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Gerd Nufer

Lessons from Sports: What Corporate Managers can learn from International Professional Sports

Abstract

Although sports is generally defined as motor activity, it has always been much more than that. Since management and sports follow the same objective of achieving highest performance, correlations between these two fields nowadays become increasingly interesting in terms of corporate strategy. This paper aims to point out how organisations as well as individuals can benefit from the general and psychological values and strategies of international professional sports, by first looking at the general framework of professional sports and further applying approaches from various types of sports directly to certain business functions like

general management, human resource management and marketing management.

1. Introduction

People all over the world love sports. Especially international professional sports is a manifold topic influencing and moving people regardless of nationality, gender or age. It has been connecting people, cultures and countries at all times and overcomes conflicts, wars and political disputes. Due to the focus on the individual by means of performance and personal development, sports is on one hand very emotional and private, and on the other hand society is highly interested and enthused about sports and therefore

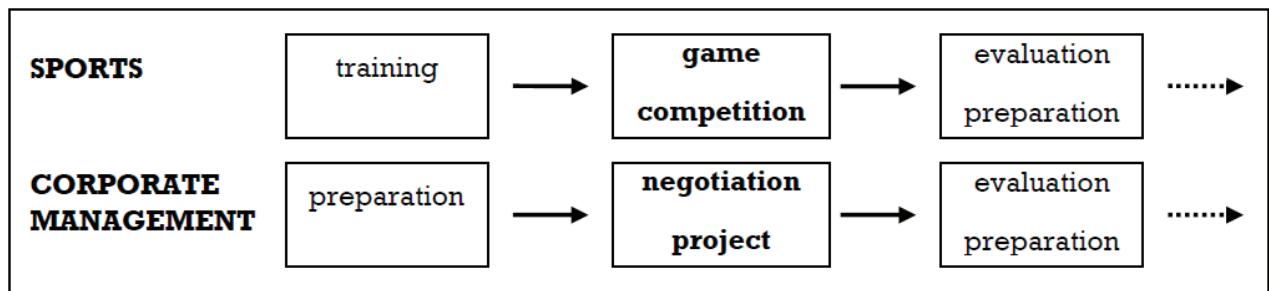


Fig. 1: Processes in sports and corporate management (Source: Nufer & Bühler (2014), p. 359)

rewards it with highest reputation¹. Accordingly sports is turned into a kind of social commodity². Given these special characteristics sports became more and more important, globalised and commercialised throughout history. Whereas the worldwide interest and significance of sports is nowadays reflected in the sports management science, business is not yet deriving or implementing many strategies or values from sports, especially international professional sports, into their area.

Precisely because of the fact that "[...] sport is a microcosm of society, it dramatises the social order [and] represents the social order in miniature"³, we can successfully refer sports to management. Substituting the opponent with a competing company, the athletes with employees, the coach with the manager and the fans with clients, one can see similarities and derive recommendations for innovative management strategies⁴.

In this paper the following questions are analysed: What can a company manager learn from sports? In which ways can sports management serve as a role model for corporate management? The start is the description of some existing parallels between international sports and corporate management in general. Then, it is examined how corporate management can make use of specific characteristics and values of sports. The further focus of the paper is on how sporting organizations

use strategic management, human resources and marketing. We will see that sports is far ahead of today's corporate management in these areas – there is a lot to learn for corporate managers from the strategies and approaches used in the world of international sports.

2 General parallels between sports and corporate management

What do managers of ordinary businesses and managers of professional sports teams have in common? More than you think! Both have to put together and lead a team of individualists. Both have to react to steadily changing situations. And both are under extreme pressure⁵. Corporate management, especially project management, in which every business manager is involved, has strong parallels to athletic competition: There are winners and losers. The rules are, in general, clearly defined. There are fouls and goals, and the line between success and failure is often uncomfortably thin. Second place is often not good enough. Fig. 1 illustrates the processes in ordinary businesses and in sports.

It becomes clear that processes in sports and in corporate management resemble each other to a high degree. The focus of all activities in sports is the game or competition respectively, framed by the training for and the evaluation of the event. In corporate management the same strategy applies. The focus is on the initial negoti-

1 Cf. McComb, 2004.

2 Cf. Ohl, 2005.

3 Boxill, 2003, p. 1.

4 Cf. Nufer & Bühler, 2014.

5 Cf. Rudolph, 2002; Nufer, 2002.

ation or project respectively, which has to be prepared and evaluated. The parallels between sports and corporate management in each of these process phases will be shown in the following⁶.

Before the competition:

Training and preparation for the big game are as crucial for good athletes as is daily on-the-job learning for managers. Training builds the foundation a team needs to successfully compete in every season. Coaching belongs as much to game preparation as do the individual training of strengths and overcoming of possible weaknesses. One has to critically study the opponent in order to detect and develop strategies for reactions, moves etc. In the same way corporate managers must know: What are the customers' needs? Who will take part in a negotiation or important meeting? Are there any special individuals who need extra attention? And what are the competitors like?

During the competition:

During the game everything must be a perfect fit. Rivalries while training are forgotten. The concentration is on the game/competition only. The team members must give everything they have. High expectations weight heavily on all players. In sports, the expectations come from the spectators while in corporate management it is the client who expects optimal performance and full commitment. During the game, a team's endurance becomes the decisive factor. Exhibiting stamina, mobilising forces and bringing the team into formation are critical factors. Every team member must be able to rely on his team mates, pass each other the ball in the right moment and, of course, turn these assists into goals.

After the competition:

After the match is before the match. When the game is over, preparation for the next

game starts immediately. New projects are waiting. Nevertheless, it is important to have a critical look at the last game by analysing previous processes and activities. Debriefings should identify potentials for improvement. It is vital to continue observing the market and benchmarking with competitors to be best prepared for the next match or project respectively.

3 Making use of specific characteristics and values of sports

This section examines how corporate management can use specific characteristics and values of sports in order to survive in highly competitive markets⁷.

3.1 Internationality and globalisation

People have been competing in sports at all times. Since the nineteenth century however, there exist international sporting competitions in the forms of World Cups and European Championships as well as the modern Olympic Games that make a global interaction possible. Maybe the long history and the importance of peaceful sports are the reason why there is such a high degree in internationality in the sports market nowadays. Looking at team sports as football, handball or basketball the teams are very mixed and diverse. In no organisation we can find a mix of international employees to such a large extent as for example in the English football league with a proportion of two third of foreign players (see Tab. 1).

Globalisation is no new phenomenon. Yet the speed of globalisation is just now picking up, and its potential is extraordinary. For many sports areas internationalism is a facet of everyday life. In corporate management of many businesses, however, the globalisation process is still in the development stage. Sports teaches

6 Cf. Nufer & Bühler, 2014; 2006.

7 Cf. Nufer & Reimers, 2011.

Rank	Country	League	Foreign players (%)
1.	England	Premier League	67.6
2.	Belgium	Jupiler League	58.5
3.	Italy	Seria A	56.5
4.	Portugal	Liga NOS	55.6
5.	Germany	Bundesliga	50.5
6.	Switzerland	Super League	49.6
7.	Turkey	Süper Lig	47.4
8.	Spain	La Liga	43.4
9.	Greece	Super League	42.4
10.	France	Ligue 1	42.4
11.	Russia	Premier Liga	39.4
12.	Netherlands	Eredivise	38.0
13.	Croatia	1. HNL	29.6
14.	Czech Republic	ePojisteni.cz Liga	23.2
15.	Ukraine	Premier Liga	17.4

Tab. 1: Ranking of shares of foreign players in Europe's football leagues (Source: Sportal now (2016))

us that nationality can be overcome in the progress of globalisation⁸.

International companies often fail to hire, or if hired, to appropriately integrate people with different cultural backgrounds and therefore cause inconvenient working atmospheres. These problems do not seem to exist in sports. In order to benefit more from globalisation, management should decrease or avoid the prevalence of cultural prejudices and better concentrate on diversity management⁹.

3.2 Transparency

A further particular characteristic of the professional sports market is the predominant transparency of all actions and decisions concerning athletes, teams, coaches or clubs based on the public awareness. The special attention of the public, represented by the media, is justified by the strong interest of the con-

sumers – the fans. The followers who identify with the club or a specific sport want to be informed about everything concerning the club, players or coach. Accordingly, the sports clubs and organisations are forced to consistently share all decisions with the public and often they have to justify these actions to a very critical audience¹⁰.

Exactly this transparency is lacking in many business fields. The organisations should share more decisions with the public or important external advisors. For companies this would, on the one hand, mean losing sovereignty, but on the other hand it would help preventing bad outcomes and probably give more trust to the clients.

3.3 Fair play

Fair play is one of the basic behavioural principles and prerequisites of sports interaction. It refers to the consistent and

⁸ Cf. Simon, 2004.

⁹ Cf. Sprenger, 2008a.

¹⁰ Cf. Nufer & Bühler, 2012, 2013.

conscious compliance with the rules within a tournament or competition as well as the respect and appropriate behaviour towards the opponent¹¹. Further, one can distinguish between the so-called formal fair play, which is required by regulation and the informal fair play¹² that implies the rules of decency.

Given the high economic importance of the performance in today's professional sports, one can directly compare sports and management in terms of fair play. Whereas informal fair play is still prevailing in sports because it belongs to the traditional value system of athletes, the principle of formal fair play is the reality in business life. Due to the economic concept of utility maximisation, managers strive to achieve as many profits as possible in compliance with legal rights. This often results in the lacking application of ethical rules. Applied ethics are becoming more important nowadays and customers and society expect organisations to establish a value system accordingly¹³. Looking at sports, management can learn from the natural conviction of athletes to follow the informal fair play code in order to ensure a fair competition and a sustainable relationship with customers, suppliers and competitors based on the principles of respect.

In the following we will have a closer look at specific business functions. What are the lessons from sports for general management, human resource management and marketing management?

4 General management

We start with the discussion what general management can learn from sports.

4.1 Determining a vision

In all kinds of sports athletes follow the same overall objective: winning. Before the athletes start to prepare for the next tournament or competition, they first think about their dreams and their objectives. In line with their resources they then determine their vision that will lead them through the tough times, support them when they have to suffer from a defeat and reminds them of their dream when they start again¹⁴.

Nowadays, almost every company has a formulated vision that describes some main objectives for the future. However, in many cases these statements are not communicated properly or the employees cannot identify with the values or vision and will not try their best to achieve it. The management has to clearly define the vision so that everybody can understand and identify with it¹⁵. Leaders inspire a shared vision. They breathe life into the hopes and dreams of others, enabling them to see the exciting possibilities that the future holds; they forge a unity of purpose by showing their constituents how a dream is for the common good¹⁶. After the vision has been communicated, it is essential to monitor and measure the fulfilment. In sports, athletes immediately see how they have performed and if they have met their objectives. In business life, many companies fail to measure their success. According to Galileo Galilei¹⁷, organisations need to "count what is countable, measure what is measurable, and what is not measurable, make measurable."

The vision of leading European sports teams such as Real Madrid or Manchester United is simple and always the same: to be the best in the world. Why is it so difficult to copy this vision in other industries?

11 Cf. Boxill, 2003.

12 Cf. Lenk, 2002.

13 Cf. Brand & Löhr, 2008.

14 Cf. Heimann, 2010.

15 Cf. Brand & Löhr, 2008.

16 Cf. Kouzes & Posner, 2012.

17 cited in Kaydos, 1999, p. 20.

One reason for the decisive difference between business and sports is that the common mission in sports is not only much clearer, but also unanimously shared by the players. When forming and welding together an international management team, one has to work out a common mission and establish the proper level of intense identification. Only then can commitment to the company become stronger than any national peculiarity. A company achieves true globalisation when each team member can perform freely and earn promotion independent of nationality, religion and culture. Everybody who demands best results has to provide an optimal working atmosphere. In this regard many companies save money. If they treat their associates as production factors, they commit a management failure. But a company that demands top performances has to provide optimal working conditions. In Germany, FC Bayern Munich is famous for providing ideal basic conditions for its players and team members.

The slogan "more than a Club" expresses the commitment that FC Barcelona has maintained and still maintains beyond what belongs in the realm of sport. For many years, this commitment specifically referred to Catalan society, which for many decades of the 20th century lived under dictatorships that persecuted its language and culture. Under these circumstances, Barça always supported Catalan sentiments, and the defence of its own language and culture. Now, in the age of globalisation, Barça has extended its social commitment with a specially significant event being the signing of an agreement with UNICEF in 2006, which was a way of saying that a sports club should not be marginal to problems going on in society, in this case, the plight of children around the world. Because of this, Barça continues to be "more than a Club" and is implied in numerous cultural, social and charity initiatives. Fig. 3 explains the de-

fining traits of FC Barcelona.

Catalanism: Since its very foundation, FC Barcelona has been intrinsically linked to its country, Catalonia, a commitment that comes from society as a whole and one that is understood by Barça fans in the rest of Spain and in the rest of the world. The Club firmly and strongly promotes Catalonia around the world.

Universality: When the Club anthem says "it does not matter where you come from", it expresses the spirit of an institution open to everyone, that brings together fans from around the five continents and links them to a history in which half of the Club's founders were from outside Catalonia.

Social commitment: Barça is an open club, one that brings people together and promotes positive values on a daily basis whether it be via its own Foundation, via agreements with international institutions or via collaborations with local organisations. These projects are usually developed in areas such as education, the arts and culture as well as in community support and developmental aid.

Democracy: The Club members are also its owners and they decide democratically who it is that ought to run FC Barcelona. The democratic principle is a fundamental pillar of the Club and it has only been neglected when dictatorships have intervened.

Fig. 2: FC Barcelona – more than a club
Adopted from: FC Barcelona (2017)

4.2 Energy, discipline and perseverance

In decathlon, athletes have to complete ten track and field events, which are enduring two days. The athletes prepare themselves many months only for this one

event, in order to exploit all their strengths on the tournament day. In order to succeed they have to concentrate from the first second on. After having completed one discipline, they concentrate on the next discipline without worrying about things happened before, so they can again use their full energy potential. Mental and psychological training helps them to keep this rhythm. Their preparation is a continuous process, their objective must be to always continue and improve results.

Whereas in international sports it is normal to practice every day, managers usually only attend one or two further educations per year. In order to have a competitive advantage, however, it is vital to learn continuously¹⁸.

4.3 Dealing with failure

Professional athletes within their discipline are constantly exposed to changes and failure. Especially fast team sports as handball, ice hockey or basketball can be called "failure games", because of the high proportion of failures in a game¹⁹. The players are trying to keep the possession of the ball and to create as many goal-scoring chances as possible throughout the whole game. This strategy is associated with a lot of trying and also a lot of disappointment. Nevertheless, the players motivate themselves again after every loss of ball possession and strive to attack the opponent again to regain the ball. Psychological and mental coaching belongs to the athlete's preparation; it helps to become aware of the possible failure and to deal with it in advance²⁰.

Many international business organisations as well as politicians do not plan on failure with the resulting reaction of disappointment – fear and repression instead of act-

ing strategically²¹. Actively managing failure by preparing the organisations and its employees is a highly effective psychological tool²².

4.4 Support and advise

Every athlete is assisted by a coach. The coach is supporting the athlete before, during and after the tournament with preparation, training, recommendations and personal support. In the course of the professional career and alongside an increasing level of success and importance, the number of supporting people around the athlete is rising. Coaches, personal managers, psychologists, physiologists, doctors, etc. provide the sportsman or woman with expert knowledge in every field.

Considering the dynamic and challenging business environment, managers are in need of professional support and external advice, too. Contrary to the authoritarian leadership-style, management needs to establish expert teams and share responsibilities among more people rather than directing all important decisions to only one person²³.

5. Human resource management

The most difficult challenge of globalisation lies in human resources and culture, particularly in international recruiting and the advancement of young talent.

5.1 Recruiting and advancement of young talent

Just as basketball, baseball, hockey or American football serve as models for the internationalisation of human resources in the United States, the most important

18 Cf. Busemann & Busch & Lasko, 2005.

19 Cf. Sprenger, 2008a.

20 Cf. Uhtenwoldt, 2009.

21 Cf. Uhtenwoldt, 2009.

22 Cf. Behrend, 2010.

23 Cf. Sprenger, 2008a.

European model is definitely football. Football is so thoroughly internationalised that it is probably one or even two generations ahead of today's corporate management when it comes to finding and integrating the world's top talents. Football clubs recruit personnel based on performance, not on nationality as the following examples show. Throughout the decades, foreign coaches like Tschik Cajkovski, Ernst Happel, Lucien Favre or Pep Guardiola have left an indelible mark on the German Bundesliga. In return, German coaches have enjoyed a high level of international recognition and prestige. Some coaches even do not speak the language of the country in which they work (e.g. Germans coaches in Spain or Turkey; others, such as the Italian Giovanni Trapattoni in Munich or Stuttgart, perform on a rather poor but very amusing and likable language level – his gibberish "Habe fertig – Flasche leer" speech in a press conference became famous in Germany). Nevertheless they manage to succeed. It is even more impressive when one looks at the different nationalities of players: More than half of the players participating in the last football World Cup tournaments earned their incomes outside their native country. Some of the most successful European teams such as Real Madrid or Chelsea London boast players from many different national teams. While the German IT industry is trying with little success to attract international top talents with the Green Card, Bundesliga clubs' squads include many foreign players. In the season 2001/2002 the Bundesliga team Energie Cottbus for the first time battled out an entire match without one German player stepping onto the field²⁴. Today even the following scenario is no longer a utopia: A football player is born in country A, possesses the citizenship of country B, and plays during his career for clubs in countries C to F. The sponsors and promotion partners of his current club stem from

countries G to L, his team manager is from M, the club's sports director from N, the player's personal advisor from O and his team mates from countries P to Z²⁵.

Is it by accident that outside sports itself in companies this diversity can just be found in the sports supplier industry? The current management board of adidas consists of seven executives from five different countries, representing two continents (two Germans, two Americans, one Danish, one Briton, one French). Adidas also defies the norm with around half of their world headquarter employees in Herzogenaurach coming from more than 40 different nations. Such success stories of cultural diversity can seldom be encountered today in the rest of the business world.

Sports has also served worldwide as an outstanding example for the international advancement of young talent. In Europe it is in football that one can experience professional private management at its best. European football leagues are the world's most competitive. Successful clubs take the "global war for the best talents" very seriously, more than most companies do. Today all leading clubs have scouting departments or even dependencies all over the world. Even in the USA – often criticised for knowing little about the rest of the world – sports leads the way in capturing international talent. The German Dirk Nowitzki has been one of the best players in America's basketball league NBA for many years. In the minor leagues of professional baseball, almost half of the nearly 6,000 players are foreign-born, representing more than 30 countries from all continents.

Yet only a few companies make international experience an absolute necessity for promotions into higher ranks. Right now in Germany only 15 % of top executives in the 500 biggest corporations have

24 Cf. Nufer, 2002.

25 Cf. Müllender, 2005.

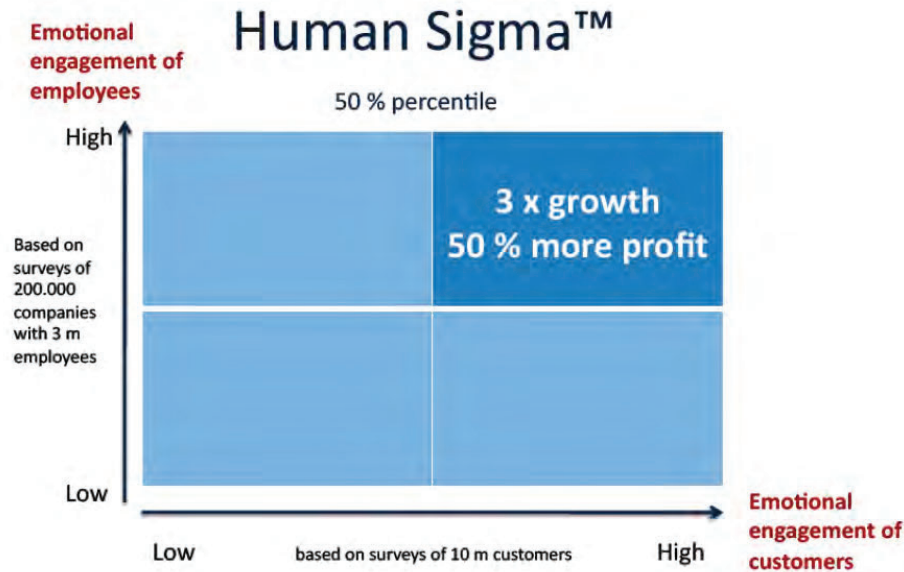


Fig. 3: Motivation and output
(Adopted from: Cave Henricks (2007), w. p.)

studied abroad, and only one-quarter have international experience from studying or working abroad. In the USA, a mere 2 % have studied outside of their home country, and only 7 % have international experience²⁶.

5.2 Motivation, enthusiasm, passion and commitment

Excellent athletes do not decide to become professional because of the money or the reputation they might earn. The secret of their outstanding performance is the will to become better every day and to live their dream. The ups and downs of their career, the tension and the competition are what make them so emotional and committed towards their profession. Although coaches support and strengthen the athletes, the motivation has to come from the athletes themselves²⁷.

According to a study by the Gallup Institute (2009), in Germany only 13% of the employees describe themselves as highly committed. Most of the Germans work be-

low their capacity²⁸. These unsatisfied employees mean an approximated yearly loss of €250-260 billion to German society. Management has to fight this lacking motivation by integrating the employees and communicating to them their value, so that every employee can identify with the organisation, makes the customer happy and generates more profit for the company²⁹. Gallup's "Human Sigma" methodology (see Fig. 3) demonstrates this theory and shows that companies with highly engaged employees and customers at the same time can achieve significant growth and up to 50% more profits³⁰.

5.3 Team spirit and individual responsibility

Success in football means winning games. All the players have to work together to achieve their common objective and to become better. The role of the coach is here to be the coordinator that steers the talents and energies of a non-uniformly paid and varyingly talented multicultural

26 Cf. Nufer & Bühler, 2014.

27 Cf. Mesmer, 2006.

28 Cf. Meinert, 2009.

29 Cf. Busemann, Busch & Lasko, 2005.

30 Cf. Cave Henricks, 2007.

workforce³¹. During the game, which is the crucial event, he can only give advice. Substituting the coach with the manager and the team with the employees, it becomes clear how important the employees are, because they are actually responsible for the success of the company in the end.

In racing the surrounding team has to cooperate perfectly in order to succeed. Although the driver is alone in the racing track and responsible for winning the competition, he is totally dependent on his team in the pit stop. Within a very short time frame the mechanics have to prepare the car for the driver in order to avoid accidents. This requires high trust and very good teamwork. In most other team sports the team consists of several different athletes who get assigned different positions and salaries. Although some players may play better or are more experienced, everybody is treated equally and only the sum of all players can achieve extraordinary success.

In the complex globalised world employees more and more have to work in international diverse teams. Excellent business people therefore have to be both responsible individuals as well as very good team players that create synergies. Only the sum of individual high-performance and maximised team spirit can lead to innovative success of the corporation.

5.4 Health and sustainability

Sports demand a lot of mental and physical strength from the athletes. Of course they can have the motivation and will power to achieve incredible accomplishments but they also have to plan in line with their resources. Faster than in any other profession, professional athletes notice when they expect too much of their body because they will directly be punished with failure or injuries. This forces

them to practice according to long-term training plans and to study their body signs in order to develop responsibility towards their most important asset – their body³².

With reference to the managerial world, the most important assets of a company are the employees, the products or the services. Comparable with sports, the management has to think and act responsibly in the long-term by treating their capital as if it was e.g. their own health they would have to care about.

6. Marketing management

An outstanding marketing policy is just as important as a globally-oriented personnel policy. Most of today's products are interchangeable. Customers can choose between very similar articles from different producers. Since there are seldom obvious differences in price or quality, the only way for a company to differentiate itself from its competitors is an emotional positioning of its own products. Branding and communication policy are important marketing instruments to reach this goal.

6.1 Branding

The brand strategy in combination with the nature of the sports consumer plays a crucial role: In general, supporters of sports clubs show a high level of passion, loyalty and irrationality. So-called die-hard-supporters would never ever even think about switching to competing brands (i.e. the rivals of their teams) just because another club offers cheaper tickets or better merchandising. In addition, supporters even arrange word-of-mouth communication for their club as a matter of prestige and for free. Corporate management is well advised to look at how successful clubs such as Manchester United and Real Madrid use the brand

31 Cf. Sprenger, 2008b.

32 Cf. Dunning & Malcolm, 2003.

loyalty of their fans and their branding power as clubs in order to grow as a business³³.

The branding policies of certain sportsmen or sports clubs, too, are stellar examples of success to which corporate management should take heed: Sports celebrities such as Franz Beckenbauer, David Beckham or Cristiano Ronaldo have practically become icons or global brands because of their immense popularity and success. They transfer the symbol of victory onto their teams (or even countries), while keeping the glory of the past and thus standing for the continuity of success. Such celebrities are likeable figures with whom fans can identify. Regarding sports teams Real Madrid maintains one of the leading roles in branding. One reason is the internationality of their world class players. People love athletes when they win and when they can identify with them. In either way the athletes are responsible for the reaction and loyalty of the fans. As a result, professional athletes, coaches or sports managers become idols, guiding examples or brands that fans associate with the club or team³⁴.

Establishing such idols in the company to whom customers look up to and immediately associate with the respective organisation is a major competitive advantage against other companies³⁵. Famous examples are Steve Jobs (Apple), Bill Gates (Microsoft) or Michael Dell (Dell). These people gave and still give the company a face and a story people can identify with which adds "human touch" to the organisation³⁶. Unfortunately, there are too few examples of well-cultivated myths which have contributed greatly to a company's image and brand identity. One exception

is the storybook success of the small-town Vermont ice cream company Ben & Jerry's whose founders learned the art of ice cream making in a community college course. Furthermore, it is not surprising that the brand value of the sports supplier company Nike tops that of Volkswagen, just as the brand value of adidas beats out those of Shell.

6.2 Communication policy

To bridge the gulf between globalisation and local identification a global brand must be identically positioned. This is achieved through clearly defined target groups and emotionally communicative appeals. In a world of increasingly interchangeable products, a brand's image must be emotionally charged by communication policy in order to appear unique and attain cult statuses to differentiate from the competition.

Within the last years FC Bayern Munich has learned much from the benchmarks Real or ManU and has kept up with global players in the industry by means of brand awareness. In Germany they were the first club to build up a corporate identity. Above all, while clearly claiming market leadership, the club has always stressed and never tried to modify its champion image. This allegedly rather arrogant approach helped the club in earning itself a distinct profile that inevitably creates a polarised effect: if you are not a fan of Bayern, you hate this club. There is no in-between. So Bayern Munich deliberately tolerates a certain number of enemies as long as their target group of fans is still closely bound to the club. Many football clubs in the world like FC Barcelona, AC Milan or Arsenal London possess tradition, brand awareness and cult status all over the world in contrast to only a few companies in corporate businesses.

In Germany, VfB Stuttgart is the only club having a red ribbon around the player's chests on the jerseys. This means a unique

33 Cf. Nufer & Bühler, 2006; 2014.

34 Cf. O'Reilly & Braedley, 2008; Heider & Nufer, 2013.

35 Cf. Brand & Löhr, 2008.

36 Cf. Carter & Rovell, 2003.

Traditional red ribbon on players' jerseys over years:



Red ribbon as USP in marketing communication:



Fig. 4: USP of VfB Stuttgart (Source: VfB Stuttgart Marketing GmbH (2006))

selling proposition. Consequently, the club is promoting this USP also in his marketing communication: advertisements of the club have a red ribbon, too (see Fig. 4).

On the business side, Porsche has benefited from the polarisation strategy. Volkswagen's new Beetle has also managed to succeed in the international market. Although, as to the price-performance relationship, the Beetle is inferior to the competition, VW highly emphasised the brand's cult status – and succeeded. Once you have reached cult status, your customers become supporters of your brand, showing enthusiasm, being loyal and the origin of precious word-of-mouth communication. For a company they are essential, especially during critical times because fans do not immediately turn towards competitors' brands, but show their displeasure through contradiction. Thus the company gets a last chance to correct its deficiencies.

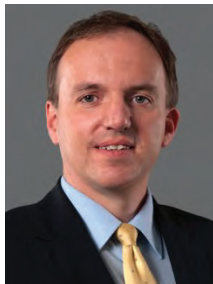
7 Conclusion and outlook

Although the emotional world of sports differs in many ways from the rational business world it proved to be worth derivable to general management, human resources and marketing. However, with regard to the many psychological aspects that relate to a lot of different situations or departments it cannot clearly be differentiated between these three managerial sectors. Most factors do not only directly concern the manager or the employee but more likely the individual in accordance with his or her special personality.

The globalisation process is going on at a breathless pace. The challenge lies in placing oneself in this process. Whether in sports or in business, it does not matter where the participants in the process come from. It is crucial that all participants are fully committed to their common mission. In this respect achievements in sports can serve as brilliant role mod-

els for management teams to emulate. And yet, besides all the advantages of globalisation, a company, which aims at growth, should never give up its local relatedness. Being big may lead to higher revenues, but also to increasing costs, a more complex structure and higher risks – without a guarantee for higher profits. The price a company has to pay can be the loss of a close relationship to its customers. While mega-mergers e.g. in the automotive industry finally led to revenue cuts, smaller companies like BMW are still booming – just as smaller football clubs like SC Freiburg or FC St. Pauli have always been proud of being somehow different.

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