

# SIR NORMAN CHESTER CENTRE FOR FOOTBALL RESEARCH

## FACT SHEET NO. 16

### The Bosman Ruling, Football Transfers and Foreign Footballers

#### 1. Introduction: Foreign footballers and English football

1.1 This fact sheet considers the impact of foreign footballers on the English game as well as the correlation between 'big business', 'politics' and 'sport'. To what extent has the European game changed during the late twentieth century – and how is it changing now? We look specifically here at the issues and the results of the now infamous 'Bosman ruling' on the transfer of footballers in Europe and consider the implications of the new transfer culture in the global game.

#### 2. The football world before Bosman

2.1 Prior to the Bosman case, which changed the nature of player transfers in Europe, football clubs had considerable employment control over their players. Players were registered with clubs, and it was this registration which was transferred between clubs when a transfer was made. A fee would usually be demanded for the movement of players. It is this provision of a transfer payment, and also the inability of players to move freely between employers as and when they liked which, largely, marked them out as different from many other sorts of employees.

2.2 Until 1963 players in England had to put in a transfer request if they wanted to move clubs. If the club refused to allow a player to move he would be tied to the club as long as his wages were maintained at least at the level of his previous contract. This 'retain and transfer' system meant clubs could pretty much control the employment lives of players. The idea of this system was to limit player mobility and wages and thus prevent all the top football players simply finishing up at the richest clubs. In the era of the maximum wage, this meant that the top players – England's Tom Finney at Preston North End, for example – spent their whole careers at their 'home' clubs that often experienced little success.

2.3 In 1960 an English player, George Eastham, challenged the power of clubs. He was transferred from Ards in Northern Ireland to Newcastle United in 1956 and the player expressed an interest in moving on from the North East in December 1959. The club fought his desire to leave, and simply 'retained' him despite his repeated requests for transfer. Eastham eventually left the game after appealing to the Football League management committee over his position. Newcastle United effectively *owned* him; so Eastham was unable to play anywhere else. One year later in 1960 Newcastle United and Arsenal finally

agreed a transfer move for Eastham, but the player took his case to the High Court in order to test the retain and transfer system. There, Judge Wilberforce found there were five areas to be considered in the case:

### The High Court and the Eastham Case

- Are the rules of the Association and the regulations for the league in restraint of trade?
- If so, are the restraints no more than such as are reasonably necessary for the protection of the Association or of the League or of its members?
- Has the court any jurisdiction that the retention and transfer system is invalid against all or any of the defendants?
- If so, should the court exercise that jurisdiction?
- Has the plaintiff any right to damages? (Eastham 1963: 146)

2.4 The High Court found that the retain and transfer system was ‘an unreasonable restraint of trade’. If clubs did not re-hire their player on a further contract players, it decided, should be able to leave for free. However, football clubs could still exercise the option to re-hire players at the end of their contract. This ‘freedom’ was still very limited.

2.5 In 1977/1978 ‘freedom of contract’ finally arrived. At the end of their contracts, players could now exercise their option to leave their club. If the club offered the player new terms that were at least as attractive as the old ones, then the selling club was still entitled to a transfer fee. If a fee could not be decided between the clubs, a tribunal would then decide the appropriate figure. When under contract in this new arrangement, players or their agents were explicitly *not* allowed to initiate transfer moves; it was up to the potential buyer to approach the club directly where this player was based. This system lasted until the ground-breaking Jean-Marc Bosman case in 1995.

### 3. A Changing World: Bosman and After

3.1 In 1990, Jean-Marc Bosman was an unremarkable footballer playing for the Belgian first division side FC Liege. But this would soon change. At the end of the 1990 season Bosman wanted to move to French side Dunkirk. FC Liege tried to stop the move from taking place by using the cross-border transfer ruling, which meant the clubs had to agree a fee before a player was allowed to transfer. FC Liege tried to make the move impossible by demanding a very high transfer fee for Bosman’s services. Bosman protested against this decision and he filed suit against FC Liege, the Belgian football authorities, and the European football authorities, arguing that the football regulations on payment of transfer fees stopped EU citizens from having the human right of freedom of movement in employment.

3.2 In 1995 the European Court of Justice ruled in favour of Jean-Marc Bosman, deciding that the existing football transfer rules were in breach of the European Union law on the free movement of workers between member states. As a result of this: “the European Union demanded that regulations concerning players’ transfers and limitations on foreign players be amended almost immediately”. (www.fifa.com)

3.3 The European Union ruling eventually led to the free movement of footballers between clubs within and between EU countries, with no fee payable when players’ contracts have expired. The new ruling has also meant that players are now allowed to discuss and negotiate their own deals with a new employer when their previous contract has expired. This means, of

course, that top players are in a very powerful position with their own clubs – and with potential buyers – when their contracts are nearing an end.

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#### 4. Who benefits from the Bosman ruling?

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4.1.0 Football clubs can benefit from the Bosman ruling. In the summer of 1999, for example, Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier was said to be targeting seven new signings for the start of the new season, of which at least three or four were expected to be ‘free’ transfers. This was seen as at least some compensation for the loss of local player, Steve McManaman, on the Bosman ruling. But top players benefit most. Because McManaman could be bought for no fee, he was able to negotiate his own package with his new club Real Madrid. This meant a wage rise from £12,000 with Liverpool to a reported £60,000 with Real. So Campbell moved in 2001 from Spurs to Arsenal, smashing the Highbury wage structure, again because no transfer fee was payable. Top players undoubtedly now have a great deal of power and benefit greatly from this new ruling. Those players playing at the highest levels can receive massive signing-on fees and much higher wages because of the absence of transfer fees.

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4.2.0 Poorer clubs can also benefit by recruiting quality players on free transfers – or else by signing promising younger players on longer contracts. In 1995 football agent Eric Hall claimed that: “Clubs will try to sign 17 or 18-year-olds on a seven or eight-year contract. If these players are any good they will be sold at a nice profit. The smaller clubs will benefit”. In 1997 Watford’s Youth Development Officer Jimmy Gilligan believed that the outlook for promising young footballers was still a positive one. Young players are now being offered four, five, or even six-year contracts when they are just 16 or 17-years-old “If you’re good enough, someone will still want you. Those kids can still go to a big club”. (quoted in *The Guardian*, February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1997).

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4.3.0 A new agreement now allows for compensation fees to be paid for younger players for the training and investment put into them by clubs. Also, players can now move before their current contract ends – but they do have to spend a period between clubs before they can sign a contract with another club.

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#### 5. Who suffers because of the Bosman ruling?

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5.1.0 The game in the widest sense could be said to suffer because of the new Bosman freedom of movement for players. This is because transfer fees used to be paid directly to the clubs. This money could be reinvested in playing talent – or else invested in stadium development, or a youth system, and so on. The argument here was that money invested by clubs in developing players could at least remain in the game. It would circulate between clubs, and thus help in maintaining the sport’s infrastructure. The new arrangements mean that the top players and their advisors now pocketed much of what was previously transfer money. So, a very large proportion of the new TV income in football actually ended up in players’ salaries rather than as club profits – or money to plough back into the football business.

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5.2.0 Smaller clubs within the Football League, it was argued, would undoubtedly suffer most. Although signing players on long contracts would mean they would still get a transfer or compensation fee if sold within the player’s contracted period, many top English clubs are now looking elsewhere for footballers, especially to continental Europe. The effects of bosman are also blamed for rising wages in the Football League, especially among clubs relegated from the FA Premier League.

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5.30 The chances available to some young English players may be more limited now because the Bosman ruling and the influx of foreign footballers may mean fewer opportunities for local youngsters to make the grade. Young footballers may believe that if they start at the bottom they will be able to work their way to the top, but top managers also argue that too many young footballers within the lower divisions are over-priced; the introduction of a cheaper, proven foreign footballer is often more attractive for the FA Premier League clubs. Players towards the end of their careers can also benefit from the Bosman ruling – but it may also mean them ‘sitting out’ contracts with little chance of first team football.

**6 Possible solutions**

6.10 Lower-division football clubs need more financial support following the loss of some transfer fees and TV income. As a result, two Queens Park Rangers fans set up a company to help their own club buy footballers in the future. Brothers Alex and Matt Winton come from a family of QPR supporters and own the Ghost fashion label. They raised £250,000 to sign Charlton Athletic defender Daniel Shittu in January of 2002. They also agreed with the club to pay a year’s accommodation and wages for their new forward Doudou. They have recently set up a company entitled ‘Weareqpr.plc’ claimed at getting supporters to raise money for future signings. Alex Winton argues that within the next 100 years approximately 50% of lower football league clubs will go the same way due to changes in the transfer system such as the Bosman ruling. (*The Observer*, Jan 13<sup>th</sup>, 2002)

6.20 In 2000 Sepp Blatter, president of FIFA, and UEFA chief executive Gerhard Aigner put forward the view to the European Union that football was a ‘special case’ and should not have to abide by European employment law. US sports are exempt from similar legislation across the Atlantic. Football clubs are more than just businesses after all – they need to survive for their necessary ‘community’ input. These football men also proposed that football clubs should be forced to field at least six ‘home grown’ footballers in each match, therefore limiting the number of foreign imports. The Bosman ruling changed football to the extent that limits on EU foreign players no longer existed in the European game.

6.30 Although many ‘big’ English clubs are against this move – after all, they have spent millions on foreign talent – Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson backed the proposals in April 2000, even though Manchester United have their fair share of imports, including the £28 million Argentinean Seba Veron. Emphasising that football is a ‘special case’ it is argued would mean that football should move back to pre-Bosman times when clubs could field three overseas players and two others who were considered to be ‘nationalised’.

**7 Foreign Players: a global view**

**Figure 1: Foreign Footballers in European Premier Divisions (1999)**

Spain	200
Germany	185
Italy	163
Netherlands	161
England	116 (players from outside Britain)
France	80

**Figure 2: Approximate percentage of Foreign Players in FA Premier League starting line-ups:**

1992/93	22%	1993/94	26%	1994/95	27%
1995/96	29%	1996/97	32%	1997/98	43%
1998/99	44%	1999/00	54% (forecast)		

**Figure 3: Premiership Foreign Players season 1998/99:**

Arsenal 16	Aston Villa 3	Blackburn 8	Charlton 4	Chelsea 19
Coventry 12	Derby 12	Everton 5	Leeds Utd. 11	Leicester City 4
Liverpool 13	Man Utd 11	M' brough 7	Newcastle 16	Nottm Forest 10
Sheff Wed 12	S'hampton 5	Tottenham 11	West Ham 9	Wimbledon 3

7.10 Since 1999 the number of foreign players registered in the FA Premier League has continued to climb. The figures above show that foreign players (especially from South America) are a routine feature in Spain, but they are also prominent in Italy, Germany and Holland. However, the figures quoted here for England would almost double over the next three years. Until 2002 transfer monies spent abroad by English clubs spiralled. But for the 2002/3 season fears about diminishing TV income have rather dampened the home and international transfer market. The figures above also show that some clubs still favour a 'British' approach to player recruitment, though by 2002 all FA Premier League teams hosted foreign players

7.20 History was made on Boxing Day 1999 when Chelsea became the first English side to field an 'all-foreign' starting eleven. Chelsea visited Southampton and came away with a 2-1 victory. Later in that season Chelsea entertained Italian side Lazio in the Champions League. When the teams lined up for the pre-match photographs it was clearly seen that not a single English player was present. *The Independent* newspaper suggested that this was a 'picture that humiliates the English Game', though few fans seemed to complain about the signing of quality foreign stars in what is becoming an increasingly global game. Evidence from the FA Premier League National Fan Survey in 2001, however, suggested that 60% of fans thought there was now 'too many' foreign players in the English game.

7.30 Fans were also beginning to ask how long it would be before the starting line-ups in the FA Youth Cup finals are made up of entirely foreign players. FA Premier League clubs are beginning to recruit foreign talent to play in their under-19 sides. It is argued that this could have severe detrimental effects upon the national team. In the 2000 FA Youth Cup final Nottingham Forest played Arsenal. The Arsenal team emerged victorious but the team's stars were three non-British players: an Italian centre-half, a German full back, and a French striker.

7.40 FA Technical Director Howard Wilkinson has attracted some blame for his role in deciding that English clubs cannot recruit to their Academies English 13-year-olds who live more than 90 minutes travel time from the club's base. This had led more clubs to look abroad, it is alleged, for younger players with a view to relocating them and their families here in England. These days even smaller clubs are scouring the globe for young talent: Stockport County hosts young Chinese players for training camps while young players from Cyprus, Malaysia and other bases are regularly invited to England to be assessed. As one newspaper put it recently: "The ever-increasing cost of mature professional footballers means our clubs are likely to continue scouring Europe for talented youngsters."

## 8 The 'new' Bosman case or Bosmanovic: the new transfer rules

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8.1 With similar overtones to the Bosman case in 1995, a new transfer case was settled in 2001 between a Hungarian player, Tibor Balog, FIFA, UEFA and the European Commission. At the end of Balog's contract with RSC Charleroi, the Belgian club prevented him from leaving for AS Nancy in France, as they were demanding an 'excessive' transfer fee. As a non-European national the Bosman ruling didn't apply in this case. The player took the above club to the Belgium courts, which in turn ruled in his favour – that he should be allowed to move clubs for free. Balog ended up at the Belgian club Mons. The Charleroi court referred the case to the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg. After consideration of the facts the Advocate General was to make a decision in March 2001, as it happened there was an amicable solution and FIFA settled out of court. In response to this, Balog's lawyer commented: 'From Bosman to Balog, a decade has passed during which freedom has become the principle... FIFA again showed its commitment to take the interests of all parties involved in the transfer issue to account.'

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8.2 This decision must be considered in the wider context. What is the relationship between FIFA/UEFA and the European Commission? Balog reached an agreement with FIFA with the preamble that: 'all players who have reached the end of their contracts are free to move internationally throughout the world subject to the stipulated provisions concerning training compensation' (SLB May/June 2001). The new rules, which came into effect the following August, are as follows:

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**The newly approved FIFA rules**

- International transfers of players under 18 are restricted to special circumstances
- Clubs will be able to receive compensation for players aged under 23, who move during the currency for at the end of their contracts
- This will no longer be a negotiated transfer fee, it will be calculated instead to specific criteria
- Contracts will be for a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 5 years
- There will be one transfer period per season, with a limited mid-season window. Only one transfer per player per season
- When a contract is signed up to the player's 28<sup>th</sup> birthday, a unilateral breach in the first three years will give rise to compensation and the application of sports sanctions restricting a player's ability to play immediately for his new club
- When a player is signed after his 28<sup>th</sup> birthday, the above applies but only for the first two years of the contract
- A new arbitration system was established to provide an effective and swift alternative to civil litigation

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8.3 So how does this new arrangement actually affect the game? Well there is no effect on contracts already in force. Will changing the transfer rules for the future pre-empt legal challenges? It is still open for a player to argue that a system that violates his right to break his contract is also in violation to his right to freedom of movement, and against European law. There is also the uncertainty as to whether the Bosman ruling applies *within* member states; the changes cannot override national law.

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8.4 In line with the system that exists in the FA Premier League and the Nationwide League, players under 23 can move if a compensation fee is agreed between the two clubs. There is now a formulae for calculating this fee. The fee is dependent on his professional development and is seen as compensation for training. FIFA will agree a ceiling for this new 'training' fee, and this will apply to all countries in the EU and EEA. It is hoped that this will reduce the size

of transfer fees; those players who are popular will still be able to negotiate their own personal terms and conditions. After the 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday, a player acquires some freedom to move to another club within the scope of his contract, which cannot be for more than 5 years. A player under 28 must not break his contract, however, without paying compensation to his current club, or having compensation paid by the new club. What is important is that these new rules make explicit reference to the requirements of national law, which prevents litigation, by calculating damages based on the fact that the contract had been completed.

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8.5□ There is also a new category of litigation here, called 'Sporting Just Cause.' This is for when a contract is broken at the end of the season perhaps because of a player's age, or the fact that he has not been allowed sufficient first team games by his club. FIFA's Dispute Resolution Chamber will solve all conflicts in this area. Under the usual English law of Contract, a player is only entitled to end a contract when the club has committed a repudiatory breach of it. Failing to be picked for a first team game wouldn't breach that contract. If a player is proven to have broken the rules, he can be prevented from playing for his new club for up to one year. Indeed a club might seek an injunction *in tort* to stop either the players' agent or a club from suggesting a player to break his contract of employment

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8.6□ Time will tell if the operation of these new rules will make the process simpler, fairer or just easier; or whether a new piece of litigation will re-ignite the situation and new rules again will be decided upon. It shouldn't be understated that more flexibility on both sides in contracts is not welcomed by all players. Many players, especially older ones, realise that a long-term injury can leave them very grateful for a contract which guarantees a wage. It must be stated that the contract system for clubs, players and supporters, is on the whole mutually beneficial.

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## 9.□ *The New Foreign Footballers*

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9.1□ For the past eight football seasons the Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research has carried out research on fans from both the FA Premier League and the Football League. One of the sets of questions these annual surveys have covered is for their views on the changing make-up of their team, and in particular the effect on the English game that foreign players have had. The 1995 survey, for example, posed the question: 'What do you think about the recent influx of foreign players into the FA Premier League?' Of the 15,000 fans who were asked this question, almost eight out of ten felt foreign players were good for the English game, with only 10% disagreeing (See Figure 4)

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**Figure 4: What do you think about the recent influx of foreign players into the FA Premier League (Sample of 15,170)**

Good for the English Game	79%
Not good for the English game	10.8%
Undecided	10.2%

Source: FA Premier League National Fans' Survey 1994/5

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9.2□ The data from the fans' survey here corroborates the view that most fans during this period approved of the new international influence, with only one in four wanting a restriction on proven internationals from the top footballing countries. Back in 1995, female fans were slightly less impressed that their male counterparts with foreign stars, although this may be because fewer female fans followed clubs with foreign players. The so-called 'Klinsmann effect', and the following graph showed little doubt in 1995 about the attractions of overseas talent.

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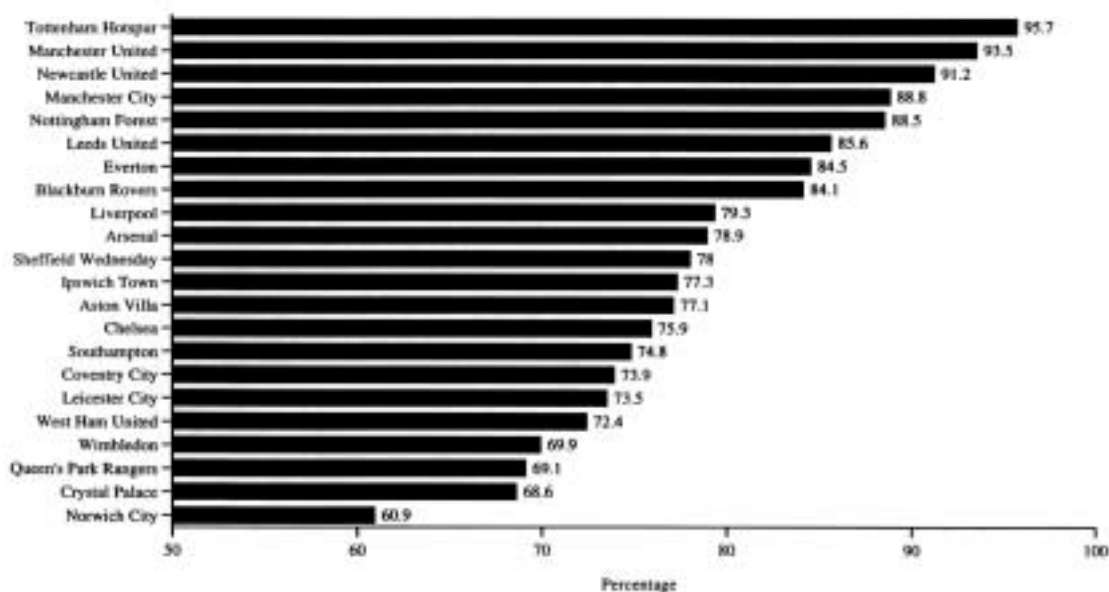


Figure 5: Fans who think the recent influx of foreign players in the FA Premier League has been good for the game (%)

Source: FA Premier League Fans' Survey 1994/5.

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9.3□

Fans were also generally agreed, however, on the need to offer at least some protection for 'home' talent against the intrusion of more minor foreign players playing here. The following graph shows the fans from clubs such as Ipswich Town and Aston Villa were showing early signs of disappointment in the performance of their own foreign imports

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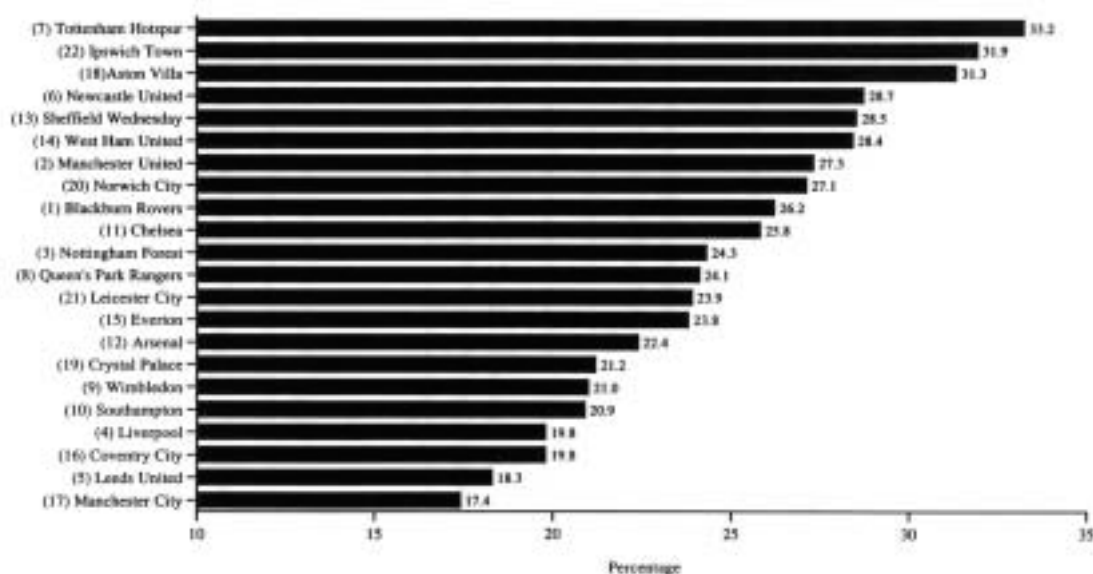


Figure 6: Fans who think foreign players could be restricted to proven internationals from top footballing nations (%) (Bracketed numbers denote final league placing).

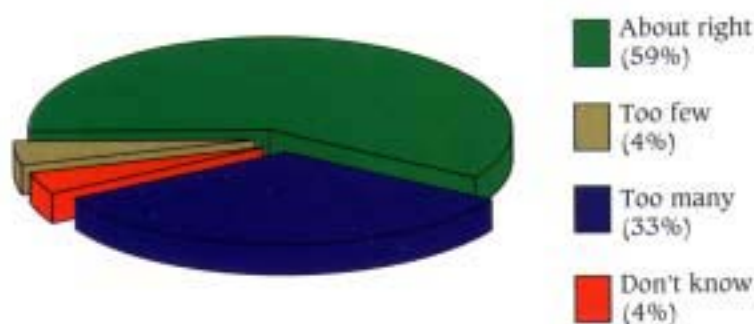
Source: FA Premier League Fans' Survey 1994/5.

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In 1997 the *National Fans' Survey* turned its attention again on this issue of foreign players in the top English clubs. In this new post-Bosman era, the issue has become ever more contentious. Most people agree that these new 'stars' have significantly raised the quality of the English game, but as in 1994/5 the PFA (Professional Footballers Association) were still concerned that foreign players are closing down the traditional routes that home raised talent has to top flight football, whilst not significantly adding to the overall quality of the British game. The question was posed to a sample of around 14,000 FA Premier League fans.

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**Total Sample by What Do You Think About the Number of Foreign Players in the FA Premier League?**

**Figure 7: Source: FA Premier League Fans' Survey 1997.**

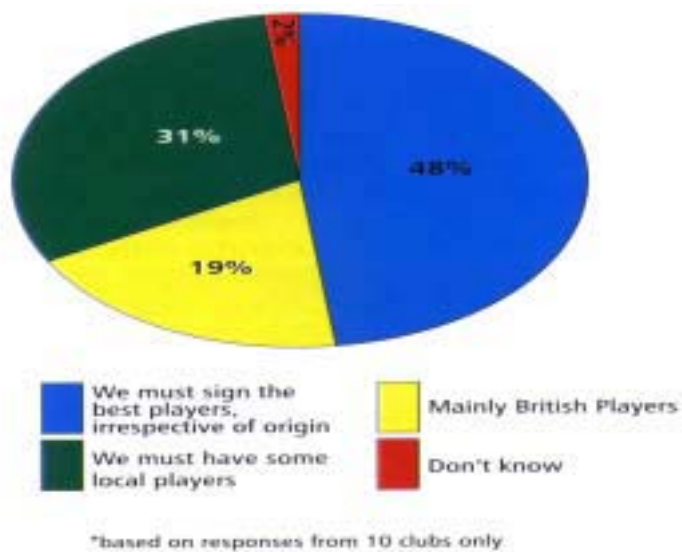
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9.5 □ A sizeable minority of fans (33%) were concerned about the number of foreigners currently playing in the Premiership. Typically, on inspection, these were mainly fans from the smaller clubs, those of which had fewer foreign players on their staff. Nevertheless, almost 80 out of 100 respondents felt that the effect on the game of foreign players was a positive one, and a little over 70% of all supporters felt that local British talent could still flourish. Many of these are likely to have agreed that the new direction offered by some foreign imports – in terms of lifestyle, technique, behaviour and diet – might benefit younger English players in the long term.

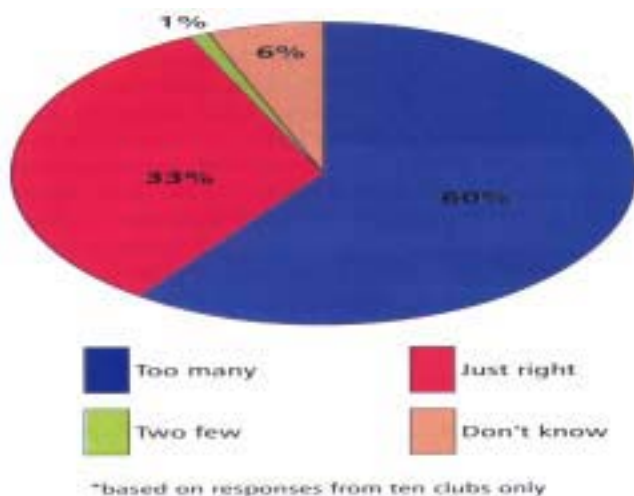
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9.6 □ In 2001 a similar set of questions were asked, and again due to questionnaire constraints only about half the sample (some 15,000 fans) were asked their views on foreign players playing in the FA Premier League. The questions this time were linked into the wider issue of football quality. In 2001 most fans believed that clubs should draw on a variety of home-grown talent and foreign imports – the best of both worlds. The following pie chart shows the responses to a question about club recruitment policy: from being completely open in recruitment terms to stressing the importance of maintaining strong local roots. Interestingly, in 2001 fewer than half the respondents opted for the 'rootless' approach. 30 out of 100 fans opted for at least some local players. Even at the larger London clubs, where an 'open' policy is more popular, about 40% of these fans seemed to want a 'protected' British or English core to their club.



**Figure 8: What type of players should we recruit to this club?**  
 Source: FA Premier League Fans' Survey 2001.

9.7 As mentioned earlier, in 1997 33% of FA Premier League fan respondents thought that there were 'too many' foreigners playing in England; the following chart shows this view had mushroomed in 2001 to cover 60% of respondents.



**Figure 9: What do you think about the number of foreign players in England?**  
 Source: FA Premier League Fans' Survey 2001.

9.8 This represents a substantial opinion change in the past six years on the foreign 'invasion' within the FA Premier League. This view on the negativities of foreign imports was seen at its most extreme at Newcastle United (76%) and was least strongly felt at Liverpool (40%), where new foreign imports – and an English core – have been connected with recent successes. There is no demographic or fan grouping that is *not* currently concerned about the numbers of foreign players now playing in the Premiership.

## 10. Player Trading at a National and European Level

10.10 Despite the uncertainty of the future of the transfer system, the 'superstar' trading in the sport continues unabated. Fan pressure at all times often seems to be the reason for this. The TV-driven ability of top FA Premier League clubs to pay more and more for top players in the European marketplace has meant that this 'bullish market' has remained largely unchecked. The emphasis of the free market economy means the transfer market, too, is driven from the top. The effects of the 2002 World Cup is a good example of how easy it is to massively inflate the value of some players – though in the new, more careful, times, even as Manchester United forked out £30 million for Rio Ferdinand, Arsenal were still able to purchase a Brazilian World Cup winner Gilberto Silva for just £4 million. The higher cost of 'home-grown' players is one reason given for the influx of foreign players into the English market.

10.20 Spending on transfers by English clubs has increased by more than 50% over the last five years and much of this can be attributed to non-English transfers. Spending within the English leagues is at its lowest in five years. This 'total spend' figure is now about 31.5% of the total income of clubs and, realistically, rather more than clubs can afford. By way of comparison, for every pound spent by a top English football club in 2000/01, 1p went on transfers and 59p went on wages (Deloitte and Touche 2001)

10.30 Out of the £158m spent on transfers in 1999/2000 within the English League, the Premier League saw the smallest change, falling just slightly. Its net outflow with other English clubs was £27.2m. Division One clubs saw a 25% increase in receipts, up to £12.6m. This was useful as the transfer spending at this level increased by £20.8m, narrowing their 'balance of payments' surplus to £17.1m (from £25.8m in 1998/99). Lower down, in Division Two, a small deficit of £0.7m became a surplus of £8.6m in 1999/2000. In Division Three transfer income nearly halved at £2.7m, but with the reduction of transfer spending, the annual surplus in the football basement was £1.5m. (Deloitte and Touche, 2001)

10.40 The key argument favoured for a 'substantial' transfer system, as put forward by the governing bodies of the game, is that it redistributes the wealth within football, ensuring the survival of many smaller clubs, and allowing them to supply the next generation of talent. The past five years has seen £96m pumped down the English divisions. Last season the Football League received £27.2m from this source, representing 24% of the £112m of operating losses run up by all the Football League clubs together. This money, along with grants from the FA Premier League and Sport England, keeps the Football League club Academies and schools of excellence going.

10.50 English clubs spent £182m on non-English players in 1999/2000, a continuation of the trend for more expenditure to go to non-English clubs. Deloitte and Touche (2001) point to a number of factors contributing to this:

- The European pool of players is considerably larger than the English one.
- With the blossoming of English club football at the moment, the clubs are able to pick the players that they want.
- Lower taxes here allow clubs to pay the player the same 'net' wages than say in France.
- The influx of foreign coaches using their knowledge of the continental market.

Last season saw, for the first time, more money spent by top English clubs on the non-English market for players. A sign for the future? The biggest increase in transfer spending recently

has actually been among larger Football League clubs, perhaps trying to 'buy' their way up the divisions and into the FA Premier League.

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10.60 In the 1999/2000 season there were 215 foreign national playing in England's leagues, 100% more than four years earlier. This averages out at around 6/7 per FA Premier League Club, and just over one per Football League Club. This flow rate into the English game is now slowing, indicating that the FA Premier League Clubs are anxious about future income and perhaps have reached 'optimum' position on foreign talent; many clubs want to keep a core of English players to cope with English conditions. This situation is yet to be reached in the Football League, where foreign imports were up by 25% in 1999/2000. One reason for this was their increasing financial power; often greater than many top clubs in Central or Eastern Europe. However, the collapse of ITV Digital and the rise in the number of high profile 'problem finance' cases – Leicester City, Bradford City, Sheffield Wednesday, Nottingham Forest – means that spending in this way has declined dramatically recently

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10.70 The top six biggest spenders in the FA Premier League in 1999/2000 will make unsurprising reading to many, from highest to lowest: Liverpool (£58.5m), Newcastle United (£58.2m), Manchester United (£44.6m), Tottenham Hotspur (£44.4m), Leeds United (£43.8m) and Chelsea (£43.8m). Only Manchester United had a large surplus (£84.9m), reflecting its well-organised business. Most of the other clubs have a cumulative deficit; indeed only Arsenal, Aston Villa and Manchester United do not.

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10.80 In the Football League the top five spender make no surprising reading either: Fulham (£17m), Nottingham Forest (£12.2m), Manchester City (£9.9m), Blackburn Rovers (£8.2m), Birmingham City (£8m). Eight of the top ten Football League spenders made operating losses, which, added to the transfer spending add up to some huge overall deficits. Fulham had the largest deficit, at £42.6m. It was hoped that by gambling with these huge deficits, caused in the main by over-large wage bills, they will eventually be offset by promotion into the FA Premier League. By 2002, however, Fulham's debts had actually risen. It is evident that as fans demand low or no ticket price increases, money on this scale can probably only be spent by the 'global' clubs and by those supported by 'benefactors', as has been seen recently at Middlesbrough, Fulham and Blackburn Rovers

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10.90 When Blackburn Rovers won the FA Premier League back in 1995, their success was put down to 'you only get what you pay for'. According to the calculations made by Deloitte and Touche, comparing on-field success to money spent off-pitch, it is clear that transfer spending has less of an effect on success than wage spending. Football is not an exact science: good management and team spirit are keys to success, too. The clubs that scored the most points per pound in 1999/2000 were Ipswich Town, Southampton, and Tranmere Rovers. Conversely Newcastle United and Liverpool scored the least. However these clubs are fighting for very big stakes, such as the rewards of Champions League football.

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## 11 Conclusion

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11.10 What lies in future for this important area of the game? The massive impact that the Bosman ruling has had on the sport and on player loyalty, cannot be underestimated. The richest clubs continue to buy the best players, of course, but now the scope for their spending is truly global. In 2002, high profile FA Premier League signings came from Senegal, Nigeria, China, Japan and Turkey. Players are more free to move from club to club – and across national boundaries – than at any other time in the game's history. But footballers have also always moved around Europe (see Lanfranchi and Taylor, 2001). Top continental players seem especially keen to move to England partly because of the strong reputation abroad of the Premiership, but also because the wages here still compete well with those in top leagues abroad. It is a good time to be a top football player in Europe. Problems come, however,

when wages are high and opportunities are low. Jari Litmanen at Liverpool has played little first team football at Anfield but seems to hate to move because he cannot better his wages elsewhere. Problems come, too, when players and agents angle and agitate for moves. Ronaldo's determination to leave Inter in 2002 rankles with those fans who saw the Brazilian's wages paid for almost two years while he fought injury in Milan. Top players are too often seen as mercenaries seeking the biggest payday. The idea of club loyalty by players, or even a determination, above all else, to actually *play* rather than sit in the stands seems consigned to history.

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- 11.20 The new foreign stars bring a great addition of style, mystery and glamour to FA Premier League. They have increased its international profile, its global TV audience, and its appeal to spectators in this country. These new arrivals have also been influential in making some younger British players rethink their approach to football – and to life. FA Premier League crowds have continued to rise as foreign talent arrives at these stores. Conversely, many in the game, including some fans, now feel that this new talent is actually sapping the strength from the English game. The recent history of the England national teams is still quite poor, raising about the limited chances offered to home-grown talent. 'What is this effect on the national team?' asks Williams asks. 'The threat posed by the growth in European club competitions to the English game is surely another sign of the times' (Williams 1999: 67). Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson's, view is that the big domestic clubs will have eventually have two first team squads: one for domestic, and one for European, competitions (quoted in Williams 1999). This already seems to be the case at some of the top English clubs.

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- 11.30 Finally, perhaps the greater mobility of foreign football talent will also make us rethink our attachments and views of national teams. The growing international basis of top club sides has led some commentators to question the validity of national team football at all. After all, Juventus could now beat Italy and Arsenal could probably do the same to England. But increasing player mobility may actually have *strengthened* national team attachments. Fans of French football, for example, now have to wait to see their stars assembled in the French national team: most top French players play outside France these days. Supporters of Senegal are arguably likely to identify *more* strongly with their down stars in the national team now more are playing at the highest European level. Meanwhile, in England, club fans have more than just the England team to cheer: they can also follow their club favourites plying for countries around the globe. A lessening of exclusive nationalist fervour might actually be a rather good thing in the new 'global' age of football.

**Further Reading and Bibliography**

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**Fact sheet compiled by James Lowrey, Sam Neatrou and John Williams**

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