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## European football under close scrutiny

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# European football under close scrutiny

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## Peer reviewed

## Executive summary

The commercial aspect of football is growing inexorably, and this requires the adaptation of its various structures to the changing socio-economic context. Even though sporting authorities have always promoted ethical attitudes, some of their rules have demonstrated some weaknesses in terms of how they respect societal values. However, consumers are increasingly looking beyond products, and are expressing concern for the respect of societal values. This change in mentality seems praiseworthy when

## Abstract

Consumers are increasingly looking beyond products, and are expressing concern for the respect of societal values. This paper analyses how football organisations and governing bodies in Europe are adapting their marketing strategies to reflect these concerns. 'Ethical charters' or 'ethical codes of behaviour' need to be redefined under close scrutiny from shareholders and stakeholders. Whether it is a deliberate decision or a forced change, football organisations must respond to simultaneous commercial and political pressures.

the organisation acts positively with regard to both its own objectives and the values of society. As a new social standard, ethics does not claim to serve an ideal, but is a means by which the interests of the majority can be satisfied. In terms of social responsibility, sport embodies an ideal. As the flagship of an egalitarian society, it should be the emblematic example for ethical conduct. The aim of this paper is two-fold. First, it will analyse the framework within which the system of ethics used by football authorities



has been designed, and identify the pressures exerted by stakeholders. These pressures can take a commercial form (sponsors, broadcasters, spectators, fans, etc.) as well as economic and political forms, and are imposed by federal governments, communities and citizens. Second, it will examine how ethical concerns, which are vital to the future of sport, can coexist with the increasing impact of commercial concerns. The main question is whether ethical concerns and commercial imperatives are compatible, and whether they can successfully coexist while at the same time respecting ethical values.

Our approach, based on a documentary study and concrete cases, falls within the framework of the stakeholder theory. It focuses on the normative dimension of this theory, as it examines the introduction of an ethical dimension into the analysis of strategic management.

The first section of this paper aims to examine the interdependence of the concepts of ethics and deontology. In response to various scandals, ethics has become a rallying point in the communications made by leaders in the worlds of business and sport. We examine the fragile equilibrium for the football industry between a market dimension and an ethical dimension. From a matrix that takes into account the ethical importance in the marketing strategy of football organisations and their identity-oriented or collective actions, four different approaches have been identified: an ethics of comparative responsibility; an ethics of conviction; forced ethics; and egocentricity or self-centeredness. The second section of the paper deals with ethics as a new management tool. Pressured by their partners and stakeholders, football organisations are forced to put ethical considerations at the centre of their communication activities. Ethics thus catalyses strategy; the strategy of international sporting organisations tends to oscillate between commitment and opportunism. It is necessary for sporting organisations to protect their relationships with consumers, fans and sponsors if they want to ensure their commercial survival. The marketing consequences cannot be ignored; actions must be in

congruence with an ethical dialogue. Under pressure from stakeholders, football organisations have had to adapt their global strategies to the changing world scene, and are under close scrutiny.

### Introduction

Sporting event organisers, professional clubs and federal sporting authorities, particularly in football, are being faced with both socio-economic changes in their environment and mounting criticism. They have reacted to this by implementing marketing strategies in which ethics – in the broad sense of the term – plays a major part. This has led to a revision of ethical charters and the creation of new ‘professional codes of behaviour’. Under pressure from stakeholders (non-governmental organisations, governments, suppliers, the media, sponsors and fans), football organisations have had to adapt their global strategies to the changing world scene. Indeed, clubs and federal sporting authorities act in an increasingly commercialised environment, incorporating television and digital broadcasting rights, partnership/sponsorship contracts, corporate use of sporting events for public relations purposes, and ticket sales through establishments that are mainly funded by national or local taxpayers.

The commercial aspect of football is growing inexorably, and this requires the adaptation of its various structures to the changing socio-economic context. This issue is all the more important as high-level sport is a combination of intense physical commitment, competition against an opponent, major media exposure and high financial stakes. Moreover, the world of sport has long sought to be identified with mainstream ethical values such as equal opportunities for all, respect for the rules, the desire to exceed one's limits, and the rewarding of talent, sustained effort and hard work. Football organisations thus need to openly show their willingness to guarantee that these values will be respected, and to implement and stick to a clearly stated deontology that is widely accepted



by all concerned. The feeling of disenchantment that has taken over the world has shaken the world of sport. These days, clubs and federal sporting authorities need to redefine their codes of behaviour and devise methods to enforce them. They must choose whether to take deliberate steps for moral and commercial reasons, or to respond to political and social situations.

Using a descriptive approach related to the case of European football, the aim of this paper is two-fold. First, it will analyse the framework within which the system of ethics used by football authorities has been designed, and identify the pressures exerted by stakeholders. These pressures can take a commercial form (sponsors, broadcasters and spectators) as well as economic and political forms, and are imposed by federal governments, communities and citizens. The ethical aspect of football marketing will thus be considered. Second, it will examine how ethical concerns, which are vital to the future of sport (as well as in other sectors), can coexist with the increasing impact of commercial concerns. The main question is whether ethical concerns and commercial imperatives are compatible, and whether they can successfully coexist while respecting the aforementioned ethical values.

The paper is divided into two sections. The first section examines the general aspects of ethics. Ethics is defined, and its growing demand from the corporate world is reviewed. We look into the conditions required for companies to develop ethical concerns, relying on the example of sporting equipment suppliers. In the second section, the part played by ethics in European football is examined. First, there is a description of the marked shift to more commercial concerns over the last 20 years, as well as an assessment of the consequences this has had on strategies, especially marketing strategies. We look into the role of ethics in this new context and ask the question of whether ethical preoccupations are a key factor of success. Finally, we examine the implications of sports ethical marketing managed by football organisations for consumers and sponsors.

### Where do ethical concerns fit in?

Generally speaking, today's sporting world is bathed in moral principles in an attempt to counter the numerous accusations of corrupt management, embezzlement, geographical inequalities and exploitation, among others. Ethics and its corollary, deontology, are often supposed to be clearly defined. An important point to bear in mind is that the sporting organisations that support these ethical standards or professional codes either do so willingly, by deliberate choice, or are forced to adhere to them due to pressure from their stakeholders.

### From ethics to deontology

Etymologically, the word 'ethics' has two origins: the Greek word 'ithos', which refers to the attitude of the spirit, and 'ethos', which indicates the rules that result from it. Louart (1999) identified two ways of thinking:

Deontological approaches "judge that humans have the duty to conform to the rules of nature and the customs or social contracts that are essential to them". These have "determinist and normative contents".

Teleological approaches consider that "each act must be assessed in terms of its results either by the actor (ethical selfishness) or by others (utilitarianism)".

However, current ethical thinking is not focused on the causes and effects of social phenomena, but instead aims to describe the normative foundations of social actions (Rojot, 1992). As a new social standard, ethics does not claim to serve an ideal, but is a means by which the interests of the majority can be satisfied (Mercier, 1999). From this perspective, the antagonism between ethics and the finality of an undertaking can be superseded when an organisation functions better by acting in accordance with both its own objectives and an equitable development of the world (Le Tourneau, 2000; Courrent & Mercier, 2000).

Within this framework, teleology and deontology remain inseparable as long as deontology has prescriptive power, which can occur only if it is part of a global ethical movement with clearly stated values (Vitell, 2003; Vitell & Paolillo, 2003). This observation



is particularly clear in the sporting world, which has a long ethical tradition. Moreover, deontology has a markedly professional character: it represents all the rules that govern the relationships between members of a given profession, both among the members themselves and between them and their economic or social partners. Establishing a code of behaviour amounts to identifying the good principles of action and the bad ones, which plays a federalising role in the organisation's culture and more generally on the sector in which it operates. This pragmatic dimension of deontology indicates the actions to be taken. In this sense, deontology defines who has authority; it even defines the official body of a given sector of activity – a body which may have the power to impose sanctions.

The transition from deontology to modes of defining rules and checking if they comply with them requires a process that literature has termed 'ethicology'. This word, borrowed from Louart (1999), refers to the set of rules related to a certain ethical domain. Indeed, the construction of a professional code of behaviour includes a step that clarifies the way in which individuals justify their actions within the collective occupational framework. The interdependence of the concepts of ethics and deontology in both nature and content should be emphasised. Ethics provides the basis for the general doctrine observed in the corporate world, particularly in the sporting sector, as opposed to the moral philosophy, which is specific to each individual.

Deontology is the professional translation of a code of behaviour ensuing from general ethics – which is itself a general standard aiming to satisfy the majority – adopted by an organisation. Consequently, the internal rules and procedures express the contents of a sector's deontology.

### **A call for more ethics: a world movement that football must take into account**

The liberalisation of the economy that is driving globalisation has widened the gap between the market and society. However, the market, in the broad sense of the term, needs society since it needs an

institutionalised environment in which the various actors are important (Barrientos, 2000). Moreover, without sufficient international government pressure in favour of regulatory mechanisms, the private sector is always ready to take up the challenge and become the architect of world markets. In the sporting market, criticisms of sporting events, and particularly of football, have been strengthened by new information and communication technologies that are now used as powerful media weapons. This has increased the risks for sporting event organisers. Whether this criticism is justified or not, organisers are now developing policies of greater social responsibility. However, as seen through the prism of ethics, these organisations have become increasingly vulnerable.

In response to various scandals, the harmful effects of economic development and the consequences of globalisation, "ethics" has become a rallying point in the communications made by leaders in the worlds of business and sport. There is, in fact, nothing new about this, as ethics has a long philosophical and sociological history. Le Goff (1995) pointed out that when a society lacks common references, modern companies, and in particular public or private organisations, become ethical communities, promoting and implementing the forgotten humanist values. Today's omnipresent concern with ethics reveals the deep anxiety of a society whose codes of behaviour are no longer defined by ideological or religious reference points, or by strong authority figures (Canto-Sperber, 2001). Therefore, the organisation comes to perceive itself as a citizen, and insists on its share of responsibility in local and national affairs. It can no longer turn away from the responsibility it has for society, and indeed is accountable to all of its interlocutors. This change in mentality seems praiseworthy when the organisation acts positively with regard to both its own objectives and the values of society. Studies carried out in the United States (Cui & Choudhury, 2003) highlight the fact that the ethical consequences of organisational actions are increasingly important to the fundamental beliefs of individuals. These beliefs are expressed in the search



for social and moral equity, and in the desire for honesty and justice. A beneficial combination of philosophy and morals could then give rise to a business ethics dominated by integrity, and sports in general would not be exempt. Football in particular, because of the huge amounts of money involved and its intense media exposure, often experiences these pressures.

Since its creation, football has always portrayed certain fundamental values such as courage, determination, performance, respect for rules and for others, exceeding one's limits, and the "beauty" of track and field. Moreover, sport has a symbolic function in that it is a reminder that sport is, above all, the activity of individuals who are members of a society. In terms of social responsibility, sport embodies an ideal. As the flagship of an egalitarian society, it should be the emblematic example for ethical conduct. The sporting market is huge, and international brands convey images that combine youth with the idea of a cosmopolitan and multicultural society. The importance of such a thought is demonstrated and exemplified by Nahapetian (2004).

### **Ethics used as a strategy: a deliberate choice or a forced decision?**

As a rule, the responsibility of today's organisations is three-fold: a social responsibility to their employees and consumers; a societal responsibility to the community in which they operate; and an environmental responsibility in the broad sense of the term (Caroll, 1979; Beji-Becheur & Bensebaa, 2004). Given this triple responsibility, our study concerns the incorporation and the application of ethics in the strategies of these organisations. Furthermore, organisations that coordinate sporting events are highly specialised and require a particularly focused study, since this market is characterised by a specific ethical claim, emphasised to the point of asserting that these activities are the "sporting exception".

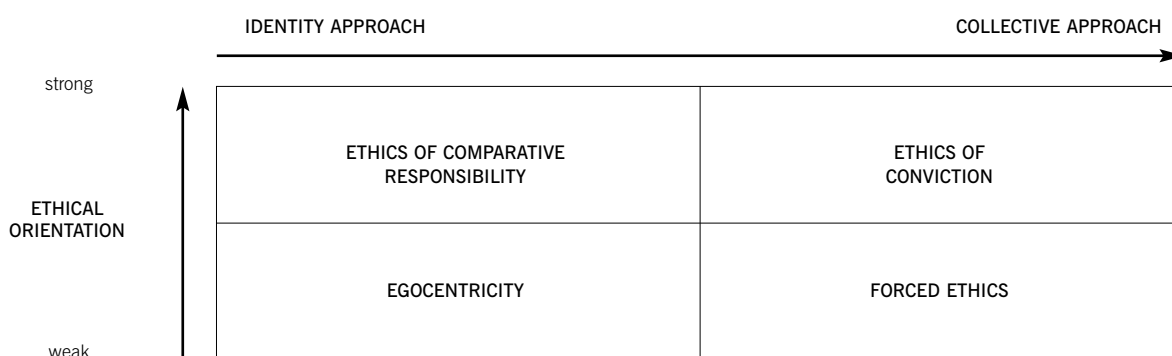
How can profit be reconciled with a respect for "what is right and good" from economic, social, societal and environmental points of view? Ethical problems also emerge when two duties conflict; for example, the duty to ensure the continuing financial health of a capitalist enterprise and the duty to protect the interests of society (Morin, 2004). This is undoubtedly the most acute issue. In combining ethics with sport, football organisations find themselves ahead in the implementation of higher levels of functioning, and could be seen as ideal examples for non-sporting organisations. We can better illustrate this with the following examples. In 2006, the Sepp Blatter Foundation Prize was awarded to the Handicap Sport Association. This foundation aims to support sporting projects, particularly in football. In the same way, the Football Foundation, funded by the Football Association and the British government, is one of the largest sporting and social associations in the UK. These foundations are playing a key role in revitalising grass roots sport. Their main mission concerns social development through the establishment and communication of the values traditionally associated with English football.

Although once committed to satisfying their shareholders, these organisations are today required to meet the demands of their stakeholders, whether they belong to these organisations (owners, managers, employees, volunteers) or not (competitors, fans, governments, lobbies, the media, community and natural environment) (Mercier, 2001; Madsen & Ulhoi, 2001; Gabriel, 2003)<sup>1</sup>. The report 'Football and its communities', carried out by Manchester Metropolitan University over three years, outlines a new vision and understanding of how the football world can engage with communities. It recognises the extensive efforts that football, more than any other sport, has put into community development. This stakeholder theory is the framework of much of today's research on organisational ethics (Caroll, 1979, 1999; Mercier, 2001). This paper focuses on the normative dimension

<sup>1</sup> Maignan & Swaen (2004, p.55): "Stakeholders refer to individuals or groups who – directly or indirectly – influence the operations of the company or can be influenced by them (suppliers, customers, employees, investors, local communities, governments, lobbies, trade associations, etc.)."



FIGURE 1 Positioning of organisational management compared with ethics



of this theory, as it concentrates on the introduction of an ethical dimension into the analysis of strategic management – addressing the need to reconcile the conflicting interests of stakeholders to ensure the organisation’s survival<sup>2</sup>. The commitment to the wellbeing of the community as a whole is implicit, and underlies the idea of a joint project to which all stakeholders adhere.

Another approach considers the ethical dimension from the point of view of an organisation – a professional club, a sporting authority or an equipment supplier<sup>3</sup> – dealing with the importance it attaches to ethics in its marketing strategy and its recourse to identity-oriented or collective strategic actions (Figure 1).

In Figure 1 we can see that sporting organisations, professional clubs or equipment suppliers can take four different approaches:

**An ethics of comparative responsibility** (Weber, 1964, 1971), in which only results matter. Organisations such as Adidas<sup>4</sup> can be led to

compromises that have the sole aim of demonstrating their societal responsibility to their stakeholders. Ethics becomes a tool for marketing differentiation, like the brand name itself. It also gives the company a competitive advantage as it contributes to the positive image of the organisation (Tixier, 2004).

**An ethics of conviction** (Weber, 1964, 1971), according to which action is taken out of a belief in a moral principle, regardless of the consequences (e.g. Patagonia, Timberland<sup>5</sup>). This is a more philosophical attitude that is marked by a harmonisation between what is thought, said, and done, through a double-loop societal training process – a process that works retroactively and integrates questions about the underlying principles of an action (Gond, 2003).

**Forced ethics**, which typifies organisations like Nike, the equipment supplier that always acts in response to pressures from stakeholders<sup>6</sup>. Nike’s adaptation to its environment could be considered as a ‘paradoxical balance’ insofar as it tries to reconcile its

2 The descriptive dimension highlights the relationship between the organisation and its environment; the instrumental dimension describes the stakeholders, not the shareholders, as factors making it possible for the company to achieve its goals (Donaldson & Preston, 1995, mentioned by Mercier, 2001, p.6).

3 By supplier, we mean companies which have the role of providing clothing and equipment for players or teams needing to practise for a sporting competition (Desbordes, 2001, p.21).

4 Adidas, through its slogan ‘Forever sport’, clearly shows its implication in traditional sporting values.

5 Beyond the information registered on the labels of its products, Patagonia invests in environmental protection and advertises it widely (1% of its turnover is devoted to the protection of the environment through the funding of associations that carry out concrete actions). Timberland, a forerunner in respect for the environment, is the initiator of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI).





organisational goal (profit) with the general interests of society as a whole. Its appropriation of ethics is comparable to a single-loop societal adjustment process (Gond, 2003). A strategy of cooperation prevails over confrontations.

**Egocentricity or self-centeredness**, which is the attitude of organisations that do not care much for ethics (e.g. Puma). Their development is ensured by their inimitable competence, due to which they keep a definite advantage over their competitors.

Indeed, ethical positioning, with regard to marketing strategy, can be analysed in two ways. These combine aspects that have to do with deliberate strategies and fall under a contingent logic. The pressure of the environment plays a major part in this. The following section attempts to measure the relative roles of these two concepts in professional football.

### **European football and ethics: ethics as a major element in marketing**

The integration of ethical considerations into sporting management depends first on the commitment of managers, who set the tone of the organisation's general policy (Mercier, 1999). Making their ethical commitment credible is a challenge for organisations, and the stakes are very high. This has become a new battleground for competition, much like 'quality' was a few years ago. Although "ethics" may appear to be a new management tool, its successful use relies on intense work on the group's values (Mercier, 1999), because any disagreement will lead to sanctions from higher powers. Passing on information will be a key factor in the area of communication, and will depend on the stakeholders. Such a marketing choice gives the organisation a better rating over its competitors (Pautard, 2004). After briefly examining the radical commercial shift that football has undergone, we will show the respect this sporting sector has for ethics, through a study of a selection of actions. In line with

this, commercial repercussions on consumers and sponsors are emphasised.

### **The shift of the 1980s: towards a form of capitalist business?**

In many countries, football carries so much social and political weight that it has become a political force in national or local governing bodies. The changes football has gone through over the last 10 years have led to many observers considering it as an emerging industry. The major evolution to less state economic control and a general trend towards more privatised structures and globalised trade has significantly affected the sector of sporting event production, and football has been the first sport affected in terms of audience. The European clubs can thus be compared to sporting event producers working in the field of entertainment.

The rise in the economic stakes involved in sporting events since the 1980s, linked with the opportunity to sell broadcasting rights, has attracted many private operators interested in investing in the sector. Some have developed in the direction of industrial strategy, like the media, sport-oriented public relations agencies and equipment suppliers. Some, only a few in fact, are solely motivated by financial gain. Others seem to be driven by a need to maximise their own social efficiency: they subsidise clubs to satisfy their personal passion and to secure a strong reputation through the strong media presence in football.

The political economy of professional football has changed radically over recent years. Andreff (2000) summarises this transformation as the passage from an 'SSSL' (Spectators-Subsidies-Sponsors-Local) model of subsidising, which was the rule in the 1970s, to an 'MMMMG' (Media-Magnates-Merchandising-Markets-Global) model in the 1980s.

One of the major goals of the operators in football today is a commercial one. They seek to diversify and

6 Nike sells a rebellious state of mind – a festive lifestyle – more than sporting products. When in 2001, non-governmental organisations blamed the equipment supplier for making children work in sweatshops, it was its speech about "blossoming", "going beyond", the "Just do it" slogan, and the social ideas associated with them, that were targeted (Levy, 2003). Nike's response was to keep a tighter control on its subcontractors and to give subsidies to a non-governmental organisation, Global Alliance for Workers and Communities, in partnership with the World Bank and the Gap clothing brand. Even if the reports on the audits carried out among the subcontractors were not positive, the group is taking on its responsibility and is rebuilding its image step by step.



expand their sources of income, particularly outside of sport. This strategy can be seen through the development of brands (Kapferer, 1996; Aaker, 1994), illustrated by the plethora of products carrying team logos, names and mascots being sold through major distribution channels or specialised shops across the world. This overall commercialisation associated with football is made quite obvious both to the general public and to stakeholders, who witness costly transfers and contracts. Players, while benefiting from this commodification, have become goods to be traded and are sold to the highest bidder. Federal sporting authorities have also extensively developed their commercial activities. FIFA announced that the last 2006 World Cup in Germany has generated a revenue of €1.86 billion and for 2008 a turnover of USD 957 million (€719,5 million) and a profit of USD 184 million (€138 million). UEFA has announced an estimated revenue of €1.3 billion for the 2008 European Championship, mostly from the sale of television broadcasting rights (€900 million). We can therefore see that this mass marketing of football is affecting sporting organisations that used to be non-profit organisations. With this in mind, what is the part played by ethics in the marketing strategies of these organisations?

### **For sporting organisations, ethics is a key value under close scrutiny**

Beyond the general consideration of ethics in the business world, some sporting organisations have made it a central element in their strategy (Durand & Rouvrais-Charron, 2006). This choice involves a constraint that is two-fold. With these organisations having social goals, it is imperative that they protect sporting values; ethics is a key element in their identity. In addition, pressure from their partners and stakeholders forces organisations to put ethical considerations at the centre of their communication activities. Ethics thus catalyses strategy. In ethical terms, we may suppose that international sporting organisations tend to oscillate between commitment and opportunism. We are then led to ask which of the

decisions taken are a result of giving in to pressure, and which ones come from a real desire to act. We can begin to answer this question if the international sporting movement is considered as an integral part of societal evolution. Along these lines, we must first clarify the dilemma sporting that organisations face, especially in football: adapt or die.

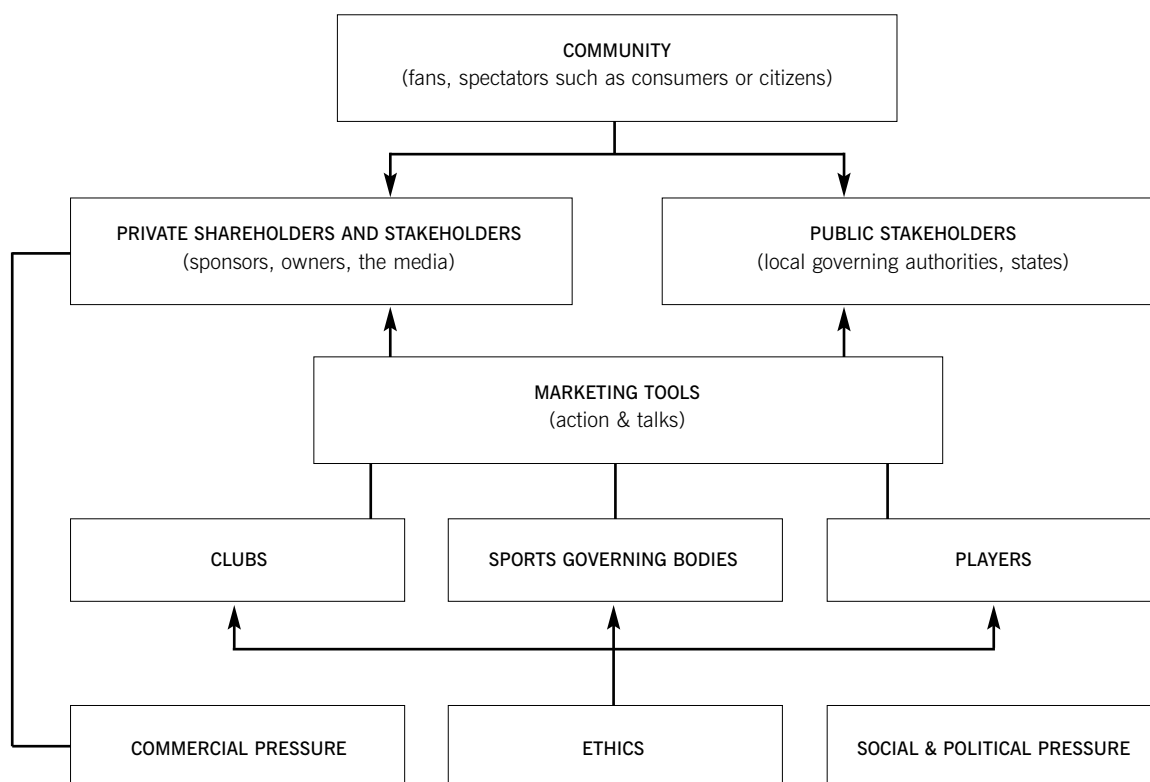
While sporting myths may always have been a key element in this sector, a critical movement gained momentum in sport as a whole in the 1990s, and was sometimes expressed in extreme words (Brohm et al, 2004): "By a quasi-mystical invocation of the 'eternal values of sport', this ideology seeks self-prophesying status by reducing the gap between the reality of capitalist practices in the production of sporting events and the celestial sphere of the 'grand idea of sport'."

As Bayle & Durand (2004) noted, there is "a growing gap between ethics and behaviour" among historical sporting authorities. As a result, the legitimacy of international sport's governing bodies can no longer be based on a rhetoric that has more to do with ideology than with reality (Figure 2).

Figure 2 represents a self-regulating system. The community sends two types of signal. The first targets private actors. It defines some demands mainly guided by commercial motivations. The second type of signals concerns social matters and is directed towards public stakeholders. There is an attempt at a greater code of ethics from the sporting movement, and in particular from the world of football, for political reasons. These pressures oblige sporting figures, whose principles are rather similar, to apply suitable marketing tools to respond to these various demands. Moreover, these marketing tools relate to the actions on the moral level, for example the fights against doping, corruption, xenophobia or violence in stadia. They also consist of talks and communication operations with social figures. Therefore, for example, the official reports of sporting authorities propose the role of sport as a tool for social integration and the protection of basic values before any other elements. It can therefore be seen that sporting figures are compelled



FIGURE 2 Pressure of ethics and effects on sporting actors



to act and communicate against doping, corruption or a disregard for human rights. The original dimensions of football, such as respect, equal opportunities for all and courage, must be obvious to all.

Moreover, ethics, as defined in the first part of the paper, is to be found at the heart of the system. Authorities like UEFA, guardians of sport's original values, have adopted a more strict approach to the application of deontology in football; they impose their directives on professional clubs as with players. Sporting authorities and professional clubs must no longer limit their philosophy of action to a commercial framework, but must find their roots again. Dependent

on sponsors (suppliers and various private organisations), who themselves experience the pressure of the community, sporting authorities and professional clubs can no longer shy away from this moral constraint.

The system presented in Figure 2 is regulated by linking the pressures exerted. Private stakeholders trade their financial contribution with the sporting system. Public stakeholders offer to take away their legitimacy and their prerogatives concerning football from the sporting authorities. Hence, if matches are the opportunity for small groups to express their racism and violence, the stakeholders' reactions will



be double: commercial partners will take away their contributions, while political actors will take away the legitimacy of football sporting authorities. Broadcasters have also stated their aim to be associated only with events whose 'moral standards' are unambiguous. The financial stakes are such that these 'customers' have a considerable weight, influencing not only the logistical organisation of events but also the image of organising authorities. Football sporting authorities will be sanctioned if they are unable to preserve commercial and symbolic qualities of sporting products. Players and clubs undergo the same dual constraints. The example of Paris Saint Germain is revealing. In 2000, the Parisian football club created a foundation to engage with the community, and the integration of underprivileged youths in particular. However, some fans displayed violent behaviour, which received much media coverage. With this in mind, the city of Paris – the owner of the Parc des Princes stadium and the most important and oldest supporter of the club – plans to reduce its support as the team and its image do not meet with what is expected from them. In the same way, the obvious exploitation of players coming from Third World countries to play with European clubs produced a strong reaction from the European Commission in 2003.

As illustrated above, the ethical positioning is thus largely dictated by pressure from stakeholders, whether they are political and public or commercial and private. Consequently, the fact that football event producers take ethical aspects into account no longer arises from a strategic choice to make a specific organisation different, but from a vital need initiated by stakeholders – the need to respond to the emergence of a new world, a world that is seeking transparency and truth.

### **Implications of sports ethical marketing**

The stakeholder theory is most appropriate to integrate the concept of organisational ethics into management issues (Caroll, 1989, 1999; Mercier, 2001; Madsen & Ulhoi, 2001). Its strategic quintessence is based on the necessity of reconciling the conflicting interests of

the stakeholders in order to ensure the survival of the sporting figures. Ethics is meaningful because it concerns everybody; as for marketing, its purpose is to convey the values shared with the stakeholders. Thus this theory throws light upon the intricate interactions between the actors aiming at implementing an ethical process (Figure 2). Fulfilling the expectations of the stakeholders implies erasing the limits between the private and the public spheres in terms of ethical objectives. So, in order to be totally relevant, the means used by the sporting authorities must necessarily be adapted to the social context. Taking ethics into account in the marketing approach of football figures is quite a strong signal towards two interlinked major targets in terms of consequences. The cases of the media and the investors will not be analysed in this section, because the implications of ethical marketing are less important for these stakeholders.

The first target concerned is the consumers who are also citizens, fans and spectators of sporting events, and eventually paid workers. Beyond his personal consumption, the individual wants to share common values and emotions with the brand of goods he has purchased – a brand owned by the sponsor. In the experiential framework of consumption, marketing corresponds to a new paradigm that says that the development of a brand is based on the co-production of meaning and on the sharing of experiences with consumers (Cova, 1995; Cova & Cova, 2001; Cova & Louyot-Gallicher, 2006; Hetzel, 2002; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Langlois, 2002; Ritzer, 2005; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). It becomes part of the post-modern view in which consumption holds a crucial role and has multiple functions such as re-establishing social links, building the individual's identity according to the concept of learning, and meeting a need for emotions and experiences (Addis & Podesta, 2005; François-Lecompte & Valette-Florence, 2006). Thus, Nike, Adidas and Puma are brands exemplifying different lifestyles rather than simple products. In their roles as sponsors, ethical breaches during a sporting event or by a player will have repercussions both on



the sales of sporting goods and on the social representation of brands (Kapferer, 1996). These brands stand for values, laws and history; if their 'soul' is smeared by scandal, the sales of goods will fall. Following the 2006 FIFA World Cup, Nike was hoping to sell 2.4 million replicas of the football shirts, 23 million pairs of shoes and 10 million balls. In 2002, the victory of the Brazilian team, sponsored by Nike, did nothing but strengthen its leadership among the world of sporting suppliers. A partner of FIFA since 1970, Adidas used the 2005 Cup with its logo, as the supplier of the official ball 'Teamgeist' ('team spirit'); sales were forecast to soar by 50% compared with the previous World Cup. Moreover, Adidas signed a partnership contract with UEFA for Euro 2008 and the Champions League.

The second repercussion of the ethical marketing of footballing figures, linked to the one above, has to do with the sponsors. Whether they are suppliers or not (e.g. Coca Cola), sponsors use football matches watched by millions of viewers as a showcase. In terms of image sponsoring, they show off their brands in order to be known and to generate a closeness and emotions with the viewers. Sporting events are also opportunities to test their latest products. Finally, there is also network sponsoring, since the brands take advantage of the events to stimulate their sales network. This is why any ethical breaches will reflect badly on the sponsors' images, and will have repercussions on the mental representation they have in their partners' minds.

Within the context of ethical marketing, we can observe a beneficial hybridisation of wills of the shareholders and the stakeholders in order to fulfil a collective interest; it is a search for global meaning fed by the original sports values. The implications of ethical approach taken by the sporting authorities lead to repercussions in terms of image as well as in terms of sales for their stakeholders searching for more authenticity. Zinedine Zidane's head-butt during the World Cup final is a case in point in terms of non-respect for sports ethics. In spite of the bad image the

player gave of himself, the repercussions on the sponsors were limited for part of the public. If football attempts to free itself from the ethical needs of its stakeholders, the large financial means it currently enjoys will be going to other sports. And therefore the use of ethical marketing managed by football organisations can be deemed a virtuous circle.

### Conclusion

There remains one question, however: is the ethical approach of sporting organisations sincere or is it a solution – or a fad, even – related to the current environmental context (Gaski, 1999)? Even the marketing dimension of this approach is open to criticism because no theoretical reconstruction has taken place; only a mere extension of the original marketing model has occurred (Crane & Desmond, 2002).

In the last 20 years, sport has entered into a rising commercial spiral due to the evolution in consumer behaviour and new communication technologies. However, two major elements come to disturb the autonomy asserted by professional sport.

Communities are expecting the application of ethics by these organisations. This social demand also concerns figures from the sporting world, public authorities and sponsors. The marketing consequences cannot be ignored; actions must be in congruence with an ethical dialogue. However, the public of mainland Europe are still attached to a sport bearing human and social values, and look beyond the packaged spectacle. In order to preserve their legitimacy, football's governing bodies must play their primary role of guardians of the sport's central values, by imposing the respect of a true deontology on all stakeholders and shareholders (clubs, players, sponsors, fans, etc.).

Indeed, in 2006, an independent report<sup>7</sup> written by Arnaut for the European Union considers ethical recommendations in terms of "corporate governance

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.independentfootballreview.com/doc/A3619.pdf>



resulting from sport governing bodies" (p.76), of active prevention against "criminal activities around football, money laundering and trafficking of young players" (p.81), that of "the fight against racism and xenophobia" (p.83) and doping. As Arnaut highlights: "two important features need to be taken into account: the rapid and irreversible trend towards commercialisation of sport and at the same time the development of the European Union into a wider political, economic and legal structure..." (p.9). Therefore we can say that the pressure of the political sphere on ethical questions will be major: "political bodies have both the duty and the legal means to play their part in finding the appropriate solutions (p.10)". The setting up of ethical codes is strongly advised: a European code of corporate governance for clubs, procedures to help establish best practice, and a transparent system for transactions related to player transfers.

Facing political pressures and public demands, sporting authorities, particularly in football, must integrate the ethical dimension into their marketing function. However, talk is not enough. Authorities are criticised for favouring talk over action. To act means to set up real actions, like restoring sport's educational and social role through the creation of foundations in charge of integrating underprivileged youths or disabled people. Moreover, clubs and players should be obliged to develop partnerships with private organisations that respect certain moral standards, such as being against child labour and respecting human rights.

In this return to the 'grass roots' of the game, sporting authorities, federations, clubs and players will no longer be able to form a deliberate strategy but will be forced to adhere to a given logic. An ethical dimension is required by powerful stakeholders in agreement with the European model of the sport. In the event of a contravention, the market of consumers – citizens and the sporting public – will be obliged to sanction any ethical infringement.

Stakeholder theory would contribute to the development and true improvement of European

football's governance: its governing bodies, multinational groups, the business world, consumers, fans, and more (Rossouw, 1994; Mercier, 2001). In spite of its limits and unfinished state, this paradigm provides an interesting basis for a study of corporate management environment, in particular those corporations that are spread out over several geographical locations (Beji-Becheur & Bensebaa, 2004)

In 2007, new UEFA president Michel Platini said: "Many sporting people want to defend certain sporting values and protect the values that we knew. I'm not against business at all, but if business takes football hostage then we risk losing everything." This could be considered as a symbol of necessary return to football's fundamental ethics.

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