

# ATTITUDES OF FOOTBALL FANS TOWARD SOME OF THE MORE CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES SURROUNDING THE GAMES NOWDAYS

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*Original scientific research*

## Abstract

*The survey, based at attitudes of football fans who lives in towns and cities across Serbia, looked at such areas as the cost of attending matches and how this contrasted with fans' views about player wages. The sample included 219 male students from Faculty of Sport and Physical Education at University of Novi Sad. The criteria for selecting of respondents for the sample were as follow: being a regular student one year at least and attending the classes constantly. For the data collecting was used the technique of survey investigation. The data obtained in the research were processed using the application statistics program SPSS 15.0 by frequency distribution. The results of this investigation were fairly evenly divided between those who have positive attitude and who have negative attitudes toward some of the more controversial issues surrounding the games nowadays.*

**Key words:** true fan, football game, present

## INTRODUCTION

Modern football is the game which is associated with passion, emotion, excitement and dedication across all continents and whole World. References to extreme emotional experiences at football games characterized all aspects of discussions with fans. Such is the intensity of the experience that two thirds of fans have cried at football matches, mostly through joy, but occasionally because of despair (Koković, 2004). Football provides for many fans an opportunity to let themselves go emotionally to release the frustrations of everyday life and feel better after the matches. Everybody who wants to be a true fan it requires the living experience of football. It is not about being a spectator; it is about being a participant. Match attendance is a given but there is also a duty to engage emotionally in the life of the team in order to impact positively on a team's performance. Attending away games is an important ritual for fans involving a number of psychological and logistical challenges. Away supporters are always out-numbered and mostly out-sung. Football fans describe themselves as the "twelfth man" at the match, as essential to the success of the team as the players and coaching staff. It is the actions performed by fans during the game, the ritual chants, songs, banner waving, etc. that motivates the team, intimidates the opposition players and perhaps

even influences referees' decisions. The fans truly believe they must attend the game to help the team to win, not just to observe the event. There are three types of fans, when it comes to a rivalry especially in football. The first type of fan is the delusional fan who thinks their team is going to win, in blow out fashion, every game. Their top guy will receive the heismann. This fan also hates everything about their rival. The second type is the rational fan. The fan that realizes it's just a game. The fan that realizes he wants what's best not only for his team, but for the conference. He understands that our team is only as good as our conference. If our conference sucks, then we have to go undefeated or one loss knocks us out of contention. They realize that their rival must win every out of conference game, that they have to be good in conference for the rivalry to help their team out. And the third type of fan is the fence sitter band wagon fan.

While much of the researchers of football fans has focused on the negative side as on hooliganism and violence (Koković, 2008; Nikolić, 2009), this research reveals a much more positive side to football and its passionate supporters and the main goal of this paper represents the analysis the attitudes of football fans toward some of the more

controversial issues surrounding the games nowadays.

## MATERIALS AND METHOD USED

A survey undertaken by authors in the winter semester of 2009 analyzed the attitudes of football fans toward some of the more controversial issues surrounding the games nowadays. The survey, based at attitudes of football fans who lives in towns and cities across Serbia, looked at such areas as the cost of attending matches and how this contrasted with fans' views about player wages. The sample included 219 male students from Faculty of Sport and Physical Education at University of Novi Sad. The criteria for selecting of respondents for the sample were as follow: being a regular student one year at least and attending the classes constantly.

For the data collecting was used the technique of survey investigation. Several questions used 5-point scales, which are plotted in the presentation as percentages agreeing/disagreeing. Each of the five points of the scale were by a number from 1 to 5 (where 1 is agree strongly and 5 is disagree strongly). Several questions used 4-point scales, which are plotted in the presentation as percentages up/down. Each of the four points of the scale were by a number from 1 to 4 (where 1 is too high and 4 is don't know). And several questions used the closed questions with answers.

The data obtained in the research were processed using the application statistics program SPSS 15.0 adjusted for the use on personal computers by frequency distribution which were calculated, and it's going to be presented in the next section.

## THE RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section offers the results of the survey questionnaire, and it's going to be sorted into following tables with discussion.

The first question analyzed the assumption if football fans attend live matches or not. This means that 21.9% respondents attend football matches at stadiums and this information is worrying low.

Table 1.  
Attendance at live matches?

	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	18.3	18.3
No	81.7	100.0
Total	100.0	

The second question analyzed whether interest in the Jelen Super league had grown in the past five years. There were more respondents whose interest grown in the last five years than respondents whose interest fallen. Probably their interest have grown because the marketing activities of our football federation are getting stronger every year.

Table 2. Jelen Super league interest change in past 5 years?

	%	Cumulative Percent
Agree strongly	21.9	21.9
Agree	26.0	47.9
Don't know	24.7	72.6
Disagree	16.4	89.0
Disagree strongly	11.0	100.0
Total	100.0	
	0	

The fact that there is no only two clubs: Partizan and Red Star are now seen as contenders for the Jelen Super league title as it was the fact in the past, we coupled with a more better style of play among several clubs as Vojvodina and Belgrade, is beginning to take its prize on interest levels.

The third question analyzed the assumption if traditional fans are being priced out of football. Overall, respondents were fairly evenly divided between those who agreed that traditional fans are being priced out of football and who disagreed that traditional fans are being priced out of football.

Table 3. Are traditional fans being priced out of football?

	%	Cumulative Percent
Agree strongly	35.6	35.6
Agree	12.3	47.9
Don't know	15.1	63.0
Disagree	12.3	75.3
Disagree strongly	24.7	100.0
Total	100.0	

On the one hand this might be seen as good news from a revenue point of view, the middle classes can afford the higher ticket prices and might spend more on a matchday in bars and on catering but the low classes cannot afford the higher ticket prices and definitely cannot spend more on a matchday in bars and on catering. There is, however, a downside to such a premise. First, the standard of service provided by most clubs is not compatible with the expectations of such a socio-economic group. The speed and quality of service and product at football stadia, for food and drink in particular, is still below that experienced in the general retail environment. This part of the matchday experience is unlikely to generate loyalty so it is arguably only the hype surrounding football that has retained the interest of such a group. Should the football product start to falter, and the signs are that this could be happening; the socio-economic group that the Jelen Super league now depends on could look to the numerous other options in an increasingly competitive and sophisticated leisure market. Even if fans retain their interest in football, it should, for example be borne in mind that the cost of attending the Jelen Super League matches is acceptable enough that in some cases it is more interesting to take a low budget airline to some other European country and buy a ticket to see Milan, Barcelona or Manchester United play and visit those cities and have great time.

The fourth question analyzed the assumption if going to the football match is too expensive. Overall, respondents were fairly evenly divided between those who agreed and those who disagreed towards the price.

Table 4. Is going to football match too expensive?

	%	Cumulative Percent
Agree strongly	23.3	23.3
Agree	26.0	49.3
Don't know	20.5	69.9
Disagree	23.3	93.2
Disagree strongly	6.8	100.0
Total	100.0	

The fifth question analyzed the assumption if the professional footballers are overpaid. Most respondents felt that professional footballers are overpaid. The assumption is that most of them have this attitude given the current economic situation in the country.

Table 5. Are professional footballers overpaid?

	%	Cumulative Percent
Agree strongly	30.1	30.1
Agree	24.7	54.8
Don't know	28.8	83.6
Disagree	8.2	91.8
Disagree strongly	8.2	100.0
Total	100.0	

Not surprisingly, given the responses regarding the cost of going to football match. 54.8% of the sample agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, with only 16.4% strongly disagreeing or disagreeing and 28.8% didn't have the attitude toward this statement. The responses varied slightly depending on whether the respondent was a ardent football fan or not.

The sixth question analyzed the assumption how much should footballers be paid. 37% of respondents believe that footballer should earn more than €100,000 per week but 37% of respondents also believe that they shouldn't earn more than €5,000 per week. The results are not surprising given the dissatisfaction with the price of attending football because most

fans realise that ticket prices go almost exclusively towards paying wages.

Table 6. How much should footballers be paid?

	%	Cumulative Percent
Less than €5,000	37.0	37.0
€5,000	11.0	47.9
€10,000	19.2	67.1
€10,000	8.2	75.3
€20,000	9.6	84.9
€50,000	4.1	89.0
€75,000	5.5	94.5
€100,000	5.5	100.0
More than €100,000	37.0	37.0
Total	100.0	

Also, a potential reason for this attitude is the fact that middle class citizens in our country are in danger and a greater number of respondents are in the low social stratum, or in the higher.

The seventh question analyzed the assumption if there are brand categories the respondents don't want to see on club strip. The analysis of attitudes towards commercialization of football considered the brand categories that respondents felt comfortable with as team sponsors. By a significant margin alcohol, at 53.4%, was the category that people were most against seeing on players' t-shirts and all club strip. Given that the name of the league have alcohol as primary sponsors, it suggests that such rights holders might find a need to consider public opinion in future, especially in the Serbia, has been tainted by alcohol related incidents concerning fans, and endorsing alcohol brands is clearly not viewed by the public as a good way to set an example.

Table 7. Are there brand categories you don't want to see on club strip?

	Percent
Soft Drink	5.5
Alcoholic Drink	53.4
Sportswear	8.2
Technology	5.5
Finance	23.3
Consumer goods	6.8
Confectionery	4.1
Children's brands	4.1
Fast food	23.3
No brand	4.1
Total	100.0

Next to the alcohol drinks respondents also felt a degree of unhappiness with teams' endorsement of finance and fast food (23.3%) although children's brands and confectionery were not seen as a problem. In terms of an overall view on commercialization of the game, also 4.1% stated that there should be no branding on club strips which suggests that sponsorship is now readily accepted among the public.

The eighth question analyzed the assumption if footballers set a good example to children. Most respondents felt that footballers set a good example to children. The assumption is that most of them have this attitude given the fact that lot children adore the sport because of them.

Table 8. Footballers set a good example to children?

	%	Cumulative Percent
Agree strongly	30.1	30.1
Agree	20.5	50.7
Don't know	26.0	76.7
Disagree	8.2	84.9
Disagree strongly	15.1	100.0
Total	100.0	

Not surprisingly, given the responses regarding the money how much footballers can earn. Children can see the idols in them and it could be a possible solution of their social problems in the future.

The ninth question analyzed the assumption if the respondents would bring their family to a football match. Overall respondents are happy with the idea of bringing their family to a match with the overwhelming majority of fans. Therefore, it should be found the driving force that launched the masses to return to the football stadium in Serbia.

Table 9. Would you bring your family to a match?

	%	Cumulative Percent
Agree strongly	32.9	32.9
Agree	16.4	49.3
Don't know	19.2	68.5
Disagree	9.6	78.1
Disagree strongly	21.9	100.0
Total	100.0	

The tenth question analyzed the assumption if the respondents would agree if their daughter marrying a footballer.

Table 10. Daughter marrying footballer?

	%	Cumulative Percent
Agree strongly	17.8	17.8
Agree	9.6	27.4
Don't know	41.1	68.5
Disagree	11.0	79.5
Disagree strongly	20.5	100.0
Total	100.0	

The sample is split fairly evenly between those who agree and disagree with this proposition, but the most significant response is the high level of don't knows (41.1%). The eleventh question analyzed the assumption if football clubs do enough for their community. Most respondents agreed with this statement and this suggests that clubs, many of which have developed significant community programmes as seen elsewhere in the report.

Table 11. Football clubs do enough for their community?

	%	Cumulative Percent
Agree strongly	13.7	13.7
Agree	37.0	50.7
Don't know	34.2	84.9
Disagree	8.2	93.2
Disagree strongly	6.8	100.0
Total	100.0	

The twelfth question analyzed on pitch behavior of players. The increased profile of football in the media has meant that the behavior of players is under increasing scrutiny. The increasing number of cameras used to televise football also means that any foul play is much more likely to be picked up and screened. The combination of these facts has resulted in many controversial incidents being highlighted in both football programming and in national television news coverage. As a result, it could be assumed that there would be a high level of agreement with the statement. Surprisingly, however, this is not the case with only 24,6% of respondents agreeing or agreeing strongly. Almost half of respondent (47,9%) didn't have an attitude in this statement and this could be a disturbing fact because the respondents did not bother to compare their beliefs before and now.

Table 12. On pitch behaviour of players.

	%	Cumulative Percent
Agree strongly	6.8	6.8
Agree	17.8	24.7
Don't know	47.9	72.6
Disagree	13.7	86.3
Disagree strongly	13.7	100.0
Total	100.0	

The thirteenth question analysed off pitch behaviour of players. The sample is split fairly evenly between those who agree and disagree with this proposition, but the most significant response is the high level of don't knows (30.1%) as in the previous question.

Table 13. Off pitch behaviour of players.

	%	Cumulative Percent
Agree strongly	17.8	17.8
Agree	23.3	41.1
Don't know	30.1	71.2
Disagree	15.1	86.3
Disagree strongly	13.7	100.0
Total	100.0	0

Professional footballers are now courted by up market night clubs, which encourage them to attend free of charge to use their celebrity status to attract other customers. The players no longer live among the local fan communities because their salaries mean that luxury housing is easily within their grasp. As such players have little to connect them to a normal lifestyle for someone under 35 years of age and the trappings of money and fame mean that temptations are thrown at them at every turn. However, it should be borne in mind that any misbehavior by players is now much more likely to attract the attention of the tabloid media in particular. A good story involving a top player can significantly boost sales of a tabloid paper and those who inform the paper have a high financial incentive to do so.

The fourteenth question analyzed subscribers to football on pay-TV. Only 11% of respondents subscribed to football on pay-TV suggesting that the sample would not be representative but this should be a realistic percent of subscribers in the national population. Pay-TV is a new technology in our country and this percent could be high enough for the beginning. Some of respondents who are not subscribers have an opinion regarding the price of pay-TV and it means they heard about it.

Table 14. Subscribers to football on pay-TV.

	%	Cumulative Percent
Yes	11.0	11.0
No	89.0	100.0
Total	100.0	

The fifteenth question analyzed the opinion regarding the price of pay-TV. Regarding the previous question that most respondents are not subscribers to football on pay-TV, most of them didn't have any opinion about the price of pay-TV and this is the fact which should be changed in the future.

Table 15. Opinion regarding the price of pay-TV.

	%	Cumulative Percent
Too high	15.1	15.1
Fair	26.0	41.1
Low	15.1	56.2
Don't know	43.8	100.0
Total	100.0	

The sixteenth question analyzed the attitudes to subscription pricing among non-attending fans. Supporters who don't attend live matches and, therefore, have a high propensity to use television as their primary means of football consumption, find that subscription levels are too high (15.1% of respondents). 24.0% believe that the price is fair while 14.0% believe that it is low. The 46.9% who do not know are likely to be casual fans who have not really considered taking out a subscription because their commitment is not high enough.

Table 16. Attitudes to subscription pricing among non-attending fans

	%	Cumulative Percent
Too high	15.1	15.1
Fair	24.0	39.1
Low	14.0	53.1
Don't know	46.9	100.0
Total	100.0	

The seventeenth question analyzed the attitudes to subscription pricing among attending fans. Among fans who attend matches, there is an even greater sense that television subscription prices are too high with 12.5% agreeing with the statement.

Interestingly, however, 20.0% believe that the price is fair, while 17.5% believe that it is low. 50.0% didn't know anything about this question.

Table 17. Attitudes to subscription pricing among attending fans

	%	Cumulative Percent
Too high	12.5	12.5
Fair	20.0	32.5
Low	17.5	50.0
Don't know	50.0	100.0
Total	100.0	0

The eighteenth question analyzed the attitudes to subscription pricing among subscribers. Among those who subscribe to televised football, there is 16.7% who believe that prices are too high with a large number 16.7% who believe that prices are fair. Very few (8.3%) believe that prices are low and "don't know" run at a majority level (58.3%).

Table 18. Attitudes to subscription pricing among subscribers

	%	Cumulative Percent
Too high	16.7	16.7
Fair	16.7	33.3
Low	8.3	41.7
Don't know	58.3	100.0
Total	100.0	

This suggests that the product of football lost its appeal, but there is a case that price

sensitivity could trigger a significant drop in subscriptions.

## CONCLUSION

On account of the stereotypical belief that young people are always the ones to blame for their own wrongdoing, especially when it comes to incidents around sport and sports arenas, because they are, allegedly, unreasonable and ill-bred, the society is taking a series of measures to prevent those incidents and conflicts. Following similar activities in United Kingdom and other European countries, our country has put in act a law to prevent and diminish such unwanted occurrences (Nikolić, 2009). The most frequent question is how to return football fans to the stadiums and whether it is even possible after all the recent events. In an attempt to approach this problem it was concluded that the results of this investigation were fairly evenly divided between those who have positive attitude and who have negative attitudes toward some of the more controversial issues surrounding the games nowadays. Overall this survey points to a lot of negative feelings among the public about football. The game is seen as overpriced in terms of both live attendance and subscription television packages and there is a definite sense that traditional fans are being priced out of going to football. Players are seen to be overpaid and, they don't set a good example to children.

Generally, most respondents in our country love football and they are happy to return to the football stadium, however they still feel unsafe to be there. All of us expect that a line ministry would do the vigorous reaction and remove the hooligans from the stadium. This would be a chance to make the stadiums the place where the family would rally again as it was the case in the past.

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## STAVOVI FUDBALSKIH NAVIJAČA PREMA NEKIM SPORNIM PITANJIMA KOJA OKRUŽUJU SAVREMENU FUDBALSKU IGRU

*Originalni naučni rad*

### **Sažetak**

Ovo istraživanje je zasnovano na stavovima fudbalskih navijača koji žive u gradovima širom Srbije prema nekim spornim pitanjima koja okružuju savremenu fudbalsku igru, kao što su cene prisustvovanja fudbalskim mečevima i odnos stavova navijača prema platama igrača. Uzorak ispitanika je obuhvatio 219 studenata Fakulteta sporta i fizičkog vaspitanja Univerziteta u Novom Sadu. Kriterijumi za izbor ispitanika za uzorak su bili sledeći: birani su studenti koji najmanje godinu dana redovno pohađaju predavanja. Za prikupljanje podataka korišćena je istraživačka tehnika anketiranja. Podaci dobijeni u istraživanju su obrađeni korišćenjem statističkog programa SPSS 15.0 a izračunata je distribucija frekvencija. Rezultati ovog istraživanja su bili prilično ravnomerno podeljeni između onih koji imaju pozitivan stav i koji imaju negativne stavove prema nekim spornim pitanjima koja okružuju savremenu fudbalsku igru.

**Ključne reči:** iskreni navijač, fudbalska igra, savremenost

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