

It's not fair... he's bigger than me – or does he just train harder than I do?

SPORT

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On 16th November 2023, fans of Everton FC may have been reasonably satisfied about how the football season was shaping up. They were 14th in the English Premier League, and had recently recorded wins against West Ham and Crystal Palace.

Then on 17th November, everything changed. The club were docked ten points for breaching the league's 'profitability and sustainability' rules, pushing them down to 19th place and into the relegation zone.

Everton's penalty for breaching Premier League financial rules was eventually reduced from 10 points to six after an appeal. However, Everton were then deducted two points for a second breach of Premier League financial rules. Profit and sustainability rules (PSR) permit clubs to lose £105m over three years, and an independent commission found Everton breached that by £16.6m for the three-year period to 2022-23.

Premier League clubs voted to fast-track independent commissions for those clubs accused of overspending so as to ensure punishment is as close as possible to any breach. The Premier League say the Manchester City case is different, more complex and therefore more time-consuming.

It seems, to a layperson like me, unfair that the complexity of financial management gives an advantage – and keep all their points for longer – over those who, like Everton 'were slightly simpler.

Financially, the disparity in wealth seems to make the competition unfair. Manchester City is worth £4 billion; Sheffield Wednesday, £153.2 million.

Wealth and Inequality

Wealth generates inequalities in most sports. A rich Premier League FA club can afford to attract the best coaches and managers by paying them more than poorer clubs. Just look at this half a dozen list of coaches, past and present, and their respective salaries: Pep Guardiola, Manchester City £15 million; Mauricio Pochettino, Tottenham Hotspur £8.5 million; Jurgen Klopp, Liverpool FC £7.5 million; Roy Hodgson, Crystal Palace £2.5 million and poor old Jan Siewert, Huddersfield Town on just £264,000.

On Tuesday 30th April, I discovered that Premier League



clubs have provisionally agreed a spending cap for the first time in the top flight. The proposed spending cap would mean that all teams in the Premier League would see their outlay on transfers, wages and agents restricted in proportion to the amount that the bottom club receives in TV money.

It seems that Manchester City, Manchester United and Aston Villa voted against the new rule, while Chelsea abstained. The vote will now go to the league's AGM in June at which 14 clubs will need to vote in favour in order for the new rule to be passed.

If approved, the new model will replace the Profit and Sustainability Regulations and will begin from the 2025-26 season.

To improve fairness, sport authorities set limits on finances. In the 2019-20 season, reigning champions Saracens were relegated from rugby union's top flight at the end of that season following persistent salary cap breaches. Sarries had already been deducted 35 points for that Premiership campaign and fined £5.4m for three seasons' spending above the cap.

'Accessibility, universality and fairness'

It is not only finances that bring unfairness into sports. Eliud Kipchonge's marathon time of 1 hr,

59 min, 40secs is the fastest ever recorded by a human, but it does not stand as a world record because it was not in open competition and he used a team of rotating pacemakers. Nike provided Kipchonge with their latest edition Vaporfly shoes. However, they are deemed to give athletes an unfair advantage and were banned from the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo. The governing body of World Athletics says it wants to find a balance between "encouraging the development and use of new technologies, and the preservation of the fundamental characteristics of sport: accessibility, universality and fairness."

Is that right? Is that fair?

In an attempt to make sport less unfair, authorities control technologies. Javelin specifications were changed in recent decades for safety reasons when top throwers approached the 100-metre mark. Great Britain's Steve Backley used a "rough-tailed" javelin designed by 1976 Olympic gold medallist Miklos Nemeth of Hungary to set a world record in 1990. However, the mark was rescinded when the rough-tailed model was banned the following year.

It is, however, deemed fair to train harder than your competitors. Eric Cantona knew he was good but, more importantly, he knew why he was so good and it boiled

down to hard work. It wasn't because of luck that he reached the top. Yes, he had more talent than others but he also wanted it more and trained harder.

David Beckham acquired his ball-bending and accurate long passing through many extra hours of practice. He learnt the importance of going the extra mile from watching Eric Cantona train.

There are vast differences in what sports people can access in their diet, psychologist, medical team, masseur and chaplain support. In 1992, Sir Alex Ferguson brought chaplain Rev John Boyers to Manchester United. He said that, if MUFC had a chaplain when George Best was playing, he would not have self-destructed. Sports Chaplaincy UK knows how players can benefit from the input a chaplain can make to the morale and wellbeing of their players – and thus the impact this ministry can have on results.

In part, due to their superior equipment – and personalised beds transported forward daily so the team always had a good-night's sleep – from 2012 to 2018, Team Sky won six out of seven Tour de France races, with their leader, Chris Froome, winning four of those races.

Competing as 'equals'

Superior wheelchairs and state-of-the-art prostheses can give athletes an unfair advantage over less well-equipped rivals. How can athletes from less well-off countries possibly compete as equals when they have no access to any sort of equipment, let alone the latest Paralympic mod cons? Haitian athletes Nephthalie Jean Lois and Josue Cajuste had to borrow equipment when in 2012 they arrived in the UK.

Altitude training is the practice by some endurance athletes of training for several weeks at high altitude, preferably over 2,400 metres (8,000 ft) above sea level, though more commonly at intermediate altitudes due to the shortage of suitable high-altitude locations. At intermediate altitudes, the air still contains approximately 20.9% oxygen, but the barometric pressure and thus the partial pressure of oxygen is reduced

On 6th January 2020, The Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport (CCES) reminded the Canadian sport community that the World Anti-Doping Agency's (WADA) had produced a 'Prohibited List' that had come into effect on 1st January 2020. As always, athletes are cautioned to exercise a high degree of care with regards to the use of medications, supplements and

sport nutrition products.

Back in 1965, I met Peter Snell, who had surged away from the rest of the field in the final lap to win Gold at the Tokyo Olympics in 1964. His words are etched in my memory.

"I owe it all to my trainer, who I had chosen because I knew he was a b**tard. He had me running with backpacks full of sand over the beach and I hated him. But when it came to the final lap, I had it in me to accelerate from the rest. I know I wouldn't have done that if he had not been a b**tard."

Setting aside his language, was Peter wise in his choice? Did it give him an unfair advantage? Why not discuss it over Sunday lunch?

Powering through the water

Size of lungs seems to give sports-persons advantages. The average total lung capacity of an adult human male is about six litres of air. British rower and three-time Olympic gold medallist Pete Reed is reported to hold the largest recorded lung capacity of 11.68 litres. US swimmer Michael Phelps is also said to have a lung capacity of around 12 litres.

Phelps is the most successful and most decorated Olympian of all time with a total of 28 medals.

Physiognomy definitely gives the best endowed advantages.

Swimmers tend to have longer torsos and shorter legs than the average person.

Standing at 6 feet 4 inches, Michael Phelps has the torso of a man who's 6 feet 8 inches tall and the legs of a man 8 inches shorter.

This disproportionately large chest enables Phelps to power himself through the water. It also means his legs produce less drag (or water resistance) with each stroke.

Rich athletes can do altitude training which can potentially improve your endurance during intense exercise. It may increase your aerobic capacity, lactic acid tolerance, and oxygen flow to your muscles.

If your tennis partner keeps beating you, it could be down to the way they see the ball. A recent study has shown that some people have better than average 'temporal resolution'; they are able to 'see' more moving objects per second than others. This gives them an in-built advantage when tracking fast moving objects such as tennis balls.

Is it fair that half the country has an IQ below average? If yours is well above average, thank God – but realise that it is thus fair that God asks more of you while you are on earth.