



Professional sports teams: Going beyond the core

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Professional sports teams: Going beyond the core

Abstract

Purpose- The addition of products to the core of matches by Professional Sports Teams (PSTs) has received much coverage. However, there has been limited work as to how their stadiums are used to stage non-sporting events. This paper investigates how clubs in the English Football League (EFL) use their venues to diversify into other markets.

Design/methodology- Secondary sources were used to categorise the teams who played in the EFL by: average division turnover, stadium capacity and stadium age. Semi-structured interviews were held with a member of the commercial teams of 21 clubs.

Findings- Clubs use their stadiums to supply a range of products and working with partners is commonplace. These products are targeted at a range of stakeholders, such as supporters, the local community and regionally based organisations. In addition to their own efforts, increased geographical coverage for clubs usually develops in three ways: via internal marketing by local organisations who use the facilities, agents who market the stadium for the club, and the EFL who market the league/clubs holistically.

Research limitations/implications- The use of a stadium allows PSTs to diversify by providing new products for new markets. In this instance it has led to the development of capabilities in areas such as conferencing, funerals and weddings.

Originality- This is one of the first papers to examine the capabilities developed by PSTs that lie outside the staging of matches.

Keywords- Facilities utilization, Professional sports teams (PSTs), Sports products, Stadiums

Article classification: Research paper

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Introduction

In the existing literature concerning the marketing of sport leagues and professional sports teams (PSTs) most of the research has focused on the notion of a core product. Defined by Mason (1999, p.404) in the context of football as a 'series of league games with an uncertain outcome'. As a result, researchers have examined the way PSTs attempt to increase income related to the product on the field (Richelieu, 2016) via: brand extensions (Apostolopoulou, 2002); broadcasting of matches and sponsorship of leagues/teams (Plumley *et al.*, 2018); the development of global markets (Richelieu and Desbordes, 2013; Richelieu *et al.*, 2008); sport tourism (Ginesta, 2017) and sports museums (Magalhães *et al.*, 2017). This has meant that the focus has been predominantly on the teams in the top leagues across the globe as they have the resources to develop product portfolios and markets.

As a consequence, there has been limited interest in PSTs that play in leagues outside the top level and which have far lower turnover (Oddy and Bason, 2017). Given that lower league clubs represent the majority of teams in the sport sector, and may operate in a different manner, there is a need to conduct research into these clubs (Moore and Levermore, 2012). The limited revenue from broadcasting, sponsorship and attendance at matches means that lower league clubs may need to diversify their activities, in order to help them maintain professional status (Musso *et al.*, 2016). One way to do this is through using their stadiums to stage non-sporting events, such as conferences and social functions, which are not aimed at fans of the team (Parish *et al.*, 2014; Pritchard, 2016). Although PSTs in the top leagues may also utilise their stadium for events (Apostolopoulou, 2002), this generates a far lower proportion of total revenue than sponsorship and broadcasting (Deloitte, 2017; Plumley *et al.*, 2018).

The empirical setting for this paper is the English Football League (EFL) which was founded in 1888 and consists of 72 teams (Buraimo *et al.*, 2006). The top tier of English football the English Premier League (EPL) which had previously been part of the EFL broke away in 1992, see table 1 for an outline of the structure. Despite being a 'second tier competition' it is amongst the top ten revenue generating leagues in Europe (Wilson *et al.*, 2018). Several authors have included EFL teams when examining the football industry, in terms of: business practices (Moore and Levermore, 2012); financial problems (Beech *et al.*, 2010); and social media use (Anagnostopoulos *et al.*, 2017). There is a general consensus that these PSTs are constrained financially but little research has examined how they might alleviate these problems.

A large difference in annual revenue exists between PSTs in the EPL and EFL. The former has been very successful in selling broadcasting rights to games both in the UK and internationally (Deloitte, 2017). The latter as a lower tier league does not attract as much interest, both domestically and globally (see table 1). As a result, EFL clubs need to develop a product portfolio that goes beyond the core of hosting matches, as income from this source may be insufficient to survive (Leach and Szymanski, 2015; Pritchard, 2016). Furthermore PSTs differ in a number of ways from generic businesses: many are long established in their area of operation (Moore and Levermore, 2012), they have a core of loyal customers even though the number is small (Buraimo *et al.*, 2006), and being embedded in their communities makes intrusion difficult for competitors (Anagnostopoulos *et al.*, 2017). A further difference to most businesses is that they may be able to adapt their facilities, in this case a stadium, to stage events in order to generate additional revenue (Lee *et al.*, 2015).

It is within this context that the paper aims to question whether the core definition as 'providers of a series of games with an uncertain outcome' (Mason, 1999, p.404) is an accurate indicator of what these PSTs do. The notion of 'league' is removed from the definition as EFL clubs have a guaranteed 23 home league matches in a season, but will also play at least two games

in other competitions during this season. We examine how the resource of a stadium is used by PSTs in order to expand their product portfolio and to diversify into new markets. The paper proceeds to analyse the factors that influence additions to the clubs' range and considers if this leads to the development of competences that are unrelated to the core product. The investigation starts by reviewing the literature concerning the streams of income for PSTs and how stadiums are used for non-core activities. The methodology is then outlined before findings are reported. The paper concludes by explaining the contribution to both theory and practice, discussing its limitations and outlining scope for further research.

Literature review

Revenue sources of PSTs have attracted academic attention for a number of years. Four streams of income have been identified: spectators, broadcasters, sponsors and local communities (Mason, 1999). Andreff and Staudohar (2000) contrast income by geographical source, identifying two types of PSTs. Those that generate income from spectators-subsidies-sponsors-locally (SSSL) and those that have expanded and earn revenue from media-corporations-merchandising and markets that are global in scope (MCMMG).

More recent research has focused on how PSTs that play in the top leagues have tried to increase spending by both spectators and corporations. Desbordes and Richelieu (2012) coined the term 'vipization' of sport to describe how PSTs have become increasingly interested in prioritizing spending on higher priced corporate seats and lounges to the detriment of the average fan. Ginesta (2017) observes how the leading Spanish football teams all offer hospitality and events packages to both corporations and individuals. In Portugal FC Porto added a museum to attract both national and international visitors (Magalhães *et al.*, 2017). According to Richelieu (2016) those PSTs who develop a strong global brand experience 'irrational fan behaviour'. Terming this the 'financiarization' of sport, it results in increased

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3 spending by their fans both in and out of the stadium, much to the satisfaction of corporate
4 stakeholders. However, there is a lack of consensus as to the extent PSTs owners pursue profit
5 orientation in the UK market at the expense of team performance (Leach and Szymanski, 2015;
6 Olson *et al.*, 2016).
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13 Increasing income and profiting from fans is more difficult for PSTs who do not play in the top
14 leagues. This is challenging because of the smaller numbers of supporters (Buraimo *et al.*,
15 2006), together with the limited organisational and financial resources of these PSTs (Musso
16 *et al.*, 2016). According to Richelieu (2016) global sporting customers are looking to associate
17 themselves with premier brands that are leaders in their category (such as the EPL), as opposed
18 to brands from lower tier leagues like the EFL. Other authors agree that that it is difficult for
19 some teams and leagues to expand geographically and, as such, they need to generate income
20 locally (Couvelaere and Richelieu 2005; Richelieu and Desbordes, 2013). As a result they may
21 need to add to their core product offering, by using their facilities to derive income from non-
22 sporting events (Pritchard, 2016). These additions to the portfolio may also be provided in
23 conjunction with external partners as the PSTs may not have the resources to deliver them or
24 be prepared to take the financial risk (Manoli and Hodgkinson, 2017). Although as has been
25 previously recognised, to do this the PST needs to have ownership or a lease on the stadium
26 (Beech *et al.*, 2010). Wilson *et al.* (2015) in an investigation of the finances of clubs in the UK
27 rugby Super League argue that co-ownership of venues with other sports teams is likely to
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51 Using sports stadiums as a multi-purpose venue has primarily been examined in the context of
52 Minor League Baseball (MiLB) in North America (Lee *et al.*, 2015). There are similarities
53 between the EFL and MiLB in that both competitions are not the highest level of their
54 respective sport, receive limited media exposure and stadium sizes are in some instances
55 similar (see table 1). However, a notable difference is that the franchise system in North
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American sport means that teams cannot be promoted/ relegated to divisions where they would earn higher/lower income (Pritchard, 2011). Moreover, it is common for local authorities in North America to use subsidies as a way of attracting teams to their area and retaining them once there (Parrish *et al.*, 2014).

Kim *et al.* (2013) note that modern stadiums, though primarily built for sport, have multi-purpose use in mind. They investigated how North American sports stadiums have been used to host non-sporting events in order to generate extra profit and revenue when matches were not being played. However, they also point out the need to develop a specific position in the very competitive events markets. Parrish *et al.* (2014) focused on the non-sporting events offered by teams in MiLB, their analysis of stadium websites showing the most popular events marketed to be: birthday parties, business meetings, business social outings, weddings and conventions/trade shows. Sports stadiums are not a typical site for conferences and events, so there is a need to market to event organizers who may not be aware of the venue capabilities. These are likely to include: staff experienced in event planning, infrastructure, and accessibility (Lee *et al.*, 2015).

As Lee *et al.* (2015) point out those stadia whose primary use is sport may find it difficult to stage non-sporting events on the days of matches. Other restrictions include having to comply with the conditions of league membership (Hamil and Walters, 2010); adhering to broadcasting commitments, which are often sold collectively by the leagues as opposed to the clubs (Plumley *et al.*, 2018); safety requirements (Stadium Grounds Safety Authority [SGSA], 2018); and engaging in charitable activities (Babiak and Wolfe, 2009). Although these factors have been identified within the literature, there has been little empirical work that attempts to examine their influence on how stadiums are used and the type of non-sporting events that are staged. This paper aims to use the context of EFL clubs to gain a

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3 better understanding of: the influences on these events, the markets they serve, their use of
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5 partners in supplying the range and competences that are developed.
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10 11 12 **Methodology**

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15 The study used a qualitative approach which combined two main methods of data collection:
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17 document analysis and semi-structured interviews. In stage one, documentary analysis was
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19 undertaken in order to provide background information on the clubs. Content analysis is a
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21 prevalent research method as websites and publications provide easy access to information on
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23 the range of off-field activities undertaken by PSTs (Lee *et al.*, 2012). A range of sources
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25 were used including: club websites, stadium websites (Football-Stadiums.co.uk, 2017),
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27 football annuals (Sky Sports, 2017) and industry reports (Deloitte, 2017). These sources led
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29 to the collection of information about individual teams and stadiums helping increase the
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31 validity of the research (Couvelaere and Richelieu, 2005). This built a picture of the 80 clubs
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33 who played in the EFL for the three seasons commencing 2015-16. Using this data allows
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35 for the grouping of clubs by league turnover, stadium age and capacity to highlight the
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37 differences between them, see table 1. Previous research has noted the difference between
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39 teams' resources (Wilson *et al.*, 2018).
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46 For stage two, a qualitative approach was judged to be appropriate as it enabled the
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48 generation of valuable insights and unexplored accounts from key personnel in the industry
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50 (Moore and Levermore, 2012). This should lead to a better understanding into the reasoning
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52 behind decisions that were made concerning the addition of non-core products. All 80 of the
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54 clubs mentioned above were contacted by email, to try and arrange a telephone interview
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56 with a senior member of the commercial staff. Eight questions were asked relating to the use
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58 of the stadium, see appendix one. The interview commenced by asking three questions as to
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3 how the stadium had been utilised to make additions to the portfolio (Pritchard, 2016). Two
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5 questions were then asked concerning the use of partners as previous work identifies co-
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7 operation with other organisations as commonplace (Manoli and Hodgkinson, 2017). The
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9 next two questions concerned geographical markets to determine if the clubs were mainly
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11 regional operators (Andreff and Staudohar, 2000; Couvelaere and Richelieu 2005).
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13 Interviews concluded with a question regarding the expertise that had been developed as a
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15 result of these additions.
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21 Of the 80 clubs contacted, 21 responded and semi-structured interviews were held with a
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23 member of the staff at each of these clubs. Of these respondents: seven were chief
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25 executives/directors, seven were commercial /marketing managers and seven were
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27 commercial/marketing executives. Securing a sample of this size is difficult as gaining access
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29 to the management of PSTs is challenging (Olson *et al.*, 2016). Six of these clubs said they
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31 would prefer to answer by email, a request that was accommodated. Each of the remaining
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33 oral interviews lasted between 30 minutes and an hour. The interviews were then transcribed
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35 with responses coded manually by the first named author. Thematic analysis using the
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37 groupings identified in the paragraph above was used to examine the data (Braun and Clarke,
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39 2006). The first named author selected the quotes used below making sure a range of
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41 respondents were used to contrast experiences, an approach suggested in the sporting
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43 literature (Puente-Díaz, 2018). These were deliberated with the other five co-authors who as
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45 “critical friends” provided feedback and reflections on interpretations of the data, so as to
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47 enhance academic rigour (Smith and McGannon, 2017). The interview schedule specifically
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49 focused on four areas (ownership, product lines, partners and markets served). In addition to
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51 these, a further theme was identified through the coding process. The themes are listed below
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53 and capture important patterns about the manner in which stadiums were used and the
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55 reasoning behind services that were offered.
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1. Ownership influence- the extent to which the owner(s) influences the portfolio that can be offered.
2. Product lines offered that were not related to football- have clubs extended beyond the core of football matches?
3. Organisations partnered with to provide products/services- do they use partners to provide those parts of the portfolio that go beyond the core?
4. Markets served – do these extend beyond football supporters?
5. Expertise and capabilities developed not related to football- if they have extended beyond the core has it led to the development of skills in other areas?

The interviews helped corroborate and develop findings from secondary sources concerning the use of the stadium. A limitation of this line of inquiry is that there may be some inaccuracy because of the problem of recall. Reflexivity also may be problematic as the interviewer may have unknowingly influenced respondents due to the conversational nature of the interview and the wording of the email (Yin, 2014). This to some extent was avoided by reviewing documents in stage one, allowing interviewers to prompt respondents about the product portfolio. The five themes identified are discussed in the results section below.

Results

Table 1 below provides a profile of the teams who played in the EFL for the three seasons commencing 2015-16. It illustrates the wide disparity in income between EPL and EFL teams, and also highlights the large differences within the EFL leagues. The average revenue for a Championship club (the second tier) is nearly four times that of those in League One (the third tier) and seven times that of those in League Two (the fourth tier). More than half

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of the EFL stadiums are over 70 years old but have been renovated over the years in order to keep in line with safety requirements (SGSA, 2018). An old stadium is not necessarily a drawback, as heritage is often used in marketing by clubs (Hill and Vincent, 2006). Stadium capacity also tends to be smaller for clubs in Leagues One and Two, which restricts the size of events they can stage.

TABLE ONE PLACE HERE

Ownership influence

A number of the clubs do not own the stadium they play in. However, long term leases allow its use in order to provide non-core products (Beech *et al.*, 2010). There was only one exception with a participant stating that ‘unfortunately we don’t own the stadium, so we don’t have any say in what goes on here during the daytime and outside of match days’. As a result the club is only able to use the facility for football (10B). Another who did own their stadium contracts out all non-match day events to a third party who have an office within the venue (12C).

Some clubs said that the local council owned the stadium and they lease it from them with few restrictions placed on what products/services they can offer (5A, 6A, 17B, 20A). This form of ownership can prove to be advantageous, because it can lead to the council using the facilities for functions (5A). Of the clubs that were part of corporations outside the sport industry most operate as separate business units. One participant said that they have little to do operationally with their owners, although they have offices in the stadium (7C).

Product lines offered that were not related to football

Aside from the single exception, all other PSTs provide a portfolio that goes beyond the core of staging matches and in particular the hosting of conferences and events. This is consistent with the findings of Parrish *et al.*'s (2014). As one respondent said 'we are a dedicated conference and events centre' (8B). Another commented on the importance of non-match day revenue, 'I think football has now become a business and you are looking to generate revenue every day, even weekends when you are not playing. Certainly the conferencing has seen an increase' (6A).

The flexibility of the clubs is evident by the range of events they host. These include: exhibitions, musical concerts, birthday parties, Christmas parties, graduation events, weddings, funeral wakes and even at one club, examinations (16B). As one put it 'there is a vast scale of things we can do on the conference side [...] we are open to everything' (9B). Some clubs also generate regular sources of income by letting out offices, storage space and their car parks, with one even using it for motor cycle training (2A). Another had let rooms for over a year to a dance studio (21B). A number commented that they stage more non-sporting events than matches (14B, 15C, 19C).

A constraint on staging non-sporting events is match commitments. Playing 23-30 games at a stadium each season with a pitch preparation time of at least three days (20A), reduces the availability of the stadium. This was particularly so with weddings, as they require extensive planning and are normally booked a year in advance. As a result, potential bookings have to be rejected as there may be a clash with future fixtures. This is exacerbated by the majority of matches being played at weekends when facilities are normally required. Further pitch

renovations often takes place during the summer months impacting on visual appeal (15C, 17B). However, clubs in many instances are able to match stadium resources to the needs of the local community as illustrated by the comments below:

Something I am really proud of is the fact that we are really busy for funerals. I tell you how it came about. We know that there is an emotive link with us and football fans. So we are often their first port of call when it comes to the reception. They think dad was a football fan why do we not look at them for the funeral reception/wake. What I did was make contact with funeral directors in the area (15C).

We have also set up a park and walk scheme at the club, this is paid on a quarterly or annual basis. This was introduced when strict parking restrictions were introduced around the town centre making it more expensive for local professionals (4A).

However, three of the teams revealed that they are currently restricted by the age, location and size of the stadium but are planning to move to a new facility (1A, 11B, 17B). All three of these clubs were at the time of the interviews in Leagues One and Two, moving to a new multi-purpose venue would allow for more non-match day events to be staged. One respondent commented that 'where we are and what we have is a great historic football club and stadium, but it is very tricky trying to get more out of it than that' (17B). Additional revenue for a PST could be used to improve the team in the hope that it would help gain promotion to a higher league. As stated previously, North American sport is different, as the franchise system does not allow for movement between leagues (Pritchard, 2016).

Organisations worked with to provide products /services

All of the clubs, with the single exception noted above (10B), work with other companies to host events. For example, one club who utilise their stadiums for music concerts stated ‘most of these events now are designed and delivered through concert promoters [...]. We would always work with a promoter, we would never do anything off our own back’ (13C). Other clubs try to use their own staff but if necessary use partners. One said of working with partners, ‘We have teamed up with very specialist organizations when we do not have the appropriate skill set ‘in-house’ e.g. for Asian weddings’ (14B). One commercial manager stated that they tried to organise these but found it difficult and decided to work with specialists about two years ago:

We spent a year getting five Asian caterers to work alongside us [...]. They have marketing tools themselves, so they are helping us with marketing. We are talking to them about putting together a bridal fare so you are using the expertise of others to sell our services and promote our business (15C).

For those clubs with smaller stadiums, different approaches to catering emerged:

We use suppliers locally, catering and we will take a percentage cut. We find it much more effective because it is very much ad-hoc you are not doing the same things every week. You need to be able to call on professionals. [...] We get approached, we joined the local Chamber of Commerce. Yesterday they had a mini-exhibition here. I find it a good way of meeting all local businesses (5A).

These findings corroborate work by Manoli and Hodgkinson (2017) who found that resource scarcity and cost minimisation are acknowledged as drivers of the decision to work with partners. What is also evident is the flexibility of these PSTs and their ability to draw on the expertise of others on either an ad-hoc or long term basis. This is reflected in a number of clubs adding events after being approached by organisations to use the stadium, for instance one club allow their supporters to operate a Sunday market (11B). The partners clubs work with tend to be situated in close geographical proximity to the stadium. A further benefit of these commercial partnerships is that users of the stadium, such as Asian wedding planners are able to market the facilities of the club to their own customers.

Markets served

Most of the clubs interviewed, regardless of stadium size, market the team and the facilities separately as they view them as different markets:

The football is marketed to fans and the wider public looking to watch live sport.

Conferencing and event facilities are marketed at businesses and individuals. There may at times be some cross over i.e. Christmas parties booked up by sponsors and corporate clients (18B).

For some clubs resource scarcity is a problem (Moore and Levermore, 2012). One of the clubs pointed out that lack of commercial staff limits the activities that the club can undertake (4A). Therefore, several clubs attempted to market events such as parties, concerts and weddings to fans of the team and football matches to users of the stadium facilities. This was

summed up by one respondent who stated that they 'market facilities to fans and football to facility users' (11B). Another respondent made the point 'Joe Bloggs who stands on the big bank and watches us maybe a businessman, he might not sit in the corporate area' (6A).

Clubs use a number of channels to promote to these potential customers, such as advertising on their website or in the match day programme. In other cases 'season ticket holders were given a loyalty card and conference voucher which entitles them to discount on bookings' (4A). Others mentioned using their supporter database, website and social media to market facilities to supporters (3A, 19C). What most could not quantify was how successful this is, although a number of respondents commented that anecdotal evidence suggests cross-selling works. This is consistent with previous finding in UK cricket (Pritchard, 2016).

From a geographical perspective, it is clear that clubs seek to develop lines that are aimed at their local community. They market both business to consumer (B2C) and business to business and organisations (B2B) (Agha, 2013). For instance, one respondent notes that they are able to hold one or two funerals a week, because they are known by the local funeral directors (5A). One commented that 'a lot of our business is reactive but we try and get to networking events and read local business magazines to get insight in to other businesses and what they may be doing in the future' (8B). Those with larger stadiums try to expand their geographical reach. Primarily because: they have larger room capacity, greater financial resources, and more specialist staff. This gives clubs a wider potential client base, highlighted by three clubs, who all play in the Championship, staging both national and international exhibitions (13C, 15C, 19C).

However, facilities can constrain the geographical markets a PST can serve. For instance a club in League One commented that they are stifled by their existing stadium but suggested

‘when it is developed we will market our conference facilities to a far greater area. Becoming more regional as opposed to city based, probably using agents’ (11B). Another club in the same league claim they benefit from their central location and transport links for conference and events. As a result they are able to exploit this advantage and market their venue nationwide (14B). Two other clubs, in Leagues One and Two, pointed out that although most of their business is local, organisations who use their facilities help to expand their geographical reach. Both work locally with the National Health Service (NHS), who in turn use the PST’s facilities to stage conferences and meetings for their partner organisations. This brings NHS staff from other parts of the country to the stadium for corporate events (9B, 21B).

Expertise and capabilities developed not related to football

Most participants seemed to find this difficult to articulate and tended to be very modest about what they did. It was perhaps best described by one respondent who said of his assistant:

Running a function [...] we get approached by people. They will come up with things they want to do [...] while we will accommodate anything within reason he has the expertise to say you can do this but you might want to consider doing it this way.

People appreciate that and its works well (5A).

The ability to be flexible and tailor services was endorsed by another who said:

I would not say in particular, no. It's probably better gauging companies, what they are after and tailoring to their needs [...] we are very flexible, you go to some places they are very regimented. With us being so small we will say we will do what you want in order for it to work (9B).

Other participants also reflect the ability to adapt: 'I would not say we have expertise in very specific areas but we are able to put on a wide range of events' (14B). Another said, 'How to promote and run a relatively successful venue, what sells what does not sell. We have created a niche market for ourselves' (1A). One of the respondents commented on the issue of finding a position in the market. Pointing out that the resource of the stadium, and particularly the pitch, acts as a differentiator meaning they are capable of staging an event in a slightly different way:

If you are a regular conference goer to a hotel of some kind that is fairly similar all across the country why do you not come to a football club where you can have your lunch in the directors box, look at the pitch you can sit in a room where you have trophies and placards. We focus on the fact we are a football club and there is a quirky mixture to it [...] some national companies like this quirkiness when they are booking venues (3A).

The ability to position their PST in the conference market was endorsed by another: 'There is something nice you know, instead of going to a hotel it's nice to go somewhere and look at some green grass (laughing). They [customers] love that' (6C). The issue of aesthetics as a selling point has been highlighted in a North American context (Lee *et al.*, 2015). There were other examples of niches that clubs have developed. Several stadiums have been hosting

breakfast clubs for local professionals such as solicitors and accountants for many years (7C, 17C, 19C, 21B). Another respondent pointed out that they have been complimented on the service provided at funerals, as they personalise this by having the staff stand outside the stadium when the hearse passes the ground (15C). For the club which stages exams, they approach educational institutions and have developed a reputation locally that leads to them receiving staging requests (16B). Although there are a wide range of events and approaches the research found that stadia use goes beyond the core of purely staging matches. Instead stadiums are viewed as multi-purpose venues providing a range of non-sporting events that are aimed at the needs of the local environment.

Discussion and Conclusions

EFL clubs use their stadiums as multi-purpose venues, with football matches being only part of the portfolio of products offered. Only one of the 21 clubs interviewed was unable to use the stadium in a manner unrelated to football. The addition of non-sports events to diversify into new markets is consistent with previous findings (Lee *et al.*, 2015; Pritchard, 2016), although for some of these events football supporters form only part of the target market. This to some extent results in the ‘financiarization’ of sport if match attenders are spending more money at the club (Richelieu, 2016). However, this revenue is not related to sport and as Musso *et al.* (2016) observe for small sports clubs other sources of revenue from supporters are needed to help in maintaining economic viability. There may be some element of ‘vipization’ with the sales of corporate seats and lounges to organisations (B2B), if clubs succeed in cross-selling the core product to non-match day customers (Desbordes and Richelieu, 2012).

Club ownership, league commitments and the environment all influence the range of EFL clubs, although the latter varies by PST. The ability to use the stadium is more important than

ownership of it, supporting the work of Beech *et al.* (2010). It emerged from the interviews that the portfolio offered is often linked to providing service to the local, as opposed to the national, community (Couvelaere and Richelieu, 2005). However, league (and potentially cup competition) commitments place a restriction on the hosting of events. The need for at least three days of preparation results in the pitch being unavailable for over 90 days a year. This is particularly restrictive in terms of events such as weddings that require substantial planning and can clash with matches and ground maintenance.

The clubs with bigger stadiums, within the C Category, use the facility to expand into a wider geographical area and offer larger scale events, all were in the Championship at the time of data collection. PSTs with smaller stadiums, who are constrained by capacity and finance, are predominantly in the lower two leagues, and generate less income than those in the Championship, (see table 1). Due to the constraints of the stadium, smaller clubs tend to concentrate on local markets. In considering other factors which influence the provision of non-core products, stadium age was not suggested to be as important as location. Several of the stadia mentioned, are over a hundred years old but have been modernised over the years to facilitate the provision of the events portfolio discussed previously. As a result stadium development, economic growth of the location and transport play a greater role than age in how the venue is used. Two respondents indicated that as more housing was built, access to the stadium has become more difficult. Transport time has increased discouraging both individual and corporate customers as well as prospective event organisers (17B, 20A). The latter group are important due to the reliance on partners help in marketing the venue (Manoli and Hodgkinson, 2017).

Mason, (1999) defined the core product of PSTs as a ‘series of league games with an uncertain outcome’. However, in this instance that definition only accounts for some of the usage of stadiums. Focusing only on sport is not always sufficient to maintain financial viability and

teams outside the top leagues need to add other products/services. Our first theoretical contribution lies in expanding the definition of the core product by using the broader term, 'production of an event'. These are PSTs that offer football matches for less than 10% of the year and can use their facilities for the other 90%, although the pitch might be out of bounds in the days leading up to matches. Indeed some clubs unsurprisingly stage more non-football events than matches. This research has not sought to investigate the relative financial implications of hosting sport and non-sporting events.

The second contribution acknowledging the importance of non-core activities lies in the area of sports finance. It concurs with Andreff and Staudohar (2000) by suggesting that there is a category of PSTs that generate most of their revenue in their geographical locality through spectators, sponsors and subsidies (SSSL). Pritchard (2016, p.28) adds another stream unrelated to matches that he coined "facilities utilization (FU)". Our study agrees that this source of income needs to be added, as the SSSL streams maybe insufficient and income from non-core activities are important in maintaining professional status.

The adoption of a portfolio based approach using the stadium as a multi-purpose venue to finance a PST was acknowledged by one respondent. He told us that his club used income generated from matches against EPL teams during a cup competition to invest in improving conference facilities as opposed to the team (3A). The acronym SSSFuL (spectators, sponsors, subsidies, facilities utilization, local) is used to represent this. In addition to their own efforts there are three ways to expand geographically: (1) by using agents to market the portfolio of the club; (2) by local organisations who operated across a larger geographical region marketing internally to other departments/companies within their group; and (3) by marketing from the governing body, the EFL.

There are a number of lessons that can be learnt from the long history of these stadiums.

First, resources need to be configured to take account of local requirements and PSTs need to work within that community alongside both residents and organisations to provide them with a range of services. This should contribute to creating a reputation for being concerned about local issues and the needs of this community. From a marketing perspective, building a reputation can help to differentiate PSTs from their competitors in non-match day activities. An important factor as stadiums may be overlooked by buyers when selecting event venues (Lee *et al.*, 2015; Kim *et al.*, 2013).

In terms of unique selling points (USP) some of our findings were consistent with previous research in that stadiums offer unique resources. For example viewing the pitch and car parking space availability is an important criterion in the selection of conference venues (Lee *et al.*, 2015; Parrish *et al.*, 2014). It is also suggested that clubs when promoting their non-core activities should highlight both their social (Babiak and Wolfe, 2009) and business/economic contribution to the area in which they are situated. The ability of PSTs outside the top leagues to help develop business activity in their communities has been discussed by sports economists (e.g. Agha, 2013) but could be further highlighted by sports marketers. In order for clubs to do this, it is recommended that the EFL, as the governing body and with its greater financial resources, considers using these messages in its marketing communications when promoting these non-core activities.

Limitations and further research

The study was conducted within the context of a single sport and is limited to a sample of 21 clubs based within a single country. As these PSTs stage a large number of different events, recalling of specific situations can prove to be challenging for participants (Yin, 2014). Further

research could consider the applicability of these findings to other countries particularly those where there is a tradition of state funding and where this source of income may be under threat. However, as a number of authors have pointed out (e.g. Moore and Levermore, 2016) country-specific comparisons are difficult because of differences in infrastructure and markets. The findings are likely to have relevance to PSTs in other sports where income from the core product itself is insufficient for commercial viability (Musso *et al.*, 2016), although it is accepted that further research is required in this area. Additionally another area fertile for further exploration is the question of how organisational buyers perceive and use the facilities of PSTs and the potential differences between B2B and B2C markets. Linked to this is branding, as many of these clubs having segmented their markets and use different names when marketing their stadiums to distinguish between on-field and off-field activities.

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Appendices one: Semi-structured interview questions

Are there any activities that are not related to football that have been successful at generating income e.g. musical concerts, weddings?

Are there any parts of the stadium that you rent out to generate income (e.g. car parking, general shops, office space and hotels)?

Are there any new products lines, not related to football, that you have added in the past year? If so what made you add these?

Have you formed alliances with other companies to provide products /services on a commercial basis e.g. concerts and catering

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Do you approach other organizations to work with you e.g. caterers, wedding planners or have they approached you to use the stadium?

Does the club you try to market its facilities to supporters of the football team?

Is there any evidence to suggest that non- football activities such as conferencing and banqueting have encouraged people to attend football matches?

Are there any areas of expertise that you have developed e.g. Asian Weddings, Mehdi parties, funerals?

Table 1 Summary of teams/ stadiums

Number of clubs who played in the EFL for the three seasons 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18	<p>72 (3 divisions of 24 clubs: Championship, League One and League Two)</p> <p>Each season 3 are relegated from the EPL and Championship, 4 from League One and 2 from League Two to the National League. They are replaced by clubs promoted from the division below. Over the course of these three seasons, 80 clubs have played in the EFL.</p>			
Average division income per team 2015-16 (£ millions)	<p>EPL: 182; Championship: 23.2; League One: 5.7; League Two: 3.6. Of the sample, six were in the Championship for season 2017-18. The remaining 15 were in Leagues One, Two and the National League.</p>			
Year stadium was opened (sample in brackets)	<p>1882-1899: 23(7)</p> <p>1900-1945: 21(8)</p> <p>1946-1999: 20(4)</p> <p>2000 onwards: 16(2)</p>			
Stadium capacity	Range from 5 to 52.			
	Capacity (000,s)	Number of clubs	Sample	Category used
	Under 10	18	7	A
	10-20	32	8	B
	Over 20	30	6	C
	<p>Clubs in Category A play mainly in Leagues One and Two. Only one of the 18 has played in the Championship over the course of the three seasons.</p> <p>Of the MiLB clubs the AAA leagues have average capacity of 12 the seven other leagues are all under 8.</p>			

Sources: Agha (2013), Clubs websites, Deloitte, (2017) Sky Sports Football Yearbook (2017-18) www.Football-stadiums.co.uk