
Competitive balance and intensity in European women's elite football: A key failure factor?

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Type: Scientific

Category: 6: Sport Economics and Finance

Abstract

1. AIM / RESEARCH QUESTION

Women's football is a growing topic for the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) for the last years. However, knowledge about European women's football has still to be improved, in particular on competitive balance (CB) and competitive intensity (CI). The smaller interest for women's football compared with men could be partially due to a worst CB and CI. In this paper, our aim is to check that there are important differences between European women and men's elite football in terms of CB and CI and consider how improving these indicators for women.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

CB postulates the necessity of equilibrium between the teams in a league in order to guarantee uncertainty of outcome and thus generate public demand. Fort and Maxcy (2003, p. 155) distinguish two lines of literature: the analysis of CB which "focuses on what has happened to competitive balance over time or as a result of changes in the business practices of pro sports leagues"; the uncertainty of outcome hypothesis which analyses its effect on fans. But is it relevant to only talk about "competitive balance"? In the European leagues, there is a promotions/relegations system (opened leagues) and so there are sporting prizes at the bottom of the league standing, unlike the American leagues. An unbalanced championship can be potentially more interesting than a more balanced one if each team has a sporting prize to defend, as in the first system, whereas the second offers few sporting prizes. The importance of sporting prizes leads to talk about the notion of competitive intensity, as proposed by Kringstad and Gerrard (2005).

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

So as to reach our aim, we studied three kinds of European women's football competitions that we compared to the corresponding men's ones:

1. The UEFA Women's Euro 2013 (qualifying and final rounds) compared to the UEFA Men's Euro 2012.
2. The UEFA Women's Champions League over the period 2010-2013.
3. Ten national leagues over the period 2010-2013: Belgium, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.

In national team and continental competitions, CB and CI were measured at the intra-game level. Intra-game CB is the percentage of game-time with no more than a difference of one goal between the two teams. Intra-game CI is the percentage of game-time for which a goal may change the situation of a team considering the sporting prizes.

For CB in a national league, HICB (Herfindahl Index of CB) is the most adapted measure to capture its global level of CB and allow comparisons with other leagues with a different number of competitors (Michie & Oughton, 2004): $HICB = [\sum_{i=1}^N s_i^2 / (1/N)] * 100$, where s_i is club i 's share of points in a season, and $i = 1, 2, \dots, N$, where N is the number of clubs in the league. For CI, we applied the formula proposed by Kringstad and Gerrard (2005): $CI = \sum_{i=1}^n P_i w_i$, where P_i is the intensity of prize interval i and w_i the weight of prize i . Kringstad and Gerrard (2005) set the prize interval at 10 points and suggest to measure P_i as the sum of the proportional gap between the points of the prize-winning team and the points of each team in the prize interval.

4. RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

CB and CI in the women's and men's Euros in 2012 and 2013 are comparable for the final round, what shows that the women's Euro final round has a good level in terms of CB and CI. Nevertheless, the comparison between women's and men's Euro qualifying rounds shows a lack of CB and CI for women compared to men.

CB in the Champions Leagues over the period 2010-2013 is worse for women than for men. The difference is even greater for CI. It means that not only teams are less balanced in the women's Champions League but its format is not relevant to generate CI.

HICB shows that CB in women's leagues is worse than in men's leagues. For CI, most of the values are smaller for women than for men. It can be explained by the lack of CB but also by the lack of sporting prizes.

Globally, there are important differences between European women and men's elite football in terms of CB and CI. By acting on formats of competitions, indicators for women could be improved. Nevertheless, formats of competition are only one key success factor among other important points including professionalization and regulation.

References

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