

Prospects and Strategic Challenges of Korean Sports Movies

Ill-Gwang Kim¹ and Sung-Duck Kim^{2*}

¹Department of Leisure Sport, Seowon University, Korea; whyhow2010@seowon.ac.kr

²Department of Sports Science, Baekseok University, Korea; sdkim@bu.ac.kr

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the current status and characteristics of Korean sports movies and propose the prospect and strategic challenges of them. To attain the objectives, the present study reviewed domestic sports movies of last 10 years and analyzed expert interviews and literatures. Such effort found that 11 sports movies ranked within 200 hit films that have been released since 2004. Of them, the movie "National Team" (by director Kim Young Wha) released in 2009 recorded 8 million audience, ranking on the 9th of the total and top of sports movies. It is expected that sports movie will have further growth potential along with change of existing movies and be digitalized and globalized. In the meantime, the strategic challenges that Korean sports movies have to tackle to grow are to i) target an unconventional segment of audience and make a plot targeting it, ii) break traditional development of events and character composition, iii) make non-fiction movies that can impress audience and iv) make an effort to arouse social interest in unaccustomed area.

Keywords: Component, Korean Sports Movies, Prospect, Challenge, Strategic Tasks

1. Introduction

For the past decade, the number of Korean movies newly released and the size of audience has rapidly increased (74 movies and 37,741,433 moviegoers in 2004 --> 183 movies and 127,286,319 moviegoers, and 59.7% share of all the movies)¹. Such a growth seems to be caused mainly by excellent marketing capacity of film distributors, consistent maintenance of the screen quota system and the increase of the number of screens as well as production of movies based on good direction. In addition, with the increase of the number of movies released, a number of movies with the theme of sports have been produced and released. While some of them have become popular as much as those in other genres, others have failed to attract the attention of the audience and been forgotten. The growth of sports movies is based on the characteristics sports have and the unique charm of such movies is upgraded when sports are changed into scenarios² suggested five reasons for the reason why sports movies are attractive:

challenge to human limits, suspense of unpredictability, warm humanity, and interest resembling refreshing beverage. As such, sports movies have various characteristics and charm unlike blockbusters and those of other genres. So, we can evaluate the potential expected values of sports movies favorably. In this respect, this research predicts the future of Korean sports movies and suggests the strategic values for globalization of such movies.

2. Research Method

2.1 Research Subject

This research collected data from various sources such as literature review, various reports, statistics, related online sources, and specialist interviews. Keywords for online search were 'sports movie', 'popularity', 'movie types', and 'movie strategy'. The research period was three months from July to September 2013. Statistical data were up to 2012.

*Author for correspondence

3. Results

3.1 Current Situation of Sports Movies

According to¹, among all the Korean movies released from 2004, the number of sports movies released in Korea and which belonged to the top 200 movies in popularity were 11 (5.5%). The rank order of box office tickets of Korean sports movies released during the research period is as follows: "National Representative" produced by Yong-hwa Kim in 2009 (8,035,181, the 9th); "Marathon" produced by Yun-cheol Jeong in 2005 (4,196,840, the 40th); "The Best Moment in Our Lives" produced by Sun-rae Im in 2008 (4,018,872, the 44th); "Barefoot Gibung" produced by Su-gyeong Gwon in 2006 (2,005,180, the 108th); "Gloves" produced by Wu-seok Gang in 2011 (1,887, 733, the 114th); "Korea" produced by Hyeon-seong Moon in 2012 (1,872,681, the 117th); "Perfect Game" produced by Hi-gon Park in 2011 (1,507,084, the 158th); "My Fists Are Crying" produced by Seung-wan Rhu in 2005 (1,462,972, the 161th); "Mr. Go" produced by Yong-hwa Kim in 2013 (1,326,852, the 172nd); "Sugar Cube" produced by Hwan-gyeong Lee in 2006 (1,265,508, the 183rd); "Lift Kingkong" produced by Geon-yong Park in 2009 (1,262,858, the 185th). If we compare the number of box office tickets of sports movies with that of other kinds of movies, we can find that "National Representative" secured more audiences than "The War" in 2007 (7,855,474), "Marathon" did more audiences than "The Introduction to Architecture" in 2012 (4,111,237), and "The Best Moment in Our Lives" did more people than "Baksu Idler" in 2013 (3,897,969). As described above, sports movies based on real stories and themes of various sports are as popular as other types of movies. Especially, the number of movie-goers who watched "National Representative" released in 2009 was more than 8 million, much higher than the number of all the watchers of professional baseball games, the most popular sports in Korea, in 2012 (about 7 million people). In the respect that popularity of professional sports is measured by the number of people watching the games, the industrial value of the movie is higher than that of professional baseball games. Furthermore, given that it has been three decades since professional baseball games started in 1983, the movie secured more effect than the games. Of course, we cannot simply compare the numbers of people who enjoy real sports

games and who watch sports movies. We should consider many other aspects. Nevertheless, what is important is that the number of watchers who enjoy professional baseball games is more than the number of those who enjoy the baseball movie, and it suggests many things.

3.2 Types and Characteristics of Sports Movies

3.2.1 Types of Sports Movies

Sports movies based on various types of sports sometimes stimulate audiences to shed tears, and, in other times, satisfy them with rare delights. It is difficult to classify sports movies into a specific genre, because, as described above, the development of stories in sports movies is similar to that of other types of movies in the sense that the stories of joy, anger, sorrow, and enjoyment proceed in the four steps in composition (the introduction, the development of the theme, conversion, and summing up). Therefore, it is difficult to classify the movies using sports or with the theme of sports with certain standards. Nevertheless, as the case of other types of movies, it is possible to classify sports movies into two types: person-centered movies and event-centered movies. First, the movies representing person-centered ones are "Champion" (2002), "Yeokdosan" (2004), "Superstar Gamsayong" (2004), "Marathon" (2005), "Barefoot Gibongi" (2006), and "Lift Kingkong" (2009), etc. "Champion" deals with the tragic boxing star Kim Deuk-gu, and "Yeokdosan" describes the professional wrestling star Yeokdosan (his Korean name is Kim Sin-rak) in Japan. "Superstar Gamsayong" tells the story of the baseball player who took the mound as a starter for the first time and for the last time. "Marathon" deals with Hyeongjin Bae, mentally retarded child, and his mother. "Barefoot Gibongi" made into movie the story of Gi-woong Eom, mentally retarded marathoner. And, "Lift Kingkong" is the story of In-yeong Jeong who picked out and trained Byeong-gwan Jeon, weight-lifter³. Second, the movies representing event-centered ones are "YMCA Baseball Team" (2002), "The Best Moment in Our Lives" (2008), "National Representative" (2009), "Gloves" (2011), and "Korea" (2012), etc. "YMCA Baseball Team" used as its motive the first baseball team in Korean history which was formed in the early 1990s during the Japanese occupation era. "The Best Moment in Our Lives" is based on the story of the Korean female handball team at

the Olympic Games held in Athens in 2004, featuring the final games against the Danish team. "National Representative" deals with the Korean team for ski jump related with the competition to attract the site of winter olympic games to Muju, Jeonbuk province in Korea. "Gloves" is a story of the baseball team of Seongsim School in Chungju, the first baseball team composed only of deaf players. Lastly, "Korea" deals with the real story of the female ping pong team composed of players of South and North Korea at the World Ping Pong Contest held at Jiba, Japan in 1991. The team defeated the Chinese team which pursued nine successive winning of the contest³. Event-centered movies have been found to attract more watchers than person-centered ones.

3.2.2 Characteristics and Sports Movies

Why does the audience like sports movies? There are some common characteristics in movies with the theme of sports. Especially the movies which were critically-acclaimed and commercially successful such as "National Representative" (2009), "The Best Moment in Our Lives" (2008), and "Marathon" (2005) are based on real stories in some sports genres which give the audience higher impression and interest. They are based on various sources and tell stories about people belonging to non-main stream. There are sports movies which were not commercially successful. But all the sports movies have charms, sensations and lessons².

Sports movies are those whose qualities are higher than other types of movies with their contents including sports in their stories. Separate from ordinary efforts of movie producers to move spectators, sports movies have unique characteristics with human stories of overcoming difficulties, creating teamwork in which members of a weaker team cooperate among themselves and make synergy effects. Such things can be shown not only in Korean sports movies, but as unchangeable principles in the advanced American movies.

In the Korean sports movies which are in the beginning stage in movie development and in the American sports movies which are much more developed than Korean ones, there are some common factors like focusing on sports in the movie and having a message to give to the audience, etc. In Korean case, commercially successful sports movies like "National Representative", "Usaengsun", "Sugar Cube", and "My Fists Are Crying" got the favor of Korean audiences by reinterpreting socially ski jump, handball,

horse-riding, and boxing. In the case of America in which sports and movies developed earlier than in Korea, it has been common that movies combined personal success stories with specific sports, and that those movies send some messages to the audience by providing stories where a team composed of not very good members achieve specific goals and grow to be a good team.

3.3 Prospects for Sports Movies

3.3.1 Potential Growth Possibility of Sports Movies

It is expected that sports movies will grow step by step along with the growth of Korean movie market. The background is reduction of movie production costs and increase of profitability. First, production costs have decreased. In 2012, total production costs of 174 movies released in that year was estimated to be 353.22 billion won, and mean production cost was 2.03 billion won, which is less than 50% in 2003-4 when the mean cost was 4.16 billion won [Table 1]. In addition, since 2008, among newly released movies in Korea, the number of low-budget movies has continuously increased. The proportion of movies whose production costs are less than 1 billion won takes up 62.9% of all the released movies, which is the largest in Korean movie history⁴. In the sense that what can be called software is more influential to sports movies than what can be called hardware, it is possible to produce low-budget movies. And, reduced production costs can be diverted to expenses for marketing. Second, profitability of investment has increased. The analysis of profitability for the 70 Korean movies among those released in 2012 showed that the average production cost was 4.68 billion won (net production cost 3.04 billion plus marketing cost 1.64 billion won), and profitability was tentatively estimated to be 13.0%. Actually, since profitability of investment for movies recorded surplus in 2006 for the first time, it increased to 7.9% in 2005, and 13.0% in 2012 was additional 5.1% from that of 2005. [Figure 1] During the time of 2007~2008, profitability in movie investment recorded the worst, over -40%. Such a profitability deficit continued until 2011. So, for the Korean movie industry, such an increase of profitability is very significant⁵.

3.3.2 Digitalization of Sports Movies

The digitalization revolution has promoted movies to be smart and converged⁶. Such a all, digitalization will

Table 1. The average production cost of Koeran movies (KOFIC⁴)

Year	Net production cost(A)		Marketing cost(P&A)(B)		Total production cost (A+B)
	Average net production cost (million won)	Weight (%)	Average marketing cost (million won)	Weight (%)	Average total net production cost (million won)
2003	28.4	68.3	13.2	31.7	41.6
2004	28.0	67.3	13.6	32.7	41.6
2005	27.3	68.4	12.6	31.6	39.9
2006	25.8	64.2	14.4	35.8	40.2
2007	25.5	68.5	11.7	31.5	37.2
2008	20.7	68.8	9.4	31.2	30.1
2009	15.6	67.5	7.5	32.5	23.1
2010	14.2	65.7	7.4	34.3	21.6
2011	15.5	68.3	7.2	31.7	22.7
2012	13.4	66.0	6.9	34.0	20.3

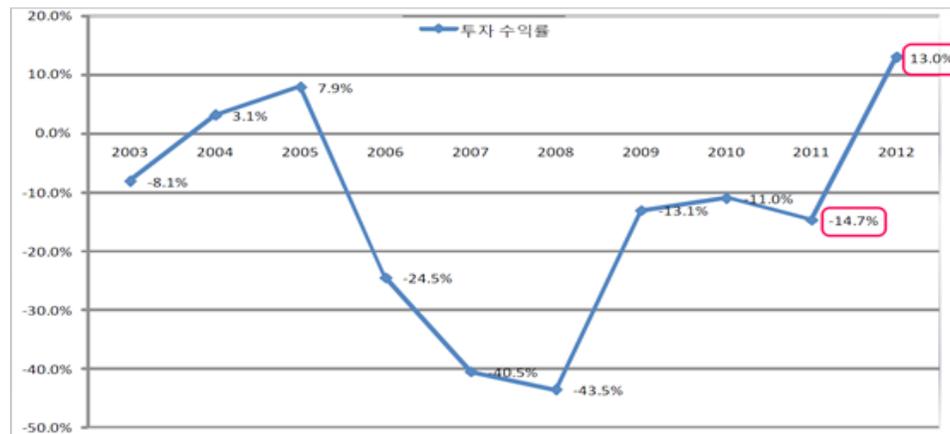


Figure 1. Return on investment trend of Korean movies by year (KOFIC⁴).

be accelerated not only in production stage, but also in distribution stage. In this sense, when we re-watch dramatic moments of sports games with slow video, we can experience more vividly feeling of presence, reality, and excitement of those moments. What will happen if we watch such scenes with 3D/4D with the help of digital technology? Due to the characteristics of sports scenes, it is expected that the preference of 3D/4D media of watching movies will rapidly increase. According to the survey to movie consumers by 4, proportion of such consumers who knew the existence of 3D/4D films reaches 93.5%, and the reason why they want to watch such films was that they consider 3D/4D versions are suitable in watching the movies they prefer⁴. It is expected that sports movies will provide much more excellent game scenes than scenes of blockbuster movies.

In the distribution of movies, the digital online movie market will grow more rapidly with the development of IPTV and digital cable TV markets.

3.3.3 Globalization of Sports Movies

Globalization of world economy will naturally influence various industries. Movie industry will not be an exception. It will affect general growth, sales amount and scale of movies⁷. Table 2 shows the sales amount relative proportion of movie industry per region and country in 2009, and predicts them for 2014. As shown in the Table, sales amount and proportions of America, Japan, and Western Europe are still greater than other regions. But the growth of such statistics in new powers in Asia, India and China, needs to be given attention to.

Korean movie industry is evaluated positively for good stories, efforts of producers and movie actors, technological factors and variety of Korean movies. But, the market for movies in terms of sales scale and proportion is smaller than those of China and India. Thus, it is expected that the growth of sales and proportion of the Korean movie industry will not be high in 2014.

The view on sports movies can be different depending on whether they are those in sports or those in the movie industry. Those related with sports looks at the area related with sports favorably, based on values sports contains. Through sports in movies, we can learn lessons like abundance by rule, fair play, challenge spirit, and mental concentration, etc². Such lessons imply much to us who live with social relationships with one another.

Table 2. Current and Futurt sales of movie industry by countries (H. G. Woo⁷)

2009			2014		
Country/Region	Sales(\$)	Market share(%)	Country/Region	Sales(\$)	Market share(%)
The United States	34,431	40.4	The United States	41,162	38.3
Japan	11,061	13.0	Japan	15,053	14.0
Western Europe	5,151	6.1	Western Europe	6,024	5.6
India	1,899	2.2	India	3,400	3.2
Korea	1,275	1.5	Korea	2,549	2.4
China	1,206	1.4	China	1,592	1.5
Middle East/Africa	345	0.4	Middle East/Africa	424	0.4
Total	55,368	65.0	Total	70,204	65.4

As if reflecting such a new trend of movie markets, "Kung Fu Panda", the animation movie produced and distributed in Hollywood in 2011 was produced in the West targeting the Asian markets. "Kung Fu Panda" was more sensational in Korea than in America where it was produced and distributed. And, it implies something to know that the Chinese fans of "Kung Fu Panda" expect a sequel of it more than other groups of fans. The movie combining Asian martial art kung fu and animation character Panda has a story in which Panda grows through kung fu and recognizes the true martial art. It was made targeting Asian markets. The movie released in Korea in May 2011 attracted about 5 million watchers. It emphasizes the reality that the industry called movies is performed by thoroughly calculated strategies considering the global market, and that sports movies also need strategies of globalization. In this sense, sports movies produced in Korea in the future will be made with wider understanding of other cultures and sources and stories based on such understandings.

3.4 Strategic Challenges for the Development of Sports Movies

In contrast, those in the movie industry say that the matters which need to be careful or avoided in the process of making movies are water, fire, child, animal, and sports. To produce a movie with the theme of sports involves various difficulties compared with other themes. For example, if the movie is event-centered one, some of the problems are how to revive the emotion from the event which happened in the past, and necessity to shoot too many times to get a single good shot. Considering such problems, this paper wants to suggest strategic challenges for the development of sports movies.

3.4.1 In Deciding on Targeted Customers, Escape from Stereotypical Perspectives and, Then Make Stories They May Favor

It is assumed that sports movies are for everybody to watch. But, such an assumption means that such movies are so general that they may not be very attractive. Therefore, it is important to decide on targeted customers. For instance, sports movies are generally considered as belonging to the genre for male customers. But, in reality, females like such movies more than males, taking up 55% of customers, and advance purchase rate of women is 64%⁸.

It proves that, depending on how the story is composed, sports movies with high masculinity can be favored more by females than by males. The movie industry is a cultural industry. In the case of culture, it is difficult to control expanded production. Rather than being afraid of the possibility of selecting specific group of customers and failing to attract it, it is more rational to expect expanding phenomenon through the targeted group of customers.

3.4.2 *It is Necessary to Escape from the Structure of Uniform Events and Characters*

It is necessary to go beyond general patterns (structures) of movies. Especially, hero-centered story-telling should be avoided, and, to go beyond monotonous specific event- and person-centered structure toward wider scale of events- and various persons-centered structure. In the planning stage, the first stage in movie production, story structure is very important. Basically, the movie scenarios with the theme of sports are narrow in story scale, and event patterns are stereotypical. Owing to such aspects, movie planners start movie productions with many risk factors¹⁰.

3.4.3 *It is Necessary to Consider Whether the Impression the Real Story Creates Can Be Revived by Movie*

If movie planners focus on either one of events and persons in sports history, the story part, the most important part of a movie, can be composed as a simple stream, and lose attractiveness as a movie. And, in the case of person-centered movie, there is a difficulty to recreate a historic character by the movie, which can generate less impression than the real story does¹¹. Consequently, sports should play only a role of medium in the stream of the movie, and sports should be put as part of the whole story.

3.4.4 *Raise Social Attention on New Areas*

It is necessary to expand the scope of our perception. The mass can perceive sports movies with monotonous concept with 'specific kind of sports'. Consequently, it is necessary to compose movie stories freshly and without patterns. It is one way of doing that to select sources from an area relatively unfamiliar to the people. For example, the kinds of sports commercially successful sports movies have selected like ski jump ("National Representative"), handball

("The Best Moments in Our Lives"), and weight-lifting ("Life Kingkong") are not popular sports. In addition, they can choose characters that are socially discriminated or isolated. For example, "marathon", and "Barefoot Gibongi" served to help people to have new perspective on handicapped people, and pay more attention to them. It is the most important value and role among various values and roles of sports. Sports need to go beyond the simple role of generating empathy of impression and human victory, and play the role of revealing the areas people ignore to the view of us.

4. Conclusion

What makes the width of human emotion narrower and wider to the greatest extent in the shortest period of time seem to be music, art, and sports. Movies using sports as the theme provide us much empathy and many lessons. Through such movies, we can look back on our lives and gain the energy of life, which must be the biggest value of sports movies.

This paper has dealt with current situation, types, characteristics, and future prospects and strategic challenges of sports movies. For sports movies to develop further, it is necessary for producers of those movies to escape from stereotypical story structures, adopt new technologies, and, at the same time, pay attention to globalization. Adopting such changes and innovations, Korean sports movies will be commercially successful not only in the Korean market, but in foreign movie markets.

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