



# Public funding of Russian football clubs: historic formation and implications of the current system

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## ABSTRACT

Practices of public funding of sports clubs vary across the globe. In large parts of the world, public funding represents only fractions of an otherwise largely privately financed club sport sector. In Russia, public funding acts as the most common scheme. The prevalence of such type of funding launches a chain of unique controversies and has implications for many stakeholders. A scholarly discourse directly related to this topic is virtually non-existent. To help bridge this gap, a systematic historic overview of the formation of the system of club funding in Russia is presented here. By using the 'soft budget constraints' approach as a theoretical angle, clubs are clustered into several groups with a subsequent implications analysis. Such comprehensive examination of the funding system is crucial to advance the scholarly discourse, enhances the understanding of Russian professional sport in general and thus lays the ground for future research in this direction.

## Introduction

The phenomenon of public funding of professional sport clubs can take many different forms, depending on the perspective taken.<sup>1</sup> In a Western European context, where professional sport clubs are usually private entities, the topic is prominent due to, for example, the investments of wealthy Gulf states into top football clubs (e.g. PSG, Manchester City) in order to promote their countries, improve the reputation and pursue geopolitical interests.<sup>2</sup> In North America, where clubs operate as franchises and are being sponsored by private investors, stadiums and other facilities are often being built at the expense of public money.<sup>3</sup> In China, large state-related corporations receive huge tax exemptions for professional sports sponsorship.<sup>4</sup> While in these examples public funding represents only fractions of an otherwise largely privately financed sport, in some countries of the former Soviet Union, and especially in Russia, public funding is as literal as it can be and represents the dominant source of money. The vast majority of professional sports clubs in Russia receive the biggest parts of their budget from public sources.

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In other words, they operate as municipal or state organizations, comparable to public schools or hospitals.

Such a system creates significant side effects and controversies for many stakeholders involved. One of the consequences is that by receiving money from state budgets, clubs usually do not seek to generate other significant income streams, or to live within their means. Moreover, as the funding is being allocated by and being dependent on local governments/state corporations, clubs can be subject to opportunistic behaviour of those responsible for money allocation, which complicates any possibility for long-term planning.<sup>5</sup> In addition, knowing that money flows often depend on particular governors or corporate managers, club executives often neglect the interests of fans and spectators. An illustration of such a conflict is the phrase from Vasily Kiknadze, a general manager of Lokomotiv Moscow in 2019–2021, pronounced at the annual pre-season meeting with fans, who were questioning the club's policy:

It's not you who make decisions. From no point of view you can have a serious impact on the club. Not from the point of view of what financial contribution you make to our activities. Not from the point what kind of support you provide in the stands.<sup>6</sup>

The Kiknadze case is not unique: Throughout the last couple of decades there have been cases of clubs conflicting with their own audience on the matters of money misuse, dubious personnel appointments and administrative decisions, development policies and so on.<sup>7</sup> While the issues of public funding are often subjects of intense discussions between journalists, football fans, and officials, a scholarly discourse directly related to this topic is almost non-existent. The paper at hand addresses this gap and provides a systematic historic overview of the formation of the system of club funding in Russia as well as its implications. The aim is to contribute to the scholarly discourse an as yet missing comprehensive examination of the funding system in Russian club football. By building on the on the 'soft budget constraints' (SBC) approach as a theoretical underpinning, the study enhances the understanding of Russian professional sport in general and lays the ground for future research in this direction.

## Literature review

Academic contributions on funding and other financial aspects of Soviet and Russian professional sports are scarce and either narrowly focus on certain particular aspects or appear as details in wider studies. Numerous works devoted to sports in the USSR practically did not touch upon the issues of funding. This is understandable, as in a command economy, such as the Soviet Union, everything by definition is financed by the state. For instance, Riordan thoroughly explored different areas of Soviet sports organization across a number of historical books and articles.<sup>8</sup> O'Mahony devoted a book to the history of participatory sport in the USSR and drew parallels between the development of sports, the Soviet society, lifestyle, and visual art.<sup>9</sup> However, sport's financial aspects have not been addressed in any of these contributions. Same can be said about Grant's work on the Soviet sports in the interwar period, which rather emphasizes on cultural, societal and political aspects.<sup>10</sup> The connection between sports and politics has been reflected in football-specific research as well: for example, the politics of Soviet football in the second half of the twentieth century were analysed in Zeller's book.<sup>11</sup>

The post-Soviet era has ushered in economic and political realities necessitating new directions in research. The most common topics are sporting mega-events held in Russia and related economic, political and social effects, and debates on state-sponsored doping in individual sports, which erupted after the scandal at Sochi 2014.<sup>12</sup> However, mega-events have a distant connection to professional clubs; and state patronage of individual sports has little in common with public funding of professional clubs in team sports, as they face a totally different structure and environment (from an economic, competition, and audience-related perspective). Geopolitical developments of the 2020s also brought in the topics of sanctions on Russian sport and its global perspectives.<sup>13</sup>

Issues related to the sports industry's finance in Russia have started to attract more scholarly attention in recent years. This is largely due to the scale of changes that occurred during the transition period of the 1990s and the following state capitalism. The role of institutional changes for sports economy in post-socialist states was first analysed by Poupaux and Andreff, and then followed by Veth's comprehensive contribution.<sup>14</sup> In his dissertation, Veth explored how the structure of football and football clubs in the former Soviet Union evolved with the rapidly changing political and economic environment. Despite the close relationship between the topics, and an inevitable incorporation of some public funding system spillovers in these works, an in-depth analysis of the funding system itself and its particular impact on the professional clubs and their stakeholders was lacking. Other studies, on contrary, single out particular details in sports funding: Porotkin analyzes the social effects of football sponsorship in Russia, comparing it to European countries.<sup>15</sup> He calculates the cost of winning and how higher expenditures attract new fans and measures the efficiency among privately and publicly funded clubs. Solntsev reflects on the financial sustainability of Russian football clubs: he investigates clubs' financial reports, suggests measures to restructure their spendings and proposes options for new financial reporting standards.<sup>16</sup> Pavlinov describes corruption related to the field.<sup>17</sup>

It is obvious that there still is a clear lack of comprehensive overview of the public funding system, analysing its historical prerequisites, repercussions and resulting stakeholder dynamics. This gap is being addressed with the present research: Veth's work on the dynamic changes of clubs and the role of overarching changes in economy, politics and society is complimented here by a critical assessment of the current state, which demonstrates how different the situation is from the conditions of professional clubs' operations in other parts of the world. Building on Poupaux and Andreff, who employed statistical analysis to discover the relation between institutional changes in economy and respective reforms in sports in post-socialist states, the role of public funding in the actual status quo is highlighted here. It is demonstrated that the system of public funding of Russian football clubs creates a unique set of stakeholder interests, connecting local and federal politics, business interests, economy, and, of course, football spectators. Understanding the peculiar context in Russia against important historical events, categorizing the clubs according to the source of funding and subsequently analysing stakeholder dynamics help to properly explore the phenomenon of public funding of professional clubs. The analysis thus helps to better understand Russian sports as a whole as well as related controversies (e.g. reactions of various stakeholders to the 2022 events or volatile developments of particular clubs). Further, given that Russian club football has been increasingly intertwined with European structures since the end of the Soviet Union

until February 2022 (and – presumably – will be again at some point after the Ukraine conflict is resolved) due to cross-border club competitions as well as the common transfer market, an understanding of the club funding structure in Russia (as well as in other, lesser known, parts of Europe) is also relevant from the perspective of a non-Russian audience. Because, after all, in competitions such as the UEFA Champions League and UEFA Europe League, clubs face one another with quite distinct structural prerequisites.

## **Methodology and theoretical framework**

This study adopts a multi-method approach to comprehensively examine the public funding system in Russia. The methodologies employed include a case study approach, systematic analysis, and historical analysis. The article first overviews funding systems in the world's leading leagues, then provides a historical analysis of prerequisites of the current system in Russia, and finally describes and systematizes the case of public funding in Russian football. Following that, an analysis of the main implications is provided.

To interpret the implications of the public funding system, the study applies the theoretical framework of SBC, originally introduced by János Kornai in 1979 to examine the problems of socialist and post-socialist economies.<sup>18</sup> In short, the concept suggests that budgetary inefficiency arises when organizations expect external financial support to cover their losses. Andreff was the first to apply the SBC approach to professional football and this idea has been taken up by many scholars since, such as Rasmus K. Storm, Klaus Nielsen, Egon Franck, Zsolt Havran and others.<sup>19</sup> These authors posit that European football clubs in many ways operate with losses under conditions that can be understood as SBCs. In contrast to a 'hard budget constraint', where a club can spend only the resources it possesses, a 'soft budget constraint' describes a situation in which losses are routinely covered by public authorities or other creditors.

Interestingly, even though Kornai developed the SBC concept to understand and explain the inefficiencies of organizations and companies in socialist or post-socialist economies, there is almost no academic contribution as yet that applies the SBC to football in this geographical region. This is remarkable, as the SBC provides for an ideal approach to understand the peculiar system of professional football in a country like Russia. Our paper attempts to address this gap and, by building on the SBC, to explain implications of the public funding model of sports in Russia.

The research draws upon a diverse array of secondary data sources, including academic literature, official information from sports organizations' websites, existing regulations and policies, as well as materials from reputable sports news and analytical portals. These sources are considered reliable within the context of social science research.<sup>20</sup>

## **Funding of professional sport clubs: common practices across the globe**

The leading professional sport leagues, situated in North America and Western Europe, normally consist of clubs whose budgets do not rely on the respective state. Although the funding practices differ, especially when comparing North American leagues to the rest,

the funding sources are assumed private, and public funding mainly takes the forms of facility construction or particular international sponsorships. Post-socialist regimes, by contrast, often support their clubs with public money, and the roots of such a system go deep in history, creating a set of distinct implications. To highlight differences and to underline our assessment of the unique context in Russia, the main funding and ownership practices across North America and Europe are overviewed first in the following paragraphs.

Professional sport clubs in North America are usually synonyms for successful profit-making sports entities.<sup>21</sup> They operate as members of a particular league, where the league sells a franchise to an investor, which allows him/her to have the contractual right to own or operate a sports team in a specified location.<sup>22</sup> A new franchise may enter a league only under the approval of a league's board of governors (owners of already existing clubs).<sup>23</sup> Leagues are focused on creating value and promoting the policy of equal wealth distribution.

Typically, they have two main economic models: the prevailing ownership structure in major North American leagues today is characterized by a so-called distributed club ownership model, albeit with slight variations from one league to another.<sup>24</sup> Under this model, each league features a distinct group of club owners, and ownership of more than one club within the same league is prohibited. Typically, club ownership takes the form of syndicates, composed of various individuals or organizations with varying degrees of ownership interest determined by the shares they control.<sup>25</sup> Examples can be found in the National Hockey League, National Basketball Association, Major League Baseball, National Football League or Major League Soccer. Such models can rarely be found outside of North America and the risks involved in such an organization of a professional sports league have been outlined by, for example, Morales and Schubert.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, no matter which ownership model they use, the leagues in North America agree on league-wide sponsorships and broadcasting rights and distribute the revenues among the clubs.<sup>27</sup> To increase the attractiveness of a league by ensuring a proper competitive balance, the leagues introduce different measures like salary caps, salary floors, entry drafts and so on. This is important, as although the clubs have different budgets, they all aim to be profitable for their investors or owners.<sup>28</sup>

Considering the above, there are two main sources of club funding (apart from the profit a club generates itself), both of them are private: money received from the league and money received from the owners. However, stadiums and facilities for the clubs are often being financed from public sources. This partly results from the franchise system, which does not bind the clubs to a certain city and allows them to relocate to better markets, therefore making the cities 'compete' for hosting a franchise.<sup>29</sup>

The European system of club football differs from the North American one in many ways.<sup>30</sup> However, generally speaking, also in Europe, football clubs are usually funded with private money. The five major European leagues each show their very own and distinct features. In the English Premier League, clubs are registered as private limited companies or public corporations and the owners are usually private individuals, trusts, or investment companies. The biggest trend of the last decades is the active spread of foreign private investors, who own most of English top flight clubs.<sup>31</sup> Italy's Serie A is not as 'internationalized' as the English Premier League, however, it goes in line with the English practice of having

a particular ‘controlling’ investor and the recent years have attracted some international investors too.<sup>32</sup> A distinct feature of Italian club football funding, however, is that it gave birth to the phenomenon of the so-called ‘Berlusconization’: Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, wealthy Italian businessmen were investing in the clubs and thus improved their influence and reputation, which was resulting in a subsequent political promotion.<sup>33</sup>

French football, where the prevailing form of club ownership has been a member association, recently has converted to the English and Italian model as well, with most of the clubs now being under the control of a private majority investor.<sup>34</sup> Despite the rise of Qatar-owned PSG, no investors with similar ambitions and opportunities have entered the league yet. However, French clubs are becoming increasingly attractive to investors due to their relatively low value and a new media rights deal of the Ligue 1.<sup>35</sup> Opposite to that trend, clubs in Spain and Germany, in general, are controlled by several shareholders. By 2014, around 50% of the clubs in Germany went incorporated, whereas the rest operates as member associations.<sup>36</sup> A unique feature of the German Bundesliga is the ‘50 + 1 rule’. It states that although a club can sell some shares to investors, the majority of voting rights (50%+1) remain in the hands of the club members.<sup>37</sup> This rule should protect from opportunistic behaviour of sole majority investors.

Nevertheless, despite being funded mainly by private sources, clubs in Europe sometimes receive benefits from public hands in one way or another due to their cultural and economic importance. Storm and Nielsen explain this with reference to the ‘too big to fail’ phenomenon: they posit that many European football clubs are considered as ‘too big to fail’ by their stakeholders (e.g. public bodies such as local or regional governments), who would always bail out the clubs instead of letting them go bankrupt.<sup>38</sup> The authors claim that European football is ripe with examples where this SBC syndrome applies. In fact, the public funding by football clubs in Europe has led to several complaints within European institutions: For example, in 2016 the European Commission claimed that seven Spanish clubs (FC Barcelona, Real Madrid, Valencia, Athletic Bilbao, Atlético Osasuna, Elche and Hercules) have received illegal state aid, including tax privileges, land transfers, and loans.<sup>39</sup>

While these examples exist, still most clubs in Western Europe and North America usually operate with private money mainly. Russian football shows a completely different situation regarding the funding of clubs. According to publicly available information, almost 75% of the clubs in the Russian Premier League in the last five seasons have been extensively funded from state sources.<sup>40</sup> This means that either municipal or regional budget act as a main source of funding. Although clubs may receive some revenues from match days, the selling of media rights or from sponsorship contracts with private companies, these sums are rather insignificant as compared to public funding. Common practice for the majority of clubs is to have their needs for players’ wages, transfers, facilities, daily operations etc. covered by taxpayers’ money. In the following section, an overview of the incidents and developments that led to the current situation is presented.

## Historical prerequisites of today's public funding system of sport clubs in Russia

The formation of the public funding system in Russia is deeply connected to the historical past of the country. While there are plenty of factors that contributed to the current status quo to larger or lesser extent, some elements have impacted the system most: (a) the peculiar operation of football in Soviet times resulting in a lack of local fandom in provincial regions; (b) the crisis of the 1990s and the failed professionalization of club football in the wake of Perestroika; and (c) low incentives for oligarchs to invest in Russian football clubs. From a historical perspective, these three characteristics can be seen as important explanatory factors for the public funding system of sport clubs in Russia today.

The origins of the Soviet sports system go back to the 1920s and 1930s, when the country was establishing itself and its institutions. Sport participation was organized by sport societies, which used to belong to a certain branch of the state and represent people of certain professions and social groups.<sup>41</sup> The largest societies were (a) Dynamo (representing the police), (b) SKA (representing the army), (c) Spartak (representing trade unions), (d) Torpedo (representing the automobile industry), (e) Lokomotiv (representing the railway industry), (f) Zenit (representing the machinery plants industry), (g) Krylia Sovetov (representing the aviation industry), (h) Trudovye Rezervy (representing high school students).<sup>42</sup>

These societies operated with a clear hierarchy, having their main club in the capital of the respective USSR member-state. For football, such a system resulted in the following: Clubs from the capitals of the USSR member-states completely dominated the Top League (the first tier of Soviet football) and most of them belonged to the named societies. From 1936 (the first time the league was played) to 1991 (the last season), the only non-society clubs to win the league title were Zarya Voroshilovgrad (1972), Ararat Erevan (1973) and Dnepr Dnepropetrovsk (1983, 1988).<sup>43</sup> Of all the winners, only Dnepr and Zarya represented non-capital cities.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, as most of the Top League spots were occupied by the clubs from the capitals of the member-states, there were only 12 Russian clubs outside Moscow and Leningrad that reached the Top League during the 55 years of its existence. And only three of them – SKA Rostov, Krylia Sovetov and Rotor – managed to stay more than three seasons at the highest level.<sup>45</sup> The only time a Russian club outside Moscow and Leningrad finished in the top-3 was SKA Rostov in 1966, and this club is also the only one to win any trophy (USSR Cup in 1981).

These numbers clearly demonstrate the prevalence of the societies' clubs and the dominance of capital cities over the others. Often, a football club from a small Soviet town was a part of one of those societies and was called Dynamo, Spartak and so on, thus losing much of local identity. Local clubs were rarely in contention for trophies. Due to such hierarchy, football fans across the USSR were typically supporting a society club from one of the capitals, depending on a supporter's ethnic origin, professional occupation or a presence of the similar society club in his/her town.<sup>46</sup> As a result, fandom of local clubs in the Soviet Union has never flourished in any way similar to (Western) Europe.

With the 1990s being a turbulent time for the Russian economy and society, many clubs were subject to renaming, bankruptcy, sudden disappearance and reappearance.<sup>47</sup>

This did not contribute to the formation of local fandom either. As a consequence, still the majority of the country either supports the clubs from Moscow or instead Zenit, rather than supporting a club from their hometown or the nearest big city, even if it plays in the Russian Premier League with relative success.<sup>48</sup> The low share of audience interest certainly does not contribute to a club's attractiveness to a potential private investor: Porotkin confirms this by stating that the average number of sponsors in the Russian Premier League was 5.31 per club in 2014/2015 season, while in the German Bundesliga this number equalled to 30.56, in the English Premier League to 13.85, in the French Ligue 1 to 12.9, in the Spanish La Liga to 11.3 and in the Turkish Superlig to 10.28.<sup>49</sup>

Due to a low purchasing power of fans in provincial Russia as compared to citizens in the two largest cities (Moscow and St. Petersburg) provincial Russian clubs cannot count on fans as a source of sufficient revenue, which, in turn, does not make them financially attractive to potential private investors. Another consequence of underdeveloped provincial fandom is a very small probability of having a wealthy investor who sponsors a club due to their lifelong passion.

The failed attempt of the Soviet clubs to establish a fully professional commercial league in the times of Perestroika further affected the current situation. A detailed analysis of that case is provided by Edelman, and the following passage only recaps the key events with a focus on their implications.<sup>50</sup> In 1988, the Soviet government decided to restructure the sports system, addressing new economic and political reality.<sup>51</sup> Different views existed on how the sports should be modelled, in particular regarding the extent of involvement and power of state institutions. After months of intense debates, the idea of a fully autonomous, professional and for-profit oriented football system was abandoned in favour of a system in which the clubs remained under the patronage of ministries, local administrations, state factories or sports societies. As a consequence, the following years saw an exodus of the most skilful players to other European leagues, severely affecting the quality and attractiveness of the game in the Soviet league. When the economic crisis hit the USSR and the newly independent states throughout the 1990s, many clubs entered financial struggles and local governments often were the only saviours.<sup>52</sup>

However, when the economy began to stabilize in the early 2000s, following some prominent examples in (Western) European leagues, Russian oligarchs started to approach Russian football clubs, resonating with the phenomenon of Berlusconi. For example, Roman Abramovich's Sibneft was helping Evgeni Giner to quickly make CSKA the most successful Russian club of the 2000s and the first ever UEFA Cup winner from former USSR. Mikhail Khodorkovsky's Yukos was sponsoring Dynamo Moscow and the revival of Rubin Kazan was related to the political campaign of the city mayor Kamil Iskhakov. However, after the arrest of Khodorkovsky in 2003, it became clear that the political advance of oligarchs in Russia would not be possible, or only possible under certain specific arrangements.<sup>53</sup> Without an opportunity to properly enter the political scene, and already having all other possible benefits in Russia, the only interest for oligarchs to sponsor football was to gain prominence at an international level. Due to the lack of competitiveness at international level, Russian clubs could not serve towards this goal. Therefore, almost all oligarchs lost interest in sponsoring local clubs and turned their attention to clubs abroad (e.g. Abramovich and Chelsea). The only notable exceptions since the mid-2000s were Suleiman Kerimov with Anzhi Makhachkala and Sergey Galitsky with FC Krasnodar. While the latter is still in office as the club's president,

**Table 1.** Categories of Russian football clubs by the source of funding.

Category	Definition	Russian Premier League Clubs
Clubs funded by state-controlled organizations	Football clubs whose main source of funding is the funds of various organizations, enterprises, companies or corporations that are all controlled or owned by the state. They are usually owned by the relevant organization or state.	Arsenal Tula, CSKA, Dynamo Moscow, Lokomotiv, Orenburg, Rostov, Sochi, Ural, Zenit, Fakel
Clubs funded directly by the state	Football clubs whose main source of funding is municipal or regional state budgets. They are usually owned by the state.	Akhmat, Amkar, Krylia Sovetov, Rotor, SKA-Khabarovsk, Tambov, Ufa, Yenisey
Privately funded clubs	Football clubs whose main source of funding is the funds of private investors. They are usually owned by a private owner.	Anzhi, FC Krasnodar, Spartak Moscow, Tosno, Torpedo
Clubs with a mixed scheme of funding	Football clubs whose main source of funding combines both public and private funds, in the form of Public-Private Partnership or other forms. They can be owned by the state or de jure by a private person.	Khimki, Pari NN, Rubin Kazan

Kerimov, after two sensational years and the signing of super star players like Samuel Eto'o or Roberto Carlos, distanced himself from the club management in 2013, which resulted in Anzhi's relegation and subsequent sale.<sup>54</sup>

To sum up, the absence of timely professionalization and the peculiarities of the Soviet sport club system did not contribute to establishment of private clubs. After all the turbulence of the 1990s, the growing Russian economy of the 2000s saw the lack of private interest to fund the clubs. As a consequence, state institutions accepted the funding burden in the 1990s to save the clubs during the critical time. Football clubs thus provide yet another example where Kornai's SBC approach applies. By the 2020s, the public funding system's roots were so deep that they had created a whole chain of repercussions unique to the Russian context. These developments need to be taken into account to be able to critically assess the current status quo.

### **Funding of professional football clubs in Russia: overview on the current situation**

The current system of public funding is not strictly regimented and unified. Depending on a particular case, some publicly funded clubs exist fully on state money, while others use the funds of state-related organizations or adopt more sophisticated schemes. Based on publicly available information regarding the funding or ownership structure, clubs can be grouped into four categories: (a) clubs funded by state-controlled organizations; (b) clubs funded directly by the state; (c) privately funded clubs; (d) clubs with a mixed scheme of funding.<sup>55</sup> This categorization is based on the primary source of a respective club's funding, which makes up most of the budget. At the same time, it is acknowledged that clubs of each category may have multiple sources of funding, including both private (e.g. minor sponsors, advertising, media rights) and public. Further, an assignment to one group does not exclude the possibility of receiving funds from the title source of the other group. Each category carries its own set of implications for involved parties.

An overview of the categories and its definitions as well as the corresponding clubs is depicted in [Table 1](#). Among the 24 participants of the last five (2017–2022) seasons of the

Russian Premier League, the clubs funded by state-controlled organizations form the largest category with nine clubs in total. Eight clubs are directly sponsored by the state, while four clubs are funded privately. Three clubs are characterized by a mixed scheme of funding. Taken together, the share of clubs living from state money is above 70%. Similar proportion applies to the second tier.<sup>56</sup> Interestingly, each category has its own specific features, which will be illustrated now in turn.

### **Clubs funded by state-controlled organizations**

State-controlled organizations (e.g. enterprises, companies, corporations) are a common phenomenon in Russia and play a huge role in the country's economy. In Russian sports, such organizations are quite often responsible for sponsoring a particular sport or a club as their 'social responsibility'.<sup>57</sup>

According to Ilia Gerkus, general manager of the Russian Railways club Lokomotiv Moscow in 2016–2019, sponsoring a football club in Russia helps corporate top managers to regularly meet with regional/municipal politicians in an informal setting and act as intermediaries in the organization of the meetings between influential people of different kinds.<sup>58</sup> They thus 'exchange' financial subsidies to clubs for intangible benefits such as important connections gained due to the funding and improved relationships with political actors. Another interest of state-controlled organizations is to increase their influence in the region on different social groups, which again may bring intangible benefits.<sup>59</sup> For the biggest state-controlled organizations in Russia (Russian Railways, Gazprom, VTB, VEB.RF), owning a football club can also be seen as a form of elite business-club competition and a matter of prestige. Porotkin compares such corporations with Caesar, who used the gladiator fights to acquire the support of the population and increase his reputation.<sup>60</sup> The author further claims that the creation of a socially active company image is an important task for state-controlled corporations.

On practice, there are some differences in the implementation of state-controlled organizational funding. For example, Orenburg, Rostov and Ural belong to their respective regional government, however the responsibility for funding lies on a local enterprise, which is fully or mostly owned by the state.<sup>61</sup> The second way is when the organization both owns the club and takes the financial care of it. This applies to the biggest clubs such as CSKA, Zenit, Lokomotiv and Dynamo Moscow.<sup>62</sup>

CSKA Moscow has been an ideal example of a successful private club in Russia in the 2000s and 2010s, but 2019 marked its new era when the previous owner Evgeni Giner sold the club to VEB.RF, the state-owned investment bank.<sup>63</sup> Since then, the club has signed sponsorship contracts with a number of state-related institutions, such as Post of Russia, Rosseti or Aeroflot.<sup>64</sup> Dynamo Moscow, another classical Moscow powerhouse, has enjoyed sponsorship from VTB, a state-owned commercial bank.<sup>65</sup>

Russia's richest club, Zenit, is being owned and sponsored by Gazprom, a state corporation which is responsible for the country's natural resources.<sup>66</sup> The precise ownership and sponsorship structure of Zenit is rather complicated as it contains numerous Gazprom's subsidiaries.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, Zenit enjoys some additional special privileges. For example, Zenit is the only club in Russia which has received a publicly funded World Cup stadium for a 49-year rent for the symbolic price of 1 Russian Ruble, while all the other

clubs, despite being public themselves, pay the stadiums (which are also public) from 2.4 to 3.8 million Rubles rent per game.<sup>68</sup>

Lokomotiv Moscow is the flagship sports entity of Russian Railways, which similarly to Gazprom enjoys a natural governmental monopoly.<sup>69</sup> The patterns of funding are not different from Zenit, as the money comes both from the main Russian Railways body as well as the number of its subsidiaries.<sup>70</sup> Although Russian Railways try to position Lokomotiv as a private entity, its state-controlled funding becomes directly obvious by looking at, for example, a 6.3 million Rubles tender for Lokomotiv's new logo, which was posted on the government purchases website, where all the state institutions are obliged to post their budgets and conditions for external purchases.<sup>71</sup>

### ***Clubs funded directly by the state***

The second group includes the clubs funded directly by the state. They are the most dependent from the government and this results in a couple of remarkable features. First of all, such clubs are often being used as political instruments. For example, the former mayor of Kazan, Kamil Iskhakov, has described the interest of the local government in the decision of sponsoring Rubin Kazan.<sup>72</sup> He argues that one of the reasons the city decided to help the club in the 1990s and to keep supporting it is that they wanted to get some recognition on a broader level. After Rubin Kazan won the Premier League titles in 2008 and 2009 and had a few successful European campaigns, including the victory at Camp Nou against Pep Guardiola's prime FC Barcelona in the 2009/2010 Champions League season, people from foreign countries started to recognize Kazan, what leveraged other international projects in the city.<sup>73</sup>

Another example of political promotion can be the rapid resurrection of Terek Grozny (now named Akhmat) after the second Chechen War: the club was not playing in official leagues in the 1990s due to the war, but as soon as the Federal government reached the agreement with the Chechen Republic in 2000, the club was re-established, quickly reintegrated into the system of Russian football, and promptly reached the Premier League, winning the Russian Cup in 2004 and playing a few games in the UEFA Cup afterwards. However, since the regime of counter-terrorist operation was still in force after the war, Terek was allowed to play their home matches in Grozny only in 2008 (in 2001–2007 they played their home games and had training bases in neighbouring regions).<sup>74</sup> Their first home game, which coincided with a comeback to the Premier League after a relegation, received a huge social and political resonance in the country and was framed as a sign of an establishment of complete peace in North Caucasus.<sup>75</sup>

While these examples illustrate political use of a club for a strategic regional promotion, the case of FC Tambov is a demonstration of opportunistic exploitation of a club. The promotion of the club into the Premier League in 2019 gave rise to a series of remarkable developments: Tambov Stadium was not complying with the Premier League rules and the club had to start the season around 600 km away from their home ground, in Saransk, where the World Cup stadium was not in use.<sup>76</sup> Despite the promises of the Tambov oblast governor Aleksandr Nikitin (made before elections) to quickly adjust the stadium in Tambov to Premier League standards and provide stable long-term funding, this has never happened.<sup>77</sup> Later in the season the club literally lost almost all the funding (regional budgets in Russia are adopted by calendar year, in the middle of football

season), and had to survive in harsh conditions, finishing the league with a predominantly youth squad.<sup>78</sup>

The Tambov example highlights the dangers of clubs being heavily dependent on the individual will of a certain governor or a close circle of politicians. Given the centralized character of power in Russia, many spheres of a respective region's policy are decided in such a manner, which puts clubs in a position of uncertainty and dependence. Being subject to a particular governor's preferences also inhibits long-term strategic planning, thus affecting the quality of club's decisions.

### ***Privately funded clubs***

The third group includes privately funded clubs. Each of the private teams in Russia have their own peculiarities. Two clubs were already mentioned earlier: Anzhi and FC Krasnodar. After the abrupt exit of Suleiman Kerimov at Anzhi, in 2016 it was purchased by Osman Kadiev, another Dagestani businessman. Since then, the club has been surviving on a modest budget and eventually got relegated to the third tier.<sup>79</sup> FC Krasnodar, where Sergei Galitsky is fulfilling his dream of having a football, continues to gradually develop and has become one of Russia's top clubs, with recently built award-winning infrastructure, stadium and academy. Other private clubs among the participants of the last five seasons include Spartak Moscow and Tosno.

Tosno, a club from a small town in Leningrad oblast, was owned by entrepreneur Maksim Levchenko.<sup>80</sup> Within a few years, the club made it to the Premier League from the bottom of the football system, eventually winning a trophy during their only top-flight season – the cup of Russia in 2018. However, instead of representing the country in the Europa League the following year, the club was disbanded. The main sponsor, Fort Group, lost interest in the project due to the high costs of maintaining a competitive level in the Premier League, and there was no one willing to take over the club.<sup>81</sup> Levchenko admitted that his initial expectations were to receive financial support from the Leningrad oblast when the club reaches the Premier League, yet since this did not happen, he could no longer sponsor the club himself.<sup>82</sup>

Spartak Moscow, the championships record holder and, arguably, the most popular football club in Russia, is owned by the private oil company LukOil. Leonid Fedun, one of LukOil's top-managers, purchased the club in 2004 from entrepreneur Andrei Chervichenko, whose ownership led the club to a crisis.<sup>83</sup> In 2022, LukOil acquired 100% of the club's shares, thus making Spartak a purely corporate club. An important distinction with Zenit or Lokomotiv in this case is that LukOil is a private company and not a state-owned corporation, although the legitimacy of privatization processes in the 1990s Russia, especially in the area of natural resources, is often subject of debate among academics and the public.<sup>84</sup>

The entirely different stories of private clubs demonstrate once again that a private football club in Russia is rather an exemption than a rule. Competition with publicly funded clubs with soft budget constraints imposes high costs on the private investors and not many can afford this. However, certain clubs are trying to adapt the schemes of partially private funding, which forms the fourth group – clubs with a mixed scheme of funding.

### **Clubs with a mixed scheme of funding**

In the fourth group, FC Khimki, a club from the eponymous suburb of Moscow, is an example of a public-private partnership. Although most of the clubs whose main source of funding is public usually have a few minor sponsors from the private sector as well, Khimki, which is by its legal form a municipal institution, is different by having two equal major investors: the regional ministry of sport and a private individual investor.<sup>85</sup> Interestingly enough, the private partner appeared when the club was promoted in 2020, but the regional government said it would not allow the club to move up due to the lack of sufficient funds.<sup>86</sup> The situation went scandalous and after experiencing serious pressure from the media and football community, the Moscow oblast government found a private investor to cover the lacking part, assumingly in exchange for some business privileges.<sup>87</sup>

Pari NN, previously known as FC Nizhny Novgorod, represents another example of public-private partnership. In the summer of 2022, the club signed an agreement with betting company PariBet, which assumed renaming in exchange for covering 50% of the club's budget.<sup>88</sup> Curiously, a basketball club from the city signed a similar agreement and thus both clubs are now named after the betting company. Such practice of clubs carrying a commercial name is still in use in some European leagues as well as in European basketball (and it was used by some Russian football clubs too in the 1990s), however for the current Russian football such case is unique.

Rubin Kazan represents a complex case as it has experienced a series of structural changes. It has transformed from a municipal entity to a de jure private club, receiving funding from TAIF, an investment company from Kazan, which controls a number of industrial enterprises.<sup>89</sup> This case reflects the complicated political landscape of the Tatarstan Republic in Russia, where nearly all private corporations are closely connected to the regional political elites. Generally speaking, the clubs in Tatarstan are factually funded from private sources, however, the allocation of these funds is dependent on Republican politics.

Based on our analysis, it is evident that public funding is dispersed through diverse channels. While most cases align with the aforementioned categories, our allocation is not static, as clubs can easily see changes in their funding structure. Given the different ownership structures and key patrons across categories, the repercussions for the involved parties differ as well. Moreover, private clubs are affected by the system too, operating under conditions distinct from private clubs in the leagues with entirely private systems. Beyond the implications unique to specific categories, there are also broader consequences of the public system that can be extrapolated to all clubs. These will be addressed in the following section.

### **General implications of the public funding system**

The biggest general implication can be ascribed to the economic concept of SBCs. Indeed, as shown in the previous sections, Russian football seems to represent a paradigmatic case for inefficient firms (club in this case) in which losses are covered up by public authorities or other creditors.<sup>90</sup> With an expectation to be always covered by the state, the

clubs do not live within their means or in accordance with the economic reality of their regions, leading to long-term societal losses.<sup>91</sup>

For Russian clubs this results in overspending and inefficient transfer policies. As Porotkin points out, the Russian league has a much higher cost per point in the table compared to the countries of similar economic levels, and the bigger the amount of public money a club gets, the higher that cost is.<sup>92</sup> Public funding allows the clubs to have stronger squads for international competitions than they would be able to afford otherwise, but at the same time attributes of the system artificially increase the transfer fees and wages: for example, the existence of ‘legionnaire limit’, another rule which resulted from the dependence of the football system from the political agenda, requires clubs to have a certain number of domestic players on the pitch. Thus, qualified Russian footballers become scarce, leading to gigantic salaries, and therefore extra spending for the clubs, creating a kind of vicious circle.<sup>93</sup> Consequently, SBC punish privately funded clubs, who either need to spend more to keep their positions in competitions, or suffer from a decrease in results if they prefer not to participate in such an ‘arms race’.

While these outcomes are typical of SBC systems, the Russian model differs from the mentioned examples in Europe in one crucial respect: public money in Russia is not just a rescue mechanism – it forms the core of a club’s annual budget. This complete dependence on public funds creates significant power asymmetries between government authorities, club management, and fans.

These power imbalances, together with the lack of incentives to earn and spend carefully result in another controversy. Fans in Russia, as noted in earlier sections, possess no direct economic influence over clubs. Paradoxically, however, they (along with non-fans) are the ultimate source of public funding, as the money comes from federal and regional tax revenues. Since regional governments control the allocation of funds, they effectively become the most powerful stakeholders, relegating fans to a marginal position. Club managers therefore prioritize satisfying government officials rather than responding to the fan base. Such a dynamic helps to explain Kiknadze’s phrase cited in the introduction.

Dependence on public funding also exposes clubs to opportunistic behaviour by political actors or different priorities of new regional administrations. Because financial support comes from local governments or state-owned corporations, club budgets are vulnerable to political change, which steals the possibility for long-term strategic planning.<sup>94</sup> As Storm and Nielsen note, one cause of SBCs in Europe is the emotional and symbolic value of clubs, which motivates bailouts.<sup>95</sup> However, in the Russian case, emotional attachment plays a lesser role, especially in provincial cities with underdeveloped fan cultures. Instead, clubs function as tools for regional prestige and political signalling.

This makes Russian SBCs particularly volatile. For example, despite its sustained presence in the top division, Amkar Perm accumulated a number of debts and eventually was dissolved in 2018, when a newly elected governor denied providing additional financial support.<sup>96</sup> Here, the ‘softness’ of the budget constraint proved inconsistent, suddenly disappearing with devastating consequences for the club. A resembling case happened with FC Tambov, as previously discussed.

This volatility shows that regardless of whether a budget constraint is hard or soft, it must be at least consistent and predictable. Clubs need financial stability to plan for the

long term. However, due to the fact that governments and regional priorities change over time, consistency in terms of budget sizes and public funding seem fragile.

A permanent hard budget constraint may be a more sustainable and healthier model that encourages clubs to rely on self-generated revenues and fosters better financial discipline. As Franck argues, hard constraints incentivize managerial competence and responsible budgeting.<sup>97</sup> When club survival depends on actual work of club and club's performance rather than political goodwill, managers are more likely to adopt sustainable and strategic approaches to spending.

The implications described in the paper, both general and specific to individual categories of clubs, illustrate that the conditions significantly different from predominantly privately funded leagues. The system of public funding creates a different set of relations among key stakeholders, different set of goals and motivations for management, different principles of money allocation, and thus a distinct environment for the clubs and their fans.

## Discussion

The public funding system described above and its implications raise an inevitable question: should such a system be changed, and how? The following section shall contribute to a hopefully emerging scholarly debate.

Andreff identifies SBC determinants at three levels: macroeconomic (nationwide economic systems), meso-economic (industry-level dynamics), and microeconomic (the internal budget discipline of individual organizations).<sup>98</sup> Since this paper focuses on the public funding system, only macroeconomic and meso-economic determinants are of immediate relevance. The microeconomic level becomes important only if public funding transitions from being the prevalent model to the exception in Russia.

In essence, that means there are two main tracks for possible reformation:

(1) Meso-economic: Introducing strict caps on public funding and implementing robust oversight mechanisms. This track would likely rely on league-level regulations, budget transparency requirements, and the creation of independent regulatory authorities. (2) Macroeconomic: Completely eliminating public funding of professional sports clubs through federal legislation, either universally or for specific sports such as football.

Both tracks demand careful planning, clear roadmaps, and a gradual rollout, allowing clubs to transit smoothly over the course of several years and not engage in burdening long-term contracts. However, hardening budget constraints is not an easy task. Andreff identifies various obstacles corresponding to six conditions of budgetary hardness – five introduced by Kornai et al. and a sixth by Storm and Nielsen: H1 (exogenous prices), H2 (hard taxes), H3 (no subsidies), H4 (no access to credit), H5 (no external investment beyond initial funding), and H6 (no creative accounting).<sup>99</sup>

In the context of the Russian public funding system, the meso-economic track would primarily require enforcing H3 (elimination of subsidies) and H6 (no soft accounting practices). And if hardening of H3 is basically the essence of the reform, then H6 is the main obstacle on making the actual practical difference and the reform's introduction. The macroeconomic track would necessitate full hardening of H3, along with H5 (no external investment beyond foundation) and H4 (restricted access to credit), which

would prevent clubs from substituting public funds with other forms of politically motivated financial aid.

Ultimately, reforming the public funding model would mean shifting away from politically dependent, risk-insulated and inefficient financing towards a system that promotes financial responsibility, sustainable planning, and better alignment with stakeholder (especially fan) interests.

## **Conclusions, limitations and further research**

The mix of various factors contributed to the creation of a unique and peculiar system of professional football in Russia, completely different from the countries with developed market economies. Although such a system may allow the clubs to mitigate economic externalities and volatile market conditions, it creates a number of ambiguous repercussions.

Among them are economic inefficiency, neglected interests of spectators, the possibility of opportunistic behaviour of local governments or sudden changes in the region's priorities putting clubs in an unprotected and unstable position. Due to this system, the policies of federal and local governments become the crucial factors for clubs' well-being. And although the list of related implications is not exhaustive, the mere presence of at least those presented in the paper can demonstrate the importance of studying the practice of public funding and the necessity of its understanding if one wants to investigate Russian club sport. These overarching repercussions, stemming from both theoretical perspectives and practice, contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the intricate phenomenon that is public funding, and the way it makes the context of Russian sport different from the Global West. The unique environment around the Russian clubs is vital to account for both for scholars, policy makers or practitioners.

Our study is, of course, not void of some (de-)limitations. First and foremost, it is mostly descriptive in nature, aiming to introduce and contextualize the phenomenon of public funding in Russian football for a broader academic audience. Its core objective is to provide a foundation and stimulate further inquiry rather than to conduct an in-depth examination of specific elements within the system. Consequently, the analysis remains general and overarching, rather than focused on any single implication or mechanism in exhaustive detail. This approach is also shaped by practical constraints. A more granular analysis of governance structures, financial flows, or stakeholder behaviour would have required a narrower focus, was beyond the scope of this article. A further limitation concerns the dynamic nature of the football landscape itself. The status of individual clubs, particularly their funding models or ownership structures, is dynamic. Yet, while changes may affect specific examples, they do not undermine the broader patterns and systemic issues identified in the paper. The aim has been to capture the prevailing tendencies rather than provide a static snapshot of each club's financial situation. Based on these limitations, a key direction for further research involves a more in-depth application of the soft budget constraint framework to governance and financial practices within Russian sport. This includes not only assessing the extent to which SBC conditions are met or violated across clubs but also examining how these dynamics affect competitive balance in the Russian Premier League and lower divisions.

Another important direction lies in conducting an ethical analysis of the public funding model. This would involve evaluating the system through lenses such as social justice, egalitarianism, and communitarian theory, especially considering that tax resources are diverted to elite professional sport while many regions face underfunded grassroots and public health initiatives. Exploring whether the current funding structure serves the common good or exacerbates inequality can help build a framework for more ethically grounded policy.

Further research should also focus on the stakeholder landscape in Russian football. A detailed mapping of key actors (federal and regional governments, private and public organizations and sponsors, fan groups, regulatory bodies etc.) and their interests and influence can reveal the institutional logic underpinning current arrangements. Particular attention should be paid to how fan communities are marginalized in decision-making despite being indirectly involved as taxpayers and cultural stakeholders.

The impact of geopolitical conditions also merits thorough exploration. It could be the case that if Russian football relied mainly on foreign private investors instead of public funding, the consequences of the 2022 sanctions on local club could be devastating. So despite all the controversies, intuition hints that the public funding system saved the clubs from the heaviest repercussions of sanctions.

Finally, a crucial research priority involves the development and evaluation of reform proposals. This includes comparative studies of successful transitions from publicly funded to privately sustained football ecosystems, the design of phased subsidy reduction plans, and legal pathways for enhancing financial transparency. Scenario modelling of both meso- and macro-level reforms could provide practical roadmaps for change that consider economic, political, and cultural constraints specific to Russia.

To sum up, what in the 1990s seemed to be a solution to save the clubs from disappearing, now has become a complex puzzle: even if at some point of time Russian football decides to abandon the system, it does not seem possible to do so quickly and without severe consequences. With the roots of the system being so deeply ingrown in all the aspects of football, any possible reformation can only be implemented gradually and should take a significant amount of time and effort.

## Notes

1. The term 'public funding' is understood as public subsidies of professional sport clubs, in contrast to private investments and other sources of income (e.g. gate receipts, merchandising). To avoid confusions, it is important to clarify that in Russian language the translation of the term is '*gosudarstvennoe finansirovanie*', which is also the translation for 'state funding', 'state financing' and also is used interchangeably with 'state sponsorship' ('*gosudarstvennoe sponsorstvo*').
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11. Zeller, *Sport and society in the Soviet Union: The politics of football after Stalin*; Bennetts, *Football Dynamo: Modern Russia and the People's game*.
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15. Porotkin, 'Sponsorstvo kak istochnik finansirovaniya professionalnyh futbolnyh klubov' [Sponsorship as a source of professional football club funding]; Porotkin, 'Sportivnaya i sotsialnaya effektivnost raskhodovaniya sredstv professionalnymi futbolnymi klubami' [Sportive and social efficiency of football club spendings].
16. Solntsev, 'Improving the Financial Sustainability of Russian Football Clubs'.
17. Pavlinov, 'Corruption in the Field of International and Russian Sport'.
18. Kornai, 'Resource-Constrained versus Demand-Constrained Systems'.
19. Andreff, 'The Financial Crisis in French Soccer: About a French Senate Report'; Andreff, 'French Football: A Financial Crisis Rooted in Weak Governance'; Andreff, 'Building Blocks for a Disequilibrium Model of a European Team Sports League'; Andreff, 'Governance of Professional Team Sports Clubs: Agency Problems and Soft Budget Constraints'; Andreff, 'Disequilibrium Sport Economics: Competitive Imbalance and Budget Constraints'; Dietl et al., 'Overinvestment in team sports leagues: A contest theory model'; Franck, 'Private firm, public corporation or member's association governance structures in European football'; Franck, 'Financial Fair Play in European Club Football – What is it all about?'; Storm and Nielsen, 'Soft budget constraints in professional football'; Nielsen and Storm, 'Profits, Championships and Budget Constraints in European Professional Sport'; Scelles 'Wladimir Andreff (Ed.), *Disequilibrium Sports Economics: Competitive Imbalance and Budget Constraints*'; Storm and Nielsen, 'Soft Budget Constraints in European and US leagues – similarities and differences'; Storm, Nielsen and Havran, 'Introduction: new research pathways in the soft budget constraint approach'.
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32. Ruta et al., 'The Relationship between Governance Structure and Football Club Performance in Italy and England'.
33. Veth, 'The Berlusconiization of Post-Soviet football in Russia and the Ukraine'.
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36. Kindler, *The 50 + 1 Rule: What to Consider before Buying a Football Club*.
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41. Riordan, 'From Communist forum to Capitalist market East European sport in transition', 15–26.
42. Istyagina-Eliseeva and Dubinin, 'Istoriya propagandy massovogo sporta sredstvami sportivno-istoricheskogo naslediya v period 1945–1991 gg' [History of mass sport propaganda by the means of sports historical legacy in 1945–1991].
43. Rest of the titles were taken by Dynamo Kiev (13 times), Spartak Moscow (12 times), Dynamo Moscow (11 times), CSKA Moscow (7 times), Torpedo Moscow (3 times), Dynamo Tbilisi (2 times), Dynamo Minsk and Zenit Leningrad (both 1 time).
44. Leningrad, of course, was not a capital as well; however, it both formally and informally had, and still has as St. Petersburg, a special federal-city status due to its imperial capital history and economic and cultural importance.
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46. Zhuravkov, 'Genezis subkultury futbolnyh fanatov v Rossii' [Genesis of football fan sub-culture in Russia].
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48. According to 2006 WCIOM (Russian official public opinion survey centre) survey, 69% of football spectators supported Moscow or St. Petersburg clubs, and 24% did not have a favourite team. This leaves only 7% to all the other clubs in the country, which is an incredibly small share. WCIOM, *Analytical review: rating of Russian football clubs popularity*. However, local fandom has been growing since then: according to Championat.com, in 2017 Moscow and St. Petersburg clubs took up 64.2% of the audience and the share of indifferent spectators dropped to 7.8%. 28% of the respondents supported provincial clubs, which is four times bigger than in 2006. However, still, the dominance of capital clubs is quite astonishing, considering the size of Russia against just two, although the biggest, cities. Korytov, 'Za kogo na samom dele boleyut v Rossii – tolko cifry' [Who do they support in Russia – only numbers].
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50. Edelman, 'The Professionalization of Soviet Sport: The Case of the Soccer Union'.

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57. Solntsev, *Finansirovanie professionalnogo futbola v Rossii* [Financing of professional football in Russia].
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60. Porotkin, 'Sponsorstvo kak istochnik finansirovaniya professionalnykh futbolnykh klubov', 93.
61. Galanov, 'Samyi Bogatyi Futbolny Klub v Rossii – Byudzhety Klubov RFPL na 2020–2021 gody'; Gorin, 'Budzhety klubov RFPL 2017/2018'.
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64. Galanov, 'Samyi Bogatyi Futbolny Klub v Rossii – Byudzhety Klubov RFPL na 2020–2021 gody'.
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70. Galanov, 'Samyi Bogatyi Futbolny Klub v Rossii – Byudzhety Klubov RFPL na 2020–2021 gody'.
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72. Nikitin, 'Kamil Iskhakov: Podnyat Rubin – eto byla zadacha, sopolstovimaya so stroitelstvom metro' [Kamil Iskhakov: to raise Rubin was as hard as to build metro].
73. Ibid.
74. FC Akhmat official website.
75. Matur, 'Porazhenie Tereka bolelshiki priravnyali k pobeде' [Terek's loss is like a victory].
76. RIA, 'V Mordovii podtverdili, chat Tambov sygraet v Saranske' [Tambov will play in Saransk: confirmed].
77. Poltavets, 'Okazyvaetsa, v Tambove s futbolom vse v poryadke – Tak schitaet gubernator' [Apparently, all is well in Tambov with football. That's what the governor says].
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81. Sports.ru, 'Tosno voobshe ne do Ligi Evropy. Neponyatno, vyzhyvet li komanda' [Tosno doesn't think about Europe. It is unclear if the team survives at all].
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