

Managing organizations in sports labor markets

Course syllabus

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Why is this course important?

Football seems to have gone mad. Neymar for 222 million to PSG, 140 million for Philippe Coutinho, and ‘only’ 135 million Euro for Kylian Mbappé. Clubs spend insane amounts of money to hire a contingent of foreign players. Players make so much money that being a footballer nowadays seems to be synonymous with being a millionaire who spends a small fortune on new haircuts, tattoos, and colorful football boots. Fans can no longer identify with players, and the gulf between fans and teams have widened. And with all that big spending on the market, the outcome of competitions and cups becomes more and more predictable. These casual observations often find their way into the popular discourse and suggest that the transfer market is a, if not *the*, leading cause of the problems of ‘modern football’.

But how does the labor market for modern football players and other athletes really work? This question lays at the heart of this course and has been examined from an economic and a sociological perspective. For economists, sports labor markets are a prime example of an efficient market, where talent is observable and teams have all the information they need to make rational decisions. For sociologists, sports labor markets are a place of exploitation where mala fide player agents and club directors buy and sell players from around the world with the goal of reaping high profits.

In this course, we will briefly discuss how economists see the labor market in professional football, but pay most attention to understand how sociologists conceptualize sports labor markets. We will see that sociologists have focused on either contouring the macro-level structural features of the labor market or describing the micro-level experiences and decisions of individual athletes as they traverse the market. However, the meso-level of how organizations act on the market and what goes on within organizations has been largely overlooked. This gap opens up opportunities for organizational scholars to contribute to our understanding of sports labor markets. We will explore these opportunities and investigate how sports labor markets might be conceptualized as fruitful areas to explore more general questions and puzzles in management theory. Overall, this course will give you an academically informed understanding of how sports labor markets work and how sports labor markets can be researched to inform management theory.

What should you be able to do by the end of this course?

At the end of this course, you are able to:

1. Understand the main social-scientific theories about the labor market in professional football
2. Compare key differences between sociological and economic theories on sports labor markets
3. Identify new directions and research opportunities for organizational scholars to sports labor markets
4. Assess how research to sports labor markets can contribute to management theory

What do you need to do for this course? Assignments and evaluations

Each student needs to hand in a research proposal that includes 1) a clear research question related to the management of sport organizations, 2) a motivation why this question is theoretically important, 3) a literature review embedding the research question in the literature and which cites at least one of the papers we discussed in this course, and 4) a data and methodology section outlining the data and methodological strategy to answer your research question.

Research proposals cannot exceed 8 pages (font size 11, double spaced, standard office margins) including all text, tables, figures, and references.

For a good source on how to structure your research proposal see “Dr. Karen’s Foolproof Grant Template” on <https://theprofessorisin.com/2011/07/05/dr-karens-foolproof-grant-template/>

Hand in your research proposals within two weeks after the final day of this course

Course schedule

Students are expected to read the two key readings prior to each session. Suggested readings are provided for your reference if you would like to read more about the topic of the session

Session 1 How do economists conceptualize sports labor markets?

Key readings:

Szymanski (2015) Money and soccer: A soccernomics guide. New York: Nation Books.
Read chapter 2 “Players”, pp. 29-55.

Frick (2007) The football players’ labor market: Empirical evidence from the major European leagues. Scottish Journal of Political Economy vol. 54(3), pp. 422-446

Suggested readings:

Bryson et al. (2013) The returns to scarce talent: Footedness and player remuneration in European soccer. Journal of Sports Economics vol. 14(6), pp. 606-628

Frick (2009) Globalization and factor mobility: The impact of the “Bosman-ruling” on player migration in professional soccer. Journal of Sports Economics vol. 10(1), pp. 88-106

Session 2 How are sports labor markets structured?

Key readings:

Poli (2010) Understanding globalization through football: The new international division of labour, migratory channels, and transnational trade circuits. International Review for the Sociology of Sports 45(4), pp.491-506

Giulianotti & Robertson (2012) Mapping the global field: A sociological model of transnational forces within the world game

Suggested readings:

McGovern (2002) Globalization or internationalization? Foreign footballers in the English league, 1946-95. Sociology 36(1), pp. 23-42

Darby et al. (2007) Football academies and the migration of African football labor to Europe. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 31(2), pp. 143-161

Session 3 **How do athletes maintain their agency when they move across country borders?**

Key readings:

Carter (2013) Re-placing sport migrants: Moving beyond the institutional structures informing international sport migration. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 48(1), pp.66-82

Elliott (2016) Football's Irish exodus: Examining the factors influencing Irish player migration to the English professional leagues. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* vol. 51(2), pp.147-161

Suggested readings:

Elliott & Gusterud (2018) Finding the back of the net: Networks and migrant recruitment in Norwegian football. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* vol. 53(1), pp. 69-83

Agergaard & Ryba (2014) Migration and career transitions in professional sports: Transnational athletic careers in a psychological and sociological perspective. *Sociology of Sport Journal* vol. 31(2), pp. 228-247.

Session 4 **How important is agency for domestic mobility in sports labor markets?**

Key readings:

Roderick (2012) Domestic moves: An exploration of intra-national labour mobility in the working lives of professional footballers. *International Review for the Sociology of Sports* vol. 48(4), pp.387-404

Roderick (2012) An unpaid labor of love: Professional footballers, family life and the problem of job relocation. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* vol. 36(3), pp.317-338

Session 5 **What is it like to be a professional football player?**

Key readings:

Roderick (2006) A very precarious profession: Uncertainty in the working lives of professional footballers. *Work, Employment & Society* vol. 20(2), pp.245-265

Roderick & Schumacker (2017) 'The whole week comes down to the team sheet': A footballer's view of insecure work. *Work, Employment and Society* vol. 31(1), pp.166-174

Suggested readings:

Roderick (2006) Adding insult to injury: workplace injury in English professional football. *Sociology of Health & Illness* vol. 28(1), pp.76-97

Velema (2016) A game of snakes and ladders: Player migratory trajectories in the global football labor market. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* DOI: 10.1177/1012690216679967

Session 6 **What about organizations in sports labor markets?**

Key readings:

Ertug & Castellucci (2013) Getting what you need: How reputation and status affect team performance, hiring, and salaries in the NBA. *Academy of Management Journal* vol. 56(2), pp. 407-431

Velema et al. (2018) Global value added chains and the recruitment activities of European professional football teams. Accepted at *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*

Suggested readings:

Kelly & Waddington (2006) Abuse, intimidation and violence as aspects of managerial control in professional soccer in Britain and Ireland. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* vol. 41(2)

Grund (2012) Network structure and team performance: The case of English Premier League soccer teams. *Social Networks* vol. 34(4), pp. 682-690

Session 7 **How do market observers judge quality?**

Key readings:

Christensen (2009) "An eye for talent": Talent identification and the "practical sense" of top-level soccer coaches. *Sociology of Sport Journal* vol. 26(3), pp.365-382

Velema, T.A. (2018) Upward and downward job mobility and player market values in contemporary European professional football. *Sport Management Review*, DOI: 10.1016/j.smr.2018.02.004

Suggested readings:

Lund & Soderstrom (2017) To see or not to see: Talent identification in the Swedish football association. *Sociology of Sport Journal* vol. 34(3), pp. 248-258

Hill & Sotiriadou (2016) Coach decision-making and the relative age effect on talent selection in football. *European Sport Management Quarterly* vol. 16(3), pp. 292-315

Session 8 **How can research to sports labor markets inform management theory?**

There is no reading for this session, but we will use this time to jointly explore how our own research in sports labor markets can inform more general questions and puzzles in management theory.