

# **Should "the Big Four" English Teams Prefer a Genuine European League?**

## **A Media Impact Analysis of the English FA Premier League**

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### **Abstract**

The English Premier league is probably the national League in Europe with the highest levels of global media coverage. The games are broadcasted in more than 100 countries.

Achieving success in the UEFA Champions League is the main objective for all top European clubs, as this competition offers the maximum exposure and media coverage amongst all available competitions. Apart from the direct economic impact of payments by UEFA depending on the final classification of each team, the Champions League generates substantial additional returns in the long term through the increase of media value of the players and teams.

How important are those international games for these top four English teams in comparison with national games? The answer to this question is relevant, as there is an open debate – which will probably increase in the near future – concerning whether a pure European League should be created, where participants would stop participation in the regular national leagues. This option is arguably very seductive in media impact and economic terms for top teams of second level leagues. But some argue that the benefits of a European League could be lower than those produced by the present status quo where both a national and an international competition are played.

In this paper we want to investigate to which extent the Champions league is also a determinant of media impact for the top teams from the top national league in Europe, the English Premiership. Manchester United, Liverpool, Arsenal (and in recent years Chelsea) are the clear dominators of the English Premier League since its inception in 1992.

The fact that these teams play simultaneously in both competitions makes it hard to disentangle and estimate the relative media impact of both competitions. Is the Premier League internationally acclaimed mainly because of the international exposure of these four teams thanks to their participation and performance in the Champions League? Or in the reverse case, does the Champions League benefit from the participation of those top English teams, which bring into the Champions League games their international attraction and media exposure gained in their Premiership successes?

We have a unique data set which allows us to explore these issues in a way that satisfactorily reveals the causality problem. We will use a strictly homogeneous measure to estimate the media impact of Premier League games versus Champions League games.

For information on media value, we have used the data set of ESIRG dealing with media value of football players collected twice weekly. This data set estimates the intangible notion of media value by two complementary elements, popularity and notoriety. The notoriety measure reflects the mass media exposure received by each sport player.

We have run an econometric analysis using the media impact produced by each game day during the season 2006-2007 in each player of the four teams studied. We elaborate a model explaining the determinants of media coverage for a football player and we check the differential impact of English Premier league games and Champions League games.

The empirical results indicate that knock out phases of the Champions League has a much greater media impact than the average game of the English premiership. However, the media impact of the qualifying stages is less than or equal to that of the Premiership.

This clearly leads to the conclusion that for any reform of the current Champions League to tempt the big four teams in the FA Premier league to abandon the current dual structure of competitions, it must be one which will lead to the media impact of every game being greater than that of the level they currently enjoy by playing in both competitions. Hence every game must be important in determining final success, i.e., it must resemble a standard league competition where teams gather points towards a final classification.

Another point is the way players with "Superstar" status receive concentrated media focus even when their performance on the field of play do not deserve such. It would seem that there is a memory lag in media impact that continues to take into effect long past results.

Manchester United Players receives a much higher level of Media coverage than the other 3 clubs, making them the media reference in English football. Perhaps this is related to the consistent success of the team since the creation of the Barclay's Premier League.