Public Relations Practice in English County Cricket

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Abstract
Contemporary organisations have come to understand that they can differentiate themselves and their offerings and also gain competitive advantage by developing the public relations function as part of their communications and relationship building strategies. This is also true for sports organisations and the promotion of the sport product. The transactions and relationships that exist in all modern sports are frequently of a commercial nature and it is a fact that market pressure imposes an instrumental rationality on sporting institutions, just as it tends to do so on all business organisations. (Hargreaves, 1998)

Public relations practice in sport is rarely evident yet to the contemporary sport business it has much to offer. Research was conducted in order to find out if and how professional cricket clubs use public relations. A critical finding from this research is that the communications strategies recommended for use in cricket, are equally applicable and can undoubtedly offer the same potential benefits to all sports.

Keywords
Public relations; sports; relationship management; stakeholders; cricket

Introduction

“England’s rugby World Cup win could be the best thing that’s happened to English cricket” (Michael Vaughan, England Cricket Captain, February 2004)

This paper is a critical evaluation and analysis of the current level of public relations activity in English domestic First Class County cricket. The paper is the outcome of research which began in September 2002 and which
was concluded in April 2003. The basis for this paper is a completed case study of Durham and Yorkshire County Cricket Clubs.

As a spectator sport, cricket is facing the fact that the traditional structure of the game does not have wide appeal. The governing body for UK cricket, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) is funding and promoting initiatives to widen the appeal of cricket from providing cricket equipment to inner city schools to encouraging greater participation in the sport by women. At the professional level, although the National team attracts sponsorship and significant ECB backing, the County teams are finding that in order to remain viable business and sporting propositions, they have to increasingly adopt a strategic, consumer-oriented vision.

In today’s increasingly competitive business environment, the realisation is dawning that in order to attract and keep customers and others interested and loyal to the organisation, high quality products and services are no longer enough. Contemporary organisations have come to understand that they can differentiate themselves and their offerings and also gain competitive advantage by developing the public relations function as part of their communications and relationship building strategies. This same understanding is also true for sports organisations. The transactions and relationships that exist in all modern sports are frequently of a commercial nature and market pressure imposes an instrumental rationality on sporting institutions, just as it tends to do so on the institutions that comprise civil society as a whole. (Hargreaves, 1998)
This study was conducted in order to find out if and how professional cricket clubs use public relations. Cricket, though not enjoying the same popularity as football, does have an extremely loyal following and widespread support at grass roots level. The sport does, however, suffer from a serious and long-held image problem, which is proving difficult to reverse and which is undoubtedly affecting cricket’s potential to attract essential media and financial support. The England and Wales Cricket Board does have a marketing orientation and disseminates good practice throughout the eighteen First Class County Clubs but each club is responsible for promoting the game at a local level. A significant finding from the research is that no unified or consistent promotional strategy currently exists in the professional game in the UK.

Public relations, as an essential tool in the organisational communications armoury, is of just as much value to the sporting organisation as it is to the business organisation. The research, conducted amongst marketing and public relations professionals, playing and coaching staff and sponsorship and media managers produced the emphatic consensus that public relations is essential to the future success of the sport. The reality is that public relations is not formally implemented to the extent that it should be or, in the opinion of many within the game, needs to be.

Professional sport is one of the major profit and loss industries in our contemporary society. Although it’s contribution to the global economy is in-
disputable, it is surprising to learn that one striking feature of much sport is precisely the way that it is not organised as a business (Horne et al, 1999). The main reason that most sports are seemingly uncomfortable with the associations of capitalism and entrepreneurship is that they remain heavily influenced by their historical developmental traditions. Modern cricket struggles not only with the legacy of its privileged past, but also with the fact that it is freighted with extraneous moral overtones (Birley, 1999). The widespread practice of describing unacceptable behaviour as ‘not cricket’ helps to perpetuate the myth that cricket is the gold standard for the sportsmanlike behaviour that belongs to the age of imperialism and gentility. As a direct result of this legacy, professional cricket has struggled to keep pace with the tempo of the age, and has sometimes seemed to be lost in a dream-world of past glories and outworn social attitudes (Birley, 1999). An outcome of this is that cricket has found regarding itself as a business particularly problematic.

Most modern spectator sports, of necessity, operate as businesses and are therefore having to adopt and adapt to the core business functions of marketing, finance and human resource management. Cricket, however, has shown a reluctance to express itself in business terms but has come to accept that if it is to survive and compete for media and supporter attention, it has to modernise and behave as a commercial enterprise. To put it another way, in order to maintain its licence to operate, cricket must regard itself as part of the entertainment industry and compete for its share of the global market. A key objective of this strategy is building and main-
taining mutually beneficial relationships with a range of publics, an objective that can only be achieved through the systematic and structured implementation of excellent public relations. If cricket is to have a viable future, it must address its image problems and must become more appealing to a demographically different audience than has traditionally been the case.

Public relations, more than the other elements of the contemporary promotional mix, offers a solution. UK sport generally and cricket especially have yet to reap the potential rewards offered by adopting a strategic public relations philosophy, yet, as is evident from the findings of this research, where a public relations focus exists, there is much to be gained.

**Methodology**

The research interest was to analyse public relations practice in English County Cricket and to offer a strategy for effective, proactive public relations. By using a case study approach, the primary research conducted for this study revealed the extent to which key stakeholder publics in contemporary First Class County cricket understand and utilise public relations. Case studies were written on Durham and Yorkshire County Cricket Clubs focussing on, amongst other things, issues of regional identity and the differing operational practices of both a young modern club and one that has a long and successful cricket history. Communication and relationship building strategies were analysed and by applying key theoretical principles of public relations, insight and understanding has occurred into
a sport, which is frequently both misunderstood but overlooked. A key finding from the research is that the communications strategies recommended for use in cricket, are equally applicable and can offer the same benefits to all sports.

In the UK, the sport that captures most attention in terms of spectators, finance the media and academic interest is “the national game” – football. Although cricket is played and watched all over the world by huge numbers of people, it is only those who are interested in the game who will have been aware of the 2003 Cricket World Cup. It undoubtedly attracted media coverage and offered a whole range of sponsorship and commercial opportunities, but these will all have been to a much lesser extent than is the case with football. Cricket generally has been rather slow to capitalise on the enormous potential benefits of customer relationship building, perhaps having a tendency to be somewhat complacent about supporter loyalty. Why is this? What is it about cricket that has given it the perceived status of football’s “poor relation”? What can be done to get cricket off the back pages and into the lifestyle sections of the newspapers? Why do cricket clubs not attract the same kind of support that football clubs do? What role could public relations play in changing attitudes and behaviour towards cricket generally? An interest in answering such questions led to this research.

It was clear that the only way to get a realistic snapshot of actual prevailing attitudes and practices in cricket was through making personal contact with people involved in the sport. Arrangements were made to interview a
wide range of personnel who were associated with cricket in differing capacities, as this would give a broad but representative range of perspectives and views of the game. Informal talks with coaches and others associated with professional cricket but external to the two clubs in the study also provided useful material. In selecting individuals to be interviewed a purposive sample was identified and agreed. Visits were made to Durham and Yorkshire CCC headquarters at the Riverside in Chester-le-Street and Headingley in order to conduct personal, face-to-face interviews. Other interviews were conducted over the telephone as this was more convenient for all the participants. All interviews were transcribed and analysed in detail in order to develop and produce a ‘thick description’ which has been useful in establishing the quality of the research.

Secondary research took the form of consulting a variety of literature sources namely key texts and journals, other print material and the Internet. A range of significant key scholarly texts were identified, the majority of which deal with sports from a social science perspective. An extensive preliminary literature search suggested that texts dealing specifically with cricket were few. Most general sports texts tend to have short, though significant, pieces on cricket. The greater majority of cricket related writing tended to focus on the history and development of the sport or were specifically about cricket clubs or players.

Public relations literature and theoretical material was also consulted and applied to the research. Specific elements of public relations theory were appropriate to this study. For example, in determining the extent and ap-
lication of public relations activity conducted by the two clubs, reference is made to the public relations planning process, communication models and theories, stakeholder and publics theories and image and identity theories.

**Findings**

A key factor to emerge from the research is that public relations is extremely important at Durham County Cricket Club. Their approach to public relations is the exception rather than the rule amongst the eighteen First Class Counties. Marketing is very much a feature of all the County Clubs and each club has a marketing manager or the equivalent, but public relations tends to be incorporated into the marketing activities rather than being used as a communications tool in its own right. From the research conducted at Durham it is evident that even here such activity is not always considered to be a priority and there is a constant struggle for budgets and resources. This apparent neglect of public relations is a risky strategy that must be addressed particularly as it contradicts the ECB’s much more proactive approach to public relations:

The greatest barrier to implementing public relations strategies in cricket is lack of finance. Although the ECB is financially secure, the Counties are reliant on the ECB for funding. However, in order to survive, the clubs have to generate their own income, and largely depending on location and relationships with key publics and stakeholders, some Counties are more financially secure than others. It is suggested that if cricket was treated
more like a business, the ECB could adopt the role of “head office” in overseeing the activities and performances of the “branch offices”. More of a corporate approach to public relations would assist greatly in ensuring a better corporate image and identity for the game. This would allow the Counties to continue promoting their regional identity but under the England and Wales Cricket Board corporate umbrella. An encouraging finding for public relations practice is the discovery that much greater use of public relations at County level features as a significant element of the ECB’s long-term strategy for the game.

It is evident that the ECB seems to focus much more on the England national team than on the Counties. This skewed balance was particularly noticeable during the early part of 2003, as very little information had been made available about the new Twenty20 tournament, which was widely regarded amongst players and officials alike, as a resuscitation strategy for the sport. Communications for the tournament, which had its inaugural games in June 2003 appeared relatively late in the year, which, according to many directly involved in cricket, was a tactical mistake. The fact that the major sponsor for the Twenty20 was not secured until March 2003 is further evidence of a lack of strategic promotional planning.

Durham’s active public relations approach, which is enthusiastically encouraged throughout the Club, is being observed with great interest by many involved with the sports promotion. The Club’s policy of nurturing local young cricketers by developing them through the Durham academy
before they graduate into the First and Second teams is a key element of
the club’s public relations strategy and one that is well-regarded by the
club’s supporters and members. Of the twenty 2003 playing staff, fourteen
were from the North East and had been playing together since the age of
thirteen. Durham CCC’s attitude to player development is a key strength
in that it extends throughout the Club from its programme of coaching
youth cricket in the region’s schools, through the Durham Schools Cricket
Association which has county representative teams in all age groups from
Under 11 to Under 16 as well as women’s teams, into the Academy and
First teams. Players of all ages are valued and made to feel part of the
Club, which is a key element in developing player, or internal public, loy-
alty.

The resource issue in regard to public relations in cricket needs to be
monitored. As James Bailey, Durham’s Marketing Manager observes:
“Cricket is such a break even business. One of the main reasons that
First Class Counties don’t have any PR or even marketing is that it doesn’t
add to your bottom line immediately. They’ll concentrate on selling spon-
sorship or corporate hospitality, which has a big impact. Durham is a
break even business but we’re very much focussed on the long-term.”
The role that public relations has to play in the overall promotion of cricket
and specifically Durham CCC, cannot be overemphasised. Since its in-
ception as a First Class County, Durham CCC has relied heavily on the
support of the local spectators and businesses and readily admits that
without such stakeholder support, the club will be unable to survive as a going concern.

Of all the First Class County cricket clubs in the United Kingdom, Yorkshire CCC is the club that many would agree, supporters and non-supporters alike, is the most traditional and well-known. Yorkshire CCC is one of the very few sporting institutions which is recognisable to a wide audience, many of whom are not in the slightest bit interested in cricket. The whole Yorkshire approach to cricket has become legendary. Much of what has been written on that subject together with stories that have grown around some of the famous players through the years has created a mythology about the Club. A key feature of Yorkshire CCC is the fact that it has successfully positioned itself as a corporate brand, something that many of its competitors have still to achieve.

Yorkshire CCC, unlike Durham CCC, does not have a dedicated public relations professional on the marketing team. Public relations activity is said to be important but it is not given specific financial resources. The approach to marketing communications at Yorkshire CCC appears to be very successfully integrated and, like Durham CCC, the income generating focus is not exclusively on cricket. Though there is clearly a place for public relations, other techniques, which are clearly not aimed at the grass roots supporter, seem to be more important at Yorkshire. This is a clear example, which seems to be very common in domestic cricket, of public relations being subsumed or even overlooked in favour of other organisational
functions and activities which are perceived as being more lucrative and cost effective, such as corporate hospitality packages. However, there is a tangible sense that, for the long-term survival of both the Club and the game, it is the younger publics that need better targeting. This is something that is relatively new at Yorkshire CCC, the acceptance that if a younger public is targeted, they can potentially be tied into the Club for a long time. With the advent of the Twenty20 Cup, Yorkshire CCC are, like Durham CCC, hoping that this will be product that will fill the gap in the market.

One particularly noticeable characteristic of Yorkshire CCC is that there seems to be a tendency to internalise problems and issues which, in terms of reputation management, is ill-advised. Reputation management, if it is to emerge as a significant business function, clearly rests on a foundation of what is traditionally termed “public relations”. (Hutton et al, 2001) The fact that the Club does not have a dedicated public relations function yet seems apparently content to rely on history, tradition and, perhaps mythology, to assuage potentially damaging image and reputation issues suggests a possible lack of understanding concerning reputation management.

The overwhelming justification for developing a proactive approach to public relations and reputation management is that a good reputation is fundamental to any organisation’s success (Hutton et al, 2001). It is evident from the research at both Durham and Yorkshire that cricket clubs, which
depend upon continual replenishment of supporters for their long-term viability, need to be especially mindful of the implications of ignoring the basic principles of public relations.

**Applied Public Relations Theory**

Recent research into the operation of professional English cricket is unanimous on one particularly incontrovertible issue which is that the modern game is strategically vulnerable. Despite a number of radical changes being made at every level of the game since the late 1990s, the focus must continue to be on making cricket accessible to a wider audience.

In order to consider how the game can move forward, it is necessary to review a number of observations concerning the financial strength of the eighteen First Class County clubs. Research shows that a significant amount of gross income is generated by commercial activities but this falls far below the amount needed to pay for the core activity leading to an unsatisfactory situation for all the clubs where the commercial income shows static profitability, a high degree of volatility and therefore inherent unreliability (Shibli and Wilkinson-Riddle, 1998). With only 34% of gross revenue coming from the England and Wales Cricket Board, lucrative additional income streams are therefore essential to the survival of the county clubs. It is suggested that cricket’s current financial difficulties are a direct consequence of a number of micro-environmental factors. Most significant amongst these are that county cricket continues to rely upon grant
income from the ECB, County Championship matches have not generated enough support from the public, member subscriptions are falling year on year and commercial income is unlikely to grow sufficiently to present clubs with the necessary financial support (Shibli and Wilkinson-Riddle, 1998). Findings such as these point to the anachronistic nature of cricket management and illustrate the persistent problematic financial situation peculiar to a sport in which most clubs operate at a loss and are subsidised by cricket followers. Unlike football club directors who embrace such initiatives as share flotations as a way of attempting to raise revenue, cricket clubs have historically relied upon membership fees, gate-receipts and general fund-raising initiatives to keep their club functioning (Adair 2003).

The apparent reluctance by those at the sport’s highest levels to regard cricket as a business has its roots in the very origins of the modern game. The fact that it took more than 130 years to change the County Championship to a two-division, more competitive tournament is yet a further illustration of the resistance to change that continues to permeate the sport. It is this persistent and unfortunate image of the game that presents it with perhaps the most pressing public relations challenge of all, that is to create an image that is appealing and relevant to today’s more demanding and sophisticated audiences. An emergent fact from the primary research is that although the modern game is proving to be more attractive to audiences with a different demographic to the traditional cricket audience, much more needs to be done. All the players and coaches interviewed
were unanimous in supporting the notion of getting close to the people who really matter and giving them more of what they really want to see a view which was further endorsed by Nicky Peng of Durham CCC who said: “Crowds want to see big shots and action, we need to encourage people to come and watch. You can see by the Norwich Union League how much the people love it; with coloured clothing and floodlights, it brings a different dimension to cricket.” The ECB’s own market research found that “Some groups of consumers felt that there was a lack of buzz and excitement associated with cricket compared to other sports, particularly with the county game. Younger and potentially new cricket audiences made clear that they wanted forms of entertainment with enough excitement to justify the leisure time and money they would invest in purchasing a match ticket.” [1] There is clearly a recognition that cricket must continue in its attempts to become much more consumer focussed and that a systematic public relations orientation can help in achieving that objective.

A dominant phrase in the lexicon of contemporary public relations and marketing communications is “relationship building”. Public relations practice, historically has been directed towards managing communications. However, within the last five years, academics have begun to conceptualise the practice of public relations as relationship management, and research has become centred on critically examining the range of variables that impinge upon organisation-public relationships. The findings of such research continually show that effectively managed organisation-public relationships affect key public member attitudes, evaluations and behav-
iours. Actual recent research though not applied to cricket club publics, is nonetheless relevant (Bruning, 2002; Hutton et al, 2001). The fundamental tenet of such research is that publics will display long-term loyalty and repeat purchase behaviour to a company, brand or service if a relationally-based grounding is applied to organisational public relations practice. This theory of relationship building is completely consistent with Grunig’s Two-way Symmetric Model of Public Relations (Grunig and Hunt, 1984) which is characterised as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Mutual understanding</th>
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<tr>
<td>Nature of Communication</td>
<td>Two-way; balanced effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Model</td>
<td>Group ↔ Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of Research</td>
<td>Formative; evaluative of understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leading Historical Figures</td>
<td>Bernays, educators, professional leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where Practiced Today</td>
<td>Regulated business, agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated Percentage of Organisations Practicing Today</td>
<td>15% (including Durham County Cricket Club)</td>
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**Characteristics of the Two-Way Symmetric Public Relations Model**

The research findings indicate that this model is evident in the communication strategies of both Durham and Yorkshire CCCs but that Durham is more proactive in creating two-way symmetric communication strategies than Yorkshire. The obvious implication of such findings is that there is real need for trained public relations practitioners at all First Class County Clubs.
Relationships are of significant importance and relevance to people who are direct stakeholders of the organisation such as employees, customers, stockholders and others who usually are the organisation’s most important publics (Hutton et al, 2001). They also make the interesting observation that: a reputation is generally something an organisation has with strangers, but a relationship is generally something an organisation has with its friends and associates. The relevance of these findings to cricket clubs and the sport in general is clear. Creating the correct image for both the sport and clubs is necessary and essential as this will develop the reputation that in turn forms the alchemy which turns strangers into long-term friends and associates. Proactive relationship building strategies present an achievable critical success factor for cricket which can be replicated in other sports.

For publics to become more widely engaged with cricket, it is necessary for those involved in the game, whether administrators, players, or the media, to communicate all that is desirable about the sport and its teams frequently and consistently. This goes to the very heart of the human communication theories which form the foundations of modern public relations. It is argued here that an acknowledgement and awareness, at least, of the influence of particular communication theories can only assist in the construction of highly effective public relations strategies for cricket clubs. Two specific and accessible communication theories worth discussing in this context are the theories of social penetration and social exchange. Social penetration theory is completely relevant to public relations in
cricket quite simply because social penetration refers to the process whereby people come to know one another in varying degrees of detail and intimacy (Heath and Bryant, 1992). This theory views the quality of communication – what is exchanged between relational partners – as vital to the development and maintenance of relationships, positive communication produces positive relationships, whereas negative communication results in negative ones. One of the keys to relationship development is what the participants remember about previous encounters with one another. Memorable and positive experiences are critical to all relationship building founded on social penetration theory. Here, the metaphor of “penetration” helps in explaining the idea that cricket clubs-publics relationships can be developed on the basis of “getting into” and, by association, getting to know each other in order to achieve the mutual understanding of two-way symmetric public relations.

In order for cricket clubs to further nurture lucrative relationships of the kind that have the potential to “draw in” future generations of supporters, an understanding of social exchange theory is necessary: According to social exchange theory, individuals (publics), who are involved in interactions that they want to be positive, define and negotiate what they consider to be required for positive and negative communication, and “agree” on the rules and behaviours required to foster the relationship. Interpersonal communication is a symbolic process by which two people are bound together in a relationship, provide each other with resources or negotiate the
exchange of resources (Heath and Bryan, 1992). This theory, then, sits at the very heart of public relations practice.

A conclusion to be drawn from the aforementioned theories is that many of the relationship building strategies, which are fundamental to human interpersonal communication, can be perfectly adapted to cricket club-publics relationships. It is undoubtedly the case that both key public members and the cricket club will benefit when public relations activities are managed utilising relational perspectives. It is also extremely likely that when publics are able to feel as though they have a relationship with their club, the halo effect will occur whereby the overall image of cricket as a sport will be greatly improved.

By applying Grunig’s situational theory of publics (Grunig and Hunt, 1984) to the concept of relationship management it is evident that cricket clubs, through a better understanding of how their publics operate, will be able to devise much more effective communications strategies. Organisations need to establish relationships with their publics and publics seek to establish relationships with their chosen organisation for reasons of mutual benefit. Most publics, which include stakeholder publics such as, in the context of both Yorkshire and Durham CCCs, members, players, spectators and the local community are passive. Mutual interest and acknowledgement exists but for the greater part of the relationship, publics and organisation are content to function without significant formal communication. However, it is imperative that in order to maintain positive relation-
ships, the organisation does not take these publics for granted or overlook them when communication becomes a necessity. Both Yorkshire and Durham CCCs have commented upon falling membership numbers and low gate numbers at matches, particularly the County Championship games. A key finding of the primary research for this study is that there is clear evidence that certain key stakeholder publics in cricket have been allowed to become active – they are actively demonstrating their dissatisfaction with the clubs or the sport in general by not buying into the game. This has clear implications for cricket’s future and is an issue that needs to be addressed at the sport’s highest levels.

Conclusions
This heightened awareness of cricket has resulted in some recent important announcements surrounding the game. On 12th March 2003, npower announced its sponsorship of the new Twenty20 Cup. This is an example of a significant third party endorsement for cricket the product as npower is already extensively involved with the sport. It is especially significant because in 2002, npower became the first Test sponsor to actively market matches to families and children, with designated npower ‘Lion’s Den’ areas at the games. This project has introduced over 6,500 children to Test cricket.

It is apparent from the research findings that the Twenty20 Cup is regarded as cricket’s potential saviour. The Twenty20 Cup is the result of the ECB’s own market research which has proved to be an invaluable tool
in helping to develop a more consumer focused approach to cricket. The ECB anticipates that this venture will yield long-term benefits that will help the game within England and Wales to become stronger at all levels both professional and amateur. Changing the structure of a game which to many is outdated and irrelevant is an important first step, but it is clear that much more can be done at club level in developing and maintaining satisfying long-term relationships with a range of existing and intensely loyal publics and the new publics which will be created by the new tournament. A systematic commitment to proactive public relations is undoubtedly the key. A management commitment to ensuring that the function is professionally applied and resourced will be rewarded by the extensive long-term benefits that are the result of establishing and implementing the symmetric public relations model.

It is evident from the research that those involved in the game recognise the need for and actively encourage “Staying close to the customer” (Peters and Waterman, 1982). This is an example of the active symmetrical communication which is practised extensively in what Peters and Waterman termed “Excellent Organisations”. Grunig says that it is only a small leap in logic to conclude that excellent organisations should have an excellent public relations function to manage this symmetrical communication (Grunig, 1992). Durham CCC with its existing commitment to public relations is well on the way to achieving excellence. If public relations is allowed a greater strategic role at the Club there is real potential here for Durham to enjoy a competitive advantage that will affirm its position as an
innovative market leader in the sport. As Richard Nowell from Karen Earl Sponsorship Limited observes: “Durham CC brings innovation to the game in terms of what they are doing as far as PR and marketing are concerned. Many other cricket clubs (including First Class Counties) don’t do PR and I feel that this is a big mistake.”

Players should be used much more strategically for public relations purposes. Youngsters are attracted to the sport because they want to emulate and get close to the players that they admire. Cricket has the advantage of being much more accessible than other sports like football and identifying and training playing staff to coach young players and making players available on match days to sign autographs and play in the nets is a cost effective approach to relationship management. In Richard Nowell’s opinion: “Players need to understand their role as ambassadors – they need to be consumer friendly. Cricketers have short contracts and are only tied to the county for a few months – building goodwill is important to ensure that players will engage with PR effort. On a local level, you need to get involved with local people. The counties don’t have any money so players need to be worked harder in terms of PR. Get players to talk to the media as a way of generating loads of free advertising. Players need media training. Take players to the publics, make them human, get people to relate to them – cricket needs a David Beckham”.

Essex CCC’s Paul Grayson endorses this view. He feels that it is incumbent on all senior cricket players to engage in “active public relations” and thinks it should be a compulsory part of an international player’s training,
at all ages and levels. It is clear, therefore, that the Clubs have the potential to derive significant benefits if they develop their players as public relations tools.

Both the cricket clubs and cricket in general must be thoroughly aware of who their publics are and be able to categorise them in accordance with Grunig’s typology of publics (Grunig and Hunt, 1984). Reference has been made to the fact that, perhaps as a result of lack of awareness or understanding of publics behaviour, key stakeholder publics in cricket have changed from being passive to active, a situation which needs to be addressed and reversed. Acknowledging the existence of active publics in cricket has to be a priority for both the policy makers at the highest levels of the domestic game and the senior CEOs at the cricket clubs. It is imperative, for the future well being of both the clubs and cricket generally that strategies are set in place which allow for both the continual monitoring of publics and the organic adaptation of the organisation. This can be achieved by the installation of public relations personnel who know how to fulfil the “boundary” role to greatest effect.

Marketing and promotions are evidently the functions with which the clubs and the sport are most comfortable. The perhaps rather reluctant acceptance that cricket is a business and thus needs to operate as one is manifest in the promotional strategies in place at both Durham and Yorkshire CCCs. However, in response to Richard Nowell’s view that “cricket needs to take itself to the public a lot more”, a final observation needs close at-
tention. In their research into public relations and marketing practices Eh-ling et al found that both marketing and public relations are important functions for any organisation. However, when public relations was subsumed into marketing, as tends to be the case in the cricket clubs, organisations were deprived of one of those two critical functions (Grunig, 1992). It is therefore recognised that if the public relations function is to derive its optimum capabilities and benefits, public relations departments must exist separately from marketing departments, or if that is not viable then the two functions must be conceptually and operationally distinct within the same department.

The case for public relations in cricket has been made. The 2003 season saw the most significant structural changes to the domestic game for many years. It seems appropriate, therefore, that the extensive innovations which are beginning to be seen on the field of play, are underpinned and optimised by similar innovations in the boardroom. Maximising the obvious potential and benefits of public relations has to be done now in order to secure the future of the modern game – there are many important lessons to be learned here for the sports industry generally.

Notes

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