

Sir Norman Chester Centre For Football Research

British Football on Television

Fact Sheet 8

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Whannel and Williams (1993:2) have suggested that in recent years television has increasingly drawn other cultural and leisure pursuits, including football, into its domain. Moreover, it is evident that throughout this century in Western - if arguably not *global* - societies, television has become an integral part of sports presentation contributing to the growth and popularity of many modern sports, including association football.
- 1.2 With now over 2000 hours a year of sport being broadcast on terrestrial television in Britain alone, Whannel has suggested that for many people - and for most of the time - sport *is* television sport (Whannel 1992:1-3). In Boyle and Haynes's (2000: 54) words: 'As a result of television becoming the driver of elite professional sport, it has come to dictate where, when and in what form sport can take place.' This fact sheet is divided into a number of short sections, each dealing with a particular aspect of the evolving relationship between football and television.

2. The Courtship

- 2.1 Until early in the twentieth century news of sport was generally restricted to a small audience, usually consisting of those present at the event or those receiving information by basic forms of communication, such as word of mouth. This all changed with the introduction of a mass circulation national popular press that brought information of sporting events to a large national audience for the first time. This was followed by the rapid growth in Britain in the 1920s & 30s of cinemas which meant that moving images of sporting events, in the form of newsreels, supplied many with their first glimpses of major sporting events. The 1920s also saw the arrival of BBC radio and outside live broadcasts of sporting occasions (Williams 1994b:7). Regular television broadcasts were first launched by the BBC in 1936, and two years later on 9th April 1938 the BBC screened the world's first live television pictures of a soccer match (Barnett 1990:7).

- 2.2 From the 1950s, television began to rise to a position of national dominance over radio. In 1952 Labour's Committee on Copyright announced that the rights to TV sports coverage be vested in the broadcaster on agreement of remuneration to sports promoters for any loss of revenue. This triggered a rise in televised sport and in 1954 the BBC launched *Sportview*, the first BBC television programme to have its own full-time production team, and the seeds of a sports department within the BBC were sown (Whannel 1992:38). The arrival of floodlit football in England the 1950s increased the sport's attractiveness to viewers, as ITV began to assemble its own sports list. By the early 1960s television was reaching the majority of the British population and in the words of sports promoter Mark McCormack "...an unholly alliance was developing. [in which] Sport was helping make television and television was helping make sport" (Cited in Whannel 1992:65). This alliance was encouraged - if not nurtured - by the growing interest in sport by major sponsors as a form of advertising (*op.cit.*).
- 2.3 There was no live action from the World Cup Finals in Chile in 1962, though satellite technology offered some delayed pictures from the 1964 Olympic Games. The 1970 World Cup Finals in Mexico were the first to be screened live and in colour in the UK. Until the 1980s the BBC dominated televised sport in Britain carrying the majority of major British sporting events including the FA Cup, Wimbledon, and the Derby, to name but a few. Competition, in the form of the commercial ITV channel in 1955, led the BBC to form new and long-lasting contracts with the organisers of the vast majority of British sporting events, securing their position of dominance in respect to sports coverage over the next 30 years.
- 2.4 It is important to note though, that television coverage of sport was by no means universal. Administrators of English professional football had an "*uneasy relationship with television... throughout this period, fearing that televising games would reduce the number of ticket-buying live spectators*" (Williams 1994b:8). In particular, the Football League resisted "live" coverage of football games up until 1983 when, due to escalating costs, coupled with declining gates, the potential of income from sponsorship and television rights became too tempting for the League's ruling body to refuse any longer (Whannel 1992:80-1). Even then the Football League continued to prohibit television from screening recorded football material on Saturday afternoons, and as late as the mid 1980s the FA routinely refused British television permission to cover major foreign matches.
- 2.5 Whannel and Williams (1993:2) have suggested that contemporary changes within British broadcasting may prove to have the greatest effects upon football's relationship with television. The renewal of the BBC's Broadcasting Charter in 1996, Channel 4's recent independence from ITV in selling its own advertising space, and the auction of independent television franchises all resulted in further changes in the relationship between television and the game. Yet the most dramatic turn in the contemporary relationship between television and football occurred in 1992, when the new FA Premier League signed a ground breaking deal with Rupert Murdoch's satellite sports channel *Sky Sports*, giving the channel exclusive rights to "live" coverage of the newly formed breakaway League consisting of the top 22 clubs from the old English League Division 1. This £304 million deal (including highlights fees

from the BBC) constituted a massive rise in the fees paid for the right to show "live" football. As Fig.1. illustrates this figure was almost five time greater than any fee previously paid and it entitled Murdoch's BSkyB network to "live" coverage of 60 games a season, and gave the BBC limited access to edited highlights from the Premiership.

Fig. 1. Milestone deals between TV companies and English footballing bodies 1983-1997

	1983	1985	1986	1988	1992	1997
Length of contract (yrs)	2	0.5	2	4	5	4
Broadcaster	BBC/ITV	BBC	BBC/ITV	ITV	BSkyB	BSkyB
Rights fee (£m)	5.2	1.3	6.3	44	191.5	670
Annual rights fee (£m)	2.6	2.6	3.1	11	38.3	167.5
Number of live matches per season	10	6	14	18	60	60
Fees per live match (£m)	0.26	0.43	0.22	0.61	0.64	2.79

Source: FA Premier League

2.6 This deal with BSkyB heralded the disappearance for some time of "live" top class League football from terrestrial television and secured the position of the BBC as the only terrestrial channel with access to recorded domestic highlights. This prompted the remaining terrestrial channels to snap up the rights to other football coverage. The independent television companies struck a deal with the Football League - the governing body responsible for the remaining 70 League clubs - while Channel 4 purchased the rights to coverage of the Italian *Serie A* League at the bargain price of £1.2 million per season (Taylor, 1995:4). Independent TV also secured Champions League rights, while Channel 5 and the BBC fought over rights to cover British clubs in other European competitions. These changes led to a vast increase in the "live" coverage of football on British television, with sometimes in excess of seven live games a week being available to the British television audience.

2.7 It therefore seems, for better or for worse that the marriage between football and television is here to stay for at least the foreseeable future. This fact was made clear by the fact that in 1997 BSkyB/BBC together renewed its FA Premier League contract by offering a staggering £743 million for live and highlights rights for four years. At the same time, BSkyB also tied up live rights for Football League coverage on a rather different scale (£125 million over five years). In the late 1990s, then, 20 FA Premier League clubs shared around £180 million per season for TV rights while 72 Football League clubs shared just £25 million. A new deal with the Scottish Premier League, and with coverage also coming in from the Spanish League later meant that TV football was spread over the whole weekend on Sky

Fig. 2. Typical TV Football coverage in 2001/2002 How much football on TV?

Weekend 18/19 August 2001

Saturday: 12 noon: Live FA Premier League B SkyB	BBC	80 minutes
Saturday: 5.30 Live Scottish football B SkyB	Eurosport	360
Saturday 8.00: Live Spanish/German League B SkyB	ITV Sport	1,460
Sunday 2.00: Live Football League ITV/ITV Digital	ITV 1	445
Sunday 4.00: Live FA Premier League B SkyB	Sky Sports ppv	165
Sunday 7.00: Live Spanish League B SkyB	Sky Sports 1	1,765
Monday 8.00: Live FA Premier League B SkyB	TOTAL	4,275 minutes
Tuesday 8.00: Live Football League ITV/ITV Digital	Source: Guardian 20 August 2001	
Thursday 8.00: Live Football League ITV/ITV Digital		

2.8 In 2000 the TV football world changed once again. Under pressure from the European competition authorities, the FA Premier League negotiated a 66 match deal with B SkyB for only three years, but for the astonishing sum of £1.1 billion. 50% of these monies were divided up equally between clubs, 25% according to final League position and 25% according to TV appearances. Which usually meant that the larger, more successful clubs doubled their money compared to smaller ones. In addition to this, ITV bought the FA Premier League highlights rights from under the noses of the BBC for £183 million, and pay-per-view rights were sold to a variety of broadcasters for £181 million. As Figure 2 shows, this meant close to ‘seven nights a week’ football in the new era, with one estimate suggesting over 70 hours of football coverage over a weekend. Finally, the FA Premier League sold on the international rights for coverage of the FA Premier League to Sport+, Newscorp, TWI and Octogon CSI for £178 million. Making a grand total of £1.6 billion to be shared by 20 FA Premier League clubs over three years. Significantly, the new deal also offered top clubs the opportunity to sell live internet coverage of their club’s matches abroad via webcasting and delayed full coverage in the UK. It is assumed in some quarters that the 2003 TV deal will allow top clubs much more leeway to sell their own TV coverage, thus opening up what is already a widening gap between the larger, ‘global’ clubs in the League and the rest.

Figure 3: Premiership Domestic TV Payments 2000/2001 (millions)

FA Premier League			
Manchester United	20.4	Newcastle United	12.7
Arsenal	17.5	Tottenham H.	12.3
Liverpool	18.5	Leicester City	12.0
Leeds United	17.5	Middlesbrough	10.6
Ipswich Town	15.7	West Ham U.	11.3
Chelsea	15.4	Everton	10.3
Sunderland	14.6	Derby County	9.4
Aston Villa	13.7	Manchester City	10.9
Charlton Athletic	12.7	Coventry City	9.6
Southampton	12.3	Bradford City	8.4

- 2.9 ITV's highlights coverage proved an embarrassing failure at its new competitive 7pm Saturday evening slot. Despite football's new popularity, the sport was unlikely to pull in the sort of uncommitted audience needed to raise the staple 7 million viewers advertisers expected at this time. Football on ITV at 7pm peaked at 5 million and dropped as low as 3.2 million. It soon returned to the 10.30pm niche established by the BBC and its 4 million regular viewers. Shorn, after some 37 years of partnership with the sport, of its flagship *Match of the Day* coverage, the BBC secured a deal with the FA (shared with BSkyB) for live coverage of FA Cup matches and of England international matches. The BBC and the FA promised to return some integrity to the FA Cup following the FA's strange request that Manchester United, the holders, should not even contest the 1999/2000 tournament but should play, instead, in a FIFA event in South America. The new FA/BBC plan was at least to play all FA Cup ties matches during the weekend of Saturday and Sunday, though plans in 2002 to screen all four FA Cup quarter finals 'live' on the same weekend also produced claims of TV football overkill and a lack of respect for the tournament's traditions and for live spectators.
- 2.10 In the Football League, things were stranger still. The new ITV Sport network lost out on bidding for the FA Premier League and FA Cup rights and so turned its attention to securing the rights for Football League coverage. It was at a price. £315 million secured a new four year deal for 80 matches a year, with around 80% of this total going to Division One clubs, about £3 million per club per season. The other 48 Football League clubs received an average of around £300,000 per season. This did not seem like money well spent by ITV when a number of Football League matches screened on ITV Sport in 2001 offered audiences of fewer than 100,000 viewers. In fact, some matches were reckoned to make modern TV sports history by having more live attenders than TV viewers! By early 2002 ITV were asking for a renegotiation of the deal.

3. "...the deadliest striker in front of the box..."

- 3.1 The title of this section is taken from a caption of a billboard advertisement used by the sports company *Nike* at the time of the 1994 World Cup Finals. The advert featured Ian Wright of Arsenal and England - "the Striker" - angrily sitting in front of a television screen - "the box". This advertisement uses the pun "the box" to refer to the *television* rather than, the 'natural' assumption that it refers to the penalty box on a football pitch. Without getting too deeply involved in a semiotic analysis of this advertisement, what it clearly illustrates is that, Ian Wright, who was unable to play in the World Cup Finals when England failed to qualify, would instead have to watch the games on television. This is only one example of how the, 'natural' relationship between television and football has become an established part of our understanding of football in Britain.
- 3.2 It is evident that, football coverage is *good* for television. It is - still relatively cheap programming compared with the cost of producing other programmes such as plays, currents affairs programmes and quiz shows (Barnett 1990:23), and consistently draws large audiences who want to watch "their team" play, or who just want to relax or relieve tension (Wenner & Gantz 1989:255). In turn, the mass media supplies sport

with a distinct and privileged position. On the back page of newspapers and within "...clearly demarcated 'slots'...giving the impression that sport exists isolated and distinct from the rest of society ... literally in a 'World of Sport'". (Clarke & Clarke 1980:9)

- 3.3 However, the relationship between sport and the mass media - and more specifically television - is neither as neutral nor as straightforward as one may imagine. Rather than simply *presenting* football - and sports generally - what television gives is a *representation* of the event. Football itself, operates through the use of clear rules and 'codes' that the spectator must understand in order to follow the game. However, Buscombe (1975:3) has argued that television, through the use of production techniques such as editing, lighting, colour, definition, framing, speed, camera movement and placing, adds an additional level of *coding* that makes the television viewers' access to the game distinct from that of the live spectator.

"...In practice decisions about when to cut, about whether to move the camera in or out, need to be taken at speed and must therefore be understood so implicitly that it has become second nature - just like a language" (Buscombe 1975:5).

- 3.4 Nowell-Smith has argued that television always presents a point of view, "...an angle... coming from somewhere and directed somewhere" (1981:160). For example, television in its portrayal of football has a tendency to focus on, and isolate, players on the screen in an attempt to create a sense of visual/dramatic impact and increase the "human" element. However, in doing so the viewer is presented with a selective and limited view that deprives them of a perception of the game as a whole and hence its patterns and tactics (Barr, 1975:51).
- 3.5 It may therefore be useful to understand the term "*televised*" to mean "*having been changed by the process of television*", rather than simply meaning "on television" (Corner, 1984:58). As Tudor argued, "*television creates worlds, it does not record them*" (1975:65). Whannel (1992) has also pointed out how TV acts to confirm the ways in which sport is effectively gendered by 'reassuring' the audience that female sports stars are still conventionally feminine *despite* their involvement in sport - unless, of course they are from *Eastern Europe* in which case questions about the sexuality of female athletes are rendered entirely appropriate by replaying established stereotypes. He has also indicated the ambivalence of TV around issues of race and sport. While TV provides a fund of positive images of talented black athletes succeeding it also serves to reproduce stereotypes about race and sport, such as the 'natural' physical superiority of blacks, and the tactical (intellectual) naivety of, say, footballers from Africa.

4. "The Good, the Bad ... & the Ugly?"

- 4.1 The debate concerning the effect of television upon sport has been raging for over thirty years. The camps are divided between those who see television as having distorted aspects of certain sports through its demands, and those who view 'televisionisation' as merely a part of the on going adaptation and modernisation involved

in sporting competition (cf. Whannel 1992:203). It is evident that the televising of football has brought some benefits to the game and society as a whole. Most obviously, television allows access to sport to be made available to a mass audience and it can provide access for the old, the infirm, and those displaced from their home town. It can also be argued that "...TV coverage of sport extends the power of fans..." in that it provides the television viewer with access to slow motion replays, multiple camera angles and 'expert' commentary on the events unfolding in front of the spectators eyes (Williams 1994a: 239). TV offers ways of *seeing* events unavailable elsewhere. Moreover, Rose & Friedman (1994: 29-30) have suggested that sporting competition helps relieve social tension, and promotes healthy forms of competition. Therefore, it can be argued that television brings sport, this potentially powerful social good, to a larger audience than could fit into any one stadium. Furthermore, Barnett (1990:108-9) has suggested that increased familiarity with a sport breeds enthusiasm for the game and ultimately results in a larger and stronger pool of players.

- 4.2 Moreover, the televising of football in Britain has generated vast sums of money for the sport (Gruneau 1989:136), not only from deals for television rights but also from the sponsorship opportunities that greater coverage of the sport has provided (Barnett 1990:183). This influx of capital has arguably allowed football, for example, to improve many aspects of the game including the stadia, professionalism in performance and staging of events, and provided new resources to support grassroots developments (Whannel & Williams 1993:4). It has also allowed top British clubs to compete more effectively for star players with their larger continental rivals which, in turn has helped maintain spectators' enthusiasm for the game (William 1994b: 9). Undoubtedly, the influx of top foreign stars into the English game – Veron, Henry, Pires, Barthez, Desailly and Zola – has depended fundamentally on new TV income. Finally, in the defence of the televising of football it can be argued that, in such a consumer-based market as television, it is the *viewer*, by choosing what to watch and what not to watch, who, at least in part, dictates television's schedule and the role of sport in it (cf. Williams 1994b: 4).
- 4.3 However, critics have argued that the televising of football may also have **detrimental** effects upon the sport and its fans. Barnett (1990:164) has suggested that television overlooks issues of politics and controversy involved in football, and moreover it is suggested that in many cases television helps generate racial and sexual stereotypes through sport. For instance, Tudor (1975:60) has suggested that television commentaries commonly use ethnic and racial stereotypes to describe *foreign and* international players. In respect to women, Cooper-Chen (1994:264) has suggested that the placement of televised football within the weekly and daily schedules is designed to specifically appeal to a male audience. Williams and Woodhouse (1991) have pointed out how women's participation within football as players has been marginalised, if not almost entirely overlooked, by British television (Though in 2002 the football-starved BBC will show the Women's FA Cup final live for the first time ever on terrestrial television).
- 4.4 Furthermore it can be argued that television coverage of football deprives the viewer of the freedom and the experience of the live spectator. The viewer is *a prisoner* to the television producers, directors and commentators (Barnett 1990:155). Morse

(1983) has suggested that the viewers are also *isolated from* the event and therefore must forgo the communal pleasures experienced by the live spectators. In France, where "live" coverage of football on TV is popular, the football fan "community" more readily gathers around the television rather than attending the football stadia, and the fear in Britain is that the same could eventually happen here (Williams 1994b:10). However, even in early 2002, with claims of TV football overload, FA Premier League attendances had reached an average record high of 34,000, compared to 25,700 in Spain and 25,200 in Serie A in Italy. The abandonment of the live game by its fans, it is feared, could have an adverse effect on the live game itself, not only **in** terms of the loss of atmosphere within the stadia, but also as Williams has argued, because the live fan forms an integral part of the football "culture" and hence the *"... 'live' spectator constitutes part of the sports product which is ... currently so attractive to television executives"* (*op.cit.*). Thus far, the evidence in England suggests that "live" coverage on satellite television does not reduce live attendance at the event. In fact, evidence suggests that attendance for live games since 1992 have risen.

- 4.5 Buscombe (1975:21) has suggested that television may have an influential effect upon how the live game is staged and presented. For instance, he cites the example of the opening ceremony of the 1974 World Cup Finals that featured children running into a stadia to form the shape of the World Cup logo when viewed by the television audience from a helicopter, but the full effect of which, was unlikely to have been evident to the live spectator in the stadium. One must therefore presume that this event was staged purely for the consumption of the television audience, and consequently that *"the presence of television ... can affect the course of events which were not, in the first instance, produced expressly for the medium"* (1975:21). Buscombe goes on to question whether one can then assume that the game of football itself is actually devoid of the influence from television. For, it is apparent that players can *"play to the television cameras"* with increased theatrics and Williams cited the example of how Silvio Berlusconi - media mogul and Italian football club AC Milan owner insisted *"...that Milan's game must be based on spectacular attack rather than utilitarian defence, because the former shows better on television"* (Portelli 1993:81, cited in Williams 1994a:244).

- 4.6 It has also been suggested that televised football has brought about changes in the nature of the game's fans and that it may be helping to nurture a new type of football fan. As Taylor argued:

"It does, indeed, seem to be the case...that the English football authorities are currently engaged in a process of re-organising football in ways that will produce what will actually be a new kind of football fandom for England (built around television viewership and a very rare attendance at a game 'in the flesh')" (1995:10).

In this connection, King (1998) argues that BSkyB's dominance of the TV market in the UK is simply another sign of the success of Thatcherite free-market principles which is part of the wider deregulation of the British economy in the 1980s and 1990s and which has helped to convert followers of the sport to consumers and not supporters.

- 4.7 It is also suggested by Taylor (1995) that this "new fandom" represents a more consumer based and more 'middle-class' audience than the *traditional working* class basis of football fan 'community'. A new fandom that, some have suggested, may consist of a more fickle and less dedicated audience. For instance, Barnett has suggested that television audiences raised on a diet of edited TV highlights, such as those presented on the BBC's *Match of The Day*, may be "...increasingly less likely to pay the requisite entrance fee for live football games when they discover that all but the most exceptional soccer matches can include considerable periods of inaction" (1990:141).
- 4.8 Finally, it has been argued that a new customer is, in fact, the intended recipient of televised football, but that the sponsors are the new *consumers* of professional football in Britain as Williams has argued:
- "Sponsorship has become central [in financing football]; if the sponsors are paying for the event, they must implicitly be a customer... increasingly, television produces audiences, which it sells to the advertisers, so the advertisers are a customer, and the television audience merely the product"* (1994a:248).
- 4.9 Nevertheless, it is also important to remember, as Whannel and Williams (1993:4) have suggested, that there is a tendency to romanticise the past and to see all that is new within football as invariably bad because it signals change in a culture which is valued for its traditions. It is evident that *traditional* sports organisations and their fans tended to be white and male (and in the case of association football, working-class). The advent of a 'new fandom' appears to have encouraged a more 'cosmopolitan' audience, including more active support from young, female and ethnic minority fans, and in doing so it may have helped to undermine the traditional masculine (and often hostile) environment of many top football stadia in England.

5. New Players and Old

- 5.1 By 1996 BSkyB was available in 4.6 million homes, 70% of whom subscribed to *Sky Sports* (3.1 million). Additionally over 30,000 pubs and clubs subscribed to *Sky Sports*, giving an average total audience of 2.2 million for a Sunday afternoon match and just under two million for a Monday evening match (Clever 1995). However, home TV audiences for some satellite games are often numbered in hundreds of thousands. Moreover, viewing figures published in *Broadcast* in December 1995 showed that in an average week, football related programmes constituted six of satellite television's ten most watched programmes (Phillips 1995:24). Demographically, Clever suggests that BSkyB reaches a young, affluent audience; audiences of whom, 54% are under the age of 34, compared with 32% of ITV audiences and 29% of BBC audiences. Clever also suggests that 44% of these viewers are in social classes ABC I which, is almost the same figure as those for BBC and higher than ITV. He, furthermore, claims that BSkyB has less DEs in its typical audience profile than either ITV or the BBC (Clever 1995). In June 2000 BSkyB had 4.5 million subscriber households, but 9 million households received Sky

channels either through subscription to Sky, cable or ITV Sport. By the year 2003 BSkyB aims to have 7 million subscriber households, most of these subscribing to Sky Sports. In 2000 BSkyB spent £385 million on sports coverage, more than on movies and entertainment. The audience for TV football was, clearly, fragmenting in the face of a growing range of outlets and options for TV football viewers. But Sky was still the main player.

- 5.2 It is very clear that such audience figures for football have been good for satellite television. As Barnett has pointed out, unlike terrestrial channels, satellite television has to attract an audience willing to buy the technology required to receive their broadcasts, and "*...what better means could there be than exclusive live coverage of a major sporting spectacle?*" (1990:194). It is evident that sport, and particularly football in England, is a major source of television audience interest. Williams (1994a:237) has suggested that exclusive coverage of the FA Premier League saved BSkyB from virtual extinction and turned the company around. However, in 2001 BSkyB reported that the cost of its conversion to digital technology ran up losses for 2000 of £515 million. Sky reported that average spend per subscriber rose from £281 to £313 in 2000, with an average of £11 coming from 'interactive sources, including internet shopping and betting. Sports TV betting is expected to be a major income raiser for BSkyB in the next few years. It is clear that satellite television has more air time for sport than terrestrial channels. Adrian Metcalfe - ex-head of sport broadcasting at Channel 4 - has argued that rating concerns of terrestrial channels had ousted sport from peak time viewing slots, while satellite, with its diversity of channels is able to dedicate prime-time viewing space to the coverage of sport (*cited in Barnett 1990:197*).
- 5.3 Furthermore, it is evident that smaller and even non-League clubs have received a greater degree of coverage on BSkyB and recently on other channels than they ever did on terrestrial television alone. In the deal with BSkyB in 1992 it was agreed that a minimum of one home game a season of each Premiership club would be broadcast. This is in contrast to the previous deal with ITV where the channel had a tendency to concentrate its coverage on the most attractive teams in terms of ratings. Between the years 1988 and 1992 (years when ITV had exclusive rights to coverage of the Football League), television coverage of the "Big 5" teams (Arsenal, Everton, Liverpool, Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur) constituted between 48% and 62% of all games shown. In 1990 alone, Liverpool and Manchester United featured in one third of all televised games (10 each, out of 60 that were televised). In 2001 smaller League clubs – and even non-league clubs - were receiving live TV coverage almost for the first time. Though coverage may have been spread between clubs by Sky, the size of the total audience for live TV football has been much reduced by satellite's involvement. Gone are the six million-ten million terrestrial audiences for football. They have been replaced by TV audiences that sometimes number hundreds of thousands and only rarely extend over two million. More fans watch satellite TV matches in pubs, of course.

Table 1: Average viewing on BSkyB for live football matches, 1993/94 to 1998/99 (million)

	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99
Premier League	0.82	0.97	1.27	1.47	1.39	1.21
FA Cup	0.74	0.92	1.00	1.11	1.19	N/A
Nationwide League	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.36	0.41	0.26
Worthington Cup	N/A	N/A	N/A	1.09	0.98	0.56

Source: BSkyB

5.4 Furthermore, even though figures for subscription to *Sky Sports* appear to be relatively low, data from the *FA Premier Fan Survey 2001* suggests that the majority of fans of FA Premier League football clubs have access to live televised Premiership football – if they want it. Finally, one could argue that satellite television's influence on football can only be limited due to its small audience share, with most viewers still concentrating their viewing time on the *traditional* terrestrial channels (Williams 1994b:10). The *1997 FA Premier League Fan Survey* which covered more than 28,000 fans of top clubs, including fans of Rangers in Scotland, shows that *Match of the Day* is still the most watched football TV programme for 'active' fans, but that other sorts of coverage are now well established for a large proportion of the supporters of top professional clubs

Fig. 4. Which of the following do you try to watch in an average week? (SNCCFR, 1997)

Match of the Day	89%
Live Premiership, Sunday	58%
Live Premiership, Monday	53%
Live Italian Football (C4)	28%
Live Football League	25%
Live Scottish League	14%
Live Spanish League	7%

5.5 Taylor (1995:5-6) has suggested that contemporary changes in television broadcasting have had profound effects upon English professional football. For instance, he argues that the movement of games to weekdays to suit television schedules, and the introduction of many new features adopted from American television, such as touchline interviews, have increased with the advent of satellite television in Britain. Furthermore, Duke (1994:133) has asserted that the creation of the FA Premier League and its extensive coverage on satellite television has been aimed at attracting a new kind of football spectator; that is to say satellite television has helped accelerate the move towards a "new fandom".

"The elitist pretensions of the Premier League and its lucrative links with BSkyB television herald the presentation of football as a part of the wider

entertainment industry. At the sametime, football's heritage as the people's national sport, even the world sport, is downgraded. Already Premier League fixtures are played on Sunday afternoons and Monday evenings to suit the television schedules, but at the 'live supporters' inconvenience"
(Duke 1994:133)

- 5.6 There seems little doubt that matches are scheduled by TV to suit its own audience needs rather than those of 'live' fans. Scheduling for TV can also fall foul of police recommendations. The final Celtic v Rangers Scottish Premier League match in 1998/99, for example, was scheduled for a Sunday at 6.00 pm to suit BSkyB. The Scottish title hung on the result and the violence in the crowd and that aimed at referee, Hugh Dallas, during the match (he was felled by a missile and was the target of a number of fan intrusions onto the pitch) was attributed by the Strathclyde Police in part to the TV-dictated late kick off of the vital and volatile match and the presence of fans in Glasgow pubs from early morning. Early in 2002 other hooligan incidents occurred at a Rangers match in Aberdeen – this time a Saturday evening kick-off for TV.
- 5.7 It is also evident that even though coverage of a larger number of clubs has been achieved by the advent of satellite television, the distribution of money from television broadcasting rights has become increasingly concentrated within the top flight of English professional football. The percentage of money gained from television rights for the lowest two divisions fell from 12% in 1987 to only 2% and 3%, respectively, in the 1992-93 season. While in contrast, the FA Premier League (or the First Division as it was known up until 1992) had increased its domination of television rights earning a massive £36 million in 1992-93, £180 million by 1997/98 and around £336 Million by 2000/2001. More importantly, in 1992/93 FA Premier League clubs earned around 36 times more money from television rights than clubs in the Football League's lowest division. In 1987 top clubs earned only around *five* times what smaller clubs earned in the way of television income. A decade later (1998/99) top clubs could earn many times what small Football League clubs do from TV sources. It is also important to note that while the larger clubs earn more than smaller Premier League clubs from TV coverage, the *proportion* of total income earned from TV is much larger for smaller clubs.
- 5.8 This line of argument suggests that television's financial influence over football and its fans has grown considerably in recent years. But, television style of coverage now also intrudes into the stadium itself. Williams (1994a: 239) argued that many football stadia around the world have installed large screens showing 'live' action, close-ups and replays. Here the live action becomes televised 'live' action, with both fans and participates increasingly looking towards the screen to see themselves and the action replays. Barnett (1990:156) has pointed out how nearly every spectator of a live game has experienced the sensation of half expecting the live event to rewind at a crucial moment for an *action replay*. This leads Williams (1994a:240) to question whether in fact the televised image has replaced the event as the *reality*. As Barnett puts it: "*The world of sports spectating is being turned upside down as increasingly, stadium spectating mimics the living-room rather than the reverse*" (1990:156).

Table 2: The proportion of revenue accounted for by BSkyB's coverage of the Premier League, 1996/97

%	
Wimbledon	42.3
Southampton	34.6
Derby County	34.0
Sheffield Wednesday	28.9
Blackburn Rovers	25.8
Coventry City	25.1
West Ham United	24.6
Leicester City	22.7
Sunderland	22.3
Arsenal	20.9
Aston Villa	20.6
Chelsea	19.6
Nottingham Forest	19.3
Everton	18.5
Leeds United	17.9
Tottenham Hotspur	15.6
Liverpool	14.7
Middlesbrough	13.8
Newcastle United	13.6
Manchester United	7.2

- 5.9 Furthermore, it has been suggested that football has increasingly been *globalised* by television (Barnett 1990:1). That is to say it is argued that television, and in particular satellite has allowed football to be broadcast world-wide breaking down time and geographical borders in the process (a football time/space compression). The argument here is that in doing so satellite television may be helping reduce the more traditional identification of fans with *their* local clubs. Taylor (1995:27-8) has noted how youths all over England wear a vast range of different club shirts not necessarily identifiable with their locality or even their nationality. Taylor suggested that for many club *affiliations* may now centre more around ethnic identity, such as English Catholics with Glasgow Celtic, or English African-Caribbean's with teams with high profile black players such as Arsenal or Aston Villa.
- 5.10 On the financial front, it was clear that the operation of the global marketplace for valuable sports rights and domestic forms of protection for sports TV coverage were heading for a collision. It was feared at one time, for example, that coverage of the World Cup finals in 2002 might be sold to pay TV. Kirch Media, a German company, bought the TV rights from FIFA, but then came across the 1996 Broadcasting Act in Britain which guarantees the finals for a terrestrial British audience. This interesting clash of the international market for TV sports rights and domestic law on protected events was finally resolved when the BBC and ITV together agreed in October 2001 to pay Kirch Media £160 million for coverage of the 2002 and 2006 finals. World Cup matches in Japan and Korea are scheduled for early morning kick-off times in the UK, prompting the government to allow special licenses for pubs to be open in the early morning for the collective watching of England matches.

6. Recent Developments: Pay-Per-view and Man U/BSkyB

6.1 One of the few things that one can safely predict with respect to the future of football is that 'live' televised football is here to stay. After all, though the 'cultural' benefits of satellite television to the game and its fans may be in question, it is unquestionable that 'live' satellite television has introduced very large sums of money into the game. Due to its small, but growing, audience penetration *Sky Sports* also present a smaller threat to the live game than does 'live' coverage on terrestrial television. In fact, BSkyB coverage has seemed to make top football more exclusive *and* more attractive to potential fans. 'Magazine' coverage of football on Sky - *Hold the Back Page*; *The Footballers Football Show*; *Soccer AM* - is also of a kind and scale which is impossible to reproduce on network TV which already has to force its own football coverage into a crowded schedule. Sky's *Soccer Saturday* show – a quickfire results and reports service which features ex-players watching matches on TV watched by viewers has become an enormous – if unlikely - success with sports fans.

6.2.1 As digital TV has come on stream, offering a lot more channel space, televised football is now available more regularly via *pay-per-view*, an arrangement where the viewer pays for individual events rather than one fee for the whole (televised) sporting calendar, as is the norm at present. Rick Parry, Chief Executive of the FA Premier League, sees pay-to-view as the future for televised football arguing that it is:

"The ultimate market philosophy. What it means to us is that football is directly in touch with its audience. It gives you marketing and commercial opportunities." (Daily Telegraph 1992, cited in Williams 1994b:12).

6.3 In November 1996 BSkyB showed the Bruno v Tyson heavyweight championship fight on pay-per-view, charging between £10-£15 for the privilege. Some 660,000 subscribers (15% of the subscriber base) paid the extra fee to watch an event that started at 2.00 am (Booth and Doyle, 1997). This showed the potential of pay-per-view which might earn up to £100 million per season for the largest clubs running their own pay-per-view deals. In 1998/99 the Football League experimented with pay-per-view fixtures on Sky Sports, offering coverage of Sunderland's away fixture at Oxford United and Manchester City's games at Bristol Rovers and Colchester to fee paying customers only. In many ways these are the perfect sorts of football games for pay-per-view; clubs with a large following playing in a stadium which simply cannot accommodate them. In some ways this is a 'natural' development from the situation in which clubs of this sort 'beam back' coverage of such games to their own fans watching on a screen at the club's home ground. Take up was reported to be small but promising - around 50,000 Sky Sports customers, mainly from the north east, paying £7.99 in the case of the Sunderland match. For fans faced with paying, say, £15 for a match ticket (and much more in the Premier League) and the costs of away travel, this sort of fee, perhaps shared with mates, might begin to look very attractive to supporters. Loss of away support has been reported to be a problem with pay-per-view arrangements in Italy: will 'away' fans here stay at home if pay-per-view becomes the norm?

- 6.4 *Club* TV channels are also likely to proliferate. At the moment the national Sky TV deal means clubs cannot show live coverage of first team matches on their own TV channels - but that leaves reserve and youth team games and also interviews with players and 'nostalgia' broadcasting examining great matches of the past. Middlesbrough, Hearts and Manchester United have all experimented with club TV channels. Liverpool is the latest club to explore club TV with the club's new investor Granada. The United MUTV channel, in association with Sky, obviously has the greatest potential. The *national* number of United followers is estimated to be in the region of three million, so a national and *international* TV channel for United is very much on the agenda. Here, too, fans can buy merchandise and connect in other ways with the club without going to matches.
- 6.5 The potential attractiveness of club TV channels was boosted when in 1999 the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) began investigating whether the BSkyB deal with the FA Premier League was, in effect, an anti-competitive cartel which acted against the interests of football supporters. The OFT argued that allowing clubs to do their own TV deals would bring more money into the sport, would open up access to more broadcasters, would bring more TV coverage for smaller clubs, and would mean an increase in the total number of football matches shown on TV. Why only 60 FA Premier League matches on TV? Why not 360? The League's defence on this, backed up by club chairman was that a centrally negotiated deal, as now, prevented saturation TV coverage and made sure that income from TV was reasonably evenly distributed, at least among the top 20 clubs. To have individual deals, argued the League, would simply allow the richest clubs to grow ever richer, thus making competition more and more uneven. The League also argued that the OFT missed the crucial point about a *League* for sport: that the 'product' (in this case football matches) requires *collaboration* between competitors of a sort which is only guaranteed by the agreed League structure. No League, with centralised powers, means nothing at all to sell to TV.
- 6.6 BSkyB had already seen the OFT case on the horizon and was also worrying about the prospects of pay-per-view and other TV competitors for football after the end of its deal with the FA Premier League in 2001. (In Italy, a group of top clubs has established their own TV deal, something which could also happen here after 2003 when the current TV deal ends). Not liking this sort of uncertainty - uncertainty is something which is arguably good for sport, but bad for business - and being so dependent now on top football for its future, BSkyB took the extraordinary step of trying to make its own future more certain by simply *buying* the top club around, Manchester United, for a figure of over £650 million. United's board, with ambitions for the club to become the most financially powerful sports business in the world, accepted the Sky bid; but many of its fans did not. A national fan campaign against this new form of 'vertical integration' in football began as the Murdoch-owned *Times* and *Sun* newspapers extolled the deal and, predictably, other newspapers rallied against it. The BSkyB bid for United was referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, which had to decide whether the bid was 'in the public interest'. Meanwhile, other TV companies began to look, too, at buying into top English clubs as football share prices rose due to this new development.

- 6.7 Around the world these sorts of TV/sports club deals are not unusual. TV network, Canal Plus, owns top clubs in France and has deals for subscription football coverage there. The Italian media moguls, Silvio Berlusconi and Checci Gori also own top Italian football clubs, AC Milan and Fiorentina, respectively. Murdoch himself owns a top baseball franchise in Los Angeles, the Dodgers, *and* also the US Fox TV network which covers top US sport. It looked as if there were sports precedents everywhere for the BSkyB/ Manchester United linkup (Table 3). The new Blair government had also worked hard at improving its links with Murdoch, who had become one of New Labour’s most powerful and influential supporters. Would Labour now thwart these new sports/business ambitions of one of the world’s most powerful media entrepreneurs?
- 6.8 Perhaps surprisingly, the answer to this question was “yes”. The MMC concluded that the proposed ‘merger’ would give BSkyB additional influence over the selling of football TV rights. It also concluded that the new deal would give BSkyB influence over other Premier League decisions. The MMC concluded that there would be occasions when the interests of broadcasters would not be the same as those of football and that: “*decisions based on football authorities’ perception of the long term interests of the game are more likely to be in the public interest than those based on the commercial interests of broadcasters*” (MMC, 1999: 47). By increasing BSkyB’s influence over the FA Premier League’s decisions, the MMC argued that the proposed merger would lead to decisions which would damage the quality and the long term future of the English game. The BSkyB bid for United was ruled as being *against* the public interest, and was generally reported in the press as being a major success for ‘supporter power’.
- 6.9 The MMC decision does not mean the end of the ‘love affair’ between pay television concerns and English football, of course, though a bid by US cable company, NTL, to buy into Newcastle United has been put on ‘hold’ as a result of the MMC decision. The potential cash rewards from new TV links are too high for clubs and TV companies to be held at bay for long. Exactly *how* these links are enacted is the real question. The post 2001 period seems likely to be one of increasing *fragmentation* in football TV deals, with the FA Premier League straining to keep all its members on board at least in some common arrangement.

Table 3: Media interests with ownership stakes in major sporting organizations

<i>Media interest</i>	<i>Sporting clubs</i>	
Canal+	Paris St Germain Sevette Genera	(France-football) (Switzerland-football)
Mediaset	AC Milan Monza	(Italy-football) (Italy-football)
International Management Group	Racing Club Strasbourg	(France-football)
Cecchi Gori Communications	Fiorentina	(Italy-football)

News Corporation*	LA Dodgers New York Knicks New York Rangers	(US-baseball) (US-basketball) (US-ice hockey)
Time Warner	Atlanta Braves Atlanta Hawks Thrashers	(US-baseball) (US-basketball) (US-ice hockey)
Disney	Anaheim Angels Chicago Cubs Mighty Ducks	(US-baseball) (US-baseball) (US-ice hockey)
Cablevision	New York Yankees	(US-baseball)

Source: Manchester United submissions, Italian competition authorities and various newspaper reports

We will see more pay-per-view coverage for sure. Perhaps there will be one or two ‘national’ games covered on pay TV, as now, with perhaps up to four matches offered at a different time at the weekend on pay-per-view. Future weekend Premier League football coverage might look like more like this:

TABLE 4: The Football Weekend and Pay-per-View, Post 2003?

Saturday 3.00 pm (No TV coverage) Saturday 7.30 pm (Pay per view)

Tottenham H. v Wimbledon	Manchester United v Sunderland
Blackburn R. v Chelsea	Bolton W v Derby County
Everton v Coventry City	Leicester City v Arsenal
West Ham United v Southampton	Liverpool v Ipswich Town

Sunday 4.00 pm: National satellite coverage: Leeds United v Aston Villa
Monday 8.00 pm, National satellite coverage: Newcastle United v Middlesbrough

6.10 Beyond these few simple predictions, conclusions on the relationship between the game and television must be carefully weighted. Optimistically, it could be argued that football's changing relationship with television is no more than part of an on going process of modernisation of the sport and presents no threat to the game or its fans. At the same time, Brenda Maddox (1995) has argued in *The Times* that football will never disappear completely from terrestrial television in Britain, as football relies on a mass audience to sell itself to advertisers and sponsors. The election of a Labour government may also continue to prove a limiting factor on the influence of television on sport. In their *Charter for Football* the Labour party proposes to do away with, what they call *the laissez-faire* governmental attitude towards the running of professional football, and ensure that certain sporting events such as, the FA Cup Final, do not move to exclusive coverage on subscription only channels (Labour Party, 1995). The government’s Football Task Force has also taken a keen interest in the *financing* of football and reports suggests some external regulator for football may not be entirely out of the question.

- 6.11 However, it could be argued that what Maddox and others have overlooked the fact that top English football clubs no longer rely quite so heavily on live support or sponsorship as its main sources of income. Television is in a very powerful position to shape the future of football. Williams (1994b :12) sees the result of this being a move towards a two-tier television service with the audience-hungry and rich satellite and cable stations monopolising "live" televised football, and terrestrial television making do with highlights packages and coverage of more minor competitions. In fact, what has happened is that the absolute amount of football TV coverage has increased, which has produced more spending on TV by terrestrial companies. However, in 2001 Greg Dyke, director general of the BBC warned that "sports rights costs have hit their peak", and that "the massive escalation of the past decade is coming to an end." If this is true – as seems quite possible – then the larger clubs will look to shore up their own TV arrangements – or else hold down player salary deals.
- 6.12 A further possibility here is that the *globalisation* of football through the influence of television will persist with a greater loss of local team identity. Here, Giulianotti & Williams (1994:13) point towards the USA, and the mobility of teams from one geographical base to another in search of greater capital, as an example of the influence of globalisation on sport. What such arguments suggest is that television's influence upon football and its fans will persist. However, contrary to the arguments for globalisation is the culturally distinctive nature of football to each nation. Blain and Boyle (1991:4) have suggested that attempts at pan-European sports coverage have in the past been hindered by sporting cultural barriers. As Tudor (1975:60) has pointed out cultural barriers have traditionally existed within styles of football play and coverage. For instance, Tudor suggested - in 1975 - that English television coverage places greatest emphasis upon goal mouth action. Continental audiences equally value the short passing skills and build up of play. In short, globalisation also have localising effects, shoring up support for smaller, local clubs and regions against the claims of the large, televised "super-clubs".
- 6.13 More radically, challenges to the very *governance* of the sport at national and international levels are largely fuelled by income derived from TV. The recent Media Partners challenge to UEFA's running and control of the Champions League, for example, was 'funded' by rewards from TV coverage and new proposals on the distribution of income from these sources. Such examples serve to show the importance of TV to sport today, and perhaps especially to football. Global TV markets for English football only serve to increase salability of the English game to the highest TV bidders. It seems a long time from when 'live' attendance was everything and TV interest was seen by those running the game, at best, as a necessary, if potentially destructive, evil.

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