Learning to become a football star:

Representations of football fan culture in Swedish public service television
for youth

Britt-Marie Ringfjord

In Swedish Public service Television, sports journalism aimed at children has been broadcast since November 1983. It is a success story of how TV has helped to nurture Swedish children and make them accustomed to practising sport themselves, and to watching sports news and sports events on the same TV channel as they become adults.

The present article is a content analysis of how the constructions of Swedish football culture are reported and presented by the popular Swedish Public Service TV program Little Mirror of Sports.¹ It will demonstrate how media content in public service television may serve as ideal representations of sport and football in general and, in particular, provide representations of gender identities and ethnicity for young football-playing girls and boys. Our understanding of the relationship between sport and media may also be increased by studying a sports program produced for young Swedish citizens.

The main question is how football is represented in Little Mirror of Sports. In the analysis and discussion, I will focus on the processes of football journalism, youth culture, gender identities, ethnicity and mediated cultural meaning.

The total number of newly-produced and broadcast Little Mirror of Sports programs per year is thirty-two. The program is broadcast once a week,

¹ In Swedish, the program is called Lilla Sportspegeln. The name is derived from the adult version of “Mirror of Sports”, addressing the adult Swedish Public Service Television audience.
except during the summer, when reruns from the previous season are shown. The selected forty-one episodes, on which this analysis is based, consist of nineteen sequences from 2007 and twenty-two sequences from 2008. The selection and demarcation has been guided by focusing on football content. I shall concentrate on sequences containing football reportage about two famous football players, Marta Vieira da Silva and Zlatan Ibrahimovic, also including some other features such as the football culture of other national football stars and of the football-playing girls and boys in the selected content.

Media content constructs and communicates ideals for gender identities. In this case, I find it especially interesting how a sports program for children and teenagers is interrelated with establishing identity processes in football culture. These structures are often referred to as the media-sport-complex where the analyses of global power relations are connected to perspectives on political economy and culture (See Miller et.al. 2001; Roche 200; Boyle & Haynes 2000.)

**Become the best**

The *Little Mirror of Sports* may be described in three categories; the program structure, the opening sequence and the program management style. Three main recurring themes also appear: sport stories, quizzes, and an interview with a famous sports star. In each section there is a fluent mix of studio recorded pieces and some pre-recorded segments on sport from the community of sport-active children or sports stars. The method used here is to direct the analyses with the specific goal of deconstruction media content. The categories often deal with the constructions of media texts’ use of different codes, language, studio environment, design, props, communication style and dress codes (mise-en-scène) and in addition, how the technical
equipment used to create and produce the phenomenon of sport is adapted to the TV medium and its audience. In order to interpret a mediated text, one must first break down the production’s parts, which are analysed as signs and codes, and this has consequences for how to make sense of sport. (Selby & Cowdery 1995: 3ff, 123ff) To get answers to my questions, I first needed to break up the program structure into design categories that I believe are central to how we perceive and interpret a program like Little Mirror of Sports.

To be eligible, one must first participate in the elimination competitions with questions conducted on the program’s website; through this process, children are selected to participate in the quiz taking place in the studio. The final prize is often a trip to a sporting event. The first prize in the spring episode of 5 May 2007 was a trip to Italy to watch Zlatan playing in Milan and to meet him in person.

Every episode starts with the theme song “Champion” that was sung in 2007-2008 by a young Swedish singer, Amy Diamond², popular among Swedish children and teenagers. The refrain goes “Champion, champion, you’ve got to go for number one. Ain’t that what makes a champion?” The theme song, together with rapidly passing images of sporting children mixed with sequences from famous sports events, supports the message that this is a program for children interested in sport. The music and the lyrics reinforce the impression that sport is fun, with lots of action, but we also get the impression that if only you strive hard enough it is possible to be number one.

² Previously, another version of the signature was performed by our now internationally famous artist Robyn. “You Can Always Be Number One” (Sport Goofy Anthem). In 1991, at the age of twelve, Robyn sang a Swedish translation of the Little Mirror of Sports previous theme song, which then served as the signature for this program.
A brief summary of some episodes from 2007 will show the quantity of football reports during this year. In April 2007, an interview is broadcast with Lotta Schelin, winger and forward. Prior to Schelin’s inclusion in the FIFA Women’s World Team in China later in 2007, this was shown as a current news event, important to all of us in football culture. At the time she was also leader of the shooting league of the Swedish ladies’ premier league and the winner of the diamond ball 2006, an award to the most talented female football player. When she talks about this prize and answers more questions about the technique of playing good football her eyes sparkle and she supports her words with gestures:

... it was like a dream that came true. I couldn’t believe it was true … You should fixate on the goal and kick the football with the inner side of your foot. It is to trick your opponent by quickly changing direction.

She is a role model for the young viewers: the female star having achieved success. She stresses the joy of performing well – football is fun – and implicitly she communicates that the success is worthy of the prize.

The program’s serial Little Mirrors Football Academy is headed by Marcus Allbäck, formerly a famous forward in Sweden’s national football team and, at the time of these episodes, assistant coach for the team. Since 9 October 2007, the program has been introduced by a cheerful voice-over: “Today we kick off our football academy and, in the quiz, win match tickets for Zlatan’s inter playing in Milan. Your new coach Marcus Allbäck shows how to improve your shot.” We meet Marcus in a space of playing fields surrounded by high rise apartment buildings. Marcus shows how to handle the ball. The story is dull and flat. His being an idol, for the young viewers, seems to rely on his former star status as a player and successful scorer in the Swedish national team and with Heerenveen, Aston Villa and FC København. The staging is not attractive in this suburban setting where the only interaction is between Marcus and the invisible camera team.

3 The award was established in 1990 and has been handed out at the Swedish Football Gala since 1995.
However, the subsequent sequence about Yanko Marca from Sierra Leone, a teenager born in 1995, is much more interesting. Yanko is playing with the Swedish boy team Brommapojkarna 1993. He seems to be older than his twelve or thirteen years, and we can hear that his voice is already breaking. This report shows the whole team playing a match, and includes a short interview with Yanko. According to the team’s coach, Yanko “is a dangerous scorer, big and strong”. This statement suggests that there will be a future career and thus Yanko serves as a role model for the TV-watching, football-playing boys and girls. The statement that Yanko is dangerous, big and strong may appeal more to boys in their early teens than to football-playing girls, as the western ideal of femininity does not include being a big girl (if this is referring to size), neither in the community nor in the football arena. It is especially important to preserve heteronormative gender roles predefined by culture as feminine and masculine qualities (Caudwell 2006:152f). On the other hand, the term “big” may sometimes refer to be a great and skillful footballer with a lot of self-confidence – and this of course is the main message to watchers of this program, despite gender differences.

In September of the same year, there is an interview in Beijing with a Chinese team of girls aged fourteen. Through an interpreter, two of the girls ask questions about the coming matches to the Swedish goalkeeper Hedvig Lindahl and the forward Lotta Schelin (Lotta might already be familiar to children who regularly follow football news). The interaction between the young football-playing girls and the players from the Swedish national ladies football team represents the repeated story about the importance of good preparation, good training habits, and how to focus in a match.

In October, we meet Simon playing with Brommapojkarna. He is twelve years old according to the name tag on the screen, and his dream is to play for the national football team as an adult. He competes in a challenge with Christian “Chippen” Wilhelmsson to see who does the best football tricks. Anyone may win – just face the challenge. Chippen has to confess: “I didn't stand a chance! That was impressive!” So the winner is Simon! At the time, Christian Wilhelmsson was the winger for Bolton, the English league team,
and he tells us that he also dreamed of playing for the national team when he started playing at the age of five or six.

In the October program we also visit Barcelona football academy where we meet Edu, who plays defender for the boys’ team 14 of Barcelona FC. He lives with his family in Tarragona, about a hundred kilometres from Barcelona. He goes to school in Tarragona, and after school a taxi picks him up to take him to the training in Barcelona. His days are long, and he seldom gets back home before eleven o’clock at night. You have to work hard to become a star.

Much of the content in *Little Mirror of Sport* deals with teaching children the proper sporting techniques. The overall topic in 2007 is the need to make serious efforts at improving your skills as a young boy or girl, in order to achieve success in the future. Some sequences show role models for kids who want to play football: the famous stars or, perhaps, other teenagers playing in junior teams. It is important, however, to stress that the ideal of being a famous football star is presented as a success story that is possible for every child to achieve. To be number one in football you’ll need to strive for number one (the program does not present any alternative stories about what happens if you should fail to reach the top). These stories also support the main message of how to become “the Champion – the very best!” Being number one is the ultimate aim.

**The female idol Marta Vieira da Silva**

For background we need to look in detail at an episode of *Little Mirror of Sports* from 7 April 2008. This episode focuses on Marta Vieira da Silva, the famous forward in the Swedish women’s football team Umeå Sports Club (Umeå IK). Together with this team, Marta won the Swedish championship

---

4 In Sweden, the expression ”Boys 14” or “Girls 15” is familiar to youngsters playing football. The players are aged fourteen and the number is added to the team’s name.

5 We also meet the famous hockey player Henrik Lundqvist – at the moment goal keeper for the New York Rangers – and visit an Estonian school with special gymnastic lessons in dance. The episode also includes a report from a Swedish project in a suburb for immigrant children, who are introduced to different kinds of sports. Here we meet children and football players from the local team in this northern part of Sweden playing football together.
in 2005, 2006 and 2007, and the Champions League in 2004 and 2007. Among several international awards at this time she received the World Cup Golden ball and Golden Boat in 2007. Marta is said to have been a very influential role model for young football-playing girls in Sweden, since in 2001 she was hired out from Brazilian team Belo Horizonte and started her international career in Umeå IK.

A short introduction of the parts to this program is followed by some swift sequences of Marta in different situations during football matches, where she represents Umeå IK and the Brazilian women’s football team in the world championship. Some clips from the Swedish football gala show Marta together with Zlatan Ibrahimovic, receiving awards.

The interesting fact about these two football stars is that they have different ethnic origins, and that they have both won the hearts of the Swedish football fans. Marta came from Brazil to play in Swedish Umeå, and Zlatan was born in Sweden but has his roots in the Balkans. Together they represent the international elite in football, and they are probably role models for several ethnic groups in Swedish society, as well as globally. So they are national and international football stars, uniting football fan culture despite its different ethnicities.

Then the program hostess Yvette Hermundstad welcomes us at Gammliaavallen, the arena where Umeå IK play their home matches. “It’s swinging in Umeå on Gammliaavallen and you just saw lots of beautiful Marta goals.” Yvette is standing at the football arena together with Marta Vieira da Silva – obviously on a cold spring afternoon, since they both wear knitted caps and sweaters. Yvette asks Marta questions sent to the program from the young viewers:

Yvette (reading from one of the letters in her hands): Many of our viewers are curious about you Marta, and they want to ask you some questions. How do you react when you win a match?

Marta: I feel happy.
**Yvette:** You often make a lot of goals, so what do you think is important to become a good goal maker?

**Marta:** You need to train hard, eat good food and be a good pupil at school as well.

**Yvette:** It’s important to be good at a lot of things then? Carolina has mailed us a question about which country you like best. If you compare Sweden with Brazil, in which country do you prefer to play football?

**Marta:** For me it’s both! Umeå because of the respect I feel for my first international team, and Brazil since it’s my country. It’s my language and my culture.

**Yvette:** How did you start with football?

**Marta:** It came naturally for me. I liked to play football more than playing with dolls as girls usually do. I never wanted to play with dolls, so instead I played football with the boys. I started at home when I was about eight years old. We played in the street. And then at eleven or twelve I played matches regularly in a boys’ football team. At fourteen I signed up for my first club. That was a little bit hard and I was nervous.

Marta shows us some tricks: “This one I call the helicopter feint. I often do this one in matches.” Marta starts slowly in one direction, and then she quickly stops, jumps over the ball and spins over in the opposite direction. Yvette acts as opponent team player trying to win the football from Marta. Then, after this demonstration on how to feint, the superstar Marta writes her autograph on the football – a prize to compete for in the coming quiz for the children watching the program. She answers questions about how she manages to cope with stress during a match:

---

6 Rio de Janeiro, Vasco da Gama
Marta: I’m rather good at handling stress. I think the goalkeeper is likely to be under more stress than other players.

Yvette: What about red and yellow cards?

Marta: Oh, the referee got the impression that I cheated and pretended – but I always try to play on the ball and not take any notice and get upset.

Yvette: Over to Johan Wissman, who also wants to ask you a question…

This question from Yvette is interspersed with interviews from earlier episodes in which sports stars formulate a question for the next guest in the upcoming program. Johan Wissman, who was the interviewed sports star in the previous episode, asks: “What do you think about cold Sweden?”

Marta: When I’m in Brazil I miss the cold winter, you know you sweat at lot in hot Brazil.

Yvette: What about gymnastics at school in Brazil?

Marta: In the big cities you have a lot of different sports to choose from, but in the countryside this is not the case.

Then Yvette closes this interview by asking Marta if she has any hidden talents. Marta answers that she likes to sing and play the guitar when she spends time together with her family. Here an implicit message to the children watching the program may be that they should also cultivate activities other than football in order to become a football star.

Ibrahim, Kadisa and Melissa from Gävle

After the sequence with Marta, the program continues with a speaker’s voice. “In Sweden, many children start playing football at an early age, but children from other countries often don’t know how big football is as a sport in

---

7 Johan Wissman is a Swedish sprinter, successful in Swedish and European championships. His latest gold medal was won in Turin 2009.
Sweden”, introducing an episode about immigrants in Sweden and how Gävle IF, a sports club in the northern region, arranges team courses to introduce children to different sports – for instance, football – following the link from the leading report on Marta. In this section we meet some kids playing football indoors in a gymnastics hall (presumably at a school). The children answer questions made by an invisible reporter that we neither see nor hear, but the answers hint at football playing as fun. The children representing Gävle Sports Club are Ibrahim, Kadisa and Melissa, but these two boys and the one girl only give us short, positive statements. It seems as if they do not have the time to answer questions, as they want to continue practising football. The adult coaches are responsible for taking the initiative and talking more about these activities which are aimed at providing social growth and health.

*Head coach:* Sport is strong and fun, so why not gather the kids and do funny things here? We keep them off the streets and we all have a great time together. We know where the kids are and that they are doing something useful after school. Anyone is welcome here – no one is left out.

*The assistant coach:* Not all families have the financial resources to participate in sports and not all parents are free to drive you by car to practises and games. It’s enough to come here and participate.

There is clearly some good organisation behind these courses offering sports as leisure activities for children and teenagers in Gävle, whatever their gender, ethnicity or family situation. The big football teams usually support boys and teenage male teams rather than girls or teenage female teams. As a follow up to the interview with Marta, this section of the program tells us that talent needs cultivation in order to grow. Some talents need to be encouraged to develop. The grown-ups are responsible for teaching the children skills.

Marta and the team coaches in this episode tell us how to become a successful football player. These two sections address the children as if they are pupils, first in a conversation between two adults and then through the
answers from Ibrahim, Kadisa and Melissa, giving rise to a strong sense of fostering football fan culture. The identity positions here are, perhaps, directed primarily at football-playing girls in the Swedish audience, but the male identity position is protected by the two coaches and may also serve as a possible role model for football-playing boys among the viewers.

**Emma, Wille and Alex at Zlatan Camp**

Another regular feature in the program series is Zlatan’s football academy, which started in 2008 and recurred in the 2009 edition. Zlatan Camp is a series of six parts first announced in March 2008. An interview with Zlatan ended the series in the seventh part in October. Each of the six sections from the camp lasts for about five minutes, and the interview with Zlatan lasted almost ten minutes. Let us look at one example from the press to illustrate how media, and especially sports journalism, covered this event:

Now Zlatan himself is out hunting – for the new Zlatan. This summer, Zlatan Camp starts: a football school for Swedish adolescents in some thirty locations in the country. “This is something I am passionate about. I want to give something back to the kids,” said Zlatan to SPORT-Expressen. David Beckham has already done it. Now Zlatan is doing the same thing in Sweden. Together with Nike, he has founded a football school for young people, starting in the summer. Zlatan Camp was established in some thirty clubs. “The interest is huge,” says Nike’s football manager, Tomas Antonelius. Young people will be trained by representatives from the clubs, but Zlatan himself has been involved in and developed the exercises. “Zlatan has approved and described every single practise,” says Antonelius. “Zlatan is passionate about the project and I will support it financially.” According to SPORT-Expressen he is going in with “a substantial sum of money”. On this, however, neither Nike nor Zlatan would comment. The superstar will personally visit at least one camp in Sweden for young people. “I want to give back to kids – and this is a good way to do it. The camp is
something I’m passionate about and I have wanted to do this for a long time. It will be a great fun.”

(www.footbollsexpressen.se 20080401) [Translation by the author from the original text in Swedish]

According to the Swedish press, Zlatan’s football academy was arranged in thirty Swedish clubs sponsored by Nike (Semneby 20080422; Malmborg 20080608). This also illustrates how the power relationship within the sport-media-complex is linked to the football culture by powerful political and economic interests. The Public Service Media is bringing a famous football star into the children’s lives through Little Mirror of Sports. On this occasion, the famous international football star Zlatan gets attention, not only in a children’s program, but also in other media, and his sponsors, such as Nike, can use this opportunity to market their label to young consumers in several ways (Boyle & Haynes 2000:49; Boyle 2006). There were some alarming reports on various football sites that Zlatan did not keep his promise to the children about a visit to one of the camps (fotbollssverige.se); by this we also understand how cooperation between the Public Service TV and the commercial sponsors of sport makes it harder for Public Service Media to maintain their standards and not expose children to advertising in children’s programs. Producing a series about a famous football star like Zlatan will certainly contribute to a program’s popularity with a young audience, and it will also serve the interests of the public service television (by increasing viewing levels); of the sponsors (by increasing the sales of their products); and of the football organisations (by increasing the number of children attracted to the sport).

The school’s main instructors were said to have been flown to Italy to learn the exercises that Zlatan has developed. On the website, the organising club Limham Bunkeflo claims to arrange the “coolest” football school for children between the ages of seven and sixteen; the football summer school promises a week in July filled with football and lots of fun. Zlatan promises to give his knowledge about football to his greatest fans, the children. Zlatan Camp is
his own idea. It is going to be great fun, focusing on individual skills. Zlatan Camp is exclusively for football clubs cooperating with Nike! (LB07) We also understand by this website that this is the club from where Little Mirror of Sport is broadcast; however it is never obvious in the program or the Little Mirror of Sport’s own website.

For this study it is important keep in mind that Little Mirror of Sport produced six sections of Zlatan Camp from Limhamns Brovallen, and a seventh final section in which Zlatan was interviewed. These sections were put out on Swedish Public Service Television in the autumn of 2008 and again in the autumn of 2009. The following covers parts from these episodes broadcast on the Swedish Public Service Children’s Channel starting in September 2008 and ending in October of the same year.

In episode one, 15 September 2008, the first section is introduced with views from the Malmö–Øresund Bridge, the Turning Torso, and Canadian geese wandering over the plains of Skåne. The speaker voice’s introduction (“over to Zlatan who is cruel with the ball; juggle, dribble and learn how to feint just like him”) is followed by a pre-recorded section where we meet Zlatan presenting the theme for today’s workout: “Don’t see your opponents as an obstacle – see them as an opportunity instead.”

The images shift back to the football camp and a little blonde girl with freckles begins to tell us that she is nine years old and has played football for two years. “I hope I will learn all about Zlatan Ibrahimovic's skills, so that I will be a good football player like him when I grow up,” she says. We get to know her name by a name tag on the TV screen: Emma. Then Willie, a blond boy of the same age, tells us about his plan for the week ahead: “I want to go to Camp Zlatan because it’s fun and I will meet a lot of friends there, so I think you learn a lot about football.” Then you hear an enthusiastic voice coming from a loudspeaker: “Welcome to the summer's fiercest football school!” The voice belongs to one of the trainers, with whom we will grow more familiar during this program. The camera sweeps over a green and yellow field. A group of children are walking to join the first gathering.
Emma: I have played football for two years and I always play football when I am at home. I have always my football with me, indoors and wherever I go when I’m out somewhere.

Alex: We focused on running backwards. This was a good exercise! I want to become a professional soccer player for Manchester United.

Wille: I want to play for Chelsea as a professional when I grow up.

During the six camp sequences, broadcast in six episodes, we will be following Emma, Wille and Alex. Every child wears sweaters in Inter’s team colours of black and blue. When the camera shows snapshots from the camp, we see that all the children are wearing these shirts, with the number “8” and Ibrahimovic’s name on their backs. This episode ends with Zlatan talking to us about next week, when he will show the children how to dribble.

Episode two, on 22 September, has the same structure: a brief introduction by Zlatan about the day’s practise, followed by sequences from the children’s training. Zlatan ends the episode by talking about the theme for the next week. Alex and Emma comment upon the week’s exercise:

Alex: This exercise was good. It was called “How many fingers do you see?” Through this I learned to hold my head up and look ahead to plan my next move.

Emma: I dribble the ball while keeping an eye on my team-mate who is running in front of me and holding up different numbers of fingers that I count aloud, while I run forward dribbling the ball.

Alex’s and Emma's explanations reinforce the importance of doing this exercise to develop their skills and competence as football players, even at this children’s level.
Episode three on 29 September starts in the same familiar way with Zlatan telling us that this time they will practise headers.

*Emma:* Today I feel more secure. The first day was quite exciting, but now I know more about the kids here. Today we practised headers. I’m not professional in that!

This is also supported by a sequence in which Zlatan shows how to do it the correct way (Stay behind the ball and keep your eyes open”) while Emma continues:

*Emma:* The important thing is to look at the ball and the trick is to meet it with your forehead. A great tip, I think! And I think it's great that he comes from Malmö.

*Wille:* Before this camp I was not so good at headers, but now I'm much better.

We see groups of children practising headers together. The coach gives instructions: “Remember to get behind the ball and keep your eyes open. Looking good, Wille! Very nice Emma, it’s important that you stay focused on the ball. Don’t close your eyes – keep them wide open!”

This part ends with images from matches, with sequences highlighting some of Zlatan’s headers from a Milan-Einhofen match, and a Juventus meeting with Livorno, with a transition to Zlatan, who says: “And next week we will practise dribbling”, closing this episode. The message about imitating the professional football player representing Sweden in the international arena may be redundant for the adult viewer but it reflects how important football fan culture is in young children’s lives. Knowledge about football and the need to learn techniques by imitating their football idols are included in the children’s answers and actions at the camp. This indicates to what degree cultural symbols in football are well known and articulated in the generation group presented in these episodes.

---

8 Zlatan
The remaining episodes deal with how to dribble and kick penalties (6 October), good eating habits (13 October) and how to score (20 October). In the last episode, Emma starts to show her skill. She tells us that it is so sad that this is the last day at the camp. But the cheerful voice-over tells us that 180 children at this camp have improved their football skills. The interview with Zlatan in the seventh and last episode, 29 October, follows one of two patterns familiar when a sports star appears in this children’s program. Here, the children’s written questions to Zlatan are asked by three familiar faces from Zlatan Camp: Emma, Wille and Alex. The interview takes place in a flat (presumably in Malmö) where the children sit together on a sofa posing their questions to the famous football star. Emma starts: “What was your most memorable goal?”

Zlatan: The last one I scored when I played for Ajax – when I dribbled through seven or eight players to make it.

Zlatan’s response is reinforced by a sequence from the game, showing a memorable moment in his career. The children ask questions about how to become a professional and what it is like to be an internationally famous football player. Several examples from well-known Zlatan moments are shown as the interview goes on.

The interaction between the children and Zlatan shows different styles of conversation. Zlatan seems to be comfortable in this environment. Emma, Wille and Alex are guests and seem to seek support from each other, but Zlatan lights up the mood with his big smile. He is a nice guy, but you can also sense that he is accustomed to handling media relations. The importance of visibility in the media, and of having good relationships with sports journalists and fans, are parts of the interdependence of media and sports personalities, which means that even Little Mirror of Sports counts. Zlatan creates a good relationship with the young fan football culture, and the media get material that makes interesting content for their viewers. Another major player in this context is Nike, sponsoring the football academy. Even if Nike only plays behind the scenes, the company brands its image by Zlatan’s participation. The children realise that the company supports the famous
football star’s camp and career, and also that it might support them in a future successful football career.

**Gender aspects**

Most of the Zlatan material demonstrates his importance for Swedish football and for a rising generation of football-playing boys and girls. This male football hero is adored by the children, who all want to become at least as good a footballer as he is. While Zlatan can be said to symbolise the men’s football top layer, the program editors seem aware of gender equality, and represent the experiences of both girls and boys at the football camp. Boys and girls are also shown in other episodes of *Little Mirror of Sports*, and several female football players from the Swedish premier football women’s league are interviewed in the program.

We also need to consider, not only the adult football stars and coaches in this program, but also the function of the hosts and hostesses presenting sport ideology, and especially football culture, to the young viewers. In earlier years, the hosts were established sports journalists from Public Service Television Sport News or special sports events. During the period covered by this content analysis, Yvette Hûbinette was the hostess; in the years since this study the task has been shared out by a team of young, and older, reporters (some of the older reporters have good reputations as sports journalists on Public Service Television, while the younger reporters’ background is in hosting programs on Public Service Children’s Channel). These hosts and hostesses, together with the football stars and experts, shape the essence of football culture and encourage the youngsters to learn how to understand and appreciate football.

In general, mediated sport for children and teenagers maintains a strong focus on male players, whose skills are rated more highly in the media than those of female players (Rowe 1999: 124f, Thornham 2000:184f). To some degree, representations of football in *Little Mirror of Sports* are still built on an ideological understanding of football as typically masculine, but *Little Mirror of Sports* also presents some new gender ideals. Gender equality is recognised and supported by society and by the Public Service commission to...
broadcast (Boyle & Haynes 2000:133f; Reimer 2000). The program will perhaps lead to some changes and to further acceptance of girls and women when these children have grown up.

Through various elements, children learn to respect adults’ knowledge, and leadership, by adults who themselves have already internalised the ideology of sport that they convey to the children participating in the program and the children watching it. However, the representations of football fan culture displayed in this program are not merely connected to the power structures in society and in the sport-media-complex. The program’s friendly atmosphere also provides several examples of good relationships between children and adults, by the program’s hosts and by the participating football stars and children. The positive images of shared interests traverse some conventional generational, gender and cultural boundaries and, by opening up to other ethnic communities in Sweden, offer multiple alternative identities for the children to choose from and be inspired by.

The male and female gender identities seem to differ. The boys’ gender identity corresponds entirely with the masculine norms for football players, while the girls’ gender identity is a mixture of male and female, which means that football-playing girls are subordinated to male norms of football.

Then there is the expressed middle-class ideal, where children are expected to have supporting families, or to live in areas where a football club exists. This middle-class ideal is also connected with cultivating a good character by training diligently, eating well and purposefully investing in a future football career similar to that of the role models appearing in the program. Although this career is open to both girls and boys, it is presented as a typically male activity.

*Little Mirror of Sports* obviously tries to take girls’ football seriously and to give them space to appear talented and skilled at the game. There are many examples of famous women footballers. But in comparing the two stars in this analysis we can observe a clear difference between how the female and the male football identities are presented. Marta Vieira da Silva is usually
seated during the interview; compared with the image of Zlatan, she appears passive. Zlatan, however, expresses male activity and action both verbally and physically. His is a normal and accepted position, and he embodies masculine hegemony. He takes his place in a “natural” hierarchical gender order, where men are always assumed to play football better than women. This culturally and socially constructed gender dichotomy becomes natural; the audience may recognise and accept these symbols of both male and female gender behaviour.

The football ideology in *Little Mirror of Sports* corresponds largely to male norms. But Marta Vieira da Silva offers another picture of the norms of professional football, since this interview is more cheerful and includes mention of interests outside the football arena. In the sequences with male footballers, and especially Zlatan, male professional football is presented as something else. The questions in the Zlatan episodes express a more serious attitude towards the importance of starting young and maintaining a good training structure and good eating habits. It seems as if girls play for fun rather than for a serious career, but boys are supposed to keep this purpose in mind.

One can, of course, argue that this program represents the dominant ideology of football culture, but despite its deference to power structures within and surrounding sports media, no other media room in television exists for the football-viewing generation of the future. Despite all competition over audiences, and especially sports audiences, so far no commercial TV broadcasting company in Sweden has produced a similar program for this important young viewer group. To be positive about *Little Mirror of Sports*, at least it gives support to the younger generation by reflecting on cultural values and norms for football-playing girls and boys, not only by showing them fan culture, but also by showing youngsters in everyday situations from different contexts and letting their lives be represented in this program.
References


Other sources
http://smdb.kb.se

Brandberg, Jens 2008-04-01 *Jag brinner för kidsen*. http://www.fotbollsexpressen.se/Nyheter/1.1105660/jag-brinner-for-kidsen

Malmborg, Emil 2008-06-08 *Pappan, divan myten* http://www.dn.se/2.738/2/2.1084/pappan-divan-myten-1.573756


Lilla Sportspegeln (svt.se):
2009-04-14: http://www.svt.se/2.56725/lilla_sportspegeln
