

INDUSTRY

Students both young and old are turning to sport business courses in the hope of gaining an upper hand in breaking into the industry. Most have found their hopes have come true.

Bernardo Domingues reports.

A SUCCESSFUL ROUTE into the much-coveted sports industry is undoubtedly what most students are looking for when enrolling on a sports-specific university course. And what's more they seem to have quite a precise idea of what a degree needs to offer to take them where they want to go.

"How deep, relevant and practical the theories taught are; how close the links with companies and sport organisations are; how large the alumni network is; plus the international dimension of the programme are all key factors when considering courses," explains Professor Thierry Lardinois, head of the marketing department at ESSEC Business School in Paris.

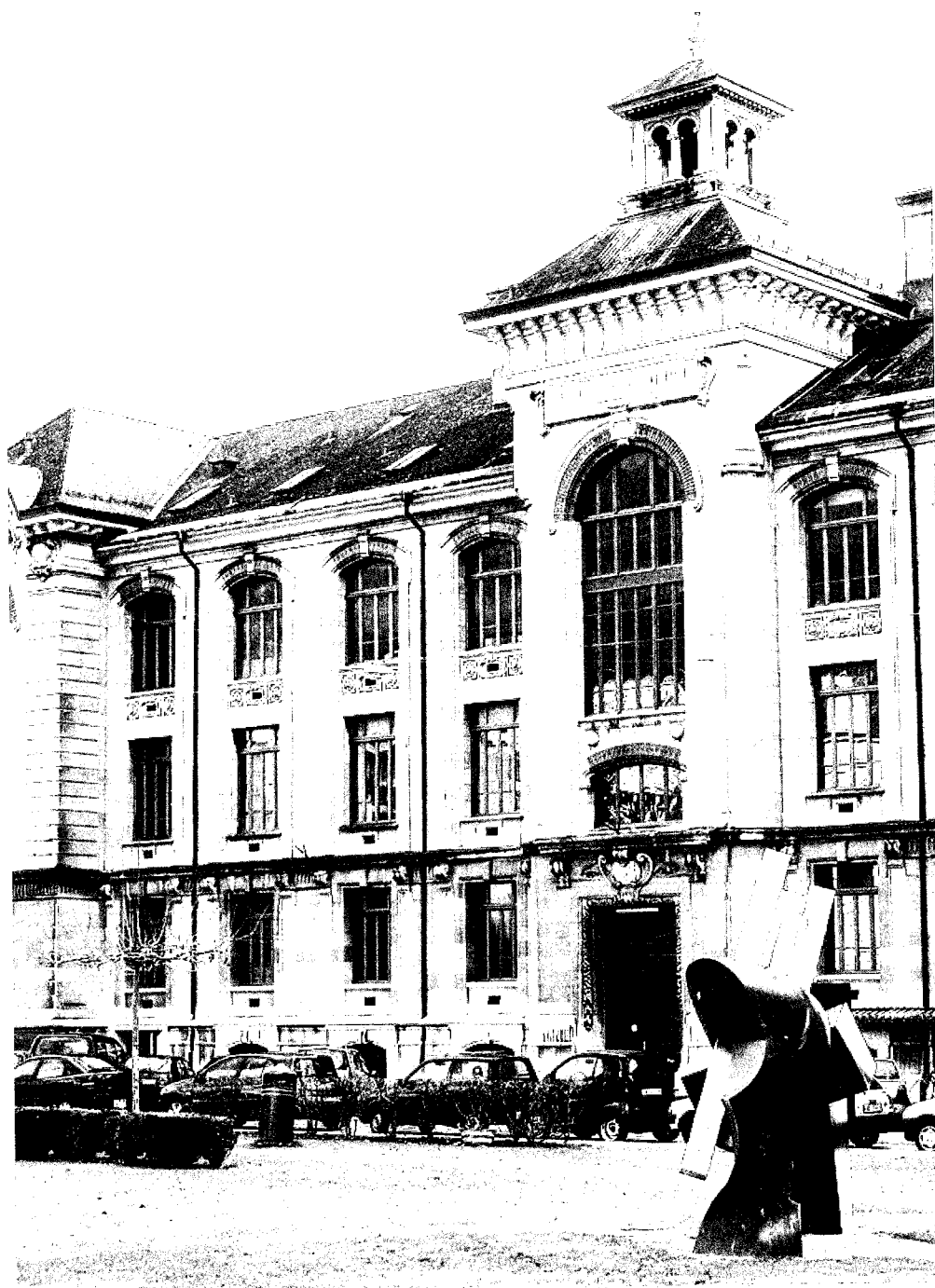
ESSEC has two sport-dedicated programmes and the age ranges of people taking the courses are clearly distinct. Those attending the graduate programme are normally between 20 and 24 years old, whereas students opting for executive education tend to be aged from their late 20s to early 40s.

"The older people have much more business experience," adds Lardinois, who is also the founder and holder of the school's International Sports Marketing chair and pedagogical head of the Master in Sport Management and Corporate Strategy. "They want to improve their sports marketing competencies and transform theoretical knowledge into relevant skills. The younger students have no experience but are very talented. They want to work on challenging and genuine case studies. They want to learn by doing."

Lardinois reveals that in 95 per cent of cases, a sport business degree is a student's first-choice rather than plan B, and many students are eager to get as much hands-on industry experience as possible during their studies.

"Students know they have a lot to learn and to practice in order to become more competent than their competitors," he says. "That's why most of the time they combine courses with working experiences."

Alban Dechelotte, a former ESSEC student



University of Neuchâtel - *iwouldstay*

and now the head of development at the Havas Sports & Entertainment agency, rates his work experience placements as the best moments of both his undergraduate and post-graduate degrees at the business school.

"I had the opportunity to do something for adidas and for the French Football League (LFP) and was given real problems to solve by real managers," he recalls. "I had to work on the tasks, share my feelings with those managers and finally present my recommendation to the very

top people within those organisations."

Dechelotte spent five years at ESSEC, the first four completing a dual Bachelor's degree in International Management and International Sports Marketing, then moving on to a Master in Marketing Management. In addition to his work with adidas and the LFP, he was also a trainee at PricewaterhouseCoopers and Havas, where he has now been for seven years.

Currently a lecturer in sports marketing at ESSEC, Dechelotte became a champion

of partnerships between the industry and academia. Having experience on both sides of the divide, he is perfectly placed to understand all the benefits involved.

"The partnership between the course and Havas gave me the opportunity to get this position. I had the opportunity to demonstrate what I was able to do and be hired for a permanent position," Dechelotte adds.

"As a manager of a team it is a great advantage to have trainees that are already involved in sport, who understand the stakeholders and how to leverage marketing strategies through sport, because [sport] is a very different world, with specific rules, and is very sophisticated compared to the classic marketing world. That's why we look for people who have already done such sport courses before joining our company."

From a Havas standpoint, the partnership with a business school that offers a specialisation in sport was so successful that it has completely transformed the company's recruitment policy.

"We have a rule not to recruit senior people," says Dechelotte. "Instead, we take advantage of this trainee pool to build our workforce. With this policy we can guarantee that we know the people, that they are already integrated with the teams and also know the [work] culture. We can ensure we maintain a certain level of values.

"In Havas we receive between five to ten CVs per day and there's one per cent chance of those people getting a traineeship. On the other hand, when I receive CVs from ESSEC, there's a 60 per cent chance they will become trainees at Havas."

In signing up for his course at the age of 17, Dechelotte was looking for a way in the sport business and ticked most of the boxes listed by his former tutor Lardinois.

"In my personal life I did a lot of rugby, so for my professional career I decided to aim for a business course that would allow me entry again to the sports field," he says. "For me, a specialisation in sports marketing was a natural choice to acquire knowledge and expertise, but also relationships within such a closed and hard-to-access market.

"When I was looking for a university I was very interested in the international approach of ESSEC. Its alumni network is very strong and its brand very well-respected in France. The standard of the lecturers was very high too, both in terms of network and quality of the content – many of them were representatives of clubs, the International Olympic Committee, FIFA, and others."

ESSEC is, perhaps surprisingly, the only leading business school in France to offer sport-dedicated courses and there's a similar story from the other side of the world.

With family in Brisbane, Australia, Joanna Main wanted to pursue a degree that would give

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her a head start in the sports industry: "Griffith University was the only one in Brisbane that offered the Business Sport Management degree when I was choosing which university to attend.

"Therefore I did not really have too much to consider because if I wanted to partake in that degree there was a distinct lack of both competition for Griffith and options for me as a student wanting to study sport management."

At 25, Main is close to completing an undergraduate degree with a major in Business Sport Management and a minor in Counselling (Psychology). The option to put the two subjects together came in very handy as it not only allowed her to combine her first option (Sport Management) with her second preference, but also to put her in a better position when she begins job-hunting for a permanent position.

"Ideally I would like to look to work in sports player welfare," explains Main. "That is the reason why I chose to put psychology with my sport major: in the hope that I would create an edge for myself over those pursuing this area as well."

The second feature of the course she thinks will give her an upper hand is, as Professor Lardinoit identified, work experience - Main

is currently undertaking work experience at the university sports college. Most universities have sports departments, so giving sport management students a say in how those teams and programmes are run is quite a simple way to offer hands-on opportunities.

"Work experience is definitely an important part of a sport degree and can present excellent networking options, and the opportunity to develop and hone skills," Main says. "It also gives first-hand experience of the sport industry and this may help quash any unrealistic expectations about an area.

"Work experience and internships provide students with invaluable experience, particularly those who have entered university straight from high school. It can also aid a student in determining what area within the industry they may like or prefer not to work in."

Finally, Main identifies the importance of depth and relevance in lectures. For her, a good measure of their quality is if they make students see sport from a new perspective: "I surprise even myself, as despite having almost completed this degree, how differently I perceive and interpret things is incredible. Watching a game of football I am now aware of everything from sponsors to

SPORTS MARKETING TRAINING PROGRAMS

EXECUTIVE PROGRAM

ESSEC's Executive Masters in Sport Business Management and Corporate Strategy sets out to ready the players in the field of sport business management to assume the role of informed partners, to contribute meaningfully to value creation in their organizations and to manage all the challenges they will have to face in sport business management.

Next course starts end of November 2010.

Website : <http://formation.essec.fr/domaines/sport>
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GRADUATE PROGRAM

As one of the optional programs of the ESSEC Business School, the International Sports Marketing Chair offers an education tailored to the sport business needs: courses, seminars, conferences and real cases to complete for famous business partners such as adidas, Havas Sports & Entertainment, Adecco, Coca Cola or sports federations.

For discovering how join the ESSEC Business School and his sport marketing track:
<http://www.essec.edu/professors/chairs-and-institutes>

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the camera positioning. This is a good thing!"

After finishing a postgraduate degree in Law in his native Latvia, 27-year-old Pavels Tjusevs felt like looking for "a potential platform for embarking into the world of sport" and saw that platform in the FIFA Master programme. The FIFA Master is organised by the International Centre for Sport Studies (CIES) and delivered by three universities in different countries – Leicester's De Montfort University in the UK, Milan's SDA Bocconi School of Management and the University of Neuchâtel in Switzerland.

The FIFA Master's strong alumni network was an effective promotional tool for the course, says Tjusevs: "I think the course has the following assets: networking opportunities, professional teaching, interesting classes, high-profile 'fly-in' guest speakers, getting to know other cultures, sharing life experiences, developing long-lasting friendships with bright individuals and generally an unforgettable experience."

"Before getting accepted to the programme, I asked a lot of miscellaneous queries to the former students and I must say that I was very impressed by the feedback."

Having gone through an internship in London, Tjusevs was working for a law office back home before joining the course. He believes that in order to make the most of postgraduate courses, previous professional experience is crucial.

"This will seriously enhance job-seeking opportunities after graduation," he says. "In my view, however, this experience should not be limited solely to the sports sector. Sport is just another form of business - albeit an attractive one - but it has corporate, finance, legal and marketing aspects to it, just like other businesses."

Above all, though, having an international reach and attendance contributes massively to a programme's ability to deliver quality and it is one in which Tjusevs and other students place large importance.

"I expect to learn the managerial aspect as well as to be positively surprised by the lecturers in sports law," he adds. "The programme will definitely give us a great overview of how international sport works and we shall get friends for life."

"As a manager of a team, to have trainees that are already involved in sport, who understand the stakeholders and how to leverage marketing strategies through sport, is a great advantage."

Around 30 graduates attend the FIFA Master each year - Getty Images Sport



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