

## Muse Eleven.

### A Revision of the Structure of the Football Association Leagues

#### Restructure of Leagues

There is continued criticism of both the congestion fixtures - a situation arising from both domestic and international demands - and also the consequent need to play during the depth of winter.

The situation has been worsened by the formation of the Premier League; not least by the inequitable distribution of the sponsorship and contract monies available from commercial sources.

There is some evidence that the existing financial set-up is not in the long-term interests of the majority of the clubs.

The following is offered as one of several - if not many - options in which some of the problems may be addressed.

In this, as with any other, the greatest problem will be to arrive at a consensus for change: the next will be the manner in which the changeover is initiated: in the case of this proposal it may be carried out relatively painlessly over one or two transition seasons.

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The basis for this proposal is to divide one hundred, one hundred and ten, or one hundred and twenty clubs, into groups of ten or twelve thus including all the existing 92 League Clubs together with some or all of the Blue Square League.

This is achieved by dividing each of the existing League divisions into Upper and Lower halves as per their position at the end of a given season.

The following season, and thereafter, each of the two halves operate for the first half of the season as a ten, or twelve, division; the teams playing each other home and away in a fixture list of 18 games for a ten team division, or 22 games in the case of a twelve team division.

In the second half of the season these Mini-Leagues are restructured with the bottom half of the table of a league – say The Premier B - combined with the upper half of the league immediately below – in this case The Championship A - to give a secondary league of ten, or twelve teams who will each play another 18, or 22, game fixture list.

At the end of this second half of the season the upper half of each league will combine with the lower half of the league immediately above to form the appropriate groupings to start the next season.

Thus the second half of the season incorporates the promotion and relegation battles of the present league structure, and thus reduces the possible incidence of teams being promoted and relegated in successive seasons, as well as removing the iniquities associated with a sudden-death, play-off system.

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As thus presented, at the end of the first half of the season, the uppermost half of the top league and the lower half of the bottom league are left in apparent limbo.

It is assumed that the first of these – namely the top half of The premier A - will become involved in the European Competitions; to include a possible European League made up by teams from participating European Countries operating a similar, or comparable, selection process.

The second group, i.e. the lowest group of the bottom league, would most probably combine with the same number of non-league clubs; again with the topmost half returning to the bottom league at the end of the season.

This thus becomes the vehicle whereby Non-League clubs are promoted to the League.

For the purpose of simplicity the non-league clubs making up this secondary league will be selected from those who apply from designated non-leagues, with due weight given to both their current results, their financial status, and the suitability of their grounds.

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It is likely that the lower leagues of such a structure would obtain cost benefit from a return to the former North and South regional leagues - or some such other regional basis - in the first half of the season. In this case it would probably require either two lots of two, or, two lots of three to go forward into a higher group at the end of the first half season and, likewise, to return to lower groups at the end of the second half season.

This could require the bottom five groups to consist of twelve teams compared with the ten teams of the top five groups.

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Thus at the end of the final season of the existing League structure, the following movements would be required in order to establish the revised structure for the next season:

- the former Premier Division would be divided into two Leagues; Premier 'A' and Premier 'B'; each consisting of ten teams.

While it would probably better to suspend the relegation and promotion process for that season, it would not be essential to do so.

- Likewise the top twenty teams in the Championship League would be divided into two Leagues; Championship 'A' and Championship 'B', with the four bottom teams dropping into the next lowest tier.
- These four teams and the top six teams of Division One will combine to form Division One 'A': the next twelve teams in Division One will constitute Division One 'B'.
- The remaining six teams, together with the top eighteen clubs of Division Two will constitute the two regional leagues Division Two North and Division Two South.
- This leaves the bottom six teams in Division Two to combine with the top eighteen clubs of the Blue Square Division to form Divisions Three North and South.

There are several other options at this level:

- One such option could be to form one Division Three consisting of twelve teams:
- A second option would be to retain one larger league consisting of twenty, twenty-two, or twenty-four teams.

- There are many other options depending upon the limitation placed upon the total number of 'League' Clubs considered appropriate.

Thus there are Five Leagues of 10 Teams and Five Leagues of 12 Teams making a total of One Hundred-and-Ten Teams, compared with the existing Ninety-Two League Teams plus Twenty-Four Conference Teams.

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Clearly the total number of teams participating is adjustable by varying the number of Leagues and deciding upon ten or twelve teams per League.

Given the unsatisfactory financial state of many clubs it could be considered unwise to increase the number of clubs: in this case the number of Leagues could be reduced to the Five National Leagues and Four Regional Leagues; thus equating, more or less, with the current situation.

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## Ownership of Clubs

Given this perilous state it might be time to consider removing the Rule preventing anyone having a controlling interest in more than one club.

There is obvious advantage in the richer clubs being able to financially support clubs in lower leagues: while there are evident problems associated with conflict of interest it should not be beyond the wit of the authorities to regulate the situation.

One restriction could be to specify the minimum spacing between Owner Clubs and Owned Clubs: perhaps to not less than three leagues.

The obvious advantage of having Nursery Clubs is not only, to promote the development of home grown talent, but also, to reduce the duplication of facilities and administration.

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Undoubtedly, there will be anomalies associated with supporter-loyalty and historical animosities to be overcome; but given the limited number of rich clubs and the large number of poor ones there should be room for manoeuvre to avoid the most obvious conflicts.

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## Players Wages

Given the unsatisfactory financial situation of many Football Clubs the high levels of wages of some of the players is a significant factor. The result has been to push the price of entry to matches to levels that are, arguably, a disincentive to long-term support. Personally I cannot understand how the average supporter is able to sustain season long support of his team without prejudice to other personal commitments. It is not unreasonable to make comparisons of the level of player wages with those of the majority of the supporters i.e. to use the Mode to Median Wages as a unit of comparison.

Note: These are defined and discussed in Muse Three.

It has to be accepted that a player's career is not likely to exceed 15 years, during which provision has to be made for post-playing subsistence.

Obviously if we consider players from the Premier League, comparison with League Two players would be invidious; it is thus necessary to consider two examples.

## Example One

Premier League players who may be paid between £30,000 and £150,000 per week.

If we were to assume he is 27 years old and thus likely to be at the peak of his career, he probably started at less than £1,000 per week at Twenty and those who regress down the leagues towards the end of their careers may see their wages fall to £10,000 per week by the time he reaches Thirty-Five. (The wages expressed in current values.)

His earnings over the fifteen playing years would probably total between £10 and £20million: if 15% of this were invested in a personal provident fund it would at the end of his playing days have a possible value between £1.5 million and £3million.

If this were to remain invested until he attains Sixty this total would likely fund a Pension of £200,000 to £300,000 per annum - thus placing him in the top 2% of the population.

I cannot believe this should cause hardship during his playing career.

One has to accept there is a 25 year period to be lived from the time he stops playing until the pension becomes payable.

It is not too much to expect that this period be passed in gainful employment in a profession or trade for which he could have trained during his playing career:.

while this does not give consideration that there are, for some, opportunities for celebrity-income, this will not be available to the majority of players.

Nonetheless it is possible that the majority would be able to earn £30,000 to £50,000 per annum: if this could be supplemented to £100,000 per annum, by additional investments accrued during their playing career, they would still be in the top 10% of the population.

To do so would require that he invest a further 10% of his player earnings.

At no time, during those 15 years, should saving a total of 25% of his gross salary have compromised a reasonable lifestyle.

Clearly a profligate lifestyle may prejudice his future; but it is hardly reasonable to expect the fans to support any degree of excessiveness.

Obviously the 'cake' could be cut differently but at no time should the result be other than the player being in a position of relative privilege.

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## Example Two

This considers a player who spends his life in Division Two of the present Football League, at a continuous relative salary of £1,000 to £3,000 per week.

His career earnings would total between £750,000 and £2,000,000 which even if he were able to save 25% would yield £250,000 to £500,000 by the time he stopped playing.

Left invested this could increase to more than £500,000 to £1,000,000 by the time he wished to retire at 60 years-of-age.

This should yield a Pension of £20,000 to £50,000 per annum i.e. an income between the Median Wage and one and a half times the Average Wage; a situation that many fans will never achieve.

There is no reason to suppose that a player at this level should not have been able to prepare himself for his post playing days in the same way as those from a higher division: thus a earning capacity in excess of the Average Wage is a reasonable expectation. Arguably he may consider there is no need to make additional provision for his pre-

retirement period. In consequence while his financial position is not comparable with Example One there is little reason to believe he should not maintain at least an average lifestyle throughout his life; this is something many of the population are not able to anticipate.

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## Conclusion

- It is difficult to see how the current levels of salaries paid to some players, managers and coaches in the higher echelons of the Leagues can be justified.
- Clearly there is little likelihood of a realistic wage structure being implemented.
- Nor can one expect the price of admission to games reduce.
- Yet an increasing number of lower league clubs are going into administration: if no action is taken the numbers will surely rise, including clubs from the higher divisions.
- The present trend for Premier League clubs to be owned by non British individuals and consortia is clearly destined to destabilise the Game.
- In common with all global commerce and financial Institutions: as well as National and International Politics: nearly all policies are based upon short term personal gain. The Football Association, The Premier League and its clubs, and the The Football League are seen to be no different.
- The Maxims will apply come what may. The Credit Crunch is the consequence of the Short Term, selfish Policies of Global and National Chain Businesses . If the resultant recession is long enough and deep enough, the consequences to everyone including all Professional Sport will, at the least be uncomfortable.

When will it be too late for the Game?

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