1-1-2012

An Examination of Star Players' Effects on the Branding Process of Professional Sports Teams

Nathan David Pifer
ndpifer@gmail.com

AN EXAMINATION OF STAR PLAYERS' EFFECTS ON THE BRANDING PROCESS OF PROFESSIONAL SPORTS TEAMS

A thesis submitted to

the Graduate College of

Marshall University

In partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

in

Sport Administration

by

Nathan David Pifer

Approved by

Dr. Jennifer Y. Mak, Committee Chairperson

Dr. Won-Yul Bae

Dr. Jarrod Schenewark

Marshall University

December 2012

ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, this thesis could not have been completed without the persistent guidance and support of the Committee Chairperson, Dr. Jennifer Mak. Her tireless work ethic and long hours of assistance were highly valued and contributed greatly to the success of this study. In addition, Dr. Won-Yul Bae and Dr. Jarrod Schenewark should be thanked for their timely contributions to the research. Without the support of these three faculty members, it is unlikely the study would have ever left the developmental phase.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the remaining faculty members in the School of Kinesiology who assisted me with the distribution of the survey questionnaires. By allowing me to take away from your class time in order to present my study, you played a part in helping me gather enough responses to ensure the research's effectiveness.

I would also like to thank those closest to me who were forced to put up with the long hours and distractions caused by my work on this thesis. In particular, I would like to express my appreciation to Jason Corriher, Steven Schoon, Matt Weber, Ty Osborne, and Daniel Manget for picking up my workload this semester while I completed my studies. My family and fiancé should also be thanked for their continued support and unwavering determination to help me succeed in this endeavor. Your prayers and encouragement were definitely felt and appreciated.

It is also important for me to thank the students of the School of Kinesiology who volunteered and took time to complete the survey questionnaire. Your accurate responses played a critical role in ensuring the accuracy of this study and were greatly appreciated.

Lastly, I would like to praise the Lord for supplying me with the wisdom and willpower to see this study through. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Tables

LIST OF FIGURES

Figures

ABSTRACT

Although various models and real-life examples seem to convey its presence, the relationship between star players and the branding process of professional sports teams is one that remains rather vague and unquantified. Though numerous examples seem to suggest that star players are capable of exerting an effect on a team's brand, more thorough analysis is required in order to decipher which areas of a brand's development are more or less affected by these marquee athletes. Taking responses from survey questionnaires containing 40 items pertinent to the topic, this study deployed Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to uncover six underlying factors that could be identified as various areas of the branding process. Accompanied by an additional analysis seeking to clarify the essence of an athletic superstar, the insight gathered from these examinations is intended help teams interpret which areas of brand development are more or less affected by true star players.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The influence of star players on professional sports organizations is evident at a variety of levels. Whether affecting attendance numbers, television ratings, or merchandise sales (Foster, Greyser, & Walsh, 2006), marquee athletes possess unique attributes that enhance the value of a sports franchise. Such a phenomenon is visible in nearly every major professional sports league in the United States, as numerous star players make their presence known both on and off the field of play. The NBA has witnessed this firsthand with superstars like Yao Ming, Jeremy Lin, and Lebron James, players who have provided a noticeable link between the masses of consuming fans and the teams they so eagerly support. James, for instance, singlehandedly accounted for one of the greatest shifts in team value when he left the NBA's Cleveland Cavaliers to pursue a career with the Miami Heat. As noted by NYU business professor Michael Cramer, "The league is very driven by winning teams and more so by visible personalities. You take away Lebron from Cleveland, it's not taking away one player, it's taking away the image of the franchise" (Matuszewski, 2010, p. 4).

In other leagues, players like Tim Tebow of the NFL and David Beckham of the MLS serve as vivid examples of the potential influence that star athletes can have on a team's supporters. Tebow, despite playing as a backup NFL quarterback at times, stands out as a cultural icon capable of bringing the spotlight to the teams on which he plays. Such polarizing ability has seen him boost the Jets' merchandise sales and ticket revenues while also keeping media attention on a New York-based team that must fend off competition from surrounding teams and opposing forms of entertainment (Roling, 2012). Similarly, international soccer star

1

David Beckham has raised awareness for soccer in America by using his athletic skills in conjunction with his marketable personality, looks, and lifestyle. As a result of his popularity, soccer fans in the United States and abroad have become more aware and supportive of his team, the Los Angeles Galaxy (Gilmour & Rowe, 2010).

However, these diverse, real world examples do little to determine and quantify the relationships that exist between star players and the branding process of professional sports teams. Defined as the method by which an organization builds its brand in order to distinguish and differentiate itself from others in the marketplace (Shank, 2009), the branding process is present in professional sports franchises as they seek to successfully develop amidst increasingly competitive sport and entertainment environments. Yet aside from real-life examples, information pertaining to the subject is sparse. Theoretical frameworks created by Shank (2009) and Gladden and Milne (1999) offer a solid base from which the branding process may be examined but were not narrow enough in their examinations to strictly focus on the contributions of star players to a team's brand. Therefore, the following study was undertaken in order to expand on their ideas and more thoroughly examine the star athlete's contribution to factors affecting the branding process of professional sports teams. An endeavor that is important due to the high-risk, high-reward nature of professional sports.

Statement of the Problem

This study is two-fold in that it seeks to better define the star player by identifying which characteristics are more or less precedent to an athlete's attainment of star status while primarily examining how star players contribute to factors affecting the branding process of professional sports teams.

Purpose of the Study

The research in this study was conducted in order to help better define star players and determine the effects these marquee athletes have on the branding process of professional sports teams. The results of this examination contribute to a better understanding of star athletes and the roles they play in affecting professional sporting teams' brands while also aiding professional sports organizations in their mission to attract, retain, and develop players who positively contribute to a team's brand as a whole or in areas where the organization's brand may be lacking.

Justification of the Study

Various models (Gladden & Milne, 1999) and examples in the world of sport give evidence to the idea that star athletes play a key role in affecting the branding process of professional sports teams. Yet the concepts behind both the star player and the branding process tend to be rather imprecise. To date, there are no known studies that have sought to both reveal and compare the specific areas of the branding process that are affected by star players. The rationale of this study is to thus provide important insights related to the effects star players have on the process while simultaneously identifying which "player attributes" have a strong or weak link to stardom. In a professional sports landscape where millions of dollars, large quantities of resources, and countless amounts of energy are expended in an effort to ensure the success of athletic teams and events around the world, being able to decipher which players are worth the investment and what areas they affect can pay dividends to both the short and long-term success of a team's brand.

Delimitations

The study was delimited by the following factors:

1. The framework under which this study operates is based on the professional sporting realm and is not meant to include collegiate, amateur, or any other level of sport in its investigative scope.

2. This study is intended only to examine those attributes that are helpful in defining a star player at the professional level.

3. The number of traits used to characterize star players was restricted to 10 "player attributes" derived from previous literature on the subject.

4. Only students enrolled in the School of Kinesiology at the chosen university during the fall 2012 semester were identified as a sampling frame for this investigation.

5. Only responses from those respondents who identified themselves as being "fans of professional sport" were used.

6. The data collection method was limited by the utilization of the in-class survey questionnaires administered to participants who were 18 years of age and older.

Limitations

The study was limited by the following factors:

1. The willingness of participants to complete the research instrument.

2. The extent to which respondents were fans of professional sport and understood athletics at the professional level.

3. The degree to which the participants understood the survey.

4. The inherent limitations of the in-class survey questionnaire technique.

Assumptions

This study was based on the following assumptions:

1. The survey instrument used by this study effectively measures fan perceptions of the effect that star athletes have on the branding process of professional sports teams.
2. The selected attributes used to characterize the star player encompass a majority of the feasible terms that could have been used.
3. The participants fully understood the research instrument.
4. The participants answered each section of the survey questionnaire honestly.

Hypothesis

The study was designed to test the following null hypothesis:

1. There is no relationship between star players and the areas of a team's branding process.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are defined as they are used in the study:

Brand Awareness: Refers to the brand's initial presence in consumer minds; it involves consumer recognition and familiarity with the brand (Shank, 2009; Gladden & Milne, 1999).

Brand Equity: Assets or liabilities linked to a brand that add or subtract from its value in the marketplace. The value of the brand (Aaker, 1996; Shank, 2009).

Brand Image: The personality of a brand that is shaped by consumer beliefs and attitudes toward it (Shank, 2009).

Brand Loyalty: Occurs when consumers repeatedly choose and purchase one brand over another in the marketplace (Shank, 2009).

Brand Reputation: Tradition (Gladden & Milne, 1999). The long-held beliefs and perceptions of a brand's performance and promises that exist in consumer minds (Foster, Greyser, & Walsh, 2006).

Branding: The use of certain features (name, logo, symbol, etc.) to differentiate a product or organization from the competition (Shank, 2009).

Branding Process: The method by which an organization builds its brand in order to distinguish and differentiate itself from others in the marketplace; it is typically composed of the brand awareness, brand image, brand equity, and brand loyalty stages (Shank, 2009).

Eigenvalue: Represents the amount of variance in the data that is explained by each factor (Coughlin & Knight, 2007; Smith & Albaum, 2005).

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA): A technique for exploring the number and characteristics of variables underlying a larger number of measurements in an effort to group them into subsets called factors (Smith & Albaum, 2005; Coughlin & Knight, 2007).

Factor: A component that is not directly observable but is developed as a linear combination of observed variables; an underlying construct that results from a combination of variables (Smith & Albaum, 2005; Kootstra, 2004).

Loading: The correlation between an item and a factor (Smith & Albaum, 2005).

Perceived Quality: Consumer judgments of a product's overall excellence relative to its intended purpose (Aaker, 1991); drives financial performance and how a brand is viewed (Aaker, 1996).

Star Players: Used interchangeably with the terms *star athletes*, *marquee athletes*, and *superstars*; outstanding, unique athletes whose elevated statuses make them capable of providing benefits unrealized by the average player (Kaynak, Salman, & Tatoglu, 2007).

Survey Questionnaire: A research method in which the information sought is obtained by asking questions of the participants (Smith & Albaum, 2005).

Items: Also referred to as values, variables, or questions, they seek to measure different aspects of certain larger variables called factors (Kootstra, 2004).

Variance: A measure of dispersion showing how far a set of numbers is spread out; it is the mean of the squared deviation of individual measurements from the arithmetic mean of the distribution (Smith & Albaum, 2005).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter presents previous literature and research related to the topic of star players and their effects on a team's branding process. For organizational purposes the literature is presented according to the topics of the branding process, star players, and the specific branding process areas of brand awareness, brand image, brand equity, and brand loyalty.

The Branding Process

Branding for a product involves the use of certain features to help differentiate it from all others in a crowded marketplace (Shank, 2009). In the context of professional sports organizations, such a definition applies to teams as they seek to make themselves noticeable in an increasingly competitive sports landscape. Like any product in the sports market and markets abroad, teams must brand themselves in a way that attracts the multitudes of consuming fans who are willing to invest in the cause. For many fans and owners, teams are at the heart of sport competition and are thus endowed with the tasks of stimulating fandom and generating revenues for the organization (Foster, Greyser, & Walsh, 2006). In order to do this, the team must build its brand with the intention of affecting such consumer behaviors as attendance and merchandise purchases. Before such behaviors are realized, though, several things must happen to the brand in a progression known as the *branding process*. As seen in Figure 1, the branding process theorized by Shank (2009) is typically said to include the stages of *brand awareness*, *brand image*, *brand equity*, and *brand loyalty*. Under this conceptualization, the team must establish itself in each area of the process in order to develop its overall brand, distinguish itself, and find success amidst a crowded field of direct and indirect competitors.

Figure 1. Shank's Model of the Branding Process. Adapted from "The Branding Process," by M. Shank, 2009, *Sports Marketing: A Strategic Perspective,* p. 211.

Others like Aaker (1991) and Gladden and Milne (1999) proposed different concepts that grouped some of these areas within the context of brand equity. Gladden and Milne, for example, divided brand equity into four major categories of brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty. They then identified three groups of antecedents – product related, organization related, and market related – that impacted brand equity, while also listing desired outcomes – consequences – that would occur if brand equity was high enough (see Figure 2). Gladden and Milne's model was of particular interest in this study due to the fact that it was based on professional sports. Furthermore, the focus of this current study is contained within its framework because star players are listed as a product related antecedent in the model. In essence, the model visualizes what this study is trying to prove by showing that star players can have an effect on the brand associations, brand loyalty, brand awareness, and perceived quality attributes that are necessary to build brand equity and generate merchandise sales, national media exposure, corporate support, atmosphere, and ticket sales.

| Antecedent | Brand Equity | Consequences |

Product Related

Success

Head coach

Star player

Organization Related

Reputation and tradition

Conference and schedule

Entertainment package/product delivery

Market Related

Local-media coverage

Geographic location

Competitive forces

Support

Perceived Quality

Brand Awareness

Brand Associations

Brand Loyalty

National Media Exposure

Merchandise Sales

Corporate Support

Atmosphere

Ticket Sales

Additional Revenues

Marketplace perception

Figure 2. Gladden and Milne's Framework for Assessing Brand Equity in Professional Sport. Adapted from "Examining the Importance of Brand Equity in Professional Sports," by J. Gladden and G. Milne, 1999, *Sport Marketing Quarterly, 8,* pp. 21-29.

Nevertheless, this study still focuses heavily on the model presented by Shank (2009) because his framework more broadly separated and denoted four popular aspects of branding that can be easily analyzed in previous literature and real-life examples.

Star Players

Before one can examine the effect star players have on the branding process of a professional sports team, it is important to first clarify what a *star player* is. In team sport there is no competition without the players, the individual athletes who are in many ways the true product of a team (Foster, Greyser, & Walsh, 2006; Shank, 2009). With the capabilities to boost team performance, attendance numbers, television ratings, and merchandise sales, the players are essentially at the root of providing the benefits that can differentiate one team's brand from another (Foster et al., 2006). Yet not every player is capable of exerting such an influence. Indeed, there is a special word reserved for those athletes who possess an elevated status in the consumer mind; the superlative athletes who have become transcendent brands of their own, displaying various characteristics that draw fans to their very presence. Yes, for these marquee athletes there is a special label: the superstar, *the star player*.

Often, spectators attend live matches or watch televised games because they are attracted to star players, these superlative athletes who draw fans to a team not just because they improve team performance, but because they have an appeal that extends beyond the field of play (Yang, Shi, & Goldfarb, 2009). In a world seemingly dominated by the cult and appeal of celebrity, the media response to such superstar athletes is immense, and the line dividing the sporting and entertainment worlds has become increasingly blurred (Gilmour & Rowe, 2010). No longer is it just about the scores and stats, it is about knowing enough about the athletes to care which ones fail and which ones succeed. Even though a player's skill and athleticism may be mind-blowing, there may be no connection between the athlete and fan without knowledge of the player's backstories and off-field appeal (McDonell, 2011). For such reasons it is sometimes difficult to

distinguish the traits and characteristics that are common to star players as media distortion and off-field allure cloud the minds of sport consumers (Gamson, 1994).

Thankfully, there are a reasonable number of studies that can help define a player in the context of superstardom. Although a decent portion of those studies seek to reveal attributes that make athletes effective product endorsers (Ohanian, 1990; Charbonneau & Garland, 2006; Shuart, 2007), many contain characteristics that are translatable to the sport-specific realm. In conjunction with more relevant examinations and examples from sport history, such studies help better define the essence of a star player; a label that has been around for some time. Perhaps one of the first athletes to embrace this label was baseball legend Babe Ruth. In becoming both a celebrity and an athlete at the same time, Ruth combined his impressive exploits on the baseball field with the stylistic image he portrayed to society in order to form a highly-successful marketing package that was capable of endorsing products, appearing in movies, and attracting large quantities of fans. Carrying with him elements and meanings that satisfied the unfulfilled needs of the American middle class, Ruth appealed to a culture that embraced him as a sport hero, celebrity, and societal icon (Susman, 1984).

In later eras, athletes such as Muhammad Ali, Hank Aaron, and Michael Jordan became heroes in their own right, gracing fans with captivating displays that bridged the gaps between generations. They became superior brands themselves valuable not only from a business standpoint but from personal and societal standpoints as well. As Nike CEO Phil Knight pointed out, people are drawn to star athletes and view them as having the very best that the human spirit can offer. They bestow glory upon them, enshrining the players as though they are heroes of old, the kind of heroes that are read about in books. Knight put it best when he said, "People don't

concentrate their emotional energy on products in the way fans abandon themselves to the heroes of their games" (Foster, Greyser, & Walsh, 2006, p. 174).

Certainly, star players, in possessing numerous capabilities and high levels of significance, are held in much higher regard by fans than the ordinary sports product. It is clear from the examples above that society embraces athletes who are heroic on the field of play and in popular culture; but, aside from carrying obvious relevance at the athletic, business, and cultural levels, what specific traits and characteristics are common to these marquee athletes that lend them such high levels of value? What precursory factors are necessary for a player to become a star?

As mentioned, previous studies by Ohanian (1990) and Charbonneau and Garland (2006) were applicable toward assessing an athlete's effectiveness as a celebrity endorser on the basis of three factors: attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. Expounding on those characteristics, Shuart (2007) proposed that celebrity athletes possessing an additional *heroic* quality prove to be the most effective endorsers. He confirmed the proposition by showing that those athletes who were both sports heroes – succeeding in sport while reaffirming the cultural value structure – and celebrities were the most effective spokespeople for a product. Such notions coincided with earlier works by Goode (1978), which stated that winning, having rare talents, and achieving high levels of performance were all sources of prestige.

Foster, Greyser, and Walsh (2006) gave perhaps the most straightforward insight when they listed several factors that were relevant to building an athlete's personal brand. Amongst these were the popularity of the player's sport, on-field ability and consistency of performance, winning tradition of both the team and the player, charisma, public image, and media face time.

The areas of public image and media face time – publicity – have been further analyzed by researchers like Wakefield and Sloan (1995), who suggested that athletes possessing negative attitudes or bad publicity run the risk of harming both themselves and their team's brand. Such phenomena perhaps suggest why athletes having attractive and family-friendly qualities (Yu, 2005) are viewed more favorably in the consumer eye.

Operating from a more behavioral standpoint, McCracken (1989) proposed that a player's star value arises from the cultural meanings that the athlete possesses. Such characteristics include status, gender, class, and age, as well as the personality and lifestyle factors that make the player unique. These cultural meanings are valuable and capable of being passed from superstar to consumer via sporting events and other athlete-related products.

Focusing his research on a more economic perspective, Rosen (1981) suggested that superstar effects occur because of joint consumption technology and the imperfect substitution of consumer preferences. Because a large number of people can jointly consume a celebrity service together, a large economy of scale is created for the superstar athlete that widens the impact such a player can have. The imperfect substitution occurs when the value of watching a star player perform is higher than the value of watching several average players. In essence, quantity cannot replace quality. Rosen then states that when joint consumption technology and imperfect substitution work in harmony, a limited number of athletes are granted star status.

Others, like Yang, Shi, and Goldfarb (2009), defined the star athlete by combining all-star votes with in-season performance. Players who received a large number of votes in relation to their athletic performances were deemed as having a high level of individual brand equity, an equity that the trio's study revealed could spill over to the teams those athletes play for,

14

particularly in situations during which a player with high brand equity joined a team possessing medium brand equity.

Further research by Yang and Shi (2011) revealed that the attainment of star status for an athlete originates with exceptional on-field performance and that winning championships can have long-term, positive effects on a player's popularity. The pair also found that star status is linked to solid team performance and that star teammates can reinforce one another's popularity.

Such insights were particularly useful to this examination as they gave concise characteristics that were linkable to an athlete's classification as a superstar. Accordingly, the traits of *exceptional skill*, *high individual performance*, *leadership*, and *contribution to team success* were adopted for this study's use. Cultural-societal aspects and the ideal of celebrity (McCracken, 1989; Susman, 1984; McDonell, 2011; Shuart, 2007; Wakefield & Sloan, 1995) were also taken into account in developing the *cultural significance, celebrity status*, *positive public image*, and *overcoming obstacles and stereotypes* characteristics, as was Ohanian's (1990) scale in relation to the attributes of *attractiveness* and *exceptional skill*. The element of *charisma* was derived from Foster, Greyser, and Walsh's (2006) listing, which also reinforced the characteristics of *contribution to team success*, *high individual performance*, and *positive public image*.

Brand Awareness

Various examples from real-life occurrences point to the fact that star athletes may be capable of exerting an effect on the *brand awareness* area of a team's branding process. Defined by Shank (2009) as a consumer's recognition and remembrance of a brand, it stands as the preliminary stage in his four-factor process. After all, it is only once consumers become aware of

15

a brand that they are able to lend to further areas like image, equity, and loyalty. Taken from Gladden, & Milne's (1999) viewpoint, the definition is similar but applied to the professional sports realm in that brand awareness is defined as the consumers' familiarity with a specific team. Such familiarity can be elusive, though, especially in a crowded professional sports marketplace (Ross, 2007). Thus, marquee athletes and their ability to garner fan interest may become paramount for teams looking to stamp their presence in consumer minds.

Perhaps one of the greatest examples of a team using a star player to raise brand awareness was seen in the ascension of former NBA star Yao Ming, who – being a native of China – created an awareness for the Houston Rockets among Asian fans who might never have heard of the Texas-based team if not for Ming's presence. Drafted in 2002 by the Rockets as the number one overall pick, Ming brought a significant cultural and economic impact to the NBA scene. Not only was he voted by fans to the NBA All-Star game, but the Shanghai native boosted ticket sales of Rockets games to an increasingly Asian-American fan base. The Rockets and the NBA capitalized on this, using the aptly-titled "Ming Dynasty" as a key ingredient in the Rocket's business revival and in the spreading of the game to a global audience. By making it to the NBA, Yao made himself a national hero whose influence generated a large amount of awareness for his team (Wang, 2004).

Another example of a star player raising levels of brand awareness can be seen in the instance of celebrity athlete and soccer player, David Beckham. The Englishman has long been one of the most popular athletes in the world, and the teams he has been a part of have reaped the rewards of his iconic status. Beginning in his early days with Manchester United, Beckham helped the club generate sponsorship deals and create a larger fan base (Garrahan, 2003). In 2002, $3.8 million of United's $22.5 million in merchandising sales came from the sale of

Beckham jerseys (Milmo, 2003), and, when he was sold to Spain's Real Madrid in 2003, his new team welcomed his arrival for his marketing potential as much as his on-field talents (Datson, 2004). Indeed, Beckham was a marquee player who could raise Madrid's awareness amongst fans across the globe while bringing in millions of dollars in increased revenues (Milmo, 2003). More recently, Beckham's ability to generate brand awareness was witnessed in the Australian Tour undergone by his current team, the Los Angeles Galaxy. The American-based Major League Soccer team would have carried very little weight in a country like Australia that is behind in terms of soccer devotion, but with David Beckham leading the organization's charge, a sellout crowd of over 80 thousand packed Sydney's Olympic Stadium to witness the Galaxy battle Sydney FC. An unprecedented amount of Australian media coverage was also present, and if not for Beckham, soccer would not have been on free-to-air television in Sydney that night and kids would not have paid large amounts of money for Galaxy jerseys bearing Beckham's trademark number 23 on the back (Gilmour & Rowe, 2010). Essentially, Beckham himself was responsible for the Galaxy's newfound visibility in the Australian community.

Even more recently, Asian-American point guard Jeremy Lin burst onto the scene to create what some called a "pop-up economy" for his former team, the NBA's New York Knicks (Torre, 2012). After leading a struggling Knicks team on an 8-1 run through nine games, marketers began reaching out to Lin saying that his identity alone was worth millions, if not billions, of dollars worldwide. "Linsanity" was being felt both in the United States and in China, where hundreds of companies reached out in an effort to take advantage of his cultural heritage and sponsor him. Once he began seeing the court, Lin became a one-man stimulus for the Knicks as he helped raise the organization's stock value by 11% and increased website traffic by 4,000% (Torre, 2012).

Although such factual examples are helpful in showing that potential relationships between top-athletes and brand awareness may exist, they also amplify the reality that no examples in previous literature exist to assess a star player's effect on the area. Thus, this study's mission to explore star athlete's effects on the branding process remains justified.

Brand Image

Once fans become familiar with a sports organization, a sense of connectedness ensues and they can begin to define themselves in terms of the team (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Falling in line with Shanks's (2009) model, *brand image* is defined as the personality of a brand that shapes beliefs and attitudes toward it. Much like the brand awareness stage, brand image – particularly in its relation to star players – has been discussed very little in previous literature. In fact, the model used by Gladden and Milne (1999) does not even directly incorporate brand image to its framework. Nevertheless, another study from around that time by Keller (1993) proposes a different brand equity based model that takes brand image into account. Citing brand image as a component of the brand knowledge that contributes to brand equity, the area is complexly detailed in the model as being a result of the favorability, strength, uniqueness, and types of brand associations possessed by consumers.

Hill and Vincent (2006) also delved into the topic by stating that player personalities can add excitement to a team's image. Identifying past and present players as being charismatic, media celebrities, the researchers took these athletes into account when factoring in elements that contributed to the creation of a brand. Sutton, McDonald, Milne, and Cimperman (1997) expounded upon the idea that players can lend positively to brand image by suggesting that those who engage in philanthropic pursuits can reinforce the team's position within the marketplace.

Citing such examples as Shaquille O'Neal sponsoring Thanksgiving Day celebrations in the Orlando community back when he was with the Magic, the group proposes that athletes with positive reputations will reflect such an identity on the team and fans.

However, there is another end to this spectrum that centers on athletes possessing a negative reputation. Stories of popular athletes behaving badly are common in today's media influenced culture, and conflicts emerging between the individual athlete and his team may weaken the branding abilities of both the player and the organization. An athlete known to have a negative image in the public eye may have a difficult time projecting such an image on a team that values good reputations (Foster, Greyser, & Walsh, 2006).

Yet even with Keller's model, Hill and Vincent's suggestions, and the positive and negative personal images that athletes are known to project upon a team, more research is still needed to determine whether or not – and to what extent – star athletes affect the area of brand image.

Brand Equity

Defined by Shank (2009) as the *value* of a brand relative to others in the marketplace, *brand equity* is something that should be developed at high levels by organizations hoping to boost their worth. As mentioned earlier, Gladden and Milne (1999) described brand equity within the scope of professional sports as being a combination of perceived quality, brand awareness, brand association, and brand loyalty. Drawing on prior research by Keller (1993) and Aaker (1996), brand equity was defined as the collection of assets and liabilities that add to, or subtract from, a brand's value. Gladden and Milne's model borrowed all four areas from Aaker's construct, whereas just two of Keller's components – brand association and brand awareness –

19

are present in both later models (Ross, James, & Vargas, 2006). Two elements present in both Aaker and Gladden and Milne's works that are not explicitly mentioned in Shank's branding process are *perceived quality* and *brand associations*.

Perceived quality was established by Aaker (1996) to represent a consumer's judgment of a product's overall excellence relative to its intended purpose. Brand associations are said to be anything linked to the memory of a brand, and represent the thoughts and ideas for a particular product that an individual holds within his or her mind (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993).

Although it is unfortunate that – aside from Gladden and Milne – so few attempts have been made to further analyze the relationship between various aspects of the sporting industry and brand equity, studies have actually been performed in an effort to measure team brand associations in professional sport. Ross, James, and Vargas (2006) originally did so using the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) method to good effect, revealing that the research technique might prove suitable within the context of branding. Gladden and Funk (2002) also investigated this area and suggested that in the case of unsuccessful teams, marketing and promotional activities involving star players may help alter the negative brand associations fans develop with losing teams.

Numerous real-life examples of players appearing to affect brand equity also exist, beginning with the aforementioned David Beckham, whose move from Manchester United to Real Madrid gave direct insight to the transfer of brand equity from one team to another. While supporters at his previous club – United – were mourning his loss (Yu, 2005), Madrid fans were relishing the opportunity to see their team reach new heights, and Beckham fans were purchasing Madrid jerseys at exceedingly high rates. The soccer star was expected to bring in additional

television revenues as he helped the team reach more championship events, to increase

attendance numbers that would create higher volumes of concession and ticket sales, and to

contribute to a rising global brand power that would allow for tours in Asia and North America

(Foster, Greyser, & Walsh, 2006). In essence, Beckham added value to the Madrid organization

and made it more equitable.

Lebron James is another modern day illustration of a star player impacting a professional

team's value, as witnessed by his arrival and departure from the NBA's Cleveland Cavaliers.

After being drafted first overall in the 2003 NBA Draft, James became part of an organization

that was coming off a 17-win season, possessed a team value of $258 million, and held a below-

average attendance of 11,497 fans per home game. James, a basketball superstar, gave the

Cavaliers organization the injection it needed by nearly doubling attendance to a figure of

20,562, giving the Cavs multiple 60-win seasons, and propelling the team to an overall franchise

value of $476 million that ranked fifth in the NBA. LeBron boosted revenue for the Cavs by

almost $160 million and was said to be worth over $100 million alone to the franchise

(Matuszewski, 2010). When James announced his departure in 2010 the Cavs' overall value

dropped nearly 26%, and Miami, his new destination, saw its value rise by 17%. The Miami

Heat's ticket sales, which had been on the decline for four years, sold-out once LeBron made his

decision to join the Florida-based team (Ozanian, 2011).

Such real-life instances of players affecting brand equity are relevant in light of the

antecedent conditions present in Gladden and Milne's model, since one of them includes star

players within its framework. This inclusion is particularly important to the study because – at

least according to Gladden and Milne's model – it signifies that such athletes are capable of

exerting an effect on brand equity (Shank, 2009). Yet further study is needed to *prove* this

relationship and *reveal* just how much influence star players can have on what is arguably the branding process's most important stage.

Brand Loyalty

Shank (2009) defined *brand loyalty* as being the final phase in his branding process, and a phase that is of utmost importance to organizations as they seek to obtain the consistent preferences and repeat purchases from consumers of their brand. It should also be noted that the concept of brand loyalty was present as a component of brand equity in Gladden and Milne's (1999) model, where it was similarly defined as the ability to attract and retain customers.

Compared to other areas of the branding process, there is a decent amount of literature relating to the general topic of brand loyalty in sports. Aside from being present in Aaker (1991) and Gladden and Milne's initial models, the subject was subsequently seen in further research by Gladden, who teamed with Funk (2001) to dissect the link between brand associations and brand loyalty. In this study, the researchers suggested that brand loyalty guarantees a steady following even when team performance falters, and that such loyalty helps the team charge a price premium for its events.

Wakefield and Sloan (1995) defined team loyalty as an enduring allegiance to a particular team, showing that team loyalty was the number one factor in determining a spectator's desire to attend a sporting event in person. Jeffrey James was also responsible for performing various analyses on the topic, first teaming with Funk (2001) to conclude that team loyalty forms a psychological connection capable of eliciting consistent, enduring behaviors from a fan toward a team. Such psychological connections were further explored by Mahony, Madrigal, and Howard (2000), who used the psychological commitment (PCT) scale to segment consumers based on

loyalty. In this particular scale one variable was present that sought to directly analyze the effect star players might have on consumer loyalty to the team. It was accordingly adopted and deployed as an item in the survey questionnaire used for this study.

Conclusion

Although the literature review revealed a scant amount of studies that were directly pertinent to the topic, it nevertheless presented the study with several frameworks through which the concept could be viewed. Shank's (2009) model, focusing more on the branding process as a whole and not just the area of brand equity, presented the researcher with general areas that helped in the formulation of the 40 items used for the research instrument. Gladden and Milne's (1999) framework for assessing brand equity was also valuable for showing the interrelation between the branding stages and revealing further factors that were capable of being affected by star players. In the end, both branding concepts were useful in naming the factor extractions discovered by the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) that is presented in the proceeding chapter. Analysis using such a method was supported in the literature by Ross, James, and Vargas's (2006) attempts to measure team brand associations in professional sport. Further literature (McCracken, 1989; Susman, 1984; McDonell, 2011; Shuart, 2007; Wakefield & Sloan, 1995; Ohanian, 1990; Foster, Greyser, & Walsh, 2006) contributed to the terminology and selection of the attributes used to characterize star players.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in order to uncover and examine which areas of a sporting team's branding process are more or less affected by star players in the professional setting. Furthermore, this examination sought to better define what characteristics are most important in granting an athlete star status. In this chapter, the research methodology used to obtain the data is organized and discussed according to sample size and selection of subjects, development of the questionnaire, administration of the instrument, and data analysis methods.

Sample Size and Selection of Subjects

In an effort to obtain information from a knowledgeable and accessible source, the survey questionnaire used in this study was distributed to 250 School of Kinesiology students at a university in the Mideast region of the United States. Within the surveyed sample, 209 chose to participate, leading to an effective response rate of 83.6%. Yet of the 209 in the initial sample, only 195 were deemed usable for an updated effective response rate of 78%. The 14 not selected for analysis were discarded due to the fact that the participants' responses indicated they were *not* a fan of professional sports, and thus not well-equipped for answering questions related to the topic of study. In general, frequent consumers experience a more intense relationship with a brand than occasional or non-buyers (Koll & Wallpach, 2009), meaning answers from participants who were themselves frequent consumers of sport would provide the study with more accurate and relevant information. The use of students was judged to be appropriate in this instance given that they are conveniently accessible, commonly used in product and brand choice

research (Biswas & Sherrell, 2006), and significant consumers of sport in modern culture (Ross, James, & Vargas, 2006).

Development of the Questionnaire

In developing a survey questionnaire that was capable of being administered to a student population, careful consideration was used in constructing questions that were both insightful to research and understandable to the participants. The creation process involved the aforementioned study of related literature, as well as an analysis by an expert panel consisting of three faculty members at the university's sport management department. Each member of the panel provided feedback regarding the survey's construction, and further assisted with the wording and formulation of items used in the instrument. The main researcher, though, was responsible for designing the overall survey questionnaire, and after drawing from previous research and the advice of the panel, came up with four sections designed to aid in the discovery of relevant data.

The first of these sections consisted of five questions that asked the respondents to give out general background information about themselves in the areas of gender, marital status, class standing, age, and ethnicity. Such information was necessary for ensuring an accurate sample of students age 18 and older, and was useful in analyzing the various demographic and psychographic segments of the sample.

In the second section, consumer preferences and behaviors were examined through the use of polar questions, open-ended questions, and Likert scales. In this section, the polar questions determined whether or not the participant was suitable for examination as a fan or non-fan of professional sports. The open-ended questions asked respondents to write the names of

their favorite professional teams and players in an effort to stimulate their thoughts and responses toward the concept of professional sports and athletes (Ross, James, & Vargas, 2006). Last, the Likert scale questions further analyzed the participants' strength of fandom by discovering their self-perceptions and behaviors as related to sport. These scales asked what level of fan they thought themselves to be, whether or not they agreed that their favorite player – if applicable – was a star player on the team, and how often – on a scale anchored by 1 as *never* and 7 as *very often* – they watched and listened to their team on the television or radio, read online or printed media, purchased merchandise, or attended sporting events related to their favorite teams. Essentially, the questions in this second section were designed to eliminate irrelevant respondents while persuading the suitable ones to think about professional sports and players. This way, they would be stimulated to submit answers in later sections that were relevant to the topic of study.

The third section of the questionnaire involved the identification of star player characteristics. Here the respondents were asked to indicate on a Likert scale which items were more or less characteristics that defined a star player. Number 1 signified *strongly disagree*, 2 *disagree*, 3 *slightly disagree*, 4 *slightly agree*, 5 *agree*, and 6 *strongly agree*. For the sake of avoiding neutrality, there was no 'undecided' or 'neutral' selection allowed. Each question presented a characteristic that had been formulated from previous literature and real-life occurrences, and asked the participant to rate the strength – or lack thereof – that each trait had in defining an athlete as a star player. The mean scores of all 10 characteristics were designed to be calculated and compared against one another in the final analysis.

The fourth section of the survey involved the primary focus of the study, which was to identify and examine the areas of a professional team's branding process that were more or less

affected by the aforementioned star players. Using a Likert scale, part four listed 40 items relating to the effects that star players can have on specific aspects of a professional team's brand. These items were based on the theoretical frameworks presented by Shank (2009) and Gladden and Milne (1999) and sought to explore the effects star athletes had on the participants' relations to a team's brand. Drawing from previous literature on the topic and the advice of the expert panel, the questions were designed to be both easily understood by the student participants and capable of generating insight to the researcher. It was further developed to allow for the use of an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) that could funnel the 40 items into factors that were identifiable as various areas of the branding process.

Administration of the Instrument

After developing the survey questionnaire, gaining IRB approval, and printing hard copies of the questionnaire, personalized, advance-notice letters were given to instructors whose classes would be participating in the study. The main researcher then attended each class in person and provided the class with a general overview of the topic before distributing the survey questionnaire to the students. Each survey was accompanied by an anonymous survey consent form stating the non-mandatory nature of the questionnaire and the requirement that participants be 18 years or older to participate. While the instrument was being administered, the researcher was available at the front of the class to field questions and collect the surveys once the respondents were finished. Generally, the completion time for the study was 5-10 minutes per class.

Data Analysis Methods

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) is a scaling procedure that examines a set of observed variables, reduces them, and then summarizes them until sets of hypothetical, underlying dimensions called *factors* emerge (Kootstra, 2004; Smith & Albaum, 2005). Put another way, EFA is a tool that explores the interrelationships among variables to discover whether or not they can be grouped into smaller subsets – factors (Coughlin & Knight, 2007). Typically, the number of factors derived from the analysis is much smaller than the number of items used, since the factors are supposed to represent the various sets of measures that compose the larger field. These factors should correspond to constructs that can help one better understand the overall field of study (Green & Salkind, 2008).

In this particular examination, EFA was carried out on SPSS 19.0 for Windows and used in an effort to uncover which areas of the branding process were more or less influenced by star players. Through the use of 40 relevant items, the study explored the interrelationships between the items in an effort to discover whether or not they could be grouped into specific factors – areas – that are affected by star athletes.

For the parts of the study examining characteristics of the participants, and the attributes of star players, descriptive analysis was used to derive the relevant information. The means of all 10 "player attributes" were calculated and compared to one another before being sorted in rank order to help determine which ones were more or less characteristic of superstardom.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

In this chapter, an analysis of the data provided by the results of the survey questionnaires and EFA is performed in an effort to examine the demographic characteristics of the respondents, the reliability of the research instrument, factor naming, and the general findings of the study.

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

This study initially began with a potential population equivalent to the nearly 14,000 students enrolled at the university for the fall 2012 semester but was limited to School of Kinesiology classes in an effort to obtain a sample whose responses would shed more light on the research problem. The survey garnered 209 favorable responses from a sample population of 250 students at all levels – undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral – but was reduced to 195 following the removal of survey responses that indicated the participants were not fans of professional sport. As a result, the following data was obtained in relation to the five demographic variables presented in part one of the survey questionnaire. Presented in Table 1 is a summary of the numbers and percentages of the respondents for each of the following demographic variables: gender, marital status, class standing, age, and ethnicity.

As shown in Table 1, over 65% of the 195 participants were male, while 68 females accounted for slightly less than 35% of the sample. Of those sampled, 89.2% were single, 6.2% were married, and 3.6% were either engaged or divorced. College juniors accounted for the largest percentage of class standing at 29.2%, while seniors and sophomores (21.5% each), masters students (16.4%), freshmen (8.2%), doctoral students (1.0%), and others (1.0%)

followed in descending order for the variable. In regards to the age demographic ranging from 18 to 63, 20-year-olds were most highly represented at 23.6%, while 85.9% of the respondents were 24-years of age or younger. Finally, the ethnicity demographic revealed 157 of the participants (80.5%) to be White, and African Americans (11.8%) and Asians (3.1%) to compose the next two largest contingents of race present in the study.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 195)

Characteristic	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	127	65.1
Female	68	34.9
Marital Status		
Single	174	90.2
Married	12	6.2
Engaged	4	2.1
Divorced	3	1.5
Missing	2	--
Class Standing		
Freshman	16	8.3
Sophomore	42	21.8
Junior	57	29.5
Senior	42	21.8
Masters	32	16.6
Doctoral	2	1.0
Other	2	1.0
Missing	2	--

Table 1 Continues

Table 1 Continued

Characteristic	Frequency	%
Age		
18-20	87	45.3
21-23	61	31.8
24-26	26	13.5
27-29	9	4.7
30-63	9	4.7
Missing	3	--
Ethnicity		
African American	23	11.9
Asian	6	3.1
Hispanic	2	1.0
White	157	80.9
Native American	4	2.1
Other	2	1.0
Missing	1	--

Part two of the survey then reported the behaviors and preferences of participants. Of the 195 fans of professional sport, 175 (89.7%) claimed to have a favorite player on the team, and 66.2% stated they own a replica jersey or other piece of team merchandise specifically associated with a past or present player on the team. Each participant was also asked to pick which professional sports they followed, and as seen in Table 2, a majority followed football (89.7%), basketball (60.0%), and baseball (55.9%). Hockey (16.9%) and soccer (16.4%), along with a minority of others sports like golf, NASCAR, tennis, and rugby, were not as well represented.

Table 2

Description of Professional Sports Followed (N = 195)

Sports	Frequency	%
Football	175	89.7
Basketball	117	60.0
Baseball	109	55.9
Hockey	33	16.9
Soccer	32	16.4
Other	24	12.3

In Table 3 it is seen that exactly 40% of the fans studied claimed to have been a supporter of their favorite team for over 15-plus years, with another 24.6% saying they had been fans for 10-14 years. Cumulatively, 81.5% of respondents had been fans of their professional sports teams for five years or more.

Table 3

Description of Fan Length (N = 195)

	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Less than a year	6	3.1	3.1	3.1
1-4 years	30	15.4	15.4	18.5
5-9 years	33	16.9	16.9	35.4
10-14 years	48	24.6	24.6	60.0
15+ years	78	40.0	40.0	100.0
Total	195	100.0	100.0	

The open-ended responses from part two indicated the Pittsburgh Steelers of the National Football League to be the most highly supported team amongst the surveyed students (11.2%), while the Cincinnati Reds of Major League Baseball were second at 8.7%. Neither response was

surprising given the Mideast location of the sampled population. Joey Votto of the Reds, Ray Lewis of the NFL's Baltimore Ravens, and Lebron James of the NBA's Miami Heat were selected as the favorite athletes, each accounting for 4.1% of the players listed as being fan favorites. Furthermore, of the 178 people who noted themselves as having a favorite player on their favorite professional team, 91.6% *agreed* to some extent that the player was a *star* athlete. On the whole, a majority 51.7% *strongly agreed* that their favorite player was a star player.

Finally, the concluding responses in section two revealed that 91.8% of the participants were at least *somewhat involved* as supporters of their favorite teams, while only 8.2% considered themselves to be *occasional/fair-weather* fans. In addition, when asked how often they performed the following actions, 93.3% watched or listened to coverage and games of their favorite teams with at least moderate frequency, 76.2% at read printed or online media related to their teams at or above a moderate level, 59.6% at least moderately purchased or received team-related merchandise, and 36.3% attended sporting events of their favorite teams with at least moderate frequency. Overall, the most frequent behavior amongst the participants was watching or listening to coverage of their favorite teams after it was noted that 36.1% did so *very often*.

Reliability of the Research Instrument

The instrument used in this study was designed by the researcher to explore which areas of the branding process were affected by star players and to examine what characteristics attributed to these players' star label.

After collecting the responses from all 195 professional sport fans, results were inputted to SPSS Windows software by the research administrator. A screening process was then used to ensure that no outliers existed in the respondent data. After it was determined that the responses

and inputs into the SPSS software were correct, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used to analyze the data on the 40 items that signified player relations to the team's branding process. A description of the 40 items may be found in Table 4.

Table 4

Descriptive Information of 40 Items

Item Number	Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I first become aware of a team because of its star players	192	1.00	6.00	3.0833	1.62871
2	Star athletes are good promotional spokesmen for their teams	191	2.00	6.00	4.9058	.95229
3	Star players of a specific nationality raise awareness for their teams in those countries	189	1.00	6.00	4.6720	.98839
4	I recognize a team's brand when I see its star players	192	1.00	6.00	4.4792	1.29420
5	I become more aware of a team when it signs a star player	186	1.00	6.00	4.3656	1.26734
6	The skills and performances of a star player generate exposure for the team	190	2.00	6.00	5.0842	.81861
7	Star players generate additional media exposure for the team	189	3.00	6.00	5.2857	.75291
8	Star players spread the team's brand (logo, name, colors) to new audiences	191	2.00	6.00	5.1780	.81418
9	I am aware of a team because the players help it win more games	191	1.00	6.00	4.4817	1.20019
10	I am aware of a team because I purchase player merchandise	192	1.00	6.00	3.0208	1.47211
11	Star players with good reputations impose a positive image on their team	191	3.00	6.00	5.3979	.76005
12	I have a greater trust in teams that have star players	191	1.00	6.00	4.0105	1.23965
13	My impressions of a team are shaped by its star players	188	1.00	6.00	3.6702	1.31944
14	I think more highly of a team if it signs a star player	188	1.00	6.00	3.6383	1.29871
15	I think less of a team if it releases a star player	191	1.00	6.00	3.1361	1.27416
16	Star players with bad reputations impose a negative image on their team	190	1.00	6.00	4.9684	1.05863
17	I am more impressed by teams with star players	189	1.00	6.00	3.7566	1.27330
18	Star athletes who give back to the community are beneficial to their team's image	191	1.00	6.00	5.3979	.82001

Table 4 Continues

34

Table 4 Continued

Item Number	Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
19	Star players shape the team's brand image	191	3.00	6.00	4.9319	.84016
20	Star players' actions can affect team image in a positive or negative way	191	1.00	6.00	5.2618	.90295
21	A star player delivers wins to a team	192	1.00	6.00	4.3490	1.13401
22	Multiple star players deliver even more wins to a team	192	1.00	6.00	4.7083	1.15243
23	I want to buy team merchandise because of the star players on the team	189	1.00	6.00	3.2222	1.35793
24	I will purchase tickets for a game when star players are on the team	192	1.00	6.00	3.5365	1.43943
25	Having star players on a team adds value to the organization's brand	190	2.00	6.00	4.7421	.98229
26	A newly signed star athlete will improve the value of the team	191	2.00	6.00	4.5654	1.09768
27	High-profile athletes bring further media revenue to a team	191	2.00	6.00	5.0419	.87559
28	The loss of a star player diminishes the team's value	191	1.00	6.00	3.8010	1.12493
29	Star athletes can raise the performance level of their teammates	192	2.00	6.00	4.7969	.89524
30	I would not renew season tickets if the team lost its star players	192	1.00	6.00	2.7813	1.43043
31	I will not support a team if its star players leave	192	1.00	6.00	2.1615	1.18453
32	I decide to support one team over another because of the star players on that team	193	1.00	6.00	2.5596	1.25326
33	I will recommend a team to others because of its players	190	1.00	6.00	3.3474	1.35903
34	I support a team because of the traditions established by star players	193	1.00	6.00	3.8964	1.27869
35	Star players give me an emotional connection to the team	191	1.00	6.00	3.6335	1.26978
36	I am more likely to support a team that has star players on its roster	193	1.00	6.00	3.3161	1.27009
37	I support a team because of the star athletes on the team	191	1.00	6.00	3.0576	1.32658
38	I will stop supporting a team if new star players are not brought in	192	1.00	6.00	2.5625	1.27655
39	I will continue following a losing team if it has star players on its roster	193	1.00	6.00	4.1347	1.26346
40	A past or present star player will keep me supporting the team for a long period of time	193	1.00	6.00	4.2953	1.25035

First, though, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) was run to indicate whether or not the items were able to be grouped into subsets of underlying factors. High values close to 1.0 typically indicate that factor analysis may be useful with the data, while a value smaller than .50 generally indicates that factor analysis will not be very useful (Coughlin & Knight, 2007; Field, 2005). This instrument was measured to have a value of .862 that ranked it on the higher end of adequacy. Because values between 0.8 and 0.9 are considered great (Field, 2005; Hutcheson & Sofroniou, 1999), the value discovered by this KMO was more than sufficient in showing EFA to be a reliable method of interpreting the data. In conjunction, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was run as another descriptive to help determine the study's reliability. This measure tested the correlations between the variables and was shown to have a significance value of .000 that was less than the .05 value required for significance. Furthermore, being highly significant at less than .001, the test revealed that there are relationships between the variables that make factor analysis appropriate (Field, 2005). Results from both KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5

KMO and Bartlett's Test (N = 195)

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.862
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3471.503
	df	780
	Sig.	.000

Next, Principal Components Analysis was used and based on Kaiser's (1970) criterion that eigenvalues greater than one suggest relevant factors. The logic of this rule states that by selecting 1.0 as the standard for retaining a factor, only those factors explaining the highest percentage of variance will be extracted (Coughlin & Knight, 2007). In total, eight factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were extracted and deemed relevant based on Kaiser's rule. These factors accounted for 62.881% of the overall variance. Orthogonal rotation with Varimax was then used to rotate the data while values smaller than .40 were suppressed in order to make studying easier by excluding those values that did not load significantly onto the factors. Following the discovery of the eight factors, the Rotated Component Matrix was examined and variables loading onto more than one factor were discarded. In total, this statistic screening discarded five of the 40 items, leaving 35 items to be loaded amongst the eight discovered factors. In summary, Factor 1 was loaded with nine items (26.337%), Factor 2 with seven (14.526%), Factor 3 with five (4.6%), Factor 4 with four (4.133%), Factor 5 with three (3.926%), Factor 6 with three (3.603%), Factor 7 with two (3.084%), and Factor 8 with two (2.67%).

Table 6

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	10.535	26.337	26.337	10.535	26.337	26.337	5.892
2	5.811	14.526	40.863	5.811	14.526	40.863	3.652
3	1.840	4.600	45.464	1.840	4.600	45.464	3.258
4	1.653	4.133	49.597	1.653	4.133	49.597	3.186
5	1.571	3.926	53.524	1.571	3.926	53.524	2.895
6	1.441	3.603	57.127	1.441	3.603	57.127	2.296
7	1.234	3.084	60.211	1.234	3.084	60.211	2.088
8	1.068	2.670	62.881	1.068	2.670	62.881	1.884

Then, because factor analysis is an exploratory tool that should be used to help guide the researcher in making decisions (Field, 2005), theoretical screening was accordingly used at the researcher's discretion to discard factors that did not contain at least three items and remove items that did not fit into the respective factors. At the conclusion of this assessment, it was determined that factors seven and eight – each loaded with just two items – should not be included in the overall analysis. Furthermore, one of the values loaded in Factor 1 did not fit significantly, so it was discarded. Such modifications to the data were supported by Thurstone's Rules, which state that selected values should be .40 and above, double loaded values should be dropped, and values loading high on inappropriate factors should be deleted (Coughlin & Knight,

2007). By formulating and screening under such guidelines, further validity was added to the instrument's reliability.

As one last measure of legitimacy, the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient Test was run on the factors as a whole, and individually, in order to ensure their reliability. Table 7 displays the results of the test for all six of the theoretical components. Please refer to Table 4 for the list of items and item numbers.

Table 7

Alpha Coefficients of the Main Study (N = 195)

Factor	Item Numbers (n)	Alpha
Brand Loyalty	30-33, 35-38 (8)	.889
Brand Awareness	1-6, 8 (7)	.786
Brand Image	11, 16, 18-20 (5)	.774
Direct Brand Equity	25-27, 29 (4)	.793
Perceived Quality	10, 12, 17 (3)	.639
Brand Reputation	34, 39-40 (3)	.634
Overall	1-6, 8, 10-12, 16-20, 25-27, 29-40 (30)	.891

Factor Classification

As mentioned, eight factors and 35 values were initially discovered by the research instrument following the conclusion of EFA (see Table 5). Once the screening process trimmed

the results down to 30 values loading onto six factors – Factor 1 with eight, Factor 2 with seven, Factor 3 with five, Factor 4 with four, Factor 5 with three, and Factor 6 with three – it was time for the researcher to label the factors. Classifying the factors is an important and difficult part of the analysis, but is a task that falls solely upon the researcher (Coughlin & Knight, 2007). With the items having initially been designed to encompass general branding areas, it was intended that the items load upon extracted factors that were relevant to the overall process.

Initial examination made it apparent that the items loaded onto each factor were appropriate to various aspects of the branding process, and it was determined that Factor 1 be classified as *brand loyalty*, Factor 2 *brand awareness*, Factor 3 *brand image*, Factor 4 *direct brand equity*, Factor 5 *perceived quality*, and Factor 6 *brand reputation*. Factor 1 was labeled *brand loyalty* because the eight items loaded on it were each indicative of star players' effects on consumers' repeated support and preference of a professional sports team (Shank, 2009). In Factor 2, *brand awareness* was an appropriate title given the fact that all seven variables loaded to it pertained to the consumer becoming mindful of a team's brand as a result of star athletes. Factor 3 held items relating to the consumer perceptions of a team's image being positive or negative due to player influence, thus earning it the *brand image* classification. With Factor 4, each loading item dealt with the value added by a star player to the team, thus earning it the title of *direct brand equity*. The word "direct" was added due to the fact that the model of Gladden and Milne (1999) shows brand equity to be composed of other areas like brand awareness and brand loyalty. Because these areas lend to the brand equity stage under such a concept, labeling the factor *direct* brand equity was appropriate in order to differentiate the single factor from the overall area of brand equity that is shown by the researchers' model to encompass multiple factors present in this study.

The classification process became more difficult for Factors 5 and 6 due to the fact that both components held just three items apiece and, unlike their predecessors, did not directly correlate to one of the four main stages of Shank's (2009) branding process. Nevertheless, the variables in both factors displayed common themes that allowed them to be named after two smaller aspects of Gladden and Milne's (1999) brand equity model: *perceived quality* and *brand reputation*. Factor 5 assumed the *perceived quality* label due to the fact that it revealed consumer judgments of product excellence that had led to purchases (Gladden & Milne, 1999), while Factor 6 was titled *brand reputation* because it showed how players affect the long-term perspectives of a team's fans by influencing their views on team traditions and performance levels (Foster, Greyser, & Walsh, 2006; Gladden & Milne, 1999). Figure 3 is a model showing the extracted factors and the items loaded upon them.

I would not renew season tickets if the team lost its star players ⟵——— (.742)

I will not support a team if its star players leave ⟵——— (.793)

I decide to support one team over another because of the star players on that team ⟵——— (.822)

I will recommend a team to others because of its players ⟵——— (.594)

Star players give me an emotional connection to the team ⟵——— (.491)

Brand Loyalty

I am more likely to support a team that has star players on its roster ⟵——— (.691)

I support a team because of the star athletes on the team ⟵——— (.740)

I will stop supporting a team if new star players are not brought in ⟵——— (.757)

I first become aware of a team because of its star players ⟵——— (.527)

Star athletes are good promotional spokesmen for their teams ⟵——— (.451)

Star players of a specific nationality raise awareness for their teams in those countries ⟵——— (.567)

I recognize a team's brand when I see its star players ⟵——— (.714)

Brand Awareness

I become more aware of a team when it signs a star player ⟵——— (.635)

The skills and performances of a star player generate exposure for the team ⟵——— (.565)

Star players spread the team's brand (logo, name, colors) to new audiences ⟵——— (.549)

Star players with good reputations impose a positive image on their team ⟵——— (.819)

Star players with bad reputations impose a negative image on their team ⟵——— (.591)

Star athletes who give back to the community are beneficial to their team's image ⟵——— (.695)

Brand Image

Star players shape the team's brand image ⟵——— (.460)

Star players' actions can affect team image in a positive or negative way ⟵——— (.769)

Having star players on a team adds value to the organization's brand ⟵——— (.675)

A newly signed star athlete will improve the value of the team ⟵——— (.600)

Direct Brand Equity

High-profile athletes bring further media revenue to a team ⟵——— (.855)

Star athletes can raise the performance level of their teammates ⟵——— (.549)

I have a greater trust in teams that have star players ⟵——— (.563)

Perceived Quality

I am more impressed by teams with star players ⟵——— (.592)

I am aware of a team because I purchase player merchandise ⟵——— (.643)

I support a team because of the traditions established by star players ⟵——— (.642)

Brand Reputation

I will continue following a losing team if it has star players on its roster ⟵——— (.646)

A past or present star player will keep me supporting the team for a long period of time ⟵——— (.679)

Figure 3. Extracted Factors and Loaded Items.

Star Player Characteristics

A descriptive analysis was run on the 10 "player attributes" intended to better characterize an athlete as being a star. Sorting responses from the six-point Likert scale and arranging them by attribute according to their means, the analysis revealed a rank order for the proposed superstar traits (see Table 8). *Contribution to team success* was the most highly considered attribute with a mean of 5.5916, while *exceptional skill* was a close second at 5.5208. Leadership (5.3542) rounded out the top three, with *individual performances and honors* (5.2251) and *positive public image* (5.1937) respectively finishing fourth and fifth on the list. *Charisma*, *overcoming obstacles and stereotypes,* and *celebrity status* were determined to be on the positive end of the scale as well, before *attractiveness* and *cultural significance* rounded out the attribute nomination as the two least relevant characteristics. Of all the choices, *cultural significance* – collecting a mean of 3.3281 that was below the neutral point of 3.50 – was distinguished as the only attribute that participants disagreed was representative of superstardom.

Table 8

Rank Order of Star Player Attributes

Rank	Attributes	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
1	Contributes to the team's success (helps the team win games and championships)	5.5916	191	.65753
2	Exceptional skills (possesses skill and athletic ability that few others can replicate)	5.5208	192	.81194
3	Leadership (the ability to make teammates better)	5.3542	192	.89184
4	Performs well as an individual (wins personal awards, has good stats, all-star appearances)	5.2251	191	.85014
5	Positive public image (serves the community, stays out of trouble)	5.1937	191	1.04588
6	Charisma (personality, sharpness, speaking ability, swagger)	5.1250	192	.86527
7	Found success by overcoming obstacles and stereotypes (rose from poverty to fame, overcame physical limitations)	4.5104	192	1.28621
8	Celebrity status (the athlete captures society's attention on and off the field/court)	4.3594	192	1.35408
9	Attractiveness (good looks, sex appeal)	3.8128	187	1.46729
10	Cultural significance (Asians in the NBA, Americans in Europe)	3.3281	192	1.43320

Discussion of Findings

The descriptive analyses and EFA revealed several findings relevant to the topic of study. The fact that 195 respondents were fans of professional sport provided the examination with a solid base from which to operate, a base that was further validated by responses indicating 91.8% of the fans to be at least *somewhat involved* as supporters of their favorite team. Furthermore, 64.6% of the participants had been a fan of their team for 10 years or more. Responses were not only indicative of allegiance to a team, but also to added value, with 66.5% reportedly owning merchandise specifically linked to a player on the team. This figure was supported by the fact

that close to 60% purchased or received team-related merchandise with at least moderate frequency.

In describing the characteristics of a star player, it was shown that those players who contribute to a team's success were perceived as being the most capable of achieving superstardom. Such a revelation was not only useful in defining the essence of a true star player, but in portraying the star player as being a vital element to team achievement. The possession of unique skills and abilities, and the leadership trait, were also seen as top characteristics of star players. Attractiveness and cultural significance were seen as the least important prerequisites to stardom, with most respondents signifying that cultural significance was not important in defining a star player. From the results it was determined that an athlete possessing such attributes as *contribution to team success*, *exceptional individual skill*, and *leadership*, most strongly fit the participants' definition of a true star player.

After it became clear that the participants were knowledgeable of the subject, and that a more precise definition of the star player could be presented, it was time to apply the results of the EFA to the null hypothesis. The null hypothesis stated:

N_0: There is no relationship between star players and the areas of a team's branding process.

The EFA extracted eight factors, six of which had loadings and eigenvalues sufficient enough to support the conclusion that star players did in fact have an effect on various areas of the team branding process. Furthermore, the extracted factors were classifiable and consistent with previous branding models (Shank, 2009; Gladden & Milne, 1999). As such, it was determined by its revelation of player-brand relationships that the study was validated in rejecting the null hypothesis.

In particular, the area of brand loyalty was revealed as one stage strongly linked to the influence of a star player. Accounting for the largest percentage of variance, this stage was loaded with eight items that indicated fans choose to begin supporting, end supporting, and switch supporting teams due to the presence or absence of star players. Such a discovery is supported Gladden and Milne's (1999) model linking star players to brand loyalty as a component of brand equity, and serves as proper justification for Mahony, Madrigal, and Howard's (2000) use of star players in their PCT scale. The participants' responses generally seemed to indicate that marquee athletes are indeed capable of influencing the consistency of fan preferences toward a team's brand (Shank, 2009).

A professional team's brand awareness was another factor that appeared to be highly correlated with the presence of a star athlete. Holding the second largest percentage of variance with seven loaded items, this stage showed how fans first become aware of teams due to star players, and that these superstar athletes are capable of generating recognition and exposure for a team while spreading its brand to new audiences. This description is consistent with the definitions of brand awareness proposed in other studies (Shank, 2009; Gladden & Milne, 1999), and one capable of explaining the real-life events portrayed by Yao Ming, David Beckham, Jeremy Lin, and other star athletes (Wang, 2004; Gilmour & Rowe, 2010; Torre, 2012).

The brand image factor registered five items pertaining to the area, showing that star players are capable of positively and negatively affecting a team's image, and that players who give back to the community can improve team image. These findings agreed with the viewpoints of Sutton, McDonald, Milne, and Cimperman (1997), who suggested that star players can reinforce a team's position in the marketplace by engaging in philanthropic pursuits. They also coincide with the views of Foster, Greyser, and Walsh (2006), who propose that athletes known

to have a negative image in the public eye may have a difficult time projecting such an image on a team or fan that values a good reputation. In addition to the EFA's findings on brand image, the descriptive analysis run on "player attributes" found that *positive public image* was agreed upon by fans to be a definite indicator of superstardom.

In assessing brand equity, the task became more difficult because the perceptions of two differing models had to be taken into account. On one hand, there was Shank's (2009) model showing brand equity to be a stage separate from – but not necessarily independent of – the areas of brand awareness, brand image, and brand loyalty, whereas Gladden and Milne's (1999) framework portrayed the areas of awareness and loyalty to be components of brand equity. Either way, both frameworks seemed to agree that brand equity is nearly synonymous to a brand's value, meaning both representations are appropriate when analyzing the *direct* brand equity factor extracted by the EFA. Loaded with four items related to the direct effects a star player can have on team value, revenue, and performance, this factor showed a definite relationship to exist between marquee athletes and brand equity. If analyzed under the scope of Gladden and Milne's model to encompass the areas of brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand reputation, one could argue that brand equity is the area shown to be most affected by star players (see Figure 4).

The final two constructs derived from the EFA – perceived quality and brand reputation – exist in Gladden and Milne's framework as components of brand equity. Loaded with three items apiece, these two areas revealed a definite – albeit slight – relationship to star players. Viewed as a consumer's judgment of a product's overall quality relative to its intended purpose (Aaker, 1991), this definition of perceived quality is congruent with the loaded items relating to fans' quality-based judgments of team trust and impression. Because perceived quality is also known

to drive a brand's financial performance (Aaker, 1996), the remaining loaded item revealing how fans purchase player merchandise further supports the notion that they perceive quality in the team because of star players. In regard to brand reputation, the near synonymous linkage to tradition proposed by Gladden and Milne (1999) justified the fact that one of the items loading to the brand reputation factor showed that fans support a team because of traditions established by the star players. The other items showed that players can give team brands a reputation that will keep consumers pledging their allegiance to the cause for long periods of time.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLEMENTATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Indeed, the results of the EFA provided clout to the conclusion that consumers perceive quality, develop thoughts on a team's reputation, become aware of a team, shape their image of a team, contribute to team value, and remain loyal to a professional sports organization because of the presence of star players on the roster. In this instance, those players were characterized as superstars due to the fact that they contributed to team success, displayed exceptional skill within their respective craft, and possessed a leadership quality capable of making teammates around them better.

Aligning with the various stages of Shank's (2009) branding process and the brand equity framework proposed by Gladden and Milne (1999), the study yields results linking star players to brand awareness, brand image, brand equity, perceived quality, brand reputation, and brand loyalty. Such results may be viewed in the conceptual model labeled Figure 4. In light of these findings, professional sports organizations with supportive fan bases would be wise to leverage star players and other assets in order to attract and retain similar marquee athletes in the future.

Star Player Attributes (Mean)   **Star Player Effects** (% of Variance)

Contributes to Team Success (5.5916)	
Exceptional Skills (5.5208)	
Leadership (5.3452)	
Performs Well as an Individual (5.2251)	
Positive Public Image (5.1937)	
Charisma (5.1250)	
Overcomes Obstacles and Stereotypes (4.5104)	
Celebrity Status (4.3594)	
Attractiveness (3.8128)	

Star Player

Brand Loyalty (26.337)

Brand Awareness (14.526)

Brand Image (4.600)

Direct Brand Equity (4.133) — Brand Equity (52.527)

Perceived Quality (3.926)

Brand Reputation (3.603)

Figure 4. Conceptual Model Depicting Star Players' Effects on a Team's Branding Process. The above model displays the various relationships between star players and the areas of a professional team's branding process. It also shows the antecedent attributes of a star player in rank order.

50

Conclusions

Based on the findings within the limitations of this examination, the following conclusions were made:

1. Star players have a definite effect on the various areas of a professional sporting team's branding process. The EFA extracted six factors loaded with items that revealed and supported such a relationship.

2. A team's brand equity is an area highly influenced by star players, both directly and indirectly. It was shown that marquee athletes are not only capable of imparting a direct effect on the value of a team, but are also capable of indirectly affecting a brand's equity through the areas of brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand reputation.

3. Star players exert a significant amount of influence on fan loyalty and awareness of professional sports teams, as these athletes are capable of initially attracting fans to a team and ensuring that they remain loyal supporters for long periods of time.

4. *Cultural significance* is an attribute that is not agreed to be a prerequisite trait for superstardom amongst this sample of respondents. The attribute attained a mean showing that a majority of respondents disagreed when asked if it was characteristic of a star player.

5. Star players derive just as much meaning from team performances as they do from individual acts of brilliance. Even though *exceptional skill* came in second on the rank order of superstar characteristics, it was flanked by the most highly agreed upon trait, *contribution to team success*, and the third choice, *leadership*. Such information leads one to conclude that star players are also talented *team* players.

Implementations

The findings and conclusions of this study may be implemented in the academic, professional, and research settings in the following ways:

1. The results of the study could be used to supplement and expand the models presented by Shank (2009) and Gladden and Milne (1999) since the findings support various areas presented in their theoretical frameworks and lend to them in a specific fashion. Whether portraying the relationship between star players and four stages of the branding process, or showing more specific effects on brand equity, this study's results contribute to knowledge presented in the previous studies and adapt them for use in the professional sports realm.

2. Professional sport organizations would be wise to consider these results in their effort to attract, retain, and develop the top athletes for their teams. Discovering and leveraging the star player who is capable of attracting fans, shaping a positive team image, and raising loyalty amongst the fan base is important to teams as they seek to increase brand equity and distinguish themselves from the competition.

3. Because star players are capable of imparting such effects on a franchise's brand, teams would be wise to pay top dollar to those athletes who are adept at lending such value to the organization. Scouts and general managers should accordingly be on the lookout for value-adding marquee athletes, while coaches and management should groom current and prospective players for future success.

4. Similarly, players should work to brand themselves as team players with exceptional skill in order to become an attractive asset to professional sport organizations and the consuming fans. Although working hard to develop personal skills is important, the

athlete who can combine their expertise with leadership and a team-centered

mentality stands the best chance of obtaining superstar status in consumer minds and

holds the most potential value for a team.

5. Organizations should focus marketing and promotional efforts on star players since

they are shown to be viable links between teams and consumers. In specific, teams

who are attempting to raise awareness and build a loyal fan base would be wise to use

superstars as promotional agents in a culture that fixates on popular icons.

Implementing such tactics might involve player cameos at various events in the

community, the use of a star athlete on team billboards and season ticket campaigns,

or the appearance of a marquee player's name, number, or likeness, on a variety of

team-related merchandise.

6. The EFA provides researchers in this field with a feasible method for quantifying and

segmenting various areas of a professional team's branding process. The results of

this study and others (Ross, James, & Vargas, 2006) indicate that EFA can be

implemented in a variety of contexts, including the *professional sport* and *branding*

settings.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested for further research within this realm of

study:

1. Some notable trends emerged to show that star players contribute to factors affecting

the branding process of professional sports teams. Although such discoveries are

valuable, more research could be conducted to examine the reverse role that teams play in affecting various areas of player superstardom.

2. Further research is needed to examine the interrelationships between the various areas of the branding process. Even though EFA extracted and loaded specific factors to varying degrees, Confirmatory Factor Analysis or additional methods may yield even more insight to the various aspects of the branding process and the strength that star players hold in such areas.

3. Additionally, more extensive research might be conducted on the direct relationships between star player attributes and the areas of the branding process. Rather than focusing on the general effect of star players on branding areas, future studies could attempt to show how specific superstar attributes affect a team's branding process.

4. This study was performed on an adequate, yet relatively small sample size of 250 college students. Further research conducted on a larger sample size may yield additional results, particularly in the demographic area of ethnicity. Because 80.9% of respondents were White, further analysis is needed to gather responses from varying cultural groups. In the same sense, analyzing participant answers from students in additional regions of the United States might yield different results in regards to specific team and player loyalties.

5. This study could be constructed with a more team-specific focus that targets fans of specific professional sports organizations by examining the relationships between current star players and the branding process of those teams. Although the purpose of this particular study is broad in nature, future studies might limit the application to a

specific league or team in order to reduce generalizations and yield more customized results.

6. Future research might expand to examine the relationships of additional groups to the branding process of professional sports teams. Such groups may include coaches, family traditions, and geographic location, amongst others. Each area could be analyzed separately or in comparison to the star player relationship analyzed by this particular study.

7. Finally, further research should consider using qualitative methods in addition to the survey instrument deployed by this examination. Such research might lend further insight to the topic of study and broaden the framework under which the examination currently operates.

REFERENCES

Aaker, D. A. (1991). *Managing brand equity*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

Aaker, D. A. (1996). *Building strong brands: Capitalizing on the value of a brand name*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

Biswas, A., & Sherrell, D. L. (2006). The influence of product knowledge and brand name on internal price standards and confidence. *Psychology & Marketing*, *10*(1), 31-46.

Charbonneau, J., & Garland, R. (2006). The use of celebrity athletes as endorsers: Views of the New Zealand general public. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship, 7*(4), 326-333.

Coughlin, M. A., & Knight, W. (2007). Exploratory factor analysis. *AIR/SPSS Professional Development Series*.

Datson, T. (2004). Infidelity stories may hit Beckham's endorsements. *Yahoo News*.

Field, A. (2005). *Discovering statistics using SPSS* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.

Foster, G., Greyser, S. A., & Walsh, B. (2006). *The business of sports: Text and cases on strategy and management.* Mason, OH: Thomson South-Western.

Funk, D. C., & James, J. D. (2001). The Psychological Continuum Model: A conceptual framework for understanding an individual's psychological connection to sport. *Sport Management Review 4(2)*, 119-150.

Gamson, J. (1994). *Claims to fame: Celebrity in contemporary America*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

Garrahan, M. (2003, April 26). Becks, an international icon. *Financial Times*.

Gilmour, C., & Rowe, D. (2010). When Becks came to Sydney: Multiple readings of a sport celebrity. *Soccer & Society, 11*(3), 229-241.

Gladden, J. M., & Milne, G. R. (1999). Examining the importance of brand equity in professional sports. *Sport Marketing Quarterly, 8*(1), 21-29.

Gladden, J. N., & Funk, D. C. (2001). Understanding brand loyalty in professional sport: Examining the link between brand associations and brand loyalty. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship, 3*(1), 67-94.

Gladden, J. N., & Funk, D. C. (2002). Developing an understanding of brand associations in team sport: Empirical evidence from consumers of professional sport. *Journal of Sport Management, 16*(1), 54-81.

56

Goode, W. J. (1978). *The celebration of heroes: Prestige as a control system*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

Green, S. B., & Salkind, N. J. (2008). *Using SPSS for Windows and Macintosh: Analyzing and understanding data* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Hill, J. S., & Vincent, J. (2006). Globalisation and sports branding: The case of Manchester United. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship, 7*(3), 213-230.

Hutcheson, G. D., & Sofroniou, N. (1999). *The multivariate social scientist: Introductory statistics using generalized linear models*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Kaiser, H. F. (1970). A second generation little jiffy. *Psychometrika, 35*(4), 401-405.

Kaynak, E., Salman, G. G., & Tatoglu, E. (2007). An integrative framework linking brand associations and brand loyalty in professional sports. *Journal of Brand Management, 15*(5), 336-357.

Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing, 57*(1), 1-22.

Koll, O., & Wallpach, S. (2009). One brand perception? Or many? The heterogeneity of intra-brand knowledge. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *18*(5), 338-345.

Kootstra, G. J. (2004). Exploratory factor analysis: Theory and application. Retrieved October 1, 2012 from http://www.scribd.com/doc/103738250/Exploratory-Factor-Analysis-Kootstra-04.

Mael, R., & Ashforth, B. E. (1992). Alumni and their alma mater: A partial test of the reformulated model of organizational identification. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 13*(2), 102-123.

Mahony, D. F., Madrigal, R., & Howard, D. (2000). Using the psychological commitment to team (PCT) scale to segment sport consumers based on loyalty. *Sport Marketing Quarterly, 9*(1), 15-25.

Matuszewski, E. (2010, June 29). Lebron James's departure would cut value of NBA Cavaliers by $250 million. *Bloomberg.* Retrieved April 22, 2012, from http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2010-06-29/lebron-james-s-departure-may-cut-value-of-nba-s-cavaliers-by-250-million.html.

McCracken, G. (1989). Who is the celebrity endorser? Cultural foundations of the endorsement process. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *16*(3), 310-321.

McDonell, T. (2011, November 28). Sport in America. *Sports Illustrated, 115*(21), 70.

Milmo, C. (2003, April 16). Is there life after David Beckham? The Beckham industry. *The Independent*.

Ohanian, R. (1990). Construction and validation of a scale to measure celebrity endorsers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. *Journal of Advertising, 19*(3), 39-52.

Ozanian, M. (2011, January 26). The NBA's most valuable teams. *Forbes.* Retrieved April 22, 2012 from http://www.forbes.com/sites/mikeozanian/2011/01/26/the-nbas-most-valuable-teams-2/print/.

Roling, C. (2012, November 1). Tim Tebow not traded at deadline. But could Jets QB be moved this offseason? *Bleacher Report.* Retrieved November 27, 2012 from http://bleacherreport.com/articles/1393268-tim-tebow-not-traded-at-deadline-but-could-jets-qb-be-moved-this-offseason.

Rosen, S. (1981). The economics of superstars. *The American Economic Review, 71*(5), 845-858.

Ross, S. D., James, J. D., & Vargas, P. (2006). Development of a scale to measure team brand associations in professional sport. *Journal of Sport Management, 20*(2), 260-279.

Ross, S. D. (2007). Segmenting sport fans using brand associations: A cluster analysis. *Sport Marketing Quarterly, 16*(1), 15-24.

Shank, M. D. (2009). *Sports marketing: A strategic perspective* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Shuart, J. (2007). Heroes in sport: Assessing celebrity endorser effectiveness. *International Journal of Sports Marketing & Sponsorship, 8*(2), 126-140.

Smith, S., & Albaum, G. S. (2005). *Fundamentals of marketing research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Susman, W. (1984). *Culture as history: The transformation of American society in the twentieth century*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Sutton, W. A., McDonald, M. A., Milne, G. R., & Cimperman, J. (1997). Creating and fostering fan identification in professional sports. *Sport Marketing Quarterly, 6*(1), 15-22.

Torre, P. S. (2012, February 27). A run like no other. *Sports Illustrated, 116*(9), 73.

Wakefield, K. L., & Sloan, H. J. (1995). The effects of team loyalty and selected stadium factors on spectator attendance. *Journal of Sport Management, 9*(2), 153-172.

Wang, C. (2004). Capitalizing on the big man: Yao Ming, Asian America, and the China Global. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, 5*(2), 263-278.

Yang, Y., Shi, M., & Goldfarb, A. (2009). Estimating the value of brand alliances in professional team sports. *Marketing Science, 28*(6), 1095-1111.

Yang, Y., & Shi, M. (2011). Rise and fall of stars: Investigating the evolution of star status in professional team sports. *International Journal of Research in Marketing, 28*(4), 352-356.

Yu, C. (2005). Athlete endorsement in the international sports industry: A case study of David Beckham. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship, 6*(3), 189-199.

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

MARSHALL UNIVERSITY
www.marshall.edu

Office of Research Integrity
Institutional Review Board
401 11th St., Suite 1300
Huntington, WV 25701

FWA 00002704

IRB1 #00002205
IRB2 #00003206

September 26, 2012

Jennifer Mak, PhD
Kinesiology Department

RE: IRBNet ID# 379755-1
At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Mak:

Protocol Title:	[379755-1] An Examination of Star Players' Effects on the Branding Process of Professional Sports Teams

Expiration Date:	September 25, 2013	
Site Location:	MU	
Submission Type:	New Project	APPROVED
Review Type:	Exempt Review	

In accordance with 45CFR46.101(b)(2), the above study and informed consent were granted Exempted approval today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Designee for the period of 12 months. The approval will expire September 25, 2013. A continuing review request for this study must be submitted no later than 30 days prior to the expiration date.

This study is for student Nathan David Pifer.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Coordinator Michelle Woomer, B.A., M.S at (304) 696-4308 or woomer3@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

- 1 -

Generated on IRBNet

Appendix B: Stamped Consent Form

An Examination of Star Players' Effects on the Branding Process of Professional Sports Teams

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled "An Examination of Star Players' Effects on the Branding Process of Professional Sports Teams" that is designed to categorize star athletes and analyze the effect they have on the four stages of a professional sports teams' branding process. The study is being conducted by Dr. Jennifer Mak and Mr. N. David Pifer of Marshall University.

INFORMATION

The survey questionnaire will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. There are seven parts to the questionnaire: a) General Information, b) Consumer Preferences and Behaviors, c) Star Players, d) Brand Awareness, e) Brand Image, f) Brand Equity, and g) Brand Loyalty. No known risks are involved with this study.

BENEFITS

The purpose of this study is to provide important insights related to the effect star players have on the brand awareness, brand image, brand equity, and brand loyalty stages of a team's branding process. Further, this study seeks to identify key factors that define an athlete as a "star player." By revealing which components of the branding process are related to the effects of star athletes, and what factors cause an athlete to be labeled a "star," the examination contributes to a better understanding of star athletes and the roles they play in affecting the brands of professional sports teams.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All replies are anonymous and the information in the study records will be kept confidential. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link participants to the study.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Dr. Jennifer Y. Mak, at GH104E, Huntington, WV 25755, 1-(304) 696-2927, or mak@marshall.edu. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant you may contact the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity at (304) 696-4303.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may refuse to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed. By completing this survey and returning it you are confirming that you are 18 years of age or older. Please keep this page for your record.

Appendix C: Final Revised Questionnaire

An Examination of Star Players' Effects on the Branding Process of Professional Sports Teams

<u>You must be 18 or over to participate in this study.</u> Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may refuse to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The information in the study records will be kept confidential. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study.

Section A. General Information Please Check (☑) the appropriate box or fill in the appropriate blank

1. **Gender:** ☐¹ Male ☐² Female

2. **Marital Status:** ☐¹ Single ☐² Married ☐³ Other(s) _____

3. **Class Standing:** ☐¹ Freshman ☐² Sophomore ☐³ Junior ☐⁴ Senior
   ☐⁵ Masters ☐⁶ Doctorate ☐⁷ Other(s) _____

4. **How old are you?** _____ years old

5. **Ethnicity:** ☐¹ African American ☐² Asian ☐³ Hispanic ☐⁴ White ☐⁵ Native American ☐⁶ Other

Section B. Consumer Preferences and Behaviors Please Check (☑) the appropriate box

1. Are you a fan of any professional sports teams? ☐¹ Yes ☐² No

2. Do you have a favorite player(s) on the team(s)? ☐¹ Yes ☐² No

3. Do you own replica jerseys or other team merchandise associated with a past or present player
   on your favorite team? ☐¹ Yes ☐² No

4. What professional sports do you follow?

   ☐¹ Football   ☐⁴ Hockey

   ☐² Basketball   ☐⁵ Soccer

   ☐³ Baseball   ☐⁶ Other_____

5. For how long have you been a fan of your favorite team?

   ☐¹ Less than a year   ☐⁴ 10-14 years

   ☐² 1-4 years   ☐⁵ 15+ years

   ☐³ 5-9 years

6. Please state the name of your favorite team:_____

7. Please state the name of your favorite player:_____

8. What level of fan would you consider yourself to be (please CIRCLE the appropriate number)?

Not a Fan	Occasional/ Fair-weather Fan	Somewhat Involved	Involved	Highly Involved
1	2	3	4	5

9. Would you agree that your favorite player is a star player on the team (please CIRCLE the appropriate number)?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6

10. How often do you do the following in regards to your favorite team (please CIRCLE the appropriate number)?

	Never	Very Rarely	Rarely	Moderately	Often	Quite Often	Very Often
1 Watch/listen to coverage and games of my favorite team when in season...	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2 Read printed/online media related to my team...........	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3 Purchase/receive merchandise related to my team....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4 Attend a sporting event of my favorite team in person...	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Section C. Star Players

Using the scale below, please CIRCLE the appropriate number that indicates to what extent you agree or disagree that each of the following items is a characteristic of a star player.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1 Charisma (personality, sharpness, speaking ability, swagger)....	1	2	3	4	5	6
2 Exceptional skills (possesses skill and athletic ability that few others can replicate)..	1	2	3	4	5	6
3 Attractiveness (good looks, sex appeal).................................	1	2	3	4	5	6
4 Leadership (the ability to make teammates better).....................	1	2	3	4	5	6
5 Celebrity status (the athlete captures society's attention on and off the field/court)..	1	2	3	4	5	6
6 Positive public image (serves the community, stays out of trouble)..	1	2	3	4	5	6
7 Cultural significance (Asians in the NBA, Americans in Europe)..	1	2	3	4	5	6
8 Performs well as an individual (wins personal awards, has good stats, all-star appearances)...............................	1	2	3	4	5	6
9 Contributes to the team's success (helps the team win games and championships)..	1	2	3	4	5	6
10 Found success by overcoming obstacles and stereotypes (rose from poverty to fame, overcame physical limitations)..........	1	2	3	4	5	6

Section D. Star Player Effects on Professional Sports Teams

Using the scale below, please CIRCLE the appropriate number to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements as they relate to star players' effects on a professional team.

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	I first become aware of a team because of its star players......	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	Star athletes are good promotional spokesmen for their teams..	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	Star players of a specific nationality raise awareness for their teams in those countries...........................	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	I recognize a team's brand when I see its star players...........	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	I become more aware of a team when it signs a star player....	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	The skills and performances of a star player generate exposure for the team...............................	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	Star players generate additional media exposure for the team....	1	2	3	4	5	6
8	Star players spread the team's brand (logo, name, colors) to new audiences...........................	1	2	3	4	5	6
9	I am aware of a team because the players help it win more games..............................	1	2	3	4	5	6
10	I am aware of a team because I purchase player merchandise....	1	2	3	4	5	6
11	Star players with good reputations impose a positive image on their team...........................	1	2	3	4	5	6
12	I have a greater trust in teams that have star players...........	1	2	3	4	5	6
13	My impressions of a team are shaped by its star players...	1	2	3	4	5	6
14	I think more highly of a team if it signs a star player...........	1	2	3	4	5	6
15	I think less of a team if it releases a star player..................	1	2	3	4	5	6
16	Star players with bad reputations impose a negative image on their team...........................	1	2	3	4	5	6
17	I am more impressed by teams with star players.................	1	2	3	4	5	6
18	Star athletes who give back to the community are beneficial to their team's image..........................	1	2	3	4	5	6
19	Star players shape the team's brand image.........................	1	2	3	4	5	6
20	Star players' actions can affect team image in a positive or negative way.....................................	1	2	3	4	5	6

21	A star player delivers wins to a team..	1	2	3	4	5	6
22	Multiple star players deliver even more wins to a team...........	1	2	3	4	5	6
23	I want to buy team merchandise because of the star players on the team...	1	2	3	4	5	6
24	I will purchase tickets for a game when star players are on the team...	1	2	3	4	5	6
25	Having star players on a team adds value to the organization's brand..	1	2	3	4	5	6
26	A newly signed star athlete will improve the value of the team	1	2	3	4	5	6
27	High-profile athletes bring further media revenue to a team....	1	2	3	4	5	6
28	The loss of a star player diminishes the team's value.............	1	2	3	4	5	6
29	Star athletes can raise the performance level of their teammates	1	2	3	4	5	6
30	I would not renew season tickets if the team lost its star players.	1	2	3	4	5	6
31	I will not support a team if its star players leave...................	1	2	3	4	5	6
32	I decide to support one team over another because of the star players on that team..	1	2	3	4	5	6
33	I will recommend a team to others because of its players....	1	2	3	4	5	6
34	I support a team because of the traditions established by star players..	1	2	3	4	5	6
35	Star players give me an emotional connection to the team...	1	2	3	4	5	6
36	I am more likely to support a team that has star players on its roster..	1	2	3	4	5	6
37	I support a team because of the star athletes on the team...	1	2	3	4	5	6
38	I will stop supporting a team if new star players are not brought in...	1	2	3	4	5	6
39	I will continue following a losing team if it has star players on its roster...	1	2	3	4	5	6
40	A past or present star player will keep me supporting the team for a long period of time...	1	2	3	4	5	6

Thank you for your participation in this study. Please return the questionnaire to the administrator and have a nice day.

1

VITA

N. DAVID PIFER
M.S. Sport Administration
B.A. Business

1300 Peter Pan Rd.
Lookout Mountain, GA 30750

Phone: 423.994.4148
Email: ndpifer@gmail.com

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Marshall University	M.S. Sport Administration	Aug. 2011-Dec. 2012
Covenant College	B.A. Business	Aug. 2007-May 2011

WORK EXPERIENCE

Sports Information Assistant	Marshall University	Aug. 2011-Dec. 2012

- Handled media relations duties for the soccer, tennis, track and field, golf, and cross country programs
- Wrote recaps, previews, and feature stories for various sporting events
- Designed posters, media guides, and other publications for the teams
- Managed the social networking sites and official webpages for each team
- Was responsible for game day management at the various sporting events

Interim Sports Information Director	Covenant College	Summer 2012

- Served as Covenant College's head Sports Information Director over the summer
- Transitioned the athletics department from an old website to a new one
- Updated, designed, and ran the new website
- Handled press release duties for events that occurred over the summer

Golf Club Staff Member	Lookout Mountain Golf Club	Summer 2011, 2012

- Assisted club professionals in upkeep of the pro shop, driving range, cart barn, and other facilities
- Helped with the management of outings and events at the golf course
- Served club members in a variety of daily functions

Journalism and Marketing Intern	Chattanooga Football Club	Summer 2010

- Wrote game recaps, previews, and feature stories for the semi-professional soccer team
- Helped manage the team's official website and social networking sites
- Traveled as the team's official journalist to Washington D.C.
- Helped in a variety of marketing areas, including promotions and media relations

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Teaching Practicum	Marshall University	Fall 2012

- Lectured for the Introduction to Sport Management undergraduate class
- Formulated lesson plans, lecture slides, quizzes, and in-class activities
- Assisted in the process of grading and recording student scores

Student-Athlete Tutor	Marshall University	Fall 2012

- Assisted NCAA Div. I student-athletes in a variety of academic capacities
- Tutored student-athletes in business, statistics, and sport management classes

HONORS AND AWARDS

Dean's List	Covenant College	2010, 2008, 2007
NCCAA All-American	Covenant College Men's Soccer	2011
NCCAA All-Region	Covenant College Men's Soccer	2010-2011

PUBLICATIONS

Graduate Thesis	Marshall University	2012

An Examination of Star Players' Effects on the Branding Process of Professional Sports Teams

Undergraduate Thesis	Covenant College	2011

The Marketing Methods of the World's Largest Sporting Events

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA)	2011-2013

SKILLS AND PROFICIENCIES

- Adobe InDesign, Photoshop, Acrobat, and Illustrator
- Microsoft Word, Excel, Outlook, and Windows
- Blackboard
- StatCrew
- Netitor and PrestoSports