

**Wen-Guu Lei****AN ANALYSIS OF THE STP MARKETING,  
MARKETING STRATEGY AND BUSINESS  
PHILOSOPHY OF THE BROTHER ELEPHANTS  
PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL CLUB****ANALIZA STP TRŽENJA, TRŽNE  
STRATEGIJE IN POSLOVNE FILOZOFIJE  
PROFESIONALNEGA BASEBALLSKEGA  
KLUBA BROTHER ELEPHANTS****Abstract**

Baseball is currently one of the most popular sports in Taiwan. The Chinese Professional Baseball League, which was formally founded on 17 March 1990, opened up a new age of the development of baseball in Taiwan. Now sixteen years have passed since the 'first year of baseball' in 1990. Although all clubs were making efforts to operate, ticket office revenue was not an immediate success. Except for the Brother Elephants professional baseball club that made up the deficit and achieved a surplus in the fourteenth season of professional baseball clubs, and achieved profits in two consecutive years, the other clubs were still suffering operating losses. Therefore, the author conducted the research via data searching and interviews with the main objective to analyse and discuss the STP marketing, marketing strategies and business philosophy in detail, and to put forward suggestions based on the research results as a marketing reference for the clubs in the Chinese Professional Baseball League.

*Keywords:* Chinese professional baseball league, Brother Elephants professional baseball club, marketing strategy, STP marketing

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**Izvleček**

V Tajvanu je baseball med najprihljubljenejšimi športi. Z uradno ustanovitvijo Kitajske profesionalne baseballske lige 17. marca 1990 se je začelo novo poglavje razvoja baseballa v Tajvanu. Od leta 1990, ki velja za »prvo leto baseballa«, je minilo že šest let. Čeprav so si vsi klubi prizadevali poslovati uspešno, je bil dohodek od prodanih vstopnic sprva nizek. Razen profesionalnega baseballskega kluba Brother Elephants, ki je v štirinajsti sezoni profesionalnih baseballskih klubov pokril primanjkljaj in ustvaril dobiček ter dve leti zapored posloval z dobičkom, so ostali klubi še vedno beležili izgube iz poslovanja. Glavni namen te raziskave, ki je potekala z zbiranjem podatkov in anketiranjem, je bil analizirati in podrobno preučiti tržne strategije, STP trženje in poslovno filozofijo ter na podlagi rezultatov raziskave pripraviti predloge, ki bi klubom Kitajske profesionalne baseballske lige služili kot trženjska referenca.

*Ključne besede:* Kitajska profesionalna baseballska liga, profesionalni baseballski klub Brother Elephants, tržna strategija, STP trženje

## INTRODUCTION

Baseball is currently one of the more popular sports in Taiwan. The game's development in Taiwan originated from its introduction and popularisation during the time of the Japanese colonisation. It became truly rooted in Taiwan after 1968 when the Hung Yeh (Red Leaf) Little League Club defeated the visiting world champions, namely the Wakayama Club from Japan. In 1992, when Taiwan's adult baseball club beat many strong clubs at the Barcelona Olympic Games and took the silver medal, baseball won the status of honour and pride in the minds of Taiwanese people and brought enthusiasm for sports in Taiwan to a peak. Although baseball was warmly welcomed by the Taiwanese people, the lack of a continuous career development environment for Taiwanese players forced the best athletes to join Japanese professional clubs to ensure their development. Famous visiting Japanese players included Kuo Yuen-Chih who joined the Chunichi Dragons in 1981, 'Oriental Express' Kuo Tai-Yuen who in 1985 joined the Seibu Lions, Chuang Sheng-Hsiung who joined the Lotte Marines in 1985, and 'Cannon' Chen Ta-Feng who also joined the Chunichi Dragons in 1988. As a result, under the active promotion of Mr. Hung Teng-Sheng, who was in charge of the Brother Hotel, the Professional Baseball Promotion Committee was formally founded on 31 December 1987 while the Chinese Professional Baseball League (CPBL; 2005) was established on 23 October 1989. On 17 March 1989, the first baseball season of the CPBL formally started. This year was called the 'First Year of Chinese Professional Baseball', and it opened up a new era for Taiwanese baseball.

It is now sixteen years since the 'first year of baseball' in 1990. Although all clubs have been making efforts to operate and the CPBL has been strongly promoting the sport, ticket office sales are still not very successful. According to the statistics, from the first year to the fourteenth year of Chinese Professional Baseball altogether 3,449 games were played, with 3,888 people attending per game (based on the CPBL official website information). This is far behind the levels of Major League Baseball in the USA. Another professional baseball league, named the Taiwanese Major League (TML), joined the professional baseball market in February 1997. It had an average attendance of 6,878 people per game in the third year, while the CPBL's attendance numbers had declined to 2,041 in the eighth year and to their low point of 1,676 in the eleventh year. Further, the number of clubs dropped from seven at the peak to four (CPBL, 2005). This terrible performance surely cannot attract sponsors and it was also the reason the Taiwanese professional baseball clubs have continued to lose money. In fact, the CPBL had some popular clubs such as the Wei-Chuan Dragons, which had already been relegated out of the competition, along with the Uni-president Lions and Sinon Bulls which were still popular. However, only the Brother Elephants earned a profit in the fourteenth season of professional baseball clubs after many years of hard work, making an operating revenue of 150 million New Taiwan dollars ('NT\$'). In fifteen years it achieved an operating revenue NT\$250 million and realised profits in two consecutive years. Total revenue increased 33% over the previous year. However, other clubs of the CPBL are still making painstaking efforts to overcome their continuous losses and keep their respective enterprises going.

From the sport marketing perspective, professional baseball is itself a product. Therefore, appropriate marketing strategies should be used to promote product sales to its fans. Baade and Tiehen (1990) stated that the existence of commercial sports depended on the fans. Therefore, the marketing of professional baseball should focus on how to attract the favour, support and consumption (tickets and related merchandising commodities) of fans. As a result, it could attract

enterprise sponsorship (advertisements) and increase TV broadcasting (TV rights fees) to boost the revenue of the club because ticket revenue, merchandised commodity sales, advertisements and TV rights fees were the main revenue streams for the CPBL (Lin & Lin, 2004). From the perspective of strategy analysis, based on an evaluation of the operating environment, self-capability and resources, a sport organisation will choose the most possible successful stages and operating methods to extend the favourable space of an organisation's survival and development (Kao, 2001).

The Brother Elephants was one of the founding clubs of the CPBL and it is currently in its sixteenth season of professional baseball. The club has had fluctuations and completed the second 'Three Peat' during the twelfth to fourteenth years in the CPBL's history. Although there are many fans of the Brother Elephants and the ticket sales were higher than for all other clubs, after fourteen years of painstaking effort the Brother Elephants became the first club to turn a profit. However, other professional baseball clubs still suffered operating losses. Therefore, when the news came that the Brother Elephants were 'in the black', not only were other baseball clubs surprised but researchers were inspired to analyse and research the Brother Elephants' marketing strategy and business philosophy. We hope that the exploration of the marketing strategy of the Brother Elephants will become a reference for other clubs, and mutually foster Taiwan's professional baseball leagues while helping other clubs to reap larger economic benefits.

The Brother Elephants and other professional baseball clubs entered the era of Taiwanese baseball history in the first year of professional baseball. Also as a club invested in by private enterprises, the Brother Elephants was able to make a profit for the first time. Therefore, the purposes of the research were to analyse and explore the STP strategy (segmentation, target and position), marketing strategy, and business philosophy of the Brother Elephants through the following research questions:

- a) What were the Brother Elephants' organisational structure and business?
- b) What were the Brother Elephants' revenue sources and expenditures?
- c) What was the Brother Elephants' STP strategy?
- d) What was the Brother Elephants' marketing strategy?
- e) What was the Brother Elephants' strategy regarding its enterprise sponsorship (advertisements)?
- f) Did the Brother Elephants intentionally develop star players due to marketing considerations?
- g) What was the Brother Elephants' business philosophy?

## METHOD

The research took the Brother Elephants as the research subject (capital: NT\$40 million; income for 2004: NT\$ 195 million; net profit for 2004: NT\$25 million). The Brother Elephants Professional Baseball Club was a Class B amateur baseball club invested in by the Brother Hotel. In 1985 it was upgraded to an amateur club of Class A. Later it joined the CPBL as a professional club and it is now in its sixteenth season. The author used the literature data analysis method to obtain the data needed for this study.

## RESULTS

### *The organisational structure and business of the Brother Elephants Professional Baseball Club*

With Brother Elephants Co. Ltd as the main entity of the structure, the Brother Elephants Professional Baseball Club has one president with four business departments (Yen, 2003), namely a:

- (1) Commodity Department: responsible for merchandising and developing peripheral products for the club.
- (2) Activity Promotion Department: responsible for all external activities of players, recruiting members, arrangements for campus campaigns, and the sale of tickets.
- (3) Baseball Village: handling various baseball camps and the relevant affairs of games.
- (4) Commercial Department: responsible for making invitations to businesses, billboards and sponsorship.

### *The revenue and expenditures of the Brother Elephants Professional Baseball Club*

Hung Jui-He, General Manager of the Brother Elephants, told us that the majority of revenue comes from ticket sales, TV rights fees, merchandised peripheral commodities, and corporate sponsorship (advertisements). It is worth mentioning that the merchandised peripheral commodities have turned a profit during each of the thirteen years of professional baseball. The total revenue also became profitable (being the first club to achieve this in professional baseball). Its revenue included: NT\$ 50 million from tickets, NT\$ 35 million from TV rights fees, NT\$ 35 million from merchandised peripheral commodities, and NT\$ 30 million from sponsorship (advertisements). The total revenue was NT\$ 150 million. In terms of expenditure, the human resource expenditure (the average monthly salary of each team member of the Brother Elephants is NT\$100,000) is the highest (70%), while other expenses accounted for 30%, including supplies, transport fees, accommodation and promotions.

### *The STP marketing of the Brother Elephants Professional Baseball Club*

Regarding market segmentation, the Brother Elephants has no intention to make a market segment based on geographical characteristics (the area of Taiwan is very small). Regarding regions, the club hopes that the fans of the Brother Elephants will spread across Taiwan and not remain limited to the North Taiwan region where the home field is located. In addition, the Brother Elephants has not undertaken any product segmentation towards special consumption groups because currently 50% of the fans are students and the rest are adults. This situation does not support the adoption of market segmentation.

Regarding the target market, based on the research data the fans of the Brother Elephants are mainly male (67.9%), and most have an income of less than NT\$10000. The main age group was 16-25 (73.4%) (Yen, 2003). The fans can be classified mainly as public and students, with each making up 50% of the fan base.

Regarding position. Hung Jui-He, General Manager of the Brother Elephants, believes that it should be based on the principles of a small quantity with many types of products, both practical and commemorative. Aimed at the target market, the products selected were players' T-shirts, savings cans ('piggy banks'), mobile phone decorations, calendars, the Brothers' team uniforms,

and vacuum flasks at NT\$ 200-300. The positioning of the products took into consideration the economic capability and acceptability of products since many fans of the Brother Elephants were students. Also, according to Yen's (2003) study there were some other products aimed at the public, for example jackets priced from NT\$ 1000-2000.

### ***Marketing strategy of the Brother Elephants Professional Baseball Club***

The Commercial Department Manager of the Brother Elephants, Huang Ying-Po, believes that the marketing of the Brother Elephants has surpassed that of other clubs in the League. The Brother Elephants expected itself to become the model of Taiwanese sports marketing. Here we discuss the marketing strategy of the Brother Elephants through the '4Ps' combination:

#### ***a) Product***

From the perspective of sport marketing, the game of the Brother Elephants is a product. In terms of the characteristics of the sports industry, it belongs to spectator sports. Therefore, the marketing of products should be emphasised and should promote ticket sales to fans through appropriate methods. Professional baseball was a commercial sport, its existence depended on the support of fans, including the relationship network that established the interactions among fans. Hung Jui-He, the General Manager of the Brother Elephants, believes that for the connection between the club and the fans the support committee is a major force, including the Elephants committee (belonging to the League) and local support committees (voluntarily organised by fans). The work on connecting fans has depended on local support committees, which is the channel for interactions between fans and the club.

On the other hand, Hung Jui-He indicated peripheral commodities sales are also the focus of the Brother Elephants. The Commodity Department is responsible for product development. At the peak of professional baseball in Taiwan, too many developments of peripheral commodities caused overstocking. Now in order to avoid any waste of resources and space, the development of commodities has adopted the principle of a small quantity with many kinds, while continuing to develop fans' favourite commodities. The commodities developed needed to have both commemorative and practical aspects, for example, souvenir T-shirts and caps. Because of the effective strategy and support of its fans, the Brother Elephants turned a profit in its thirteenth year of professional baseball.

#### ***b) Price***

In its game ticket price-setting strategy, the Brother Elephants uses the Tien-Mu baseball stadium and the Hsin-Chuang baseball stadium as its home fields, the full-price ticket for a field box was NT\$300 and favourable tickets for students and half-price tickets were NT\$200, full-price tickets for the outfield-level reserved seats were NT\$150, and favourable tickets for students and half-price tickets were NT\$100. For away games, the full-price ticket of field boxes was NT\$250 and favourable tickets for students and half-price tickets were NT\$150, the tickets of outfield-level reserved seats were all NT\$100. Compared with other clubs' game ticket prices, the Brother Elephants' tickets were the same as Uni-President Lions and Sinon Bulls (the most popular clubs), while field box prices at the Tian-Mu field and the Hsin-Chuang field were NT\$50 higher than those of the China Trust Whales, Macoto Cobras and LaNew Bears. Ticket prices in other counties and cities were the same.

### *c) Promotion*

Yen Ya-Hsin (2003) pointed out in an investigation of the Brother Elephants' marketing strategy that the club promoted itself through TV game broadcasting, club logos, billboards, official websites and members' periodicals. The promotion and creative momentum in the marketing strategy was also important. The Signing Ceremony was one of the main activities. Mr. Hung Jui-He, General Manager of the Brother Elephants, believes that the fans and players could have face-to-face contact through a Signing Ceremony, and thereby enhance the fans' feelings towards the club. The marketing campaigns at university campuses have also been good strategies because many young students regarded excellent baseball players as a role model/idol. The potential consumption capability of student groups cannot be ignored.

### *d) Place*

Fans can purchase the commodities of the Brother Elephants' merchandising through four marketing channels (Brother Elephants, 2005):

- a. The Brother Elephants Commodity Department: located on Chin Chen Street, Taipei City. The business hours are from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays to Fridays and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays.
- b. The Commodities Department of the Brother Elephants Hotel, located in the third section of Nan Ching East Road, Taipei City. The operating hours are from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., mainly serving the fans in the northern region.
- c. The Franchise Store of the Brother Elephants, including 'Coco Brown' on Ching Chen Fifth Street in Taichung City, and the Kaohsiung franchise store of the Brother Elephants on Fu Hsin Road Two of Kaohsiung City, serve fans in the southern region.
- d. Brother Shops online.

### ***The strategy of the Brother Elephants Professional Baseball Club regarding its enterprise sponsorship (advertisements)***

Hung Jui-He, the General Manager of the Brother Elephants, established the Commercial Marketing Business Department three years ago in order to strongly promote the commercial sponsoring business and marketing activities for team members in this CPBL team. By way of negotiating the business opportunities arising from the representation and exposure of its team members with vendors actively with the team administration, such a business strategy has brought in additional profits for the Brother Elephants (Wu, 2005). Other strategies were:

- a) Independent invitation: regarding the sponsorship strategy of the Brother Elephants, Hung Jui-He thought the professional club is in fact a business because the Brother Elephants was the most popular club in the CPBL, and 18 out of the 20 games drawing the biggest crowds involved the Brother Elephants. Therefore, in order to seek more advertising benefits the Brother Elephants started to independently invite sponsors to place their advertisements at the Brother Elephants' home field.
- b) Strategic alliance: while the recent strategic alliance with the two major sponsors, namely the Cheng-Shin Tire Company and BenQ (an electronics company), has brought in extra revenues for the Brother Elephants, Hung Jui-He believed that the performance of the Brother Elephants' players could offer more benefits for the sponsors. In addition, the strategic alliance with ET Mall TV shopping involved the joining of the sales of the peripheral commodities

of the Brother Elephants. Therefore, this strategic alliance is a win-win strategy for both the Brother Elephants and its sponsors.

- c) Advertisements (sponsors' logos) on players' sports jerseys: the advertisements on players' sports jerseys have caused many discussions but also attracted great sponsor interest in placing advertisements on players' jerseys. In order to help advertisers gain more exposure on players' sports jerseys, it changed the position of a player's number and thus showed its goodwill to the sponsors. The practice of the Brother Elephants to invite sponsorship was to set a fixed price on ads on every part of the uniforms (left and right arms were the most expensive: they cost NT\$ 4 million, below the right chest would cost NT\$ 3.5 million for advertisers). Interested enterprises first negotiated a price with the Brother Elephants, and then could win sponsorship rights, and a priority option to renew the contract. According to the Business Manager Huang Ying-Po, the renewal percentage of sponsorship was as high as 80%. The 20% of sponsors which failed to renew their sponsorship did so due to a lack of budget funds.

***Did the Brother Elephants Professional Baseball Club intentionally develop star players due to marketing considerations?***

The answer to this relates to the previous question. Tseng Wen-Cheng, the senior ESPN commentator, believed that professional sports equals the entertainment business and therefore sponsoring vendors will always invest their money in the most popular sport with the greatest commercial efficiency. Since the Brother Elephants have won the CPBL championship for three years in a row, Hung Jui-He (General Manager) realised the philosophy of 'Using Popularity', which means to create a star player first and to then convert that popularity into a commercial marketing method to reap profits (Wu, 2005).

As a result, apart from the player's skills, Hung Jui-He also focuses on whether a player possesses a potential star image when selecting his players. He explains: 'A player who has a special appearance and looks friendly will have the potential to succeed as a star.' In addition, Hung Jui-He thinks that with the proper allocation of key players in creating the topical subject, viewing rates will rise without any aimless piling up of manpower costs.

***The business philosophy of the Brother Elephants***

Noting that young people lack appropriate and healthy recreational sports, people like Mr. Hung Teng-Sheng (founder of the Brother Hotel) have made efforts to promote the professional baseball league, to bring professional baseball into the mainstream of young people's recreational activities, and to then drive baseball as a sport in Taiwan. The players were in fact the club's largest assets. Therefore, the interactions and relationships between players and the club were very important. Accordingly, it was also an important business philosophy to take good care of the players, provide good benefits to them, while paying attention to their education and psychological identification. Hung Jui-He thinks that the club and players should share happiness. Therefore, in the 15<sup>th</sup> year of professional baseball in the country the bonuses for players amounted to NT \$15 million. This was the best demonstration that the club regards the players as the lifeblood of the club.

The administration of the Brother Elephants also stringently demands its team members to treat their fans cordially, prohibits team members from chewing betel nut, or to throw bats into the baseball field etc. as part of the basic code of conduct (Wu, 2005).



## DISCUSSION

The revenue of the Brother Elephants mainly comes from ticket sales, TV rights fees, peripheral merchandised commodities and corporate sponsorship (advertisements). The author believes that the Brother Elephants could put more emphasis on the investment of resources to promote ticket sales and the development of merchandised peripheral commodities. If a club attracts good ticket sales and viewing rates it will be much easier to negotiate sponsorship (advertisements and TV rights fees).

The Brother Elephants has more product channels than other clubs in the league. The author believes that all clubs can increase their product channels on cost considerations to providing stocks to channels. After all, merchandised peripheral commodities should consider the market concentration and the product should be close to the consumers.

On the 4Ps and STP strategy of the Brother Elephants, the author suggests that a market analysis investigation and product sales statistics should be conducted first to understand the preferences and demands of consumers and product sales, and to calculate and control the costs because those enterprises that can precisely control their costs will more probably make profits.

The commercial logos of various sponsors that are attached to the team jersey have brought in significant income for the team administration. However, given the increased interest in sponsoring commercials on the jerseys the author makes the following suggestion: the excess use of this marketing measure will lead to the dissatisfaction of sponsors because too much of such sponsorship will result in a huge drop in the commercial efficiency for sponsors.

The author believes that the players need a certain 'packaging' to become stars, just like other products. The star players attract fans through their popularity. This research hopes that the previous brilliant rivalry between 'Holiday Killer' Chen Yi-Shin and 'Gold-Arm Man' Hung Ping-Young, or the shout of 'Steal, steal, steal' to encourage 'Thief King' Lin Yi-Jeng to steal bases will not become lost in the CPBL.

TV rights fees are an important revenue source for all clubs. Yet, after the scandal of the CPBL players' involvement in gambling, most fans feel disappointment and distrust towards professional baseball, noting for example that the China Times Eagles were dismissed in 1997. The clubs should never allow short-sightedness and personal benefits to damage fans' interest in watching the game, otherwise unsatisfied fans will choose to leave again.

Enlarging the strategic alliance and creating a win-win situation. Through the sponsorship of strategic alliances the club can increase its revenue. The sponsor can, as a strategic ally of the club, not only promote the corporate image and brand but also increase economic benefits.

All the clubs of the CPBL should consider that they are mutually dependent. Without other clubs an individual club survive alone. Therefore, every club should view the other clubs as business partners and offer fair and honest competition.

Players are the most important resource of all clubs of the CPBL. Without good players, there would be no exciting games that fans can take delight in talking about even after they finish. Lin (1995) researched the viewing motivation of the fans of the Brother Elephants and found that the most important viewing motive was that the 'the exciting and brilliant games of the Brother Elephants attract me'. The average value was 4.5 (on a Likert five-point scale). We can see the



importance of the performance of good players in the game. According to a report by the Apple Daily dated 21 March 2004, the Brother Elephants was the guarantee of a professional baseball ticket office. Even for away games, large numbers of Elephants fans boosted revenues for the local home field clubs. However, this year Elephants did not have enough good players on the field and their performance dropped sharply. It was well known that too many players were injured and good players were hard to find. The Elephants' fans may refuse to watch the game on the field because of such disappointment. However, it is more surprising that some excellent athletes did not have the chance to play on the field. For example, Huang Hsin-Fu of the Uni-President Lions was released because the club had no vacant defending positions for him, and until now he still has had no chance to play. Yang Sung-Hsian, an excellent fielder of the China Trust Whales could not come back to play, and any return to the field was far away and not within the foreseeable future. Games can hardly attract fans without excellent players fighting and demonstrating their techniques and skills on the field. Finding foreign players is not a long-term development strategy for the clubs. The author appeals for all clubs to be mutually dependent and compete fairly and honestly. If a club does not need a player and releases him, it should allow other clubs to recruit him. After all, games with equal strength and competitive clubs are more attractive to fans than lopsided games.

The author suggests that the management of all clubs should be patient. Although only the Brother Elephants are making a profit, professional sports need patience and time. The cultivation and accumulation of fans cannot be realised within a short time. For example, in the 14<sup>th</sup> professional baseball year the First Financial Holding Co. Ltd took over the club and changed its name to the Warrior Attendants, and yet it folded almost immediately because of large monetary losses sustained after one year. In the 15<sup>th</sup> year, LaNew Co. took over and changed its name to the LaNew Bears. How can players perform well if the future remains problematic? If after one or two years the LaNew Bears are taken over by another corporation and their name changes again, will this club with so many alternating names be accepted by the fans?

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