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FUTURE EXPECTATIONS OF AMATEUR FOOTBALLERS: NEVŐEHİR CASE

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Abstract

Parallel to globalizing values in the ever-globalizing universe football phenomenon, with its increasing significance in all cultures and social groups, has become an inseparable part of our daily lives. By virtue of being a profitable and industrializable sport branch easy to track, football has been widely adopted by corporations, populations and government authorities at most. Inasmuch as today, due to ever-enhancing effect of popular culture on general public, it is now a much stronger element in reconstructing and reshaping the function of daily life. Based on this assumption, in order to identify sociological account of the transformative role of football in social dynamics and future expectations of amateur club footballers, present research initially probes into the history of football and the way football popularized and industrialized within global system. Next, social demographics of amateur league footballers are described and it has been attempted to draw a sociological analysis based on their future expectations.

Keywords: Football, Football Industry, Amateur Footballers.

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INTRODUCTION

Originated from Latin words “desportare” and “isportus”, sport as a term corresponds to having fun, keeping busy and spending time. It is an individual as well as group activity with its own specific rules, which can be professionalized or utilized as free-time activity only. It is a socializing, unifying, mind and body stimulating activity which is directly under the effect of its own social group but it is at the same time a competitive cultural phenomenon that leaves a transformative effect on its own society (Voight, 1998; Erkal, 1981; Atasoy and Kuter, 2005).

In entire globe football is the most popular recreational activity and sports branch favored by vast numbers of sports fans. Football is an ancient phenomenon dating back to the early mankind. Throughout history sport has taken place within social structuring as a cultural, religious and ceremonial unity (Solmaz and Aydın, 2012: 72). During 2500 B.C. football was practiced in China to develop war skills of soldiers to fully prepare them for battles and gain agility through various tactics whereas in Egypt it was a component of rites offered to pharaohs. Played as a holy game in Aztecs in which the defeated team was sacrificed to deities, in Eskimo societies, football was played as a fun game on the ice fields by singing songs and kicking morse fish or seal heads. A common team game amongst Roman soldiers it is known that football, named as Tepük then, had also been quite a popular sport activity among ancient Turkish tribes (Erdoğan, 2008).

The closest form of football as we know it in modern day has taken shape in 17th century England and very rapidly spread to masses. The first football club was opened in England in 1857 and after the collection of 12 teams, the first professional football league was established in 1881. The first encounter of football with Turkish people has also been driven by the British who were in the 19th century engaged in tobacco and cotton trade in Ottoman Empire. The foundation of Turkish Professional Football League coincides with year 1959 (Erdoğan, 2008).

To be able to better comprehend and analyze football one should not limit its scope into a simple way of recreation or free time activity but rather examine the sport as a social phenomenon, which represents in its body the characteristics of popular culture and consumption trends. Defined as the life-style of human groups within a particular space and time, culture is identified and shaped in line with physical and emotional needs of mankind. Popular culture on the other hand is exemplified as imitation and repetition based collective use of cultural elements and assets by wide masses (Şentürk, 2007: 24), which proves the fact

that popular culture is not a self-emerging phenomenon. It is a culture that has been produced by transforming a societal culture towards the aim of consuming and buying/selling. Popular culture is heavily dominant in all aspects of financial, social and political life but it reflects the most dynamic, colorful and exciting effect on football (Şentürk, 2007: 26). As reported by Critcher football, which was once a game for common people has in time been taken away from average men and with the transformative effect of popular culture, it turned into a different form of recreation presented to the wide masses via media tools (Bennett, 1999 quoted by Şentürk, 2007: 34). Not long after football has lost some of its fun-game properties and gained the characteristics of a financial, social and political unity (Talimciler, 2008: 89).

As noted by Fişek (Fişek, 1985 quoted by Talimciler, 2012) the earliest professional spectators, sportsmen and teams of football date back to coal pits and plants where the financial and social depression was hardest which is a sociological indicative of the way sport, free time and capital association initiated. To attract the wide masses in order to popularize high income and profitable sports activities, it became a necessity to organize the matches officially and play the games in spectacular stadiums (Fişek, 1985 quoted by Talimciler, 2012). In line with the rising interest towards sports the inclination for fan products and sports equipments has also risen and a new sector has been born. To meet the games with masses it became a necessity to develop mass communication tools thus a better analysis on the way sports activities formed shall at the same time be useful in demonstrating the way social structure is shaped (Fişek, 1985 quoted by Talimciler, 2012).

Popularization of football is also a direct outcome of consumer society. Football, which was originally played for the mere fun of sports, has in time transformed into mass industry upon realizing its popularity and profitability (Erdoğan, 2008). Football clubs have become incorporations with financial income motives (Çoban, 2008: 92) and football has been placed into the hands of certain groups then resubmitted to wide masses (Erdoğan, 2008). Çoban argues that branding of football and consumption of its subproducts by masses is indicative that football has been under the influence of consumer society culture (Çoban, 2008: 74). Leagues sponsored by big companies, super bowls, rise in the number of weekly matches, film star luxury lives of footballers, astronomic transfer payments, new perception of technical directors as war commanders, huge amounts of bets, channels that broadcast matches by huge subsidies have fueled the change in football (Erdoğan, 2008). All these changes have spread to the masses via mass communication tools. For instance Hakan Şükür's 4 million dollar cost transfer after his

crowning as top scorer has triggered great curiosity. Media disseminated this news via mass communication tools. During this communication process, transfer money in different exchange rates, how many kilometers it would be once added side by side, its weight, space and several other comparisons and the time spared for football in media channels (forums that start a few days earlier and continues even after the derby matches end) have always kept popularity of football alive (Şentürk, 2007: 37). Parallel to the new identity of football as a component of popular culture, football matches have turned into theatrical rather than action games. The most evident feature of modern society is its show-business character. Each competition is geared towards viewing, enjoying and making money. Football has changed its free-cost character and assumed a new format as toll activity. According to data released by World Cup USA Corporation set for 1994 World Cup organization, about 30 billion people watched World Cup on TV that was organized in different dates in Italy and the U.S. (Şentürk, 2007: 35). These figures are the greatest indicators of the domination of football as a mass industry by popular culture. Football is the most profitable sports branch in sector. Sports investors that are immune even to global crises double their investments each new day. On a global scale, sports investments approach to 450 billion Euro level. It is projected that with an annual growth of 3,7 percent, global sports revenues shall reach to 145,3 billion dollars in year 2015. According to the data from football money league report, it is projected that the world's richest 20 football clubs attained above 5 billion Euros income during 2012-2013 season (Yılmaz, 2013: 16). As an outcome of popularization and industrialization of football many a number of daily-life side- consumer products were introduced. Team uniforms and shoes re-designed every new year, club accessories, perfumes, telephone cards, toys and footballer news that take wider place now in women magazines (recently women and kids are also drawn closer to football industry) and many other factors have fueled dramatic changes in society's consumption habits (Erdoğan, 2008). That is because football has currently turned into a Meta. In that aspect football, by reshaping consumption patterns directing our lives, lost its game character and assumed a new identity as business (Çoban, 2008: 99). There have been reflective changes in footballers too. As explained above in place of footballers who used to play once a week only, show-business gladiators who appear in national and international leagues twice or more in a week have replaced the usual footballers; therefore in today's world sports is no longer a fun-game for its practitioners. Professional football is dominated by market rules that seek to make more money under all circumstances. Record-break is only a tool to reach the preliminary goal

so football is at all times marketed in the form of a show (Nikolov, 2001 quoted by Atasoy and Kuter, 2005: 20). As defined by Frankfurt School football now embodies all the characteristics of consumption fetishism (Çoban, 2008: 99).

As above assumptions indicate, after the new identity of football as industrial football the only thing that remained unchanged has been its name while the context and objectives of football have gone through major transformation (Talimciler, 2008: 89). As a result football has taken place as a consumption tool in all facets of social life and lost its character as mere fun but assumed a new role as a phenomenon that is strong enough to alter even political agenda as a whole (Erdoğan, 2008). To wind up within social structure that faced a transformation with the rise in capitalism football has secured itself a new space. Football which was originally practiced as a way to run away from work stress has in time turned into business itself as free time of people increased. Currently speaking football has assumed a new structure integrating the qualities of both business and fun (Talimciler, 2012: 377) therefore this sports activity is no longer just a fun activity for its practitioners. Professional football is guided by market rules dominated with the principles of money-making. With the emergence of new identity of football as business, amateur and professional football terms originated.

Amateur as a term refers to beginners who are engaged in this profession not to make money (<http://www.turkcebilgi.com/sozluk/amat%C3%B6r>) whereas professional sportsman is someone practicing football as a job to make money according to the preset requirements of work. It should be noted that an amateur footballer does not necessarily mean that he is far from professionalism in his practice. Money making is not the only criterion in professionalism. Conducting a work within certain rules is what makes a professional business. Amateur footballers are individuals who live within a social structure dominated by popular culture while at the same time they aim to rise as brilliant footballers in future.

In that aspect it is highly significant to determine for the objectives of present research the future expectations of amateur footballers, in which position they see themselves, the way they shape and alter their daily life. Parallel to this objective, amateur footballers playing in "Derinkuyu Gücü" amateur club in Nevşehir city Derinkuyu district, team's technical director and 23 students who study in Nevşehir University but also play in different amateur football clubs have been included into one-to-one interview and received surveys with close and open ended questions. Obtained findings have been interpreted via SPSS program.

CONCLUSION

Of all the amateur footballers constituting sampling group, 52.2% belong to 17-19 age interval, 34.8% belong to 20-22 age interval, 13% belong to 23-25 age interval. In this research mean age of sampling group is low since the survey included only footballers who play actively in any amateur club. Since sampling of the universe consists of amateur footballers from Derinkuyu and also Nevşehir University football the highest share in educational level belongs to high school graduates (87%). Of all the interviewees, two footballers are secondary school graduates and only one is elementary school graduate.

A question has been directed to amateur footballers on the educational background of their fathers. 52.2% reported that their fathers are elementary school graduates, 30.4% high school graduates, 13% secondary school graduates, 4.3% two-year college graduates. Of the entire sampling, 52.2% reported to have elementary school graduate mothers, 26.1% are secondary school graduates, 17.4% are high school graduates and 4.3% are with no diploma. These figures indicate that amateur footballers have parents with low educational background. Amateur footballers' mothers are mostly housewives (91.3%). Only two mothers are employed and they work as farmers. 30.4% fathers work as government officials, 30.4% fathers work as laborers, 30.4% fathers work as fathers and 8.7% fathers work as drivers. 78.3% of amateur footballers defined their current profession as student, 17.4% as laborer and 4.3% as farmer. A vast majority of amateur footballers are primary education and higher education students.

34.8% of amateur club footballers reported to have two siblings, 21.7% to have three and/or four siblings, 17.4% reported to have six siblings. 39.1% of interviewees claimed to live in a household of four people, 21.7% in a household of six, 13% in a household of three. Their families basically consist of four people.

A question has been directed to amateur footballers on their dream job. 39.1% said footballer, 34.8% (university students mostly) said physical education teacher, 13% said any work with good income and 4.3% said to work in the future as police officers.

Since negligible quantity of footballers had professional jobs, their total family income has also been considered. 39.1% of amateur club footballers reported to have 901-1100 Turkish Liras monthly income, 30.4% to have 701-900 TL, 17.4% to have 1300-1500 TL, 8.7% to have 501-700 TL. Despite their low income levels all interviewees defined themselves as members of middle class. Football manages to create an attractive force for a variety of social classes. Our research findings are parallel to Voigt according to whom football is a sports

activity combining different segments of society and that it is mostly preferred by people from middle and low socio-economic class (Voight, 1998 quoted by Devocioğlu and Sarıkaya, 2006: 3).

34.8% of interviewees reported to spend 1 - 100 TL in a month and 34.8% reported to spend no money on football. Since a majority of participants are from low-income families they spare no extra money for football. Only a ratio of 17.4% reported to spend around 101-150 TL, which is quite a low amount of share. One of the reasons explaining the popularity of football within disadvantaged groups is that it requires minimum amount of money to practice.

A question has been directed to footballers whether or not they earn any extra income and 82.6% of participants answered negatively. Only a small ratio as 13% reported to earn 101 - 200 TL in a month.

All interviewees declared that the moment they decided to play football they were resolved to be professional footballers playing in reputed teams. They also expressed that they placed high expectations to football and that they were quite talented but still it was rather challenging to climb the stairs in amateur teams.

The pumping of luxurious lives of globally star footballers through the means of mass communication tools leaves adverse effects on the social and psychological stance of amateur footballers. However regardless of all hardships the interviewees aspire to climb a higher social class with the help of football. Hence aspiration for money and fame drives youngsters to this sports branch.

39.1% of interviewees reported to see themselves as professional footballers in future while 34.8% admitted not to have any dreams established on football. 26.1% of participants stated their will to play in a team much more successful than their current team. Though all participants dreamed of themselves as professional players when they first started football, their current answer has indicated that the ratio degraded to 73.9%. College student footballers are the ones less dependent on football as a professional career since they have other alternatives to choose. On the other hand the participants without any alternatives to climb the social ladder lay all their hopes to football.

Amateur footballers having reported to believe in a better future with football are convinced in their belief that if they strive hard enough they can rise as accomplished footballers although they have to cope with many obstacles presently. They report that football is a sport of intelligence so regardless of age they shall still have a chance to be successful in future.

Amateur footballers having reported not to believe

in a better future with football are convinced in their belief that since their football club is a simple one, they have zero chance to be discovered by great clubs. They also said that nobody ever bothered to watch even the best footballers in this small city while in capital cities the footballers have better chances to be discovered by means of media as well as hunters of great teams. There is also a group holding the belief that they are now too old to be successful footballers.

A question has been directed to sampling group on the motives leading them to football. 65.2% responded to that question as their talent, 34.8% said to have a better future. Amateur footballers' initial motive has been to obtain a better future and they all believe fully in their talent.

69.6% of interviewees reported that it takes to work cooperatively to be a good team. 30.4% have declared that good friendships are required to be a good team. Amateur footballers' relations with their teammates reveal that they place stronger emphasis on cooperative work rather than good friendship.

A question has been directed to amateur footballers if they meet their teammates outside the field. 78.3% have responded to that question positively while 21.7% responded negatively.

87% of interviewees declared to sustain warm relations with their teammates while 8.7% have said no and 4.3% said partially yes. A majority of the ones sustaining good relations with teammates underlined that securing good relations with teammates is a prerequisite. The ones not sustaining good relations with teammates lined the reasons as the high competition in team and that since they are a team they have to be in good terms with one another but this does not mean that there is true sense of cooperation and integration.

The interviews conducted with the ones having problematic relations with teammates gave hints about a general atmosphere of jaundice within team members and that some team members, particularly the ones excelling in football, hold themselves higher than the others whom they ostracize. This is a definite proof of the fact despite seemingly prevalent team spirit there is a covert and tough rivalry behind the veil.

69.6% of interviewees reported that technical director acted unfairly in team member distribution while 30.4% advocated the opposite. Footballers hold the belief that technical directors select footballers in line with their own political orientations and constantly favor particular team members.

A question has been directed to interviewees whether they exercised regularly. 91.3% have responded

to that question negatively while 8.87% have responded positively. The reasons they listed for the failure to conduct regular exercises are time shortage, unfavorable pitch conditions, lack of adequate interest by amateur footballers and trainers. They also added that equipment shortage was at its peak and even at times they had difficulty in finding balls. Another reason they pointed is that since all members worked in different jobs they find it hard to designate a suitable time period for all teammates.

78.3% of interviewees shared their assumption that football has changed their lives positively while 21.7% stated not such positive effect of football. They worded that with the positive effect of sport they had healthier bodies and more friends. They also reported that once they attain success in football they shall be more popular just like famed players they aspire to. Another amateur footballer shared his belief that though football has no tangible effects on his present life, it shall leave positive influences in his future.

47.8% of interviewees who are from the department of physical education shared that if they fail to be successful in future they wish to work as physical education teachers. 43.5% plan to work in any profession with sufficient income. One of the participants even stated that even if he worked in a financially satisfying profession he would still consider to be a part of football and would not be bothered to work even as a ball boy.

30.4% of sampling claimed that hard work and talent is sufficient enough to be a good footballer. 26.1% emphasized hard work alone, 21.7% pointed at luck and string-pulling as crucial factors. The fact that amateur footballers place emphasis on string-pulling as much as hard work is a clear indicator of the troublesome reality.

A question has been directed to amateur club footballers on their free time activities. 65.2% of interviewees answered to this question as school. 17.4% have stated to work in a different job, 8.7% said to work somewhere and go to school and 8.7% to spend their time in cafes.

A question has been directed to amateur footballers on the attitudes of their families. 73.9% families supported their children's interest to football whereas 26.1% posed a negative attitude.

A majority of families remain neutral as regards their children's engagement, which they believe, keep kids away from bad habits. The ones holding a negative attitude do so since they fear of the injury risks and that the financial benefits of football is low, even none. The fact that football is a tough game increases the risks of injury. But to generalize, families are supportive of football love of their children since it is a dream for

people from all social classes to climb the ladder once they become professional footballers to access money and fame (Erdoğan, 2008). That is the kind of social awareness aiming to be created. In the past parents were furious at children who wore out their shoes in pitches but modern parents hold their children's hands and take them to football schools or summer camps in person which really underlines the great transformation.

56.5% of interviewees claimed that it was their father who rendered the greatest support. The most ardent supporters of footballers are fathers or uncles. 17.4% of interviewees pointed their technical director as the biggest supporter. Intrafamily interviews indicate that mothers are against their kids' engagement with football. 17.4% of interviewees pointed their friends as supporters.

60.9% of footballers aspired to play in Galatasaray, 26.1% in Fenerbahçe, 8.7% in Beşiktaş, 4.3% in an international team. None of the footballers aspired to play in local teams since they all dreamed of great teams, which would enable them to access fame and wealth.

For modern individual whose sense of traditional sense of belonging collapsed after industrialization, fanaticism bears a meaning that goes much beyond mere fun. It is like a concept that can define itself on its own. It can define itself clearly despite millions of fans and deem itself to share the very same values with this group. Fanaticism gains a collective identity and share. In modern age fanaticism has become a collective value, ideology, perception and belief and thanks to this sense of belonging it helps the people to move away from the troubles of daily life. Football fanaticism is defined by social scientists as nonreligious zeal and holiness, neopagan form of trans (Şentürk 2007:36).

60.9% of interviewees reported to be Galatasaray fan, 26.1% Fenerbahçe fan, 13% Beşiktaş fan which is parallel to dream teams of footballers and the teams they support.

Amateur league footballers mostly favor the foreign players in their dream teams. Some of the names they idolize are Cristiano Ronaldo, Rio Ferdinand, Muslera, Müller, Thierry Henry, David Luiz, Gareth Bale, Messi, Milan Baros, Alex, Selçuk İnan, Arda Turan, Engin Baytar, Wesley Sneijder.

Idolization of foreign footballers by amateur players is on the same page with present thesis. Transfers are exaggerated via commercials and news that place too much emphasis on huge amounts of transfer payments of footballers. Film star lives of foreign footballers with their wives create a fake dream world in amateur footballers' imagination.

A final question has been directed to interviewees on the meaning of football in their lives. It has been found out that amateur club footballers were almost addicted to football. They noted that once they could not play football they felt themselves sad and missing. Football was in their own words love and inseparable part of their lives.

CONCLUSION

Amateur team footballers come from low educated families with small incomes. They are mostly from middle or low social classes. Their mothers are basically housewives; their fathers are government officials or laborers. Amateur players mostly belong to nucleus families. A majority of amateur footballers stated to have started football for the aim of playing in a professional league eventually but they are convinced that playing in an amateur team is not advantageous for their rise and it is even more a hindrance on their way to reach fame. Almost all interviewees stated to spend no money for football which itself gives them no financial revenue either. Generally speaking they sustain good relations with teammates but still intrateam rivalry is rather strong. They cannot attend regular exercises and they even cannot exercise at all due to the fact that their teammates are students or employees in different jobs. Footballers' families are supportive of their children's engagement with football. Fathers and uncles are the greatest supporters in family. Next comes technical director. Amateur footballers are mostly fans of three-giants and aspire to play in these teams. Amateur players idolize and aspire to foreign footballers at most.

To summarize amateur footballers cultivate great hopes for their future and aim to rise as professional players. They believe in their talent but due to the limited opportunities in their social environment they are aware of the fact that it is hard to achieve their dreams. On the other hand constant pumping of the luxury lives of star footballers via mass communication tools entraps young footballers into a delusion of possible fame which inevitably pushes them into a hopeless struggle to seek after their unattainable goals.

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