

## Takeovers: the Demise of Football?

As a Chelsea fan, I am (understandably) not too concerned about the state of football following Mr Abramovich's takeover. I still have to pinch myself when I read our team sheet, so maybe my opinions on the matter are a little clouded by my excitement about the 'revolution' currently taking place at my club. However, I have had time to think about what these takeovers are doing to football, and I have come to the conclusion that they are not destroying the game. No really.

Consider the end of last year: my team had just qualified for the Champions' League, but we were going nowhere really. Zola (yes, we still remember him) was about the leave, we had no money to bring in any new players, and, more worryingly, we were about to fall into a large pit of debt. Enough debt to possibly put the club into administration. It is true that Roman Abramovich came in because we desperately needed financial relief, even if what followed did exceed the fans' wildest dreams. Almost overnight, we have become a top European side; there seems to be no limit to the number and quality of players we can buy. The average players that have dogged us over the years are no longer needed – on your bike, Boudewijn Zenden – and finally there is a chance that Chelsea might be a truly successful club.

Is this a bad thing? Surely even the most jaded Premiership fan would admit that they are tired of the dominance of Arsenal and Manchester United in recent years, and with Chelsea becoming a real force, it at least opens up the title race and makes things a little more interesting. This can only be good for English football, despite the gulf in finance between us and other teams.

Some would say that we're simply playing fantasy football for real, but that's simply not true (and no, not because you actually have a budget in fantasy football). We have bought the players that were right for the team – why else would we buy Glen Johnson and Wayne Bridge over more experienced defenders? The players were chosen on their ability to fit into the Chelsea setup, not star names. This is pretty evident in the team's start to the season, as the players have gelled well and played as a team from the beginning. It is also important to remember that the core of the team is still English, with at least one Englishman playing every game. To have these players playing alongside top-class internationals every week is surely good for the national team, as players like Joe Cole will learn so much from the likes of Crespo and Veron. Would he have got that kind of experience playing in Division One with West Ham?

Overall, I think that it is just too early to judge whether takeovers are bad for the game or not. Cynics may worry, but the fact is that it will take time to see their overall effect on the game. So far, I have seen no reason to worry about the future of our game, only reason for excitement about the title race this year.

Interestingly, Aston Villa have allegedly also been approached by a Russian billionaire, so maybe we will see the full extent of what takeovers can do to the game in a few years' time. For the moment, though, English fans shouldn't be too concerned about football's demise.

After all, it gives them another team to hate ....

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