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FOOTBALL, ALCOHOL AND GAMBLING: AN UNHOLY TRINITY?

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I argue that football plays a questionable role in promoting two potentially problematic activities, namely drinking alcohol and gambling. Gambling and alcohol companies sponsor clubs and competitions and also pay to advertise their products at the stadia and during television coverage. Consequently millions of fans, including children, are exposed to the marketing of these restricted products. The latter are exposed despite regulations that prohibit such advertising and promotion in other contexts. The promotion of these activities to children and to adults increases levels of consumption which in turn increases the number of problem drinkers and gamblers in society. High-profile footballers play a further role in normalising drinking and gambling. They are role models whose actions influence others. Their excessive drinking and gambling activities provide poor examples for football fans, young and old.

Keywords: alcohol; gambling; football; role models; promotion

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INTRODUCTION

When watching football, particularly elite level professional football in the UK, it is clear that two activities are closely aligned, namely drinking alcohol and gambling. The gambling and alcohol industries know that one sure way to access their customers or potential customers is through football, so they invest millions of pounds sponsoring clubs, tournaments, and leagues, and advertise their products during today's extensive televised football coverage. Drinking beer and betting on the result of matches (or on the likelihood of some event during the game) either at home, in the pub or at the match is an obligatory complement the spectacle of the game for many fans. Elite players themselves, the multi-millionaire icons or 'role models' are also prone to drink and to bet, sometimes with devastating consequences. Health, reputation, financial security, career, family, liberty

and life have all been put aside in the search for the change in mood, thrill, buzz, fix or financial gain promised by the bottle or the betting slip.

My aim in this article is to cast a critical eye over problematic aspects of the association between football and two popular but potentially destructive and addictive consumer activities (drinking alcohol and gambling). Although alcohol and gambling are legal in the UK (and in most western countries), the risks associated are acknowledged inasmuch as their consumption and supply are regulated. Both are deemed inappropriate for young people under the age of eighteen (although some forms of gambling such as the lottery [16+] and certain categories of gambling machines – fruit machines – are not restricted to adults). The marketing and promotion of alcohol and gambling are also tightly regulated in the UK by the advertising standards agency (ASA). There are explicit restrictions on the way companies can market alcohol and gambling in terms of the content, time and placement of adverts. Over the last decade there has been significant and arguably detrimental relaxation of regulations governing both the supply of gambling and alcohol, resulting in soaring profits for both industries and soaring costs for the taxpayers who carry the burden of the problems associated with excessive consumption¹.

Football, unlike most other sports, is subject to further regulation where alcohol is concerned. In an effort to lower the risks of crowd disorder, spectators watching games at the stadia are not allowed to drink alcohol in sight of the pitch, not even those in the corporate boxes. So a curious irony arises, since the products of Carlsberg, Carling and Heineken – dominant names in football sponsorship over the years – are not permitted to be consumed by fans watching the team or tournament at the ground. In this paper I provide a thumbnail sketch of some of the problematic aspects of the relationship between football, alcohol and gambling and identify some key conceptual and theoretical issues at the heart of the debate.

No ordinary commodities

There are many products and practices that are risky or pose some threat to those who consume or participate in them. In some cases, if the risk of harm is deemed significant a paternalistic intervention on behalf of the government or other authority to limit individual freedom to consume or engage may follow. Paternalism, the act of making a decision about what is best or good for an individual on their behalf, is controversial, and the great liberal philosopher John Stuart Mill argued in the 19th century that restricting people's liberty was only justified if their choices posed a danger to others. According to this 'Harm to Others Principle', individuals ought to be allowed to make choices for themselves even if those choices put them at great risk. The decision not to allow football fans to stand on terraces following the Hillsborough disaster is a paternalistic one based on the argument that standing poses a great risk to the well-being of other fans, and such a restriction, according to Mill, is only justifiable if it is true that all-seater stadia are safer. Mill allowed some exceptions to his principle; for example, we are entitled to

¹ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/addiction-soars-as-online-gambling-hits-2bn-mark-8468376.html> (accessed 10/11/2015) and <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/11308576/Alcohol-saturated-areas-soar-as-measures-fail-to-dilute-late-night-drinking-culture.html> (accessed 10/11/2015)

restrict children's choices lest they harm themselves because they are considered not yet rational or responsible enough to make informed choices for themselves. The age of consent for sexual intercourse and age restrictions on gambling and alcohol are predicated on the assumption that this group cannot be trusted to make sensible decisions about these issues. This is often referred to as soft paternalism.

The mere fact that alcohol and gambling are subject to paternalistic restrictions suggests that they are 'no ordinary commodities'. Consumers buy alcohol in pubs and at supermarkets, purchase lottery tickets, bet on horses and football at betting shops and take advantage of the myriad online gambling opportunities available. These products are regulated because there is potential risk of harm associated with them. Thomas Babor et al. (2010) argue that alcohol is a drug that is consumed because it changes the mood or produces an altered state rather than any nutritional value it might have. The harms associated with alcohol are well documented. They include a host of diseases, illnesses and injuries, harm arising from being drunk (or being victimized by someone who is drunk) and addiction. David Nutt et al. (2010) compared the harms associated with alcohol to the harms associated with other drugs in the UK. They assessed the relative harms linked with drugs including alcohol, heroin, cocaine, crack cocaine and cannabis. Each substance was allocated a score of 0–100 on 16 criteria, 9 relating to individual harm (for example harm caused by the drug directly such as alcohol-related cirrhosis) and 7 to harms to others (for example injury resulting in alcohol-related violence). Heroin, crack cocaine and methamphetamine scored highest in relation to harm to self, but alcohol scored higher than both heroin and crack cocaine in relation to harm to others. In the combined scores alcohol came out very badly. The panel of experts who analysed the various harms and devised the classificatory criteria came to the following conclusion: "Overall, alcohol was the most harmful drug (overall harm score 72), with heroin (55) and crack cocaine (54) in second and third places" (Nutt et al., 2010, p. 1558).

The harms from gambling are perhaps less well documented, less obvious and more contested than the harms associated with alcohol. According to Jim Orford (2011) many of the costs of gambling are intangible and it is difficult to measure the harms (as well as the benefits). It is clear that they cannot be easily expressed in terms of monetary value. There are no direct physical health risks, at least not in the way there is with alcohol. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify the type of problems that arise from gambling, even if they can't be clearly quantified. Inevitably there is some overlap with alcohol. They include: criminal justice costs associated with problem gambling; crime associated with gambling such as corruption in sport and money laundering; personal costs to problem gamblers and their families; costs associated with obtaining money to gamble; costs associated with treating problem gamblers; costs of government regulation and environmental costs – the change in the environment associated with gambling facilities (Orford, 2011, p. 161).

In the context of both gambling and alcohol, the argument is often made that the problems associated with both are caused by irresponsible individuals rather than the product or practice itself. The argument has a certain degree of credibility. With respect to alcohol, however, there is a significant proportion of the population who misuse alcohol and contribute to the costs in different ways, some more obvious and visible (young city centre binge drinkers) than others (well educated women or the retired). In other words,

a significant number are choosing to consume in ways that pose risks². Elite footballers commonly consume alcohol in ways that lead to significant problems. Driving under the influence of alcohol is a particularly common vice among this constituency, but so are violent and aggressive behaviour and sexual crimes.

Where gambling is concerned, it does appear that most of the costs associated with the activity attach to the few who might be described as gambling addicts. Addicts' actions in obtaining money might have significant broader impacts, for example they may be more vulnerable to being corrupted. There are examples of footballers (e.g. John Hartson) who have gambled away hundreds of thousands of pounds, sums which the highest paid can easily afford. Nonetheless they are consuming in ways that bring risks of bankruptcy, family breakdown, debt the other problems these bring with them. According to Stephen Morse (2011), most people who use "potentially addicting substances do not become addicts, but between 15% and 17% do" (p. 176). This seems to imply that there are a few who cause problems and the rest of us should be allowed to choose for ourselves whether we indulge or not. The picture is not that simple, however, and most working in the substance abuse or mental health fields either as practitioners or researchers agree that problem drinking and gambling is a combination of the individual's make-up (genetic/psychological), the environment (prevalence and attitudes towards gambling or alcohol) and the product itself (its inherent addictiveness) (Orford, 2011). I will return to this discussion later.

Consumption and choice

We generally believe that we consume as a result of our choices and, further, that these choices are ostensibly free choices. When we consume we are exercising our free will. The concept of free will is a complex and difficult one which has occupied the thoughts of philosophers since Aristotle and more recently is the focus of neuroscientists and psychologists. For the purpose of this paper, however the interesting thing about free will is that we are all supposed to have it, yet we all make decisions that contradict our better judgments. Aristotle argued that there are two conditions for free or voluntary action. These are knowledge and freedom. A rational decision is one that we fully endorse or choose because we are aware (know) of the implications. One might claim that one knows that drinking alcohol and gambling carry certain risks, but is fully aware of those risks and therefore chooses freely. The freedom condition speaks to the idea of unforced or un-coerced action or choices. Despite knowing the risks of playing Russian roulette, Robert De Niro's and Christopher Walken's characters in the film *The Deer Hunter* were not playing the game freely. They were forced to play by their captors. They wouldn't have played in the absence of this external force. In more banal circumstances it is very difficult to be certain which choices are absolutely free and informed. We may never fully understand or know the consequences of our decisions and may not be fully free from forces outside of ourselves which influence our decisions. Consequently, it might be better to talk of free will as a continuum. We may be able to judge (more or less accurately) in any given context how free and informed a given choice is, but we may never be certain. As a rule, children are expected to be

² <https://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/help-and-advice/statistics-on-alcohol> (accessed 10/11/2015)

towards the ‘ignorant-and-dependent’ end of the scale, and mature and educated adults are expected to be towards the ‘informed-and-autonomous’ end, although neither age nor formal education are reliable correlates.

The law, however, generally treats the actions of adults as if they were autonomous unless there are compelling reasons to conclude otherwise. In other words, adults are held accountable for their actions unless there are good reasons to think differently. Children on the other hand are generally not held accountable (by law) in the same way as adults. Certain substances (including alcohol) which have psychoactive properties (i.e. produce changes in brain function resulting in alterations in perception, mood, consciousness or judgment) will (depending on dosage) compromise autonomy. The consumption of such substances is regulated in the case of alcohol or banned in the case of heroin (there is a move to outlaw all psychoactive substance – so called ‘legal highs’ – in the UK, except alcohol, caffeine and tobacco). There are a number of reasons why such regulation is in place. Firstly, their psychoactive properties create risks to the consumer and others-our rational capacities are affected by them. (The alterations mentioned above have a number of well-documented consequences, such as violence, driving under the influence, or poor decision making.) Secondly, their use or abuse often has chronic health implications, and thirdly they are potentially addictive, since some users become hooked and a number of additional problems arise as a consequence.

In law, being drunk or high are not valid excuses for poor decision making, in fact getting drunk may be considered an aggravating rather than a mitigating factor. Although it is clear that being drunk or high does compromise autonomy, we hold the individual responsible for getting themselves into that state in the first place. The story is a little different for victims of crimes, especially sex crimes. A judge may deem a drunken victim incapable of consent in a rape trial, for example, regardless of the victim’s role in becoming drunk. These are salutary issues, especially in relation to the number of ‘alcohol and sex’ scandals associated with British football stars.

Gambling seems to be a very different activity, but some of the concerns we have about it relate to the risks of becoming addicted. In other words, consumers can lose control over their gambling. Gambling does not involve the consumption of a psychoactive substance, but it is nevertheless seen as the ‘paradigmatic’ process addiction, and the mechanisms of addiction to gambling are similar to those of other substances. It affects the brain in a certain way and can cause similar addictive neuroadaptations as alcohol and other drugs (Ross, 2013). Gambling products are therefore also restricted.

Does the fault lie in the person or the product?

This question posed by Orford (2011) is important and, as I have already indicated, is likely throw up complex answers. Nevertheless, it is in seeking to answer this question that the relevance of the role football plays in society’s alcohol and gambling problems comes into focus. Are alcohol and gambling intrinsically addictive? Are they products which uniquely and universally compromise autonomy in dangerous ways? The fact that they are legal and extensively promoted certainly gives the impression that they are relatively benign, especially when contrasted with paradigmatic addictive drugs like cocaine and heroin. These latter drugs are thought to be far more addictive and dangerous hence

their legal status, although as we have seen some researchers strongly dispute such a characterisation (Nutt et al., 2010). Despite the significantly higher chances of harm resulting from alcohol use, many parents continue to introduce their children to alcohol at a young age, ignorant of the evidence that shows this to be a bad idea (Sigman, 2011). Drinking alcohol is considered normal and acceptable.

There are a host of factors that contribute to the risks of developing a problem with alcohol or gambling, including facts about the product (type, strength, availability), society's attitudes towards consumption (liberal/conservative, what counts as a vice/acceptable behaviour), early experiences of gambling and drinking (exposure to parents' use and normalising influences such as portrayals on television), one's socio-demographic background, the rewards associated with the activity (financial, status, fitting in with the crowd), genetic vulnerability and personality factors (such as risk-taking). None of these factors are sufficient to cause addiction in isolation.

Nevertheless, the cost and availability of a product, for example, has a demonstrable effect on problematic consumption. When alcohol is readily available the amount consumed and the problems associated increase (Babor et al., 2010, p. 128). The story is similar where gambling is concerned. The "total population consumption model" (Orford, 2011, p. 110) predicts that if there is an increase in the whole population's consumption of a product there will be an increase in those who consume the product problematically. As such it makes no sense to treat problem gamblers or drinkers separately from the rest of the population – measures to reduce gambling and drinking (if required) should target the behaviour patterns of the entire population. Evidence shows that marketing has an effect on consumption patterns and research focusing on young people has found that exposure to the marketing of alcohol in particular accelerates the onset of drinking and increases the amount drunk by those already drinking (Babor et al., 2010, p. 196).

The products themselves or certain features of the products are also risk factors. The price, availability, strength and flavour of alcohol may be more or less risky. Free drinks, happy hours, high strength drinks and alcopops are thought to be more dangerous and pose more risks to consumers. Where gambling is concerned, the methods for paying and receiving winnings (cash or tokens), the speed of play, maximum stake, prize, the frequency of small wins and the ambience of the betting environment may all exacerbate risky gambling (Orford, 2011, p. 114). These risks are recognised by the UK government in both the gambling and alcohol context and there are two organisations which look to inform the public about the risks. Gambleaware, (funded by the Responsible Gambling Trust) and Drinkaware are charitable trusts which seek to promote responsible gambling and drinking respectively.

Both these organisations receive significant amounts of funding from the gambling and alcohol industries, which leaves the industries to regulate themselves. There is an obvious contradiction in this relationship. Alcohol and gambling products are promoted and glamorised in glossy ads and commercials with a footnote from these organisations inviting us to "enjoy the product responsibly". Unsurprisingly critics are scathing about this self-regulatory arrangement. It is not in the best interest of the industries for customers to enjoy responsibly. In fact Nutt (2012, p. 101) argues that if all drinking above recommended levels in the UK ceased there would be a drop of 40% in consumption, equating to a £13 billion loss of revenue for alcohol companies. Alcohol misuse is self-evidently

profitable for alcohol companies. There are estimated to be over 500,000 problem gamblers in the UK and over £1.3 billion pounds was lost on fixed-odds betting terminals alone³. The industry's "enjoy responsibly" tagline and campaign serves to place the responsibility for the problems associated with excessive use squarely on the shoulders of irresponsible consumers, whilst seeking to absolve the industry of any wrongdoing.

Marketing in football

The alcohol and gambling industries in the UK are subject to regulation both in terms of supplying their products (although there has been significant relaxation in terms of availability over the last decade or so) and in terms of marketing. There are strict rules about targeting children or under-18-year-olds in their marketing campaigns, and the advertising is regulated by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). The ASA state that adverts for gambling (with the exception of bingo) should not be shown before 9 p.m. and neither alcohol nor gambling adverts should target children or appeal to children. As a general principle, adverts for gambling and alcohol do not appear in programmes aimed at children. Live football is an exception. Alcohol and gambling sponsorship and advertising is allowed during live football broadcasts irrespective of the time of day they are broadcast. It is of course argued that football is not *aimed* at children, but a significant proportion of the audience are children.

Andrew Graham and Jean Adams (2014) conducted a frequency analysis of alcohol marketing and references to alcohol in televised English professional football during the 2011–2012 season. During that season three competitions were sponsored by alcohol companies, namely the Budweiser FA Cup, the Carling League Cup and the Heineken sponsored UEFA Champions league. Visual references to alcohol were frequent in the six matches they studied – 111.3 visual references per hour of broadcast (nearly two a minute on average). Most were on hoardings advertising beer on and around the field of play and a total of 17 alcohol commercials were broadcast during the games.

Jean Adams et al. (2014) studied broadcasts of the European Football Championships (2012) and found an average of 1.24 alcohol references per minute, and a recent study of the FIFA 2014 World Cup by Alcohol Concern found that viewers of an entire programme would be exposed to one alcohol reference per minute of playing time and around 10 alcohol commercials for broadcasts other than the non-commercial BBC. Alcohol Concern estimate that half of the games they analysed would have been watched by over a million under-18s⁴. Graham and Adams (2014) conclude that current regulations "make no attempt to restrict this constant bombardment or to make the case that association of alcohol with professional sport and sporting success is likely to reflect one aspect of social success" (p. 5).

The power of alcohol companies seemingly extends much further. We have recently seen that FIFA has been embroiled in a corruption scandal, but their dealings with sponsors have come under scrutiny before. FIFA have a track record of promoting the interests of its commercial partners, which include Budweiser – 'The official beer' of the World

³ <http://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/Home.aspx> (accessed 25/06/2015)

⁴ http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce_uploads/2014/10/Alcohol-Marketing-at-the-FIFA-World-Cup-2014_pdf.pdf (accessed 12/09/2015)

Cup. AB InBev, the owners of Budweiser pays “anything between \$10m and \$25m a year to be part of the World Cup ‘family’” (Gornall, 2014, p. 16). Brazil, the hosts of the 2014 World Cup had to waive the taxes on any profits made by sponsors during the World Cup. Gornall (2014) argues that in 2014 this obscene condition “will leave sponsors such as Budweiser free to walk away with every *Real* they pocket, depriving Brazil of an estimated £312m in revenue” (p. 15). Planned tax increases on alcohol were postponed until after the tournament and proposed Brazilian laws to ban alcohol from sports stadiums were abandoned. Gornall (2014) quotes Ronaldo Laranjeira a professor of Psychiatry at the University of São Paulo who says that it’s shocking that FIFA “can come to a country and makes [*sic*] it change its laws. We have been very active in trying to embarrass the government on this issue, but in the end the alcohol industry has won. At the moment it is running the show” (p. 16). Budweiser will be the sponsors of the World Cup in both 2018 and 2022 in Russia and Qatar respectively. The winter Olympics at Sochi were alcohol-free (part of the Russian Government’s efforts to curb a national alcohol problem) and Qatar is a strict Muslim country with tight alcohol regulations. Gornall (2014) observes that Qatar has already agreed to sell alcohol in fan zones in 2022 and speculates whether Russia will change approach in the face of FIFA pressure⁵. Budweiser are one of FIFA’s partners who are, perhaps hypocritically applying pressure on the organisation to “clean up its act”.

As yet, there have been no studies of the level and frequency of gambling sponsorship or advertising, but even the casual observer cannot fail to notice the ubiquitous presence of gambling companies in and around professional football. In the 2014–2015 Premier League season Hull City, Aston Villa, Stoke City and Burnley had shirts sponsored by gambling companies; the second tier of English football was sponsored by Sky Bet; and Ray Winstone’s Bet 365 commercials provide a familiar, frequent and appealing incentive to viewers to bet on a range of ‘in play markets’. Ladbrokes agreed a one-match shirt sponsorship deal with Notts County for the televised Capital One Cup tie with Liverpool, West Ham are affiliated with 4 gambling companies, and in 2013 Arsenal signed a three-year deal with Asian gambling company Bodog⁶. Other familiar brands in football include Paddy Power and William Hill. There is no doubt that, like alcohol companies, betting companies see football as a crucial vehicle for expanding their customer base both in the UK and abroad.

Gary Lineker, the former England football player and anchor of the BBCs football coverage programme, Match of the Day (which incidentally broadcasts interviews with managers and players who stand in front of hoardings advertising Bet365, among other companies) recently voiced his concerns about the presence of alcohol and gambling promotion in football:

⁵ In 2012 the then Chairman of the English Premier League, Sir Dave Richards, reacted badly to FIFA awarding the 2022 World Cup to Qatar and the threat of an alcohol free tournament. Much to the embarrassment of his employers he ranted that drinking “is our culture as much as your culture is not drinking”. He subsequently stumbled into the hotel fountain, allegedly under the influence of alcohol. <http://www.theguardian.com/football/2012/mar/14/dave-richards-fifa-uefa-stole-football> (accessed 23/10/2014)

⁶ <http://calvinayre.com/2013/08/29/sports/football-sponsorship-and-gambling-relationship> (accessed 11/06/2015)

The other thing that worries me is all the betting advertising and sponsorship in sport. All you ever see is commercials for gambling and apps, it is really dangerous and I think we need to do something about both of them, alcohol and gambling⁷.

Studies have shown that in relation to alcohol, structural aspects such as the exposure to marketing have a direct impact on consumption patterns among young children. Lesley Smith and David Foxcroft (2009) found that “exposure to alcohol advertising in young people influences their subsequent drinking behaviour” and concluded that “[i]t is certainly plausible that advertising would have an effect on youth consumer behaviour” (p. 9). Gerard Hastings et al. (2012) claim that advertising alcohol “encourages young people to drink alcohol sooner and in greater quantities” (p. 184) and Phyllis Ellickson et al. (2005) established that several forms of alcohol advertising “predict adolescent drinking” (p. 235). Peter Anderson et al. (2009) discovered “consistent evidence to link alcohol advertising with the uptake of drinking among non-drinking young people, and increased consumption among their drinking peers” (p. 242).

Research by Alcohol Concern UK into children’s recognition of alcohol marketing (2014) found that 90% of children (10–11 years old in England and Scotland) correctly identified Fosters as an alcohol product and 47% of children in England correctly associated Carlsberg beer with the England football team, illustrating that despite the ASA guidelines the marketing of alcohol is having an influence on children⁸. The ASA says that advertisements for gambling and alcohol must not: be likely to be of particular appeal to under 18s, especially by reflecting or being associated with youth culture⁹. One could reasonably make the case that watching football, going to the match and being a fan is a central plank of youth culture for some and that the gambling and alcohol companies are inextricably and problematically tied in to this. It is not surprising therefore that there is a strong lobby to ban the association between alcohol, gambling and football, and to stop football’s powerful role in the normalisation of drinking and gambling. There is a risk that both activities come to be seen as mainstays of what is referred to as the *habitus* of fandom (Dixon, 2012).

Role Models – alcohol

In the previous section I argued that the marketing of both alcohol and gambling in and through football posed a problem. Such marketing encourages people to gamble and drink, but more importantly it encourages potentially vulnerable youngsters into the practice both through direct incentive and encouragement and by normalising both gambling and drinking. Another way football plays a role in encouraging and normalising gambling and the consumption of alcohol is through the actions of high profile players. Elite players’ actions are more accessible now than ever. If their actions are newsworthy, we are sure to be informed about them in the media (especially the tabloid press). Moreover,

⁷ <http://www.marketingmagazine.co.uk/article/1306395/gary-lineker-condemns-dangerous-alcohol-betting-brand-sponsorship-deals> (accessed 11/06/2015)

⁸ http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce_uploads/2015/02/Childrens-Recognition-of-Alcohol-Marketing_Briefing.compressed.pdf (accessed 22/06/2013)

⁹ <https://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/Display-Code.aspx?CodeId=%7B7761A93B-64D0-425B-BB93-3DC15596F8A4%7D&ItemId=%7B0F62D2C5-0B87-4F17-9C1F-D9C8C49094DF%7D> (accessed 11/06/2015)

a number of players and former players have twitter profiles with large numbers of followers and among other things keep their fans updated about their betting activities. (There are strict rules which forbid current but not past players from betting on any football anywhere, but former players such as Didi Haman and Robbie Savage often Tweet about their betting activities.)

The issue of football role models is a contentious one, but it is a concept that is often employed when evaluating football stars. Although the issue is controversial, I believe that a sensible case can be made that high profile players should conduct themselves reasonably. A good role model is a person who exemplifies admirable qualities of character or conducts themselves in admirable ways. A bad role model is the opposite. In terms of gambling and drinking, professional football players are subject to fairly rigid contractual constraints. Nevertheless many do engage in excessive drinking at certain times in the season such as Christmas parties, celebrating an important victory or during the end of season tour. These young men choose to spend their ‘down’ time relaxing and enjoying themselves much like other young men. This involves night clubs, parties, attractive women and alcohol and, for some, problematic consequences will follow. With good sense and judgement intentionally and knowingly compromised by alcohol, players drive their cars, get into fights, verbally abuse people, and become embroiled in various forms of sexual impropriety (including rape and sexual assault).

I want to make two related arguments here. Firstly, despite counter-arguments (e.g. Mumford, 2012) it is reasonable to hold players accountable for the example they give to others, particularly young impressionable fans. Secondly, the important and problematic choice being modelled is the choice to drink excessively. Choosing to get drunk is a popular choice for many people (particularly teenagers), but creates risk of harm (some foreseeable, some not) to the drinker and others, and therefore should be considered very carefully.

Being a role model is not really a choice. It is a fact that most, if not all, professional football players are a role model for someone. In other words, there are fans, particularly young fans, who look to emulate certain aspects of their character and behaviour. They might seek to play in a similar style, wear similar clothes or behave in similar ways. Their actions are shaped by and contribute to the *habitus*. There are some individuals, of course, who have a far greater influence than others because they are the most popular players, usually, but not always, because of their footballing ability. The only choice footballers have therefore is whether they are good or bad role models.

Michael Sandel (1984) argues that there is no such thing as an “unencumbered self” who is “free to choose our purposes and ends unbound by [...] custom, or tradition or inherited status” (p. 87). The question about what constitutes a good or bad role model largely overlaps the question about what makes a good person. Moral philosophers as much as anyone else have argued over this question for centuries and proffered numerous answers. I favour a virtue-theoretical or Aristotelian-inspired response to the question: what identifies a good person (and thereby a role model) as a person of good character – a person who, as Edmund Pincoffs (1986) argues, is preferable on the grounds they possess certain virtues such as kindness, generosity and courage. Vices such as spite, cruelty and vindictiveness are also largely absent. Further important questions arise in the discussion of character, many raised by Owen Flanagan (1991). Questions include: how

many virtues does the good person have to have? All of them? Only the most important? Some absolutely essential ones? In the sporting domain, the question of context often arises. Are we to expect players to exemplify good character both on and off the pitch? I have attempted to address some of these questions elsewhere (Jones, 2011, 2008, 2005) so I will limit the focus here to a discussion of one possible objection to my contention that footballers ought to take seriously their position as role models.

When I argue that they should exemplify good character, I am not advocating unrealistic or unrealisable standards. I am arguing only that they should aspire to and exemplify what Lawrence Blum (1994) describes as ‘ordinary virtue’ and are further praiseworthy if they exemplify ‘noteworthy virtue’. Ordinary virtues are run-of-the-mill virtues such as honesty, decency and kindness or perhaps more accurately involve the exemplification of such virtues in ‘ordinary’ settings or contexts. Noteworthy virtues or a noteworthy exemplification of virtue occurs in situations or context where there is greater risk, threat or difficulty. Notwithstanding variations in individual circumstances, upbringing and so forth, we are entitled to expect all citizens, including footballers, to aspire to live lives of ordinary virtue, to be kind and considerate to each other and to be respectful. No doubt it is more difficult to do so if the milieu or ‘moral atmosphere’ is one which celebrates and rewards selfishness, self-centredness and egoism (Jones & McNamee, 2000). Perhaps in football the virtues mentioned are *noteworthy* because to exemplify them is to go against the grain, requiring courage and discipline to swim against the tide. Footballers are capable of exemplifying genuinely noteworthy virtue too. Courage in the face of serious injury or illness is to be admired; loyalty determination and perseverance are also laudable qualities. Role models are not saints, they are individuals who exhibit virtue and provide the concrete example which help others learn to cultivate similar habits themselves.

Bad role models have the opposite effect. They model bad habits and behaviours. Getting drunk sets a bad example, although it is largely accepted and acceptable, particularly at certain times and in certain places (part of the *habitus*). It is the stated goal of many people at the weekend, young and old, footballer or not. However, moderation and abstinence are worthwhile. Acute and chronic illnesses and disease, injury or death, violence and aggression and sexual assault are all possible consequences of drinking excessively. Role models should avoid exemplifying reckless and irresponsible drinking. The current crop of professional football players on the whole stay away from the routine consumption of alcohol common at clubs such as Manchester United and Arsenal in the 1980s, but many of them do continue to choose getting drunk as the favoured mode of celebration (recent examples include Leicester City’s ill-fated post season trip to Thailand and Jack Wilshire’s post FA Cup celebrations with Arsenal).

The second problematic choice I wanted to highlight is the importance of the decision to consume alcohol. Earlier in the chapter I discussed how alcohol, each glass or bottle, has an impact on the ability to make sensible decisions, but its role is not taken sufficiently seriously in the UK. The attitude towards the role of alcohol in the bad behaviour of athletes is very different in the United States. It is rightly seen as a key causal factor in offending. An athlete who commits an offence in which alcohol is causally significant is suspended from playing, but is also required to attend a substance misuse programme for treatment. The programme requires that they abstain from alcohol and abstinence is a prerequisite for being allowed to play again. If British football followed the US example, the countless

players caught drinking and driving, fighting, involved in sexual impropriety allegations, etc., would be compelled to address their relationship with alcohol. So setting out to get drunk is a bad decision. It might also be *the* key decision, because once alcohol takes effect, one's ability to further regulate or manage behaviour is seriously undermined.

Binging on alcohol, which is a popular practice among young people, including football players, can lead to a host of well-known problems. Rio Ferdinand, Jonathon Woodgate, Steven Gerrard, Craig Bellamy, Joey Barton, Luke McCormick, David Goodwillie, Marlon King, Titus Bramble, Lee Cattermole, Nicklas Bendtner, Jermaine Pennant, Andy Carroll and Jack Grealish have all had alcohol-related problems. A number of these are recidivists; they have offended more than once. They may not get into trouble every time they drink, but when they do get into trouble, drink is usually involved. The point I am making is that the important behaviour or decision – the bad example – is not just the decision to drive or to assault or to grope or to fight, but the decision to get drunk. Once that decision is made, one cannot confidently predict how one will behave when drunk. The actions of Luke McCormick (the footballer who killed two young children while driving under the influence of alcohol) are anchored in “his earlier decision to drink in circumstances where he might feel the temptation to drive while drunk” (Vargas, 2005, p. 270). In other words we believe that, previously to driving whilst under the influence of alcohol (or when committing any other offence), there was a point at which the player could and should have made a decision not to drink, or not to take the car keys. The decision is a prudential one. It requires an individual to accept that if they get drunk they may behave badly (shame and regret almost always accompany a hangover) and therefore they should avoid the risk by not getting drunk. The impediment is obviously greater in the cases where there is a track record of bad behaviour, such as those mentioned above.

There are some for whom alcohol poses an even greater risk. They become addicted to or dependent on alcohol and it has a systematic and debilitating impact on their lives and others around them. George Best, Paul Gascoigne, Tony Adams, Paul Merson, Kenny Samson, Paul McGrath, Clark Carlisle, Dean Windass and Jimmy Greaves are notable examples. Addiction or dependence is a complex phenomenon characterised, among other things, by compulsive consumption and unsuccessful attempts to stop. It is not easy to predict which of those who misuse alcohol (alcohol abusers) will develop dependence. Most do not, and are said to mature out of their problem drinking. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that excessive drinking carries a number of risks other than addiction and sets a bad example.

The recent problems of Paul Gascoigne and Clark Carlisle have kept, and continue to keep, alcohol dependence and football in the spotlight. Both Gascoigne and Carlisle have had their relapses made very public. George Best died as a result of his addiction. Tony Adams is perhaps the most high profile former footballer in recovery from his addiction. Not only has he stayed sober for nearly two decades, but he was instrumental in establishing the Sporting Chance Clinic, which offers current and former professional football players a chance to tackle their problems with alcohol and other mental health issues (See Jones, 2014, for a case study of a former professional footballer who attended the Sporting Chance Clinic for treatment for alcoholism)¹⁰. Adams is an excellent role model and

¹⁰ <http://www.sportingchanceclinic.com>

shows that sobriety is a possibility, but also exemplifies an unselfish desire to help other who struggle with the same condition he had.

Role Models – gambling

Football and football players can play a role in normalising gambling by exemplifying a way of life or a culture where betting is cool or aspirational. On the face of it gamblers, like the most people, value money, yet they engage in an activity that will lose them money. Gamblers buy into the ‘gambler’s fallacy’ that some improbable set of events, or some skill or insight on their behalf will result in them ‘beating’ the odds. They are able to fool themselves in some way “that the value of gambling comes from the chance to win money” (Ross, 2013, p. 31). Many, including wealthy footballers, who earn huge sums of money (so don’t need to win money by gambling) bet extensively. The motives of gamblers are therefore more complex, because the activity provides a buzz or thrill. Michael Owen, former football player and race horse owner says he enjoys the “buzz of backing a winner”¹¹. The thrill or buzz can become addictive and problem gamblers become addicted to the thrill – or the brain level mechanisms or processes responsible for the thrill (Ross, 2013).

According to a report by the Professional Player’s Federation, professional footballers and cricketers are three times more likely to have gambling problems than other young men¹². Often they have money to spend, time on their hands and gambling is a ‘normal’ way of passing the time. The Sporting Chance clinic mentioned above says that 70% of their referrals are gambling-related. Players are betting vast sums of money on horse racing, greyhound racing and poker (they are prohibited from gambling on football). The online facilities make it easy for players to gamble and, according to the chief executive of Sporting Chance, players are using pay-day loan companies to finance their habits. Well-known problem gamblers include Keith Gillespie, John Hartson, Michael Chopra, Matthew Etherington, Dietmar Hamann, David Bentley and Andros Townsend. Townsend, Cameron Jermome and Dan Gosling were fined by the FA for breaching betting regulations in 2013¹³. John Hartson, who bravely and publicly fought cancer, sought help for his gambling problem when his wife threatened to leave him. He said: “Cancer takes good people away every day, but, for me, gambling also kills.”¹⁴ Since 1980 pathological gambling has been regarded as a disorder included in The American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM). The DSM offers a standard classification and diagnostic criteria for a range of officially recognised disorders and is updated fairly frequently (Orford, 2011)¹⁵. In its current manifestation – DSM 5 – pathological gambling is now classified as an addiction. Players who gamble are playing an important role in normalising gambling, both for other players transitioning into the *habitus* of professional football, but also for young fans who look up to footballers.

¹¹ <http://www.radiotimes.com/news/2013-10-19/michael-owen-on-gambling-i-enjoy-the-buzz-of-backing-a-winner> (accessed 12/06/2015)

¹² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/30308203> (accessed 12/06/2015)

¹³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/football/28599142> (accessed 12/06/2015)

¹⁴ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/30716977> (accessed 12/06/2015)

¹⁵ <http://www.psychiatry.org/practice/dsm> (accessed 12/06/2015)

CONCLUSION

My aim in this paper was to cast a critical eye over the relationships between alcohol, gambling and football. Both alcohol and gambling are potentially addictive, but can cause significant harm to the individual and others irrespective of addiction. Despite these potential harms football is a significant and high profile vehicle for promoting alcohol and gambling. More troubling is that football provides a loophole which exposes children to the advertising of potentially harmful products. Football plays a key role in selling the idea that drinking and gambling is normal and exciting. The visual (and verbal) landscape of football is dominated by alcohol and gambling branding and references. Moreover, the behaviour and example set by some professional footballers further serves as a tacit endorsement of drinking and gambling.

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