



Management implications of foreign players in the English Premiership League football

Nnamdi Madichie

University of East London Business School, London, UK

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to show how one of the biggest phenomena of the twenty-first century is the internationalisation of professional sports and how premier league football epitomises this. With the influx of foreign players, managers and now owners, European League Football has become big business. This paper aims to provide a theoretical analysis of the management implications of foreign players in the English Premiership League football – renamed the Barclays Premier League to suit the needs of its major sponsors.

Design/methodology/approach – The approach adopted is purely qualitative in nature, evaluating the top Barclays Premier League teams and the impact of globalisation on their reconfigurations since the early 1990s to date. The study draws mainly from a review of the extant literature on sports and management, as well as a critical analysis of media reports.

Findings – Globalisation has emerged as a new force that has changed the way corporations are managed. Financial services, retail and information technology firms have all responded to this new wave – and so also has sports. Unfortunately while sports have the potential to teach lessons on management strategy, management researchers seem to have relegated sports to the sociology and psychology disciplines.

Practical implications – The Barclays Premier league football provides a unique environment for management decisions and processes to occur in a range of markets and at varied levels. However, the globalisation of professional sports has received relatively very little attention in the academic literature – especially in the field of business and management.

Originality/value – This paper contributes to the scant literature on the management implications of football by highlighting how globalisation has affected and reconfigured professional sports using the influx of foreign players into the English football league as a point of departure.

Keywords Decision making, Employees, Football, Management power, Globalization

Paper type Case study

Introduction

Professional sports have emerged as a lucrative business, with many opportunities and challenges for sports management. As Mason (1999) argued, professional sports teams unite to produce a league product that has evolved from mere “entertainment for spectators” to being “sold to four distinct groups”:

- (1) fans who support leagues by attending games, following games on television and other media, and purchasing league- and team-related merchandise;
- (2) communities which build facilities and support local clubs;
- (3) television and other media companies which purchase the rights to show games; and



-
- (4) corporations which support leagues and clubs by increasing gate moneys, purchasing teams outright, or providing revenues through sponsorships or other associations.

Consequently, football leagues provide that unique opportunity for management decisions and processes to occur in a range of environments and at varied levels. Indeed professional sports in general and football in particular, have become a growing segment within the broader, global, entertainment industry.

This paper provides some theoretical insight into the management implications of foreign players in the Barclays Premier League – drawing mainly from a review of the literature and other media reports. The next section provides a brief background of the league, which is followed by a discussion of migratory patterns of foreign players in general (Dobson and Goddard, 2001). The paper goes on to highlight the challenges of the football quota mechanism, which restricts the influx of foreign players in European football. Some strategy discourse is also brought to bear (Parnell, 2006; Chaharbaghi, 2007) in order to reach a sound set of conclusions and managerial/ research implications on this largely neglected – at least in management parlance – emergent epitome of globalisation.

Background

The English Premier League – now officially known (for sponsorship reasons) as the Barclays Premier League (BPL) is the highest professional football league in England. Formed on 20 February 1992 when clubs in the football league's First Division decided to break away from the traditional Football League in order to take advantage of the lucrative potential of the growing market – thanks to globalisation and broadcasting rights, the league is currently contested by 20 club sides. The League operates a system of promotion and relegation in conjunction with the English Football Association (FA). Seasons run from August to May with each team playing 38 games each. The Barclays Premier League has since become the world's most watched sporting league (Dennis, 2002) and the most lucrative with cumulative club revenues of around £1.4billion. It is also worth noting that the league has now become a corporation in its own right with 20 clubs acting as shareholders.

From its inception in the 1992/1993 football season, a total of 40 teams have competed in the League but only four of these have actually won the title (see Table I) – Manchester United, Blackburn Rovers, Arsenal and Chelsea – and for this reason form the primary basis of this paper. Manchester United are the current champions having won the title for the tenth time (the most of any other team) in the recently concluded 2007/2008 football season. Manchester United is based at the Old Trafford Ground in Manchester, Blackburn Rovers is based at Ewood Park, Arsenal has not too long ago relocated to its new home at the Emirates Stadium in north London and Chelsea is based at Stamford Bridge in southwest London.

The BPL is undoubtedly awash with talent from around the world. While many feel that some football clubs opt for cheaper foreign players over home-grown talent and thus restrict the development of future English players (Niemann and Brand, 2008), others have argued that the league has proven to be very important in developing football in foreign countries. Players have been exposed to competitive play and have become professionals thus prompting much exposure to the coveted regional

Year	Winner	Points	Second	Points	Third	Points
2006-2007	Manchester United	89	Chelsea	83	Liverpool ^a	68
2005-2006	Chelsea	91	Manchester United	83	Liverpool	82
2004-2005	Chelsea	95	Arsenal	83	Manchester United	77
2003-2004	Arsenal	90	Chelsea	79	Manchester United	75
2002-2003	Manchester United	83	Arsenal	78	Newcastle United	69
2001-2002	Arsenal	87	Liverpool	80	Manchester United	77
2000-2001	Manchester United	80	Arsenal	70	Liverpool	69
1999-2000	Manchester United	91	Arsenal	73	Leeds United	69
1998-1999	Manchester United	79	Arsenal	78	Chelsea	75
1997-1998	Arsenal	78	Manchester United	77	Liverpool	65
1996-1997	Manchester United	75	Newcastle United ^a	68	Arsenal ^a	68
1995-1996	Manchester United	82	Newcastle United	78	Liverpool	71
1994-1995	Blackburn Rovers	89	Manchester United	88	Nottingham Forest	77
1993-1994	Manchester United	92	Blackburn Rovers	84	Newcastle United	77
1992-1993	Manchester United	84	Aston Villa	74	Norwich City	72

Table I.
Premiership past winners

Note: ^aPlaces decided on goal difference
Source: www.sportingchronicle.com/premierleaguewinners.html

tournaments – such as the European Champions League and the African Cup of Nations – on the international media circuit (see BBC News, 2005; Madichie, 2008). There is also evidence from all over Europe that foreign players have contributed to the development of top league football – from the German *Bundesliga*, through the Italian *Serie A* and Spanish *Primera Liga* to the English Barclays Premier League.

As the 2008 European Champions League moved into its quarter-final stages, the presence of talents such as Cristiano Ronaldo (Portugal), Fernando Torres (Spain), Didier Drogba (Ivory Coast), Cesc Fabregas (Spain) among others, underpinned Chelsea's key player's (Frank Lampard) belief that an English team "will win" the Moscow final on 21 May 2008 – which was achieved. Indeed it was clearly pointed out (Winter, 2008) "English teams have the individuals to light up the tournament". This view is no better demonstrated than in the apparent presence of four English teams in the 2008 European Champions League quarter finals draw – Manchester United, Chelsea, Liverpool and Arsenal – with the former three reaching the semi-finals stages and Manchester United eventually clinching the European title.

This underpins the need to evaluate the subject of labour migration in football across Europe and beyond.

Professional sports, football and labour migration

The phenomenon of labour migration is a salient feature of modern sports that has been investigated by scholars for over a decade – covering a wide range of sports. For instance, while Klein (1991) examined the migration of baseball players, Maguire (1999) focused on basketball, ice hockey and cricket. The subject of football has also been relatively well researched – albeit at a generic level by scholars including Bromberger (1994), Lanfranchi (1994), Lanfranchi and Taylor (2001), Maguire (1996), Maguire and Pearton (2000), Stead and Maguire (2000), Magee and Sugden (2002) and McGovern (2002). While it seems obvious that researchers have unequivocally established that

migration in sport is a complex and multidimensional process, and part of global sport systems (Maguire *et al.*, 2002; Adcroft and Teckman, 2008a), the societal multi-dimensionality of migratory issues, however, has led to the proliferation of academic interest with often divergent views on the subject (Magee and Sugden, 2002; Taylor, 2006).

Again, while some of these scholars scrutinized general migration issues in sports, developed typologies and investigated particular features and segments of sport migrations, the sphere of Central European football and related migrations have remained under-investigated by systematic collation and exploration of primary evidence (Molnar and Maguire, 2008). Nonetheless, the migration of workers usually follows certain patterns, which has the propensity of creating “talent/migratory pipelines” – umbilical cords between host and donor countries – through which individuals can be recruited and channelled (see Poli, 2005). As Molnar and Maguire (2008) pointed out in their study of central European football, the patterns of these pipelines are in constant flux and change in a longitudinal fashion. On the one hand and taken from a macro-structural sense, host countries such as Western European countries and the USA, hire labour force from donor countries for a certain amount of time to improve or maintain the quality of their domestic league games. Donor countries such as Latin and Central American, South African and Central and Eastern Europe, on the other hand, provide the required skilled labour force. Host countries on their part have the financial means to secure higher pay packages for athletes who were trained in countries of lower development – with dire consequences attributable to “deskilling of donor countries” (Klein, 1991; Maguire, 1999). Put differently, donor countries invest time, money and energy into manufacturing sporting talent, which on maturity, are exploited by clubs from economically developed countries via migratory pipelines that are maintained by football agents in Western Europe (Poli, 2005). In addition to this “deskilling” controversy is the emerging “Eurocentric brouhaha” over football quotas for foreign players in European leagues – a move that has been largely instigated by the Bosman ruling (see Dobson and Goddard, 2001; Lowrey *et al.*, 2002; Niemann and Brand, 2008).

The Bosman ruling and European football

The subject of labour migration in European football is quite dated. However it was only after the Bosman ruling of 1995 that research interest was regenerated. The 1977/1978 football season marked the arrival of “freedom of contract”, which stipulated that, at the end of their contracts, players could now exercise their option to leave their respective clubs. However, should the club offer the player new terms that were at least as attractive as the old ones, then the selling club was still entitled to a transfer fee, but if a final figure could not be agreed on between the clubs concerned then a tribunal would have to decide the appropriate figure. Under the terms of this arrangement, contractually bound players or their agents were explicitly prohibited from initiating transfer moves – it was up to the potential buyer to approach the club directly – a system which was prevalent until the ground-breaking Jean-Marc Bosman case in 1995.

Bosman was a footballer playing for the Belgian first division side FC Liege, but on wanting to leave for French side Dunkirk at the end of the 1990 season he was met by a stiff resistance by his employers. The latter invoked the “cross-border transfer ruling”

which stipulated that clubs had to agree a fee before a player was allowed to transfer. FC Liege tried to make the move impossible by demanding a very high transfer fee for Bosman’s services – a move that was successfully challenged in a lawsuit against the tripartite social actors – FC Liege, the Belgian football authorities, and the European football authorities – on the grounds that the football regulations on transfer fees prevented EU citizens from exercising their human right of unfettered labour mobility.

About half a decade later in 1995, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruled in favour of Jean-Marc Bosman, deciding that the existing football transfer rules were in breach of the EU law on the free movement of workers between member states. As a result of this: “the European Union demanded that regulations concerning players’ transfers and limitations on foreign players be amended almost immediately” (see Lowrey *et al.*, 2002). This EU ruling eventually led to the free movement of footballers between clubs within EU member states with no fee payable at the expiration of players’ contracts. It also meant that players were now allowed to negotiate their own deals with a new or potential employer as their existing contracts neared expiration. Consequently top players found themselves in a very powerful position with their own clubs – and with potential buyers – as soon as their contracts approach their end.

This point was clearly aired by Lowrey *et al.* (2002) in their assessment of the Bosman ruling and its impact on the issue of football transfers and foreign players. In their discussion they clearly pointed out that:

... in England, club fans have more than just the England team to cheer: they can also follow their club favourites playing for countries around the globe. A lessening of exclusive nationalist fervour might actually be a rather good thing in the new “global” age for football.

Indeed the massive impact that the Bosman ruling has had on the sport and on player loyalty, cannot be underestimated, as the richest clubs (see Figures 1 and 2) have continued to buy the best players with global impunity.

Dobson and Goddard (2001, p. 12) highlighted a similar position for the BPL when they clearly pointed out that “since the Bosman ruling in 1995, European football labour markets have been open rather than closed, with players frequently hired from outside the domestic league.” Players are freer to move from club to club – and across

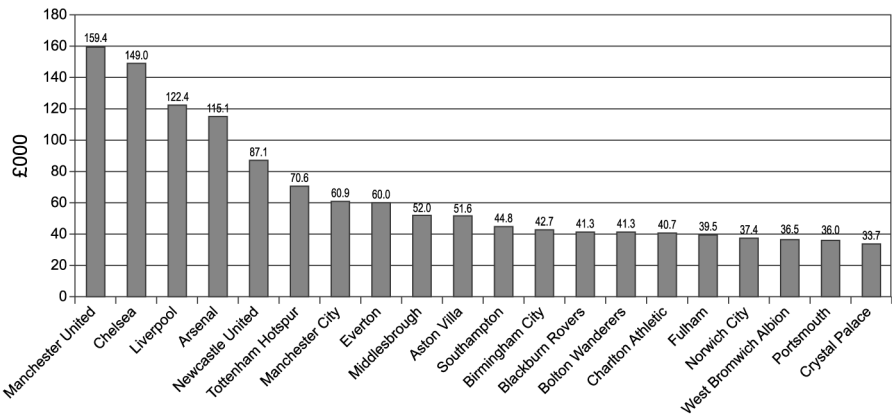
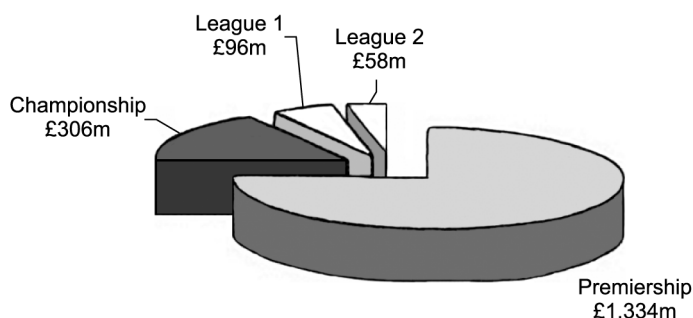


Figure 1.
Turnover of leading
English clubs, 2004-2005

Source: Deloitte & Touche, annual company reports and accounts, Mintel



Source: Deloitte & Touche Sport/Mintel

Figure 2.
Turnover of English
professional football clubs,
by league, 2004-2005

national boundaries – than at any other time in the game’s history. Although footballers have also always moved around Europe (see Lanfranchi and Taylor, 2001), high profile BPL signings in 2002 came from non-EU countries like Senegal, Nigeria, China, Japan and Turkey. Top continental players seem especially keen to move to England partly because of the strong reputation of the BPL on the international scene, but also because the wages there still competed well with those in other top leagues abroad.

Methodology and analysis

The approach adopted in this paper is purely qualitative in nature, evaluating the leading BPL teams and the impact of globalisation on their reconfigurations since the early 1990s to date. This paper draws insights from Molnar and Maguire’s (2008) study on the Hungarian football industry – where the authors approached football migration-related issues from a qualitative angle by examining specific, personal layers of these via the lived experiences of Hungarian migrant footballers (see Table II). The paper also benefits from the studies of Niemann and Brand (2008) on the German *Bundesliga* as well as Mehler’s (2008) study on the implications of patriotism and/or nationalism in African football – comparing Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire (two prominent African countries that have contributed players to the BPL). From a methodological standpoint, Niemann and Brand (2008) employed what was described as “process tracing” which they “put into practice through triangulation across different data sources” – drawing on official documentation, secondary literature and major media reports – in addition to their 11 semi-structured interviews.

This view is also consistent with Parnell’s (2006) methodology where he argued that a “new business strategy typology is developed and grounded in recent developments in the literature and in business practice.” In other words the latter paper was based on a critical review of the strategy literature. After which an attempt was made at reconceptualising two central strategic considerations – value and market control. Finally, Adcroft and Teckman (2008a) drew largely on sources on the official web site of the Rugby Union in their in-depth analysis of the Rugby World Cup (RWC).

The approaches adopted in these scholarly works cited thus suggest that the method adopted here is consistent with the norm in the field under study. Having established this reasoning it is worth highlighting the key players in the BPL and their

Table II.
Literature review

Author(s)	Purpose	Methodology	Conclusion
Niemann and Brand (2008) ^a Germany	Football is the most popular game and the sport with the greatest economic significance in Europe. Its influence cuts across political, economic, social and cultural spheres, and should also be illustrative of other sectors of European sport	Used the comparative method and process tracing... where observations concerning structural dynamics and actors' attitudes/behaviours are traced, analysed and discussed. This way integrative knowledge is gained concerning the nature and composition of causal mechanisms and processes. Process tracing has been put into practice through triangulation across different data sources – official documentation, secondary literature and major media reports	The three analysed cases can be characterized by distinct dynamics, processes and outcomes. Bosman I – described as strong EU-level pressures on German clubs to change nationality restrictions, which were mediated through a mixture of progressive and conservative transposition. Whereas national and transnational actors hardly intervened in the policy formulation period, their impact is decisive in specific 'system transformation', which is indicated in the steadily increasing share of UEFA residents playing in the Bundesliga between 1995 and 2005
Mehler (2008) ^b Ivory Coast and Ghana	The paper discourses football coverage referring to political issues reflect dominant – and possibly contesting – "truths", which themselves are linked to power relations and political struggles within a given society. Objectivity is not sought in this endeavour. The media reports chosen may not even be "representative" of what "people" think. They just show the range of positions adopted	Uses electronically available newspapers and other internet sources for about a year were screened for football and political content in both Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. Between July 2005 and July 2006 about 30 internet sites and a number of other available sources from both countries were regularly consulted and about 100 telling examples were considered for inclusion	Putting Patriotism outside the narrow framework of the nation-state. Based on his book "Revolutionary Path", Kwame Nkrumah continues to inspire a new generation of Africans despite the demise of his socialist, pan-Africanist experiment in Ghana. Since the 1960s strong ideological tensions could be detected leading to the development of political traditions in which political parties and individual leaders would place themselves. Football that confronts national teams present an opportunity to display, live, reinforce, and challenge patriotism

(continued)

Author(s)	Purpose	Methodology	Conclusion
Molnar and Maguire (2008) Hungary	To shed light on some of the numerous personal and occupational struggles, difficulties and uncertainties Hungarian professional footballers encountered at varied stages of their transfer after the collapse of communism. Aimed at drawing wider attention to motivational forces – push and pull factors that can facilitate or hinder migratory processes and experiences	The authors approached football migration-related issues from a qualitative angle by examining specific, personal layers of these via the lived experiences of Hungarian migrant footballers	Attempted to make sense sociologically of the migration-related lived experiences of Hungarian footballers. It also concluded that it was inaccurate to specifically state migrants' motivations without a longitudinal examination of the elements of, and power balance within, this blend. Indeed a continually changing mixture of global and local push and pull factors was responsible for demotivating Hungarian footballers

Notes: ^a There are several rationales for focusing on German football in our case study: first, along with the English, French, Italian and Spanish leagues, the Bundesliga is one of the major football leagues in Europe (Niemann and Brand, 2008, p. 91); ^b The paper analyses whether and in what way different political contexts influence style and content of football coverage and what implications this may have (see p. 96). It also focuses on an analysis of three key themes used in sports coverage – patriotism, peace and governance – and their meaning for Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana. There are however some cautionary remarks concerning the "comparison of sports coverage between Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana is certainly far from complete by focusing on only three issues and by quoting a small selection of articles and opinions expressed in internet forums

Table II.

management strategies that not only guarantee success but also provide avenues for management research.

Foreign players in European league football

The influx of foreign players into European football League has raised some concerns over their potential of taking over and by so-doing, extinguishing the potential development of home grown talent (for a debate on these matters see Dobson and Goddard, 2001; FIFA, 2008; The FA, 2008). To this extent quota restrictions have been instituted at both the European and the country FA levels. There is a catalogue of quotas being imposed on foreign players in European League games. The stories are very similar across Europe but only select cases will be discussed here for illustrative purposes – drawing from two emerging European markets (Hungary and Ukraine) and one founding member of the European Union (Germany).

In the case of Hungary on the one hand, Molnar and Maguire (2008) shed light on some of the numerous personal and occupational struggles, difficulties and uncertainties professional footballers encountered at varied stages of their footballing transfer after the collapse of communism. These authors also attempted to draw wider attention to motivational forces, in the form of push and pull factors that can either facilitate or hinder migratory processes and, at a later stage, impact on migratory experiences (Molnar and Maguire, 2008). Another interesting part of their paper was the attempt to highlight the selection of potential host countries and the degree of control Hungarian professional footballers' exercised over choosing their countries of destination.

In Ukraine, on the other hand, the nation's top clubs breathed a sigh of relief after courts ruled in favour of the Football Federation of Ukraine's (FFU's) restrictions on foreign players in early 2007. Indeed the success of Ukraine's senior and Under-21 national teams in recent years has been attributed by many to the FFU's efforts, and in particular, their insistence that clubs in the élite division should field no more than eight foreigners, giving young local talents the chance to parade their skills (Linnyk, 2007). With a further reduction of the foreign players' quota planned, the rule was challenged by FC Metalurh Donetsk's Georgia striker Georgi Demetradze, who claimed the restriction was a breach of his working rights and incompatible with the Ukrainian constitution. However, the courts decreed that there was no case to answer, arguing that under national legislation, players did not have any right to first-team football, so the foreign players' quota could not be considered in breach. Indeed, the FFU retains the backing of national coach Oleh Blokhin, "I always demanded, and will continue to insist, that teams should be able to field no more than five or six foreign players in a match" (see Linnyk, 2007).

The story in Germany is not much different, as the number of foreign players has grown over the years. As Christoph(2003) observed:

Foreign players? In the first German *Bundesliga* campaign there were just three of them. Forty years later, on the final day of last season's *Bundesliga* campaign, the number was above 150.

He goes on to add that:

Foreign players have brought skill, colour and flair to German football, and the influx of talent shows no sign of slowing.

With German national teams continuing to perform well at the highest levels, the idea that foreign players weakened national teams has been further questioned. The *Bundesliga* seems to have been improved immensely by its foreign legion – and the arrival of Anthony Yeboah at Eintracht in 1990 was the cue for another wave of foreign players, this time from Africa. The Ghanaian striker was the first of many African players to thrive in a league which now boasts players from other countries including Cameroon, Namibia, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo (see Christoph, 2003).

However, recent studies have highlighted the re-emergence of European football quotas. As Niemann and Brand (2008) pointed out in their study on German football, i.e. the *Bundesliga*, there are salient European limits on overseas players – a maximum of five per team – UEFA also wants a specified percentage of clubs' first-team squads to have come up through their youth system. Both schemes – particularly the foreign quota – could have a dramatic effect on clubs such as Chelsea, who have in the past fielded a full team of foreigners. This led to their analysis on three sub-cases:

- (1) the nationality issue related to the Bosman ruling;
- (2) the transfer rules resulting from Bosman; and
- (3) the issue of broadcasting rights.

There have also been suggestions that domestic level actors can influence the impact of EU level decisions to a reasonable extent. Hence, outcomes depend both on the strength of EU level pressures for domestic change and on domestic level counter-reactions.

Foreign players in the BPL

Coming back to the main subject of this paper (the English football league or BPL), Silver (2008) documents some very instructive commentary on the league leaders (see Table III) – notably Manchester United, Chelsea, Liverpool and Arsenal through the eyes of the Chelsea boss and his praise for the “enthraling” games managed by his “foreign peers” – but also club rivals (Arsene Wenger and Sir Alex Ferguson – who I dare refer to as foreign – after all Scotland plays its national games separate from England).

It is worth noting that at least these teams have been accused at one time or the other since the commencement of the BPL as being a “League of Nations” or, more

Position	Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
1	Manchester United	38	27	6	5	80	22	58	87
2	Chelsea	38	25	10	3	65	26	38	85
3	Arsenal	38	24	11	3	74	31	43	83
4	Liverpool	38	21	13	4	67	28	39	76
5	Everton	38	19	8	11	55	33	22	65
6	Aston Villa	38	16	12	10	71	51	20	60
7	Blackburn Rovers	38	15	13	10	50	48	2	58
8	Portsmouth	38	16	9	13	48	40	8	57
9	Manchester City	38	15	10	13	45	53	–8	55
10	West Ham United	38	13	10	15	42	50	–8	49

Source: www.skysports.com/football/league/0,19540,11660,00.html

Table III.
Top ten Barclays
Premiership teams (end
of season – 11 May 2008)

cynically put, “Foreign Legions”. Starting with Manchester United in the days of the likes of Diego Forlan, Dwight Yorke, Juan Sebastián Verón, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, Ruud van Nistelrooy, and Peter Schmeichel among others. Chelsea not too long ago with the likes of Andriy Shevchenko, Carlo Cudicini, Didier Drogba, Petr Cech, Louis Saha, Michael Ballack, Michael Essien and Nikolas Anelka among others and not to mention Arsenal which features what is arguably half of the French national side and a third of the Ivorian national team all in one game!

The top BPL sides do not only feature a wide range of foreign players (mostly from Eastern Europe and West Africa) but are all foreign owned and foreign managed (see Table IV). While defending champions, Manchester United is owned by Malcolm Glazer (an American) and managed by Sir Alex Ferguson (Scotland); Chelsea is owned by Roman Abramovich (Russian) and managed by Avram Grant (Israel); Arsenal is owned by Stan Kroenke (American) and Alisher Usmanov (Russian) and managed by Arsene Wenger (French); and Liverpool is owned by an American duo of George Gillett and Tom Hicks and managed by Rafael Benitez (Spanish).

The top ten highest goal scorers in the BPL as at the time of writing this paper (June 2008) were also all foreign players – with Portuguese Cristiano Ronaldo of Manchester United leading the pack (see Table V) and Argentine Carlos Tevez also of the same club closing the rear. These foreign typologies emphasise the reality of globalisation in professional league football in England. It also poses challenges for management strategy discourse as well as opportunities where lessons might be drawn on, learned and/or shared.

Football migration, nationality issues and management strategy
In this section three key themes are discussed drawing on studies that directly impact on the current paper – notably Niemann and Brand (2008) on the dynamics of labour

Team	Manager	Duration	Nationality
Manchester United (1)	Alex Ferguson	6 November 1986	Scotland
Chelsea (2)	Avram Grant ^a	20 September 2007	Israel
Arsenal (3)	Arsene Wenger	30 September 1996	France
Liverpool (4)	Rafael Benitez	1 July 2004	Spain
Everton (5)	David Moyes	15 March 2002	Scotland
Portsmouth (8)	Harry Redknapp	8 December 2005	England
Blackburn ^b (7)	Mark Hughes	6 September 2004	Wales
West Ham ^b (10)	Alan Curbishley	13 December 2006	England

Notes: ^a On 12 June 2008 Chelsea announced that Scolari the Brazilian and national coach of Portugal (which suffered a Euro2008 quarter final exit at the hands of Germany on 19 June 2008) would be the new manager to replace Avram Grant as from 1 July 2008; ^b Blackburn is included in this table as a previous title winner in the BPL in the 1994/1995 season. West Ham is included due to its Icelandic ownership and its position as the seat of controversy – English players Jermain Defoe and Joe Cole left the Hammers for Tottenham and Chelsea respectively. Likewise the Argentine duo of Mascheranos and Carlos Tevez moved to Liverpool and Manchester United amidst controversies. Note also that Mark Hughes has now been replaced by Paul Ince since 21 June 2008 as manager

Source: Mariner (2008, p. 54)

Table IV.
Select Premiership
managers (top five plus
two others)

				Foreign players in English football
Name	Number of goals	Team	Nationality	
C. Ronaldo	31	Man United	Portugal	35
E. Adebayor	24	Arsenal	Togo	
F. Torres	24	Liverpool	Spain	
R. Santa Cruz	19	Blackburn	Paraguay	
R. Keane	15	Tottenham	Republic of Ireland	
D. Berbatov	15	Tottenham	Bulgaria	
Y. Aiyegbeni	15	Everton	Nigeria	
M. Benjani	15	Man City	Zimbabwe	
C. Tevez	14	Man United	Argentina	
J. Carew	13	Aston Villa	Norway	
W. Rooney	12	Man United	England	
J. Defoe	12	Portsmouth	England	
N. Anelka	11	Chelsea	France	
S. Gerrard	11	Liverpool	England	

Source: www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/

Table V.
Top goal scorers, teams
and nationality
(11 May 2008)

migration in the German League; Mehler (2008) on patriotism and nationality issues in Ivory Coast and Ghana football; and Parnell (2006) and Chaharbaghi (2007) on the management strategy discourse. These are discussed in three sub-sections.

Labour migration in the Bundesliga

Arne Niemann and Alexander Brand, political scientists in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, and Dresden, Germany, respectively noted the neglect of sport in the EU provision (Niemann and Brand, 2008, p. 91):

Sport, in so far as it constitutes an economic activity, is subject to Community law. With (and since) the Bosman ruling of 1995, EU-level policy-making in the area of sport has been (considerably) more prominent and significant than during previous decades of European integration. However, not all developments on the EU level are as well-known as the Bosman case.

These authors also clearly pointed out that:

...while the developments at European level are relatively well documented, the actual impact of EU law and EU policy-making on the domestic arena is still under-researched.

Niemann and Brand (2008) stated that of all professional sports, football was the most popular game and the sport with the greatest economic significance in Europe. With its influence cutting across political, economic, social, and cultural spheres.

Building on these macro environmental influences, Niemann and Brand (2008) focused on three particular influences in German football:

- (1) the nationality issue related to the Bosman ruling of the ECJ;
- (2) the transfer rules resulting from the Bosman ruling; and
- (3) the issue of *Bundesliga* broadcasting rights.

They also pointed out that along with the English, French, Italian and Spanish leagues, the *Bundesliga* (German League) was one of the major football leagues in Europe. In

justifying their decision to research the *Bundesliga*, they also argued that Germany was one of the founding members of the European Community and a country in which the European integration process has traditionally been held in high esteem, both by the political elites and the public. While they admit certain limitations of their study – “such case set-up does not allow us to confirm an idea or concept – for which a ‘hard’ case would be necessary,” they maintained that their research still allowed for the initial exploration of the impact of European integration on domestic sport under favourable conditions, and potentially – if even these conditions do not yield “results” – the falsification of the idea that European integration may shape domestic football. In analysing sport policy-making at the EU level, Niemann and Brand (2008, pp. 91- 92) also pointed out that:

Although there is no specific reference to sport in the Treaty, the European Union has been indirectly involved in sport where it cut across its competencies and affected existing Community policies, such as competition, audiovisual policy, education, health, youth policy etc.

The EU’s first moves into issues related to sport occurred in the 1970s. The ECJ ruling in 1974 established that sport was subject to Community law to the extent that it constituted an economic activity. Most sport-related cases that prompted the involvement of EU institutions were concerned with (at least one of) the following provisions on free movement and non-discrimination on the basis of nationality, triggered by the 1968 Council regulation on the free movement of workers. Yet, the Commission only accomplished modest liberalization of nationality restrictions under the so-called “3 × 2” agreement in football, and effectively accepted discriminating practices. They also detected some important changes in the composition of players in the *Bundesliga* after undertaking a pre and post-Bosman analysis:

- the share of German-born players has steadily decreased up to 2005;
- the share of UEFA residents as well as the share of players from other continents has substantially increased, although the share of non-UEFA residents, remains relatively small (between 12 and 14 percent) compared to that of UEFA residents (up to 38 percent in 2005).

Although the decision to open the market for all Europeans has been rather liberal, the DFB did not fully liberalize immediately. The number of players a professional club could field from other continents remained limited to three until 2001, when, for reasons of international competitiveness, one could, for instance, argue that other football associations and leagues in Europe did not expand their definition of “EU resident” precisely because they wanted to restrict the influx of foreign players, thereby protecting young players which could be eligible for national teams. In Germany, Bosman and its extension to all Europeans arguably led to problems for the development of young players. As former DFB president Gerhard Mayer-Vorfelder put it (Niemann and Brand, 2008, p. 97):

Our decision was just to treat all citizens of UEFA member-countries like EU citizens. I now believe that this decision was wrong. How can we expect young German forwards to develop in the *Bundesliga*, if 70 percent of all forwards are foreign-born?

Niemann and Brand (2008) also argued that in the post-Bosman era, the DFB – in accordance with the DFL – also tries to steer the development by establishing certain rules for professional and amateur clubs, which aim at developing and protecting young and talented German players as far as possible within the limits of public national and European law. For instance, every club in the *Bundesliga* has to maintain a training centre for young players in order to comply with the licensing rules. Most recently, the *Bundesliga* decided to systematically increase the number of young players which have been raised in German clubs, from at least four in the 2006/2007 season to at least eight in the 2008/2009 season.

Amateur branches of professional clubs had to field at least six players eligible for German national teams younger than 24, three of them younger than 21, until 2005; since 2005/2006, these teams became full U23-teams (which means that only three players aged 23 or older can be fielded). Parallel to these measures, the number of non-EU players in amateur teams has been cut back from up to six in 2002 to three by 2004. This kind of “steering policy” within the association is complemented by the policies of the German Ministry of the Interior, which in 2002 issued a directive that in effect ruled out that a non-EU player will get a work permit in Germany unless he is signed by a team in the (first or second) *Bundesliga*. In 2003, the follow-up to this directive specified that non-EU players must be signed to play in the first team and must not play in the amateur teams of the professional clubs. In their conclusions, Niemann and Brand (2008, p. 101) posited that the Bosman ruling:

...can be described as strong EU-level (ECJ induced) pressures on the DFB (and German clubs) to change nationality restrictions, which were mediated through a mixture of progressive and conservative transposition. [They also added that] Whereas national and transnational actors did hardly intervene in the policy formulation period, their impact is decisive in specific transposition processes. As a result, we have a very significant degree of change, adequately described as “system transformation”, which is indicated...the steadily increasing share of UEFA residents playing in the *Bundesliga* between 1995 and 2005.

Patriotism and nationality issues in African football

Building on Niemann and Brand’s (2008) nationality question, another German, Andreas Mehler – in a completely separate study, argued that the comparison of Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana, two neighbouring countries in very different conditions (i.e. historical trajectories and the degree of societal consensus), and more particularly, the comparison of dominant discourses on the topics of patriotism, peace and good governance related to the World Cup qualification of both national teams supports the hypothesis of a strong context-relatedness of a politically loaded “football language”(see Mehler, 2008, p. 96). While in Ghana, patriotism in football quickly merged with pan-Africanism, the Ivorian team renewed the heated political debate about “Ivorianness” by putting forward a notion of inclusive patriotism. In his view, patriotism and self-esteem furnish another link to be found in Ghanaian media reports or internet forums (Mehler, 2008):

The 2006 World Cup is about little Ghana, discovering that we will not settle for the silver that is always offered to us and now competing for the ultimate prize. The Black Stars are shocking all Ghanaians into awareness about their inherent worth. Their story and grit, epitomized by Razak Pimpong limbering on in the wake of an obvious injury and bringing

glory to Mother Ghana, is one that all Ghanaians, irrespective of colour, shape or form should tap into. We are beginning to believe! And it can only do wonders for us as a nation!

Although Ghana seemed to fare much better in the eyes of most observers and Ghanaian citizens than neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire, problems of governance still remain there. And they are recognized as problems in the eyes of the Ghanaian media (Mehler, 2008, pp. 104-105). Posted on the day of the third match in the World Cup another article in Ghana Web bluntly states:

The story of African soccer is much like the African nations themselves- abundant resources squandered by organizational dysfunction.

Mehler (2008) concluded with suggestions that a comparison of sports coverage between Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana is certainly far from complete by focusing on only three issues and by quoting a small selection of articles and opinions expressed in internet forums. There were also suggestions for future research to adopt a "more systematic procedure of collecting and analyzing all articles from relevant electronic sources over a certain time span might have produced more ambiguous results and certainly a majority of articles without political overtones." Roughly we find a Ghana where patriotism is rarely alluded to in everyday practice, but when football comes in – it is quickly merged with pan-Africanism. Across the board Ghanaians and their leaders see a special role of Ghana for the entire continent. In Côte d'Ivoire all sides of the political game claim patriotism for themselves and deny it to others. However, the national soccer team, by its very composition, is a symbol of national unity and somehow untouchable.

Deconstructing management strategy

Strategy as was rightly pointed out by Chaharbaghi (2007) is a borrowed term from the military – derived originally from the Greek term *strategia*, meaning the art of war. Within its original context, it was simply understood as a military means to achieving political ends. It has, however, now become the new *mantra* of contemporary organisations, an inert term with no substance and meaning, incapable of producing any reaction from those who utter or hear it. It is taking over meeting rooms and corporate documents like a virus. The overuse and misuse of this term can be explained in terms of the presence of inherent contradictions that derive from the disjunction between the existing assumptions on which organisations are run and the reality that no longer fits these assumptions.

Leading organisations are however, strangely unconcerned by the availability of post-rational observations and formulas that claim to explain their behaviour. They probably realise that post-rationalisation embodies the past and not the future. It can only explain their last creativity, the sell-by-date of which is already passing:

...the constant call for strategy in the real world of organisations provides little more than a vacuous belief to displace anxiety, a form of escapism from the recurrent crisis that remains unresolved (Chaharbaghi, 2007, p. 328).

In any case, leading organisations are too busy replacing an obsolete formula with a new one based on a recent creativity. The irony is that it is precisely the unpredictable behaviour of leading organisations that forces post-rationalists into making further observations in order to create more formulas for success. The exponential growth of

literature, fuelled by the constant post-rational observations and abstract constructions that compete for attention, is reminiscent of the fashion industry whose audience are made to discard unfashionable clothes and replace them with the latest fashion. A cursory examination of the growing literature on strategy displays this in action with the following famed examples having already been paraded on the “cat-walk” of strategy, where it has been dressed up to be (Chaharbaghi, 2007, p. 329):

- About differentiation and cost leadership, stretch and leverage, vision, choosing what not to do, revolution, and fit.
- Treated as a plan, a pattern, a position, a ploy and a perspective.
- Generic, rational or incremental, deliberate or emergent, prescriptive, descriptive, configurational, implicit or explicit.
- Approached from either a classical, evolutionary, processualist or systemic framework, and from a process, content or context perspective.

Chaharbaghi (2007) also argued that the exponential growth of literature on strategy has directed attention in different ways; adding greater complexity and provoking more and more uncertainty while communicating less and less meaning to its audience, which in turn gives rise to another set of problems. In order to return organisations to the basic principles that provide the necessary direction to achieve sustainable success and in order to bring about the much needed clarity to the strategy field, four interrelated dualities, offer a framework for understanding strategy as a multi-dimensional, dynamic construction and for evaluating different observations and perspectives of strategy. They also drive and support these observations and perspectives of strategy and permeate the fundamental vocabulary. These include the duality between (Chaharbaghi, 2007, pp. 330):

- continuity principle and discontinuity principle;
- knowledge and imagination;
- opportunity exploitation and opportunity exploration; and
- conformist innovation and deviant innovation.

Parnell (2006) aimed to demonstrate how the generic strategy approach to strategy formulation can be applied in today’s environment, especially in the development of what he ascribed to as “parsimonious, prescriptive, and relevant tools for strategic managers.” According to him (Parnell, 2006, p. 1139):

Much of our understanding of competitive strategy can be traced to Porter’s... seminal low-cost-differentiation-focus framework. His work has received considerable – although not universal – support in the literature and marked a key transition in the field by beginning to integrate organization-specific factors into a model of firm performance dominated by the industrial organization perspective. Recently, however, there have been two key developments – one in the literature and one in the business environment – that collectively evoke a reconceptualization of the Porter-based perspective on competitive strategy.

He goes on to argue that much of the prominent work in the business strategy literature has shifted from a typology orientation to a heightened role of organization-specific factors as characterized by the resource-based perspective (see

Parnell, 2006). This focus on firm resources has further defined the nature and complexities associated with variations across organizations. The emphasis on resources combined with the accompanying decline in typology testing and refinement papers, however, suggests a growing view in the field that the low-cost-differentiation framework is incomplete and may not be completely compatible with the present resource-based view (RBV) of the firm. However, this assertion does not necessarily suggest that strategy typologies are no longer useful or that integration of competing perspectives is not possible. This is consistent with Chahargbaghi's (2007) assertion in order to combine strategies rather than separate them.

Extending this hybridised strategy to the realms of football, it can be readily appreciated that the game can derive guidance from as well as provide lessons for management discourse.

Management strategy and the BPL

In this paper, some insight is provided on how football teams have adopted and adapted strategic processes to ensure performance effectiveness (see Table VI). Performance in sports in general and football in particular has been linked to two possible sets of outcomes/ influences on economic results, and on revenues. In the first case, independent of what the "core football business" concept might be, of whether or not football clubs are profit-maximisers, each of the following proposals implies that there is no relationship between sports performance and economic results; balance between sports performance and profit of the club in the long-term (Szymanski and Kuypers, 1999); seeking the best possible sports performance while maintaining financial solvency (Morrow, 1999); looking to maximise sports performance once the minimum profit levels have been achieved (Gerrard and Dobson, 2000) – or that once the economic target has been satisfied, any excess resources will be spent on improving the squad.

Taking on the revenue perspective, there exists that general agreement or assumption that good performance on the pitch would attract higher incomes (Szymanski and Kuypers, 1999; Deloitte & Touché, 2001). While Szymanski and Kuypers' (1999) data set provided an indication of inflation adjusted wage increment to have risen from 10 percent in the 1950s to 90 percent between 1961 and 1974, Deloitte & Touché (2001) data reported a net transfer expenditure outflow as a whole to have increased from around £11million in 1993 to about £93 million only three years later in 1996 and then £140million by 1999 (see Dobson and Goddard, 2001, p. 96).

These are not the only authors who consider the club's revenues as a function of sports performance – exclusively or considered alongside other factors. For example, El Hodiri and Quirk (1971) argued that the income of a sporting club was a function of the population in which it is based and that the sports performance was measured by a win ratio (evidence of these ratios are provided in Table III). Indeed while most teams have similar patterns of play, there are slight variations depending on what teams they were playing at the time, what level they were playing at, who the manager of the day was and how many players were fit to play on the day (either due to injury or perhaps suspensions). Moreover, decisions made over what players to recruit and discharge over the January transfer window is also largely a strategic decision. These could include decisions based on financial calculations, boosting the strike force or partnerships in attacking (see Table VI), enhancing the defence or even seeking a new

	Manchester United	Chelsea	Arsenal	Liverpool
Goalkeeper	1 Edwin van der Sar 12 Ben Foster 29 Tomasz Kuszczak	1 Petr Cech 23 Carlo Cudicini 40 Henrique Hilario	1 Jens Lehmann 21 Lukasz Fabianski 24 Manuel Almunia	25 Jose Reina 30 Charles Itandje
Defender	15 Nemanja Vidic 19 Gerard Pique 2 Gary Neville 22 John O'Shea 25 Danny Simpson 27 Mikael Silvestre 3 Patrice Evra 5 Rio Ferdinand 6 Wes Brown	18 Wayne Bridge 2 Branislav Ivanovic 20 Paulo Ferreira 22 Tal Ben Haim 26 John Terry 3 Ashley Cole 33 Alex 35 Juliano Belletti 51 Sam Hutchinson 6 Ricardo Carvalho	10 William Gallas 16 Johan Djourou 22 Gael Clichy 25 Kerrea Gilbert 27 Emmanuel Eboue 3 Bacary Sagna 30 Armand Traore 31 Justin Hoyte 5 Kolo Toure 6 Philippe Senderos	12 Fabio Aurelio 17 Alvaro Arbeloa 23 Jamie Carragher 3 Steve Finnan 37 Martin Skrtel 4 Sami Hyypia 48 Emiliano Insua 5 Daniel Agger 6 John Arne Riise
Midfielder	11 Ryan Giggs 13 Park Ji-Sung 16 Michael Carrick 18 Paul Scholes 24 Darren Fletcher 33 Chris Eagles 4 Owen Hargreaves 43 Sam Hewson	12 John Obi Mikel 13 Michael Ballack 15 Florent Malouda 4 Claude Makelele 42 Lee Sawyer 48 Michael Woods 5 Michael Essien 8 Frank Lampard 9 Steven Sidwell	15 Denilson 16 Mathieu Flamini 17 Alexandre Song 19 Gilberto Silva 2 Abou Diaby 4 Cesc Fabregas 7 Tomas Rosicky	14 Adam Hammill 14 Xabi Alonso 20 Javier Mascherano 21 Lucas 33 Sebastian Leto 35 Ray Putterill 8 Steven Gerrard
Attacking midfielder	17 Luis Nani 7 Cristiano Ronaldo 8 Oliveira Anderson	10 Joe Cole 24 Shaun Wright-Phillips 37 Jimmy Smith	13 Alexander Hleb 32 Theo Walcott	11 Yossi Benayoun 16 Jermaine Pennant 19 Ryan Babel 7 Harry Kewell
Striker	10 Wayne Rooney 21 Dong Fangzhuo 32 Carlos Tevez 9 Louis Saha - Danny Welbeck - Manucho	11 Didier Drogba 14 Claudio Pizarro 21 Salomon Kalou 39 Nicolas Anelka 7 Andriy Shevchenko	11 Robin van Persie 25 Emmanuel Adebayor 26 Nicklas Bendtner 9 Eduardo	10 Andriy Voronin 15 Peter Crouch 18 Dirk Kuyt 9 Fernando Torres

Note: Many of these players have moved clubs since the season ended. For example, Cristiano Ronaldo, Alexander Hleb, Mathieu Flamini and Jens Lehmann have all changed clubs
Source: www.skysports.com/football/player/0,19754,11670_285739,00.html

Table VI.
Squad strategy –
organisational structure

goal keeper – just as Arsenal is doing at the moment with the departure of Jens Lehman to Stuttgart – in order to record the number of goals conceived (also accounting for differences between second and third position as was the case between Newcastle United and Arsenal in the 1996/1997 season – see Table I). It could also include decisions to rest certain key players for games deemed more crucial to the club or alteration of the formation of the teams depending on the structure and game pattern of the opponents and the level of the play.

Other decisions have even become more popular in recent years – such as firing the managers for failing to deliver or due to some form of boardroom squabble as was the case of Chelsea's Portuguese manager Jose Mourinho who was replaced by the Israeli, Avram Grant at one of Chelsea's lowest moments (the latter has also now been replaced by Luiz Felipe Scolari, the Brazilian who led his country to the World Cup finals in 2002 and Portugal to the semi finals of Euro 2004 and quarter finals of Euro 2008). There have also been concerns over Rafael Benitez's future at Liverpool even after ensuring their place on the semi-final stages of the Champions League. With controversies over an alleged meeting of Liverpool bosses Hick and Gillett and CEO Parry with former Germany coach Jurgen Klinsmann in the USA – a meeting that has impacted on Benitez's future at Anfield – apparently top Spanish league sides seem interested in the latter's services – Valencia, Internazionale (or Inter Milan), Barcelona and Real Madrid (see Eurosports, 2008; *The Guardian*, 2008).

It is nonetheless amazing how rivals could be complimentary of one another's game plans and/or strategies. Arsene Wenger of Arsenal was regarded as a hated figure at Chelsea during Jose Mourinho's reign but his replacement Avram Grant insisted on being a major admirer of the Frenchman. And the Israeli believes he is changing his club's image after the "win-at-all-cost" approach of his predecessor, Jose Mourinho. According to Grant (see Silver, 2008):

Arsenal is a good example . . . I've never spoken badly of what happened here in the past but I know what people used to say about Arsenal before Arsene went there. They said "boring, boring Arsenal" – now nobody says that.

I don't think you can say Chelsea are boring this year. We are playing good football, sometimes we have dropped points, but we are going in the right direction. If you are going to change to a different way of playing, it's not going to happen in just one day. I don't think at Chelsea I will have the same amount of time to change things like Alex Ferguson (Manager of Manchester United) was given before he won his first trophy at Manchester United or perhaps the time Arsene Wenger gets at Arsenal – but that is the way for a club to do it.

. . . I'm not that romantic but I do like the way Arsene has a more romantic approach to the game . . . Wenger thinks more about the style of the game. We need to have respect for him. People can say what they like about him but their stadium is full with 60,000 people every week and people all over the world want to watch Arsenal . . . Arsenal play good football and the manager is doing a great job.

The above does present a semblance of what underlines "the beautiful game". It also demonstrates how football managers tend to adapt and adopt best practice from their business rivals and tailor these to their specific needs. It is thus clear that the same management concepts in more "visible" corporations are also readily applicable in the case of football where a competitive profiling is undertaken in order to inform the team's positioning and/ or repositioning strategies.

Discussion

As already inferred in the previous sections, the management contribution of football is not as explicit as it need be – at least in academic research. It has been argued in previous sections with plethora of evidence that the BPL is a multi-million industry with players earning up to £150, 000 a week from £4 a week in 1901 and £12.83 in 1958 (see Dobson and Goddard, 2001, p. 91). However, no study seems to have approached this industry with the same tools of more explicit corporations in the strategy discourse. This paper makes a final attempt to link the football dynamic with management strategy in the hope that future researchers would appreciate the significance of football beyond a mere entertainment provision and thus begin making connections between football and its global corporation status. This would also ensure that management research takes cognisance of football as big business worthy of more consideration in management discourse.

Indeed football exudes most of the attributes of organisational development, performance and competitive strategy. For instance, in his discussion on the historical development of business strategy theory, Parnell (2006, p. 1140) argued that:

A key concern of business strategy research is the link between the competitive strategy adopted by an organization and its performance. Within traditional industrial organization (IO) economics, industry-level factors have the greatest influence on this relationship. Because individual firms tend to have little or no influence over industry structure, IO logic suggests that firms should adapt to the industry structure in order to maximize prospects for success.

Porter's (1980) "five forces" model for analyzing industry structures is built on the IO logic, with an eye on how an understanding of structure can enable an organization to better position itself within an industry more effectively and thereby improve performance (Parnell, 2006, p. 1141):

Conceptually speaking, generic strategy typologies are logical extensions of strategic group research and at least historically represent a single broad perspective on the strategy-performance relationship, namely the notion that firm performance is a function of strategic factors that are common across some – but not necessarily all – rivals in a given industry.

These attributes have been found in professional football in general and the BPL in particular – hence there is no reason why the sport should not be analysed using the same tools. Moreover, in his conclusions Parnell (2006, p. 1150) did remind us that:

Regardless of strategic position, it should be recognized that the two key dimensions of strategy – value and market control – are not mutually exclusive. Although emphasis on a single orientation can be effective, organizations should constantly seek to enhance both market control and value orientations. A business with a strong value emphasis can still benefit from increased control, while one with a strong control orientation can benefit by enhancing its value orientations.

Related to the issue of management control, the case of Liverpool FC provides a classic illustration of the tussle between the co-owners George Gillett and Tom Hicks. Parnell (2006) stressed that practitioners should consider two key questions when evaluating the strategies of their own organizations:

- (1) From an IO perspective, there is a need to understand what limitations industry structure and other factors place on strategic options, most notably the level of market control an organization can exhibit. Strategic managers should understand the ability of their firms to exert market control, recognizing that control is desirable for all organizations and essential for those unable to deliver strong value propositions.
- (2) From the resource based view, to know what valuable resources possessed by the organization could best foster an improved strategic position, and more importantly how such resources influenced the success or failure of the strategy pursued by the firm. In relation to this second point, Arsenal FC might take home a cue or two – after being top of the Barclays League table for nearly 80 percent of the 2007/2008 league season (i.e. 29 out of 38 games), they seem to be struggling to maintain third position only two games later. This leads to the need to reiterate some managerial and/ or policy implications for the future of the “big league”.

Conclusions

It is clear that there has been a considerable research effort exposing a growing synergy and correlation between sports and business. For example, Adcroft and Teckman (2008a, p. 601) reviewed a wide array of literature and concluded that the central aim of these studies had been:

... to make general points about management theory through the use of sporting examples but this paper takes an opposite track; our study is not so much to advance knowledge of management theory but rather to demonstrate that management theory can be used to advance knowledge of non-traditional contexts for management research...

This paper has been couched on a very similar trajectory – to demonstrate that management theory can indeed be used to advance knowledge of football as a subset of the globalised professional sport. The influx of foreign players into the BPL has undoubtedly changed the face of English football – whether this falls within or outside the framework of the Bosman ruling, football’s management has been impacted on by this development. For example, the 6 + 5 rule being debated by the world ruling football body goes to show the extent of the Bosman ruling. The 6 + 5 rule provides that a club team must start a match with at least six players who would be eligible for the national team of the country in which the club is domiciled.

Only recently in May 2008 ahead of the FIFA Congress (29-30 May 2008) Joseph Blatter, FIFA president, held a round table with journalists where he explained why in his opinion the so-called “6 + 5 rule,” was crucial to the future of football (see FIFA, 2008a). As Blatter put it (FIFA, 2008b):

Over the years and decades, by signing more and more foreign players, clubs have gradually lost their identity, first locally and regionally, and today even nationally as in some cases all players hail from abroad or even from a different continent.

This simply implies that (The FA, 2008):

Young players lose their motivation in the same way as their perspectives dwindle in terms of one day getting a chance to play in their favourite club’s first team. Strong club competitions with huge prize money for the participating clubs have brought about a two-tier society in

many countries as the gulf between the haves and have-nots has widened. Only two or three teams play for the league title and all others are fighting against relegation.

At the main event – FIFA Congress in Sydney (29-30 May 2008) – the FA voted in favour of further exploration of the “6 + 5” rule proposed by Blatter (FIFA, 2008b):

One of our reservations has always been that the “6 + 5” rule appears to contravene European law and we welcome further exploration of its legality ... However, this is a question of balance and we believe first and foremost in a meritocracy system, where players appear in club teams based on performance and ability. This is at the core of our coach and player development strategy over the coming years.

This goes to show how an isolated event can spiral out of control and redefine the management structure and rule of the game in any industry. It also testifies to the need for sports researchers to begin to publish in mainstream management journals – by leveraging the synergies already observed in the two disciplines. As Adcroft and Teckman (2008a, p. 601) recognised “management theory is versatile and allows for serious investigation of wider phenomena.” In the light of this development four main explanations were proffered:

There are many issues common to both the study of sport and the study of management as (i) success in both areas can be influenced by judicious use of strategy, motivation, team working and leadership; (ii) sport is very much concerned with the traditional management task of allocating scarce and finite resources in order to muster the best possible outcomes; (iii) sport offers clear, tangible and measureable outcomes; and (iv) sport, like business strategy, is about contests whether it is the one-on-one contest of a knock-out tournament [such as the FA Cup or Champions league] or the multi-faceted and long-term contest of a league [e.g. the BPL consisting of 38 games]. [Emphasis added].

There is clear evidence of these propositions being played out in the BPL where the connections between success and strategy have been exhibited (for example, the formations teams tend to assume when playing other teams – see Table VI) alongside the use of finite resources (summer transfer windows and having players on loan, etc.) and measurable outcomes (such as the number of goals conceived, battle for Europe and the fight against relegation etc) across the varied tournaments.

Indeed Adcroft and Teckman (2008a, p. 603) rightly pointed out that the conceptual basis of their study was founded on the argument that any outcome enjoyed by an organisation (which could mean football clubs in this case) was the direct product of two key factors:

- (1) the ability to perform; and
- (2) the ability to compete.

According to them:

... a competitive team would have a number of characteristics such as an ability to win matches despite poor performances, an ability to win matches in unaesthetic or ugly manner, an ability to win matches against better opposition and an ability to win high pressure matches in, for example, knock-out stages of the tournament. (Adcroft and Teckman, 2008a, pp. 607-9).

Although these grids were formulated with a different sport in mind – RWC, and different area of investigation – performance management and measurement – they

illustrate how the RWC and the BPL could still benefit from mainstream management discourse as well as contribute to the management literature.

It is arguable therefore that this paper ticks all the boxes – for example, the “top four” BPL teams (Manchester United, Chelsea, Arsenal and Liverpool) have demonstrated the ability to win matches and actually do this resoundingly (with the likes of Edwin van der Sar, Cristiano Ronaldo, Carlos Tevez, Michael Essien, John Mikel Obi, Didier Drogba, Nikolas Anelka, Petr Cech, etc. all in the line up of foreign players) – whether the games are unaesthetic or not, the end often seems to justify the means. When it comes to flair (and thus performance or entertainment value) the case for Arsenal (with foreign players like Emmanuel Adebayor, Cesc Fabregas, Manuel Almunia and Robin van Persie) is very well discussed and Avram Grant’s praise for Arsene Wenger is living proof. Moreover, where “the ability to compete” is concerned, this was epitomised by the Moscow drama that eventually led to Manchester United clinching victory in the 2008 European Champions League at the expense of Chelsea.

Management implications

It is no longer contentious that the BPL has matured “just like old wine” to a level of immeasurable prominence and attractiveness from a financial as well as entertainment perspective thanks to globalisation. The premier league has not only been able to attract a huge followership of fans from all corners of the globe, but also features players of almost every nationality as well as attracting a cache of billionaire investors from previously unimaginable places such as the USA and Russia. The list is ever growing – from Malcolm Glazer (American) for Manchester United; to Roman Abramovich (Russian) for Chelsea; Stan Kroenke (American) and Alisher Usmanov (Russian) for Arsenal; George Gillett and Tom Hicks (American duo) for Liverpool among others.

However, business scholars and other management researchers and academics alike have remained rather short-sighted in appreciating that the BPL, in addition to other major European Football Leagues, have become big business and deserve research attention like the more established corporations. With immense turnovers (see Figures 1 and 2) of over £200 million (especially for the confirmed cases of Arsenal, Chelsea and Manchester United in England and Real Madrid in Spain) – to the extent that some of the teams in these leagues have been listed on stock exchanges around the world.

This paper should also spur management researchers and academics into taking sports (i.e. football) more seriously in the fields of management or business rather than leaving the management and business models of “the beautiful game” in the fringes of sports science and related disciplines. Football is undoubtedly big business – a professional sport that thrives on sound strategic business models – involving all the conventional business strategies that are suited to conventional corporations in the fields of information technology, financial services and retail. It is persuasive therefore that management scholars and practitioners can draw a lesson or two from understanding the inner workings of big league games in order to enhance their day to day management of non-sport business. Thus this paper on the globalisation of the English BPL – takes the possibilities one step in that direction. It also reinforces the identified need pointed out by Adcroft and Teckman (2008b) in their timely call for this

special issue of *Management Decision* – a clear reminder that sport is “no longer a diversion or a pastime confined to the back pages of the popular press. . . coaches have become management gurus and players have become role models. . . taking sport seriously has ceased to be an oxymoron”.

Foreign players
in English
football

References

- Adcroft, A. and Teckman, J. (2008a), “Theories, concepts and the Rugby World Cup: using management to understand sport”, *Management Decision*, Vol. 46 No. 4, pp. 600-25.
- Adcroft, A. and Teckman, J. (Eds) (2008b), “Call for papers, special issue on ‘Taking sport seriously: sport, management and business’”, *Management Decision*, available at: <http://info.emeraldinsight.com/authors/writing/calls.htm?id = 78>
- BBC News (2005), “Is the premiership killing African football?” 8 July, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4637017.stm>
- Bromberger, C. (1994), “Foreign footballers, cultural dreams and community identity in some North-Western Mediterranean cities”, in Bale, J. and Maguire, J. (Eds), *The Global Sport Arena: Athletic Talent Migration in an Independent World*, Frank Cass, London, pp. 171-83.
- Chaharbaghi, K. (2007), “The problematic of strategy: a way of seeing is also a way of not seeing”, *Management Decision*, Vol. 45 No. 3, pp. 327-39.
- Christoph, M. (2003), “The league of nations”, 25 August, available at: www.uefa.com/footballer/news/kind = 4/newsid = 94016.html
- Deloitte & Touché (2001), *Annual Review of Football Finance 1999/2000*, Deloitte and Touché.
- Dennis, M. (2002), “Now you can be red in the face”, *The Mirror*, 1 August, p. 54.
- Dobson, S. and Goddard, J. (2001), *The Economics of Football*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- El-Hodiri, M. and Quirk, J. (1971), “An economic model of a professional sports league”, *The Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 79 No. 6, pp. 1302-19.
- Eurosports (2008), “Eurosports Premier League – Benitez suspects betrayal”, 14 April, available at: <http://uk.eurosport.yahoo.com/14042008/58/premier-league-benitez-suspects-betrayal.html> (accessed 15 April).
- (The) FA (2008), “FA statement: ‘6 + 5’ rule”, The Football Association, 30 May, available at: www.thefa.com/TheFA/NewsFromTheFA/Postings/2008/05/FAstatement6plus5.htm
- FIFA (2008), “Blatter: ‘6 + 5’ rule is crucial”, 7 May, available at: www.fifa.com/aboutfifa/federation/president/news/newsid = 762500.html
- Gerrard, B. and Dobson, S. (2000), “Testing for monopoly rents in the market for playing talent”, *Journal of Economic Studies*, Vol. 27 No. 3, pp. 142-64.
- (The) *Guardian* (2008), “Benitez wants urgent answers over latest Klinsmann talk”, *Guardian Sport*, 14 April.
- Klein, A.M. (1991), *Sugarball: The American Game, the Dominican Dream*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.
- Lanfranchi, P. (1994), “The migration of footballers: the case of France, 1932-1982”, in Bale, J. and Maguire, J. (Eds), *The Global Sport Arena: Athletic Talent Migration in an Independent World*, Frank Cass, London, pp. 63-77.
- Lanfranchi, P. and Taylor, M. (2001), *Moving with the Ball: The Migration of Professional Footballers*, Berg, Oxford.
- Linnyk, I. (2007), “Courts back Ukrainian quotas”, 27 March, available at: www.uefa.com/footballer/news/kind = 2/newsid = 520447.html

- Lowrey, J., Neatrou, S. and Williams, J. (2002), "Fact Sheet 16: The Bosman Ruling, Football Transfers and Foreign Footballers", Department of Sociology: Sports Resources. University of Leicester, August, available at: www.le.ac.uk/so/css/resources/factsheets/fs16.html (accessed 3 June 2006).
- McGovern, P. (2002), "Globalisation or internationalisation? Foreign footballers in the English league", *Sociology*, Vol. 36 No. 1, pp. 23-42.
- Madichie, N. (2008), "African players in English Premiership Football? Oh yes!", *Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference: International Business Development: Globalization, Opportunities, Challenges, International Business School at Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania*, 15-16 May, pp. 193-201.
- Magee, J. and Sugden, J. (2002), "The world at their feet: professional football and labour migration", *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, Vol. 26 No. 4, pp. 421-37.
- Maguire, J. (1996), "Blade runners: Canadian migrants and global ice-hockey trials", *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 335-60.
- Maguire, J. (1999), *Global Sport: Identities, Societies, Civilisations*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Maguire, J. and Pearton, R. (2000), "The impact of elite labour migration on the identification, selection and development of European soccer players", *Journal of Sport Sciences*, Vol. 18 No. 9, pp. 759-69.
- Maguire, J., Jarvie, G., Mansfield, L. and Bradley, J. (2002), *Sport Worlds: A Sociological Perspective*, Human Kinetics Publisher, Champaign, IL.
- Mariner, J. (2008), "Today in the Premier League", *The Independent*, 3 April, p. 54.
- Mason, D. (1999), "What is the sports product and who buys it? The marketing of professional sports leagues", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 33 Nos 3/4, pp. 402-19.
- Mehler, A. (2008), "Political discourse in football coverage – the cases of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana", *Soccer & Society*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 96-110.
- Molnar, G. and Maguire, J. (2008), "Hungarian footballers on the move: Issues of and observations on the first migratory phase", *Sport in Society*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 74-89.
- Morrow, S. (1999), *The New Business of Football: Accountability and Finance in Football*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills.
- Niemann, A. and Brand, A. (2008), "The impact of European integration on domestic sport: the case of German football", *Sport in Society*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 90-106.
- Parnell, J. (2006), "Generic strategies after two decades: a reconceptualization of competitive strategy", *Management Decision*, Vol. 44 No. 8, pp. 1139-54.
- Poli, R. (2005), "Football players' migration in Europe: a geo-economic approach to Africans' mobility", in Magee, J., Bairner, A. and Tomlinson, A. (Eds), *The Bountiful Game? Football Identities and Finances*, Meyer and Meyer Sport, Aachen, pp. 217-32.
- Silver, N. (2008), "English Premier League: Grant just wants a little bit of time", available at: www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/967049.html (accessed 22 March).
- Stead, D. and Maguire, J. (2000), "Rite de Passage or Passage to Riches? The Motivation and Objectives of Nordic/Scandinavian Players in English League Soccer", *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 36-60.
- Szymanski, S. and Kuypers, T. (1999), *Winners and Losers: The Business Strategy of Football*, Penguin, Harmondsworth.
- Taylor, M. (2006), "Global players? Football, migration and globalization, c. 1930-2000", *Historical Social Research*, Vol. 31, Special Issue, pp. 7-30.

Winter, H. (2008), "Winner from Premier League no flight of fancy", *Daily Telegraph*, 25 March, available at: www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/main.jhtml?xml=/sport/2008/03/15/sfnver115.xml

Further reading

BBC News (2008), "Chelsea complete £15m Anelka deal", Friday, 11 January, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/football/teams/c/chelsea/7175749.stm>

BBC News (2008), "Has football changed your life?", available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/talking_point/7175581.stm

BBC News (2008), "Success boosts Man United finances", 11 January, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/7180767.stm>

BBC Sport (2005), "Football's foreign policy under fire", 21 February, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/sport1/hi/football/4270593.stm>

BBC Sport (2006), "Is Premiership the world's best?", 14 December, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/football/africa/6180127.stm>

BBC Sport (2007), "Arsenal bullish over £200 million income", 24 September, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/football/teams/a/arsenal/7009944.stm>

BBC Sport (2008), "Football on the BBC", 8 January, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/football/africa/7096771.stm>

BBC Sport (2008), "African goals in Europe: 11-13 Jan", 14 January, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/football/africa/7187637.stm>

Boon, G. (Ed.) (1999), *England's Premier Clubs: A Review of 1998 Results*, April, Deloitte & Touché Sport.

Boon, G. (Ed.) (1999), *Deloitte & Touché Annual Review of Football Finance*, August, Deloitte & Touché Sport, p. 26.

Daniels, J., Radebaugh, L. and Sullivan, D. (2007), *International Business Environments and Operations*, 11th ed., Prentice-Hall, London.

Doole, I. and Lowe, R. (2004), *International Marketing Strategy: Analysis, Development and Implementation*, 4th ed, Thomson Learning, London.

(The) FA (2007), *England Hall of Fame*, The Football Association Official web site, available at: www.thefa.com/England/SeniorTeam/History/Postings/2003/09

Gimbutas, K. (2006), "Foreign talent divides Lithuania", 20 November, available at: www.uefa.com/football/europe/news/kind=2/newsid=480489.html

Hamil, S., Michie, J. and Oughton, C. (Eds) (1999), *A Game of Two Halves? The Business of Football*, Mainstream, Edinburgh.

Iredale, R. (2002), "The migration of professionals: theories and typologies", *International Migration*, Vol. 39 No. 5, pp. 7-24.

Maguire, J. (1996), "Blade runners: Canadian migrants and global ice-hockey trials", *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 335-60.

Maguire, J. and Stead, D. (1998), "Border crossings: soccer labour force migration and the European Union", *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, Vol. 33 No. 1, pp. 59-73.

Molnar, G. (2006), "Mapping migrations: Hungary related migrations of professional footballers after the collapse of communism", *Soccer & Society*, Vol. 7 No. 4, pp. 463-85.

Stalker, P. (2000), *Workers without Frontiers: The Impact of Globalisation on International Migration*, International Labour Office, Geneva.

- Taylor, I. (1991), "English football in the 1990s: taking Hillsborough seriously", in Williams, J. and Wagg, S. (Eds), *British Football and Social Change*, Leicester University Press, Leicester.
- Thomas, D. (2007), "Nations Cup Guide. BBC Sport", 21 October, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/football/africa/7055343.stm>
- Turner, C. (2007), "Chelsea FC set up web site for US Fans", *Marketing Week*, 18 November, p. 16.
- UEFA (2008), *Birth of UEFA (1954-1962)*, available at: www.uefa.com/uefa/aboutuefa/newsid=2476.html
- Winter, H. (2008), "Beckham England recall mustn't block progress", *Daily Telegraph*, 21 March, available at: www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/main.jhtml?view=DETAILS&grid=A1YourView&xml=/sport/2008/03/21/sfnwin121.xml

Corresponding author

Nnamdi Madichie can be contacted at: madichie@gmail.com