You Can Even Walk Alone:

Stadium Attendance and Professional Soccer Clubs' Social Role[1]

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Abstract: The purpose of the paper is to suggest a new perspective on the social role in the community for Italian professional soccer clubs. Our findings loosen the knot between hooligans and clubs and could have important consequences on the club's corporate social responsibility and marketing strategies.

After investigating the impact of stadium attendance on team performance for *Serie A* and *B* in seasons 2004/05 through 2006/07, we conclude that crowd plays no role in the winning performance of soccer teams at home.

Our proposal consists of two policies hinting at a reconciliation between social and educational role of the sport with the club's commercial interests.

The first policy is to establish an umbrella association whose membership is granted only to fans with a clear history as regards to crimes committed inside the arena and in the surrounding area, therefore hooligans are excluded. The umbrella association is administered by the club and embeds every supporters' associations.

The second policy uses ticket price fixing to discriminate against bad behaviour, excluding violent supporters from the stadium. Very high prices are imposed to non-member fans (presumably, all the bad guys) and to wealthy people requesting more comfort and additional services. Members in the umbrella association are allowed high discounts on the tickets as an incentive receive for being scrutinized. Popular prices or

free tickets can be offered to other social relevant stakeholders such as grassroots, youngsters and for social policies aimed at inclusion.

Key words: professional team sports; home advantage; 12th man; ticket pricing fixing strategies; corporate social responsibility; panel data

1. INTRODUCTION

Revenues from tickets in Italian *Serie A* plunged from 9.6 millions euros in 1998 to 7 millions in 2006 (Lega Calcio, 2007), a 40% decrease in real terms. Hooliganism has played a major role in keeping fans away from the stadium: attacks upon one another by rival supporters are countless. In 2007 a police officer was killed while attempting to control a riot at the site of a *Serie A* match.

As a consequence, in an attempt to stop such violent bursts, the Italian Parliament passed a law (no. 44/2007) to impose strict restriction access to a stadium by supporters. The burden of safety measures now lies more heavily on clubs, which were already held responsible for illegal acts by their supporters.

The Italian Soccer Federation (*Federazione Italiana Gioco Calcio*, F.I.G.C.) holds the club responsible for the supporters' behavior in the arena and imposes fines to clubs. This policy gives organized associations of hooligans leverage to blackmail the club in order to receive favours as a conterpart to responsible behaviour. Moreover, whereas safety inside the stadium is still guaranteed by the police, a recent bill has requested clubs to disseminate stewards in the stands. A steady increase in maintenance costs resulted and the clubs are even more exposed to blackmail from hooligans that propose as middlemen to keep order.

The role of *ultras* (Italian hooligans) is twofold. They consider themselves as the most passionate and important supporter of the team. They feel responsible for the positive outcome of the matches at home to the extent that they appraise themselves as the 12th man. This sentiment is confirmed by soccer players who render respect and thank them by exulting at them after a goal.

Moreover, it is heard on the streets that ultras are the only passionate and true supporters, the last remnants of the romantic age of pure sport and passion, the necessary bulwark against the ongoing and often criticised vulgar commercialization of soccer.

Even statistics confirms that the home team wins more often than not: is not it an evidence that there is a home advantage? The fans get their share of the merits, too. Conventional wisdom of the layman and irrefutable sentences by the press hold these as self-evident truth.

Hooliganism is often condescendingly accepted in Italy as natural valve to ease social anomy, as if civil order ultimately rests on the possibility given to the fan to fight after a match. We think the 12th man myth has contributed in romanticizing the ultras and the rhetoric on the true spirit of soccer has put them on the pedestal as one of the most relevant stakeholder. This attitude mingles with the widely accepted social role of sports and the important impact that professional sports clubs can offer to social causes. Whereas we support this idea, because we think soccer can infuse positive values to youngsters, we doubt the club should be assigned a social role in keeping order in the society. We consider the ultras a real problem that not only distracts clubs from concentrating on a positive social role but also that undermines any game as a conduit of sporting values. As a result families that see the positive educational role of sport are migrating from soccer in such a way that should worry the sport governing bodies especially when its attractiveness for the young athletes seems to reside with the money earned by professionals.

The purpose of the paper is to highlight corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies arising from an appropriate analysis of the role of attendance at stadium as a factor in the sporting production function of teams. We ask, do stadium revenues policies can walk hand in hand with a CSR strategy for professional soccer industry?

The paper has two distinctive features. It is the first analysis on home advantage conducted on Italian soccer, based on an original panel data we built up for all the professional soccer teams in the Italian *Serie A* and *Serie B* for three seasons (from 2004/05 to 2006/07). It is focused on policy implications, a neglected aspect in the literature (an exception being Forrest et al., 2005) as we use our results to derive some proposals for soccer clubs' CSR strategies and for sport and public bodies concerned with hooliganism. By leveraging on the results about the role of attendance in boosting wins at home we are interested in challenging the 12th man myth and the use of panel data allows us to derive indications on the appropriate policies because we can control for soccer teams heterogeneity for more than one season.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In the next section we develop its conceptual framework inside extant literature. The subsequent section illustrates the econometric model and discusses the data**,** the results. In the last section we outline some policy implications.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The sport economics literature has widely investigated home advantage and has proposed many measures. Courneya and Carron (1992: 13) defined it as "the term used to describe the consistent findings that home teams in sport competition win over 50% of the games played under a balanced home and away schedule". Pollard and Pollard (2005: 338) suggested that "For sport in which ties are allowed […] home advantage is quantified as the number of points obtained by the home team expressed as a percentage of all points obtained in all games played". Nevill et al. (1996: 182) noticed that for soccer leagues where three points are awarded for the win, one for a draw and none for a loss, "the calculation of home advantage using points including drawn games would become problematic", and use the end of season frequency of home wins (excluding draws) to measure the phenomenon.

Home advantage has been detected in various sports as the result of several factors. Neville and Holder (1999), applying the conceptual framework developed by Courneya and Carron (1992) and Carron et al. (2005), categorized four determinants: crowd, learning, travel and rule factors. Schwartz and Barsky (1977) found a most pronounced effect on sports played indoor than outdoor, concluding for the relevance of effective offensive action, players quality and attendance social support. Pollard (1986) analysed home advantage for English soccer league concluding that the role of crowd contributes less than familiarity of conditions when playing home. Pace and Carron (1992) found that only a small portion of the variance in home advantage can by explained by travel. Clarke and Norman (1995) highlighted the importance of distance between club grounds as the main explanation of home advantage. Pollard (2002) confirmed the ijmportance of familiarity of conditions by controlling for new stadiums. Clarke (2005) showed a significative effect in the Australian football league from crowd and ground familiarity. Thomas et al. (2004) detected a decline in such a phenomenon for English soccer. Pollard and Pollard (2005) confirmed this finding after analysing four sports in North America and England on a very extensive time series. Page and Page (2007) underlined second leg home advantage for European football cup competitions. Pollard (2006) extended the analysis to every country in Europe and South America plus some from others continents. Caudill and Mixon (2007) studied the relationship between relative fan attendance, stadium size and home field advantage in American College Football.

Nevill and Holder (1999) concluded that there is strong evidence that home advantage increases with crowd size, until the crowd reaches a certain size or consistency and suggested that two mechanisms could be at work: either (i) the crowd is able to raise the performance of the home competitors relative to the away competitors; or (ii) the crowd is able to influence the officials to subconsciously favour the home team. The latter effect is found by Nevill et al. (2002), Boyko et al. (2007) and Dawson et al. (2007).

Whereas theoretical reasons behind home advantage mentioned are convincing, it is very difficult to detect each component in an empirical way. As it is clear from the literature, there is no general consensus on the impact of attendance on number of wins at home despite the soccer fans perceptions (Wolfson et al., 2005) and the media opinion (Smith, 2005).

Our paper focuses on the role of the crowd without distinguishing between player performance and referee bias, and controls only for team sporting quality. We do not include the other three drivers (familiarity, travel factors and rules) indicated by Nevill and Holder (1999) as possible explanatory variables for two reasons. In the first place, we are interested in detecting the mere existence of the crowd effect; in the second place, the peculiar features of the Italian league reduce the relevance of the other factors. The learning factor is caused by different pitch measures and stadium location. The former does not matter in Italy because soccer pitches are almost of the same size, the latter because there was only one occurrence since only Juventus and Torino relocated in the seasons under investigation. The travel factor can be considered irrelevant. Italy being a small country, the cities where soccer teams play are not so distant. Finally, contrary to what happens in other sports, in soccer the rules for home and away matches are the same.

The area of social responsibility, philanthropy and entrepreneurship in sports remains quite unexplored (Mc Alister and Ferrell, 2002). Breithbart and Harris (2008) developed a conceptual model which incorporates a broad definition of CSR and applied it to football business.

In the introduction we hinted at the social roles for sport clubs, well recognized and important. Professional sports mantain their social role and mix business to it, reinforcing that role by adding money and charisma to it. The idea of a social role for business has several theoretical antecedents, among which is the concept of corporate citizenship (CC). The term is widely used in connection to the social role of business but it is not properly defined, to the effect that "the effective functioning of liberal citizenship has been sufficiently affected by the corporate uptake of government functions to render corporate involvement in "citizenship" a largely unavoidable occurrence […]" (Matten and Crane, 2005: 171).

By recurring to the concept of CC, we refer to the role that soccer clubs have taken in administering safety to supporters, they have become partners with the government in guaranteeing the protection from harm and violence during the matches. The club has become counterpart to the citizens in place of the government in the safeguard of what is perhaps the most important among citizens' rights, for sure one constitutive of the role of the State. As a matter of fact, when the citizens enter the stadium the State partially relinquishes its power to the club in matters of safety inside the arena, even in the presence of police forces. Clubs must comply to under the menace of sanctions.

On top of this there is the attitude of considering violence at the stadium inevitable to let people feel better about their miserable lives. This is why hooliganism is represented as a social issue instead of being treated as violent disorder, and soccer clubs are called by the state to step in, to propose solutions to the problem or, at least, to fully co-operate. In a self-evident contradiction, this is considered an element of the social role of sport, while in effect reducing the attractiveness of any sport and demeaning the formative and educative role to youngsters.

According to recent legislation in Italy (Law 44/2007) clubs must comply to many safety requirements under this new role we depict. Clubs acquire this inappropriate social role and adopt what can be considered a political view to CSR. Garriga and Melè (2004) show four different perspectives on CSR: instrumental, political, integrative, ethical. Political theories are the ones in which "social power of corporations is emphasized, specifically in its relationship with society and its responsibility in the political arena associated to its power. This leads the corporation to accept social duties and rights or participate in certain social cooperation" (2004: 52). In matters of hooliganism and safety inside the stadium the State is asking cooperation to professional sport clubs, as a form of social behaviour by a good citizen, based on the pre-conceived and unrealistic idea of corporate power, that clubs do not possess.

Understanding the role of the attendance in the clubs production function could help in finding a rationale to implement adequate CSR strategies to deal with the problem of hooliganism. This could also lead, as a side-product, to the implementation of strategies aimed at improving social inclusion towards the more desirable kind of supporters, whom indeed must be regarded the more appropriate constituency.

3. THE MODEL, THE DATA AND THE RESULTS

To detect if the impact of stadium attendance on winning performance is relevant we concentrate on the supply side as represented by the following sporting (production) function:

$$winperch_{it} =$$
$$= u_t + \beta_1 \log att_{it} + \beta_2 cap_{it} + \beta_3 goalsdiffh_{it} + \beta_4 away_{it} + \beta_5 managerunch_{it} + \varepsilon_{it}$$

The dependent variable is the percentage of matches won on the total number of home matches, as in Nevill et al (1996). In our sample we observe a percentage of home wins of 46% less than one indicated by Courneya and Carron (1992). The existence of draws and the three point awarded per win allows us to conclude for the existence of home advantage in Italian professional soccer. The question is: can the observed home advantage be explained by the crowd effect? The percentage of wins at home is explained by the following covariates.

The role of attendance, our focus of interest, is measured by the logaritm of attendance (log *att*) and stadium capacity (*cap*). Attendance is presented in logarithm form in order to consider its variation in percentage. We do not distinguish between season tickets and game tickets because season ticket holders are usually the more passionate and addicted supporter: they rarely miss a match. Moreover, season ticket holders who cannot attend a match usually find the way to give their season ticket to a friend. The sole case when a season ticket holder misses a game is whenever the team's aim for the season is no more reachable. In such a case the interest in the team could decrease even many months before end of season. For the considered seasons only few teams found themselves in such an awkward situation. In the period analyzed, we can safely hypothesize, without affecting the results, that season ticket holders can be considered always present at the stadium. Incidentally, a cross-sectional regression on season 2005/2006 in which we substituted attendance with game tickets confirmed this hypothesis because the results did not change in comparison to those from the panel data.

Stadium capacity is a control variable to check whether there is a constraint on the impact of the attendance. There is no need to control for the stadium capacity on attendance because matches do not sell out.

In considering sporting variables we try to distinguish manager's role from players' (Dawson et al., 2000). The manager's impact on team performance has been widely studied in the literature (Dobson and Goddard, 2006). We capture managerial skills by including a dummy variable that scores 1 if the manager did not change for the entire season and 0 elsewhere, even though we are aware that this dummy could not entirely capture the whole story on the importance of the manager (Audas et al., 2002). Absence of turnover in the manager is 1 in the dummy variable *managerunch*, considered as an indicator of continuity in building up a policy of cohesion of the team and a consequence of consistent sporting results.

In order to account for players quality and overall team strength we use two different variables. Team quality should prove an important factor, it is measured by the difference in goals scored at home (*goalsdiffh*) and by points gained away (*away*). We used these proxies for team quality because for Italian soccer data on playing skills or match situation as depicted in Carmichael et al. (2000) and in Carmichael and Thomas (2005) are not available.

The variables are recapitulated in Table 1, which lists the sources used for developing the database, the hypothesized relation with the dependent variable and descriptive statistics.

Variables used in the supply model. Sources are reported in the second column. The nature of the variable and additional comments are reported in the third if needed. The last three column report descriptive statistics: mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum for the 126 observations in the sample. All the data are referred to seasons 2004/05 through 2006/07.

The equation represents a fixed effect model, which is justified by the presence of unobserved heterogeneity (measured as deviations from a constant term) characterizing each club, expressed by the individual-level effect, the term ui, uncorrelated with the error term εit. These ui represent club characteristics that could make the difference in winning performance, and should be different among clubs. Each u represents a list of time invariant characteristics of the club and the crowd (such as learning, strength from being at home, from playing that pitch, lower levels of fatigue by not traveling, the crowd's skills to impress the umpire, and so on). The panel model allows us to test whether these ui are significantly different among teams, by an F test following the regression.

Since we leave open the possibility that these factors in u_i can remain correlated with the included regressors, we prefer the fixed effects to the random effects estimator. A relevant theoretical modeling issue is the following. It seems straightforward that not only people's passionate support can cause the team to win more, but also that, the other way round, people show more propensity to gather at the stadium when the team is enjoying a winning streak. As a result, causality can go both ways between attendance, *logatt*, and winning percentage at home, *winperch*. We are aware of this form of endogeneity arising from simultaneity and we did check our results on the production equation by using a two stage least square estimator on a more complete model that considers also the demand side. We opted for the simplified version we present herein because the results do not change and we can focus on the implications regarding club's strategies and policies.

We estimated the equation with a fixed effect unbalanced panel data model including every team in Italian *Serie A* and *Serie B* (i = 49), seasons 2004/05 through 2006/07 (t = 3), a total of 126 observations. The panel is unbalanced due the relegation process: some teams fell out the panel when relegated from *Serie B* to the *Serie C* (a division not covered by our data), at least for the year following the relegation. We did not make further adjustments because the panel is quite balanced as almost 75% of the observation are present for the seasons considered. The results of our regression are reported in Table 3: the significative variables have got the expected sign of relationship.

Table 1: List of the variables and descriptive statistics

Variables	Source	Comments	Mean	Std.dev.	Min	Max
winsperch D	*Almanacco del Calcio*	Percentage of home wins.	.4546883	.1614669	.105263	.947368
att (*logatt*) R(+)	*Almanacco del Calcio*	Attendance, sum of season and game tickets. (The regressor is in logarithm form.)	281451.4	244534.5	20663	1216031
cap R(-)	*www.fussballtempel.net*	Seats in the stadium	32461.65	20473.34	8412	83679
goalsdiffh R(+)	*Almanacco del Calcio*	Difference between goal scored and conceded in home games.	8.055556	10.56281	-19	38
away R(+)	*Almanacco del Calcio*	Points gained in away matches	20.1746	8.292724	3	49
managerunch R(+)	*Almanacco del Calcio*	Dummy variable used to control for manager's effect = 1 if the team did not change the manager in the season = 0 if the manager changed.	.547619	.4997142	0	1

D=dependent variable, R=regressor, with (+) expressing positive and (-) negative effects.

Table 2: Results from fixed effect estimation of winsperch

Regressors	Coefficient	Std.dev.
constant	.20565695	.4357476
logatt	.00434474	.0345158
cap	1.031e-06	1.24e-06
goalsdiffh	*** .01225676	.0010259
away	* .00298428	.001551
managerunch	.00637148	.0184641

σ_u =.05328257	$F(5,72) = 49.19$, p-value= 0.000	
σ_ε =.06628723	Observations: 126	Groups: 49
ρ = .39250947	F test all u_i=0 $F(48, 72) = 0.86$, p-value = 0.7155	

Significance levels are: * p<.10, ** p<.05, *** p<.01
σ_u is the standard deviation of u_i
σ_ε is the standard deviation of ε_i
ρ is the fraction of variance due to u_i

We find that attendance is not significative even at the conventional 10% level and conclude that winning percentage at home for Italian professional soccer league (Serie A and B) for the seasons considered cannot be explained in terms of a crowd effect. Capacity is not significative: as explained, sold out matches for Italian league are very rare. Only the proxies for team quality (goals difference at home matches and points awarded in away matches) appear relevant. Managerial change does not affect winning performance whereas manager skills are surely a major component of the team sporting variables. The constant is not significative, meaning that no team has a certain amount of winning percentages. Agnew and Carron (1994) distinguish the effect induced by crowd size from the effect caused by crowd density. We also checked for this effect: we substituted attendance levels with a density measure, obtained by dividing attendance by total capacity, for each team, for the whole season. The result does not change and the crowd density is not significant.

The test F of the regression $F(5,72) = 49.19$, with a p-value of zero, shows that the model is overall significant. We report estimated standard deviations of the coefficients, of the fixed effect, and of the error term.

Correlation between individual effects u_i and fitted values from the model is negative and a low 0.2779. This means that time invariant unobserved characteristics belonging to clubs (learning, travel and so on) are negatively and feebly connected to included explanatory variables (sporting, attendance, capacity).

The estimate of ρ, the fraction of variation in winning percentages due to club specificity, suggests that the variation in the dependent variable is due to inter-team differences only to 0.39, which is a low figure. This is a prelude to the F test *following* the regression, which checks out our most important hypothesis, whether there are significant individual (club) effects. Well, the F test that all u_i=0 shows that $F(48, 72) = 0.86$, with a p-value = 0.7155 and therefore we conclude that we cannot reject the null hypothesis that clubs are homogeneous. This is to say that, once the explanatory variables are controlled, individual time invariant characteristics among teams do not make the difference as regards the impact on winning performances.

As a side product, this result implies that we could have even conducted a pooled ordinary least squares instead of a panel data estimation, which in turn means that even though we have given each team the possibility of being different, the data show that they can be considered the same kind of individual.

4. CONCLUSION

Results show that when stadium attendance is properly handled, it cannot be considered as an input in the sporting (production) function of the team, because it does not make a difference among teams:

For the seasons in the sample attendance plays no role in the winning performance of the Italian soccer clubs, hence the 12th man does not exist and the main strategy to improve sporting performance is to acquire talented players and managers. Wins at home depend on sporting quality of the team, that could be improved by acquiring talent with money coming from revenues (tickets, merchandising, broadcasting rights).

If the 12th man does not exist there is a rationale to abandon the ultras-are-relevant rhetoric and to implement marketing strategies aimed at maximizing profits in ticket selling, which, incidentally, could also boosts revenues to be invested in sporting talent.

The finding can have an impact on soccer teams' marketing strategies, CSR policy, and also on safety issues as developed by police and government in cooperation with the club. Our findings could contribute to reconcile social and educational role of the sport with the club's private interest. In particular, there is the opportunity to reduce the distance between profit maximization and CSR policies, by allowing people to enjoy the match without the risk of being harmed. If there is no other interest in filling up the stadium except that maximizing ticket revenues, profit maximization rationale only should lead ticket price fixing strategies. These should be designed in order to discriminate bad behaviour and violent supporters, excluding them from the stadium. Profit maximization motive becomes instrumental in keeping violent people far from the stadium, a case in which profit motives can be reconciled with social ones.

Having assessed the aim of our proposal, let us now turn to more practical matters. We devise two steps to implement our policy. In the first place, the club establishes an umbrella association that embeds every supporter association, whose membership is almost free, subject to paying a very small fee. Rather, membership is granted only to fans with a clear past behaviour with regard to crimes committed inside the arena and in the surrounding area: hooligans are excluded. In the second place, clubs fix very high prices to discriminate market segments and to implement CSR policies. Those subject to these high prices are wealthy people, who in exchange will receive more adequate services, and fans who are not members of the association: presumably, the bad guys. The incentive to become member in the club's umbrella association and consequently get scrutinized is given by a high discount (let us say, even 90%) on the seats in some sectors. The luxury seats should cover the facility management costs, giving way to social inclusion policies such as free entry to grassroots players, school pupils, disabled people, people targeted for inclusion in society. Consider also that many seats, which for a reason or another have been given away to hooligan organizations, will become available to implement these CSR strategies aimed at these social relevant stakeholders.

By leveraging on the ticket price discount incentive, lead by profit motive, soccer clubs can be encouraged to fully take the social role the law already assigns to them, this time with an added intake, that finally there is a message against violent showing it leads to social exclusion.

As already argued, Italian law requires the clubs to maintain order and safety inside the stadium, thus relinquishing the most important function of the State. In such a case the club cannot be considered a private citizen but a provider of rights that define citizenship. On October 30, 2008 the Italian Minister of Interior proposed, along with the police bodies, a supporter's badge. Since 2009 any club should give this badge to supporters, after severe scrutiny on their past behaviour (Bellinazzo M., 2008). Without the badge the supporter should be banned from the stadium. *Lega Calcio* (the Italian Professional Soccer League) is worried about the impact these controls will have in reinforcing the descending trend in stadium attendance, and has expressed scepticism on the applicability of the proposal, because it is difficult to oblige a supporter to be scrutinized in order to obtain the badge, privacy matters being impinged upon. *Lega Calcio* and the Italian Federation should promote adequate policies in order to foster clubs to adopt the proposed CSR strategies, in line with their goals to sustain supporter's appropriate affection to clubs. They should find

ways to coordinate the adoption of the incentive scheme we have devised, which is a different route to reach the aim of the proposal. If, as we suggest, getting scrutinized and acquiring a badge means getting a 90% discount on the dramatically-risen ticket price might be worthwhile, even against privacy disclosure. Italian hooligans who nowadays try to enter the stadium for free will not be able or will not be willing to pay, say, a hundred euros or more for a seat, and they will not be eligible for official supporter discount. On the other side, excluding violent fans could also encourage many supporters, nowadays scared of attending matches, to return to the stadium.

The adoption of CSR strategies as the one depicted herein could enhance the possibility that stadium privatization will be accepted by public opinion more easily. Privatization is a positive sum game: an unavoidable step for Italian professional soccer clubs to be able to fully exploit the asset and a way for local government to reduce public debt. Reducing violence as a final goal could add to appreciation of privatizating the stadium in eye of the public opinion.

Re-acquiring confidence and safety is an urging matter to avoid the impending doom of vacant stadiums that should be in the first place in the political agenda of the League and the Federation. It is not our aim to present results to imply a rationale in favour of an empty stadium or to support the idea of the match as a televised event, because the magic of full stands enhances the sport in any aspect. It is our intent to show a possible way of mixing profit and social responsibility in a meaningful way for the benefit of sporting values.

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