

Money in sports: how much is too much?

Manchester City were recently banned from European football for spending too much money. OMAR CHAUDHURI looks at the influence of money on creating champions.



ROLANDHINO1

Rodri was one of the Manchester City's expensive buys in 2019 at over \$111 million. The amount of money in football has increased dramatically over the last ten years, with some clubs buying lots of good players to win more games.

Last month, Manchester City were banned from playing in the Champions League for the next two seasons. UEFA, who run the competition, were investigating how much money the English team were spending. They found that Man City had spent more than they were allowed.

Man City will **appeal** against the decision. They hope that the ban will be reduced or even removed. UEFA believe Man City have broken the "Financial Fair Play" rules of their competitions. The rules are complicated though. Man City will argue that they played by the rules. If the ban is not removed, it will be very damaging for the club. Their best players will want to leave, to play for clubs who are competing in the Champions League.

The Financial Fair Play rules were introduced in 2009, just one year after Manchester City's wealthy owners bought the club. The rules tried to stop football clubs spending more money than they were making. UEFA did not like how some clubs were trying to

buy lots of good players to win more games, especially if they could not afford it. No one has spent more than Man City over the last ten years, so it was not too surprising when UEFA said that they had broken the rules.

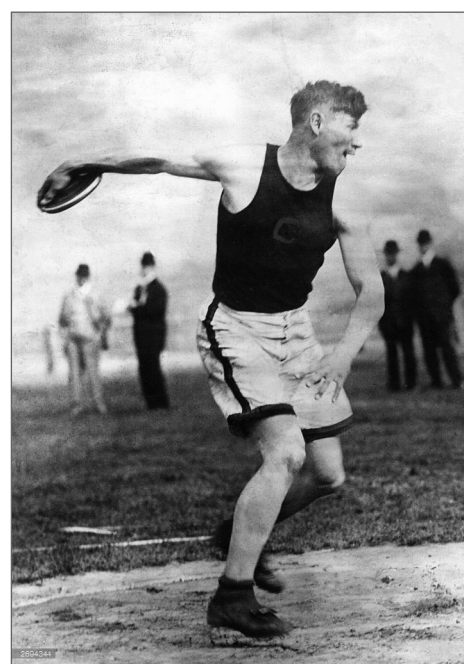
While the amount of money in football has increased **dramatically** over the last ten years, in truth all sports have been working out how to manage the **influence** of money for over one hundred years. At the start of the twentieth century, most athletes and clubs were amateur. This means that they played sport only for fun, not for money. In fact, professional individuals and teams were looked down on. It was believed that sport should only be a leisure activity, not a job. Athletes who were paid would also have an unfair advantage over those who were not. This is because they would have more time to train.

Amateurs versus professionals

For most of the twentieth century, the Olympic Games only allowed

amateur athletes. In 1912, American Jim Thorpe had his gold medals taken away because it was revealed that he had once been paid to play sport. By the 1970s though, it became clear that the rules were not working. Many amateur athletes, especially from Eastern Europe, were being helped by their countries. They might have said they were a doctor or student on their forms, but really they were being paid to train full-time. True amateurs who were losing to these fake amateurs were not happy.

What's more, fans did not care if they were watching athletes who played sport as a job or played it for fun. They just wanted to watch the best. Gradually, the Olympics allowed professional athletes. Money now plays an influential role in who wins medals. The United Kingdom spends five times more on its Olympics athletes now than it did in the year 2000; in that time, they jumped from tenth on the medal table to second. This has unfortunate **consequences** for talented athletes in poorer



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countries. If their state doesn't have the money to invest in the athlete or team's time to train, then they will not be able to beat athletes from richer countries.

Formula 1 has a similar problem. While the winning drivers are certainly talented, they rely a lot on having the quickest cars. The teams with the quickest cars are usually the ones that can spend the most money on research and development. Formula 1 could learn lessons from folk racing, which is popular in Scandinavia. In folk racing, any driver must sell his or her car for a fixed price if a competitor wants to buy it. This means that the best drivers won't always have the most expensive cars.

Capping the spending

Another way to stop sport being all about who has the most money is to allow anyone to spend — but up to a limit. American sports have done this very well. In major league basketball, baseball or American football, teams have a "salary cap". Any team can spend up to this limit, but no more, and everyone can afford this limit. This means lots of teams can compete for championships. No team has won consecutive Super Bowls since 2004, whereas in most European soccer leagues this has happened at least once in the last three years.

However, this approach is not supported by everyone. If there is a salary cap, this limits how much any one athlete can be paid. This has made some athletes unhappy with the rules.

Manchester City's situation is more complicated. It is unclear whether they have actually broken the rules. UEFA wanted to limit how much they can spend, up to how much money they were making (unlike in America, where the limit is the same for everyone). Their case however raises the bigger question: should athletes and teams be allowed to spend as much as they like, in order to win? Manchester City believe so, but their poorer rivals may not. If we want close, unpredictable competitions, restricting spending might still be the best solution.

VOCAB BUILDER

appeal (say "e-peel"; verb) = make a request to the authorities to change an earlier decision.

dramatically (say "dre-me-tik-lee"; adverb) = greatly.

influence (say "in-fluens"; noun) = impact.

consequences (say "kon-si-kwen-ses"; noun) = outcomes or results.