

# Manchester City and FFP: A Lesson in Hypocrisy

[Nick Meadowcroft-Lunn](#) stands in defence of Manchester City over their Financial Fair Play breaches

Wednesday 14 November 2018



Manchester City's sponsorship by Etihad Airways has been called into question, given their shared ownership with the airline. Image: Ed Higgins

Since the beginning of football, there has been dodgy money.

In 1906, 102 years before Sheikh Mansour and the Abu Dhabi Investment Group bought a controlling share of Manchester City, the same club were involved in a massive financial regulation breaching scandal. City were accused of unsuccessfully attempting to bribe Aston Villa players to throw the last match of the season which City lost 3-2, costing them a chance of a championship. Billy Meredith, acclaimed City legend to this day, claimed he had been ordered to offer bribes by City manager, Tom Maley. City, so desperate to avoid sanction from the FA, refused to play Meredith for an entire year despite him being by far and away their best player. City were still fined £900, had several key players suspended, and were infamously forced to auction of their remaining players at The Queens Hotel, Manchester. Amongst those sold was Billy Meredith, for £500 to cross-city rivals, Manchester United.

Financial Fair Play (FFP), in this grand schema, is nothing new. Nigh on every football club, if they've played professional football for more than 70 years, has bent, broken or dodged the rules from time to time to achieve success. From City's early troubles, to the Calciopoli scandal that saw Juventus relegated, to the Good Friday scandal of 1915, featuring Liverpool and Man United joining forces to fix a game, causing Chelsea to be relegated in place of United. Every club has dabbled in the dark arts and sought to profit from making the system work to their advantage. In this context, the latest leaks, that City reached a heavily favourable compromise agreement with UEFA with regards to their 2013-2014 accounts amongst other questionable actions, are small fry.

The hatred and scorn poured upon City, for breaking a set of rules that some consider necessarily unfair anyway, stems not from a firm belief that some clubs act “good” and some act “bad”, but from a partisan belief that your rivals are an evil force compared to your team, who are good and saintly. In this context, the anger can be understood. No doubt should linger that City’s behaviour was poor. Whilst people might dismiss FFP as unjust, it is still the law of the land, and City undeniably failed it. The compromise, unfair in the context of other clubs from Turkey and Romania having the hammer brought down on them for much slighter infractions, had to be reached. City’s and Paris Saint-Germain’s legal teams might have presented a severe threat to the continued viability of FFP, and UEFA acted to ensure they could maintain their flagship financial reforms, maybe at the cost of their consistency. Despite this though, one only has to look at the history of a club like Manchester City, a club that rival fans declare has no history, to see worse scandals.

You can look at the history of Manchester United, Liverpool, Real Madrid, and see equally bad behaviours that aren’t used as demonstrations of the utter moral depravity of the modern club. City, placed in the context of football’s chequered history, are simply not *that* bad. For this reason, I think it’s important that we judge these contraventions fairly and consistently. City cannot answer for their crimes pre-2014, for the simple reason that they’ve been punished for them, however distastefully soft that punishment is.

Their post-2014 activities, including the direct investment from our owners, are also unlikely to be strongly investigated; UEFA changed their own FFP rules in 2015 for exactly this purpose. The third-party ownership concerns, regarding City’s preferential contracts with FC Nordsjaelland, will be investigated by FIFA and could result in a transfer ban, several of which have already been handed to clubs such as Real Madrid, Chelsea, Atletico Madrid and Barcelona in the last 10 years. Why are City being singled out for opprobrium then, and not those clubs? Why are City the symbol of all that is bad and corrupting in football, and not Real Madrid?

The reason, I would suggest, is obvious. City are the interlopers, the nouveau riche, the lottery winners who fundamentally don’t deserve to be at the top table. This mentality, mainly held by jealous rivals, has precluded any ability to judge these situations fairly; to question if FFP was fair in the first place or if they may be being hypocrites.

Every infraction is a mortal sin and every crime should be punished by sporting death, or so the baying masses would have you believe. This, is obviously unfair. City deserve everything that’s coming to them, to be punished as their crimes deserve. But they are no worse than the majority of their rivals, who only reached the heights they reached because they themselves broke the rules, many years previously. Since the beginning of football, there has been hypocrisy, and that won’t be changing any time soon. So long as there are rules, there will be football clubs trying to evade them.



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## 4 comments

Jeremy Poynton

19 Nov '18 at 10:37 am

Point. FFP is not “the law of the land”. It is a ruling implemented by a private organisation. Important difference. Otherwise 10/10!

 Report

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Anonymous

19 Nov '18 at 6:59 pm

FFP is anything but fair. It is designed to keep the big clubs big and the small clubs small. You could have the richest owner but if you are a small club then you are never going to make it big due to the financial constraints of FFP of what an owner can invest.

No mention of clubs like Man Utd who have a £400,000,000 debt yet that doesn't get taken into any FFP calculations.

[Report](#)

Anonymous

19 Nov '18 at 7:48 pm

Doesn't really dig into what supposed rules other clubs have broken apart from a few opaque references most of which were a century ago or more.

[Report](#)

MoTuck

19 Nov '18 at 8:22 pm

Si, is the eufa, fa and ffp all playing by the rules !

[Report](#)

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