

David versus Goliath...

... how a football empire was born. **Ruth Mortimer** looks at the England captain's lucrative brand profile and asks if the 'Becks effect' is ever at loggerheads with the Manchester United club brand

It is one of the few global football club brands, according to the September 2002 *Scoring with Sponsorship* survey by Landor Associates. The brand consultancy's research suggests that Manchester United's success overseas is attributed to its status as a 'signpost' brand that can be loved alongside local heroes.

Ed Coan, marketing director of first division Watford FC, adds: "It is quite simply the premier brand in UK football, probably in Europe and maybe the biggest football club brand in the world."

But Manchester United is not the only brand on the pitch at Old Trafford. The modern cult of sporting celebrity means that some Manchester United players can call themselves brands as well.

Matthew Patten, managing director of consultancy World Sports Solutions, which handles the brands of Luis Figo, Rio Ferdinand and Leeds United, says: "Over the past five years, there has been a move towards players becoming commercial brands in their own right, making revenues from activities that are not their core sport."

The king of them all is Manchester United's David Beckham: sporting hero, fashion icon, parental role model and global merchandise machine. He is used to endorse a number of other brands like a very attractive human logo: Adidas, Marks & Spencer, Brylcreem, Castrol, Police Sunglasses and Pepsi have all benefited from the 'Becks effect' recently.

It is not clear how much money Beckham makes from these deals, but a recent endorsement for Vodafone alone netted him £2m over two years. He has a number of companies to market his personal brand, including Footwork Productions, running since 1996 and previously called David Beckham Ltd.

But with two massive identities playing on the same pitch, are there conflicts between the work of the parent brand and the player brand? Peter Draper, marketing director of Manchester United, claims not: "As long as both Manchester United and the individual player have a good idea what the other one is doing, there isn't a conflict. They are very complementary."

"It's an unusual case with Beckham because we're a very big brand but so is he. But he is always very careful to put everything second to the footballing part of his brand. He's also fully aware of his responsibilities to the team. This means that Manchester United can use his fame appropriately to help build our brand."

Watford FC's Coan agrees: "I can't see that Beckham could ever harm or overshadow the Manchester United brand unless he did something extraordinarily crazy in public. He seems to know that he represents the Manchester United brand as well as himself."

It is not just Beckham who seeks to turn a global high profile into a brand. In Europe, players such as Zinedine Zidane and Luis Figo have also become huge brands. Figo is represented by World Sports Solutions and is currently linked with Armani, which attempts to capitalise on Figo's perceived sophistication to promote the brand.

But Beckham is perhaps unique in his sheer marketing dom-

inance. His brand is so desirable that during the World Cup, he ended up supporting both 'cola war' rivals Pepsi and Coca-Cola through a £1m personal deal with Pepsi and Coke's £6m deal with the England team. It embarrassed both sponsors and diluted the impact of both campaigns.

World Sports Solutions' Patten explains: "The two cola companies were trying to build on different aspects of Beckham's personality. Pepsi took individual sponsorship to build on the edgy, cool side of his character, whereas Coke was attracted to the more mainstream England captain."

Watford FC's Coan says: "Sponsorship deals can get really silly and there is only so much of the cake to go round. Both players and clubs need to be careful about deals overlapping like this."

Alec Rattray, marketing director of Landor Associates, agrees: "This is a problem. But I think it only really affects David Beckham because he's become so sophisticated at merchandising which causes some issues."

But Manchester United's Draper insists that despite the World Cup cola debacle, Beckham's brand deals are unlikely to clash with those of Manchester United. "The way we manage most rights relating to our players is a standard three-play rule, which means that brands can't use any particular player more prominently than another one in their advertising or PR."

Rattray comments: "I think this scenario throws up some classic brand architecture questions. The player sub-brands provide the parent club brand with differentiation, while the parent brand gives these player sub-brands some relevance. The two need to support each other. And ultimately I think they do."

And when a brand is as long-lived and star-studded as Manchester United has been in the past, a celebrity footballer on the team is nothing new. Draper adds: "Manchester United has had many amazing players. Has Beckham's contribution to the brand been any greater than that of Cantona or Best? He's just one in a long list of newsworthy players at the club."

World Sports Solutions' Patten says: "If you're a Manchester United fan, David Beckham is a great player but Manchester United is more important. But for little kids or people less interested in football teams, David Beckham as an individual is more important. It all depends who is being targeted."



