

Limit on foreign players in Russian football – step forward or backward?

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In 2005, a historic decision was made by Russian Football Union – the limit on foreign players was approved.

According to this project the number of foreign players on the field has to be 7 in seasons 2006-2007, 6 in 2008-2009 and 5 in 2010. However, in 2009 the leading football clubs demanded to keep the limit under 2008-2009 formula. Russian Football Union confirmed their desire and, hence, it is “5+6” rule, 5 native players and 6 foreign players, that is actual today.

The reason for such important change in league design was dictated by poor performance of Russian national team in 2005. Introduction of quota on foreign players seemed to be a solution to the main problem – development of new talents for national team. According to the charter of Russian Football Union the limit on foreign players should also solve general problems such as increase in competitiveness of national league, enhancement of commercial value, support of national football at different age levels.

The following paper aims to analyze whether the limit on foreign players fulfilled the objectives for which it was developed. For this purpose the effects on competitiveness in the league, its commercial value and number of new young players in national team are investigated. If the growth in all these categories is positive then introduction of limit is certainly a step forward in football development. In case the results for selected variables are controversial to define the role of quota on foreign players, the pivotal priority would be given to the core reason of limit introduction – young players in Russian squad.

Changes in Russian Premier-League competitiveness are evaluated by adapting the dynamic competitive balance method developed by Trudo Dejonghe and Troels Troelsen. To investigate relationship between limit and development of new players for Russian national team, the squad changes will be explored in relation to time dynamics. Finally, the commercial value of the football league is measured by tracking trends in TV-broadcasting and attendance of matches.

In addition to these analyses, all stakeholders involved in question of implementation the limit are determined and their impact on the process is investigated. For the following research the “stakeholder salience” proposed by Mitchell, Agle and Wood is used in combination with “stakeholder analysis” of Parker and Stone.

The results of investigations are the following.

The most powerful stakeholders in question of limit implementation in Russia are certainly Russian Football Union and Russian top clubs. However, the main beneficiaries are Russian players and their agents who get higher financial profits in comparison to the period prior to the reform.

The positive result of quota on foreign players was competitiveness increase in Russian Premier-League as dynamic competitive balance analysis suggest. There is no hegemony of few teams in the tournament anymore. Most important of all, the limit on foreign players forced owners of Russian clubs to pay more attention to development of youth academies rather than purchasing strong players from other countries.

Of course, the limit on foreign players is orientated on long-term and, hence, the effect of it will be evident in 5-10 years. Despite this drawbacks are evident already today. The number of young players (under 24 years) in Russian national team has reduced from 38% to 13%. Arrival of world-stars is constrained thus slowing down the growth of matches attendance and commercial value of the tournament as TV-product. The latest example is football club Anji which purchased global world-stars (e.g. Roberto Carlos, Eto’O) in 2011 and increased the overall attendance of matches by 48% in one year. Russian top clubs oppose the quota on foreign players because it decreases their competitiveness comparing with European clubs. The latter ones play under single rule the entire season while Russian clubs play under one rule (with limit) in Russian league and under another (without limit) in European championships. The main problem that emerged after introduction of limit is drastic rise in salaries of native players that brought some clubs closer to the bankruptcy.

To conclude, until now limit on foreign players did not fulfill its core objective and even brought new challenges. Quota on foreign players alone will not provide desired benefits. Other measures are required such as efficient youth academies, better promotion of league, new infrastructure. If these and other measures suggested in this paper will be implemented, then Russia will make one step forward in the development of national football rather than one backward in comparison to the period prior to the reform.

References

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