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# Betting-driven Sport Consumption among Young Adults: Motivational Dynamics and Reconfiguration of Sport Engagement

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## Abstract

**Research question:** Sports betting has been promoted as a way of attracting and boosting younger audiences, although critics warn that it turns sport into a means to an end and can generate social harms. Evidence on this process is scarce. This article analyses how betting reshapes sports consumption among young adults in Portugal, what drives this and what it implies for the cultural value of sport.

**Research methods:** Based on constructivist grounded theory, 28 semi-structured interviews were conducted with Portuguese bettors aged 18-35, recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. Data were coded until saturation, with Self-Determination Theory as a sensitising framework.

**Results and Findings:** The findings reveal a dual process. On the one hand, betting broadens sports consumption by increasing attention spans, stimulating interest in secondary competitions, and promoting the discovery of new sports. On the other hand, it fosters instrumental and fragmented consumption patterns, in which sport is experienced as a vehicle for financial gain rather than as a culturally significant practice. Some bettors moved from extrinsic to intrinsic engagement.

**Implications:** The article contributes to the debates on the commodification of sport, highlighting how the market logics inherent in betting practices can both expand and erode the social meanings of sport.

**Keywords**

Sport betting; sport consumption; audiences; youth; gamblification of sport; Portugal.

## Introduction

Although sports and betting have been linked throughout history (Huggins, 2022; Chappelet & Verschuuren, 2019), the current relationship between them has generated a novel ecosystem. New technologies have made online betting increasingly fast and easy and have enabled new types of bets and micro-bets before and during competitions (McNamee & Moriconi, 2026 chapter 2). This has generated a billion-dollar global market that quickly became consolidated and legitimized: not only was betting legalized in most parts of the world, but the world of sports, which had historically been critical and cautious about linking itself to the gambling industry due to the social problems associated with it (Tak et al., 2022), welcomed betting companies that offered new forms of financing through sponsorship and taxes (MacInnes et al., 2025; Sharman, 2020). In this context, betting colonised the world of sports (Hing et al., 2023). Today, due to the ubiquitous presence of sports betting advertising at sporting events, it is very difficult to practice or consume sports without receiving incentives to bet at the same time (Tak, 2022; Moriconi and Cima 2026).

At the same time, gambling has become normalised in society (Lopez-Gonzalez et al., 2018; Hing et al., 2023; Constandt et al., 2022). Sports betting is part of everyday life, mainly for men between the ages of 18 and 35 (Mcgee, 2020). In 2024, sports betting generated a global revenue of USD 39,418.9 million, and this figure is expected to reach USD 79,615.6 million by 2030 (Grand View Research, 2025). This increase in consumption is related to a change in the social status of gambling. What was once associated with a negative activity linked to addiction is now promoted as a form of entertainment, risk-free - provided the necessary precautions are taken - and as an activity whose success is attributed more to knowledge of the sport than to chance (Lopez-Gonzalez et al., 2017; Jacobs et al., 2025; Pitt et al., 2024; Nyemcsok et al., 2018).

This process has been conceptualised as “gamblification of sport” (Hing et al., 2023) and has generated various criticisms and controversies. First and foremost, the phenomenon has been criticised for potential social problems associated with pathological gambling (Hing et al., 2023) and for threats to the integrity of sports competitions (Moriconi 2020; McNamee & Moriconi 2026; Tak 2018). Amidst this criticism, support for the new situation, coming from both the world of sport and the political world, has revolved around financial considerations: the money that flows from the betting market into the public coffers (through taxes) and into sport (directly through sponsorship and indirectly through the state) (Humphreys 2021; Taylor et al. 2025;

Villeneuve & Diaconu, 2011). For example, the AGA (2018c) estimates that legal sports betting could generate around $4.2 billion in additional revenue for the four major US sports leagues (MLB, NBA, NFL, NHL). In 2023, in Portugal, the money from taxes on the betting market distributed among sports federations (66.9 million) was almost double the public money that the federations received from the Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth (35 million).

A final argument revolves around the premise that the betting boom generates new forms of sports consumption (Lee et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2021), multiplying audiences (AGA, 2018a; Broughton, 2019; PwC, 2019) and building loyalty among new consumers (Hollebeek, 2011b), mainly among younger generations, who are losing interest in sports consumption and shifting / dispersing their interest to other types of industries, such as eSports or media multitasking activities (Jeong & Fishbein 2007). Beyond these assumptions, there are still no studies that categorically prove that this premise is valid (Blank et al. 2021). While some studies claim that consumers are more likely to watch a sporting event if they bet on it (PwC, 2019; Dwyer et al., 2024), other studies show the opposite (King, 2020; Blank et al., 2021). For their part, Lis-Clarke and Walsh (2024: 210) warn that sports betting "is of considerable moral concern insofar as it undermines the ideals of sport by transforming the manner and modes in which spectators engage with and value sports." For the authors, sports betting reconfigures the logic of sports consumption, transforming it into a means to an end (money) rather than an end. While the authors' criticism is valid, they start from an idealistic view of sport that does not consider the loss of interest and new forms of consumption among the younger generations.

This article emphasises that, while concerns about changes in sports consumption by sports bettors are logical, concrete empirical studies need to be developed to understand bettors' behaviour and its relationship to sports consumption. In this sense, this study seeks to understand the relationship between betting and sports consumption among young adults (18-35 years) in Portugal, describe new modes of consumption, and establish the opportunities and risks that the gamblification of sports generates for the survival of the status quo of sports and its historical values. Through a qualitative research design based on constructivist grounded theory (CGT), and using semi structured interviews to collect data, this article seeks to understand: a) to what extent do sports betting practices reconfigure the logic of sports consumption?, b) what are the main

drivers of this process?, and c) what positive and negative consequences do they entail for the sustainability of sports consumption and for the cultural and social values of sport?

The article is divided into six sections. Following the introduction, the literature review is presented, divided into two issues: the consolidation of the gamblification of sport and its relationship with sports consumption patterns, and the contributions of self-determination theory for understanding and analysing intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for sports consumption. Then, the methodology is presented. The fifth part presents the results, which, in the next section, are subsequently discussed considering their effects on the sustainability of sport and the safeguarding of its intrinsic values.

**Gamblification of sport and changes in sports consumption patterns**

Research on the relationship between sports betting and sport consumption is still at an incipient stage. Existing studies have examined the topic from two antagonistic perspectives.

One theoretical perspective considers that betting can intensify attention, media attention, and attendance intentions (Lee et al., 2025), and can function as an alternative fan engagement channel (Dwyer et al., 2024; Mahan et al., 2012). According to this view, betting constitutes a positive factor for sports fans, as it contributes to greater satisfaction during their sport consumption experiences, whether by attending a stadium or watching a live broadcast of a sporting event (Lee et al., 2025). If fans watch the sporting event on which they have placed a bet (before or during the event), their emotional involvement with the event becomes more likely (Forrest, 2013) and, consequently, they are more likely to experience an optimal psychological state (flow state), such as a sense of enjoyment, time distortion, and intense concentration on the game (Lee et al., 2025). In this sense, betting may function as a vehicle for attracting interest in less appealing sporting events (Salaga et al., 2020).

The other theoretical perspective argues that sports betting negatively reconfigures the logic of sport consumption, transforming it into a means to an end (Lis-Clarke & Walsh, 2024), because betting may be driven more by monetary reasons than by fandom (Cason et al., 2020). Betting may shift spectators' attention toward events available for (live) betting, as well as provoke selective attention to specific events (e.g., prop bets) on which they have wagered. Sports betting may also divert consumers' attention from the sporting event itself to betting outcomes, discouraging them from watching events on which they have not placed bets (*ibid*.). Betting may further generate negative emotions

that undermine fan engagement. According to a study by Blank et al. (2021), when fans lose a bet, positive emotions and subsequent participation decrease. Conversely, when fans bet and win, participation does not increase. Therefore, in the medium and long term, sports betting may represent a significant threat to sport. Lis-Clarke and Walsh (2024) also argue that sports betting may foster morally problematic preferences, such as celebrating a tragic event — for example, an athlete's injury — if it guarantees or increases the likelihood of winning the placed bet(s). Finally, sport–betting integration might increase normalization, advertising exposure, and gambling harm rather than necessarily improving sport consumption (Hing et al., 2023; McGrane et al., 2025; Hing et al., 2015).

Despite the advances made, the literature presents three main limitations. First, it is contextually limited mainly to North American consumers/sports, which prevents verification of whether the conclusions of existing studies are transferable to other cultural and social contexts (Guba, 1981). Second, it is empirically limited, particularly regarding young people (18–35 years old), and more concrete data are needed to enable a deeper understanding of the impact of the gamblification of sport on consumption. Finally, the positive and negative interferences of sports betting in the way people consume sport have been discussed in a fragmented manner.

This study addresses these gaps by examining a underexplored social context (Portugal/Southern Europe), focusing on one of the social groups with more prevalence of gambling practices (young adults between 18 and 35 years old) (see Allen et al., 2025; Lim et al., 2017; Stillman et al., 2016) and proposing an analysis that links the positive and negative effects of gambling on sports consumption. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985), motivation (in this case for consuming sports) varies along a behavioural continuum, whereby extrinsically motivated behaviours may give rise to intrinsically motivated behaviours. In other words, behaviours typically considered negative for sport, such as instrumental consumption motivated by sports betting, can evolve into positive forms of self-determined consumption, where the origin of interest lies in the sporting event itself and promotes engagement with sport.

The next section explains why some SDT premises are useful for the objectives of this is article.

## Self-Determination Theory: Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations for Sport Consumption

SDT studies individuals' motivations for their involvement in certain activities based on the satisfaction of three basic needs: competence, autonomy and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985). A central assumption in SDT is the distinction between autonomous motivation and controlled motivation (Gagne & Deci, 2005).

Autonomous motivation translates into intentional and choiceful action. An example of autonomous motivation is intrinsic motivation, that is, the adoption of an action for the inherent interest and for the pleasure that is obtained in its exercise (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For example, a spectator may consume sport due to the feeling of belonging and identity in relation to a certain team / sport actors (e.g.: players, referees, coaches) (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and/or due to the emotional experience provided by a certain sporting event (Yim et al., 2021).

In turn, controlled motivation presupposes a sense of obligatoriness in the involvement in actions (Gagne & Deci, 2005). In its genesis are extrinsic rewards, that is, the action is motivated by the attainment of a specific result. In this case, the motivation does not derive from the action itself, but rather from the external rewards that it enables (e.g., tangible rewards). That is, the action is instrumental for a certain end (Ryan & Deci, 2000). That may be the case of the spectator who attends a sporting event and/or acquires knowledge about the modality and the actors in question, not because he is interested in that event, but rather because he intends to maximise his chances of making money with sports betting (Lis-Clarke & Walsh, 2024).

Intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation are not contextually independent. Under certain social and environmental conditions, intrinsic motivation can either be induced, consolidated or developed, as well as eliminated, limited or repressed (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For example, the literature on motivations for sport consumption has demonstrated that fanship, socialization and entertainment constitute important drivers to dynamise the consumption of live and televised sporting events (Kim & Mao, 2021). On the other hand, young people's preference for short videos with highlights and for interactive content has raised concerns among various personalities. For example, the president of Real Madrid, Florentino Pérez, justified the desire to create a Super League of football on the premise that young people are no longer interested in sport, while the former player Pablo Aimar mentioned that his generation is the last to watch full football matches (Varela e Scher, 2017). A study carried out by the European Club Association (ECA, 2020) found that 40%

of respondents aged 16 to 24 admitted that they either had no interest in football or hated it (13% of the participants).

The literature also demonstrates that extrinsic rewards can compromise intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1971; Lepper, Greene & Nisbett, 1973; see Ryan & Deci, 2000). This statement strengthens the practical applicability of the theoretical proposition of Lis-Clarke & Walsh (2024) by suggesting that consumption motivated by sports betting may remove the pleasure of watching sporting events on which one does not bet.

Notwithstanding, this sequential process is not linear. An individual may also experience an activity based on an extrinsic motivation (e.g. reward), but, as a function of exposure to that activity, discover and value the intrinsically inherent properties of it to the point of redirecting the orientation of his motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Since the genesis of extrinsic motivation does not lie in the interest of the experienced activity, but rather in its consequence(s), for this reorientation process to occur, the individual begins by being externally stimulated by the influence of third parties with whom he feels connected (ibid.). In addition to relatedness, the satisfaction of the basic need for competence is equally important in the internalisation of extrinsic motivation. However, the central condition for integration to occur is the satisfaction of the need for autonomy (Gagne & Deci, 2005).

From this perspective, considering the prominent role that peer pressure represents in shaping social perceptions regarding the practice of sports betting (see, for example, Deans et al., 2017; McGee, 2020; Parrado-González, et al., 2023), it is possible that an individual bets on secondary sporting events, or sporting modalities that he does not follow due to the feeling of belonging to a person or to a group. Nevertheless, for the consumption of those sporting events to cease being extrinsically motivated, becoming gradually oriented by the interest and valuation of the sport, it is necessary that the individual acquires competences at the level of practitioners, teams and tactics of the sport in question, to the point of being able to select the sporting events of his interest and feel motivated to follow them due to the emotion that they arouse (for a more in-depth view of the SDT self-determination continuum see Gagne & Deci, 2005).

All these issues are very useful theoretical propositions for the aim of this article and can be empirically analysed using the collected data. However, before proceeding with the results, the methodology approach is presented, explaining how GT and SDT can work together.

## Methodology

The evidence presented in this study was collected within the framework of the G-Risks Project[1]. One of the objectives of this project was to explore how the "gamblification of sport" influences sport consumption practices among young people in Portugal.

Given the limited empirical knowledge currently available on this topic and the exploratory nature of the research questions, the study adopted a qualitative research design based on Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) (Charmaz, 2006). CGT is appropriate for investigating underexplored social phenomena due to its systematic yet flexible procedures for generating conceptual interpretations based on participants' experiences. It consists of systematic and inductive guidelines for data collection and analysis, with the aim of constructing mid-range theoretical frameworks that explain the collected data (Charmaz, 2000: 509). This epistemological stance recognizes the researchers' role in the dual construction of meaning, giving central importance to the concepts of emergence and reflexivity.

The study focused on young adults aged 18 to 35 who had regularly participated in sports betting during the previous twelve months. Previous research identified this social group as one of the most exposed to sports betting practices and gambling-related normalization processes. A total of 28 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Among the participants were two former sports bettors who had recently self-excluded from the betting market after experiencing gambling-related problems (E3; E8). Interviews were conducted in Portuguese, and all quotations used in the text were translated into English by the authors. Due to the sensitive nature of some topics (e.g., problem gambling), certain information collected was treated confidentially (Tolich, 2004; Numerato, 2016). For the sake of coherence, all testimonies were identified by interview number (e.g., E1, E2…).

Participants were recruited using a combination of purpose sample and snowball technique. Initial access was facilitated through the researchers' professional and social networks, and additional participants were identified through referrals from interviewees. Interviews were conducted using a topic-guided script centred on “the interference of sports betting in sports consumption.” Participants were encouraged to speak openly about four subtopics: *“instrumental consumption of sport”*; *“focus on sports event*

[1] “Gamblification” of sport and new generations: tendences, addictions, social harms, and risks for integrity of sports (G-Risks), funded by Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnología (FCT) with reference 2023.15001.PEX

*consumption with/without betting"*; *"interest in sports consumption with/without betting"*; and *"immoral preferences elicited by betting."* Due to the interative nature of the research, the script was adjusted continuously according to emerging properties and categories. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), that is, until further interviews no longer generated substantial new conceptual insights or analytical categories.

Data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection, following an iterative and consistent comparative approach. In the initial coding phase, data were coded line-by-line, with each text segment assigned a provisional, comparative, and data-driven code (Charmaz, 2006). The aim of this phase was to stimulate a brainstorming process and generate as many analytical possibilities as possible.

Focused coding elevated the analysis to a more abstract level. The most analytically significant initial codes were developed into more targeted, selective, and conceptual codes to synthesise and explain larger text segments (Charmaz, 2006). The level of abstraction increased with the generation and verification of provisional categories, and the development, refinement, and linking of final categories.

Although the final version of the study incorporates key premises of the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), this theoretical perspective was not used as a predefined coding framework. Instead, categories were generated inductively using the grounded theory procedures described above. Only after the core categories emerged, SDT was employed as a sensitizing theoretical framework to facilitate the interpretation of the motivational dynamics identified in the data, particularly regarding the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for consuming sports. In this sense, SDT influenced the interpretation of the findings, rather than the generation of codes or categories. Thus, the relationship between gambling-related practices and motivational processes was developed through an iterative dialogue between emerging empirical categories and existing theoretical concepts.

Given this methodological approach, reflexivity was an important dimension of the research process. The authors have conducted previous research on gambling practices (Moriconi and de Cima, 2020), sports integrity (Moriconi and Cima, 2021; Cima and Moriconi, 2022), and the social consequences of the gamblification of sport (Moriconi and de Cima, 2026). This background facilitated access to the field and enhanced familiarity with the phenomenon. At the same time, it raised the possibility that pre-existing assumptions could influence the interpretation of the data. To address this issue,

researchers kept analytical notes to document emerging assumptions and interpretations, conducted independent analyses of the interview material before comparing interpretations, and continually challenged provisional explanations through discussion and comparison with contradictory cases. Particular emphasis was placed on paying attention to both the positive and negative experiences of the participants. In addition, theoretical claims were systematically grounded in the participants' narratives and supported with illustrative quotations to ensure that the interpretations remained closely linked to the meanings expressed by the interviewees.

## Reconfiguring the logic of sports consumption: between the bright and the dark side of sports betting

Findings reveal a dual process. On the one hand, as a source of excitement and adrenaline, sports betting can expand and create opportunities for new forms of sports consumption. However, due to its addictive nature, it can also foster compulsive behaviours that negatively reconfigure the sporting experience. The processes through which sports betting positively and negatively interfere with sports consumption are outlined below (Table 1 presents the systematisation of the findings). Despite their interconnection, these processes are presented separately to facilitate the analytical distinction between categories.

| Categories | Dimensions | Properties |
|---|---|---|
| Enhancement of pleasure and expansion of sports consumption | Attention retention mechanism | Contrast between the predictability of the outcome of the sporting event and the unpredictability of the bet; uncertainty associated with the bet as the main incentive to watch the sporting event until the end; occasional directed attention (does not alter sports consumption habits or intrinsic motivations); promotion and strengthening of young people's emotional connection with sport. |
| | Stimulation of the consumption of secondary sporting events | New consumption routines driven by betting; betting as a vehicle for expanding emotional involvement in secondary sporting events; preservation of the emotional intensity inherent to major sporting events. |
| | Expansion of sports consumption to other disciplines | An evolutionary process initially based on relationships. Consumption initially motivated by extrinsic rewards (betting gains) and the logic of betting; expansion of knowledge and autonomy regarding a specific sport at an intermediate stage (based on watching events and reading/analysing content); development of an emotional connection with the new sport in the final stage. Reorientation of the logic of sports consumption toward intrinsic motivations (interest in the sport). |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Platform for promote and consume sport | Promotion / stimulation of contact with sports and international competitions not broadcast on free-to-air channels; viewing matches as the primary factor for opening / maintaining an account on betting sites; maintaining interest in sport without placing bets. |
| Instrumentalizing and alienating sports consumption | Instrumental consumption of sport | Sport as a means to achieve an end (making money from betting); loss of the intrinsic value of sport; consumption mediated by betting; shift of the spectator's attention toward the placed bet and parallel events available for betting; reorientation of interest from the intrinsic elements of the match to betting-related elements (statistics, terminology). |
| | Interference in collective consumption dynamics | Reconfiguration of social sporting experiences into moments subordinated to the logic of betting; reconfiguration of the emotional connection with sport from collective to individual; spectator alienation. |
| | Sports consumption under an addictive logic | Consumption of sport mediated by gambling addiction; loss of control and reorientation of consumption toward betting; reduction in the emotional significance associated with the sporting event; interest limited to sporting events with high emotional intensity in the absence of betting. |
| | Driver of immoral preferences | Celebration of tragic events that secure or increase the chances of winning the bet(s); stimulation of cultural behaviours in sport; expansion of immoral preferences in extrinsically motivated consumption; new reasons to celebrate tragic events in highly emotionally charged competitions. |

### *1 - Enhancement of pleasure and expansion of sports consumption*

Based on the evidence collected, it is possible to systematise four processes through which betting positively reconfigures the logic of sports consumption. When practised in a recreational and responsible manner, betting entails several benefits for the sports sector, such as retaining spectators' attention, stimulating audiences for less mediatised matches or competitions, and/or promoting sporting experiences in disciplines that were previously not consumed.

*Attention retention mechanism*

Betting can retain spectators' attention until the end of a sporting event (E18, 11, 19). This occurs when the predictability of the outcome of a given event (e.g., a match) is contrasted with the unpredictability of a bet placed on a specific occurrence within that event (e.g., number of goals), with the uncertainty associated with the bet serving as the decisive incentive to watch the sporting event through to its conclusion.

> *I'll give you the example of the Super Cup [futsal] match between Benfica and Sporting. I bet that the game would have 6 goals. By half-time it was already 4–0 for one of the teams, and the winner was almost defined. But I was caught up in all that excitement, thinking the bet was almost guaranteed. The second half starts, the minutes go by, and nothing. And I start getting stressed. Near the end, Sporting and Benfica score and imagine my emotion, my joy. There was a massive mood swing […] If I hadn't placed the bet, the game would probably have lost my interest at half-time. Since I have friends on both teams and I like futsal, I would have continued watching the game, but probably not with the same level of attention. I might have distracted myself with my phone or something else.* (E4)

Betting as an attention mechanism is beneficial to sport when it involves occasional directed attention - that is, when it does not alter consumption habits or intrinsic motivations for sport.

> *The way I consume sport has changed. I feel that I prefer to have bet on a game I'm watching, because that way it gives me more adrenaline and makes me want to watch the game until the end.* (E18)

> *Betting increases the intensity of the game.* (E19)

In other words, this category reflects situations in which the spectator would have watched the sporting event until the end regardless of its circumstances, but, due to sports betting, their attention remained at high levels despite the likely determination of the event's outcome.

This stimulus among spectators is particularly relevant among younger generations. As previously noted, due to the heightened activation of neural reward mechanisms associated with excessive use of smartphones and social media, some young people may find it more difficult to follow a sporting event to its conclusion without diverting their attention to other simultaneous activities. Bettors believe that the adrenaline generated by betting is an incentive to consume an entire event while maintaining their attention (E14, E18, E17, E11).

> *Betting multiplies the adrenaline rush when watching the game. If I don't bet, I don't get the same adrenaline rush.* (E17)

> *Betting increases the intensity of the game. Both in a positive way (by connecting me more emotionally to the game) and in a negative way (if I lose, I lose twice: I lose because my team lost and I lose because I lost my bet).* (E19)

From this perspective, betting has the potential to promote and energize young people's emotional connection to sport, preserving its social value. In turn, audience retention improves sports viewership figures, thereby enhancing the commercial value of broadcasting rights, one of the main sources of funding for the sports sector.

*Stimulation of the consumption of secondary sporting events*

Betting also serves as an incentive for watching matches that, a priori, are of little interest (because the teams are not very popular or because there are no important sporting objectives at stake). This category refers mainly to bettors who were already consuming sport and who added betting to their consumption routine, thereby promoting new sporting experiences and new forms of entertainment driven by a prior sense of knowledge about a given sport.

> *There is more excitement when watching the game, and I watch it as if I were a [fan] of the team I bet on, but I'm not paying attention to statistics or details […] My goal is to create more excitement/fun while watching the game. Not to make a big deal out of it.* (E9)

For example, a football fan who places a bet on a lower national league match or on a peripheral international competition within that sport may generate an emotional engagement in watching that event that they would not otherwise achieve. It is true that, in such a match, the bettor's focus lies on the bet. Had they not placed a bet, that viewer would probably not have watched the game. However, this does not mean that, for that viewer, sport has been transformed into a mere instrument for making

money through betting. It simply means that, because of the bet, that viewer consumed a sporting event they otherwise would not have consumed.

> *I placed a bet and watched a match between Alverca and Arouca. I would never have watched that game if I hadn't bet.* (E14)

This does not preclude sport consumption from remaining an end, since many bettors will continue to watch the sporting events that generate greater emotional involvement without the need to place a bet. In fact, the evidence collected indicates that most bettors do not feel the need to bet on matches with a high emotional charge. For some bettors, this is due to the concern that betting may shift the focus toward the outcome of the bet rather than the game itself, turning what could be a moment of pleasure into a moment of stress.

> *Betting is an incentive to watch games. There are very few matches that I watch out of personal interest. The ones my club plays and not much else. When I bet, I want to watch more.* (E11)

> *It's different. It doesn't mean it's better. Betting makes you pay attention to a game that you wouldn't have if you hadn't bet. It can make an Aves–Farense match interesting/exciting. On the other hand, some games are interesting on their own, and betting can prevent you from fully enjoying the game. For example, in a Barça–Real match, when you bet, you want the game to go according to your bet—you don't care whether it's a great game or not.* (E10)

*Consumption of new sports disciplines*

Sport betting has the capacity to promote the consumption of new sports disciplines. Bettors encouraged by peers may place bets on sports they do not usually follow and, because of the bet, watch the sporting event in question.

> *[…] by betting responsibly, we are discovering other sports. Now I know rugby players, I know who Carlos Alcaraz is in tennis, which I didn't know before. Now I know things about swimming and boxing. There are several sports about which I now have a different perspective.* (E18)

At this initial stage, betting fosters the first contact and/or familiarity with a given sport, with sports consumption being primarily instrumentalised by the bet.

> *I didn't understand anything about tennis and started watching it because of the bets, to know who to bet on. I began studying, looking at statistics […] Now I follow the main competitions […] even without betting.* (E4)

Tennis, North American sports (NFL, NBA, NHL), and combat sports (MMA) emerge as the most frequently mentioned examples by interviewees (E4, 10, 11, 14, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22). This reconfiguration of consumption is initially driven by financial interest and the logic of betting, since in these sports the probability of a draw is low or non-existent. In this way, the consumption of these sports is initially mediated by the advantages of odds and the probability of winning bets.

The expansion of sports consumption to other disciplines occurs when the bettor acquires advanced knowledge about the teams and participants in the game and develops an emotional involvement with the new sport strong enough that the sporting experience is no longer exclusively mediated by betting or influenced by third parties, but instead motivated by their own interest in the sport.

As noted, such situations are initially experienced in social events mediated by betting. From this perspective, betting acts as a unifying and stimulating element of sporting experiences, fostering collective emotional engagement with sport.

> *My friends and I developed a strong connection with the NFL […]. On Sundays, we would all meet at someone's house and start placing bets. Not everyone, of course. And we really enjoyed it, you know […] betting influences the way we watch sport. Of course it does. I never realised I'd watch the NFL, really enjoy it, and get excited about it.* (E8)

> *We started watching ice hockey, which was like roller hockey [a popular sport in Portugal]. We began watching the games because of betting […]. We would go to the café we always visited, and when it closed, we stayed inside with the owner, watching NHL ice hockey games and placing bets.* (E19)

The consumption of new sports extends beyond the sporting event itself, encompassing sports news content, content creators, statistics, and institutional information. In the short term, this consumption is primarily driven by the goal of

improving the chances of winning a bet. Nonetheless, the evidence shows that in some cases, in the long term, this behaviour can simultaneously serve as a means of expanding knowledge and fostering an emotional connection to sport.

> *Before, I didn't know anything about tennis, and now I can name most of the players in the rankings, the tournaments, and the different surfaces.* (E18)

> *The world of MMA is very interesting. Betting led me to become interested in the fighters, learn about their lives, and follow them on social media […] An MMA fight is announced five months in advance. A lot happens in those five months, both in the fighters' personal lives and in their training. Then there are the events, the phase-offs, where you see how they react. All of that has an influence. It all provides information to analyse and determine probabilities* (E16).

One of the bettors (E18) even mentioned that starting to bet and watch tennis led him to want to experience the sport. And now he plays it regularly.

*Platform for promoting and consuming sport*

Finally, sports betting platforms indirectly promote sports consumption by allowing bettors to watch sporting competitions that they would otherwise be unable to access.

In Portugal, some licensed betting operators offer live streaming services, enabling the broadcast of sporting events in real time. Among the events available are international leagues in sports such as football, tennis, and basketball. These events are also part of the programming of multiple private sports channels (e.g., Sport TV, DAZN, BTV), which hold exclusive broadcasting rights and require a subscription fee.

However, due to programming limitations, private sports channels only broadcast the main matches of these competitions, while the remaining games may be available through sports betting platforms. In this way, betting operators function as channels for promoting sport, allowing those who cannot subscribe to these channels to establish or maintain contact with sports disciplines and international competitions that are not broadcast on free-to-air television.

Several interviewees acknowledged that the possibility of watching sporting events through these platforms serves as an incentive to create or maintain an account on a betting site. Some admitted to doing so primarily to watch sport, noting that this is also a common practice among their friends. Contrary to what Lis-Clarke & Walsh (2024) stated, the data show that the recreational bettors interviewed not only continue to be interested in sporting events on which they do not bet, but some even use betting platforms to consume sport without feeling the need to place a bet on the event they are watching (E15, 25).

> *I have an account to watch basketball games. It's cheaper than having Sport TV. Occasionally, I can place a bet, but I mainly have the account to watch the games.* (E15)

> *The minimum deposit on Betclic or Betano is €10. With €10, I have access to a wide variety of sports and games. It's not worth paying for a Sport TV subscription.* (E19)

> *Some people even put money into a betting account just to watch football games because they don't have Sport TV. By having an account and some funds there, you can watch the games that are available.* (E7)

**2 - Instrumentalising and alienating sports consumption**

Despite their positive effects, sports betting also has a dark side. This side is not limited to problem gambling, extending, for example, to the ways in which sport is consumed, experienced, and socially valued. The evidence collected indicates that, in certain circumstances (e.g., problem gambling), betting can contribute to the instrumentalisation and alienation of sports consumption, interfere with collective sporting experiences, promote sports consumption under an addictive logic, or serve as a vehicle for immoral preferences.

*Instrumental consumption of sport*

The testimonies collected support the theoretical premise of Lis-Clarke & Walsh (2024), which holds that one of the dangers associated with sports betting is the possibility of sport being transformed into an instrument for achieving an end. This occurs when betting

alters the intrinsic motivations that drive spectators' engagement with sport, fostering consumers who are more motivated by the adrenaline of the bet(s) placed than by the sporting event itself, regardless of its emotional significance. This is a process through which sport loses its intrinsic value, and sports consumption becomes mediated by betting.

Instrumental consumption of sport can manifest as the bettor's attention shifting toward parallel events available for betting or specific occurrences on which they have placed bets, to the detriment of the game itself.

> *It has happened to me that I paid more attention to corners and yellow cards because of the bets I placed than to the game itself.* (E3)

> *We are a group of seven. Almost every weekend we get together to watch a soccer game in a café or somewhere else. On television, they usually show a big game (soccer), involving Benfica, Porto, or Sporting. We start watching that game. But then we have seven cell phones watching another soccer game, a basketball game, a tennis game, a paddle tennis game, a volleyball game.* (E16)

Betting can also shift the bettor's interest from sporting performance to other elements that support the likelihood of success of the bets placed. From this perspective, the consumption of journalistic, statistical, or analytical content becomes central and can be harmful to sport as the emotional connection moves away from the intrinsic elements of the game (e.g., beautiful plays, goals/points, tactical choices) toward statistics or language related to sports betting.

> *The NBA was already a very large market, but betting has made it even bigger. Nowadays, you see people talking about basketball—not because they know the game, but using statistical terms.* (E7)

> *Yes. I have friends who follow the sport based on the bets they place. They consume sport not for the enjoyment of the discipline, but to see if they will win the bet.* (E2)

The worst thing for sports is to take a backseat. Several bettors believe that if gambling is involved, the financial aspect will take precedence (E17, 11, 13, 15, 16, 19).

> *I consider myself a sports fanatic. I watch sports, I play them. I love it. I don't need to gamble to be a sports fanatic. But if I do bet, when I'm watching a match I've wagered on, the bet itself becomes the focus. The adrenaline rush of money is stronger*. (E17)

For this reason, some bettors choose not to wager on matches of the clubs they support (E18, 13, 16): first, because they wouldn't be objective when considering a good bet, and second, because a bet could shift the focus of the match and diminish their passion for being a true fan.

*Interference in collective consumption dynamics*

Betting can also interfere with collective consumption dynamics. This occurs when social sporting experiences, such as watching a sporting event at a café or live with friends, are reshaped into moments subordinated to the logic of betting. As a result, the emotional connection to the sport is reconfigured, becoming more individual than collective. In extreme cases, this process can contribute to spectator alienation, at which point the individual becomes completely disconnected from the socially consumed sporting event and restricts their attention and emotional involvement to the bets placed on that or other sporting events.

> *For example, we're at a café watching a football game, and they're thinking, "let's bet on goals here, on that." I look at them and say, "Guys, let's just watch the football game. That's why we came here [...] I'll give you the Sporting–Porto case. On Saturday, we went to watch it at the café. It was a good football game to watch, but they were worried about betting on the score at half-time. 'Porto is better, let's bet on Porto to win.' To me, that's not very healthy anymore.* (E5)

> *[…] we were watching Braga live at the stadium. And there was one guy who had bet on a player to score in a crappy league and wasn't paying attention to the game. He was focused on his phone, watching the game he had bet on.* (E5)

Naturally, new intragroup dynamics emerge, such as competing to see who can predict the most bets correctly, or watching a match together, hoping a friend will win or lose their bet. In these cases, the dynamics are not motivated by positive values of sport, but rather by the act of betting itself.

*Sports consumption under an addictive logic*

In extreme cases, sports consumption can evolve into an addictive logic. This occurs when a bettor loses control over their sports betting and begins to orient their sports consumption primarily around the bets they place. Interviews with two self-excluded sports bettors (E3 and E8) confirm that, as gambling dependence increases, sports consumption becomes increasingly guided by betting and less by the emotional significance of the sporting event. In this sense, the development of risk tolerance associated with sports betting can turn sport into an (indirect) source of frustration and pathology, simultaneously undermining its social image and value.

> *On Sundays, I would wake up and, if there was an interesting* [Portuguese] *Second League match, I'd watch it; if not, I'd wait for the* [English] *Premier League. The Premier League started at 12:30, then 3, then 5 […] I would spend the whole day sitting here, completely glued to the TV watching games […] I bet a lot on corners, a lot on the next goal, a lot on draw-no-bet when the favourite team was losing […] I only felt good when I had placed a larger number of bets.* (E8)

> *I used to bet on football matches, 1x2 […] Anything there was to bet on. I would bet with friends/colleagues during work breaks […] we followed the games on our phones […] and at the end of the day, on the matches available at that time.* (E3)

One of the hypotheses tested with the problematic bettors interviewed was the potential loss of interest in sports consumption following self-exclusion. Both mentioned that they

continue to consume sport, but now their consumption is exclusively guided by the emotional significance of the sporting event. Thus, the evidence collected in this study rejects the hypothesis of Lis-Clarke & Walsh (2024) that dependence on the excitement generated by sports betting could lead to a generalized disinterest in sporting events in the absence of betting; although both admit that the inherent excitement of sports consumption after betting dependence was affected. What is observed - even among recreational bettors - is a disinterest limited to sporting events involving teams or athletes unable to generate emotional engagement.

> *I watch the big games, because I've never really liked betting on the big matches. Real Madrid – Barcelona […] I have a soft spot for SC Braga […] I don't get sad or happy when Braga wins or loses. But when I go to watch Braga at the stadium, without betting, it becomes a basic game, without excitement. With a bet, it feels more alive.* (E8)

> *I watch football […] I continue to watch games even without betting, but not much. I watch the clubs that really matter […] but, of course, it's not the same.* (E3)

*Driver of immoral preferences*

On the other hand, the data confirm the theoretical proposition of Lis-Clarke & Walsh (2024), which states that betting can also act as a vehicle for immoral preferences. This is the case with the celebration of a tragic event (e.g., an athlete's injury) that increases the chances of winning or guarantees success in a particular bet(s).

However, the testimonies collected show that celebrating an injury, for example, is not a phenomenon caused by sports betting, but rather a cultural behaviour within the sports context in Portugal that has been amplified by betting. In other words, even without betting, it is common for a devoted fan to feel pleased with an injury to a player from the opposing or rival team, because it increases their team's chances of winning a particular match or the championship itself.

> *If it's the team opposite mine, I think it will depend a lot on the result. If the score is 10–0 and the opposing goalkeeper gets injured, I might be more concerned, but if the score is 0–0 or 1–1, then you want to win, so you might*

*feel a bit happier because you want to win. Then, when the game ends, you see what happened and so on, but it all really depends on the person, on their hunger to win.* (E4)

However, by stimulating the consumption of secondary sporting events and previously unconsumed disciplines, sports betting has extended this behaviour to the consumption of sporting events driven by extrinsic motivations. Furthermore, since the celebration of a tragic event is linked to the outcome, sports betting has introduced new reasons for such behaviour, even in sporting events with high emotional significance.

From this perspective, betting becomes harmful to sport once it reverses the logic of admiration and transforms the veneration of idols into a desire for their misfortune.

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*Usually, it can be about a yellow or red card. Or a player getting injured in the UFC, or a star NBA player, which makes it easier [to win the bet], or even [to win the bet immediately] […] Anything that affects the bet ends up affecting you, for better or worse. What matters is that you're more likely to be close to winning.* (E8)

*In general, this happens involuntarily. I'll give you a practical example—in futsal. I bet against a team, and the goalkeeper is having a great game. He ends up getting injured. You don't know the severity of the injury, but he comes off. He was saving everything. I think you celebrate a little because, in principle, you're going to be able to win the bet more easily.* (E4)

## 6 – Discussion and conclusions

This article shows how interviewed young bettors in Portugal perceive and experience the influence of the gamblification of sport on their sport consumption practices. The findings revealed both positive and negative aspects in this matter.

On the one hand, the rise and widespread availability of online betting have created opportunities for sports to attract audiences and/or encourage sports consumption among generations that are losing interest in watching complete sporting events or who, simply due to technological and cultural changes, no longer have the necessary concentration to sit and watch a sporting event in all its dimensions and maintain attention and excitement throughout. Furthermore, the evidence gathered suggests that the

recreational experience of betting can stimulate consumption of leagues and/or matches with less media coverage and/or less sporting interest. Finally, sports betting may foster the consumption of new sport modalities, which, consequently, can also trigger a desire to practice them. In short, the experiences reported by participants suggest that betting may attract audiences who otherwise might not consume some sporting events if betting were not available.

On the other hand, the findings suggest that sports betting can also promotes instrumental forms of sports consumption and, in situations of uncontrolled gambling, this can lead to consumer isolation, harm collective experiences, or stimulate forms of sports consumption driven by an addictive logic. Betting can also serve as a vehicle for immoral preferences, because, in their eagerness to win a bet, people may celebrate injuries, accidents, or any type of misfortune that could help their bet have a better chance of winning. Therefore, what can be an opportunity for encouraging sport audiences is also a risk to sport survival and the promotion of its positive values.

The data suggests that many people seek to intensify the emotional experience associated with sports consumption. While sports themselves continue to offer events capable of generating emotional involvement independently, specific situations of instrumental sports consumption mediated by betting do not appear to pose a problem within the logic of sports consumption. However, those who identify themselves as sports fans and consume sports even without betting acknowledge that placing bets on a sporting event shifts their focus, as their interest in the bet competes with, and in most cases surpasses, their interest in the game itself.

The findings support the theoretical premise that sports betting increases satisfaction with sports consumption experiences (Lee et al., 2025), fosters a stronger emotional connection with sporting events (Forrest, 2014; Salaga et al., 2020; 2022), and attracts new audiences, particularly new generations (AGA, 2018a; Broughton, 2019; PwC, 2019; Hollebeek, 2011b). They also support some of Lis-Clarke and Walsh's (2024) premises, particularly the idea that betting acts as a driver of instrumental consumption, selective attention, or immoral preferences. However, the results reject Lis-Clarke and Walsh’s (2024) idea that the absence of betting availability might compromise or reduce sports consumption.

Based on these findings, theoretical and practical implications can be drawn. First, this research demonstrates the importance of considering the interdependence between

positive and negative factors when studying the relationship between betting practices and sports consumption.

Secondly, the findings suggest an alternative interpretation to that proposed by Lis-Clarke and Walsh (2024), insofar as several participants described trajectories moving from initially extrinsic forms of engagement towards more intrinsic forms of sport consumption. Sports betting promotes instrumental forms of consumption, such as secondary games/competitions and new sports, with extrinsic motivation driven by economic rewards derived from betting, which can gradually evolve towards intrinsic forms of consumption, motivated by excitement and interest in the sporting event itself.

This does not mean that betting cannot discourage sports consumption in its absence. In fact, the literature confirms that expected tangible rewards can undermine intrinsic motivation to participate in an activity (Deci, 1971; Lepper, Greene, and Nisbett, 1973; see Ryan and Deci, 2000). However, the evidence suggests that, if sporting events generate emotional intensity, this is unlikely to occur.

Third, it expands the literature on motivations for sports consumption by showing that, beyond intrinsic motivations such as fandom, entertainment, identity cultivation (Kim and Mao, 2012), or team loyalty (Koronios et al., 2020), extrinsic motivations like betting can act as a stimulus for new forms of sports consumption. While extrinsic motivations were formerly primarily based on social relationships, these relationships can take on a background role when betting becomes involved.

In this new context, sports have the opportunity to attract consumers who wouldn't sit down to watch a game without betting, but it is clear that, initially, their interest lies in their bet, not in the sport itself. The findings suggest that sport governing bodies may wish to consider this issue and strive to reorient the motivation of these new consumers from extrinsic elements (financial rewards from betting) toward intrinsic elements (interest in and excitement for the sport). Relying excessively on betting as a mechanism for boosting audiences may create tensions between commercial objectives and the cultural values traditionally associated with sport.

Firstly, because by promoting its sustainability through betting, sport runs the risk of becoming an activity that (mainly) sells audience to the betting market. A market for which sport is simply a tool to attract customers and generate profits. Secondly, and related to this former point, if public interest focuses on betting (and the adrenaline rush it generates), the sport itself takes a back seat. For a bettor, it makes no difference whether it's a professional football match or a more recreational event, such as the King League

(organised by influencers), an amateur league, an esports event, or even any event that can generate adrenaline around a bet, from film awards to political election results.

Professional sports and entertainment must openly and seriously discuss their future and the tools they use to captivate audiences. Works like this help understand the intrinsic values of sport that attract fans and viewers (excitement, competitiveness, a level playing field) and the problems that can alienate audiences. They also offer opportunities for action in reshaping competitions and highlight potential sources of conflict in sports management. The findings raise broader questions regarding betting-driven sports consumption, media markets, and the sustainability of traditional broadcasting models. However, these issues are beyond the scope of this study and should be considered hypotheses for future research, rather than conclusions drawn from the testimonies collected for this study.

As a national qualitative study, this work has some limitations, especially regarding its transferability to other social contexts. In this regard, it is important to explore further, both in this and other social contexts, how sports betting, as promoters of instrumental consumption, can redirect the motivations of the sports public (particularly young people) from extrinsic to intrinsic factors and, above all, in the opposite direction, since this was not observed in the present study. Future research should also examine what sports policies can be promoted to preserve the intrinsic values of sport and prevent its instrumentalisation in the service of sports betting.

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