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**A theoretical and empirical supported discussion
about the challenges regarding
Women's Professional Soccer in the USA**

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Abstract

This dissertation is a theoretical and empirical supported discussion about Women's professional soccer (WPS) in the USA. The aim is to discuss the challenges to establish a professional soccer league for women. Questions of importance are what is the product, how is the product marketed, and who is the intended consumer. The material for the discussion is extracted from interviews with people who are or have been involved with the WPS. Other sources are material from the Internet that concerns or relates to the WPS as well as literature about marketing, product development and soccer in the US. The theory that's mostly used is C Wright Mills ideas about individual and structure and also management and marketing models that are used to explain the material when it's needed. Four areas are defined as the foundation, which correlates to each other. First what the discussion revolves around: the WPS. Then there's the format of the WPS, which is franchise. Further, a sport franchise needs to be sellable to an audience. Therefore matters concerning product and marketing need to be addressed. These are the four principal areas that will be discussed, to begin with. Later in the discussion the question of gender arises. But equality between the sexes is not a prerequisite for the WPS, as the other four areas are, it's mere a possible result. Therefore other theories than gender theories are in focus since the aim is to locate strengths, weaknesses and challenges for the league. With that said a gender perspective is present and will be explored at the end. The core discussion is turned towards the consumer and the target market. Do the management of the WPS actually know who is coming to the games? Do they know what these consumers want from the product? And if they don't know this, they can't know how to market the product.

Key words: product, marketing, target market, soccer, and gender.

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Part I

1. Introduction

It's summer in Dresden, Germany 2011 in August. I'm surrounded in a crowded stadium. There's anticipation among the people and the atmosphere is cheerful. I'm amazed and fascinated, and the game hasn't even started yet. It's quarterfinal in the World Cup. People are filling the seats for a soccer game. Maybe I shouldn't be surprised, but I am. I wonder where these people is when it's not the World Cup. It's not quite enough to say that the female soccer leagues don't attract spectators because it's women playing. Women are playing now and there are 25,000 people here to see a women's soccer game.

It started as fascination about a full stadium at the World Cup. As the game went on it turned out to be one of the most dramatic games possibly in the history of the World Cup. The crowd was committed, the progress of the game stirred up a lot of emotions and I was intrigued. The audience was not just there for a laugh, to socialize, or to experience an event; they were involved. This was the quarterfinal between Brazil and the USA, an intense game that included questionable judgements from the referee, an undeserving (?) penalty kick, a red card, an amazing comeback, a massive scolding of female soccer star Marta by the spectators, a goal at the last minute of the extra time and a thrilling penalty shootout. Later that evening, walking back to the hotel, I passed ESPN's live studio on Teaterplatz in Dresden, they had prominent guests: the two heroines of the quarterfinal. I stayed and listened and got inspired by the excitement surrounding the team. The next day I didn't want to leave the city, the atmosphere, the enthusiasm and my inspiration. I had to do something.

The rest of the summer I thought about it and I found broadcasts from the Women's Professional Soccer (WPS) league in the US, which I watched and wondered about. My notion was that this league was important because as far as I knew, it was the only completely professional soccer league for women. I wanted to explore the organisation of the league and what they did to make the league work. An idea for my

master dissertation took shape, and eventually turned into something viable. Then the league announced that season 2012 was cancelled due to legal issues and a need to regroup financially. My questions became the opposite, why couldn't the WPS endure, what happened and why does it seem so hard to sell women's soccer? Apparently it can be sold, as evidently shown during the World Cup. The league is a product and has to be sellable to sustain, but what does the product consist of exactly? And is it just about selling a product? The investors have lost a lot of money, so why aren't they backing out? They are business people, so what do they see in the product that is worth more than the money they've lost and maybe still will lose before it gets better? There are a lot of different aspects to these questions. It's about business, finances and marketing. The WPS is a franchise and needs to profit to survive. And it is sport, with all the ideals and values considering good sporting results. Or isn't it? Maybe it's about business altogether. And does it matter that it's women playing?

1.2 Relevance

This is a study where I discuss a quite uncharted area to explore what's interesting for further research. Since women's professional sports leagues haven't been subjected to researchers that much in the past this study can be seen as a start in researching a field that needs further development.

This is a two-layered investigation. Firstly I cover the obvious problems surrounding the league, the fact that there won't be any professional league in 2012 and the ambition to play again in 2013. Secondly I want to continue beyond these issues, and see the problem from a marketing perspective and gain understanding of how the league is marketed, to whom it's marketed, and to what effect. It's a study without a main theory, but several theories or models will be applied and tested on the material.

Sociologist C Wright Mills (1997) asks what is meant by the demands that our research should be relevant? He says that it ought to mean that the research should be truly relevant for our perception of a social structure and for what's happening within it. From a sports research point of view the study will aspire to show the conditions for the WPS and the obstacles in establishing a sports league. The discussion in this study could therefore be relevant to other sport franchises and other professional sport entities. From a social perspective the relevance lies within the circumstances of business. What happens when you market a product that consists of individuals? And

what if the consumer, the product and the product developer can't agree on what the product should be?

2. Purpose and research questions

The posing of questions should comprise a direct notification of a series of public issues and personal troubles. And it should uncover the caused connections between environments and social structures, so that you will get access to investigate it, Wright Mills (1997) says. When we phrase questions we have to clarify which social values that are threatened, who accepts them as values and who or what is posing a threat to them. These questions are often complicated through discovering that values that are in danger not necessarily are the same as those values individuals or the public believes are threatened. This means that we have to ask questions such as: Which values do the agents perceive as threatened? From who or what do this threat appear to come? If the agents had been fully aware of the values that actually are in danger would they be worried (Wright Mills, 1997)? From the soccer player's point of view the cancellation of the WPS means that they probably won't be playing professional soccer in 2012. The players are obviously aware of their loss. But what does it mean in the bigger picture, that the WPS is cancelled? Is it even important in the world of sports? Is it noticeable? It's a setback for some, but is it a setback for sports, for women's sports, for equality, for society? I cannot answer that and don't intend to, but these questions are worth having in mind at the end of the discussion.

The aim of this dissertation is to discuss, and to broaden the understanding of, the challenges to establish a women's professional soccer league. In the discussion I will use the Women's professional soccer (WPS) founded in the USA as an example. I will examine how people involved perceive the product of the WPS, how the product is marketed, and who the intended consumer might be? Is there a market for a women's professional soccer league? Does it exist a correlation between product and consumer, or is it a mismatch? And if the product can't be sold does it mean that it's a bad product? This also relates to matters concerning for whom the product needs to be sold? And finally have the problems anything to do with gender? This dissertation is meant to lead a theoretical and empirical supported discussion. Therefore I will only graze the management and marketing models, and the information is interweaved when the different subjects surfaces.

3. Methodology

In this chapter I will describe my choice of method and why I perceived this to be my best option. I also reflect on the advantages and disadvantages with these choices. Then I describe how the interviews have been performed and present the informants and their role in or around the league. Last my role as a researcher is addressed and how it might have affected the study.

3.1 Choosing interviews

One part of the empirical material in this study is interviews. Interviews are used because when the research questions are difficult to measure, interviews have a more explanatory approach in contrast to surveys, which is more descriptive. Interviews provide material that is more extensive (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Because the informants have different roles in and around the league the information will vary. The intention was to get different perspectives to be able to dig deeper to the intricate phenomena of the WPS. Chris Gratton and Ian Jones (2010) say that the advantage with interviewing is that the interviewees can talk about their experiences with their own words and address issues that are of importance to them. This means that unexpected information will surface, which expands the researcher's understanding of the subject. This is something that I expected and relied on. Because ultimately what the interviewees told me influenced the course of the study.

Interviews should not be seen as a method of collecting information but as a social encounter where knowledge is exchanged, which leads to new knowledge being produced (Negus, 1999). Because of that I believe an interview face to face is of preference if you want to gain a more extended answer. Therefore I decided to travel to the USA to perform the interviews with the people I wanted to interview. With that said most interviews are done by telephone, as it was a matter of logistics and that I would have been forced to exclude them from the study, which I didn't want to do. The disadvantage of telephone interviews, Gratton and Jones (2010) say, is that it is harder to gain trust when you can't observe body language. What I found through this study was that it's harder to get as in-depth answers on the phone compared to a personal encounter. Not because of trust but because when you meet a person there could be silence in a more natural way that eventually will lead the interviewee to talk more. On the phone you're just waiting for the next question. But I also experienced that it

depends on whom you talk to and that a telephone interview can be just as informative as a meeting.

The interviews were conducted in English, which is not my first language. Of course this had an impact on the interviews since I'm not as fluent in English as in Swedish. Therefore the interviews might have been slower and it might also have led to misunderstandings. To avoid confusion I asked them to repeat their answer when I thought it was necessary. The English speaking part of the interviews is one reason for travelling to the USA. There I would be surrounded by and get used to an English-speaking environment and be able to perform the interviews with less distraction from the language barrier.

3.2 Performing the interviews

In the autumn 2011 I contacted five teams in the WPS and presented an idea for a study. I received answer from the owner of Philadelphia Independence, David Halstead. In the beginning my intention was to study the team, the efforts of marketing and how the individual player perceived the league. I was going to travel to Philadelphia and observe and interview people in and around the team. But in the beginning of 2012 the news arrived that the league was cancelled for the year. In discussions with my supervisor and David Halstead I decided to still study the WPS but with my main focus on the business-side of the league.

I collected the empirical material for the study through semi-structured interviews. I chose this because I wanted to see what kind of information I would get and then be able to adjust my questions to what I thought would be interesting for the study. Semi-structured interviews mean that the interviewer uses a predetermined schedule of questions or area of questions, but that there are room for changing the order, adding questions or deleting questions (Gratton & Jones, 2010). When talking to the interviewees I soon discovered that some questions weren't relevant anymore and refined my list of questions. I interviewed people that are or were, in different ways, involved with the WPS. I wanted as many point of views as possible. The team owners could provide me with insights of the business decisions that affect the league, why the league was cancelled and what is required to make the league sustainable. The journalist could tell me how the league is perceived from the outside as well as what kind of success you can expect from a professional women's league. The different managers

could give me information concerning the operating side of the league as well as the challenges ahead.

I documented the interviews by taking notes. According to Gratton and Jones (2010) written notes have the advantage of not being technology based and therefore eliminates the risk of failing equipment. You can choose to note only what's relevant for the study and therefore save time. Runa Patel and Bo Davidson (2008) mean that there are some disadvantages with using a tape recorder. They claim that it might affect the answers you'll get. Even though there usually aren't any problems getting people to talk while using a tape recorder, something changes when you turn it off. People talk more freely and are not as eager to appear logical and reasonable. I found that also to be true when taking notes, at one point I got very interesting information after I declared that the interview was over. I've also received information that the informants asked me not to use, which I haven't. That information was shared with me to illustrate a point and is of no real relevance for the study.

Mats Alvesson and Kaj Sköldbberg (2005) say that interpretation is a large part of the interview. It's the researcher's task to interpret and understand the information that is received from the object of study. Before the interview you chose whom to talk to and during the interview you interpret what to ask, what has been said and what is interesting. The interviewee also interprets what's relevant to tell and the context for the interview. Two of my interviewees asked me if I was a journalist. If this was the prevalent perception then that would influence the answers I got, since the league is facing a legal battle. This might also have affected why some of the people I wanted to interview wouldn't talk to me.

3.3 The interviewees

I have performed six interviews with five people, three in person and three on the phone. I acquired the contacts through David Halstead. These five interviewees are those who were willing and/ or able to talk to me during the time I spent in the USA.

I've done two interviews in person with the owner of Philadelphia Independence, David Halstead. This is the first sport franchise he owns and he got involved because of a big sport interest as well as a big business interest. Over the phone I interviewed the owner of Atlanta Beat, Fitz Johnson. He got involved because he has a soccer history and this is the first time he owns a sport franchise. The former general

manager of Philadelphia Independence, Terry Foley, I interviewed in person. As a general manager he made decisions regarding the operating side of the franchise, which means more soccer decisions than business decisions. He is the current owner of FC Virginia, a youth club for elite girls. The strategy and operations director, Melanie Fitzgerald, of the team Western New York Flash (a former WPS team), I talked to on the phone as well as follow-up questions through email. This year WNY is playing in WSPL (Women's premier soccer league). She's also the former director of operations in W-league and former manager of league operations for the WPS. The journalist Charles Cuttone writes nationally about soccer in the USA and has a column on Phillysoccernews.com.

3.4 Analysing the interviews

To analyse an interview, Ronald Grele (2005) points out that we have to consider the social and psychological relationship between the participants. I interviewed people from different positions and relations to the WPS and that probably meant that they had different ways of responding to me as an interviewer. There is also the matter of how they perceive me and if they try to give me answers they think I want. Gratton and Jones (2010) also stress the risk of interviewees misunderstanding the questions or not being able to verbalise their thoughts. Another issue could be if the informants have their own agenda or reasons for not providing an accurate picture of reality. I anticipated that some, especially the owners might be elusive in their answers and some questions were obviously more difficult to answer, because they might have been sensitive. Torsten Thurén says people could also be consensual in their views due to discussions they've had about the issue and therefore have a mutual version of the situation (Thurén, 2005). I did perceive some consensual views but I could also distinguish some differences depending on their position and how honest they felt they were allowed to be. I need to emphasize though that it's my role to interpret the interviews, and that this is how I have interpreted and analysed the information that was shared with me.

When you analyse qualitative data you first need to reduce the material by interpreting and discarding data that aren't relevant for the study. This is an on-going process. Then it's important to structure the material so it becomes easier to draw conclusions (Miles & Huberman, in Gratton & Jones, 2010). I categorized the notes in

different groups (such as US Soccer, strengths and weaknesses or players involvement in marketing etc.), which I then transferred to the text. I compared the answers from the interviews with the literature as well as articles on the Internet about the WPS. Are the different sources saying different things and if so what do that mean? Is for example literature on marketing saying different things from what's in practice in the WPS?

3.5 Complementary sources

Wright Mills (1997) claims that research based on empirical material collected from surveys and interviews cannot be used to explain structural factors, because structure lies above the information that interviews or surveys can attain. My empirical material will consist of interviews as well as interviews with owners, columns and articles from the Internet concerning the WPS. This because I wanted to gain a picture of what kind of stories that existed about the WPS. These two types of sources I hope will give me inkling about the structure. With the help of previous research on related subjects and other sources I aim at understanding the structure, not only the WPS structure, but also gain an understanding of the structure that the WPS is surrounded by. Wright Mills continues; to be able to understand the shifting of influences between small environments and larger structures we have to use historical material. What exactly does he mean with historical material? Perhaps history of the phenomenon. In this case the phenomenon of establishing a sport franchise. To understand the context I have to gain knowledge of what makes a league sustainable and to do that I have used examples from the past and the present.

Other sources I have used are literature about franchise, marketing and product management, as well as literature about soccer in the US. Additionally I used the WPS website to find out what they write about themselves and what information that is addressed to the fans. I also used US Soccer's website to see what they write about the WPS and thereby get an idea of the relationship between the league and the federation as a part of the structure surrounding the WPS.

3.6 Reflexive research

Alvesson and Skoldberg (2005) writes that the purpose with reflexive research is to avoid getting caught in stereotypes and reproduce them instead of challenging them. When empirical research is tinged by reflection you aim at understanding how reality

works instead of determining truths. To admit that the empirical material is a construction is important in reflexive research. Reflexive research is characterized by interpretation and reflection. All empirical results are interpretations, and not empirical facts. This demands an awareness of theoretical assumptions, and the significance of pre-comprehension. Reflection on the other hand, turns the focus to the researcher, her character, field of research area, the society, traditions and the form of the text. Reflection might be phrased as interpreting the interpretation, and it leads to a critical self-trial of your own construction of the empirical material. Why do the researcher do these interpretations? This question needs to be answered before you can say anything about the results. Reflection is how personal and intellectual involvement influences the study subject. It could deal with self-reflection by the researcher or/and how the surrounding society is constructed. Alvesson and Sköldböck mean that reflection should concern the premises for your own thinking, observations and use of language. It is the context in which the researcher exists that is of most interest (Alvesson & Sköldböck, 2005). My previous papers have been gender studies within sports. I have used gender theories, especially Adrienne Rich and Judith Butler's ideas about compulsory heterosexuality. I have with those theories specifically searched for gender differences and tried to explain different phenomenon with these theories. This study is tinged by those previous studies. Even though I don't intend to use those theories I am sensitive to information that could be interpreted as crucial in a gender perspective, for example what players are doing outside the soccer field.

My underlying motif for studying the WPS is that I have a wish for women's professional sports to prosper. I believe a professional soccer league for women is important, since soccer probably is the most widespread sport in the world. I see it as a question of equality. It's a backlash for feminism to deny women the chance to fully commit to the biggest sport in the world. Women can be professional tennis players on the WTA tour and professional handball players in the Danish "dame håndbold ligaen", so why not in soccer? When I approach this subject I have ambitions to find out how a professional soccer league could be possible by dissecting the conditions of the current league. These strives of mine and my background with gender studies, may render the study to become too gender centred. It is tempting to explain every challenge and set back the league faces with references to inequality of the sexes. This is something I actively try to avoid. I want the question of gender to surface as late as possible because

some of these challenges may have nothing or very little to do with gender. Therefore I haven't used gender theories. Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2005) write that there's a risk that gender research will reproduce and create gender stereotypes if it assumes that the oppression of women by men are the dominant element in every relationship between the sexes. There has to be more self-criticism than that, they say. They also make an interesting remark concerning sport and gender. They claim that feminists are criticising the using of sport metaphors because of the association between sport and masculinity, but nowadays sport is an activity for both sexes and criticism like that rather reinforce than reveals gender differences. I believe this is true to some extent. It is important not to immediately victimize women and their situation, and blaming the structure because that might lead to inactivity and capitulation.

So what I've done is to use other theories and models and then applied a gender perspective in the analysis when I've found it relevant. The question of equality between the sexes is not a prerequisite for women's professional soccer, it's mere a possible result. Therefore other theories than gender theories are in focus since my aim, first and foremost, is to locate strengths, weaknesses and challenges for the league, and to examine if (and when) gender becomes important for the cancellation. I am aware that gender issues might turn out to be a part of why the league is stumbling, but it's not certain. Is the reason for starting the league to start a women's league? Is there a demand for a female soccer league? Is the marketing orchestrated in a special way because women are being marketed?

4. Previous research

Sport marketing has grown as a field of study and has distinguished itself from marketing in general. Sport is an intangible product and a product without any guarantees that it will be a price worthy experience. Therefore marketing must focus on the anticipation and the excitement of the uncertainty. Sport marketing is quite an extensive area and literature is not hard to find. *Strategic Sport Communication* from 2007 by Paul Pedersen, Kimberly Miloch and Pamela Laucella is a book, which addresses different types of sport communication including within organisations, between organizations and with the media. They also present a strategic sport communication model of the relationships between different sport bodies. *Sport Marketing* by George R. Milne and Mark A. McDonald (1999) focuses on the exchange process between

marketers and consumers. They stress that this interchange is the fundamental piece of the marketing process. *Advanced theory and practice in sport marketing* (2008) by Eric C. Schwarz and Jason D. Hunter approach sport marketing with a theoretical base for the practice of sport marketing. They address how to understand the sport consumer and the importance of market research and consumer behaviour. The book tries to give a few solutions to common marketing problems. *Marketing & football* (2007) edited by Michel Desbordes has an international view on sport marketing and includes soccer-marketing cases from all over the world. Especially two articles are of interest. "Marketing professional soccer in the United States" by Richard Southall and Mark Nagel handles the different approaches the MLS (Major league soccer) and the WUSA (Women's united soccer association) had in starting a new league. Frank Pons and Stephen Standifird address almost the same issues in their article "Marketing of professional soccer in the US".

Most literature on women's professional soccer in the US is written about the WUSA, the previous league. Andrei S. Markovits and Steven L Hellermans article "Women's soccer in the United States: Yet another American exceptionalism" from 2003 concerns the growth of women's soccer in the US. They stress the importance of collegiate soccer for the progression of women's soccer and that all national team players have emerged from college soccer. Their conclusions include that a professional soccer league for women has the advantage of being the best league in the world, which all the other major franchises in the US are as well. But they mean that a condition for success for a female soccer league is to attract women to become fans. Annelies Knoppers and Anton Anthonissen published in 2003 the article "Women's Soccer in the United States and the Netherlands: Differences and Similarities in Regimes of Inequalities". The study aims at comparing the visibility and progression of women's soccer in the US with the struggles of being accepted and respected as female soccer players in the Netherlands. By using the concept "regimes of inequality" the authors try to demonstrate how ideas of gender, and masculinity in particular, influences women's soccer both from a gender perspective but also in relation to social class and sexuality. The similarities between the countries are the dependencies of men, as men often are in control both on field and when it comes to distributing resources. There's also a book about the American success story of the World Cup 1999 *The girls of summer* (2001) by journalist Jere Longman. The book is interesting because he addresses issues of the

players as role models and the discussions concerning the sexualisation of the team members. He means that media loved to focus on the physical attractiveness of the players and that most players did not reflect on the situation and enjoyed the attention given to female soccer players. About soccer in the US in general is the book *Offside. Soccer and American exceptionalism* from 2001 by Markovits and Hellerman. This book mainly concerns men's soccer. It examines why soccer have struggled in the US and that one reason for that is that an American (male) soccer league wouldn't be the best league in the world.

5. Theoretical perspectives and models

In the choice of theories I decided to use one theory about structure, one about media influence, as well as models with connections to three components that are keys to the existence of professional women's soccer in the US: franchise, product and marketing. This means that I had many possible models in mind when I started. As the study progressed I excluded several of those models. In this chapter I will present the theories and models that will help me understand the WPS and the structure surrounding it.

5.1 Individual and structure

Wright Mills (1997) has written about the sociological imagination, which address issues concerning how research is being made and the importance of using previous experiences as a reference point when investigating sociological questions. One of the distinctions that the sociological imagination makes is the one between personal troubles and public issues. Troubles occur within the individual and are limited by his immediate relations to other people and to the surroundings he is personally aware of. Trouble is a private matter, and is surfacing when values that are important to the individual are perceived as threatened. Issues have to do with questions that go beyond the individual's close surroundings and inner life. Outside the individual the environment is organized into institutions, which enters one another to form a larger structure for the social and historical life. An issue is a public concern that arises when a value that the public treasure is perceived as threatened, for example could one value be to earn your own living. Troubles become issues when the structure of people's opportunities is collapsing and you can't solve a person's trouble by "changing" something within them. For example, a personal trouble is if there's no team to play in

for a soccer-loving girl who lives on the countryside, because it's too far to a team. That's just unfortunate. But if ten thousands of girls can't play soccer because there aren't any teams at all, then it's a structural problem and it becomes a public issue.

To be used as a theoretical tool there needs to be relationship between individual and structure. Structural issues consist of a large amount of individuals' troubles. So what are the troubles that turn into issues? The WPS could be seen as neither the structure nor the individual but both. There are bigger structures above that affect the cancellation of the league, and the WPS owners' decision to cancel affect the individuals that were hoping to play professional soccer. But it's also possible to see the WPS as an individual that is dealing with troubles in a sport structure. And now they're on their own trying to solve its' troubles since they're not perceived as public issues. The theory about individual and structure is used to put the WPS in a context.

5.2 Agenda setting theory

This theory relates to matters concerning media stories about the WPS. What most people know about the WPS they've probably learned through the media. So are the media writing about the WPS and the WPS players? What are they writing about and is this favourable to the WPS?

Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972) developed the agenda setting theory after a study of the media's influence during a political campaign. They mean that few people get first hand information about what the candidates believe to be the most important issues. The only source most people have to gain information from is the media. McCombs and Shaw found that the news that the media reported wasn't always about the issues the candidates spoke about. In the study this meant that the media influenced voters' judgements of what the campaign's most essential issues were. Even when they asked voters who favoured a candidate it showed that they still absorbed and were affected by all campaign news and not only what 'their' candidate spoke of. McCombs and Shaw stresses though that to say that the media determine people's views are exaggerated. But this displays the importance of accurate and favourable media coverage, and how hard it is to change the ideas people have attained through the media.

5.3 The business idea model

This management model is used to compare the practise with what the literature suggest is an ideal way to think about and approach the business market. It concerns issues of how to be a business actor. What is the business idea for the WPS? Is it a consensual idea? And how might it affect the brand? How are those involved viewing the brand and do they have the same picture as the consumers have?

The business idea model shows interplay of five components: offerings, consumers, resources, brand and values. The way a company manages to analyse and connect the components is crucial to a surviving and successful business. An important aspect is if there are one or several business ideas within the company and an analysis should be done of every business idea separately. Conflicting business ideas is often a source to a company's problems. In worst case scenario the company doesn't really support any of the business ideas. A company depend on the ability to satisfy consumers' needs, and develop value for these consumers and thereby value for the company. The company strives for a good correlation between clients' needs and the offer the company serves. This correlation defines the company's external efficiency, which is measured by market shares, brand loyalty, customer perceived value and gross margin. In analysing the business idea it's important to identify the resources of particular value for the company and which resources constitute the core for the operating business to sustain. Critical resources could be competence and personnel, technical equipment or capital. The correlation between offers and resources constitute the internal efficiency; how to use the resources most effectively to produce offers. A strong brand gives validation to the company to operate in a desired manner. The brand is often more valuable to the company than physical and financial assets. It makes it easier to recruit skilled employees and establish good relations with business partners as well as attracting consumers. A strong brand demands a correlation between image (external perception), profile (desired perception) and identity (self image). Last, values of the company are the glue. They direct the decisions, behaviours and actions of the company representatives (Bruzelius & Skärvad, 2004).

5.4 SWOT, Brand asset valuator and Customer based strategy

Marketing is essential when it comes to selling a product, and models concerning marketing will be used to analyse the proceedings of marketing the WPS. How is the

WPS marketed and to who? All the models pinpoint a different aspect of marketing. Since marketing is such a multifaceted issue I have used several ideas about what's most important when marketing products.

The SWOT analysis estimates a company's strengths and weaknesses (internal environment) and opportunities and threats (external environment). Philip Kotler and Kevin Lane Keller (2006) focus primarily on the opportunities. They mean that the key to successful marketing is discovering the opportunities and using them in a lucrative manner. They describe a threat as something that could develop in an unfavourable way, which would lead to a decreased profit. In this study the focus is mainly on strengths and weaknesses because it's used to define the quality of the product.

The brand asset valuator is a measuring tool to identify the key components of brand equity. The first component is differentiation; it's in what way the brand is different from other brands. Relevance is how many people that would be appealed by the brand. Esteem is the brand's respectability and the regard people have for the brand. Knowledge is to what extent people know and recognize the brand. Differentiation and relevance together define brand strength. These are important for the value of the brand in the future. Brand stature includes esteem and knowledge and these indicate the value the brand has had in the past. New brands are low in all levels, but can measure high in differentiation (Kotler & Keller, 2006).

The customer-based strategy involves four basic customer approaches: Getting new customers, keeping existing customers contented, getting existing customers to buy more and dropping undesirable customers. A study from 1999 by the Boston consulting group shows that remarkable little effort is devoted to keeping existing customers contented and most attention is focused on getting new customers (Lehmann & Winer, 2002). Kotler and Keller (2006) claims that the cost of attracting new consumers is five times more than the cost to keep the present consumers.

The Four P components of marketing, also referred to as the marketing mix, are: product, price, promotion, and place. It is a model of important factors from the seller's point of view. The product involves matters of quality, brand or service. The price of the product must be appropriately set. Promoting the product is an important part in attracting consumers. Place is the channel by which the marketer reach the

consumers (Kotler & Keller, 2006). This model will not be used but is referred to in the text and therefore it's included here.

Part II

6. Examining the WPS

In this chapter I will present the collected material from the interviews intertwined with the complementary sources and literature of the subjects. The different sources will be compared and analysed with the help of theoretical literature. The interviews are rendered not as actual quotes but as a rendition of what they've said. The chapter is divided into five parts. First the format of sports leagues in the USA, which is **franchise**. Then there's **the WPS**, what the discussion is surrounding. Further, because it's a franchise the condition for the WPS' existence is to be able to sell it to an audience. Therefore matters concerning **product** and **marketing** need to be addressed. All these issues are entangled and are the main areas I will discuss, to begin with.

Franchise and the WPS are the starting points, the first layer of the study. After this, product and marketing will be addressed, which is a deeper examination of the conditions and hindrances to operating the WPS as a permanent league. Last there is a chapter that concerns the question whether the problem with the WPS has to do with soccer in general or if it has to do with attitudes towards women and women's sport. This chapter is meant to begin the discussion about gender that has been unstated throughout the material.

6.1 To franchise a sport league.

US sport franchises are a traditional business in its formation. American team sports were commercialized early on, and professional leagues in the US have always been self-possessed (Markovits & Hellerman, 2001). Franchising involves two important parties: the franchisor and the franchisee. The franchisor is the parent organization that grants a person (the franchisee) to operate a location of its' developed business. The franchisor controls the products and trademarks, but through a contract the franchisee buys the right to use them. The relationship between the franchisee and the franchisor is founded on a contract, which mainly benefits the franchisor. But at the same time, franchisors are dependent on the franchisee in order to get proceeds. Another advantage for the franchisor is the knowledge of the franchise or the business in which the franchise operate. In USA and Canada it is illegal to withhold information about company history

to a potential franchisee, which is why franchising is more prospering there. It is important for the franchisor to attract franchisees and gain competitive advantages, if a franchisor is unable to do this they will probably renounce from franchising (Price, 1997).

According to Stuart Price (1997), franchising should be seen as an innovation because franchising means changes in the management of an organization, and also change of strategy and in the culture of business. Adding to this, the managing of franchisees, which requires certain skills. This change, this innovation, is also a source of potential failure. Price means that the decision to franchise isn't an obvious choice; it's not the only option to grow a business. Since franchising is seen as an innovation, and not a business model you add to your business, franchising may disturb existing processes, technologies, power structures and organizational culture. Price points out that to franchise is a voluntary choice and not something that is coerced by the business climate. Though, to franchise is not necessarily a choice of rational behaviour, it could also be argued that it is a decision of a more mechanical strategy; everyone else is franchising, so I should franchise as well, he writes. With a sport franchise you often don't start as a regular business that you franchise later, it becomes a franchise right away. So a sports franchise is not an innovation in that sense and therefore it's different from a regular franchise. For a successful franchise, the franchisor needs to include the franchisees in the innovation process. To be sustainable and prospering the ideas and knowledge from the franchisees might be an important part of the competitive advantage Price says (1997). But in the WPS the franchisor and the franchisees are the same people. The owners of the teams also own the league. This means that new franchisees get to be a part of the franchisor and are thereby included in the process of advancement. But it also displays a risk that the mission is not unanimous and that the managing of the league is drawn in many different directions, as one of my informants suggests. This might lead to, according to Lars Bruzelius and Per-Hugo Skärvad (2004) that they're not moving forward since there are several ideas that in theory are equally strong.

By people that profit from franchising, such as lawyers, consultant banks and popular franchise press there is an overly enthusiastic praise of franchising. It's alleged as a risk-free business with low rates of failure, and it's promoted as preferable to independent businesses. After the formation there's a period of initial success. But

then comes the high-risk period when the franchise is particularly susceptible to insolvency, and a majority of franchises fails within four years. Price writes of a study by Shane in 1996 where he found that out of 138 new US-based franchisors, approximately 75 per cent failed over a ten-year period. Whether a franchise grows or not is influenced by how alluring the offer is to potential franchisees and how long the franchisees are motivated to continue (Price, 1997). It appears to be a key issue to have franchisees that have the money and the patience to endure. If a franchise is having problems, new franchisees are hard to find. The owner of Philadelphia Independence David Halstead says that if we don't have a good plan for new teams they will not join the league, since the old business model didn't work and we've lost a lot of money. It seems crucial to alter the business model, not only because the US soccer federation requires more teams to the league, but because the league needs more teams to share the burden of costs to be able to sustain. Otherwise I believe the owners eventually will withdraw from the league. The owner of Atlanta Beat, Fitz Johnson confirms this in a way when saying that the league needs strong ownership.

To expand is a question of strategy, since expanding too early, before the franchisor have the required experience, resources, and are ready to manage franchisees, might cause problems for the franchise. If a franchisor expands too quickly they get too dependent on sales of new franchises to sustain. This could be a problem for sport franchises since they need several teams from the start and don't have time to establish the business beforehand. That means that those committed from the beginning need to be committed until the franchise has been established long enough to be able to get new teams or new team owners to the franchise. This was a problem for the WPS because it begun with seven teams and after first season one team departed and after the second season three teams departed, one in the middle of the season journalist Charles Cuttone says. It's important for the teams to be financially stable, because it is damaging for the league if teams resign during the on-going season (Woratschek, Schafmeister & Ströbel, 2007). Those franchisors that don't sustain are the ones with fewer outlets, consequently the ones with less expansion rate. So Price (1997) advices future franchisees to chose a franchisor that has long experience as a manager, that the franchise has been established for more than five years, that the costs and fees are even with comparable franchises in the same category and that the franchisor have resources to survive and sustain growth. I think the problem for the WPS could be that potential

new investors want to wait until the league is established, when the risk isn't as big. Halstead says there are cities that have expressed an interest to have a WPS franchise and who has a good market for soccer, but we have to have a better business model. Until we do they won't invest and we don't have all the answers yet. Halstead continues saying that most sports franchises lose money, so you need a team of owners that can lose a lot of money. But if you just lose some, that's tolerable as long as you gain equity value. Equity value is the team's identity and if the identity is strong that is worth more than anything else because that means that you can sell the business for more money than you bought it for. But it's hard losing money if the trends aren't pointing towards future prosperity, he says.

6.1.1 Other franchise leagues

All-American girls professional baseball league (AAGPBL) was founded due to a fear that World War II would impoverish the men's baseball league and that this would lead to the ruin of the baseball parks. The female baseball league emerged in the spring 1943. There was a governing board with investors that ruled the league. The teams were located in smaller cities where they got a lot of publicity and the more intimate ballparks were filled. First season was a success. Because women were frequently working in the factories they were also accepted as ballplayers. The second season two teams were added from larger cities but they had a hard time getting noticed and the ballparks were too big and impersonal. The teams in the larger cities wasn't locally funded, and instead funded by the league management group, which was a huge disadvantage. The league started with four teams in 1943 and peaked with eleven teams in 1950 and ended with five teams in 1954. The reason for the decline was the decentralisation of the governance of the league, this lead to a restrain on the expenses for publicity, promotion and player procurement. The consequences were decreasing attendance (All-American girls professional baseball league, 2012).

Two professional leagues in women's basketball were attempted around the late 1970's and early 1980's in the US, but they couldn't withstand. 1996 the women's national basketball team won the Olympic gold medal in Atlanta. This strengthened the women's college basketball, but also lead to yet another attempt to start a professional league. Two leagues started in 1997: the American basketball league (ABL) and the Women's national basketball association (WNBA). The ABL had better

players and twice as high salaries as the WNBA, but it was poorly organized, teams were located in odd places and they didn't land a favourable television contract. The league only lasted two years. The WNBA had a lot of help from association with the NBA. They played during NBA summer recess, which made the attendance on average at ten thousand per game. The teams were located in big cities and had a television contract with NBC. Women's basketball is out of the margins, but not yet an everlasting part of the American sport scene (Markovits & Hellerman, 2001). 2011 there were twelve teams in WNBA and the average attendance were 7948 spectators per game (Womens basketball online, 2012).

There have been two professional soccer leagues for men in the USA before the currently existing. 1921 to 1933 there were American soccer league (ASL). It was successful, attracted European players and the attendance was about 10,000 on average. The league suffered the consequences of the great depression, which meant that financiers withdrew from the league. North American soccer league (NASL) existed from 1968-1985. The league was a victim of too high expenses and many teams had to withdraw and the league lost its glory and finally dispersed (Southall & Nagel, 2007).

Major league soccer (MLS) was founded 1996, after the men's World Cup in the USA 1994. When starting a new league it's important to have the capital to sustain the league until enough revenues is generated to cover expenses. This requires the investors and league owners to be committed to a long-term development; they need the financial resources as well as patience, Southall and Nagel (2007) say. Sponsors, administrators and players also need to be aware of the growth potential of the league, so they will remain dedicated to the league. For a soccer league in the US, with a limited fan base, it's vital to be cost-conscious and cultivate the revenues as effectively as possible. Even with player-salary limit the MLS lost over 100 million dollars the first three years, but the investors adhered to the business plan. It was a small group of three investors but they were dedicated and kept the league from bankruptcy. They were convinced that the league would be lucrative in the future and in 2003 Los Angeles Galaxy was profitable and the MLS expanded to twelve teams in 2005. In the beginning the league paid ABC to broadcast their championship game. Since then the ratings have increased and the broadcasting deal has been more auspicious for the league. In 2005 95 per cent of the MLS games were broadcast live and the game attendance has been satisfying (Southall & Nagel, 2007). Currently there are nineteen teams (MLS soccer,

2012). The average game attendance for the MLS 2011 was 17872 spectators, which was a record for the league (SB nation, 2012). This is promising since the league cannot market itself as the best soccer league in the world. The MLS has been successful in attracting sponsors due to effective and dedicated work toward the sponsors. Adding to this, the MLS has developed well-attended youth camps for soccer, which has generated positive publicity. The key aspect of the relative success with the MLS is besides the immensely large access to capital, the intention to build success over decades instead of years, Southall and Nagel say. The league has grown slowly, commencing with a low profile, which has gradually increased and now includes high profile players. The future of the MLS is solid, but not secured (Southall & Nagel, 2007).

There are two semi-professional soccer leagues for women in the US. W-league started in 1995 and includes the USA and Canada. It contains of three conference leagues: central, eastern and western. The W-league is one of the leagues of the USL (United soccer leagues) who organise soccer leagues on elite level. On the USL website they claim that the league is the strongest and best organised league for women. They also state that the league is recognised around the world for being a league that provides high-class competition (USL, 2012). Then there's the WPSL (Women's premier soccer league), which was founded 1998. It's an open league, which means that teams can join if they fulfil and respect the WPSL requirements. There's an elite league as well as a non-elite one. Their mission statement contains matters like being a choice for women who want to play soccer at the highest level and that the female players should be role models for youths. They also stress that the success of the league is all teams' responsibility and that without a strong league the success of one team is useless (WPSL, 2012). These leagues are not fully professional and are not sanctioned as a division 1 professional leagues by the US Soccer federation.

It wasn't until after the World Cup 1999 in USA that a professional soccer league was initiated. WUSA (Women's United Soccer Association) was the first soccer league for women in the USA, where every player was paid a salary. WUSA was founded in 2000 and first season began in 2001 consisting of eight teams. The franchises were situated in Philadelphia, Boston, New York City, Washington DC, Cary in North Carolina, Atlanta, San José and San Diego. The league contained several international players from China, Germany, Norway and Brazil (Longman, 2001). The founders developed a five-year business plan, which aspired to turn the league into a successful sports franchise

with a satisfying fan base and a popular product for television viewers and sponsors. The investors knew the league initially would not profit but after first season they had 20 million in expenses and realised that ticket and merchandise sales wouldn't be enough to repair the damages. Ultimately they had assumed higher revenues than what was realistic. And they failed in attracting corporate sponsors. The interest in the league weren't as high as estimated, neither by sponsors nor by fans and spectators. WUSA was directed to young girls and women, who weren't big sport consumers, like boys and men are, and therefore it was difficult to build a fan base. The target market weren't a frequent visitor on games. Despite all the top players of the world the league couldn't compete with the established (male) sports franchises. WUSA was suspended after the third season. When the league ended, about 100 million dollars had been lost (Southall & Nagel, 2007). Markovits and Hellerman (2001) argue that the success of the women's World Cup 1999 was not an adequate condition for establishing a professional league. But without the success, it would be substantially harder, almost impossible.

Both WUSA and MLS were founded as single entities, which mean that the owners of the league owned the teams. It was not like the other major sport franchises where every team was a separate franchise linked to a franchisor (Markovits & Hellerman, 2003).

6.2 The WPS: The best league in the world

The WPS was established in September 2007 and began playing in March 2009. It was constituted as a franchise where each team is individually owned and the league is operated by a group of investors. The league consisted 2011 of six teams (Atlanta Beat, Boston Breakers, Philadelphia Independence, Magic Jack, Sky Blue FC and Western New York Flash). During 2012 the league was cancelled due to legal issues with the owner to the expelled team of Magic Jack. But the cancellation has also to do with the lack of profit, and the league needs to regroup and regain strength to be able to grow and become a permanent league. The average game attendance for 2011 was 3531 spectators, excluding the three play-off games. Looking at the median value the teams with best attendance were Boston Breakers and Atlanta Beat. One game attracted over 15000 spectators, which was a WPS record (Women's professional soccer, 2012).

6.2.1 The cancellation, Magic Jack and a damaged reputation

Concerning the financial situation and the need to regroup the question is: have the experiences and fall-downs of the WUSA been useful information for the investors of the WPS? It seems as WUSA were a victim of hubris and overspending, is this what has happened to the WPS as well? Cuttone says that the difference from WUSA is that it was a company ownership and that they didn't have the passion for soccer. The owners of the WPS have the passion for soccer and are very dedicated, but don't have the money. Halstead, and the former general manager of Philadelphia Independence Terry Foley say that the business model was inadequate and that the expectations and projections were "way off". Because sports in general are a top ten industry in the US, as Pedersen, Miloch and Laucella say (2007), the players might have assumed they would be able to earn lots of money. Halstead says, the players often didn't know what was going on. Some players said they wanted a share of the profits, they hadn't understood that there were no profits. Also the biggest expense for the teams are the players he says, it is not just salaries; it's cars, housing and visa. Foley says he doesn't know where the attendance prognosis came from that the owners used when planning the business. It might have been estimations made with the WUSA league in mind, but it was misleading and overly optimistic.

Concerning the cancellation Johnson says on philly.com (2012) that it was too much of a risk playing the 2012 season. And Halstead says that the key is money. When people have been talking about why the league don't work many, like the media and previous players, talk about the soccer and how you need European players. That may be so but the most important thing is to understand business and how business works. We cancelled in 2012, Halstead says, to pause and figure out how not to lose so much money. In business, if it doesn't work you have to stop and change what you're doing. We had a business model that didn't work, we lost more than we anticipated and now we have to change it. Because why should new investors invest when other investors leave? He says that when we approach possible investors they ask how much money you lose and for how long. Foley says that there are a lot of reasons for the cancellation; first and foremost there was a foul business model based on too high expectations. This led to higher expenses than revenues, ultimately that the players were paid more than what ticket sales brought in. Then there is the issue with Magic Jack, which might lead to the end for the league as the WPS. But Foley also claims that

the WPS owners made some unfortunate decisions, such as spending money on wrong things like a front office with 24 employees, which is way too many. Another ineffective decision, he says was working with the wrong people and that they should've brought in more people who knew soccer.

The articles in the media this year have been about the cancellation and mostly about the legal battle with the owner of Magic Jack, Dan Borislav. The focus on that conflict is the prevalent story of the WPS in the media. And if the media is the number one source for most people, as the agenda setting theory suggest (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), this is not a positive portrayal of the WPS, no matter if the WPS is wrong or right. Even if most stories are in favour of the WPS in the legal battle, it's still about a negative issue. Strategy and operations manager for Western New York Flash, Melanie Fitzgerald points out that a cancellation never is a positive story, but that it's important to tell that women's soccer isn't dead just because of the cancellation, it's just trying to find its form. Foley says that it's the cancellation in itself that gives the league a bad reputation and not the Magic Jack- situation.

This situation gets really complicated though when there are articles about how one of soccer's biggest female stars at the moment, Abby Wambach, is supporting Borislav (ESPN, 2012). I see this as a problem, because if fans thinks she, their favourite player, is critical towards the league then they're not going to be positive towards the WPS. There may be no conflict between Wambach and the WPS, but some sources are insinuating that there are. And if media is the agenda setting for people's opinions and they believe what's written in the media first, this is not a good thing. Foley says that a few star players on the US national team view the national team as their team and sees playing in the WPS as a mere favour to the league. If there are star players, even if they're not many, who aren't loyal to the league I believe it will be much harder to get the people to take an interest in it as well. Then the women's national team (WNT) will receive all the attention without spreading it to the league.

6.2.2. The expansion

On the WPS website and all the teams' own websites the information given is unanimous. The cancellation is due to legal issues with a former team owner and a possibility to regroup and come back stronger in 2013. On US Soccer's website, the most recent article concerning the WPS is about the granted sanctioning and permission to

proceed with the league as a division 1 professional league (US Soccer, 2012). There are conditions mentioned though, they implicate that the league has to expand to a minimum of six teams in 2013 and a minimum of eight teams in 2014. These conditions are not mentioned on the WPS' website. Why not? Is it common knowledge? An unimportant detail? Or a delicate subject? This seems to be an important factor of the problems for the league's future. Foley says that the expansion won't be a problem as long as there's a new business model with realistic attendance prognosis. Sergio Cherubini (2007) writes about the risks of letting the eagerness for the organisation to grow, haze judgements and cause profligacy. He stresses the importance of risk management during the organisation's expansive phase. This was a problem for the WPS since they were too hastily in accepting new franchises because US Soccer required new teams to meet their regulations (Bleacher Report, 2012). Thomas Hofstetter, owner of Sky Blue FC, mentions this in an article published on New York Times Website (NY Times, 2012).

A league needs attractive games and several teams that play on a high level. It's vital to have a league with right amount of teams to make the league exciting (Woratschek, Schafmeister & Ströbel, 2007). The number of teams is important, a league of five teams is quite few and therefore it gets harder to attain the excitement of who will make it to play-offs. Fitzgerald says that it's a weakness for the WPS that there are so few teams; a league needs many teams to become a strong league. In interviews on the web some of the owners are stating that there are new teams interested for 2013 (nj.com, 2012; examiner.com, 2011).

At the moment there are only teams on the east coast. None of the interviewees see that as a problem, because travelling expenses gets too high. But Foley suggest two leagues, one on the west coast and one on the east and that they'll meet in play-offs. Fitzgerald is of the same opinion and Halstead says that many sports leagues have started locally to strengthen the league and have expanded later, and if that's what's necessary that's what we will do.

6.2.3 The US Soccer Federation

On US soccer's website there are no notice taken about the cancellation of the league. This is odd and one may wonder how the relationship between the league and the federation is. Do they benefit from each other? Certainly the national team players and

their success are important to the WPS as Johnson claims, but it's not quite as obvious that the WPS is important for the federation. The national team has a lot of training together away from the league and are paid by the federation. Foley do not think that the success of the national team is necessary for the league, but that the league needs the best players. In the policy manual for US soccer it says that every player that are US citizens are required to be available if the federation is requesting this. It includes international games, FIFA, and the Olympic games as well as preparations and qualifications for the tournaments (US Soccer, 2012). Do this mean that the national team players (WNT) aren't that available for the league? Halstead says that the national team players are paid both by the league and by the federation. The WNT players are often called to play for the USA and they will be away from games in the league. The WNT players are often the stars so the team lose ticket sales when they are away. It becomes a problem paying them so much money when you don't get the profit from having them on your team. In an interview last year at examiner.com (2011) Mike Stoller, in the owner group of Boston Breakers, says that it's important that the league adapt to the schedule of the WNT to avoid important players being absent too much. For example the league was on going during the World Cup 2011.

In 1999 communication between the WNT and the federation were strained, Longman (2001) claims. US Soccer didn't believe in the product of women's soccer and showed little interest in the women's team even after the World Cup success. They were more focused on the men's soccer. The WNT had to fight hard for equal pay despite that their merits far exceeded the men's. US Soccer wanted to support a female league under the MLS but the national players refused to play in such a league. They wanted a league of their own and not to be a part of the MLS, and so the WUSA was established as an independent league. Cuttone says that they probably didn't think the MLS would have their best interest in mind. Even still there is reluctance, Cuttone claims that it's time that the federation take their responsibility and help the WPS and not only put their focus on the men (Philly soccer news, 2011). He explains it as being a love/hate relationship between women's soccer and the federation. Foley says that US Soccer isn't helping the league and that they're, like everywhere else, putting their efforts on the men. One thing that the federation could do, Foley says, is to loosening the rules for division 1 pro leagues. For example are the WPS teams required to play in bigger stadiums than they can fill, which is a higher expense than if they could play in and fill a

smaller stadium. Foley also says that US soccer is keeping their hands off since the WPS has lost so much money. Halstead is more diplomatic in his respond, saying that US Soccer want what we all want; to see women's soccer grow in the US. And Johnson says that US Soccer sanction the league and register players and nothing more. On nytimes.com (2012) Hofstetter is quoted saying that there haven't been enough financial support from the federation and that it would be significant for the league if they would just acknowledge the importance of the league. At the moment he doesn't know if they even share the vision that the owners have for the league. Cuttone says that the federation probably don't know how dedicated these owners are, and that they are very different from the managers of the WUSA league in that respect.

6.2.4. The MLS

A MLS franchise manager that Southall and Nagel (2007) has interviewed claimed that if a new league should succeed after the WUSA it would be recommended to create close ties to the MLS, since they have the experience and knowledge that could be useful. Foley don't believe there's a genuine interest from the MLS to co-operate with the WPS, and that their interest are only to get the WPS fans to attend MLS games. Cuttone, on the other hand believes that the WPS, or any other professional league needs the MLS because they are well funded and have stadiums to play in. He claims that a women's league would be more successful with their help. Halstead would like to see co-operation with the MLS, they have stability and they're growing. The WPS could learn from them. In Philadelphia, he says, we worked together with the MLS team to get soccer to grow in the city. In Atlanta there are no MLS team so formally they don't cooperate with the MLS, Johnson says. If there should be collaboration he cannot say. Fitzgerald says cooperation with the MLS would be a great option, but she's not sure they are really interested in providing the necessary means to focus on the women's game at the moment.

6.2.5. The Best League?

A mission statement clarifies what the organisation wants to accomplish beyond the value created by its offers. The mission provides an identity to the company, and it's something the organisation is striving for. It's meant to inspire the staff and everyone with an interest in the company (Bruzelius & Skärvad, 2004). On the WPS' website you

can read the following about their ambitions for the league: *Our mission is to be the premier women's soccer league in the world, and the global standard by which women's professional sports are measured* (Women's professional soccer, 2012). That's a vast, but not a surprising ambition. Markovits and Hellerman (2003) mean that women's soccer in the USA is a good example of the term institutionalization of primacy, which is a necessity for a successful and sustainable league in any team sport in the American sport scene. Institutionalization of primacy means that the league is the best in the world, that the league attracts all the best players in the sport. It's the league you want and need to be playing in if you want to be the best. Foley believes the league has to be the best to be more marketable in the US and therefore they also need the best players, like Marta, Christine Sinclair and Caroline Seger. Cuttone says that one player doesn't make a difference but that it's important that the WNT is playing in the league. Johnson says that the league has to be the best to set a standard and be the leader in the world. We want the best product with the best players, he says. Kotler and Keller (2006) state that when formulating goals one important aspect is that they are realistic. Goals should be a result of an analysis of the company's opportunities and strengths and not be formed out of wishful thinking. Are these goals realistic? Fitzgerald thinks the most important thing now is to be responsible and start smaller, like the MLS did. Halstead continues; to be the best you need big stadiums and high salaries and that business model didn't work. So for the future it might be a good idea to think about revising that mission statement, he says.

6.2.6. Importance of a professional league

So is the professional league important? Foley thinks it is, because otherwise there is no place for women to play professional soccer. It's important for the sport to be strong, Cuttone says, because it hurts the sport when the professional leagues aren't working. He continues, but at the same time the 1999 WNT was the best without having a professional league and kids just need to know there's a national team to aspire to. This is where the USA is different from other countries, I think, because the national team players are paid by the federation, so if there's no league the best players still get paid. Fitzgerald says that a professional league is especially important for US players, because that's where they get noticed. Also if there's no professional league players have a decision to make whether they're going to keep playing or not, since they need to make a

living. This might cause many players to quit, which would be a shame, she says. Halstead says he thinks that women's sport are as important as men's sport and women should be given the same opportunities. Soccer is the most popular sport for women in the US and it's important to be able to give girls dreams of being professional soccer players, he says. A professional league is very important, Johnson says, to get the best WNT in the world as well as for the development of young players.

6.2.7. The future

Cuttone says that people think the WPS won't survive and that it's hard for a sport franchise to disappear for a year. He thinks it will be very difficult to come back and that there are no signs of anything positive happening. I understand the cancellation and the lawsuit is eating at the WPS, but maybe the worst thing isn't the money it costs but that women's soccer, and the WPS in particular, is sensitive in the US at the moment. If another league should fail it might discourage the investors and the sponsors, the players and the fans, and the federation. Cuttone is confirming this when he's saying that it will hurt women's soccer if they can't get the league going. So I wonder: will people believe in yet another league? Looking at past sport franchises in the US it seems to take some time for a sport to find the right way, there have been a couple of basketball leagues for women and there have been a few soccer leagues for men. But both currently operating WNBA and MLS started slow and have existed for about fifteen years each. And both WUSA and the WPS started with too high expectations, and lasted, up to date in three years each.

What's happening now, Halstead says, is that the owners speak from time to time about how we should resolve some of the issues, trying to work things out. If there will be a league 2013? There's an interest, Halstead says but it's also a question about how we are paying players and in what stadiums we're playing in. The challenges for the future, Cuttone says is having ownership in place to bring some stability to the league so teams won't quit in the middle of season. Fitzgerald means it's important to learn from the past and make positive changes, the challenge is to bring all the best teams in one league. Even though it's yet to be known what's going to happen, she believes that the future is bright.

6.3 A good product or the right product?

A product is something that satisfies the consumers' perception of what they need. Consumers learn what kind of products that can be used to satisfy those needs. But a product is more than a physical object or a performed service; its value also lies in the culture surrounding the product. You don't just buy to satisfy basic needs, you buy style, service, prestige and brand (Wasson, 1971). If the consumers' expectations are too high, the risk of disappointment increases, but if the expectations are too low, the product won't attract consumers. The quality of a product is measured by the consumers' satisfaction with the product. Consumers are attracted to the product with the highest quality, best performance or most resourceful assets, but in combination with right price, fortunate distribution and successful advertising (Kotler & Keller, 2006).

6.3.1. A new product

Chester Wasson (1971) describes when there are opportunities for new products being developed. That is: if there's a space between the products offered by competitors, if there's a demand that is unsatisfied, if there are new needs surfacing from changes in people's lifestyles, or if there are new markets being developed. It's important that the organisation developing the concept have the resources to nurture it through the introduction to the market. If the product is launched too early it will have problems standing on its' own. The market must be prepared for the product, Wasson states. What is considered popular change, products and ideas emerge, disappear and re-enter. A product must be in sync with the trend at the time of the introduction, to be accepted by consumers. Wasson is essentially talking about physical products and how they often are seasonal. So when is it the right time for a league? Halstead says that it at the moment is no trend pointing towards prosperity in the future. But it takes time to get the word out, he says. For us it was a new product and it was going to take time. Adding to this there is a financial crisis, especially in the US, so is that why the league aren't prospering? Is this not the time for sports leagues at all? Entering a business is always a risk, Halstead says, you always know there's a risk of failure. But at the same time he says he had confidence in his ability and in the ability of the people he hired. We had a good franchise in Philadelphia, but we spent too much money. Foley says that it's a risk investing at the moment but he believes the financial curve is rising. Considering that

the MLS had their highest attendance average 2011, the financial crisis doesn't seem to have affected sport attendance that much.

According to Wassons (1971) description of opportunities for new products you could say that there is a gap in the market since there is no other fully professional soccer league for women. But is there a demand from the fans? When forming new products one significant element is analysing what the customer need, want and will use. Has this been done? Is the league an initiative of identified consumer needs? This raises the question if the league is a product for the benefit of the consumers or a profession opportunity for female soccer players?

6.3.2. Strengths and weaknesses

Wasson (1971) states that it's important to be tentative to the weaknesses of the product in order to enhance and improve as soon as possible to prevent final failure. The weakness of the WPS was the business model and that is what needs to change.

Fitzgerald also says that the WPS is too small. The strength is in numbers and five teams are not enough to be strong. Johnson says that one weakness is the difficulties of getting the word out, because women's sports are harder to sell. Everybody I have talked to say that the strength of the WPS is the product. The WPS stood for quality play by the best players in the world. The games were exciting and the players were enthusiastic and positive role models for the youths. But if the strength of the product is its quality then why isn't the league attracting more spectators?

6.3.3. Market competition

A competitor competes for the same consumers. What's important when it comes to competition is to what extent products compete. It's not as easy as to say that products compete or not, there's more of a continuum than a certain distinction. In defining your competition you therefore need to balance between identifying too many or too few competitors. To fail in identifying competitors can negatively affect the success of the marketing plan, since awareness of ones competition improves your chances of responding to their strategies. There are several levels of competition. There are products that appear to be the same, products with similar features, products that could substitute the product and is fulfilling the same needs, and products that form a market and are "competing for the same customer dollar" (Lehmann & Winer, 2001, p.59). This

last level means that the competitors increase tremendously. On a day-to-day basis the products that appears to be the same are the ones to focus on, but in a long-term view the competition mapping should be broaden.

What is the competition for the WPS? When it concerns the support from the federation, as Cuttone writes about, it's clear that the MLS is a competitor. But for game attendance? Foley says that there's a rivalry between the WPS and the semi-professional leagues. They don't want the WPS because without the WPS they get all the American players. According to Foley this rivalry needs to change. One of the opportunities as he sees is to create an infrastructure with the semi-pro leagues but this is most unlikely. It will require that US Soccer step in to force the parties to discuss and come to an agreement, he says. Fitzgerald wish there were more co-operation because it would boost women's soccer. Both Cuttone and Fitzgerald say that the other leagues are exploring their options to become fully professional leagues. But Fitzgerald says that the difference between the WPS and the semi-pro leagues is that the WPS is professional through and through. In the other leagues there are certain teams that have that professionalism and that it would be a stronger league if all those teams were playing in the same league. Right now the teams in the semi-pro leagues are not on the same parity. Cuttone also says that it's more to professionalism than paying salaries to the players. Halstead and Johnson see it in a wider perspective, and mention the leagues in Europe as competitors because they compete for the best players.

If there are competitive products on the market that have well-established brand names and companies with commendable prominence it is hard for new competitors to enter the market. In succeeding to establish a brand lays a successful product differentiation (Lehmann & Winer, 2002). This because consumers perceive differences between products when there in fact are none and that is due to the image of the brand or the retailer Wasson (1971) writes. The WPS is the only professional soccer league for women in the US, but it's not the only league providing women's soccer. The W-league and the WPSL have been around for about fifteen years each and are more established in the minds of people. But you couldn't say they are so well established so you would call them market leaders. And what about the MLS, do the MLS and the WPS share the same audience? And are there soccer fans that might be interested in attending both the MLS and the WPS games? Is this considered? Or are the MLS and the WPS seen as two different sports? The MLS only want to cooperate to get the WPS fans

to come to the MLS games, Foley says. But if it's seen as two different sports and the WPS have soccer girls as their target audience, isn't it much more likely that they want to see those play to whom they can aspire?

6.3.4 The player as a product

The athlete becomes a central part of the team product. The more you get to know a player, the more probable it is that you will watch the games either on location or on television. So if the players of a team can get indirect (through interviews) and direct (autograph signings) contact with the fans it's more likely that the fans will identify with them. Players that are available through indirect and direct means are valuable assets beyond what they achieve during games (Wakefield, 2007). Since marketing expenses in the WPS aren't high it's important that the players are visible in other places as indirect marketing of the league. Johnson and Fitzgerald say that anytime we can get the player out there is positive, whether it be television, radio or something else, the more visible the better.

It's important to communicate with the community, because the community is the key to fan identification. One strategy that Milne and McDonald (1999) mention is philanthropic actions such as fundraising events and social projects, like literacy programs and drug education programs, which can reinforce the team's positive position in the community and with the fans. In Philadelphia Independence the players were involved in youth programs where players coach soccer girls or they do promotional appearances in school and philanthropic work in school projects. Halstead stresses the importance of being where the intended audience are and being visible in the community, at the grass roots. This means visiting malls, soccer tournaments, schools and churches. Even though high profile players have immediate impact, those players who go out in the community are helping the team getting an identity. They are very important for the team, as they are being good ambassadors, he says.

6.3.5 A product in crisis

If a brand is in trouble you need to figure out the reasons for this. Maybe the brand has been associated with negative matters. If this is the case, Kotler and Keller (2006) stress that the company needs to decide if they should try to retain the same position or create a new one. If the company is slow in handling a crisis there's a risk that unflattering

press coverage will influence the consumers to form adverse opinions of the brand and even impact them to abandon the brand, they say. According to this I believe it's important that the issues with Borislav of Magic Jack will settle as soon as possible so the league can focus on positive things and provide different stories for the media to write about. If not, there might be the need to reinvent the WPS as a new franchise. The WPS is a league in crises, to be able to attract attention to positive matters such as the good product, which everyone states is the strength of the league, becomes extremely important. But now when there isn't a league, there isn't even a product to focus on and the legal issue gets all the attention. If the media writes anything about the WPS at the moment it's going to be about the legal issue or they're not going to write anything at all. And all the attention certain star players receive in the media will probably be associated with the WNT and not with the WPS, especially when the Olympics are coming up this summer.

6.4 Marketing is tough competition.

Marketing is essential, Kotler and Keller (2006) states, for a company to earn financial success the key is its' ability to market their products. If you can't create a demand for the product it will not be sold.

6.4.1. Market research

Schwarz and Hunter (2008) say that the usual product concepts supply and demand isn't applicable to the sports product like it is to other products. Sports products are demand-based only, they say, which mean that it's crucial for the seller to research what the consumers want. Market research has two main purposes. First, it will tell if there are opportunities in the market that are unexplored, such as lack of competitors or ways of enhancing the product. Second, threats become visible, which gives the company a chance to alter the strategy. Market research increases the company's readiness to make decisions concerning marketing, they say. For example, Kotler (2004) writes, a company can easily determine whether their message is getting across by mapping the target consumers' knowledge and perception of the company. And according to the brand asset valuator people's knowledge about the brand is key in determining brand stature.

Kotler (2004) means that the appliances of marketing theories are inadequate, and Schwarz and Hunter (2008) mean that sport marketers seldom perform

market research. No market research has been done because the league hasn't existed that long, Foley says. But if the league continues market research would be a good investment, so they know who's attending and why. Halstead means that they have a pretty good idea of who's coming to the games in Philadelphia without having made market research. In Atlanta there has been market research done to find out who's attending and it's the same as their target market; teenage girls, Johnson says.

6.4.2. Marketing the team

Several MLS managers that Pons and Standifird (2007) have interviewed stress the importance of putting a lot of effort into marketing, on market research and on segmenting markets. Everything revolves around branding and to achieve long-term realisation; building a fan base loyal to the brand is crucial. The managers mean that because of the complex and capacious US sport market, marketing must be more aggressive than perhaps in other countries. Halstead says that they don't really afford big marketing campaigns. And Stoller says that the spending on marketing has decreased because the campaigns cost more than they gave and that they now focus on grass root marketing instead (examiner.com, 2011). Then if the US sport market is especially hard to penetrate that must mean that the WPS hardly gets noticed at all. There is a big enough youth market to attain satisfying ticket sales but it takes effort to reach them and marketing are not prioritized, Foley says. Cuttone claims that when it comes to marketing the owners didn't use the money as they could have.

Foley states that each team work with marketing on grass root level and that the players are doing promotion for free. Halstead says that the players aren't forced to market but that they know they have help and in Philadelphia we tried to make them want to do it, he says. Fitzgerald says that it's vital that the players do marketing otherwise they're not appreciating what they're a part of. They are ambassadors. In Atlanta they have used fan nights, advertising and to involve sponsors more to get attention, Johnson says. They have also tried to use the success of the WNT to raise awareness of the league.

6.4.3 Marketing the stars

Women's tennis was challenged by marketing difficulties during the 1990's because of its' lack of stars, Spencer (2001) claims. The fans were bored. The players only seemed

to care about money and took no responsibility for selling the sport and the WTA tour. It demanded more of the players than to just play tennis and give a comment after the game. During this time the women's tennis also had faced a couple of scandals. A Steffi Graf-fan had stabbed Monica Seles because Steffi had lost the number one position, Mary Pierce got a restraining order granted to protect her from her abusive father/coach and Jennifer Capriati were arrested for possession of marijuana. These were incidents that probably made it harder to get sponsors to the WTA tour as well as to attract fans to the tennis court. This has drastically changed though because now seven of the ten richest and most endorsed female athletes in the world are tennis players (Forbes, 2011). The stars are obviously important. Wakefield (2007) says that teams who do not have established stars in their squad have a more challenging task to get interest from the public. In those cases they have to create their own stars by focusing their advertising and marketing on a young promising player and a future star, he writes. Fitzgerald agrees with this but also says that you don't know who's going to draw people to the games; it's not always the best player. For example in Western New York Flash, she says, we had Marta but she didn't draw that many spectators. But after the World Cup when Wambach's team came to play, she drew a lot of people because she's from Rochester, the hometown of WNY. You need to have these things in mind; who's going to draw spectators at which location. Cuttone says that the most popular player isn't always on the WNT, like in Philadelphia Independence where Tasha Kai was very popular and hadn't played in the WNT for a couple of years.

6.4.4 The sport consumer

Satisfying consumers' needs are what marketing essentially is about. Success requires that you understand who the sport consumer is and the aspects that influences their consumer habits. To be competitive in a myriad of offered sport events it's critical for the management to be aware of the segmentation and comprehend where the consumers live, what motivates them, and how they choose and use products (Milne & McDonald, 1999). Kotler and Keller (2006) write that the most successful strategy for a company is to choose their target market and custom-make a marketing program for that segment. To try and sell a product to everyone is not acceptable. There is always a more likely consumer, Kotler (2004) says. If you use segmentation and market to

different groups of people, you need to ask if all segments generate the same income. Are some segments flatly unprofitable to focus on?

The target market in Philadelphia is active families, Halstead says, families involved with sports who have daughters playing soccer, but also people who generally love soccer. Foley says though, that the goal is to reach all demographics. Fitzgerald agrees that it's important to reach beyond the soccer families. To do that you have to connect with colleges and businesses and get them to attend games and then the word of mouth would carry it from there. It seems like the focus in the WPS lies in the community, to attract and market towards people at the grass roots in each city where there is a team. But the WPS games were also aired on television and through the web, so who are going to watch the games on television? If all marketing is directed towards the local community, to those who should attend the games, then why air on television at all?

6.4.5 Marketing the game

Sports are an intangible product and it means that marketers must accentuate the potential of the event and build expectations of the competition. Pedersen, Miloch and Laucella (2007) claim that sports are consumed in the moment of its conception and, therefore it becomes important to be able to provide a high quality experience. But considering descriptions of fan identification below it would be more accurate to view the sport consumption to occur earlier than the actual game. Most people attend because of what they feel or think about the product and not because of the quality of play even though good quality is always appreciated. Business and marketing researchers Hans Westerbeek and Aaron Smith (2003) write that there are people who are what they call aficionados, people who attend games because they seek a quality performance. They are the most frequent game attenders together with the passionate partisans, those who are loyal to a team and want their team to win no matter what. According to the interviewees the WPS is a high quality product and therefore have the ability to attract those who want to see a good game. Fitzgerald wants to see the WPS becoming an event for the audience, just like the WNT are starting to be. Westerbeek and Smith (2003) call those attenders theatregoers, they attend quite often and want to be entertained but they have none or little loyalty for the team. These theatregoers might be hard to keep since they go where entertainment is provided and can easily

abandon the team for other teams or other sports. And they will probably not buy merchandise.

Different consumers also have different missions for going to the game, such as entertainment or socialization (Milne & McDonald, 1999). According to Schwarz and Hunter (2008) studies show that more than 98 per cent of the sport spectators attend sporting events together with others. This means that sport events involve a social element and that marketers must take this in consideration while marketing. The WPS is marketed towards young girls and their families and portrays game attendance as a family event. Halstead mentions a marketing campaign together with Toyota, which was arranged since both WPS and Toyota had families as a target market.

6.4.6 Fan identification

Sport is different from other products since you don't know exactly what you'll get. Other products are first and foremost economic decisions that are based on perceived value of what you get for what you pay. But you would probably not identify with the product, buy licensed merchandise, travel to the company headquarters, closely follow the product on websites and in newspapers and so on. To be a sports fan, you're not a traditional consumer. Loyalty to the product is achieved through identification with the product and that is one of the differences between marketing goods and services and sports marketing (Wakefield, 2007).

To gain fans the audience needs to identify with the athlete and/or the team. The more marketers can create fan identification, the more fans will support the team. The sport organisation needs to sell an identity. To win usually helps identification but you can't take victory for granted, that is why marketers should focus on marketing something else about the team, something that reach beyond the results on the field and can be delivered no matter what the sport results will be (Wakefield, 2007). Foley agrees that attendance has little to do with team success. He gives the example that Boston Breakers were at the bottom half and had one of the best attendance rates and Philadelphia Independence, who was in the championship final, didn't have as good attendance figures as Boston had. Fan identification is important because it means that the franchise management can increase prices without decreasing ticket sales and it's also important because the fans will not abandon the team if they don't perform satisfying results (Milne & McDonald, 1999). An additional flavour to increase fan

identification would be if the teams had a well-developed rivalry with at least one of the other teams, Milne and McDonald (1999) say. But it takes a long time to develop and demands a certain culture around the sport that is not yet apparent.

6.4.7 Publicity

Schwarz and Hunter (2008) have added a fifth P to the marketing mix when it comes to sport marketing. They mean that publicity is more important in sport marketing than other types of marketing since sport are more dependent on positive publicity.

Pedersen, Miloch and Laucella (2007) say that media's perception of a sport organisation is often shared with the people. Though sport isn't dependent on media to exist a sport that doesn't get attention by the media has a hard time alluring fans and to generate financial success, they say. This is a problem for the WPS, since attendance rates wasn't at all what was expected. The average game attendance was 3531 spectators per game (Women's pro soccer, 2012). There is a lot of money to be made if a league is able to get a television broadcast contract. The revenues that are generated through broadcasting deals are the main distinctive factor between the most prospering leagues (NFL, NBA, MLB, NASCAR) and the less prospering leagues (NHL & WNBA) (Wakefield, 2007). The WPS was aired once a week on Fox Soccer or Time Warner Cable Sportsnet. The televised games were also available as webcasts (Women's pro soccer, 2012). The WPS had to pay for television to broadcast, Fitzgerald says.

Michener (1983) says that the large amount of money put into sports means that professional leagues must earn money from television or expire. But he stresses that the written media, such as newspapers, are more important for a team than broadcasts on television. A newspaper's positive writing of a team is a key to financial success. This because people's opinions are shaped by what's written in the papers, since papers often contains more opinionated information than television. Wayne Wanta (1997) states that different media relates differently to the agenda setting process. Though broadcasting media can deliver news and agenda setting effects earlier, the effects of printed media decrease slower. Kotler (2004) says it's important to get experts, columnists and opinion leaders to talk and write positive things about the product. A lot of consumers appreciate the recommendations from experts. Kotler and Keller (2006) continue by saying that the most influential sources about a product are

personal or public ones. Intervening factors in the purchase decision is the attitudes of others.

Longman (2001) claims that newspapers in the US weren't willing to write about women's sports and particularly not soccer before the World Cup 1999. Halstead says that getting awareness is the most difficult issue in the beginning. It's a bad circle, because if you don't afford to market, people don't know there is a team or a league and if people won't come to the game we don't get sponsor deals, he says. When it comes to media attention the WPS don't get a lot of national coverage but that local media write about their teams. Fitzgerald says that right now no one is talking about the WPS, the media's just waiting. I wonder if maybe it's better that they don't talk at all than talking about the lawsuit. But Fitzgerald says that it's not a good thing that the media is silent because it means that they are either uninterested or assuming the worst.

The past decades marketers have been able to get closer to the fans with the help of the Internet. This is useful when building fan identification. Milne and McDonald (1999) devote one chapter to the importance of reaching fans through the Internet. Sport marketers have a chance to extend the team and organization's community beyond the geographical limitations by using the Internet in a productive manner. They suggest that the most beneficial effect a sport franchise could get from the Internet is by providing information about players, giving fans opportunities to interact with other fans and maybe co-purchase season tickets, offering exclusive possibilities to travel with the team to away games and selling team and league merchandise. Kotler & Keller (2006) points out that the person who plans the media exposure needs to know what the different media types can accomplish when it comes to reach, frequency and impact. All the WPS teams are connected to facebook and twitter, so fans can communicate with each other. There also existed player chats where fans could chat with a different player each week (Women's professional soccer, 2012). Through the Internet was also the possibility to watch games. This is positive if you want to reach beyond the east coast or even beyond the USA. But as I understand there are no attempts made to reach outside the local community anymore, which make the webcasts an unnecessary expense.

6.4.8 Marketable female athletes

Being marketable as a woman is often associated with looks and being sexually attractive. Historian Kathy Peiss (2000) writes about the connection between business and beauty. She describes how attractive women during the mid 20th century were used to give products a sense of style and class. This wasn't only for products but also for work places, especially companies with a lot of encounters with clients, such as white-collar and service-sector jobs. Journalist and author Naomi Wolf (1996) claims that when women started to enter the labour market the beauty myth was used by power structures to repress their advance. According to Wolf the beauty myth is based on the lie that beauty is objective and universal, and that women therefore strive to embody it and that men want women who embodies it. The higher women reach the more intense the beauty myth works to pull them back. What she means is that the believed demand for women to be beautiful always catch up with women, especially successful women, and creates an insecurity of competence and an emphasis on physical attractiveness.

Before the 1999 World Cup soccer star Brandi Chastain posed nude for the magazine *Gear*. Chastain said she agreed to the photo because it was a strong athletic photo and that it improved her self image. Co-player Michelle Akers was critical of Chastain's *Gear* posing and meant that it reflected negatively on the team and women's sports as a whole. Chastain later regretted her participation since corporate sponsors saw it as damaging to her marketability. Here the appearance of the player as a role model might clash with how female athletes are marketable as women. When the World Cup team of 1999 visited *The late show with David Letterman* he focused on the daring *Gear* photo and referred to the team as Babe City. The American team played along and thought the attention was positive. Media loved asking questions about their looks and what it meant. There was a debate among players, officials, experts, feminists and media whether or not gender, sex and beauty was the cause for the popularity of the team. Most of the players were convinced that the sexualisation of some of the players wouldn't harm their reputations or careers. They claimed that the product was more important than what the product looked like. A few players believed though that the focus on looks was offensive and devalued their accomplishments (Longman, 2001). After the World Cup 2011 Hope Solo, the US team's goalkeeper and WPS profile, posed nude in ESPN's *The Body Issue* (2011) and in March this year another national team and WPS profile, Alex Morgan, posed in *Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition* (2012). Are these

two recent nude posings damaging to the league? Does it matter at all for the marketability of the league? And will it damage the perception the target market has of the players and the league? Do families want their girls to have these players as role models?

There is a Swedish example illustrated by sport philosopher Kutte Jönsson (2010) that explains what is wrong with these kinds of photos. He writes about the difference between the lightly dressed appearances of two Swedish sport profiles: the equestrian Malin Baryard and the soccer player Josefine Öqvist. At a horse-jumping exhibition Baryard was wearing sexy underwear, and Öqvist posed in a bikini in the men's magazine *Slitz*. Öqvist was highly criticized for her decision, teammates commented on her decision, and journalists wrote about Öqvist damaging women's soccer. Baryard on the other hand, was celebrated for her smart decision that made her recognisable and resulted in a long-term sponsor contract. The clothing was practically the same but the difference was, Jönsson argues, that Baryard was performing her sport, while Öqvist was a passive object. Women can sell their sport by being attractive but to get respect as an athlete there might be some "rules", and that is portraying the woman as an athlete before anything else. The sport world is harder on women, since there are perceptions that women don't belong there or have the same right to be there, therefore women who get attention for their looks only are said to damage the entire sport, as the example above shows.

6.5 A soccer issue or a women's issue? (Initial discussion)

There are two important milestones to the proliferation of women's soccer in the US, according to Markovits and Hellerman (2003). First Title IX from 1972, which prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex in the education system. This was enforced in 1988 to clarify the regulation for gender equality. Second, the women's World Cup in 1999 where the US team experienced great success. This event gained a lot of fans to the sport both as an activity and as entertainment. In Knoppers and Anthonissens (2003) study comparing the USA and the Netherlands they mean that since soccer isn't a national sport in the US the interpretation of women's soccer is different from the countries where soccer is a national sport. Since (American) football was considered the most physical sport for men in the US, soccer was an appropriate option for women. This meant that women's soccer could grow in the US. They claim that soccer's middle

class status in the US compared to its working class status in the Netherlands meant that soccer wasn't seen as that violent and therefore more in tone with dominant views of appropriate female activities. Soccer is still a team sport though and as a team sport it's a male domain. Men get more resources and are prioritized both at collegiate level as well as by the federation, because their sport is seen as more important. Both Halstead and Johnson mean that the fact that it's women's sports makes it more difficult to market and get attention.

Pedersen, Miloch and Laucella (2007) mean that when there are no existing stories of female athletes, or when they are inadequately told, or contain sexualised and trivialising components, they can shape the opinions people have of women's sport and women in sport. There is a book about *Sport stars* edited by David L. Andrews and Steven J. Jackson (2001); it consists of sixteen chapters, one star for each chapter, and each of these covers subjects such as identity, racism and image. The book doesn't necessarily include the most famous athletes, but those where there's a story that people can relate to or be fascinated by. Only three of these sixteen is about a female athlete. This can be interpreted in at least two ways. Either it is an expression of ignorance towards women's sports and women in sport, or female athletes just doesn't own a mediated story that goes beyond their career, with other words, something that can be signified as important from a cultural political perspective. If you look at the last option you may question why female stars doesn't represent anything else than their sport and their gender. The consequence might be that fans don't relate and identify with these athletes, and if the sport stars should reach both women and men the star's story should focus on more aspects than gender. Perhaps women are marketed in the wrong way. You want women's sports to be as profitable as men's sports but fan identification, which is considered so important according to Wakefield (2007), is failing. Daniel Boorstin (in Andrews and Jackson, 2001) writes about the distinction between a hero and a celebrity, and says that the heroes are known for their achievements and the celebrities for their image and trademark. Then how can you expect to sell female sport profiles if you don't sell the heroes but mere the celebrities? It's the same in the music industry; personal image is the deciding factor, Shumway (2000) states. The artists need to be more than professionals, because so many can play the music or sing the songs. To be a star, fans must imagine that the connection they feel with the artist is a personal relationship. This means that the sport star needs to be both relatable and admired.

Michener (1983) writes about sport in America and different aspects of the sporting culture. He has three criteria for every statement in the book, which is: "Sports should be fun for the participant", "Sports should enhance the health of both the individual participant and the general society" and "Sports have an obligation to provide entertainment" (p.24-25). One chapter regards women in sport. He writes about the inequality between men and women in the budget of the athletic department at college in America, a few decades back. Michener insists that regarding the first two criteria, the budget should be divided fairly equal, since both men and women have the same right to have fun and to be healthy. The problem begins with the third criterion, about entertainment. Michener says that women's sport will not fill the biggest stadiums or attract television income and women's sports seldom require as expensive equipment as men's sports do. Therefore the huge inequality is justified. But he also claims that the fact that the culture of regarding men's sports as more serious and more worth to be encouraged, should be taken into consideration, in favour of the inequality. Markovits and Hellerman claimed in their article from 2003, before the WUSA was cancelled, that the fact that women were playing a team sport at professional level was a development for gender equality in the US. Do this mean that you should interpret the cancellation of the WPS as a backlash for equality? Or maybe the cancellation just means that women's soccer have significance but isn't big enough to generate a profitable business? Do women deserve a professional soccer league, even if there's no foundation to build a business? Do the sports market have that kind of sympathy?

In 1999 90,000 spectators and 40 million television viewers watched the final of the World Cup. Some say it was the excitement of the big event that drew people to the final, but the popularity of the American team persisted. The team had high attendance figures even in games after the World Cup (Longman, 2001). But Markovits and Hellerman (2003) claim that with the exception for certain games in the World Cup, soccer is hard to sell to the American viewers. Halstead says that one obstacle for soccer in the US is that soccer isn't part of the culture yet. From a young age you are brought to football games and basketball games by your parents because they went when they were young. Soccer is a young sport in the US, maybe 15-20 years so people don't have it in their culture to attend games and buy merchandise. But those girls who grow up now and love soccer; they will hopefully bring their children to soccer games and there will eventually be a culture around soccer as well, he says.

In 1967 there was an attempt to introduce soccer to the American television viewers. But it didn't suit the American sports scene since there were few goals and no places to hold the game for commercial breaks. The league was dropped from television quite rapidly (Michener, 1983). Soccer failed, Markovits and Hellerman (2001) say because baseball and football grew more popular since soccer was perceived as non-American. It also failed due to inadequate promotion. Soccer was unsuccessful in developing the organizational features that have made other team sports attractive to the American masses, they say. Because a men's soccer league in the US isn't the best in the world makes it unattractive to American fans, they claim. Instead the best American players aspire to play in Europe, which is a problem for the image of soccer. Is this true, or is it just a stereotype, a self-fulfilling prophecy? Cuttone says that there's a misperception that soccer in the US isn't that big, and that MLS draw very well and the European teams as well when they visit. There's a lot of interest in soccer, just not in women's soccer, he says.

Markovits and Hellerman say that it is provocative that female US soccer players are among the best in the world, which the men aren't. Key conditions for making a sport popular in the US is met by women's soccer in the US: it's the best in the world and it can make American soccer fans proud of their country (Markovits & Hellerman, 2001). According to this it's hard to understand that there's a men's professional league going on its 16th year and that one female league has failed and one is currently cancelled. It seems like it doesn't really matter to be the best to make a professional league? So is there a devaluation of the women's game because of gender? Back in 1999 the WNT was the only soccer in the US therefore it got a lot of attention, Cuttone says, but then the MLS improved and the interest were transferred to them. Women's soccer, he says, could at best expect an attendance between 3000 and 5000 spectators. Halstead says that any sport league is hard to make-work, add to that a women's league and it gets even harder. But it gets better; Fitzgerald says the success of the WNT is important for the sport. Now there is a commercial about the Olympics and one of the athletes in it is Alex Morgan and that didn't happen four years ago, that is huge she says.

7. Challenges for the WPS

In the following chapter I will put the WPS in a context with the help of Wright Mills' ideas on individual and structure. I will discuss weaknesses in the WPS when it comes to important components of marketing and how that could threaten the league. This has to do with market research, marketing and identifying competitors. The discussion turns towards the consumers and who these are and what kind of product they want. I will also approach gender and femininity and how this affects the conditions for female athletes.

7.1 Individual and structure

The WPS, seems to be an island in the sport society. The troubles of the league aren't acknowledged and dealt with, and it appears as if the WPS is battling on their own. The structure surrounding the league is silent at the moment. The federation is unwilling, the media is waiting, the semi-pro leagues are triumphing, the court is unmerciful and the players and the fans have moved on. No one knows what's going to happen. Some are optimistic, some aren't. Wright Mills says that an individual's trouble is a matter that surfaces when important values are perceived as threatened. If the WPS is viewed as an individual in a sport structure then the value that's threatened is women's soccer's own intrinsic value. Wright Mills says that it's not always clear what's threatening these values. According to this study it could be many different things, as stated above. But what's disturbing for the WPS concerns what Wright Mills says about public issues. When the public perceives treasured values as threatened it is an issue. Is the WPS of public concern? Probably not. Wright Mills also says that troubles become issues when people's opportunities are hindered by failing structures. There might be a failing structure and a threat if the federation is unwilling to support the league, if the media refuse to write about them or if the sponsors don't want to sponsor women's soccer. But still there could be no claim that the public needs to attend women's professional soccer games since the interest isn't that high in comparison to other sports and other activities. Therefore the WPS stands quite solitary in the sport structure. But it's also not only a structural problem. If the individual can solve their troubles by changing something within, it's not a structural problem, Wright Mills says. And change within the WPS is needed according to most of the interviewees. This would mean that the WPS

shouldn't expect any help to solve their troubles. If it only were personal troubles it would be all up to the WPS, but is it? Is it all in their hands?

7.2 The consumer and the product

7.2.1 The consumer

The most important thing for a business is to have consumers (Schwarz & Hunter, 2008; Wakefield, 2007; Kotler & Keller, 2006; Milne & McDonald, 1999). Since the estimations of attendance rates weren't at all fulfilled it is questionable if these estimations were based on research made according to the current market. If the results differ from the plan the marketers need to decide if it has to do with poor implementation, in cohesive marketing mix or inept market research (Kotler, 2004). Some teams have done market research, others haven't. It seems to be a decision for every team to do on local level, but what about the league? The league was also aired on television, who watched the league on TV and on the Web? Schwarz and Hunter (2008) say that market research has the advantage of letting the company know how to act and precede with the business strategy; it shows what the customer wants and how the product and marketing must be altered. What's the point of spending money on television broadcasts if there is no marketing towards a television audience? Who watches these games on TV and why? What do they want? Would they prefer games on certain days or at certain times? This audience is harder to know anything about because they're not visible. They're anonymous, maybe a very small market, which costs more than it's worth.

To reach beyond the target market is a goal for the WPS according to some of my informants. But getting new markets to attend is expensive according to Kotler and Keller (2006), and Lehmann and Winer (2002) mean that companies often try to get new consumers before they put efforts on keeping existing consumers. This means that if you don't perform market research and don't know why people attend, you might change things about the product or in the marketing strategy that won't appeal to the existing target market. And while trying to expand the market you might lose the core market because you don't know what attracted them to the games in the first place. The result might turn out to be more expenses and fewer consumers.

Lehmann and Winer (2002) say that when it comes to identifying competitors it is crucial to be thorough otherwise you will not be able to adjust your strategy and are risking to lose consumers because of it. Some of the informants mention

that the semi-pro leagues are exploring their option to start pro leagues, but not all consider them as competitors. Lehmann and Winer point out that you have to think wide when it comes to competition and consider the intended customer. What do they want and need, and then figure out who else are satisfying those needs. Milne and McDonalds (1999) study shows a positive correlation between being a high-level fan and having played sport, especially on higher levels of competition. A high level fan is probably young and male, according to their survey. And Markovits and Hellermann (2003) mean that a change is necessary in the way girls and women relate to team sports, a change from recreation and participation to a culture of spectatorship and following. This change would be crucial for women's team sports if they want to be an important part of the American sport scene. But Wasson (1971) says you have to adjust the product to the market, not the other way around. What does this mean in the case of women's soccer as an entertainment product? Is there a market and is it big enough? If girls are the target market and not enough girls are attending games then what are the girls doing instead? Who or what are the WPS competing with for these girls' attention? Maybe it isn't sport at all. Then what could be done to make them chose a women's soccer game instead? If the sport product is demand-based as Schwarz and Hunter (2008) claim, then what are the consumers demanding?

7.2.2 The product

According to the informants the WPS product is a quality product. But to determine a product or a brand's value two important criteria need to be met. People need to have high regards for the brand and people need to know and recognise the brand (Kotler & Keller, 2006). How many people know there's a women's soccer league? And how many people know anything about it? Bruzelius and Skärvad (2004) write that a strong brand demands a link between image, profile and identity. So is the way the WPS perceive themselves the same as how they want to be perceived and more importantly how the people perceive them? To strengthen the brand these perceptions need to correlate, Bruzelius and Skärvad say. That requires some kind of unanimity regarding what kind of product it is. Then I see it as a problem to have a mission for the product like "the global standard by which women's professional sports are measured" and be managed as a local business. There is no soccer culture to build on yet, as Halstead said, it takes a couple of generations to create a culture. I believe something sustainable is important

since the memory isn't long enough at the American sport scene for the World Cup and the Olympics to keep the interest for women's soccer vivid in the minds of the spectators.

Markovits and Hellermann (2001) write that two third of the TV audience during the World Cup 1999 were men and that this mean that female soccer players needs to be commercially attractive for male audiences in order for women's soccer to survive. But is that why men watch women's sports and how do we know this? Some claim, according to Longman (2001) that the reason for the popularity of the American team 1999 was that the players were presented as heterosexually attractive. What does that mean? Is that wrong? And who presented them this way? The sponsors? The federation? The media? Themselves? And if you are a good soccer player and considered attractive, what dictates why this player is popular? Mere this discussion is a way to devalue the success, to claim that the players aren't really skilled soccer athletes they're only attractive. And as soon as women are successful they're offered to pose in a magazine where they are supposed to show their female attractiveness only.

In the 1940's and 1950's the players in All-American girls professional baseball league were required to attend charm school. There they were educated in etiquette, personal hygiene, good manners and dress code. The effort was that every player should be physically attractive. The uniform was a knee-length frock, influenced by clothes in figure skating and tennis during the same time. The players also had rules of conduct to obey. These included rules such as "always appear in feminine attire when not actively engaged in practice or playing ball", "boyish bobs are not permissible" and "all social engagements must be approved by chaperone" (All-American girls professional baseball league, 2012). This was seventy years ago and even though there is no compulsory charm schools today the importance of femininity is still a reality or at least it is perceived as a reality. The media has its own agenda and it consists of selling their newspapers or getting people to watch television programs. So if physically attractive women are more sellable they might be inclined to focus on that. But if girls and women are the target market how are they responding to women being acknowledged for their looks and being portrayed as attractive, and sexy even? Maybe this is how you market to female consumers in other markets, but what happens when you use the same marketing strategy in sports? The WPS product has a life of its own since it consists of individuals who are free to make their own decisions. But players'

choices of posing nude might not be good for the marketing of the league. A study by Lisa Harrison and Ashley Secarea (2010) displays the attitudes college students have of professional female athletes that are being described in a flashy manor. Their findings show that the students view athletes that are being sexualized as less skilled athletes than those that are not depicted in a sexualized way.

There seems to be a certain logic concerning women's professional sports, which means that if you want to earn money on your sport, you have to give something back to the commercial market, since investors and sponsors are the ones providing the opportunity to be professional. If you're in a disadvantaged negotiation position, which many female athletes are and can't or aren't willing to do this you can't expect to get paid. If you want to be a professional athlete, you have to "sell yourself" to the market as an endorser. And you can assume that (most of) the companies that sponsor sport are conservative in their view of women, because stereotypical representations of women sell products (Peiss, 2000; Wolf, 1996). They can't therefore have any desires to challenge the norm. So if you are norm breaking as an individual you have to sacrifice this at times to be able to go on being a professional athlete. And most women that do sports, especially team ball sports, are considered norm breakers (Griffin, 1998). But if this at the same time is damaging to women's credibility as skilled athletes, then that's a problem. It's a bad circle. Young people are looking for role models, parents want appropriate role models for their children, owners want to make money, sponsors want to sell their products, media want to be read and viewed and athletes want to play their sport. All these agents might not agree on what the product should be. What the consumers, young girls, want might not be what is best for the sport's development from a credibility perspective or a financial perspective. So whom do you please? Wasson and other marketing authors say that you should always please the customer. Longman (2001) writes that when newspapers didn't write about the 1999 WNT they got exposed through other media instead, like magazines such as Seventeen, Teen people and Cosmopolitan. Maybe these pop culture magazines are more appropriate channels if you want to reach the target market. Because what if what the customer wants are role models that are attractive, cares about clothes and style and who performs on *Dancing with the stars*, do you then succumb to that portrayal of female athletes? And what will be lost if you do?

8. Further thoughts

Women's professional sport, and especially professional team sport is a subject that needs to be further explored. The issue concerning the ability to be professional is an important research topic, since this displays a huge inequality between men and women. All over the world there are men's professional leagues in all kinds of sports and even in levels below the elite. Women's leagues are scarce. The key is that a professional league needs an audience and according to Michener (1983), among others, women's sports do not attract a huge crowd to their games. Why is that? Is it quality of play? According to all I have talked to for this study the quality of play is very good and even the strength of the WPS. But people don't come to the games and therefore women can't get paid. The answer, at first glance, seems to be a need of changed attitudes towards women's sports. I believe there is a perception that women's sports aren't as good as men's sports. But I've heard people say that they for example prefer women's tennis before men's tennis because women's play is more exciting and that every point counts. I've also heard someone believing that as soon as women can fully commit to soccer and be professional their entire career, their game will be more exciting than the men's game. This is just informal talk but interesting ideas. Then what can be done to change people's attitudes towards women's sports? What will make people attend women's sports? This is a difficult but necessary question to explore.

The sociological imagination, that Wright Mills (1997) writes about, is at large covering the ability to move from one perspective to another and at the same time build a holistic perspective on society and its components. His theories are referring to the national state, and define institutions and units in relation to the national state. Some people have seen the world of sports as a society-like structure. There's a big difference though between general society and the sport society and that is the question of freedom, which is important in Wright Mills theory. You can leave the sport society but you can't leave society or be unaffected by it. Because of this voluntarily entrance to the sporting world you have to play by "the rules" or do something else. Maybe this means that women's soccer can't be viewed as a social issue only as a sports issue. Maybe women's soccer isn't like men's soccer, and therefore needs a different approach. And maybe it's not the soccer in itself that makes it different but the intended audience, the young girls. Perhaps the customer defines the product. This means that if the intended market can't identify with the product, they will not choose it. Does this mean

that the WPS have to change the product and adjust it to the products the girls are choosing? To what extent are the WPS willing to alter the product to build a business and will the players agree? Then the question arises again; is it a league for the consumers or for the players? And if you adapt to the consumers, will it still be high quality soccer?

In this study I didn't use gender theories, if I had I would've searched and probably found that the reason for the cancellation is because women are disadvantaged and discriminated by all actors surrounding the WPS (the federation, the media, the sponsors, the spectators) but I don't believe it's that simple. Gender theories would've limited the understanding of the problem. In future research gender theories might help to explain and understand why women are disadvantaged but they won't say what to do about it. At the market there is a choice to make for women's sports, and in this case women's professional soccer; to adapt to the logic of marketing and portray women in a traditional, stereotypical manner, or to challenge the market and portray women as athletes. The first might earn you money and the other might earn you respect. I believe this is not just true for female athletes, but also for male athletes. The difference is that men don't have to break any norms by being successful and committed athletes, women do, and therefore they have something to lose by committing to sports. The problem, as I see it, is that there is a belief that women have to be stereotypically feminine to be likeable as athletes, just like Wolf (1996) writes about the beauty myth. But to focus on women's looks is also the easiest choice, a well-tried strategy that has proved to be effective when selling other products. But it hasn't rendered equality between men and women in sports. Also, the focus on women's looks hasn't really been challenged, since the women who the sponsors expose are the women within the norm. Maybe this is changing to some extent with the popularity of Abby Wambach, who isn't presented in the media as a stereotypical feminine woman. But, she still isn't as visible as fellow WNT star Hope Solo, who is portrayed as a feminine woman, and therefore receives more endorsement deals (ESPN, 2012). Gender theories might help to explain why femininity is so important for women, and how women who are breaking this norm are regarded. Gender theories could also describe why team sports are especially problematic for women to engage in. Here, what I have done first is to analyse the challenges for the WPS without a gender perspective, which gave me certain answers. Then I added a gender perspective on the material and other things became visible.

There might be a market for women's professional soccer, but the league doesn't reach the consumers because they know too little about them. There is an idea of a correlation between the product and the consumer, but it's based on beliefs and not always facts. I believe the product is good enough to be sold, but it's not sold properly at this stage (which almost no female sports are). I don't see the problem for the league primarily as a question of money; I see it as a problem with consumer identification and a problem to find a balance between what the product is and what the consumer wants. This is where a gender perspective becomes relevant. If the target market is male then it's believed that women need to be attractive to appeal to the consumers. But it's not really known what will appeal to a female target market. This is a problem. What do the female consumers want? Do they want the same as male consumers? They might. Or they want something different. Whether you choose to adjust the product to the consumers or find the right target market for your product, you need to know who those consumers are and what they want. I believe that's crucial when selling a product, even for a sports product.

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