



# **Determining the individual attributes influencing professional male rugby athlete value in South Africa**

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## Abstract

South Africans are very much a sporting nation with the ability to host and compete on the world stage in classic fashion. Through sport and inspirational leadership South Africans have united as one nation behind any particular sport discipline.

To this end a qualitative research study was conducted with key stake holders within the South African Super Rugby industry. Structured interviews were conducted to highlight or unearth attributes or factors that may or may not influence Super Rugby athlete value when contract discussions took place.

The research found that although rugby player contract offering is based on physical performance measures there are other factors which can be attributed to an individual that may impact that player's perceived value. These attributes can and usually do vary between individuals. The research managed not only to highlight a number of attributes that are relevant to professional rugby player value but created a basis from which more research can be conducted enhancing knowledge around South African Super Rugby players.

## Declaration

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria.

It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

**Name:** Wiehan Thuynsma

**Signature:**



**Date:** 9 November 2011

## Acknowledgements

I dedicate this research project to my wife Ramona and son Miekkil who was born during the first year of the MBA studies. Thank you for being there every step of the way: your patience, support and love mean the world to me.

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# 1. Chapter 1: Problem Definition

## 1.1. Introduction

Professional sport is a highly lucrative industry globally and professional athletes have the potential to earn large sums of money to do what they do. The average earnings of the top 50 American athletes by salary were \$26.2million in 2010 (up 11% from 2009) (Reuters, 2001).

Earnings can consist of a basic salary structure, bonuses, winnings, endorsements and appearance fees. The above mentioned are the outputs of a professional athlete's value. Certain quantitative models have been developed to explain or determine a professional athlete's value and in terms of soccer the following is explained.

The model developed by Tanaru and Viney (2010), which is based on a study of soccer, recognizes that a player's value is a product of a variety of factors, some of them more obvious (i.e. on-field performance, injuries, disciplinary record), and some of them less obvious (i.e. image rights or personal background).

If the various obvious and not so obvious attributes or factors contributing to an athlete's value are better understood, franchises and clubs will be able to negotiate better transactions with shareholder value and franchise sustainability in mind. Investing in a player today is very risky because future income is uncertain due to

the fact that income is dependent on athlete performance (Kedar-Levy & Bar-Eli, 2008).

The value of any asset is ultimately determined through a negotiation process between a willing and knowledgeable buyer and seller. It is therefore important for both parties to intrinsically understand the asset value to negotiate based on proven knowledge with the result being the making of an informed decision.

According to Kedar-Levy and Bar-Eli (2008) no model could be found in the sport management literature that values professional athletes or coaches while explicitly incorporating the fact that they are paid cash today for uncertain returns in the future, with these returns depending on the combined performance of all team members with each other and with the coach. Although performance measurements along with key performance indicators have been investigated there does not seem to be information available relating to the not so obvious athlete attributes influencing value. An example is a player's being viewed by the public as an iconic player attracting large crowds to a franchise.

Once the demand for a player has been established negotiation will commence to agree upon the different stipulations in the potential offered contract. A professional sport contract is loosely translated as an agreement under which an individual is employed or agrees to render services as a player on a professional sporting team, with a professional sports organisation or as a professional athlete (Oregon Legislature, 2011).

To further grasp why contracts differ for professional rugby players this research will aim to uncover more than the normal performance measures.

Some considerations other than performance measures will be considered when drafting a contract. Perhaps considerations may be related to the individual himself or personal traits that can influence the contract. In professional sport and especially in South Africa consideration must be given to transformation and therefore colour of a player will play a part when deciding on offering a contract. According to Martin Hlongwane in an interview with Sebastien Berger (2007). In the same article Berger goes on to state that “Provincial and professional Super 14 teams include black players, but their absence at the highest levels of the game has led to demands from the ANC government for faster change, whatever the sporting consequences, in the name of ‘transformation’”.

Based on this view it is important to explore race and other possible attributes within South African rugby and their impact on contract values and length.

## **1.2. Research Scope**

The research will focus on South African rugby franchises participating in the Super Rugby tournament 2011. Although only South African Super Rugby franchises will be considered in this study, if during the qualitative process information is exposed which may correlate with Currie Cup or Springbok rugby, reference will be made to it. This will assist in creating context and support the study even further.

In terms of the focus the identified franchises are referred to as:

**Table 1: South African Super Rugby Franchises**

<b>Union</b>	<b>Super 15 Name</b>	<b>Province</b>
Blue Bulls Rugby Union	Blue Bulls	North Gauteng
Lions Rugby Union	Lions	South Gauteng
Sharks Rugby Union	Sharks	Kwazulu Natal
Western Province Rugby Union	Stormers	Cape
Free State Rugby Union	Cheetahs	Free State

In order for the study to hone in on attributes contributing in either a negative or positive manner to the contract value of a professional rugby player, Super Rugby contracted players will be investigated in a qualitative fashion. Various interviews will be conducted with key stakeholders that will explore the different conditions and or factors that were taken into account when a contract was offered.

### **1.3. Research Motivation**

South Africans have a huge interest in rugby and according to Dhurup,(2010) if sport is well managed and promoted it can unify and build a nation. Rugby has evolved over time from being played as an amateur sport to becoming a professional sport generating profits for franchises. There seems to be limited research done in a South African context to fully understand what motivates fans to attend sport events (Dhurup, 2010). The research will therefore attempt to highlight player attributes that are attractive to fans motivating them to attend matches. Fan

attendance increases ticket sales and therefore has an effect on the unions' profitability which translates into a stronger budget to make player purchases.

Through the evolution of the game remuneration and contracts appeared naturally to protect franchises and players. Today there is evidence that issues do exist when investigating rugby player contracts and how these contracts are negotiated. According to Reuters (2001) contracts between players, their countries and clubs are in disarray. Salary disputes have sparked huge discussion points and have raised concerns over the future of rugby and its status as a professional sport. Ackford (2008) explains that annual salaries have increased significantly over the past three to four years.

“A huge increase in the annual salaries of the Premiership's top players, from £180,000 three or four years ago to between £300,000 and £350,000 now, has prompted fears that rugby may be 'heading for a football-type scenario'” (Ackford, 2008).

In recent developments in South African rugby the head coach of the Free State Cheetahs Naka Drotské highlighted that he was concerned with the contracting system in South Africa. He stated that player values were increasing by 15% every season and causing smaller unions problems if they wanted to hold onto their most prized assets. It is reported that the Free State had to cut down their contracted players from 55 to 33 in comparison to the previous season. The main reason for

this is because the union had to hold on to superstar players who can ensure the unions still remain competitive in the Super Rugby league.

Naka further commented on contracts “How can it be healthy for a player to be contracted to a union and basically be their third-choice player, whereas that same player would make the starting XV of another union? It simply cannot work that way. I know that SARU are considering a central contractual system, but there are unions who are against it” (Anonymous, 2011a).

Due to the fact that players are demanding and commanding higher salaries various governing institutions have had to implement and amend regulations and policies regarding player contracts. Player contracts not only stipulate the obvious but clauses prohibit contracted players to participate in activities exposing them to possible injury or to pre-arranged media coverage.

“A contract player shall not move to another Union, Rugby Body or Club during the period of his written agreement unless the Union, Rugby Body or Club to which he is contracted, the Union, Rugby Body or Club he is proposing to join, and the Player himself all concur. Any compensation to be paid in such cases shall be agreed between the relevant parties concerned” (International Rugby Board, 2011).

Contracts support the notion that player value must be protected and as the player increase his skill level and performance the demand for that player will increase.

While performance indicators form the base used to determine value other factors or attributes may influence value of a particular player.

Although most research and reading material explores various professional rugby players it mostly references skill and on-field performance. Therefore focus is very much on the individual's performance. Limited research has been done to explore and expose other individual attributes that may contribute to performance.

#### **1.4. Research Problem**

Throughout the study different relationships between individual player attributes, team performance and fan attendance will be explored. Fan attendance contributes to, or is the underlying factor that determines the profit generated by unions. It is the support of sport fans that underpins the sports industry, where they are in supreme authority without which the golden core of the game has no currency. This group buys season tickets, attends games, pays for parking and typically follows a favourite player or team with unabashed loyalty(Dhurup, 2010).

Rugby is one of South Africa's big three sports, alongside soccer and cricket. Whilst the game of rugby has grown in stature and continues to draw capacity crowds into stadiums, little is known concerning motivational factors behind fan attendance at rugby matches. According to Dhurup (2010) the physical skills of the players seem to be the most important motivator in rugby fan attendance (Dhurup, 2010).

People consume sport for different reasons and as individuals possess various motives for attending a game, buying team merchandise or watching a game on television (Trial, Fink, & Anderson, 2003).

Hence the question of what drives people to watch or attend rugby games remains unanswered within a South African context (Dhurup, 2010). Previous studies have highlighted possible factors that may influence match attendance at rugby matches. Dhurup (2010) found that fan attendance is impacted through support for artistic quality and finesse of players.. Further to the artistic quality and finesse more possible factors are highlighted. One of these factors is labelled “physical skills”, and relates to well-executed, athletic and superior performance of players, of the team in general and the artistry of individual and favourite players in a team (Dhurup, 2010). In addition to the above mentioned factor another factor, labelled “achievement”, relates to the sense of personal achievement and pride when a fan’s team does well whereby fans share in the victory (Dhurup, 2010).

The study will attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the various player attributes or characteristics that are considered when the player is valued in a transfer or transaction scenario. These attributes are different from normal performance indicators and may be quite difficult to apply a value to.



The research however is not aimed at comparing various performance measure models but rather investigates attributes related to an athlete which do not necessarily form part of proven performance measures.

Considering player attributes and specifically individual attributes, experience, age and perhaps race may be obvious attributes that can be investigated.

Transformation within South African sport is very important and this is driven at all levels of sport including school and professional levels. There seems to be no research which explores the individual attributes that may assist with the compilation of a national or any other team that is fairly reflective of the South African population. Although blacks make up 80% of South Africa's population, there were only six black players in the 30-man South African squad for the 2007 World Cup (Logan, 2008).

Springbok rugby is widely perceived as aligned with the old South African apartheid system where it is speculated that the Springbok rugby team and captains were selected by the secretive Broederbond. To ensure this was no longer the case proposals were made to change the national emblem from the Springbok to the Protea and to introduce a quota system to ensure a number of black players are selected for the national side (Logan, 2008).

There is an argument that if quotas are too stringent the excellence of South African rugby may be threatened because not enough elite black players are present to warrant selection in proportion to their presence in the population. Should unreasonable quotas be enforced Super Rugby may be under threat. According to Andrew Logan (Logan, 2008), if the South African teams are not competitive, then interest in the tournament drops, as eventually do TV revenues. This depletes South Africa's share of South Africa, New Zealand and Australia Rugby (SANZAR) monies and therefore leaves less for Rugby development in our own country. Therefore there seems to be some correlation between individual player race and the financial impact on the South African rugby industry.

In South Africa, rugby as a sport has made inroads as an inclusive game by broadening the domain previously dominated by White South Africans; it has established itself as a sport for all South Africans by gradual inclusion of sports persons of all races. Hence fans aspire to better understand the rules of the game (Dhurup, 2010).

Super Rugby is very demanding and usually puts a lot of strain on the players. According to Austin, Gabbett and Jenkins (2010) back row forwards for example spent the most time in high intensity exercise followed by the front rowers. The result of the Super Rugby season is that there has been an increase in total high-intensity activities, sprint frequency, and work to rest ratios across all playing positions.

Utilising developed performance techniques and tools, coaches can influence athlete capability and skill. The research will establish what impact athlete attributes have on key performance indicators and therefore what impact it has on the athlete's value.

Illustrated further in the research it will become apparent that it is critical to fully realise where a player is within his career relative to competencies, attributes and estimated value. This will help unions not to make ill-informed decisions which can have a detrimental effect on the union's budget and on team performance.

## **2. Chapter 2: Theory and Literature review**

### **2.1. Introduction**

According to Rockerbie (2009) a complementary relationship exists between capital and talent which leads to increased team output, measureable in ticket sales. Talent can therefore be related to performance per individual, which, added collectively, will deliver team performance. Sport events attract participants and spectators who hold perceptions of the sport (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2010). The purpose of the study is not to redefine performance models but rather to explore underlying individual attributes, factors or characteristics that may support the actual athlete's value and not the athlete's performance. These attributes may very well be perception driven but nonetheless influence player worth.

Danny Cipriani for example, playing in the Super Rugby series, is an extremely popular player due to the fact that he had a relationship with Kelly Brook and played seven tests for England (Cleary, 2011). Thus the popularity of Cipriani is due not necessarily to his skill but rather to an attribute not related to rugby which nonetheless influences his rugby persona.

Prior research has been conducted to investigate and explore talent and the development thereof. Spamer (2009) investigated various talent variables which included proprioception, balance, plyometric strength, injuries, and ethical behaviour. The aim of this research review is to provide scientific evidence concerning the profile of an elite youth rugby player, thereby providing variables, assessment tools, and recommendations to coaches, selectors, administrators, and scouts, which may be used in the identification, selection, and development of future elite rugby players.

Further investigation is however required to explore the presence of the different attributes that may affect or influence rugby unions when considering signing a contract with a professional rugby player at a Super Rugby level. The aim of the study is not to explore performance indicators or to relate performance or skill to personal attributes. The research will be focused on the player's personal attributes and how they are considered and viewed by the unions.

## 2.2. Definition and Relevance of Player Valuation

Considering the investment unions make in terms of their players and what these players must return in terms of performance, it is important to explore the impact of poor valuations of players. The research will attempt to highlight attributes or factors that may influence player valuations when considering contract offerings.

When player valuation is ill-informed it will impact negatively on the clubs acquiring the services of the professional athlete. Investing in a professional player is very risky because future income is not a certainty due to the fact that revenue is based on athlete performance (Kedar-Levy & Bar-Eli, 2008).

Quality players may suffer due to the fact that underperforming players are remunerated based on the same criteria. During 1999 and 2001 salary wastage occurred within the Springbok ranks; some examples are supplied as to why it is critical to value players correctly.

According to Keohane (2004):

- Kaya Malotnana played one test and was paid R1.2 million.
- Brendan Venter played three tests and was paid over R1 million.
- André Snyman earned R1.4 million for four test appearances.
- Wayne Julies played 10 minutes in a 1999 match against Spain and earned R957, 500 for his effort.

The above mentioned examples seem to be based on on-field match performance. A question however remains as to why certain players play limited tests while other players tend represent a side for a much longer period of time. These players may be skilled but in all probability there are other contributing factors to their prolonged time on the field compared to the examples above.

Following on from the examples mentioned above the research will aim to uncover attributes relating to professional player value.

Gerrard (2001) investigates a new approach to player / team quality which involves constructing a player quality index (PQI) based on observable player characteristics before performance. Some of the characteristics involved are age, experience and previous performance. These characteristics will be further investigated.

Based on the research done by Gerrard, age and experience will be explored as attributes within the context of Super Rugby. Further to the age and experience attributes the research will explore additional attributes as uncovered through literature review.

- Age

There seems to be limited research completed regarding age and the role it plays within Super Rugby. There is a call for those involved with research regarding the relationship between age, sport and physical activity to use qualitative methods to highlight views in terms of sport and age (Dionigi, 2006). This research will however

use age as an influencing factor in Super Rugby to explore its importance when considering offering a contract to a professional rugby player.

Danny Cipriani managed to represent England on a professional rugby level when he was 17 years old (Stafford, 2010). Cipriani was a very young player when he represented rugby at the highest level. This illustrates that although very young he was able enough to represent England. Limited research exists on what the average age is for different positions in a Super Rugby side. The age of 17 may be old enough for a backline player but this may not be the case for a tight five position.

Arguing against youth, Gregor Paul hypothesises that youth does not necessarily mean better performance on the field, and that experience can be more beneficial to a team than youth (Paul, 2010a).

According to a study on Italian football players over the age of 28, greater experience, in terms of tactical ability and knowledge of the game, is offset by worsening physical performance, including reduced speed and fitness and greater susceptibility to injury. This is reflected in player salaries (Lucifora & Simmons, 2003).

Reflecting on salary or remuneration related to age there seems to be evidence that although experience and age increase over time salary increases or offerings do not

increase but rather decrease. Based on previous studies salary increases with age decrease and earnings will fall with age as player's speed and athleticism decline with age (Lucifora & Simmons, 2003).

- Experience

Considering experience as a contributing factor to value it is usually considered as a benefit when applying for a position regardless of whether it is a corporate business position or a position in a particular sporting team.

Recent research reported significant differences between the psychological skills of senior elite and club rugby players in South Africa (Kruger, 2005).

Prior experience can support an athlete when it comes to the perception of control. If an athlete feels in control of a situation lower stress and anxiety levels will be experienced which will contribute to effective coping (Kruger, Potgieter, Malan, & Steyn, 2010).

A number of researchers are in accord that sport-specific cognitive perceptions are the result of athletes' prior experience in their specific sports. These authors conclude that prior sport experience will be instrumental in developing athletes' perceptions of their abilities to perform. According to Lazarus (2000) athletes' "performance history" will be responsible for the realistic or unrealistic expectations of performing well in any given competition. This "performance history" is often reflected in athletes' current rankings, and influences their cognitive perceptions of



their own as well as their opponents' abilities. The influence that an athlete's prior experience might have on his/her cognitive perceptions can potentially play a vital role in determining their performance in competitive situations

Self-confidence thus appears to stem from prior experiences. Self-confidence, however, is also known to have an influence on a number of psychological skills that an athlete could possess and apply (Hodge & McKenzie, 1999). It is, therefore, reasonable to argue that prior experience could have a substantial influence on athletes' psychological skills.

Experience seems to be an important factor when analysing team performance. Toby Robson (2010) explored the New Zealand All Black side after winning 15 test matches in a row to determine if leadership or experience contributed to this feat. Mils Muliana reflects that there is a lot of experience in the team and that the team has gone through a lot together. This contributes to trust between players and between the captain and other players. Experience plays a vital role when exploring on field performance. (Robson, 2010)

From a Springbok perspective salary and remuneration structures were influenced during previous seasons. Remuneration structures were associated with different responsibilities and seniority within the Springbok camp. Different salary packages and performance bonus structures were put in place for more senior experienced

players. Mark Keohane highlights a few financial figures in terms of players and experience during a previous Springbok season (Robson, 2010).

Annual retainers ranged from between R200,000 and R400,000 with the exceptions of senior players. At that stage Skinstad and Krige were earning R600,000 while Joost van der Westhuizen was on a different contract with a minimum retainer of R500,000 per annum (Keohane, 2004).

Based on the information evidence exists that non-performance related athlete attributes affect the valuation method when deciding on remuneration packages and in the above mentioned case the attribute is experience. Experience is gained over a period of time and therefore it will be different for players.

To create context a brief analysis was done on soccer players in England to determine if experience had any influence on transfer fees. In models regarding transfer fees distinction is made between most recent experience (the previous season) and accumulated experience prior to that season (Lucifora & Simmons, 2003). Therefore accumulated experience had a bearing on potential transfer fees offered.

In addition to experience as an attribute other attributes that are not as obvious came to the fore when literature was reviewed. One of these attributes was

leadership qualities and based on information, seemed to be quite important when considering team dynamics and on team field performance.

- Leadership

Considering team dynamics leadership plays a vital role on the field. Leadership is defined as the ability to “guide, conduct, persuade and direct” according to Toby Robson (2010).

Very important in a rugby team dynamic is that when the captain wants the team to do a certain task or perform in a certain way he will rely on his so-called lieutenants in the team to rely and act on those messages. Players must therefore not only preach the message but must act upon it too (Robson, 2010). Leadership and making the correct decisions during rugby matches are very important and team members must be able to trust the captain and the captain his team mates to perform accordingly. Leadership therefore is another attribute to investigate during the research process to clarify its importance when considering offering a contract to a player.

According to Sean Fitzpatrick, retired All Blacks captain: "It is a fact of life that successful on-pitch captaincy means being able to develop a rapport with the man with the whistle, so you can confirm interpretations, clarify decisions and, inevitably, try to get the best deal for your team. I recognised it as a core responsibility when I was captain and I worked hard to be visible, respectful and enquiring towards the

ref. It might have annoyed the opposition every once in a while but then again, they're the opposition, so no real harm done (Gregor, 2010b).

Now a days there is a lot more that the captain has to do and even though he has players around him assisting in the match plan it all comes down to the captain (Robson, 2010). During the 2002 Springbok season Keohane reveals information that shows the captain of the team at that time was remunerated more than any other player because of more responsibilities.

According to Keohane (2004) Springbok rugby player contracts and remuneration were very different based on individual characteristics. In 2002 Harry Viljoen and Rudolf Straeuli agreed to remunerate the Springbok captain R50,000 more per annum because he had many more individual responsibilities.

Another interesting piece of literature reflected what a captain role means in a different sport, national hockey in the USA. National Hockey in the USA shows a wage premium of between 21% and 35% for leadership ability (Deutscher, 2009).

Professional player contracts are offered based on different attributes and experience. These contracts secure the services from a particular player for an agreed upon remuneration amount as well as a certain period of time.

- Contracts

It is critically important that professional rugby players utilize legal experts to ensure the right terms when considering signing an offered contract. Usually agents representing players are approached because of their extensive knowledge and experience to assist with finalizing and agreeing on a contract (Anonymous, 2011c). High value teams may potentially place higher values on particular players that may lead to competitive imbalances. The higher value teams are usually earning more revenues due to their performance and according to McMillan this may be because of star players influencing the rest of the side's performance. Some South African unions are chasing star players and are willing to pay large contract fees for these players. This can potentially lead to mobile players' salaries being driven to high where only the richest teams can afford these players. This will lead to competitive imbalances occurring. (McMillan, 1997)

Recently signed contracts by Bryan Habana and Jaque Fourie are believed to be worth close to R4m. According to (Cardinelli (2010), Jaque Fourie is viewed as a skilled player and along with his astute brain and positive personality he would boost Western Province Rugby Union. Fourie du Preez scrumhalf for the Blue Bulls has signed another 1 year contract with the franchise which will end in 2011 (Anonymous, 2011b). Fourie represented South Africa in the Rugby World Cup 2011 and will probably after the conclusion of the tournament move overseas to gain financial benefit because his age is starting to count against him. Although Fourie has massive experience and is considered a brilliant player there seems to

be a retirement plan where players search for greener pastures overseas. According to Gregor Paul (2010a) only six out of a 140 contracted Super Rugby players in New Zealand are older than 30. Even though they have massive amounts of experience these players are not contracted and it gives them opportunity to move overseas and potentially earn more money.

The likes of Victor Matfield and John Smit earn close on R3m a season (Isaacs, 2010). Both Matfield and Smit have captained their provincial sides as well as the national side. After the 2011 season rugby Matfield will retire and although his skills will be missed it will be his leadership that will be missed most (Cardinelli, 2010).

These two are seasoned players with considerable experience. One may question their ability compared to younger players in terms of actual match performance but the literature supports the view that there is a value component that is associated with experience and leadership attributes. Even though players with great experience are not offered renewed contracts they are still in demand by other clubs playing in other tournaments across the globe.

- Race

Historically, South Africa was not supportive of players of colour representing the country at an international level. In 1976, Dr. Danie Craven declared that "no black will ever wear a Springbok jersey" (Booth, 1998). In modern day South Africa race issues have been legally abolished and gone are the days of "apartheid". Although race still plays a part in some areas of public debate, South Africa and its variety of

sport communities are very committed to transformation and promoting previously disadvantaged people to the world stage.

When attention is turned to the sensitive issue of transformation within South African rugby it is noted that it is definitely a pressing issue and one that deserves attention. According to the State of the Nation 2007 document compiled transformation in South African rugby is described as follows:

“Transformation and racism have been the contentious issues in South African sport – and in South African rugby in particular – since before the country’s first democratic election. The process of integration and transformation is perfectly understandable and justified, given the years of exclusion of black and coloured athlete’s under apartheid” (Human Sciences Research Council, 2007).

According to the State of the Nation 2007 document numerous retired Springbok rugby players had an issue with quotas being in place to promote black players into the games because of the stigma associated with it. In addition to this statement some retired players felt that because of the quota system talented young white players were left out of a team to “make’ way” for these quota players. All retired Springbok players felt that the quota system was very necessary to move black players through the structures of development to be able to represent South Africa. Some concerns however were highlighted in that the identification process and

structures of promoting black talent was in a disarray and therefore lacking in effectiveness (Human Sciences Research Council, 2007).

It is fundamental to succeed with transformation in South African rugby and to achieve it a strong black player base is critical. From this base, new black players can emerge, thus reducing pressure on the few black players at the top and easing pressure on the selection staff when injuries occur to the top black players.

Today South Africa is very much focused on sport transformation, meaning that more black and coloured players can be represented on all different levels of the country. Team compositions should reflect the different races and the weight thereof correlated with the South African population. During the early years of the game poor decisions made led to negative impacts and perceptions of South African rugby (Logan, 2008).

- Undefined Attributes

Undefined attributes are those attributes that were uncovered during the literature review process and that cannot be specifically placed in a particular attribute group. Even though these attributes may not be grouped specifically this does not mean that they cannot influence player value. As previously mentioned attributes are different for each individual player and can be considered in a different manner when exploring potential.



The “superstar” phenomenon exists in economic literature where a few individuals in selected professions can enjoy huge salaries (Sherwin, 1983). Consumers have a very high demand for excellence which impacts greatly on a professional athlete’s value in terms of what they can offer. According to Lucifora and Simmons (2003), the marginal revenue product of a player is related to the extra price a consumer is willing to pay to see the athlete play multiplied by the number of consumers. The demand to see the athlete play therefore is driven not only by the price mechanism but also through a reputation effect that the superstar’s talent has in attracting large audiences. Through enhancements and continuous innovation in technology and media products in terms of matches increasing demand can be reproduced at a lower cost, which permits market expansion. World Cup matches or tournament finals can attract huge audiences attending the games or watching via a broadcast with consumer perceptions that other players are imperfect substitutes to the superstars which increases the superstar’s value (Lucifora & Simmons, 2003).

McMillan postulates that fans enjoyment of the game comes through being familiar with the home team’s players (McMillan, 1997).

Thus one can postulate that fans are motivated to attend matches when their team is performing well and when they are familiar with the players within that particular side. Fan attendance and revenue to the union is correlated and based on this correlation if the team does not perform well the union will suffer in loss of revenues because of the lower number of fans attending a match.

According to Lucifora and Simmons (2003), the fact that age and appearances influence player salaries does not imply that maturity and experience determine footballers' salaries over and above ability. Therefore an assumption can be made that other attributes may also influence player salaries to some extent and can perhaps influence attendance at matches.

### **2.3. Identified attributes within South African rugby**

Analysing and exploring South African rugby in terms of attributes highlighted in the literature brings some very definite attributes to the fore. In this section the research will attempt to group the different attributes together even if the attributes are not clearly defined.

- Personal attributes

When the Stormers side was selected in the 2005 Super 12 competition, Luke Watson was a newcomer who was extraordinary confident and very outspoken. He had more opinions, presence and charisma than all the other Super 12 players put together according to Colquhoun and Rogers (2005). The question however is to what extent these attributes contribute to Watson's value as a player, if at all. Later on Watson became the captain of the Stormers side which could have been because of his presence and charismatic attributes. Based on literature evidence the role of captain has more responsibilities and therefore commanded additional remuneration. No evidence however exist that this was the case with Luke Watson.

In his article Ryan Vrede explores the ability of Morné Steyn who represents the Bulls in the Super Rugby league to be reckoned with the best fly-halves in the world. The reason is that Morné displays and possesses certain qualities that make him a world class player. Morné can perform on an international stage under pressure making him a world class player. (Vrede, 2010). There is an indication that players who stand out on the international stage need to possess a temperament not to be influenced by crowd pressure and still to be able to perform optimally. Analysing Morné Steyn a little further his main attribute can be linked to his extraordinary skill at kicking. Personal attributes such as temperament and the ability to remain calm elevate his kicking ability and skill making him a world class player who will be in demand globally.

- Leadership

Leadership and having a great captain on the field in whom players can trust influences the way a team can perform. The following example highlights why John Smit was selected as the starting hooker for South Africa during the 2011 Rugby World Cup.

“Would you start at hooker if you weren’t captain” – is the question that was asked of John Smit by Ryan Vrede. This question is very relevant due to the fact that Bismarck Du Plessis is a younger, more skilled hooker than John Smit (Vrede, 2010). Later in the article Vrede goes on to write that Smit is accommodated in the Springbok side not because he is the best player but because he is the captain.

Being selected for an attribute such as leadership which is clearly thought of as more valuable than actual on-field performance, supports the hypothesis that other personal attributes may indeed be regarded as more critical than performance.

- Experience

Experience has been uncovered during the literature review process as an attribute that can carry value when considering a player for a particular sport or team. Within the South African rugby context some examples exist where experience is regarded as a valuable asset to have as a player.

Butch James is a player who can contribute to the South African world cup 2011 effort because of his experience and his ability to impose himself on the field. John Smit revealed that James brought a sense of confidence in the 2007 world cup team. In addition to this quality James could galvanise the team on the field when the time came (Cardinelli, 2011).

Another player, Springbok Jean de Villiers who represents the Stormers in the Super Rugby league is another individual who can have a massive impact on any match. According to some opposition coaches and teammates, de Villiers possesses an outstanding ability to read the game and play his team into advantageous positions. The article further mentions that his team believes that he is the one capable of conjuring the try scoring opportunities in the Rugby World Cup. (Cardinelli Jon, 2011).

- Other Attributes

This section or group of attributes are general attributes that were identified amongst international players but cannot be assigned to any particular group. An attribute that was identified is one of education and what education means to a professional rugby player. According to Gregor Paul (2009) the way New Zealand rugby went about sourcing young players made it very hard for these players to continue with their education. It is however important for players to build a life outside rugby. Further, there is a belief that players are better rounded when they have some educational background.

## **2.4. Attribute Summary**

Based on the literature reviews the following factors or attributes were uncovered. These attributes may or may not be relevant in the South African professional rugby industry. Through the research process support information will be attempted to be uncovered validating the themes uncovered through the literature review.

*Table 2* on the following page highlights attributes or factors that have been identified through the literature review that may be relevant to the research study.

**Table 2: Rugby Attributes**

<b>Sport Discipline</b>	<b>Attribute / Factor</b>	<b>Attribute Category</b>	<b>Support Literature</b>
<b>Super Rugby</b>	Age	Personal	Stafford, ( 2010); Paul, (2010a); Lucifora & Simmons, (2003)
	Experience	Personal	Kruger et al., (2010); . Lazarus, (2000); Hodge & McKenzie A, (1999);, Robson, (2010)
	Leadership	Personal	Robson, (2010); Paul, (2010b)
	Player Race	Personal	Booth, (1998); Human Sciences Research Council, (2007); Logan, (2008)
	Undefined Attributes	Personal / Skill	Sherwin, (1983); McMillan, (1997); Lucifora & Simmons, (2003)

Following on from *table 3* definitive attributes are assigned to high level attribute categories which will be more clearly defined as the research moves through the exploration and analysing phases.

### 3. Chapter 3: Research Questions

The study will utilise exploratory research methods to determine if any other influencing attributes are present other than performance metrics when establishing professional male rugby player values.

The questions that will be answered in this study are:-

- **Research Question 1:** When offering a professional rugby player contract, age as an attribute is a main consideration that influences the contract either in terms of value or length.
- **Research Question 2:** The more experience a player has on different levels in rugby the more value will be attributed to him when considering a contract offer.
- **Research Question 3:** Only senior rugby players have the ability to attract large numbers of fans to the stadiums.
- **Research Question 4:** Performance indicators are the main drivers when considering offering a contract to a professional rugby player.
- **Research Question 5:** Player race influences decisions when contracts are offered to professional rugby players.
- **Research Question 6:** Leadership qualities are not considered when selecting a player to represent a union.
- **Research Question 7:** Personal attributes relevant to a particular individual such as education are irrelevant when considering offering a contract to a professional rugby player.



## **4. Chapter 4: Research Methodology**

### **4.1. Proposed Research Method**

The research explored and interrogated contributing attributes other than normal performance metrics influencing professional rugby player value through a qualitative semi-structured interview process.

A number of interviews were conducted with identified expert groups such as player agents, franchise CEOs etc. These experts were interviewed per franchise to gather as much information as possible. According to Miles & Huberman (1994) a major feature of well-collected qualitative data is that it focuses on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, so that we better understand reality.

The study was supported by explorative questions but leeway was given to go into other areas that might be of value to the research. Due to various limitations a constraint was placed on interview times as well as the extent the interviewee was allowed to veer off the original set of questions. The researcher utilized the “5 x Why” technique where there was a requirement to delve deeper into relevant information regarding explorative questioning. In terms of the number of questions, it was limited and focused on what the study wanted to achieve as not to lose direction of the aim. Miles and Huberman (1994) stress that formulating more than a dozen or so general questions are problematic. “You can easily lose the forest for the trees and fragment the collection of data.”

The quantity of data collected was done in a controlled fashion where a broad population was narrowed down to produce a sample that could be fully interrogated. According to Miles and Huberman (1994) qualitative study consists of two actions that are important to achieve the best possible results. First the researcher will set boundaries to define the aspects that can be studied within the limitations of the researcher's time and means. Secondly a frame will be created to help uncover, confirm or qualify the basic constructs of the study.

#### **4.2. Proposed Research Process**

This research took the form of a qualitative study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders regarding valuation calculation and influence. In keeping with Gilham (2005), semi-structured interviews abided by these criteria:

- The same set of questions was asked per expert group. The questions were different per expert group in an attempt to gain deeper insights.
- The kind and form of questions went through a process of development to ensure their topic focus.
- To ensure equivalent coverage (with an eye on the subsequent comparative advantage) interviewees were prompted by supplementary questions if they did not deal spontaneously with one of the sub-areas of interest
- Approximately equal interview time was allowed in each case.

The interviews were used to determine what the views and or understanding were of the various stakeholders influencing player value. This phase was helpful in

developing propositions that were more specific to professional rugby player valuation.

The following table depicts the various potential experts that were consulted as per role in the different franchises.

**Table 3: Experts Interviewed Regarding Valuation Method**

Expert Group	Why selected
High Performance Manager	The high performance manager is directly involved with the players, identifying new talent and ensuring the future sustainability of the team. The high performance managers are usually involved when decisions are made in terms of contract offering.
Team Head Coach	The team coach was able to shed light on factors considered when selecting a captain and other attributes when selecting a team. Team dynamics and other factors such as race and temperament were discussed to gain more clarity around what can be perceived as valuable.

### **4.3. Proposed Population and Unit Analysis**

The South African rugby industry does not function similarly to soccer where players can be bought and sold through an open market event. Professional rugby players are usually offered a contract for a specific term. Six players were randomly selected from a list obtained from the various unions and investigated in terms of the attributes that were considered when they were offered professional contracts. In addition to the randomly selected player research general themes that were highlighted from the literature review will be broadly discussed.

The identified themes are:

- Experience
- Age
- Attraction power
- Performance Indicators
- Race
- Leadership Qualities
- Education

The unit of analysis is the various attributes that are considered before a contract is offered to a player. The contract value itself has no substance for this research because it is only the result of the different attribute values.

*Appendix 3* shows an example of the information gathering sheet that was submitted to the various unions on which to report on their contracted players. After all the lists of contracted players were received from the participating unions the players were consolidated on one sheet from which a random sample was generated. The random sample consisted of six players only.

#### **4.4. Size and Nature of the Sample**

*Table 4* below illustrates the data collection method, sampling technique and sample size for the proposed research. A qualitative approach will be followed where information will be gathered through explorative question directed at certain areas of interest.

The sample frame consisted of 106 players from the unions who were willing to participate in the research study. The sample size consists of six contracted players who may or may not be from different unions. This means that the selected players may not necessarily represent all the unions and can potentially only represent one union. All Super Rugby contracted players from the Super Rugby unions were sourced and added to one data sheet from which the random sample was generated. The sample of six players was randomly generated through an un-bias technology influenced process.

This will enable the interviewer to derive results purely from gathered data and not from any pre-conceived ideas.

All information will be kept confidential and no reference will be made to any franchise names, transaction values or player identities. No information will be disclosed in any manner which may bring any player, interview respondent or union into disrepute.

#### **4.5. Data Collection, Data Analysis and Data Management**

The data collection and analysis phases could be completed separately but in order to gain a deeper understanding of the data the two phases were intertwined. This enabled the interviewer the opportunity to guide the interview into unexplored areas. Although the same set of questions was used per expert group, exploratory research enabled the interviewer flexibility (Gillham, 2005).

The following process will be followed to ensure optimal required results:

- Conduct interview with selected expert
- Record interview, and make notes of key items during the interview
- Capture any other behavioural actions such as body language
- Consolidate recording and interview notes attempting to derive attribute themes that may have an influence when considering offering a professional Super Rugby contract to an identified player.

##### **4.5.1. Data Collection**

*Table 4* highlights the data collection method used during the research project. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the various parties involved supported by specific questions in the interview guide.

The questions proposed within the interview guide were used to gather relevant information adding structure to the information gathering process but were flexible enough to elaborate into supporting areas. It could be argued that the semi-structured interviews is the most important way of conducting a research interview because of its flexibility balanced by structure, and the quality of the data so obtained (Gillham, 2005).

#### **4.5.2. Data Analysis**

According to Seidel (1998) qualitative research consists of three parts: Noticing, Collecting and Thinking about interesting things. It is important to note that once certain items are noticed that they are assigned to some code to track and to ensure the exclusion of possible research bias occurring.

During the research project two types of analysis methods were used in combination, namely thematic and content analysis. Based on the various qualitative analysis methods available the selected two did in combination deliver the best results in terms of what the research project wanted to deliver.

*Table 4* supplies the motivation for the selected analysis methods used in this study.

**Table 4: Data Analysis Methods**

<b>Analysis Method</b>	<b>Motivation</b>
Thematic Analysis	Thematic Analysis is an approach whereby codes are created and assigned to specific data pieces; also called an open coding technique. This approach may be viable when unearthing generic and specific attributes pertaining to player value.
Content Analysis	Content Analysis is the detailed examination of contents that were collected in terms of data. The researcher will utilise interview notes and recording material to identify attributes which is uncovered during the interview process.

#### **4.6. Data Validity and Reliability**

The study was conducted using a qualitative research approach due to the limited information available in terms of the topic selected. Utilising explorative methods, in this case semi-structured interviews; the researcher gained insights to the research area. Further to the methods used, the interview structure was discussed with a qualitative expert to ensure optimal information gathering. In addition to these preliminary findings was shared with an expert to determine if the results were reasonable and if researcher bias was omitted.



#### **4.7. Potential Research Limitations**

The following aspects were limitations to this study:-

- In South Africa there are only five Super Rugby franchises which in turn means that if a union refused to participate in the study different point of views and opinions were lost that may have influenced the findings of the research project.
- Interview agreement limitations were prevalent due to the sensitivity of the topic and data that was discussed.

#### **4.8. Comments on actual interviews**

During the interview process the following comments or observations were made:

- All unions and their representatives preferred not to be mentioned by name within the research report.
- In addition to the above point all player information will be kept confidential, not only data that was used in the research project but also data gathered for the purpose of random sample generation.
- Based on the agreed above terms all union representatives were very willing to discuss and answer exploratory questions and were very accommodating during the whole interview process.
- All participants were very interested in the topic and after the interview commented that the interview process made them think differently and highlighted a few interesting points that might be considered in the future.

## 5. Chapter 5: Research Results

### 5.1. Introduction

Chapter five summarises the qualitative research process that was followed during the interview process. The question will be presented followed by the interviewee's summarised responses. All questions were kept the same for each interviewee regardless of position within the particular rugby union. Although the questions remained the same some interviewees elaborated more than others on certain points.

### 5.2. Overview of the interviews

Due to confidentiality agreements all of the respondents' identities are protected. The respondents however are directly involved with Super Rugby player contracts, Super Rugby player selections and overall management of Super Rugby players within each union. All interviews were conducted on premises at each respondent's office by the researcher.

General investigative questions were posed during the interview process to achieve greater knowledge on Super Rugby player considerations before exploring the six specific identified players.

*Appendix 4* illustrates the different questions that were posed during the interview process.

### 5.3. Research Question One

**When offering a professional rugby player contract, age as an attribute is a main consideration that influences the contract either in terms of value or length.**

Various exploratory questions were asked aimed at clarifying age as an attribute.

The following are comments that were made during the interviews regarding age and the importance of it when considering offering a player a contract.

To fully grasp the context of age as a potential attribute interviewees first identified positions within a team that have different requirements in terms of skill and game play. “Each position has its own attributes that you must have” (Interviewee 1).

“When considering Super Rugby the player must be able to do his job. When playing Super Rugby the player is not a novice, he should know what is expected from him in terms of job” (Interviewee 2).

Further to the actual skill and the player knowing what is expected of him as a player in a particular position the player representing the union at Super Rugby level must be a specialist in his position.

“At the Super Rugby level you are looking for specialists, in his position he knows what is required and what must happen.” As Interviewee 1 mentioned, “A fly half

must be able to kick far and tackle exceptionally because the opponents are running into that channel these days.”

“A lock must be able to get into the air and hit the ball back to his team, while a wing and a loose trio player must be fast” (Interviewee 1).

In addition to great skill and on field presence some players have an “it” factor that also contributes to their performance on the field. These players are game makers and can at any stage perform at a level at which only a few players can play.

“You do get special players that just have “it”, they understand the game well and can perform well based on this “it” factor” (Interviewee 2).

Based on the different requirements for different positions age can be associated with positions within the team. One interviewee commented that in comparing South African and English players, the English players are selected when they are older.

“Looking at the English international team players get selected when they are between 28, 29. ...The English players are usually much older than South African players” (Interviewee 1).

Considering South African players that represented South Africa, some players are still quite young and as one interviewee argued: “You can have a look at a number

of South African players that represented that Springboks at a senior level when they still played u/21 Springbok rugby” (Interviewee 1).

Exploring the different positions in a team average age can be associated to each where the tight five seem to be older than the rest of the team.

“Tight five must usually be older than the rest of the side, but don’t forget you do get players that fit into these positions and are only 20 or 21 years old. But if I would average it out the tight five is usually between 28 and 32 in South Africa.”

“The loose trio and backline must be young players and here you look at about 24 years of age. ... You are at your best at these ages in the positions just described” (Interviewee 1).

Even though these ages are averages there are players that represent their union sides at very young ages. All interviewees were of the opinion that when a player is good enough to play at that level of rugby he must play. “Good enough is old enough” (All Interviewees).

“Unions should not say the player is too young and therefore cannot play. Some players were 21 years old when South Africa won the last world cup” (Interviewee 2).

Exploring when age is a consideration or an influencing factor one interviewee in particular made a strong point that first the union's or team's structure must be fully understood in terms of the requirement. "When looking at a player you first check your structural requirement before anything else is considered" (Interviewee 1).

Another interesting point was raised where age has the potential to be an influencing factor. The length of the contract offered by the union to a player can be impacted by the age of that particular player. As an interviewee mentioned, "Age can have an effect on the contract length that is offered. Old players are not offered long contracts because they know they won't get offered another contract and because of that they try and get long contracts." Linking to this point is that in rugby an age cycle exists where older players leave or are let go to make space for younger players.

"It is good to let older more experience players go, it will open more budget because of expensive players no longer on the books and it allows the union to develop younger players keeping your structures strong" (Interviewee 1).

"In rugby there is a cycle where young players come through the ranks, gain experience and end up playing Super Rugby and perhaps Springbok rugby. With the experience gained comes age too and a player only has a certain number of years to reach his peak before he starts slipping down the curve because of younger players coming into the side" (Interviewee 1).

## 5.4. Research Question Two

**The more experience a player has on different levels in rugby the more value will be attributed to him when considering a contract offer.**

The following are comments made by the interviewees on the importance of experience when considering offering a player a contract. Various exploratory questions were asked to uncover what experience meant and the interaction between it and other attributes.

A number of interviewees identified experience as a key consideration when analysing players for potential contracts.

“Experience is everything in rugby” (Interviewee 1) is a statement that was made by one of the interviewees. This seems to be supported by all involved with Super Rugby team selection and management.

An interviewee argued that experience will actually determine the value of your contract and will influence the demand for that player. “If you are a world class player with experience it will determine your amount on your contract”(Interviewee 2).

Valuable experience in terms of match involvement and being involved in the important games can contribute greatly to a player's value as one interviewee explained. "The only way to really see if a player can potentially become a world class player is when he is put in a position where pressure is huge....A piece of coal under pressure becomes a diamond and that is what you are looking for. Players that become diamonds, their value increases and the players that remain coal will eventually be phased out" (Interviewee 1).

Focusing on what it takes to win Super Rugby tournaments all interviewees were of the opinion that match experience and the Super Rugby level and Springbok level will be telling if one wants to be competitive.

"If you want to win the Super Rugby tournament your starting line-up must have represented the national side, the Springboks, before."

"The most expensive Super Rugby contracts offered and secured for the union were because of experience. The expensive contracts are associated to players with a 100 plus Super Rugby games."

"It is said that you will only be able to win a Super Rugby tournament if you have five or six players in your team with 50 or more Super Rugby caps" (All interviewees).



A strong argument was that competitive structures need to be fed the whole time. Players with valuable experience do get older and must be replaced by younger less experienced players to ensure competitive sustainability as discussed by Interviewee 1.

“You have to take out experience or players at the top (meaning well experienced players) to feed the team again with younger players. They may not be as experienced as the top players but they do have enough experience already gained to be competitive” (Interviewee 1).

Exploring how younger players get access and exposure to the Super Rugby league it became apparent that unions preferred scouting and developing their own talent.

“We don’t buy any other union’s experience” (Interviewee 2).

“It is cheaper to grow your own players and let them gain experience than it is to go out and buy an experienced player” (Interviewee 1).

“I can count on my one hand the number of players in the last four years we went and contracted from other unions.” (Interviewee 2).

Interviewee 1 made that following comments:

“We prefer building up our own experience through scouting for young talent still playing school rugby and signing these players to grow within the union.”

“Developing players within the structure enables the union to move the players around based on requirement.”

“Experience is gained through time and getting the young guys involved exposing them to games and backing them.”

There is a balance that comes to the fore when discussing the dynamics between young lesser experienced players and older more experienced players. It is argued that even though old players are critical to the team to ensure competitiveness, younger players must be involved to ensure sustainability. The young players however do not have the relevant experience yet and must learn this from older players.

“Developing the young players is great but you can’t only play young players in a team. You must play the young players with older more experienced player that will make them better and give them confidence and self-esteem.” (Interviewee 1)

“Older more senior players know how to work with pressure and can focus on the job at hand. Young players can learn this from the more experienced players.”  
(Interviewee 1)

“When older more experienced players retire from the game or are not offered new contracts it means that although the team is losing experience and perhaps Springboks, it allows for younger players to come into the structure” (Interviewee 1).

As young players enter the structure and older players leave the union must ensure that the young players have a relevant amount of experience to carry the team's performance and remain competitive in any tournament.

“This means that structure can be kept strong or can be developed further to sustain the positive performance of a team. Usually the younger players get exposed during the Currie Cup season through the set structures learning and being supported by the older more experienced players” (Interviewee 1).

“Experience only comes through time and exposure to the different levels of rugby. Young players must be able to learn from senior more experienced players during matches” (Interviewee 2).

“When players have won trophies, meaning different rugby trophies such as the Currie Cup or the Super Rugby cup they seem to “know” how to do it and that experience that they have been in the winning seat supports or helps them to win another trophy easier or give them a better chance to win another trophy” (Interviewee 2).

Even though in-house talent and experience development are the core focus the union may decide to approach an available player who may own relevant experience. The reason for this is not necessarily the experience but rather what that player can offer to the structure.

“Some unions do go out and buy experience because their team or union structure allows for it. They utilise these players differently within the structure and believe more experience will deliver a higher return in terms of team performance” (Interviewee 1).

Another interviewee stated that although unions “try to bring the best players through the structures but if great potential is noticed at smaller unions they will be approached and offered a position with the larger Super Rugby union” (Interviewee 2).

“Unions may buy experience to assist pulling through younger inexperienced players to build up their core; this can be considered a short term solution, bridging the experience gap whilst ensuring maximum team performance” (Interviewee 1).

“In some instances we buy or offer experienced players contracts but this is based on the team or structural need that exists within the union” (Interviewee 1). The more experienced player can assist in developing young talent that may take over in the future.

As mentioned earlier, it is cheaper to develop founded young talent than to source more experienced players in the open market as argued by an interviewee.

“Financial sustainability is critically important to any union or business and therefore careful consideration must be made when deciding on when to buy any player.

Structural requirements and team dynamics play a critical role in this decision”

(Interviewee 1).

During the interviews the impact of Springbok players were considered due to the different level of experience they can bring or take away from a team. The interviewee’s had the following comments when the movement in and out of a team was explored when Springbok players were called up for national duty.

“If a large number of Springboks are prevalent in a particular Super Rugby team, when they are selected for the national team they weaken that Super Rugby side which can threaten the side’s overall performance in a season” (Interviewee 1).

Not only can the absence of Springboks within a team have an influence but the return of the Springboks may also be disruptive for a side. “The Springbok players may come from a milieu where they lost and this can have a disruptive effect on a team performing and playing well” (Interviewee 2). Therefore one can postulate that

even though great experience can be injected into a side it may be disruptive to overall performance.

### **5.5. Research Question Three**

**Only senior rugby players have the ability to attract large numbers of fans to the stadiums.**

The following are comments made by the interviewees in terms of rugby player attraction power to get people into the stadiums and thus influence union revenue.

Exploring attraction power and its relevance within Super Rugby it is argued that a player must first perform at extraordinary levels and develop ability associated with him which enables him to perform in such a way that he stands out.

“There is a belief that optimal performance or extraordinary performance is required before a player can develop or inherit an individual attribute that no other player may have, such as attraction power” (Interviewee 2).

The fact that players are contracted Springbok players influences contractual negotiations. Springbok players only become Springbok players because of extraordinary performance and their ability to outperform average players.

“Being a Springbok influences a player value and importance when considering contracting such a player” (Interviewee 2). Springbok players have the ability to attract fans to the stadiums because of their on-field ability.

“Springboks attract crowds to the stadiums” (Interviewee 2).

An interviewee used a particular player as example when he described what attraction power can mean to a team and to the fan attendance at the stadiums. When the star player did not participate in a match a noticeable drop in attendance was noticed.

“Another player had massive fan attraction power, where ever he went locally or internationally people want to see him. This may be due to a dynamic personality and the fact that these players are seen as role models. When leaving these players out from your team when playing one notices a drop in attendance” (Interviewee 1).

In addition to extraordinary performance rugby players can become role models through their actions and behaviour off the field. These role models inspire and motivate younger people who look up to them.

“Some more experienced senior players are role models for younger team mates in terms of discipline and professionalism” (Interviewee 1).

Exploring professional players as brands, interviewees postulated that there are not a huge number of players that are considered as brands in South Africa. Players that are seen as brand players tend to command a higher premium when contracts are negotiated.

“Not a huge amount of rugby players in South Africa are considered as brands” (Interviewee 1).

“Some players become brands, where through their lifestyle they are recognised as icons more than what they can offer on the field in terms of performance. Because these players are in the media for all the right reasons they become role models and this influences their supporters’ attraction power which in turn impacts on their value. Players attracting fans tend to demand a higher price” (Interviewee 1).

Having a closer look to what a brand player mean in a side or team, all interviewees agreed that a player’s being considered as a brand influences fan attendance. If that particular player is playing attendance figures are usually higher than when the player is not playing.

“If you do however have a player in your side that does have a brand attached to him there will be an influence in the number of people being attracted to the stadium. These players attract large amounts of people and have a direct influence on the unions’ ticket sales and therefore turnover” (Interviewee 1).



“If for instance the star player is not playing the union will notice it in fan attendance, there will be a drop in the numbers” (Interviewee 1).

Considering where these players play and which union they represent is usually a personal choice and it does not seem to be monetary orientated but rather a personal choice.

“These players are fantastic players and the reason why they were contracted with other unions is that firstly that the union did not want to pay that much and it was a personal choice of the player” (Interviewee 2).

Further, fan attendance is influenced by the overall team’s star power. This means that if the first team is playing more people attend the matches than when the second team is playing.

“When the so called ‘A’ or first team the attendance is much higher at the stadium itself than when a lesser known or ‘B’ team plays” (Interviewee 1).

## 5.6. Research Question Four

### **Performance indicators are the main drivers when considering offering a contract to a professional rugby player.**

The following are comments made by the interviewees when performance indicators were weighed up against personal athlete attributes.

The interviewees argue that certain physical attributes are very much a requirement for different positions available in a team. These positions must be filled with players meeting these requirements and who can perform optimally.

There are a few attributes that are present and must be met before a player can potentially perform optimally.

“We say there are four main attributes — big, strong, fast and the ‘head’ but the head you will only get to know once you have worked with the player. ...Every position has its own set of attributes. ... When considering individual player attributes there are four main attributes that are taken into account. These are large in size, strong, ability to run quick and be mobile and the last attribute is the head. A player must be intelligent to predict what his opponents are going to do or be able to adjust if a new game strategy is laid out” (Interviewee 1).

Using the example of a lock, Interviewee 1 described the normal expected attributes that must be present before a player will be considered for that particular position.

“A lock must be tall, he must be intelligent, and he must be mobile and must be able to read opponents.”

An interviewee argued that it is important that when a player represents a team on a Super Rugby level that he already “knows” what he must do and achieve in his position. That player must almost become a specialist in that position; there should be no doubt about work rate and what is expected.

“When walking onto the field a Super Rugby player forms part of the elite. He knows what he has to do in terms of work and job requirement. ...The player knows there is a certain work rate and requirement that goes along with his position and function within the team” (Interviewee 2).

## **5.7. Research Question Five**

### **Player race influences decisions when contracts are offered to professional rugby players.**

Investigating player race and if it plays a role when considering a contract offering, the following comments were made by the interviewees.

The interviewees agreed that the structural requirement within the team is critical and players are contracted according to that requirement. It was however important that a player does fit into the culture of the union.

“Structure within the union is very important when considering offering player contracts. It is essential to ensure that before a player is offered a contract that the need and structural fit in terms of team and culture complements the identified player.”

All interviewees were very much in support of transformation and agreed that all rugby unions across South Africa were very committed and supportive to this process.

“Transformation in South Africa is a natural process supported by all the sport types and especially all the rugby unions buying into it” (Interviewee 2).

Strangely enough more players of different race come through at certain positions in a team and not all positions are fairly representative of different races.

“In certain positions you get more players of colour coming through than at other positions in the team” (Interviewee 2).

The impact of different races within a team is important to the community and the fans supporting the sides. These fans buy merchandise and when the team is representative of South Africa the unions benefit.

“Having players of colour in the team is important, the supporters of the sides are not only white, a large percentage is of another colour and they purchase the merchandise and watch the matches” (Interviewee 2).

“It is also good to have representation in the team of these players; they very often become role models or icons that are representative of all people in South Africa” (Interviewee 2).

## **5.8. Research Question Six**

**Leadership qualities are not considered when selecting a player to represent a union.**

Exploring individual leadership qualities and if it is a consideration when offering a contract, the following comments were made by the interviewees.

Interviewees agreed that leadership was an important aspect that played a critical role within the team. One interviewee used an example of leadership qualities when a prominent player was contracted back to South Africa to lead a particular team.

This player had the ability to bring the players together and form unity within the team.

“There are some other attributes such as leadership ability. In one instance a very influential player was brought back into a side because of his extraordinary leadership ability. He had the capability to get the most of each player as well as from the team as a unit ensuring great synergy and focus. Such players are rare and are a definite asset to any team” (Interviewee 1).

The identification of leaders is a natural process; these individuals usually come to the fore through their natural ability and personality.

“Natural leaders come to the front, they take control. They speak the same ‘language’, leaders lead through speech, attitude and what you stand for” (Interviewee 2).

Leadership on the field is critically important. These players know what is expected and have a good grip on the game plan. Other players have respect for these players and trust their judgement when the captain makes a call.

“The leaders in the team form part of the technical decision group, the rest of the players know that these players will be able to make the right choices or decisions on the field when under pressure. The moment does not get to you; you are

calculated and make the correct decisions. If these decisions pay off, respect is earned as well as trust” (Interviewee 2).

When a captain or proper leadership structures are not in place it impacts very negatively on the team and its performance. As an interviewee argued: “You can’t put and rand and cent value on leadership quality but when it’s gone you immediately notice it” (Interviewee 2).

## **5.9. Research Question Seven**

**Personal attributes relevant to a particular individual such as education are irrelevant when considering offering a contract to a professional rugby player.**

The following comments were made by the interviewees when other factors such as intelligence were explored in terms of relevance when a contract is offered to a player.

An interviewee argued that: “If a player has emotional intelligence (EQ) it is almost more important than IQ in a team. If the player understands the game then that is what is required. Yes you do have players with degrees in your team but that is not necessarily what is required” (Interviewee 2).

It is not necessary for all players to be involved with game tactics and game planning. Certain players are involved in the technical meetings and they ensure that the players on the field are moving towards the same goal.

“The technical decision makers will be in the team making the decisions the other guys can then just follow instructions or the game plan” (Interviewee 2).

Intelligence is not a requirement to get over the gain line, all you need is physical power and presence.

“Rugby is a physical sport and it is important to get over the gain line and to get over the gain line you don’t have to be intelligent” (Interviewee 2).

## **5.10. Conclusion**

The following section will summarise the findings as per the research questions that were posed to the key stakeholder interviewees. The conclusions will further be discussed in Chapter six where the findings will be explored.

The main consideration before any player is considered regardless of any attribute be it match performance or personal attribute is that the requirement must first exist within the union or team structure. If there is no requirement for a player performing a certain task then the union will not consider procuring a player.



Considering age as a factor or attribute when decisions are made regarding contracts it is shown that although age is not a main driver it serves as a guideline. Age plays a weighted role when contract lengths are taken into account.

Young players are offered longer contracts which may be between two to three years. The main reason is that it allows the player time to settle into the union and team structure which means that the union can ensure its requirement is met. However young players by themselves representing a team are not a feasible prospect. They are at their peak in terms of match performance but they lack knowledge and self- confidence. Knowledge and self-confidence can be learnt from senior players.

Experience in Super Rugby is everything. To win a Super Rugby tournament the starting line-up must have at least played for South Africa or must consist of 50 Super Rugby caps per player. Experience is probably the most weighted in terms of personal attributes that can influence player value offered in the form of a contract.

Some unions prefer to develop their own young players and through this allow them exposure on the different levels of rugby which in turn translates into experience. Unions may however go out and secure a senior experienced player from another union if there is such a requirement within it a structure.

Senior experienced players may have a Springbok contract which means to secure the services of such a player on Super Rugby level will be expensive. The unions must consider budget allowance as well as sustainability therefore Springboks are formed within the union rather than go out and buy these players.

There are other factors that can influence a union's decision when filling the structural or team requirement. Certain players have very special "it" attributes which cannot be defined. These players are masters at the game itself and develop into strong tacticians and key decision makers on the field. Head coaches appreciate these players incredibly and consider their opinion when deciding on a game plan. In addition to their value in the war room coaches rely on these players to make the correct decisions on the field when under pressure.

Another factor that can influence the contract decision although not really considered is the fact that a player may have a brand value associated to him which can translate into fan attraction power. Just by including this player the union will be ensured of more fans attending the game at the stadium.

Other factors such as leadership qualities and colour may be considerations but are not deciding factors. Leadership however is quite heavily weighted especially when that leader can bring a team together and have the trust and respect of fellow team mates. In one instance a player was sourced back from overseas to captain a Super

Rugby team. The decision to approach this player was firmly based on his leadership ability and what he meant to the overall team structure.

In South Africa transformation is a reality and all the unions seem to embrace it. Huge effort has gone into developing scout networks where young black talent can be identified and potentially be attracted to a particular union. Although in Super Rugby the main objective is to win each match and therefore only the elite is selected from what the union has to offer at a Currie Cup level things are a bit different.

During the Currie Cup season young players are “bled” and because of this stance some black players are given the chance to play just because they are black and conform to some sort of skill level. The skill level however may not be as high as white players but the unions believe to support and back these players to elevate their potential.

To conclude, players are selected on the basis of what they can do on the Super Rugby level. The Super Rugby level is for elite players only and although personal attributes do and can influence decisions the main consideration is the requirement of the union’s structure and what that individual player can offer to the team.

## 6. Chapter 6: Discussion of Research Findings

### 6.1. Introduction

Chapter six will discuss in detail the findings from the data collected in terms of the research questions and literature review.

Major themes have been identified and are compared with the relevant literature for each of the research questions. A conclusion is given after each research question.

### 6.2. Research Question One

**When offering a professional rugby player contract, age as an attribute is a main consideration that influences the contract either in terms of value or length.**

#### 6.2.1. Findings from research

The following key statements or information were derived from the research data relating to the effect age as a consideration has when deciding on offering a contract to a player.

- Age as a consideration

According to the research data any player being considered as good enough for a particular position is old enough to represent the team at a level determined by

the coaching staff. Position attributes are based on the different tasks that must be performed by the particular position.

Positions such lock require the athlete to be able to get into the air quickly and reach competitive heights. In addition to these very basic high-level attributes a lock must be able to knock or pass the ball from being in the air back to his team in an effective manner.

Based on these attributes or position requirements locks must be tall, strong and be able to handle the ball whilst in the air.

The following general positions were highlighted with average age taken into account.

General positions:

- Tight five, average age of between 28 and 32
- Loose trio, average age of 24
- Back players, average age of 24

Although age is based on average it does not mean that older or younger players will not be considered for the position based purely on age.

- Age within the team structure

When considering offering a player a contract the current team structure and future team structure will be considered very carefully. If the current need is to assist developing young players; older players will be considered that will be able to support the task ahead.

Unions prefer developing their own young players by positioning them within the team structure with future team sustainability in mind. Not only is it beneficial for the unions to develop young players within their own structures and frameworks, it also supplies the union with information that can be used to predict or highlight future player needs. The unions can monitor young player temperament through various scenarios and pressures ensuring only the best young players are developed.

### **6.2.2. Important points from literature**

According to Lucifora and Simmons (2003) salaries decrease as age increases because of the impact age has on agility and athleticism. The modern game of rugby union is played at a faster speed with greater player involvement. The professional era also introduced greater physiological and psychological demands on players (Bramley, 2006).

Gabbett (2002) has shown in his research that both age and experience are determinants of selection of players into first grade rugby league teams. In his study Gabbett proved that players chosen for the first team were older and more experienced.

Age may influence player value and does have an influence on contract period considerations. Previous studies have concluded that as age increases earnings will decrease. This is due to the fact that although experience such as knowledge and tactical ability are gained physical performance is worsening which includes a reduction in speed and fitness (Lucifora & Simmons, 2003).

### **6.2.3. Conclusion on research question one**

In conclusion age is not the key consideration when deciding on player contracts. It does however play a role for the unions when planning team structures. There seems to be a balance between young and older players within the team structures.

The older players support team structures and give guidance to younger players. Based on the role within the team structures older players may command more consideration than younger players.

### **6.3. Research Question Two**

**The more experience a player has on different levels in rugby the more value will be attributed to him when considering a contract offer.**

#### **6.3.1. Findings from research**

The following information resulted from the researched data relating to experience and how heavily this is weighted when considering offering a player a contract.

Experience is everything in rugby according to the interviewees and can directly influence the profitability of a union. Experience levels can be very different and can have different meanings to unions. When considering experienced players more experienced players can demand higher contract fees.

The following main themes relating to experience were derived from the researched data.

- Match or Tournament experience

Players who know how to win trophies can do it again. These players must “teach” or show other players how to achieve this so that the younger players can “learn”.

Experience gained from playing in different tournaments as well as the demands and challenges resulting from each tournament resonate experience with a player.



Playing in different conditions on different continents proves vital in team performance. Different conditions demand different actions and only players who have gone through these matches will know what to expect and how to act. Having players in the side who are comfortable with different scenarios is valuable: they can explain and highlight information that can influence the team's overall performance.

- Position experience

The more matches a player plays the more experience he gains. Positions in a rugby side require a player to perform certain tasks or fulfil certain requirements. Once a player becomes masterful at this the demand for that player will increase. A threat to specialised rugby positions is rule changes. Rule changes may impact what a player must do in terms of tasks. Some players struggle to adapt to these rule updates and therefore do not perform well, which may lead to the team's performance being impacted negatively.

- Structural experience

Unions prefer finding and developing their own young players. It gives the unions the opportunity to monitor the players' temperament within the team structure. Unions can make adjustments and ensure that players are played in the optimal position guaranteeing the best performance from both the player and the team. Some young players will not be able to perform under crowd pressures and it is in the union's and the team's benefit to find the players that can perform under those pressures that have the potential to become world class players.

In rugby the team performs well and wins a match, not one individual. Therefore players that can adjust or fit into a particular structure are more likely to succeed than individuals performing or acting on their own.

- Seniority

When the data sample was generated different player profiles were generated and forming the base of these players was experience gained through years of playing the professional rugby game. Through the exploration process it became very clear that experience is very heavily weighted but also how that experience can be transferred in terms of knowledge to younger players entering the side.

More experienced players are given the responsibility to mentor and teach younger players how to perform or act in situations. The knowledge transfer is critical to younger players ensuring the best possible team performance. Highly experienced individuals such as a player that has played over fifty Super Rugby matches and represents South Africa is considered very valuable because of the knowledge they can bring to the team. In addition to the experience if the player fulfilled a particular role such as being captain he is considered an asset to the union he represents. The leadership aspect or attribute will be discussed later in the document.

Having more experienced players in a team leads to better overall performance which can lead to potential trophy wins. Competing at a Super Rugby level it is critical that a team consists of highly experienced players because of other

underlying influencing factors such as travelling and playing in different conditions against international players.

- Experience cycle

An experience cycle exists within rugby. This section will elaborate on how experience impacts on the various levels with the focus on Super Rugby. Players performing well during the Super Rugby season have usually come through the different union structures and possibly the Currie Cup season where experience and exposure is given. These players may potentially get selected for the Springbok squad which impacts on the local rugby tournaments being played during Springbok tours. The effect of these players not being available for local selection is that valuable experience which was developed through the union structures cannot be used in the local tournaments.

In contrast to the above statement is the fact that when these players do return from international duty they usually have gained more experience which in turn translates into these players being more valuable in the senior team. Thus even though some of the unions may struggle in local Currie Cup tournaments because of key players not being available; they may perform well in the Super Rugby season due to the fact that players with Springbok experience can offer more on the field.

Challenges will arise for the top performing unions when considering the local Currie Cup tournament because they are basically fielding players with less experience. In this regard it is important to unions to still attempt to maintain a

certain level of experience within any team in any tournament. Therefore some unions are of the opinion that experience levels can be maintained through purchasing players meeting skill requirement but who are not considered for the national side.

Strangely enough certain unions feel that having Springboks within their structures influences their performance to such an extent that it may not be worth their while to have a large number of Springboks in the ranks. Having Springboks in the team does however mean that larger crowds are attracted. This will be discussed later in the document.

Interviewee 1 mentioned that it is important that older more experienced players do get phased out of the structures to allow younger players to move in and gain experience ensuring that the union and team remains competitive in any tournament. The balance however between young players and experienced older or senior players is very important to maintain to achieve optimal success.

### **6.3.2. Important points from literature**

Considering that rugby teams must perform well in any tournament and that experienced players can have an influence on matches in terms of winning or losing unions are holding onto their prized assets (Anonymous, 2011a).

A number of researchers are in accord that sport-specific cognitive perceptions are the result of athletes' prior experience in their specific sports. These authors

conclude that prior sport experience will be instrumental in developing athletes' perceptions of their abilities to perform (Lazarus, 2000). In addition, "performance history" is often reflected in athletes' current ranking, and influences their cognitive perceptions of their own as well as their opponents' abilities. In this regard experience influences a player's self-confidence which in turn can influence or impact an athlete's psychological skills (Hodge & McKenzie, 1999).

### **6.3.3. Conclusion on research question two**

In any form of rugby, experience is critical and is very highly regarded when deciding on contract offerings. Experience is usually intertwined with age. Therefore a correlation exists between players' age and the experience they have because of the exposure they received during their careers. Professional rugby players have a limited career span where during the growth and peak periods massive potential value can be delivered to a union in terms of trophies won and ticket sales. After a certain point though, these highly experienced players must make way for younger less experienced players. Although age is not a main consideration is definitely has a bearing on how experience is considered when looking at a player.

Older players with great experience are more risk prone because of potential injuries which can be extensive and very costly to the union. These older more experienced players are quite expensive and the union expects larger returns from a team carrying so much experience.

Therefore unions prefer developing their own experience by exposing younger players to the different levels of rugby whilst being supported by older more experienced players. This in turn means that the contract offering gross value is less because younger players cannot demand large contracts and the union can still perform well because of the older players' guiding and assisting the younger players. This is the experience cycle where if a player has a large amount of experience he will be removed from the structure usually because of his age or because the union structure does not allow for him continuing.

To conclude, young players' experience must be developed through the support of experienced older players acting as mentors. These older players contribute to the performance of the team in a different manner than the conventional on-field performance.

#### **6.4. Research Question Three**

**Only senior rugby players have the ability to attract large numbers of fans to the stadiums.**

##### **6.4.1. Findings from research**

Based on the information gathered and analysed attraction power come to the fore as a factor that unions consider valuable. The number of fans that attended matches during the season had a direct relation to revenue generated. From the

sample data generated and interviews conducted certain players depicted attraction power.

Attraction power was further explored and certain main themes were highlighted that impacted on how players were perceived by their fans.

The following main themes came to the fore and will be discussed accordingly.

- The Springbok contract

If a player is a signed Springbok it influences his value. In instances when a player is signed before he becomes a Springbok the offered contract value is normally lower than when a player with a Springbok contract is made an offer.

When a team plays with a number of Springboks in the side the game usually attracts more fans who wants to see these players in action. Springbok players thus attract fans and ensure high attendance numbers which in turn reflects positively on the unions' financial statements. Although unions know that Springboks attract fans some unions are not willing to over pay or break the bank to secure these players. There seem to be a number of considerations that have to be taken into account before considering making a high contract offer.

Certain Springboks however have more attraction power than others. These players attract more fans to the stadiums whether they play locally or internationally. In some instances these players develop the fan attraction

attribute because of exceptional game play or extraordinary skill. In addition to these players' skills their personalities seem to also play a part in being positively perceived by supporters.

- Attraction power – on-field performance

In a particular instance if a certain backline Springbok player played attendance numbers increased dramatically. When he did not play it was estimated that around ten thousand fewer people came to watch the match. Although this is only an approximation reached by associating ticket sales with stadium attendance, it implies a significant loss of revenue. Further, the value calculated could not only be directly associated to the Springbok not being present but it does indicate that there is an associated value to the player based on personal attributes other than on-field performance.

Return on investment — in this case a rugby player — is measured on the team and the team's overall performance. If the team is doing well and winning trophies the return is significant.

When a team is performing well it means that fans will attend more matches being played at the stadiums. In turn this will result in an increase of revenue because of more ticket sales. Due to the fact that more tickets are being sold the union will increase its potential budget that can be allocated to player contracts. The union can either increase player contract value, offer more contracts or contract more expensive players. Of course all the above mentioned scenarios



must be sustainable. Therefore unions are very much dependent on players performing well, attracting fans and winning tournaments as a team.

According to the data gathered during the interview process it became clear that when the so-called “B” side plays fewer fans are attracted to the match if compared to the attendance figures when the first team is playing. This can be contributed to the star players not being present in the team which directly correlates to the attraction power players have on attendance.

- Attraction power – life style

Other Springbok players who are great players in their own right do not necessarily attract fans through their game play. These players attract fans through their lifestyle and what they believe in. They become role models and people look up to them in respect of their views and off the field behaviour. Normally in South African rugby there are not a large number of these players present. Some of these players are no longer playing their best rugby but they are contracted because their level of performance is still acceptable and they can attract fans to the stadium. If the player contract was purely considered on performance some of these players might not necessarily play rugby anymore but because they have another special attribute their value and benefit is higher than normal. These players however will not remain in the team unless they can remain an important on-field component ensuring the team can perform optimally.

To conclude, these players are recognised rugby player brands that carry some value. In South Africa there are probably only five players that can be regarded as professional rugby player brands. These players are respected for their on-field play and off-field behaviour and supporters want to be associated with these players.

#### **6.4.2. Important points from literature**

During the exploration process various themes were identified that may be classified as attraction attributes. Although not a consideration as such when player contracts are considered, attraction power still plays a vital role in terms of revenue generation for unions. The more people or fans attend a match the more revenue is generated for the union.

The “superstar” phenomenon exists in economic literature where a few individuals in selected professions can enjoy huge salaries (Sherwin, 1983). Consumers have a very high demand for excellence which impacts greatly on a professional athlete’s value in terms of what they can offer. According to Lucifora & Simmons (2003) the marginal revenue product of a player is related to the extra price a consumer is willing to pay to see the athlete play multiplied by the number of consumers.

#### **6.4.3. Conclusion on research question three**

Through the interview process it became apparent that although not a consideration when offering a contract, attraction power plays a key role for unions. Having large numbers of fans attending matches increases revenue for the union, which has an

impact on its budget that can allow more lavish spending on player development or contracts. Not all players have the attraction quality and this is usually developed through either extraordinary game play or through personality traits on and off the field. Players with attraction power usually become role models for younger people which in turn attracts them to the stadiums when the players are playing.

## **6.5. Research Question Four**

**Performance indicators are the main drivers when considering offering a contract to a professional rugby player.**

### **6.5.1. Findings from research**

As stated in the previous questions experience is heavily considered when considering offering a contract to a player. Although other attributes are considered the fact remains that a contract will only be offered to a player when the union structure allows for it and a team requirement exists. Rugby is a physical sport and only individuals meeting the physical criteria will potentially be considered. There are of course exceptions but usually rugby players must be able to hold their own on the field.

Players must physically have the ability to perform in the position they are selected for, which means that they must conform to the four main attributes which are: big, strong, speed and head. Players were not considered purely on individual

attributes. These attributes only support the performance attributes making the player more valuable and more attractive in terms of contractual engagement.

### **6.5.2. Important points from literature**

Based on previous literature studies it is postulated that physical skills are critically important in all forms of rugby. Contact skills are a fundamental component of performance in rugby union. This study demonstrated that the ability to resist defensive opponents through good contact intensity and strong fending strategies function to dominate the tackle contest and is imperative to success in rugby union. Strong leg drive and low body height as well as purposeful resistive fending were desirable technical attributes that promoted tackle-breaks (Wheeler & Sayers, 2009).

Even though physical attributes and performance play a definitive role, there are exceptions such as in the case of Springbok captain John Smit. Smit is a contrast to the finding that players are first and foremost considered based on their performance. Ryan Vrede states that John Smit was only selected for the Springbok side going to the world cup because of his leadership qualities. The coaching staff did therefore associate a higher value to his leadership combined with his winning world cup experience than just his on field performance (Vrede, 2010).

### **6.5.3. Conclusion on research question four**

South African rugby players are contracted based on performance. Different performance indicators and measurements are more heavily weighted than

personal or individual attributes. Experience and structural requirements are key considerations but decisions are made based on positional performance. Potential players are offered contracts based on physical performance and to what extent they conform to the main physical attributes required to fulfil the tasks associated to their position.

## **6.6. Research Question Five**

**Player race influences decisions when contracts are offered to professional rugby players.**

### **6.6.1. Findings from research**

Through the research process and analysis of interviews conducted the question of player race and what influence it had on selection was explored. South African sport is supported to progress and developed previously disadvantaged people. The research was not focused on transformation within rugby or at the speed it has taken place but rather if race itself played a contributing factor to being selected for a Super Rugby side.

Through the interview process it became very apparent that rugby as a sport is very much committed to transformation and supports the government view and role in this regard.

Rugby unions have been actively scouting for promising young black players.

Unions follow these promising players through different development programmes and different school rugby tournaments. Normally only the best of the black players are selected and offered contracts. It is stated that although these black players have incredible future potential it seems to deteriorate as they get older.

There is a belief that once these players achieve a certain level where they start earning a good living they tend not to spend their money sensibly and there is a lack in discipline when off the field. In some instances unions had to assign team members to the specific player to ensure the player was present at the correct practice sessions and other team meetings.

This may perhaps point to a lifestyle change which the player may not necessarily be used to. In addition to the lifestyle change impacting on the player there seems to be a genetic constraint. These players tend pick up weight and lose the abilities which contributed to their being offered a contract in the first place.

Normally black players progress from school rugby through the different union structures into the Currie Cup side. From the Currie Cup side very few players of colour progress into the Super Rugby side. Super Rugby demands extremely high standards and the majority of these players do not seem to be able to achieve these standards.

### **6.6.2. Important points from literature**

The first item that may possibly influence contract considerations is transformation and ensuring that players of different race are included in a representative manner on all levels of professional rugby (Human Sciences Research Council, 2007). Even though poor decisions were taken in the past to actively exclude black players from rugby sides (Booth, 1998), today there is an active process to ensure black players do come through the structures. Supporting these different race players has been beneficial to the rugby unions and to South Africa as a country.

### **6.6.3. Conclusion on research question five**

While all rugby unions are very committed to transformation in South Africa, black players must still earn their place in a Super Rugby team. Players representing unions at the Super Rugby level are the top players in the rugby community and therefore only top skills will be accommodated regardless of race. Young black players are sourced through scout networks that enable unions to select and offer great opportunities to these players within the existing structures of the union, enabling these players to fully develop into professional players.

## **6.7. Research Question Six**

**Leadership qualities are not considered when selecting a player to represent a union.**

### **6.7.1. Findings from research**

Through the interview analysis leadership quality as an attribute was highlighted as an important factor when considering certain player contracts. Leadership has a critical role within the team especially on the field where the captain has to be able to make certain decisions that is supported by fellow team mates.

A strong leader can ensure the players are all integrated to play as a unified team. Motivating and guiding the individual players all form part of being a great leader. Players must respect the leader and trust his vision and judgement. These qualities are difficult to find in one individual but can come to the fore when players are managed and developed through the union structures.

When considering offering contracts to players, leadership qualities are not always the driving factor but may only be a supporting function. Players are not offered contracts just because they are great leaders; first they must be great players. In some instances a strong leader was offered a contract to represent a union but this was only because the structure allowed for it and it was a very clear team requirement.



Usually leaders are developed through the structures where experience and skill are the main drivers.

Thus being a strong leader, for instance being the captain of the South African schools u/19, and South African Schools u/20 teams does not mean the player will be considered for a contract just because of his unique leadership qualities.

### **6.7.2. Important points from literature**

Supporting the research findings, literature shows that leadership qualities are recognized through the association of monetary value to the particular quality. Mark Keohane highlighted that during the 2002 rugby season the then Springbok management agreed to remunerate the Springbok captain R50,000 more per annum. The only reason for this was because the player was the captain (Keohane, 2004).

In recent events much debate and focus was on the current Springbok captain John Smit and why he was included in the world cup squad. According to Ryan Vrede, John was included only because of his role as captain in the squad and not because he was the best hooker in South African rugby. (Vrede, 2010)

### **6.7.3. Conclusion on research question six**

In some instances leadership qualities carried more weight when a player contract was considered. There are examples where players were brought back into the union ranks because of their exceptional leadership skill and what they meant to the team in terms of unity and motivation. Although this is a factor that cannot be

directly associated with a monetary value, once it is gone the team will immediately notice it.

Some players either have extraordinary leadership qualities from a young age or they develop them through the years of participating. Although this is a key attribute unions will foremost consider the player's individual skill. Only in extraordinary circumstances will leadership be more heavily weighted than performance indicators such as the case with Springbok captain John Smit being selected for the World Cup squad.

## **6.8. Research Question Seven**

**Personal attributes relevant to a particular individual such as education is irrelevant when considering offering a contract to a professional rugby player.**

### **6.8.1. Findings from research**

Exploring education as a personal attribute and the influence thereof when considering a potential contract, research shows that it is not a key consideration. As research indicates when considering contracts physical ability is at the fore as criteria. Research further indicated that some players form part of a technical group where game plans and actions are discussed; these players enforce these plans on

the field. Therefore not all players require to be tacticians but must rather put into action the plans or actions as stipulated by the tacticians or captain.

Education however did have an impact on the player's personal ability especially considering personal financial management. Due to a lack of education there are players who made poor decisions when managing their own finances.

### **6.8.2. Important points from literature**

There are limited previous studies researching the correlation between education and professional rugby player contracts. It is postulated though that education make players more rounded and it does have a positive effect on their rugby careers (Paul, 2009).

### **6.8.3. Conclusion on research question seven**

Education does not feature as a prominent consideration when considering a contract offering. Some players within the team take over responsibility to plan and action game tactics but must be supported by the team to fully realise the potential. Fellow team players do not have to understand the finer details, because these players put into action what has to be done. One interviewee argued that "You don't need a degree to get over the gain line."

## 6.9. Conclusion to the discussion on the research findings

*Table 5* summarises the knowledge gained through the interviews conducted compared with the literature.

**Table 5: Conclusion on Research Questions**

Research Questions	Comments
When offering a professional rugby player contract, age as an attribute is a main consideration that influences the contract either in terms of value or length.	Age in itself is a key consideration when deciding on contract length. Younger players are usually offered longer contract terms allowing the unions to develop and mould the player into its structure. Older players are usually offered shorter period contracts, one year contracts seem to be the norm. Players that are at the end of their professional careers are not likely to be considered for contracts unless there is a very specific need within the union structure.

Research Questions	Comments
<p>The more experience a player has on different levels in rugby the more value will be attributed to him when considering a contract offer.</p>	<p>Experience in professional rugby is critical. The level and type of experience may be different depending on what the player is exposed to.</p> <p>Experienced players may be procured if there is a specific requirement within the union's structure. In other instances unions prefer developing their own talent and experience.</p> <p>During the interview process it was highlighted that when a Super Rugby team have players with 50 or more Super Rugby match caps the team will be very competitive in the tournament.</p>

Research Questions	Comments
Only senior rugby players have the ability to attract large numbers of fans to the stadiums.	Individual attributes such as experience, age, colour and leadership are considered when deciding on the contract value and length. The main drivers however are the physical attributes of the player being considered. These attributes are specific to the different positions that make up the team.
Performance indicators are the main drivers when considering offering a contract to a professional rugby player.	Performance and physical attributes are more heavily weighted than other individual attributes such as for example leadership. Physical and performance attributes are considered first before other individual factors. It seems that individual attributes and factors are developed through on-field and team performance.
Player race influences decisions when contracts are offered to professional rugby players.	Even though rugby in the past was very much an Afrikaner sport making it predominantly white, rugby in recent years has changed to be more representative of the country's demographics. Colour is not a key consideration but it is nonetheless a consideration when selecting players to represent a side.

Research Questions	Comments
Leadership qualities are not considered when selecting a player to represent a union.	Leadership is a key quality and does play a critical role within team structures. When a particular leader is no longer amongst the team members the team notices it immediately. It is however very difficult to associate a monetary value with this particular quality but it is a critical factor nonetheless.
Personal attributes relevant to a particular individual such as education are irrelevant when considering offering a contract to a professional rugby player.	Education is more important on an individual level where players need to manage their own finances. Certain players with the ability to understand and analyse the game form part of technical discussions and usually make decisions during the match where the rest of the team only enforce those plans. To conclude, education has no bearing at all when considering a contract offering.

Based on the research findings it is clear that the overall research objectives have been met. It is evident that other attributes or factors exist that are taken into account when considering professional rugby player value other than actual on-field performance. Although it is difficult to calculate or associate values with these attributes it is none the less taken into account when deciding on offering a player a

contract. Attributes such as experience and age can have a direct bearing on the contract length and potential value.



## 7. Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

The following chapter provides a conclusion to the research project. In addition to the conclusion recommendations are made to further study to enhance the current research completed.

### **Review of the research project**

The main objectives and scope of research will be reviewed in this section.

The stated objective of the research was to uncover and investigate different attributes that may influence professional rugby player value in a South African Super Rugby context. Performance measures or indicators were not considered because previous studies are quite conclusive on the physical ability and skill required by professional rugby players.

The unit of analysis was the different attributes that different professional rugby players may possess. Due to the specific level of rugby all five Super Rugby unions were selected from which a random sample of six players was generated.

To create a context key individuals representative of the unions which the sample players was generated from were interviewed. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and then analysed against the literature review.

## Summary of key points

The participants did not represent the entire population of Super Rugby in South Africa. The results of the research project do however give insights into the different attributes that may play a role when considering contracting rugby players.

The following attributes were exposed and explored:

- Experience – the most critical attribute when considering offering a contract to a professional rugby player. Experience can be expressed as the parent of a number of child attributes of which age and international exposure are included. In other words experience is gained and developed over time and at different levels of exposure. The higher the standard of exposure the more valuable the experience.
- Age – is very much intertwined with experience. Usually older players are more experienced in terms of tactics and different conditions.
- Leadership – is not associated with any player. Only a handful of players are regarded as true leaders. In some instances the leadership attribute can weigh more than actual physical skill and on-field performance; the leadership quality can be viewed as amplifying a whole team's performance instead of just having one great player.
- Colour – in South Africa transformation is critical. Transformation in rugby implies that professional teams must be representative of the country's demographics and population.

- Individualism – a small number of rugby players become role models not only because of their on-field performance but because of their lifestyle and what they as human beings stand for and represent. These players possess fan attraction power because of this attribute which in turn translates into revenue for the union.

## **Implications**

Through conducting the research some information came to light that may be useful in the rugby industry.

### **Super Rugby Franchise**

When Super Rugby franchises consider contracting new players to the union more consideration can be given to certain factors to define more clearly the intrinsic value of the particular player. Although physical ability is key within rugby the below mentioned attributes may create a competitive advantage if better understood.

- Experience - even though unions prefer developing their own experience it may be beneficial in certain circumstances to introduce more experienced players to the team if the side is young and in need of guidance and knowledge. Experience is earned and exposing players to the top level of Super Rugby early on can be beneficial in the long run for the union.

- Leadership - developing strong leaders within the team is critical. These players can be vital when inspiration and guidance are required most. Leaders within rugby can develop into role models where lifestyle and motivation can be created through their actions.
- Education – rugby is a very demanding sport and requires huge time commitment. Even though this is the case there is support that professional rugby players participate in a career education outside that of rugby. It may be beneficial to support and ensure that franchise players do further their education, in previously stated literature there is a view that a player with education seems to be a more “rounded” player.

### **Recommendation for further research**

The following topics or aspects are suggested for further research to enhance and enrich the findings explored in this research project.

- Further study can be done to compare attributes of the different sport types and compare the findings. South Africa’s main sport disciplines, rugby, cricket and soccer, can be considered and compared.
- Future research may include the national Springbok side. Qualitative research can be done to determine personal attributes that may influence player value at a national team level. Further to exposing these attributes, they can be compared to the Super Rugby and provincial rugby levels. After reaching a conclusion on the different attributes the study may further go on

to identify the attributes that are required on a Super Rugby and provincial level to become a Springbok player.

- Quantitative research can be conducted that can concentrate on extrapolating value associated with the highlighted attributes within this research document. This can possibly lead to a model to assist unions to better define player value.
- Consideration can also be given to what role a player has in the Springbok side based on individual attributes and does that relate back into his value within the local or provisional side he is representing.
- In addition to the above-mentioned possible area for further research rugby player attributes may vary on international provincial levels, with players leaving South Africa to play for a different country's club being considered in a different manner in terms of identified attributes captured within the current research study.
- The top three sport types may be investigated locally and compared on an international level considering different countries. This may contribute greatly to further understanding of different sport disciplines.

## **Concluding remarks**

In the researcher's view individual attributes do influence contractual value when considering contracts. It is however very challenging to associate a value to any of these attributes and even if a value could be associated to each value it would be

different for each individual. These attributes are present and cannot be disregarded or ignored.

The contribution of this study should assist key stakeholders and decision makers within the different levels of rugby to highlight and be aware of what each of these attributes may mean when considering rugby players.

In conclusion, I hope this study can contribute in some way to a greater understanding of Super Rugby player value. It was a privilege to be part of a project like this and to have the opportunity to engage with decision makers who strive to develop and increase their union's and team's efficiency and sustainability.

## 8. List of Appendices

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## Appendix 2: Player Data Gathering sheet






The following sheet shows the framework that was used to gather player data. Once all contracted player data was received a random sample was generated to arrive at six individual players that were discussed during the interview process.

Table 6: Player Data Gathering Sheet

Full Name	Age	Super Rugby Experience (Seasons)	Position	Other Responsibilities
<i>Name and Last name of player</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Seasons</i>	<i>Playing position</i>	<i>Captain / Vice Captain</i>

## Appendix 3: South African Super Rugby Unions – 2011

Table 7: South African Super Rugby Unions

	<b>Blue Bulls Rugby Union</b>
	<b>Founded:</b> 1997  <b>Grounds:</b> Loftus Versfeld  <b>Head Coach:</b> Frans Ludeke
	<b>Golden Lions Rugby Union</b>
	<b>Founded:</b> 1996  <b>Grounds:</b> Ellis Park Stadium  <b>Head Coach:</b> John Mitchell
	<b>Free State Cheetahs Rugby Union</b>
	<b>Founded:</b> 1997  <b>Grounds:</b> Vodacom Park Stadium  <b>Head Coach:</b> Naka Drotské
	<b>Western Province Rugby Union</b>
	<b>Founded:</b> 1997  <b>Grounds:</b> Newlands Park Stadium  <b>Head Coach:</b> Allister Coetzee
	<b>Natal Sharks Rugby Union</b>
	<b>Founded:</b> 1997  <b>Grounds:</b> Kings Park Stadium  <b>Head Coach:</b> John Plumtree

## Appendix 4: Exploratory Interview Questions

The following section contains the different sections and exploratory questions that were asked to gain insight into the different areas discussed in chapter three. The interviewer's approach was to first discuss these areas in a broad fashion where after the randomly generated players were discussed based on the different sections. This ensured that the interviewer had a broad understanding of the different areas as well as good supporting questions from which more specific questions could be asked when the player sample was explored.

The different sections that were discussed are:

- Player contracts
- Individual attributes
- Age
- Experience
- Other attributes (Education etc.)

### Player Contracts

- Who from the rugby union influences the contracts?
- How heavily is financial consideration taken into account in terms of budget?
- How is a return on investment in terms of contractual payment realised?

## Individual Attributes

- What are the most critical player attributes when determining value?
- In what way do you think personal attributes can influence valuation?
- Would you think that as the above mentioned attributes develop the performance indicators should be adjusted - meaning some of these attributes may become more "valuable" than say a certain skill?
- In terms of these attributes how would you associate a value with them?
- What are the most critical player attributes when determining value before considering contracting a player?
- Thinking of the most expensive contracts, why was the deal done – what key considerations were taken and to what extent did other individual attributes play a part in the transaction?

## Age

- Does age influence contractual decisions when considering a player, and why?
- Does age influence the length of the contract?
- What is the typical age when considering a player?
- How heavily weighted is age when negotiating contract value (can this be used as leverage because of older players being more “desperate” to get a contract?

## Experience

- How heavily is experience weighted when considering a player?



- Does experience influence the length of the contract?
- Would you rate experience higher than skill, why?
- Understanding the relationship between age and experience, would you rather contract a young inexperienced player or an older much more experienced player – why?

### **Other Attributes**

This section was added into the research to support general discussion points that may influence a player's contract value. The attributes in this section may be related to an individual himself or may be general factors that were highlighted during the interview process.

- Based on what criteria do you negotiate a player's contract?
  - What influences the length of a player's contract?
- Do you consider certain individual characteristics or attributes when considering procuring a player, if so what are those characteristics (Charisma / Flair / Public fondness)?
- Do you consider colour when considering offering a contract to a player?
- Are black players important in a Super Rugby side?
- Would you offer more for a black player than a white player of equal skill in a scenario where there is a requirement within the structure?
- Do black players have any other special attributes other than colour that make them more valuable?

- If a player has terrible off-field behaviour, does he get punished for it and can such a player get a stigma attached to him as a trouble maker influencing his contract opportunities?
- Does a player's education influence contract value; in other words is it a consideration when investigating a potential candidate?
- Are there any special items negotiated per individual and if so what items may these be and in what case?
- In your opinion do you think sport fans come to see individuals? - why or why not?
- What power does the individual player have on fan attendance, for instance if a so called "B" team plays and if the 1<sup>st</sup> Team plays?