

Internet + Football = Profit For Owners and Associations, Losses for Players.

From connecting enemies in war torn areas such as Liberia, to furthering friendships in Canada, football, also called Soccer in some parts, is responsible for many positives. The recent World Cup in South Africa shows again just how sports can be used to bring people together in positive ways.

Football has long been considered the most popular sport in the world. As football's popularity continues, the proliferation of communication channels is not only helping to engage audiences across the world, but it is also lining the pockets of FIFA. This widespread appeal translates to profit for FIFA. Sixty-eight percent of football fans in India, the second most populous country in the world, reported purchasing World Cup paraphernalia including soccer shirts during the tournament. Most made their purchase in person, however, a large percentage (30%) made purchases online as well.

In developing countries such as India, soccer rivals cricket as the sport of choice. During the FIFA tournament almost 90% of all males reported a high level of interest in the FIFA tournament. The proliferation of new communication channels has furthered the game's appeal. As many as 24% used streaming Internet feeds to take in the games while 12% watched via mobile devices such as cell phones.

Visitors to far off regions can often connect with locals over conversations of past football heroes such as Pele or more modern stars such as Ronaldo. With such notoriety it is no wonder that athletes such as Wayne Rooney bears the brunt when his personal life is placed under a microscope and millions if not billions discuss his personal indiscretions that take place beyond the pitch.

With the expansion of the game and the increasing communication channels to access information about it, owners and associations are poised to reap the benefits at the expense of players' privacy. However, the flip side is that athletes are now, more than ever, able to build their own brand independent of the league and their team using these new online channels. Football athletes and NBA stars such as Chris Bosh and Lebron James are at the fore-front of using these new online channels such as Twitter as a means of expanding their "brand" beyond the game. Make no mistake about it, Wayne Rooney as well as other stars now realize that they are a brand as well as an individual.

So is the thirst for popularity and interaction with fans through these new channels all part and parcel of competing at the upper echelons of sports which comes with a number of rewards and pitfalls?

The goal will be to harness these new communication channels and maximize their benefits at the same time protecting your brand. This is the challenge that individuals and organizations will face when operating within a world with ever emerging communication channels that brings fans and "brands" closer together.

