Conclusion: Why Study the Dark Side?

Abstract: Since the 1980s football has been transformed by a combination of the media, foreign investment and the redevelopment of its infrastructure. These changes have enabled football to become a global spectacle that is consumed by billions of people from diverse nationalities, religions, genders and ethnicities. In England, the gentrification of football has moved the sport away from its working class origins to family entertainment. This tends to disguise the less salubrious facets of the sport. This chapter draws together the data gathered from several research projects involving over 10,000 participants to issue statements on the condition of football and its future.

As the first regulatory body of association football, the English FA celebrated its 150th year anniversary in 2013. Since the 1980s football has been transformed, firstly through the exposure and finance provided by satellite television; secondly through stadia redevelopment and increasing levels of foreign investment. These changes have enabled football to become a global spectacle that is enjoyed all over the world by billions of people from diverse nationalities, religions, genders and ethnicities. In England, the gentrification of football has moved it away from its working-class roots to a more family-based form of consumptive entertainment, but many problems remain, some of which seem to fall as a low priority for the governing organizations to challenge. Rather than generalize on a number of key topics at the forefront of popular debate, we have empirically gathered the opinion of over 10,000 fans that has allowed us to draw a picture of football’s landscape surrounding the important areas of racism, violence, homophobia and corruption. What it has demonstrated is that football culture is not homogenous. Why on the one hand are we witnessing the continued expression of racism, yet on the other there is widespread support for a gay player (even though there are no openly gay high-profile players playing professional football within Europe)?

The root of all evil

Corruption within professional football has been found to exist at international as well as domestic levels. The conclusion to draw from this is that where there is money and demand is high, corruption usually follows. Since the formal recognition of professionalism in England in 1885, the ethics of football both on and off the field has changed, with winning a match, title or desire to host a major championship underlying reasons behind the wide-ranging levels of corruption we are now witnessing. One element of this, matchfixing, has existed in football for at least 100 years given the Manchester United–Liverpool case discussed in Chapter 2, but there are also high-level cases of bungs being accepted amongst referees, managers and players as well as kickbacks to leading figures in football to vote favourably for the hosting and broadcasting of international competitions like the World Cup. Domestically, there have been recent cases of players being paid to react at different times of a match in order to fulfil spread betting across the world on a particular scenario (such as a yellow or red card) occurring at a specified time.