

# Sport's dual dilemma

Can commercial interests be combined with voluntary work? Leeds United thinks so

By Kirsten Harkjær Larsen and Steen Bille



**Children might not see learning as appealing – until a player like Mark Viduka tell them about which books he loved when he was a boy, stated Emma Stanford (above) from Leeds United**

The English football club Leeds United is actively involved in its local community – but in a different way from typical voluntary organisations elsewhere in Europe. The club is working hard to combine its community with its own commercial interests.

Leeds United is responsible for an ongoing, large-scale project designed to motivate local children into playing football, learning more in school, and, at the same time, becoming fans of the club. At the same time, the venture is intended to attract sponsors, create positive press and influence local leaders.

Emma Stanford, the day-to-day leader of United's community initiative, explains that the project is a grass roots venture that was started four years ago.

»It is intended to create a bond between the club and the city's children and young people,« she says. »This has been accomplished through offering help in the teaching of football, but

also in other subjects such as reading, writing and maths.«

While the club seeks to provide positive benefit to the local community, it also aims to bring more fans to the stadium, where they not only pay to watch football, but also buy official merchandise adorned with the logos of companies like Coca Cola and Nike.

»The club can profit from its community work by building a positive public perception and creating new, loyal fans of the club,« says Emma Stanford.

»While, at the same time, commercial interest amongst sponsors is increased.«

Within the framework of the project is a learning centre at the Elland Road stadium, where children and young people can make use of an Internet cafe, IT suite and a library with attached teachers that is open six days a week. The work in the club and affiliated schools is primarily carried out by paid staff.

The project incorporates a total of 30 full time employees, 30 part time staff, around 100 voluntary workers and has an annual budget of a million £.

»The club's professional players are also involved in the project. They visit local schools, where the children see them as role models,« continues Emma Stanford.

»Children might not see learning as particularly appealing – but if they hear a player like Mark Viduka tell them about which books he loved when he was a boy, they think again.«

In all, she estimates that around 100,000 children are annually taught such topics as anti racism, teamwork and healthy living.

Emma Stanford points out that the club's engagement in the community can also provide a boost to its overall standing.

»If we are involved in the local community, we will better be able to influence local leaders, politicians and members of parliament,« she adds.

## Defining the dilemma

Some Play the game delegates remained unconvinced as to whether the Leeds project was aimed primarily at serving the interests of children and the local community, or the club's sponsors.

However, Lars Haue-Pedersen is one who is sure that such schemes herald the way forward. The former General Secretary of the International Volleyball Federation and current Director of the Lausanne-based firm TSE Consulting, he believes that sport can play a major role in building a feeling of collective self-confidence in a given community. If, for example, a particular country is awarded host status for a big international event, its people will automatically feel a great sense of honour.

»Sport is a fantastic way of bringing out people's sense of pride,« he says.

He points out that sports associations are coming under increasing pressure from sponsors, agents, middlemen, and the public sector.





***It was of great importance to me to get a share of the inspiring papers from almost all corners of the world ... there is no doubt that the participation of journalists, scientists and sports leaders also from Africa, Latin America, Asia and Australia has an impact on several levels, just as networking plays a role in the global village of sport and physical education***



***Alice Riis Bach, PhD, Sports Researcher, Copenhagen***

To help encourage progress and achieve a sense of pride, he says, these same sports organisations must be made learner and – much in the same way as top athletes and trainers are judged by their results – their leaders' work must be made more goal-oriented.

»There is not much in the way of competition behind the scenes in these organisations,« says Lars Haue-Pedersen, whose company advised China's successful Olympic bidding team.

»For example, I have never heard of a leader of a sports organisation being fired due to lack of results.«

Today, he says, the working methods of many sports associations are unclear and random, and the role of top leaders is often undefined. Sometimes they need to play the role of a politician, while at other times they must act as businessmen.

»An example of this can be seen in the agenda of a recent meeting of UEFA in Copenhagen,« he continues.

»It contained such varied topics as the increase in racism, the development of dialogue with national associations, refereeing standards, TV rights, and the hosting of the European Championships in 2008.«

»It's all about adopting a new, more focused, strategic approach to administrative work,« he concludes. 'In this way, the national and international associations, as well as projects like the one in Leeds, will provide benefit to all interested parties – sponsors, the local community and public authorities alike.«

### **Encouraging spectators**

Amongst the sceptics of the Leeds model is DGI Chairman Søren Møller. Like most other Scandinavians, Møller has his roots in a sports culture with a far greater tradition of voluntary engagement than either the UK or the rest of Europe.

He underlines the danger of encouraging people to become passive spectators instead of active participants in sport, and points out that voluntary activity naturally follows active participation.

»We need more research in this area,« he says. »The agenda will change because the need for physical activity is still growing.«

Sports researcher Bjarne Ibsen claims that voluntary work in Scandinavia is equivalent to between seven and nine percent of the region's combined working hours.

In Denmark alone, 90% of jobs in sport are carried out on a voluntary basis. Ibsen adds that the local community's engagement in voluntary work has also a democratic dimension. »Voluntary workers take responsibility for the local community,« he says.

»One can state quite clearly that voluntary work is just as important as turning out to vote.«

### **New skills**

However, the conditions under which voluntary work takes place are changing. Anders Bülow, President of the International Sports and Culture Association, ISCA, says that in order to meet tomorrow's challenges, voluntary leaders must adapt to these changes.

The situation today calls for participation before observation, he says – and volunteers of the future need to move with the times by learning new skills.

»You need to be in a condition to listen to other people, to co-operate, to respect differences, to handle changes, and have the capacity to be honest about yourself,« he says.

»The best arena in which to learn these competencies is the world of sport,« says Anders Bülow, indirectly resuming the thread to the learning project Leeds United have started in their local area.



***Lars Haue-Pedersen urged sports organisations to modernize: »I have never heard of a leader being fired due to lack of results,« he said***

## Football at street level

By Marlene Jensen



Vladimir Borkovic is a former professional footballer. For many years he earned a living in the stadiums and playing fields of his homeland, ex-Yugoslavia.

Now, he has swapped his former career for one where the focus is on softer, grassroots values and the goals are very different.

»I work with Streetfootballworld,« he says.

»A new project initiated under the auspices of the Football Research Foundation in Germany.«

He explains that the venture seeks to establish contacts between street football projects across the world – from the Somatic Street Soccer project in Canada to Football for Peace in Rwanda.

»We have established an Internet portal where different street football projects across the world can gain knowledge and exchange experiences,« he continues.

»In addition, we also work to arrange a global street football tournament every fourth year – running parallel with the World Cup. The games are played in the street in order to place focus on the local community.«

»Our slogan is 'Streetfootballworld – the other dimension of the game'. We aim to bring young people closer together – both boys and girls – and give them a different perspective on life. Our intention is to hold different workshops during the tournament where we will provide information on AIDS, violence and criminality.«

Vladimir Borkovic has put together a small exhibition in the foyer of DGI Byen.

»I have the responsibility for developing a network and broadening awareness of the project,« he continues. »That's why I'm here at Play the game.«