

IATL ASSESSED WORK COVER SHEET

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Student ID number:	<u>2239078</u>
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Module code:	<u>IL128</u>
Module Convenor:	<u>Paul Prescott</u>
How many words did you use?	<u>1412</u>
Assignment title:	<u>Wellbeing in Football</u>

*Ethics Approval

If your work involves working with human participants, you will have had to seek Ethics [Approval](#) for your assignment. You must attach the approved documents and confirmation of approval letter into Tabula with your assignment.

Delete yes/no as required:

- My project involves human participants No
- I have applied for Ethics Approval No
- I have submitted my approved Ethics application (application form, participant information leaflet and consent form template) and confirmation of full approval letter into Tabula with my assignment: Not applicable

In completing details on this cover sheet and submitting the assignment, you are doing so on the basis that this assignment is all your own work and that you have not copied, borrowed or failed to acknowledge anyone else's work (including your own).

Please 'X' this box if you agree to this statement.

X

Wellbeing in Football

Introduction

Football is the world's most popular sport, but it is more than just a game. It is a social phenomenon that provokes emotions, builds relationships, and shapes cultures. For the creative part of my SDA (student devised assessment), I chose to use a Powerpoint showcasing photos that capture the essence of wellbeing in football. Imagery has the ability to evoke feelings and shapes narratives in ways that words struggle to do at times. Each slide tells a story, of friendships, rivalries, heartbreaks, and victories. These descriptive images encapsulate the essence of the themes discussed in this essay - community, economic implications, and the pressures of expectation. The photos and captions serve as a visual aid to complement the analysis within this academic essay, connecting to the audience on both an emotional and logical front.

Community and Relationships in Football

Football has a distinctive ability to bring people together. Whether its fans sharing their passion for their team, stewards volunteering to make the sporting event a success, or casual players competing in a friendly match against one another, football unites individuals and fosters a sense of belonging that cultivates a potential for lifelong relationships. This aspect of community is embedded in the concept of collective identity, where shared experiences enhance emotional connections (Tajfel, 1979). Professional football clubs have been regarded as sites for the expression of common identity for much of the game's history (Brown, 2009). For example, Lionel Messi and Sergio Ramos transformed from fierce rivals to friendly teammates when presented with a common identity. This shows how football embraces the sense of community, overcoming individual rivalries and connecting individuals through shared characteristics. Outside of the professional scope, football continues to have powerful contributions in the wider society. Sharing a common goal, whether you are a spectator or player, encourages a mutual recognition of belonging to a cause and cooperation to work with others to achieve the goal. Football, due to its unique role in people's lives, provides a social value that is difficult to achieve elsewhere. However, its competitive attributes occasionally causes tension, highlighted by extensive research evidencing 'disorder' being a frequent consequence of football (Stott, 2007). In fact, such disorder 'often reflect or even reinforce social inequalities' (Spaaij, 2019). This demonstrates that the outcome of partaking in football events has both positive and negative effects, and focus should be in promoting the positive effects and suppressing the negative effects. Football should act as a medium to negate divisions through connecting individuals across different cultural, economic and social backgrounds, achieving its potential in being a force for good. Campaigns and initiatives such as 'Kick it Out' (Ouseley, 2018) and 'Respect' (UEFA, 2022) emphasize the footballing body's

commitment to improve camaraderie and better represent the notion of successful community. By supporting and expanding such initiatives, football can continue to promote positivity that resonates far beyond the stadium walls.

The Economics of Wellbeing in Football

Football is notably renowned for its financial implications, especially on players, but also on the community at a macro level. For players, performance is intrinsically tied to salary, encouraging maximum effort and drive whilst fostering a view of self-worth. As Clarke (2018) states, 'Individuals who are observed to have higher levels of income in cross-section data also report higher levels of subjective well-being', suggesting that financial success is closely linked to personal happiness. Thus, for the footballer, if you play well, you feel well. However, a players' salary, and by extension, perception of self-worth, is precariously conditional on performance. This immense pressure to constantly achieve is habitually a source of stress and anxiety, often resulting in a loss in sense of security. Additionally, the close comparison of a player to a commodity, whose value fluctuates based on their utility to football clubs, may negatively impact their perception of self-worth, and lead to the depiction of themselves as an asset that has no real intrinsic worth. This further exhibits the vulnerable nature of a professionals' view of self (Mason, 2012). For example, Michael Carrick despite winning countless trophies, and earning a sizeable income, spoke of his own experiences dealing with wellbeing issues, facing doubts over self-worth during the pinnacle of his career (Carrick, 2019). At a macro level, football consistently generates significant economic activity, profiting at both a local and national scale. Major events contribute to tourism, job creation, and infrastructure development, providing an economic benefit within that area which drives national wellbeing. For example, the 2022 FIFA World Cup, held in Qatar, saw the nation spend '\$500 million per week on infrastructure projects including roads, hotels, stadiums and airport upgrades' (Craig, 2022), in preparation for the hosting of the world's biggest sporting event. This provided a huge boost to the Qatari economy and was seen as a large-scale investment with the overarching aim of providing economic growth. However, such economic benefits are not always distributed in a fair and even manner. Whether it is the disparity in salary between male and female players, or the unjust social conditions of workers hired to help facilitate such a large event, football may cause an economic imbalance resulting in social inequalities that dramatically damage general wellbeing. Addressing and improving this disproportion in distribution of wealth, can aid in the stabilisation of wellbeing and reduce social issues via the power of sport.

Expectations, Scrutiny and Resilience

Unfair expectations placed on players, from themselves and others, have often led to feelings of depression and anxiety when a player fails. Failure is a part of every process and builds endurance and resilience, however 'high and inconsistent pressure' on players to perform

and achieve cause an overpowering fear of failure, resulting in constant and immense stress (Arnold, 2012). Public criticism of performances further exacerbates this pressure. Fans' adoration during victories can quickly turn to abuse when suffering a loss, and players are made aware of the conditional love that fans have for them. This presents a high pressure to succeed, and footballers have often described the mental toll of these expectations. World Cup winner and perceived hero of the nation, Andres Iniesta, revealed his struggle coping with the expectations of fans and media, leading to depressive states (Iniesta, 2016). The recent and large increase in social media consumption has provided a 24/7 platform for the sharing of views, and professional players are subject to a constant bombardment of unforgiving opinions. The interactivity aspect of the internet provides no safeguard on what content players come across (Boyle, 2004). For instance, after a penalty miss in the Euros finals, Bukayo Saka was tormented by endless racially motivated comments, creating a victim of mass hate. This can influence one's self confidence and often has detrimental impacts on wellbeing. To negate this effect, resilience, defined as the ability to 'rebound' (Caputo, 2024), is required to adapt and thrive when faced with adversity. Building resilience is the first and most courageous step toward redemption. However, some aspects of football are simply uncontrollable, notably injuries. Injuries can happen during the peak of one's career and often invoke feelings of anger unto one's own physical body. This toxic relationship between body and mind can lead to frustration and a sense of helplessness as players deal with the limitations imposed by their injuries. Neymar's back injury during the 2014 World Cup is a prime example of how an injury can significantly affect the trajectory of a player's career, leaving lasting psychological trauma. Meaningful conversation regarding a player's mental state, support, and access to mental health resources is crucial to address these challenges. Furthermore, fostering an environment that normalizes injury as a fabric part of the game, rather than a personal failure, can help maintain positive wellbeing whilst recovering from the injury.

Conclusion

Improving wellbeing in football requires a holistic approach, involving fans, clubs, and players. For fans, promoting a culture of empathy and respect, whilst treating social media as a safe space for both players and fans, is essential to a positive environment. For clubs and players, integrating mental wellbeing tasks and considerations into everyday training may help reduce the stigma surrounding the topic, and emphasises how prevention is better than finding a cure. To conclude, despite inspiring and transforming lives for the better, football carries a huge risk to wellbeing. Like many other sports, there are inevitable highs and lows, and focus should be on managing the lows rather than obsessing over highs. To cement itself as a sport of enjoyment, football must place wellbeing at the heart of its evolution.

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