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# Addressing the relationship between gambling and professional football in England: a response to Smith et al.

Jamie Wheaton<sup>a\*</sup> and Ben Ford<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>School of Geographical Sciences, University of Bristol, UK

<sup>b</sup>Psychological Sciences, School of Natural and Social Sciences, University of Gloucestershire, Cheltenham, UK

\*Corresponding Author: Jamie Wheaton – [jamie.wheaton@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:jamie.wheaton@bristol.ac.uk)

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# Addressing the relationship between gambling and professional football in England: a response to Smith et al.

## Abstract

Our paper continues the discussion recently initiated by Smith et al. on the relationship between gambling and professional football in England. In their vital contribution to *Soccer and Society*, they argue that a reconsideration of the relationship between football and gambling is required, highlighting the importance of prevention schemes of gambling harms for athletes, and maintaining the integrity of football. We respond by arguing that a reconsideration of the relationship between English football and gambling must go further to reduce the risk of harms to all stakeholders. The expansive, neo-liberal nature of the gambling market has rendered gambling omnipresent within English football, with the volume of gambling-related marketing in the game giving rise to concerns of harms which could be experienced by stakeholders. A full reconsideration of the harmful intersections between football and gambling would involve a significant change in regulation at societal level, thus protecting stakeholders and maintaining integrity.

## Introduction

The debate around the relationship between gambling and professional football in England has intensified in recent years. English professional football has been heavily sponsored by the gambling industry, including from operators who operate within jurisdictions where gambling is illegal.<sup>1</sup> For example, Nottingham Forest's primary shirt sponsor during the 2023/2024 season was Kaiyun Sports, an operator targeting customers in China where gambling is also illegal.<sup>2</sup> There are concerns that the relationship between gambling and football may be causing harm for supporters and athletes alike. Thirteen percent of English football supporters bet online at least once a week,<sup>3</sup> with many of the target audience of English men's football (men, aged between 18 and 34) also at higher risk of experiencing gambling harms.<sup>4</sup> As for harm to athletes, Ivan Toney (currently a striker at Brentford) was sanctioned by an independent regulatory commission, receiving an eight-month-ban for committing over 200 gambling offences on matches relating to his own team between 2017 and 2021. As a mitigating circumstance, it was noted that Toney was diagnosed with a gambling disorder.<sup>5</sup> This accordingly intensified the debate around the role of gambling within English football.

Smith et al. have recently argued in response that the Football Association (FA) and wider society should "reflect on the adverse interconnections between English football and problem gambling",<sup>6</sup> whilst also acknowledging that others have highlighted the hypocrisy of the ban handed to Toney. Such reflection, they argue, should consider a more holistic approach to sanctions with the inclusion of rehabilitative measures such as cognitive behavioural therapy, alongside campaigns which reduce mental health stigma within professional football. We agree that these initiatives are needed, and that all stakeholders in the football sector who experience gambling harms should have the opportunity to access support without the fear of stigma or shame. Similarly to Smith et al.,<sup>7</sup> we would also be concerned that measures such as banning guilty parties from "all football-related activity" risks creating additional complexities (for example, social isolation and loss of social relationships) that increase the risk of additional harmful gambling behaviour.<sup>8</sup> Solely punitive measures will be ineffective at addressing an individual's gambling addiction, which is often a complex condition.<sup>9</sup>

However, it is also our contention that authorities such as the FA and indeed the United Kingdom's (UK) Government should go further when addressing the relationship between gambling and professional football in England. Such reconsideration should include the role of the industry itself and the presence of sponsorship which is prevalent within both the English Premier League (EPL) and the English Football League (EFL), a consideration which should also be made when sanctioning

footballers for gambling-related offences when they may also be experiencing gambling harms whilst playing within a sport where gambling is omnipresent. There have been attempts at self-regulation to placate stakeholders, but it is our view that self-regulation cannot be trusted to reduce the risk of harms. Not only does the conflict of interest between brand visibility, gambling yield and reducing marketing and advertising exist, but also we contend that sanctions for breaching self-imposed regulations are less likely to be impactful, and industry responses to harmful practices are likely to be hard-fought and less effective.<sup>10</sup> Smith et al. also suggest that a combination of regulatory powers and punitive measures is important for the preservation of fairness and integrity of sport.<sup>11</sup> These regulatory powers, we contend, should shift responsibility away from the individual, and place more emphasis on the separation of football and gambling if we wish to meaningfully intervene to reduce the rates of athletes presenting with a gambling disorder. Furthermore, conversations of sporting integrity which are restricted to portraying individual athletes as culprits risks further stigmatisation. Instead, the emphasis should be placed on other threats to integrity with a focus on organisations that have the ability to intervene and stop behaviour such as match-fixing, through which athletes, coaches, managers, and officials experience harms such as exploitation and coercion.

We therefore build upon Smith et al.'s vital contribution by highlighting the need for separation of the football and gambling industries. Indeed, while internal relationships between stakeholders within football are important when upholding sporting integrity through initiatives such as whistleblowing and anti-corruption procedures between FA and other club officials, the game in England should also address the relationship it maintains *externally* with the gambling industry. Our paper is structured as follows. We firstly provide a brief overview of how the gambling industry in Great Britain has evolved towards its current neo-liberal existence since the enactment of its current regulation, the Gambling Act 2005. Secondly, we evaluate the current state of the relationship between English football and the gambling industry, and highlight factors which lead to harm for stakeholders. Thirdly, we highlight the industry response to these concerns and evaluate how self-regulation will fail to protect stakeholders, whilst highlighting the regulatory actions which have been pursued elsewhere. Finally, we discuss the issues with focusing on individual footballers when talking about sports integrity, and briefly outline the main threat to actual integrity and possible areas of focus.

## Development of the Gambling Industry

The gambling industry is currently regulated within Great Britain under the Gambling Act 2005, an Act which effectively deregulated gambling from an activity previously tolerated into a commercial activity.<sup>12</sup> The Gambling Act 2005 (or The Act) paved the way for the proliferation of advertising, the expansion of gambling markets into different sports, and the growth of operators within an industry which had previously been largely land-based. However, the start of the 2000s saw the advent of online gambling, and The Act was duly enacted by a New Labour government which intended for Britain to become a world leader of online gambling.<sup>13</sup> The Act was also intended to ensure that gambling – regulated by Britain's Gambling Commission – remained free from crime and disorder, was conducted in a fair and open way, and was carried out in a way that children and other vulnerable persons were protected from being harmed or exploited by gambling.<sup>14</sup>

However, whilst gambling on certain channels such as online and Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs) grew - the Act did not foresee the extent of digital transformation which facilitated the rise of gambling on devices such as smartphones and tablets. Gambling within the UK in 2024 is omnipresent, with the industry generating a gross gambling yield (namely the money kept by operators after the paying out of winnings) of £14 billion per year, 45% of which is generated by online betting, casino- and bingo-related products.<sup>15</sup> This growth has been enabled by the techno-economic development of gambling facilitated by a neo-liberal system approach which encourages the over-consumption of risk, yet vilifies those who suffer from harms as a result of over-consumption.<sup>16</sup> The proliferation of online gambling has enabled the development of products which ensure that gambling is now continuously

available.<sup>17</sup> The digital transformation of gambling products and the quantification of sports has also led to the creation of micro-markets,<sup>18</sup> such as the number of throw-ins or yellow cards to be given during a match. Additionally, operators may offer markets that are tailored to specific events or bettors, the odds of which all appear to offer value to customers, yet do not represent the actual chance of the selection being successful. Casino- and slots-based games now offer a wealth of products which encourage customers to spin multiple times in quick succession.<sup>19</sup> Customers are often enticed through special offers tailored to their own spending habits.<sup>20</sup> These offers are another product of the digital transformation of gambling, which has also enabled the continuous mining of gamblers' data as raw material to be used by operators to accumulate further capital.<sup>21</sup>

Whilst the availability of gambling has grown, so has its presence through marketing. The gambling industry spends £1.5 billion per year on marketing in Britain, with adverts appearing for example through television, sponsorship, or on social media.<sup>22</sup> There have been growing calls within Britain for a curb to marketing, with concerns that heightened marketing can cause detrimental impact for those experiencing gambling harms. Increased gambling marketing can be associated with increased intentions to gamble, increasing the likelihoods of gambling harms.<sup>23</sup> Adverts which highlight the possibility of gambling in-play can also encourage the urgency of gambling during a sporting event itself.<sup>24</sup> In response to concerns, the Betting and Gaming Council (BGC) – the industry body representing the United Kingdom's gambling operators – announced in 2019 a “whistle-to-whistle” ban on televised adverts during live sporting events televised before the 9pm watershed. They have also mandated that a proportion of advertising is dedicated to “safer gambling” messaging, or messages which encourage the notion of gambling responsibly through messages such as “when the fun stops, stop” or “take time to think”.<sup>25</sup> However, thanks to the neo-liberal development of the industry as highlighted above,<sup>26</sup> these messages can be criticised for “othering” individuals who may be experiencing harms and diverting attention away from the potentially harmful nature of products,<sup>27</sup> whilst research indicates that such messaging has limited impact on gambling behaviour.<sup>28</sup> These policies – both of which are products of self-regulation – have little impact on the overall relationship between gambling and professional football in England. This is demonstrated by the size of the gambling industry, as well as its prevalence within English professional football. For example, a recent study found that just under 11,000 gambling-related messages – such as logos, commercial adverts, or social media posts by operators – were exposed to audiences across live match broadcasts, sports news broadcasts, social media and radio during the opening weekend of the 2023/2024 Premier League season.<sup>29</sup> Researchers and organisations increasingly argue for a need to shift from this individual perspective to a socioecological approach that incorporates determining factors beyond the individual.<sup>30</sup> As we demonstrate within the next section, it is our view that this approach should also be taken towards football in England.

## Relationship between English Football and Gambling

The value of sponsorship within English professional football is significant. The value of combined domestic and international media rights of the EPL has grown from US\$7.56 billion in 2013-2016, to US\$12.85 billion in 2022-2025.<sup>31</sup> Research commissioned by the EPL also found in the 2019/2020 season that cumulative global viewership totalled 3.2 billion.<sup>32</sup> There is therefore a significant incentive for businesses to sponsor EPL clubs in order to reach a global audience. Equally, the EFL – which has been sponsored by Skybet since 2013 – recently sold its media rights to Sky for £935 million for the period between 2024/2025 and 2028/2029,<sup>33</sup> with Skybet retaining its role as principal sponsor until the end of the 2028/2029 season.<sup>34</sup> The Skybet brand will therefore be shown during the broadcast of 1,000 matches between the 2023/2024 and the 2028/2029 seasons.

Some clubs are linked to the gambling sector through their ownership models. For example, Stoke City are owned by the same family who own Bet365,<sup>35</sup> while the owner of Brighton and Hove Albion also owns a company that specialises in analysis of sporting data for betting purposes.<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless, the

main benefit for English professional football as a whole from gambling is the revenue obtained through sponsorship which appears in multiple locations. Gambling operators took the place of the main, front-of-shirt sponsorships for eight clubs within the EPL during the 2023/2024 season, with another two clubs featuring gambling operators as sponsors on their shirts' sleeves.<sup>37</sup> The inclusion of sponsorships on the front-of-shirts is surprising given that EPL clubs collectively announced a voluntary decision to remove sponsorships from front-of-shirts from the end of the 2025/2026 season.<sup>38</sup> However, whilst the EPL was praised by the gambling industry itself for listening to concerns from a range of stakeholders,<sup>39</sup> front-of-shirts are not the most prevalent form of advertising in English professional football.

Pitchside advertising is the most prevalent form of marketing. One study published in 2020 found that most adverts exposed during EPL broadcasts – 38% – were shown pitchside,<sup>40</sup> whilst a more recent study of ten EPL matches during the 2022/2023 season found that pitchside hoardings or the stadium structure was the most prominent location for marketing.<sup>41</sup> Torrance et al.'s findings highlighted how only 6.9% of gambling-related logos during the ten matches appeared on front-of-shirts. Additionally, Rossi et al.'s study of gambling marketing during the opening weekend of the 2023/2024 EPL season found that 6,966 messages (consisting of logos or other references) were exposed to the viewer during the live broadcasts of six matches, 9.1% of which were featured on teams' shirts.<sup>42</sup> These findings highlight how the EPL's voluntary ban of sponsorships from the front-of-shirts will not address most marketing which appears during EPL matches. Given the research that provides evidence on the causal relationship between marketing and heightened gambling consumption which can lead to harm,<sup>43</sup> it could be argued that stakeholders within football clearly have a cause for concern.

The majority of gambling operators that now appear as sponsors within the EPL are also overseas operators. The interconnectivity of global gambling operators with a global viewership through the EPL product therefore highlights the growth of global, economic networks. However, investigations have highlighted how gambling sponsorship now comes from operators who target jurisdictions where gambling is *illegal*.<sup>44</sup> Such operators – who are licensed in Great Britain through the use of a 'white label' operator<sup>45</sup> - may seek to give the illusion of legitimacy through specific marketing techniques, or with the collaboration of well-known football personalities.<sup>46</sup> From an economic perspective, operators within jurisdictions where gambling is illegal advertise to prospective markets through English football – above all, the EPL – which is exported globally. It is our contention that this example of neo-liberalism is not beneficial to the viewer or supporter who – whilst encouraged to gamble – cannot reliably gather information on whether the operator they are interacting with has the correct license to operate. This therefore may add to a potentially exploitative nature of the relationship between football and the gambling sector for the viewer or supporter when non-licensed operators are present.

Nonetheless, the gambling industry still benefits from its presence within professional football in England. Data from the Gambling Commission indicate that football betting generated a gross gambling yield of £1.4 billion from offline and online football betting between April 2021 and March 2022, accounting for approximately 10% of the industry's total revenue.<sup>47</sup> These data do not separate betting on English football from betting on leagues within other jurisdictions. Data from YouGov show that 13% of British football fans bet online at least once a week.<sup>48</sup> Target audience groups of professional football in England are also more likely to suffer negative consequences from their gambling, with those aged between 18 and 24 more likely to report harmful gambling behaviours. Depending on source, the prevalence of harmful gambling behaviours could range from 1.0%<sup>49</sup> to 8.5% of British 18-24 year olds.<sup>50</sup> Prevalence is also highest amongst men (ranging from 0.4% to 4.0%, according to the same sources), compared to women (0.3% to 1.8%). These prevalence rates – against the backdrop of the relationship between English professional football and gambling – are alarming, particularly given that marketing plays a strong role in the normalisation of sports betting.<sup>51</sup>

There is a growing awareness of this relationship in England, with supporters, organisations and clubs challenging gambling sponsorship. One sponsorship deal was overturned by Championship club

Norwich City in 2021, when it cancelled a newly-signed deal with an online casino targeted at Asian markets after supporters voiced concerns over the sexualized content of the operators' marketing material, in addition to the lack of transparency around its ownership.<sup>52</sup> A more recent example saw supporters of Chelsea FC voice opposition to an agree front-of-shirt sponsorship deal agreed with an online casino that also specialises in crypto gambling.<sup>53</sup> Chelsea pulled out of the sponsorship deal after 77% of the members of the Chelsea Supporters' Trust voiced opposition to the use of a gambling operator as a primary sponsor.<sup>54</sup> Organisations such as The Big Step and Football Supporters Against Gambling Ads seek to pressure football clubs into rejecting sponsorship from gambling operators,<sup>55</sup> whilst EFL clubs such as Forest Green Rovers and Plymouth Argyle also reject gambling sponsorship that is not contractually obliged as part of their membership within the EFL.<sup>56</sup> Nonetheless, it is our view that fully addressing the harms which arise from the relationship between gambling and football requires a legislative approach.

## The Need for a Response

In our opinion, there is a strong case for the regulation of gambling-related marketing within football, framed against the wider review of the Gambling Act 2005, announced in 2020.<sup>57</sup> The review of the Act promised to provide new legislation in the era of digital transformation. However, the review – finally published in 2023 – did not provide any plans towards legislative measures to address the volume of gambling-related marketing within football or within wider media.<sup>58</sup> The review instead highlighted the need for sports bodies need to ensure a responsible approach to gambling sponsorship through the adoption of a code of conduct. We feel that this may be seen as a positive outcome by the gambling and football industries who could argue that restrictions on aspects such as marketing would be detrimental to both people who gamble and the football sector as a whole. The BGC argue that tighter restrictions beyond its whistle-to-whistle ban would result in gamblers using unlicensed operators (or the 'black market').<sup>59</sup> The gambling industry frames additional regulation as an example of the 'nanny state', or an example of governments stopping citizens from spending money how they wish.<sup>60</sup> The BGC also outlines the support the industry provides to both the professional and amateur football pyramids alike, whilst the EFL has also highlighted how the sponsorship from Skybet has helped to provide vital support for clubs, particularly within the lower leagues.<sup>61</sup>

The review of the Act therefore leaves the role of marketing to self-regulation, and the mechanics of neo-liberalism. Leaving principles such as harm reduction to self-regulation by the gambling industry may cause tension, particularly when it could be argued that the gambling industry cannot achieve social responsibility whilst its primary objective is the generation of profit from gamblers, including those experiencing harms.<sup>62</sup> The industry response to the causality between marketing and harms is dismissive.<sup>63</sup> Yet, it also recently praised the deployment of a 'safer gambling' message alongside a gambling operator on the front-of-shirt of Scottish club, Rangers.<sup>64</sup> We therefore contend that self-regulation allows operators to produce mixed messaging which protects their interests. In summary, in the absence of regulation, it is our opinion that profits to emerge from marketing will take precedence over the considerations of harms which may be experienced by stakeholders within the game. The same could also be argued of the football industry. For example, despite Toney's recent diagnosis of gambling disorder, his team Brentford will continue with a gambling operator as its primary front-of-shirt sponsor during the 2023/2024 season.<sup>65</sup> Whilst it is not for us to explore the nature of the case in any further detail, we contend that the notion of social responsibility would encourage football clubs to seek other sponsorship in order to protect athletes. This approach would also encourage clubs to not only focus on the role of gambling on its internal relationships, but to explore the role of its *external* relationships with operators.

If self-regulation is ineffective, then one should ask how to address the harmful intersections between football and gambling from a regulatory perspective, particularly when economic conditions prefer a lack of intervention. Recent regulatory action taken within other jurisdictions in Europe highlight how

regulation of marketing is possible.<sup>66</sup> In Belgium, regulation has been staggered. A blanket ban on marketing came into force across public-facing media (such as television, radio, social media, and newspapers) in July 2023, whilst stadia and football leagues will be prohibited from gambling sponsorship from January 2025. Professional football clubs in Belgium have been given until January 2028 to find alternative sponsorship, thus allowing them to honour existing sponsorships and find alternative streams of revenue.<sup>67</sup> A similar approach has been followed in the Netherlands, with untargeted gambling marketing on television and towards those aged 24 or under on social media banned from July 2023, and the sponsorship of sports clubs prohibited after July 2025.<sup>68</sup> Even tighter restrictions have been pursued elsewhere. Gambling-related marketing (with the exception of the lottery) was completely prohibited by the government in Italy from 2019.<sup>69</sup> In Spain, gambling adverts are permitted on television between 1am and 5am only, whilst gambling sponsorship of sports teams is prohibited.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, in contrast to other jurisdictions within Europe, professional football in England experiences a significantly deregulated relationship with the gambling industry.

Approaches followed elsewhere could be adopted to professional football in England. The restriction of advertising would also facilitate a challenge to the neo-liberal economic relationship between football and gambling, helping to stem the redistribution of wealth from people who may be experiencing gambling harms. This relationship also relies on a deeply embedded economic system which promotes the over-consumption of gambling, yet creates a stigma around those who are experiencing harms.<sup>71</sup> Such a rethink would benefit numerous stakeholders within the game. Firstly, supporters who are at risk of gambling harms would be protected as a result of the removal of advertising which can result in the intention to gamble.<sup>72</sup> Likewise, with the intention of advertising being to influence individuals to place bets, the reduction of advertising may also increase the ability for individuals, whether experiencing harm or not, to make a free choice to gamble their money.<sup>73</sup> Legislative action would ideally cover marketing from all operators based both in Great Britain and overseas, therefore restricting the prominence of unlicensed operators who advertise in jurisdictions where gambling is illegal. Concerns around the impact on revenue could be addressed through a staggered approach to advertising, such as that found within Belgium. This approach has already been followed in part by EPL clubs, with the future start date of their voluntary front-of-shirt bans at the end of the 2025/2026 season.<sup>74</sup> Effective regulation, however, would extend this approach to include the most prominent forms of gambling adverts.

The restriction of advertising reduces the risk of interaction between gambling advertising and children and young people in football. With English professional football benefitting from such a large viewer base, concerns that children and young people would be exposed to such volumes of marketing, particularly when evidence suggests that gambling-related marketing can normalise gambling for children.<sup>75</sup> As well as through shirts and pitchside marketing, children may also interact with gambling-related marketing within match programmes sold on matchdays.<sup>76</sup> The reregulation of marketing should therefore seek to address all forms of marketing prevalent within football stadia, whether on shirt, pitchside or on print.

The shift of focus away from personal responsibility and towards the risks of harm from gambling highlight the importance of ongoing, holistic health promotion strategies,<sup>77</sup> which could also include English professional football. There is an increased risk of gambling harms being experienced by athletes.<sup>78</sup> However, the focus on individuals is – as we have mentioned previously – unhelpful and a result of the economic conditions of the gambling industry. As we explore within the following section, this is also true when focusing on integrity which was also an area of focus for Smith et al.<sup>79</sup>

## Sports Integrity and Individual Footballers

Discussions which address the relationship between football and gambling often focus on sporting integrity, but we feel it is important to make considerations beyond the behaviour of individual athletes. Our foremost concerns with focusing on individual athletes with gambling disorder in relation to sports



integrity are threefold. Firstly, as breaches of FA regulation represent a relatively small threat to integrity, focusing on treatment of gambling disorder which takes place after the integrity has been tarnished will be insufficient. Our first concern with only focusing on *individual* athletes experiencing gambling disorder is that even a suite of gold-standard psychologically and psychiatrically informed policies and procedures may fail to uphold fairness and sporting integrity by not intervening at the right time or at the correct level. Gambling disorders are difficult to observe in others, given the ubiquity and normalisation of gambling, especially in a sporting context.<sup>80</sup> It is often not until significant harm is being experienced that help is sought, if at all.<sup>81</sup> Crucially, public perception of sports' integrity is not the same as *actual* corruption. Therefore, whilst the procedures Smith et al. suggest can be publicised to preserve the perception of sporting integrity and is an important safeguard for individual athletes,<sup>82</sup> any actual integrity will have already been undermined by the time athletes are identified as needing support. Furthermore, individual breaches of FA regulations are relatively small threats to actual sporting integrity in relation to other more systematic behaviours such as match-fixing.<sup>83</sup>

Secondly, in our view, focusing attention on individuals risks further stigmatisation that may reduce the efficacy of policies outlined by Smith et al.<sup>84</sup> Smith et al. themselves mention the need to address entrenched stigma surrounding gambling disorder and many other researchers agree of its importance.<sup>85</sup> This narrative of individual athletes being responsible for the integrity of the sports and garnering significant media and research attention is concerning as it risks mirroring historic reporting of sports corruption in relation to betting as outlined by Villeneuve and Aquilina.<sup>86</sup> They found that authorities and organisations are commonly placed in a positive light whereas teams and athletes may be shown as guilty parties. In particular, British coverage focuses on weaknesses of individuals, especially greed. In our opinion, we are at risk here of focusing too much attention on individuals and not contextualising the wider and more significant threats to integrity. This is important because internalised stigma is significantly related to public stigma,<sup>87</sup> and with stigma being an important barrier to treatment,<sup>88</sup> it is important we stay wary of unintended consequences of our well-meaning attention.

Thirdly, we feel this conversation diverts public attention away from the stakeholders (for example, sports bodies, governments, operators) that can make significant changes to reduce threats to integrity, and to prevent harms experienced by individuals and sporting communities. Research evidence suggests that actual corruption of sport is complex and ranges from single cases of bribery to multinational organised crime syndicates.<sup>89</sup> This system of corruption relies on gambling, involving the possible coercion and exploitation of vulnerable populations, athletes and officials,<sup>90</sup> thus causing harm to individuals, clubs, leagues and sports.<sup>91</sup> This risk could be addressed through various avenues, such as education campaigns that address corruption targeted at clubs with certain risk factors such as size, amount of formalized staff, and revenue diversification.<sup>92</sup> Accordingly, there should be greater focus on tackling corruption at the national level through employment contracts and financial support in order to diversify club incomes which could produce greater long-term reductions to sport-related corruption. A further area of focus could be addressing key facilitators of corruption where there is little understanding of risk factors and vulnerabilities such as 'mule' accounts.<sup>93</sup> A deeper understanding of gambling-related risk factors can allow operators, financial institutions, law enforcement and regulators to target their investigative resources,<sup>94</sup> as well as allow organizations to develop more detailed awareness campaigns.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, national and supranational policymaking bodies across sports and governments must continue to cooperate to detect, prevent and punish behaviour that undermines sporting integrity.<sup>96</sup> For instance, big data are currently used by operators, regulators, and police to identify and charge crimes.<sup>97</sup> Data could also be used to target wagering limits on specific types of bets to make the practicalities of corruption unworkable (for example, requiring too many mule accounts) or far riskier (for example, requiring behaviours that are more anomalous or more likely to be identified and reported by other athletes, managers, and officials).

In sum, although we welcome the implementation of policies, procedures and treatment for individual footballers who are diagnosed with gambling disorder or who breach FA guidelines, we contend that

this will have relatively little impact on *actual* sporting integrity compared to addressing broader, commercial determinants and risk factors. We are also concerned that focusing too much on individual athletes risks imitating the issues associated with national press coverage and risks further stigmatizing and disengaging the individuals we wish to engage with such policies. Furthermore, we have outlined a significant threat to integrity which we hope puts individual breaches in perspective of the broader issues and we have also highlighted a few candidate areas where researchers could focus attention.

## Conclusion

Our paper has sought to continue the important discussion started by Smith et al.'s earlier paper.<sup>98</sup> For the avoidance of doubt, we agree with Smith et al. that more help is needed for professional footballers who are experiencing gambling harms, particularly when they are surrounded by high volumes of marketing. Nonetheless, we argue that this should be done in conjunction with an outward evaluation of English football's relationship with gambling sector which is not conducive to protecting individuals from gambling-related harm or sporting integrity. There would be no use in ensuring a more holistic view on the rehabilitation of athletes, if such holism does not stretch to the presence of marketing itself. English professional football serves as a product which a wide range of global gambling operators use to connect with its global viewership which can incur significant harms for many. Indeed, future research may seek to continue the work of Ireland et al. who have found that stakeholders – including fans, club officials and marketing professionals - voiced concerns around the presence of marketing of 'unhealthy commodities'.<sup>99</sup> Equally, we feel that seeking sanctions in the name of protecting integrity from gambling would be ineffective when the threat emerges from the sport's overall relationship with gambling rather than individual footballers. We contend that, similarly to the spheres of research, treatment, and education, there is a need to ensure greater independence of football itself from gambling.

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<sup>1</sup> Auclair, 'In the name of charity'.

<sup>2</sup> D'Urso, 'Nottingham Forest agree shirt sponsorship deal'

<sup>3</sup> YouGov, 'Which sports fans are most likely to have a bet?'

<sup>4</sup> Gambling Commission, 'Gambling participation'.

<sup>5</sup> Football Association, 'Regulatory Commission'

<sup>6</sup> Smith et al., 'Gambling, sports psychiatry, and disciplinary sanctions', p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> McQuade and Gill, 'The role of loneliness and self-control'; Hing et al., 'A review of research into problem gambling amongst Australian women', Elton-Marshall et al., 'Marital status and problem gambling among older adults'.

<sup>9</sup> Yau and Potenza, 'Gambling disorder and other behavioral addictions'.

<sup>10</sup> See Yani-de-Soriano et al., 'Can an Industry Be Socially Responsible If Its Products Harm Consumers?'

<sup>11</sup> Smith et al., 'Gambling, sports psychiatry and disciplinary sanctions'.

<sup>12</sup> Cassidy, *Vicious Games*.

<sup>13</sup> Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, *A Safe Bet for Success*.

<sup>14</sup> Gambling Commission, 'Statement of principles'.

<sup>15</sup> Gambling Commission, 'Industry Statistics'.

<sup>16</sup> Reith, 'Techno economic systems and excessive consumption'.

<sup>17</sup> Whelan et al., 'A casino in my pocket'.

<sup>18</sup> Newall, 'Dark nudges in gambling'.

<sup>19</sup> Forrest and McHale, 'Patterns of Play'.

<sup>20</sup> Rawat et al., 'What's the Message?'

<sup>21</sup> Wheaton, *Platform Gambling and the Redistribution of Wealth in the Land-Based Betting Industry*.

<sup>22</sup> Regulus Partners, 'Gambling Advertising and Marketing Spend in Great Britain, 2014-17'

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