

# GAME ON: THE COMMERCIALISATION AND CORRUPTION OF THE PRE-SEASON FRIENDLY



By  
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# Why study pre-season friendlies?

Commercialisation

In summer 2014, 109,318 people watched Real Madrid vs Manchester United. This was the biggest crowd for a football game in the USA

Globalisation

Governance

The entire English Premier League (EPL) season comprises 380 matches

Integrity

This summer, 252 pre-season friendlies between senior professional clubs were played ... just in Austria

# The study

Pre-season activities by EPL clubs from 2005 to 2014 analysed

Who were their opponents?

Where did the EPL clubs go?

How does EPL pre-season activity compare to other European leagues?

What governance over friendlies is there?

What are the implications for sporting integrity?

# Where is the EPL going?

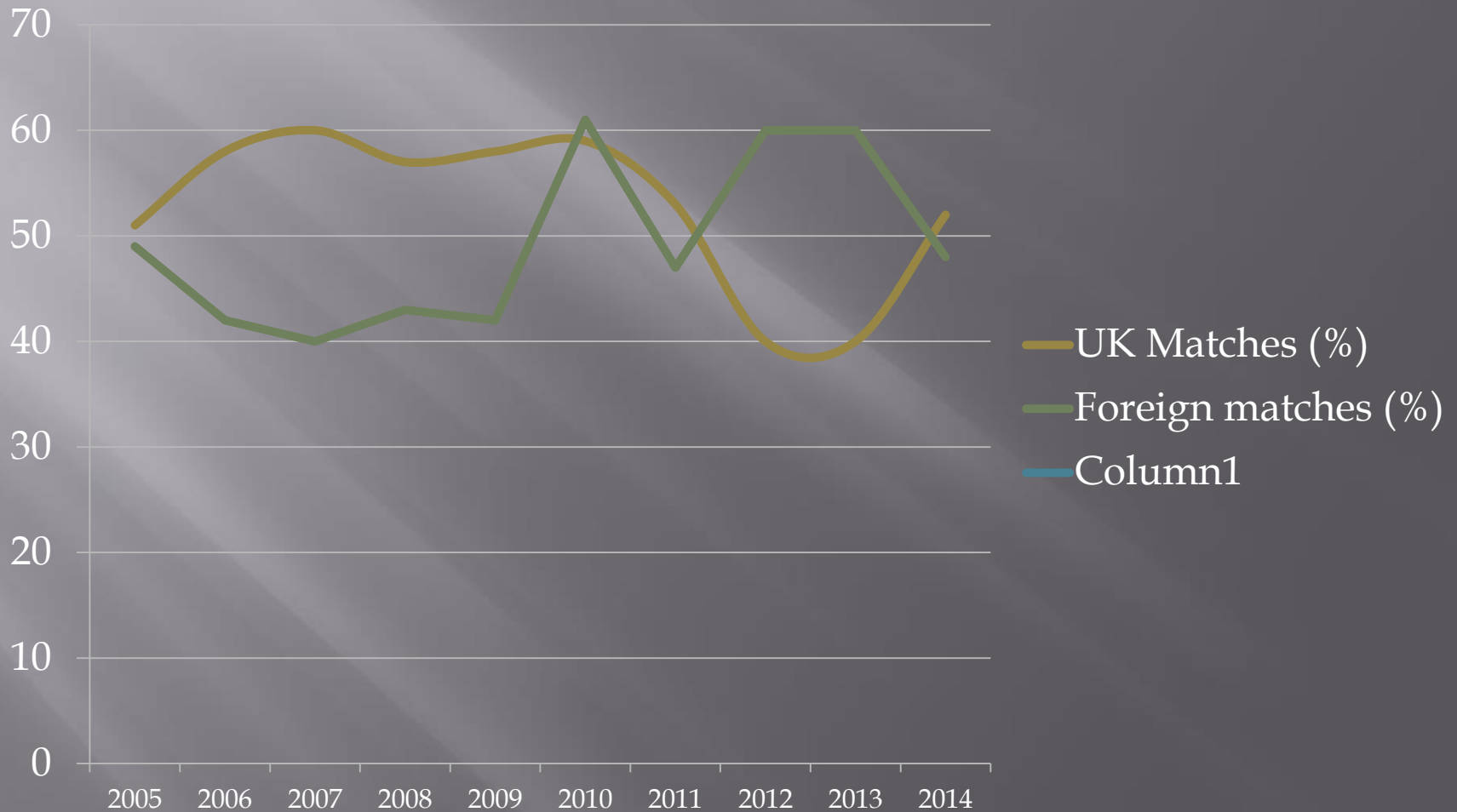
## COUNTRIES VISITED

<u>Country</u>	<u>Matches</u>
USA	94
Germany	85
Austria	58
Netherlands	37
Portugal	36

## COUNTRIES/CLUBS PLAYED

<u>Country</u>	<u>Matches</u>
Germany	92
USA	72
Spain	41
Portugal	36
Netherlands	34

# The big picture



# By FIFA Confederation



Region	Countries visited	Matches
Europe	23	361
CONCACAF	3	110
Asia	10	94
Africa	2	19
Oceania	2	12






# Asia vs North America

ASIA

NORTH AMERICA



# International Comparisons 2014

	<u>League</u>	<u>Ave per club</u>	<u>Home/overseas (%)</u>	<u>Home matches</u>	<u>Home vs overseas opp.</u>	<u>Overseas Matches</u>	<u>Destinations</u>
	Premier League	6.6	52/48	69	23	63	15
	Ligue 1	6.1	67/33	74	16	33	14
	Bundesliga	8.8	74/26	118	29	41	11
	Serie A	8.4	67/33	108	25	54	18
	La Liga	7.7	55/45	77	11	62	23



# What are leagues doing?



# The big clubs

Between 2005 and 2014, Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool and the two Manchester clubs played 319 senior first XI pre-season friendlies

Just 97 of those games were in the UK

Only 62 of those friendlies in the UK were played against other British clubs

Chelsea only played 12 senior first XI games in the UK during this period

# What are the clubs doing?

Pre-season no longer a cash negative activity. Most major clubs seek to at least break even

Trans National Clubs (TNC) generally seek to make a profit of £2m to £3m in each pre-season

TNC charge £1 million to play prestige friendlies

*“The clubs are ruthless. They are solely in it for the money, whereas the national teams do it for technical reasons.*

*“We tend not to promote club games any more as anything can go wrong, like the best players pulling out. In an international game, there are always replacements but not in club games.”*

Mike D’Arcy, KAM Sports

# Cashing in

Pre-season friendlies offer a budget opportunity for sponsors and TV companies without connections to the Premier League to cash in

Friendly tournaments created to give matches credibility



# Organisation

The vast majority of pre-season club friendlies are organised solely for profit by agents, NOT by clubs, leagues or national associations

221 Match Agents  
licensed by FIFA

54 in England

43 in the USA

The English Football Association must approve all requests by clubs to play overseas, and all requests for clubs to visit England

At 2014, no request had ever been rejected

# Austria

OFB vet all friendlies in Austria for a fee of €100 paid by the promoters

No match officials from outside Austria are permitted

No firecrackers

No games between clubs whose fans might cause hooliganism



# Match-fixing

Between January and November 2014, 16 friendly club matches were 'escalated' due to suspicious betting activity by Sportradar

A match-fixing gang has manipulated dozens of friendlies between foreign clubs training in Spain according to the International Centre for Sports Security (ICCS)

Dutch side Heerenveen walk off the pitch during a mid-season friendly with Standard Leige in Murica after conceding 4 penalties

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kl-76IAV0X8>

Isle of Man-based Celton Manx, who operate Sbobet, paid out thousands of pounds on FC Slutsk's 2-1 'friendly win' against fellow Belarus side Shaktar Soligorsk but the game never took place

BBC March 2 2015

Norwich City beat Italian Serie D side Saint-Christophy Vallee d' Aoste 13-0 in summer 2014, only to later have to apologise after finding out that the team was not Saint-Christophy but a bunch of trialists hastily assembled by the match agents

Mailonline July 25 2014

# Conclusions

- ▣ The average EPL fixture is now worth £10m in TV fees
- ▣ Why dilute this product with a watered down version?
- ▣ With NBA and NFL playing regular season matches in the UK, Game 39 is inevitable
- ▣ More research needed on mid-season friendlies in Cyprus and Turkey
- ▣ Global standards for governance of pre-season friendlies need to be imposed
- ▣ No gambling permitted on any non-competitive sporting events