

C'mon Cymru!



Creating The Welsh Sports Experience

A Proposal by

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1. The Issue

Background

Like many Welsh men and women, the authors of this report feel a deep passion for Wales and its sporting heritage. By way of introduction, Tim Lewis and Tim Evans have prepared this paper utilising their respective backgrounds in sports sociology and finance/commerce. Where their careers permitted, they found time to attend sporting events in many countries spanning Europe, North America, Australasia, South America, Africa and Asia, and when possible, events involving Wales. Further background information on them can be found in the Appendix to this report.

These travels have provided extensive exposure to a variety of sports including Rugby, Football, Ice Hockey, American Football, Baseball, Basketball, Summer Olympics events and Winter Olympics events. These activities have provided a deep appreciation of the cultural identity that sport can offer a country and its people, as well as the need to nurture and display this heritage for future generations.

The Importance of Sport

The benefit of pursuing sport is well documented. Most recently, the London Olympics, which touched upon Wales through its football tournament and the excellent performances of Welsh athletes, left many involved with a desire to ensure that our younger generations continue to be inspired by sporting excellence. Not only can this aspiration provide an educational and health benefit, it can also encourage group participation in sports, leading to considerable social benefits.

Since the Olympics there has been broad agreement that at a grass roots level, sport should continue to be in the spotlight. Few would question the benefits of promoting and playing sport and, although this responsibility often falls to schools, families, youth organisations and professional sporting bodies, both central and regional government clearly have a key role to play.

Whilst much of the inducement to participate in sport will come in the form of providing suitable facilities, sporting success at a professional level, both nationally and regionally, also plays a pivotal role in inspiring the next generation of young Welsh athletes. We believe it is vitally important that these Welsh success stories are recognised and promoted wherever possible.

Sport in Wales is hugely important to the Welsh people. Yet, despite its great heritage in sport, we believe Wales is missing out on a great opportunity to promote its sporting prowess for the benefit of both current and future generations.

The Questions

In light of the importance of sport in Wales, and following one of our regular debates on the state of Welsh sport, we posed ourselves a series of questions to address the issue:

- What more can Wales do to inspire the next generation of sports men and women to make the sacrifices necessary to be world-class performers in their chosen sport?
- What more can Wales do to showcase its considerable sporting heritage?
- What more can Wales do to permanently honour its iconic Welsh sports men and women?
- What more can Wales do to demonstrate the passion of Welsh sport to British and international visitors?
- What more can Wales and Cardiff do to offer visitors world-class tourist facilities in the city centre?
- How can Wales capitalise on the immense international currency of sport?

In this proposal, we endeavour to address one way in which Wales, through the Welsh Assembly, acting in conjunction with local councils and the various sporting organisations that represent sport in Wales (at both professional and amateur levels), can make a further positive contribution to sport in Wales. Our vision will, we believe, provide a solution to the questions posed above and will also create a legacy which will provide an inspiration to many future generations.

2. The Opportunity

Sport in Wales

Wales has a rich and diverse history in sport. It is a history which helps give us identity as a nation. Whilst idolising our iconic sportsmen and women, Wales has no place in which their achievements can be recognised.

This proposal does not attempt to quantify the cultural significance, the media impact or commercial influence that sport can have. Instead it makes the point that Wales as a nation can do so much more to benefit from the ever increasing global media coverage and subsequent international awareness of sport by commissioning a national sports attraction for Wales, which we have dubbed the “Welsh Sports Experience”.

The traditional sports of Rugby Union and Association Football need no introduction, but Wales also has a rich history in a variety of sports from cricket to boxing, bowls, cycling, golf, athletics, show-jumping and so on. Both men and women from Wales have excelled internationally in their chosen sport for many years. Name any major sport and there is a Welsh connection. Sadly however, there is no central venue where this is showcased.

In our view, the educational and inspirational opportunity from creating a Welsh Sports Experience would be considerable. Not only would this have the potential to inspire Welsh youth, but it would also provide a platform through which those Welsh men and women that have excelled in the sporting arena can be properly honoured.

Visitors to Wales

For many years the authors have hosted numerous friends, family, colleagues and students, from both the UK and overseas, in Cardiff. These visits often coincide with major sporting occasions, but despite our efforts to anecdotally explain the cultural values of Welsh sport, our visitors are not able to access the unique journey of Welsh sport under one roof.

A great number of the visitors that travel to Wales do so with a sporting connection, whether to watch or participate in rugby, football or a whole host of other sporting events. Wales in general, and Cardiff in particular, are increasingly gaining exposure to domestic and international visitors with a deep interest in sport. Whilst nothing can replace the excitement of witnessing a sporting event first hand, our vision is to enhance any visit to our capital city by offering a world class experience based around Wales and its sport.

In addition to the scores of domestic and international events that Cardiff hosts, a further concrete example of such a missed opportunity is the recent UEFA Super Cup, when an alternative fan base visited Wales, many for the first time.

According to the Football Association of Wales, ticket applications for the match were made from at least 69 separate countries, “from as far afield as Brazil, the

United States, Kuwait, China and Sri Lanka.” Leaving aside any potential loss of income from fans visiting a national sports museum, many of those supporters could have left with a deep knowledge and appreciation of what sport in Wales is all about. Perhaps this might have helped encourage some of them to return with others. Further, through signing a visitors’ book, their comments could have contributed to a database of international reflections of Welsh sport.

Those visitors would have had the opportunity to spread the word as to Wales’ role in the history of European and World sport. We had hoped that Wales would be afforded the opportunity to host matches in UEFA’s 2020 European Championships, but sadly this was not to be. Notwithstanding this disappointment, Wales will continue to strive to attract further sporting events within its borders, the 2016 World Half Marathon Championships being one such example. Each will provide an opportunity to showcase Welsh sport internationally and we believe that the creation of the Welsh Sports Experience would provide a memorable attraction to all such visitors.

Whilst there are, of course, examples of sports museums such as the excellent Glamorgan County Cricket Club archive at the Swalec Stadium and the opportunity to do a tour of the Millennium Stadium, these venues are not set up to cover the journey of Welsh sport.

The Vision

We feel that Wales is missing out both culturally and economically by not exhibiting and promoting its sporting heritage. Put simply, our vision is to create a venue where both the people of Wales, along with our visitors, can witness and be inspired by the passion of Welsh sport.

The Welsh Sports Experience would be designed to appeal to everyone: men and women, young and old, from every country and ethnic background. The objective would be that all sports in which Wales has excelled should be showcased, although our major sports would naturally enjoy a higher profile.

Exhibitions and museums can switch some people off. But having seen a variety of vibrant and interactive sporting (and other) exhibitions around the globe, we are convinced that with an innovative approach, such an institution could be one of Wales’ most successful tourist attractions.

As an example, in North America, each major sport has its own “Hall of Fame”. These venues provide an outstanding sporting experience - a place where sports fans yearn to visit. They have an almost iconic status within their sports, in part because of the annual induction of sporting legends to the Hall of Fame. Examples of these facilities include:

The Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio (<http://www.profootballhof.com>)

The Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto, Canada (<http://www.hhof.com>)

The National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York (<http://baseballhall.org>)

Closer to home, there is also the recently inaugurated National Football Museum, located in Manchester (<http://www.nationalfootballmuseum.com>)

The North American venues have developed into major tourist attractions and although they are based on an individual sport, we can see no reason why Wales cannot offer a broader sporting experience, spanning a variety of sports, through a world-class facility that would attract a wide range of sports fans and players alike.

Our vision is The Welsh Sports Experience.

3. The Welsh Sports Experience

What do we mean by the Welsh Sports Experience?

Although notionally an exhibition or museum, the Welsh Sports Experience would showcase the very best of Wales and its technology, design and creativity. It would have the potential to take the concept of an exhibition or museum to a completely different level and become an iconic part of the Welsh sporting, educational and commercial landscape.

In this respect we are suggesting that the Welsh Sports Experience should accommodate:

- A range of interactive displays that would encourage physical participation e.g. video based rugby penalty kicking experience and other interactive displays designed to encourage visitors to broaden their knowledge of other sports.
- Interactive displays throughout the facility through which attendees could test their own knowledge of various sporting achievements. Perhaps at the end of the tour, visitors would have the option to test their knowledge of Welsh Sports via interactive screens and/or a Welsh Sports Experience App, which would allow visitors to compete against each other, the most successful respondents being recognised on a daily Visitors Hall of Fame, displayed in real time on a screen by the exit/outside the facility. This would be of particular interest to school and youth groups.
- A very broad experience which highlights the full range of sports in which Welsh men and women have performed, exposing alternative views and hidden histories e.g. the history of women's football.
- Provide experiences designed to make the visitor feel that "they were there" e.g. an old rugby dressing room environment with pre-match speeches and the crowd noise in the background, leading to the tunnel onto the pitch.
- A stadium seating environment from which participants can watch videos of classic Welsh triumphs
- An outstanding collection of memorabilia showing items from iconic moments in Welsh sport, creatively showcased.
- A display showing the development of the significant Welsh sporting venues through the years
- In respect of those sports for which a full and permanent display might not be justified, there could be an area for rotating displays which are changed periodically.

- A Hall of Fame, where individual Welsh sportsmen and women could be inducted on an annual basis.
- A dedicated educational programme designed to encourage school groups (and others) to visit and providing facilities for them to be able to take time to have group discussion, similar to a classroom environment.
- An art gallery and digital archive of sports art, photography, sculpture etc
- Y Platfform - a media centre and performing arts stage
- Restaurant and catering facilities, potentially including an upmarket sports-themed bar/restaurant as part of the facility.

The list of potential exhibits and activities is endless, but by way of example we have taken a few of these concepts a little further to highlight some opportunities that the Welsh Sports Experience could offer:

(i) Hall of Fame

The idea here is that the most deserving Welsh sports men and women are inducted into the Welsh Sports Hall of Fame. Once inducted, there would be a plaque/statue commissioned (or some other form of display) depicting the inductee and summarising his or her sporting career and achievements. Adjacent monitors would provide video footage of them performing at their best.

Inductees would be selected on an annual basis, with the Welsh public voting on the candidates following newspaper and online coverage. Initially around 10 to 15 sporting icons would be inducted from a long-list of, say, 30 pre-selected candidates to get the ball rolling. Thereafter there would be a limit of up to 5 inducted every year, also through public voting, which would ensure that the Welsh Sports Experience and its Hall of Fame would remain very much in the spotlight.

The concept would be that to be inducted, the athlete would need to be retired for a certain period (perhaps 5 years), to ensure that any bias towards recent achievers is mitigated. Once voted in by the Welsh public, the sportsmen/women would be formally inducted at a formal annual dinner and ceremony. We believe this concept, and the annual voting process, if properly managed, could capture the imagination of the Welsh public, would give cause to remember a range of retired sports men and women, would undoubtedly give rise to much debate in living rooms, pubs and clubs across the country and would provide outstanding visibility for the Welsh Sports Experience.

(ii) Y Platfform (also entitled “The Dragons Tale”)

This would be a physical stage area where any Welsh national team that does not have their own media facilities could hold press conferences/squad announcements etc. They would be supported by media facilities and technical support that could - for example - produce team images and badges if required.

Y Platfform could also act as a type of speakers’ corner where people could give their views on sport - not only in person but through digital links from around Wales and the world.

Y Platfform would enable poets, comedians etc to have an opportunity of continuing and developing the “poems and pints” tradition of Welsh sport.

Y Platfform could importantly encourage a new generation to “have their say” about Welsh sport and not to assume sport is a “media product” to be consumed passively.

(iii) Sports Restaurant/Bar (dubbed “Dragon Pride”)

Integral to the Welsh Sports Experience would be an upmarket restaurant/bar which, in its own right, would attract sports fans. The revenue generated could provide a source of revenue for the Welsh Sports Experience, with cross-promotion and discounts being available between the two.

In addition, the availability of kitchen facilities on site would provide the opportunity for the Welsh Sports Experience to be available for hire for corporate events (e.g. cocktail parties, promotional launches), sports clubs dinners, as well as a venue for formal sporting-themed events and dinners, including the Hall of Fame induction events.

Naming

Clearly this can be developed over time, but we propose the title:

C’mon Cymru!

The Welsh Sports Experience
Y Profiad Chwaraeon Cymreig

The logo and marketing could utilise the logo seen on the front cover of this report.

Consistent with our suggestion about public involvement in selecting inductees for the Hall of Fame, we can see merit in also involving the public in the naming of the Welsh Sports Experience. Such an approach would significantly raise its profile ahead of launch and would offer free marketing in promoting the new venture.

Location

It is proposed that the Welsh Sports Experience would be located in Cardiff city centre. We believe this is vitally important as this location would provide a natural footfall from the range of domestic and international visitors to Cardiff. Equally, it would make the Welsh Sports Experience easily accessible to schools, clubs and other patrons that travel to the capital city.

Looking further ahead, one could envisage the possibility of taking aspects of the Welsh Sporting Experience to other locations in Wales via ever developing technology and travelling exhibitions.

Economics

It is appreciated that money is tight and that a compelling business and/or social/educational case will have to be made for the creation of the Welsh Sports Experience. At this early stage, it is not viable to construct any meaningful financial projections because so many of the variables are unknown. A key issue will be the availability of an attractive city centre site which will make it easy for patrons to attend.

Once some initial parameters are agreed upon, a detailed feasibility study will be required to assess the initial costs of commissioning the Welsh Sports Experience. In terms of initial costs, it is hoped that in addition to any funding/premises provided through the Welsh Assembly and/or Cardiff City Council, additional resources could be tapped from the lottery and other bespoke funding sources. It should also be possible to raise funding through some prime corporate sponsors and philanthropists with close Welsh ties plus interested individuals, all of whom would become patrons of the Welsh Sports Experience. Patronage would be set at various levels based on the donation provided and patrons would receive recognition of their contribution on a display located at the entrance to the facility.

Revenue would flow from admissions and also, if it can be included, the Sports Restaurant/Bar. As noted above, we believe that the Welsh Sports Experience could be a superb venue for corporate gatherings and formal sporting-themed dinners, providing a further potential source of revenue.

These are only our initial thoughts. It is appreciated that assessing the economic and social/educational benefits will be key and that further work will be required before any formal decision to proceed is reached.

4. The Next Steps

- To start a meaningful debate about the Welsh Sports Experience
- Ideally coordinated by the Welsh government, with assistance from the authors as required, the effort would embrace all interested parties from across the Welsh sports spectrum, including the main sports bodies and, perhaps, current and past Welsh sports men and women, who could potentially act as sponsors and promoters of the project.
- To initiate the process, we suggest that the Welsh Government considers the distribution of this report to all interested parties, with a view to the government coordinating an early forum to enable the vision to become a reality.
- Naturally, if the project is to have legs, funding will need to be secured from Government and/or other interested parties. If a decision is taken to move to the next step, a budget to establish the Welsh Sporting Experience would need to be agreed, as discussed earlier.

We hope this paper can prove to be the initial step in our objective:

To showcase Welsh Sport at its very best. C'mon Cymru!

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Appendix: The Report Authors

Both Tim Lewis and Tim Evans were born in 1960 and have been Welsh sports fans all their lives.

Tim Lewis

Through his company livingoffside.com, Tim produces sports related cartoon graphics and is the creator of the cartoon character Coach Ronnie Rout who features in the book “Building for Next Season”.

Tim is also a Sociology of Sport lecturer who teaches students from Germany, France and Switzerland.

In 2015 Tim will release a paper entitled; Wales v England - “Bringing History to the Surface”

Tim will also launch a Sociology of Sport’s book entitled “The Unwelcome Sports Commentator”.

Tim Evans

Tim is a successful businessman who has served on the Board of a range of UK based companies.

In the UK his sporting interests include being a debenture holder at the Millennium Stadium since 1999 and he regularly follows the Welsh rugby and football teams both at home and overseas. He is also a season ticket holder at Southampton FC and a Lifetime Vice President of AFC Bournemouth.

Tim splits his time between the UK and Detroit, Michigan where he holds season tickets with the Detroit Red Wings (Ice Hockey), the Detroit Tigers (Baseball), the Detroit Lions (American Football) and the University of Michigan (American Football).

As a committed sports fan Tim attended every one of the 92 league grounds as of 1990 and through sport and business he has travelled extensively outside the UK, enabling him to obtain a wide exposure to sporting culture around the globe.

As well as many other sports interests Tim has built an extensive collection of Wales and Southampton memorabilia dating back to the late 1800’s.

Between them, Lewis and Evans have attended far too many international sports matches to provide an exhaustive list. They have travelled to watch significant

numbers of international matches involving Wales, very often together, and have also attended a range of international tournaments including:

- Rugby Union World Cups: 1991 (UK/France), 1999 (Wales), 2007 (France), 2011 (New Zealand)
- FIFA World Cups: 1986 (Mexico), 1990 (Italy), 1994 (USA), 1998 (France), 2002 (Japan/ South Korea), 2006 (Germany), 2010 (South Africa), 2014 (Brazil)
- British & Irish Lions tours: 2005 (New Zealand), 2013 (Australia)
- UEFA European Championships: 1996 (England), 2000 (Belgium/Netherlands), 2004 (Portugal), 2008 (Switzerland/Austria), 2012 (Poland/Ukraine)
- Commonwealth Games: 1990 (New Zealand)
- Olympics: 1994 (Winter - Lillehammer) 1996 (Summer - Atlanta) 2006 (Winter - Turin), 2012 (Summer - London)