



INTERNATIONELLA HANDELSHÖGSKOLAN
HÖGSKOLAN I JÖNKÖPING

Stjärnan och varumärket

En studie om interaktionen mellan organisatoriska och personliga sportvarumärken

Filosofie magisteruppsats inom EMM

Författare: Martin Berggren and Martin Mohn

Handledare: Karl-Erik Gustafsson

Jönköping: Januari 2007



JÖNKÖPING INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS SCHOOL
Jönköping University

A brand, a star and a goal

A study of the interaction between organizational and personal sport brands

Master's thesis within EMM

Author: Martin Berggren and Martin Mohn

Tutor: Karl-Erik Gustafsson

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Författare:	Martin Berggren och Martin Mohn
Handledare:	Karl-Erik Gustafsson
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Sammanfattning

- Bakgrund:** Med en ökande professionalism inom svensk idrott har varumärkesmedvetenheten också blivit mer central i sportorganisationer. Spelare har blivit verktyg i arbetet med att stärka varumärket. Även spelarnas personliga varumärke har fått ökat utrymme och interaktionen mellan organisation och spelare som symboler blivit allt mer intressant.
- Syfte:** Uppsatsen syftar till att undersöka innebörden av att ha en spelares personliga varumärke som en symbol för sportorganisationens varumärke.
- Metod:** Genom en kvalitativ studie av en idrottsorganisation i Allsvenskan och en i Elitserien ämnar uppsatsen uppfylla sitt syfte. Valet av kvalitativ metod bygger på syftets natur. Empirisk data har samlats in genom personliga intervjuer med marknadschefer från klubbarna Elfsborg och HV71 samt spelarna Samuel Holmén och Johan Davidsson. Utöver detta intervjuades även sportjournalisten Erik Niva. Empirin har sedan analyserats och definierats med relevanta befintliga varumärkesteorier och modeller.
- Slutsatser:** Genom att identifiera delar i analysen som berör våra centrala problemfrågor har vi kommit till följande slutsatser. Idrottsorganisationer använder aktivt spelare för att stärka sitt varumärke och förstår vikten av spelare som symboler. Vidare har vi funnit att det är svårt att implementera och förankra klubbens varumärkesidentitet bland spelare. Dessutom kan klubben, genom val av spelartyp, styra varumärkesidentiteten. Vi har också funnit en insikt hos spelare om fördelarna med ett starkt personligt varumärke, men att de inte har klara strategier för att uppnå det. Trots ökad medvetenhet om personliga varumärken finner vi inga tecken på att det existerar några konflikter mellan organisationens varumärke och spelarens varumärke.

Master's Thesis in EMM

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Abstract

Background: With the increasing professionalism in Swedish sport comes an increasing awareness of the importance of brands. Athletes have become tools in the organizations' efforts to enhance their brand. Also, the athletes' personal brands have had increasing attention and the interactions between the organization brand and the athlete as a symbol have become an interesting topic.

Purpose: The thesis aims to examine the implications of having an athlete's personal brand as a symbol of the sport organization brand.

Method: With a qualitative method, we have studied one club from Allsvenskan and one from Elitserien. The empirical data were collected with personal interviews of marketing managers from Elfsborg and HV71 together with the football player Samuel Holmén and hockey player Johan Davidsson. An additional interview was made with the sport journalist Erik Niva. The empirical findings were then analyzed and defined with existing and relevant brand theories and models.

Conclusions: By identifying parts of the analysis crucial for answering our research questions, we have come to the following conclusions. The sport organizations actively manage the athlete in favor of enhancing the brand and understand the importance of having a player as a symbol. Furthermore, we have found that it is hard for the organization to implement the brand identity among player and that the organization, by choosing which type of player to sign, can direct the brand identity. We have concluded that the athlete understands the benefits of having a strong personal brand, but lack the strategies to achieve it. Even with this increased awareness of personal brands, we found no evidence that this leads to a conflict between the organization brand and the personal brand.

Content

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Background	1
1.1.1	Sport and brands	1
1.2	Problem discussion	2
1.3	Purpose	3
1.4	Clarifications	4
1.5	Stakeholder of this thesis	4
2	Theoretical framework	5
2.1	Brands	5
2.1.1	Brand Added Value	5
2.1.2	Brand Equity	5
2.2	Brand identity	6
2.2.1	Main perspectives	7
2.2.2	The structure of brand identity	8
2.3	Leveraging the brand	9
2.3.1	Possibilities with brands	9
2.3.2	Problems when leveraging the brand	10
2.4	Personal branding	10
2.4.1	The new brand	10
2.4.2	How to create strong personal brands	11
2.4.3	Synergy effects	12
2.4.4	Leveraging the famous athlete	13
2.5	Summary	13
3	Method	14
3.1	Perspective	14
3.2	Qualitative research	14
3.2.1	Sample	15
3.2.2	Conducting interviews	16
3.2.3	Actor perspective	17
3.2.4	Theoretical framework	18
3.3	Trustworthiness of the thesis: Validity and reliability	18
3.4	Criticism of chosen method	19
3.4.1	Sample	19
3.4.2	Theoretical framework	20
3.4.3	Analysis and interpretation	20
3.4.4	Trustworthiness	20
4	Empirical findings	22
4.1	Section one: Managerial perspective	22
4.1.1	Athletes as symbols of the organization brand	22
4.1.2	Athletes and brand identity	23
4.1.3	Managing the athlete	24
4.1.4	Players as personal brands	25
4.1.5	Conflict of interest	26
4.2	Section two: Athlete perspective	26
4.2.1	Athletes as symbols of the organization brand	26

4.2.2	Athletes and brand identity	27
4.2.3	Managing the athlete	27
4.2.4	Players as personal brands	28
4.2.5	Conflict of interest	29
5	Analysis	31
5.1	Athletes as symbol of the organization brand.....	31
5.1.1	Brand-added value	32
5.1.2	Core values through players.....	32
5.2	Players and brand identity.....	33
5.2.1	Athlete turnover and identity	34
5.3	Managing the Athlete	34
5.4	Athletes as personal brands.....	35
5.5	Conflict of brands	37
6	Conclusions	39
6.1	Conclusions.....	39
6.2	End discussion	40
	List of references	42
	Figures	
Figure 1	Factors influencing the strength of a sport brand (Berggren, Karlsson & Mohn, 2004)	2
Figure 2	Brand Identity Planning Model (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000, p. 44) modified by authors	8
Figure 3	Leveraging the Brand (Aaker, 1996, p. 275) modified by authors ..	10
Figure 4	Induction (Carlsson, 1991, p. 27)	15
Figure 5	Range of interviews (Carlsson, 1991, p. 31) modified by authors ..	17
Figure 6	The actors' perspectives	18
Figure 7	Different type of players influence on brand identity	39
Figure 8	Athlete's impact on the sport organization brand	40
	Appendices	
	Frågeformulär Janne Hedell och Sten Strinäs.....	44
	Frågeformulär Samuel Holmén och Johan Davidsson	45
	Frågeformulär Erik Niva	46
	Questionnaire Janne Hedell and Sten Strinäs.....	47
	Questionnaire Samuel Holmén and Johan Davidsson	48
	Questionnaire Erik Niva	49

1 Introduction

This first chapter aims to give the reader an understanding for the background of our thesis, the purpose it tend to fulfill and which research questions it will answer. Definitions and stakeholders will also be included.

1.1 Background

Swedish pro sport organization has gone through changes over the last ten years. By glimpsing over to the other side of the Atlantic Ocean and taking influences from top clubs in European football, many sport organizations have changed the way they do business. Sport organizations in Europe (mainly football organizations) and North America have decades of experience when it comes to capitalizing not just on the sport entertainment it self, but also merchandise, adjacent restaurants and the players themselves (Söderman, 2004). These organizations have clear strategies on how to enhance their brands in every situation and make substantial profits from selling merchandise. Stotlar (2001) claims that this occurrence has transformed the sport industry from being a service sector to being a hybrid between the service sector and merchant sector. For instance, it is said that the New York Yankees (an American Baseball team) would be able to play their games without spectators and still make a profit, mainly due to their large sales of merchandise. The way of looking at these surrounding functions as a mean to give the spectators and fans a full-on experience, and thereby increasing revenues, is a new phenomenon within Swedish pro sport organizations. Today, many organizations have adopted these methods and are evolving into business-like entities with clear organizational structures and marketing strategies. Swedish sport clubs are building new arenas (predominantly ice hockey clubs playing in Elitserien) to fit the need of having more restaurants, conference halls, merchandise shops and snack bars(Berggren, Karlsson & Mohn, 2004).

As the Swedish sport clubs change their business, branding has become an increasingly more important factor to consider. Clubs let their brands affiliate with sponsors' products and their players to appear in commercials, sales drives and other marketing events. There has been a shift of focus and the brand is now a substantial part of the organization. Most major sport organizations now have clear brand strategies and want to convey the core values of their brands to all stakeholders of the club (Berggren et al., 2004).

1.1.1 Sport and brands

Some might argue that the importance of branding a sports team is not nearly as crucial as it is to manage the actual performance on the field, but the fact is that the well-being of the organization is correlated with performance on the field. Brand theorists like Aaker¹ (1996), Keller (2002) and Wheeler (2003) argues that the brand can be seen as the most powerful asset a company holds, and by looking at pro sport organizations in Sweden as profitable companies the brand surely has importance for them. Brands help with the communication to the stakeholder, especially to companies and supporters, which are the sole providers of funds to the organization.

¹ David Aaker is a prominent professor in marketing at Berkley University of California. He has written thirteen books about branding and is often referred to in thesis, journals and brand literature.

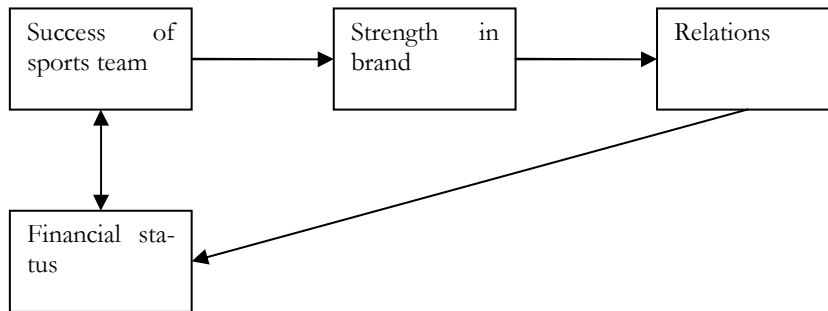


Figure 1 Factors influencing the strength of a sport brand (Berggren, Karlsson & Mohn, 2004)

The creation of a strong sport brand relies heavily on the success of the sports team. With the winnings comes a strong brand that in turn strengthens the relationships with the fans and sponsoring companies. This will increase attendance and companies' willingness to contribute. Revenues increases which results in a good financial status. The good financial status is essential for achieving success in sports (Berggren et al, 2004).

The model above is based on results from the author's bachelor thesis which had the purpose of highlighting how brands are created and maintained within Swedish sport organizations. As a part of the end discussion the question of how athletes work as a symbol, how they influence and carry the brand's core values and identity of the organization was raised. These questions were found to be, as we believe, a good starting point for a more in-depth study of the athletes as symbols of the sport brand.

1.2 Problem discussion

As the sport organizations move towards being more like companies in terms of management and organization, so does brand management (Bauer, Sauer & Schmitt, 2004). Even if the level of commitment is lower than the ones of 'ordinary' companies, Swedish professional sport organizations now have strategies on how to manage their brands (Berggren et al., 2004). Do these strategies include the athlete's part of the brand? Gummesson (1995) says that brands and symbols of the brand are important in maintaining and creating relationship networks. Marketing events with athletes as representatives of the organization in favour of enhancing relationships with sponsors and fans are common (Graham, Neirotti & Goldblatt, 2001). But is it an active effort of strengthening the brand? How does the use the athletes in the branding of the sport organization? These thoughts lead us to our first fundamental research question:

- Do the sport organizations actively manage athletes in favor of enhancing their brand?

Previous questions focus on the organization's perspective. But what part does the athlete play? The athletes' view of the brand could be just as important as the organizations. From the authors' previous work, questions of this sort were raised. The impact of an athlete as a symbol of the organization's brand has, as we believe, not been adequately examined in the academic world. As athletes can grow to be important role models, one has to find the impact on the organization interesting. The relation between a brand and customers are carried out through the brand identity. The brand identity can gain a lot if it is backed up with a strong symbol for the brand (Aaker, 1996; Wheeler, 2003). How aware are the players of

the organization's brand identity? Does the level of commitment stretch farther than fan meet-n-greets and sponsor dinners?

- To what extent do athletes carry the identity of the organization brand?

Söderman (2004) argues how the focus on professionalism in sports also affects which players to buy. Most professional sport organization have to calculate whether the signing of an athlete will produce revenues in merchandise and sponsor commitments and not just concentrate on putting the best players possible on the pitch. One of the most significant examples in recent years is David Beckham's transfer from Manchester United to Real Madrid in 2003. Many speculated that the over 300 million SEK transfer was not based on Beckham's skills as a footballer, but more a business transaction to control the brand 'David Beckham'. With the transfer, experts calculated revenues of over 1.3 billion SEK in Beckham football shirts alone. Within less than six months there had been more a million shirts sold (Bank, 2005). We will let the discussion of how good of a football player David Beckham is be, but there are strong indications that in today's professional sport, personal brands become more important when investing in new players. Well, is this also a common occurrence within Swedish pro sport organizations? Hence the following research questions:

- Are players and managers aware of the athlete's personal brand and how they could benefit from it?

Every human has some kind of a personal brand but the majority is probably not aware of the possibilities with it. Several advantages can be reached if the personal brand is nurtured and handled in the right way. Famous athletes have in many cases understood the advantages that a strong personal brand can give and built up minor industries around their names (Montoya², 2002). This is not yet the case in Swedish sport. But what happens if a player starts to perceive himself bigger and more important than the club? What if a player does not agree with the organization and feels that they are hindering him in his development? Will conflict occur?

- Could there be a conflict between the athlete's personal brand and the brand of the organization?

1.3 Purpose

The thesis aims to examine the implications of having an athlete's personal brand as a symbol of the sport organization brand.

² Peter Montoya is considered a guru in personal branding. He is the publisher of the magazine Personal Branding and has written two award winning books about the subject. Furthermore Montoya runs a successful consultant firm which main objectives are to spread the knowledge of personal branding.

1.4 Clarifications

- Sport organization will be a collective name for both Ice hockey clubs in Elitserien and football clubs in Allsvenskan. Organization, sport organization and club thereby refer to the same thing.
- Player(s) and athlete(s) are to be seen as equal.

1.5 Stakeholder of this thesis

Sports marketing are a relative unexplored area in the Swedish academic world. Even without any groundbreaking theories, we believe that this thesis would generate topics for future studies. Sport is big business today and any conclusion that will help sports organizations to better understand their brands would benefit them.

The sport organizations that will participate in our study will hopefully get a new view on how to handle and manage their athletes as symbols of their brand. Furthermore, the athletes might find it interesting to see themselves included in an academic context.

2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework presents suitable literature which will be used to interpret the empirical findings. The chapter consists of four major parts that treats theory concerning brands, brand identity, leveraging the brand and personal brands.

2.1 Brands

The importance of building brands has become crucial in today's business. In the past, brands were often associated with big consumer products. Now all type of companies talks about how to increase awareness of their brands. Brands are of course not just a modern hype; the bottom line is that good brands build companies while ineffective brands undermine success. With the increasing competition in all different product and service sectors differentiation is important. A strong brand can be the difference between success and failure (Wheeler, 2003). Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders and Wong (2002) aggrsess upon this and mean that brand building nowadays is a fundamental ingredient in organizations marketing strategies.

Kotler et al. (2002) define brands as:

“A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, design or a combination of these, which is used to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors.” (Kotler et al., 2002, p. 469)

Besides the primary role, to identify products or services, brands have other abilities and advantages. Riezebos, Kist and Koostra (2003) mean that a brand can create financial-, strategic- and managerial advantages if they are managed correctly. Melin (1997) mention the same factors and adds consumer advantages as a brand ability.

2.1.1 Brand Added Value

Riezebos et al. (2003) describes brand-added value as the value the brand adds to the product or service it is connected to. Every brand tries to communicate something to the consumer and a brand can on a physiological level convince a consumer to buy a certain product. In that type of occurrence it is the characteristics of the brand which is applied on the consumer. This feeling of becoming someone makes the consumer to pay a higher price. When the brand communicates high quality, consumers are also prepared to pay extra money for the product or service. Awareness is another important factor for a brand to be able to add value. If the consumer is not familiar with the brand they do not know what to expect. The level of the brand awareness therefore decides how much value the brand can add to the physical product or service.

2.1.2 Brand Equity

Brand equity is an overall term which often is used in brand theory because it can be discussed from both the brand owner and the consumers' perspectives. If a brand creates value for the customer it automatically creates value for the brand owner. Brand equity could be seen as the brands gathered assets which can be associated to the brands name and symbol and thereby add value to the product or service (Aaker, 1996, Melin, 1997).

According to Aaker (1996) brand equity is built through different assets that the brand possesses. These assets can be divided into four categories: *brand awareness*, *perceived quality*, *brand loyalty* and *brand associations*.

The first part of the brand equity is the brand awareness. It refers to what extent a brand is present in the consumers mind. Recognition, recall, top of mind and dominant are the four parameters which are used when brand awareness is measured. Recognition is seen as previous exposure of a brand. Recall is when a brand comes to a consumers mind when talking about a product class. The first brand that is recalled is the top of mind effect. The last parameter is dominant and is the only brand recalled in a product class (Aaker, 1996).

High quality on products and services are crucial in business. If a company manages to communicate high quality through their brand much is won. Aaker (1996) means that perceived quality is the major strategic thrust of business and also affects other aspects on how the brand is perceived. High perceived quality equals high brand equity.

Brand loyalty simply describes how loyal customers are to a specific brand. A lot of loyal customers cut marketing costs since retaining existing customers is cheaper than attract new ones. It can sometime work as an entry barrier to competitors as loyalty often is expensive to shift. Brand loyalty also generates very predictable statements of future incomes (Aaker, 1996).

The associations consumers make to a brand play an important role in the creation of brand equity. The associations do not necessarily have to focus on product attributes. It can also include famous representatives or special symbols that can be associated with the brand. Brand association is derived from brand identity (Aaker, 1996).

2.2 Brand identity

Brand identity is a set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain. (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000, p 43)

The brand identity has different functions in the organization. The main function is to contribute to the relation between the brand and the customer. Brand identity also provides direction, purpose and meaning for the brand. To establish a good relation the identity must communicate values that are attractive for the customer and that works on both a functional and emotional level. The identity should also be able to communicate values of its own (Aaker, 1996; Wheeler, 2003).

Wheeler (2003) makes a distinction between brands and brand identity. Whereas the brand is something that speaks to the heart and mind, brand identity is tangible and appeals to the senses. The definition of the brand identity is slightly different compared to Aaker. Wheeler focuses more on the visual and verbal parts while Aaker means that brand identity is created through associations. Association is a broad field and one can argue that visual and verbal can be included in that term. But there is still a difference.

Brand identity is the visual and verbal expression of a brand. Identity supports, expresses, communicates, synthesizes, and visualizes the brand. (Wheeler, 2003, p.4)

Lagergren (2001) also clarifies the terms surrounding brand identity and means that there is sometimes confusion between the terms identity, image and profile. *Identity* describes what you are, *profile* is what you want to be, and *image* is the picture the world around has of a person, company, country, organization etc.

2.2.1 Main perspectives

Aaker and Joachimstahler (2000) states that brand identity can be described through twelve different categories gathered around four main perspectives (see figure 2). Brand identity provides direction, purpose and meaning to the brand. Brand identity is derived from brand association which is one of the four principals that forms brand equity. Even though each category has relevance for some brands, practically no brand has associations in all twelve categories.

There are four parts which should be taking under consideration when creating a strong brand identity. The brand could be seen as a product, an organization, a person and a symbol. The perspective of seeing the organization as a brand focuses on organizational attributes like innovation, a drive for quality, and concern for the environment. These attributes are created by the people, culture and values of the company. Quality is a typical attribute which can be linked to both the product and the organization. In some cases there can be a combination of the two perspectives. Organizational attributes have an advantage when it comes to resisting competition. To copy a product is much easier then duplicate an organization with unique people, values and programs (Aaker, 1996).

A brand identity can gain a lot if it is supported by a strong symbol. Structure and consistency will be added to the identity and also recognition and recall will be higher trough a strong symbol. Aaker (1996) also says that the presence of a symbol will help to develop the brand while the absence can be a handicap. Anything that represents the brand could be seen as a symbol.

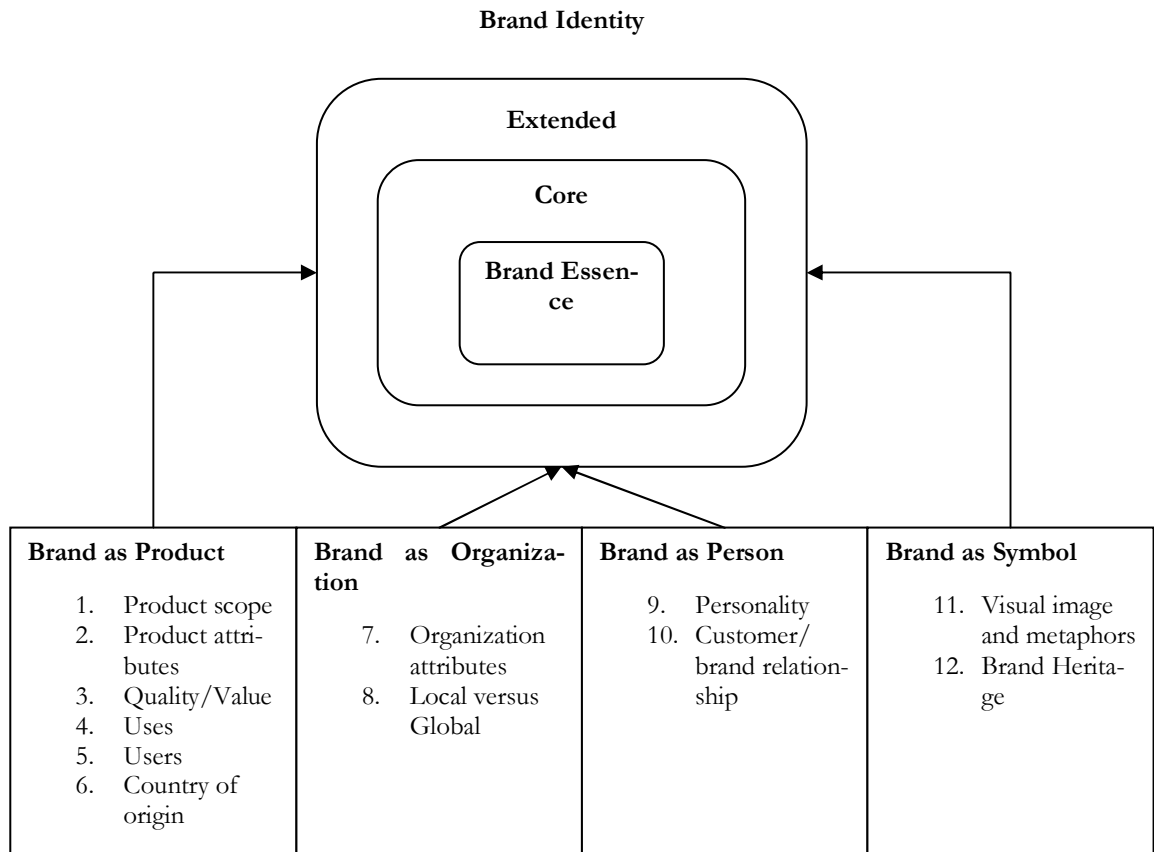


Figure 2 Brand Identity Planning Model (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000, p. 44) modified by authors

2.2.2 The structure of brand identity

The brand identity can also be structured into *core identity*, *extended identity* and *brand essence*. Core identity is a collection of timeless values that the brand is mediating to the customer. These values are very strong and resistant and will not change if new products are launched or new markets are entered. The core identity usually has two to four dimensions that compactly summarize the brand vision; how the company wants their brand to be perceived. The extended identity is matched after the situation the brand is in. The task is to complement the core identity with messages to the consumer so it fits the current situation. Working with the extended identity is often useful when it comes to launching of new products and changes in the organization (Aaker, 1996).

Even though both core and extended identity communicate a lot of feelings and associations to consumers, Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) means that a brand essence can be appropriate for some companies. Brand essence can be seen as a single thought that captures the soul of the brand. It provides a slightly different perspective, compared to core identity, while still capturing much of what the brands stands for. The brand essence could be seen as the glue that holds the core identity elements together.

According to Lagergren (1998) a successful brand needs to be supported by the whole organization. The factors behind the brand building should be implemented and understood by everyone. Long term strategically thinking, consistency, and courage combined with quality awareness and cautions are some of the factors that lie behind a successful brand.

The power and attraction of an organizations brand is depended on communication about and around the brand. That communication should be effective and with high quality. In this work the brand identity is a very helpful tool.

2.3 Leveraging the brand

2.3.1 Possibilities with brands

A brand can in many cases be the most powerful asset that a firm own. Attributes like association, perceived quality and customer loyalty should therefore be handled in a way that creates more value to the firm. To exploit a brand and get the most out of it, companies need a strategy. *Line extensions, stretching the brand vertically, brand extension and co-branding* are the four strategies that Aaker (1996) presents. Kotler et al. (2002) also mentions line- and brand extension but add two strategies called *multi brand strategy* and *new brands*. According to Keller (2002) brand extension is the most researched area in branding.

Line extension is when a company uses an already established brand to launch a new product in the same product class. The difference could be other attributes like new flavour, size or colour. The reasons for line extension is mainly to provide variety, expand user base or boost the interest for the brand. There is one trap with line extensions that is important to take under consideration. If a brand offer too many products customers can be confused and that will eventually harm the brand (Aaker, 1996; Kotler et al., 2002).

The vertical stretch of the brand refers to using a brand in the same product class but on another level in the sense of for example price and quality. Higher competition often force companies to attract other segments and by adapting another product approach that could be possible. The brand could be stretched both upwards, more exclusive and higher price, or downwards, low quality and price (Aaker, 1996). This strategy is supported by Kotler et al. (2002) multi brand strategy.

Brand extension is the strategy to choose if a company wants to enter a new market with a new or modified product but still use the same brand. The advantage here is that marketing costs can be cut due to the high level of awareness from the existing brand (Aaker, 1996; Kotler et al., 2002).

Co-branding is related to brand extension but here a brand enters another product class together with another brand. Co-branding can be seen as a classic search for synergy effects. Sharing risk and reduce marketing costs. The problem here is the same that goes for all kinds of mergers, cultural clashes between the different organizations (Aaker, 1996).

Keller (2002) talks about associations and perception fit between the parent brand and the extended product. When this occurs, a successful brand extension is more likely. When advertising a brand extension it is more important to focus on the information on the extension it self rather than reminders of the parent brand. He states that high quality brands are easier to extend and stretch than more unknown ones. The high quality brands are also more likely to be prominent in dissimilar product categories.

A company's brand is far too valuable to just have one use. That is why brands are stretched, extended, licensed and managed in many different ways in order to ensure their valuable role in the connection with customers (Strategic direction, 2006).

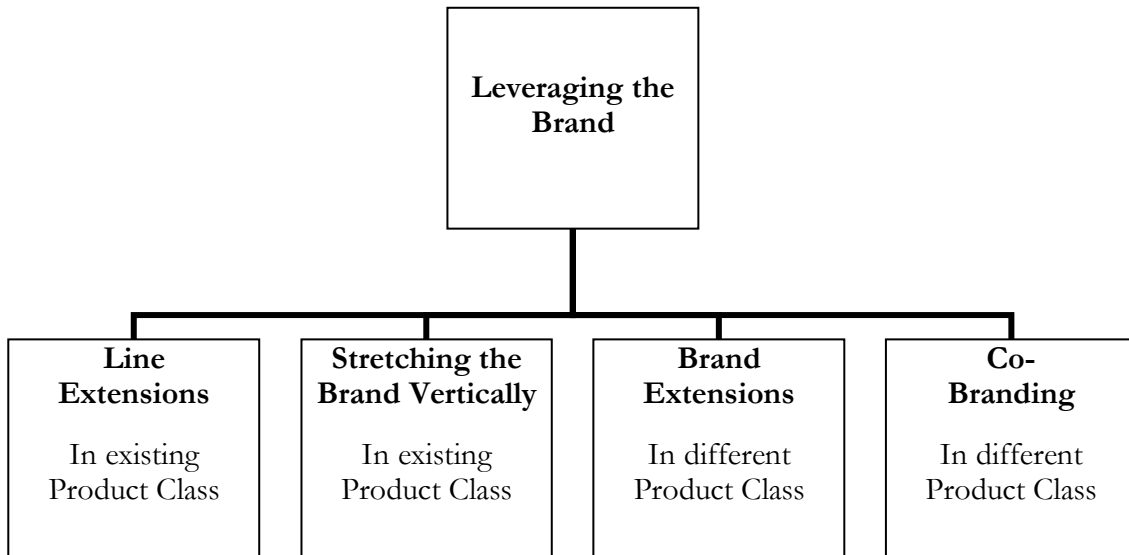


Figure 3 Leveraging the Brand (Aaker, 1996, p. 275) modified by authors

2.3.2 Problems when leveraging the brand

When using vertical stretch as a brand strategy problems can occur. The parent brand and the sub brand can be in situations where instead of add value to each other, they conflict. The idea of creating a sub brand is to create more value to the company as a whole. When a brand is stretched downwards there is a risk for cannibalization. Customers to the parent brand might shift to the cheaper version. Another risk is that a low class sub brand might stain the parent brand and change the customers associations to it. To move a brand up is often easier then moving it down. The problems are the same but the other way around. There is a possibility that the sub brand, which now is a premium brand, makes the parent brand look ordinary. To separate the sub brand and immediately get it to earn credibility as a premium brand might be difficult. There could also be a problem with the brand identity if it is not able to stretch in the same way as the brand. The identity has to correlate with the new product level in order to make the stretch work (Aaker, 1996). Although, Keller (2002) means that an unsuccessful stretch only hurts the parent brand if there is a strong basis of fit between the two brands.

Melin (1999) also has some concerns regarding the choice of brand strategy. He states that it is important to identify the brands within the company that really contribute. Several firms have too many brands in their possession and are not able to manage all of them in a beneficial way. There is a risk that the total brand equity will decrease if the brand building is spread on many different brands. To prevent this, the brands that have the most strategic value should be identified. Once they are identified, focus and resources could be put on the strategic brands while the other less successful brands should be phased out and maybe removed (Melin, 1999).

2.4 Personal branding

2.4.1 The new brand

According to Montoya (2002) personal brands are the new currency of business and culture. He uses the example of famous golf player Tiger Woods, who was a brand long be-

fore he became a dominating golf player. Jack Nicklaus, world's number one golfer during the 1960 – 1970th century, was a huge star, but his personal brand is not even close to Tiger Wood's. There has been huge changes and development the past 20 years when it comes to discover, building and nurture personal brands.

Through history people has always been fascinated by celebrities. From kings and queens to presidents and Hollywood stars. Companies use this fact in their marketing. People are more likely to buy from people that they have some sort of connection to. That impulse lies at the heart of the personal branding phenomenon. When TV-star Oprah Winfrey promotes Coca Cola, trust, comfort and identification appears in the scenes of many buyers. Companies have been aware of this for decades, which is why celebrities have been endorsing a wide range of products over the years. But nowadays, celebrities are no longer just spoke persons of a brand. They can be seen as own products and brands (Montoya, 2002).

Montoya (2002) says that it is important to remember that a personal brand is not a personal image. While personal image is about what clothes you wear and cars you drive, personal branding is about understanding perception. How we perceive others, how those perceptions affect our behaviour and how those same perceptions can be managed in a beneficial way. When you have that understanding you can create a personal brand. A personal brand is not the entire human being. It is the public projection of certain aspects of a person's personality, skills or values.

A personal brand works in the same way as a regular brand. It communicates values, personality and ideas about ability to its audience. Montoya (2002) defines a personal brand like this:

A personal identity that stimulates precise, meaningful perceptions in its audience about the values and qualities that person stands for. (Montoya, 2002, p.4)

The power to influence others' decisions, purchases or attitudes are also a part of the personal brand. Montoya (2002) mentions some benefits of having strong personal brands.

Top of mind status: The persons name is mentioned first in a context.

Attracts: Is regarded to be the strongest feature. It is the ability to create a personal aura that attracts the right people.

Perceived value: If a person sells something the customer perceives a higher value of the product they are buying.

Association with a trend: A personal brand can position the person as being part of a hot business method or technology.

Increase earning potential: By fulfilling all or some of these benefits the person can earn more money through promotions better sales etc.

2.4.2 How to create strong personal brands

Montoya (2002) lists eight parts of personal branding which should be looked at and call them the eight laws of personal branding. The eight laws are the building boxes of personal branding and should be followed in order to create a successful personal brand. It also works as a measurement of a current personal brand, where it is today and what can be done to grow and develop in the future.

1. The law of specialization. The brand should focus on one area of achievement.
2. The law of leadership. The person behind the brand must be known as one of the most respected, skilled and knowledgeable in his/her field.
3. The law of personality. A brand must be built around one's personality in all its aspects, including flaws.
4. The law of distinctiveness. Once the personal brand has been created it has to be expressed in a unique way.
5. The law of visibility. The personal brand has to be exposed repeatedly to be effective.
6. The law of unity. The behaviour behind closed door must match the behaviour in public.
7. The law of persistence. Once the personal brand is established it needs time to grow. Stick to it and ignore fads.
8. The law of goodwill. If goodwill is created through the brand it is likely to be more influential.

McNally and Speak (2002) have similar ideas as Montoya (2002) when it comes to how to create strong personal brands. While Montoya uses the eight laws of personal branding as a blue print, McNally and Speak narrows it down into three key factors. They state that a strong personal brand should be distinctive, relevant and consistent. These three key factors kind of summarize Montoya's eight laws of personal branding.

Distinctive in the way that a person decide what they believe and then commit themselves to acting on those beliefs. When this is done that very person begins to separate from the crowd. The author's highlight that distinctive is more than just being different.

It results from understanding the needs of others, wanting to meet those needs, and being able to do so while staying true to your values. (McNally & Speak, 2002, p. 14)

Being relevant is the second factor and refers to the understanding of other people. The personal brand gains strengths every time show that what is important to them is important to you. Being both distinctive and relevant creates a synergic effect that boosts the power of the personal brand. To create this relevancy one has to think in reverse and move into other peoples worlds and see it from their point of view in order to determine their needs and interests (McNally & Speak, 2002).

Doing things that are both distinctive and relevant, and to do it over and over again creates consistency. This is, according to McNally and Speak (2002), a hallmark of all strong brands. A brand can only get credit if it repeats its way to act and behave. Acting in a consistent way is therefore crucial.

2.4.3 Synergy effects

McNally and Speak (2002) have some interesting thoughts about aligning a personal brand with the employer brand. According to them the purpose of work is to create value on a personal level and for others in both tangible and intangible ways. If the employee and the employer understand this purpose a synergy between the business brand and the personal brand is created. Individuals feel more motivated and encouraged when the values of the person correlate with the organizational values. In the same process, the organization gets more committed workers. Synergy and a win - win situation occurs and a success of the or-

ganizational brand can also be seen as successful expression of the workers personal brands.

The theories that Montoya, McNally and Speak presents are consistent with theories of regular brands. They break it down to a human level and try to apply it on a persons attribute instead of cars or fast food chains.

2.4.4 Leveraging the famous athlete

According to Graham et al. (2001) and Till (1998) famous athletes have an ability to create interest around them. It could be through drawing people to an event and sell more tickets, gain media exposure for an organization or sell more products.

When managing a famous person as a symbol and endorser of the brand there are some principals that should be taken into consideration. If the famous person have a high level of fit, congruence and belongingness to the endorsed brand it tend to be more effective. Another principal which is important is once again consistency. Using the same person over a long range of time tends to create a connection with the customers who can relate both to the parent brand and the endorser. Unknown brands often gains more than more familiar brands when using a famous person as symbol. There is also a downside with this way of advertise a brand. If the endorser creates negative publicity for themselves the brand, which they are associated with, can be damaged (Till, 1998).

2.5 Summary

The first part of the theoretical framework presents an introduction to brands, what it adds to the brand owner and the core of brand theory, brand equity. If the brand creates value for the consumer it contributes to a value creation for the brand owner, and that is the main point of brand equity. *Brand associations, perceived quality, brand awareness and brand loyalty* are the four assets that build brand equity (Aaker, 1996).

Aaker (1996) and Wheeler's (2003) theories about brand identity are presented in the second part. They both argue that brand identity main function is to create a relationship between the brand and its customers. The identity can be divided into four perspectives (*brand as organization, brand as product, brand as person, brand as symbol*) and three different structures (*brand essence, core identity, extended identity*).

How to handle the brand and exploit it as efficient as possible is of course important. The brand can be leveraged mainly through different type of extensions. *Line extensions, vertical stretch, brand extension* and *co-branding* are the most common types of strategies. The central idea is to use an already existing brand as a base when it comes to launching new products or entering new markets (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2002; Kotler et al., 2002).

Personal brands and the use of famous people as endorser of brands conclude the theoretical framework. Both Montoya (2002) and McNally and Speak (2002) stresses the importance of having a strong personal brand and how much there is to benefit from it. They present comparable ideas on how to create that kind of brand. The main focus should lie on *distinctiveness* and *persistency*. Famous people with strong personal brands can be a good endorser to a company's brand. This type of endorsement tends to work out better with brands that are quite unknown (Till, 1998).

3 Method

This chapter describes the method we used in order to fulfill the purpose of the thesis. Perspective, qualitative research, validity and reliability and criticism of chosen method are the four parts that are treated in this section.

3.1 Perspective

When approaching the method of the thesis, one must be aware of how different perspectives alter the outcome of the thesis. *Hermeneutics* focus on the interpretation and insight of a subject rather than proving (or disproving) hypotheses of an object (Alvesson & Sköldb-berg, 2000). As the purpose of this thesis suggests an understanding and description of a process, a hermeneutical approach would be suitable. In the hermeneutical spiral, Eriksson and Wiedersheim-Paul (1999) show how the starting point is a predetermined “understanding”. This predetermined understanding is based on what the researcher already know of the subject. We would have an idea how branding is conducted in sport organizations based on findings from our bachelor thesis. With these understandings in mind, a new dialogue will lead a re-interpretation, which in turn will lead to a new understanding.

Marschan-Piekari and Welch (2004) explain how the hermeneutical perspective could be used when researching everything from organizational issues to management research. They also explain the importance of interpretation in complex contexts. The purpose of the thesis would fit the mold of being complex in nature and the authors must thereby understand their role as interpreter. We feel that the subjectivity is necessary to be able to interpret the empirical data found in our interviews. If we did not interpret, we would only get a series of catchphrases and clichés that would do nothing to fulfill our purpose.

Even though the hermeneutical perspective does not imply a strict choice of method, Marschan-Piekari and Welch (2004) say that qualitative methods are more applicable. Carlsson (1991) support this idea by saying that it is hard to get a deeper understanding and interpretation of a subject thru surveys.

3.2 Qualitative research

The thesis does not aim to use any quantifiable data nor any statistical analysis to fulfill its purpose and therefore a qualitative research method has been chosen. The reason for doing so relies heavily on the fact that we believe that the many of the aspects of a brand are hard to analyze and quantify thru numbers. Furthermore, this thesis has no intention of making any broad generalizations of sport organization brands or personal brands, but rather in a descriptive manner explaining the relationship between the athlete and the organizational brand in Swedish pro sports. Gummesson (2000) says that a qualitative method and case studies are suitable for research in marketing, leadership, organization and more. We feel that an in-depth study of the relationships surrounding sport organizations, brands and athletes is the preferable way to fulfill the purpose.

Carlsson (1991) says that a qualitative research often is based on induction. An inductive approach focuses on the empirical data rather than having empirical data prove/disprove hypothesis derived from existing theory (deduction) (Gummesson, 2000; Carlsson, 1991). Induction helps generating new theory or hypothesis that could be used in deductive research. As we feel that our study of professional Swedish sport brand is hard to hypothe-

size and as theory in this subject is limited, the inductive approach is suitable. Gummesson (2000) comments on the critics that say that inductive researchers risk reinventing the wheel by saying that only bad inductive research will do that.

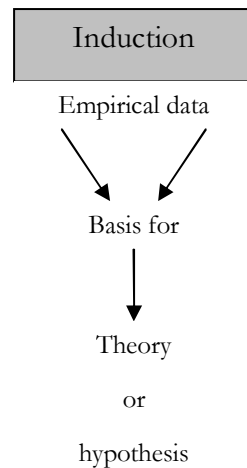


Figure 4 Induction (Carlsson, 1991, p. 27)

3.2.1 Sample

With the chosen qualitative method and the purpose of this thesis any kind of sample will be biased to some degree. The selection of organizations and player come from our findings from previous studies of branding in sport organization. The assumptions of sports teams evolving into companies is of course not nearly applicable to every organization. With limiting ourselves to Sweden, options of sports that are evolving are narrow. We believe that only clubs playing in Sweden's highest football league (Allsvenskan) and ice hockey league (Elitserien) have reached the level of professionalism required to qualify for this thesis. This might be seen as presumptuous, but the fact is that football and ice hockey has far more attendance at games, more professional organizational structures, media exposure and sponsor revenues than any other sport³ in Sweden (Riksidrottsförbundet, 2005).

With this starting point, the question of which organizations to choose within Allsvenskan and Elitserien arises. As this thesis will describe the aspects of both organization brands and personal brands of athletes, we have to consider clubs that have prominent brands as well as at least one player that would be categorized as a star player and a brand. By previous work within sport branding, we know that the ice hockey team HV71 is a prominent brand both locally and nationally. HV71 would also fit the profile of a suitable club when it comes to a star player. Our choice of player was the thirty year old Johan Davidsson. He is the captain of the team and considered one of the most prominent players in Elitserien. He has years of experience with media and fan exposure from playing for the national team as well as in the NHL. To have representation from both Elitserien and Allsvenskan, a football club is needed. The choice of IF Elfsborg (football club from Borås, and here after referred to as just Elfsborg) is based on their recent success in becoming Swedish champions and that it, like HV71, is a well-known brand locally and nationally. Elfsborg also corresponds to the increased professionalism in sports. With the construction of a brand new

³ This excludes all individual sports such as track and field and tennis.

stadium (Borås arena) and an increase in turnover from 35 million to 60 million in over just a few years, we feel that Elfsborg is an interesting and expanding organization. As for player representation, we found it to be interesting to get the perspective of a younger up and coming player as a contrast to Johan Davidsson. Samuel Holmén is twenty two years old and one of Elfsborgs most promising young players. He joined the a-squad at the early age of 17 and is now a big part of Elfsborg's success. He has also participated in several caps for the Swedish U21⁴ team and recently made his debut in the senior national team.

As spokespersons for the organizations, we have chosen the marketing managers of the clubs. The reason for this is that we feel that they are most likely more involved in brand building and management than for example the president or the sports manager. Janne Hedell is the marketing manager of HV71 and has been so since 1994. Hedell was also playing hockey for HV71's A-squad between 1980 and 1988. Sten Strinäs started his management career as a consultant for Trollhättan Bois at the age of 23 and has been the marketing manager for Elfsborg since 1986. With his 20 years of experience, he has had an important role in transforming Elfsborg's organizational and marketing strategies.

In addition to the sport organizations and the athletes we will also interview Erik Niva. He is considered one of the most well-known sport journalists in Sweden and we feel that his outside perspective would help us give us a better understanding of the context of sport brands. Niva is currently writing for Aftonbladets *Sportbladet* as well as *Sportmagasinet* but started his sport journalist career writing for the renowned football magazine Four-FourTwo⁵ at the age of 20. Niva has made a name for himself mainly through his investigating articles and insightful writing.

3.2.2 Conducting interviews

Interviews conducted with a qualitative approach tend to be less structured than interviews made with a quantitative method. The qualitative techniques could range from semi-structured interviews to everyday conversations. The nature of the interview relies on to what extent the interviewer wants to control the situation (Carlsson, 1991). With the qualitative approach of this thesis, we found that we would have to have similar set of questions for all the subjects. The questions would be more of a guide to discussions rather than a strict questionnaire. They would function as checklist for discussions so that every actor contributes to all aspects of the purpose. Kahn and Cannel (1957) say that a qualitative interview could be considered as a conversation with a purpose (cited in Carlsson, 1991). An inductive method should make the qualitative interview a foundation of new ideas and hypotheses. It should not be used to verify predetermined ones. Even with the set questions we feel confident of being able to keep the interviews as close to a conversation as possible.

Along side Carlsson's (1991) emphasis on conversation-like interviews when using a qualitative and inductive method, he also points out that the interviewer must be able to steer the conversation. Discussions not concerning the topic should be avoided. We have to be aware of this fact to not dilute our empirical base and lose focus on our purpose. Eriksson and Wiederheims-Paul (1999) also stresses to keep interviews concise, but on the basis that

⁴ The national team for players up to 21 years of age.

⁵ FourFourTwo stems from the classic football formation and is one largest football magazine in Europe.

personal interviews often have time constraints and off-topic detours could reduce the time for purpose related questions.

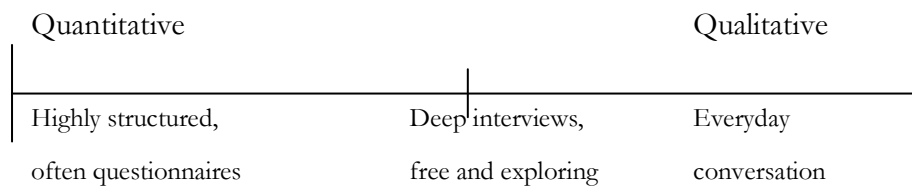


Figure 5 Range of interviews (Carlsson, 1991, p. 31) modified by authors

The interview questions (see appendices) derived from our research questions and our theoretical framework. It was a way of ensuring that the data would correspond to our purpose and thereby giving us an adequate view of the sport organization brand and the athlete’s personal brand.

The interviews were scheduled to be about an hour long. We believe that this gave us just the time to explore the subjects thoroughly. As for the type of interview used, we feel that personal interviews enabled us the right setting to explore our purpose. Eriksson and Wiederheim-Paul (1999) say that personal interviews are more controllable than for example phone interviews. Advantages like the usage of visual aids and interpretation of body language make the personal interview superior to the phone interview. Furthermore, with a personal interview it is easier to gain trust from the interviewee and thereby enabling more outspokenness and sincere answers. We recorded the interviews with a tape recorder. The interviews were then typed out as transcripts.

3.2.3 Actor perspective

The illustration below shows the different perspectives of the actors in the thesis. Hedell and Strinäs represent the views of the sport organization and have an internal perspective when it comes to the sport organization brand. The athletes both have an internal and external perspective of the organization brand as they are a part of the organization, but also have personal strides and ambitions. With the athlete’s personal brand, only the athletes themselves could have an internal perspective. We feel it is crucial to understand from which perspective the opinions of the actors come from in order for the interpretation of the data to be as accurate as possible.

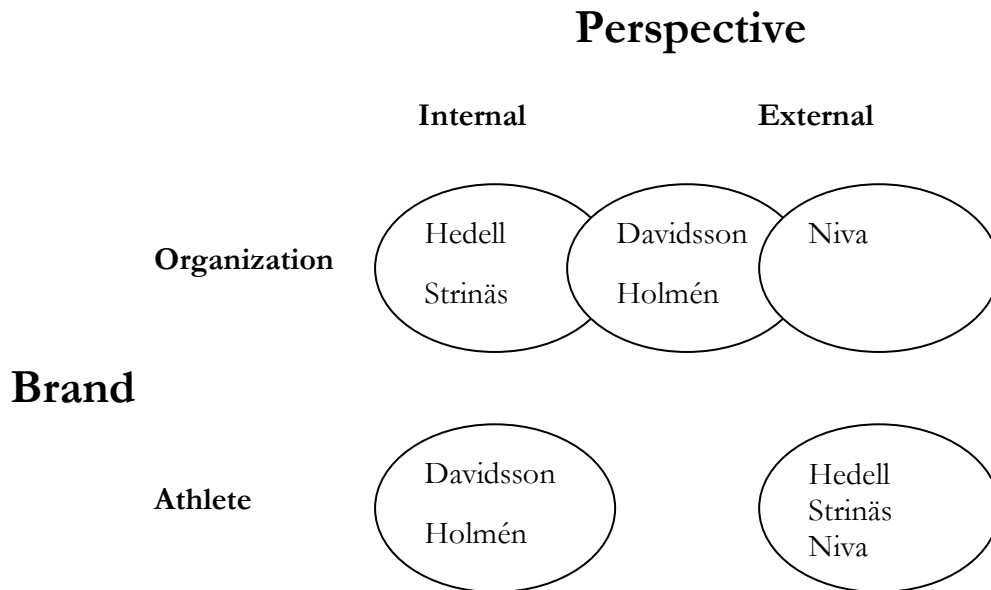


Figure 6 The actors' perspectives

3.2.4 Theoretical framework

The frame of reference is based on models and theories of branding and brand management. Since our purpose implies a broad view of the brand, we feel that the frame of reference must reflect as many aspects of the brand as possible. Since there are both time and quantity restraints for writing a master thesis, the brand theories have been selected with the utmost care and should, in our opinion, give the reader a good view of what we try to accomplish. Furthermore, since there are limited amount of models of brands and sports that would be consistent with our purpose, we have found that generic brand models and theories would suit us better. There have been studies made on sports and brand, but no one was found that would fit our purpose.

The study of existing literature was mainly conducted at the library at Högskolan i Jönköping. We used the databases Libris, Ebrary and Emerald to find adequate theories and models. As a supplement to the library, we have used internet search engines. The mostly used search engine was Google Scholar (<http://scholar.google.se/>), as it holds a vast amount of links to research papers, studies and other scientific publications as well as books. For basic facts such as turnover statements, attendance and background facts, the Google standard search engine (www.google.com) was used.

3.3 Trustworthiness of the thesis: Validity and reliability

The measuring instruments when collecting and interpreting data in qualitative research are usually not as reliable as ones used in quantitative research. As the researchers are both the interpreter and the instrument (comes from the pre-understandings of the hermeneutical perspective) makes it hard for other researchers to repeat the study with the same outcome (Carlsson, 1991). Despite this, a qualitative researcher must reflect over the *validity* and *reliability* of the research.

Bennet (2003) explains validity as to what extent the chosen method actually study what is meant to be studied. Eriksson and Wiederheim-Paul (1999) adds that one must consider both the *internal* and *external* validity. Internal validity measures the degree of relevance between the definitions used for measuring and the models of which they derive. When applied to our thesis, this would be how the research questions and the theoretical framework correspond to the interviewing questions. It is our belief that the interview questions and discussion topics adequately reflect the research questions and will be a sufficient instrument to fulfill our purpose. External validity explains how well the definitions correspond to reality. Definitions in this case would be the criteria for sample selection and the reality would be the actual world of sport brands. Are the interviewees qualified enough to be included in the study? Do they have relevant information and the proper background that would contribute towards fulfilling the purpose? We have chosen the interviewees for just this reason. We are confident that the athletes and the organization representatives as well as Erik Niva have the knowledge and insight needed to help us reach external validity.

Reliability is a measurement of how reliable the study is. This means other researchers, using the same sample and the same methods, should reach the same conclusions as the original study (Edvardsson, 2003). If the study cannot be repeated, one could assume that reliability has not been reached or is flawed. Gummesson (2000) shows how the reliability measurement serves three functions: Reveal dishonest research, intelligence test of the researcher (logical reasoning etc.) and confirms validity when it is not clear. The last function asserts that if reliability is established, one could also assume validity. Carlsson (1991) claims that reliability is a bit more complicated to measure in a qualitative study than in quantitative research. He bases the statement on the fact that qualitative research has more subjectivity involved. Different researchers have different background and pre-requisites and could therefore come to different conclusions in interpreting the data. Even if qualitative research requires a certain amount of subjectivity, we believe that one could still reach reliability if one fully document the method used.

3.4 Criticism of chosen method

This section will evaluate the thesis' choice of method. We recognize the importance of self-assessment and critique of the work that has formed this study.

3.4.1 Sample

The sample of actor was selected with a certain amount of subjectivity. One might see this as a flaw that negatively impact the thesis, but we recent the idea that subjectivity equals a biased result. We believe that another set of sample within Allsvenskan and Elitserien would generate an equal study. With the criteria of being a regionally strong brand, we believe that HV71 and Elfsborg were perfect candidates.

Another point to the criticism of the sample would be that we only used two sport organizations. One might say that one or two more clubs would better help us to generalize our conclusions of the thesis. As said before, we believe that similar organizations, and in our opinion most of them are, would not create a different result than the one the thesis presents. We are not saying that it would have hurt the study with more clubs, but we only feel that one clubs from Allsvenskan and one from Elitserien was adequate enough.

Lastly, the choice of including Erik Niva in the study might seem out of place to some. We believe that the study could have been done without his participation, but would then lack

an outside perspective. The study would then run the risk of being one-sided. Niva played, in our opinion, an important role in helping us analyze the interviews from players and managers and in giving a better understanding of the context.

3.4.2 Theoretical framework

When first looking at the theoretical framework, we started our literature study with the aspiration of finding research similar to our own work. We did not find any sport brand research suitable for our purpose, as most of them were quantitative in nature and lacked the personal brand and symbol perspective. The reader might see this as a drawback when analyzing the empirical data, but we feel that covering all aspects of the brand with generic models and theories that helped us to better evaluate the actors. We see trouble in limiting our study's frame of reference to a small selection of sport brand studies when trying to gain an understanding of the brand. Another valid reason is that this research did not function as a comparative study between literature and the reality. The literature was merely meant to be a tool in describing a context.

The selection of authors for the sample were not influenced by their backgrounds, but more by what their theories and models explained. This is why one might argue that the theoretical framework consists of views from only a selective number of authors. But even if for example Aaker has major representation of theories, one must consider him as one of the world's leading theorists in branding and that his work is scientifically accepted. The fact that Montoya comes from a consultant background might also be an issue. By studying the background of Montoya, we found that he is conducting research in the field of personal brands and comes from an academic background. To summarize, we feel that the theoretical framework was adequate to fulfill our purpose.

3.4.3 Analysis and interpretation

When starting to evaluate one's analysis and conclusions, one must be aware of the subjectivity that comes from conducting a qualitative study. The interpretation is a form of subjectivity that cannot be excluded. We are aware of the complications that come with subjectivity. Even if our background ran the risk of influencing the result, we are convinced that the interpretations are rational and correct.

3.4.4 Trustworthiness

All efforts concerning this thesis have been made with the purpose in mind. We believe that the chosen method was the preferred method to the purpose and for answering our research questions. We cannot find flaws that would threaten the trustworthiness. From this standpoint we believe that the thesis should reach the wanted validity.

The internal validity, measuring the relevance of frame of reference and research question to the interview questions, should be reached. We believe the questions, that serve as discussion template, accurately represent the aspects of the brand needed for answer the research questions. As for the external validity, we feel that the clubs fully represent the criteria that was set up and explained earlier in this method chapter.

The subjectivity would be a concern for reaching reliability. One issue concerning this subjectivity is the interviews. By using the questionnaires as discussion template, there might have been situations and directions that cannot be re-created which could reduce the reli-

Method

ability. We are aware of this and feel that the aspects reflected upon in the interviews are present in the empirical findings chapter. As said before, we feel that the conclusions are based on logic reasoning and we find no evidence that they are tainted with biased input. We are confident that other researcher would come to a similar conclusion as this thesis and thereby fulfilling the reliability requirements.

4 Empirical findings

The following chapter will present the empirical findings from our interviews. The empirical data is divided into two sections. Section one will present the data from the interviews of the marketing managers of the sport organizations and the second section will present the athletes' perspective. We believe that this will help the reader to get a better view of who said what. Note that the findings from the interview with Erik Niva are present in the managerial section.

4.1 Section one: Managerial perspective

4.1.1 Athletes as symbols of the organization brand

The discussion of how to handle athletes in order to enhance the brand is a rather hot topic within sport organizations. Hedell means that that most important thing is to focus on the right players, who has the traits and competence that appeals to the market. HV71 had a discussion whether they should focus on star players outside the region as symbols or local players which are easier to relate to. They choose the latter and are now calling themselves the team of the region. Although, outside players like former NHL⁶ star Jan Hrdina obviously give their brand a boost. *"In the long run it is important to have profiles from our own region. But to boost it up a little, a profile like Jan Hrdina is a good thing."* (J.Hedell, personal communication, 2006-11-30) Niva (Personal communication, 2006-11-29) also stresses the importance of having local or regional players as spoke persons and poster players. The reason is mainly that the professional clubs have forgotten their core values. He means that the core values suffer from the financial aspects pro sport of today relies on. The clubs are afraid of failure, which can lead to loss of income, that they instead of giving talented players the chance they play it safe and sign expensive professional player who might not even be better. Niva mentions Hammarby IF, which have had the working class and underdog mentality since it was founded in 1889, as a good example of core values gone astray. *"Hammarby has always had that bohemian atmosphere and great companionship among fans and players, but that has not been the case in the last couple of years. They have really lost their way."* (E. Niva, personal communication, 2006-11-29) In order to get back to their core values, the fans and the community must be able to relate to the players. This is also evident in Elitserien. Stockholm has not had any successes in promoting local hockey teams in years. Niva says that the low attendance at games can only be reversed by having regional players that give the audience a sense of *"us against the rest"*. He mentions the Spanish football club Atletico Bilbao as an example of a rather famous club who put the local approach ahead of success on the pitch. Bilbao's philosophy is to only contract players who originate from the local area of Basque.

Strinäs claims that star players are crucial for the organization. He exemplifies this by mentioning Anders Svensson's⁷ transfer away from Elfsborg in 2001. *"Skilled players are important symbols for the club. When Anders left in 2001, we immediately lost 1500 people in attendance per game."* (S. Strinäs, personal communication, 2006-12-07) Hedell agrees to some extent, but explain how one must be cautious to not over expose prominent players. *"If we look at Färjestad, they*

⁶ National Hockey League. The premiere hockey league in North America.

⁷ A renowned player in Allsvenskan and the Swedish national team that returned to Elfsborg in 2006 after playing in the English Premier League.

*have focused all their marketing efforts around Jörgen Jönsson and that will cause problems the day that he quits playing hockey.*⁸ (J. Hedell, personal communication, 2006-11-30) Hedell feels that HV71 has had tendencies to follow the same pattern with Johan Davidsson, but that they are aware of the pit falls that come with it. HV71 actively seeks younger talent that would be able to fill Davidsson's shoes the day he ends his hockey career. Hedell explains that it is impossible to create a spoke person like Davidsson over night and that HV71 have let players mature. Hedell mentions Erik Ersberg (one of the goalies) as a possible candidate. This based on Ersberg's talent as an athlete and that people easily get a connection with goalies in particular. Hedell claims that, to his knowledge, Färjestad does not have any candidates after Jönsson, and that this will create a whole that is hard to fill.

Even with a stride of being the regional club, Hedell (personal communication, 2006-11-30) explains how the occasional signing of a star player could help create a buzz and more attention towards the club. With the signing of an artist contract⁹ with Jan Hrdina in 2006, the management was first met with criticism. The media and to some extent the fans, was worried that the contract would be too costly in relation to what the team would gain from having him. In hindsight, this arbitrary cost-benefit analysis would be proven wrong. Fans and sponsors now praise Hrdina and the critics in the media have disappeared.

4.1.2 Athletes and brand identity

Elfsborg have, through analyzing its brand identity, stated their three core values as *Challenger*, *professional* and *entertaining* in brand platform. The challenger value is based on an underdog mentality towards the clubs from the larger cities in Sweden (Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö) as well as the bigger clubs in Europe. Elfsborg should with courage, quickness and smartness challenge financially stronger organizations. Professional comes from the belief that no organization could survive without financial stability and business-like manners. Elfsborg will always stride for professionalism and it should be evident to all members of the organization. Entertaining means that every event should leave the customer satisfied. With one foot in sports and the other in the entertainment business, Elfsborg has to let its product evolve to fit the customer (Strinäs, personal communication, 2006-12-07).

HV71 has five core values summed up by the mission: *Professional sports entertainment*¹⁰. The first core value is *powerful* and originates from HV71's belief that the team should never fold. *Offensive* represents the organization's pioneer spirit and stride for progress. HV71 should lead the evolvement on the ice as well as of the ice. The third core value is *eventfulness*. This corresponds to HV71's willingness to always entertain the fans and sponsors through unexpected events and happenings. *Engagement* should be the value that guides the organization's and its members' commitment towards social causes and to improve the interaction between stakeholder and the organization. The last core value of the HV71 brand identity is *team work*. It represents the very essence of how to succeed in the world of sports. One could never win without team work (HV71, 2004).

⁸ Färjestad is a team playing in Elitserien and Jörgen Jönsson is their star player with a long career in NHL and the national team.

⁹ A contract regulated by a special tax law. Contract is restricted to a maximum of 6 months. Hence the signing after the season has already started.

¹⁰ Authors' translation of Professionell sportunderhållning. The Swedish core values are Kraftfull, Offensiv, Händelserik, Engagemang and Lagspel.

HV71 is currently creating a brand book from these values. Even if the present state of these guiding values has not been fully implemented yet, Hedell (personal communication, 2006-11-30) feels that they are already understood by the organization and that they are based on the already existing value in HV71. Elfsborg brand platform is at an implementation state as well, but the values are already present in the organization (Strinäs, personal communication, 2006-12-07).

Hedell (personal communication, 2006-11-30) and Strinäs (personal communication, 2006-12-07) agrees that it is crucial for the athlete to recognize and adopt the brand identity of the organization. Even if both of them understand the importance of being able to communicate the identity to the players, it is not clear whether they succeed in doing so. Hedell (personal communication, 2006-11-30) says that a lot of the responsibility and getting the athletes to understand the values that the organization consists of, lay in the hands of the sport manager. The reason for this is that handles the day-to-day contact with the player and that this intimate contact conveys the brand identity of the club more natural than orders from the marketing department. Strinäs (personal communication, 2006-12-07) claims that the adaptation to the brand identity comes natural for the athletes. Elfsborg has a long tradition of making athletes feel at home. The close relationship between the organization and the players and the camaraderie among players help the identity to be better implemented in whole organization.

4.1.3 Managing the athlete

Hedell (personal communication, 2006-11-30) say that there is a strategy of using the right player for the right event. He mentions that if a presentation of or an appearance by the club is made, the players that have the most in common with the audience are chosen. For instance, when HV71 organizes sponsors gatherings in the surrounding areas of Oskarshamn, they bring the Oskarshamn bred player and former captain of HV71, Per Gustafsson to speak about the club. Hedell explain how this creates a closer tie towards the sponsors. HV71 also makes appearances in schools. They recently started working on a project called "*Skolprojekt HV71*". The project aims to teach students in middle and high school the importance of exercising, eating right and studying. With these types of events it is important that the players that attend represent these values. If they did not correspond to the responsible, hard working persons the topic suggests, the students would not consider them as credible. Furthermore, the social interaction in these types of event is not only based on philanthropic reasons, but also a way of enhancing awareness of HV71. Strinäs (personal communication, 2006-12-07) explains that there is a selection process for players as representatives for the organization. He concludes that one has to be able to say no to too much promotion of the star players and that the scale of the marketing event dictates what type of player should represent the club.

Both HV71 and Elfsborg have rules of conduct that players are forced to apply themselves to (Hedell, personal communication, 2006-11-30; Strinäs, personal communication, 2006-12-07). Hedell explains how there are both contractual and unspoken rules to manage the athlete. The contractual rules regulate mandatory marketing events, restrictions of personal promotion and the routines surrounding practice and games. The unspoken rules are how to meet fans, manners when in public and etiquette in general. The key word for the unspoken rules is *professionalism*. "*The internal control is important. One could destroy a brand just by giving someone the finger at a stoplight.*" (J. Hedell, personal communication, 2006-11-30)

4.1.4 Players as personal brands

Hedell (personal communication, 2006-11-30) says that there has been an alarming development in last 10 or 15 years. Players are now more aware of the fact that their personal brand is important. It has been more common that prominent players have been flown in for short term contracts of 2-3 months just for the sake of having a strong brand. Hedell (personal communication, 2006-11-30) feels that this makes it hard to create common values for the team and commitment to the club and leaves them with more egoistic player out to make a name for themselves. He compares this development to what is already present in NHL¹¹. *“If you look at the NHL, all the focus is on the star players. No one cares about the team anymore.”* (J. Hedell, personal communication, 2006-11-30) Strinäs says that the development of Swedish pro team sports in recent years has had an effect on how player promote themselves. *“With the improved financial possibilities, players tend to be more egoistic.”* (S. Strinäs, personal communication, 2006-12-07) He also saw an increased awareness of the players’ personal worth as a result of the Bosman ruling¹² as it gave the player more control over their careers.

Niva (personal communication, 2006-11-29) does not agree that there is more focus on the players and that athletes nowadays are more aware of their personal brand. He feels that it is just an increasing awareness of how a career in professional sports is made. *“It is common, especially in Swedish football, that player have strict career goal. First a couple of years playing in Allsvenskan to get experience and then find a suitable club in one of the bigger European leagues.”* (E. Niva, personal communication, 2006-11-29)

Niva (personal communication, 2006-11-29) says that players could benefit more by branding themselves and try having opinions that are other than the usual sport clichés. The act of standing out would probably benefit the mediocre players the most as he explains that the most talented players are able to rely solely on their performance as athletes. Niva feels that both clubs and player are unaware how to build a brand. *“They all seem to believe that the best way to build a brand is to say nothing, stand for nothing and smooth out every controversy.”* (E. Niva, personal communication, 2006-11-29) Hedell (personal communication, 2006-11-30) responds to this by saying that it’s the media’s own fault that no one stands out anymore. *“No one dares to say anything exceptional to the media. They know that if they do, the media would twist what they say to sell more newspaper.”* (J. Hedell, personal communication, 2006-11-30) Strinäs agrees with Hedell but adds that star role models also could be a factor to the wide-spread media shyness. He mentions Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Henrik Larsson as an example. *“When Henrik says ‘let’s go meet the vultures’ before entering a press conference and Zlatan refuses to talk to Swedish journalists, they set a standard for the other players.”* (S. Strinäs, personal communication, 2006-12-07)

Niva (personal communication, 2006-11-29) points out how openness towards the media has works in the NHL, where the media is allowed in locker rooms and even to do live interviews during the game. Niva continues that this will bring more attention to both players and the sport and that this would benefit the clubs greatly.

¹¹ National Hockey League. The premiere hockey league in North America.

¹² Ruling from the European court of justice that regulates free transfers of football players. Clubs were no longer able to charge a transfer fee after the players’ contract period had ended.

4.1.5 Conflict of interest

Strinäs (personal communication, 2006-12-07) says that the possibilities of making more money in other European leagues have made players more eager to self promotion. He continues by explaining that a player whose only goal is to increase their own market value will only hurt the club. Even if Strinäs say that it is not a common occurrence in Elfsborg, he feels there have been examples in Allsvenskan where this has happened. Elfsborg has always tried to find athletes that are coherent with the goal of the organization. Other ways of ensuring that that the player has the organization at heart is to actively search for prospective players that have an outspoken desire of joining Elfsborg. Hedell (personal communication, 2006-11-30), on the other hand, claims that clashes between the personal brand building of an athlete and the identity of the organization does not occur in Elitserien. He continue by saying that if such situation should occur, one has to be able to correct the athletes behaviour.

Niva (personal communication, 2006-11-29) says that even if the personal branding culture is not yet common in Swedish professional team sports, there have been instances where the brand of an athlete has been in conflict with the organization identity. He mentions Ervin “Magic” Johnson’s guest appearance in the Swedish basketball league playing for M7 Borås as an example, which left the club in debt that ultimately made them go bankrupt. The brand ‘Magic Johnson’ did not have the same goals as the organization, did not share the common values of Swedish sport tradition and was far too big of a name to enhance the M7 Borås organization brand. Niva raises a cautionary warning towards these signings of ‘market players’. He feels that the goal of winning a game will be secondary to brief entertaining stunts and that is a dangerous road to walk down.

4.2 Section two: Athlete perspective

4.2.1 Athletes as symbols of the organization brand

Davidsson (personal communication, 2006-12-13) says that the brand HV71 is one of the most powerful assets in the organization. The brand has to be nurtured and handled in the right way in order to grow and in that process the athletes play an important role. *“To be visible, to be heard, and to act in the right way in order to help marketing the brand is part of the work of being a hockey player.”* (J. Davidsson, personal communication, 2006-12-13) Holmén (personal communication, 2006-12-07) also reflects about the role the players have when it comes to enhancing the brand and means that their contribution really matters. He mentions the signings of Anders Svensson and Mathias Svensson¹³ that worked as a big boost for the whole organization. Not only their skills as football players were positive but also the increasing media interest was beneficial for the club.

The idea of signing a player who does not really fulfil the requirements on the field but instead boost the club brand is something that neither Davidsson or Holmén have met in Swedish pro sport (J. Davidsson, personal communication, 2006-12-13; S. Holmén, personal communication, 2006-12-07). Davidsson (personal communication, 2006-12-13) feels that the reason for that is simply the financial aspect. The clubs can not afford a player who will not make ends meet on the ice. If a club spends money on a certain player he has to deliver as a hockey player, not only sell merchandize in the fan shop. But under certain cir-

¹³ A popular striker in Elfsborg who has experience from the national team and the English Premier League.

cumstances it might affect the choice of player. *“If the club is choosing between two equally good players, the marketing abilities are taken under consideration.”* (J. Davidsson, personal communication, 2006-12-13)

4.2.2 Athletes and brand identity

Holmén (personal communication, 2006-12-07) claims that the organization communicates the brand identity to the squad in a sufficient way. Being a role model, behave well and follow the clubs directions are parts from the identity that Elfsborg communicate. Holmén feels that Elfsborg works hard with conveying the identity and often stresses the importance of a unified identity within the whole organization. He thinks that the recently developed brand platform could be positive for the organization and the values it presents are something that he really can relate to. Even though the brand platform is not fully released and implemented, Holmén says that: *“I already feel that we have come a long way with this work and that we follow it pretty good.”* (S. Holmén, personal communication, 2006-12-07) Davidsson (personal communication, 2006-12-13) differs a bit in his perception of the brand identity. He says that the sport aspects have the main focus and that is something that is very clearly communicated from the organization. Being top four in the league, reach at least semi final and being a contender for the gold medal each year are the performance oriented corner stones in HV71. The more marketing oriented part of the brand identity is not really communicated and implemented top down from the organization. There are some policies, for instance alcohol and gambling policies, which are compulsory for the players to follow. But besides that, common sense and learning from other players are ways to implement and carry the identity of the brand. Davidsson believes that due HV71’s relatively calm history, when referring to scandals and messy players, there has not been an obvious need for a handbook to follow. *“It is important to remember that you not only represent yourself but also the club, family and friends. That is something that you learn to handle over the years, it will come naturally to you.”* (J. Davidsson, personal communication, 2006-12-13)

Both Davidsson and Holmén say that if a player represents an identity which is not in line with the brand identity problems can occur. When athletes break the rules, they have to be prepared to take the consequences. Rude behaviour towards fans, violation of alcohol, drug and gambling policies and inappropriate behaviour towards team mates are examples of infringements. The punishment for the misbehaviour differs from a reprimand to suspension and in worst cases a torn contract. Sometimes the coach or the organization deal with the trouble maker, other times the group within the team handles these situations (J. Davidsson, personal communication, 2006-12-13; S. Holmén, personal communication, 2006-12-07).

4.2.3 Managing the athlete

HV71 have a clear strategy on how to manage their players in different marketing events. Davidsson (personal communication, 2006-12-13) says that sponsors and fans demand the same players to different happenings. There are usually around five players who are in this “popular group”. The happenings that the players participate in are for example sponsor dinners, fan meeting and mall activities. This type of undertaking towards the club has developed and increased over the years. The more prominent and known Davidsson became as a player, the more his role as a market tool grew. He has no problems with participating in these types of events and sees it as a part of his job. Although, a couple of years ago,

Davidsson and Stefan Liv¹⁴ took part in almost every sponsor event which led to a change of focus. *“The sponsors really appreciated us being there but it was just too much. The focus on the hockey was damaged and we had to start to say no to invitations and interviews.”* (J. Davidsson, personal communication, 2006-12-13)

Holmén (personal communication, 2006-12-07) means that it is a certainty that Elfsborg use their athletes in order to build the brand. It is not only the most popular player, Anders Svensson, who does all the work. Elfsborg divides the tasks to several players. Holmén notes a correlation between performance on the pitch and the frequency of participation in sponsor events. The fact that he is an own product from Elfsborgs youth academy makes him more popular in the region. *“I go out on some events with the background of me being one of few own products and that is something the club wants to parade. I think it is just funny that people appreciate us.”* (S. Holmén, personal communication, 2006-12-07)

4.2.4 Players as personal brands

Davidsson and Holmén agree that a personal brand is something that athletes can use and build in order to create advantages and increase personal value. They both use David Beckham as a typical example of an athlete who has managed to exploit his brand to such extent. None of them, or their fellow team mates, are even close to Beckham’s personal brand but they sometimes talk about it and start to understand the meaning of it (J. Davidsson, personal communication, 2006-12-13; S. Holmén, personal communication, 2006-12-07).

“Somehow you always represent yourself as a personal brand. And doing it well in the media can really create value.” (J. Davidsson, personal communication, 2006-12-13) When negotiating a new contract the marketing value of a player is taking into consideration. Davidsson believes that he earns more money due to his ability as a symbol and spokes person for HV71 compared to a player with similar skills on the ice. Another benefit that he mentions is that if he handles his personal brand well it can create job opportunities for him after his ice hockey carrier. Even though Davidsson thinks that the personal brand can be nurtured through personal acts off the ice he believes that his performance on the ice often is of more importance. The driving force behind the personal brand is often the player’s agent. The agent wants to earn as much money as possible for the player and themselves. When Davidsson was younger he sometimes took help from his agent when he was about to participate in some sort of commercial but nowadays he handle most of it by himself or together with HV71. *“I could use my agent more in order to make more money but it would feel a bit like selling my soul.”* (J. Davidsson, personal communication, 2006-12-13)

Holmén (personal communication, 2006-12-07) highlights the importance of being a good role model and that is something he wants to communicate through his personal brand. He often reflects on the way he acts and tries to create and maintain a good reputation. Handling the personal brand has more than one stakeholder. *“It is an interest from me but also a demand from the club. We are their players and we are hired by them and therefore it is important for the general impression that we behave.”* (S. Holmén, personal communication, 2006-12-07). The agents play an important role in this, often dirty game. Holmén means that agents spread rumours about their players with the purpose to build up a media buzz around them. This ploy can draw attention from many clubs and thereby create a higher value of the player.

¹⁴ A fan favourite goaltender who led HV71 to their second SM-guld in 2004

Holmén does not work like this with his agent. Instead he believes in doing his promotion on the pitch. But he admits that he sometimes promote himself in interviews. *“In interviews I can say that if the right offer from a club in Europe comes up I am ready for it. It could be that kind of stuff as well. To let people know that I am ready.”* (S. Holmén, personal communication, 2006-12-07)

Players of today are more egoistic than ten years ago. They have clear goals of what they want to achieve in the terms of playing in the national team, going abroad and earn money. In an early stage of a player's carrier a carrier plan is determined which they tend to follow by all means. Changing clubs and moving to other countries in a short span are very common today. The increasing egoistic approach to the game has led to an undermining of the genuine feeling for a specific club (J. Davidsson, personal communication, 2006-12-13; S. Holmén, personal communication, 2006-12-07). HV71 are aware of that fact and try hard to maintain the local approach on the team. The approach with local players who have this genuine club feeling is crucial for maintaining commitment to the region (J. Davidsson, personal communication, 2006-12-13). Holmén emphasize this change and sees it mainly through an attitude change among young players. Young players are more confident today. They do not apologies for being young. They try to take what they can. *“When I joined the senior squad I sat in a corner and polished the older players' shoos. That is not the case anymore.”* (S. Holmén, personal communication, 2006-12-07)

That media, in different forms, is a strong force that has the influential power to build strong personal brands and also ruin the same is a statement that Davidsson and Holmén concur with. Despite the obvious potential that media holds, there is a sign of caution towards journalists (J. Davidsson, personal communication, 2006-12-13; S. Holmén, personal communication, 2006-12-07). Davidsson mentions that a lot of players have had bad experience with their media encounters and as a result of that a negative trend has developed. No one really dares to say exactly what they think which leads to boring interviews filled with clichés. But he sees a change among the players about the awareness of medias' importance. *“Nowadays you get more informed and aware of the importance that media has for the survival of hockey. This is something that the club stresses too.”* (J. Davidsson, personal communication, 2006-12-13)

Holmén (personal communication, 2006-12-07) makes a distinction between different situations that affect his way of dealing with media. In Elfsborg there are certain rules, in the national team it could be others and in interviews similar to this he feels that he can speak freely. He thinks that the rather doll relationship between media and athletes are influenced by star players like Zlatan and his total lack of interest for it. The big stars set the standard. *“A couple of years ago the journalists were only interested in football. Nowadays you are covered on all different levels, even the private ones. It is a hard question, I would like to be more open but if I am, I get all the other things.”* (S. Holmén, personal communication, 2006-12-07)

4.2.5 Conflict of interest

Davidsson (personal communication, 2006-12-13) says that it is sometimes unclear if he represents himself or the club. He mentions that he has participated in a lot of settings that has nothing to do with HV71. For instance, Davidsson has been working for TV3 during its coverage of the World cup doing interviews and reports. He has also been doing work for SVT's Hockeykväll¹⁵. He explains that this is not something HV71, but it still is something

¹⁵ Weekly hockey show in one of the Swedish public broadcasting's channels.

Empirical findings

that affects the club. *"When I went to work during the World Cup, I thought it would be fun to do a something else than just playing hockey. But it turned out to be extremely hard work mentally."* (Johan Davidsson, personal communication, 2006-12-13) Davidsson says that he did not have any time to work out and keeping his physical fitness during this period. He feels that this could have been negative for his obligations towards HV71, as his attributes as a hockey player could affect the performance of the team. Davidsson continues by saying that these private obligations have been more common in recent years and are a product of him realizing that he will not be a hockey player forever. He has reached the latter part of his career and has come to realize that there is a life after HV71.

Even if Davidsson (personal communication, 2006-12-13) recognizes the dilemma of representing two brands, he feels that his role as the captain hinders him from doing too much outside the control of HV71, and thereby many of the conflicts between brands are eliminated. He explain how the obligations of and on the ice as the role of captain of the team, must be performed with the insight of what is best for the team. He continues that players that do not have the same responsibility as him have more options to promote themselves, and where the conflict of interest therefore could be more evident.

Holmén (personal communication, 2006-12-07) explain how it is important to keep what is best for the team at heart. Although he admits that sometimes a great individual performance on the pitch could satisfy him even if the team did not win. *"I rather perform good than bad even if my team loses a game."* (S. Holmén, personal communication, 2006-12-07) He does not consider this matter as a type of conflict but more a way of expressing his eager to always perform well.

5 Analysis

This chapter aims to analyse the empirical data and to define the implications of having athletes as symbols of sport organisation brands. The managerial perspective and the player perspective are composed in the same sections in order to get a complete overview.

5.1 Athletes as symbol of the organization brand

All the interviewees recognize the importance of players as symbol of the brand and the fact that the athlete really has an impact on the brand. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) say that anything that represents the brand could be seen as a symbol. That would mean that the Holmén and Davidsson is a symbol when representing the clubs as athletes, spokes persons and role models for younger people as well as when doing commercials. Furthermore, the athletes seem to be aware of the responsibility that comes with it. Both Holmén and Davidsson accept their role and the facts that this sometimes could hinder them from doing what they really feel like. We see this insight and acceptance as a natural progress of the increasing professionalism in Swedish pro sport organization. Both clubs and players realize that athletes, as the ultimate tool for the organization, can create brand awareness and are perfect carriers of the sport organization brand identity.

As for the managers' perspective, Hedell and Strinäs are in agreement that a prominent player, with the extra fan and media exposure that follows a successful athlete, will create a positive value for the brand. One could easily state that it has been known for years that prominent players sell more tickets (Graham et al, 2001; Till, 1998), but there are elements of star players that have nothing to do with him/her kicking a football or passing a puck. With Strinäs explaining that they lost 1500 people in attendance after Anders Svensson left the team, one would automatically make the assumption that it is because the team would not perform as well on the pitch without him. We believe that the performance aspect is important, but not nearly the only aspect to consider. As Anders Svensson was/is¹⁶ the most hired player in Elfsborg to do fan meetings and company events as well as being a role model for children, we are certain that the brand symbol factor played a big part in losses in attendance and sponsor revenues.

Hedell raises an important issue of overexposure of prominent players. We agree that there are problems with overexposing an athlete for the sake of increasing brand awareness. First, the organization brand would be synonymous with the athlete and therefore any negative behavior from the athlete would automatically generate negative effects on the organization brand. This is consistent with Till's (1998) thoughts on negative impact on the brand by bad behavior by endorsers. Secondly, if the athlete is forced to focus too much on the marketing activities, there might be a risk of losing focus on performance on the pitch. Since Berggren et al. (2004) says that success on the field is the single most important factor in building a strong sports brand; it would be foolish to divert the athlete's attention from this. One would have to find a balance between the two. Lastly, having a single player as a symbol of the brand will create a void when the athlete retires. The other players, which have been in the shadow of the prominent player, might lack the routine, experience and skills of representing the club.

¹⁶ Anders Svensson is once again playing for Elfsborg after his years in European top football

After interviewing Hedell and Davidsson, we recognize that HV71 have tendencies towards putting too much of their marketing efforts on Davidsson. Even if he is a big part of HV71, that in turn would justify the massive attention, it is quite clear that the club will have problem finding a successor to Davidsson. Hedell claims that HV71 is actively seeking a successor to Davidsson, but if this was true one would be able to spot this successor already. The reason for this is that building prominent player that speaks to the hearts and minds of people, in our opinion, takes years. Since Davidsson only has five seasons left (our own somewhat arbitrary estimate) of his career, HV71 should have found someone by now. One could make the argument that it is hard to create a prominent figure and that it is more of natural evolvement than a conscious choice.

5.1.1 Brand-added value

Strinäs and Hedell both disclaim the signing of star players for the sake of their personal brand or their ability to boost the organizational brand alone. They are in strong agreement that a player's skill as an athlete always comes first. Riezebos et al. (2003) explain how the price of a product or service could be higher if a strong brand is affiliated with it. We believe that the brand added value theory is also applicable to sport brands. Strinäs, Hedell and Davidsson all agree that clubs would rather have an athlete that would contribute in marketing efforts than someone who did not. They also say that clubs would be prepared to pay a higher price for a player that possesses qualities that would strengthen the brand. It could thereby be said that players who are aware of the added value of strong symbols could gain a lot if they possessed these qualities or gave the impression of having them.

From the managerial perspective, an acquisition of a strong symbol could be equally beneficial for the organization. Aaker (1996) and Melin (1997) explain how the brand equity is the gathered assets surrounding the brand. By acquiring the presumably strong symbol the brand equity would increase and could thereby justify the higher price the brand added value suggests.

5.1.2 Core values through players

Niva says that the clubs in Allsvenskan and Elitserien have lost their way when it comes to the core values that they represent. He claims that the increased professionalism has made the clubs nearsighted and that clubs are not willing to take any chances anymore. Niva says that it is definitely evident in the recruitment of players. The organizations often choose outside professional players rather than home-grown young players and Niva expresses his concerns that this will eventually distance the clubs from local areas and regions. Both Strinäs and Hedell explain how they want their clubs to be the clubs of their region and that it is important for fans to belongingness when they visit an event. They are also in agreement that local and regional players are an important part of keeping the ties to the region. We are in agreement with Niva that regional ties are important and that the organizations are moving away from these values. We also believe that there is a discrepancy between what the manager, and to some extent the players, say and how the organizations act in reality.

Both Elfsborg and HV71 have outspoken goal of sustaining their place as top clubs in Allsvenskan and Elitserien. Both organizations highlight professionalism and continuous excellence and the financial aspects have become the focal point the last couple of years. It is our conviction that the organizational brand will have trouble with sustaining the regional identity as it moves towards increased professionalism.

Since the athletes are important symbols, we believe that what type of players the organizations sign is crucial for how the club brand is perceived. We support Niva's conclusion that the best way to relate to the community is for the fans to relate to the players.

As we see it, the clubs have two completely different brand paths they can choose to walk down. With core values of professionalism and goals of being the top club, we believe that the best way of communicating this to their stakeholders is to continue signing established professional player that would be signaling professionalism. The downside of doing so is that younger player would have trouble fulfilling the professional requirements which could result in Sweden losing positions in football and hockey further down the road. On the other hand, if they want to be the club of the region, they have to actively search for local talent and promote these player in their marketing efforts. Niva say that the latter option has been working in Europe. He mentions Atletico Bilbao as an example of the regional anchoring more important than winning every year. When looking from a brand theory perspective, both options coincide with increasing brand equity.

Aaker (1996) explain how brand awareness and association are a part of brand equity. The first option, the path towards professionalism, would through the signing of recognized player contribute to increased media attention and thereby enticing bigger sponsor from the whole country, and not only from the region. It is our belief that it would result in higher brand awareness. On the other hand, the second option would closer the ties to the region and its fans. This would mainly affect the association spectrum of the brand equity. People would recognize the brand as a brand of the region and associate it with a sense of belongingness.

5.2 Players and brand identity

Lagergren (1998) says that the core values of the brand represents need to be understood and supported by the whole organization. Elfsborg has just recently finished their work on their brand platform, but Strinäs says that the core values are already present within the organization. Even though Holmén supports the already existing identity, we believe that there are some issues that quite not support Strinäs. Holmén do understand his role as a representative of the organization and what they want him to do. But we disagree that this constitutes a total embrace of the organization brand identity. We see Holmén's actions more as following rules of conduct and contractual obligations than an understanding of the identity. We are not saying that common sense and rules of conduct contradicts the brand identity. It is most likely the other way around. Our point, supported by Lagergren (1998), is simply that identity is something you are and not something you comply to.

In agreement with Strinäs, Hedell recognizes the importance of having the identity adopted by the players. But Hedell differs to Strinäs when analysing whether the brand identity is fully implemented in the organization. He says that most issues that regard player behaviour are handled by the sports manager and that he has limited knowledge to how well the players know the HV71 brand identity. We found that Davidsson's thoughts on brand identity were the most accurate description of reality. He explains how the core values concerning the sport aspects are the ones the players embrace and understand while financial and marketing goals and aspirations are more for the rest of the organization. We have not been able to conclude whether this is a result in failure of implementation by the managers or that athletes simply have not interest in learning the identity aspects that does not con-

cern the sport itself. Even if the latter is true, we believe that HV71's recent development of the brand book is a step in the right direction to get whole organization behind the HV71 identity. One might have to accept that some parts of brand identity will never be communicated effectively to the players.

5.2.1 Athlete turnover and identity

Aaker (1996) explain how the core identity consists of timeless values that the brand stands for. When analysing how players carry the core identity of the organization, one must keep in mind that athlete turnover is very high in both Allsvenskan and Elitserien. In recent years, this turnover has increased even more. With the introduction of artist contracts and the increased pressure of continuous success from sponsors, stakeholder and shareholders¹⁷, clubs nowadays have tendencies towards sacking players and coaches just at a hint of failure to perform. This leads to a vast number of athletes entering and exiting the organizations each year. That a player only stays for a short period of time in an organization it is almost self-explanatory that there will be complications in keeping every player in tune with the core brand identity.

Aaker (1996) adds that in addition to the core identity, a brand could also consist of brand essence and extended identity. When core values are hard to transfer onto players, one might argue that extracting the brand essence or the extended identity could be a way of including the athletes in the sports brand.

5.3 Managing the Athlete

Aaker (1996) says that brand equity is built through awareness, loyalty, quality and associations. The athletes play an important role in this work helping the organization to build brand equity. Through sponsor, marketing and fan events the clubs use the players as endorsers for the brand. Elfsborg and HV71 are well aware of the importance the players have for the organizational brand and have clear strategies for how to manage them. Those strategies are not something that is decided on management level and never implemented among the players. Both Holmén and Davidsson say that they know how the strategies work and are well educated in how to handle them. We consider Till's (1998) ideas about famous people as brand endorsers to be applicable here. The clubs use players that have fit, congruence and belongingness to the organizational brand. That is a reason for their success in this work.

According to Aaker (1996) brand awareness refers to what extent a brand is present in the consumers mind. In the region where Elfsborg and HV71 are situated their brand awareness probably is dominant therefore it is hard to see any direct flaws in that particular work. Although they work hard to maintain it. Skolprojekt HV71 is a good example of them not being satisfied but continues to nurture the important brand awareness. The future challenge is instead to create higher awareness outside the region, on a national level.

The fan meetings and sponsor events are also signs of loyalty building. By meeting people off the field a more personal relationship is created. They bond with fans and sponsors and loyalty is strengthened. Aaker (1996) means that brand loyalty can work as an entry barrier for competition, cut marketing costs and predict future incomes. The competition the two

¹⁷ Applies to clubs that are companies that have tradable stocks like AIK fotboll.

clubs are exposed to is presently not very high and neither are the marketing costs. But being able to predict the number of spectators for future games is crucial in their budgeting.

How the athletes are managed can not really affect the perceived quality of the organizational brand. The perceived quality of sport brands often refers to their performance and success on the field. What the athletes can do to affect the perceived quality off the field is to always act in a pleasant and proper way.

Aaker (1996) means that associations do not necessarily have to focus on product attributes it can also include famous representatives or special symbols that can be associated with the brand. In this work prominent players play an important role. It is easier for fans and sponsors to associate to a famous player than a poor performing player no one ever heard of. Davidsson is a symbol for HV71 and many people associate him with them. Holmén is not on the same level yet but Elfsborg promote him as a young talented local player. The association that players create for the organizational brand is very helpful when building brand equity.

The dependence the clubs have on the players when it comes to building brand equity is an interesting aspect. If the athletes did not participate in any events outside the field it is a certainty that the clubs would have difficulties to build brand equity. The players are such a vital part of the organizational brand so if you subtracted them as representatives it would have real problems standing on its own. This might not ever happen but it is a way of illustrating the importance of managing the athletes correct.

Another aspect that influences the brand equity is the player's individual performance on the field, which is something that management can not control. For example if a player represents the national team, or place himself high in individual statistic charts, the organizational brand will often be mentioned together with the player. Awareness outside the region is created and that is something that the clubs often find difficult to create. We believe that this extra exposure, which derives from individual performance, sometimes is forgotten even if it has great value for the organizational brand.

The organizations also use the athletes in other marketing strategies. Extensions are according to Keller (2002) the most researched area in branding today and should be considered important. The extension strategy the players take part in is co-branding. Co-branding is related to brand extension but here a brand enters another product class together with another brand (Aaker, 1996). To make a co-branding possible in this context you have to assume the athletes as own brands. A lot of merchandize is depending on the players and that is a typical co-branding. Idol cards, hats and jerseys with players name on are examples of items that branded with both the club brand and the players personal brand. Once again the organization shows sign of an effective and smart way to manage their athletes in order to create a stronger brand. Melin (1999) says that there is a risk that the total brand equity could decrease if the brand building is spread out on to many brands. We can not argue that the clubs are aware of that risk but we do believe that they only profile the players who are considered attractive to the market.

5.4 Athletes as personal brands

By using the benefits Montoya (2002) lists about personal brands we will try to see how relevant they are for Davidsson and Holmén.

Top of mind status - If you ask anyone to mention one player in HV71 the majority would probably answer Johan Davidsson. His top of mind status in that context is undisputable. Holmén is not there yet. But if we narrow down the context to mentioning a talented Swedish player in Elfsborg, his name would most likely have high top of mind status.

Attracts - Davidsson is a very charismatic person. Players respect him and listen to him which gives him the ability to attract other people. Being the captain of the team is an acknowledgement of that. Holmén is eloquent for his age and we believe has the possibilities to become a future captain of his team.

Perceived value - Sponsors use Holmén and Davidsson in their marketing in order to communicate something to their customers. The motives the sponsors have with that is to create a higher perceived value for their customers.

Association with a trend - Also here sponsors use Holmén and Davidsson in their marketing strategies. For example by driving a certain car people on the streets notice that and associate it with the prominent athlete.

Increase earning potential - Both Davidsson and Holmén are well aware of this benefit. By acting in the right way and to some extent promote themselves they understand that their personal brand will generate more money. Davidsson mentions contract negotiations as a concrete example when the personal brand pays off in terms of money.

When looking at Montoya's (2002) eight building blocks of personal branding one can say that Davidsson and Holmén match some better than others. The law of visibility and the law of unity are strategies they both are well aware of and try to carry out. When they get recognition in media or taking part in a sponsor event their brand gets exposed more which will lead to a higher awareness of their personal brands. Visibility is therefore crucial. Even though they seem to understand the importance of visibility they have some concerns towards media. Niva's view is that media plays the most important role when it comes to create a strong personal brand for a sport star. Therefore he finds it strange that more players do not use the opportunities that media gives. Instead of trying to profile themselves he means that the majority avoid media as much as possible. Here a conflict of interest occurs. The athletes want their privacy and media want the athletes 24-7. As in many conflicts a compromise is probably the best way to handle this with more openness from the athletes and more respect of privacy from the journalists.

Pro athletes are always representing the club and themselves which makes it important to always try to act in a beneficial way. The behaviour behind closed doors must match the behaviour in public, as Montoya (2002) puts it. This strategy, the law of unity, is something that Davidsson and Holmén and their fellow team mates try to follow. They are well educated in working consistently and are prepared to handle it. The remaining laws of personal brand building are not that obvious for them. Those laws work on a more psychological level and were not mentioned directly during the interviews. Although there is strong indications that all the laws are applicable on them in one way or another.

Davidsson and Holmén say that personal branding is not the most common topic in the locker room and that is mainly their agents who bring it up. Therefore it is very interesting to see that the two of them fit so well into Montoya's theories concerning personal branding. It seems like they understand the importance of it but they do not really understand how they fully benefit from it and how it is created. We feel that this is a way of subconsciously building a personal brand.

Hedell and Strinäs, who represents the managerial perspective, have both noticed a development in the personal branding area. They believe that it mainly has to do with the increasingly financial possibilities in Swedish pro sport. Nowadays there is more money to make for the players and a strong personal brand help the players to get a share of it. The downside with this is that players tend to be more egoistic. The egoistic approach could undermine the genuine club feeling that both HV71 and Elfsborg aim to create and maintain. Some players focus mainly on there own success, and cherish a profitable contract higher than a for example a league trophy. In the long run this can turn into a more obvious problem than it is today. The North American pro sports and some European football leagues are already at a stage where clubs face huge financial problems. With a constant pressure from stakeholders who demands success the club management drives up the players salary and transfer fees to levels they cant cope with if the success not will occur. In North America they have handled these issues through a salary cap¹⁸ and maybe it is time to introduce that in Sweden to avoid similar difficulties.

The opinion of an increase personal brand awareness, that the representatives from the sport organizations have noticed, is not shared by Niva. He means that it is the awareness of a well planned career plan which has increased. We believe that a more detailed career plan goes hand in hand with the increased awareness of personal brands. They both depend and nurture on each other. McNally and Speak (2002) says that distinctiveness and consistency is major bricks in the personal brand building. To create these traits we think that a detailed career plan can work as a guide. The player set up goals in his early years and put his heart into it, determined to succeed. The distinctiveness is thereby formed. If they follow the plan through their careers consistency is created. Saying that a career plan is identical to a blue print for successful personal brand building might be an exaggeration but it is definitely a helpful tool.

5.5 Conflict of brands

Even with Niva confirming the occurrences of clear conflicts of brands, one must be cautious to automatically assume that there will be conflicts. Both Strinäs and Hedell come to the conclusion that it does not occur in their organizations respectively. Strinäs adds that if a player ignored the clubs wishes in favour of self-promotion they would be reprimanded for their behaviour. He also explains that they choose to refuse signing of players that display tendencies of just wanting the club as a stepping stone to something bigger. We have not seen any indications that there have been incidents where Elfsborg and HV71 have been in conflict with an athlete who is out to make a name for himself.

We agree with Strinäs analysis that while the appeal of playing in Europe, fuelled by the increasing salaries in other leagues, increases there will also be an increase of the value of having a strong personal brand. We are concerned that it could lead to conflicts in the near future. The environment for ice hockey clubs has also changed during the last years and might face similar difficulties. We see personal branding increasing as means to attract attention from clubs outside Sweden.

Davidsson raised an interesting comment. He said that his interest in promoting himself has increased the last few years as he sees and end to his career. He continues by saying that it has been hard to keep both external and HV71 obligations from not affecting each

¹⁸ A limited amount of money that clubs are allowed to spend on salaries for their roster.

other. Davidsson also said that it is hard to know when he is the person Davidsson and when he is Davidsson the captain of HV71. The first stated could be for two different reasons. It could signal an increased awareness of personal brand or it is a result of him trying to secure a future outside the rink. Either way, the increasing sense of not knowing what he represents in what situation implies a risk of conflict. Not so much a conflict between Davidsson and HV71's organization, but rather a conflict between Davidsson the symbol and Davidsson the personal brand.

Holmén, as we recognized as somewhat conservative and cautious, did not see any reasons why there should be a conflict. He emphasises that the best way of building a strong brand is to perform on the field and that this hardly could be in conflict with the organizations goal of winning. We support Holmén's ideas that one should not expect a conflict and that clubs and players should focus on creating synergy effects between personal brands and club brands instead.

6 Conclusions

This final chapter presents the conclusions that derive from the analysis. The conclusions are based upon the research questions and the purpose of the thesis. An end discussion, including future research topics, will also be presented.

The purpose of the thesis is to examine the implications of having an athlete’s personal brand as a symbol of the sport organization brand. Through a qualitative research study and by analyzing the empirical data, we have come to the following conclusions.

6.1 Conclusions

- Our analysis shows that the athlete as a symbol is crucial for the sport organization brand. The athlete has an impact on all aspects of the brand equity and the sport organizations understand the benefits of engaging players in branding activities.
- There are indications that it is hard to fully implement the organization brand identity among the players and that the athletes apply themselves to rules of conduct rather than totally embrace the brand identity. We found that one of the reasons for this is the high turnover of players each year. We believe that the athlete has significant impact on the brand identity of the sport organization. This suggests that the identity could be altered depending on what type of players the clubs sign. Below is a model of what certain player type contributes to the change in the core values of the organization. With the recruitment of established and recognized player, the organizations signal values of professionalism and sustained competitiveness. To identify with local and regional values the organizations have to sign regional players that correspond to these values. Note that we are not saying that a player is only restricted to one of these categories. An athlete could possess qualities that contribute to both professionalism and regional belongingness.

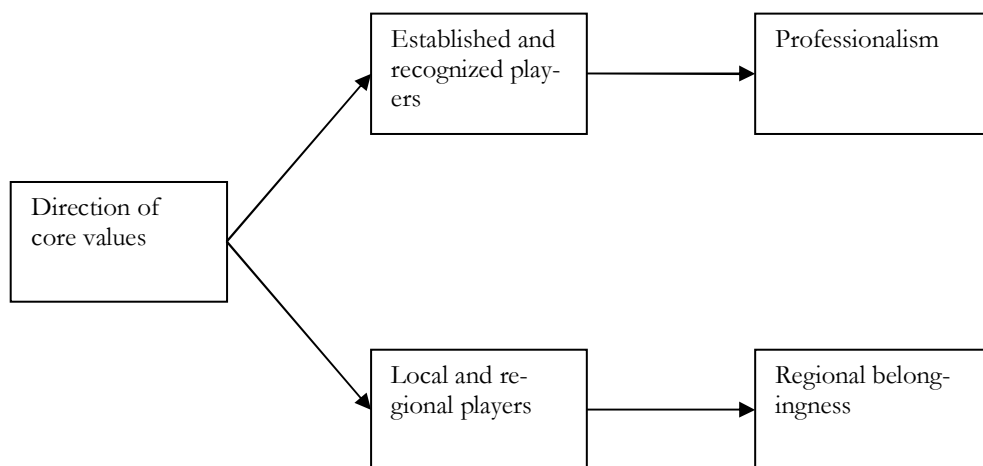


Figure 7 Different type of players influence on brand identity

- The athletes are managed to increase the organizations’ brand equity in a satisfactory way. Through clear strategies the organizations use the athletes as endorsers in marketing, fan events and sponsoring in favor of brand enhancement. Further-

more, the organizations actively manage the athlete's brand in co-brand merchandise.

- We recognized an increasing awareness among players of the importance of a strong personal brand. The athletes know the benefits of possessing a strong brand, but they lack the strategic plans of creating it. Although their actions contribute to a strong personal brand, they do not recognize these as plans. We label their unawareness as subconscious brand building. Furthermore, we see the increasing professionalism and finance in Swedish pro sport as a contributor to a growing importance of personal brands in the future.
- It seems like conflicts between the sport organization brand and the athlete's brand is rather rare. When situations occur, that could be a sign of conflicts, the organization handles it immediately to prevent eventual harm. In more prominent leagues these types of conflicts probably appear more frequently due to players that are considered superstars. The Swedish pro athletes have not reach that level of stardom yet, but with the increased awareness of personal brands, conflicts between the two brands might be more common in the future.
- The model below illustrates the impact of having a player's personal brand as a symbol of the sport organization brand. The model is a modification of *factors influencing the strength of a sport brand* (see figure 1). A good performance of an athlete will contribute to the success of the sports team as well as helping the athlete to create a stronger personal brand. Note that athlete performance includes marketing efforts, behaviour and attitudes. The strengthened personal brand does not only benefit the athlete, but also acts as a tool for the branding efforts of the sport team brand. Both the athlete brand and the organization brand acts as a communicator in relations with the stakeholder (fans, media, sponsors and community).

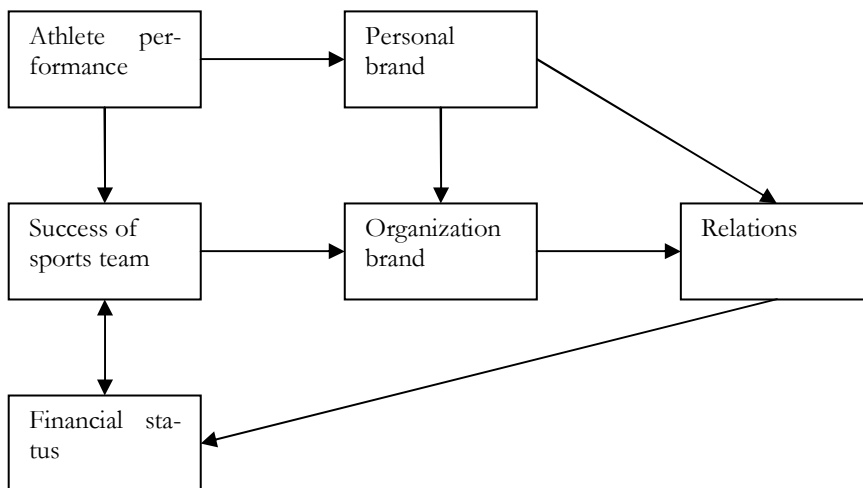


Figure 8 Athlete's impact on the sport organization brand

6.2 End discussion

With the conclusions above we believe that a greater understanding of the importance of players as symbols has been reached. Since the thesis is limited to Sweden, we feel that one

Conclusions

must not draw general conclusions to sport teams outside the country. We are not saying that they would not be applicable, but merely saying that the different culture and prerequisites creates different results. It is to our conviction that we have fulfilled our purpose and feel confident in defending this thesis' findings.

We feel obligated to add that while working with the thesis, many questions not related to our work have been raised. There have been thoughts, reflections and conclusions that did not suit our purpose, but still bore relevance in sport branding and personal branding. Here are some thoughts that we feel would be interesting starting points in future research.

- We believe to solely focus on personal brand building of athletes would create a deeper understanding of the thoughts behind the athletes actions.
- Since professionalism have the attention of both clubs, and we imagine that this applies to all clubs in Allsvenskan and Elitserien, one might raise the question if everyone manages to uphold their goal of professionalism.
- Since both Elfsborg and HV71 just recently created their brand platforms, we feel that a follow-up on the impact of the platform on the organizational brand would create bases for an interesting study.
- With the limitations that the thesis presents, it would be interesting to see whether our conclusions are applicable to other countries or sports for that matter. A comparative study of different leagues and countries would be most interesting.

The signs of increasing awareness of the importance of a strong sport brand (whether it is a personal brand or club brand) are evident. The openness towards the subject from the actors suggests that it is a topic that has been thoroughly discussed both within and outside the clubs. We feel that this learning process is beneficial for the sport organizations.

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Frågeformulär Janne Hedell och Sten Strinäs

Personlig bakgrund

Sportorganisationer som varumärken

- Hur ser du på sportorganisationer som varumärken?
- Hur ser arbetet ut med profileringen av klubbarna?
- Har ni ökat medvetenheten senaste året?
- Är sportslig framgång enda anledningen till ett starkt varumärke eller har ni klara strategier för hur ni ska hantera varumärke även vid utebliven framgång?
- Erik Niva menar på att devisen ”all publicitet är bra” är omvänd för idrottsorganisationer och spelare. Vad tycker du?

Spelare som symboler för klubben och som personliga varumärke

- Vad har du för tankar kring spelare som varumärken?
- Använder ni er av spelare aktivt för att stärka klubbens varumärke?
- Finns den gamla devisen ”att vara klubben” kvar, eller är klubben numera bara ett medel för att profilera sig själv?
- Är spelare mer medvetna om sitt ego nuförtiden och försöker öka sitt marknadsvärde?
- Lanseras produkter med hjälp av spelare som ni utan deras hjälp aldrig kunnat sälja?
- Finns det svårigheter med att både vara en symbol för klubben och samtidigt stärka sitt eget varumärke?
- Finns det exempel där spelare med starka varumärken har kontrakterats, som till klubbens vetskap inte uppfyller de sportsliga kraven?
- Kan det uppstå problem mellan spelarnas personliga varumärken och organisationens varumärke?
- Finns det en dokumenterad varumärkesidentitet som ni förmedlar?
- Hur viktigt är det att organisationens varumärkesidentitet genomsyrar det spelarna gör på och utanför planen?
- Hur hanterar ni spelare som har en identitet som inte överensstämmer med organisationen?

Frågeformulär Samuel Holmén och Johan Davidsson

Personlig bakgrund

Sportorganisationer som varumärken

- Hur ser du på Sportorganisationer som varumärken?
- Hur jobbar ni med att profilera klubben?
- Har ni ökat medvetenheten senaste åren?
- Är sportslig framgång enda anledningen till ett starkt varumärke eller har ni klara strategier för hur ni ska hantera varumärke även vid utebliven framgång?

Spelare som symboler för klubben och som personliga varumärke

- Vad har du för tankar kring spelare som varumärken?
- Tänker du aktivt på att profilera dig för att nå fördelar?
- Niva menar på att devisen ”all publicitet är bra” är omvänd för idrottsorganisationer och spelare. Vad tycker du?
- Finns den gamla devisen ”att vara klubben” kvar, eller är klubben numera bara ett medel för att profilera sig själv?
- Är spelare mer medvetna om sitt ego nuförtiden och försöker öka sitt marknadsvärde?
- Finns det svårigheter med att både vara en symbol för klubben och samtidigt stärka sitt eget varumärke?
- Finns det exempel där spelare med starka varumärken har kontrakterats, som till klubbens vetskap inte uppfyller de sportsliga kraven?
- Tror du att arbetet med att profilera sig själv som ett varumärke kan ta fokus från det sportsliga utövandet?
- Är du en del av klubbens varumärke eller är du mest ditt eget varumärke?
- Ökar dina åtagande gentemot klubben ju bättre det går för dig?
- Kan det uppstå problem mellan spelarnas personliga varumärken och organisationens varumärke?
- Hur väl kommunicerar organisationen med er spelare gällande varumärkesidentiteten?
- Hur viktigt är det att organisationens identitet genomsyrar det spelarna gör på och utanför planen?
- Vad händer om en spelare har en identitet som inte överensstämmer med organisationen?

Frågeformulär Erik Niva

Personlig bakgrund

Den växande professionalismen inom svensk idrott

- Hur ser du på utvecklingen av svensk elitidrott?
- Vilka för- och nackdelar finns med att Sportorganisationer mer och mer kan liknas vid företag?
- Utvecklingen har kommit ganska långt men ändå är vi långt efter Europa och Nordamerika. Varför?

Sportorganisationer som varumärken

- Har du, i egenskap av journalist, märkt en tydligare medvetenhet om varumärkets betydelse inom svensk elitidrott?
- Diskuteras det kring värdet och vikten av ett starkt varumärke?
- Vilka organisationer har kommit längst i detta arbete?
- Någon förändring vid intervjuer?
- Tror du att arbetet med att profilera klubben som ett varumärke kan ta fokus från det sportsliga utövandet?

Spelare som symboler för klubben och som personliga varumärken

- Vad har du för tankar kring spelare som varumärken?
- Kan man säga att Sverige börjar få franchise spelare?
- Finns den gamla devisen ”att vara klubben” kvar, eller är klubben numera bara ett medel för att profilera sig själv?
- Finns det svårigheter med att både vara en symbol för klubben och samtidigt stärka sitt eget varumärke?
- Finns det exempel i Sverige där spelare med starka varumärken har kontrakterats, som till klubbens vetskap inte uppfyller de sportsliga kraven?
- Kan det uppstå problem mellan spelarnas personliga varumärken och organisationens varumärke?
- Vad händer om en spelare har en identitet som inte överensstämmer med organisationens?
- Framtiden för svensk elitidrott?

Questionnaire Janne Hedell and Sten Strinäs

Personal background

Sport organizations as brands

- What is your general view of sport organizations as brands?
- How do you work with profiling the brand?
- Have the awareness of this work increased during the last couple of years?
- Is success on the arena the only reason for a strong brand or do you have clear strategies of how to handle the brand even if success fails?
- Erik Niva means that the saying “all publicity is good publicity” is the other way around for sport organizations and players. What do you think?

Players as symbol for the club and as personal brands

- What is your general view of players as brands?
- Do you actively use players in order to strengthen the organizational brand?
- Is the old epithet “being the club” still present or is the club only a way for the players to profile themselves?
- Are players more aware of their ego and tries to increase their market value nowadays?
- Do you launch products through players and reaching for markets that would not been possible without them?
- Could there be any difficulties to be a symbol of the club and still trying to build a strong personal brand?
- Can a player with a strong personal brand be contracted even if he is not fulfilling the athletic requirements?
- Can problems occur between the organizational brand and the player’s personal brand?
- Is there any documented brand identity that is communicated to everyone it concerns?
- How important is it that the organizational brand identity concur with the actions that the players do on and off the field?
- How do you handle a player who has an identity which is not in line with the organization?

Questionnaire Samuel Holmén and Johan Davidsson

Personal background

Sport organizations as brands

- What is your general view of sport organizations as brands?
- How do you work with profiling the brand?
- Have the awareness of this work increased during the last couple of years?
- Is success on the arena the only reason for a strong brand or do you have clear strategies of how to handle the brand even if success fails?

Players as symbol for the club and as personal brands

- What is your general view of players as brands?
- Are you actively trying to profile yourself in order to gain advantages?
- Erik Niva means that the saying “all publicity is good publicity” is the other way around for sport organizations and players. What do you think?
- Is the old epithet “being the club” still present or is the club only a way for the players to profile themselves?
- Are players more aware of their ego and tries to increase their market value nowadays?
- Could there be any difficulties to be a symbol of the club and still trying to build a strong personal brand?
- Can a player with a strong personal brand be contracted even if he is not fulfilling the athletic requirements?
- Do you believe that the work with profiling yourself as a brand can take focus from your performance on the field?
- Are you a part of the organizational brand or are you more your own brand?
- Do the commitments to the club increase when you performing better as an athlete?
- Can problems occur between the organizational brand and the player’s personal brand?
- Is there any documented brand identity that is communicated to everyone it concerns?
- How important is it that the organizational brand identity concur with the actions that the players do on and off the field?
- How do you handle a player who has an identity which is not in line with the organization?

Questionnaire Erik Niva

Discussion template for interview with Erik Niva, journalist Aftonbladet, 2006-11-29

Personal background

The increase of professionalism in Swedish pro sport

- What is your view of the development of Swedish pro sport?
- What are the pros and cons with the fact that sport organizations more and more can be seen as regular companies?
- The development has come pretty far but we are still far behind North America and Europe. How come?

Sport organizations as brands

- Have you, as a journalist, noticed an increased awareness of the importance of brands among pro sport organizations?
- Is the value of a strong brand discussed?
- Which clubs have come farthest in this work?
- Have you noticed any changes when it comes to interviews?
- Do you believe that the work with profiling the brand as a brand can take focus from performance on the field?

Players as symbol for the club and as personal brands

- What are your thoughts about players as brands?
- Can you say that Sweden starting to get franchise players?
- Is the old epithet “being the club” still present or is the club only a way for the players to profile themselves?
- Could there be any difficulties to be a symbol of the club and still trying to build a strong personal brand?
- Can a player with a strong personal brand be contracted even if he is not fulfilling the athletic requirements?
- Can problems occur between the organizational brand and the player’s personal brand?
- How do you handle a player who has an identity which is not in line with the organization?
- What do you think about the future of Swedish pro sport?