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Union Royale Belge de Sociétés de Football Association ASBL v. Jean-Marc Bosman: The Evolution of Labor Law in Professional Soccer and its Implication

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Union Royale Belge des Sociétés de Football Association ASBL

v.

Jean-Marc Bosman

The Evolution of Labor Law in Professional Soccer and its Implications

Marvin Smith
European Union Conference
Professor Nigel Boyle
April 9, 2007

Jean-Marc Bosman, a journeyman Belgian midfielder, has had a greater impact on European soccer than David Beckham, Zinedine Zidane, or Michael Ballack ever have, or ever will. Bosman, born October 30, 1964, now retired, played for then 2nd division Belgian soccer club R.F.C. de Liège. Bosman, through his struggle in the European Court of Justice against his former club inadvertently revolutionized labor law in modern soccer, with a ruling that has infamously changed the economics and culture of professional soccer. Unfortunately for Bosman, he will always be remembered for his case instead of for his contributions to the sport of soccer as a player. However, his trial may have implications and valuable uses to skilled workers within the European Union in realms other than soccer. To fully understand the history of labor law in regards to soccer, the history of labor law pre and post-Bosman Ruling will be examined as well as the affects the ruling has had on soccer in the EU in addition to what affects it could have for future athletes and experienced employees looking to improve their working conditions. This analysis will show that despite the negative affects the Bosman ruling has had on some smaller clubs, it has afforded players rights which have been deserved for years and has served to positively globalize soccer through the abolition of prejudice quota systems.

The Bosman Ruling

In 1990 Jean-Marc Bosman was in the last year of his contract with soccer club R.F.C. de Liège, and entertained the thought of transferring to French club US Dunkerque, as they began to show interest in obtaining the midfielder from his Belgian

club. Bosman decided that transferring to US Dunkerque would be in his best interest and sought to close the deal with the French club, but when Dunkerque came up with what R.F.C. de Liège viewed as insufficient funds for the transfer fee, they refused to let Bosman leave the club and transfer to Dunkerque. As a result, perhaps out of spite, Liège demoted Bosman to the second team, which considerably decreased his playing time, and drastically reduced his salary from 120,000 to 30,000 Belgian Francs. Bosman, understandably upset with his situation, decided to pursue legal action against his club, which snowballed into a lawsuit against the Belgian League, and then against the Belgian Football Federation, and eventually to UEFA (The Union of European Football Associations) the administrative and controlling body of European Soccer. (“Sport and Free Movement)

Bosman’s official argument in court was that the laws regarding the transfer system inhibited him from seeking employment with US Dunkerque and Bosman’s attorney’s argued that the transfer system, as well as the nationality clauses, were incompatible with the Treaty of Rome citing article 48 of the EEC treaty as proof, as well as articles 85 and 86 to deal with the transnational work immigration issue. Article 48 of the Treaty of Rome states:

“Freedom of movement for workers shall be secured within the Community by the end of the transitional period at the latest.

Such freedom of movement shall entail the abolition of any discrimination based on nationality between workers of the Member States as regards employment, remuneration and other conditions of work and employment.

It shall entail the right, subject to limitations justified on grounds of public policy, public security or public health:

- (a) to accept offers of employment actually made;
- (b) to move freely within the territory of Member States for this purpose;
- (c) to stay in a Member State for the purpose of employment in accordance with the provisions governing the employment of nationals of that State laid down by law, regulation or administrative action;

(d) to remain in the territory of a Member State after having been employed in that State, subject to conditions which shall be embodied in implementing regulations to be drawn up by the Commission.

The provisions of this Article shall not apply to employment in the public service.
("Treaty Establishing the European Community)

The Belgian Court of Appeals, unable to successfully determine whether or not article 48 of the EEC treaty applied to Bosman's case, forwarded the claim to the European Court of Justice (ECJ). The most controversial aspect of the European Court of Justice's ruling is that their "opinion rested firstly on the principle that sporting activities did not constitute an exception to the provisions of the of the Treaty of Rome," (Cubbin and Antonioni). Although this may not seem like a revolutionary conception, until this point and even after the ruling soccer governing bodies including the Belgian Football league argued that soccer was not an economic activity. Furthermore, the ECJ ruled that article 48 of the Treaty of Rome does not allow any sporting body to regulate their own affairs, which took place in Bosman's situation and prevented him from seeking employment with his desired employer. With these facts in consideration, the court ruled in favor of Jean-Marc Bosman on the basis:

"Article 48 of the EEC Treaty precludes the application of rules laid down by sporting associations, under which a professional football player who is a citizen of one Member State may not, on the expiry of his contract with a club, be employed by a club of another Member State unless the latter club has paid to the former club a transfer, training or development fee.

Article 48 of the EEC Treaty precludes the application of rules laid down by sporting associations under which, in matches in competitions, which they organize, football clubs may field only a limited number of professional players who are citizens of other Member States.

The direct effect of Article 48 of the EEC Treaty cannot be relied upon in support of claims relating to a fee in respect of transfer, training or development which has already been paid on, or is still payable under an obligation which arose before, the date of this judgment, except by those who have brought court proceedings or raised an equivalent claim under the applicable national law before that date." (Cubbin and Antonioni)

To better understand what this ruling is stating, it can be simply broken down into a few main points of ratification, which have been summarized by the European Commission as:

“Point 1: If a professional football player's contract with his club expires and if that player is a citizen of one of the Member States of the European Union, this club cannot prevent the player from signing a new contract with another club in another Member State or making it more difficult, by asking this new club to pay a transfer, training or development fee.

Point 2: Limitations concerning the nationality of professional players who are citizens of a Member State of the European Union (within competitions between football clubs organised by sporting associations), are not allowed.

Point 3: The Court has decided to exclude, exceptionally, any retroactive effect of its interpretation on the temporal effects of the judgment as regards the transfer system, except for persons, such as Mr. Bosman, who have taken steps in good time to safeguard their rights. Therefore the Court's judgment CANNOT be relied on in support concerning fees already paid on, or still payable under an obligation arising before 15 December 1995, except by those who have brought court proceedings or raised an equivalent claim under the applicable national law before that date.” (“Sport and Free Movement”)

Originally the ruling was intended only to affect the then 15 countries that were EU member states, and lay within the European Economic Area (EEA) and who, as a result, were entitled to the benefits of the EEA Agreement signed in May of 1992. The EEA Agreement sought to uphold the “four fundamental pillars of international market, [the] freedom of movement of goods, persons, services, and capital” (“The European Economic Area”). However, due to soccer’s international appeal and the increase of non-EU member state foreign players transferring to Europe, it did not make sense to have “two sets of rules one for Europe and one for the rest of the world the (FIFA) which is the governing body for international soccer changed their rules” (Enander). The reasoning behind this being that European soccer clubs were, and remain today, the most dominate of all soccer clubs, and rules, which apply to Europe, directly effect the development of soccer globally. The significance of this is that Bosman’s simple campaign for playing time with the club of his choice and a decent paycheck lead to the significant

modification of soccer policy worldwide, which is why Jean-Marc Bosman is known for this case more than any of his professional contributions to the sport.

Soccer Employment Law Pre-Bosman

In order to understand why the changes that resulted from the Bosman ruling are so significant, it is important to see how soccer policy regarding transfers played out in previous years. One important case took place in 1960 and involved English player George Eastham, born September 23, 1936 in Blackpool, Lancashire. Eastham was transferred from the Northern Irish club Ards to the English club Newcastle in 1956. In December of 1959, Eastham expressed an interest in leaving Newcastle to seek other opportunities, but Newcastle retained him, despite his request to leave the club. During this time players were viewed as property of the club and as a result Newcastle decided to keep him. A year later in 1960 Eastham was transferred to London squad Arsenal, but still decided to take his case to the High Court. The presiding Judge, Wilberforce along with other members of the high court ruled that, “the retain and transfer system was '*an unreasonable restraint of trade*'. If clubs did not re-hire their player on a further contract players, it decided, should be able to leave for free. However, football clubs could still exercise the option to re-hire players at the end of their contract” (Lowrey, Neatrou, and Williams). Despite the addition of a bit of “freedom,” soccer players were still property of their respective clubs, as they could not leave should the club decide to re-hire them. Players were not viewed as autonomous employees, but instead as contributing tools to the clubs.

Soccer players again made progress in 1963 when it was decided that they no longer needed to submit transfer requests to move clubs. Beforehand a player would have

to submit a transfer request with his current club stating that he wished to transfer. Should his current club refuse his request, he could be tied to his current club assuming that they maintained his wages at an equal rate. This means that a club could essentially hold a player with them for the entirety of his career. It also means that if a player's skills dramatically increased the club could get away with paying him the same rate as before meaning that his salary would not be equal to his production on the field. An example of this can be seen with soccer player Sir Tom Finney, born April 5, 1922, who has been honored by receiving a spot in the Football Hall of Fame as well as receiving Football Writers Player of the Year in both 1955 and 1958. Finney spent his whole career with Preston North End despite the fact that they were a less than stellar team and he could have succeeded more had he gone elsewhere to play ("Tom Finney"). Still we see that players are property of their clubs, and have little power of their own careers.

It was not until thirty-seven years after Eastham's challenge of the transfer system, in 1977, that the idea of "freedom of contract" came to fruition. Players now had the option to leave their clubs at the end of their contracts with the incorporation of a transfer fee at the request of the selling club. If a fee could not be agreed upon between the selling and buying clubs a tribunal working with the governing soccer body would decide on a suitable sum. However, "When under contract in this new arrangement, players or their agents were explicitly *not* allowed to initiate transfer moves; it was up to the potential buyer to approach the club directly where this player was based" (Lowrey). This meant that although players finally had the ability to leave a club on their will they could still only do so after have been approach, and they could not initiate any movement.

English soccer law has been used as the example in this section, because until the end of the 1960's, England had the most important and influential soccer league in Europe, placing them in the role of pioneers in regards to labor law. Soccer before the Bosman Ruling involved clubs having total control over the players and where they played, which is unquestionably oppressive in a sense. Most would agree that a player, or employee, should have the right to chose their place of work as well as be provided with the opportunity to better their own economic status by moving to a more formidable institution should they choose. However the Bosman ruling, as most rulings tend to be, is a doubled edged sword, which provides players with more freedom and diminishes some of the power of the larger clubs. More freedom for players is beneficial to them as individual, but it is important to consider in what ways the Bosman ruling may negatively impact international soccer.

Social Implications of the Ruling

As previously mentioned, the impact of the Bosman ruling was farther reaching than many could have anticipated. With little, serious reform taking place before 1990, the ruling caught many off guard, particularly the clubs who saw themselves as victims of the ruling. However, despite the more obvious economic changes in soccer transfers and the obvious changes in the way in which transfers would take place in the future, there also came less obvious social, and political ramifications. The ruling had a direct effect on European identity, xenophobia, and the integration of foreign players into European leagues, England being the case used in this example.

Some saw the shift in power away from the club and towards the player as a dangerous swing in power, which allowed the money grubbing players to take full

advantage of the clubs. BBC Sports online reporter Tom Fordyce believes that the Bosman ruling caused more harm than good, as he assumes that the clubs had been looking out for the best interest of the players as well as the fans. Fordyce writes that “When players became more powerful, so did their agents,” because agents were able to pick up huge signing fees or loyalty bonuses that their clients demanded, and adds that “The savvy amongst them were able to set themselves up as international operators, acting as negotiators for the overseas footballers pouring into the European leagues and as unofficial scouts - or touts - for the clubs signing them” (Fordyce). He sees this as a problem, because competition amongst clubs for the signing of top stars diminishes as only the large club with established dynasties within the league can afford to pay these fees. Meaning that even medium sized clubs have only a slight chance to attract big talent. In that very same report, under the title “Foreign Frenzy” Fordyce mentions the elimination of the UEFA regulation, which stated that in European competitions clubs were only allowed to have three foreign players plus two assimilated players who had been developed through the club’s youth farm teams. He rightfully claims that had this rule not come into effect, clubs such as Arsenal and Chelsea, which are known for fielding squads without British players despite being in an English soccer league, might not have had the success they did. Fordyce argues that the elimination of the three plus two rule helped British squad Manchester United win the 1999 Champions League final. The three plus two rule stated that teams could not field more than three foreign players at a time, plus two “assimilated” players who had come up through the club’s junior squad. Before Bosman, the squad would not have been able to play their Welsh and Scottish players because they were considered foreign despite being members of the

United Kingdom. These players scored important goals, which helped their teams come out on top. Although very slight, there are hints of xenophobic rhetoric in Fordyce's article, which mirrors the sentiments of many concerned that British soccer is becoming less than British.

Columnist Frank Malley of British Football Week wrote in an editorial on March 19, 2007 in which he quoted FA chief executive Brian Barwick as having warned that England was running out of quality English players, and that perhaps "maybe 10 or a dozen" Englishmen would start in the four Champions League games involving the English teams Chelsea, Liverpool, Manchester United, and the recently eliminated Arsenal. Malley corrects Barwick to note that in those matches only nine English players actually played and that five of those nine played for Manchester United. Malley goes on to warn that with foreigners pouring into the FA Premier League as both owner and players that in the future, "one day the only thing English at the top of the sport which gave the world its most popular game might well be the supporters." This fear of a soccer league in Britain without Britain is echoed by the University of Leicester that notes in a report that, "the chances available to some young English players may be more limited now because the Bosman ruling and the influx of foreign footballers may mean fewer opportunities for local youngsters to make the grade." Many of the young up-and-coming British stars have the conception that they can work their way from the bottom up and prove themselves as start worthy of top salaries, but this is debunked by the argument that, "top managers also argue that too many young footballers within the lower divisions are over-priced; the introduction of a cheaper, proven foreign footballer is often more attractive for the FA Premier League clubs." This statement leads to several important

questions: Are the foreign players performing at top caliber? Is this invasion real or imagined? If it is real, why is it a problem?

Statistically it is a fact that the amount of foreign players playing in European Premier Division has increased dramatically over the past decade. As of 1999, Spain led the way with 200 foreign players while England was further down on the list with only 116; however, the FA Premier League starting line-ups were most significantly affected. In the 1995/96 season in the FA Premier League, 29% of players in the starting line-up were foreign, while that number increased to upwards of 54% in the 1999/00 season (Lowrey):

Approximate percentage of Foreign Players in FA Premier League starting line-ups:

| | |
|---------|----------------|
| 1992/93 | 22% |
| 1993/94 | 26% |
| 1994/95 | 27% |
| 1995/96 | 29% |
| 1996/97 | 32% |
| 1997/98 | 43% |
| 1998/99 | 44% |
| 1999/00 | 54% (forecast) |

The English Premier league currently serves as the home to just over 260 foreign players, which means that the number of foreign players has more than doubled from the 1999 figure, which had the English at 116 players outside of Britain. So in answer to the question of whether or not an invasion is taking place, the answer is yes. So having determined that, to whom is it a problem and why? Using the particular case of Chelsea versus Southampton on Boxing Day may shed some light on this situation. It was during this game, of which Chelsea emerged victorious, that Chelsea made history by featuring a starting eleven without a single British player present in the line-up. Although the then

manager Gianluca Vialli was forced to play only foreign players due to the injury of his British players he noted that, ““We had a few players out. Unfortunately some of them were English. Nationality is not important. Whoever we play, wherever we play and in whatever competition everyone - British or foreign - must be capable of adapting” (Davies). Vialli’s response to the groundbreaking development was reasonable, but the response from others was not so mild. A photo of the team featuring a British-less squad was taken during the autograph session and the newspaper The Independent wrote that the “picture humiliates the English Game,” and although few fans are cited as caring at the time, a FA Premier League National Fan survey in 2001 showed that “60% of fans thought there was now ‘too many; foreign players in the English game’ (Lowrey). This is a weighted statistic because of how that 60% responded during games.

The year after the famed Chelsea game, during the 2001/02 season there were 82 arrests for racist chanting during matches, which was an all time high for 21st century. The Bosman ruling expanded the world’s game to more of the world, but it did so without providing proper warning to the traditionally minded thinkers, leading to the an increase of xenophobia against players which more times then not led to overt racism. In addressing the previously asked questioned of the performance of foreign players in the FA premier league for example, we see that some of the current top scorers are Didier Drogba (Ivory Coast), Ayegbeni Yakubu (Nigeria), Nwankwo Kanu (Nigeria). So before the fans or columnists bite the hand that feeds them, it would be advisable for them to take a look at how much these foreigners are producing and to use their success to inspire others national and international to succeed, so that racism is never again associated with Jean-Marc Bosman’s attempt to switch clubs. Instead, the ruling should be associated

with having made soccer more accessible to the world, while providing those from lesser economic backgrounds with the opportunity to move to Europe and succeed in their work. It is of my belief that the Bosman ruling, in regards to the free movement lack of quota restrictions for foreign players has greatly improved the quality of European soccer and will continue to do so, not at the expense of British youth who wish to make it big.

Economic and Political Implications

Economically speaking, many were feared that the Bosman ruling would completely and utterly destroy professional soccer leagues in Europe. At the heart of this concern were several major worries. One major concern seems to be that the clubs would be crushed because they would lose the major source of income that the transfer fee provided and paid directly to the club. This supposes that the clubs relied heavily on these transfer fees and basically, “The argument here was that money invested by clubs in developing players could at least remain *in the game*. It would circulate between clubs, and thus help in maintaining the sport's infrastructure. The new arrangements mean that the top *players* and their advisors now pocketed much of what was previously transfer money. So, a very large proportion of the new TV income in football actually ended up in players' salaries rather than as club profits - or money to plough back into the football business” (Lowrey). There was also concern that the Bosman ruling would destroy small clubs because they received most of their income from transferring players they had developed to the larger clubs in the primary leagues of their countries. However, the argument that the Bosman ruling keeps smaller clubs down is a bit weak given the two points provided by the European Commission:

1. Three quarters of all fees paid by the UK Premier League clubs in 1992/93

went to other clubs in that same League and not to smaller clubs (Source: Football Trust 1992/93:37).

2. Two thirds of the money spent on transfers of first division clubs in the UK were paid to other clubs in the first division, and 91 % of such expenditure was given to clubs in the top two divisions (Source: Football Trust 1991/92:37). (“Sport and Free Movement”)

An example of a lower division team dealing with the loss of income can be seen with the lower-division team the Queens Park Rangers whose fans, brothers Alex and Matt Winton set up a fundraiser through their family company in which money they raised flowed directly to the club. (QPR Fans’ Cash Gesture”)

Using Sweden as a counter example, the Bosman ruling again becomes complex and harder to interpret as good or bad. Sweden, perhaps more than any other country, relies on the transfer fees acquired through the transfer of their players to the larger leagues in England, Scotland, Germany, and Italy. One statistic notes that, “The total amount the Swedish soccer clubs earned in 1999 from selling players was \$9.1 million. That is 19.4% of the total income of \$47 million. With out the sale of players to other clubs the amount would have been \$37.9 million,” (Enander) meaning that the Bosman ruling would in fact hurt soccer in Sweden. What difference does it matter if Sweden is hurt a bit economically? In Sweden, as in other countries as well, there is no question that soccer is more than just a sport or entertaining activity. The Swedes attempt to use soccer to educate and foster the education of children, and they do so through the organization Riksidrottsförbundet. Riksidrottsförbundet is the name of the Swedish Sports Confederation, which is an organization of the Swedish sports movement, which is the movement to incorporate soccer into everyday life. The task of the Riksidrottsförbundet is to:

“Speak on behalf of the united sports movement in contacts with politicians, the government and other institutions/organisations
Coordinate the sports movement in fields like research and development
Provide service in areas where these cannot or don't want to build up their own competence
In certain areas act in place of the government, e g through distributing governmental grants to sports” (“The Swedish Sports Confederation”)

Sweden, which was already a smaller market, couldn't compete with larger clubs after the Bosman ruling, and all of the top Swedish players were lured away by the money of large clubs. The golden age of Swedish soccer, where IFK Gothenburg won the UEFA cup twice, and players wishing to remain loyal to their clubs had come and passed (Enander). The Swedish clubs, because of the Bosman ruling have found themselves in a catch-22 situation where the only way to get supplementary income in order to compensate for the void let by the lack of transfer fees would be to get advertising, but appealing to advertisers is nearly impossible without a good team. Advertisers then began to align themselves with the larger clubs who had all of the star players and who were already bathing in wealth.

The case of Sweden is unfortunate because the Bosman ruling affected not only soccer, but also the nation of Sweden as a whole. With their strong and effective integration of soccer into their national identity, and by relying on politics to support soccer they have been weakened all around. The Swedish Soccer Association's (Svenska Fotbollsförbundet SFF) slogan is, “one soccer club in each village,” but due to the greed that has resulted from the Bosman ruling that slogan may become more of a hope than a promise.

However, there are others than Sweden that see soccer as more than an economic activity, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Treaty of Rome. Sepp Blatter, the

president of FIFA, and UEFA chief executive Gerhard Aigner came together and decided that “football was a 'special case' and should not have to abide by European employment law,” as is the case here in the States where Major League Baseball is exempt from certain legislation. They went on to express the importance of acknowledging that, “Football clubs are more than just businesses after all - they need to survive for their necessary 'community' input” (Lowrey). Although much of what they say is on the basis that they are opposed to the Bosman ruling, it is interesting to consider what consequences could result out of different definitions of European soccer. If soccer is in fact its own separate activity then it should be held to a different standard, but if it is in fact an economic activity, which is under the jurisdiction of the Treaty of Rome, as ruled the European Court of Justice, then it is possible that the Bosman ruling can be applied to other economic activities in which skilled workers, or even unskilled are seeking work through intra-EU migration.

Potential Applications Outside of Soccer

An analysis of the Bosman ruling has provided insight into several important aspects of the European Union. The Bosman ruling shows the impact of the Treaty of Rome. Intended to expand upon the success of the Coal and Steel Treaty, which unified European nations post World War II by integrating the production of coal and steel, the Treaty of Rome produced a European Economic Community (EEC), or ‘common market’ in which the “idea is for people, goods and services to move freely across borders” (1945-1959). An analysis also provides insight into the economics of integration, as well as the Europeanization of popular sports culture.

As previously stated, the Treaty of Rome was intended to allow the free movement

of people, goods, and services across borders, but this is often forgotten and the Bosman ruling, despite being a policy that affects mainly soccer, the conclusions reached by the European Court of Justice can be applied to other situations as well. Currently Germany and Austria are blocking workers' movement from Central and Eastern Europe, to their countries. Germany and Austria are reluctant to open their labor market and make it easier to acquire work permits for immigrants on the basis that there would be social dumping and many lower class citizens would be thrown to Germany, which is looking to better the situation for its own citizens before dealing with those of foreign poor ("Workers' Movement 'Blocked for Political, Not Economic Reasons'"). Despite the fact that numbers produced by the European Commission have shown that Migration from Central and Eastern Europe has been “very limited” and “simply not large enough to affect the EU labor market” there is still discrimination from the old member states who feel that these immigrants will reap the benefits intended for their own citizens (Telicka). Although this may seem irrelevant to soccer, it is a case that could cite the Bosman ruling as support for the abolition of such work restrictions. In this situation a Polish plumber looking for work in France is no different from a Belgian soccer player looking to work in France in the sense that they are both protected by article 48 of the Treaty of Rome. If there was a better understand of how the Bosman ruling used the Treaty of Rome to shift soccer labor law in favor of the employee, the same could be done amongst low skilled workers such as plumbers, and the highly skilled such as those that work within technological or pharmaceutical industries looking to head west for work without having to deal with harsh restrictions.

Conclusion

The successes of the Bosman ruling can be measured in several ways. A way in which the ruling has succeeded is by having brought the world to European soccer and vice versa. As a report by the University of Leicester noted, “The new foreign stars bring a great addition of style, mystery and glamour to FA Premier League. They have increased its international profile, its global TV audience, and its appeal to spectators in this country,” while at the same time increasing attendance. Despite feelings of xenophobia, the game has continued stressing the importance of international stars that have contributed so much, and the Bosman ruling has made it easier for them to make their presence felt. The Bosman ruling has also served to increase the excitement surrounding international games, as the top French players for example, are spread all throughout Europe so that when they do come together, it is pure excitement. Some have argued that the days of player loyalty are dead, and that players have adopted a mercenary mindset in which their loyalty can be bought by the richest clubs, but this is a limited perspective, which does not take note of the contrary examples in which loyalty is stronger. As a counter example, as cited by Frank Malley in *British Football Week*, is Henrik Larsson. Larsson, a Swedish soccer star, was on loan to Manchester United during the Swedish off-season and he helped the English Premiership squad rise to the top of the league table, as well as to the round of eight in the UEFA Champions League. Larsson could not have anticipated Manchester United’s success and was scheduled to return to play for his local Swedish club, Helsingborgs. Larsson easily could have avoided this obligation to his home club, but out of loyalty to his country and family he chose to return to Sweden, ultimately turning his back on the potential glory of victory. Another example is that of Chilean prodigy Matías “Mati” Fernández whose chose to transfer

from Chilean club Colo-Colo to Villarreal so as to work with the manager, fellow Chilean Manuel Pellegrini, despite receiving handsome offers from both Chelsea and Manchester United, arguably the richest clubs in the world. My intent is not to imply that wealth seeking soccer players do not exist or have not increased since Bosman, but instead to show that those with a true respect and appreciation for the game have remained.

On March 13, 2007, the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome was celebrated with a friendly match between Manchester United and the all-star Europe XI squad. The game drew a record breaking 74, 343 fans to the stadium Old Trafford, which is an attendance record for a friendly game at that stadium and ended with a 4:3 win for Manchester United. After the game, European Commission President José Manuel Barroso was presented with a football kit with the number 27 to represent the unity of the 27 member states within the EU. In his acceptance speech Barroso said, in reference to the friendly match, “It is a great way to mark the 50th Anniversary of the creation of the European Union through the great game of football [soccer]. It inspires Europeans in a unique way, through a shared passion and a language understood by all” (EU 50th Anniversary Football Match”). Barroso gives soccer its due credit as an international unifier, explaining that, “football brings people together. In a continent so proud of its cultural diversity, football offers a common language. It helps to integrate different communities. At its best, our sport conveys some of Europe’s basic values: the rule of law, respect for others, freedom of expression, teamwork and solidarity.” Thanks to a journeyman Belgian, and his efforts to reform soccer, the EU has had a revolutionary impact on professional soccer and soccer as a globalizing, bonding force.

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