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Professional football in Portugal: preparing to resume after the COVID-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a theoretical reflection on how the First Portuguese Football League is preparing to return to competition, after the suspension and mandatory confinement, as well as the security measures adopted in response to the pandemic caused by the new coronavirus. Despite the paper is descriptive and theoretical, our discussion draws particularly on documentary analysis of mass media/journalist reports, official almanacs, and academic works. A first purpose of this paper, therefore, is to address the way in which professional football is financially exposed and vulnerable to the main sponsors, who seek to exert power and influence. Second, we seek to explore the increasing asymmetrical power relations of the broadcaster's rights that are increasingly using strategies for wielding power than act a business partner. The implications arising from the study are considered for sport-governing bodies and clubs, in addition to future research directions.

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Introduction

COVID-19 does not yet have enough time to has a solid structure that allows us to get a full knowledge about it. In fact, why should we study it? The answer may lead to another question: how can we ignore it? After all, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was felt across the sporting world, including football. In this sense, due to the confinement and safety measures resulting from the response to the pandemic caused by the new coronavirus, sports institutions have overcome several barriers, in an increasing effort to try to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 and resume to competition as soon as possible. In Portugal, the 2020 sports season will remain forever in memory as something new for Portuguese football, and with a strong impact in political, social, and economic that quickly brings latent instability to the surface.

The COVID-19 pandemic has arguably brought about a tightening of the current financial resources of sports clubs and professional clubs and heightens the visibility of the fragility since a long installed. For clubs of Portuguese league, there is no one-size-fits-all solution, neither the strongest nor the weakest are immune. There is a great variation between clubs more reliant either/or with a balance between television income, sponsorship, matchday revenue; and smaller clubs with lower overall revenue, which overwhelmingly relies on media rights payments from the league and tickets sales.

Our aim, in this article, is to discuss the current factors of financial instability, credibility and conflict management between stakeholders in the recovery process of the first league rise this in a time of COVID-19 pandemic. This leads us to the following research questions: Is the Portuguese

first league organization financially exposed and vulnerable to stakeholders seeking to exert power and influence over it? Is the sustainability of Portuguese football based on the TV rights fee?

For the purposes of this article, we draw particularly on documentary analysis of mass media/journalist reports, official almanacs, and academic works. Despite our discussion is descriptive and theoretical, the key research findings of this essay is that the actual scenario requires all those in the sport ecosystem to work together to achieve it – the football authorities, government and broadcasters, fans, businesses, owners and players among others, need to find new and innovative solutions to mitigate the negative effects of COVID19 on the world of sport.¹ Last but not least, the authors argue that not only the league but also the government, and other stakeholders involved need to take on a set of laws and regulations for ensuring a fair broadcasting in the future.

Governance and sport policy in COVID-19 context

Coronavirus pandemic disrupted major sporting events across the globe. Global sports came to a halt in early March of this year, and it was no different in Portugal.

Portuguese Football Association (FPF), the most significant nongovernmental regulatory body of sport, that manages amateur football and youth levels football competitions, and Liga Portugal (LPFP), that manages the professional football competitions, the 18 professional clubs in the I League, also known abroad as Liga Nos, and the 20 professional clubs of the II League (or Liga Pro), they both look for, among the available pathways, which one creates the least amount of damage. However, following the declaration of pandemic status by the WHO² on March 11, Liga Portugal decided to suspend the I and II League championships (the only sports competitions considered professional in Portugal) the very next day (March 12), for an indefinite period, also recommending the immediate suspension of training sessions of each team. On the same day, FPF also decided to suspend all non-professional football competitions, including all youth teams' competitions.

With the continuation and worsening of the pandemic situation, FPF definitively cancelled all youth competitions on March 27 and took the same decision to all non-professional football championships on April 8. Finally, on April 30, the Portuguese Government definitively cancelled the II League (Liga Pro), and, at the same time, authorizing only the restart and conclusion of the I League (Liga NOS) and the Portuguese Cup Final.

However, it is clear that policymaking, and practice are moving in uncharted waters and to this end the role of science for shaping robust policies will be more important than ever. A particular characteristic of football is its multilevel governing structure.³ Thus, planning for a return is hugely complicated, as the leagues must balance sporting integrity, public, players and staff safety with the economic interests of clubs, the demands of broadcasters and the needs of sponsors. Nevertheless, only with 24 (of a total of 34) match weeks having been completed, Liga Portugal took the frontline of the fight to make professional live sport safe and for the fans to gradually return to watch games.

Whichever way they find to complete the season, there will inevitably be some stakeholder who feels the outcome is unfair, and the leagues are likely to face legal challenges immediately after the season concluded. By one hand, it seems almost sure that the eternal candidates for the title, that will not be champion, may argue that some Liga Portugal conjunctural decisions, due to coronavirus circumstances, have compromised the sporting integrity of the competition, as they are always in a constant complaint and fight between each other.

By other hand, and although the decision to cancel the II League (Liga Pro) was made by the Government, Liga Portugal was immediately criticized for the decision in promoting to I League (Liga NOS) the two teams that were first and second classified at the time of the suspension of the championship. This format of the final classification decision was opposed as the clubs that followed in the immediate positions believed they still had a chance to be able to fight for this promotion as well when a competition was interrupted, due to covid-19 and the state of emergency that followed.

In so doing, Liga Portugal had to make a difficult decision and was criticized for that, even though this decision was based on criteria of sporting merit, as recommended by UEFA.⁴ Some of the side-effect of this decision were overcome through a financial compensation. The main problem was the revenue from television rights, without playing the last 10 matches, the broadcasters of II League did not pay the last 2 months of television rights to II League clubs. Considering that the overall revenue from missing rights fee was not very high, the return on investment was provided both by FPF and Liga Portugal using their own funds to help second league clubs, compensating them for the loss of the last two instalments of television revenue due to the non-resumption of the respective competition. In addition, there was a ‘great unanimity’ on the part of Liga NOS clubs.⁵

Organizational repercussions in NOS’ Portuguese I Liga

As we mentioned earlier, I Liga is currently suspended due to the Covid-19 outbreak and it is hoped the season can resume on June 3. After three periods of ‘state of emergency’ decreed⁶ by the president of the republic between March 18 and May 2, with the country in almost total confinement for a month and a half, the Portuguese government implemented the so-called ‘state of calamity’⁷ characterized by a progressive social return to normality, which is why Liga Portugal, from May 3 on, has implemented a return plan in order to Liga NOS can be played between June 3 and July 26.

Although Liga Portugal is paying close attention to other European leagues that decided to a premature end of their seasons (such as the football league in Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Scotland), to cancel the season in Portugal, just could become an option if there was no way to complete Liga NOS in safe. Due to that, Liga NOS highest priority was restarting action. That means, Liga Portugal and all Liga NOS clubs need to prove they took every reasonable action available to them to finish the season safely and on the pitch, even missing just 2 months until the intended start of the 2020–21 season. With issues surrounding a return to football in mind, Liga Portugal added a team of public health specialists from the Portuguese Health Authority to advise and adopt a set of guidelines which will align with the best health protocols available to establish a path to Liga NOS resume.

According to Day report,⁸ in a weekly peer-reviewed medical journal, he stated 78% of Covid-19 patients may be asymptomatic, underscoring the importance of testing. So, testing is crucial for an early detection, isolation, and tracing of coronavirus. Following these guidelines, Liga Portugal chose Unilabs laboratory as a partner to test players and teams’ staff. Despite this company was the one that guaranteed the best conditions, according to Liga Portugal Press Release,⁹ soon the first results showed some mistakes, like several players (from different teams) that were not really infected by coronavirus but that tested positive. Because of that, those players could not participate in their teams training sessions during some days and having started a quarantine period, until the laboratory realizes that the results were wrong.

Unilabs laboratory is testing Liga NOS players twice a week. Until May 25, the biotech Unilabs had found eight players and staff positive for Covid-19 after performing nearly 2,000 tests at the league’s 18 football teams. Unilabs has identified 10 positives among athletes from ‘Vitória Sport Clube’ and ‘Futebol Clube de Famalicão’. They were all asymptomatic, but only two tests were effectively correct. That kind of situation can contribute to distort the sporting truth because some important players could be put out of the matches by an unfair medical order. This is a really important matter in a professional sports competition, should be reflecting a normative (indeed moral, ethical, and political) orientation towards the context, because involves so many sportive and economic interests.¹⁰

Thus, it may often appear that we tread of doubtful and opaque governance guidelines, and wholly unsuited to the big-money age.¹¹ As Maguire¹² noted, the Portugal’s position in the global economy of professional football was placed side by side with its own underdevelopment (in terms of business) or, to look at it differently, with its semi-peripheral position within the sports ‘complex’

of global mediation. In line with this position, Grix and Phillpots¹³ identify the notion of 'asymmetrical network governance' to highlight the modified forms of governance which still rest on asymmetrical power relations and largely unchanged patterns of resource dependency operating in.

It is fair to say that the discussion around the amount of income that is derived from sponsorship and broadcasting, leagues are trying to restart as quickly as possible in the professional football. According to Garcia,¹⁴ the structure of the selling arrangements for football broadcasting rights has very important implications for the governance of the game. In Portugal, as in most European countries, the main reason for this hasty resumption of the championship is essentially due to the need for clubs to obtain the latest instalments of the season regarding the rights fee of matches broadcasted on closed channels. In fact, most of the broadcaster's rights have cancelled payments to clubs from the time the championships were suspended, leading these clubs to a weak and vulnerable economic and financial situation. If we add to this great constraint the total lack of matchday incomes (which will remain because the matches will be played without fans), if the season does not end (if COVID-19 becomes worse), financial support from the government will be essential to save many bankruptcy clubs.

The restart of Liga NOS is once again involved in controversy, another of the main divergencies for the resume of Portuguese League has been the choice of the stadiums. Effectively, the Portuguese health authority has applied extremely strict criteria in the conditions of the teams' dressing rooms and its accesses to the stadium pitch to avoid possible contamination of players, team's staff, and other sportive agents.

For a month, the stadium inspection committee, which includes representatives of Portuguese health authority together with the FPF and LPFP, has been inspecting the different stadiums of the 18 participating teams. At the beginning of the process, it was noted that only the most recent (new or recently rebuild ones) stadiums would be allowed: those that participated in EURO 2004. In this scenario, everything indicated that only six teams would play in their stadium, a fact that did not seem to favour the sporting truth. Thus, 12 teams without the possibility of playing at their home. A second option would be to play all games in a single region of the country. First, there was talk in the Algarve. Then, in the centre region. Again, it was not consensual because, especially the biggest clubs did not give up playing in their own stadiums. Overall, it can be observed that the clubs which have a scale dimension much higher than the average, dominate the organizing body of the top division of club football.

After that, with all the controversies that few teams would play in their own stadium, the various clubs were implementing the corrective measures that the health authority was demanding, and many other stadiums were also being authorized. Finally, at the beginning of the week of the restart of the League, the stadium approval process has ended and only two teams will play outside their stadium 'Belenenses SAD' and 'Clube Desportivo Santa Clara', because their stadiums have no sanitary conditions at all and were not validated using the COVID-19 criteria. Alternatively, both teams will use the FPF stadium, located in Cidade do Futebol¹⁵ (Oeiras). Faced with this, Allen and Jones¹⁶ argue a large body of research has confirmed that athletes and teams perform considerably better when they compete at home compared with away from home. In this way, Pollard¹⁷ asserted the game location has a powerful influence on performance outcomes in sport. For these reasons, we hope that, at the end of the championship, none of these teams will be able to impugn the final classification because it has not had the chance to play in their own stadium, alleging an eventual lack of sporting truth.

Finally, the problem of the calendar. The publication of the calendar comes after the Portuguese government only authorized the competition to start again in June, the games calendar was defined until the last weekend of July, to allow a short pause in August and the beginning of the new sports season (not yet defined by FIFA nor UEFA). As the games will be played all without spectators, the broadcasters rights had the opportunity to choose the days and hours of all the games, as long as the minimum 72 hours of rest for each team were respected. In this sense, all the 10 match weeks that are still missing will be played between the 3rd of June and the 26th of July, each one during a 4-

5-day timeframe, with only 1 day of rest between the last game of a match week and the first game of the next match week.¹⁸ Accordingly, to Ekstrand et al.,¹⁹ there is a real risk of playing too many matches. Concentration deteriorates which can affect coordination, leading to underperformance and greater risk of injury.²⁰ In an extension of this argument, Kenttä et al.,²¹ argue there is reason to believe that too many matches can lead to lack of motivation and mental burn out, that is, players are no longer able to gear themselves up for matches and training sessions.

However, this was the model that TV operators understood best to be able to monetize the television rights they have, in order to satisfy more audiences and try to maximize the revenue from subscriptions to their closed channels. In addition, the broadcasters argue closed-doors games devalue product.

Last but not the least, however, to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission, there is one crucial ingredient missing: spectators in the stadiums! But why do we care so much about spectators' noise, and why do many of us feel we need it? Without it, sport just does not seem as exciting. Football without an audience at the stadiums comes down to a game and is no longer a spectacle. Football has been the world's most popular sport, at least since the late nineteenth century,²² and particularly in Portugal, there are not many activities and social fields in society that occupy such a central and dominant place in sociability as football. Unfortunately, in these last 10 match weeks, it will not be possible: all 90 games remaining and will be played 'behind closed doors'.

But, even without public inside the stadiums, will public health be guaranteed with this return to professional football? As a result, to be expected that the fact that all games are broadcast exclusively in a TV closed signal, may harm the fight against SARS-Cov-2, as they are awfully expensive, few families subscribe to coded sports channels in Portugal. Thus, and considering that the pandemic brought a serious financial crisis for the majority of the population, the most advisable solution to avoid crowds of people in restaurants, cafes and bars watching football matches on TV closed channels, would be the Government to buy the best games each match week and determine that they could be broadcasted on TV open channels. Thus, most football fans could already watch the games at home, only with family members, not increasing the risk of transmission of COVID-19 due to football resume, as Maduro²³ has repeatedly argued. Even the LPFP president, Pedro Proença, defends this thesis and runs the risk of being fired at the next General Assembly of the League (schedule to June 8), given that the clubs put themselves in defence of broadcasters rights underlying economic pressures and not on the side of their own fans. If Portuguese Government continues to affirm that this issue is strictly a commercial issue and not a matter of public health, we are very sceptical about the possible harmful effects of football for the aggravation of the pandemic, in the coming months of June and July.

In the following section, we argue how broadcasters are taking advantage of body of the top division of Portuguese club football.

Alienation by the broadcaster's rights of NOS' Portuguese I Liga

Sports organizations and television broadcasters have built a synergistic relationship that has allowed both to further their commercial interests,²⁴ a relationship of self-interest,²⁵ which allows them to reap the fruits of the complementarity of their interests.²⁶

Sport broadcasting evolved into a big business and a major source of revenue for sport organizations (leagues, federations, associations, and clubs).²⁷ Due to the large viewership, sports have become an integral programming content for broadcasters and the competition for the acquisition of sports broadcasting rights, along with the large sums of money spent on them demonstrate the dominant position of sports in television programming.²⁸

In order to realize the importance of the broadcasting rights fee in professional football competitions, and accordingly to UEFA,²⁹ in 2018–19 season, roughly 32% of Portuguese clubs' overall income derived from broadcast and media rights revenue, followed by sponsorship/commercial with 24%, UEFA prizes with 20% and matchday revenue with 15%. If we keep in mind that

the main source of revenue for European clubs are the broadcast and media rights revenue and accounted 37% of the total revenue of all clubs in Europe, we found that Portugal can still grow a lot this type of revenue.

Although the Portuguese championship has the seventh largest television rights market, which in 2018–19 was worth a total of 143 million euros, behind England (2.9 billion), Spain (1.3 billion), Germany (1.1 billion), Italy (1.1 billion), France (622 million) and Turkey (317 million euros), Portugal (currently ranked 6th in the 54 UEFA countries – immediately after the ‘Big Five’ Leagues) is now the only major league where, unlike other major European leagues, in each club negotiates the sale of its own individual broadcasting rights, and that is reflected in the huge gap between the role is taken by the big three clubs (SL Benfica, FC Porto, and Sporting CP) that earn significantly higher revenues than the rest of the teams in the league: the ratio between the largest TV recipient is more than 10 and 15 times the median club in Portugal, compared to an average of 2.3 times in the 24 countries with collective selling. As Maduro³⁰ defends, pressure for solidarity may introduce much-needed redistributive elements in favour of smaller leagues and clubs.

These figures show the need for action in the Portuguese league, according to EC³¹ report, the collective selling gives the league ‘market power’ to dictate the price of broadcast rights and the possibility to increase the competitiveness and reduce the integrity risks. Additionally, King³² has emphasized it is the larger clubs, with increased revenue from television and great difference of budget, that have been better able to cope with against adversity, and that smaller clubs have become ‘almost unviable’.

According Szymanski,³³ the results are measurable, not only in financial terms, but in terms of sports success (games and trophies won). As suggested by Falter and Perignon,³⁴ there are few industries produce such clear profit and loss indicators. As Cashmore³⁵ notes, the outcome of sports competitions should be – as a rule – unpredictable, thus, it is this very unpredictability of sport that makes it attractive to most. So, we may add that, for football to be unpredictable, it must be competitive.³⁶ However, Portuguese football seems to be on an increasingly uneven and less competitive path.

Every government has a political interest in sports competitions.³⁷ Their prestige, status and competitiveness are at stake due to the national nature of the representation in sports competitions, which is visualized through political symbolism.³⁸ However, in 2016, the political, and judicial authorities have involved in legal dilemmas of sport regulation television rights agreements, to allowed Portuguese major clubs to have signed long-term television rights agreements, disregarding European regulations limits the duration of exclusive vertical contracts.³⁹ The Commission also required the collective selling entities to limit the duration of the exclusive rights offered in vertical contracts to no more than three football seasons, according to EC⁴⁰ report. The Portuguese league has certainly taken into account the European Commission’s view that consists in the existence of a more or less developed sphere of autonomy, which is left to sport bodies for their own self-regulation.⁴¹

However, the Portuguese league continues to use ability to deviate from the path chosen by the EU legislative authorities in several fields. When political intervention was required in favour of centralizing rights, there was a political detachment that will contribute to a further weakening of the competitiveness of Portuguese football. It is notable, however, that the dominance of centralized solutions or the adoption of decentralized regulatory regimes is certainly influenced by institutional design and historical legacy.⁴²

By one hand, because Portuguese clubs (as the main sports rights holders) all have long-term television rights contracts (until 2028), individually signed, so we believe that the competitiveness of Portuguese football will decline a lot until the end of this decade. By other hand, countries such as Russia, Belgium, Holland, Ukraine or Turkey may come to surpass Portugal in the coming years taking into account its proximity in terms of ranking, the greater magnitude of these countries or their respective economies, the better distribution of television and media revenues by all clubs due to centralized negotiation and, at last, the greater sporting balance and increased internal competitiveness of the teams resulting from the greater negotiation capacity for TV rights to be renegotiated in the future.

The cancellation of the season, without ending the 10-match week left, in Portugal could lead to the expected bankruptcy of many clubs. The possibility of the matches was to be available to all subscribers with a basic-tier package on Portuguese operators such as MEO, NOS and Vodafone, this was an option of absolute last resource due to the economic implications it would bring, namely the failure to pay the last two instalments (in a total of 10 per season) of the media-rights to each team by each broadcaster.

Thus, club partners (NOS, Altice or SportTV) did not pay the 9th and 10th instalment of the media-rights to the teams during the months of April and May, claiming the suspension of the championship and the consequent non-broadcasting of the matches on television.

For example, Altice, the telecoms operator, has warned that it is suspending its rights fee payments to clubs from Portuguese football's top two divisions amidst the ongoing postponement of professional football in the country.⁴³ Despite this, Altice proposed to the four teams (FC Porto, Vitória SC, Rio Ave FC and Boavista FC) whose games they hold the rights that these last two instalments will be able to pay during the months of June and July, although both will be discounted in the instalments of the next season.⁴⁴ At the start of April, Altice said that it had maintained its rights fee payments but 'regretted' that it was not notified in advance of plans to suspend the Portuguese leagues.⁴⁵ Knowing that these are the most relevant revenues for the vast majority of Portuguese football teams, especially now with the absence spectators in the stadiums due to the pandemic crisis, it does not seem to us that this is a position of a true strategic business partner. If we add to all this, the excellent economic results achieved in 2019 by this operator recently announced,⁴⁶ there does not seem to be much ethical sense in the proposal presented by Altice to its partner teams.

This situation needs to involve a government response to resist to arguments of non-solidarity and attempts to establish rules by the pay-TV operators and some sports organizations. Often, the organizer of a competition is also the governing body with a relationship of common interest. Furthermore, within this context of blackmail and attempts to control of professional football, Portuguese I Liga, the country's top-flight football league, will lose telecoms and pay-television broadcaster NOS: the company has taken the decision not to renew its deal which expires at the conclusion of the 2020–21 season, as its league naming sponsor, as announced by NOS a few days ago.⁴⁷ It is important to remember that the broadcaster NOS started as an exclusive sponsor of I Ligue since 2015, being responsible for about 1/3 of the Liga Portugal annual budget.

Thus, the governing bodies of football and the Government of Portugal through the Secretariat of State for Youth and Sports (SEJD) need essentially increased a whole host of regulatory measures and supervisory. In this respect, it would be desirable a substantial government intervention, to make it possible to broadcast some matches of the remaining 10 rounds, in screened that can be made available to the wider public.

Faced with this, supporters are unlikely to be allowed to attend games due to Covid-19 restrictions, to watch the matches at home could be a stimulus. The loyalty of the supporters is very important to league, teams, and athletes, they are valuable and indispensable partners. Without supporters' football is not the 'beautiful game' as Cashmore and Cleland⁴⁸ called it.

In this sense, the UK Premier League was an example. Due to the pandemic situation, in UK the transmission of 25 (from the 92 remaining Premier League matches of the season) will be screened live free to air on TV, including, for the first time, games at 3 pm on Saturdays.⁴⁹ Richard Masters, the Premier League chief executive, said: "The Premier League and our clubs are proud to have incredibly passionate and loyal supporters. It is important to ensure as many people as possible can watch the matches at home. We will continue to work step-by-step and in consultation with all our stakeholders as we move towards resuming the 2019–20 season."⁵⁰

Concluding comments

Above all, this article has attempted to demonstrate how the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the intersection between financial problems, leadership crisis, and permanent and dubious conflicts between

stakeholders. Predicting the future of professional Portuguese football, in the post-COVID-19 world, is not an easy task as there are numerous human and economic factors involved. Nevertheless, the focus of this paper draws upon some of the issues that are now afflicting the complex system of interests of the I League in Portugal.

On the one hand, we illustrate that the institutional landscape of sport policy in the Portuguese professional football is complex, it is an organization financially very exposed and vulnerable to the main sponsors, who seek to exert power and influence over it, and not acting as true business partners. Nonetheless, we have also advocated the need for football clubs to learn from previous crises by embracing innovation and entrepreneurship. We would argue that said forms of soft disempowerment need to be addressed swiftly if Portuguese football is to maintain its international credibility. In practical terms, it is important that officials within the football industry acknowledge the need to adopt appropriate approaches to managing the power balance with networks of stakeholders.⁵¹ As Nye⁵² argues, power is the ability to influence the behaviour of others to get the outcomes one wants. Learning lesson from this crisis, must ensure sport managers and practitioners are better prepared in sport and society for similar events in the future.

Within the framework for sport in general and football in particular much of the economic value of a particular match stems from their inclusion within a wider structure, as the League, hence the argument that the league must be the rightful owner of broadcast rights (collective selling). In turn, the League should be based on more sustainable financial models might reduce the integrity risks. A league or competition is more exciting and attractive to fans (and broadcasters) if the outcome is uncertain.⁵³

Overall, a sustaining sport policy should be based on the promotion of transparency and responsibility at political levels and the leadership motivation, commitment, endurance, and other tangible attributes needed to transform rhetoric into action.

Our work substantiates that broadcasters are taking advantage of the situation to not comply with their contractual obligations, especially when the teams had no responsibility for the suspension of the championship. Inclusive poses some threats to consumer interests. Media would survive without football, but it would not be so well nourished.⁵⁴ Our research also, corroborates the clear sign of the increasing commercialization of the matches in the last decade, tightly linked to the interest of television operators, that has resulted in a horizontal axis of stakeholder, headed by the rights-holding broadcasters that seems to wish assume Portuguese professional football governance, where issues of representation, accountability and legitimacy of direct vertical regulation are endangered. In sum, broadcasting rights will have to be reconciled in a much broader way than currently.

On the other hand, it is possible to see some positive consequences from this crisis. For instance, urges the leagues to use this opportunity to draw up more robust plans for similar scenarios in the future. And so, the results of any legal challenges regarding this season are going to have long-lasting implications and set precedents for the future. Overall, it is important to take account to wrap up a much better codification in case of the event of another Covid-19 outbreak, as part of any and every deal, be it with the clubs, the broadcasters, or anyone else. While our results provide a critical reflexion for those operating in sporting organizations, learning lessons from this crisis must ensure sport managers and practitioners are better prepared in sport and society for similar events in the future.

Whilst we have sought to capture and present the dynamic nature of the relation and network of influence in Portuguese football in this paper, it is difficult to accurately predict how will the dynamics be in the future of I League of professional Portuguese football will look like in a post-Covid-19 world. In this way, there is a need for a good deal critical scrutiny and systematic research to follow developments effects of this pandemic on football.

Finally, some lines of research to the academics: Portuguese football will gain a new perspective on itself with the pandemic? Will we have a new paradigm after this crisis? What football is next? From this perspective, the contribution of this paper should encourage

academics to follow development effects of this pandemic. Undertaking further work on a longitudinal basis would provide insight to understand how such symmetrical power relations evolve and change over time on Portuguese football. Longitudinal studies have the advantage of ‘improving our understanding of causal influences over time’.⁵⁵ In addition, this paper lies also how to reflect upon what can be done to continue the leverage of the potentially of Portuguese favourite sport.

Notes

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