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Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracoval samostatně s použitím uvedené literatury a zdrojů informací.

V Plzni dne.....

.....
Matěj Živčák

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ABSTRACT

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The thesis deals with football in England and aims to discover more about people who follow the game, and their motivation and opinions on certain issues that are connected to football in England, with specific reference to the English Premier League. The thesis is divided in five chapters. The first three chapters introduce to the theory and background that is connected to football. The last two chapters deal with the method and results of the research, some of which were surprising while others confirmed certain assumptions based on the background readings or author's own opinion.

Keywords: club, fan, football, identity, player, Premier League

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AV = Aston Villa FC

EPL = English Premier League

FA = Football Association

MU = Manchester United FC

POTS = Player Of The Season

Rx = Respondent number x

STH = Southampton FC

TH = Tottenham Hotspur FC

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INTRODUCTION

Football is arguably the most popular sport in England and has a great impact on English people on many levels, including helping them connect with others who share the same passion for the same team or unite in national pride when the national team achieves success. For many people, allegiance to a football club could be compared to a religion: they follow their club every week, “worship” the players and managers, compose songs about them and are willing to travel abroad to see them play live if the club is playing in a European competition. The English Premier League is considered to be the best football league in the world and the majority of footballers have the dream and goal of playing in this competition. The league attracts enormous media attention which enables the clubs and players competing in it to have a global impact, as well as gain followers from all over the world.

The first chapter of the thesis introduces the issue of the relationship between football and identity. It proposes a basic theory behind identity and its construction, the impact that football has on a person’s identity, some of the problems related to football’s role in society and how football and place are related.

The second chapter focuses on the English Premier League, providing a brief history of English football and how one of the best sports leagues in the world was established. This is followed by a basic overview of the relationship between the media and the Premier League’s financing.

The third chapter introduces the issue of professional football players in the Premier League. Here the focus is on the way the players may be viewed by the public, the issue of foreigners in the league, as well as the status of the players and their impact on people.

The fourth and fifth chapter form the practical section of the work. The fourth chapter focuses on the method used during the research, while the fifth chapter presents the results of the research, and offers additional information linked to the main points of the first three chapters.

1 FOOTBALL AND IDENTITY

Since the beginnings of football its link to society has always been a powerful instrument to express local identity in both success and failure (Russell, 1997). Gibbons (2011) argues it would be naïve to state that every English person would connect their identity with football but it would be ambitious to deny that football has been considered to be England's national sport for a very long period of time.

1.1 IDENTITY AND ITS CONSTRUCTION

1.1.1 IDENTITY

According to Gibbons (2014, p. 19) "people make up webs of interdependence or figurations of many kinds, characterised by power balances of many sorts." And people form dynamic relationships with other people and groups: in football, for example, the relationship between teams and their fans may change based on several factors such as possession of the ball, positions of players on the field, score, and so on. Today these webs have extended their reach so that millions of people now have some kind of mutual relationship, as is evident in the team-supporter relationship mentioned above.

Identity itself helps people to step out of anonymity into an individualised world, where they seek answers to such questions as Who am I? Who is like me? Where do I belong? Overall, everyone in search of identity is looking for a community and wants to be recognised and belong somewhere. In sport this shifts into an uncritical acceptance of the presumption that social groups have a tendency to create divisions, separation and fragmentation which can cause some problems because in sport different groups proclaim their identities (Jarvie, 2006).

1.1.2 CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

Jarvie (2006) suggests identity is created on the basis of the need of an individual to be recognised by another individual or a group. Human recognition is very important because it helps a person to establish themselves; however, it can also lead to a misrecognition that may cause a misinterpretation of self and a false sense of identity, which in turn could have a negative impact of the creation of a healthy cultural identity itself. For this reason, some people within groups that have a negative image might try to 'repair' that group by acting in a way that challenges the incorrect pictures; this sometimes results in group members rejecting the old image and creating their own in the form of a new self-representation that

can be respected and enjoy positive recognition in society. Sport overall can provide a basis for creating identities which are reflected or ingrained within national identities and are accompanied by traditions (Jarvie, 2006).

1.2 FOOTBALL AND ITS MEANINGS

It is fascinating how football teams and their matches can be a major reason for people to show and celebrate their identities whether local or national. As noted in Brown (1998), the performance of a team in such a simple event as a football match can assume huge significance and symbolism for those following it.

Jarvie (2008, p. 115) suggests “the symbolism of sport has also helped to promote national identity and sentiment at major sporting events.” Various sporting successes help create a closer relationship between a place and a sport. The idea of sport and success in sport being able to supply an idea of identity and “at times help to transcend internal strife and social deference” has been a topic of considerable discussion and commentary over the last decade or more (Jarvie, 2008).

Most of the early work of sports historians tended to focus on issues of sport in the context of social relations and class identity. It is complicated and problematic to understand exactly what identity is and how various identity categories are established but it is a concept no historian can ignore: “Historians of football have been most comfortable in dealing with ‘meaning’ when articulating it via the notion of ‘identity’” (Taylor, 2008, p. 7). Football teams may be regarded as representatives of social groups and communities where the similarities and differences are based on competing with opposing teams and their fans (Taylor, 2008).

Taylor (2008) notes how scholars argue that since the game has been dominated by males, football has traditionally been instrumental in forming and reinforcing masculine identity and denying feminine input. Walsh (1999) cited in Taylor (2009, p. 8), mentions that in inter-war Liverpool football was important because it offered ‘a temporary escape from the responsibilities of daily life and an opportunity to reinforce the ties of male allegiance’. Another important aspect is identity of any type and the way in which these identities blend together. Some studies have revealed several identities, such as town or region, and how people display their loyalty to others based on a particular situation. It has

also been shown that identities related to a particular place are not necessarily fixed permanently to that place but can be flexible. (Taylor, 2008).

Historians and sociologists have been saying for some time that football is one of the focal points of national feeling and belonging but more recently they have been studying more the difference between local and global identification (Taylor, 2008).

1.2.1 FOOTBALL IN SOCIETY

In the late 19th century, Edwardes (1892) had suggested football was assuming too much of an importance in people's lives, especially among the working class. Similar attacks on the game as a part of popular culture continued into the 20th century, not least because it complicated the organisation of congregations for religious services or meetings of political parties. The problem was not in numbers but because many believed that sport was diverting supporters away from political paths or, in the case of the church, challenging Christian priorities and purpose. One representative of the church is even cited by Russell (1997, p. 72) to the effect that: "A professional footballer was a monstrosity. God did not design a life to be spent in kicking a leather ball about. It was a perversion of God's meaning of life."

Another criticism of football related to spectators. One frequently voiced opinion was that a nation's males should not replace actively playing the game by passively watching it: allegedly, this would not help redeem the national physique since many football spectators had their shoulders hunched and were smoking cigarettes.

Even though football was receiving a great deal of criticism, there was much evidence of it continuing to be an important part of people's lives. Employers allowed many part-time workers to finish work early so they could attend training sessions or play a match. Many factories were closed when a crucial game of the local club, such as a cup tie, was taking place on a weekday so that people could go and support their teams. This could have been seen as an acknowledgement of many people missing work to go and watch a match since their motto was "if your work interferes with football, give it up". Another indication of the game being recognised was in 1914 when King George V attended the FA Cup Final, which was the first time anyone from the British royal family had visited a football fixture (Russell, 1997).

1.2.2 FOOTBALL THE PEOPLE'S GAME

Football is often called 'the people's game' but the word 'people' in this case essentially refers to 'the working class'. This is because historically the majority of people who played or watched the game were from the working class, evidence of which is the fact that the first professional football player came from a working-class background (Taylor, 2008).

1.3 FOOTBALL AND PLACE

Since the beginnings of football, most football clubs have represented a certain place and their names are based on the city or district where they come from. Thanks to bearing the name of their place of origin, the most successful teams can represent their locality at national and international level (Taylor, 2008).

Taylor (2008) argues that, unlike in the USA, where many teams from various sports have changed their locations relatively often, most English teams have not only kept the same name since their inception but also stayed loyal to the location where they were established. American teams are more of a franchise than a club and are owned by a certain person and respective league, while football clubs in England favour keeping their autonomy and staying close to the community they have been a part of for many years. The community of a football club revolves around their stadium and includes people who work there, fans who come to the home games but also every little business located close to the stadium, where people can meet (Linden & Linden, 2017).

Taylor (2008, p. 350) also describes the significance of football "in providing a sense of pride in place". The game is very important in creating a bond to a certain place and people can easily identify with their local clubs because they have a sense of belonging and identity by being "brought together in support of their place" (Taylor, 2008, p. 350). A supporter's sense of identity may be strongly intensified if their club is successful: for instance, Taylor (2008), in an analysis of the reaction when Sunderland beat Leeds United in the 1973 FA Cup final, states that productivity and local pride in the city increased. Another example of the effect football can have on people in a certain city occurred in 2016 when Leicester City became the Premier League champions, and the whole city came out to celebrate, including people who do not normally follow football but were influenced by the general atmosphere in the city (Linden & Linden, 2017).

1.3.1 SIGNIFICANCE OF A STADIUM

In football, the stadium is the main physical feature of a club. Supporters of clubs see the stadium as a symbol where they are part of a community that is loyal to their club (Linden & Linden, 2017). Taylor (2008) argues that in many cases the stadium is a reason for the creation of topophilia, the love of a place. Cronin (1998), citing Bale (1993), notes that “love of the stadium is not rooted in a conscious awareness of any merits of design but possesses instead an authentic sense of place which is, above all, that of being inside and belonging to your place both as an individual and as a member of a community and to know this without reflecting on it.”

Taylor (2008, p. 351) mentions Bale’s (1993) theory of five metaphors to explain the importance of a football stadium. Bale argues that stadium is a ‘sacred place’ which can be compared to a temple or cathedral. There are many customs surrounding match day which in a way tend to be based on worship of the local club. For some people football is basically a religion and thus the stadium can become a holy place. Another metaphor is that the stadium is a ‘scenic place’ which brings joy to those connected to a club. Third, for many people the stadium is ‘a second home’ because they have such an emotional connection to it. Regarding the stadium as a ‘home’ can also help psychologically the players and supporters who are ‘at home’ and thus have the edge over ‘visiting’ teams. This is the most important form of love for the place because many supporters have been visiting the same stadium for many years and have many memories associated with it. Fans can occupy their favourite spot, bring their children or meet their friends there. Taylor (2008, p. 352) suggests that “some fans have been so attached emotionally to the ground that they considered it more significant than the team itself”. In the fourth metaphor, the stadium is a ‘tourist place’ because people visiting the stadium can connect with its history since there is contains numerous relics from the past. Lastly, because of its importance it becomes a place which empowers the sense of local identity and pride (Taylor, 2008).

Although there are many reasons for people to love their stadiums, some of which can also be reasons for others to be somewhat apprehensive about the same place and feel unwelcome there. In football, such negative emotions were mostly associated with crowd trouble, so fans of visiting teams were scared to visit away games at some stadiums because they feared the violence that happened at those locations (Taylor, 2008).

1.3.2 CLUB VERSUS COUNTRY DEBATE

Gibbons (2014) argues that many supporters prefer their club over the country. His research focused on the online community, where many supporters had their avatar set to be a logo of their club rather than the national flag. Another piece of evidence revealed by Gibbons is that some of the fans had the club's full name or abbreviation in their nickname they chose for the forum. In internet forums people can add some more information to their profile and in many cases supporters choose chants, pictures of players or some score against a rival club.

Gibbons (2014) has found that in internet forums many supporters prefer club over country. He cites the example of England's friendly match against Germany where many fans were showing their support mainly to the English players who played for the clubs they supported but when a player from the club's rival appeared to have been injured the same supporters were almost rejoicing over it.

The club over country debate has a strong basis in local versus national identity, anecdotal evidence of which appears in a typical fan's comment on an internet forum that "his club and locality were more important to him than anything to do with England" (Gibbons, 2014, p. 127). Other forum contributions cited by Gibbons are in similar vein. It is important to note these entries were not only from the supporters of the leading Premier League clubs but also from the fans of teams lower in the standings or in lower leagues. One entry explains why the person making it feels stronger about the club than the country: the author states that he watches his club week in week out and thus feels he knows the players better, adding that he is more likely to see a Leeds player to walk around town than he is to see any of the England players and would feel more comfortable approaching his club's player because he seems closer to him (Gibbons, 2014).

Gibbons (2014) concludes there are many reasons for fans to prefer their club over the country, one of them being that many fans do not see sufficient passion from England players when playing for their country, an impression which is only re-enforced by a lack of success and the irregular schedule that the English national team has.

2 THE PREMIER LEAGUE

The English Premier League is one of the most popular and richest leagues in the world alongside with the major American sports leagues such as the National Football League or the National Basketball Association (Elliott, 2019). And as one of the most followed leagues it has had an impact on people on a local, national and global level.

In the EPL, considered by many to be the best football league in the world, twenty clubs compete for the title of English champion and the prize money that goes with it. Clubs at the top of the table are rewarded not only with money or titles but also the opportunity to play prestigious matches in the UEFA Champions League and UEFA cup.

Of course, as noted by Oberstone (2014), at the other end of the table, there is a fight to stay in the league because at the end of each season the three bottom clubs are relegated to a lower league known as the Championship. Apart from hurting the clubs from a purely sporting perspective, relegation also means the loss of money from television rights and for some clubs' lower attendances.

2.1 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL IN ENGLAND

2.1.1 THE BEGINNINGS

The Football Association (FA) was founded in 1863, at which time most teams were playing based on their own rules so some agreement was necessary on how the game should be played. This had major significance for the formation of professional football as opposed to the football that was played in the streets or at schools and universities (Taylor, 2008).

Taylor (2008) states that despite the FA's efforts, only teams or schools based in London were following their concept of how to play the game. There was another association at that time, the Sheffield Football Association, which had more influence than the FA and until 1877 played by its own rules. During the intervening years many new clubs were founded with players from various backgrounds, including, for example, doctors and teachers, as well as working class people. A big step to official competition was the creation of a cup tournament in a knock-out format, which introduced a vying element into otherwise friendly matches and the game started to be linked with local identity and pride (Taylor, 2008).

The professionalisation of football goes hand to hand with the game's growing popularity: increasing crowd numbers and their money led to the possibility of the best

players being paid in some way. It was said that in the early 1870s many clubs erected a fence around their field and spectators could only watch the game if they paid. A third major indicator of the process of professionalisation was the way teams started to import players from Scotland, as well as borrow and 'poach' players from other clubs. Professionalism was considered to have many negative influences on the game but at the same time it allowed many people to develop a love for the sport, and watch a game they would otherwise have been unable to see, while for the best players it provided a new means of livelihood (Taylor, 2008).

In 1888 the Football League was created without a single club from London or southern England participating. All the clubs were from industrial cities in the north and these clubs continued in professionalising the sport (Elliott, 2019).

Taylor (2008) describes how the league had problems of its own, in addition to the question of professionalism. In 1890 there was an attempt to create a league which would be under the London FA, at that time four out of the nine clubs were purely amateur but, like other leagues in England, it had a considerable influence on the professionalisation of football. The problem in the south was that fewer people were willing to come and watch the game than in the north.

In the 1890s some of the Southern League teams joined the Football League and throughout the twentieth century football became a professional sport that had widespread influence over the nation, connecting business-world people and their male working-class supporters (Elliott, 2019).

2.1.2 ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PREMIER LEAGUE

According to Taylor (2008) the most crucial event prior to the Premier League being established was the Hillsborough incident on the 15th April 1989 where 96 fans were crushed to death during an FA Cup semi-final match between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest. The tragedy caused grief never previously associated with football. One crucial outcome of the Hillsborough tragedy was the publication in 1990 of the Taylor Report by Lord Justice Taylor: it offered 76 recommendations, the majority of which were implemented. However, the implementation process was more expensive than expected, which raised debates about the state of professional football in England, where the elite clubs possessed the most money thanks to media coverage and commercials. Traditionally,

football in England had been based on the idea of equality; however, this had changed over time and by the late 1980s the biggest clubs had started claiming the smaller ones were holding them back economically.

Due to some of the leading club directors, football became more of a business which was supposed to make a profit. Clubs started to devote an increasing amount of attention to marketing and even joined the stock market. This led to clubs wanting to escape from the Football League and form a 'super league' which would enable the best clubs to make more money. This in its own way is what subsequently occurred. The best teams were receiving more money from media coverage; however, the smaller clubs were in the same situation as previously. The media coverage and more money were going mainly to the big five, which consisted of Arsenal, Everton, Liverpool, Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur. But an even more important role in all of this was played the FA which was responsible for all the clubs and teams, including those at amateur level. The Football League ran their competition of 92 clubs that were under the FA licence but the FA did not exert as much influence over the competition as it would have wished (Taylor, 2008).

According to Taylor (2008), there were numerous comments on how the professional game was being governed by Lord Justice Taylor, academics and journalists and the first to come out with a plan for change was the Football League, using the slogan 'One Game, One Team, One Voice'. The FA reacted with a plan to create a whole new league which would be controlled by FA. Many of the clubs that played on the elite level agreed to the FA's plan and in 1992 started to play in a whole new competition for the elite eighteen clubs, namely the FA Premier League.

2.2 THE PREMIER LEAGUE AND MEDIA

In 1992 the Premier League entered a contract with BSkyB allowing the station to provide a live coverage of the EPL matches and television rights have been a central to the whole history of the league. Because of the television contract a long-established football kick-off at 3 pm on Sunday afternoon had to be moved particularly because of the introduction of 'Monday night football'. (Elliott, 2019).

According to data supplied by Elliott (2019), football on English television for the season in question consisted of 168 live matches. Even though many 'traditional' football supporters would have preferred to maintain the traditional 3 pm Saturday afternoon kick-

off time, Sky TV introduced 'Friday night football'. Elliott further describes how television companies wanted and obtained a big say in the scheduling, structure and marketing of the league as they were the ones paying for the coverage. Gibson (2015), cited in Elliott (2019), further notes how the BBC paid a substantial sum to the Premier League to keep their rights to show highlights of matches.

Elliott (2019) says it is important for the Premier League to keep its domestic broadcast revenues but this is becoming problematic because of the referendum result of the UK leaving the European Union, which could lead to a potential exit from the European Free Trade Area. Exiting the Trade Area could result in some customers buying watch time for the EPL somewhere outside of the UK for a cheaper price. Elliott (2019) also argues that livestreaming of football matches could represent a problem for the Premier League because in many cases it can be accessed illegally without any charge.

2.3 ECONOMY IN THE PREMIER LEAGUE

Brown (1998) describes a revolutionary contract with BskyB TV in 1992 which allowed Premier League clubs to increase their revenue and invest in better players who were supposed to attract larger crowds. Given the larger demand for tickets, clubs could increase prices, which would allow them to pay more to shareholders. This is why English football became interesting for investors. In fact, the process of commercialisation had started even before the BskyB TV contract as the first club to be listed on the stock market was Tottenham Hotspur in 1983; however, it took another six years for another club to take a similar route. During the 1990s a further six clubs joined the stock market and a dozen clubs started to trade their shares on the City's junior markets.

Football clubs earn income from many sources, the most important of which are TV revenues, merchandising and ticket sales. Brown (1998) offers the example of Manchester United, which in the 1996-97 season had sold 40,000 season tickets paid for in advance. According to the web site birminghammail.co.uk in 2020 Manchester United sold 52,000 season tickets which was the most in the entire Premier League for that year.

3 PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL PLAYERS

Thanks to the money that came into the game because of its rise in popularity, more players could become professionals. In the 1940s there were over seven thousand professionals, about a half of whom were full-time footballers, although they were earning less than factory workers. The best players of course were receiving more and had higher wages as a result of greater media coverage (Russell, 1997).

3.1 FOREIGN PLAYERS AND THE PREMIER LEAGUE

The EPL no longer consists of players who only come from Britain as to be the case but thanks to the money flowing into the league, clubs could afford to buy the best players from all around the world so that today there are players not only from Europe but also from Africa, America or Asia. Elliott (2019) argues this became possible as a result of commercial and economic growth of the league, with clubs now looking to sign highly skilled players from all around the world. It is necessary to add that it is not only clubs from the English Premier League but also clubs from Spanish La Liga and German Bundesliga are behaving in this way.

Over the last 25 years football has developed into a business where clubs are seen as brands, fans as customers and player or managers regarded as commodities that can be traded. Thus, it is only natural that clubs want to have the best 'product' so they often buy from abroad, which has negative impact on domestic talent (Elliott, 2019).

According to Elliott (2019), it is entirely natural for clubs to want foreign players, who are quite simply often better than the English players and offer the talent necessary for clubs to compete on an international stage such as the Champions League. The best clubs within the best leagues have to trade with one another or draw on leagues with less bargaining power. Since the top teams in the best leagues have massive resources, they usually face no problems in attracting the best players.

The EPL itself is one of the richest sport leagues in the world, which allows its clubs to spend more money on salaries and provide the best care for their players, all of which naturally helps to attract foreign talent. According to Elliott (2019) by the end of the 2015/2016, 59.9 per cent of players in the EPL were not from England, while in Spain the percentage of non-domestic players was only 39.9 per cent. To date, according to the website transfermarkt.co.in, 328 players in the EPL are foreign, which represents 62.8 per

cent of all players in the league. These players are from all around the world and represent 97 nationalities with French and Spanish players being the major non-domestic ones (Elliott, 2019).

All this information suggests the EPL has, since its change from the Football League in 1992, shifted from a league that has only been followed on a national level to one with a global reach and its clubs have been aiming to bring not only the best players, but also coaches and other staff to the league. From the first week of the Premier League, when only 13 players were from abroad, the recruitment of foreign players has increased to the point where the foreigners outnumbered domestic players (Elliott, 2019).

3.2 SPORTING PERFORMANCE

UKessays.com states that to be a footballer on the top level, one has to possess many skills and be strong both physically and mentally. The quality of a football players is determined by many factors, including speed, strength, agility, power and endurance. These qualities are important based on which position the player plays.

Mackenzie & Cushion (2012) argue that sporting performance is complex and hardly predictable, especially in football where some typical behaviours will not be the same in every match because it is influenced by the opponent or locality where the match is played. It is also important to differentiate players based on their position and look at their speed and the distance they run when they have and do not have possession of the ball. For example, based on a study conducted by Sarmiento et al. (2014), players' positions had an influence on the intensity of their movement, with midfielders covering much more ground than other players.

Another aspect used by Sarmiento et al. (2014) to determine a player's performance was the involvement with the ball, for example passing, shooting, tackling or dribbling. The research revealed that players of stronger teams had more time and distance covered with ball in their possession, more shots on target and more involvement with the ball, meaning they completed more passes, dribbles and shots.

3.3 FOOTBALL HEROES

Holt and Mangan (2013, p. 5) suggest that “a sport without a hero is like Hamlet without the Prince”. The game of football may be based on the performance of the whole team but when an individual puts in a phenomenal performance, he is then celebrated more than the rest of his team.

From the historical point of view, the reason great players are viewed that way may be that they are seen as ‘normal people’ not as ‘great men’ in the manner of generals or other great leaders. Sport heroes are more of a symbol to the local people, being not just outstanding athletes but also representing their region and sometimes their nation (Taylor, 2008).

Taylor (2008) states that football players are occasionally referred to as ‘heroes’, though it might be claimed ‘hero’ is not the right term since historically heroes were humans who fought against evil. Following Reiss (1995), sport heroes should not only offer excellent performances for a long period of time but also should have moral and social responsibilities and act as role models with their work ethic, individualism, self-reliance or teamwork. The players have a big impact on their followers for many of whom they are role models.

Some authors, such as Archetti (2001) or Holt and Mangan (2013), have highlighted the aspect of tragedy necessary for someone to become a hero, and one example might be the Argentinian Diego Maradona, who was an exceptional football player but both his career and personal life fell apart and thus for many he is a ‘tragic hero’. As examples of an English ‘tragic hero’ Taylor (2008) mentions Frank Barson and Fred Keenor. Barson was a central defender for Barnsley, Aston Villa and Manchester United in 1920s. He was often injured and had a terrible disciplinary record, even being sent off in his own benefit match. Keenor was a centre-half for Cardiff City who as team captain symbolised Cardiff’s 1927 FA Cup victory but throughout his career he suffered from depression, faced other life struggles and “like many others who were remembered as heroes of clubs and community, Keenor was less important for what he was and what he did than what he represented” (Taylor, 2008, p. 157).

On the other hand, heroes in football do not always have to be ‘tragic’. One example of such footballer is Sir Stanley Matthews, considered by many to be one of the best dribblers in the history. He was known not only for his football skills but also for his

sportsmanship and in 1965 he became the first British footballer to be knighted. Another player many regard a footballing hero is Jimmy Greaves a striker who played for Tottenham Hotspur in 1960s. Statistics show he is the best striker in Tottenham Hotspur's history with 266 goals in 379 games and is ranked fourth in all time English national team goal scorers.

The 'heroism' of footballers does not have to be associated with their clubs only. One contemporary example is Manchester United and England striker Marcus Rashford who is fighting against child food poverty. The means of his fight is a free school meals campaign and he managed to change UK Government's decision about not continuing to offer food vouchers during school holidays. These vouchers were launched in March 2020 to help families who were struggling to afford food for their children. For his efforts Rashford was awarded an MBE and he used his high public profile to keep on pressuring the government to continue supporting families in need. Even after the government declined to extend the free school meal plan, Rashford persisted with his efforts and managed to persuade many organisations, big and small, to provide food for children in need.

3.4 FOOTBALL PLAYER AS A CELEBRITY

Nowadays professional football players earn enormous amounts of money not only from their wages from the clubs they play for but, in many cases, also by appearing in commercials and other activities that could be considered showbusiness.

Taylor (2008) describes how famous football players have converted from players into performers and celebrities, a product of market values and media. Elliott (2019) notes that there have always been famous football players, but it was the effect of rapidly growing commercialisation, player wages and media interest which allowed some players to become more fashionable and a part of 'celebrity' culture.

The football superstars soon adapted to their new role and in the world of showbusiness their role recalled that of a TV celebrity. As mentioned previously, the media has had a large influence in this transition by presenting a football match as the narrative of a movie in which the footballers take the leading role (Taylor 2008). In addition to the media influence, Elliott (2019) states the ownership of television in homes has played an important role in the switch from the role of footballer to a role of a superstar or a celebrity. Stories of the players are brought to the public by various media forms, including biographies, which make players more familiar (Taylor, 2008).

As examples of footballer celebrities in a British context, Taylor (2008) suggests the first player to become a celebrity was George Best and, according to Elliott (2019), the player who probably became the biggest star outside football was David Beckham. Best, originally from Belfast, played for Manchester United and was ostentatiously different from other footballers not because of his lifestyle, which is the kind that many footballers enjoyed and continue to enjoy; it was his “cool appeal” (Taylor, 2008, p. 279) which made him stand out of the crowd. His behaviour to a large extent was similar to that of modern footballers: he dressed according to the newest fashion trends, had stylish haircuts and appeared in showbusiness settings. As a result, his every move was followed by journalists (Taylor, 2008).

David Beckham was another Manchester United player and according to Elliott (2019, p. 102) “his career may have well been read as a defining moment in football history and the ascension of the football celebrity”. Since first appearing in newspapers, Beckham has appeared in numerous roles: he has served as a UNICEF ambassador, played a big part in the rise of football in the USA and been “a central figure in England/Britain’s bidding for mega events.” (Elliott, 2019, p. 102) At the beginning of this playing career he was not a wonderkid who would take the football world by surprise. Unlike his friends Ryan Giggs and Gary Neville, Beckham did not immediately make the Manchester United first team: he was regarded as an average player and spent part of the 1994-1995 season on loan to Preston North End in what was then the English Third Division. What made him famous after his return to the Manchester United squad was a goal scored from his own half against Wimbledon and soon Beckham’s “combination of sex appeal and football talent” (Elliott, 2019, p. 103) led to comparisons with George Best. Over time Beckham became an international brand whose face was everywhere. After being made England national team captain, he was nicknamed ‘King of England’ which would make his wife, Victoria Beckham, a famous singer, a queen; the couple’s home was subsequently referred to as ‘Beckingham Palace’. Beckham thus evolved from being a footballer into a superstar, a celebrity, who was important to the nation in other areas than just football: his impact was resembled that of rock musicians and movie stars (Elliott, 2019).

It is apparent that throughout the last few decades football players role has shifted into the most popular players being both public and sporting figures which may also be a problem. As one of the most famous football coaches José Mourinho said young players

today are more worried about their image, money, fame and celebrity status than they are about becoming great players and winning titles. According to dailymail.co.uk, Mourinho also criticises how players today make too much money and young players become rich even before they play their first Premier League match.

3.4.1 FOOTBALL CELEBRITIES AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The issue of football players and social media was touched upon in a study by Firgolska & Kucharska (2019) in which they look at the authenticity of clubs and players. In the current world, where social media are an important part of communication between clubs, players and their supporters, fans seek authenticity since there are many instances of fake news and illusions on the internet. As noted by Firgolska & Kucharska (2019, p. 1): “Authenticity is defined as the perception that a celebrity behaves according to his or her true self”. The same authors further argue that players who are authentic, generous, close to the club and work well in a team well are perceived better by the supporters, which in turn makes the football club’s brand more valuable.

4 SURVEY METHODOLOGY

For this research a questionnaire was distributed to English acquaintances of the author of this thesis and to one of the biggest forum webpages on the internet Reddit, specifically to the subreddit of the Premier League. The reason behind placing the questionnaire on the Premier League subreddit is that it is followed by people with various allegiances to different clubs and their commitment to football allows them to offer informed opinions.

The questionnaire contains a combination of open and closed questions. The aim of the questions in the survey was to obtain qualitative data as a basis for analysis. In the case of a semi-closed question, respondents were invited to add a brief explanation behind their answers. The focus was on the club allegiance, the reasons people support their club and what people's opinions are of Premier League players who have a big influence on football supporters' lives.

The questionnaire was launched on Tuesday March 23th 2021 at 13:24. After 666 responses had been received in 15 hours, the decision was taken not to accept any more responses. Out of the 666 responses received, 240 were from non-English people; their answers were subsequently omitted from the analysis so as not to distort the data in terms of supporters' attitudes towards the English national team.

The original version of the questionnaire appears in an appendix to this work. However, after an initial check of the personal data in the completed questionnaires, it was decided to modify the profile categories for purposes of analysis in two ways. Firstly, given the fact that an overwhelming majority of the respondents were male, the gender distinction was ignored in the analysis. The alternative would have been to exclude non-males completely from the survey but this was not a path the author wished to follow. Secondly, the number of age categories was reduced from the original four to just two, namely 18 through 25, then 26 and older. The reason for this reduction was that the over-40s did not provide responses in sufficient number to warrant a category, or categories, of their own.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the 426 respondents, 406 were male, 17 female, and three were in the “other” category. According to the original age division, a sizeable majority of respondents, namely 294, were aged 18-25, followed by the 26-40 group with 114. The 41-55 and 56+ groups accounted for just 16 and two people respectively; therefore, as stated in the previous section, these were incorporated into the 26-40s. In fact, apart from a double-digit percentage difference in the “club-country debate”, the overall results for the two resulting groups, 18-25 and 26+, proved too similar to warrant a separate discussion, so the analysis below will focus on the results as a whole.

The analysis incorporates several supplementary comments made by respondents. All of these have been reproduced in their original form with no modifications to grammar, spelling or punctuation.

5.1 REASONS BEHIND CLUB SUPPORT

There are many reasons for a person to become a supporter of a particular football club: for some it might be that the club is in a certain place and it represents a certain locality, as described in the Football and Place section earlier in this thesis; for others, as stated in the Construction of Identity section, it can be that a person is looking for a way to be recognised and they achieve it by being a supporter of a certain club where fellow supporters recognise the person. The percentage of categorically divided open responses are shown in the figure below:

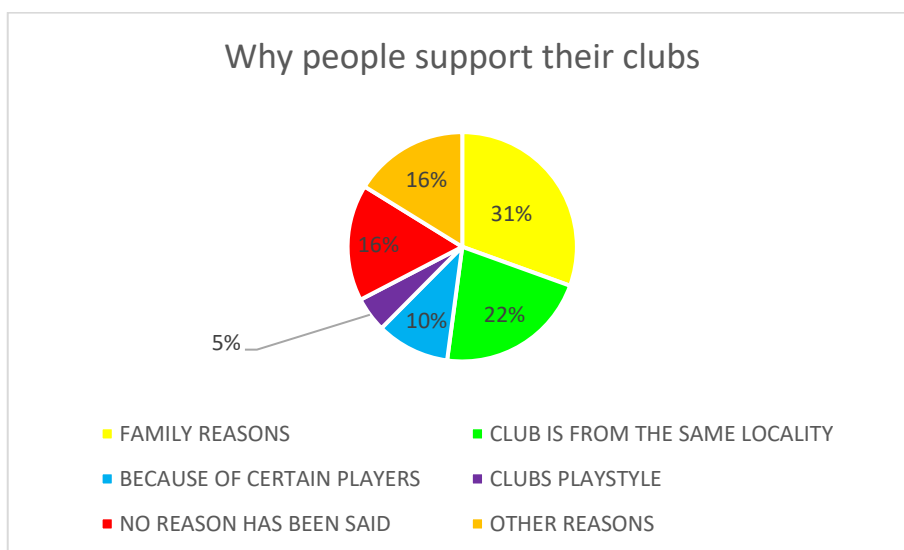


Figure 1: Why people support their clubs

It was surprising to see that the highest number of respondents, namely 130 (31%), support their club for family reasons (often fatherly influence) and for many of them the locality is of lesser importance. The majority of the answers were short and suggested the choice of club was something that just happened rather than a process of personal reflection. The following answers were typical:

West Ham, my dad supports them (R1)

Liverpool because my dad supported them and raised me the same (R25)

Aston Villa – they are my dad’s team (R279)

Leeds United, father supports them (R312)

Some of the responses did offer a lengthier explanation, and here it is interesting to see the reasoning behind the choice and the importance of family in constructing allegiance to a certain club.

Leeds, my family are from Yorkshire and we've always supported Leeds. I'm 5 generation Leeds fan, all the way back to Leeds City. (R200)

Leeds United. Dad's family are all from Leeds. While I wasn't brought up in Leeds my support is inherited. (R346)

Some people have the connection to the club inherited in them, not only because their family supported the given club, but also their fandom is linked to their parents having taken them to watch games live in the stadium, where they could experience the atmosphere:

Manchester City FC - from very close to Maine Road, family supported for multiple generations (R132)

Southampton. My Dad is from the city and we have gone to games together since I was young (R323)

Chelsea – I've been supporting them since I was 10 (I'm currently 34). The why probably boils down to the fact my dad supports them and I could go to games with him. (R408)

In some cases, the creation of identity connected to a football club goes beyond “x club, because my family supports them too”: it can be much more complex and there may be several aspects in creating such a relationship, as shown by the following comment:

Everton as they did hospital visits and I think fundraising for my dad and the other kids in hospital back the 60's or 70's when he had a tumour needing taking out. (R245)

In the case of family reasons, age seems not to matter because for many people a parent is someone to look up to, which plays an important part in the creation of identity and values.

The locality-based relationship to the club was present in 92 responses (21%). It had been anticipated this would be the main reason why people support their club. Many of the explanations which were based on locality were similar to the examples below:

Brighton & Hove Albion, they are my hometown team (R69)

Chelsea. Born there. (R111)

Manchester City, theyre local (R131)

The locality does not necessarily refer to the place where respondents are originally from: club fandom based on locality can also come from the place a certain person has moved to or spends most of their time in, although the bond between respondent and club may not be as strong.

Manchester United. I am a student in Manchester and I have had the opportunity to attend some games (R174)

Newcastle United. I studied my degree in Newcastle so the team became my home for a while. (R325)

Sheffield United. I am not originally from Sheffield but have lived there 30 years. I have always lived near the ground, it is part of the community. (R388)

Although a large number of the responses only stated that the support of the club comes from the fact, they are local, there were answers which introduced a combination of the two given reasons, being both family and locality-based.

Brighton and Hove Albion, grew up near there and my dad supported them. (R90)

Wolves - my local club and a club that my family has supported for a long time. (R137)

Newcastle United Football Club. It's my local club. My city. My dad and family are Newcastle fans, I couldn't be anything else. (R384)

Apart from family relations or locality, some respondents stated they simply started following a club and became supporters because of the players the clubs had in their squad, especially if they liked a certain player when they were younger. For children, a football player can be a hero, as described in the "Football heroes" part in the third chapter of this thesis. As Reiss (1995) states, players have a big impact on their followers and can be role models for them. This statement is supported by several answers:

Chelsea FC, because when I was younger I saw Frank Lampard and Didier Drogba play and the way the team played made me want to support the team that Frank was a part of. (R114)

Leicester - James Maddison used to play for my favourite club, Norwich so I supported them when he moved (R190)

Liverpool. Fell in love with players like Robbie Fowler, Steve McManaman and Steven Gerrard (R393)

Chelsea. Micky Droy was my hero when I was a kid. (R412)

5.2 CLUB VERSUS COUNTRY

In the study mentioned in the “Club versus Country debate” part in the first chapter of this thesis, Gibbons (2014) states that based on his findings the rivalries of clubs and local identities are more “authentic” than the ones at national level, especially when supporters are locally attached to the club.

It is apparent from the chart below that most of the respondents’ feelings are attached to the club they support. The number of responses stating “absolutely yes” exceeded expectations; it had been anticipated there would be more neutral or “probably” answers.

An interesting fact contrary to expectations is that in the club or country debate. club allegiance does not seem to matter. The respondents included a variety of people who follow a club from the “big five” and people who support clubs that are consistently lower in the EPL standings; both sets of supporters had similar opinions in this respect.

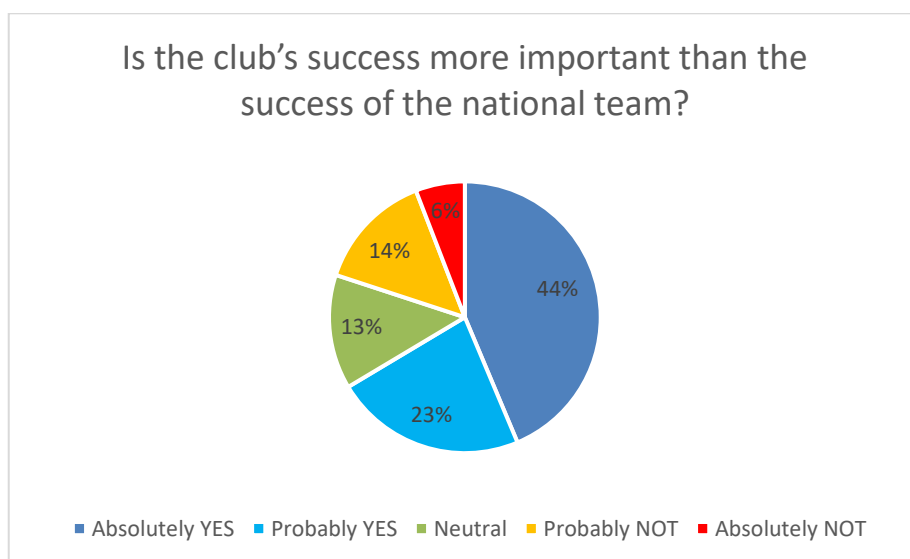


Figure 2 - Is the club's success more important than the success of the national team?

According to Gibbons (2014), there are several reasons why people prefer their clubs ahead of their country, and the chart above only proves that supporters feel more connected to their club. The responses to the survey offer several reasons for this phenomenon, the most common one being that the club plays more often, which causes supporters to feel disconnected from the national team.

Although I do follow my national team, and wish for them to be successful, international football play far less frequently. Premier league teams play in more competitions, more regularly and therefore, I find myself more devoted to club football instead of international football. (R51)

I support my club team week in, week out, whereas international games are on every so often and I can't watch them due to it being on a TV channel I can't afford to pay for, just for 1 or 2 games every other month. (R183)

"I would love if England won a World Cup or Euros but that only comes around once every two years compared to my club which is all year long (R266)

Another major reason for the relative unimportance of the national team seems to be its disappointing performances and inability to win a major international competition. Again, this is a view shared by fans of both bigger and smaller clubs.

Years and years of embarrassing performances and questionable squad/manager selections will quickly kill any interest you may have in the English team (R22)

In my opinion, there is a disconnect between the English national team and the fans - for too long there have been players who are seemingly world class, but who do not perform on the international stage, causing England to perform poorly in the vast majority of international tournaments. I also think it is less exciting, and the international breaks where we play 5 defenders and lose to teams like San Marino are a waste of time. (No disrespect to San Marino) (R82)

The issue of player selection was a recurring theme: many supporters stated some players in the national team do not deserve their place or seem not to be as passionate when playing for the national team as they are when playing club games. As R82 suggests above, there are players who on the club level seem to be incredibly skilled, but they always underperform at international level, which obviously has an adverse effect on the performance of the national team as a whole. Another player-related issue is connected to the club allegiances where supporters state that when there are players on the national team who are from a rival club, then it makes it hard to cheer for them.

The players in the national team can come from your teams rivals and the players from the club you support feel closer to you you feel like you know them more (R193)

National matches are played less often than club matches, so you build more of a connection with your club. Also some national team players could be playing for rivals, so you tend to dislike them (R237)

Never really had an affinity towards the national team. The players aren't as passionate and the quality of the matches is average. (R302)

I have issues with the way our national team is run and the players that are picked. Often these players are "poster boys" who are given special treatment in the premier league. International competition doesn't play favourites like that (mostly) so these players are typically exposed as very average when on an international stage. (R392)

On the other hand, people who choose the national team over their club mostly feel passionate about their national identity and consider the national team to be something that connects the whole nation together. People of different club allegiances can cheer for the same team alongside one another and celebrate each goal and victory together.

If England won a tournament it would unite everyone in the country rather than just Southampton fans if Southampton were to win something. (R87)

England national team unifies the whole country so it would be beautiful if we finally won something (R181)

I would far rather England win the world cup than Man City winning the champions league. The joy it would bring to the nation for years to come and unite everyone would be far greater than any joy brought to Man City fans if we were to win any competition (R260)

The "neutral" responses seem to reflect a wish that club and country do well; some of them also consider the national team to be something very different from the club.

I support equally my team and my national team. obviously I want both to succeed but I can't compare the success of both. it's two different levels (R207)

If West Ham won the prem I'd be over the moon and it would be the same for England in tournaments (R255)

This question revealed the biggest difference between the two groups of respondents, with 10% more of those in the younger age group supporting the statement; however, in both groups there was a clear majority of "yes" answers – 72% and 62% respectively.

5.2.1 PREMIER LEAGUE VERSUS THE ENGLISH NATIONAL TEAM

Respondents were asked whether they thought that a cap on the number of foreign players playing on one team in the Premier League would benefit the English national team. The

responses in this case were not as one-sided as they were in the previous case. The chart below shows how opinions in this matter are divided more or less equally.

Interestingly, many of those who in the previous question preferred their club over the national team agreed a cap would help the English national team and most of them also support it in their explanations they were invited to provide:

It would mean more English players get premier league experience, making them better footballers (R267)

Clubs being forced into using young English players would allow for new talents to be discovered and would hugely progress player development much quicker than it currently is unless you're a 'wonderkid' (R280)

It would allow more English players to break through and play at a higher level. (R302)

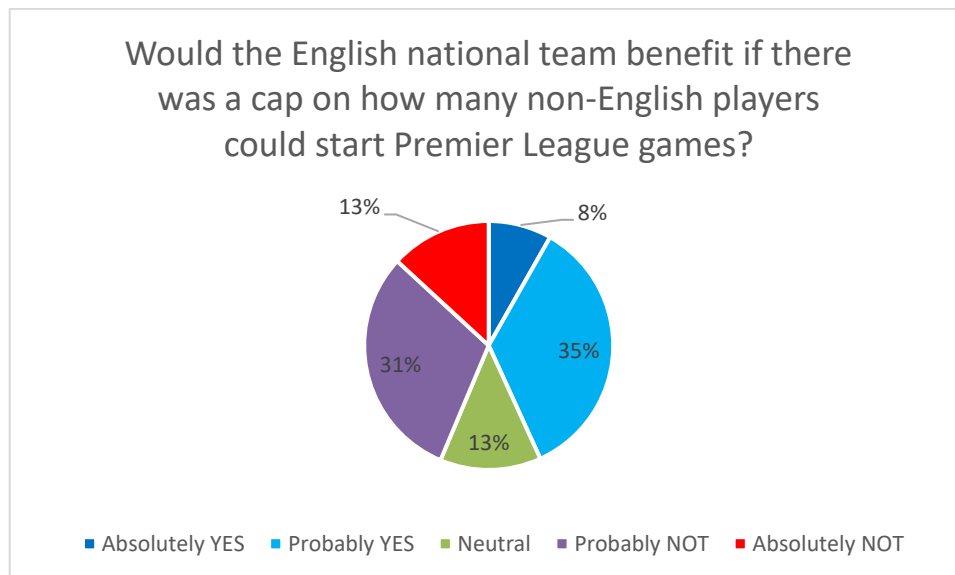


Figure 3 - non-English players in the Premier League

On the other hand, while many respondents consider a cap would indeed benefit the English national team, they still do not think it would be a good idea because the EPL would then lose some of its best players, resulting in a drop in the overall quality of the league. It is important to note that most of the people holding this opinion also stated their club is undoubtedly more important to them than the national team, which is why they also mention the overall quality of the Premier League in their responses. They take the view that the overall quality of the league would be lower if the cap was introduced and

this would harm the clubs they support, especially if it is a club where non-English players are a majority.

As much as i want to see the England national team flourish, sacrificing the club's ability to use foreign players will definitely damage their performance. Not all english players are good. If they want a spot in the team you have to fight for it. Merit over credit. (R276)

The England national team may benefit but the premier league won't. It's a terrible idea (R278)

More English players getting more game time at a higher level should logically increase both quality and quantity of top English players. That said, foreign imports improve the quality of the Premier League, which is also good for development of English players. (R365)

It is interesting to see that people with opposing opinions as to whether it would help the national team or not have very similar explanations and opinions on the fact that it would harm the Premier League:

The general quality of the premier league would come down because of forced starts rather than quality (R397)

Premier League is a global brand. The top football league in the world, so there should be no bias towards England, just because the PL is based in ENG. (R411)

One interesting aspect here is that it is not only people who prefer their club over the country who say that it would harm the league. They also touch on the fact that foreign players bring great quality into the league, which overall helps to increase the English players' quality.

Foreign players increase quality of football, On increased competition for English players, making them progress better (R32)

The EPL is the greatest league in the world precisely because it showcases such a diversity of int'l talent; i wouldnt want to sacrifice that. English clubs have some of the best youth setups in the world, if homegrown players cannot compete at the top level even with such developmental benefits, they likely wouldnt bring much to the national team. (R320)

5.3 PREMIER LEAGUE PLAYERS

In this part the questions dealing with the EPL players will be discussed. Firstly, the players who deserve the most praise for their sporting performance will be talked about.

It is always difficult to pinpoint one player out of the entire league who would deserve the most praise for what he is doing on the football pitch. Supporters form their

views by watching matches, mostly of the club they love and support and this was reflected in their answers to this item. Out of the 426 respondents, 207 chose at least one player from the team they support, alongside other players generally considered the biggest stars of the EPL. The reasons for their choices were very similar in many cases and when choosing a player from their own team, the fans looked at which player has had the biggest impact there.

Call me biased but I have to say Bruno Fernandes (MU). - I mean there are probably over players that have the same or even a bigger impact on their team, but just take a look at his qualities. He always wants to win (even at card games against his daughter) and this type of player is exactly what Manchester United missed since Sir Alex's retirement. Next to this mental aspect he also offers world class skills with his foot as well. (R204 – MU)

Jack Grealish, Esri Konsa, Emi Martinez (all AV) - They have been my team's best players this season (R279 – Aston Villa)

Harry Kane (TH), James ward prowse (STH)- Kane: incredible goals and assists tally. JWP: holding the team up, best set piece taker in the league (R305 – STH)

Another source of information about players is the media. Of course, the media mostly talks about the biggest stars in the league, such as Manchester City's Kevin De Bruyne, Liverpool's Virgil Van Dijk, or Tottenham's Harry Kane, all of whom have proved their quality and importance during their time in the EPL. It is no surprise that the biggest stars, such as the players mentioned above, were named by supporters of other clubs since they are generally acknowledged as being among the best players in the league. Comments in the survey praised mostly their different qualities and importance to the team.

Kevin De Bruyne and Virgil van Dijk - The best in the world in each of their positions (R108 - Liverpool)

Kevin De Bruyne, Virgil Van Dijk, Bruno Fernandes - KDB: Best Player, VVD: Best Defender, BF: Most Impactful on an otherwise mediocre team (R391 – Liverpool)

Of course, as R391's comment suggests, players of teams that are not having great results and whose teams are in the middle of the standings or at the bottom of the table have also been praised for their efforts, especially because they are the difference makers for their respective teams. Bruno Fernandes, who has had a great impact on the way Manchester United play, was mentioned 99 times; Jack Grealish, arguably the best player in Aston Villa's squad, was mentioned 65 times.

Bruno Fernandes, Harry Kane, Son Heung Min - Bruno has reinvigorated United. Harry and Son are having phenomenal seasons. (R344)

Grealish and Salah - Grealish has been one of the best creators in Europe for two seasons for an okay Villa side. The fact that people dismiss him for POTS and other awards baffles me. Salah because he's been an insane goal scorer since returning to the PL. He might pick up a third golden boot this year and he still gets disrespected. (R282)

Moving on to the next item, footballers deserve praise not only for their sporting performance as many of them are also actively involved work outside of the football pitch. In response to the question "Which Premier League player deserves the most praise for off-the-field activities?", one name in particular stood above all the rest: Marcus Rashford, mentioned earlier in this thesis in the "Football Heroes" part, whose efforts to help families struggling to provide food for their children is something that that has not gone unnoticed by the public.

Marcus Rashford became a national hero when he helped thousands of poor children get access to free school meals during the covid 19 pandemic (R31)

I don't remember a player ever putting in as much effort, time and his own money into a charitable cause. He has battled with the government over a cause he believes in, won, and still continues to work towards his goal of free school meals to all children and eliminating child poverty. For this, he has my utmost respect. (R95)

In addition to Marcus Rashford, several other footballers who do many things for their localities, communities and charity were mentioned.

Rashford for pressuring the UK gov. Hendo for work during operation restart. Robertson for work with food bank in Liverpool. (R8)

Marcus Rashford, Sadio Mane, Raheem Sterling - All of them do good charity work and mane helps people in his home country of Senegal (R113)

Marcus Rashford OBE has managed to spearhead a campaign that is vital to the integrity of this country, whilst maintaining humility and respect. So far, he's near enough a modern day hero and deserves more than an OBE. Plus he's still an amazing player alongside this work. Sterling really persisted in highlighting media bias and racism at a crucial time. He wasn't the first to do so, nor will he be the last unfortunately, but he made his voice heard. (R251)

As regards players who care more about themselves than the team they play for, the chart overleaf reveals the expected outcome. The majority of respondents agree there are some footballers who care more about their own fame and status, though it is interesting to note that no fewer than 100 respondents who answered "Yes" here did not offer a single name by way of example.

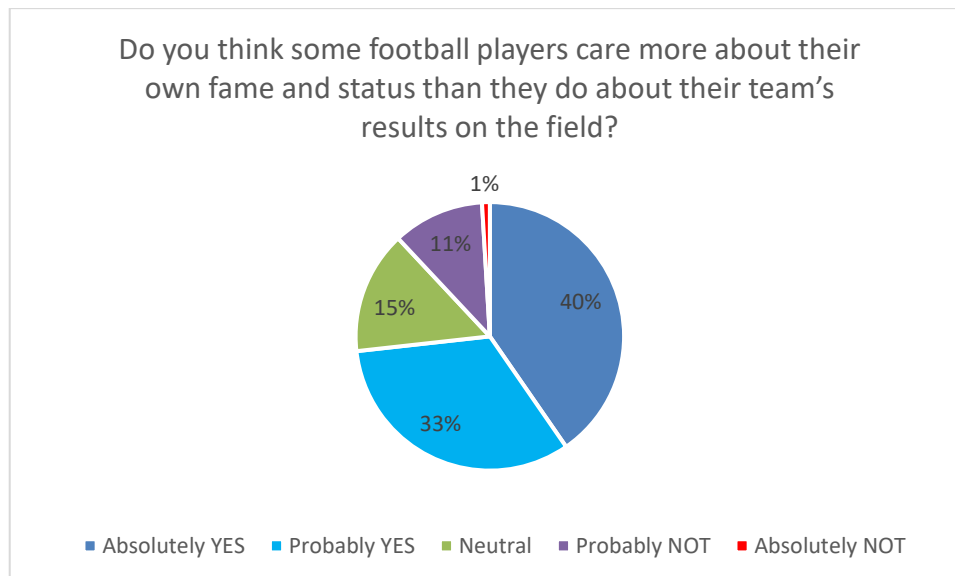


Figure 4 - Do footballers care more about their personal success more than the success of a team?

Overall, the majority of respondents did provide at least one name, some of them together with an extended answer, explaining the reason for their choice. The main problem with such players seems to be that they do not put as much effort into the game as they could considering their talent and expectations. The “most hated” player in the responses was Paul Pogba with 85 mentions; several fans offered their reasons behind the nomination:

For a while, Paul Pogba comes to mind. For a while it seemed he didn't care about football, just getting new coloured hair every week or two. The players who don't put in the effort seem to be the ones who prefer fame. (R37)

Pogba being very active on Instagram, despite not being in match shape, even though he wasn't injured (R83)

A perfect example of this kind of mentality I think is Paul Pogba, he rarely puts effort into the games which is a shame because of his clear natural skill, it seems like he doesn't care about the team and just wants to score and assist to further his own career. (R161)

Paul Pogba - has his moments but he is the attention he craves on social media is uncanny (R287)

The responses above suggest that when a player is not living up to expectations on the football pitch, his social media presence is not viewed by supporters in a good light, the reason may be that players might be viewed as those who prefer to expand their own personal brand, rather than help their club to succeed more. The comment below from R31

suggests that it is difficult to believe what players post on their social media pages and players might be seen as inauthentic.

Some players care more about developing their brand and image and so have media teams in charge of all their accounts, it's hard to believe any tweets/Instagram posts are genuine and not just a pr stunt. Jesse Lingard is an example, Ronaldo may be there now too (R71)

This result and discovery support a study by Firgolska & Kucharska (2019) in which the authors argue that the authenticity of a player or club is one of the key factors to the success of the personal or club's brand. The fact that some players are perceived as inauthentic is hurting their own image in the eyes of supporters.

The chart on the following page shows the percentage of answers on the question of whether or not it is appropriate for football players to comment on the current political or social issues and it is apparent that the majority of respondents think that it is appropriate.

The minority of respondents who considered it inappropriate for footballers to talk about social issues often argue that they are athletes and should stick to their field of work, which is sports. Others argue they are not educated in such matters, which could cause harm if they supported a "wrong cause". Some of the responses provide a reasonable explanation as to why footballers should not speak about politics or social issues:

I don't think it is appropriate as players often have many young fans who are easily influenced and can be influenced negatively if a player has bad beliefs (R31)

A difficult one. It could be used for good if they have positive agendas but also, they're not trained in politics and most of the time aren't the most intelligent people so misleading potentially millions of followers is dangerous (R60)

They are completely uneducated on the matters or no more so than the average person. Their platform wasn't earned on it but it's more the public's responsibility to not hold their opinion to a high value. (R236)

Many people who agree with the fact that footballers or famous people in general can talk about political or social matters but it is important to stay cautious while paying attention to the celebrities and their opinions, because some of them might be uneducated and could cause harm.

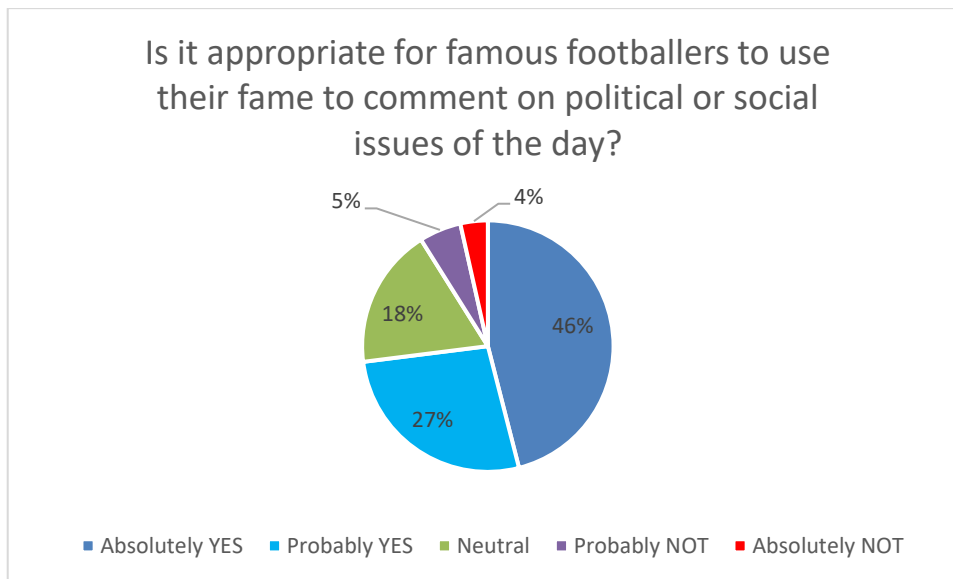


Figure 5 - Is it appropriate for famous footballers to use their fame to comment on political or social issues of the day?

I think that everybody in the public eye has the right and responsibility to use their platform and their following to champion equality and fairness. I do think, however, that it is risky for them to do so - if they have an opinion that is not in line with the ideals of their fans/club/etc. it could do more harm than good. (R82)

They are respected by a lot of people. However, some footballers may have controversial opinions on stuff, in which case I think professionally they should keep quiet. Everyone is entitled to an opinion though, and footballers are people so sometimes the ridicule for something controversial isn't justified (within reason) (R129)

I think it is important for famous people to use their platforms to highlight societal issues, but people should be careful who they listen to since just because they are famous it does not mean they are right. For example, Matt Le Tissier is a legendary ex-Southampton player, however he tweets about anti-mask wearing, anti-vaccination conspiracy theories etc which I think are harmful to society if people listen to him. (R323)

It can be argued that football players are role models for many, especially young people and their opinions and comments can raise awareness of any issue that a footballer is passionate about. Many of the respondents cited Marcus Rashford's work as an example when explaining why famous footballers should use their influential status to talk about politics or social matters.

They have a broad audience to voice their opinions and changes things; example: Rashford who made the government changed its mind on the meal for kids (R9)

They have a worldwide platform and can actually make a difference, for example with the work Rashford has done. Like anyone they have the right to campaign for causes they believe in. (R14)

They have a platform, tons of young people look up to them, they have a duty to be role models for kids who they know watch them on and off the pitch, rashford is a good example of how they can use their influence to produce positive change. I don't think anyone has to do anything but with their power/status/money they have the ability to affect change. I know a lot help with charities and local organisations which is also good (R71)

To conclude this section, I would like to add that not only did people take the time to answer the questions but a number of them also reacted to the preamble. Most were just to say that they had completed the questionnaire and were wishing luck for the future; however, some offered their views on the questionnaire itself. One such fan said: "Filled it in, there are some very interesting and thought-provoking questions in there, hope that it helps and best of luck on your thesis". Another supporter showed appreciation for the first question by saying: "Finally a good reason to remember the John O'Shea 90minute winner that got me into supporting Manchester United."

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to look at the reasons behind football supporters' allegiances to English Premier League clubs, as well as their attitude towards the English national team. Attention was also devoted to supporters' opinions of individual players, regardless of their nationality, both on and off the field. Based on questionnaire data, an analysis was conducted of 426 responses from people who follow the EPL and support at least one of the clubs in this competition.

Strong evidence that football would seem still to be very much a male-dominated world appears firstly in the personal profiles of questionnaire respondents and, secondly, in the fact that in many cases where a family member had been the primary motivation behind a young person's decision to support a particular club, it was usually the father, or in some cases grandfather, who had had the biggest influence.

The club versus country debate is many ways an interesting one. The majority of supporters would give preference to their club's success over that of the national team. This came as something of a surprise. Overall, the club seems to be more important especially due to the frequency of games played: supporters are happy to support a team that plays every single week because it is easier to feel connected to the team. This, combined with the English national team's generally disappointing results in recent decades, is the most common reason for the decline in feeling any great affinity to the national team. Even if the national team might theoretically prosper in the event of a cap on the number of overseas players allowed to start EPL games, fans would still not be happy because the overall quality of the Premier League would be correspondingly much lower.

Premier League players are definitely considered celebrities who are followed by millions of people and, just like TV stars, they are viewed in multiple ways. Many players are lauded for their achievements on or off the football pitch. Of course, there are also players who receive rather less praise, even to the extent of being strongly disliked. The main reason behind such antipathy towards certain players seems to be a lack of effort on the field, plus in some cases a strong social media presence which seems mostly inauthentic and only harms the way they are perceived.

With millions of people following them, footballers are able not only to communicate with their fans about football but also draw their attention to some greater

issues, whether political or social. The majority of fans think it appropriate for footballers to speak about such issues and consider it a good thing if a player is well informed about a particular issue and supports “the right cause”. Many respondents see footballers as role models who can exert great influence over their followers; however, if they were to support “the wrong cause” they could cause considerable harm. The issue of players’ influence on their followers is an interesting one and further research into this area could provide a greater insight into the mind of a typical football fan.

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APPENDIX A – PREAMBLE

In the post where the link to the questionnaire was attached the members of the Premier League subreddit were asked to take a while of their time and fill out the short questionnaire with the following words:

Hello everyone!

I am studying English at the West Bohemian University and right now I am working on my undergraduate thesis. I would appreciate if you could take a while to fill out my short questionnaire:

<https://forms.gle/Kg8KtzC6qrm3gHH56>

Thank you so much for your time in advance

APPENDIX B – QUESTIONNAIRE

Undergraduate thesis questionnaire

This survey forms part of a research project entitled "English Identity in Football" whose aim is to analyse allegiances to English Premier League clubs and fans' opinions of Premier League players. The survey is anonymous. By completing and submitting the questionnaire you affirm that you are at least 18 years of age and you consent to your answers being used in the research. If you have any queries concerning the project either before or after completing the survey, I can be contacted at the e-mail address below.

Matěj Živčák
University of West Bohemia, Czech Republic
zivcakm@students.zcu.cz

Personal data

1. Gender
 - Male
 - Female
 - Other
2. Age
 - 18-25
 - 26-40
 - 41-55
 - 56+

The Premier League

3. Which Premier League club do you support and why?
 - a.
4. Is your club's success more important to you than the success of the national team?
 - a. Absolutely yes
 - b. Probably yes
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Probably not
 - e. Absolutely not
5. Please briefly explain your previous answer.
.....

6. Do you think the English national team would benefit if there was a cap on how many non-English players could start Premier League games?
 - a. Absolutely yes
 - b. Probably yes
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Probably not
 - e. Absolutely not

7. Please briefly explain your previous answer.

.....

Premier League players

8. Which Premier League player(s) do you think deserve the most praise for sporting performance? List up to three names if you wish.

.....

9. Please briefly explain the reason for your choice(s) in the previous question.

.....

10. Which Premier League player(s) do you think deserve the most praise for off-the-field activities? List up to three names if you wish.

.....

11. Please briefly explain the reason for your choice(s) in the previous question.

.....

12. Do you think some football players care more about their own fame and status than they do about their team's results on the field?

- a. Absolutely yes
- b. Probably yes
- c. Neutral
- d. Probably not
- e. Absolutely not

13. If you wish, in the event of a 'yes' answer in the previous question, please give up to three examples of such a player.

.....

14. Do you think it is appropriate for famous footballers to use their fame to comment on political or social issues of the day?

- a. Absolutely yes
- b. Probably yes

- c. Neutral
- d. Probably not
- e. Absolutely not

15. Please briefly explain your previous answer.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire

APPENDIX C – RESPONDENTS’ PROFILES

1	Gender	Age	Which Premier League club do you support and why
2	Male	18-25	West Ham, my dad supports them
3	Male	18-25	I support Chelsea FC due to Michael Ballack looking exactly like my father and then the first game I ever watched of him he scored a screamer of a goal.
4	Male	18-25	Chelsea. My dad has always supported Chelsea
5	Male	18-25	Manchester City, play style.
6	Male	18-25	Wolverhampton Wanderers FC
7	Male	18-25	Everton, my family's team
8	Male	18-25	Liverpool mix of family supporting and growing up I hated that man utd were the most successful.
9	Male	18-25	Liverpool, because of the 2005 Champion's League final and that amazing comeback
10	Male	18-25	Southampton. Its been the family team and also local team
11	Male	18-25	Manchester united because of their history and players
12	Male	18-25	Chelsea, family
13	Male	18-25	Aston villa, it is my dads and my grandads team, they are from Birmingham
14	Male	18-25	Aston Villa. Local Team.
15	Male	18-25	Arsenal - started supporting them as a kid and never stopped
16	Male	18-25	Southampton
17	Male	18-25	West Ham United, cuz they're MASSIVE
18	Male	18-25	Southampton - Granddad is from Southampton
19	Male	18-25	Leeds United, because I was born in the city
20	Male	18-25	Arsenal
21	Male	18-25	Chelsea because that's who my dad supported and just grew into it
22	Male	18-25	Manchester City. My best friend as a child supported Man United when I was younger and I hated how his favourite team always won so I started supporting man city (2005). Ironic looking back on it now...
23	Male	18-25	Wolverhampton Wanderers - I support them because my dad did
24	Male	18-25	Bournemouth
25	Male	18-25	Liverpool because my dad supported them and raised me the same
26	Male	18-25	Leeds - home town
27	Male	18-25	Brighton, local
28	Male	18-25	Manchester City - it is the closest to my childhood home
29	Male	18-25	spurs, i started to follow them because of my girlfriend, and eventually started to like their style of play and team atmosphere under poch so i started to support them
30	Male	18-25	Manchester City, I like how they play, not a toxic fan base
31	Male	18-25	Manchester united. I am local to the club and all my family support it.
32	Male	18-25	Chelsea, father supported them
33	Male	18-25	Liverpool, I'm a scouser, it's the team my dad supported, team his dad supported, etc
34	Male	18-25	Leeds United
35	Male	18-25	Tottenham - chose them when I was young because they weren't too good but weren't too bad. Also, I'm from London.

1	Gender	Age	Which Premier League club do you support and why
36	Male	18-25	Wolves
37	Male	18-25	Leeds, my dad supports them.
38	Male	18-25	Manchester united
39	Male	18-25	Liverpool
40	Male	18-25	Liverpool FC, because of my family
41	Male	18-25	Liverpool, because they were always the underdogs and I used to love Steven Gerrard.
42	Male	18-25	Chelsea as blue was my favorite color and just fell in love with them.
43	Male	18-25	Liverpool. Because of great history and Fernando Torres
44	Male	18-25	Liverpool - kinda copied my dad
45	Male	18-25	Manchester United because I have supported them since 2008 during their successful period and I liked their style of play
46	Male	18-25	Chelsea
47	Male	18-25	Arsenal - local side
48	Male	18-25	Manchester United, my older brother always supported them when i was younger so thats why i support them even though I am from Wales
49	Male	18-25	None, I enjoy the game
50	Male	18-25	Leeds
51	Male	18-25	Tottenham Hotspur due to my mother supporting this team her whole life.
52	Male	18-25	Southampton
53	Male	18-25	Arsenal. Been my favorites since I was a kid.
54	Male	18-25	Spurs
55	Male	18-25	Chelsea, because my dad supports them
56	Male	18-25	Arsenal, my dad supports them
57	Male	18-25	Manchester United
58	Male	18-25	Arsenal - decided to at a young age (around 2009/10)
59	Male	18-25	Wolves because they wear gold and that was important to me when I was 6
60	Male	18-25	Chelsea because my family supports them
61	Male	18-25	Tottenham Hotspur as they're a local team and precious generations in my family have supported them
62	Male	18-25	Newcastle, family and local team
63	Male	18-25	Leeds United, because my dad does
64	Male	18-25	Burnley, I was born there & my family supports them
65	Male	18-25	Southampton, family from there
66	Other	18-25	Tottenham, when I became a fan, they were playing beautiful football
67	Male	18-25	Aston Villa - local to me at university and my friends support the same club
68	Male	18-25	Fulham
69	Male	18-25	Brighton & Hove Albion, they are my hometown team.
70	Male	18-25	Manchester United. Dad supports United and so do his three older brothers. I didn't have much choice!
71	Male	18-25	Liverpool because my dad does
72	Male	18-25	Aston Villa. Saw them beat Chelsea (my brothers team) when I was 5 and in hospital. Also had family in Birmingham. Couldn't pick a local team because we were immigrants and moved around a lot.

1	Gender	Age	Which Premier League club do you support and why
73	Male	18-25	Liverpool because of my father
74	Male	18-25	Leeds, father supports them
75	Male	18-25	Manchester United, a scrappy looking Portuguese teen made me fall in love with the game when I was 6.
76	Male	18-25	Arsenal and honestly, I just found myself there, I have no relatives who support them and I don't live in London
77	Male	18-25	liverpool, through my dad
78	Male	18-25	Newcastle because it's local to me, has a history of winning trophies and many legendary players (Shearer, Cisse etc).
79	Male	18-25	Man U, watched players in the world cup and fell in love with them.
80	Male	18-25	Tottenham hotspurBecause I was born there and lived there when I was young
81	Male	18-25	Southampton. Home town
82	Male	18-25	Leeds United; they are my local team I have supported all my life
83	Male	18-25	Burnley, my late best friend who introduced me to football was a Burnley football
84	Male	18-25	Arsenal and Fulham because I am from North London and a lot of my family are from West London, and my great grandad was a huge fan of Fulham.
85	Male	18-25	Chelsea
86	Male	18-25	West Ham, it's my local team
87	Male	18-25	Southampton, my Grandad lives there and supports them and took me to games from the age of 7.
88	Female	18-25	Aston Villa. I was born in The Midlands, and spent most of my early life in Birmingham.
89	Male	18-25	Chelsea as I liked lions as a kid
90	Male	18-25	Brighton and hove albion, grew up near there and my dad supported them
91	Male	18-25	Chelsea, liked Desailly on Fifa 04
92	Male	18-25	Chelsea FC, because of the beautiful football they played on 2012
93	Male	18-25	Chelsea
94	Male	18-25	Manchester United. Grandfather supported them
95	Male	18-25	Liverpool, I support it because it my family and it's where I grew up
96	Male	18-25	Everton
97	Male	18-25	Chelsea. Loved Lampard and Drogba
98	Male	18-25	Brighton and Hove Albion as I live in Brighton and the club is an integral part of the community.
99	Male	18-25	Arsenal. Found their football the most attractive
100	Male	18-25	Manchester United, first team I watched when I was getting into the sport and fell in love with the 09 team and their rapid style of play
101	Male	18-25	Club:Chelsea Why: Michael Essien
102	Female	18-25	Chelsea
103	Male	18-25	Man United - family club
104	Male	18-25	Southampton - home town + team my dad supports
105	Male	18-25	Manchester City. Family connections
106	Male	18-25	Manchester United. Its the club my dad supports.

1	Gender	Age	Which Premier League club do you support and why
107	Male	18-25	West Ham, when I got into football I didn't want to support the "traditional" top six clubs. So I did research and found West Ham and have loved them since.
108	Male	18-25	Liverpool, because my dad does
109	Male	18-25	Chelsea and because Higuain was the striker for 6 months
110	Male	18-25	Manchester United
111	Male	18-25	Chelsea. Born there.
112	Male	18-25	Liverpool and no reason why
113	Male	18-25	I support Sunderland who aren't in the premier league but i still mainly watch the prem
114	Male	18-25	Chelsea FC, because when I was younger I saw Frank Lampard and Didier Drogba play and the way the team played made me want to support the team that Frank was a part of.
115	Male	18-25	Newcastle United because my parents do
116	Male	18-25	Spurs - always have
117	Male	18-25	Wolverhampton Wanderers - Used to Support Man Utd but changed to my local team
118	Male	18-25	Man utd because of their history and most of my family supports them.
119	Male	18-25	Manchester United. Home town club and family history of support.
120	Male	18-25	Chelsea because of Didier Drogba and Frank Lampard
121	Male	18-25	Southampton - my dad was born in the city and supported them growing up, I had no choice
122	Male	18-25	Chelsea because my favourite colour is blue
123	Female	18-25	Fulham because my boyfriend supports them
124	Male	18-25	Tottenham/Brighton - dad supports Brighton, rest of my family support Tottenham
125	Male	18-25	Chelsea, I liked the colour blue when I was 7.
126	Male	18-25	Tottenham Hotspur, because of the rich history, passionate fanbase and general liking of the club.
127	Male	18-25	Manchester City, because I wanted to create a rivalry with my best friend who was a United fan
128	Male	18-25	Leicester
129	Male	18-25	I support Manchester City because my dad and family support Manchester City. My first football shirt was a city shirt, I am also from greater Manchester which is basically Manchester.
130	Male	18-25	Spurs, because of son heung min
131	Male	18-25	Manchester City, theyre local
132	Male	18-25	Manchester City FC - from very close to Maine Road, family supported for multiple generations
133	Male	18-25	Arsenal because I like suffering
134	Male	18-25	Southampton. They're my local club
135	Male	18-25	Leicester City because I'm born and live in Leicester
136	Male	18-25	West Bromwich Albion - local team
137	Male	18-25	Wolves - my local club and a club that my family has supported for a long time
138	Male	18-25	Southampton
139	Male	18-25	Aston Villa, due to familial history and my appreciation of their values.
140	Male	18-25	Chelsea, I grew up locally

1	Gender	Age	Which Premier League club do you support and why
141	Male	18-25	Newcastle United
142	Male	18-25	Man city. Favourite team
143	Male	18-25	Tottenham, had a fairly young and exciting team, a little bit of an underdog compared to other top teams
144	Male	18-25	Tottenhan Hotspur. To dare is to do.
145	Male	18-25	Arsenal, I've been an arsenal fan all my life, I fell in love with the club at a very young age
146	Male	18-25	Manchester city, because when i was a kid i liked colour of their kits
147	Male	18-25	Newcastle United, I support them because it's my hometown club, also my family have always supported them
148	Male	18-25	Spurs because my mum supported them
149	Male	18-25	Chelsea, i just fell in love with them because of drogba, lamps, terry...
150	Male	18-25	Chelsea - My dad supported them
151	Female	18-25	Manchester United - have since I was 7, started watching PL then
152	Male	18-25	Arsenal, local team and family also supports them
153	Male	18-25	Tottenham Hotspur and because it is the team my family has supported since I was I child
154	Male	18-25	Man City because i just wanted to choose a team and I liked their kit and players.
155	Male	18-25	My main club is actually Carlisle United but since they're in league 2 I follow Liverpool, my parents also support Liverpool so I guess that's where I got it from.
156	Male	18-25	Leeds, because they were the nearest club to where I live and my Dad supported them.
157	Male	18-25	Manchester United because it's our family club
158	Male	18-25	Southampton, local club
159	Male	18-25	Liverpool cause of my dad
160	Female	18-25	Tottenham Hotspurs
161	Male	18-25	Chelsea, and because I grew up close to Stamford Bridge.
162	Male	18-25	West Ham- family came from there, goes back to my great grandad
163	Male	18-25	Fulham
164	Male	18-25	Manchester City as my mother is from Manchester and I live locally.
165	Male	18-25	Liverpool
166	Female	18-25	Arsenal - my family supports them and i grew up supporting them
167	Male	18-25	Manchester United due to my dad supporting them
168	Male	18-25	Arsenal. Style of play attracted me to the club.
169	Male	18-25	Crystal Palace, born in Croydon
170	Male	18-25	Liverpool, because of their colors, lore and passion.
171	Male	18-25	West Ham, cos of my father
172	Female	18-25	Chelsea, because I always have
173	Female	18-25	Manchester United because my uncle supports it
174	Male	18-25	Manchester United. I am a student in Manchester and I have had the opportunity to attend some games
175	Male	18-25	Tottenham Hotspur Family
176	Male	18-25	Arsenal because of pat Jenning

1	Gender	Age	Which Premier League club do you support and why
177	Male	18-25	Chelsea because I picked it as a kid
178	Male	18-25	Manchester united as none of my family supported anyone so i just kinda picked it up
179	Male	18-25	Southampton. It's my local club
180	Male	18-25	Manchester United. My dad is from the area.
181	Male	18-25	Man City because when i was younger i liked the colour light blue
182	Male	18-25	Manchester United mainly off of family heritage in the area
183	Male	18-25	Liverpool/Accrington Stanley
184	Male	18-25	Manchester United, its my dad's team
185	Male	18-25	Chelsea because apart from west ham its closest and i chose it over west ham because my uncle supported it
186	Male	18-25	Leicester
187	Male	18-25	Aston Villa because they're local
188	Male	18-25	Liverpool because my family always has
189	Male	18-25	Leeds United because i grew up and live in Leeds
190	Male	18-25	Leicester - James Maddison used to play for my favourite club, Norwich so I supported them when he moved
191	Male	18-25	Aston Villa. My local team and dads team
192	Male	18-25	Arsenal - since childhood, was told by my friends at school who to support and they all said 'Arsenal'
193	Male	18-25	Tottenham Hotspur because I couldn't see myself supporting anyone else they are the team I fell in love with
194	Male	18-25	Chelsea because my grandparents supported them
195	Male	18-25	None, I purely enjoy watching the league as it is the top league of the country I live in.
196	Male	18-25	Everton FC, i live locally
197	Male	18-25	Chelsea, champions League final 08 was my 1st game
198	Male	18-25	Wolverhampton Wanderers. I liked watching them last season and I've been supporting them since then.
199	Male	18-25	West Brom, family
200	Male	18-25	Leeds, my family are from Yorkshire and we've always supported Leeds. I'm 5 generation Leeds fan, all the way back to Leeds City.
201	Male	18-25	Chelsea, probably because they had just won the league back to back when I started following at 6 years old, but I'm not entirely sure.
202	Female	18-25	Chelsea fc, they were doing well when i got into football so started supporting them
203	Male	18-25	Liverpool, my dad has been a supporter since the late 70s and his passion for the club. Took me to see the 2005 CL final in instanbul and I've been a die-hard ever since. Also I'm Irish, and liverpool has a lot of links with Ireland
204	Male	18-25	Manchester United, I actually don't know. It just came when my interest in football rose in my early 10s. I think it started with the red goal net in FIFA 13 that had caught my eye and one thing came to the other haha.
205	Male	18-25	Burnley, they are my local team
206	Male	18-25	Arsenal due to my dad supporting them, nothing geographical. When my dad was growing up they were dominant and when I was young there was the invincibles
207	Female	18-25	Wolverhampton. I have a special affection for that club and I like to watch them play. my family supports them so I kind of started liking them because of my family.
208	Male	18-25	Manchester City - Friend of mine was an avid United supporter so I chose them out of spite.

1	Gender	Age	Which Premier League club do you support and why
209	Male	18-25	Lfc family
210	Male	18-25	Arsenal because my dad supported them due to his dad growing up near Highbury.
211	Male	18-25	Liverpool because my dad was watching one of their games a long time back and I joined him in supporting.
212	Female	18-25	Manchester City. Family are supporters
213	Male	18-25	Chelsea because they are my local team (I live in the same town as the training ground)
214	Male	18-25	Manchester United. Family support the club and I've developed a passion for them.
215	Male	18-25	Chelsea My uncle took me to my first football game. He is a life long chelsea football fan.
216	Male	18-25	Arsenal. Family ties.
217	Male	18-25	Chelsea, 2012 UCL
218	Male	18-25	Chelsea, watched them growing up
219	Male	18-25	Everton because I like the way they play and what they mean
220	Male	18-25	Arsenal, started supporting them when I was young and read about them in football magazines.
221	Male	18-25	Arsenal. I was born in North London and my Dad got me into supporting them.
222	Male	18-25	Liverpool FC because they have a cool logo
223	Male	18-25	Manchester united. Dunno really, was just born into it
224	Male	18-25	Manchester United - favourite players as a kid and supported ever since
225	Male	18-25	Chelsea, I was born there
226	Male	18-25	Southampton, it's the family team
227	Male	18-25	Chelsea. Close to where I live.
228	Male	18-25	Tottenham Hotspur, family
229	Male	18-25	chelsea - supported them from a young age
230	Male	18-25	Fulham because I live there
231	Male	18-25	Chelsea, first football club i got attached with as a kid
232	Male	18-25	Leeds United, my dad supports them so I do
233	Male	18-25	Fulham because I lived there
234	Male	18-25	Arsenal because I was born into supporting them and they are simply the best team.
235	Female	18-25	Manchester City. Watched a World Cup in which I watched Argentina as I've always loved Argentina and I was watching Aguero and couldn't take my eyes off how good he was on the ball and then I followed him to Man City. Been a fan ever since.
236	Male	18-25	Manchester United, Grandad/friends support them
237	Male	18-25	I follow Spurs' results because my brother supports them but I'm more invested in the Bundesliga
238	Male	18-25	Liverpool, I think because of Luis Suarez
239	Male	18-25	Crystal Palace, I fell in love with them playing FIFA
240	Male	18-25	Manchester United because I have done since i was young
241	Male	18-25	Leeds united, place of birth
242	Male	18-25	Utd. Uncles supported them
243	Male	18-25	Southampton (Family support them)
244	Male	18-25	West Ham because it's my Dads club

1	Gender	Age	Which Premier League club do you support and why
245	Male	18-25	Everton as they did hospital visits and I think fundraising for my dad and the other kids in hospital back the 60's or 70's when he had a tumor needing taking out.
246	Male	18-25	Liverpool - family club/area
247	Male	18-25	Tottenham because I liked a player they used to have
248	Male	18-25	Chelsea, because my family is from west London and it's the first football match I ever went to.
249	Male	18-25	Fulham, family
250	Male	18-25	Southampton
251	Male	18-25	Liverpool. In truth Im a Sunderland fan, but in PL, I've had a soft spot for Liverpool since I stayed up late to see the 2005 UCL final and fell in love with Stevie G.
252	Male	18-25	Liverpool because they're the team that made me fall in love with the sport
253	Male	18-25	Chelsea, I was influenced by my cousin 12 years ago
254	Male	18-25	manchester united
255	Male	18-25	West Ham and because it's a local club
256	Male	18-25	Liverpool
257	Male	18-25	Tottenham Hotspur, through my dad.
258	Male	18-25	Manchester United, the premier league team my father supported
259	Male	18-25	Chelsea as my family supported them when I was growing up
260	Male	18-25	Manchester City, my family are from Manchester and I was brought up supporting the local club
261	Male	18-25	Manchester United; first club I saw play
262	Male	18-25	Man City, because my family introduced me to them when I was 6-7 years old
263	Male	18-25	Wolverhampton Wanderers
264	Male	18-25	Manchester United. Watched match of the day as a kid and and I feel love with the team.
265	Male	18-25	Liverpool, because I was in love with Fernando Torres as a child
266	Male	18-25	Manchester United
267	Male	18-25	Arsenal, because my family did/do
268	Female	18-25	Brighton, they are my local team
269	Male	18-25	Manchester City
270	Male	18-25	Chelsea, remember watching their 2012 CL and falling in love with the team
271	Male	18-25	Chelsea. The first ever jersey I got was a Chelsea jersey
272	Male	18-25	Chelsea, Local
273	Male	18-25	Tottenham as my dead grandad supported them
274	Male	18-25	Liverpool - close family friends support them + I live klopp and most of the players
275	Male	18-25	Manchester United
276	Male	18-25	Manchester United because of my father
277	Male	18-25	Chelsea. Always loved the way they played.
278	Male	18-25	Mufc because cr7
279	Male	18-25	Aston Villa - they are my dad's team
280	Male	18-25	Liverpool - family and location
281	Male	18-25	Liverpool, I just love them and they're a great team.

1	Gender	Age	Which Premier League club do you support and why
282	Male	18-25	Manchester City, I fell in love with aguero and toure when I first started watching football.
283	Male	18-25	Arsenal-Scottish, support Celtic & Kieran Tierney, followed him to Arsenal to support an English team
284	Male	18-25	Arsenal. When I was beginning to enjoy football, Arsenal were on TV frequently, so I could see their progress and struggles. I found great fan communities online that discussed their excitement and disappointment in a balanced way, which appealed to me. In a way, Arsenal was my introduction to football outside my country.
285	Male	18-25	Manchester United. Mother from Manchester. Runs in family.
286	Male	18-25	Chelsea
287	Male	18-25	Arsenal - Thierry Henry
288	Male	18-25	Manchester City, The story of an underdog club, living in the shadow of a Goliath such as Man United, punching above its weight and ultimately becoming the PL Champion inspires me.
289	Male	18-25	Southampton
290	Male	18-25	Leicester City F.C, I was born there.
291	Male	18-25	Man utd
292	Male	18-25	Arsenal; runs in the family
293	Male	18-25	Manchester United
294	Male	18-25	Manchester City
295	Male	18-25	Chelsea. I started supporting them a long time ago and i really like blue
296	Male	26-40	Aston Villa. Because they are typically the underdog.
297	Male	26-40	Arsenal - born there
298	Male	26-40	Southampton - family
299	Male	26-40	Southampton; because my close friends do
300	Male	26-40	I support chelsea because I grew up watching Lampard, Terry and Drogba play. I fell in love with the game by watching them
301	Male	26-40	Southampton - local club
302	Male	26-40	Arsenal - local team and my Grandad was an avid supporter.
303	Male	26-40	Leeds United, father supports them.
304	Female	26-40	I support Southampton FC because I was born there and my dad supported them :)
305	Male	26-40	Southampton, it's where I was born
306	Male	26-40	West Ham United. Local and family team.
307	Male	26-40	Liverpool, family team
308	Male	26-40	Newcastle United - childhood team
309	Male	26-40	Chelsea
310	Male	26-40	Manchester United
311	Male	26-40	Arsenal - me and my friend chose to support them when younger and it stuck
312	Male	26-40	Fulham. My dad and grandad are life long fans.
313	Male	26-40	Manchester United, loved Ronaldo at the 2006 World Cup.
314	Male	26-40	Southampton; hometown club (also Arsenal, as I started to follow them while Southampton competed in the lower leagues)
315	Male	26-40	Arsenal, childhood club

1	Gender	Age	Which Premier League club do you support and why
316	Male	26-40	Chelsea, I like blue
317	Male	26-40	Man United, because of Roy Keane, Denis Irwin and my older brother also supported them.
318	Male	26-40	Leeds
319	Male	26-40	Manchester United, only team on TV growing up.
320	Male	26-40	My club is Sheffield Wednesday (championship), but I avidly follow the EPL. In this regard, I support teams, not clubs - eg, I'm a big fan of the current Leicester, Aston villa, and man City teams, but do not consider myself a supporter of those clubs.
321	Male	26-40	Everton
322	Male	26-40	Manchester United, my brother lead me to them.
323	Male	26-40	Southampton. My Dad is from the city and we have gone to games together since I was young
324	Male	26-40	Liverpool, family team
325	Male	26-40	Newcastle United. I studied my degree in Newcastle so the team became my home for a while.
326	Male	26-40	Leeds United - Born & live in Leeds.
327	Male	26-40	Liverpool, just liked the team around 1997 when started to watch football
328	Male	26-40	Liverpool, born into a family of Reds.
329	Male	26-40	Chelsea FC. Started following due to players I liked being signed.
330	Male	26-40	Chelsea - father and grandfather support them
331	Male	26-40	Aston Villa, they were relatively local when was growing up
332	Male	26-40	Southampton
333	Male	26-40	Aston Villa. Grew up close by and they were great in the 90s when I was a kid
334	Male	26-40	Arsenal, because no sane person can support s*urs
335	Male	26-40	Southampton. Family connections
336	Male	26-40	Liverpool because of Steven Gerard when I was a kid.
337	Male	26-40	Manchester United, boyhood fan
338	Male	26-40	Wolverhampton - my home city.
339	Male	26-40	Chelsea. One of my local clubs. Picked chelsea over Fulham because I was a kid and had no idea
340	Male	26-40	Newcastle United. Although my father is a Manchester United fan from Manchester, i grew up in Newcastle and once I went to some games that was it.
341	Male	26-40	Wolves. Born within a mile of the stadium.
342	Male	26-40	Leicester. Went to uni there (pre-promotion to PL) and got cheap tickets
343	Male	26-40	Liverpool FC. They were the first team I ever picked in FIFA 04 and I've stuck with them ever since.
344	Male	26-40	Liverpool. Most people I know support a team because they are from that area or their family supported that team. I am neither of these, I am not from Liverpool and I do not know my family. I started to watch football when I was young and really enjoyed watching Liverpool at the time and I have supported them since.
345	Male	26-40	Arsenal. Since 2000, grew up only knowing this.
346	Male	26-40	Leeds United. Dad's family are all from Leeds. While I wasn't brought up in Leeds my support is inherited.

1	Gender	Age	Which Premier League club do you support and why
347	Male	26-40	Manchester United because they were the most dominant team when I started watching football.
348	Male	26-40	Chelsea FC. Best in London
349	Male	26-40	Arsenal since I was a child
350	Male	26-40	Southampton - Proximity to where I was living
351	Male	26-40	Chelsea - My dad and grandad both supported them
352	Male	26-40	Arsenal, because growing up I loved watching Thierry Henry
353	Male	26-40	Leeds because my dad did
354	Male	26-40	Manchester United - family history and loved the style of play
355	Female	26-40	Manchester United. My dad supported them
356	Male	26-40	Liverpool, via my dad
357	Other	26-40	Neutral fan.
358	Male	26-40	Arsenal. Freddie Ljungberg, Thierry Henry, Arsène Wenger and The Invincibles.
359	Male	26-40	Newcastle United
360	Male	26-40	Arsenal - always been my club.
361	Male	26-40	Manchester United, parents supported them
362	Male	26-40	Chelsea. Favorite player is Lampard n I grew up hearing about and watching them. Also got called Lampard often so yea
363	Male	26-40	Arsenal, relatively close geographically, father supported.
364	Male	26-40	Leeds United - father and grandfather supported them, our local club
365	Male	26-40	Liverpool - Family is all from Merseyside
366	Male	26-40	Chelsea FC - my father supports them and I followed
367	Male	26-40	Liverpool - family and geography
368	Male	26-40	Tottenham Hotspur
369	Male	26-40	Leeds United
370	Male	26-40	Manchester United
371	Male	26-40	Chelsea
372	Male	26-40	none
373	Male	26-40	Southampton
374	Male	26-40	Burnley. Childhood football team
375	Male	26-40	Southampton, it's my home town
376	Female	26-40	Manchester United because my partner does
377	Male	26-40	Arsenal - because Dennis Bergkamp, Thierry Henry and the club logo appeal
378	Male	26-40	Chelsea
379	Male	26-40	Manchester City
380	Male	26-40	Wolverhampton Wanderers
381	Male	26-40	Leeds United
382	Male	26-40	Everton because of the heart, community, and history of the club.
383	Male	26-40	Leicester City - They won the league as a financial underdog and now they're practically a top four team. Go Foxes!
384	Male	26-40	Newcastle United Football Club. It's my local club. My city. My dad and family are Newcastle fans, I couldn't be anything else.

1	Gender	Age	Which Premier League club do you support and why
385	Male	26-40	Crystal Palace
386	Male	26-40	Liverpool
387	Male	26-40	Manchester United
388	Male	26-40	Sheffield United. I am not originally from Sheffield but have lived there 30 years. I have always lived near the ground, it is part of the community.
389	Male	26-40	Tottenham. Ever since I was about 6 years old
390	Male	26-40	Arsenal
391	Male	26-40	Liverpool, my team since childhood. Older brother and cousins supported, I followed.
392	Male	26-40	Chelsea.Because of Terry.
393	Male	26-40	Liverpool. Feel in love with players like Robbie Fowler, Steve McManaman andSteven Gerrard
394	Male	26-40	West ham. Club that was close to my hometown but not many people support.
395	Male	26-40	Newcastle United, because it is my hometown team.
396	Male	26-40	Liverpool. My brother was given a Liverpool shirt in 1995 (he was 7, I was 5) but didn't like football so gave it to me and I've been stuck with them since.
397	Male	26-40	Chelsea
398	Male	26-40	Liverpool & because my father supported them
399	Male	26-40	Wolverhampton wanderers
400	Male	26-40	Chelsea, supported them since I was 6.
401	Male	26-40	Manchester United
402	Male	26-40	Tottenham Hotspur, because my family are from tottenham.
403	Male	26-40	Arsenal, wish I could tell you! I think it's just the way they make me feel like it's a family through and through. Plus the history
404	Male	26-40	Liverpool
405	Male	26-40	Chelsea because i didn't wanted to support manchester united as most of my friends and the first match that i watched was chelsea where he scored a piledriver and the jersey being blue was also made me like them
406	Male	26-40	Arsenal and I've always loved them
407	Male	26-40	Tottenham, because of Expressions Oozing.
408	Male	26-40	Chelsea – I've been supporting them since I was 10 (I'm currently 34). The why probably boils down to the fact my dad supports them and I could go to games with him.
409	Male	26-40	Fulham FC. I grew up in a non football house hold and just happened to fall in love with Fulham even though I live in the north east
410	Male	41-55	arsenal- I needed more suffering in my life
411	Male	41-55	Manchester City. I live in the area and this was the first match I saw live at the Etihad.
412	Male	41-55	Chelsea. Micky Droy was my hero when i was a kid.
413	Male	41-55	Spurs, some days I am not sure
414	Male	41-55	Fulham
415	Male	41-55	Fulham. Local ties.
416	Male	41-55	Manchester United, family always supported them.
417	Male	41-55	Leeds United
418	Male	41-55	Manchester City. They were the team that was located closest to where i lived as a child.
419	Male	41-55	Manchester City, I like Pep Guardiola and his style of play.

1	Gender	Age	Which Premier League club do you support and why
420	Female	41-55	Arsenal. My step grandad played for them so it's a family thing.
421	Male	41-55	Aston Villa the name says it all
422	Male	41-55	Leeds United family from Yorkshire
423	Male	41-55	Leeds United, family team
424	Male	41-55	Tottenham Hotspur because its a family thing
425	Male	41-55	Brighton because they play attractive football
426	Other	55+	Tottenham Hotspur because they are a traditionally Jewish club and I am a Jewish man
427	Male	55+	Tottenham Hotspur

SHRNUTÍ

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