

Fans stop plans for European Super League



Real Madrid of Spain (left) is one of the clubs whose owners want to create a Super League. The fans, like these Liverpool supporters at a pre-pandemic match (right), thought it was a bad idea.

[Photo: James Offer.]

OMAR CHAUDHURI looks at why plans for a European Super League angered so many football fans.

Football fans love to watch the best players competing for the biggest teams. It is why millions of people tune in to watch important Premier League, Champions League, or World Cup matches. So, when 12 of Europe's most famous clubs announced last month they were going to start a new "Super League", they thought their fans would be happy.

The Super League would mean that Manchester United would play Juventus, or Liverpool play Barcelona, much more often than they do today. The owners of these clubs thought that this was what their fans wanted. It turned out that not only were fans of other clubs angry, but fans of these clubs were very unhappy too.

The clubs were arrogant

In football, clubs do not normally get to decide which competitions they play in. All that matters is their results. If they play well, they get to play in top competitions like the Champions League. If they play badly, they are **relegated** to lower divisions.

However, for the Super League, the 12 clubs decided that they were the best in the world and started a new competition. This was seen as a very **arrogant** move because it was very clear that these were not the 12 best teams. Arsenal were one of the 12 clubs but were only 9th in the Premier League when the news was announced. They had just drawn with Fulham, one of the worst teams in the league. Italian club Milan last played in the Champions League in 2014 and

had not won the Serie A in ten years. The decision to launch the Super League was like the makers of a movie giving themselves an Oscar, instead of letting the judges decide.

Not only did the clubs decide that they get to play in this new competition, but they also agreed that they cannot be relegated from the Super League, no matter how bad their results. Clubs that were not part of the permanent membership could however be relegated, even if they finished above one of the 12 clubs in the league table. Football fans could not accept that one club would be punished for good results, and another rewarded for bad results. For many, this is the opposite of what sport should be — free and fair competition, with everyone treated equally.

The clubs were greedy

The owners of the clubs believed that by playing in the Super League, almost all the football fans worldwide would watch this league. It would also probably mean that fewer fans would watch the other leagues, like La Liga. Even though Real Madrid would play in both the Super League and La Liga, fans may not take La Liga seriously. The Super League would therefore make the clubs in it very rich, and the clubs outside of it very poor. The Super League clubs said that they would give some of their money to clubs not in the competition, but certainly not all of it.

Even fans of the Super League clubs — who like seeing their teams buy some of the world's best players for a lot of money — thought this was morally wrong. Many football clubs have been in existence for over 100 years and have their own supporters. There is so much money in football, fans feel that this should be shared around. Some fans of the Super League clubs even said that they would not watch their team in this new competition. This meant that the club owners' predictions about the fans might be wrong.

The clubs did not care about history

By building a new competition to replace the Champions League, the clubs threatened to move away from competitions that have a lot of history. This history means a lot to the fans of the clubs. Real Madrid fans care a lot about the fact that they have won the most Champions League titles. Liverpool and Manchester United fans have a strong rivalry because they are the two most successful teams in the English league. A new competition would not have these memories, and would therefore mean less to the supporters.

The fans were also keen to let the owners know that they are only “**custodians**” of the club. This means that there were other owners before them, and there will be other owners after them, but

the club will always be there. They were unhappy that the current owners were using the history of their clubs — history that was created a long time before they bought the team — to create more money for themselves.

The fans are everything

Football fans are known to get angry about many things, including referees, rival teams, and at their manager. But usually, this is only from one team's fans. The Super League united almost all supporters. Through social media and protests at the clubs' stadiums, they let their clubs know that they were unhappy.

Very soon after the announcement of the league, clubs started pulling out. The plans for the Super League are therefore paused, for now. The most important lesson for the clubs? They realise that without the support of their fans, they are nothing.

VOCAB BUILDER

arrogant (say "e-re-gent"; adjective) = full of self-importance.

relegated (say "re-lee-gay-ted"; verb) = pushed down to a lower position.

custodians (say "kas-to-dienz"; noun) = people who protect or take good care of something.