



BREAKING THE MOULD

What do sports management postgraduates need to do to set themselves apart from the competition? We invited a recruiter, a professor, an employer and a graduate into the *SportBusiness International* offices to address key issues around education and training in the international sports sector. **Owen Evans** reports.

What is the core value of taking a sports management course?

Will Lloyd: I think the big value of postgraduate courses are that they give you access to influential networks. The FIFA Master and Birkbeck alumni are good examples of that.

Ultimately these alumni are one of these courses' biggest assets and biggest marketing machines. We are talking about well-positioned people within the industry and in the context of employability, these kind of networks are absolutely critical.

Getting knowledge through the course will also help students with their personal development, and it is also something that will help differentiate them from the crowd. But the network that is open to these students at the courses with active alumni is a major advantage when it comes to job hunting.

Is there any merit gaining professional experience in a core business discipline like marketing, and then transferring those professional skills into the sports industry?

Bettina Kuperman: I think there is a lot of credit to learning about sports management through courses like the FIFA Master and getting a good grounding in the sports industry.

However, I think if you want to get into a business like ours which does a lot of consultancy work, having the professional business skills actually carries more worth to us than having a sports management degree.

When recruiting people I want them to show me they know how to do business, and then we can show them how to use those skills within the sports industry. It is all about whether they can transfer their skills into our business.



Bettina Kuperman (CEO, Impact34)



After working for three years at the heart of the international sports world in Lausanne, Kuperman moved to Istanbul to focus on the growing Turkish sports market.

She has worked closely with major sports organisations in Turkey such as the General Directorate for Youth and Sport, the Turkish national Olympic committee, and the Turkish basketball and football federations. She also holds a Master's in law.

Will Lloyd (CEO, GlobalSportsJobs)



Lloyd has over 15 years experience in the international sports industry, particularly in Europe, Middle East and Asia. In 2010 he founded and launched

GlobalSportsJobs, the technology-based recruitment platform, having been a co-founder of Sports Recruitment International in 2001.

Sean Hamil (Director, Birkbeck Sport Business Centre)



Hamil is the academic director of the MSc Sport Management and the Business of Football at Birkbeck College and is director of the Birkbeck Sport Business Centre.

He is also a lecturer on the UEFA Certificate in Football Management (CFM) development programme, focusing on the topic of the organisation and governance of football across the world.

John Siner (FIFA Master alumni and Co-Founder, Why Sport Matters)



After completing his FIFA Master course, Siner worked as a project manager for the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for eight years.

After leaving the IOC, he co-founded media company Why Sport Matters. Siner has more than 17 years experience working within the sports industry, having been employed at companies such as adidas in France and Major League Soccer side the Tampa Bay Mutiny.

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Should sports management students expect to have a job immediately once they qualify?

John Siner: Some of the students I've come across leave their courses a little bit tired, which is a big shock from an employer's perspective, as that is the exact time you want to see their passion for the industry.

I want them to show me they will do anything, even if it is just serving coffee to begin with, to prove they have the determination to get through the door of the sports industry.

It is highly competitive to get into the sports industry, and even if you have the professional experience, if you want to transfer into Coca-Cola's sports marketing department it is still incredibly difficult.

I was one of the first graduates to go into the IOC (International Olympic Committee) and that was thanks to the FIFA Master alumni. Subsequently when the IOC was looking to recruit, they would go to the FIFA Master.

There are more than 20 FIFA Master graduates who are now working at FIFA itself. Not every one is a superstar employee, but they are part of a powerful network.

WL: Unfortunately, that is a danger. I think it is great that postgraduates can use the network but I don't think there should be only one or two avenues to get into these federations.

These organisations know that they can go to their trusted courses and each year they will have 40 or 50 interested people in one or two vacancies. However, what they are not doing is casting their net wide enough to the non-sports arena, where they could attract people with associated business skills that would really improve them.

JS: You have to remember that sport is still an emerging industry and from a professional point of view, the sports industry is still feeling its way forward.

In terms of the sense of entitlement from the students, I approached my education in the way that I was going to get as much out of it as possible. I'd push myself and speak to every guest speaker and get involved in every conference. What I see these days is a guest speaker coming into a course and only half the class are there.

The students that show that spark of passion - combined with the education - are going to be the successful ones for sure.

Sean Hamil: I believe there is real value in a strong academic programme. For many years in Britain there was a perceived lack of respect for management programmes. You mustn't underestimate the snobbery factor, and a lot

WL: There is an old adage within the sports industry that has been relevant for far too long which is "it's about who you know, not what you know", and I think there in lies the value of the network.

Major sports federations have traditionally recruited through people they have existing relationships with, where they are not necessarily taking into account what you know as an applicant, and I think administration roles within sport have been particularly hard to get into over the years for exactly that reason.

In my opinion the sports industry lacks a training and development model that you see in other professional industries. I think it is time to improve the training and development models so those professionals coming in have a much more rounded 'upbringing'.



of that snobbery has been towards sports management programmes in particular.

The record of sports management at federations in the UK has been absolutely disastrous over the years. Look at football, there is a crying need for high-quality sports managers at the top-end of nearly all football organisation. I believe there is a need for people to be educated on how these sporting structures work and the political and economical factors that affect them. That is what I think a strong academic programme should bring.

The way you achieve the balance between academia and experience is by having a strong internship aspect to your course. We have not been entirely successful in this area but we are getting better every year.

As an institution we [Birkbeck] are getting better known for producing excellent sports managers and so it is getting easier and easier for us to place students with internship opportunities. We don't get 100 per cent of our students straight into work, but our rate is improving every year.

It also must be said that some students come with unrealistic expectations. However, even though sports management education is becoming more and more commercialised, if a university does not have a strong academic core, it should not be in the marketplace.

What are employers looking for from interns?

BK: I can only tell you what I have seen in the office and one of the big things from our point-of-view is social media. That is one of the territories where interns coming into our company can really impress us, so [at Impact34] we would be looking for someone to come straight in and start managing social media projects.

Would you ever employ someone excellent in business but with no interest in sport?

BK: No. That is the other point. One of the reasons why I am a little bit reluctant to hire

“Sport is a very, very, time consuming industry. I think you work more in this industry than most other sectors.”

people from other professional services is sometimes they are not fans of sport. This makes a real difference and they may not appreciate how much working within sport can affect your life.

If someone doesn't like sport, it is very difficult to get them to work the hours that you do, as it takes place in the evenings, in the weekends and in the summer holidays.

Do people get into sport without realising the sacrifices involved?

SH: Bettina is absolutely right. It is one of the things we try to grind out in our first term. This industry is a business. If you go into it with any other attitude you will not get anywhere.

Sport is a very, very, time consuming industry. I think you work more in this industry than most other sectors. If you want to prosper you will have to sacrifice a lot of your time, and you have to remember, on average it is not a well-paid industry when you compare it to other management sectors like marketing.

JS: You have to be aware that when you enter the industry you are sacrificing your income to supplement to your passion.

How does the sports industry compares to other sectors when it comes to federations training and developing their own staff?

JS: As far as the major federations are concerned it is still very much about internal development, which is fine if, for example, you stay with the IOC for your whole career. However, the danger with that is if you have to leave your job for whatever reason, there are only a handful of

positions that can match your existing training and development.

From an academic perspective, I wouldn't say I was prepared to do my job at the IOC because of what I learnt at the FIFA Master course, but I did get a broad exposure to the whole industry.

BK: There is also a need to train people coming into the industry in preparation for going into new markets. I have been going into Turkey, Poland and the Ukraine and anyone else should be prepared to do the same as that is the way the sports industry is going.

WL: We are seeing a lot of courses popping up now that are really focusing towards the international landscape. Cultural awareness is possibly one of the biggest factors in all of this.

If we're talking about what needs to improve in this sector over the next 10 years, then culture has to be addressed significantly. Geography is no longer a barrier. Sport is global now and the new students need to understand that and be prepared to take advantage of it. People from the UK and Europe have to be educated, for instance, on how business works within the Arab culture.

We need to have more bespoke courses that look at specific issues of the global sports industry in greater depth, rather than a few shallow courses that give a broad outlook of the industry.

SH: Philosophically, I think education should be key to delivery. However, we are in a commercial marketplace now and we have to adapt. We have started to have a more international outlook.

BK: There is another important point if we are talking about training and development: we need people coming through to have that entrepreneurial spirit.

When I wanted to set up a business in Turkey, I didn't turn up and think it would just happen. I researched the data, looked at



the legal aspects and came up with a business plan. I made it happen for myself, and I would like to see more people, through education, encouraged to take that risk and come up with their own business ideas that work.

What can be done to improve the sports management sector in the near future?

WL: Personally, I will be trying to make information on sports careers and management programmes more accessible. I think for far too long the industry has been a closed shop and as a result we have lost a lot of very capable people along the way. People need to see that the industry is growing and becoming more professional and structured, and that will give the opportunity for some very skilled people to come into the industry.

SH: We are a university and education is always going to be at our core, so at Birkbeck we are always trying to refine our offering. On top of that we are trying to emulate the FIFA Master's alumni example and so we are making real progress at improving our network.



The debate panel in the SportBusiness International offices

JS: Compared to all the other alumni networks, I think there is a healthy amount of respect for the FIFA Master, but from our point-of-view it is not enough. We have a good website but we are trying to do a lot more on getting the alumni network involved with social media. That is one of our biggest projects over the next few years. Personally, I'm teaching sport management

in the US at the moment and the knowledge of my US students on sports management outside the US is almost zero, so I am looking to improve their cultural awareness.

BK: I will be looking at bringing people in who have their own ideas. Anyone that joins us has to be a pioneer.

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