that it is an evolving field, with evolving boundaries, and that it might be more appropriate to talk about sport objects, in the plural. Sport marketing cannot be reduced to the marketing of sport fans and its mix marketing component. As sport is a complex and sometimes elusive phenomenon – the definition of what a sport is and what its boundaries are is a perilous exercise – therefore sport marketing should mirror it. Specifically, it seems that all the traditional sport landmarks have been blurred in our rapidly changing societies. For instance, sport fans are no longer only local people supporting only local athletes. As an illustration, we can evoke the case of Arsenal FC, which was the first English Premier League football club, in 2005, to name a completely non-English 16-man squad for a domestic game. Moreover, the globalization phenomenon associated with the development of new media and technology has allowed satellite fans to intensively follow and support their favorite professional club or franchise although they may have never physically attended one of their live games.

We can finally cite the example of the Stade Français rugby club, which can break attendance records a few times a year by attracting between 70,000 and 80,000 spectators to the Stade de France although its 20,000 regular stadium is never sold out for the other regular home fixtures (Bodet, 2009a). Some explanations about this surprising situation are provided
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in Chapter 17. All these examples indicate that sport has changed and so should sport marketing. The meanings of sport have also changed (Bodet, 2009b; Seippel, 2006), which strongly influences the relation sport participants and sport consumers can have with sport organizations and sport brands. For example, sport participants are not only oriented towards sport performance and sport organizations, and not-for-profit sport organizations in particular, so these no longer represent the automatic and natural place and setting for the practice of sport. This issue is also discussed in Chapter 17.

Looking at another aspect, sport goods brands and sport clothing and footwear brands are no longer bound to sporting fields and arenas, and are passively and actively investing other public spaces. Passively because many of their products are diverted from their original function and purpose by consumers (how many sport shoes have ever seen a changing room?) and actively because they now purposely compete with non-sporting brands within other markets. For example, we can wonder who knows or remembers that René Lacoste nicknamed “the crocodile” (or “the alligator”) was a French tennis champion in the 1920s, who created the namesake tennis brand. For many people Lacoste is seen as a fashion brand although it is a tennis and golf clothes supplier as well as the sponsor of many renowned tennis and golf athletes and tournaments. Some explanations of such perceptions are provided in Chapter 18.

Finally, marketing practices implemented by sport organizations have also changed a lot, either driven by internal motives and pressures to better achieve organizational objectives or driven by changes and pressures coming from the external socio-cultural, economic and legal environments. Sport sponsorship is a typical example of such changes in practices (Chapter 22). Facing an increased and globalized competition, sponsors are forced to better rationalize their sponsorship activities and integrate them as much as possible into their overall communication strategy. Moreover, the proliferation of ambush marketing practices has indirectly encouraged sport organizations and sponsors to redefine in depth the nature of their relationship in order to fully support and exploit their investment to achieve their sponsorship objectives and their return on investment while protecting their rights from the sponsor perspective, helping sponsors to capitalize on their investment and creating long-term relationships from a sport organization perspective. These elements are further discussed in Chapters 18 and 23.

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Nevertheless, despite the specificities of the sport marketing field, it should not be ignored that many changes in sport marketing trends and practices also happen in other marketing fields and that the analysis of their evolution should help us to identify the future stakes of the sport marketing field. In this regard, several issues can be identified.

Historically, marketing practices have focused on mass markets and transactions in order to attract and seduce the highest number of consumers and make them spend the highest possible amount of money. Such an approach does not fit any more with the level of competition in specific markets or consumers’ behaviors and expectations. Indeed, due to increasing numbers of offers and competitors, firms and organizations cannot afford not to satisfy their consumers as they can easily switch to an alternative offer. Moreover, consumers are no longer (if they were ever) solely rational and logical thinkers driven by rationality and problem-solving strategies (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Consumption is not only an activity fulfilling utilitarian benefits but also a vehicle for hedonic gratifications, sensations and emotions, symbolic identity roles (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) and social links
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(Cova and Cova, 2002). Sport consumption does not seem to be excluded from this mutation.

From this observation several marketing streams have been developed. The first marketing approach relies on the concept of relationship and “refers to all marketing activities directed toward establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relationship exchanges” (Morgan and Hunt, 1994: 22). At the heart of the relationship approach lies the concept of loyalty, which is thought to produce many positive organizational outcomes and management of which is seen as costing less than recruiting new partners or consumers. The loyalty issue seems increasingly important for both spectator and participation organizations with maybe a more crucial aspect for the latter as the lack of consumers and participants directly questions the sustainability and the survival of these organizations. For this reason, Chapter 17 aims to identify how consumer loyalty is formed in sport participation services. In Chapter 18, the relationship marketing approach is also discussed from a business-to-consumer perspective for sporting spectatorship organizations, as well as from a business-to-business perspective.

The second marketing approach relies on the production of experiences and is highly relevant for sporting events which, by nature, hold a strong experiential dimension (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). It is therefore crucial for these sporting organizations to identify who their consumers are and what kind of experience they are looking for in order to provide them the adequate service offer which will satisfy them. This is the purpose of Chapter 19. As mentioned in Chapter 22, the concept of experience also represents an important challenge for sponsors and sport organizations in order to create sufficient emotions to favor the achievement of the sponsors’ objectives.

Another field of application of the experiential marketing approach concerns the sporting goods market. Indeed, sporting goods brands have now realized that shops and retail stores are more than just transaction places and that they could benefit from using different point of sale designs and layouts and from creating dramatizing atmospheres. The potential benefits of such strategies and the managerial levers sporting good brands can manipulate are for these reasons analyzed in Chapter 20.

The third marketing approach, which can be seen as an extension of the relationship marketing one, focuses on the social bonds and relationships consumers try to create in their consumption activities, in order to identify, segment and satisfy them. The social dimension of consumption is discussed in relation to sport participation in Chapter 17, to sport spectatorship in Chapter 19 and to sporting good retail brands in Chapter 20.

Regarding the previously mentioned increase of competition worldwide, a last major significant contemporary trend relies on the globalization phenomenon and the development of new technologies and media that are thought to reshape consumer behaviors and management practices as well as simultaneously creating opportunities in new foreign markets and threats from competition intensification. On this specific issue, sport is certainly not excluded from these changes but constitutes a particular case for analysis due to its unique link with mass media and communication. This is the purpose of Chapter 21, which covers both traditional and new media. Therefore, as a popular communication technique, mainly due to its efficiency and the limitations of traditional communication techniques such as advertising, sponsorship’s objectives and strategies are analyzed in Chapter 22, whereas the ambush marketing issue which is now the sponsorship correlate is treated in Chapter 23.

As illustrated in the two previous sections, a complete overview of current sport marketing knowledge requires the analysis of the specificities of the sport objects (i.e. services, events and brands) as well as a deep understanding of the major trends which drive the marketing
field, and we hope that the following contributions will highlight both components to provide the most up-to-date and diverse picture of the contemporary sport marketing field.

References