

Exploring the Effect of the Bosman Ruling in Greek Professional Football

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In the last decades football tends to transform from a game into a significant business field with huge economic measures. Some of these measures relate to the labour market of professional football players and the transfer system. The Bosman ruling by European Court in 1995 has been seen as a turning point in the history of the particular sports. This is because has significantly affected the transfer system of the European football players and the associated revenues of the professional clubs (Pearson, 2002). The related literature (Szymanski & Kuypers,1999) has noted a number of issues as a results of the Bosman judgment, including (1) disputes over the administrative rights of European football and the denaturizing of the special link between supporter and football clubs (Crolley, Levermore & Pearson, 2002), (2) replacement of the young domestic with foreign players and absence of incentives to develop sport academies within the clubs, (3) back fall of profits from tickets, and (4) dramatic increases in the players' fees. Provided that the Greek literature is scarce in relation to the above issues, the aim of this study was twofold: 1) to explore the competitiveness of professional football from 1994 until 2003, regarding ticket sales and the clubs' ranking and 2) to explore potential effects from the Bosman ruling in the Greek professional players market (demand of domestic and foreign players, absorption of young players, age of average player etc).

The of data collection procedure involved the gathering of secondary data that was obtained through personal interviews with representatives from sports organizations such as the Greek Union for Professional Incorporated Companies (EPAE), the records of the Supersport Television Channel and the archives of newspapers of Eleftherotypia and Sportime. Data were collected on the player composition of Greek teams playing in the First Division, the number of tickets sold, as well as the teams' ranking during the period of 1993 and 2003.

In regards to the first objective (tickets and competitive success), the results indicated no major changes in the average rates of tickets sold per game (ranging from 3.500 to 4.500) with the exception for the period of 2001-02 during which, the averages ticket sold reached the 5.640. However, at the same period the clubs' competitive success, based on the UEFA ranking system, improved steadily. Furthermore, the research findings indicated small changes in the Greek labour market of professional football players. Specifically, the percentage of Greek professional players in the championship seems to decrease from 85% (1994 – 1996) to 73% (2002-2003). Interestingly, the increase of the foreign players in the Greek championship was relatively equally divided in all teams. Another finding was the small changes in the demand of young players (21 years old and down) in the period 1994 – 2003.

This research is one of the very first efforts to systematically measure variables in relation to the study of professional players market in Greek football, before and after and Bosman ruling. In accordance with findings from other countries, this study provided evidence, which demonstrates an effect from the Bosman Case, especially in relation to the demand of players and competitive performance of Greek clubs internationally. However, little evidence was available to support improvements in the competitive advantage of the Greek professional football (i.e. ticket sales, age of players). The evidence adds on to the discussion that the Greek professional football suffers significantly in infrastructure and is led by amateur practices, which hinder its overall adaptation to the European standards.