



International Journal of Current Research and Academic Review

ISSN: 2347-3215 (Online) Volume 14 Number 9 (September-2026)

Journal homepage: <http://www.ijcrar.com>



doi: <https://doi.org/10.20546/ijcrar.2026.1409.005>

Sports and the United Kingdom Socio-Economic Development: Case of the British Premier League Football

Orieren Olivier ABODOHOU*

Université d'Abomey-Calavi (UAC), Bénin

Laboratoire du Groupe de Recherche sur l'Afrique et la Diaspora (GRAD), Bénin

**Corresponding author*

Abstract

Professional football has become one of the United Kingdom's most commercially significant service industries, generating revenue through broadcasting, matchday attendance, sponsorship and international investment while remaining deeply embedded in the social life of Britain's industrial and post-industrial communities. Although the Premier League's commercial expansion is well documented, existing accounts frequently assert football's economic and social value without distinguishing gross expenditure from net impact, or weighing benefits against the inequalities and vulnerabilities that accompany commercialisation. This study examines how professional football contributes to the socio-economic development of the United Kingdom and to the well-being of British society, focusing on revenue generation, employment creation and the broader social value attached to the game. Drawing on utilitarian theory and Input-Output/multiplier analysis, the study adopts a documentary research design combining qualitative and quantitative evidence, examining financial reports, employment statistics and the relevant academic literature relating to major British football clubs and competitions. The analysis shows that Premier League clubs generated approximately £6.3 billion in aggregate revenue in the 2023/24 season and that the League's activity supported over 100,000 full-time-equivalent jobs while contributing an estimated £9.8 billion in gross value added and £4.4 billion in tax revenue to the UK economy. The League also functions as a source of collective identity and community cohesion, particularly in former industrial regions, although these benefits are unevenly distributed and partly offset by displacement and leakage effects. The paper contributes a more theoretically disciplined and empirically balanced account of football's socio-economic role, with implications for financial regulation in English football.

Article Info

Received: 10 July 2026

Accepted: 22 August 2026

Available Online: 20 September 2026

Keywords

United Kingdom; football, socio-economic development, utilitarianism; Input-Output analysis

Introduction

Organised sport occupies an unusual position in advanced economies. It is simultaneously a leisure activity, a media product, an urban development instrument and, for a small number of individuals, a highly paid profession. Association football illustrates this convergence more clearly than most other sports. Because it combines mass spectatorship, extensive

broadcasting rights and a globally traded labour market for players, football has developed commercial structures extending well beyond the stadium, drawing in broadcasters, sponsors, hospitality providers, construction firms and local authorities. Understanding how this activity translates into measurable economic and social outcomes therefore bears directly on debates in regional economics, public finance and social policy concerning how public and private resources interact

around large cultural institutions. Nowhere is this convergence more visible than in the United Kingdom, and specifically in England, where the Premier League has become the most commercially valuable domestic football competition in the world. Since its formation in 1992, the League has restructured its finances around broadcasting contracts, and its twenty clubs now sit atop a wider pyramid of professional and semi-professional football extending through the Championship, League One, League Two and beyond.

The scale of this activity raises a straightforward but consequential question: whether, and to what extent, the revenue and employment generated within this pyramid constitute a genuine contribution to the wider socio-economic development of the United Kingdom, rather than merely reflecting the internal finances of a self-contained entertainment industry.

British football merits investigation on grounds beyond its commercial size. Historically, the sport is closely associated with the industrial cities and working-class communities of the North West, the North East, the Midlands and parts of London and Scotland, where clubs such as Manchester United, Liverpool and Arsenal became embedded as institutions of local identity well before the sport's contemporary commercialisation (Goldblatt, 2014). The Premier League era has layered global capital, satellite broadcasting and multinational ownership onto this older social fabric, producing a case in which economic modernisation and cultural continuity coexist without one straightforwardly displacing the other. This tension between football as heritage and football as business gives the British case a distinctive analytical interest not fully captured by studies of sport in economies where professional football lacks comparable historical depth.

A substantial body of scholarship has examined the economic and social value of professional sport. One strand, associated with Gratton and Taylor (2000) and Dobson and Goddard (2011), treats football clubs as economic enterprises whose spending on wages, transfers and matchday operations stimulates employment and demand in related industries. A parallel literature examines football's contribution to urban regeneration through stadium development (Szymanski, 2010) and its role in sustaining community identity in disadvantaged areas (Wagg, 2004; Crabbe & Slaughter, 2004). Together, these strands support the broad proposition that football functions as an economic and social asset for host regions.

This proposition, however, has not gone unchallenged. A separate and equally established literature questions whether the impacts commonly attributed to professional sports clubs represent genuine additions to economic activity, or whether they are inflated by methodological choices that ignore displacement, leakage and the interests of those commissioning the research (Coates & Humphreys, 2003; Crompton, 2004). Roberts, Roche, Jones and Munday (2016), in one of the few studies to estimate the net rather than gross regional impact of a UK Premier League club, found that once spending diverted from other local activities was accounted for, the net contribution of matchday spectator spending fell close to zero, even though the club's broadcasting income still represented a substantial net inflow to its region.

Two gaps follow from this review. First, much of the literature on British football's economic role either concentrates on aggregate financial figures without distinguishing direct, indirect and induced effects, or applies Input-Output reasoning without connecting it to football's social value. Second, discussions of football's contribution to well-being frequently move from the observation that supporters value the game to the conclusion that football improves mental health or social cohesion, without specifying the causal mechanism or acknowledging the limits of the evidence. There is, in short, a need for an account of British football's socio-economic contribution that integrates economic modelling with a theoretically grounded, appropriately cautious treatment of its social value, and that weighs this contribution against the inequalities and vulnerabilities generated by its commercial growth.

This study addresses that need by asking: how does professional football contribute to the socio-economic development of the United Kingdom and to the well-being of British society? Three subsidiary questions follow from this: what are the principal financial resources of the British football industry; what is the impact of football on economic growth and employment; and to what extent do British football matches influence the social well-being of spectators and their communities. The study pursues three corresponding objectives: to identify the sources of income within the football industry; to examine how professional football influences the wider socio-economic life of the United Kingdom; and to analyse how British football contributes to the well-being and quality of life of British people. It proceeds from the hypothesis that professional football exerts a significant, if unevenly distributed, positive

influence on the British economy through revenue generation, employment creation and regional development, and that the financial performance of major clubs extends beyond the football industry itself into tourism, infrastructure and public finance, while also contributing, in qualified ways, to the well-being and social cohesion of British communities.

The remainder of the article is organised as follows. Section 1 reviews the literature within four related debates and identifies the specific gap addressed here. Section 2 sets out the theoretical framework, drawing on utilitarianism and Input-Output/multiplier analysis, and describes the study's research design. Section 3 presents the empirical analysis of football's financial structure, employment effects, event-related impact and social value, before weighing these benefits against their costs. Section 4 discusses the findings against the literature, and the conclusion returns to the research question, addresses the hypotheses and considers implications for policy and future research.

Literature Review and Research Framework

Football and economic development

Research on the economic dimensions of professional sport has long treated football as a distinctive service industry rather than a purely recreational activity. [Gratton and Taylor \(2000\)](#) identify three principal mechanisms through which the sports industry generates economic activity: direct employment across event management, media and manufacturing; income effects arising from wages, sponsorship and broadcasting rights; and investment effects, whereby sporting activity attracts infrastructure spending that would not otherwise occur. Applied to English football, this framework helps to explain why the Premier League's finances have grown so markedly since the sale of live broadcasting rights began in the early 1990s: rising media income has funded higher player wages, which in turn has widened the League's appeal to global broadcasters and sponsors, reinforcing the same commercial cycle ([Deloitte Sports Business Group, 2025](#)). [Dobson and Goddard \(2011\)](#) extend this account by distinguishing direct employment – players, coaching staff, medical and administrative personnel – from the indirect employment generated on matchdays through ticketing, security, hospitality and catering, arguing that the latter category is frequently underestimated in public discussion of football's economic footprint. [Hamil and Walters \(2010\)](#) add a management perspective to this economic account,

showing how English clubs increasingly operate within an international market for capital, sponsorship and playing talent, such that their financial performance reflects global investment decisions as much as domestic footballing success. Taken together, this literature converges on the proposition that football operates as a genuine economic sector with measurable multiplier potential, even though, as later sections of this review indicate, the precise scale of that potential remains contested.

Football, urban development and local economies

A second body of work considers football's role in urban and regional development, particularly through stadium construction and place-branding. [Szymanski's \(2010\)](#) edited volume on football economics and policy examines how stadium projects have been used by clubs and local authorities to justify wider regeneration schemes, on the assumption that a modern stadium increases inward investment, tourism and the visibility of the host city. Earlier evidence from Merseyside lends some support to this view: [Johnstone, Southern and Taylor \(2000\)](#) traced over £55 million of spending associated with Liverpool and Everton football clubs in the late 1990s, of which more than £12 million was retained within the regional economy, alongside over two thousand directly and indirectly dependent jobs. More recent work, however, cautions against generalising such findings. [Roberts, Roche, Jones and Munday's \(2016\)](#) analysis of Swansea City, undertaken during the club's first Premier League season, found that spending by match-going spectators produced a substantial gross regional injection but a net effect close to zero once residents' equivalent spending at away fixtures was taken into account, and that the most reliable net gain to the regional economy came not from matchday activity but from the redistribution of national broadcasting revenue to a peripheral region. This distinction between gross expenditure and net regional benefit is one that earlier, more celebratory accounts of football-led regeneration frequently overlooked.

Football as a social and cultural institution

A third strand of scholarship treats football primarily as a social and cultural institution rather than an economic one. [Giulianotti \(2005\)](#) situates this claim within the broader sociology of sport, arguing that football's social significance lies less in any single measurable outcome than in its capacity to organise collective identity, ritual and belonging across otherwise fragmented urban

populations, a capacity that predates, and is not reducible to, the sport's contemporary commercial value. Goldblatt (2014) develops this argument historically, situating the Premier League era within a longer history in which football functioned as the characteristic sport of Britain's industrial heartlands, offering working-class communities a means of collective expression and local pride that has persisted, in altered form, through the sport's subsequent commercialisation. Wagg (2004) and the contributors to his edited collection extend this argument by showing how the immense wealth generated at the top of English football coexists with, and in some readings intensifies, social problems relating to class, race and the decline of traditional supporter communities. Anthony King's (2002) account of the transformation of English football culture during the 1990s similarly traces how the traditional terrace culture of the industrial working class was reshaped, rather than simply displaced, by all-seater stadia and rising ticket prices, complicating any simple narrative of continuity between historic and contemporary fan communities. Morrow (2003) approaches the same tension from the perspective of football's financialisation, examining the stock market flotations, media ownership and stakeholder pressures that reconfigured English clubs during the 1990s and 2000s, and arguing that the resulting governance arrangements sit uneasily against football's self-presentation as a community institution. At a more localised level, Crabbe and Slaughter's (2004) evaluation of the Leyton Orient Community Sports Programme provides qualitative evidence that football clubs can act as a trusted point of contact for social inclusion work in deprived and racially divided neighbourhoods, using the sport as an initial point of engagement for wider youth and community development objectives. This literature collectively establishes that football's social value, whatever its precise magnitude, operates through different mechanisms from its economic value and cannot simply be inferred from revenue or employment figures.

The limits of football's economic contribution

A fourth and more critical literature questions how far the benefits identified in the preceding sections should be taken at face value. Coates and Humphreys (2003) argue, on the basis of evidence from professional sports facilities more broadly, that the economic benefits of stadium investment are often overstated and that public expenditure on sports infrastructure does not reliably generate the returns claimed by its advocates. Crompton (2004) makes a related methodological argument,

cataloguing ways in which economic impact studies of sports facilities and events can inflate apparent benefits by ignoring opportunity costs, failing to account for money that leaves the local economy through leakage, or double-counting spending that would have occurred locally in any case through displacement. Roberts *et al.*, (2016) apply this reasoning directly to a UK Premier League club, showing that once such adjustments are made, the net contribution of spectator spending to a host region can be substantially smaller than gross figures suggest, even where the club's overall financial scale is considerable. This literature does not deny that football generates real economic activity; rather, it insists on a more careful accounting of who benefits, from where the relevant income originates, and what would have happened to the same money in football's absence.

Read together, these four bodies of scholarship converge on the proposition that football is economically significant and socially valued, but they leave two questions inadequately resolved for the British case specifically: how the gross financial scale of major clubs relates to their net contribution once displacement and leakage are considered, and how the sport's social value can be assessed without collapsing into either uncritical celebration or unsupported causal claims about well-being. The present study addresses this combined gap by applying utilitarian and Input-Output reasoning to recent financial and employment evidence from British football, while treating its social contribution with the same evidentiary caution that the literature increasingly applies to its economic claims.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

Utilitarianism

The study's interpretation of football's social value draws on utilitarian moral philosophy, understood here as an analytical rather than a normative commitment. Bentham (1789) proposed that the rightness of an action or institution should be judged by its consequences for aggregate happiness, formalised in the principle that the good is whatever secures the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Applied to football, this principle offers a way of weighing the collective enjoyment, sense of belonging and entertainment that the sport provides against its social costs, such as policing expenditure, alcohol-related disorder or the opportunity cost of household spending on tickets and subscriptions. Mill's (1863) later refinement of utilitarianism is relevant here because it distinguishes between the quantity and the

quality of pleasure, cautioning against treating all sources of enjoyment as equivalent; a Millian reading would resist the inference that widespread footballing enjoyment is self-evidently of high social value simply because it is widely shared, and would instead ask whether that enjoyment is accompanied by the kind of active, reflective engagement Mill associated with higher pleasures. Utilitarianism is well suited to this study because it supplies a framework for aggregating dispersed, largely non-market benefits – community identity, entertainment, subjective well-being – that would otherwise resist economic measurement. Its principal limitation, however, is equally important for the analysis that follows: aggregate utility calculations can rise even as the distribution of costs and benefits becomes more unequal, and the theory offers no internal mechanism for weighing the well-being of a shareholder or a well-paid player against that of a season-ticket holder priced out of attendance. The theoretical framework is therefore used descriptively, to organise the study's treatment of football's social value, rather than as a normative endorsement of its current distribution.

Input-Output analysis and the multiplier

The study's analysis of football's economic effects draws on Input-Output analysis, a quantitative method developed by [Leontief \(1966\)](#) to represent how the output of one industry serves as an input to others, work for which Leontief was awarded the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences in 1973. An Input-Output framework is not, in itself, a philosophical proposition but an accounting structure: it traces how spending by a football club or its supporters generates direct effects within the club itself, indirect effects among the suppliers of goods and services purchased by the club – catering firms, kit manufacturers, transport operators, broadcasters – and induced effects arising as employees in both categories spend their wages within the wider economy ([Miller & Blair, 2009](#)). The multiplier concept, first formalised by [Kahn \(1931\)](#) and subsequently developed by [Keynes \(1936\)](#), describes how an initial injection of spending generates a larger cumulative effect on output as it circulates through successive rounds of spending, subject to leakages such as taxation, saving and imports. It is important to distinguish this reasoning from the popular assumption that every pound spent on football automatically generates an equivalent, or greater, addition to national income: multiplier effects are bounded by how much of each round of spending remains within the reference economy, and applied

studies typically report the ratio of indirect and induced effects to initial spending, rather than a general multiple of the total. [Roberts et al., \(2016\)](#) analysis of Swansea City illustrates the point precisely: an initial regionalised spectator spending injection of £4.71 million generated a further £1.90 million in supply-chain and wage-induced effects, a multiplier addition of roughly forty per cent rather than a doubling or automatic equivalence. Input-Output and multiplier analysis are used in this study, therefore, not as abstract theory but as the accounting logic through which the financial and employment evidence in Section 3 is interpreted, distinguishing direct football-industry activity from its indirect and induced consequences elsewhere in the economy.

Methodology

Consistent with this framework, the study adopts a documentary research design combining qualitative and quantitative evidence, appropriate to a topic where primary data collection from football clubs is not practicable within the scope of a single study. The research is descriptive and interpretive rather than experimental: it does not test causal hypotheses through controlled comparison, but instead synthesises secondary data and existing scholarship within the theoretical framework set out above. Quantitative evidence is drawn from club financial disclosures as compiled by the Deloitte Sports Business Group's Annual Review of Football Finance, regional employment and population data published by the [Office for National Statistics \(2025\)](#), and the Premier League's Economic and Social Impact Report, produced with EY, which provides gross value added, tax and employment estimates for the League as a whole. Qualitative evidence is drawn from the peer-reviewed academic literature on football economics and football's social role, together with relevant government and regulatory material, including the Football Governance Act 2025 ([UK Government, 2025](#)). Case selection focuses on Premier League clubs, and on Manchester United, Manchester City, Liverpool, Arsenal and Chelsea in particular, because these clubs publish the most detailed financial disclosures, attract the most sustained scholarly and journalistic scrutiny, and account for a disproportionate share of the League's broadcasting and commercial revenue, making them analytically central to any assessment of the League's aggregate economic footprint. The analytical framework combines the two theoretical resources described above: Input-Output and multiplier reasoning is used to interpret financial and employment data in Sections 3.1 to 3.3, while utilitarian reasoning, applied cautiously, informs

the treatment of social well-being in Section 3.4. Several limitations follow from this design and are acknowledged rather than concealed. Comparable, club-level net economic impact data are not publicly available for most British clubs, so the study relies on aggregate League-level estimates alongside a single detailed regional case study (Roberts *et al.*, 2016) to illustrate net-impact reasoning; the attribution of economic activity specifically to football, as opposed to broader consumer or media trends, cannot be established with precision from secondary data; and the study cannot independently verify every figure reported in club accounts or industry reports, relying instead on the credibility of the reporting organisations cited.

Football and the British Economy: Analysis of the Evidence

Financial structure and comparative performance of major clubs

The financial structure of English football clubs rests on four principal revenue streams. Broadcasting revenue, comprising domestic and international rights sold collectively by the Premier League, remains the largest single source of income for most top-flight clubs; in the 2024/25 season this stream generated £3.4 billions across the League, and its distribution, weighted by league position but still shared far more evenly than commercial income, explains why even mid-table clubs can sustain substantial wage bills (Deloitte Sports Business Group, 2025). Matchday revenue exceeded £1 billion across the League for the first time in 2024/25, sustaining activity in the transport, catering and hospitality sectors surrounding stadiums, although its relative importance has declined as broadcasting income has grown. Commercial revenue, covering sponsorship, merchandising and stadium naming rights, surpassed £2 billion in the same season, with the six largest clubs accounting for almost three-quarters of this income (Deloitte Sports Business Group, 2025). Transfer activity constitutes a fourth, more volatile channel: player sales can generate substantial one-off income, particularly for clubs with strong youth development structures, but transfer revenue is better understood as a redistribution of value within the football industry than as a stable contribution to the wider economy.

These revenue streams translate into markedly different financial profiles across clubs. Deloitte's data for the 2023/24 season place Manchester City at the top of the revenue table, with £719 million in turnover against £413

million in wage costs, a wage-to-revenue ratio of 57 per cent; Manchester United generated £662 million against £365 million in wages, a ratio of 55 per cent, while Liverpool and Arsenal recorded £614 million and £613 million respectively, with wage-to-revenue ratios of 63 and 53 per cent (Deloitte Sports Business Group, 2025). Chelsea, by contrast, generated £468 million in revenue but spent £338 millions on wages, a ratio of 72 per cent that illustrates how clubs with weaker commercial or broadcasting positions relative to their wage ambitions face considerably tighter margins. The pattern is more pronounced further down the League, where several mid-table and newly promoted clubs in the same season reported wage-to-revenue ratios above 80 per cent, and in one case above 90 per cent, a level widely regarded as financially precarious once transfer, debt-servicing and stadium-maintenance costs are met from the remaining margin. The aggregate picture, in which Premier League clubs generated approximately £6.3 billion in combined revenue in 2023/24, rising to £6.8 billions the following season, should not obscure this internal variation: the League's financial scale is real, but distributed unevenly enough that headline figures for the wealthiest clubs say little about the median club's position.

Two further points qualify this picture. First, revenue growth has been matched by comparable or greater cost growth: aggregate wage costs reached a record £4.4 billion in 2024/25, and the League recorded aggregate pre-tax losses of £948 million in the same season, indicating that rising turnover has not translated into proportionate profitability (Deloitte Sports Business Group, 2025). Second, clubs remain under regulatory scrutiny that is frequently conflated in public discussion: UEFA's Financial Fair Play regulations apply to clubs in European competitions, while the Premier League's own Profitability and Sustainability Rules apply domestically and limit permitted losses over a rolling three-year period; both respond to the same underlying concern, that revenue growth has not been matched by consistent financial discipline at club level.

Employment

Employment in British football operates across three analytically distinct categories, corresponding to the direct, indirect and induced effects described in Section 2.2. Direct employment comprises those employed by clubs themselves – players, coaching staff, sports science and medical personnel, and administrative and finance staff – whose numbers scale with a club's playing and commercial ambitions. Indirect employment arises

among organisations supplying clubs and stadiums on matchdays and throughout the season: stewarding and security firms, catering and hospitality providers, broadcasters and production companies, and the construction firms responsible for stadium maintenance and development. Induced employment, the most diffuse category, arises as wages earned in the first two are spent on housing, retail, transport and leisure elsewhere in the economy.

The most recent League-wide estimate, produced by EY for the Premier League, places total employment supported by the League's activity at more than 100,000 full-time-equivalent positions in the 2023/24 season, including direct club employment together with the indirect and induced effects described above ([Premier League/EY, 2025](#)). This employment is not evenly distributed: over 30 per cent of jobs supported by the League in 2023/24 were located in North West England, reflecting the concentration of major clubs around Manchester and Liverpool, while more than 60 per cent of the League's total economic contribution was generated outside London, complicating any assumption that football's benefits accrue disproportionately to the capital ([Premier League/EY, 2025](#)).

Employment has also proved sensitive to external shocks: the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily suppressed matchday and hospitality employment across the industry, illustrating that induced and indirect employment linked to football is not immune to disruption originating outside the sport itself.

The social distribution of this employment should also be considered rather than assumed. Community-facing roles – coaching, outreach and grassroots development positions of the kind documented by [Crabbe and Slaughter \(2004\)](#) – provide entry points into structured employment for young people in areas with otherwise limited opportunity. It would, however, overstate the evidence to describe all employment associated with football as employment created by the sport in any strict sense: some indirect and induced employment reflects spending that would have occurred elsewhere in the local leisure economy in football's absence, a qualification developed further in the following section.

Economic impact of football events: direct, indirect, induced and displaced effects

Match-going spectators and major football events generate direct economic effects through immediate

expenditure on tickets, hospitality, transport and accommodation. International tournaments hosted in the United Kingdom, such as UEFA Euro 2020's British-hosted fixtures, generate additional direct effects through inbound tourism, as visiting supporters spend on accommodation and travel beyond what domestic fixtures alone would generate. These direct effects generate indirect effects among the businesses supplying clubs, stadiums and visiting supporters, and induced effects as workers in both categories re-spend their wages within the wider economy, consistent with the multiplier reasoning set out in Section 2.2.

A rigorous assessment, however, must also account for two adjustments that earlier, more celebratory accounts of football's economic contribution have tended to omit: displacement and leakage. Displacement refers to spending that would have occurred regardless of the football event in question, simply directed towards a different leisure activity; where match attendance substitutes for other local spending rather than adding to it, treating the full value of matchday expenditure as a net gain overstates the sport's true contribution ([Matheson & Baade, 2006](#)). Leakage refers to spending that exits the reference economy immediately, through imports, taxation or income repatriated outside the region, and so does not recirculate locally in the way multiplier models assume.

[Roberts et al., \(2016\)](#) study of Swansea City offers the most methodologically detailed illustration of these adjustments available for a UK Premier League club. Gross spending by spectators during its first Premier League season totalled £8.13 million, but once income already counted within the club's own accounts was removed and leakages such as VAT were discounted, the net regional injection fell to £4.71 million; regional multiplier effects raised this to a total output impact of £6.61 million, supporting an estimated 165 full-time-equivalent jobs.

Once the study accounted for the roughly equivalent amount resident supporters spent attending away fixtures outside the region, however, the net contribution of spectator spending specifically fell close to zero. Television income, drawn overwhelmingly from national broadcasting contracts rather than local sources, represented an almost entirely additional inflow instead, and it was this income – some 85 per cent of the club's total revenue – that accounted for the great majority of its estimated net regional impact of £46 million in gross value added and 216 jobs ([Roberts et al., 2016](#)).

This finding has a general implication for how football's event-related economic impact should be interpreted across the wider League: broadcasting revenue, drawn from national and international sources and redistributed to cities and regions that might otherwise receive a smaller share of such investment, is more reliably additional to regional economies than matchday spending, which substantially reflects the redistribution of existing local leisure expenditure. The distinction matters for policy as much as for methodology, since public authorities weighing investment in football-related infrastructure are, in effect, evaluating a broadcasting-dependent and clearly bounded contribution rather than the larger, more diffuse figures produced by gross expenditure studies.

Social well-being

Football's contribution to well-being is frequently asserted in general terms, but the underlying literature supports a more differentiated account than the claim that the sport straightforwardly improves mental health or social cohesion. At the most immediate level, football functions as entertainment: attendance and viewership provide enjoyment and a structured focus for leisure time, a function well captured by the utilitarian framework in Section 2.1. A separate, more demanding claim concerns subjective well-being, understood as sustained life satisfaction rather than momentary enjoyment; here the evidence is more cautious, suggesting that match outcomes may contribute to short-term fluctuations in supporters' mood without establishing that attendance produces lasting improvements in well-being independent of other factors in supporters' lives.

Football's contribution to collective identity and community cohesion rests on firmer qualitative ground. Goldblatt (2014) and Wagg (2004) both document how football clubs have functioned historically as a focus of local pride and collective belonging in Britain's industrial and post-industrial communities, a role that has persisted, in modified form, through the sport's commercialisation. Crabbe and Slaughter's (2004) evaluation of community outreach work associated with Leyton Orient provides more direct evidence that football-based programmes can support social inclusion and civic participation among young people in deprived and racially divided neighbourhoods, functioning as a trusted entry point for broader youth work rather than as a source of well-being in itself. Taken together, this evidence suggests that football may contribute to social

belonging, collective identity and community cohesion, and that structured football-based programmes have been associated with positive outcomes in youth engagement and social inclusion in specific, well-documented local settings. It does not support the stronger claim, sometimes made in promotional or journalistic accounts, that football attendance or fandom in general reliably improves mental health; the available evidence is consistent with football providing a meaningful source of belonging and entertainment for many supporters while offering no reliable basis for broader causal claims about psychological well-being.

The evidence presented in Section 3 confirms the broad proposition, established across the literature reviewed in Section 1, that professional football constitutes a genuine and substantial contributor to the United Kingdom's socio-economic life. Aggregate Premier League revenue of £6.3 to £6.8 billion, employment support exceeding 100,000 full-time-equivalent positions, and an estimated £9.8 billion contribution to gross value added in 2023/24 are not trivial figures for any single service industry, and they corroborate Gratton and Taylor's (2000) and Dobson and Goddard's (2011) characterisation of football as an economic sector with genuine employment and income effects extending beyond the clubs themselves. The study's first specific hypothesis, that the financial performance of Premier League clubs contributes to national economic activity, and its second, that British football generates activity with a direct bearing on the UK's socio-economic life, are both supported by the evidence assembled here.

The findings depart from more celebratory accounts of football's economic role, however, in the emphasis they place on the distinction between gross and net contribution. Where earlier literature and industry communications have tended to present matchday and event-related spending as straightforwardly additional to local and national economic activity, the Input-Output and multiplier reasoning applied in Sections 2.2 and 3.3, illustrated through Roberts *et al.*, (2016) analysis of Swansea City, suggests that a substantial share of such spending is displaced from other local activity or offset by equivalent spending diverted elsewhere, such that its net contribution can be considerably smaller than gross figures imply. This finding aligns with, and extends to the British Premier League context, the more critical literature represented by Coates and Humphreys (2003) and Crompton (2004), and it suggests that broadcasting revenue, rather than matchday activity, constitutes the more reliably additional component of football's regional

economic contribution, a nuance largely absent from the original manuscript on which this study builds, and one with direct relevance for local authorities considering further public investment in football infrastructure.

The study's findings on employment similarly qualify, without overturning, the underlying hypothesis. The concentration of Premier League-supported employment in North West England, and the finding that over 60 per cent of the League's economic contribution originates outside London, together indicate that football's economic benefits are geographically dispersed in ways that partially offset the sport's evident financial concentration among a small number of globally prominent clubs. At the same time, the marked variation in wage-to-revenue ratios documented in Section 3.1, ranging from 53 per cent at Arsenal to over 90 per cent at some mid-table and newly promoted clubs, indicates that this dispersion of economic benefit coexists with considerable financial inequality and fragility within the League itself, a pattern the original hypothesis, framed at the level of the League as a whole, did not anticipate.

On the question of social well-being, the study's findings support a more cautious formulation of the third hypothesis than that with which the research began. The evidence reviewed in Section 3.4 is consistent with football contributing to collective identity, community belonging and, in specific programme-based settings such as that documented by [Crabbe and Slaughter \(2004\)](#), to social inclusion among young people in deprived areas. It does not, however, support the stronger and more frequently asserted claim that football attendance or fandom generally improves mental health or subjective well-being, a claim the theoretical framework in Section 2.1 would in any case caution against accepting without qualification, given the difficulty of isolating football's contribution from the many other factors shaping a supporter's overall life satisfaction. The theoretical implication is that utilitarian reasoning is better suited to organising qualitative evidence about football's social value than to producing an aggregate welfare estimate comparable in precision to the study's economic findings.

On the whole, these findings carry both economic and social implications. Economically, they suggest that policy attention directed at football's contribution to regional development should distinguish more carefully between broadcasting-derived and spectator-derived income than existing public discussion typically does, and should treat aggregate League-level figures as

compatible with, rather than contradictory to, considerable financial inequality between individual clubs. Socially, they suggest that football's value to British communities is real but should be defended on the more limited grounds the evidence actually supports – belonging, identity and, in specific contexts, social inclusion – rather than on the broader and less well-evidenced claim that the sport improves psychological well-being in general. The recent establishment of an Independent Football Regulator under the Football Governance Act 2025 indicates that these tensions between commercial growth, financial sustainability and football's social function are now recognised at the level of national policy: a regulator tasked with safeguarding club sustainability requires the same disaggregated, source-specific understanding of revenue that Sections 3.1 and 3.3 apply here, rather than the undifferentiated turnover figures that dominate public discussion of the League's finances.

In conclusion, this study set out to examine how professional football contributes to the socio-economic development of the United Kingdom and to the well-being of British society, and to do so with more analytical discipline than is typically found in general accounts of the sport's economic significance. The evidence assembled here answers this question in a qualified rather than an unconditional affirmative. Professional football, and the Premier League in particular, generates substantial and verifiable economic activity: aggregate club revenue in the region. This activity is not confined to London or to the League's wealthiest clubs: it is distributed across English regions, with a particular concentration in North West England, and it interacts with the wider economy through employment, taxation, tourism and infrastructure investment. Theoretically, the study contributes a demonstration of how utilitarian reasoning and Input-Output/multiplier analysis can be combined to assess a single cultural-economic institution without collapsing the social and economic dimensions of its contribution into a single, undifferentiated claim of value. This combination allows the economic evidence to be interpreted with appropriate distinctions between direct, indirect, induced, net and gross effects, while allowing the social evidence to be interpreted with a due sense of the limits of utilitarian aggregation, particularly regarding distribution. In socio-economic terms, the study's significance lies in showing that football's contribution to the United Kingdom, while genuine, is better understood as a geographically dispersed but internally unequal and financially fragile form of

economic activity, rather than as a uniformly beneficial national asset.

References

- Bentham, J. (1789). *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. London: T. Payne and Son.
- Coates, D., & Humphreys, B. R. (2003). "Professional sports facilities, franchises and urban economic development". *Public Finance and Management*, 3(3), 335–357.
- Crabbe, T., & Slaughter, P. (2004). *On the Eastside: Research Report into the Estate-Based Social Inclusion Interventions of Leyton Orient Community Sports Programme*. Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University, Sport Industry Research Centre.
- Crompton, J. L. (2004). "Beyond economic impact: An alternative rationale for the public subsidy of major league sports facilities". *Journal of Sport Management*, 18(1), 40–58.
- Deloitte Sports Business Group. (2025). *Annual Review of Football Finance 2025 (34th ed.): Premier League Clubs*. London: Deloitte UK.
- Dobson, S., & Goddard, J. (2011). *The Economics of Football* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Giulianotti, R. (2005). *Sport: A Critical Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Goldblatt, D. (2014). *The Game of Our Lives: The Meaning and Making of English Football*. London: Penguin.
- Gratton, C., & Taylor, P. (2000). *The Economics of Sport and Recreation: An Economic Analysis* (2nd ed.). London: Spon Press.
- Hamil, S., & Walters, G. (2010). *Managing Football: An International Perspective*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Johnstone, S., Southern, A., & Taylor, R. (2000). "The midweek match: Premiership football and the urban economy". *Local Economy*, 15(3), 198–213.
- Kahn, R. F. (1931). "The relation of home investment to unemployment". *The Economic Journal*, 41(162), 173–198.
- Keynes, J. M. (1936). *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*. London: Macmillan.
- King, A. (2002). *The End of the Terraces: The Transformation of English Football in the 1990s* (2nd ed.). Leicester: Leicester University Press.
- Leontief, W. (1966). *Input-Output Economics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Matheson, V. A., & Baade, R. A. (2006). "Padding required: Assessing the economic impact of the Super Bowl". *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 6(4), 353–374.
- Mill, J. S. (1863). *Utilitarianism*. London: Parker, Son, and Bourn.
- Miller, R. E., & Blair, P. D. (2009). *Input-Output Analysis: Foundations and Extensions* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Morrow, S. (2003). *The People's Game? Football, Finance and Society*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Office for National Statistics. (2025). "Population estimates for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: mid-2024". Newport: ONS.
- Premier League/EY. (2025). *Economic and Social Impact of the Premier League, 2023/24 Season*. London: The Premier League.
- Roberts, A., Roche, N., Jones, C., & Munday, M. (2016). "What is the value of a Premier League football club to a regional economy?" *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 16(5), 575–591. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2016.1188840>
- Storm, R. K., & Nielsen, K. (2012). "Soft budget constraints in professional football. *European Sport Management Quarterly*", 12(2), 183–201.
- Szymanski, S. (Ed.). (2010). *Football Economics and Policy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- UK Government. (2025). "Football Governance Act 2025". London: legislation.gov.uk.
- Wagg, S. (Ed.). (2004). *British Football and Social Exclusion*. London: Routledge.

How to cite this article:

Orieren Olivier ABODOHOU. 2026. Sports and the United Kingdom Socio-Economic Development: Case of the British Premier League Football. *Int.J.Curr.Res.Aca.Rev.* 14(9), 44-53.
doi: <https://doi.org/10.20546/ijcrar.2026.1409.005>