

DAVID BECKHAM'S EFFECT IN THE COVERAGE
OF NEWS MEDIA

A RESEARCH PAPER

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

MASTERS OF ARTS

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NOVEMBER 2009

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The institutions of media and sports play an important role for the cross-promotion of each other industry. Together, look for mutual benefits when presenting information to their audiences. On one hand, the sport is promoted by the media coverage of the activities that the sport is involved in. On the other hand, the media is promoting them-selves by making its audience interested in the information being provided (Helland, 2007). It is clear that both institutions seek to gain attention from the public in general so their efforts can see the results in the revenues that they may obtain.

Certainly, their motivation is the amount of money that is involved in these areas. In television for example, the media is willing to pay a lot of money to get the rights to transmit the events a specific team or sport is involved in. Sport teams are willing to invest a lot of money to get the best players so the media will be interested in covering the team or sport's events.

In this example one can see that this business is monetarily huge. In both sides, there is a lot of money involved, what makes both sides potentially very profitable. This paper reflects the way media and sport are related, and how these two institutions play a major role in the lives of many people in the world. The major goal of this paper is to show the relevance of media in sports and sports in media, and how they work together to achieve their personal and mutual goals.

This paper presents a closer view of how a newspaper presents information of soccer. More specifically, the paper uses a content analysis to determine the effect David

Beckham had on coverage in news media, specifically during the time period that Beckham had signed to play for the L.A. Galaxy, Major League Soccer team. The analysis continues with the after-effect of Beckham's signing on coverage of soccer in the L.A. Times.

The MLS (major league soccer) hired David Beckham in 2007 as a strategy to increase the popularity of the sport in the United States, after he was not used very much in the Real Madrid from Spain. Because Beckham's performance in the Real Madrid was not as the team expected his last year, his positive impact in the sport wide world was decreasing. The impact in the media, specifically in the United States may have been less than what was anticipated by the MLS; and therefore, minimized the impact on the popularity of soccer. This paper seeks to explore what that impact ultimately was, and to provide insight into the hiring of high-profile athletes, and the danger associated with that, to sport.

Since the paper is going to analyze a newspaper, it is important to overview the beginnings of the newspaper as a way of communication in the United States. This paper also examines the involvement of media in soccer in the United States, and a historical overview of sports and media in the United States will be presented so readers can understand more the way these two institutions form an enormous influence in the world. This paper also provides the readers with information on the sport of soccer, and its role in the United States' sports industry. This is crucial for readers because as it is seen, soccer has not been as popular in the country as other sports in the past centuries; however, as one of the most popular sport worldwide, it is important to understand the role of the sport in the United States in the 21st century.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Beginning of Newspapers

The very first newspaper was published in the 17th century. After this, in the 19th century the first newspaper was published in the United States. Newspaper was born because people who were well educated used it as a way to express their ideas and thoughts. The use of this element was more to show people's academic education, and therefore; readers were being educated. At the beginning, newspapers were not seen as a way to make business, it was more for people to express literature of different subjects. At that point, the newspapers journalists did not write large amount of sports articles, but the Boston Gazette published a boxing match in 1733. Then in 1832, the New York Herald carried another boxing story of a guy who died after a 12 round bout. It seems that the coverage of boxing was big at that time because it was very famous sport at that point, and it was a way to make readers feel proud of American fighters.

By 1862 more newspapers journalists were more involved in the coverage of sports; the Herald's Henry Chadwick was considered the first country baseball writer. Joseph Pulitzer made a world change in newspapers by creating a single sports department in the organizations. In 1895 the New York Journal became the first newspaper in the United States to print a whole section dedicated exclusively to sports.

Some other cities were slower to move to this new element of reporting. The Chicago Tribune started to have a Sunday sport section in 1899, and then, until 1905, it started publishing a daily sport section. Other cities such as Washington and Boston

waited longer to publish daily sport sections in their newspapers. Finally in the 1920's, the sports section was completely adopted in all newspapers (Beck 2003).

Little by little, the newspapers saw the opportunity to advertise business and became profitable. The only problem with it is that in the 20th century a lot of people have created their own newspaper for the sake of making money and have forgotten about the importance of the newspaper as a way of communication. The editors' work had not been the appropriate; it seemed that they had allowed writers to put whatever in the pages just to fill them up presenting a lack of quality and relevant information (Beck 2003).

Not everything was bad though; newspapers' producers and editors worked hard to create a more extensive coverage in different relevant areas for the audience. They were able to get knowledgeable people in different aspects, such as finance, community, sports, and even art. They were able to extend the subjects to the point where readers found their interests in an easy way. Another good aspect where they were ahead from other media communication was the fact that it was cheaper. A lot of people have felt identified with this communication method because it is affordable. Other ways to get informed are out of the possibilities of many people in the United States. As one can see, in the 21st century, newspapers have lost popularity in the world because of the creation of other innovative ways of communication, such as internet and cable. It is still seen out there though, powerful newspapers that have maintained their initial purpose, and have been able to adjust to the changes so they can still be attractive to the audience.

Newspapers in the United States, as in the rest of the world, have a lot of information to obtain from sports. Also, people are some how involved with a sport,

which gives a lot of opportunity to the newspapers' owners, editors and writers to capture the attention of people by being consistent in the coverage of the most relevant information of this section (Beck 2003).

History of Soccer in the United States

After different schools started to be more interested in playing soccer in the United States since 1827, the American Football Association was created in 1867. They joined different states to play in a college level and semi professional. The main creators of this association were the baseball owners who decided to bring this sport before the baseball games when baseball audience was low. In the 1900's there were different cups and leagues created. The different ethnic communities had a big influence in the development of the sport. Different people brought the sport to the country when they immigrated to the United States because of political circumstances. (Douglas 1995).

Because of the interest that the world has in soccer, different investors from America have put more effort to develop the sport in the country. In 1967 the North America Soccer League (NASL) was created with the fusion of the American Soccer League (USA) and the National Professional Soccer League (NPSL). However, later on the league was dropped because the investment that was being made was not bringing the expected revenues. For example, in 1977 they brought Edison Arantes do Nascimento "Pele" after he was retired in 1971 for 4.5 million dollars. Even though the league signed 7 games contract for national television and brought 77,000 people to his debut, the league could not maintain his expenses and had to disappear (Douglas 1995).

Later on in 1994 the United States hosted the World Cup Tournament celebrated every four years thanks to the strong infrastructure of the country and the big desire of American investors to develop this worldwide sport in the country. Because of this great event that brought a lot of attention to the sport, in 1996 the Major League Soccer was created as the professional soccer league in the United States. Now, entering its 13th season in 2008, MLS is experiencing growth with new teams, the construction of soccer stadiums, and the addition of new investors. The San Jose Earthquakes were be a new team beginning in 2008, Seattle will be another team in 2009, and the League expects to have 16 teams by 2010. The MLS has 33 million fans attending throughout the 12 season games.

The Media, Culture and Sport

To start, it would be important to see how sports media is produced, and then, how public perceive this information from the producers. This part explains the relationship that exists between the media, culture and the sport. The situation is divided in two parts: “Making media sport” and “Taking of through it” (Bernstain 2003).

Making media sport talks about the organizational structures and the professional ideologies that form the production of their texts. It is important for the media and the sport in general to overview and understand the historical and sociological aspect of a culture as a prerequisite to produce the right texts that are going to be presented to the public (Raymond 2000).

The sport and media is mutually dependant because what is produce in the media always operates with the notion of how it is going to be received. The texts have to be

constructed thinking about who the texts are sent to. It can be to women, men, and even within these categories, it depends on the ages that the producer is thinking about. For instance, the writer might be thinking about sending a message to women, but specifically to younger women. This producer's selection has to make him/her select a different format in his/her texts for the target public to accept it in the way the producer is intending.

It is important to mention that the production of these texts is not under control of the producer because he does not determine who is going to read the texts. The producer makes the content thinking for a specific audience, but it is up to the audience in general to consume the information or not. This situation might bring a negative, positive or irrelevant impact on the consumers (Sanna 2004).

It is hard for the sport journalist to maintain high professional standards, because they are expected to observe the journalistic objectivity in their texts while developing close ties to their subjects (athletes, co-workers and other sport workers) and their audiences (sports fans). These different aspects create a tension in the production of the texts for journalists. A lot of newspapers departments criticize the sports department because the journalists do not take their job serious and are involved in a lot of ethical practices (Jay 1994). It seems that the need to build the relationships with the sport in general, athletes, and co-workers is putting journalists and the newspapers' sports departments in an identity crises around the country. People in the field define the sport department as the newspapers toy and critics are often targeting the sports department. It is ironic to see that in the sport section in newspapers, people can find the best written stories, but at the same time, it is here where people can find the worst written stories as

well. It is perhaps because of the lack of objectivity that journalists sometimes adopt in their writing. Along this issue, it is also noticeable that sports departments pay more attention to men sports than women sports. It has been a lot of research that show that women's sports coverage is less than men's. Even though this situation has changed little by little, people can still see the preference writers have for men's sports (Sanna 2004).

Research questions and Hypothesis

Base on the literature review, these are the research questions and hypotheses that are proposed. The study research questions look for to find whether the inclusion of a popular soccer player in the MLS, would increase the coverage in the media (L.A. Times newspaper) in the country.

RQ1: Did the LA Time mentioned articles about David Beckham, before it was announced that he was coming to play for the L.A. Galaxy?

This question seeks to provide evidence of the power a popular soccer player has to increase the popularity of the sport in a country where soccer is not very popular. It allows us to examine, whether celebrities can actually make a sport to gain attention among different audiences; even audiences that do not know anything about the sport.

RQ2: Were there more articles about David Beckham in the L.A. focused on his personal life or as a soccer player?

This question focuses more on the media outlet. This gives the opportunity to examine whether the media outlet is more focused on David Beckham as a soccer player than as a celebrity, and whether the L.A. times articles portray knowledge about David Beckham as a soccer player

H1: The L.A. Times wrote more articles about David Beckham after it was announced his inclusion to the L.A. Galaxy.

Even though, the L.A. Times wrote some articles about the MLS, its teams, and the results, the newspaper will write more and longer articles about David Beckham, the L.A. Galaxy, and the MLS. It is expected to see articles that bring the people's attention, not only to the newspaper, but also to the sport.

CHAPTER 3

AMERICAN SOCCER BACKGROUND

Situation Analysis of Soccer in the United States

It has been mentioned that there was an attempt to create a professional soccer league in the United States in 1967, but because of the huge investment and very poor revenues it disappeared. Also, it was mentioned that thanks to the World Cup Tournament in 1994, the sport was more promoted in the country and it brought the creation of a new professional league named Major League Soccer in 1996. (Colin 1994).

The new investors have been more careful to handle this league. They came with a plan to make the league very competitive compared with the world. They had in mind to bring at some point players that could give to the league the same level and interest as other leagues around the world. They knew that the media was not going to pay a lot of attention to the sport in comparison with others in the country, but they knew that they had to be very patient in order to achieve their goal.

At the beginning, they have not put a lot of money into the promotion of the sport. (William 2003). They did not have any big figure in the league. The only international players that came to be part of the league were making the same as a regular worker in the United States. The reason they came to the MLS is because they were players that could give to the league more excitement, and because teams in their countries were not paying attention to them. The rest of the players were recruited from universities to start their professional careers. The first five years, the league had to pay television stations to broadcast the play offs of the league. Also, they had to create their own stories and place

them in the newspapers, radio and their own website (MLS.com) to inform a little bit about the league and its teams (Douglas 1995).

After the sixth year, in 2002 the league was gaining more interest, not only in the community, but also in the media. The MLS was starting to see the results of its efforts and investments. A couple of teams, including the L.A. Galaxy, had got their first television contracts to transmit their whole season. Now, the league did not have to pay anything to gain the attention of the media, especially television. Because of the interest that people were showing to the sport, the media started to see that they had a chance to make profits from it.

One of the best things that the MLS did during its first years was that they controlled the teams. In other words, at first, the MLS owned the teams to maintain the same level among them in the competition. Later on, the league allowed investors to obtain a franchise of the teams. By doing this, it helped the league increase its revenues, but at the same time to keep control of the investments the new owners were making. In 2002 until 2005, the teams were not allowed to spend more than a certain amount of money to form their teams. This was established to not experience the same situation that they had before in 1967. Now, in 2007, since the interest has grown in the community and the media, the teams are allowed to bring two players without contract limitations. This is why people can see David Beckham, Cuauhtémoc Blanco and some others in the league. This move certainly has been handled very carefully to not fall into a bad experience (Douglas 1995).

The MLS did, and keeps doing a great job reaching the community. They are trying to approach the community, not only by bringing well known players, but also, by

involving the players with the community. In comparison with other leagues, where players are untouchable and unapproachable; the MLS has used a different strategy to gain the attention of the public. They involved the players with the community, and more importantly, they make them to participate in charities, so people can see the human side of the players.

One of the MLS's strategies is the creation of a club called "Fantasy." In this club people can create their own team. They are provided with a budget that they can use to buy and sell players to form their teams. Every week, they can select different players that they think can get good grades. The higher the player is graded, the more money the participant makes. The good thing of this strategy is that participants cannot only beat others in the club, but also the winner can get rewards from the league.

Recently, the Chicago Fire, which is a team that belongs to the MLS, traveled to Africa to be part of a mission to interact with homeless kids and with the poor communities. This certainly brought the attention of the media such as the Chicago Tribune which wrote a big article in the front page about this topic (Chicago Fire – Media Relations dept. 2008).

Another strategy that they conduct is very similar to the Mexican teams. They approach organizations that are willing to offer discounts in their products. The Chicago Fire for example has created a type of check book with different organizations' discounts to promote the team (Chicago Fire – Media Relations dept. 2008). This has been a very good way for them to reach more people to follow the team. Because of the demography of these two countries, the MLS and the Mexican Football Federation (FMF) have been working together to increase the popularity of the sport. In the last three years, these two

organizations have joined their efforts to promote the sport. This desire has made them create a tournament where the best two teams of each league play a short tournament called “SuperLiga.” Every year these four teams play at home and away to find out the best team of these two countries.

This strategy has definitely helped to increase the popularity of the sport because these two teams are the best teams in the Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF). They always share the championships of this division, which has created rivalry among people in general. This situation has helped the leagues to increase the interest of the public to support their teams. Certainly, there are many strategies and tactics that the MLS and its teams have done to increase the popularity of the sport. They are still very cautious with every move they take, but so far, it is working very well (Douglas 1995).

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

To answer the study's research questions and hypotheses, a content analysis of the L.A. Times coverage of David Beckham was conducted. The L.A. Times was chosen for the closeness the newspaper has to the team David Beckham came to play for.

Articles from a total of six months from the L.A. Times comprised the sample of this study. A total of 182 publications of the newspaper were reviewed to complete the analysis. The selection of the articles were divided in three parts: three months before the day it was announced that he was coming to the L.A. Galaxy, the day he arrived, and three months after it was announced that David Beckham was coming to the L.A. Galaxy. This is the period of time that was selected to complete the analysis (October 1, 2006 through March 31, 2007). All sections of the newspaper were reviewed, and all articles that included David Beckham were taken into account. These could have included articles not related to soccer. Letters to the editor, fan reports, and advertising were excluded from this study.

After reviewing the 182 publications, the study consisted of one article before the announcement, two articles the day he arrived to the L.A. Galaxy, and 33 after the announcement.

To answer RQ1, which deals with whether or not the L.A. Times wrote articles about David Beckham before it was announced that he was coming to play for the L.A. Galaxy, the first three months of this study were analyzed. A count of articles that mentioned David Beckham, regardless of the section and topic, was conducted (see

appendix 1). All the articles that mentioned David Beckham were counted, because the purpose was to find out how much the newspaper cared about the soccer player before the announcement about him coming to the U.S. was made. All articles talking about David Beckham were coded as Soccer/Personal life topics (see appendix 2). The constructed months before the announcement allowed the researcher to answer RQ1, while the further months allowed the H1 to be confirmed, which states that the L.A. Times was going to write more articles about David Beckham after it was announced that he was coming to play for the L.A. Galaxy.

RQ2, which was related to whether or not there were more articles about David Beckham in the L.A. Times focused on his personal life or as a soccer player, was completed by analyzing the six months that compiled this study. The purpose was to find out whether the MLS was accomplishing its media relations strategy of increasing the popularity of soccer by making the media write about David Beckham, and whether this strategy was attracting people to the league, therefore making it more popular among Americans. All articles were counted to see different aspects that could have helped the MLS accomplish its goals. The articles were coded as article, section, page, quadrant, picture, soccer/personal life, length, and positive/negative/neutral. Certainly each of these aspects could have made a difference in the way people see soccer in the U.S. (see appendix 2). The constructed months allowed the researcher to answer RQ2.

The hypothesis was measured by examining the number of articles that were written after the announcement about David Beckham coming to play in the L.A. Galaxy. These articles could have included information about his personal life as well. Again, letters to editors, fan reports, and advertising were not included in the scope of this study.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

David Beckham in the L.A. Times

RQ1: Did the L.A. Times mention articles about David Beckham before it was announced that he was coming to play for the L.A. Galaxy?

The L.A. Times only wrote one article in one publication out of 182 (see appendix 2) that mentioned David Beckham. Even though the article was focused more on Manchester United expanding its empire to the U.S. by purchasing the L.A. Galaxy, and use David Beckham's image to make it happen, the article was still counted (see table 1). It is clear that the number of articles written by the L.A. Times went up after the day it was announced that he was coming to the L.A. Galaxy.

Table 1. Articles mentioning David Beckham before the announcement

	Before announcement	Day of announcement	After announcement
Articles	1	2	33

There was one article before the announcement, two articles the day it was announced, and 33 after the announcement was made that were related to David Beckham.

Media's focus on David Beckham

RQ2: Were the articles about David Beckham in the L.A. Times focused on his personal life or as a soccer player?

Almost all the articles that were written about David Beckham were related to soccer. Some articles also included some comments about him and his wife as celebrities in Hollywood. These articles were included because they were important to answer the RQ2.

This analysis also confirmed the H1. The amount of articles about David Beckham increased considerably after it was announced that he was coming to play for the L.A. Galaxy.

Table 2. Articles about David Beckham related to soccer or personal life

	Soccer articles	Personal life articles
<u>Amount of articles</u>	32	6

There were six articles that talked about Beckham's personal life, and 32 articles that were focused on soccer. The articles that included information about these two categories were placed in both, because they were focused on both aspects. This is the reason readers see a total of 38 articles, even though there were only 36 articles found total. The analysis was conducted this way, because the purpose was to find whether the L.A. Times was focused on David Beckham's soccer career or his personal life.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

The effects of the coverage in news media are huge when the elements that can help to make a good story, such as celebrities, are exploited in the right way. In 2006 David Beckham was a huge figure around the world, so the news media was utilizing any situation about him to attract people to their outlet. It is incredible, though, that the L.A. Times for example was not writing anything about Beckham before it was announced that he was coming to play for a team in the MLS. This is very clear evidence that soccer was not, and is still not compared to other sports, a sport that interests the white community, which is still the majority in the U.S. It is hoped, that soccer is able to gain the attention and importance among Caucasians in the country, so that the news media can value the sport, and therefore write more about this sport.

Some aspects are important to address in this study. The study reflects the attention the media paid to David Beckham's inclusion in the MLS six months before he actually came. David Beckham was still registered with Real Madrid from Spain during the period of time this study was analyzed. This is an enormous reason that there was such a small amount of articles about David Beckham. It is assumed that close to the day David Beckham came to the United States, on the day, and while he was playing for the L.A. Galaxy, the L.A. Times wrote much more about him.

Applications to Public Relations

There were many articles about David Beckham after it was announced that he was coming to the L.A. Galaxy as a strategy to increase the popularity of the MLS among people in the United States. As one can see in the paper, the relationship that prevails between the media and any sport's public relations department is enormous. This study helps public relations practitioners to realize how the media utilize different information about the target (David Beckham) to make the audience find about him what they want to know (Sanna 2004).

Readers can find through this study that the L.A. Times was not exclusively focused on David Beckham as a soccer player, but also as a celebrity. The fact that the newspaper wrote about Beckham's personal life may have produced interest in their readers to follow him more, therefore making them know more about the team and the sport Beckham participates in.

Public relations practitioners can find through this study that the pitch of good stories can make the media publish them in their communications outlets, regardless of what they are (television, radio, newspaper, internet, etc.) It is important for public relations practitioners to write in a way that can make the media interested in your stories.

Finally, it is important to mention that sport public relations practitioners must know and understand athletes in order to write and present the best stories to the media, so the media see the benefits of publishing the story. If there is a kind of telepathic writing style between the public relations practitioner and reporter, most likely the story will be published in the newspaper (Raney; Jennings 2006).

Implications for further research

Since the period of time that was under analysis was not the time David Beckham was in the United States, it would be important to analyze the amount and the way the media covered information about him. Even though January 2006 was the date it was confirmed that David Beckham was coming to the L.A. Galaxy, the chosen time was not the most relevant, because David Beckham was going to finish his contract with the Spanish team Real Madrid, which expired in June 2006. This situation could be the reason the L.A. Times did not write many articles about him. It would be recommended to further research a period of time closer to the day he arrived in the U.S. to play for the L.A. Galaxy. It would be important to analyze the way the media talked about David Beckham when he got injured just one month after he started playing for the L.A. Galaxy. It would be interesting to see whether the media was negative or positive about this incident, how the MLS public relations department responded to this, and whether people continue being attracted to the sport regardless of David Beckham's injury.

This study, however, is very important for a couple of reasons. First, because it gives the readers a better idea of the importance the media placed on soccer in the U.S. before David Beckham came, and second, to understand the effects that a celebrity can have in the media coverage, in this case, the L.A. Times.

Conclusions

There will always be a discussion about whether the use of a popular athlete in a public relations strategy/tactic would be beneficial to the organization. For this reason, it is very important for public relations practitioners to know deeply the pros and cons of

using an athlete as a strategy to increase the popularity of a sport. Practitioners must know very well every single aspect of the athlete to not be surprised by what the media writes about him/her.

Despite of this controversial issue, this study reflected how a major celebrity helped to increase the popularity of the L.A. Galaxy and the MLS.

APPENDIX 2

CODE BOOK

Date: Indicate the date the article was published.

Section: Indicate the “Section” column of the coding sheet which section of the newspaper covered the story.

1. U.S. National
2. Business
3. Sports
4. Opinion
5. Society

Page: Indicate on which page the article is found.

Quadrant: Indicate the quadrant(s) the article occupied.

1	2
3	4

Picture: Indicate if the article includes a picture.

1. Y
2. N

Soccer/Personal life: Indicate whether the article was related to soccer or his personal life.

Length: Indicate the length (words) of the article

Positive/Negative/Neutral: Indicate the tone of the article in the “Positive/Negative/Neutral” column.

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