

# Module 3 Relationships with the Environment (Agents - Media)

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## **1. Introduction to Relationships Management in the Sports Industry**

In the area of sports management, developing strategic abilities is essential to effectively manage the relationships between players' agents and the media. In this module we offer a detailed setting for future sports managers, centred in optimising these key interactions, which are essential for achieving organisational success and for the club's public image. Establishing and maintaining productive relationships with sports agents not only facilitates negotiations and players' signing but also ensures an effective long-term collaboration.

Managing media relationships is equally critical since the way in which a club is publicly perceived can significantly affect its reputation and finances. Parnell et al. (2018) discuss the importance of the sports manager's role in the facilitation of these relationships, highlighting how social interactions within this dynamic can impact the club's performance and perception. This strategic approach is vital for navigating the complex current media and sports outlook.

Walsh (2017) explores the expectations of media members toward the information that sports managers handle, suggesting that competence in relationships and effective communication management are essential to handle expectations and improve cooperation. This ability can be applied not only in crisis situations but also in daily management, where clarity and proactive measures can prevent misunderstandings and conflicts.

The study of Wilson, Stavros and Westberg (2008) about players' transgressions and relationship management with their agents illustrates how sports managers must balance multiple interests and manage relationships not only internally but also externally with agents and media. Each interaction has the potential to significantly influence sports organisation, which underscores the importance of a strategic and thoughtful approach toward relationship management.



Deco in an interview. Source: Agencia EFE

To sum up, sports managers must be adept not only in talent and resource management but also in orchestrating complex relationship with agents and the media. Communication, negotiation and conflict resolution skills are essential for those who seek to effectively lead in the sports area. This module has as the objective to equip future Sports Managers with necessary tools and knowledge to manage these dynamics with competence and strategic vision.

## 2. Relationships with Football Players' Agents

Collaboration with agents is a critical aspect in a football club's management, since it impacts from contract negotiations to players well-being and development. We will now explore the multiple benefits of this relationship:

### a. It Facilitates Signings and Contracting

The efficiency with which a club manages its relationship with players' agents is fundamental to ensure success in transfers and signings. These relationships can determine both scouting rising players and keeping key players. According to Cicut et al. (2017), an effective collaboration between clubs and agents allows identifying and attracting players in a more efficient way by aligning the expectations between the club and the player under a defined strategic setting.

### In-depth Look of the Signing and Recruiting Process

- Talent identification: Sports Managers, together with agents, perform a crucial role in talent identification. Agents offer clubs valuable information and access to players that might not be in the public's eye. Ünsoy (2022) emphasises the importance of a data-based decision-making setting that includes information of agents to carry out more informed and strategic signings
- Strategic negotiations: Once the player is identified, the next critical step is negotiating the contractual terms. Whitworth (2015) analyses how negotiation strategies can be adapted to the conditions of the market and the expectations of the player and their agent. The implementation of performance clauses and

bonuses can be an effective approach to align the player's interest with those of the club.

- Training and development: Beyond signing, clubs must work with agents to ensure the continuous development of the player. Gómez et al. (2019), suggest that clarity in the development opportunities within the club can strengthen the relationship among the player, its agent, and the club, and it helps to prevent misunderstandings about the players progress and career.
- Expectations and communication management: Expectations management is essential to maintain healthy and productive relationships with agents. For better or worse, every player is a prisoner of the expectations the club, the agent's agency they belong to, the family and surrounding have on them. According to the analysis carried out by Ünsoy (2022) in his study, clear and regular communication helps preventing disagreements and strengthens trust. Ensuring that every party has a clear understanding of the terms of the agreement and future expectations can minimise potential conflicts.

## **b. Contract Negotiations**

A strong and strategic relationship with agents is essential for achieving effective contract negotiations that benefit both the club and the player. As Bull and Faure (2022) point out, thorough understanding of regulations that govern the sports agents and their impact in negotiations may result in more equitable and fairer agreements. This understanding helps sports managers to maximise the club's financial resources while they satisfy the players and their agents' demands.

### **Key Aspects in Contractual Negotiations**

- Regulatory understanding: Sports managers have to be updated with the legislations and regulations that affect sports agents. According to Holt, Michie and Oughton (2016), an effective regulation of football players' agents can facilitate more transparent and ethic negotiations, which directly benefits contract management.
- Negotiating tactics: Negotiating skills are crucial to ensure that the contract terms are favourable for both parties. Ioannidis (2019) discusses the importance of self-regulation and the need for higher transparency in negotiations, and suggests that a more open and structured approach can significantly improve the results when negotiating.
- Expectations management: It is vital to manage expectations of both, the player and the agent from the beginning of the negotiation. Kelly and Chatziefstathiou (2020) highlight how discursive practices from agents can influence on

expectations and perceptions during the negotiation process. Sports managers have to be capable of guiding these conversations in a way that they align the expectations with the club's reality.

- Creating sustainable agreements: contracts should be designed not only to satisfy current needs, but also to anticipate future contingencies. Bull and Faure (2022) emphasise the importance of creating agreements that consider the players' long-term career and the club's financial sustainability, which can include performance clauses, bonuses and clear termination terms.

### **Key Aspects in 'Sports Manager-Agent' Communications in Negotiations**

The control in contract negotiations is crucial for a sports manager, especially when dealing with football players' agents. Advanced communication techniques can play a crucial role in this process facilitation. Understanding regulations that affect agents and applying effective communication strategies can lead to more successful and fairer negotiations.

- Active listening: Active listening is essential to completely understand the worries and needs of the agent and player. Alahyari, Aslankhani and Zarei (2020) highlight the importance of active listening in conflicts management within sports management departments, which is applicable in negotiations to identify agreement and disagreement points in an effective way.
- Assertive communication: Clearly expressing the club's needs and expectations without ambiguities is crucial for negotiations. Epstein (2002) highlights that negotiating skills in sports should include the ability to communicate key points in an assertive way in order to establish clear expectations and limits from the start.
- Interest-based negotiations: This technique implies identifying the underlying interests of every party instead of positions. Wood and Danylchuk (2015) discuss how negotiation strategies can be adapted to manage limitations and maximise mutual benefits, which can be applied to reach contract agreements that satisfy both the club and the player.
- Open-ended questions: Making open-ended questions that encourage the agent to express their thoughts and worries can provide valuable information that can be used to shape the club's offer. According to Faber (1993), completely understanding the agent's motivations and worries facilitates a more productive dialogue and creative solutions to possible future conflicts.

### **c. Careers Management**

Player's careers management in the sports area is a complex task that implies a close collaboration between sports managers and players' agents. Agents are essential to plan and guide the footballers' careers, ensuring not only sports development, but also long-term well-being of the player and their families. According to Green and Ghaye (2023), the approach of building strong relationships with agents is key to develop personalised career strategies that maximise the player's satisfaction and their loyalty towards the club.

### **Crucial Aspects of Career Management**

- Strategic career planning: Collaborating with agents allow sports managers to create a roadmap of the career of each player which contemplates their aspirations, development potential and long-term objectives. Kornspan and Duve (2013) highlight the importance of integrating networking skills in sports management, since its crucial to broaden the opportunities for players both inside and outside the field.
- Skills development and maintenance: In addition to planning the players' career path, it is vital to ensure that the players are equipped with necessary skills in order to move forward in their career. Wendling and Sagas (2020) apply the theory of career self-care to help athletes with their life planning after their professional career, which should also be a focus for agents and sports managers.
- Contract negotiations and transfer: Agents are essential in contract negotiations, since they ensure that the terms correctly reflect the player's value and potential. The ability to negotiate contracts that benefit both the player and the club is crucial and requires an effective communication and well-developed negotiation strategies (Lipscomb and Titlebaum, 2001).
- Transitions management: Sports careers often deal with significant transitions, such as change of club, retirement, or physical therapy due to injuries. Moeletsi (2019) discusses the importance of an effective transition management, highlighting that the agents and sports managers must work together to support the player through these changes, ensuring a fluid process and reducing the stress associated with these transitions.

### **Example of a Case Study (Simulated)**

*A player from the youth team, represented by their agent, is in the negotiation process for their contract renewal. The agent does not want to renew the contract under the current terms since they consider that the player should have the opportunity to train with the first team, whereas the club believes that the agent's financial proposal is excessive for the player's current development level.*

### Possible resolutions:

- *Gradual negotiation with performance-based incentives: The sports manager could propose a contract that includes performance clauses and clear objectives that, if achieved, allow salary adjustments and opportunities to train or play with the first team. This would ensure the agent and the player that the club is committed with their development and success by aligning economic incentives with the player's development in the sport.*
- *Personalised development plan: Another solution could be offering a personalised development plan that includes regular revision of the player's progress, individual training sessions and, potentially, loans to teams where they can gain experience in first division. The sports manager can ensure both the player and the agent that they are investing in their future, which could justify a more conservative short-term financial proposal.*

### Skills of Sports Managers

- *Communication skills: Essential to clearly present and discuss proposals, ensuring that the agent and the player understand the club's commitment with their development.*
- *Negotiation: Ability to reach agreements that satisfy all the parties involved, balancing the financial demands with sports opportunities.*
- *Strategic vision: Understanding how the player's long-term development can align with the objectives of the club, ensuring that the decisions made benefit both the club and the player in the future.*
- *Empathy: Understanding and valuing the agent's and player's worries and working to ensure that they feel valued and understood by the club.*

### Improving the Relationship with the Agent

- *Regular meetings: Keeping regular meetings to discuss the player's progress and expectations can strengthen the relationship, showing a genuine interest in their career.*
- *Total transparency: Offering full clarity about the club's politics and player's promotion to superior team's standards in order to prevent misunderstandings and build trust.*
- *Recognition of the agent's value: Ensuring that the agent feels respected and valued as a key part of the player's career may facilitate future negotiations.*



#### d. Conflicts Resolutions

The ability to manage and solve conflicts is essential in sports management. Agents may act as mediators between the club and the players, especially in situations of contract or personal conflicts. Cicut et al. (2017) highlight that a good relationship management with agents allows to address and solve these tensions in an effective way, maintaining a harmonious environment within the team and ensuring that the club's operations are not interrupted.

#### Communicative Strategies for Conflict Resolution in Sports Management

- Mediation and negotiation: Using mediation as a tool to facilitate communication between the involved parties is crucial. Epstein (2002) advocates for incorporating alternative dispute solving techniques in sports conflict management, which can include the participation of a neutral mediator to help parties reach a satisfactory agreement.
- Continuous and open-ended communication: Keeping active and open-ended communication channels is vital to prevent and solve conflicts. Sherry, Shilbury and Wood (2007) suggest that efficient communication can prevent misunderstandings and facilitate mutual understanding, which is essential in conflict management within a sports context.
- Conflict solving skills training: Training sports managers and agent's conflict solving skills can significantly improve their ability to manage unfavourable situations. According to Atare (2024), specific training in these skills can provide sports professionals the necessary tools for efficient and effective conflict management.
- Proactive conflict management strategies: Developing proactive strategies to manage possible conflicts before they arise is a recommended practice. Okeke (2020) highlights the importance of effective mediation strategies as a means of conflict management and resolution in sports, which helps accelerate the resolution process.

#### Example of a Case Study (Simulated)

*The agent of a footballer from the first team leaks to the press that the club has communicated that they will not keep the player for the next season. In addition, they claim that the communication was made by phone call, which is not true. The fans, who appreciate the player, have a negative reaction, perceiving that the club is not acting with respect.*

Possible resolutions:

- *Transparent and public communication: The sports manager could call up a press conference or take advantage of a public appearance to address the situation publicly. They should clarify the incidents, explaining that the leaked information is not true and reaffirming the respect of the club towards all its players. Transparency in communication would help calming the fans spirits and restoring the trust in the club's management.*
- *Meeting with the player and their agent: Organising a meeting with the player and the agent to personally discuss the situation. In this meeting, the club's intentions should be clarified and they should explore possible solution that benefit both the player and the club, such as a respectful transfer that allows the player to keep their career in another club while they gain financial resources.*

### Skills of Sports Managers

- *Crisis management: The ability to manage situations under pressure, ensuring that the club's response is fast, organised and effective.*
- *Effective communication: Skills to communicate clear and coherent messages both internally (players and staff) and externally (fans and media).*
- *Negotiations: Skills to negotiate with the agent and player, looking for suggestions that satisfy all the parties involved.*
- *Empathy: understanding the player's and agent's emotions, as those from the fans, to address their concerns in an effective and respectful way*

### Improving the Relationship with the Agent and the Club's Reputations Management

- *Continuous dialogue: Keeping a regular and open-ended dialogue with the agent and other stakeholders to prevent future misunderstandings.*
- *Trust building: Working with the trust not only from the player and their agent, but also from the fans, showing a continuous commitment with fair and respectful treatment towards the players.*
- *Media management training: Training all club's members, especially those that make decisions regarding communication, in how to manage sensitive information and media interactions so as to prevent future leaks or misunderstandings.*

### **3. Communication Strategies with Agents**

Effective communication between sports managers and player's agent is fundamental to ensure the success of sports management. Establishing and maintaining solid and transparent relationships with agents not only facilitates negotiations and conflict

solving, but also contributes to sustainable career development for players. The focus of this module is exploring key communication techniques and strategies that can be used by future sports managers to optimise their interactions with agents, highlighting the importance of transparency, efficient negotiation and expectations management.

### **a. Communication Transparency**

Transparency in communication is essential to build and maintain trust between the sports manager and the players' agents. This transparency not only encourages a long-lasting relationship, but it also prevents potential misunderstandings and conflicts, which is crucial for the continuous stability and progress of the club and its players.

#### **Transparency Development in Communication**

- Objectives and expectations clarity: It is vital that sports managers clearly establish the objectives and expectations from the start in any interaction with the agent. Epstein (2002) emphasises that a clear communication about the roles, responsibilities and goals can prevent future discrepancies and align all parties towards common objectives.
- Full disclosure of information: Providing all the relevant and necessary information for the negotiations or any other contract agreement is a fundamental practise in communication transparency. According to Williams (2004), sharing full and precise information ensures that the agents and their clients can make informed decisions, what strengthens the trust and cooperation.
- Using technology for effective communication: Using technological tools that ensure a continuous and accessible communication can significantly improve transparency. Relationship management platforms (CMR) and other digital systems allows a fluid information exchange, keeping agents informed about any change or relevant development.
- Regular feedback and agreements revision: Keeping regular meetings to revise progresses and discussing any concern is another effective technique to keep transparency. Lipscomb and Titlebaum (2001) suggest that regular feedback not only helps adjusting strategies as needed, but also reaffirms the club's commitment with transparency and ethics in all their operations.

### **b. Regular Meetings**

Regular meetings between sports managers and football players' agents are essential to maintain a fluid and effective communication. These meetings facilitate an open-ended and continuous dialogue, essential for monitoring agreements and adapting to new

circumstances and opportunities. An effective management of these meetings can strengthen the relationships, optimise collaborations and prevent conflicts.

## **Meetings Typology and Contexts**

### Formal Meetings

- Strategic planning: These meetings are scheduled in advanced and have a defined agenda, focused on topics such as contract negotiations or long-term career planning. They are crucial for important decision-making and require a precise preparation.
- Performance revision: Meeting scheduled regularly to assess the player's progress and discuss possible adjustments to their career planning.

### Informal Meetings

- Coffee or meals: They are used to encourage a more personalised relationship and to discuss topics in a less formal environment. These meetings can be useful to better understand agent or player's personal concerns.
- Casual encounter: They are spontaneous opportunities to address urgent topics or take advantage of unexpected circumstances. Even though they are less structured, they are important to maintain a fluid communication.

## **Meetings Preparation and Management**

- Clear agenda: Defining a clear agenda with specific objectives for each meeting (Holt, Michie and Oughton, 2016). This helps maintain the approach and ensure that all important points are addressed.
- Previous documentation: Sending supporting material, such as performance reports or contract proposals, before the meeting so that all the parties involved can properly prepare.
- Monitoring: Establishing a monitoring protocol after each meeting. This can include minutes or summaries of agreements achieved and steps to follow, ensuring that all the commitments are accomplished.

## **Tips for Effective Communication in Meetings**

- Active listening: Showing empathy and comprehension towards the agent's concerns improves relationship quality (Shilbury, Ferkins and Smythe, 2013).

- Assertiveness: Communicating the club's needs and expectations in a clear and direct way, without imposing or being aggressive.
- Flexibility: Being open to modify the agenda or communication methods according to the agent's needs, which can improve adaptability and efficiency of the relationship.

### **Example of a Case Study (Simulated)**

#### Context of the Case

*In the context of sports management, a sports manager faces the task of establishing and maintaining effective relationships with player's agents to negotiate contracts and align objectives. In case study we will address two different settings of meetings with a promising player's agent.*

- *Initial contact in the café at the hotel:*
  - *Objective: Knowing the goals and objectives of the player and offering an approach from the club for a possible contract negotiation.*
  - *Environment: Informal. It is aimed at creating a relaxed environment that facilitates and opens constructive communication.*
- *Contract negotiation on the club's premises:*
  - *Objective: Formalise the player's contract terms.*
  - *Participants: The agent and their assistant, and the sports manager and their assistant.*
  - *Environment: Formal. It must include all the needed details and documents needed to reach the agreement.*

#### Resolution of the Case Study

- *Preparing the First Meeting in the Café:*
  - *Prior communication: Email, message or phone the agent expressing the club's interest in the player and suggesting an informal meeting to discuss the player's objectives.*
  - *Preparing material: Preparing a list of open-ended questions to better understand the player's aspirations and potential terms that the agent might consider important.*

- *Logistical aspects: Choosing a quiet café that ensures privacy and a relaxed environment. Confirming appointment and checking that the space is appropriate for a discreet conversation.*
- *Running the Meeting in the Café:*
  - *Conversation tone: Keeping a friendly and professional tone. Using active listening skills to ensure that the agent and, by extension, the player feel understood and valued.*
  - *Information record: Taking down discreet notes about key point to use them in future negotiations or to inform the club's strategy.*
- *Preparing the Formal Meeting in the Club:*
  - *Necessary documentation: Preparing all contract documentation, including contract terms, special clauses, and proposed benefits. Revising any relevant legal or sports regulation that might affect the negotiation.*
  - *Meeting environment: Making sure that the meeting room is properly equipped with presentation technology. Creating an environment where participants feel confident and in confidential meeting space.*
- *Running the Formal Meeting:*
  - *Meeting structure: Following a clear agenda, starting with a revision of the points discussed in the previous meeting and moving forward towards specific negotiation terms.*
  - *Negotiation: Using interest-based negotiation strategies, looking for solutions that benefit both the player and the club.*
  - *Agreements documentation: Ending the meeting with a summary of agreements reached, assigning responsibilities for the following steps and establishing a schedule for the completion and signing of the contract.*

### **c. Technology Use**

The use of modern communication and data management systems is essential in sports management, especially in the interactions between sports manager and football players' agents. These systems allow an efficient and real time information exchange, which is crucial to keep updated with the professional sports dynamic.

### **Examples of Communication and Data Management Systems**

### Communication Systems

- Email: It is widely used to send official communications and important documentations. It is essential to keep a formal record of communications.
- Instant messaging (like WhatsApp or Telegram): It facilitates fast and effective communications, allowing real-time coordination and doubts resolution.
- Video conference (like Zoom or Microsoft Teams): It is ideal for formal meetings or when participants are in different geographic locations, facilitating complex topic discussion through virtual and verbal participation.

### Data Management

- CRM (Customer Relationship Management): Systems such as Salesforce or Dynamics 365 help manage and analyse interactions with agents and players throughout time, ensuring that all the information is centralised and accessible, as Iheanacho et al. (2013) discuss about the importance of information technology in sports management.
- Sports data base: Platforms such as Prozone or Wyscout offer detailed player's analysis, statistics, and trends, which are crucial for talent negotiations and assessment.

### Meeting Contexts and Preparation

- Formal meetings in the club's offices: Applying digital presentations and data analysis demonstrations to discuss the player's performance and possible improvements or concerns.
- Exterior informal meetings: Using mobile applications to instantly share relevant information, maintaining a less formal but productive tone.
- Preparing meetings: Properly preparing necessary technology, making sure that all devices and programmes are functioning correctly, and having a clear agenda that includes specific objectives to maximise the meeting's efficiency.

### Tips for Preparing Meetings with Technology

- Technology test: Checking that all equipment and software are working correctly before the meeting, as it is recommended by Rosandich (2001), in his discussion about IT applications in sports management.
- Data security: Implementing security protocols to protect sensitive information shared during the meetings.



- Continuous training: Making sure that both the club's staff and the agents get familiar with platforms and tools used, offering training if necessary.

#### **d. Staff Training**

Investing in staff training about communicative competences and negotiation skills is vital to ensure that the interactions with agents are dealt with professionalism and efficiency. For sports managers, developing communication skills and public relations management is crucial to effectively manage the relationships with football players' agents.

### **Communication and Public Relations Training Proposals**

#### Seminars and Workshops

- Effective communication and negotiation: Organise seminars run by communication experts that teach negotiation techniques, conflict management and assertive communication, as Isaacson (2010) suggests when referring to the importance of communication training for sports professionals.
- Sports public relations: Hold workshops that specifically deal with public relations management in the sports context, using real cases and simulations to prepare participants for real situations.

#### Certification Programme

- Communication and public relations certifications: Encourage participation in renowned certification programmes that focus on better practices and current communication and public relations strategies.

#### Communication Technology Training

- CRM tools and communication platforms: Train the staff in the efficient use of CRM tools and digital communication platforms to improve agent's relationship management.

### **Techniques for Improving Public Relations Management with Agents**

- Proactive communication: Maintaining a regular and proactive communication with agents, not only in negotiation or conflict periods, but also as a constant practise to strengthen the relationship.
- Honesty and transparency: Being transparent about club's policies and management decisions can help build a solid base of trust and mutual respect, as

highlighted by Göksel and Serarslan (2015) in their study about public relations in sports clubs.

- Constructive feedback: Implementing a system in which both agents and sports managers can offer regular feedback about the relationship and communication processes. This can help identify areas that need improvement and encourage a continuously improving environment.
- Cultural adaptation: Developing inter-cultural competences to effectively manage the diversity of agents and players from different countries and cultures. This is crucial in modern football.

#### **4. Media Role in Sports**

Currently, the importance of media in sports is undeniable, not only in the way in which traditional media influences public perception, but also in the rising role of influencers on social media and different YouTube and Twitch channels. The last two have been playing an important role for fans who want to be up to date with their football teams. In this section we will explore how future sports managers can manage and optimise these relationships for their club's and player's benefit.

##### **a. Influence in Public Perception**

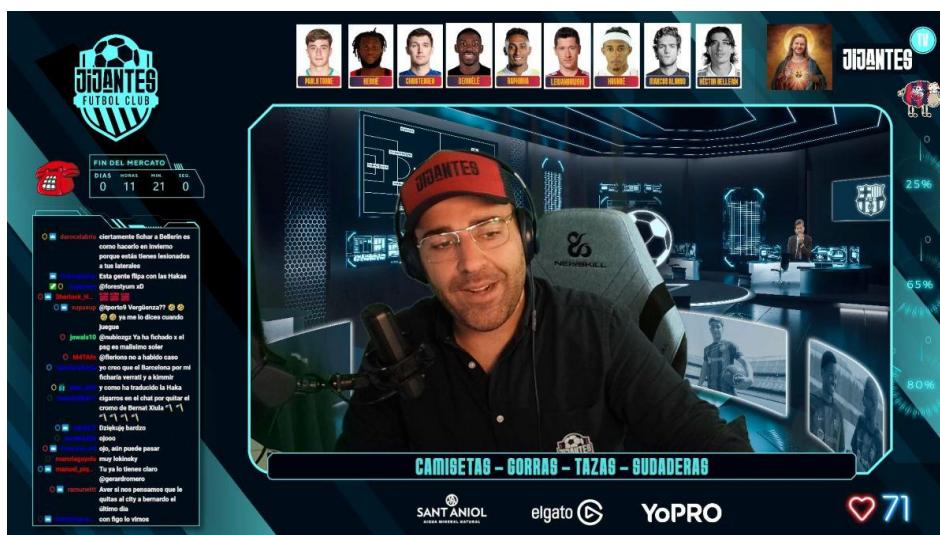
Digital and traditional media significantly shape the public image of sports clubs, influencing the perceptions of sponsors, fans, and community in general. This influence goes beyond the coverage of sports events to include how media and digital influencers present the club's achievements, challenges and culture.

- Impact of traditional media: Traditional media such as newspapers, television and radio historically have played a crucial role in the way sport clubs are perceived. These media not only inform matches results, but also offer a deep analysis, interviews with players and managers, and coverage of club related events. The way in which media present the club's victories, defeats and internal politics can have a significant impact in public's perception. According to Radmann et al. (2021), extensive media coverage can increase the club's visibility, which attracts more followers and potential sponsors. In addition, the narration chosen by the media can directly impact a team's morale and fan support, which shows the importance of maintaining strategic and mutually beneficial relationships with the media.



Newspaper SPORT cover about Lewandowski. Source: SPORT

- Influencers' role and digital platforms: the emergence of digital platforms and social media has transformed the way in which sports clubs interact with their audience. Influencers and content creators in platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Twitch and Twitter have started developing critical roles in sports narrative. These individuals, often passionate fans or ex-players, create content that rings in a more personal and direct way with fan base. This content goes from tactical analysis to live reactions and club-related entertainment content. Pilar et al. (2019) observe that these influencers have the ability of influencing on the attitude and behaviour of followers by promoting active lifestyles or encouraging fans to actively participate in the club's activities. In addition, due to their scope and emotional connection with followers, they can be useful during public relations crisis, providing a faster and effective mean of communication to publish the club's message.



Transmission of Gerard Romero on Twitch during signing market. Source: Twitch

- Media relationship management: To effectively manage media influence, sports managers must develop proactive strategies regarding public relations which include a regular and transparent communication with media and influencers. As Chmait et al. (2020) affirm, understanding and collaborating with these new actors is crucial to maintain public's commitment and relevance.
- Adaptive communication strategies: Adapting the club's message to different platforms and audiences is essential to maintain a positive and coherent image. The combination of official statements with more informal interaction in social media can help balance the formality with the closeness that many fans value.

## 5. Media Interaction Management

In sports management, as we've shown in the previous section, media communication plays a crucial role, not only in events coverage but also in shaping the club and its players' public perceptions. In addition, in the current environment, influencers from social media and platforms such as YouTube and Twitch are more and more influential, providing content that directly connects with fans and offering new ways for sports narrative. In this module we will see the importance of these media and how sports managers can efficiently improve these relationships for the benefit of the club.

### a. Interview Training

Preparing club's representatives to effectively manage media interaction ensures that the club's narrative is clearly communicated and without deviations. It is vital not only to interact with all media members, but also to focus on those with significant relevance, both at an internal level in that media and with the audience, to maximise the positive impact of the club's image.

### Development of Interview Training

- Choosing media and influencers: Identifying and prioritising media and influencers that align with the values of the club and that have a significant impact on the desired audience. This includes assessing the relevance of the media within that area and its popularity or influence among sports followers.
- Content preparation: Developing key messages that reflect the club's objectives and philosophy. This must be done in collaboration with communication and public relations experts to ensure that the messages are effective and appropriate for different media formats, as highlighted by Hebbel-Seeger and Horky (2018) in their discussion about the academic preparation in media management. At this

point, it is important to highlight that the work of the club's Communication Department plays a crucial role when it comes to content preparation.

- Interviews simulation: Making training sessions that simulate different interviews settings, from press conferences to in-depth interviews. These practices can help club's agents to develop skills to manage difficult questions and maintain coherence in the message when under pressure.
- Continuous feedback and evaluation: After each interaction with media, it is crucial to assess the performance and provide feedback. This can include interview recordings revision and discussing how to improve in future interactions.
- Keeping professionalism in relationships: It is crucial that sports managers keep a clear line between professional and personal relationships with reporters. Although a good relationship is essential; it is important to bear in mind that reporters have the responsibility of informing from a perspective that cannot always align with the club's interest. As Coakley and Pike (2009) highlight in their study, sports professionals should be cautious of not overstepping professional limits, since reporters, despite being collaborators, basically seek for contents that attract their audience and fulfil their editorial objectives.

### **Strategies for Continuous Improvement**

- Incorporate regular trainings and update communication strategies to adapt to changes in media scope and trends in digital communication.
- Establish long-lasting relationships with key media and influencer, ensuring that the club can communicate their stories in a more effective and direct way.

### **b. Sensitive Information Management**

In sports management, the handling of confidential or sensitive information is a key aspect in protecting the club's integrity, image, and finances, as well as the privacy of its members. Sports managers must implement strict protocols to ensure that the club's personal and strategic information, as well as that of the players are managed with the utmost respect and discretion.

### **Examples of Sensitive Information and Informative Interest Points for the Press**

#### Strategic Information of the Club

- Signing plans and club strategy: Details of future player's signing or selling that, if early disclosed, might affect negotiations or give advantage to competitors.

- Financial information: Financial budgets and details that might influence markets perception and the financial stability of the club if publicly known.

#### Footballer or Coaching Staff Members' Personal Information

- Personal or family details: Changes in the player's personal life that might affect their performance or career decisions. This data requires to be managed sensitively not to invade the player's privacy.
- Moving houses: This directly affects the logistics and the player's and their family's adaptation, which might affect their well-being and sports performance.
- Medical reports and details of the player's physical recovery: Another point of interest for the press is knowing the reason of a player's injury, their physical training, and their recovery process. All of this is very sensitive information for the club, even more for the player since their private life and privacy are at risk.

#### Transfer Market (Signings, Terminations and Renewals)

- Contract negotiations: The speculation of signing, terminations and renewals generate a significant interest in media and among fans, which can put pressure on negotiations and affect the team's stability.

### **Press' Impact on Sensitive Information Management**

Media looks for information that might attract the public's eye in an active way. This information includes details about the club's strategy and the movements in the transfer market. As Kidd (2013) argues, confidential information management in sports is critical, especially when media interest do not align with those of the club.

### **Recommended Protocols for Sensitive Information Management**

- Risk assessment: Make a continuous assessment of what type of information might damage the club or the player, if disclosed, and establish different access levels.
- Continuous training: Train all the staff in the importance of confidentiality and adequate techniques to manage sensitive information.
- Strategic communication: Develop a communication plan that includes prepared answers to difficult questions, protecting in this way sensitive information while maintaining the needed transparency.

### **c. Crisis Strategies**

Developing proactive crisis management strategies allows the club to answer in an effective way to unfavourable situations, minimising potential damages to its reputation. In sports management, the ability to manage communication crisis is essential, especially since the sports manager must closely collaborate with the club's communication department to ensure a coordinate and strategic answer.

### **Some Types of Communication Crisis in a Football Club that might Affect the Sports Manager**

- Sports performance crisis: This includes significant defeats or a particularly bad season, which can lead to an intense public scrutiny and media critics.
- Behaviour crisis: Inappropriate behaviour from the players or staff, whether on or off the field, that might damage the club's public image.
- Financial crisis: Financial problems such as significant debts or the inability to meet financial obligations that might put the club's stability at risk.
- Security and health crisis: Situations such as players' severe injuries or security problems in sports events that require a thorough communication to manage public's perception and fans' reaction.

### **Communication Strategies in a Crisis**

- Planning and preparation: Develop a crisis communication plan which includes potential scenarios and predefined answers to ensure a fast and coordinated action. According to Pacak (2020), sports clubs should prepare to effectively manage communication during crisis.
- Timely and transparent communication: Inform the fans and public in a transparent and timely way to maintain trust and minimise rumours and speculations, as Manoli (2016) suggests in her study about crisis communication management in football clubs.
- Using trained spokespeople: Designate spokespeople that are well trained to maintain media interaction and ensure the club's messages are consistent and reflect its values and strategic objectives.
- Continuous assessment and strategies adjustment: Monitor communication effectiveness during the crisis and adjust strategies when necessary to address the evolution of the situation and public concerns.

### **d. Collaboration with Reporters**



For a sports manager, cultivating respectful and professional relationships with reporters is essential to ensure a fair and balanced media coverage. These relationships not only affect the public perception of the club, but also how it communicates news and significant events.

### **Strategies for Cultivating Professional Relationships with Reporters**

- Mutual respect and professionalisms: Treat every reporter with respect, regardless of the media or nature of the news they cover. According to Pedersen (2020), maintaining a high level of professionalism in every interaction is crucial to establish a solid base of mutual respect.
- Open and transparent communication: Be transparent when communicating, offering clear and precise information. Avoid promises that cannot be kept and make sure that the messages of the club are transmitted in a coherent and consistent way, as suggested by Clavio and Walsh (2014), who emphasise the importance of transparency to maintain healthy relationships with the media.
- Constructive feedback and regular meetings: Organise regular meetings with reporters is key to discuss current and future topics. These meetings are an opportunity to get feedback about media coverage. They allow to understand the need of the media in a better way and to adjust communication strategies as needed.
- Media training for club's spokespeople: Make sure that every club's spokesperson, including players, coaches, and executive staff are well trained to manage interactions with media. The training should include tips on how to answer difficult questions and how to maintain the club's idea in every message.
- Information access equity: Distribute information in an equitable way among different media to prevent coverage imbalances. Make sure that you are not evidently giving special privileges to specific media, which might align other reporters and create a coverage turn.

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