Sociology

Volume 36(1): 23–42
[0038-0385(200202)36:1;23–42;020961]
SAGE Publications
London, Thousand Oaks,
New Delhi

Globalization or Internationalization? Foreign Footballers in the English League, 1946–95

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ABSTRACT

This article challenges the idea that globalization is an inexorable free market process that fundamentally changes the nature of economic competition. Using evidence on hiring practices from the English football league (1946–95) it presents a case study of a labour market where globalization might reasonably be expected. In finding that the market is characterized by a process of *internationalization*, the article goes on to show how this process is influenced by a range of economic, social and political factors that have distinctly *national* or British origins. More specifically, it argues that the recent expansion in overseas recruitment is shaped by the risk averse way in which employers deal with that which makes labour unique as a commodity: its variability and plasticity. Consequently, English clubs tend to draw heavily on those foreign sources that most resemble local sources in terms of climate, culture, language and style of football (for example, Scotland, Ireland, Australia and northern Europe, especially Scandinavia). Accordingly, the article concludes that radical notions of labour market globalization are fundamentally flawed since they fail to account for the ways in which labour market behaviour is socially embedded.

KEY WORDS

foreign footballers / globalization / internationalization / labour markets / recruitment / social embeddedness

Much of the research on globalization and labour has tended to focus on the employment of relatively immobile forms of labour by hyper-mobile forms of capital, notably in labour-intensive industries (for example, Hirst and Thompson, 1996: 29–31; Jacoby, 1995). However, international

migration is also considered to be one of the defining features of globalization, not least because it has supposedly entered a phase that some term 'the age of migration' and others 'the new migration' (Castles and Miller, 1993; Koser and Lutz, 1997; Staring, 2000: 203). Although professional football is obviously a labour-intensive industry it is, by contrast, one where employment is offered by immobile forms of capital to increasingly mobile forms of labour. Within the football industry, it is the employers who are permanently fixed to specific geographical locations while the employees can move between cities, countries and continents. In recent years, the increase in such mobility has led to the popular view that the football industry is undergoing a process of globalization, mostly because increasing numbers of European clubs have begun to import more and more players from a wider range of countries (see, for example, Boon, 2000; Jones and Chappell, 1997; Maguire and Stead, 1998).

Against this background, this article follows Hirst and Thompson (1996) in challenging the idea that a disembedded and global free market has supplanted national and international markets. The argument is developed by examining changes in the hiring practices of English clubs over half a century. Though there is evidence that national boundaries are of diminishing importance, I argue that the market for professional footballers has not, and is unlikely to, experience the kind of qualitative changes associated with the putative free markets of economic globalization. One of the main reasons is that employers prefer to engage in repeated transactions with reliable or known sources as a means of reducing the uncertainty that characterizes labour as a commodity. Consequently, market transactions are influenced by social and cultural ties, by history and by pre-existing differences in the economic power of buyers and sellers. To put it briefly, markets, even increasingly international labour markets, are not *free* in the sense that they are governed solely by the laws of supply and demand: they are embedded in specific social situations in ways that both shape and support labour market behaviour.

Globalization, Social Embeddedness and Immigration

Proponents of globalization typically argue that we live in an age in which a new kind of international economic system has emerged, one that is characterized by global competition for capital, labour and customers. They claim that decades of international marketization, neo-liberal deregulation and global economic integration have virtually eliminated the traditional constraints that nation states placed on the free flow of capital and labour. Above all, the notion that firms have to cope with foreign competitors in domestic markets is presented as a qualitative change in the nature of economic competition, not least because it destroys traditional forms of economic power (see, for example, Beck, 2000; Giddens, 1999; Gray, 1998).

Critics of globalization insist that recent changes in the major economies have neither created a completely globalized economy nor produced a world that

is defined by rampant free markets and passive nation states. In relation to the former, some accept that while globalization may exist as a *process*, it has not been achieved as an *end point*. Dicken (1998: 5), for instance, argues that it is important to distinguish between processes of *internationalization* and *globalization* (see also Hirst and Thompson, 1996: 7–12). Processes of internationalization are defined as 'the simple extension of economic activities across national boundaries'. 'It is', Dicken claims, 'essentially a *quantitative* process which leads to a more extensive geographical pattern of economic activity'. Globalization processes, on the other hand, 'are *qualitatively* different from internationalization processes' in that they involve 'not merely the geographical extension of economic activity across national boundaries but also – and more importantly – the *functional integration* of such internationally dispersed activities'.

If functional integration is to be one of the defining features of globalization then it assumes that there is a global market for capital and labour. Otherwise, market participants must operate within international systems of trade and exchange. Some neo-classical economists, such as Borjas (1990), claim that there is indeed a 'global migration market' governed by the laws of supply and demand. From Borjas's perspective, international migration is to be explained solely at the individual level where a 'transfer mechanism' redirects labour from home towards foreign markets depending on relative wage levels. For example, in countries where there is a large supply of labour and limited amounts of capital, wages tend to be relatively low compared to countries where labour is scarce and capital is readily available. Accordingly, migration occurs when individuals act on a cost-benefit calculation, which recognizes that there are greater returns to human capital where labour is scarce (Borjas, 1990).

Professional Football: A Critical Case

As a labour market, professional football is characterized by a number of properties that make it a critical case for testing claims of globalization of the free market kind. First, association football is a truly global sport: more than 200 countries currently participate in international competitions and professional leagues exist on all five continents. Second, professional football is a unique industry in which the contribution of individual units of labour is unusually transparent. Not only can potential employers observe individual performance during games, they can also obtain a wide range of statistics on the strengths and weaknesses of individual players including the number and level of appearances for club and country (under-age teams, national team) in addition to such physical attributes as age, build, weight and height. Third, the status of labour as a commodity is taken to the extreme within the football industry since players may be traded between employers in the same way as machinery or land. Unlike other employees in other industries, footballers do not have the right to resign and take up employment with a different employer since their services are legally owned by the club that holds their registration. During the

period covered by this research, footballers could only leave and join another club if their original employer agreed to sell their services.

But, despite its potential for global trade, its transparency and its exceptionally commodified status, I argue that this form of labour still presents employers with a distinctive information problem (see also Stinchcombe, 1990: 240–2). That is, employers face considerable difficulty in obtaining reliable information on player performances and, even when they do, the quality of any future performances cannot be predicted with certainty. Given this difficulty managers have a propensity to engage in what Kanter (1977) terms *homosocial reproduction*. That is, they tend to hire those who most resemble themselves in the belief that they are better able to predict how they will perform in situations of uncertainty.

In developing this argument, I shall draw on one of the central ideas of the 'new economic sociology' (Granovetter, 1985; Portes, 1995; Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993) to show that patterns of international migration within the football industry are socially embedded. In other words, migration patterns are mediated through social structures in ways that cannot be explained by a pure 'market' approach to economic action. At the macro level they 'tend to reflect a history of contact, colonization, and intervention by powerful "core" nations over weaker ones and the onset of migration flows from the latter' (Portes, 1995: 20). At the microstructural level they are shaped by social capital acquired through social ties or social networks. Furthermore, migration is a network creating and network dependent process, as it tends to create a dense web of social ties between places of origin and destination. Once such contacts are established, they are inclined 'to become self-sustaining and impervious to short-term changes in economic incentives' (Portes, 1995: 22).

This discussion raises a number of empirical questions about the nature and scale of the changes occurring in the market for professional footballers. Obviously, the central question concerns the very nature of recent changes. Has there been a qualitative change of the kind associated with globalization? Or is it merely a quantitative change in the degree of internationalization? The answer to this question is presented in four parts. The first examines whether English football is experiencing a growing diversity in migrants' national origins, what Castles and Miller (1993) term the *globalization of migration*. The second describes the way in which recruitment patterns are embedded in a range of social ties and networks with the aim of assessing whether these are more conducive to internationalization or globalization. The third examines how foreign recruitment relates to the prevailing patterns of economic power within the English league.[1] Here, the aim is to test whether the emergence of new sources of labour has changed the nature of economic competition within the football industry. The final part, which is derived from Dicken's argument that globalization describes a process where international activities are functionally integrated into a firm's activities, investigates whether the hiring of foreign players has shifted from market transactions towards hierarchical arrangements.

Recruitment Methods: Markets and Hierarchies

There are two methods of recruitment in professional soccer, namely the transfer and trainee (apprenticeship) systems. The transfer or market system is based on two elements: registration and contract. Every player must be registered with the Football Association and the Football League if he is to be employed by any club. Players may move between clubs when the player's registration is transferred from one club to another, subject to the payment of a fee to the club that holds the player's contract.[2] The hierarchy-based method of recruitment in professional soccer is an employer-led apprenticeship system that began in 1960. Though the Professional Footballers' Association took over the administration of the Youth Training Scheme in 1983, the participating clubs still select and coach the trainees. Under this system clubs sign players on associate schoolboy forms at the age of 15 and provide them with coaching until they win full-time professional contracts at 17.

This method has some similarities with what Althauser and Kalleberg (1981: 130) call a *firm internal labour market*, in that it consists of a job ladder, with entry at the bottom, and upward movement which is associated with the progressive development of skills and knowledge. Within professional football the job ladder represents the development of teenagers from youth level, through the reserve team and into first team football. However, the application of the concept of an internal labour market has limits in that it usually refers to arrangements that are designed to retain rather than recruit employees (Althauser and Kalleberg, 1981; Doeringer and Piore, 1971). By contrast, the primary purpose of such arrangements within the football industry is to recruit and develop young players. Also, clubs can only retain players through salary improvements (and by winning competitions) once they establish League careers, since the first team is effectively the top rung of the job ladder. Finally, managers may also decide to sell some players to finance the recruitment of others. So, in contrast to the classic definitions of internal labour markets, neither entry at the bottom nor the retention at the top are defining features of job ladders within the football industry. Nevertheless, the concept of an internal labour market is useful in the sense that it describes a vertical hierarchy of jobs with the potential for promotion from within.[3]

Data and Methods

English football provides a rare opportunity to examine claims of labour market globalization over the long term as comprehensive information is available on the origins of every player who appeared in the English League (and Premiership) since the end of the Second World War. The evidence presented in this article is drawn from a purpose-built data set that includes every foreign footballer who made at least one League appearance between 1946/7 and 1995/6. This 50-year period began with the re-launch of the league after the Second World War and ends one year before the landmark Bosman ruling that gave footballers freedom of contract.

The decision to use 1995/6 as an end point was based on data availability and analytical considerations. Generally, there is gap of two years between the end of any season and the publication of complete information on those who played during that season. Also, much of the analysis depends on comparing trends over five periods of 10 years and the next 10-year period is not due to end until 2005. In any case, one of the aims of this research is to place some of the more recent developments in the context of long-term historical shifts within the football industry. This contrasts with mass media interpretations of contemporary developments which tend to promote claims of radical change on the basis of a small number of unrepresentative cases.[4]

The data, which include information on each player's place or country of birth, date of birth, method of recruitment, year of recruitment and hiring club, were obtained from Hugman's (1992/8) *English League Players' Records 1946–98*. For the purposes of this article *foreign* players are defined in terms of their original footballing, as opposed to their political, jurisdictions. This means that all those who were born and reared outside of England and Wales are categorized as foreign, even though they may come from other parts of the United Kingdom. Players from Scotland and Northern Ireland, for instance, are included because both have their own leagues and are, as a result, recognized as distinct national jurisdictions by the European (UEFA) and world governing bodies (FIFA).[5] Welsh players are not included simply because Wales did not have a separate league during this period.

The divisional membership and attendance figures of each club were used to create indicators of status and size. Data on the clubs divisional status at the time of signing were obtained from Robinson (1998) while information on attendances was obtained from Tabner (1992) and *Rothmans Football Yearbooks* (1991–7).[6] The advantage of attendance figures is that they give an estimation of club income in an era when match attendances provided much of the clubs' revenue (Szymanski and Kuypers, 1999: 38). It should be noted that attendance figures are closely related to league division, with most of the better-supported (city) teams in the top division and the less supported (town) teams in the third and fourth divisions (Chester, 1968: 42; Szymanski and Kuypers, 1999). Given that most clubs have either been promoted or relegated during the course of this period, nearly all have changed in size on at least one occasion.[7]

Globalization or Internationalization? The Celtic Periphery and Beyond

The recruitment of foreign (that is, non-English/Welsh) players can be divided into two overlapping phases, which may be termed the *Celtic* and the *International*. During the first period, which lasted from 1946 to the late 1970s, the market was restricted to those who held British passports, or retained the right to take up employment in Britain without requiring work permits (that is, those from the Irish Republic after 1948). The second phase began with the legal

Figure 1 Foreign players in the English League, 1946–95

changes that followed Britain's entry into the European Community in 1973, though English clubs were not able to take advantage of this development until 1978 when the Professional Footballers' Association lifted its ban on overseas players. This decision followed an agreement between UEFA and the EEC Commission that outlawed discrimination against the employment of footballers from other EEC countries. Shortly afterwards, Tottenham Hotspur signed two of Argentina's 1978 World Cup winning side, Ipswich Town hired two leading Dutch internationals, and 'overseas' players gradually became a major feature of the English game (see Figure 1).

The Globalization of Recruitment?

Since the league recommenced in 1946, the vast majority (87.4 percent) of non-English players came from the 'Celtic fringe' of Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. Of these, the Scottish contribution, which amounts to two-thirds (68.4 percent) of all foreign players, was by far the largest (see Figure 1). Most (65.6 percent) of the Scottish recruitment took place in the 1950s and 1960s and involved nearly every club in the English league. After the 1960s, the volume of Scottish and Irish signings declined until it eventually fell below that coming from overseas after the mid-1980s.

The origins of those players recruited between 1976 and 1995 indicate that the market for professional footballers has indeed become increasingly

Table 1 Regional origins of foreign players, 1976–95

	%		
Region	*1976–85*	*1986–95*	*Total No.*
Celtic (Sco, Irl, N.I.)	80.3 (288)	56.5 (281)	569
Europe	5.8 (21)	11.9 (59)	80
Scandinavia	2.8 (10)	10.7 (53)	63
Commonwealth	2.5 (9)	8.7 (43)	52
Central & E. Europe	5.0 (18)	5.6 (28)	46
Africa	1.7 (6)	2.6 (13)	19
Latin America	1.9 (7)	1.6 (8)	15
USA /Other (32)	0.0 (0)	2.4 (12)	12
Total	100.0 (359)	100.0 (497)	856

Chi-square = 66.003, d.f. = 7, $p < .005$

international in nature (see Table 1). As the proportion of 'foreign' players from the 'Celtic' leagues declined from over three quarters (80.3 percent) of those signed to almost half (56.5 percent), the proportion from Europe doubled, while those from Scandinavia and the English-speaking parts of the Commonwealth trebled. Meanwhile the diversity of the sources increased dramatically. In the 10 years prior to 1975, English clubs had only recruited players from 10 different countries. By 1985, this had increased to 23 and, in the 10 years up to 1995, players had been imported from 41 different countries, with an increasing number of these coming from outside the European Union.

Despite the claims of some commentators (for example, Boon, 2000; Jones and Chappell, 1997) there is a danger of overstating the significance of these changes for they mask some important underlying trends. The vast majority of the imports came from a small number of regions, notably Northern Europe, Scandinavia and the English-speaking parts of the British Commonwealth (Australia, Canada, South Africa and the West Indies). In any case, approximately half (54.5 percent) of the 'overseas' category came from only seven countries, with the largest number coming from the Netherlands. Additionally, many of those who hail from some of the more unusual locations, such as Africa and Latin America, are hired after they have established careers in other European Leagues. Direct recruitment from these regions is also inhibited by the regulations surrounding work permits for players from outside the European Union. The Department of Education and Employment generally restricts such permits to established international players from countries of at least reasonable international standing. Such measures are apparently intended to prevent cheap foreign imports from taking employment from British/European players. In any case, it hardly needs to be stated that most of the players at most English clubs are English (despite some famous high profile exceptions). In sum, if these labour market changes reflect a process of *internationalization* then it is one that is marked by a regional rather than a global orientation.

Labour Market Embeddedness: Economic, Historical and Social Determinants

The regional concentration of sources within the English football industry may be attributed to a unique combination of economic, historical and social factors. While it is useful to distinguish between the economic and the social for analytical purposes, the purpose of this section is to show that economic transactions are embedded in patterns of social relations that have a differential effect on the allocation and valuation of resources (Granovetter, 1985; Portes, 1995). Significantly, these also have a distinctly national or British basis.

My thesis is that lack of information and contacts in non-English-speaking countries, combined with fears about the ability of foreign footballers, has led clubs to hire those who most resemble indigenous players, both on and off the pitch. Obviously, many of the following factors are not unique to professional football since they also influence Britain's overall experience of migration. Nonetheless, the significant point is that they are important in this extreme case where so much information is available on individual performance.

Economic

Football is not so unusual as an industry that economic incentives are not among the major determinants of labour market behaviour. The English league is, after all, the oldest and largest employer of professional footballers in the world. For players from Ireland, Scotland and, more recently, Scandinavia, English clubs have always offered the prospect of a full-time career, higher wages, and better conditions than those available at home (Chester, 1968; McGovern, 2000; Moorhouse, 1994; Stead and Maguire, 2000).

On the demand side, employers have also responded to changes in market prices, perhaps most notably during the rapid inflation in the price of domestic players in the early 1990s. Fuelled by the satellite TV and ticket revenue increases that followed the formation of the Premiership in 1992, domestic transfer fees rose until they eventually broke the world record in July 1996 when Newcastle United signed the England international Alan Shearer from Blackburn Rovers for £15 million. In these circumstances, leading Premiership clubs insist that they have little choice but to buy abroad since foreign players are generally less expensive (*The Observer*, 26 July 1998; *Rothmans Yearbook 1995–96*: 550).

Nevertheless, it should be noted that English clubs have generally avoided the top end of the international market (that is, talented players in their early to mid-20s from Argentina, Brazil, Germany, Italy and Spain). While the arrival of satellite television revenue in the early 1990s enabled the newly launched Premier League to become one of the top buyers in the world, students of the game insist that Italian clubs are still winning the European 'cheque book battle' (Maguire and Stead, 1998: 67).

Historical

If we are to understand why Australian, Canadian, Scottish, Irish and South African players moved to England rather than France or Germany, for example, it is impossible to ignore Britain's political history and, in particular, its colonial past. The sharing of a common political jurisdiction and language, as well as familiarity with British culture, have all made it easier for migrants from the former colonies to move to Britain. From the clubs' perspective, these factors made it easier to make local contacts and obtain information about potential signings, thereby reducing the risk that such players would be unable to settle into English cities and towns.

Britain is also the home of the oldest professional leagues in the world. The creation of the English League in 1888 was quickly followed by those of Scotland and Ireland in 1890. Shortly afterwards English clubs began to transfer players from Scotland (Moorhouse, 1994) and Ireland (McGovern, 2000). Since then the relationship between the English league and those of the Celtic periphery has been overwhelmingly one of buyer and seller (Moorhouse, 1994; McGovern, 2000).

The importation of players from English-speaking parts of the Commonwealth is not a recent phenomenon either as significant numbers of South African footballers were hired in the 1940s and the 1950s. After the 1970s, English clubs also began to hire players from other parts of the Commonwealth, such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the West Indies where the game of football has grown as a participation sport.

Social Ties and Recruitment Networks

Migration patterns may, as Portes argues, be shaped by the development of social ties and social networks (1995; Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993). Such ties may not only help explain why migrants may move to a certain country but also why they take up employment with a particular employer. To illustrate this point I shall present examples from the recruitment of Scottish and Irish footballers before turning to some general points about social ties and social similarity.

An analysis of the relationship between the national origins of managers and the players they hired in the period after 1960 reveals that Scottish managers of English clubs are almost twice as likely to sign Scottish players as their English counterparts. Though two-thirds (67.8 percent) of all Scottish players were hired by English managers, Scottish managers signed an average of four players each while English managers hired an average of two.[8] Two noteworthy examples of this phenomenon, Tommy Docherty and Walter Galbraith, started their playing careers in the Scottish league before enjoying lengthy spells with English sides as players and later as managers. Docherty, whose managerial career began in the 1960s and continued into the 1980s, hired more Scottish players (37) than any other manager. Though most were hired while he was

manager of such leading sides as Chelsea and Manchester United, he continued this practice at six other English clubs. His compatriot, Galbraith, was famous for having developed a 'tried and trusted method of recruiting low-priced Scotsmen' in a career that included five different clubs in the lower divisions (Jackman and Dykes, 1991: 102). This practice was taken to the extreme at Accrington Stanley (1953–8), where he imported so many Scottish players that the club fielded an entire team of Scots for a match in August 1955. In fact, 15 of the 19 players used during the 1955–6 season were signed from Scottish sides.

If this example illustrates the strength of shared social ties between migrant footballers and managers,[9] the hiring of Irish players demonstrates how recruitment networks create links with particular employers. Arsenal and Manchester United have imported significantly more players from Ireland than any of the other English clubs (McGovern, 2000). Both have long-established networks of scouts in Ireland, with some of the chief scouts being former players (for example, Billy Behan with Manchester United). The scouts in turn have a range of local contacts whom they trust to provide reliable recommendations of potential players. These structures also benefit from a *demonstration effect*, as a tradition of employing successful Irish players makes these employers more attractive to other Irish hopefuls, thereby providing the clubs with more choice. Once signed, the presence of other Irish players also makes it easier for established players and apprentices to adapt to their new surroundings, as former Arsenal and Manchester United stars have acknowledged (McGovern, 2000). In short, the reputation that Arsenal and Manchester United established for hiring Irish players carries a significant element of self-perpetuation as recruitment networks of this sort serve to locate and assess quality. As Portes (1995) argues, international migration may be simultaneously a network creating and network dependent process.

Finally, it hardly needs to be stated that English clubs import large numbers from Australia, Northern Europe and Scandinavia because they share the English language (which Scandinavians take at secondary school), are familiar with the British style of football, the climate (apart from Australia and South Africa) and the culture. Again, the attraction of these sources for English sides is social as well as economic in that those who are hired are more likely to be able to adjust to life outside of work. The sharing of the English language serves a double function in that it also helps employers with their information problem. Managers can, for example, obtain direct information on potential players in Australia, something that they cannot do in the case of Romania or Bulgaria, for example.

More generally, this regional preference may reflect a process that Kanter (1977: 48) terms *homosocial reproduction*. Kanter argues that managers who work in situations where performance cannot be prescribed with any confidence are inclined to recruit employees who are socially similar. They do so because they believe they know how such employees will behave. Such risk-averse behaviour fosters social homogeneity, as managers tend to reproduce themselves in their own image.

Public comments by a number of leading managers about the merits of players from Scandinavia and northern Europe support this point. These typically claim that players from Australia, Northern Europe and Scandinavia have a similar mentality to British players, are more likely to speak English and are familiar with the British climate and style of football (*The Independent*, 23 November 1996; *The Sunday Times*, 5 February 1995; *The Observer*, 17 August 1999; *The Independent on Sunday*, 17 November 1996).[10] Players from South America and Southern Europe, by contrast, play a different style of football and do not appear to have the appropriate temperament for the British game (*The Sunday Times*, 1 December 1996).

Internationalization: A Game for the Wealthy

While proponents of globalization admit that it may be an uneven process they remain rather vague about the details, possibly because these would undermine the strength of their claims. In this section of the article, I examine whether the increasingly international nature of this particular labour market has transformed or simply reinforced traditional divisions within English football. In other words, I ask whether the erosion of national borders has led to fundamental changes in the nature of economic competition.

Szymanski and Wilkins (1992) report that the Football League is characterized by a remarkable degree of industrial concentration, as indicated by the ability of the major clubs to maintain their league positions over the long term. Unsurprisingly, they conclude that the sluggishness in movement between league positions stems from 'the ability of the leading clubs to buy all the best players, and the difficulty of the lower clubs to generate sufficient revenues to pay for, and retain, top quality players' (Szymanski and Wilkins, 1992: 16; see also Arnold and Benveniste, 1987; Szymanski and Kuypers, 1999). Given that the English football industry contains a core of major clubs it might be assumed that these clubs import most of the foreign players. Equally, it could be argued that medium-sized clubs with more limited financial resources may be more inclined to import large numbers of foreign players precisely because they are less expensive than the domestic alternative.

When recruitment is related to club size and divisional status three distinct trends emerge. First, large clubs, who are invariably from the top division, were responsible for initiating and conducting most of this activity. For instance, the largest clubs signed half (48.0 percent) of all foreigners, including two-thirds (65.0 percent) of the 'overseas players' (see Table 2). First division clubs, as expected, accounted for over half (56.1 percent) of the 'overseas' activity (three-quarters of the large clubs were in the first or Premier division when they hired foreign players).

Second, there is evidence that the larger employers have become increasingly dominant as the market becomes more internationalized. The proportion imported by the largest clubs increased from more than one third in 1946–55

Table 2 Club size and foreign recruitment, 1946–95

	Country			
Size	*Scotland*	*N. Ireland*	*R. Ireland*	*Other*
Large	42.0 (845)	56.4 (167)	60.7 (162)	65.0 (241)
Medium	29.7 (599)	31.1 (92)	28.8 (77)	24.8 (92)
Small	28.3 (570)	12.5 (37)	10.5 (28)	10.2 (38)
Total	100 (2014)	100 (296)	100 (267)	100 (371)

Chi-square = 137.720; d.f. = 6; $p < .005$

(38.0 percent) to two-thirds in 1976–85 (65.2 percent), before declining slightly in the final 10 years. Meanwhile, the proportion signed by the smallest clubs declined from around one in four in 1956–65 (28.7 percent) to one in 10 in 1986–95 (13.6 percent). These developments probably reflect the general decline in recruitment from Scottish clubs, as well as the increased concentration of 'overseas' recruitment among the larger clubs.

Finally, there is evidence of increasing concentration in the use of the different sources. The hiring of Scottish players was widely dispersed in the first 20 years after the league recommenced as the small, medium and large clubs hired approximately equal amounts (that is, one-third each) of Scottish players. However, since the mid-1960s the proportion signed by the major clubs has increased to more than half of all Scottish players (see Table 3). This peaked at almost two-thirds (61.3 percent) in the years between 1976 and 1985 before declining as clubs turned to new sources. The hiring of Irish players has, by contrast, always been dominated by the larger and more prestigious clubs in the first and second divisions. For instance, the largest one-third hired at least half of all Irish signings in each ten-year period since 1946 (see Table 3).

It is, however, in the hiring of 'overseas' players that the dominance of the largest clubs is most striking. This was most obvious in the period from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s when these clubs accounted for approximately three-quarters of all foreign signings. Given the relatively high transfer fees attached to English players in the period since then, it might have been expected that the subsequent growth would have been shared more equally throughout the league. This did not occur. The largest 30 clubs, the majority of whom were

Table 3 Foreign players recruited by large clubs, 1946–95

Years	*Scottish*	*N. Ireland*	*R. Ireland*	*Other*
46–55	32.2 (228)	50.0 (44)	52.9 (45)	54.9 (28)
56–65	38.5 (237)	65.2 (45)	55.3 (21)	50.0 (9)
66–75	53.9 (166)	59.6 (34)	69.8 (30)	73.3 (11)
76–85	61.3 (127)	54.2 (26)	84.8 (28)	74.6 (53)
86–95	48.6 (87)	52.9 (18)	55.9 (38)	64.8 (140)

in the first division, hired almost two-thirds (64.8 percent) of these players. This finding is probably the result of a two-way process in that these clubs are able to both attract and purchase such players. Not only are they able to offer higher salaries and the opportunity of playing in front of large crowds, they also offer the prospect of participation in European competitions while being located in some of England's larger and more attractive cities (for example, London, Manchester, Liverpool).

Recruitment Methods: Functional Integration of Foreign Sources?

So far, the evidence shows dramatic changes in sourcing practices within the English football industry as the major clubs began to develop new sources. If this process is indeed one of internationalization then economic exchanges should be based on market transactions rather than being *functionally integrated* into the employment practices of the major clubs. Of course, it is possible that different clubs may have developed different approaches for hiring foreign players.

Given that the practice of recruiting from the Celtic periphery dates back to the origins of the professional game, it might be hypothesized that the repeated use of these sources would lead to a change from market to hierarchical sourcing arrangements. In other words, clubs may have decided to extend their youth schemes into Scotland and Ireland to recruit players at a younger age. There are a number of reasons why they might do so. The clubs already know that Scotland and Ireland provide a continuing supply of talent; that the cost of hiring schoolboy footballers is relatively low; and that they can have more influence over player quality through their coaching and training activities.

The evidence of such a shift is mixed (see Figure 2). In the case of Irish players, the proposition is supported by the growth in the number of apprentices produced after the mid-1970s. As the apprentice method gained increasing prominence, the number of transfers from Ireland gradually declined with the result that apprentices eventually supplanted transfers as the principal source of new Irish players. By 1995 both Irish sources (Northern and Southern) had been effectively internalized into the youth policies of the major English clubs (McGovern, 2000). Though a similar trend was also evident in the Scottish case, the increase in the use of the apprentice method ended in the mid-1970s without ever having surpassed the number of transfers.[11]

Finally, did different clubs adopt different approaches to foreign recruitment? The evidence indicates that the larger clubs adopted a different strategy to the small and medium-sized clubs, though this was not one that was based on using a particular method. Rather, it was their ability to combine both methods that distinguished them from their counterparts in the lower divisions. The difference is quite striking as one-third of all clubs hired two-thirds of all non-English apprentices in the period since 1946 (see Table 4). The domination of this source by the rich, city clubs was even greater than for transfers, as they

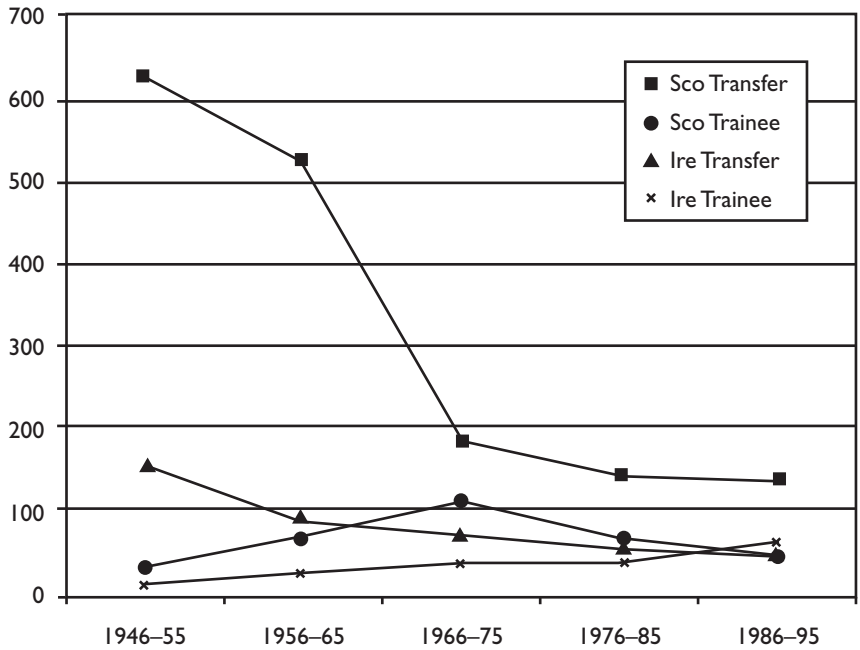

Figure 2 Method of recruitment for Scottish and Irish players

accounted for two-thirds of all non-English apprentices as opposed to less than half of all foreign transfers (67.1 versus 45.3 percent). The ability to combine methods was particularly prominent among the 10 clubs that hired the most foreign players (34.0 percent of all apprentices and 21.0 percent of all transfers).[12] Six of this group, namely Manchester United, Leeds United, Chelsea, Sunderland, Arsenal and Preston North End, were also among the top ten clubs for both transfers and apprentices.

In sum, there is no evidence that international sources have been functionally integrated into the labour market practices of English clubs. While the Irish source has been integrated into the internal arrangements of the major clubs, this development may be attributed to the economic weaknesses of Irish

Table 4 Recruitment methods by club size, 1946–95*

	Transfers	*Apprentice*
Large	45.3 (1067)	67.1 (317)
Medium	30.4 (715)	23.0 (109)
Small	24.3 (571)	9.9 (47)
Total	100 (2353)	100 (473)

Chi-square = 82.037; d.f. = 2; $p < .005$
*This table does not include cases where there was no information on method of recruitment.

football rather than to any general process of globalization (McGovern, 2000). Otherwise, the acquisition of foreign labour is conducted though the classic method of international trade, that is, through traditional market-based transactions.

Conclusion

Much of the debate about whether or not globalization represents a new and qualitatively different set of economic circumstances has been dominated by disputes about the existence of a globally integrated market for capital (Dicken, 1998; Hirst and Thompson, 1996). This study contributes to this debate by examining the same question in relation to labour. In this case, the market for professional footballers was selected because it represents a critical case for testing claims of economic globalization. Specifically, association football is a global sport, the performance of individual footballers is easy to monitor and footballers represent a highly commodified form of labour.

While the market for professional footballers is clearly becoming more *international* in nature, this trend is developing along regional rather than global lines. Additionally, there is no evidence that the hiring of overseas players has been functionally integrated into the activities of the leading clubs. With the notable exception of Irish players, the acquisition of foreign players simply reflects the extension of international trade rather than the kind of radical shift that is associated with globalization.[13] Though the hiring of these players clearly has economic origins, I argue that it is socially situated. The English end of the market, for instance, is embedded in a history of colonialism, in wide ranging social contact between countries, by recruitment networks and social ties. Furthermore, the difficulty of reliably predicting how any footballer will perform, especially a foreign footballer, means that it is entirely rational for employers to adhere to the local conception of what makes a good professional. Consequently, managers hire those who most resemble themselves since they believe they can be trusted to act in the expected manner. Such homosocial reproduction, Kanter (1977: 63) argues, provides 'an important form of reassurance in the face of uncertainty about performance management in high-reward, high-prestige positions'.

This emphasis on the non-economic elements of economic action does not contradict the earlier point that players are attracted by the prospect of a full-time career with high wages, while the clubs may be more than willing to acquire 'low-priced' foreigners. Rather, it illustrates the argument that economic action is socially situated in the sense that it is embedded in 'ongoing networks of personal relationships rather than being carried out by atomized actors' (Swedberg and Granovetter, 1992: 9) To that extent, the notion of a disembedded global market for labour is grossly over-exaggerated since market behaviour is inevitably shaped by political regulation, historical evolution and social relationships.

This point was also evident in the analysis of the relationship between internationalization and the concentration of playing resources, which showed that the importation of foreign players reinforces the traditional pattern of power relations within the English football industry. Not only were the largest clubs responsible for a disproportionate amount of overseas signings, this proportion also appears to be increasing over time. Their control of the youth market was as expected since internal labour market-type arrangements are strongly associated with large firms who occupy dominant positions in their respective markets (Baron and Bielby, 1980; Doeringer and Piore, 1971). In any case, the greater financial resources of the football elite mean that it is better able to bear the costs of investing in those who carry a higher uncertainty factor, namely overseas players and apprentices.

In conclusion, what have we learned about labour market globalization from this case study? First, the idea that globalization has already been achieved or is rapidly in the process of being achieved is fundamentally flawed, at least in terms of the football industry. This study shows that the changes that are taking place do not suggest that a single, global labour market either has, or is, emerging. Rather, markets are expanding along different international patterns that have national elements as the English case suggests. Second, the idea that globalization will produce a *global* market is simply naive. Even in professional football, where employers are able to obtain an exceptional amount of information on individual performance, the fundamental uncertainty of the labour contract is such that hiring decisions are strongly influenced by social criteria. The reason is that labour, even in the highly commodified form of professional footballers, is not like other commodities. It is a 'fictive commodity' which differs from conventional commodities in its marked variability and plasticity and because it cannot be separated from the social characteristics of its owner (Offe, 1985: 56–7). For this reason, it is highly unlikely that there will ever be a truly *global* labour market. In any case, the market is also governed by national regulations that control the number and quality of players imported from outside the EU and associated countries. Given that barriers to labour mobility exist in this rather special case then they are likely to remain even more demanding for other forms of labour. Indeed the irony is that in an age when the restrictions on the global movement on capital have declined those governing labour have increased (see, for example, Miles and Thranhardt, 1995). Third, it should also be clear from this study that the process of *internationalization* is socially exclusive in that it is mostly the economically advantaged who participate and benefit. Labour market divisions of this kind seem to survive, if not thrive, under waves of neo-liberal deregulation. *Plus ça change …*

Notes

An earlier version of this article was presented at the annual conference of the *Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics* at the University of Wisconsin,

Madison, USA, in July 1999. I would like to thank Jonathan Magee, Andres Rodriguez-Pose and the referees for their detailed comments.

1 The terms 'English league' and the 'English football industry' are used to refer to the most senior leagues, that is, the top four divisions of English football. Since 1992 these are known as the Premiership (old first division) and the Nationwide League (three divisions).
2 Since the landmark Bosman ruling by the European Court of Justice in 1996, players may now join other clubs without having to be subject to a transfer fee. The European Court also removed UEFA restrictions on the number of foreign players that clubs could field for the purposes of European competition. While these decisions may have increased the flow of foreign players, they lie outside the period covered by this article.
3 Though the basic decision is between a market and an hierarchical approach, employers may choose to combine both, since this would enable them to use transfers to meet short-term needs (for example, resulting from injury), and youth development arrangements to provide a constant supply of new, if inexperienced, talent.
4 For instance, some commentators tend to blame the presence of overseas footballers for the repeated failings of the English national side yet more non-English players were hired in the first 10 years after the Second World War than at any time since (see Figure 1)!
5 UEFA itself also classified Scottish and Irish players as foreigners for European club competitions during the first half of the 1990s.
6 All clubs were initially ranked in descending order for each season, before dividing them into equal numbers of large, medium and small.
7 Only eight clubs remained within the 'Large' category for every season since 1946. This included the so-called 'Big Five' (Arsenal, Everton, Liverpool, Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur) and three other city clubs (Aston Villa, Chelsea and Newcastle). Another three clubs remained in this category for all but one season (Leicester City, Manchester City and Sunderland).
8 The average is 2.36 players for English managers and 4.40 for Scottish managers. These data were limited to 1960–95 because of the lack of information on managers' origins for the preceding period.
9 Accordingly, it is no coincidence that the three clubs who developed a reputation for signing overseas players in the late 1990s, namely Arsenal, Chelsea and Liverpool, had foreign managers at that time. It is also interesting to note that the tendency of Scottish managers at English clubs to hire Scottish players continues in the post-Bosman era, albeit on a smaller scale (for example, Walter Smith at Everton, 1998– and Jim Jeffries at Bradford City, 2000–).
10 The recruitment of Scandinavians is helped by a high level of local interest in English football. Matches from the English Premiership are routinely shown in Norway and Sweden and many of the players who move to England have supported English teams since childhood (Stead and Maguire, 1999).
11 The subsequent decline in the number of Scottish apprentices was probably triggered by a decree issued by the Scottish Football Association in 1975, which declared that no player could move to England before they reached the age of 16.

12 In descending order these were: Leicester City, Manchester United, Leeds United, Chelsea, Newcastle United, Sunderland, Arsenal, Preston North End, Luton Town and Middlesbrough.

13 However, two of the largest clubs, Arsenal and Manchester United, have signed nursery agreements that enable them to gain access to teenagers from outside the UK (Belgium, France and Sweden) (*The Independent,* 16 January 1999; *The Observer,* 22 November 1998). It is still too early to comment on the significance of these developments since they have yet to produce first team players.

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