

## **Sport and the European Union: 10 Years after Bosman**

*Concluding comments by Wyn Grant, [www.footballeconomy.com](http://www.footballeconomy.com)*

The workshop was enlivened by the presence of a number of relevant disciplines: law, sociology, psychology, political science and economics. Of the leading disciplines involved in the interdisciplinary study of sport, only social history was absent but the history of the EU's involvement in sport is a relatively short one. One of the attractive features of the workshop was a willingness to range across disciplinary boundaries and be open to insights from other disciplines.

Richard Parrish provided a very helpful introduction to the workshop. He drew the workshop's attention to issues around the extent of legal certainty, the possible emergence of a space of supervised autonomy, and the emergence of a framework of territories. He also emphasised the need for appropriate analytical frameworks

The conference was relatively football centric despite the best efforts of the organisers to secure papers on a wider range of sports. What's good for football may not work in other sports. One way of creating a typology is to start with those that are (most usually) played on an individual basis like tennis, cycling and golf; then track athletics where competition is individual, but internationally part of a team; those with small teams like basketball; and the larger teams found in cricket, football and rugby. In the light of Valerie Owen-Pugh's interesting paper on the faltering professional status of basketball in the UK, it is worth thinking about which sports are played in leagues on a professional or semi-professional basis. For example, one might compare basketball with ice hockey or volleyball. There could also be some interesting further work on the social situation of players in a 'minority' sport.

One theme that came out of a number of papers, e.g., that by Chris Platts, was the tension between representation and power. The EU aspires to work towards representative structures and transparency, concepts emphasised in the Independent Review of Sport, but one cannot ignore the fact that power politics are at work, e.g., the access to decision-makers granted to G-14 or the final settlement of television rights in the UK which was a good one for BSkyB but arguably a worse outcome for consumers.

Uefa has been clawing back some of the ground it lost at Bosman. However, the Nice declaration is not an open-ended invitation to Uefa to ignore EU law. Uefa has to stop seeing social dialogue as a zero sum game.

There was considerable discussion of the role of the fan as consumer. Here one can think of a continuum from the amateur participant in sport who takes part for recreational reasons, through the spectator as participant, to the follower who watches a team from his couch at home wearing their merchandise. However, in economic terms this media audience is very important. There was concern about the marginalisation of the voice of the spectator. A real challenge is to organise fans effectively, notwithstanding the successes of the supporters' trust movement in the UK. How does one ensure that the spokespersons that emerge are not atypical of fans in general?

One should not overlook the fact that there are real conflicts of values. Bastian Kern's paper on doping led to a stimulating discussion about what the real issue was here: morality, cheating, or threats to the health of competitors when they are pressurised to take drugs?

There was some reference to the 'American model' of organising sport. But is there a single American model any more than there is a European model? Sport can be linked with attempts to construct a European identity and Charlotte Van Tuyckom's paper made some very interesting use of Eurobarometer data on this point. This provoked some interesting discussion about sub-national identities, e.g., in Catalonia. But, as Richard Parrish warned, we are on dubious constitutional territory when we talk about European identity.

It is evident that we are dealing with a multiplicity of actors and venues in relation to EU policy on sport with 'joined up thinking' often lacking. The DG for Education and Culture is tasked with writing the White Paper on Sport which is

supposed to appear in 2007 and this could be a basis for another workshop. However, it is important to recognise that actors engage in 'venue shopping' to find the arena most receptive to their interests.

We have to be careful about treating sport as unique or exceptional. Some systematic comparison with other EU policy arenas would be welcome. We must also be careful about confining ourselves to the EU level which sometimes happens in some American analyses of the EU. We need to know more about sports policy in the twenty-five member states and also how EU policy impacts at the member state level, the theme of the paper by Arne Niemann and Alexander Brand.

There is no doubt that as a policy arena EU sport policy poses questions of complexity (evident in the fascinating paper by Jean Christian Drolet on transfer rules) and interconnectedness. The real world is complex, but as social scientists our task is to produce parsimonious models that helps us to understand that complexity and patterns of change. If we can do that, we can help policy-makers to make better choices, e.g., understanding the risk of unforeseen consequences (as suggested by Chris Platts) and also assist fans to think about the choices they face and how they can become more engaged with decision-making.

What is evident is that the study of sport and the EU is now being taken much more seriously than it was, that interest in the area does not simply reflect a perception that it offers 'light relief' and that the quality of work is improving by leaps and bounds.