Press release
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English Premier League’s addiction to gambling sponsorship is worst of Europe’s top football leagues

The English Football Premier League has the highest number of gambling sponsorship deals across Europe’s top football leagues, according to new research from emlyon business school, which examines twenty years of data, from 2000-2020, across Europe’s five most prestigious leagues.

The research was conducted by Simon Chadwick, Professor of Eurasian Sport Industry at emlyon business school, in partnership with Dr Alex Bond, Leeds Beckett University, Dr Paul Widdop, Manchester Metropolitan University, and Dr Nick Burton, Brock University.

Databases for the Premier League, La Liga, the Bundesliga, Serie A, and Ligue 1 have been developed, cataloguing all shirt sponsorship partners from the 2000-01 season through to the most recent 2019-2020 campaign. An analysis of the databases has highlighted the relationship between each league and gambling sponsorship across Europe.

The English Premier League featured as the highest percentage of gambling shirt sponsors of the top five leagues, with an increase from 0% of shirt sponsors in the 2000-01 season to almost 50% of all shirt sponsors in the 2019-2020 season.

Spain’s La Liga featured with the second highest percentage of gambling shirt sponsors of the top five leagues. In the 2000-01 season there were no gambling shirt sponsorships, though the figure was 30% in the 2019-2020 season. The league also experienced a previous peak in 2008.

The number of shirt sponsorships by gambling brands in France’s Ligue 1 and Italy’s Serie A divisions have both remained fairly constant, with very little growth since 2000. Reaching a height of around 15% in each country during 2008, there has nevertheless been a recent decline in numbers. Germany’s Bundesliga on the other hand had the lowest numbers of all five leagues, remaining at virtually 0% of sponsorship throughout, bar a handful of years.

Source: Researcher Compiled
Professor Simon Chadwick says,

“Not only is there something of an unhealthy alliance between football and gambling, but the likes of children are subject to images and messaging that some find unpalatable. Public attitudes towards gambling are changing, and this is an inconvenient truth for European football clubs drawing significant revenues from gambling sponsorships.

In the future we are likely to see a tightening of measures designed to limit the promotional activities in which gambling brands typically engage, which includes football shirt sponsorship deals. This would cause clubs some degree of financial difficulty, with English Premier League clubs being particularly exposed.”

Regulation of the gambling and betting industries in each European country differs, and the researchers state more lax gambling laws and a vaster gambling culture correlates with higher gambling sponsorship rates.

For instance, Germany has banned online casino games and slots across the country, the French government has retained strict control over gambling across the country and all Italian sports leagues have been prohibited from all gambling-related sponsorships and advertising partnerships. Whereas the UK and Spain have limited regulation on gambling, and top football clubs are actively pursuing partnership with gambling companies.

The researchers state that it remains to be seen whether the European Union will either exercise further control over, or otherwise ban, gambling sponsorship in sport as it did nearly twenty years ago with tobacco sponsorship. With growing public health concerns across Europe about gambling especially online, where many football shirt sponsors operate, an outright ban is a possibility.

Whilst in England, given the country’s exit from the EU, the researchers suggest there could be a significant divergence in approach to gambling regulation both in the country generally and in the English Premier League. The revenue that gambling sponsorship brings to Premier League clubs is considerable, and as such, further regulation of gambling sponsorships may leave clubs financially vulnerable – this could lead to lucrative lobbying of the government by clubs.

These findings are part of a wider study from all four researchers looking at all types of sponsorship throughout European football over the last twenty years, and which industries are most represented.

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