

BRAND CONFUSION IN SOUTH AFRICAN RUGBY – SUPER 12 BRANDS VS CURRIE-CUP BRANDS?

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ABSTRACT

Through the application of marketing principles and practice, sport marketers should anticipate, manage and satisfy sports consumers' needs and wants when marketing sport. They should strive to create and build awareness of a specific sports team, which should ultimately lead to loyal supporters. Sports teams' brands should therefore be emphasised and marketed. Branding is a relatively new phenomenon in rugby, a sport that a decade ago became professional and commercialised in South Africa. Despite the importance of brands and consumer perceptions of brands, rugby management in South Africa has been slow to realise the importance of brand management (Williams, 2004: 18). A case in point is the South African Super 12 rugby brands and the apparent lack of differentiation from the traditional Currie Cup brands. This study investigated South African rugby supporters' awareness of the various South African Super 12 and top Currie Cup brands. The aim was to determine whether there is brand confusion regarding these brands among South African rugby supporters.

Key words: Sports marketing; Sports branding; Rugby; Super 12; Currie Cup.

INTRODUCTION

Sports marketing globally has become highly sophisticated, employing traditional consumer-goods techniques. For example, Manchester United Football Club is listed on the London Stock Exchange, and had a market capitalisation of US\$466 million in 2000 (Adam & Adam, 2002: 1). Because sports marketers are no longer content to allow win-loss records to dictate attendance levels and financial fortunes, many sports teams are being marketed through a creative combination of advertising, promotions, sponsorship, direct mail and other forms of marketing communication. Brand symbols and logos in particular have become important financial contributors to professional sports (Keller, 2003: 28).

When focusing on branding, one needs to clarify certain concepts. One such concept is *brand*. A *brand* is a name, term, phrase, design, symbol, or any combination of these, chosen by an individual or company to distinguish a product from competing products (Bovée *et al.*, 1995: 247). However, marketers refer to a brand as being more than that, because it also creates a certain amount of awareness, reputation and prominence in the marketplace (Weitz & Wensley, 2002: 7). Brand awareness refers to the strength of a brand's presence in the

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consumer's mind (Aaker, 1996:10). It is a measure of the percentage of the target market that is aware of a brand name (Bové *et al.*, 1995: 248).

The brand-related marketing activities of sport teams should therefore focus on building the sport teams' brands (Kelly *et al.*, 1999: 472). According to Williams (2004: 18), South Africa's international isolation from the 1970s to the early 1990s resulted in the South African rugby unions missing out on a generation of global sports development, both on and off the field. When South African rugby became professional in 1995 (Basson, 2003: 15), management was often primitive, and while the top sporting nations were evolving professional structures and brand management, South African sport was stagnating (Williams, 2004: 18). Hence South African sports brands still have some catching up to do before they reach the earning levels of the top sports brands in the world (Hasenfuss, 2001: 52).

In South Africa there are 14 rugby unions, in 14 geographically distributed areas. These are the Blue Bulls (situated in Pretoria), Boland (Wellington), Border (East London), Eastern Province (Port Elizabeth), Falcons (Springs), Free State (Bloemfontein), Golden Lions (Johannesburg), Griffons (Welkom), Griqualand West (Kimberly), Leopards (Potchefstroom), Mpumalanga (Witbank), Natal (Durban), South Western Districts (George) and Western Province (Cape Town). When rugby was professionalised, the reorganisation of the rugby unions afforded the various South African rugby unions an opportunity for branding and aggressive marketing (Anon., 1998: 22). Most of the unions have since updated their rugby brands to reflect a more powerful and aspirational feel (Van der Berg, 2003: 5). Annually, the South African rugby unions compete in various tournaments (Anon., 2000b: 1). For the purposes of this article, only the Currie Cup and the Super 12 brands will be investigated.

THE CURRIE CUP TEAMS

The Currie Cup is the oldest of its kind in world rugby competition. It was originally a floating trophy for interprovincial competition and was played for the first time in 1891 (Anon., 1999b: 1). Over the years, the Currie Cup has assumed various forms, but from 2003, the ABSA Currie Cup reverted to a strength-versus-strength format. It featured two sections, a top section of six teams and a lower section of eight teams. A double round of games is then played with the top two teams in each pool qualifying for the finals (Anon., 2002a: 1). The top six teams in 2002/2003 and 2003/2004 were the Blue Bulls, the Cheetahs, the Golden Lions, the Natal Sharks, Western Province and the Mpumalanga Pumas (Colquhoun, 2003; 2004; 2005), which will be the focus of this article.

Blue Bulls Rugby Union

The Blue Bulls Rugby Union, previously known as Northern Transvaal, was founded in 1938 (Colquhoun, 2001: 200). The Blue Bulls play in light blue jerseys and dark blue shorts (Colquhoun, 2003: 245). Their home stadium is Loftus Versfeld in Pretoria, which opened in 1914 and seats 50 000 spectators (Anon., 2000c: 2). The Blue Bulls' original brand was a Barberton Daisy (Anon., 1999a: 2), but this was changed to the brand illustrated in Figure 1. However, the Blue Bulls still sport a Barberton Daisy on the left side of their jerseys (Colquhoun, 2004: 271).

Free State Rugby Union

The Free State Rugby Union was founded in 1895 as the Orange Free State Rugby Union (Colquhoun, 2001: 260). The team is now known as the Cheetahs and plays in white jerseys with old gold stripes and black shorts (Colquhoun, 2003: 305). Their home stadium is Vodacom Park in Bloemfontein, which seats 38 000 people (Colquhoun, 2004: 320). The brand is illustrated in Figure 1.

Golden Lions Rugby Union

The Golden Lions Rugby Union was founded in 1889 as Transvaal (Colquhoun, 2001: 272). They play in white and red jerseys and black shorts (Colquhoun, 2003: 257). The team is now known as the Golden Lions (Lake, 2002: 2) and their home stadium is Ellis Park in Johannesburg, which has a capacity of 62 500 (Colquhoun, 2004: 330). The Lions' brand is illustrated in Figure 1.

Mpumalanga Rugby Union

The Mpumalanga Rugby Union was founded in 1969 as South Eastern Transvaal (Colquhoun, 2001: 308). The team is better known as the Pumas and used to play in navy blue, red and black jerseys with white shorts (Colquhoun, 2003: 257). However, in 2003, the team changed to dove grey and red jerseys, with black shorts (Colquhoun, 2004: 370). The Pumas' home stadium is Atlantic Park in Witbank (Colquhoun, 2004: 370). Their brand is illustrated in Figure 1.

Natal Rugby Union

The Natal Rugby Union was founded in 1890 (Colquhoun, 2001: 320). The team is known as the Natal Sharks and plays in black and white jerseys and white shorts (Colquhoun, 2003: 377). The Natal Sharks' home stadium is ABSA Stadium in Durban, which seats 53 000 people (Colquhoun, 2004: 380). Their brand, which was originally a wildebeest (Anon., 1999a: 2), was changed to the brand illustrated in Figure 1.

Western Province Rugby Union

The Western Province Rugby Union, which was founded in 1883, is the oldest rugby union in South Africa (Colquhoun, 2001: 356). The team plays in royal blue and white hooped jerseys and black shorts (Colquhoun, 2003: 401). Their home stadium is Newlands in Cape Town, which seats 49 500 people (Colquhoun, 2004: 400). Western Province holds the record for the most Currie Cup victories (Anon., 2000d: 1). Their brand is illustrated in Figure 1.

Blue Bulls Rugby Union	
Free State Rugby Union	
Golden Lions Rugby Union	
Eastern Province Rugby Union	
Natal Rugby Union	
Western Province Rugby Union	

FIGURE 1. BRANDS OF THE TOP SIX CURRIE CUP TEAMS (Adapted from Colquhoun, 2004; 2005)

THE SUPER 12 TEAMS

The Super 12 originated from the Super 10, which was introduced in 1993 (Anon., 2000a: 1) and played for the first time in that year (Anon., 2002b: 11).

In this tournament, five regional rugby teams from New Zealand, three from Australia and four from South Africa compete on a round robin basis, which produces semifinals and a final (Claassen, 2001: 4). Under the Super 12 agreement, various rugby franchises in the three countries were established (Anon., 2001: 1). Initially, the Super 10 fielded South Africa's four

top provinces from its 1995 Currie Cup competition. Three years into the Super 12 tournament, South Africa changed to regional sides, which compelled the South African provincial teams to unite and form four new regional teams with new identities (Hendriks, 1997: 20). The four new regional sides were the Bulls, Cats, Sharks and Stormers (Anon., 2000a: 1).

The Bulls

The Bulls' brand has experienced various identity changes since its introduction in 1995. In 1996 the Bulls competed as Northern Transvaal. However, in 1998, four rugby unions, the Blue Bulls, the Falcons, Mpumalanga and the Leopards, joined forces to form one regional team (Gilbert, 2000: 34), with their home stadium at Securicor Loftus in Pretoria (Colquhoun, 2004: 192). The team became known as the Blue Bulls in 1997, changed to the Northern Bulls in 1998 and finished eleventh in the Super 12 competition that year. In 1999 the Bulls finished twelfth and in 2000 eleventh. Most of the worst records in the Super 12 tournament are held by the Bulls (Tarik, 2002: 4). In 2000, the Bulls played in white and green jerseys with blue shorts (Colquhoun, 2001: 158), but their strip was changed to sky blue jerseys and socks and navy blue shorts in 2001 (Colquhoun, 2002: 128). In the same year they changed their name to the Bulls. The Bulls brand is illustrated in Figure 2.

The Cats

The Cats have also experienced many identity changes since the Super 12 commenced in 1995. Originally the team competed as Transvaal and finished tenth in the tournament in 1996. In 1998, the rugby unions, Free State, the Golden Lions, Griqualand West and the Griffons, joined forces and became the Gauteng Lions (Gilbert, 2000: 34). They only managed to finish fifth in the Super 12 competition that year. In 1998, they changed their name to the Golden Cats and finished twelfth. Since 2000 they have been operating as the Cats (Tarik, 2002: 3), playing in navy blue jerseys with red shoulders (Colquhoun, 2001: 143). In 2001 they again changed their strip to white and navy, with navy shorts and socks (Colquhoun, 2002: 134). Their strip was changed yet again in 2002 to white jerseys and socks and navy shorts (Colquhoun, 2003: 170). The Cats' home stadiums are Ellis Park in Johannesburg and Vodacom Park in Bloemfontein (Colquhoun, 2004: 198) and their brand is illustrated in Figure 2.

The Sharks

The Sharks' brand was introduced in 1996. In 1998, the Natal Rugby Union, Border Rugby Union and Eastern Province Rugby Union united and formed The Sharks (Gilbert, 2000: 34). The team played in black and white jerseys with red and brown bands in 2000 (Colquhoun, 2001: 148). In 2001, they played in black and white jerseys and black shorts and socks (Colquhoun, 2002: 140) and their strip changed yet again in 2002 to black, grey and white jerseys and black shorts (Colquhoun, 2003: 176). The Sharks' home stadium is ABSA Stadium in Durban (Colquhoun, 2004: 204) and they were the first Super 12 franchise to draw their one millionth spectator in 2001 (Tarik, 2002: 1). The major revenue generator of this franchise is ticket sales (Lamberti, 2001: 16). The Sharks brand is illustrated in Figure 2.

The Stormers

The Stormers' franchise is based in Cape Town. At first, the Stormers made irregular appearances in the Super 12 owing to the fact that, during the 1996 Super 12, Western Province finished eleventh. Then, in 1997, owing to the nature of the South African system of selecting the top four teams from the Currie Cup, they were dropped for the Free State Cheetahs. In 1998, the Western Province Rugby Union, South Westerns Districts Rugby Football Union and Boland Rugby Union joined forces (Gilbert, 2000: 34) and the team became known as the Western Stormers; however, it only finished ninth in the Super 12 tournament that year. Only in 1999 did the team start operating as the Stormers (Tarik, 2002: 2). The Stormers have been marketing themselves as the "Men in Black" (Van der Berg, 2001: 1), and played in black jerseys and shorts and white socks in 2000 (Colquhoun, 2001: 153). However, since 2001 they have played in black jerseys, shorts and socks (Colquhoun, 2002: 146). They had a 45% winning average during 2000 to 2003. The Stormers' brand is illustrated in Figure 2.





The Bulls	
The Cats	
The Sharks	
The Stormers	

FIGURE 2. SOUTH AFRICAN SUPER 12 RUGBY BRANDS (Adapted from Colquhoun, 2004)

In 2006 the Super 12 rugby tournament will be enlarged to the Super 14 (Smith, 2004: 1) and, as a result, the various South African Super 12 teams will once again have to change to accommodate a fifth South African regional team (Anon., 2005: 2). According to Du Plessis (2005: 1), the fifth franchise for the Super 14 rugby tournament has been controversially awarded to a central region consisting of the Free State, Griqualand West and Griffons Rugby Unions.

REASON FOR THE STUDY

South Africa has a proud rugby tradition, with some of the provincial teams being older than 100 years. With the start of the Super 12 in 1995, South African rugby saw a new area of rugby competition, giving the South African Super 12 franchises an opportunity for new brands and images.

One may thus assume that rugby supporters would support their provincial teams for longer than 10 years, and would support their Super 12 teams for less than 10 years, and if this is not the case, one may conclude that supporters are indeed confusing provincial teams with regional teams. This study was undertaken to determine whether rugby supporters in South Africa have a clear understanding of the differences between the South African Super 12 brands and the Currie Cup brands.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To achieve the objective of the study, the main aim of this article was to determine whether brand confusion exists among South African rugby supporters regarding the leading Currie Cup brands and the South African Super 12 rugby brands. To attain the objective of this article, the following hypotheses were drawn:

- H₁ = Bulls' supporters support their team for an average of 10 years or less.
- H₂ = Cats' supporters support their team for an average of 10 years or less.
- H₃ = Sharks' supporters support their team for an average of 10 years or less.
- H₄ = Stormers' supporters support their team for an average of 10 years or less.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Telkom telephone directories of the town or city headquarters of the 14 rugby provinces served as a sample frame for the population. This database consists of the names, addresses and contact details of potential rugby supporters by provinces. The sample elements (respondents) or target population of this research include all rugby supporters in South Africa. Only adults aged 16 years and older were included in the research.

For the purposes of this study, the Bayesian approach to sample size determination was used. This approach provides a formal procedure for selecting the sample size that maximises the difference between the expected payoff of sample information and the estimated cost of sampling (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2002: 17). Using this approach, a total sample of 50 respondents each in Durban, Pretoria, Cape Town and Johannesburg and 30 respondents in each of the other smaller cities and towns (Potchefstroom, Port Elizabeth, Wellington, Witbank, Springs, East London, Bloemfontein, Kimberly, George and Welkom) were ultimately included in the study (n=500).

Probability sampling was used to select respondents, more specifically a multistage sampling technique was applied to finally select the sample elements (respondents). The stages used to sample the population are shown below:

- **Stage 1**

With the target population being rugby supporters located across South Africa, it was decided that a total random selection of respondents might result in some of the 14 towns or cities (being the headquarters of the 14 rugby unions under survey) not being included or not being adequately represented in the sample. South Africa is geographically divided into the 14 rugby provinces and the town or city where the specific rugby union was based (ie its headquarters) was chosen as a stratum. The rugby unions based in each town or city were then listed.

- **Stage 2**

The potential sample units (households) per union were listed. For this purpose local telephone directories were used initially to select at least 30 sample units per rugby union systematically (50 sample units were selected for the four major cities in South Africa, Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg and Pretoria). According to systematic sampling, sample units are selected at regular intervals. A sample interval was calculated by applying the formula N/n where N =total population and n =sample size ($n=50$ in four largest cities, and $n=30$ in smaller towns and cities). This approach allowed each sample unit an equal chance of being selected. Within each of the strata, the respondents were randomly selected by means of systematic random selection where one name from every n^{th} page was chosen.

The selection of the pages from the directories differed for each stratum because it was calculated by dividing the total number of pages by the sample size for that stratum. For example, the Pretoria telephone directory has 712 pages, divided by 50, equals 14. This implies that every 14th page in the telephone directory was selected. The household on each of these pages was selected randomly, by folding the selected pages in half and then choosing the name in the middle of the page in the first column. The first column was selected by means of simple random sampling.

- **Stage 3**

The sample elements (respondents) were finally selected by random chance. Once a sample unit (household) was contacted, any rugby supporter in the household was selected, by means of a screening question, for interviewing purposes.

Inferential statistics

Cozby (1985: 142) states that inferential statistics allow researchers to make inferences about the true differences in the population on the basis of the sample data. A basic tenet of statistical inference is that it is possible for numbers to be different in a mathematical sense but not significantly different in a statistical sense (McDaniel & Gates, 2001: 413). From the abovementioned hypotheses, the following null and alternative hypotheses can be formulated:

$$\begin{array}{ll}
 H_{01} : \mu \leq 10 & H_{A1} : \mu > 10 \\
 H_{02} : \mu \leq 10 & H_{A2} : \mu > 10 \\
 H_{03} : \mu \leq 10 & H_{A3} : \mu > 10 \\
 H_{04} : \mu \leq 10 & H_{A4} : \mu > 10
 \end{array}$$

For the purpose of this research, the significance level of 0.05 was considered sufficient ($\alpha=0.05$). The z-test was used to test the hypotheses. The z-test allows researchers to compare the mean generated from a sample with the mean hypothesised to exist in the population and thus allows researchers to decide whether the sample mean confirms that the hypothesised mean is true (Tustin *et al.*, 2005: 587).

Data were collected by means of a structured questionnaire and the internal consistency reliability method was used to determine reliability. In this study, the coefficient alpha value across the entire set of scale questions was 0.72, which indicates an acceptably high internal reliability consistency.

RESULTS

The sample in this study consisted of 65% males and 35% females, with 25% of the respondents older than 50 years. The rugby supporters that took part in this study considered themselves to be extreme rugby supporters (43%). A correlation was made between age and the degree of rugby support ($p=0.011$, $R=0.114$), that is, the older respondents are the more extreme supporters.

The majority of the respondents (33%) mentioned the Stormers the most when asked which Super 12 team they were aware of. The Sharks were also mentioned to a large degree (22%). The Bulls were the third most mentioned team (19%) and the Cats had the fourth most mentions (12%). It was, however, clear that supporters were confused, as teams were mentioned as regional teams when they were actually provincial or national teams. The most mentioned provincial rugby team was the Western Province (16%), followed by the Blue Bulls (11%), Cheetahs (10%) and then the Golden Lions (9%). Again, respondents confused national, regional and provincial teams. This study also indicated that the most admired team in South Africa was the Stormers (27%), followed by the Sharks (23%), Bulls (22%), Blue Bulls (8%), Western Province (7%) and the Springboks (5%).

Most of the respondents (23%) supported the Stormers (and have done so for 16 years, on average). Following from that, supporters supported the Sharks (19% for, on average, 17 years), the Bulls (15% and 24 years of support) and the Cats (10%, and an average of 15 years of support).

$H_1 =$ Bulls' supporters support their team for an average of 10 years or less.

When conducting the z-test, H_{01} was rejected ($p_1=0.000$), thus accepting H_{A1} . Therefore, by accepting H_{A1} , one may conclude that Bulls' supporters support their team for more than 10 years. This is not possible, however, as the Bulls team has only been in existence since 1996, and it is therefore clear that supporters are in fact confusing the Bulls with the Blue Bulls.

$H_2 =$ Cats' supporters support their team for an average of 10 years or less.

When conducting the z-test, H_{02} was rejected ($p_2 = 0.003$), thus accepting H_{A2} . By accepting H_{A2} , one may conclude that Cats' supporters support their team for more than 10 years. This is once again, impossible, as the Cats team was only formed in 1996, and it is therefore clear that supporters are in fact confusing the Cats with either the Golden Lions and/or the Cheetahs.

$H_3 =$ Sharks' supporters support their team for an average of 10 years or less.

When conducting the z-test, H_{03} was rejected ($p_3 = 0.000$), thus accepting H_{A3} . By accepting H_{A3} , one may conclude that Sharks' supporters support their team for more than 10 years. As with the other findings, this was also not possible as the Sharks team has only existed since 1996, and it is therefore clear that supporters are in fact confusing the Sharks with the Natal Sharks.

$H_4 =$ Stormers' supporters support their team for an average of 10 years or less.

When conducting the z-test, H_{04} was rejected ($p_4 = 0.000$), thus accepting H_{A4} . By accepting H_{A4} one may conclude that Stormers' supporters support their team for more than 10 years. Again, as the Stormers team has only been around since 1996, it is clear that supporters are in fact confusing the Stormers with Western Province.

One may therefore conclude, with a 95% certainty, that rugby supporters in South African are confusing South African Super 12 teams with the top Currie Cup teams.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to determine whether rugby supporters in South Africa were confused as a result of the fact that Currie Cup teams merged to form four new regional teams.

South African rugby supporters indicated that they were very interested in rugby. According to sports marketing theory, these supporters have a higher level of connection with their rugby teams and therefore have distinct and exclusive preferences for a specific team (Kolbe, 2002: 1). They have formed a personal commitment towards and deep personal empathy with their respective rugby teams and are resistant to any short-term changes made to a team; they are convinced that their team is the best compared with other teams or other forms of entertainment (Kelly *et al.*, 1999: 473). They are well informed; to such an extent that they think they are experts (Goff & Spence, 2003: 1). However, this study has indicated that, although the rugby supporters are well informed, they are confusing South African Super 12 teams with the top Currie Cup teams. This should clearly indicate to South African rugby management that there are serious deficiencies in the management of rugby brands on Currie Cup and Super 12 level.

SA Rugby, together with every South African rugby union, should first strive to create brand awareness of their teams. When they focus on creating positive brand awareness in the minds of supporters, they will also establish positive brand associations. Furthermore, the management of South African rugby should differentiate the various South African Super 12 rugby teams to ensure that supporters perceive them differently from the Currie Cup teams.

Because the provincial brands are so strong, rugby management should reconsider the regional brands and should consider sticking to the provincial brands. The top four Currie Cup teams from the previous year could, for example, participate in the Super 12, contracting players from the region to strengthen the team if needed and as has been recommended by various commentators of the game.

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