



## **Building and Utilizing a Strong Personal Brand – Team Sport Athlete’s Perspective**

Lappeenranta–Lahti University of Technology LUT

Bachelor’s Programme in Business and Management, Bachelor's thesis

2023

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Examiner: Jaakko Metsola

## ABSTRACT

Lappeenranta–Lahti University of Technology LUT

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### **Building and Utilizing a Strong Personal Brand – Team Sport Athlete’s Perspective**

Bachelor’s thesis

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23 pages, 3 figures, and 1 appendice

Examiner: Doctor of Science (Economics and Business Administration) Jaakko Metsola

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Personal branding has a significant role in different fields in today’s world. Since it is a relatively new concept, a lot of research regarding personal branding is yet to be done. This bachelor’s thesis aims to provide insight into how a team sport athlete can build a strong personal brand, and the benefits from it.

To do this, the study presented existing theories regarding the topic. Interview with a former professional team sports athlete, and existing literature were used to form a theory for the research.

Overall, this bachelor’s thesis contributes to our understanding of personal brand building in the world of sports. Also, it offers some practical guidance for team sport athletes looking to build and manage a strong personal brand, and thus assists in career planning.

## TIIVISTELMÄ

Lappeenrannan–Lahden teknillinen yliopisto LUT

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Kauppätieteet

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### **Rakentamassa ja hyödyntämässä vahvaa henkilöbrändiä – joukkueurheilijan näkökulma**

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Avainsanat: henkilöbrändi, itsemarkkinointi, joukkueurheilija, sosiaalinen media

Henkilöbrändin merkitys on suuri tänä päivänä. Suhteellisen uutena käsitteenä, paljon henkilöbrändin rakentamiseen liittyviä tutkimuksia on vielä tekemättä. Tämä kandidaatintutkielma pyrkii antamaan syvällisempää ymmärrystä siitä, kuinka joukkueurheilija voi rakentaa vahvan henkilöbrändin, ja mitä hyötyjä sillä on mahdollista saavuttaa.

Tämä saavutetaan esittelemällä aluksi olemassa olevia teorioita aiheeseen liittyen. Entisen ammattijoukkueurheilijan haastattelua ja olemassa olevaa kirjallisuutta käyttäen luodaan teoriaa tutkimukselle.

Kokonaisuudessaan tämä kandidaatintutkielma edesauttaa ymmärrystä henkilöbrändin rakentamisesta joukkueurheilussa. Tutkielma tarjoaa myös käytännön apua joukkueurheilijoille, jotka pyrkivät rakentamaan vahvaa henkilöbrändiä ja hallitsemaan sitä. Täten se voi olla myös avuksi urasuunnittelussa.

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### Appendix 1. The interview questions.

# 1 Introduction

This bachelor's thesis is about the significance of personal branding for athletes playing team sports. Personal branding has a big role in today's world and sports are not an exception. In team sports it is harder to stand out from the other players compared to individual sports because everyone is representing their team. In individual sports, athletes are representing themselves. This makes personal branding crucial if you want to stand out in team sports.

## 1.1 Existing research

There are some studies covering personal branding in sports. For example, Hodge and Walker (2015) researched "how do athletes build and maintain their personal brands?" and "what strategies do athletes employ to market and promote their personal brands?". The research used professional golfers as their sample, and it concluded that many professional golfers struggled with their personal branding, mostly because they did not prioritize it very highly. They mentioned that professional athletes could benefit from sports organizations' assistance with their personal branding. Jara Pazmino and Pack (2022) implemented research on international student-athletes (ISAs). They researched what social media platforms do ISAs prefer in their personal brand building, what challenges they face and how they interact with their fans. Instagram turned out to be the most common platform to interact with fans, and most interviewees felt that interactions with fans were important and tried to answer every comment.

Green (2016) implemented research that was examining what kind of content is effective with followers and creates the most engagement with fans. This research was based on interviews with rugby players. There were several dimensions that created fan engagement recognized in the research. Sharing content from personal life, such as what are their hobbies and interests, gained a lot of responses from fans. Behind-the-scenes content from training

sessions was effective in engaging fans, and it was also a way to build a stronger identity as a dedicated and hard-working athlete since followers were able to see concretely how these athletes train. Responding was seen as an important way to interact with fans and it seemed to improve fan loyalty. Creativity with content and recognizing the target audience was also seen important. There are often some differences between followers in different platforms, so creating fitting content to each platform adds value.

In a case study based on David Beckham's and Ryan Giggs' personal brands, Parmentier and Fischer (2012) formulated their own theory what athlete's brand consists of and how they build their brands.

## 1.2 Research objective

There are some interesting studies with informing results on personal branding in sports. However, my thesis is concentrating on team sport athletes and their brand building. There has been research on brand building with athletes, but they are mostly based on athletes practicing individual sports. This research aims to find out how to build a strong personal brand as a team sport athlete and how it can be utilized. I have two research questions, that help me to find answers for this objective:

1. How can athletes in team sports build their personal brand?
2. What kind of opportunities can team sport athletes achieve with a strong personal brand?

As an optimal outcome this research would be able to provide some insight for team sport athletes on how you can build a stronger personal brand and how could you benefit from it. It could help athletes in team sports to plan their career better if they know their options. Commonly playing careers in different sports do not last very long meaning each player most likely has to plan how they earn living after it, or at least maximize their earnings during their career. This is where a strong personal brand can be a significant factor.

### 1.3 Research limitations

As the goal is to find out what leads to a strong personal brand and what can be achieved with it, this research will measure what kind of actions or content can be beneficial to one's personal brand.

The audience's perspective is also taken into account since it has a relatively significant effect on the personal brand of an individual. This study focuses only on team sport athletes and their personal branding meaning it is not aiming to provide insight that could be generalized to all personal branding. Also, the interview and most of the sources use data and findings based in Western countries meaning the findings of this research are limited to this cultural area.

The internet, and especially social media has become a great platform for personal branding because anyone can upload content without knowledge about coding or other technological particulars. In an online environment, personal branding is actually inevitable since all the actions have an effect on an individual's personal brand. (Labrecque, Markos and Milne, 2011) Younger individuals are conscious of the significance of an online reputation, and they already utilize social media in their personal brand building to differentiate in a professional field (Vitelar, 2019). Social media is a significant personal branding platform nowadays, and it will also be in a significant role in this research.

### 1.4 Methods and structure of this research

This research will be made with qualitative methods because it is the best way to get insight with a limited amount of research. Interviews covering this topic would also be too complex to transfer into quantitative data. To make this research reliable, I interviewed a person that has experience on personal branding as a team sport athlete during his playing career but also after it. Because of the limited timeframe, I concentrated on quality of the interviews instead of quantity.

This thesis will be structured in a way that after this introduction section is literature review, which will include general knowledge of personal branding, and familiarization of personal branding in team sports. This information and found models will be used to back up this research.

The next section is research methodology, where I will talk more comprehensively about the methods and materials used to conduct this research. The section aims to clarify how this research is executed and includes a description of the interview and its topics.

The next up results section, which will include results that I have got based on research material. Finally, conclusions section will provide answers to the research questions, summarize the research, and recommend future research on this topic.

## 1.5 Theoretical Framework

This research studies team sports athletes' personal brand building, and more precisely, how to build a strong personal brand. Team sports athlete's personal brand equity is composed of two main elements: professional image and media persona (Parmentier and Fischer, 2012). To reach a desired personal brand, actions affecting personal brand needs to be consistent with it. Also, for personal brand to be beneficial, it should be in line with employer's and audience's needs (Rangarajan, Gelp and Vandaveer, 2017). Gap analysis helps with matching the needs.

If an athlete is able to close gaps within these needs, the outcome is a consistent and strong personal brand. This study also aims to find out, what kind of opportunities a team sports athlete with a strong personal brand can achieve. Figure 1 depicts this study's theoretical framework.



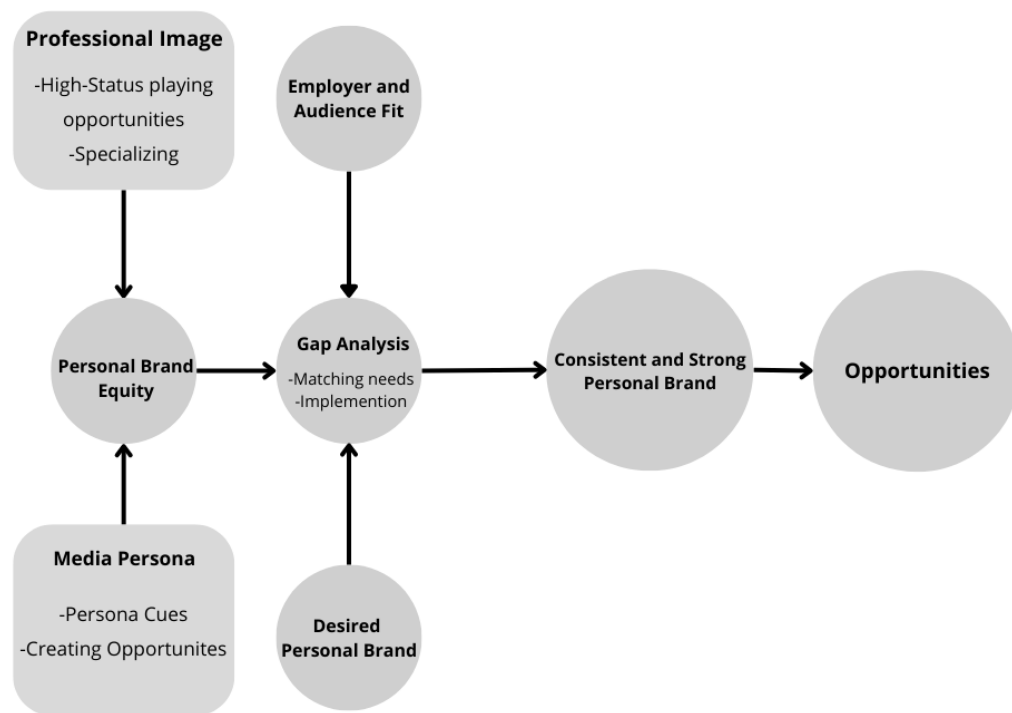


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework – Team Sports Athletes Personal Brand Building.

## 2 Personal Branding in General

In this chapter I will review the existing literature. First, I will go through research covering personal branding in general and familiarize myself with existing theories and findings. After that, I will take a deeper look into research covering personal branding in team sports.

### 2.1 Basics of Personal Branding

To gain a deeper comprehension of the topic, basic concepts and theories need to be perceived. Khedher (2014, 33) defines personal branding “as the process of establishing a unique personal identity, developing an active communication of one's brand identity to a specific target market and evaluating its impact on one's image and reputation, and that to fulfill personal and professional objectives”.

Everyone has their own identity, but with personal branding you can make it visible to others and create a personal image. A personal brand is composed of personal identity and its image meaning the positioning of the brand has to be well thought to be effective. To construct and manage the brand image, the audience must recognize it first because eventually, brand image is always defined by the audience. (Waller, 2020, 19-36)

Impression management and self-monitoring are ways to describe personal brand positioning (Hafiz and Shaker 2014). Impression management is controlling own behaviors to look good in front of other people. Impression management and self-presenting tactics are used to achieve a desired outcome. Self-monitoring is adjusting own behaviour based on the social situation and people they are surrounded by. High self-monitors are trying to present themselves in a good light which can help them to achieve their desired outcomes. On the contrary, low self-monitors are typically less skilled at adapting their behaviour in different social situations because they are not able to sense social cues as well as high self-monitors. (Rosenberg and Egbert 2011)

Personal image is defined by the audience, but with impression management individuals can guide their image in a certain direction. High self-monitors have the ability to control their

image in front of others, which is one dimension of personal branding. Waller (2020, 4) summarized this as follows: “The key premise of personal branding is that everyone has a personal brand but not everyone manages their brand strategically, effectively, and consistently.”

### 2.1.1 Building and Managing a Personal Brand

Everyone has a personal brand, but it has to be managed strategically to actually utilize it. As established, personal identity and personal image might differ if personal branding is not managed effectively. However, the gap between needs to be recognized before it can be closed. Rangarajan et al. (2017) suggest a simple way to do it: Think of three words how someone else would describe you. Then compare that description to how would you like to be seen. If there is a significant gap, some kind of change of behavior can close it.

Rangarajan et al. (2017) made a figure (Figure 2) based on these acts, and it includes also a third factor: “Employer Brand Fit”. It means your personal brand has to match with what the opposite side is looking for. They use an example that in a workplace, employers want their employees to reflect corporate values and thus, represent their brand. Basically, all this means that the target audience needs to be recognized. It does not matter that you have successfully created a desired personal brand if it does not match with your target audience. Waller (2020, 46) also emphasizes the importance of finding the target audience. She describes it as “the foundation of building a personal brand”. It is easier to come up with a marketing strategy if the target audience is determined. She uses Donald Trump, Oprah Winfrey, and Elon Musk as an example of people who have excelled at connecting with their audiences.

In their research, Labrecque et al. (2011) found some examples of “misdirected branding”. Sensitive content on social media pages, such as partying and drinking alcohol or inside jokes in comment sections, can ruin an individual’s personal brand in front of a professional audience. Just one picture on social media or badly chosen words in an interview, which gives a bad image of you can harm your personal brand. If you want to utilize your personal brand in your professional career, every public move needs to be considered from the target

audience's point of view. However, a personal brand is easy to reformulate compared to a product brand (Rangarajan et al., 2017). If misdirected branding occurs, it can still be changed.

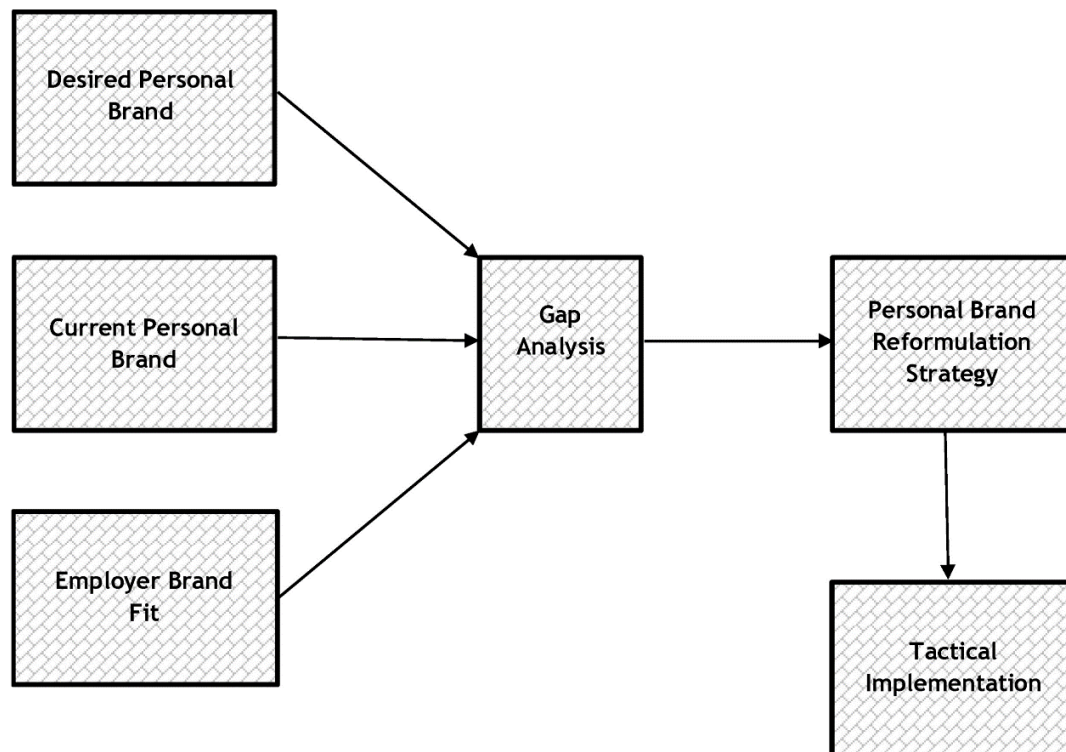


Figure 2: Personal brand building. (Rangarajan, Gelp and Vandaveer, 2017)

### 2.1.2 Personal Brand Positioning

Positioning is also a crucial part of personal branding strategies. Khedner (2015, 22) describes it “as a form of impression management which is according to the dramaturgical perspective, a compound of artifactual, nonverbal behaviors, and verbal tactics, influenced by actor's interaction motives”.

The objective of brand positioning is to find an open spot that you can occupy with your brand, and there are a couple of different tactics on how to do it. Positioning is important because it is a way to differentiate from main competitors. In an optimal market position, your brand is the first name that comes to mind when thinking of a set of detailed attributes. A personal brand often associates with an employer's brand. It can help employees to position their personal brand. For example, if you have worked for an organization that has a brand as a strict and reliable business partner, you can take an advantage of it and position your brand as an employee with those attributes. However, your employer's negative attributes can also be associated with your brand. Positioning can have a critical effect on your brand value. Famous public speakers can ask for huge compensation for the same value that a less-known speaker could provide. Also, the pricing you set can affect your positioning. More expensive pricing represents high-quality service or product. Lower pricing can make your services or product more affordable, but it can also give an image of lower quality. (Waller, 2020, 51-65)

In their study, Labrecque et al. (2011) were able to find some errors to avoid in personal brand positioning. Carefulness with shared content was seen as important because people can often miss the point and first impressions are tough to change. Also, restricting shared information can be seen as mysterious, and thus bring value to your brand. Authenticity in personal branding strategy was seen as a key point. A common mistake is trying too hard to seem interesting but coming out as a fake which immediately hurts one's brand. Thus, inauthenticity in shared content can be repulsive.

Well-thought positioning can help your brand get ahead and differentiate from competitors. Most importantly, you need to consider your positioning to avoid negative impressions. All actions concerning your personal branding strategy should be considered on how they affect your positioning.

## 2.2 Personal Branding in Sports

As this bachelor's thesis is research on personal branding in team sports, a comprehensive understanding of the subject is important. This can be achieved by taking a deeper look into earlier studies regarding athletes' personal branding.

Parmentier and Fischer (2012) made a model (Figure 3) describing two elements that athletes' personal brand equity consists of. Professional image means actions affecting a playing career, such as specializing in certain skill or role in the field or preferring clubs with a strong brand. The second element, media persona, includes actions affecting the image of one's persona, and actions that makes an athlete known for something else than the sport they play.

### *How athletes build their brands*

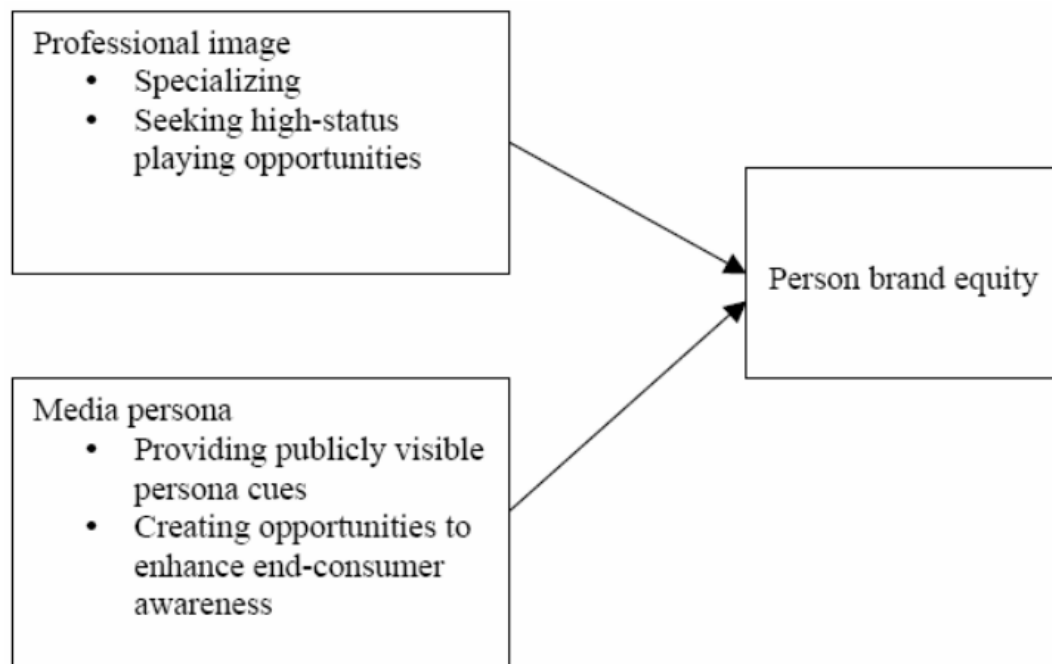


Figure 3: How athletes build their brand. Parmentier and Fischer (2012)

### 2.2.1 Athletes Brand Building

Pegoraro and Jinnah (2012) studied athletes that have excelled with personal branding in social media, and highlighted their different strengths in their social media usage. Shaquille O'Neal, an NBA star, was able to bring his funny persona to his tweets and be authentic. Moreover, he communicated with his fans and shared content from his daily life. Communicating with fans can improve athletes' fan loyalty, but moreover, by participating discussion athletes' can prevent other people from affecting their brand image (Green, 2018). Sharing daily life content from personal life is an effective way to provide publicly visible persona cues, which is an action included in the media persona element (Figure 3)

Chad Ochocinco, an NFL player, excelled in differentiating his personal brand with short-term sponsorship opportunities such as taking part in the "Dancing with stars" TV show and wrestling with an alligator (Pegoraro and Jinnah, 2012). This is a prime example of an athlete who has created opportunities to enhance end-consumer awareness, which is another action within the media persona element (Figure 3).

David Beckham and Ryan Giggs are examples of players, whose brands have benefitted from the club they play for. Manchester United has won several championships, and it is recognized as an elite club with a huge brand. High-status playing opportunities can enhance athletes' professional image. (Parmentier and Fischer, 2012) In the NFL draft, a high-status event, players picked in the first round get a huge bump to their amount of Twitter and Instagram followers (Su, Baker, Doyle, and Kunkel, 2020). Getting picked in the first round enhances athletes' professional image and gains attention from fans and media.

Pegoraro and Jinnah (2012) used Paul Bissonnette, an NHL player, as an example of an athlete who was able to be one of the most followed hockey players on social media although he was not considered a star player. His fourth-liner role was a crucial part of his professional image, which is the other element that athletes' personal brand equity consists of (Parmentier and Fischer, 2012).

Bissonnette created interesting and engaging content that provokes reactions. Similar to O'Neal, his authenticity and interactions with fans were also important factors in his success. This strategy to provoke reactions is also somewhat risky. He deleted his first Twitter account after offensive comments towards another NHL player, ultimately coming back

encouraged by his fans. However, some players have hurt their brands and even their playing careers with their social media actions. Antonio Cromartie, an NFL player, was fined by his team after tweeting negative comments about their food at training camp. Larry Johnson, also an NFL player, was cut from the team after writing negative tweets, containing homophobic slurs, about his coach. (Pegoraro and Jinnah, 2012)

These cases are examples of what Labrecque et al. (2011) established as “misdirected branding”. Although Cromartie’s and Johnson’s tweets were describing their authentic feelings, and got publicity, they were hurtful to their professional brands and careers. Even though team sports athletes’ target audience would not be their own employers, they need to consider their point of view with their actions to prevent negative outcomes.



### 3 Research Methodology

This research is conducted as qualitative research. The data gathered will be analysed by using a qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis is aiming to describe comprehensively the material used, and thus the research questions need to be related to the content (Chakhovich, 2022). I chose this method because it allows to use both inductive and deductive approaches. The deductive approach uses data from previous research to derive coding categories whereas the inductive approach forms categories directly from data. (Cho and Lee, 2014)

The main source for this research is an interview with an ex professional ice hockey player, who has been able to build a strong personal brand during his playing career and has been able to develop it and utilize it afterwards. The interviewee was chosen because he has years of experience with personal branding, and he is active in social media. With these merits the interviewee was an excellent fit for this thesis. Also, earlier literature is used to support findings from the interview.

The interview was completed in a semi-structured form. This style was chosen because questions made beforehand are planned to lean discussion to the topics that provide useful information to this research. However, it also leaves space for discussion based on the interviewee's answers. This ensures that the interviewee's own professional experience is utilized as much as possible.

The interview included discussion on how the interviewee started his personal brand building and what was his objective. Another topic during the interview was how he uses social media, what kind of content he is providing and what platform he uses. The significance of success and network are also being discussed. The interview will also include discussion of what kind of opportunities has the interviewee achieved with his personal branding, and what kind of other opportunities team sports athletes could get.

Both interviewer and interviewee are Finnish, so the interview was held in Finnish. The interview was recorded and formed into a written format. The citations used in this research were translated into English. The recording is approximately 45 minutes long. The name of the interviewee will be kept anonymous.

## 4 Results

Athlete's personal brand equity consists of professional image and media persona (Parmentier and Fischer, 2012). These are the main categories to concentrate on when building a strong personal brand. The interview and earlier literature will be used to describe actions that create a positive professional image and positive media persona. Gap analysis will help to find how to match team sports athlete's personal branding audience (followers, media) needs with employer's (organization, teammates) demands. A well-managed personal branding can be beneficial, and opportunities section goes through possible positive outcomes that team sport athletes can achieve with a strong personal brand.

### 4.1 Professional Image

As established, high-status playing opportunities enhance athletes' professional image. However, success in these high-status playing opportunities may play an even more significant role. The interviewee points out that Patrik Laine, Sebastian Aho, and Jesse Puljujärvi got a huge amount of followers on social media and a lot of media attention because of they succeeded in the 2016 World Junior Ice Hockey Championships, hosted in Helsinki. Playing in front of Finnish fans in an international tournament was a high-status playing opportunity itself but their success was the key to get all the attention.

*“Even though they do not create content actively they have hundreds of thousands of followers.”*

The organisation can also help in personal brand building. The interviewee has an example from his own career for this. He made social media content with the team he played for in Liiga, which is the highest-level ice hockey league in Finland. One “my day” video, made with his organisation, got a lot of media attention and views that lead to many new followers on social media. The interviewee also emphasized that the popularity of the sport he played had a significant impact.

*“I was in a good position because I was playing the most popular sport in Finland, where the fan base is already great.”*

Creating content on social media can also lower your professional image in eyes of some fans when your team is losing. The interviewee sees this as a thing that you just need to disregard as there are always some people who do not like your personality or what you are doing.

*“You also get some comments that you should concentrate on playing, you lost the game”*

## 4.2 Media Persona

The interviewee himself, as a former professional hockey player, has been able to benefit from a strong professional image but there are other ways to build a strong personal brand. You do not have to be the biggest star in your sport, or you can even play a sport that does not get a lot of media attention. You can achieve attention from media with your own actions and make your media persona attractive. If your media persona is attractive, you can build on it. Parmentier and Fischer (2012) came into the same conclusion in their research, establishing that you can develop considerable brand equity without a significant professional image if you have a strong media persona, and vice versa.

*“You do not have to be the biggest name in your sport, you can make content by yourself that gets you followers”*

The interviewee emphasized that it was being his own self and posting funny content on social media that got him followers. He said that he started to post content actively but pointed out that it was important to have some idea behind the post. When he posted pictures that did not stand out there was at least something funny in the description. Being your own self is important because it is easy to recognize if you are being fake. In the interviewee’s opinion, it is good to also bring up your problems. It is normal to have a bad day sometimes and you can tell about it instead of faking that everything is fine. A key point in research by

Labrecque et al. (2012) was authenticity, and it was established that followers can see through fake appearance, which is similar to this thought.

*“I was just my own self and it started to work so I noticed that this can be somewhat beneficial.”*

Behind-the-scenes content has also been effective to engage fans for the interviewee. He filmed videos from the locker room, and it was something that fans were really interested in, and that kind of content got a lot of views. Behind-the-scenes content can also enhance an athlete’s professional image. It can give fans a clearer picture of what a professional athlete’s daily life looks like and how hard they train (Green, 2016)

*“Locker room is a place where cameras do not usually have access to”*

Twitter and Instagram have been the social media platforms that the interviewee has been using in his personal branding. He emphasized that the more platforms you use, the better. Followers on one platform usually come along to other platforms.

*“When social media came the followers of blog writers started to follow them on social media too”*

The interviewee has also been a visitor to some podcasts, which he sees as great opportunities to bring up your persona and thoughts. He mentioned these kind of actions that gets you visibility are important in personal brand building. The interviewee brought up a name who has been actively participating in different situations and got visibility for his name. Siim Liivik was not known as a star player in Liiga but his media persona is built well. He has been featuring songs that have got a lot of streams, and he took part in the Finnish version of the TV show “Dancing with stars”. He excelled to differentiate his personal brand by creating an attractive media persona. The key to this was taking on chances. Chad Ochocinco had a very similar strategy in his personal branding, and he succeeded to differentiate from other NFL players (Pegoraro and Jinnah, 2012).

*“If you want to make your brand bigger and make some kind of profession of it you should take the fifteen minutes of fame wherever you get it from.”*

Although being your own self and differentiating from others is important, the interviewee mentioned that borrowing some ideas from others is not wrong and it is common in social media to do so. He also pointed out that you need just one post to go viral to get followers. The more you have followers on your social media account, the more you have visibility on that platform.

*“If you have, for example, 2000 followers on TikTok or Instagram, and you post something that gets publicity and goes viral you might end up with tens of thousands of followers.”*

#### 4.3 Employer needs – Audience needs

An important aspect of personal branding is that you need to consider both, your employer's, and your audience's needs (Rangarajan et al., 2017). For a team athlete it means remembering to acknowledge how your actions are perceived from your employer's perspective including organisation, coaches, and teammates, and how your target audience, including media and fans, sees them.

The interviewee had a fitting example from his own career. When he was providing content for fans, he used to film the locker room a lot because it was content that his target audience was interested in. However, it is important to remember to be careful with that kind of content, so it would not hurt the employer in any way. The locker room can be a vulnerable place because coaches and players are sincere there and you need to maintain a trustful relationship with them.

*“When the coach is speaking, you cannot record it and send it to everyone, you need to have an eye when you are recording.”*

Quality of the content is important to keep fans satisfied. The interviewee mentions as an example that videos and pictures cannot be low-quality. It can have a significant effect on the number of followers, so it is important to have adequate equipment to film with and keep the content quality high.

The interviewee experienced a change in coaches' and organisations' attitudes with behind-the-scenes content when he was making a series in co-operation with different sports organisations. He felt that some people, especially coaches, were a bit reserved at first but after some time they realized that this kind of content brings fans closer to the organisation as well. He feels that at some point organisations became much more receptive towards this kind of content, and suddenly everyone started to ask when he is coming to film with them.

*“They noticed that the positive things their organisation can get are quite significant.”*

The interviewee himself has not put an effort to think closer about what his target audience in social media is. He is quite happy as the situation is now and considers social media more as a hobby. He is just being himself and people who like the content follow him. Waller (2020) described defining the target audience as one of the most important things in personal branding. The interviewee too admits that it would be useful to get more familiar with his target audience but as he has many other jobs, he is not looking to put more effort into that field.

*“Of course, you should think about it, as you can see the statistics of how old and what is the gender distribution of your followers, so you can definitely target your content to some age group.”*

#### 4.4 Opportunities

A strong personal brand can be beneficial. This section will concentrate on the opportunities that team sports athletes can achieve with a well-managed personal brand. These opportunities can come up during an athlete's playing career but also after it.

Five years before the interviewee quit his playing career, he had already been offered after-career jobs by multiple parties. His brand as a sincere and funny person was in a big role to get those offers. It was also a reason why he got a commentator job on a Finnish TV channel.

*“They contacted me that I have a good delivery, and if I would like to be a commentator on playoffs the next spring.”*

The interviewee does not believe that his personal brand has affected on his contract salaries in any way. However, he says that he has never gotten into any trouble with his team, and that he has always been seen as an easy player for coaches who does not affect negatively the locker room chemistry. This has had a positive effect with getting contract offers from teams. He has a concrete example of a team he had previously played for. They contacted him because they felt he would be the perfect fit for their team’s locker room.

*“They told me that this team suits me from the playing style’s point of view, but the most important thing was that I would bring up something to the locker room.”*

Siim Liivik’s excellence to differentiate brought opportunities to him. But taking on the opportunities led to more opportunities. Many opportunities in his career have brought up more visibility, like participating in a TV show. He has got a chance to write a book on his career and is hosting his own podcast. These are opportunities that a strong personal brand can lead to, and with that strong personal brand athletes can create more opportunities by themselves, as Liivik has done.

*“He has his own Wet Show, and in my opinion, he has built very well his thing (brand)”*

*“He wants to be somewhat different, has written a book and everything.”*

The interviewee mentions that he gets co-operation and sponsorship offers almost every week. His presence on social media has gained him these offers. Overall, he believes that a strong personal brand will always lead to opportunities and offers.

*“If you have built some kind of personal brand during your career, whatever your career has been, you will definitely get some queries on what we could do together”*

## 5 Conclusions

In this section, I will explain the results of my research. The objective of this study was to find insight on team sports athletes' personal building, and opportunities that might occur from a well-built personal brand. I will try to use the findings of this study to answer on the research questions. Under discussion, I will talk about how this study contributes to the existing research. Finally, I will consider possible future research topics.

### 5.1 How can athletes in team sports build their personal brand?

Athlete's personal brand equity consists of two main categories, professional image and media persona, based on Parmentier's and Ficher's (2012) research. Also, a well-managed personal brand is in line with employers' preferences, as Rangarajan et al. (2017) explained.

Parmentier and Fischer (2012) came into conclusion that athlete can have a strong personal brand with succeeding just one the other of the two main categories. Results from this study supports this thought meaning team sports athletes can build their personal brand different ways. Professional image enhances by success, especially if it happens in high-status playing opportunities. Succeeding in your own sports might be the most powerful factor growing an athlete's brand.

Organisation can help athletes significantly with their professional image. Parmentier and Fischer (2012) explained in their research how organisations' brands affect their players. The same goes with the sports an athlete is playing, more popular sports automatically get more attention than less popular sports meaning also the players get more attention. However, players' professional image can also suffer when playing on a losing team, especially if they are active on social media.

Athletes without a significant professional image can build a strong personal brand with their media persona. Building a personal brand through a media persona gives athletes playing in teams that get less attention a chance to shine out. The use of social media plays a big part in this aspect. Bringing up own personality and being authentic is important. Creating



content that your followers are interested in is also important and knowing your target audience can help with this. Using different social media platforms and borrowing ideas might help to grow follower numbers.

Participating actively can get you visibility, and it helps with differentiating from other athletes when people know you from something different than the sport you play. This can be almost everything, the more chances you take, the more visibility you get.

When managing a personal brand, athletes need to consider at the same time both, what the audience thinks about their actions, but also what their team thinks. Athletes need to have an eye on what content concerning their team they can publish. At the same time, the content needs to be interesting, and the quality has to be kept high. Knowing their target audience and what they prefer, athletes can find out to keep these sides in balance. Teams have also noticed that they can benefit from strong personal brands, and it helps if the team is receptive toward the athlete's personal branding.

## 5.2 What kind of opportunities can team sport athletes achieve with a strong personal brand?

A strong personal brand leads to different opportunities. What kind of opportunities athletes get, depends on what they have done. During playing career, the opportunities that a strong personal brand can help to achieve can be for example sponsorship deals and co-operations. Also, an athlete's personal brand can affect in team's interest. Athletes who can bring positive value to the locker room are more attractive to teams because locker room chemistry is seen as an important thing.

Funny people with good delivery can have a good chance to get a job as a commentator within their own sport. As they have played the sport themselves, they have already good knowledge of it. Taking on opportunities can give athletes more visibility which can lead to more opportunities.

Athletes with a big brand can create opportunities for themselves. Ultimately, there are no limits to what kind of opportunities team sports athletes can achieve with a strong personal brand. A well-managed personal brand will always lead to chances and offers of some kind.

### 5.3 Discussion

This study was able to fulfill its goal and got answers to the research questions. There are many ways for team sport athletes to build personal brands. If a team sport athlete is able to create strong personal brand, opportunities will come along. However, this research was not able to find very precise answers on what kind of opportunities team sport athletes can get. Although the results indicate that the opportunities are basically limitless, more practical results could help team sport athletes even more in their career planning. Defining the actions that are more likely to lead to certain opportunities would help team sport athletes towards their desired outcome. For example, same actions are not likely to support both, a player that wants to be a coach after career and a player that wants to start own podcast after career.

A model including categories “professional image” and “media persona” created by Parmentier and Fischer (2012) inspired the theoretical framework for this research. The interview with a former professional team sport athlete supported their finding that an athlete does not need both, strong professional image and strong media persona, to build a strong personal brand. Also, this study supported the importance to avoid inauthenticity, as Labrecque et al. (2011) established. Rangarajan et al. (2017) emphasized that in personal brand building, also employer’s needs need to be considered. Findings of this research indicate that also team sport athletes need to take this into account when building a personal brand.

Taking on chances brings more visibility to your personal brand and more opportunities. This is the key finding of this research which is not as highlighted in other studies regarding athletes’ personal brand building. Participating and activity pay off and it leads to bigger opportunities. Most successful athletes get attention and other opportunities along with their success. However, being active benefits star players too, as Pegoraro and Jinnah (2012) implicated with their example of Chad Ochocinco. Regardless, especially athletes who have built their personal brand through media persona need to understand the importance of taking on chances. Anything that gets visibility to you, helps to make your brand bigger.

## 5.4 Future research

There is some research done on team sports athletes brand building. However, as it appeared in this research, athletes' personal brands can bring value to teams, and teams have noticed this too. Research on how teams utilize their own players' personal brands and how teams are encouraging their players to build a personal brand would help in understanding how the team and their players can help each other with their brands.

This research did provide general information and even some examples of opportunities that team sport athletes can gain with a strong personal brand. The result was that there is no clear limits on what opportunities can appear. However, a more thorough study what these opportunities most commonly are, and what actions support in gaining each type of opportunity. You need a different kind of personal branding for different objectives. This kind of research could help team sport athletes build their career even more.

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Appendix 1. The interview questions.

- **Did you start personal brand building consciously during your career?**
  - When?
  - What was your goal?
  
- **How much has your success during sports career impacted your personal brand?**
  
- **What platforms do you use to build and maintain your personal brand?**
  - What platforms have been the most effective?
  - What kind of content have you provided?
  - Do you have a target audience – what is it?
  
- **What is the significance of your own network and contacts in personal brand building?**
  
- **What kind of opportunities have you got due to your personal brand?**
  - During career?
  - After career?

