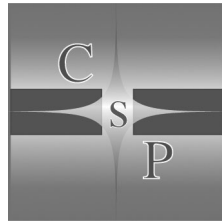


Myths and Facts about Football

Myths and Facts about Football:
The Economics and Psychology
of the World's Greatest Sport

Edited by

Patric Andersson, Peter Ayton and Carsten Schmidt



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PREFACE

DANIEL FINKELSTEIN¹

I constantly find myself called a spoilsport. Why? Because I insist on subjecting football clichés to rigorous analysis. I can't just sit there and listen to someone saying that the worst time to concede a goal is just before half time without wondering—is it true? I can't see home advantage change the course of a tournament without wondering—how does it work? I can't see a team sack its manager without wondering—did he really deserve it? And I robustly reject the idea that such analysis spoils the romance of football. I am not rejecting the banter, the punditry, the weird stats. I just want them to be true. Who can argue with that?

I have to admit that I was a football fan for about 35 years before it occurred to me that data told you the story of soccer. Actually, it didn't so much occur to me as to my friend and collaborator Dr Henry Stott, who was at Warwick University when I first met him. Henry was part of a new wave of academics, a number of them represented in this volume, who had begun to model football hand use sophisticated statistical methods to reveal football's secrets.

Quite early on in my conversion to a football data fanatic, I came across the work of Peter Ayton and admired his insights. So when he told me that this volume was appearing I was excited, and remain so. I think you should be too.

I think the sort of material he together with Patric Andersson and Carsten Schmidt have gathered in this book represents the future of sports writing. People are always a bit surprised to find me deadly serious about that, but if I wasn't I wouldn't bother with football stats at all.

I believe data can tell you far more than commentators, experts, former players or casual pundits. I believe that objective measurement is not just a way to rank and value players, but the only way. I believe a statement

¹ Daniel Finkelstein OBE is the author of the "Fink Tank"—a regular column appearing in 'The Times' and the only regular sports feature devoted to using scientific methods for predicting and understanding football.

made about football that can't be quantified and tested using data is a non statement.

Over the next ten years, managers are going to twig to this. When there are millions of pounds at stake they aren't going to go on valuing players by reading Shoot magazine and watching a video, are they? So we, the data fiends, we're going to take over the world my friends. Starting here. Starting with this book.