

Partnerships, provision and product: examining the modern football in the community programme—a case study on Everton Football Club.

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Abstract

The regulations of football, football clubs and competitions were established in England during the nineteenth century allowing the growth of domestic football in Great Britain. Due to later developments in international tournaments, similar models of governing football spread throughout the world. The historical pedigree and current significance of English teams has stimulated a growing international interest in English football's most prestigious tournament, the Premier League, largely through mass-media coverage. The global appeal and exposure of elite-level clubs in the UK has resulted in many of these clubs becoming increasingly dependent upon international markets for players, personnel and income through sponsorship and television coverage rights. However, some clubs have resisted these globalising tendencies, focusing instead on community development. In collaboration with a number of sporting bodies, Everton Football Club (F.C.) have sought to remain true to the essence of their identity as a "people's club", by devising a number of community-based initiatives. This article examines the partnerships which the club's community department has devised; principally for the provision of football opportunities for young people in the community. Interviews were conducted with key personnel from Everton's community coaching staff and the Liverpool Schools Sports Partnership, as well as with young participants working within the initiative. The sport programmes implemented were considered to have helped improve the sports skills of some young people as well as direct the future career paths of some participants, by informing their decisions regarding applications for school, college and university courses. The partnerships developed were also perceived to have supported Everton F.C. in tackling key challenges and negative stereotyping directed towards the club and the surrounding communities. In conclusion, further research is necessary in order to ascertain the long-term impact of the programmes implemented by Everton F.C. and the extent to which these have supported the club's claims and aims to reflect and represent the whole community of Everton through such provision.

Introduction

Historical development of football: from local community to international community

Britain is often described as the birthplace of football (Miller, Lawrence, McKay and Rowe, 2001). A variety of tribal ball games existed in a number of countries which pre-dated the codified form of association football which was established in England in the late 1800s (Lupson, 2006). The rules, competitions and clubs, together with many of the technical, tactical and cultural characteristics of the sport were formulated under the guidance of the English Football Association (Rookwood and Buckley, 2007). Similar models of organising and playing football then spread throughout Europe and the rest of the world, its popularity aided by the development of regularly staged national, continental and international tournaments (Peiser and Clinton, 2003). Whilst the football enthusiasts in a given country may remain loyal towards their domestic clubs and competitions, there seems to be growing international interest in English football's Premier League (known globally as the EPL: English Premier League). England has the oldest and most developed professional, semi-professional and amateur football club network in the world (Rookwood and Buckley, 2007). The historical pedigree of the English club system coupled with the recent accomplishments of the more prominent EPL clubs has enhanced this global attraction. The UEFA Champions League could be considered the most celebrated competition in club football (Rookwood and Palmer, 2008) and English teams have participated in each of the last four finals, winning two of them. Their recent success is considered to owe much to the recruitment policies of elite English clubs and the growing number of talented foreign players currently employed in the EPL. The increases in player migration to England were made feasible in part, due to the alterations in European employment law in the 1990s (McArdle, 2000). This, together with the expansion of domestic (and increasingly international) broadcasting contracts has served to further promote the exposure of the EPL.

There may be signs that the rapidly developing global consumption of the English game is causing clubs to become increasingly dependent upon international markets for players and income. Relating to the latter point, in January 2008 EPL Chairman Richard Scudamore proposed radical plans for an exhibition round of "international" EPL matches, to be played in five cities across the world from 2011. The "39th Game" proposal would see every club play one other club three times, thus altering the traditional home-and-away format of the league structure. Scudamore claimed the plan would, "...affect the league's symmetry, not its integrity" (Hammond, 2008) and stated that a twelve month feasibility study was in operation. Critics of this proposal and other similar "globalising developments" argue that such changes represent

a dangerous shift away from traditional patterns, interests and priorities (Duke, 2002; Boyle and Haynes, 2004). Due to the expanding connections with mass media agents, foreign ownership and international supporter bases, many EPL clubs are gaining autonomy from their local communities in terms of financial dependency and fan support (Rowe and Gilmour, 2008). However, football continues to occupy a central role in English society (Balague, 2005), and as Sugden (2002: 52) notes:

Fans are highly critical of their clubs for being over-commercial. They tend to hark back to a time when it was football first and business a distant second. When, in their imaginations at least, the club and the community were one and the same thing.

There has been a variety of supporter protests against the growing divergence between the financial and operational strategies of clubs and the interests of the local supporters / fan base. These differences have been notable in the city of Liverpool, for example; the collective achievements of its two clubs, Liverpool F.C. and Everton F.C. may render the city the most successful in English football, and among the most famous in the European game. However, in recent years Liverpool F.C. fans have engaged in a number of protests against their American owners, about problematic ticketing policies and the lack of stadium developments (Barrett, 2007). Fan groups including *Reclaim the Kop* and *Spirit of Shankly* have been formed to give voice to collective concerns. Conversely, Everton F.C. has adopted fewer globalising tendencies and Prentice (2008) argues that their supporters have subsequently been subjected to a less notable divergence from the essence of their identity with the local community.

Everton F.C. was formed in 1878, fourteen years before Liverpool F.C. was established, and was one of the founding members of the Football League in 1888. Although in recent times they have remained in the shadow of their city rivals in many respects, some consider the club to be an institution which more successfully reflects and serves its community (Prentice and France, 2007). When David Moyes claimed Everton were “The People’s Club” upon his appointment as Everton manager in March 2002, this was said to differentiate the club’s identity from that of Liverpool F.C. and reinforce Everton F.C. as being firmly rooted at the heart of the local community (Prentice, 2008). One way in which they have maintained this link is through the charitable community involvement programme, *Everton in The Community* (EiTC), which is an interpretation of the national *Football in the Community* initiative. EiTC is a grassroots coaching and disability sports scheme, which aims to provide football instruction, opportunities and education to the communities throughout Liverpool. Also, in 2007 EiTC formed an affiliation with the Liverpool Schools Sports Partnership (LSSP), employing additional multi-skills coaches to work in schools across the city. This collaboration has helped EiTC expand its community coaching beyond that of just football. In the same year EiTC also formed a partnership with Toxteth Tigers

basketball team, which has seen the name of the club re-branded as Everton Tigers. The work of this project is carried out in one of the city's most deprived areas and is focused on community cohesion by giving opportunities to young people to try a sport who perhaps, have not had the opportunity to try it. Despite such provision, Everton F.C.'s position in the city has been questioned after the club proposed plans to move to a new stadium in Kirby outside of the city boundary. This follows the relocation of the club's first team training and academy facility from Netherton to Halewood on the outskirts of Liverpool. Consequently, it could be asked how a club that prides itself upon serving its local community, not be located in that community?

Reflecting on data obtained from key personnel, this article examines the role and achievements of EiTC in relation to the partnerships it has formed and the community provision it has set out to provide. The first author of this paper previously worked for EiTC and the second author is a former employee of a similar scheme at Liverpool F.C.. As part of her research activities the first author conducted semi-structured interviews with representatives from EiTC and LSSP, as well as with some young people who are being helped through this partnership. Responses of interviewees are coded respectively as; "EiTC", "LSSP" and "YP" (young participant) in the following discussion.

Partnership - EiTC and LSSP

Everton in the Community (EiTC) was formed in 1988 and is a charity-based organisation (registered in 2004) which, unlike the National-Lottery-funded LSSP, do not operate solely according to specific government guidelines. Instead EiTC are focused on realising their particular objectives, together with those of Everton Football Club. A key example of the latter's agenda involves ensuring that EiTC contribute to filling the stadium on match days. The former's agenda relates to issues such as making sure that funding is directed towards supporting the wellbeing of children and young people, which is similar to the government agenda, e.g. Every Child Matters: Change for Children (Every Child Matters, 2004). Some EiTC objectives mirror those of LSSP, which is a school-based organisation that is responsible for adhering to government policy due their operational reliance on government funds. A notable government policy regarding sport and schools is the P.E., School Sports and Club Links Strategy (PESSCL) which has been recently transformed into P.E., School Sports Strategy for Young People (PESSYP). This newly developed strategy, "...expresses the Government's commitment to improve the quality of P.E. and sport undertaken by young people aged 5-19 in England" (PESSYP, 2008). LSSP are focused on raising the quality of provision in PE and increasing participation in P.E. and school sport. One successful related mode of delivery in this respect is the introduction of multi-skills coaches in primary schools, which has been made achievable by the "unique partnership"

which EiTC have recently entered into with LSSP. Respondents in this study argued that the two organisations are connected by overlapping interests and a proven capacity to put policy into practice. From the perspective of EiTC the partnership provides "...a tangible means of ensuring that Everton F.C. engages with their community, implementing the "people's club" ethos" (EiTC). This is achieved largely through exposing, "...a greater number of children in the local area to the Everton brand through quality multi-skills sports coaching sessions" (EiTC). From an LSSP position, the collaboration has provided the opportunity to employ two EiTC coaches, rather than the single coach that would have been made available through the Liverpool City Council had the partnership not have been formed.

The connection with Everton Tigers began when it was publicised that, "...the People's Club, Everton F.C., decided to extend the strong relationship that EiTC had with the successful local basketball team Toxteth Tigers. It started off as just football coaching but it has developed, embracing race and diversity issues" (Everton Tigers, 2007). This partnership could be considered especially significant considering the racist attitudes that a minority of Everton F.C. supporters have previously exhibited. For example, when Liverpool F.C. signed John Barnes in 1987, a black player from Watford, some Everton fans chanted taunts when the two sides met, referring to Liverpool as "Niggerpool" whilst proclaiming "Everton are white" (Hill, 2001: 15). This racist identity has since been strengthened, unfortunately, by the actions of some supporters of the club (Nicholls, 2004). The recently established link with a professional basketball team in the city's most ethnically diverse community was aimed to challenge the stereotyping and racist mentality which has become imbedded in the fabric of many Liverpoolian cultures, and particularly amongst some Everton supporters. The 1981 Toxteth riots presented Liverpool as a city divided by racism. As a mark of Liverpool's ongoing awareness about racism the partnership between EiTC and LSSP was developed to promote community cohesion, cultural tolerance and sports performance in the city, a link established just months before the city commenced the celebrations of its status as *European Capital of Culture*.

However, it was claimed by EiTC that their connection with LSSP has proven more successful in enhancing Everton's position "...on the ground in local communities, mostly because of its work with school kids" (EiTC). EiTC have recognised that schools provide a valuable opportunity to promote the Everton F.C. brand. For their exploitative part, EiTC claim that they, "...increase the number of hours of quality PE" (EiTC) that children and young people receive in the process. Participants in this research suggested however, that the challenge for the EiTC/LSSP partnership involves demonstrating the powerful potential of sport in schools, where its importance is often undervalued, particularly relative to more traditionally dominant subjects such as Mathematics or English, "...why shouldn't sport be on a par with them

Maths and English?” (LSSP). Another perceived benefit for EiTC relates to their opportunity to collect empirical data on the school children who are beneficiaries, for better or for worse, of the partnership. This data can inform the approach adopted by Everton FC’s marketing department, providing, “...an idea of how many children are accessible for any particular special offers” (EiTC). Consequently, EiTC have developed an incentive scheme, whereby some of those children with 100% school attendance are rewarded with match tickets, an initiative which contributes towards filling the stadium.

Furthermore, the partnership between EiTC and LSSP has supported Everton’s efforts to challenge certain stigmas which have been attributed to the club. This is particularly the case in schools, where attempts have been made to improve the club’s reputation, “...the partnership is helping people see Everton as a club in tune with the needs of the community” (EiTC). There have also been efforts to improve the correlation between the city’s two clubs. The relationship between supporters of Liverpool F.C. and Everton F.C. has experienced a notable demise in the past twenty years (Reade, 2008). Many Everton F.C. supporters display ill-feeling towards Liverpool F.C. fans for the part the latter played in the 1985 Heysel disaster. Thirty-nine Juventus supporters were killed following altercations with Liverpool F.C. supporters prior to the European Cup final in Brussels. As a consequence, English clubs were banned from European football for five years, which prevented league champions Everton F.C. from competing in the European Cup in 1985 and 1987. Everton F.C. have since only qualified for the competition once, in the 2005-06 season, when they were eliminated in the first round. Many supporters blame their lack of success on Liverpool F.C. fans (Dodd, 2007). Sampson (2007: 181) claims that as a consequence, the previously good natured relationship between Liverpool F.C. and Everton F.C. supporters has been replaced by “increasing enmity” whilst Kirkby (2007: 18) notes that, “...the word *banter* has been replaced by the word *bitter* in this context”. Another initiative which sought to mitigate the growing unrest by promoting social cohesion and preaching tolerance in the city is the ‘Kickz’ programme. This involves a collaborative effort from both clubs to provide quality football coaching to young people outside of school hours, in an attempt to curb anti-social behaviour, “...we do it joint with Liverpool F.C. to make sure that the message [of breaking down barriers] is being reinforced by both clubs. It’s breaking down those barriers, and it’s vital that both clubs are involved” (EiTC).

Although many of the partnerships that EiTC have engaged in have proven successful in many respects, particularly the collaboration with LSSP, and although this has helped increase participation and performance in school sport, some respondents however consider too much emphasis to have been placed upon football alone. For example, LSSP is by definition a sports rather than a football organisation. However,

its representatives suggested in this research that there has been limited opportunity for the future development of children regarding other specialist sports. It was claimed by respondents that the lack of accredited clubs in Liverpool make it difficult for LSSP or EiTC to develop links with and facilitate young people's skill development in other sporting disciplines. This was considered to represent an "...indication that some sports are massively undervalued" (LSSP). Several commentators suggest that sport can be utilised as a vehicle for community development and as a tool for social inclusion (Bryant, 2001; Coalter, 2002). It was argued by some respondents that the successful elements of the partnerships which Everton F.C. engage in, have related primarily and in some cases exclusively to football, often to the detriment of other sports. There are a few exceptions to this however, which are explored below.

Vision and provision

The vision of EiTC and their coaching provision, represents a range of activities and social ideals or purposes that do not relate solely to football. However, their commercial aims for the promotion of Everton F.C. may more clearly reveal EiTC's genuine mission. EiTC representatives consider their community department to have developed a wide range of programmes that "...look at different aspects of society" (EiTC). These initiatives include: disability awareness and empowerment, socially inclusive activities, women and girls sports development and Everton in Shanghai. For example, EiTC's disability programme is the most extensive "...currently in operation in England" (EiTC), providing new sporting opportunities and experiences for those with disabilities. Much of this work involves multi-skills coaching with a focus on "...movement skills and hand eye co-ordination" (EiTC). As part of this initiative, community coaches have worked with over 30 Merseyside schools. By working with disabled students in both mainstream and specialist schools, EiTC staff claim that such forms of involvement demonstrate their commitment to address misconceptions of disability sport, whilst emphasising their use of football as a tool to promote social inclusion. EiTC staff consider their programme to be one of the "best models" (EiTC) of how diversity in sport can be supported. So successful do this department perceive this initiative to have been, that their first steps have been taken towards establishing a similar project in the Shanghai region of China. The links are evidence of Everton F.C.'s developing relationship with Chinese businesses and communities, building on the shirt sponsorship deal with Chinese beer company, *Chang*. The club consider this partnership to be one of the most forward thinking and innovative community schemes from any British football club (Everton F.C., 2008).

In addition, as a consequence of the collaborative efforts of EiTC and LSSP, a multi-skills sports coach has been placed in every primary school connected by the North Liverpool Partnership. LSSP also have coaches in all the primary schools who are part

of the South Central Liverpool, Central Liverpool and South Liverpool partnerships. However, there is a notable lack of amalgamation in this respect, as EiTC are yet to fuse the connection with the four partners. Despite this, the provision currently in place is considered to assist school children in becoming, "...increasingly physically literate" (EiTC). This is a term used to denote a child's competence in a full range of fundamental movement and sport skills (Stafford, 2005). As a result of this perceived increase in physical literacy, psychological benefits such as increased confidence or increased self-esteem have been mentioned by both EiTC and LSSP coaches. One respondent from LSSP stated that he considered the enhanced self-esteem and confidence to be transferable to other elements of life, "...if you're then good at something [sport-related] then you will take that confidence and ability to learn and challenge yourself in academic work as well" (LSSP). However, when attempting to measure the impact of the provision of quality sport in the context of academic achievement, LSSP have found a lack of support from schools. It may be plausible that positive traits acquired through sport such as perseverance, integrity and team spirit might be transferred to an academic setting, being characteristics which may be considered stable and enduring (Weinberg and Gould, 2006). One could deduce that improving these personal attributes through the medium of sport could make sport more prominent in the academic environment, i.e. in schools. However, these kinds of personal/personality improvements might be difficult to measure in any objective way, with or without the co-operation of the schools.

Several respondents presented opinions that young people who previously did not engage in sporting activities prior to the coaching activities of the EiTC/LSSP partnership, are now becoming increasingly involved in sport and "...are now applying themselves in a whole different way" (LSSP). This seems to suggest that by offering quality coaching to young people who were formerly disinterested in sport the EiTC and LSSP are having a positive impact on the sports activity of children and young people. Also, in an effort to maintain this contact during school half term holidays, the LSSP devise and coordinate sports camps for children in Liverpool, facilitated by multi-skills coaches employed by the EiTC/LSSP partnership. These camps provide the opportunity for young people to partake in a vast range of sports and physical activities, including archery, judo, trampolining, wheelchair basketball, and cheerleading. The children attended the sports camps received extra-curricular multi-skills coaching in term time but after school (i.e. not as part of P.E.). The diversity of social backgrounds of young people becoming involved in these camps also serves to "...tick the bureaucratic boxes" (LSSP) in relation to the desired outcomes of both the EiTC and LSSP; firstly increasing the number of children exposed to the Everton F.C. brand, and secondly that a greater number of young people in the community seem to be benefiting from qualified coaches in a number of sports. This may help to prolong the funding for coaching activities stemming from this partnership. Fur-

thermore, the LSSP/EiTC partnership does not merely increase coaching opportunities for children it also provides training for young sports leaders (i.e. school leavers who have excelled in sport and want to continue their sporting involvement) to gain work experience. The development involves training young leaders to the standard required for employment, for example, the Community Sports Leader Award or Assistant Club Coach so they serve both as skilled community sports coaches and ambassadors for the partnership. LSSP engages regularly with the young leaders providing support and advice to ensure that their conduct remains an appropriate reflection of the company's ethos. This development of young leaders from secondary school through to university allows LSSP to recruit part-time coaches whose training they have had a stake in already, a procedure which is, "...used as an indirect way of community development work within itself" (LSSP). Additionally, LSSP are utilising the services of year 11, 12 and 13 students who, "...are actually assistant coaches going into primary schools doing assistant community sports coaching" (LSSP). Therefore this collaboration illustrates the use of sport as a vehicle for community development whilst also contributing towards the personal development of young people who serve as role models for the wider community.

Process and product

Having explored the sporting provision supplied through the partnership between EiTC and LSSP, it is clear that representatives from both organisations consider the work to support community development in Liverpool. However, in order to examine the value of the experience in greater detail it may be necessary to gauge the opinion of some young participants who attended a recent summer sports camp. These respondents expressed positive attitudes towards the summer camp, viewing it as an opportunity to keep fit, socialise and enjoy themselves. Participants also commented on the number of new skills they learned and sports they gained proficiency in during the experience. For example, "...I've found out that in some sports that I was not doing something right or that there were more rules to it. I've picked up loads" (YP). In addition, LSSP and EiTC coaches noted that, YPs claimed that as a result of taking part in this initiative, it had enhanced their confidence and self-esteem. For example one young participant commented that, "...it used to get me down when I would see my mates playing who were really good and I'm not, but now I'm really good" (YP). This view was reflected by others. Participants spoke of their increased confidence not only in terms of their sporting ability both inside and outside of school, but also regarding other skills, such as communication. The development of such skills was reported particularly by young leaders. For example one young leader said, "...It's helped me... I can get up in front of people me own age. I've got the skills to work with a big group" (YP). Most of the young leaders felt that the partnership has increased their interest and opportunities to engage in volunteering, "...we've never really done

that many sports before. But then one of the staff out of LSSP came into our school and asked us to go on a course in St. Helens doing a rugby course. And that's how it has got us involved and now we have been volunteering to help out" (YP). The interviews with the young leaders also revealed that the partnership has influenced attitudes towards future career choices, with some choosing to study 'A' Level P.E., and others opting to enrol on sport courses in further and higher education institutions. Many participants claimed that the summer camps have had an impact on them, with many keen to increase their future involvement in sport. It was suggested by one participant that the opportunities provided on the sport camps served to increase individual enjoyment of sport, whilst also enhancing their appreciation for sport in the context of community development, "...you see how it brings people on but brings people together too" (YP).

Although most elite-level English football clubs have undergone a variety of globalising processes in recent years, some of these clubs continue to be challenged by the responsibility to provide something for their local communities. As globalisation trends accelerated in the 1990s, growing numbers of professional football clubs sought to capitalise on the sport's global appeal (Hill and Vincent, 2006). However, Everton F.C. seems to have succeeded to a degree in maintaining and perhaps restoring a sense of community participation in football in Liverpool. The club's decision to invest in these programmes in Liverpool demonstrates that the club recognises a responsibility to put something back into the local community. Consequently, EiTC aims to realise the following vision, "To motivate, educate and inspire by harnessing the power of football and sport, improving the quality of the lives of all within our community, locally and regionally" (Everton F.C., 2008). Each EiTC initiative, alongside the partnership with LSSP, increases the scope of the product provided by Everton F.C.. However, it is unclear whether the community work has helped the club realise their objective to positively impact match attendance, and whether the allocation of complimentary tickets to young people has increased the likelihood of attracting bigger crowds in the future.

Conclusion

It does seem that a considerable amount of further research is required to judge more reasonably whether the provision and early outcomes from EiTC/LSSP are indeed having a positive impact upon the lives of the young people who they aim to serve. For example, it might be useful to explore in much greater detail the long-term effects of the programmes implemented by the partnership on young people's academic performance in schools. However, EiTC and LSSP may need to reconsider carefully how their "products"; i.e. coaching of football and some other sports might bring about improvements in the academic setting, or count as Physical Education or even con-

tribute to it. That is, the central educational aims for a child at school such as improving numeracy and literacy, that Physical Education may contribute to, may be only be superficially contributed to by the coaching from EiTC and PSSL and then only for those children who opt for after school sport. The coaching efforts from this partnership may indeed mirror some of the sport application aspects of Physical Education but may, by default of their sporting and commercial position, only ever be superficial in the academic setting; i.e. the school. “Sport” is not yet a curriculum subject (sponsored by Everton F.C. or anyone else) and “...increased exposure to the Everton brand” and “...filling the stadium on match days” are not, yet, educational aims. However, the aspirations of the partnership to improve social well-being in the community and perhaps, improve levels of psychological attention by pupils at school is to be commended and may be worth much deeper investigation. However, this kind of longitudinal research activity may be deemed by shareholders or stakeholders at EiTC to be too expensive to carry out or even, perhaps, as being counter-productive in the current political climate for Everton F.C.. For example, developing extensive research commitments from this partnership may represent a poor utilisation of funds, particularly in light of two pressing factors. Firstly, that Everton F.C. are struggling to raise the capital to undergo stadium renovation or relocation, a financial plight which is likely to see the club eventually adopt a permanent base outside of the city boundary, thus potentially undermining its community work in Liverpool. Secondly, as the club have won only one trophy since securing their last league championship in 1987 and a financial injection is required in order to acquire the services of new players and become more competitive on the field of play. However, despite such challenges, the partnerships that Everton F.C. have developed with various bodies represent a diverse range of forward thinking and community-centred initiatives. With these ongoing community coaching projects and realistic evaluation of their contribution or “products” might we improve our understanding of how sporting partnerships can enhance community provision, cohesion and development in the future.

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2. Kay-Leigh is 23 years old and in the third year of her BSc (Hons) Sports Psychology Degree. Kay-Leigh has a strong interest in sport having coached, participated and delivered sporting awards. She is currently undertaking a diploma in personal performance coaching which is something she aspires to in her sport psychology career.
3. Dear reader, if this article has stimulated your thoughts and you wish to find out more about this topic the authors can be contacted on: Kay-Leigh Richardson: 06002347@hope.ac.uk and Joel Rookwood: rookwoj@hope.ac.uk.

