

**A HISTORY OF MALAYSIA FOOTBALL LEAGUE
DEVELOPMENT FROM SEMI-PRO TO
PROFESSIONAL ERA, 1989 - 2011**

BY

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**A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for
the degree of Master of Human Sciences in History and
Civilization**

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ABSTRACT

This study traces the history of the Malaysian Football League development from semi-pro to professional from 1989 until 2011. The discussions begin by examining how the roots of the football league in Malaysia began to form until it reached professional level. Football in Malaysia began to gain serious ground with the establishment of the HMS Malaya Cup in 1921. It grew when the semi-pro league appeared in 1989 as a preparation before entering the professional league. During that period, there were several changes to the league's system and format, in addition to the emergence of several major issues and matters that significantly impacted the local football landscape. The research continues by discussing the changes that took place during the semi-pro and professional eras in the Malaysian football league. Both went through a process that is very important in ensuring that the league's journey process runs smoothly. The changes that occur from one period to another indirectly lead to critical changes to the Malaysian football league, which includes relevant aspects of a professional league. The developments during the transition of these two eras also impacted several entities, such as the national squad, competing teams and clubs, players, supporters, and media. The study also highlights professionalism trends among the major football leagues in Malaysia, England, and Japan. It must be recognized that England and Japan appear as two prosperous examples of countries applying professionalism in their football league. The comparison among the three leagues in this country focuses on some big things in the development aspect of a professional league. The findings of this research will help in understanding the history of the Malaysian football league in a fresher and new narrative.

خلاصة البحث

تتبع هذه الدراسة تاريخ تطور الدوري الماليزي لكرة القدم من مرحلة شبه المحترفين إلى عصر الاحتراف من عام 1989 حتى عام 2011. وتبدأ المناقشات بدراسة كيفية بدء تكوّن جذور دوري كرة القدم في ماليزيا حتى وصوله إلى عصر الاحتراف. بدأت كرة القدم في ماليزيا تكتسب أرضية جديدة مع إنشاء كأس الملايا - HMS Malaya في عام 1921. وتطورت حتى ظهرت فكرة تقديم الدوري شبه المحترف في عام 1989 كتحصير قبل الدخول في دوري المحترفين. ثم طرأت خلال تلك الفترة عدة تغييرات على نظام الدوري وشكله، بالإضافة إلى ظهور العديد من القضايا والأمور الكبرى التي كان لها تأثير كبير على المشهد الكروي المحلي. ويستمر البحث من خلال مناقشة التغيرات التي حدثت في عصر شبه الاحتراف والاحتراف في الدوري الماليزي لكرة القدم. يمر كلا العصرين بعملية مهمة جداً لضمان سير عملية رحلة الدوري بانتظام. كانت التغييرات التي تحدثت من فترة إلى أخرى تؤدي بشكل غير مباشر إلى تغييرات حاسمة في الدوري الماليزي لكرة القدم، والذي يتضمن الجوانب ذات الصلة بالدوري المحترف. كما أثرت التطورات التي حدثت خلال الفترة الانتقالية في هذين العصرين على العديد من العناصر، مثل المنتخب الوطني والفرق والأندية المتنافسة واللاعبين والمشجعين ووسائل الإعلام. وتسلط الدراسة الضوء أيضاً على مقارنة اتجاهات الاحتراف بين دوريات كرة القدم الكبرى في ماليزيا وإنجلترا واليابان. لا بد من الاعتراف بأن إنجلترا واليابان يظهران كمثالين ناجحين للدول التي تطبق الاحتراف في دوري كرة القدم الخاص بها. تركز المقارنة بين الدوريات الثلاث في هذا البلد على بعض الأشياء الكبيرة في الجانب التطويري للدوري الاحترافي. ستساعد نتائج هذا البحث في فهم تاريخ الدوري الماليزي لكرة القدم بسرد جديد ومتجدد.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Human Sciences in History and Civilization.

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I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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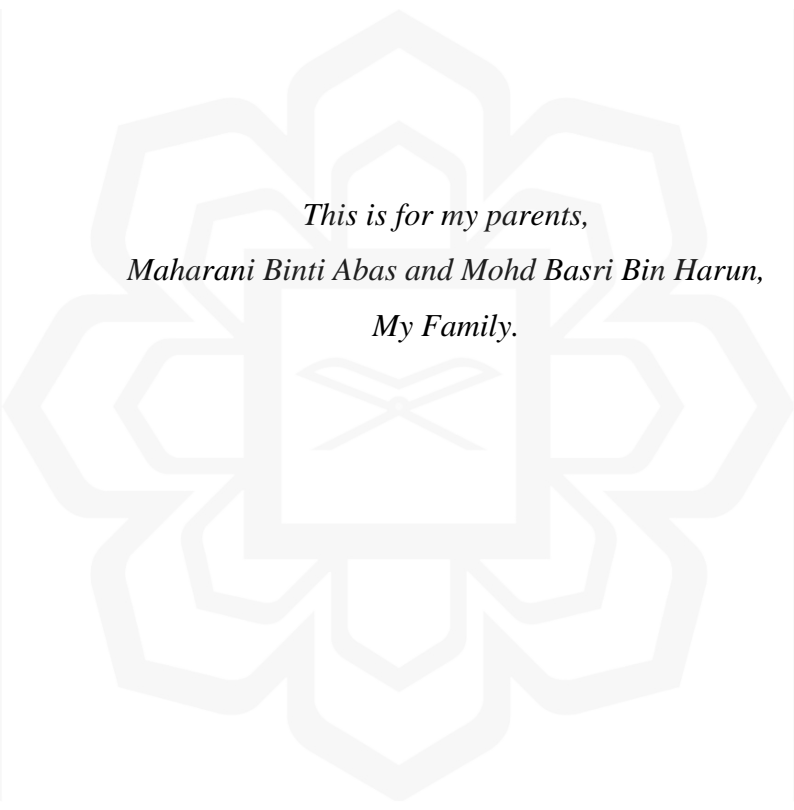
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*This is for my parents,
Maharani Binti Abas and Mohd Basri Bin Harun,
My Family.*

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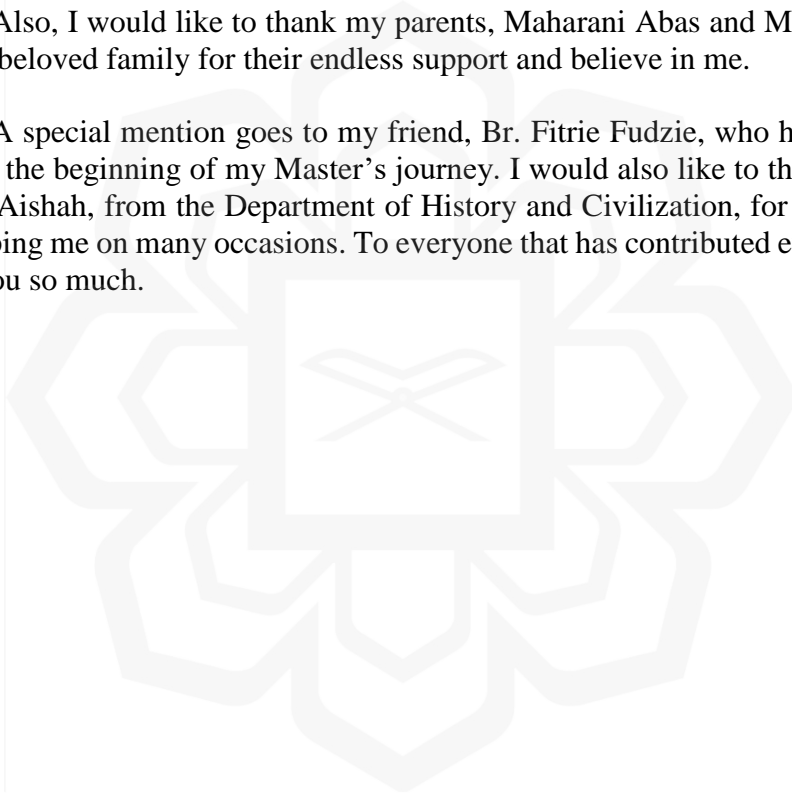


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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFC	Asian Football Confederation
AFF	Asean Football Federation
ATM	Angkatan Tentera Malaysia
BAFA	Brunei Football Association
FA	Football Association
FAM	Football Association of Malaysia
FAS	Football Association of Singapore
FIFA	Federation Internationale de Football Association
ITV	Independent Television
JDT	Johor Darul Takzim
JFA	Japan Football Association
JFL	Japan Football League
LWT	London Weekend Television
MACC	Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission
MFL	Malaysian Football League
MPPJ	Majlis Perbandaran Petaling Jaya
PDRM	Polis Di-Raja Malaysia
RTM	Rancangan Televisyen Malaysia
SSFC	Selangor Soccer Fans Club
TM	Telekom Malaysia
UEFA	Union of European Football Association

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In 1921, the HMS Malaya Cup was introduced, which was the precursor to what would later be known as the Malaysia Cup. This name was taken in conjunction with the name of the British Royal Navy ship, HMS Malaya, which used to dock at Port Swettenham (Port Klang), Singapore, Malacca, Penang, and Port Dickson.¹ While anchored there, it was common for the crew to hold rugby and football matches against local clubs. Captain H. T. Buller of the Malaya sent a letter to the chief secretary of the Federated Malay States government, to call on a competition for football and rugby by offering two trophies; as a token of the crew's gratitude for the reception they received in Malaya.² Club representatives shaped a committee to organise the tournament, and later Buller suggested the trophy to be named as HMS Malaya Cup.

HMS Malaya Cup, later known as the Malaysia Cup, remains the priority to be won by the competing teams until today in Malaysia, besides league competition and the FA Cup. In history, Singapore was the first team to win this tournament after defeating Selangor in 1921.³ Most titles have been won by Selangor, which is 33 times, while the latest winner for this competition is Kuala Lumpur City. This tournament is important in the history of Malaysian football because it is the foundation on which the football teams in Malaysia started to play this sport competitively.

¹ Alvin Chua (2015). "*Malaysia Cup (football)*". National Library Board. Retrieved from https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_1837_2011-09-06.html on 27 June 2021.

² Ibid.

³ Piala Malaysia. (2001). Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia Web site. Retrieved from https://www.pnm.gov.my/yangpertama/Sukan_Pialamsia.htm on 30 May 2002.

Major football competitions in Malaysia

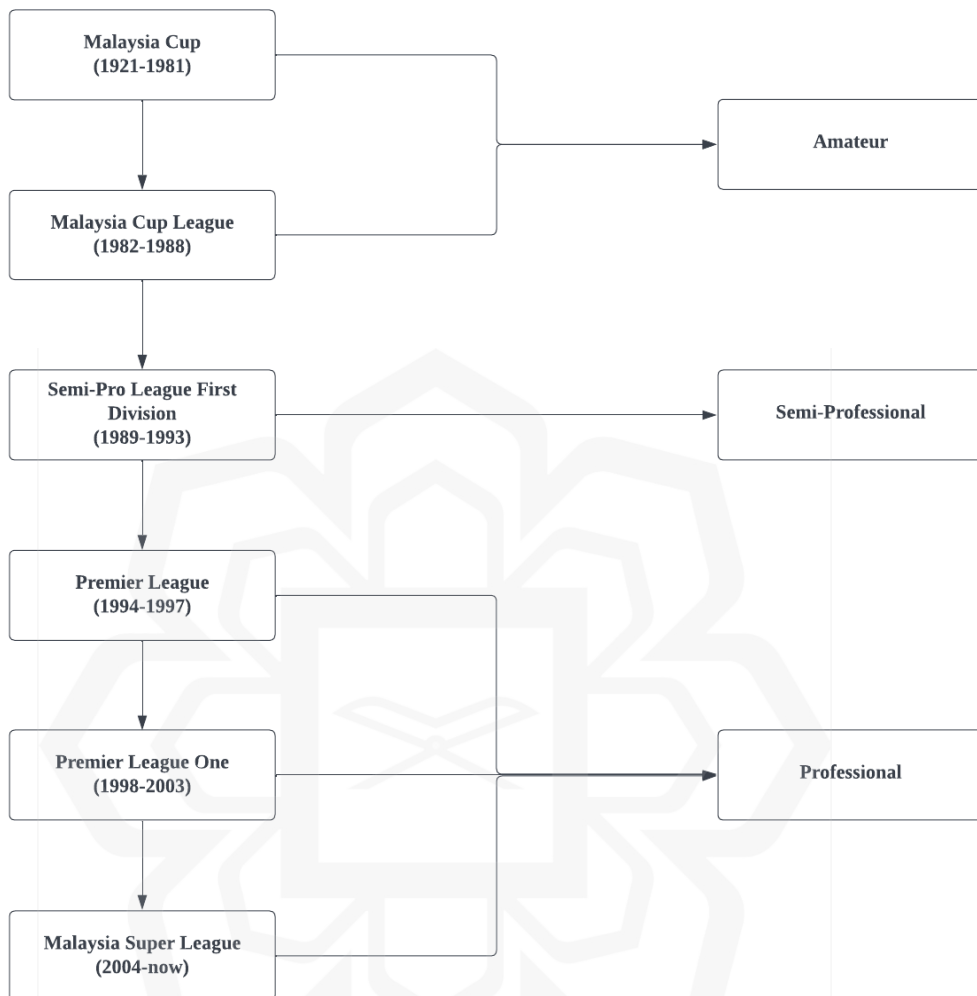


Figure 1.1 Major Football Competitions in Malaysia from 1921 until Now.⁴

Malaysia did not have a particular football league under the organization of the Football Association of Malaya (hereafter FAM) before 1982. From 1921 to 1981, teams in Malaysia competed in the Malaya/Malaysia Cup. The format from 1921 to 1978 was a group stage divided according to their respective zones. During that period, four zones were used as the basis for each group; the north zone, south zone, east zone,

⁴ Figure make by Muhammad Faiz Hadi.

and north-east zone.⁵ From 1979 to 1981, the group stage format was changed to the league system. Despite using the league system, it remains only one of the formats to win the Malaysia Cup. Within that period, the top team in the league would not yet win the trophy, but would have to continue competing at the next level to challenge for the Malaysia Cup.⁶

Despite 1979 being the foundational year for the Malaysian football league, it was in 1982 that the top of the table had been recognized as the league champions. Malaysian League Cup, also an amateur league during that time, used only one round format, with 16 teams participating: 13 state football teams, Kuala Lumpur, Armed Forces (ATM), Brunei, and Singapore (joined again in 1985).⁷ In the 7 seasons that the tournament lasted, from 1982 to 1988, several teams won the league, with only Kuala Lumpur winning more than others in 1986 and 1988.

The end of the 1980s was the time of the transition of the Malaysian football league from an amateur league to semi-pro league status. From 1982 to 1988, Malaysia Cup League functioned more as a qualifying league to the knockout round of the Malaysia Cup. The establishment of the Malaysia Semi-Pro League in 1989 opened a new chapter in the Malaysian football scene, as it had introduced a two-tier division of the football league. Matches, promotions, and relegations in the league were played at home and away.⁸ The debut season of the Malaysia Semi-Pro League consisted of nine teams in the First Division and eight teams in the Second Division. In 1990, there was an addition of teams with the participation of PDRM in the league, making the total number of teams participating in the First Division 10 teams. During the five seasons of the Semi-Pro League, Selangor was successful in winning the First Division league twice a row in 1989 and 1990, followed by Johor, Pahang, and Kedah in the next three

⁵ Malaysia 1978. Rec.Sport.Soccer Statistics Foundation. 2 December 2020. Retrieved from <http://www.rsssf.com/tablesm/malay78.html> on 19 May 2022.

⁶ Zulhilmi Zainal (28 May 2020). "When 17 teams contested the first ever Malaysian 'league' back in 1979". Retrieved from <https://www.goal.com/en-my/news/when-17-teams-contested-first-ever-malaysian-league-1979/g22gmjjom3xj1czd03hdh22ja> on 19 May 2022.

⁷ Kenneth Jalleh; S Gulam (7 October 1983). "D-Day Sunday". *Singapore Monitor*. National Library Board. p. 38. Retrieved from <https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Digitised/Article/singmonitor19831007-2.2.47.19> on 25 June 2021.

⁸ Peter Wilson & Benson Sim (1995) The demand for Semi-Pro League football in Malaysia 1989–91: a panel data approach, *Applied Economics*, 27:1, 131-138, DOI: 10.1080/00036849500000015.

seasons. In the Second Division, Perlis won the league in 1989, followed by Terengganu (1990), Negeri Sembilan (1991), Kedah (1992), and Selangor (1993).

The end of the 1993 Semi-Pro League marked the new era of the first professional league in Malaysia's football history. After five seasons since 1989, the Premier League was formed and established in 1994 to replace the Semi-Pro League.⁹ The Second Division had been abolished with teams playing in only one division. In the inaugural season, 16 teams participated in 1994. However, the Premier League era was controversial owing to a few events, namely corruption and match-fixing scandals taking place in 1994, which involved players and coaches.¹⁰ This also led to Singapore's exit from the Premier League in 1995. From 1995 to 1997, teams began to dwindle after Singapore's absence, making only 15 teams compete in the Premier League. The league played for two rounds, with home and away matches.¹¹ Singapore won the league in the first season of the Premier League, followed by Pahang, Sabah, and Sarawak.

Malaysian football league once again underwent a change when the FAM changed the league format in 1998; by dividing the league into two divisions.¹² The last time a two-division format had been introduced was during the Semi-Pro League. In 1998, the Premier League was divided into two: Premier League One for the first tier, with 12 teams competing, and Premier League Two for the second tier, with 8 teams competing.¹³ However, in the 1999 season, only 10 teams took part in Premier League One, but in the following seasons, from 2000 until 2003, all 12 teams returned to participate in the competition.¹⁴

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ B Suresh Ram (16 December 2015). "What happened to Malaysian football?". *New Straits Times*. p.17. Retrieved from <https://www.nst.com.my/news/2015/12/117505/what-happened-malaysian-football> on 25 June 2021.

¹¹ "Premier League fixtures". *New Straits Times*. 31 December 1993. Retrieved from <https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=i9hOAAAIBAJ&sjid=wxMEAAAIBAJ&pg=4726%2C4023110> on 25 June 2021.

¹² "Pemain Malaysia bebas ke Brunei". *Bernama. Utusan Malaysia*. 11 January 1998. Retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20180302113751/http://ww1.utusan.com.my/utusan/info.asp?y=1998&dt=0111&pub=Utusan_Malaysia&sec=Sukan&pg=sp_01.htm on 6 January 2022.

¹³ Andre Zlotkowski (7 January 2001). "Malaysia 1999". *Rec.Sport.Soccer Statistics Foundation*. Retrieved from <http://www.rsssf.com/tables/m/malay99.html> on 25 June 2021.

¹⁴ Hamdan Saaid (17 February 2004). "Malaysia 2003". *Rec.Sport.Soccer Statistics Foundation*. Retrieved from <http://www.rsssf.com/tables/m/malay03.html> on 25 June 2021.

Change in the number of teams competing in the Malaysian Super League (2004-now)



Figure 1.2 Change in the Number of Teams Competing in the Malaysian Super League from 2004 until Now.¹⁵

In 2004, FAM's decision to privatise the league to oversee the marketing aspects brought to the formation of the Malaysia Super League, marking the end of the Premier League One era.¹⁶ There were several times when the number of teams competing had changed. In the early three seasons, 8 teams had participated. The next two seasons saw 13 clubs competing, and 14 teams for four seasons. Finally, it decreased to 12 teams, which has continued until now. The Premier League became the second tier, and the M3 League was introduced as the third. The most successful team in this Malaysia Super League era is Johor Darul Takzim, as they won the league 8 times, followed by other teams such as Pahang, Kedah, Selangor, Johor, Lions XII, Negeri Sembilan, and

¹⁵ Figure make by Muhammad Faiz Hadi.

¹⁶ "Saingan tiga pusingan 2004 - Liga Super, Perdana lebih kompetitif". Utusan Malaysia (in Malay). 12 January 2004. Retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20190108145618/http://ww1.utusan.com.my/utusan/info.asp?y=2004&dt=0112&pub=Utusan_Malaysia&sec=Sukan&pg=su_01.htm on 25 June 2021.

Perlis.¹⁷ Malaysia Super League also defines a new era for the teams as most have started to separate themselves from the state association.

Entering the era of the 1990s, the football leagues began to experience certain changes worldwide, with the development towards professionalism becoming a global phenomenon. There were countries that began to experience the commercialisation and professionalization of football. Two countries that can be an example of success in this professionalism are England and Japan. The Football League in England was the first league to go through a professional phase. In 1992, they went a step further, this time aiming to commercialize the football league further through the establishment of the Premier League. Meanwhile, in Asia, Japan became one of the first countries to go through the process of professionalization and often became a reference for other countries. J-League 1, the leading professional league in Japan, is also recognized as the best league in Asia.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study focuses on the development of Malaysian football league from semi-pro to professional, from 1990 until 2010. Based on early observation, several main issues and problems were identified in rationalizing the study.

The first main problem is to identify and know to what extent the history of the football league in the semi-pro and professional era is presented and what the impact is on the local community. Based on the books and accounts that discuss Malaysian football, such as by Robert Godfrey, Lucius Maximus, Muhammad Helmy Abdul Gapar, and others, not much has been said on the Malaysian football league. This is proof that this subject needs further research. Therefore, a work on the history of Malaysian football league needs to be produced, as this will be of significant value to the history of Malaysian football. Not all materials are accessible through libraries or the internet, solidifying the need for a specific study to be conducted in order to preserve this underestimated matter.

¹⁷ Karel Stokkermans (25 November 2021). "Malaysia - List of Champions". Rec.Sport.Soccer Statistics Foundation. Retrieved from <http://www.rsssf.com/tables/m/malaychamp.html> on 6 January 2022.

Secondly, the issue of corruption that plagues the professional league in Malaysia needs to be investigated because it has a significant impact on the development of football and society. Lucius Maximus wrote about the corruption scandal in his book, but the explanation is not too deep. Within the library research, information on this issue is still insufficient and requires more than just flipping through books. A more proper form of research in debating this needs to be done to understand the causes and consequences of this corruption scandal. Because corruption in Malaysia football became rampant after the introduction of the professional league, one of the aims of this research is to understand how far professionalization contributed to or prepared the conditions for such a problem.

Thirdly, we would like to know the historical context behind the challenges of the 20 years' transition period from the semi-pro to the professional era, as there must be stories that are related or recorded, which undoubtedly left a lasting impact on different parties in the industry, such as football teams, coaching staff, players, and fans. It is very likely that the changes in the football league landscape during the transition, especially in rebranding, broadcasting, sponsorship, contracts, etc., influenced the way how society look at football. Challenges faced by the Malaysian football league from semi-pro to professional had a significant impact on the football industry.

In general, studying and examining the history of the football league in Malaysia, especially during the transition from semi-pro to professional, is very important, as a reference for academics and community, and as evidence of the development of the football league in the future.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Several important questions have been formulated for this research. The questions will act as guidance or focus on what should be discussed under the general subject and to the specific subtopics within. Among the questions are:

1. What factors motivated FAM to professionalize football in the late 1980s and early 1990s?
2. How did different parties in the football industry view the process of professionalization?

3. What are the differences regarding the trend of professionalism in the football league in the early 1990s between Malaysia and other nations such as England and Japan?

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are to answer the questions that have been highlighted from identified problems. This study will be able:

1. To trace the history of the football league in Malaysia from 1989 to 2011.
2. To identify and analyze the changes in the Malaysian football league to different parties in the football industry.
3. To compare the trend of professionalism between Malaysian football league and other nations such as England and Japan in the early 1990s.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Since the coming of the British to Malaya, football has become one of the mediums of entertainment, especially for the working class. For a period, football emerged as a major activity in the social development of Malaya. Football has been played by every age group and across religious and social boundaries. Since Malaysians pay serious attention to football, it makes this sport their first choice and priority over other sports. The massive influence of football has been a consistent factor in maintaining its relevancy to society.

Hence, there are several reasons why this research is significant. Firstly, it helps to understand the historical factors behind the development of the Malaysian football league, especially from 1989 to 2011. With such details, the research will explain how the football league was established in Malaysia through the phases and how it evolved.

Next, the study findings can be applied as an academic tool in the future, especially in Malaysian socio-cultural history. Football is not only a common sport for the local community, but it is also becoming one of the topics of discussion featured in the development of culture and society. Therefore, this research's findings can benefit researchers and the wider society.

Lastly, this research will become crucial evidence of how the Malaysian football league should become one of the most important components in the growth of the national team. It is expected that this study will provide details on the correlation between the development of the Malaysian football league and the growth of the national team.

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.6.1 Introduction

Several studies have been done on sports history in Malaysia. They consist of various academic books, journals, newspapers, magazines, etc., which came from football studies from all over the world from the end of the 1980s until the early 2010s. Access came from libraries around the Klang Valley, especially the National Library of Malaysia, National Archives of Malaysia, Radio Televisyen Malaysia, and electronic sources that are available on the internet. Besides those, some journals were quite beneficial as sources for understanding the topic. In particular, Muhammad Helmy bin Abdul Gapar from the Institute of Ethnic Studies, National University of Malaysia, published a journal regarding the privatisation and professionalism of the Malaysia football league.

For this paper, the elements presented involve the general discussion on themes such as the Malaysia football league background, changes from semi-pro to professional, and comparison of professionalism in the Malaysia football league with England and Japan. These elements can be developed in further studies related to the Malaysia's local sports and culture.

1.6.2 Malaysia Football League Background from 1989 to 2011

Year after year, the Malaysia football league grows and experiences its evolution, from semi-pro in 1989, to professional in 1994. The progress of the football league in Malaysia has resolved over time. However, not many specific studies discuss in-depth how the chronology of football leagues in Malaysia had developed. During 1989-2011, Football Association of Malaysia, a body involved with the organization of the league,

had changed the format and rules of the league several times. This also includes the inconsistent number of teams competing in several seasons.

To understand how the formation of the Malaysian football league became more structured and professional, we need to understand from the beginning, the path and journey that began during the semi-pro era. In his book, *The Malaysia Cup*, Godfrey Roberts gives a brief perspective on the background of Malaysian football around the beginning of the establishment of the semi-pro league competition.¹⁸ Although this book discusses the history of the Malaysia Cup from 1921-1990 in an introductory manner, the author does not leave important input regarding the semi-pro league competition, especially in 1989 and 1990. This includes the explanation and statistics on the semi-pro league, covering the First Division and Second Division.

The corruption scandal in Malaysian football marks a black spot in the Malaysian football arena that was entering the professional era. Lucius Maximus mentioned in his book, *How Malaysia Never Reached the World Cup*, the problems and issues of corruption that were widespread among the league players in domestic competitions.¹⁹ Based on reports after the operation was carried out by the FAM and MACC, 21 players were sacked, 58 were suspended, and 126 were questioned on charges of taking bribes.²⁰ This case had hampered football development in Malaysia, as most of them are players with considerable potential.

Muhammad Helmy bin Abdul Gapar produced an excellent writing in '*Penswastaaan dan Profesionalisme Liga Bola Sepak Malaysia: Bola Sepak Merentasi Sempadan*' as a reference to the chronology of football leagues in Malaysia during the semi-pro and professional era.²¹ His writing provides a view on the Malaysian football league, which if observed, seems inconsistent from year to year. Although his writing sees the shallowness of FAM in making the Malaysia football league more competitive, corruption scandals had plagued the Malaysian football during the professional era. Moreover, the failure of the management of each team, which was too dependent on funds from the state government, can also be questioned, in addition to blaming the

¹⁸ Godfrey Robert. (1991). *The Malaysia Cup*. Singapore: 2A Publications.

¹⁹ Lucius Maximus. (2014). *How Malaysia Never Reached the World Cup*. Petaling Jaya: Fixi Mono.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Muhammad Helmy bin Abdul Gapar. (2016, August 15-17). *Penswastaaan dan Profesionalisme Liga Bola Sepak Malaysia: Bola Sepak Merentasi Sempadan*. The Tenth International Malaysian Studies Conference (MSC 10). Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. p. 1773-1787

FAM for all the problems that arose. This writing merely provides an overview of Malaysian football based on chronology rather than discussing anything in-depth.

1.6.3 Changes from Semi-pro to Professional Era

From 1989 to 2011, many changes took place in the Malaysian football league. The change of era from semi-pro to professional changed how the teams would compete in the league and this affected the development of Malaysian football as a whole. Of course, these changes include the format and rules of the league, the division system, and the number of teams competing. Indirectly, the change of the league era in Malaysia led to certain impacts and effects on the players and the pattern of supporters in the Malaysian league.

Keringat dan Semangat, a book that reviewed and touched on Kedah's success in Malaysian football in 1990, not only gave us a perspective on Kedah football, but also gave an understanding of the rules, charts, and format of league competitions in the semi-pro.²² For example, this book mentions the eligibility requirements for players involved in the competition, where 5 people must be contracted players, in addition to allowing only 3 import players.²³ The format and rules used during this semi-pro era changed consistently with time.

In the Malaysia's era of professional leagues, there were two periods when import players were banned from the leagues. The first period was from 1999 to 2001, and the second period occurred 10 years later, from 2009 to 2011, making 2011 the last year for teams competing without the involvement of import players. Raja Ahmad Zainuddin Raja Omar's book, *Bola Sepak: Pro dan Kontra*, mentions the permission for each team to re-use the services of import players starting the new season in 2012 after almost three seasons of being banned.²⁴ This book contains views and memories of Raja Ahmad Zainuddin throughout his involvement in football until 2011. Many of his criticisms and views can be brought in parallel with this study, mentioning the changes and developments of football, and fans, especially during the professional era until 2011.

²² *Keringat dan Semangat*. (1991). Kuala Lumpur: Balai Penerbitan Nusa Sdn. Bhd.

²³ *Keringat dan Semangat*. (1991). Kuala Lumpur: Balai Penerbitan Nusa Sdn. Bhd.

²⁴ Raja Ahmad Zainuddin. (2014). *Bola Sepak: Pro & Kontra*. Ipoh. RAZ Resources Sdn. Bhd.

As is well known, football in the professional era underwent drastic changes to the club's management. The pattern of club management during the semi-pro era was different than in the professional era. *Kajian Perbandingan Mengenai Pengurusan Profesional Di Antara Persatuan Bola Sepak Johor Dan Kelab Bola Sepak Johor Dalam Menghadapi Saingan Liga Profesional FAM* by Amin Yusop Sulaiman, can be used in identifying and comparing perceptions among the players and coaches of the two clubs regarding the management of their employers during the professional era.²⁵ This study is important for understanding the context and situation during the study period.

As aforementioned, the players were impacted by the changes that took place throughout the semi-pro and professional era. In particular, there are gaps especially from the aspect of player contracts in the semi-pro and professional era. *Kontrak Pemain Bola Sepak Profesional di Malaysia* by Jady Zaidi Hassim is an important reference and guide to understanding the contract of football players in Malaysia.²⁶ Jady Zaidi Hassim mentions in his book the category of players and classified examples of contracts in the semi-pro and professional.²⁷ Player contracts become one of the important aspects that not only impact the team but also impact the lives of the players.

1.6.4 Comparison of Professionalism in Malaysia Football League with England and Japan

Professionalisation of football is a global phenomenon and has a long history. One of the most important things in the development of modern-era football is how England became a pioneer in developing world football leagues. Football began to be played in an orderly manner and according to specific rules beginning in 1863 after the Football Association was established.²⁸ In 1888, the first football league in the world, named the Football League, also started in England.²⁹

²⁵ Amin Yusop Sulaiman. (2002) *Kajian Perbandingan Mengenai Pengurusan Profesional Di Antara Persatuan Bola Sepak Johor Dan Kelab Bola Sepak Johor Dalam Menghadapi Saingan Liga Profesional FAM*, Bachelor's thesis, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.

²⁶ Jady Zaidi Hassim. (2018). *Kontrak Pemain Bola Sepak Profesional Di Malaysia*. Bangi. Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ "The history of the FA". The Football Association Website. Retrieved from <https://www.thefa.com/about-football-association/what-we-do/history> on 30 May 2022.

²⁹ "The EFL: Who we are". EFL Official Website - History. Retrieved from <https://www.efl.com/-more/all-about-the-efl/history/> on 30 May 2022.

Since first rebranding in 1992, the (English) Premier League has made their league a very successful one in value and commercially in the world. To see how England went through a rebranding phase from the Football League to the Premier League, *The Club* written by Joshua Robinson and Jonathan Clegg is a great book to analyse the early history of the establishment of the Premier League³⁰. The book narrates chronologically, starting with Sky getting the broadcasting rights, the duopoly of Manchester United and Arsenal in the league, the era of oligarchic involvement within the club, and finally how the club will be seen. Today, we can see how the football league in England, especially the Premier League, became a high-profile league in the world leaving behind Serie A, Bundesliga, La Liga, Ligue 1, and others.³¹

In comparing something, especially when it involves rebranding matters as took place in England during the professional era, we need to look back to identify what happened. Colin Damms wrote a thesis entitled *Different Class: The Creation of the Premier League and the Commercialization of English Football* which discusses how English football evolved from a culture of hooliganism and poor to become a very popular league in the world.³² Damms' study also expands upon changes impacting leagues, clubs, and football culture within community groups. This can be a great resource for comparing the role of professionalism between leagues in Malaysia and England.

The transition of change from the semi-pro to professional in football leagues took place in Malaysia and involved leagues in other Asian countries. In 1989, FAM president, Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah changed the format of the Malaysian league, from amateur to semi-pro. The upgrade of this new league format attracted the interest of other Asian countries such as Japan and Indonesia, to make the Malaysian football league a blueprint for their national football league.³³ Japan once sent a delegation to

³⁰ Joshua Robinson, Jonathan Clegg. (2018). *The Club: How the English Premier League Became the Wildest, Richest, Most Disruptive Force in Sports*. New York. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing.

³¹ Joe Tansey (15 January 2014). "Statistically Ranking the World's Top 10 Football Leagues". Retrieved from <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/1922780-statistically-ranking-the-worlds-top-10-football-leagues> on 30 May 2022.

³² Colin Damms (2021). *Different Class: The Creation of the Premier League and the Commercialization of English*, Master's Theses, University of Southern Mississippi.

³³ Lucius Maximus. (2014). *How Malaysia Never Reached the World Cup*. Petaling Jaya: Fixi Mono.

Malaysia to study the Malaysian football system as an example in shaping their country's football system.

How could Japan become a major power in Asian football quickly, when at the beginning of the establishment of their league they came to Malaysia to learn about the league system? John Horne in *The J. League, Japanese Society, and Football Association*, mentioned how Japan has always studied each form of system in other football leagues since its establishment in 1993.³⁴ In addition, John Horne also describes how the J. League had evolved, in line with the focus of the study in the late 1980s and early 2010s.

Another important work as a reference to the Japanese football league during early professionalization is *The Making of a Professional Football League: The Design of J.League System* written by Hirose Ichiro.³⁵ Before entering the professional era, football in Japan was not considered as popular as baseball, sumo, and racing sports.³⁶ In his writing for this chapter, Hirose Ichiro discusses in detail the processes and changes that took place until the football market there skyrocketed. His work can be a reference in looking at the phases of the Japanese football league towards the professional era.

The Malaysian football league has experienced many changes in various aspects starting from the semi-pro era to the professional era. This touches on matters involving several entities such as league management, clubs, players, supporters, and even the media. Several issues caused the rules and laws of the league to be changed for the league's survival. The management of football associations and clubs also shows maturity and improvement from year to year. In addition, the players' life and standard of living show upgrading over time based on changes in salary scales and contracts. Taken as a whole, the trend and culture of professionalism in the Malaysian football league shows the true side of the readiness of some entities to face the challenge towards a more stable and competitive league like in England and Japan. Helmy Gapar's writing is still insufficient for us to understand the factors that led to change, especially during

³⁴ John Horne. (2007). *The J. League, Japanese Society, and Football Association*. This Sporting Life Sports and Body Culture in Modern Japan. Connecticut. Yale University Press.

³⁵ Hirose Ichiro. (2004). *The making of a professional football league: the design of J.League system*. Football Goes East: Business, culture and the people's game in China, Japan and South Korea. New York. Routledge.

³⁶ Ibid.

the professional era. Lucius Maximus' writing, too, do not explain issues in the Malaysian football league. Some things still need to be researched especially involving the clubs, players, and supporters. Future research needs to be done to identify and answer the questions concerning the Malaysian football league and professionalism using a specific methodology.

1.7 METHODOLOGY

This research studies the history of Malaysian football league development from semi-pro to professional between 1990 and 2010, and will be conducted through qualitative data collection and analysis based on perspective drawn by history and sociology. Several data collection methods are used to help conduct the study efficiently, whilst aiming to produce a maximum, accurate, and concise academic writing. There are two types of data collection method that have been used in this research, which are primary data collection and secondary data collection.

In terms of primary sources, this research will be based on various types of documents and materials related to the subject from the study period. The documents and materials are in the forms of newspapers, official letters and documents, and photos. In finding these materials, the National Archives, National Library, FAM, FA states, and personal collectors can help supply information related to the primary sources on football in the country.

Analyses will be based on old newspapers such as *Berita Harian*, *News Straits Times*, and *Utusan Malaysia*, that provide important materials and evidence regarding this research. Moreover, relevant information can be found in official statements that were issued by FAM and MFL, which will be a beneficial addition to this research. Some crucial books on Malaysian football, such as *History of Football in Malaysia 1900-2000* by Percy Seneviratne and *Bola Sepak: Pro & Kontra* by Raja Ahmad Zainuddin, can be analyzed to understand the football scene in certain periods.

Furthermore, data will be collected from interview sessions. The data will be analyzed, translated, and reviewed after the session to ensure it suits the research. This method will involve some important figures that were related to football scene in Malaysia in certain periods, such as Azraai Khor Abdullah, Marlon Alex James, and

Hairy Azly. These individuals really played a significant role in football and will be useful in this study.

1.8 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study covers the football scene in Malaysia, especially the football league dating between the start of the semi-pro league in 1989, the beginning of the professional league in 1994, until 2011, based on chronological and paper analysis. The study locations identified are concentrated within the Klang Valley. However, references for the contexts of this study focusing on the Malaysia football league will include other parts of Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei.

The identified sites are Stadium Merdeka, Stadium Nasional Bukit Jalil, and Wisma FAM. These sites are important places for the football scene in Malaysia from 1989 until 2011. All the sites will be relevant to the research due to their impact on the football scene during the eras. This study is significant in understanding how football had its evolution in Malaysia. Even though football clubs in Malaya started to compete among themselves in 1921, it was not until 1989 that the formation of semi-pro league, was followed by professional league in 1994. Therefore, this period is significant to the history of Malaysian football in the modern era, where football seems to be being played systematically like in other countries.

1.9 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

Five (5) chapters are allocated here, which are:

Chapter One, which is the introduction, contains the study's technical background, objectives, signification, justification, literature review, the scope of the study, research questions and methods of data collection.

Chapter Two discusses chronologically the history of the football league in Malaysia through the years, its foundation, and how the football league was viewed and understood in the context of the time. It will then explain the motivations behind professionalization in the late 80s and early 90s.

Chapter Three is on the changes in Malaysia's football league from semi-pro to professional, and it discusses how the development of the football league impacts and affects the national team, clubs, players, fans, and media.

Chapter Four compares the trend of professionalization and professionalism between the Malaysia football league and another league, which includes countries such as England and Japan, within the context of time.

Chapter Five, which is the conclusion, outlines the previous chapters that have already been answered and completes the problems of the study. This is followed by the path of the study in future writings, extension of annotation as well as disputes and risks.



CHAPTER TWO

MALAYSIAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE FROM SEMI-PRO TO PROFESSIONAL ERA (1989-2011)

2.1 INTRODUCTION

There was a dramatic shift in the institution of Malaysian football in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Malaysian football entered a more advanced era, the semi-pro era, before reaching the professional level in the following few years. For decades, football in Malaysia was played without having the foundation of a strong and structured league. This chapter discusses the reasons and purpose for establishing the semi-pro and professional leagues. Then, it will enlighten on the important aspects of the professionalization of the Malaysian football league in the study period. As will be explained later, the system and format of the league have changed five times since the establishment of the Semi-Pro League in 1989. We will explore what factors influence FAM's actions in changing the system and format of the main league. The changes that took place had some definite effects on the course of the Malaysian football league for some periods, and it will enlighten why FAM keeps doing it. Besides, we will also examine some significant issues or matters in the development and evolution of the Malaysian football league. Among the matters that will be discussed are the 1994 Malaysian football scandal, which almost led to the collapse of the Malaysian football industry, the participation of Singapore and Brunei as guest teams, and how the presence of import players transformed Malaysian football from 1989-2011. These three issues raised are related to the league's survival throughout the study period. In this study, the primary sources used are newspapers, magazines, and parliamentary reports, as well as secondary sources that include journals, seminar papers, and books.

2.2 PROFESSIONALISM IN FOOTBALL LEAGUE

Being a professional in the football league means that all players who reach adulthood are paid a salary that allows them to continue living without expecting other additional

sources of income.¹ The players themselves make football their primary career or profession. A 'professional football league' means that anyone who plays in the league can focus and concentrate on being a football player. It is also related to professional contracts, facilities, and expenses the club manages as required for players and staff.

When the Football Association (FA) started recognising professional players in England in 1885, the history of football professionalism officially began. The Football League, the first professional football league in the world, was founded in 1888 as a result. 12 clubs played in the inaugural season until the addition of a second division in 1892. The Professional Football League's four divisions were created in 1923 and still exist today.

The football scene outside the British Isles continues progressing according to the English football model. At least each league will have one annual cup tournament to be contested using a promotion and relegation system for competing teams. In Holland, the football league has existed since 1889, but professionalism only began to take root in 1954. Germany held their first football tournament in 1903, but a complete and professional league began to develop only after 60 years. In France, although football was played in the 1870s, they did not have a professional league until 1932.

Over the last decade, Asia has experienced excellent football development with the emergence of competitive leagues. Many countries are starting to professionalise their football league. The establishment of a professional football league can also be considered slow if we look at the evidence and early records of the involvement of Asian countries in football. Apart from Hong Kong, none of the other Asian countries established a professional league before 1970.²

One of the reasons why Asian countries are slow in the development of professional leagues is the internal and political chaos in the 20th century, which failed to lead to a stable environment for a league to develop.³ Asian countries have been focused on economic development since the colonial era. For example, according to Maddison, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the people of South America is twice

¹ "What is a Professional Football League?" Sportrankers Website. Retrieved from <https://sportrankers.com/soccer/how-many-football-leagues/> on 30 December 2022.

² Stefan Szymanski. (2016). Professional Asian Football Leagues and the Global Market, Asian Economic Policy Review (2016) 11, 16-38, DOI: 10.1111/aepr.12112.

³ Ibid.

that of Asia, and in 2010 the amount was close to parity.⁴ Suppose the development of the professional football league in Asia is getting better. In that case, it is not surprising if it is the result of positive developments in aspects of social and economic life. Another reason that caused the slow progress of some Asian countries in the development of the football league is the effect of colonialism which encourages regionalism rather than nationalism.⁵ India is among the example countries with active leagues in different parts of their country but has struggled to develop a national league.

Football continues to grow worldwide with its popularity brought by the British. Based on the list of FIFA member associations, there are a total of 211 countries that are officially recognized as affiliated associations.⁶ From that number, there are 209 football leagues recognized by the official world football body. However, not all of them are professional leagues. Those still in that number are in the amateur and semi-pro league class.

Reviewing Malaysia's football history would help us better comprehend how the country's semi-pro and professional football leagues evolved.

2.3 THE ORIGIN OF FOOTBALL IN MALAYSIA

Football is a trendy sport in the world. This is an example of sports that some people prefer as escapism. All citizens play football and have the power to unite people regardless of their age, race, gender, religion, and nationality. This popular sport has become a culture that influences social and economic development locally besides having a positive impact on the world.

In Malaya, during British colonialism, the British introduced modern sports such as hockey, rugby, golf, and football.⁷ That does not mean that people in Malaya do not have their traditional sports because some games were played then, such as sepak raga, gasing, animal fighting, and so on. In the early colonial period, football was played by

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ "Member Associations." FIFA Website. Retrieved from <https://www.fifa.com/about-fifa/associations> on 30 December 2022.

⁷ John Duerden (2017), *Lions and Tigers: The Story of Football in Singapore and Malaysia*, Marshall Cavendish Editions, Singapore.

the aristocrats and the labourers who worked with the British. Football became famous in the local community at the end of the 19th century and began to spread in Malaya.

Football development in Malaya became more evident with the establishing of the HMS Malaya Cup in 1921. This cup would later evolve into what is now known as the Malaysian Cup. The impact of the organization of the HMS Malaya Cup in the early 1920s was very significant to football competitions in Malaysia. Although it was not the first football tournament in Malaysia, the HMS Malaya Cup was the catalyst for forming a more manageable football system. This tournament also gathered good teams from all over Malaya, including Singapore, before being joined by teams from Sabah, Sarawak, and Brunei.

In 1926, the introduction of football in Malaya became more serious with the establishment of a football body, the Malayan Football Association (MFA). It combines of the football association of states such as Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, and Singapore to field a Malayan team against an Australian side that visited Singapore that year.⁸ In 1933, the MFA experienced its first revolution by becoming the Football Associates of Malaya (FAM), with Sir Andrew Caldecott appointed as its first president. Before the office moved to Malaya in 1940, the original site was Singapore. The original purpose of establishing FAM was to ensure that football continues to grow throughout Malaya, manage the Malaya Cup tournament, and develop a team to compete internationally.⁹

Despite having its first football tournament in 1921, it took Malaya/Malaysia more than 60 years to form a football league. The Malaysian football league only started in 1982 with the participation of state football associations (FA) and other teams from within the country and abroad, such as the Armed Force, Police, Singapore, and Brunei. Even though the league format existed in 1979, it was more a qualification for the knockout rounds and grabbing the Malaysia Cup until the league trophy was awarded to the league champions in 1982.¹⁰ The Malaysian football league phase in 1982-1988

⁸ Muhammad Helmy bin Abdul Gapar. (2016, August 15-17). *Penswastaan dan Profesionalisme Liga Bola Sepak Malaysia: Bola Sepak Merentasi Sempadan*. The Tenth International Malaysian Studies Conference (MSC 10). Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. p. 1773-1787.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Godfrey Robert. (1991). *The Malaysia Cup*. Singapore: 2A Publications.

was known as the amateur era and became the most important tournament in the Malaysian football calendar apart from the Malaysia Cup.¹¹

In 1989, FAM president at the time, Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah, changed the existing league format to a new format, marked the beginning of semi-pro. This is a progressive manner in Malaysian football and has received an excellent response from the state FA's. Other countries recognize FAM-positive action. Indonesia and Japan apply the Malaysian football league as an example or blueprint for establishing their country's football league structure.¹² In 1994, Japan sent a delegation to Kuala Lumpur to observe and study the design of the Malaysian football league as a step to strengthen its football league system.

After five years of the Semi-Pro League, the Malaysian football league again entered a new phase with the establishment of the first professional league in 1994.¹³ FAM named this league the Premier League, a division that initially consisted of 16 teams before being reduced to 15 teams the following year after Singapore's withdrawal from the league. Changes have been happening continuously since then. In 1998, FAM again divided the league into two divisions, Premier League One and Premier League Two, which they last did during the semi-pro league competition.¹⁴

In 2004, FAM made the latest change by establishing the Super League as the main league of 8 teams to replace the Premier League One.¹⁵ The remaining 18 teams play in the second division league, which is divided into groups A and B, known as the Premier League.¹⁶ FIFA has criticized FAM due to the relatively small number of teams in a major league. FAM believes that the Super League is very professional and competitive. However, according to FIFA, a league that wants to be classified as a professional and competitive group should not be less than 10-15 competing teams.¹⁷ FAM acted by doing another action in 2007, increasing the number of teams in the

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Muhammad Helmy bin Abdul Gapar. (2016, August 15-17). *Penswastaan dan Profesionalisme Liga Bola Sepak Malaysia: Bola Sepak Merentasi Sempadan*. The Tenth International Malaysian Studies Conference (MSC 10). Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. p. 1773-1787.

¹³ "It's Premier League, not Super League," *New Paper*, 17 January 1994, 38.

¹⁴ "Melihat gemilang masa depan," *Arena Bola Sepak*, Januari 1998, 16.

¹⁵ "Pemain tempatan mesti saingi awang import," *MSL - Berita Harian*, 12 February 2004, 4-5.

¹⁶ "Liga Perdana pentas buat jagoan berentap," *MSL - Berita Harian*, 12 February 2004, 3.

¹⁷ Muhammad Helmy bin Abdul Gapar. (2016, August 15-17). *Penswastaan dan Profesionalisme Liga Bola Sepak Malaysia: Bola Sepak Merentasi Sempadan*. The Tenth International Malaysian Studies Conference (MSC 10). Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. p. 1773-1787.

Super League, disbanding two groups in the Premier League, and making only one Super League and one Premier League until 2011.

2.3.1 Behind the Establishment of the Semi-Pro League

The Malaysian football league entered a new era in 1989 with the establishment of the Semi-Pro League after almost half a decade in the process of amateurism. This new project means inviting another new culture into the country: European football culture. European professional football leagues, such as in England, Italy, Spain, France, Germany, etc., have been through this process for a long time. Bringing this new culture into the local football scene is a wise first step before football is exposed to the professional league. In Asia then, other countries had also begun to reveal their football with a culture of professionalism. Singapore, Indonesia, South Korea, and Japan make football the leading and most important sport compared to other sports.

The proposal to start this Semi-Pro League was brought by Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah in a meeting at the end of 1987 and went through a two-year planning process.¹⁸ A year before the event, a committee was formed to study some essential aspects of enabling the Semi-Pro League and Malaysia Cup tournaments to commence within 10 months.¹⁹ Paul Mony, FAM secretary at the time, mentioned what led to the start of the Semi-Pro League in Malaysia replacing the amateur-level league as a process to improve Malaysian football and start moving towards professionalism.²⁰ Several seminars and papers have been created; meetings have been held to discuss all views and opinions. Furthermore, a large group of FAM delegations visited Europe to learn and see the administration of professional football and how they function besides surveying the opinions of those involved in this field earlier.²¹

The Semi-Pro League is not only a change that affects the format of the competition but also involves changes to the organizational structure of the FAM itself. The step to initiate the process towards professionalism starts with the semi-pro agenda, and has a specific effect on all the parts involved, including the administrative role.

¹⁸ Laporan Tahunan dan Penyata Kira-Kira 1989, Kongres Tahunan Ke-27, *Persatuan Bola Sepak Malaysia (FAM)*, 24 Mac 1990.

¹⁹ "Committee to look into semi-pro plan," *The Straits Times*, 25 June 1988, 47.

²⁰ S Gulam, "Longer M-Cup programme," *New Paper*, 20 June 1989, 29.

²¹ Aziz Ibrahim, "Masalah Pengadil dan Rasuah," *Dunia Sukan*, June 1989, 6-9.

FAM has created a new organizational body divided into three, namely the legislative body, the executive body, and the administrative body.²²

- i) The legislative body is a body that consists of the highest (main) officials of FAM and is joined by two representatives from each member association. All amendments or additions to the FAM constitution can only be made by this body.
- ii) The executive body contains councils and executive committees that form other committees, including finance, competition, judicial discipline, management, youth, regulations, security, medical, and welfare.
- iii) The administrative body consists of an executive secretary two assistant executive secretaries, and four departments that include finance, technical and development, competition, and youth.

As stated earlier, changes in the Semi-Pro League do not only implicate FAM but also affect the member associations involving FA states. Each state-level organization must establish a semi-professional committee by appointing a chairperson for the competition committee, referee, finance, discipline, youth, and others if necessary.²³ From what has been shown, there is a movement in making a football association toward professionalism in management.

2.3.2 Behind the Professionalisation of Malaysian Football League

Malaysian football entered the professional era starting with the establishment of the Semi-Pro League in 1989. It was the most significant change in Malaysia's football competition since 1921, when Singapore was crowned the champion of the HMS Malaya Cup. The primary purpose of establishing the Semi-Pro League is to serve as a preparation before creating the first professional-level league. Paul Mony, the secretary of FAM at the time, mentioned this matter, insisting that the first five-year plan from

²² Khalid Mohd. Saad, "Mengimport budaya baru," *Dunia Sukan*, April 1989, 53-55.

²³ Ibid.

1989 to 1993 was for semi-pro and would go to full-pro with evaluation from 1994 to 1998.²⁴

A league with a professional status called the Malaysian League or Premier League was first introduced in 1994 to replace the Semi-Pro League.²⁵ There are several reasons and purposes why the Malaysian League was established. The primary purpose is to ensure a more professional competition.²⁶ At that time, FAM was ready to take itself in a better direction and felt no need to slow down the process. During the semi-pro era, there were many competitions and a player who had played in the FAM-organized league competition was also involved in other competitions.²⁷ This problem leaves no specific way to determine which tournament is elite, mid-level, state-level, etc. The existence of a professional league, will indirectly bind the players to a team in a professional contract. What is done in Malaysia at this initial stage is more emphasis and focus on the players, considering that at least 15 of the 22 players must be professionals, meaning that the players receive a salary just by playing football.²⁸

What FAM raised makes sense regarding how professional leagues are run in Europe. A player represents one club and will remain to represent the club in the participating tournaments only. England has the Premier League, First Division, Second Division, Third, Division, and Fourth Division. However, no player plays for a week with the First Division team, and then the next week, he goes down with the Third Division team. Each remains paid with only one team and is called the professional system. This did not happen in the semi-pro era, and FAM took a significant initiative to strengthen the existing rules by taking the meaning of professionalism in football seriously.

The relevant and highest parties have separated each competition through the Malaysian League by forming a more uniform, updated, and uninterrupted match. There is no longer an issue of the competition being postponed or delayed due to a lack of players because some are involved in other competitions. Playing in two different

²⁴ Abdullah Sani, "Objektif Liga Malaysia diadakan pemain, pegawai mesti professional," *Arena Bola Sepak*, March 1994, 10-11.

²⁵ Laporan Tahunan dan Penyata Kira-Kira 1994, Kongres Tahunan Biasa Ke-32, *Persatuan Bola Sepak Malaysia (FAM)*, 25 Jun 1995.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

tournaments requires more commitment and seriousness while hindering efforts in forming a calibre, solid, and consistent player.

In the aspect of the Malaysian League, the professionalism that FAM is trying to apply also includes various other aspects such as the formation of a state football association, especially for the officials and staff of the team.²⁹ Even though the Malaysian League was established in 1994, it could not be considered thoroughly professional if referring to several aspects. Many aspects need to be examined before an entity can be classified as entirely professional. The competing teams are still in the semi-pro class compared to how European clubs operate.

In Europe, their football clubs function like a company with full-time officials who are on duty and skilled in specific fields. For example, in financial administration, appointed accountants are qualified and will be paid a salary. Likewise, other administrative officers need to have a certificate of eligibility to hold positions and status. Football clubs in the Malaysian League are run by amateurs in accordance with the association act as opposed to a business. In terms of administration, some of the FA States already have full-time duty officers, and coaches whose job is only to train the team, as opposed to the previous ones who used voluntary services in the name of devotion to the state and the team.³⁰

2.4 FACTORS THAT LED TO CHANGES OF LEAGUE'S SYSTEM AND FORMAT

Since the introduction of the Semi-Pro League in 1989, continued with the wave of the professional era until now, the format of the contested league has undergone several changes due to specific reasons and factors. Based on research into past sources, four times format changes occurred in the major league, starting with the semi-pro era (1989-1993), which used the two-division system. In the history of Malaysian football, the league format was first used in 1978 as a qualifier for the Malaysia Cup. From 1982 to 1988, the amateur-level league was introduced with a one-division format, and the league champion would be given a special trophy as the winner.

²⁹ "Angkat martabat dan maruah bola sepak negara professional bawa banyak kemajuan – Dato' Paul Mony," *Arena Bola Sepak Edisi Khas*, 1995, 6-7.

³⁰ "Angkat martabat dan maruah bola sepak negara professional bawa banyak kemajuan – Dato' Paul Mony," *Arena Bola Sepak Edisi Khas*, 1995, 6-7.

Format league's change from 1989-2011

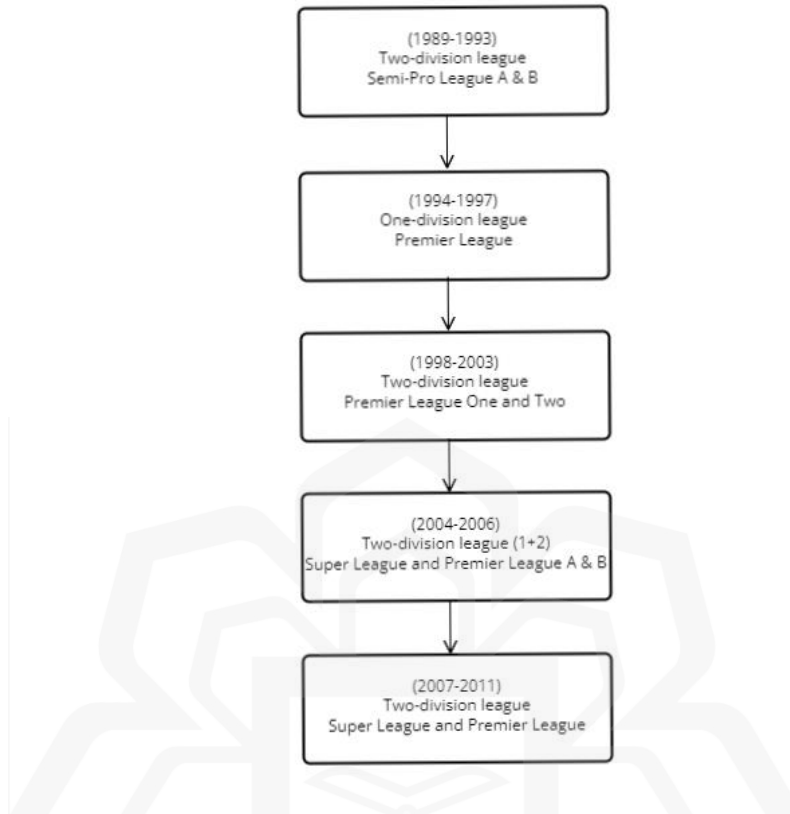


Figure 2.1 System and Format League's Change in the Malaysian Football League from 1989-2011.³¹

In 1989, Malaysian football introduced a two-division system for the first time.³² In addition to being the beginning of a new era in football, the league in 1989 also directly replaced the old format of the amateur league that lasted for seven years before that. According to Tengku Ahmad Rithauddeen, the Chairperson of the Technical and Development Committee, one of the main reasons why the two-division format was chosen is to ensure that the matches that take place are more competitive.³³ There is less competition in the amateur league because certain gap and quality exist between the

³¹ Figure make by Muhammad Faiz Hadi.

³² "Malaysia Cup to go semi-pro next year," *The Straits Times*, 20 June 1988, 35.

³³ *Ibid.*

competing teams. The two-division system that was chosen also creates promotion and relegation between teams, as well as improves the quality of the team's game.

After five years, there is a change in the Malaysian football system, which also touches on the league's current format. No more two-division systems were introduced during the semi-pro era. Starting in 1994, the Malaysian League, also known as the beginning of the professional era, introduced a one-division system.³⁴ The teams from the two divisions were previously combined to form one league known as the Premier League. Based on a statement from Datuk Bakar Daud, Chairperson of the FAM Competition Committee, after a five-year study, it was found that the teams in the second-division league did not show progress compared to the first-division teams.³⁵ The decision of the meeting in discussing this matter was to agree that it would be better to allow all 16 teams, including Singapore and Brunei, to play in one league or competition only. FAM also hopes each player will have the chance to improve the level of play in the competition together.

The Premier League era in 1994 marked the first change that occurred in the professional period. In 1998, FAM returned to the two-division league system as it had been introduced during the Semi-Pro League era. The reason for using this two-division system was the failure and decline of the Malaysian squad in the 1997 Sea Games tournament in Indonesia. Malaysia failed to pass the competition's group stage and recorded bad results, especially when losing 4-0 at the hands of rival Indonesia.³⁶ The decision to choose a two-division league system also aims to reduce the number of league matches and maintain the status of Malaysia Cup and FA Cup matches.³⁷ FAM feels that this long league journey minimizes the time for the national squad to train because the league schedule before that was supposed to be quite long. Two league divisions were created, known as Premier League One and Premier League Two.

The introduction of the Super League scene is an essential landmark for the world of Malaysian football. The Super League established in 2004, still maintains the two-division league system and is a significant continuation in the Malaysian football league arena. What differs from the previous format is that the Super League replaces

³⁴ "Mengapa Format Pertandingan Diubah," *Berita Harian*, 5 April 1994, 9.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ "Melihat gemilang masa depan," *Arena Bola Sepak*, Januari 1998, 16.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Premier League One, and two groups within the Premier League replace Premier League Two. The Premier League is divided into Group A and Group B as a divisional league. Only eight teams were selected for the Super League with the hope of building teams that could resurrect Malaysian football.³⁸ These eight teams were also selected as a team that will be the core of an elite team with a structure and infrastructure comparable to Asia.³⁹

Starting in 2007, the FAM Executive Council approved the league's new format by maintaining the league's two-division system but disbanding the two groups in the Premier League.⁴⁰ This decision saw only the Super League as the main league and the Premier League as the second-division league. The Super League shows an increase in teams up to 13 while the Premier League is combined to 14. As mentioned by the Chairperson of the FAM Committee at the time, Datuk Raja Ahmad Zainuddin Raja Omar, this new format change was made after considering the views of affiliate members who wanted to bring new excitement.⁴¹ It is also arranged to coordinate with the international schedule. Besides, criticism arose regarding the competitive status of the league before that because, according to FIFA standards, a professional and competitive league should have no less than 10-15 teams competing for one division.

According to data and results from the study period from 1989 to 2011, FAM revamped and changed the league format four times. It can count for a lot and show the problem of finding a design that is the best for the league. However, there are pros and cons every time there is a new league structure. For example, introducing a two-division league format in 1998 opened up opportunities for new clubs, such as Public Bank, MK Land, MPPJ, TNB Kelantan, etc., to compete in the professional league. This indirectly widens the platform for new talents and opens job opportunities for the community. However, the same thing is still not erased by showing an inconsistent attitude that obscures the real FAM plan and the long-term direction of the Malaysian football league.

The understanding of the development of the football league from semi-pro to professional era is not limited by only looking at the changes from the point of view of

³⁸ "Pemain tempatan mesti saingi awang import," *MSL - Berita Harian*, 12 February 2004, 4-5.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ "Format baru suntik kemeriahan," *Berita Harian*, 18 May 2006, 13.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

the system and format. There are several influential aspects that we need to emphasize to acknowledge better the developments that took place in this period.

2.5 SIGNIFICANT ASPECTS IN MALAYSIAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE

From 1989 to 2011, several aspects were seen to be very influential in the development process of the league. Three important aspects that will be noted and discussed are the 1994 Malaysian football scandal, the involvement of the country and club abroad, and the presence of foreign players. The 1994 football corruption scandal apparently caused many players to be disqualified from representing their respective teams. The Malaysian football league also attracts foreign audiences with the participation of invited teams from abroad. The presence of imported players on the field indirectly enlivened the supporters in supporting their respective teams. These three aspects significantly impacted the football league as they led to changes in the league system and rules at that time.

2.5.1 The 1994 Malaysian Football Scandal and its Impact on the Malaysian Football League

1994 marked a new milestone in Malaysian football after FAM successfully established the Malaysian League, a catalyst towards professionalism in Malaysian football. At the same time, a great tragedy in Malaysian football almost destroyed its structure and sanctity. That year was dark in Malaysian football after the league was hit with corruption scandals and match-fixing symptoms in virtually all the competing teams.

The story of football corruption in Malaysia is not something new. Since the 1970s, news has been linking players in the national squad, state, and officials with corruption, but it often ended without evidence to convict the suspects. In the amateur league era as well, this phenomenon still occurs with evidence and records. Ahead of the league match between the Armed Forces and Terengganu at the Lumut Stadium, a 30-year-old businessman was arrested by the police and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) for offering \$5000 to an Armed Forces player.⁴² This incident

⁴² "Rasuah!Rasuah!Rasuah!" *Arena Bola Sepak*, February, 1986, 11.

shows how common corruption and match-fixing are and has happened before it exploded in 1994.

In the semi-pro era, match-fixing scandals have already begun to multiply and form consistently. Corruption is a national issue. The problem with the government and FAM at that time was that they did not show seriousness and were slow to act. This matter was proposed in parliament in 1994. When asked why the government was slow to act against corruption in the Malaysian League, the answer was unconvincing.

According to Teng Giak Kwan, Deputy Minister of Sport and Youth during that time, allegations regarding corrupt practices or match-fixing by players and officials with certain parties are old problems and have been previously mentioned.⁴³ This activity has been going on for a long time, but does not seem as serious as it is being discussed. Although this problem has existed for a long time, the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) has been unable to do anything because it is tough to get factual evidence to bring the players or officials suspected of being involved to justice. From that, the government had to wait for real factors and evidence before taking appropriate action to combat corruption in football.⁴⁴

Before that, in 1993, FAM had also stated that there was no evidence of match-fixing because it believed there were other motives that deliberately meant to weaken the morale of the competing teams.⁴⁵

Before 1994, there were several cases of corruption involving the semi-pro era, but it seemed to receive less attention. Among the incidents that created problems until built chaos is the 'Case against Mohamad Din Asrap' in which the perpetrator paid a sum of money to a Perlis player to lose to Singapore in 1990.⁴⁶ In 1991, there were reports of five Pahang players admitting to being offered to sell a league match against Johor.⁴⁷ A player with a contract with Pahang, who was a ringleader then, was immediately kicked out of the team. Pahang FA has also made a police report following the incident. What happened to football is quite embarrassing and gives a bad image to outsiders. David Harrison, during his early days as a Police coach, was given an early

⁴³ Parlimen Malaysia, *Penyata Rasmi Parlimen Dewan Rakyat, Parlimen Kesembilan Penggal Pertama Mesyuarat Pertama*, 13 June 1995, 13

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ "No proof of 'fixing' says FAM," *New Paper*, 20 October 1993, 50.

⁴⁶ Suresh Nair, "The Case Against Mohamad Din," *New Paper*, 30 April 1992, 2.

⁴⁷ "Pahang five admit match-fixing bid," *The Straits Times*, 1 May 1991, 29.

warning about the existence of these match-fixing symptoms.⁴⁸ He did not pay much attention to the matter until his team lost to Selangor 10-1. Police foreign players at that time, Manuel George and Paul Donnelly, wrote to the Police FA about their teammates wanting them to sell matches against the Armed Forces, Singapore, and Selangor.

When entering the 1994 league season, this problem seemed to be getting out of control, with the number of names reported to be involved also increasing. Bookies are looking for players and targeting team officials to be bribed. Among the names the bookie has contacted is Robert Alberts, the Kedah coach in 1994. Alberts revealed how a bookie from Singapore who introduced himself as 'John' admitted that he was involved in several matches involving Kedah.⁴⁹ The culmination of this scandal involved Michal Vana, a Singapore striker who fled Singapore to avoid a court hearing. Vana has been accused of accepting bribes to influence the outcome of five matches involving Singapore against the teams of Sabah, Kedah, Negeri Sembilan, Brunei, and Melaka between May and July of 1994.⁵⁰ At the end of the year, just after the 1994 Malaysia Cup, the police and MACC detained more players for questioning. At the same time, FAM wants the Football Association of Singapore (FAS) to be more serious about cleaning up the team. This is regarding an interview with a Singaporean football magazine, where Tengku Abdullah mentioned that every player who was arrested confessed to receiving the money to lose to Singapore.⁵¹

The 1994 corruption scandal that hit Malaysian football has profoundly impacted the league's development. A total of 126 players and coaches were questioned regarding the case. The results of the investigation found that a total of 79 players were found to be involved in the case of match-fixing, and the rest were released and allowed to continue their football activities as usual.⁵² Of the 79 arrested, 21 were ordered to leave the district under the Residence Act, 58 more were suspended for 1 to 4 years by FAM for admitting to accepting bribes in the Premier League football competition.⁵³

⁴⁸ "Fixing is rampant," *New Paper*, 18 September 1993, 58.

⁴⁹ Mohd Sani Ali, "Alberts dakwa ditelefon 'bookie'," *Berita Harian*, 9 December 1994, 1.

⁵⁰ "Kelong': CPIB bantu jabatan KL," *Berita Harian*, 29 October, 12.

⁵¹ Mark Emmanuel, "The Malaysia Cup: Soccer and the National Imagining in Singapore, 1965-1996," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society Vol. 84*, No. 2 (301) (December 2011), pp. 95-115.

⁵² Parlimen Malaysia, *Penyata Rasmi Parlimen Dewan Rakyat*, Parlimen Kesembilan Penggal Pertama Mesyuarat Pertama, 13 June 1995, 13.

⁵³ Parlimen Malaysia, *Penyata Rasmi Parlimen Dewan Rakyat*, Parlimen Kesembilan Penggal Pertama Mesyuarat Pertama, 13 June 1995, 13.

The absence of players due to suspension is a huge loss to national football because some are outstanding players and important players for the country and the club. The Premier League in the 1995 season was like a reset to the football league with the appearance of young players replacing players who were no longer eligible to play.

Singaporean Football Association (FAS) did not like the comments about their unseriousness in fighting corruption from FAM officials because it shows that the fault is only concentrated on one team.⁵⁴ This issue became more intense, with Tengku Abdullah threatening to kick Singapore out of the Malaysian football league if they did not show the same effort as Malaysia. Before being dishonourably kicked out, FAS had decided to withdraw from the Malaysian football league on 22 February 1995 and set up their professional league.⁵⁵ The reason is to build a professional atmosphere that will make Singapore football more competitive internationally. However, the public knows it is more about protecting Singapore's dignity than being seen as weak and unable to defend itself. Singapore's absence marks the end of their participation since they re-joined the Malaysian football competition in 1985 for the third time.

The pressure factor from FIFA also caused FAM to be more determined to fight the symptoms of corruption faced.⁵⁶ This ensures that Malaysia can continue participating in international tournaments after this. Several times before that, FIFA voiced its concern about reports of corruption. If no immediate action is taken, FIFA will likely not hesitate to suspend FAM's membership, which may affect the country's dignity, image, and credibility.

The corruption scandal that happened in the history of Malaysian football needs considered by everyone and how the effect is not only harmful to the sport, the country and society. Corruption is an immoral act and is prohibited in religion. After more than two decades, Malaysian football is getting cleaner, which means there is awareness in the community. Stories of corruption or match-fixing scandals involving players, officials, and local bookies, are no longer heard as they used to be, such a situation can give a positive sign to the Malaysian football arena.

⁵⁴ "Rentetan Peristiwa," *Berita Minggu*, 26 February 1995, 23.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ "The FIFA factor," *New Paper*, 3 February 1995, 54.

Another relevant aspect that should be examined in understanding the development of the football league during the study period is the involvement of foreign countries in joining the Malaysian League. The presence of Singapore and Brunei provides a different point of view of the Malaysian football league from an outsider's perspective.

2.5.2 The Involvement of Singapore and Brunei During the Semi –Pro and Professional Era (1989-2011)

One uniqueness of the Malaysian football league is its attraction that attracts teams from abroad to compete as invitational teams. In the Malaysian football history, from the semi-pro to the professional era, the Malaysian League received two representatives from participating countries, namely Singapore and Brunei. These two countries are not strangers in Malaysian football because both are neighbours and have a historical relationship besides often playing among themselves in regional football tournaments. The participation of these two countries also does not mean they do not have their league. Singapore and Brunei already have their local leagues when joining the Malaysian football scene. Still, the level of competition and excitement is not the same as in the Malaysian football league. The reason for this is the club's low fan base, which is related to their country's total population.

Singapore in Malaysian football is not new since the establishment of the Semi-Pro League in 1989. Singapore is one of the teams that are very close to the history of Malaysian football. They won the first HMS Malaya Cup (Malaysia Cup) in 1921. Since then, until their final year in the professional league, they have won the same tournament 24 times, more than some other teams, and are the second-most team ever to win the Malaysia Cup after Selangor. Singapore became one of the 16 teams that joined the Semi-Pro League in 1989.⁵⁷ Singapore was an exciting team during their last period in the Malaysian football league, more precisely during the 1990s. During that time, the National Stadium also became a lively and exciting stadium for visiting teams to attend,

⁵⁷ "S'pura, Brunei dalam liga separuh pro," *Berita Harian*, 22 June 1988, 9.

with a reasonably solid atmosphere. In 1994, Singapore won the double championship in the Malaysian League (League and Malaysia Cup).⁵⁸

The brilliant success achieved by Singapore also marks another final episode of Singapore's football involvement in the Malaysian League scene. The first withdrawal occurred in 1968-69, the second in 1982-84, and the third in 1995.⁵⁹ The Malaysian League campaign in 1994 was marred by corruption and match-fixing scandals. A few days after Singapore beat Pahang 4-0, Malaysian police arrested many players for helping investigate the match-fixing case. In an interview, Tengku Abdullah mentioned that every player who was arrested confessed to receiving money from bookies to lose against Singapore.⁶⁰ Tengku Abdullah threatened to remove Singapore from the Malaysian football arena if they did not show seriousness like Malaysia in fighting football corruption. Avoiding being kicked out without dignity, Singapore withdrew from the Malaysian League on 22 February 1995 and focused on developing its football league.⁶¹

The introduction of Brunei in the Malaysian football scene is relatively slow compared to Singapore. One of the relevant reasons is the distance and relationship with the state of Malaya, which is not as close as Singapore. Brunei spent more of its football time with the states in Borneo in the Borneo Cup tournament. Brunei, Sabah, and Sarawak play in the annual Borneo Cup tournament that started in 1960.⁶² Brunei's presence in Malaysian football began during the 1978 Malaysia Cup, which took into account the position of the 1977 Borneo Cup as the qualifying round of the Malaysia Cup for the north-eastern zone.⁶³ However, in the following season, in 1979, Brunei participated in the Malaysia Cup directly after the round of qualifying zones. FAM then decided to form a league-style tournament for the first time to win the Malaysia Cup. Like Singapore, Brunei also received a similar invitation to join the Semi-Pro League in 1989.⁶⁴ Brunei's involvement (including DPMM Brunei) in the Malaysian League

⁵⁸ Mark Emmanuel, "The Malaysia Cup: Soccer and the National Imagining in Singapore, 1965-1996," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* Vol. 84, No. 2 (301) (December 2011), pp. 95-115.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ "Rentetan Peristiwa," *Berita Minggu*, 26 February 1995, 23.

⁶² Borneo Cup. Rec.Sport.Soccer Statistics Foundation. 28 June 2021. Retrieved from <http://www.rsssf.com/tables/b/borneocup.html> on 30 December 2022.

⁶³ "Sarawak dalam Piala Malaysia," *Arena Bola Sepak*, May 1988, 30.

⁶⁴ "S'pura, Brunei dalam liga separuh pro," *Berita Harian*, 22 June 1988, 9.

has been going on for 20 years since the semi-pro era. Historically, Brunei has not been a strong team, often hovering at the bottom of the league. However, their best success came in 1999 after winning the Malaysia Cup. Starting from the 2006 to 2008 season, DPMM Brunei replaced Brunei as an invited team in the Malaysian football league.⁶⁵

The participation of the team from Brunei as an invitational team became a question mark after the Brunei Darussalam Football Association (BAFA) failed to reinstate it. On 21 November 2008, the Ministry of Home Affairs in Brunei revealed that BAFA was listed among 55 associations that failed to be re-registered after failing to send the minutes of the annual general meeting.⁶⁶ According to the 2005 Societies Order, all registered associations must abide by the rules and regulations, particularly Section 22 where associations must submit the minutes of their annual general meeting within 60 days.⁶⁷ This means BAFA will continue to deregister under the society's order, suspending all activities concerning them. Without an organising body, the relationship between Brunei and FIFA, with the AFC, is also at risk. DPMM Brunei became the first victim of BAFA deregistration, and FAM had no choice but to remove a team from Brunei from the Malaysian League in 2008 to avoid violating FIFA rules.⁶⁸ FIFA regulations clarify that any football organization, including unregistered teams, is prohibited from participating in any competition.

FAM's success in attracting two invitational teams, namely Singapore and Brunei, gives an idea of the competitive value in the Malaysian football league. Although both countries have their direction in football, we need to see how the current view of the regional countries was during the early era of the Malaysian Football League. Excitement can also be felt even more during Singapore's presence, which became a big team in the 1990s. Brunei also had time to mark its legacy in the late 1990s by winning the cup competition. The involvement of Singapore and Brunei can be evaluated positively; there is an improvement from the commercial aspect, which means that the Malaysian League is also watched and followed by neighbouring countries.

⁶⁵ Samle Haji Jait, "20 pemain tempatan, 4 pemain import sarung jersi Brunei DPMM FC," *Pelita Brunei*, 7 December 2005, 11.

⁶⁶ James Kon (30 January 2009). "Appeal fails, BAFA sinks." Retrieved from <http://brudirect.com/DailyInfo/News/Archive/Dec08/251208/bb03.htm> on 30 December 2012.

⁶⁷ James Kon (30 January 2009). "Appeal fails, BAFA sinks." Retrieved from <http://brudirect.com/DailyInfo/News/Archive/Dec08/251208/bb03.htm> on 30 December 2012.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

One aspect that many overlook about its significance in the development of the Malaysian football league is the involvement of foreign players from 1989 until 2011. Foreign players change the landscape of a team in a period and influence the current format in the league.

2.5.3 The Involvement of Foreign Players in the Malaysian Football League (1989-2011)

The presence of import players in the Malaysia football scene appeared long before the formation of the Semi-Pro League. In the last few decades, players from abroad have starred in teams, especially during the Malaysia Cup tournament. This is not strange considering that football was brought by the British colonialists and played by their group first before being absorbed into the local community. Since 1989, when the Semi-Pro League was introduced, the overflow of import players in the Malaysian League began. It has become a trend for every team to bring in foreign players to further improve the quality and performance. Apart from getting the services of regional players from neighbouring countries such as Singapore, Thailand, and Indonesia, the Malaysian League teams also get foreign players from the continent they feel are the best.

From 1989 to 2011, import players in the Malaysian football league sometimes caused mixed feelings for all parties, which also affected the league's current rules. The rules for registering import players in the Malaysian football league are inconsistent and have undergone several changes. Each team could only register three foreign players during the Semi-Pro League era.⁶⁹ In 1996, FAM put a new rule in which the number of imported players that could be registered was reduced to two.⁷⁰ Tengku Abdullah, FAM deputy president, said the reduction gave more space and opportunities for local players to perform. There has been criticism given that the current number of import players (3 players) has stifled local talent development, which has not helped the national squad.⁷¹ This rule only lasted a year because FAM acted to amend it for the 1997 season. The teams in the league wanted the quota of three import players to be

⁶⁹ Joe Dorai, "Semi-pro format opens a new era," *The Straits Times*, 1 July 1989, 32.

⁷⁰ "Two foreign pros rule from 1996," *The Straits Times*, 15 August 1994, 31.

⁷¹ "Foreign players hamper growth of local talent," *The Straits Times*, 20 November 1994, 30.

implemented again as they thought there was a problem for them in fielding the best eleven.⁷²

In 1999, for the first time, the usage of import players was banned.⁷³ This enforced ban is because of the Asian financial crisis that hit in 1997.⁷⁴ This crisis has affected the competing teams, with some failing to pay the wages of import players, which are higher than the wages of local players. After being side-lined from the Malaysian League scene for three seasons, the imported player returned to the league in 2002.⁷⁵ The proposal to re-enact the rules on imported players restored the league's vibrancy after several lacklustre seasons. Since the move stopped importing players, the Malaysian League faded and was affected by the decline in supporters coming to the stadium. Also, in 2002, two foreign players were allowed to be registered for the Malaysian League competition.⁷⁶

The Super League era started in 2004, indirectly increasing the number of import players that can be registered. Three players were allowed to be brought in this time and remained until 2006.⁷⁷ In 2007, along with adding teams in the Super League and Premier League, changes took place in the number of import players (4 players) to boost the competition.⁷⁸ In 2009, FAM continued its inconsistent attitude in enacting competition rules, again banning import players for the second time since 1999.⁷⁹ Criticism regarding these import players began to be strong after the national squad's heavy defeat in the 2007 Asian Cup. FAM freezes import players' use to give local players space to show their ability to compete at the highest level. This rule lasted until 2011 after import players were allowed back in 2012.

There are pros and cons throughout the involvement of import players from 1989 to 2011. The positive thing that can be taken is that import players can attract a large crowd of fans to the stadium. Usually, if the player is good enough, his level and quality are different to beat the ability of local players, which fans love to see it. In addition, importing players is undoubtedly a short way for the team to improve its

⁷² "Pemain import tidak wajib," *Arena Bola Sepak*, May 1998, 6.

⁷³ "Hati-hati pilih pemain import," *Arena Bola Sepak*, February 2002, 6-7.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ "Berhati-hati pilih pemain import," *Arena Bola Sepak*, March 2002, 56-57.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ "Pemain tempatan mesti saingi awang import," *MSL - Berita Harian*, 12 February 2004, 4-5.

⁷⁸ "Format baru suntik kemeriahan," *Berita Harian*, 18 May 2006, 13.

⁷⁹ "Musim lebih terbuka," *EPG - Berita Harian*, 1 January 2009, 6.

quality and performance to face the league competition. That is why some teams do not mind investing in getting the best players from around the world. Next, the arrival of import players to the Malaysian football league can also raise the league's name on the continental stage, attracting foreign viewers to follow the Malaysian football league. For example, the arrival of Tony Cottee, a famous player in the English Premier League to Selangor, opened people's eyes to the commercial value of the Malaysian League.

When mentioning import players, of course there will also be negative issues. Some were involved in the corruption that almost killed Malaysian football in 1994. Michal Vana, the foreign player who plays for Singapore, is among the big-name examples of foreign players involved and more controversial is when Vana ran away from Singapore to avoid a court hearing.⁸⁰ Then, some imported players also come without the ability and effort to improve the team. The lack of quality in the game caused the team to spend money to make changes in the half-season.⁸¹ Finally, the difficulty of importing players to adapt to the local culture. The story of Tony Cottee in Selangor is a perfect example to illustrate the controversy when he brought up the issue of his roommate getting up early to pray and other trivial matters, such as no one to wash his football boots.⁸²

Looking back at the involvement of import players from the semi-pro to the professional era, there are various versions of acceptance and opinions from the public. Import players indeed play a very significant role in the development of the Malaysian football league. The legacy they left is almost rooted in all the competing teams. Sometimes it feels like their presence is not appreciated so much. They become the scapegoat in some matters, but at the same time, fans still need them. Football seems incomplete and lost without them, until it has a certain impact on the support from the fans in the stadium.

2.6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the development in the semi-pro era indirectly helped the Malaysian football league be better prepared for the change in the professional era. During that

⁸⁰ "Rentetan Peristiwa," *Berita Minggu*, 26 February 1995, 23

⁸¹ "Elak pembaziran," *Arena Bola Sepak*, August 1997, 14.

⁸² Reduan Abdullah, "Terkilan gelagat Tony Cottee," *Arena Bola Sepak*, September 1997, 50-51.

period, there were positive effects on FAM, FA states, and clubs in parallel with the primary goal of professionalizing football. The changes in format in the league between 1989 and 2011 show the FAM's confidence in maintaining consistency in one thing. The number of league format changes happens repeatedly, and has specific effects on the competing teams. The Malaysian football league is undeniably followed by neighbouring countries, with involvement between them and attracting players from outside the continent to come and play. However at the same time, there were also dark moments, especially the problem of corruption which was too chronic and almost brought down the sports institution. The Malaysian football league has undergone various evolutionary processes that have taken years and shaped how the local soccer league is viewed today.



CHAPTER THREE

CHANGES IN MALAYSIAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE FROM SEMI-PRO TO PROFESSIONAL ERA (1989-2011)

3.1 INTRODUCTION

It cannot be denied how extensive the development of Malaysian football was from the Semi-Pro League in 1989 until it entered the professional era in 1994. This development underwent a series of essential and time-consuming processes, causing critical changes in the Malaysian football league and impacting several related parties. The first section of this chapter will discuss the historical process of the Malaysian football league from semi-pro to professional level. This section will be the basis for understanding how the league process is formed. It will start from the journey to establish the Semi-Pro League in 1989 to the establishment of the Malaysian Premier League as the first professional league in 1994. Then, the second section will present the changes that took place as soon as the Malaysian football league changed its face from semi-pro to professional level, which will be explained according to several aspects. As described later, there were significant changes once the professional league was established, differentiating how semi-pro and professional football functioned. We will also examine the impact and effects of the development of the Malaysian football league from semi-pro to the professional era to several related parties such as the national squad, competing teams and clubs, players, supporters, and the media. Among the things discussed is how this development has changed the current reality of the parties involved in Malaysian football.

3.2 HISTORICAL PROCESS OF MALAYSIAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE FROM SEMI-PRO TO PROFESSIONAL

The peak of Malaysian football in the modern era began with the establishing the first professional league in 1994. The existence of a professional football league is an essential point for FAM's seriousness in further dignifying this sport at a higher level. The change from semi-pro to professional also shows that the process carried out in the five years before the establishment of the professional league is on the right track. The

idea of establishing a professional football league did not just start after the founding of the Semi-Pro League. This discussion started long before that. In 1986, the relevance of Malaysian football to reaching full professional status had already begun to be heard and debated. Still, it had not yet been raised in a critical discussion.¹

Football's evolution towards the professional direction in Malaysia goes step by step. Malaysian football started with the semi-pro era as preparation and initial action in introducing professional football. Discussions about semi-pro football began during a meeting at the end of 1987 with the then President of FAM, Sultan Ahmad Shah, who asked the Technical and Development Committee to conduct a study and submit a report on semi-pro football.² Two papers were prepared by Tengku Ahmad Rithaudeen, the chairman of the Technical and Development Committee, one was prepared by Dato' Haji Abu Bakar Daud, and Dato' Sulaiman Mohd Noor designed the other. On December 20, 1987, a seminar at the Shangri La Hotel accepted the basic plan submitted.³

The following year, at the 1988 Annual General Meeting, the President of FAM established a special committee headed by Tengku Abdullah.⁴ This committee was tasked with completing the details to ensure that the Semi-Pro League could launch in 1989. Several meetings were then organized to draft the league. To produce more concrete results, a special seminar on 23 and 24 September 1988 was conducted involving FA states, council members, individuals, and mass media and television representatives.⁵

FAM conducted a tour of Europe to understand how a professional league should function and run, covering several countries with excellent and competitive football leagues. A total of 30 officials from FA states, Council, and Semi-Pro committee members visited FIFA, UEFA, West Germany, Switzerland, Holland, and England.⁶ Important briefings on the subject of professional football were given

¹ Laporan Tahunan dan Penyata Kira-Kira 1986, Mesyuarat Agung Tahunan Yang Ke-24, *Persatuan Bola Sepak Malaysia (FAM)*, 5 April 1987.

² Laporan Tahunan dan Penyata Kira-Kira 1988, Kongres Tahunan Ke-26, *Persatuan Bola Sepak Malaysia (FAM)*, 9 April 1989.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Laporan Tahunan dan Penyata Kira-Kira 1989, Kongres Tahunan Ke-27, *Persatuan Bola Sepak Malaysia (FAM)*, 24 Mac 1990.

throughout the visit. European professional clubs such as Grasshoppers FC, Bayer Leverkusen, Ajax Amsterdam, and Tottenham Hotspurs are important references for FAM. The ideas obtained during the visit were discussed in a seminar on 18-19 December 1988.⁷ The final report to create a Semi-Pro League was completed and submitted to the FAM Council on February 12, 1989.⁸

Many significant changes have occurred since then, distinguishing the league between the amateur and semi-pro. In 1993, the Malaysian football league was in good shape, with several notable achievements. After five years, FAM sees that the Semi-Pro League is ready to enter a new professional era. 29 June 1993, FAM competitive chairman Datuk Bakar Daud announced the results of a meeting with several discussions, which made it possible to create three league divisions starting in 1994.⁹ According to the original plan, Division One will be known as the professional league, Division Two as the semi-pro league, and Division Three as the amateur league.¹⁰ In this initial discussion, it was also announced that the use of imported players would be banned due to the weakness of the national team, but it has yet to be fully decided.

On 18 August 1993, Datuk Bakar Daud, FAM competitions chairman, insisted on bringing Malaysian football to a new phase by raising five years after the implementation of semi-pro as the best time to introduce professional football.¹¹ Several proposals and working papers were discussed in the FAM meeting, and the FAM executive committee confirmed them at the beginning of the month. Early expectations: the league will start in January or February and end in November. Each team will play once a week, and the league will be on vacation during the Muslim fasting month. However, the professional implementation is still under discussion, with no further agreement from any team. Entering the professional era, FAM initially wanted to introduce two professional-level league divisions, named Super League or Premier League, but in the end, they decided to put only one division, which will be called the Premier League.¹²

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ "Three-division League under study," *The Straits Times*, 30 June 1993, 30.

¹⁰ Joe Dorai, "Super League next year?" *The Straits Times*, 14 August 1993, 38.

¹¹ Peter Khoo, "Super League: FAM sympathetic to Republic's needs," *The Straits Times*, 18 August 1993, 30.

¹² "It's Premier League, not Super League," *The New Paper*, 17 January 1994, 38.

On 28 October 1993, FAM announced that a league with professional status would be established to replace the Semi-Pro League that had been going on for five years.¹³ All the teams already in the league before that, including Singapore and Brunei, will participate in the Malaysian Premier League, starting on 2 April 1994. Datuk Paul Mony, FAM Secretary General at the time, insisted that each team must have at least 18 players, which includes 13 full-time professional players, 3 imported players, and 2 amateur players.¹⁴ This rule applies only to teams from Malaysia, except for Singapore and Brunei. The Premier League will also be extended for eight months.

In short, making the Malaysian football league reach an entirely professional level took years. The football league in Malaysia does not enter the professional era straight forward because they have to go through a five-year trial period (Semi-Pro League) first. Paperwork is drawn up, meetings are conducted, and essential visits are made to ensure everything goes smoothly. The Malaysian football league reached its peak as soon as there was an agreement among the highest authorities of FAM to organise a professional league for the first time in 1994. Thorough preparations were completed in 1993 after seeing that it was the best time to succeed in a professional-level league. What happened during the five years in the Semi-Pro League era made it easier for FAM to manage the professional league more regularly.

3.3 CRITICAL CHANGES IN THE MALAYSIAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE FROM SEMI-PRO TO PROFESSIONAL ERA

The development of the Malaysian football league from semi-pro to professional era in 1989 has brought many vital changes. These changes include matters involving the league, teams, and players. Starting with an experiment in the semi-pro era, the process of reaching the professional level is on a good track, and this is proven by the openness of FAM to start the first professional-level league in 1994. Movement from one era to another led to change. The changes that have taken place since 1994 also give a picture of professionalism not only involving player contracts. The concept is more comprehensive with the current carried out and putting other things in the same sample.

¹³ "S'pore to play in new-look League," *The Straits Times*, 29 October 1993, 37.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

The first change between these two eras is the sporting competitions. The shift in the professional era led to increased competition within the league. Most obviously, it was contributed by the increase in the number of league matches compared to the previous period, and that does not include the number of cup tournament matches such as the Malaysia Cup and the FA Cup.¹⁵ It started to change in 1994 and beyond when every team that competed, including teams from the second division, went through more than 20 games a season.¹⁶ However, the numbers from each season are different because several clubs withdrew from the league competition during the period. In addition, the increase in the number of teams also indirectly allows the competition to be greater and more open between the competing teams. The establishment of Premier League One and Two in 1998 paved the way for club-status teams sponsored by non-football companies and agencies to be involved in the premier Malaysian football league.¹⁷ However, these teams no longer dominate the Malaysian football league. The best example is the involvement of Public Bank, which won the Second Premier League in 2003, and the Majlis Perbandaran Petaling Jaya (MPPJ), who forged a name in the Malaysian League through the Malaysia Cup championship in 2004.

Player contract changes become a big deal in crossing from the semi-pro to the professional. The player's contract is essential in seeing how far the term 'professional' is used. Before entering the semi-pro era, players were bound by amateur agreements, where the player was paid according to his skills as a player, but the payment received was within the expected price that should be received in football activities.¹⁸ Currently, players do not receive salaries and only receive ringgit remuneration or appropriate allowances to cover expenses in football activities. During the semi-pro era, players were exposed to semi-pro contracts, where players who had jobs other than football were paid a salary to perform football activities.¹⁹ For example, some players work with private or government companies but are also involved in football activities organized by FAM. These players still receive payments, allowances, and initiatives from associations or teams, but their value differs from professional players. The introduction of the professional league in 1994 marked the need for each team to sign a professional

¹⁵ "Memori 1994," *Arena Bola Sepak Edisi Khas*, 1995, 9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Reduan Abdullah, "Hadapi 1998 penuh pelbagai dugaan," *Arena Bola Sepak*, January 1998, 62-63.

¹⁸ Jady Zaidi Hassim, (2018). *Kontrak Pemain Bola Sepak Profesional Di Malaysia*, Bangi, Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

contract for the players, as well as different contracts with amateurs and semi-pros. A professional contract is important as a written bond between the player and the team and solid evidence that the player has no ties to any other entity.²⁰ Bound players must also comply with all agreements written in the contract, and the team must reasonably carry out its responsibilities as an employer. Players receive salary payments for their unique skills or fees acquired by players for football activities over other payments.

The critical thing in seeing the professional level of a league is observing the attitude of the FAM and club management in developing the grassroots within their team. This was the cultural difference during the semi-pro and professional eras, where the Reserve League was introduced in 1994 as one of the reforms under the professionalization agenda of the Malaysian League.²¹ The Reserve League was introduced in 1994 as one of the reforms to professionalize the Malaysian League. At the initial stage of the establishment of the Premier League, all teams in Malaysia must have a team for the Reserve League.²² The primary purpose is to ensure that professional football will continue receiving talented young players.

As we all need to know, professional football cannot stand without money. Sponsorship money keeps the league alive, making the league's quality more competitive with remuneration and funds injected from anybody. Big sponsors bring a lot of money, and the proceeds of this sponsorship will be divided among the competing teams. The entry of significant sponsorships into the league dates back to the semi-pro era. At that time, many large companies were already interested in positioning themselves as the primary sponsor of the Malaysian league. Among the crucial companies that became the main sponsors of the Malaysian league from 1989 to 2011 are Dunhill, Telekom Malaysia, and Astro Arena. During this period, Dunhill was the longest sponsor for 15 years, from 1989 to 2004. Dunhill's sponsorship starts with RM 6.25 million annually for the first ten years.²³ Before the sponsorship was terminated due to the ban on sponsorship from cigarette companies, the total sponsorship value had increased to RM 30 million per year.²⁴ This is the most immense value in the Malaysian

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Laporan Tahunan dan Penyata Kira-Kira 1994, Kongres Tahunan Biasa Ke-32, *Persatuan Bola Sepak Malaysia (FAM)*, 28 June 1985.

²² Ibid.

²³ "FAM worried about sponsorship ban," *The Straits Times*, 20 October 1992, 30.

²⁴ Lukman Salleh and Harris Rajahdin, "Telekom penaja baru Liga Malaysia," *Berita Harian*, 27 Januari 2005, 17.

League from 1989 to 2011. Starting in 2004, Telekom Malaysia (TM) became the main sponsor of the Malaysian League, replacing Dunhill. The sponsorship value as the primary sponsor for each year decreased compared to before, which was as much as RM 8.5 million per season until 2007.

Nevertheless, the Malaysian League still receives several sponsorships from other big companies such as Malaysia Airlines, Genting, and Adidas, but the value and amount of the sponsorship are not disclosed to the outside.²⁵ Continuing in 2008, TM extended their sponsorship for the Malaysian League as the main sponsor with the same amount. Entering the year 2011, TM is no longer the main sponsor of the Malaysian League. Astro has become the tournament's main sponsor, with a mega sponsorship value of RM 30 million per year and gets the rights to broadcast the league until 2014.²⁶

In summary, the professional era that replaced the semi-pro period led to some changes to some important aspects and components of a league. From 1994 onwards, sporting competitions between teams increased. It was contributed by the increase of matches in a season and the entry of club-status teams starting in 1998. Next, player contracts had begun to be labelled as professional compared to before; it was still considered a semi-pro contract. Players are deemed full-time workers and no longer have jobs outside of football. In addition, by introducing the Reserve League, FAM gave a clear signal to focus on grassroots development for each team. In addition, external sponsorship increased, with large companies becoming more open to getting involved by sponsoring the Malaysian football league. The professional era Malaysian football league reflects a shift and the seriousness of the FAM to advance the main core of national football.

3.4 THE IMPACT AND EFFECT OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MALAYSIAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE FROM SEMI-PRO TO PROFESSIONAL

The development of the Malaysian football league from the semi-pro era to the professional impacted several related parties. This can be seen through the situation that happened to the national squad, competing teams and clubs, players, supporters, and the

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Lucius Maximus, "Astro Tabur Duit: Kebaikannya Untuk Bolasepak Malaysia," Sokernet Website, 3 Januari 2011, Retrieved from <http://sokernet.blogspot.com/2011/01/astro-tabur-duit-kebaikannya-untuk.html> on 15 June 2023.

media from 1989 to 2011. The impact and effect received are symbols of development, showing how significant it is for the football league to continue to show improvement in various aspects. Many positive things were accepted by all parties, simultaneously making this development bring a vast blessing to them. This is also clear evidence of the effectiveness received due to FAM's initial efforts.

3.4.1 National Team

The development of the football league plays a significant role in the national football team's progress. The presence of players who will be called into the national squad is assessed based on their growth throughout their time with the team in the league. Any major country in the world puts enough emphasis on quality in football during the national league to guarantee the true capabilities of their national team. For many of these countries, failure to qualify for a major tournament, either at the world or regional level, must be avoided. In Malaysia, the development of the football league has received various effects and impacts throughout the change from the semi-pro era to the professional one.

FIFA's ranking reflects the national team's current position in the world arena. It was first introduced in December 1992, and countries have alternated positions since then.²⁷ In theory, the successful team is the team with the highest ranking. The development of Malaysia's ranking throughout the semi-pro to professional era shows increases and decreases. Malaysia started with a ranking of 91 in 1992 and, in 2011, fell to 148.²⁸ On average, Malaysia's best ranking record since the establishment of the professional league was in 1997, at 89th, while the worst record was in 2009, at 160th.²⁹ Among the international matches recognized by FIFA are those in the FIFA annual calendar, including related tournaments such as the World Cup and regional competition (AFC). In the Asian Cup tournament, Malaysia only qualified once, and that was due to being the co-hosting country with Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia in

²⁷ "FIFA Men's Ranking," FIFA Official Website, Retrieved from <https://www.fifa.com/fifa-world-ranking/men?dateId=id13974> on 15 June 2023.

²⁸ "FIFA Men's Ranking Malaysia," FIFA Official Website, Retrieved from <https://www.fifa.com/fifa-world-ranking/MAS> on 15 June 2023.

²⁹ Ibid.

2007.³⁰ As one of the countries under the FIFA affiliation, Malaysia is involved in any tournament and match recognized by the main body. Malaysia is also involved in a regional tournament involving the senior squad, namely the Tiger Cup (later known as the AFF Cup) and has emerged as the champion once in 2010.³¹ However, at that time, FIFA did not recognize the tournament, and no points were given for changing the current FIFA ranking.

There are several other issues in the league as well that have an impact on the Malaysian national team. Structuring the league in the professional era opened the door to adding new teams and clubs. The addition of new teams and clubs indirectly increases the number of current players, further expanding the talent pool that can be introduced into the national squad. For example, adding new divisions with the establishment of Premier League One and Two starting in 1998 increased the number of teams.³² Before that, the Malaysian League only had 15 teams competing. As soon as the change took place, the current number of teams as a whole that competed until 2003 increased to 25 teams.³³

In addition, the corruption scandal that hit Malaysian football in 1994 also had a significant impact on the national team. The issue of corruption that occurred led to the suspension of many players in the Malaysian League.³⁴ Some of these players are the leading players for the Malaysian national team. The loss of good and talented players led to a decline in quality during the national squad, forcing them to introduce new and inexperienced players.³⁵ From one angle, it is suitable for the long term because the players get great exposure, but looking at the short-term effect, the national squad will take time to adapt by using some new names.

³⁰ “Flashback: AFC Asian Cup 2007,” AFC Official Website, Retrieved from https://www.the-afc.com/en/national/afc_asian_cup/news/flashback_afc_asian_cup_2007.html on 21 July 2023.

³¹ “AFF Suzuki Cup champions: Every single AFF Championship winner from 1996 until 2021,” Goal Website, Retrieved from <https://www.goal.com/en-my/news/aff-suzuki-cup-winners-every-single-aff-championship-winner-from-1996-until-2018/b7o9rk2nxnym12jujecvkqcvb> on 21 July 2023.

³² Reduan Abdullah, “Hadapi 1998 penuh pelbagai dugaan,” *Arena Bola Sepak*, January 1998, 62-63.

³³ “Malaysia 2023,” Rec.Sport.Soccer Statistics Foundation, 17 February 2004, Retrieved from <http://www.rsssf.com/tablesb/borneocup.html> on 19 July 2023..

³⁴ Parlimen Malaysia, *Penyata Rasmi Parlimen Dewan Rakyat*, Parlimen Kesembilan Penggal Pertama Mesyuarat Pertama, 13 June 1995, 13.

³⁵ “Wujud dasar bola sepak negara,” *Arena Bola Sepak*, February 1996, 8.

Next, banning foreign players in two periods shows that the opportunity for local players to get a place in their respective teams is greater.³⁶ As a result, their game minutes increase the chances for them to compete for a place in the national squad. Malaysia managed to produce quality players because of the banning on import players. Akmal Rizal, Fadzli Shaari, Hairudin Omar, etc., appeared since importing players was banned from 1998-2001. The second period started in 2009-2011 and introduced new groups such as Ashari Shamsudin, Norshahrul Idlan Talaha, Badri Radzi, etc. Usually, the imported players will take at least two places in the team. Due to the new rules, their absence forced teams to utilise local talent.

In conclusion, the league is an essential instrument as a benchmark for the quality of national football. The development of the Malaysian football league has had a considerable impact and effect on the national squad. What is clear is that Malaysia needs to show a better improvement in FIFA rankings and major tournaments. This is more a problem of the quality of players who must reach the required level. It must be acknowledged that throughout that period, the Malaysian League created new talent that could be featured in the national team due to the changes and issues that hit.

3.4.2 Teams and Clubs

A football league would only be formed with competing clubs. The clubs play a huge role in making the actual functioning of the league work collectively. Football clubs are important because they drive competition, contribute to financial stability, nurture player development, attract talent, hold cultural significance, and actively participate in league governance. With them, the league will retain its excitement. Since the era changed from semi-pro to professional, there has been a paradigm shift in the club, a direct result of the evolution that has taken place.

Among the impacts in the development of the Malaysian Football League from 1989 to 2011 was the initial challenge the team had to face in adapting to professional management. According to Azraai Khor Abdullah, who is actively involved in Malaysian football from the Semi-Pro League to the Malaysian Super League, team

³⁶ V. Ashok, “‘Awang import’ tidak bererti halang kemajuan anak tempatan”, *EPG- Berita Harian*, 8 January 2009, 2.

expenses are used sparingly during the semi-pro era compared to the professional era.³⁷ During the professional era, staff and players are counted as full-time workers. There is also an expense increase when traveling for away days and a bonus when winning. The monthly expenses of a team are no longer the same. There are teams under FA states, especially from small and low-income states facing problems in paying salaries.³⁸ To get good players, the team must spend more. It is essential to form a strong team, as it will also be one of the attractions for supporters to attend the stadium. When many supporters come to the stadium, it will impact the ticket collection, which is a source of income for the teams.

Next, the revolution throughout the Malaysian football league from the semi-pro to the professional era also provided significant changes in sponsorship for competing teams. Once entering the professional era, teams are highly aware of being more serious in looking for sponsors to face every football season.³⁹ The high expenses forced the team not to rely too much on small resources. Sponsorship also does not necessarily involve money but also appears in the form of clothing and sports equipment.⁴⁰ The companies sponsoring the team can advertise their brand on the jersey or any other part the team owns. Sponsorship received from outside can increase the team's finances and lighten the team's current burden.

In addition, as we already know, the establishment of Premier League One and Two in 1998 opened up space for clubs independent from the influence of FA states to gain a place in the Malaysian football league scene. Whether the team is under the influence of a FA state or a private body, both have different ways of management. Teams under FA states usually expect funds from their respective state governments.⁴¹ Clubs under private bodies are more dependent on sponsorship obtained from outside.⁴² As mentioned by Hairi Azly, ex-players who were active between 1990s and 2010s, this situation enables the team under the FA state's management to stay longer due to not being cut off from financial resources every season.⁴³ Unlike clubs under private bodies,

³⁷ Azraai Khor Abdullah, in discussion with the author, Kuala Lumpur, June 2023.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ "Lotto cadang taja skuad remaja," Liga Bola Sepak Malaysia Website, 22 April 2011, Retrieved from <http://ligabolasepakmalaysia.blogspot.com/2011/04/lotto-cadang-taja-skuad-remaja.html> on 21 June 2023.

⁴¹ Azraai Khor Abdullah, in discussion with the author, Kuala Lumpur, June 2023.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Hairi Azly, in discussion with the author, Kuala Lumpur, May 2023.

they have a challenge to sustain in the Malaysian League, needing to see how far sponsorship from outside can be brought into the club's financial pocket. This is why some clubs fail to continue the fight in the league, struggling with financial stability every season.

Foreign workers, whether coaching staff or players are hired because they have higher quality expertise and skills than local staff or players. The club will try its best to provide the best treatment to foreign workers, especially players.⁴⁴ Foreign workers are paid in US Dollars and, of course, earn higher than local workers. Some of them are provided with transport and houses by the team. To adapt quickly, the team would guide these foreign workers about the local community's culture and each of them needs to be sensitive to the customs of the local community.⁴⁵ As usual, the team also expects the best from these foreign workers on the field. This statement was supported by Marlon Alex James, the foreign player who was active in the 2000s, who mentioned that the team or club's treatment of foreign players would be extraordinary if the player is playing great, scoring goals, and helping them win trophies.⁴⁶

In conclusion, what happened to the Malaysian League in the period from 1989 to 2011 certainly had an impact on the overall development of the team. Once entering the professional era, the team experienced challenges adapting to the new environment and mentality. Significant changes also occurred in the amount and form of sponsorship for the team. The management of the team under the influence of the FA state also proved to last longer than the team that is free from the influence of the government due to more stable financial factors. Teams in the Malaysian League also value foreign workers and imported players by providing high treatment. The impact on teams and clubs during this period confirms how significant the league's evolution is from year to year.

3.4.3 Players

Players are the key in football. The club depends on the players to ensure they remain a quality team and can compete with other teams on the field. A good player offers

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Azraai Khor Abdullah, in discussion with the author, Kuala Lumpur, June 2023.

⁴⁶ Marlon Alex James, in discussion with the author, Kuala Lumpur, June 2023.

success on the field and helps create an excellent image for the team he represents. In addition, the existence of big-name players can also improve the brand of a league, as can be referred to in the major leagues in Europe since the beginning. In the context of the Malaysian League, football players become entities affected by the changes that occur throughout the semi-pro to professional period, which can be traced in particular aspects such as social and economic.

First of all, when looking at the economic status of the players, the change from the semi-pro to the professional era leads to a change in salaries among them. Players in the professional era receive better remuneration than in the semi-pro era. During the semi-pro, the average player had a job outside of the football field, either in government or private agencies, and that changed as soon as the football league entered the professional era.⁴⁷ The salary in the semi-pro era is also low. Compared to the professional era, players began to receive better compensation, which increased from year to year. The different amount of sponsors between the two periods also played a significant role. Entering the era of 2000 and beyond until 2011, the average salary rate in the Malaysian League was as much as MYR 6000-10000 per month, and this rate will be higher if the player has caps with the national squad.⁴⁸

In the professional era, the player's welfare as a professional athlete is better taken care of. The team's development in the professional league requires them to improve their quality, not just hold the professional brand. Still, it needs to be proven by improving some crucial aspects of the players. Each of them began to have its training centre, improved to suit the passage of time, which can raise the quality of players.⁴⁹ Players also, benefit from the construction of a rehabilitation room at the training centre.⁵⁰ In addition, every player can get special treatment with the existence of additional physios who are more experts and know how to give early treatment to injured players, along with the development of medical knowledge and sports science.

One issue that has always been a problem since the semi-pro era until entering the professional era is the issue of salary payments to players. One of the main factors that led to the corruption scandal in 1994 was also due to the association's failure to pay

⁴⁷ Hairy Azly, in discussion with the author, Kuala Lumpur, May 2023.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ "Pemain tempatan mesti saingi awang import," *MSL - Berita Harian*, 12 February 2004, 4-5.

⁵⁰ Hairy Azly, in discussion with the author, Kuala Lumpur, May 2023.

salaries. The issue of the inability to pay wages in the Malaysian League has been decreasing year by year.⁵¹ Upon entering the 21st century, compared to the semi-pro era, the issue is still there but becoming more isolated. This problem is less and less heard, with FAM being quite strict in dealing with this issue among the teams. FAM has also prepared complete guidelines for each team, which can lead to fines such as suspension, deduction of points, etc.⁵² The inability to pay salaries certainly raises grievances among players who have responsibilities and commitments. It indirectly interferes with their concentration to perform better on the field. The seriousness shown by FAM makes the team more careful to avoid this problem.

In conclusion, the change of era from semi-pro to professional, from 1989 to 2011, really impacted the players. That covers aspects not only in sports but also in the social and economic life of the players. Players are better remunerated than in previous eras, and the salary figures are increasing yearly. The team also began to improve the facilities at the training centre and rehabilitation room for the use of players in line with the modernity of the game. The issue that has become a fear, which is the player salaries, has become more isolated and reduced due to FAM's more serious efforts. This change of era shows that it has already happened, and there is a practice of professionalism that FAM is trying to implement even though it is clear that it takes time.

3.4.4 Fans and Supporters

Fans liven up the atmosphere of football. They bring a different environment to the stadium with their support for their respective teams. Football without fans is nothing. Without them, football loses its beauty and excitement. Supporters are also the backbone of every football team. They contribute to many things, covering the team's finances, bringing identity and culture, and being an excellent motivation for the players, besides understanding the value of supporting their team. In the Malaysian League, the group of supporters is always the focus of attention, each having its way of expressing support. When football changes from the semi-pro to professional, the supporters also feel the impact of developments in supporting their respective teams.

⁵¹ Azraai Khor Abdullah, in discussion with the author, Kuala Lumpur, June 2023

⁵² "Tunggakan gaji pegawai, pemain Perlis tak kunjung tiba," Malaysia Kini Website, Retrieved from <https://www.malaysiakini.com/sukan/445815> on 19 July 2023.

Supporters significantly boost the Malaysian League competition more during the professional era. Since then, the medium of discussion and debate has changed. What can be seen, is that football before the era of globalisation and the internet was discussed in a different form. According to Zairuddin Hashim, Malaysian football blogger, during the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, printed materials, especially newspapers and magazines, became essential instruments as the primary medium for supporters to voice their opinions.⁵³ It is supported by unique columns or columns from newspapers and magazines for support groups to voice their opinions. The internet era, especially in the 2000s, is seen to be more developed with a tradition of forums, blogs, and social media.⁵⁴ The famous ones that appeared during that period were GanuSoccer.Net, Sokernet, Harimau Malaya, etc.

During the study period, there was an issue regarding the problem of supporters going to the stadium. The difference in the form of support to the stadium appears on several factors. The subject of support from fans in the stadium is usually heavily influenced by the team's current performance. In his column in *Arena Bola Sepak* magazine, Prof. Khoo Kay Kim wrote that the amount of support will also fall when a team is weak.⁵⁵ The statement was agreed by Nurazhar Mohd Zin, Kuala Lumpur FC fans, referring to how Kelantan supporters in the late 2000s and early 2010s always filled their stadiums, and at that time, their team was in the best position.⁵⁶ Such an atmosphere is not found when the team's performance is collapsing. In addition, some cases make fans less interested in going to the stadium. In 1995, there was a crisis of confidence among local football supporters following a corruption scandal the previous year.⁵⁷ Discontent arose among supporters who felt cheated by the match-fixing scandal. In 1998, the economic crisis that hit was also one of the factors that led supporters to lack interest in going to the stadium.⁵⁸ Some supporters prioritize things other than spending money to buy football match tickets.

Changes in the Malaysian football league phase have also shaped how supporters show their level of love in the stadium. Throughout the semi-pro era until the mid-2000s, supporters' clubs received direct support from their respective FA states.

⁵³ Zairuddin Hashim, in discussion with the author, Bangi, June 2023.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Khoo Kay Kim, "Masalah bola sepak tidak pernah selesai," *Arena Bola Sepak*, July 1998, 36-37.

⁵⁶ Nurazhar Mohd Zin, in discussion with the author, Kuala Lumpur, May 2023.

⁵⁷ Zairuddin Hashim, in discussion with the author, Bangi, June 2023.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Football supporters' clubs in Malaysia began gaining a foothold in 1978 with the establishment of the Selangor Soccer Fans Club (SSFC).⁵⁹ The establishment of this supporter's club was greatly influenced by the external league brought by Malaysian students from overseas. The culture of this supporter club then continues to spread and flourish in other states, such as the emergence of PETEH (Terengganu), Perak the Yob (Perak), and others. In the mid-2000s, Malaysian football received another new influence in stadiums' support culture. The appearance of the 'ultras' group in the stadium added to the excitement and diversity of the supporters. Unlike the 'supporter club' group with good relations with FA states, this 'ultras' group is more radical and usually goes against the mainstream. The existence of the 'ultras' group in the Malaysian football scene is also due to FAM's failure to raise the level of national football in 2007.⁶⁰ However, the good or bad of something is subjective because each has its way of showing support during the 90 minutes of the match.

In conclusion, what happened from the semi-pro to the professional era profoundly affected the way, behaviour, and ideas of supporters in promoting the football league competition in Malaysia. There has been a change in the way supporters discuss current issues in football, from the era of print media to the advent of the internet after the 2000s. Several factors also play a significant role in indicating the arrival of supporters at the stadium. Cultural influences from outside also form ideas among supporters in manifesting their feelings of love to support the team in the stadium with the existence of certain groups of supporters. The development of these supporters is a clear symbol of the evolution of the Malaysian football league from age to age.

3.4.5 Media

The Malaysian League revolution from 1989 to 2011 had a specific impact on the media. In ensuring that the league competition continues to be lively, the media appears as an influential body to provide continuous exposure to the current development of the league. The league needs the role of the media in marketing its product to the public. Whether it's the league or the media, both depend on each other. The media involved is

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Muhammad Helmy Abd. Gapar and Nurzalyna Mohamed Zaki, Budaya Kepenyokongan Sukan Bola Sepak Sebagai Tapak Integrasi: Penelitian Terhadap Kelompok Ultras Malaya, *Jebat: Malaysian Journal of History, Politics & Strategic Studies*, Vol. 47 (3) (December 2020), pp. 274-307.

not necessarily only related to television and radio channels. Print media such as newspapers and magazines also play a similar role. Each contributed remarkably to further promoting information about the Malaysian football league.

The media bodies involved give massive exposure to the competition. Each has its heyday according to their respective times. Media bodies provide awareness about the league, constantly channeling important info about matches. They also play a role in creating hype in the league, either before or during the season.⁶¹ Radio at one time emerged as an influential medium among football fans from the semi-pro era to the early 2000s. The related radio channel will update the results during the match live since the television broadcast only shows the game of the selected team. Selected television channels also broadcast the matches, holding the official broadcast rights for the league tournament. Newspapers during that period have always been a relevant medium for football followers, always providing current information and playing a role in shaping the hype of football matches. Football magazines are always the focus for followers and observers of this sport in getting more detailed stories about leagues, teams, and players in detail.

Media is the best medium as a propaganda body in selling something to customers. From 1989 to 2011, the media has been the main driving force in disseminating information related to the activities of the Malaysian football league. Across the ages, it includes broadcast, print, and digital media. Since the semi-pro era, there have been five important mediums as centres of information dissemination, such as radio, television, newspapers, magazines, and the internet.⁶² The radio channels involved from the beginning of the establishment of the Semi-Pro League until entering the professional era are usually state radio channels that are under the control of Malaysian Television Programs (RTM) such as Selangor FM, Terengganu FM, Pahang FM, and others. Government or private television companies such as RTM, TV3, and Astro appeared as official broadcasters for the tournament during the study period from 1989 to 2011. In the printed media section, newspapers and magazines are synonymous among local football followers. Major newspapers in Malaysia, such as Berita Harian, Utusan Malaysia, Harian Metro, New Straits Times, The Star, etc., offer local football news daily. Sports magazines such as Arena Bola Sepak, Football, Dunia Sukan, and

⁶¹ Zairuddin Hashim, in discussion with the author, Bangi, June 2023.

⁶² Ibid.

Shoot provide information and stories weekly or monthly, but in a more exclusive form. The medium is no longer dependent on broadcast media and print media alone after the internet began to pioneer the world of information delivery. All information is no longer limited to some media only with the growth of sports channels and portals on the internet, further expanding the field of spreading news without borders.

The league body always needs the media to ensure that football followers and fans can follow the league's activities. Bilateral cooperation has always occurred between the two entities since the semi-pro era. During the semi-pro period, the league already used the media to raise spirits and liven up the league's atmosphere before the season's start by promoting it at selected malls.⁶³ Selected television companies get exclusive rights as broadcast rights holders from the league body. RTM emerged as the first official broadcaster for the Malaysian League competition starting from the semi-pro era.⁶⁴ TV3 followed it before Astro split their bank account to become the league's main sponsor in 2010, simultaneously gaining full official broadcast rights. FAM also collaborated directly with the local newspaper *Berita Harian* in 2004, with Tengku Abdullah launching the official newspaper issue for the Malaysian Super League.⁶⁵ The launch of the Malaysian Super League issue is one of the efforts to further improve the atmosphere of the newly introduced Malaysian Super League for the first time, replacing the role of the Premier League as the main league in Malaysia.

In summarizing this section, the impact, and effect hit the media as soon as the semi-pro league was established until entering the professional era. The role of the media in Malaysia is expanding with the establishment of the football league. The media was a vital medium for channeling information to football supporters. Media bodies provide exposure to supporters about league tournaments and competitions. During that period, several local radio, television, newspaper, and magazine companies played an important role in promoting the Malaysian football league. In addition, the league also needs influence from the media to ensure that the league's activities can continue to be followed by football followers. The presence of the media in the Malaysian League competition allows the league competition to continue to feel lively and not to look quiet.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ "FAM walk into 1990s on strong financial footing", *The Straits Times*, 16 January 1990, 31.

⁶⁵ Azidan Nahar, "Tengku Abdullah lancer sisipan MSL," *Berita Harian*, 13 February 2004, 21.

3.5 CONCLUSION

In summary, the development of the Malaysian Football League from 1989 to 2011 shows its significance in shaping it to be more mature and organized according to the professional style. The bold step taken by FAM in the late 1980s also bore fruit with the establishment of the first professional league in Malaysia in 1994. Although it took a certain amount of time, it illustrates how FAM was sensitive to essential issues in football at that time. Next, several changes that occurred as soon as the Malaysian football league entered the professional era became a necessary foundation for achieving its actual status as a professional league year after year. The changes that took place in several aspects further created a competitive league. In addition, several parties related to the Malaysian football scene feel the impact of what happened during that period. The developments and changes that occur in the Malaysian League are vital because they are a continuation of what is happening today. Although there are ups and downs, this is very positive to see and observe.



CHAPTER FOUR

COMPARISON OF PROFESSIONALISM IN MALAYSIAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE WITH ENGLAND AND JAPAN

4.1 INTRODUCTION

When entering the era of the early 1990s, there was a significant development in the status of the football league in Malaysia. Major changes during this period happened in Malaysia and several other countries such as England, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand, etc. The trend in many countries shows how high the demand from each football body is to make their league more advanced and competitive. The first section of this chapter will discuss the historical development of professionalism in the football leagues from the early period until the modern period. This section will be the foundation for understanding the existence of professionalism in football league history. Then, the second section will present the reasons for the selection of the league in England and Japan as a case study to compare with the Malaysian league, which will enlighten us on several aspects. As explained later, England had established itself as a significant power in the World Football League. It will explore the professionalisation of the English football league until the formation of the Premier League in 1992. This chapter will also examine the historical professionalisation process in the Japanese football league. It will touch on how the football league in Japan changed after entering the professional era. Besides, this topic will also examine the trend of professionalization in the league in England, Japan, and Malaysia during the changes that took place starting in the 1990s. Among the matters that will be discussed are related matters of professionalism that trace the pressure before establishment, issue and controversy, league structure, model of teams and clubs, contract players, sponsorships, and outdoor attractions.

4.2 TREND OF PROFESSIONALISM IN THE FOOTBALL LEAGUE

The modern law of the football game (previously identified as Association Football) was written in London in 1863 by a newly established body, the Football Association

(FA).¹ As is known, the presence of professional players was entirely accepted by the FA in 1885. The development of professional football began to culminate with the establishment of the first professional football league in the world, the Football League, in 1888 in England. It continued to expand, from 12 participating teams forming one division in the first year of its formation, then another division was added four years later in 1892.² Year after year, the Football League began to grow, with four divisions introduced in 1923, and it remains as a core of the professional league in England to this day.³

The condition and situation of football development in England opened the eyes of other countries to empowering their football industry. British influence as a world power at that time shaped the understanding of football worldwide. The British spread modern and professional football from maritime and colonial activities until it spread worldwide, including Malaysia. Around Europe, the existence of several football clubs is also heavily influenced and linked to the activities of the English. Some evidence shows that, European countries are used to football but have yet to be exposed to a more organized and structured football system.⁴

Football's popularity grew rapidly; by 1900, almost all parts of Europe and South America were playing the sport. However, the countries involved took time to follow the trend of football introduced by the British. Most countries in Europe and South America only had their football bodies after 1900. Even FIFA was only established in 1904, decades after the establishment of the FA. The influence of football is undeniably heavily contributed by England with teams from these countries very often touring the world.⁵

The league's development is closely related to its relationship with national football federations. Each country tends to establish a hierarchy of leagues in their

¹ "The History of the FA." The FA Website. Retrieved from <https://www.thefa.com/about-football-association/what-we-do/history#:~:text=The%20History%20of%20The%20FA,-Shares&text=The%20Football%20Association%2C%20English%20football's,'father'%20of%20The%20Association> on 15 June 2023.

² "The EFL: Who we are." EFL Official Website. Retrieved from <https://www.efl.com/-more/all-about-the-efl/history/> on 15 June 2023.

³ Ibid.

⁴ "Professionalism." Encyclopaedia Britannica Website. Retrieved from 15 June 2023 from <https://www.britannica.com/sports/football-soccer/Professionalism>.

⁵ "History of Football – The Global Growth." FIFA Website. Retrieved from 15 June 2023 from <http://www.fifa.com/classicfootball/history/the-game/global-growth.html>.

country. For example, in England, two bodies monitor the movement of football activities, the FA and the Football League. Although the Football League recognizes the sovereignty of the FA, the Football League body is given the power and autonomy to manage matters related to the league.⁶ In most other countries, the relationship between the national league and the governing body is solid; even the same people manage both bodies. This strong relationship is the backbone of the success and smoothness of the national team when competing in international football tournaments.

In discussing the main focus of this topic, which is the comparison of the trend of professionalism between the Malaysian League and the major leagues in England and Japan, there are several reasons why these two countries were chosen.

4.3 MAJOR FOOTBALL LEAGUES IN ENGLAND AND JAPAN AS A BASIS FOR COMPARISON

Since professionalism has existed in football until today, dozens of leagues deserve to be used as case studies to see the evidence of success forged since its establishment. In Europe, it is easy to find a reference, since most are highly developed leagues. England, Spain, Italy, Germany, France, and Portugal, appear as countries that can be used for this case study. Other continents are also included, with several Asian countries providing similar dimensions similar to those in Europe. The emergence of several professional-level leagues with a strong influence, such as the J-League, K-League, Saudi League, etc., illustrate that the level of football in Asia also has the same strength as in Europe. However, it is less commercial than there.

The two countries chosen as case studies for comparison from the point of view of the professionalism of the league with the Malaysian League are England and Japan. Both countries have relatively popular and well-established football leagues. England is well known for their Premier League, the most competitive league in the world. At the same time, Japan has always been the best example of the foundation of a professional league. The football backgrounds of the two countries are different as the league in England appeared much earlier and had more significant influence. However,

⁶ Paul Fletcher. "One letter, two meetings and 12 teams – the birth of league football." BBC Sport Website. 26 February 2013. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/21492352> on 15 June 2023.

the presence of Japan in discussing the league's professionalism is also interesting, considering they are a country where football is not the most popular sport.

Several reasons make the league in England and Japan suitable for a case study involving the Malaysian League. First is the relationship between these countries and the Malaysian football experience. As we already know, football was brought by the British to Malaya (Malaysia) until the existence of the HMS Malaya Cup (Malaysia Cup), which became the basis for forming the first football league in Malaysia.⁷ Today, the Malaysian football league has developed from amateur to semi-pro and finally, to the professional era. Japan once came to examine how the structure and system of the Malaysian football league are managed as a reference to form the first professional league in their country.⁸ The country that used to come to learn something is now far ahead of Malaysia in many aspects, from the country's performance to the quality of the football league.

Then, the current ranking shown by the national team and the main football league of both countries is also an important factor in selecting them. According to the current tally, England is in the fifth-best position while Japan is in the twentieth.⁹ This shows a rather large gap, with Malaysia itself being ranked 138th.¹⁰ From the point of view of the league's quality, as shown in the TeamForm website, England, through the Premier League, appears to be the best league in the world.¹¹ In Japan, J-League 1¹² emerged as the third-best league in Asia, coming in below South Korea's K-League 1¹³ and Iran's Persian Gulf Pro League.¹⁴ The Malaysia Super League, Malaysia's top football league in the hierarchy, is ranked 40th on the list of Asian countries.¹⁵

⁷ John Duerden (2017), *Lions and Tigers: The Story of Football in Singapore and Malaysia*, Marshall Cavendish Editions, Singapore.

⁸ Lucius Maximus. (2014). *How Malaysia Never Reached the World Cup*. Petaling Jaya: Fixi Mono.

⁹ "FIFA Men's Ranking," FIFA Official Website, Retrieved from <https://www.fifa.com/fifa-world-ranking/men?dateId=id13974> on 15 June 2023.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ "TeamForm League Ranking," TeamForm Website, Retrieved from <https://www.teamform.com/en/league-ranking/world> on 15 June 2023.

¹² J-League 1 is the main league in the Japanese football league hierarchy, established in 1992 to replace the amateur league, the Japan Soccer League.

¹³ K-League 1 is the top league in the South Korean football league hierarchy, established in 1983 as a major step towards professionalizing the league.

¹⁴ "TeamForm League Ranking," TeamForm Website, Retrieved from <https://www.teamform.com/en/league-ranking/world> on 15 June 2023.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Next, what attracts attention to the selection of these two countries for comparison is their idea of football when the league's professionalism phase in Malaysia was happening in the 1990s. In 1992, the football league in England experienced its revolution with the formation of the Premier League. The idea was sparked by the current need and urge among clubs to generate finance until it developed into a league overflowing with money power.¹⁶ In the same era, Japan chose to rebrand its football league, which was previously still an amateur level, by adding elements of professionalism and reforming to the league and club structure.¹⁷ The changes happening in England and Japan align with what those in Malaysia. The only difference is that developments in Malaysia are not as fast and advanced as those two countries.

Besides, the community's culture and acceptance of football make these two countries ideal examples for comparison. In England, football has always been the favourite sport of the common people over other sports such as rugby, cricket, etc., starting from the formation of the Football League in 1888 until the establishment of the Premier League in 1992.¹⁸ In Japan, although the reception of football is seen to be high with the presence of many fans in the stadium, football was not originally the primary sport because several other sports were more influential until the existence of the J-League.¹⁹ From an international point of view, the supporters of England and Japan are also always the focus of the lens and the media, even though both have differences of opinion in the global view. England fans are known for their relatively high hooliganism culture every time an international tournament takes place.²⁰ In the case of Japanese fans, the media is more comfortable with their procedures in the stadium, full of politeness and practising Eastern customs.²¹ The things and culture these two fan bases show are unique but nothing new.

¹⁶ Colin Damms (2021). *Different Class: The Creation of the Premier League and the Commercialization of English*, Master's Theses, University of Southern Mississippi.

¹⁷ Hirose Ichiro. (2004). *The making of a professional football league: the design of J.League system. Football Goes East: Business, culture and the people's game in China, Japan and South Korea.* New York. Routledge.

¹⁸ David Goldblatt (2015), *The Game of Our Lives: The Meaning and Making of English Football*, Penguin Books, London.

¹⁹ John Horne (2002), *Japan at Play: The Ludic and The Logic of Power*, Routledge, London.

²⁰ Andy Lines (2022), "England fans will be policed by 3,000 riot cops at 2022 Qatar World Cup," Mirror Website, 7 January 2022, Retrieved from <https://www.mirror.co.uk/sport/football/england-fans-policed-3000-riot-25884605> on 15 June 2023.

²¹ Andrew Keh (2022), "Cheer, Chant, Clean: Japan Takes Out the Trash, and Others Get the Hint," The New York Times Website, 27 November 2022, Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/27/sports/soccer/japan-fans-clean-up-world-cup.html> on 15 June 2023.

In conclusion, the selection of England and Japan as countries in comparing professionalism trends was made based on several important aspects of football. Both leagues in this country are also more familiar among Malaysians, who, on average, have watched and followed the progress of their respective leagues on television. The strong influence in world football, whether in Europe or Asia, puts these two countries far ahead and worthiest of comparison, in addition to taking into account the football relationship between the countries, the current ranking of national teams and leagues, ideas during the professionalism phase in the 1990s, and football culture in their society.

Before entering the most important part, which compares the trend of professionalism in England and Japan, it is important to trace the journey and understand the trend of football professionalism in these countries.

4.3.1 Trend of Professionalism in England

Football has been a much-celebrated sport for decades in England. England is the birthplace of modern football, forming a structure followed by other football leagues worldwide. The history of modern football in England begins with the establishment of The Football Association of England (FA) on October 26, 1863, by some representatives from 11 football clubs and schools in England.²² They gathered at the Freemason Tavern in London to establish standardized rules for the game of football.²³ Before the establishment of the FA, football was played differently in each part of the country with no specific laws. During the meeting, representatives established a committee that established the Laws of the Game, which covers laws such as the prohibition of using hands, the use of rectangular fields, and the identification of referees.²⁴ The FA then became the governing body of football in England, responsible for organising the first official match between England and Scotland and organizing the FA Cup, the oldest football tournament in the world.

²² "The History of the FA." The FA Website. Retrieved from <https://www.thefa.com/about-football-association/what-we-do/history#:~:text=The%20History%20of%20The%20FA,-Shares&text=The%20Football%20Association%2C%20English%20football's,'father'%20of%20The%20Association> on 15 June 2023.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ "The Football Association", *Bell's Life in London*, 28 November 1863, p. 6

In 1880, there was a dispute between the FA and Bolton Wanderers over offering professional terms to Scottish players.²⁵ This trend continued in the 1880s, with clubs such as Blackburn Rovers and Darwen doing similar things.²⁶ Leading clubs based in Lancashire paid for spectators from the 1870s onwards, enabling them to employ good players from the working class. The issue of professionalism began to become a crisis in England in 1884 when the FA suspended two clubs for using professional players.²⁷ The FA adheres to amateur rules to protect the influence held by the upper class and upper middle class in the game. In the current situation where the FA is not happy with the payment to the players, the following year, they have no other choice but to allow the use of professional players after the establishment of the British Football Association.²⁸ This new body wants to get out of the influence of the FA.

In 1888, the Football League was established and emerged as the first football league in the world. This is the result of the efforts of William McGregor, who wrote to several clubs proposing the establishment of a league competition that could provide several home and away matches for the clubs each season.²⁹ At the initial stage, 12 professional clubs participated in the league's first season. In the following four years, the second division was formed, and at the same time, the number of teams in the first division also increased.³⁰ At this time, the league began introducing a promotion and relegation system. A third division was added in 1920.³¹ Year after year, the increase of teams required another division to be introduced in 1958, making four divisions in total.³²

1992 was an important year in the institution of English football. The establishment of the Premier League has officially made this league based in England the most successful and dominant league in Europe and the world. The Premier League

²⁵ Robert W. Lewis, "The genesis of professional football: Bolton-Blackburn-Darwen, the centre of innovation, 1878–85", *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 14, 1, 1997, pp. 26–7, 54.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ "Professionalism." *Encyclopaedia Britannica Website*. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/sports/football-soccer/Professionalism> on 15 June 2023.

²⁸ Robert W. Lewis, "The genesis of professional football: Bolton-Blackburn-Darwen, the centre of innovation, 1878–85", *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 14, 1, 1997, pp. 26–7, 54.

²⁹ Paul Fletcher. "One letter, two meetings and 12 teams – the birth of league football." *BBC Sport Website*. 26 February 2013. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/21492352> on 15 June 2023.

³⁰ "The EFL: Who we are." *EFL Official Website*. Retrieved from <https://www.efl.com/-more/all-about-the-efl/history/> on 15 June 2023.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

became the focus of many and received a very high response. The existence of the Premier League in replacing the First Division as the mainstay of English football took time. It seems predicated on several chronic occurrences in their football histories, in addition to the current demands placed on financial production by their teams.³³ Before going through the revolutionary process in 1992, the image of the English football league sank to its lowest level in the 1980s. Hooligans are at their peak, the best players are not interested in England, and the worst is the violence and accidents involving the dignity of their football league.³⁴

Three reasons led to the establishment of the Premier League. The first is the 1985 Heysel Tragedy, the riots at Heysel Stadium in 1985. The commotion caused by the Liverpool supporters caused the collapse of part of the terrace, resulting in the death of the supporters.³⁵ Second, is the issue of hooliganism that flared up in the 1980s. The British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, formed a committee to stop the hooligan culture. Riots in London involving Luton Town and Millwall supporters have reinforced the government's decision to suppress this social phenomenon.³⁶ The third is the Hillsborough Tragedy³⁷ which occurred during the 1989 FA Cup semi-final between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest. Hillsborough Stadium witnessed the death of supporters who overcrowded the sector beyond the proper limit, showing the authorities' failure to handle the problem at the stadium.³⁸ Some essential decisions involving football clubs took place at that time. The parliament voted to approve the regulation involving supporters, 'The Sporting Events Act 1985', which restricts the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages in stadiums.³⁹ In addition, the violence of hooliganism that plagued English football caused UEFA to ban English teams from

³³ Colin Damms (2021). "Different Class: The Creation of the Premier League and the Commercialization of English," Master's Theses, University of Southern Mississippi.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ "Heysel Stadium disaster", Encycloepadia Britannica Website, 22 May 2023, Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/event/Heysel-Stadium-Disaster> on 15 June 2023.

³⁶ Colin Damms (2021). "Different Class: The Creation of the Premier League and the Commercialization of English," Master's Theses, University of Southern Mississippi.

³⁷ The Hillsborough tragedy was a major disaster in English football. A collapse occurred on the Hillsborough Stadium terrace due to overcrowding during the 1989 FA Cup semi-final between Nottingham Forest and Liverpool. Ninety-seven deaths and 766 injuries were recorded, making it one of the worst incidents in British sporting history.

³⁸ Colin Damms (2021). "Different Class: The Creation of the Premier League and the Commercialization of English," Master's Theses, University of Southern Mississippi.

³⁹ Ibid.

playing in European competitions for five years.⁴⁰ Following the Hillsborough Tragedy, the 'Football Spectators Act 1989' bill related to security and restrictions was passed in parliament.⁴¹

The new rules and laws passed were welcomed by clubs such as Manchester United and Arsenal. Both clubs want their clubs to become business and corporate entities. To further enhance the club's brand, they must create a safe space and a more peaceful stadium to attract many spectators.⁴² Stadiums with full seating capacity are expensive; most lower-level clubs need help covering the costs. Small teams are campaigning to make room for teams to renovate stadiums with existing budgets first. The British government then agreed to offer subsidies to competing clubs.

Factors leading to increased financial usage for clubs have led to major clubs in Division One to challenge the decisions of the FA and the Football League. The club began expanding its influence in the league and taking the initiative to increase income. This was the biggest motivation to get out of the Football League, having dared to threaten to leave the influential body since 1888. As a result, they began to gain influence and successfully manage their finances, starting from ticket sales to managing broadcasting rights on television. In 1990, several clubs such as Manchester United, Liverpool, Arsenal, Everton, and Spurs, had an idea to get out of the Football League seriously.⁴³ Greg Dyke, the managing director of London Weekend Television (LWT), talked to representatives of the five clubs and insisted that it would be more profitable for the clubs if only the big clubs appeared on national television channels.⁴⁴ The five clubs agreed, and the FA also accepted the proposal. The FA then issued a 'Blueprint for the Future of Football' in June 1991 as a form of support for establishing the Premier League.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ "English football clubs banned from Europe", History.com Website, Retrieved from <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/english-football-clubs-banned-from-europe> on 15 June 2023.

⁴¹ Colin Damms (2021). "Different Class: The Creation of the Premier League and the Commercialization of English," Master's Theses, University of Southern Mississippi.

⁴² "The Taylor Report", Football Network, 16 October 2006, Retrieved from http://www.footballnetwork.org/dev/communityfootball/violence_taylor_report.asp on 15 June 2023.

⁴³ Matthew Taylor, (2013), *The Association Game: A History of British Football*. Routledge. Oxfordshire.

⁴⁴ Joshua Robinson, Jonathan Clegg, (2018), *The Club: How the English Premier League Became the Wildest, Richest, Most Disruptive Force in Sports*, New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing.

⁴⁵ Anthony King, (2002), *End of the Terraces: The Transformation of English Football*, Leicester University Press, Leicester.

A proposal regarding establishing a new league was presented at the end of the 1990-1991 season, insisting that this new league would be the backbone of the English football league and bring in more money. An agreement between the top league teams, 'The Founders Members Agreement,' has been signed to establish the basic principles of forming the FA Premier League.⁴⁶ From now on, the league body will not be subject to the FA and the Football League, giving the FA Premier League the authority and license to deal with broadcast and sponsorship agreements. Although ITV (part of LWT) was initially involved in influencing the initial establishment of the league, in the end, Sky Sports won the bid to broadcast the FA Premier League for five years in a contract worth GBP 304 million.⁴⁷

The 1992-1993 season was historic in the English football league, with the Premier League's establishment replacing the First Division as the main league in England. This means the power of the Football League for 104 years has been split. In the early seasons of the Premier League, the league was still played with 22 teams, using the old Football League system and format until the number of teams was reduced to 20 in the 1995-1996 season.⁴⁸ In total, 92 teams make up the top 4 divisions of English football. The Premier League is a major league consisting of 20 clubs. Others play in lower leagues run by different bodies, namely the English Football League, such as The Championship (tier 2), League One (tier 3), and League Two (tier 4). All the clubs that make up the top 4 divisions are professional.

4.3.2 Trend of Professionalism in Japan

The first recorded football match in Japan was played in 1873, organized at the Naval Academy in Tokyo Bay by Lieutenant Commander Archibald Douglas, one of the members of the British Navy.⁴⁹ Trade relations between Japan and Britain exposed the country of the Rising Sun to football. In the 20th century, football was included in the

⁴⁶ "Origins", Premier League Website, Retrieved from <https://www.premierleague.com/history/origins> on 15 June 2023.

⁴⁷ Jason Rodrigues, "Premier League football at 20: 1992, the start of a whole new ball game", The Guardian Website, 2 February 2012, Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/football/from-the-archive-blog/2012/feb/02/20-years-premier-league-football-1992> on 15 June 2023.

⁴⁸ Joe Lovejoy, (2011), "3. The Big Kick-Off". *Glory, Goals and Greed: Twenty Years of the Premier League*. Random House. New York.

⁴⁹ Dale Whitfield, (2021), Education and football: a history of the cultural accommodation of British association football into Japanese society, *Sport in History*, DOI: 10.1080/17460263.2021.1919188

training curriculum for teaching schools.⁵⁰ The inter-school football tournament, popular today in Japan, was first introduced in 1918.⁵¹ The Japanese Football Association (JFA) was established three years later to manage the first national football tournament.⁵² JFA's participation as one of FIFA's members was confirmed in 1929.⁵³ From then on, football began to grow rapidly in Japan yearly, and the development of this sport there began to attract the attention of soccer observers worldwide. It must be acknowledged that before the agenda of professionalizing the soccer league in Japan, the market for this sport in the Japanese society was still low. The changes in the 1990s transformed the local community's view of football and began to go along with other sports such as baseball, sumo, and racing.

The football league in Japan can be considered earlier than some other Asian countries, but it is not yet in professional status. The Japan Football League (JFL), a national-level league championship, was launched in 1965.⁵⁴ However, the players are amateurs, most of whom work in the morning and train in the evening. Foreign players were first brought in in 1967, with the condition that they had to be company employees sponsoring the team.⁵⁵ The principle of professionalism was still not used in JFL until 1985.⁵⁶ Japan first participated in the World Cup qualification in 1954 at the international level. Most recognition for the country's football before the era of professionalism focused on success at the Olympic Games. They had qualified until the quarter-finals in football in 1964 during the Olympics in Tokyo and then for the semi-finals four years later during the campaign in Mexico.⁵⁷ In the meantime, success at the Olympics means nothing if there is no change in football at a higher level. The continued failure of the national team to the World Cup led to a push to create a professional atmosphere in the football league.

Football began to be an option for children and young adults. Football gained attention in high school alongside baseball in the late 1980s and early 1990s. A survey

⁵⁰ Dobson S, Goddard J. *The Economics of Football*, Cambridge University Press, New York.

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Michel Desbordes (2007), *Marketing and Football: An international perspective*, Elsevier Ltd, Oxford.

⁵⁵ Dobson S, Goddard J. *The Economics of Football*, Cambridge University Press, New York.

⁵⁶ Nogawa Haruo and Maeda Hiroko (1999) "The Japanese Dream: Soccer Culture Towards the New Millennium." *Football Cultures and Identities*, Macmillan, London, 223-233.

⁵⁷ Dolles H, Soderman S. (2013). Twenty years of development of the J-League: analysing the business parameters of professional football in Japan. *Soccer & Society*, 2013 Vol. 14, No. 5, 702-721, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2013.792503>.

conducted in December 1992 found that 31.4 percent of respondents wanted to watch J-League matches at the stadium, while 33.5 percent chose to watch baseball.⁵⁸ Most of them were influenced and encouraged through corporate-sponsored international tournaments such as the World Football Club Championship from 1980, the FIFA World Youth Championship, and the 1992 Asian Cup.⁵⁹

The pressure to change the Japanese soccer scene comes from domestic and international results. There is a push to increase the popularity of football in conjunction with the 20th anniversary of the football league being established in 1985. The return of Okudera Yasuhiko, a Japanese player with professional status from the Bundesliga to the JFL, was a question mark because the JFL at that time had yet to recognize professional players. Okudera was initially given the status of 'special licensed players,' but the license was revoked in the 1987-1988 season.⁶⁰ Japan emerged as the champion of the Asian Cup in 1992, which should be the best motivation for fans to come to the stadium to watch football matches between clubs. However, semi-pro and amateur teams such as Mitsubishi Motor, Furukawa Electric, and Toyota Jidashu were only lucky enough to attract around 2000 supporters.⁶¹ Internationally, Japan needs help with its competitive level. There are high expectations for the national team to qualify for the final round of the World Cup, but they are stranded in the qualifying round.⁶² Among the reasons for their failure to qualify for the World Cup is the current level of their players, who could be more professional. Since then, there has been a strong sentiment to do something drastic in their football league.

A committee was formed in 1988 to analyse and evaluate the situation. There are three issues of concern:

1. Gap and the double standard between import players and Japanese amateur players from the perspective of salary, social standing, and security of livelihood,
2. Lack of spectators in the stadium,

⁵⁸ John Horne (2002), *Japan at Play: The Ludic and The Logic of Power*, Routledge, London.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Hirose Ichiro (2004), "The Making of a Professional Football League," *Football Goes East: Business, culture and the people's game in China, Japan, and South Korea*, Routledge, New York, 38-53.

⁶¹ John Horne (2002), *Japan at Play: The Ludic and The Logic of Power*, Routledge, London.

⁶² Hirose Ichiro (2004), "The Making of a Professional Football League," *Football Goes East: Business, culture and the people's game in China, Japan, and South Korea*, Routledge, New York, 38-53.

3. The decline in quality in Japanese football is due to many matches ending in draws.⁶³

The results of the discussion indicated the need to introduce professionalism in the league as soon as possible as a solution to the problems that plagued their football at that time.

Some mandatory conditions have been used in restructuring the football league in Japan according to professional procedures. Among the criteria mentioned is:

1. Each team would be independent from its parent company.
2. A “hometown system” would create ties with place and community rather than company.
3. Each team must have a stadium with a minimum capacity of 15,000 seats.
4. Each team would organize under-18, under-15, and other youth teams and opportunities.
5. Each team would have qualified coaches.
6. Each team would share the costs of establishing the league, advertising, and administrative costs.
7. The J-League would retain matches, sponsorship, television, and merchandising rights.⁶⁴

The purpose is to ensure that the club's management is more professional and that the club does not get involved in other matters.

One of the important things that need to be underlined in the rebranding of the football league in Japan is the construction of the team's identity based on the neighbourhood or local than before a single company entity influenced it. This idea was worked on by borrowing names from Europe and North America while changing the team's name to be more local and have a sense of belonging.⁶⁵ For example, Furukawa Electric changed to JEF United Ichihara, Mitsubishi Motors became Urawa Red

⁶³ Dolles H, Soderman S. (2005). “Implementing a Professional Football League in Japan - Challenges to Research in International Business.” German Institute for Japanese Studies, December.

⁶⁴ Nogawa Haruo and Maeda Hiroko (1999) “The Japanese Dream: Soccer Culture Towards the New Millennium.”Football Cultures and Identities, Macmillan, London, 223-233.

⁶⁵ Dobson S, Goddard J. The Economics of Football, Cambridge University Press, New York.

Diamonds, Sumitomo Metals became Kashima Antlers, and Yomiura FC became Verdy Kawasaki.⁶⁶

Football is growing commercially, gaining the attention of major corporations to begin participating in the new branding of soccer leagues. For example, Hakuhodo, the second largest advertising company in Japan, was given responsibility for marketing and publicity.⁶⁷ Sony Creative Product also participates in aspects of product design, including the design for each team's jersey and souvenir items.⁶⁸ In the initial period of the league's professionalism, the J-League was sponsored by the beverage manufacturer Suntory and the consumer credit firm Nippon Shinpan (Nicos).⁶⁹

When we look at the structure of the Japanese Football League (J-League), it started with only ten clubs in a single league in 1991, and then the number of teams increased to 18 by 1998.⁷⁰ A second division in 1999 also indirectly added to the current number of teams. Within a year alone, there are already 26 professional teams in Japan, with 16 teams in J-League 1 and another 10 in J-League 2. In most seasons between 1993 and 2004, the tournament format in the top tier of J-League was divided into two stages, with a play-off between the first and second-stage winners held at the end of the season to determine the overall champions.⁷¹ The format has changed since 2005, where it uses a round-robin basis along European lines, with the championship winner determined through league points and no play-off.⁷² Until now, the promotion and relegation system in the J-League has seen the bottom three teams from J-League 1 be relegated, while the top three teams from J-League 2 will be promoted at the end of the season.

The introduction of professionalism in the Japanese football league in the 1990s was more organized, strategic, and organic. According to Birchall, the construction of the J-League is the greatest mass-marketing event in Japan and probably in the world,

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Dolles H, Soderman S. (2013). Twenty years of development of the J-League: analysing the business parameters of professional football in Japan. *Soccer & Society*, 2013 Vol. 14, No. 5, 702–721, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2013.792503>.

⁶⁹ Dobson S, Goddard J. *The Economics of Football*, Cambridge University Press, New York.

⁷⁰ Dobson S, Goddard J. *The Economics of Football*, Cambridge University Press, New York.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

that has ever been seen.⁷³ All the aspects brought have been arranged and implemented in an orderly manner according to the plan.

4.4 COMPARISON TREND ON PROFESSIONALISM BETWEEN MALAYSIAN LEAGUE AND TOP LEAGUE IN ENGLAND AND JAPAN

The 1990s was the peak era for the football league for all three countries, whether in England, Japan, or Malaysia. At that time, huge change to the football league significantly impacted its development until today. Although England had reached the era of professionalism in the league earlier than Japan and Malaysia in 1878, establishing the Premier League in 1992 expanded its influence globally as a major football league power. Japan's first professional football league was established in 1993, greatly improving football for the country and local clubs. The Malaysian football scene is also no exception in following the steps and trends that took place in England and Japan when the professional status league began to take over the place of the Semi-Pro League in 1994, which had lasted for five years before that. Seven key factors will be compared, including the pressure before establishment, issues and controversies, league structure, team and club models, contract players, sponsorships, and outside attractions.

The process of development and change in the football league in the three countries will not happen if there is no pressure. Either league in England, Japan, and Malaysia, there is no exception in this regard. In England, competing clubs have had to renovate their stadiums according to specific standards since the Hillsborough Tragedy that occurred in 1989.⁷⁴ This matter involves a large amount of spending and motivating the clubs to maximize revenue across the league. Big clubs such as Manchester United, Arsenal, Liverpool, Tottenham Hotspur, and Everton are pushing for clubs to have more power in making decisions that previously had much interference from the FA and the Football League, especially financially.⁷⁵ Unlike Japan, their football league needs an immediate change to professionalism following the worrying development of football

⁷³ Jonathan Birchall (2001), *Ultra Nippon: How Japan Reinvented Football*, Headline Book Publishing, London.

⁷⁴ Colin Damms (2021). "Different Class: The Creation of the Premier League and the Commercialization of English," Master's Theses, University of Southern Mississippi.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

at the domestic level, which has affected performances at the international level.⁷⁶ Before the establishment of the professional league in Japan, their national team only qualified for the Olympics. The Japanese national team experienced repeated failure to qualify for the World Cup, often stranded in the qualifying round. It triggered Japan to immediately change its football league in the early 1990s. The atmosphere in Malaysia is more about their current need to improve the quality of local football, starting with planning the Semi-Pro League as an initial preparation for five years until entering the professional era in 1994.⁷⁷ Players before the professional era were labelled as having no quality and only amateur status. Coincidentally, the professionalism trend occurred in football leagues around Asia in the early 1990s.⁷⁸ This is a great motivation and catalyst for FAM to make essential changes so that the Malaysian football scene stays caught up.

Heading towards transformation in the league, the three countries that are the focus of the study also face issues and controversies before the start of something new. The establishment of the Premier League as the main league in England to replace the First Division led to a scramble for deals among television giants for broadcasting rights. Two television companies, ITV and BSkyB, became the media's focus with drama in bidding for full licensed rights to host Premier League action.⁷⁹ Each one believes in the value that can increase in the long term, proven later by the FA's profits since then rising between 1990-2011, with estimates from 3-4 million to 300 million. Controversy ensued when ITV claimed the Premier League, and the negotiator tried to sabotage their bid following the value of ITV's bid was known to BSkyB.⁸⁰ Ultimately, BSkyB won the bid while reaping multiple profits from season to season. The issue in Japan is that, despite efforts to form a professional league, the community needs to see that football is a popular sport like baseball.⁸¹ The main task is to consider attracting the community's interest to support the football club. Appropriate and accurate policies also

⁷⁶ Dobson S, Goddard J. *The Economics of Football*, Cambridge University Press, New York.

⁷⁷ Khalid Mohd. Saad, "Mengimport budaya baru," *Dunia Sukan*, April 1989, 53.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Joshua Robinson, Jonathan Clegg, (2018), *The Club: How the English Premier League Became the Wildest, Richest, Most Disruptive Force in Sports*, New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing.

⁸⁰ Colin Damms (2021). "Different Class: The Creation of the Premier League and the Commercialization of English," Master's Theses, University of Southern Mississippi.

⁸¹ John Horne (2007), "The J.League, Japanese Society and Association Football," *This Sporting Life: Sports and Body Culture in Modern Japan*, Yale Ceas Occasional Publications Volume 1, Council on East Asian Studies Yale University, Connecticut.

need to be provided to solve this problem. Among the essential things implemented is removing the franchise entity from football that is, a company, and including the value of the sense of belonging by creating a community-based club.⁸² In addition, youth policy linked to local schools arranged to form togetherness from a young age.⁸³ In Malaysia, the introduction of the professional league in 1994 exposed everyone involved in important matters such as professional contracts. That was not the usual norm then, and at the same time, it created problems when many needed help understanding the true meaning of the contract. Some teams only honour a player's current contract by bidding for a player by following the proper channels.⁸⁴ Some players need help in understanding what is written in the contract because they do not read and examine the contents of the signed contract.⁸⁵ This issue was overcome with the guidelines FAM emphasised regarding the entry and exit of players and the emphasis on players understanding on the signed contract.

Looking at the development of professionalism that took place in the football league for these three countries during the early 1990s, the most obvious thing is that there has been a change in the structure of the football league. The existence of the Premier League as the main league in England has directly changed the current structure of their football league. Before the 1992-1993 season, the top league in England's football hierarchy was Division One. The Premier League then took over as the mainstay of the football league there, followed by the Championship (tier 2), League One (tier 3), and League Two (tier 4).⁸⁶ The structure used in England from 1992 to 1993 still stands today. In Japan, the transition from the JFL era to the J-League also had a similar impact on the current structure of their football league. In the last season of the JFL in 1992, the league still used a two-division system. The introduction of the J-League started in 1993; only one professional league division was created until another was added in 1999.⁸⁷ The same situation happened in the Malaysian football scene in that era. From 1989 to 1993, the Semi-Pro League had two football league divisions for five years. The reduction to one football division in the current structure

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ "Lamar pemain ikut saluran," *Arena Bola Sepak*, February 1994, 13.

⁸⁵ Reduan Abdullah, "Pemain perlu faham isi kontrak," *Arena Bola Sepak*, February 1994, 30-31.

⁸⁶ Joshua Robinson, Jonathan Clegg, (2018), *The Club: How the English Premier League Became the Wildest,*

Richest, Most Disruptive Force in Sports, New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing.

⁸⁷ Dobson S, Goddard J. *The Economics of Football*, Cambridge University Press, New York.

occurred when the first professional league, the Malaysian Premier League, was established in 1994.⁸⁸ It lasted for four years before FAM introduced another new division in 1998.

The revolution in the league also offered new things for the development of model teams and clubs. Leagues in Japan and Malaysia go through this phase of development. However, in England, the concept of club competition has remained the same. They still preserve their old tradition, where competing community-based clubs were maintained when the Premier League was formed as a major league in 1992. Significant changes are happening in Japan, with the club model starting to change with the introduction of the J-League. For decades before that, the traditional concept of clubs in Japan was dominated by corporate ideas and amateurism. For example, Furukawa Electric, Hitachi SC, Mitsubishi Motors, etc., are all teams formed based on companies. At that time, Saburo Kawabuchi, J-League Chairperson, toured around Europe with his team and stayed in a sports complex in Duisburg.⁸⁹ Kawabuchi was influenced by the idea of a sports club in the community, leading to the emergence of names such as Urawa Red Diamonds, Cerezo Osaka, Sanfrecce Hiroshima, and others. The trend that happened in Japan also took place in Malaysia. Due to the first professional league replacing the role of the Semi-Pro League in 1994, the model of the team in Malaysia was still the same, maintaining a state-status team under the supervision of the FA states. The addition of divisions in 1998 led to new developments and changes when several clubs began to compete with state-status teams such as NS Chempaka, Johor FC, PDRM, and others.⁹⁰

The winds of change that hit the football league also gave progress to aspects of the social life of the players, especially for matters involving contracts and payments. There has been an increase in quality and player contracts and payments in all three countries. England does not have the issue of professional contracts because they have reached the professional level earlier. Before the Premier League was established, players were paid professionally. What happened was a significant increase in wages among the players. The dumping of sponsorship money and broadcasting rights largely contributes to this. In 1992, John Barnes hit the headlines after becoming the first British

⁸⁸ "Mengapa Format Tandingan Diubah," *Berita Harian*, 5 April 1994, 9.

⁸⁹ Michel Desbordes (2007), *Marketing and Football: An international perspective*, Elsevier Ltd, Oxford.

⁹⁰ "Melihat gemilang masa depan," *Arena Bola Sepak*, Januari 1998, 16.

player to be paid a five-figure weekly salary.⁹¹ In Japan, the soccer league before 1993 was more of a sport between companies than a general sport like most other countries. Players at this time are also considered semi-pro, where they have a relationship with the company, representing the company's team in football matches.⁹² Player contracts changed after the professional era, aligning with their original mission to reduce the social gap between foreign and local players in income issues. After 1993, players were paid as full-time football players. Like Japan, player contracts in Malaysia before 1994 are also counted in the semi-pro class. Players have jobs outside of football, such as in government sectors and private agencies. For example, former Malaysian national player Zainal Abidin Hassan is an employee at Public Bank and represents a team in the Malaysian football league.⁹³ The player's position and status as a football player changed to full-time after entering the professional era starting in 1994.

The league's evolution towards a more advanced one opened the eyes of big and prominent companies to be more daring in sponsoring the football league. This openness has led to football becoming an essential industry in the country. The transition in England with the establishment of the Premier League gave confidence to Carling, a liquor company, to become the first championship sponsor for eight years, followed by Barclays.⁹⁴ The sponsorship increased each term, with an initial contract worth GBP 12 million for four years starting in 1993, the following four years rising to GBP 9 million, making the current total of GBP 21 million per season.⁹⁵ The J-League has also received very valuable remuneration in terms of sponsorship since 1993. Since the establishment of the J-League, they have received many sponsorships involving equipment, beverage, and telecommunications sponsors. The initial sponsorship of the J-League during the three years of its establishment was concluded with an agreement with drinks manufacturer company Suntory and consumer credit firm Nippon Shinpon (Nicos) for 400 million Yen.⁹⁶ The league in Malaysia also shows a similar tendency to

⁹¹ Matt Slater, Oliver Kay. "How did the Premier League change English football," The Athletic Website, Retrieved from <https://theathletic.com/1765966/2020/04/23/how-did-the-premier-league-really-change-english-football/> on 15 June 2023.

⁹² Dobson S, Goddard J. *The Economics of Football*, Cambridge University Press, New York.

⁹³ "Majikan sedar keresahan, bank beri sokongan padu," *Arena Bola Sepak*, March 1994, 23.

⁹⁴ Matt Slater, Oliver Kay. "How did the Premier League change English football," The Athletic Website, Retrieved from <https://theathletic.com/1765966/2020/04/23/how-did-the-premier-league-really-change-english-football/> on 15 June 2023.

⁹⁵ Matt Slater, Oliver Kay. "How did the Premier League change English football," The Athletic Website, Retrieved from <https://theathletic.com/1765966/2020/04/23/how-did-the-premier-league-really-change-english-football/> on 15 June 2023.

⁹⁶ Dobson S, Goddard J. *The Economics of Football*, Cambridge University Press, New York.

openness and the inclusion of sponsorship from giant companies. During the semi-pro era, Dunhill stepped forward to become the main sponsor for the football league in Malaysia. The Malaysian League once signed a joint sponsorship with Dunhill for a value of RM 35 million per year before being replaced by Telekom Malaysia in 2004, which later became an influential sponsor for the 2000s.⁹⁷ Entering 2011, Astro became the tournament's main sponsor with a 4-year contract that led to a value of 30 million for a season.⁹⁸

As soon as the gates of the football league changed, many eyes began to take the shift seriously. It can be seen in all three leagues that become the comparative model in the study. The Premier League is the best example in the world football league with their success attracting many star profiles to come and show talent in their league. It is primarily driven by the money power they have as soon as they successfully establish a new league. It started with the arrival of the biggest stars coming toward the end of their career, then big stars in their prime years, such as Ruud Gullitt, Dennis Bergkamp, Gianfranco Zola, Laurent Blanc, etc.⁹⁹ In Japan, football rebranding in the football league also interests high-profile foreign managers and players to come and offer something. Several foreign coaches like Arsene Wenger and Osvaldo Ardiles were employed in the early years.¹⁰⁰ Foreign players with high status were recruited, such as Gary Lineker, Pierre Litbarski, Zico, and Dunga.¹⁰¹ During that period, the Malaysian League did not lag in following a similar trend with the emergence of the Malaysian Premier League as a meeting ground for good imported players from around the world. Most of the star players from countries around Southeast Asia, such as Singapore, Indonesia, and Thailand, came with their respective qualities to strengthen the team. There are also big names who have represented their country in the World Cup who come to play, like Emile Mbouh-Mbouh.¹⁰² This rising influence also attracted former

⁹⁷ Lukman Salleh, Harris Rajahdin, "Telekom penaja baru liga Malaysia," *Berita Harian*, 27 January 2005, 17.

⁹⁸ Lucius Maximus, "Astro Tabur Duit: Kebaikannya Untuk Bolasepak Malaysia," Sokernet Website, 3 Januari 2011, Retrieved from <http://sokernet.blogspot.com/2011/01/astro-tabur-duit-kebaikannya-untuk.html> on 15 June 2023.

⁹⁹ Matt Slater, Oliver Kay. "How did the Premier League change English football," The Athletic Website, Retrieved from <https://theathletic.com/1765966/2020/04/23/how-did-the-premier-league-really-change-english-football/> on 15 June 2023.

¹⁰⁰ Dobson S, Goddard J. *The Economics of Football*, Cambridge University Press, New York.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² "Pemain Import Di Liga Perdana 1995 Hebat dan Bermutu," *Arena Bola Sepak Keluaran Khas*, 1995, 110-111.

Premier League stars, like David Rocastle, Chris Kiwomya, David Mitchell, and Tony Cottee.¹⁰³

The league reform in these three countries in the 1990s has shown a positive trend in developing the football league in their respective countries. Certain pressure factors have caused a major revolution in the respective leagues. In opening the door to a new era, the leagues in England, Japan, and Malaysia faced certain issues and controversies. Changes to the structure of the football league make the league more competitive. Teams and clubs are also seen to be more daring in following the current and accurate model of professional football. In addition, the status and life of players are increasing with the existence of more inclusive and secure contracts. At the same time, big industries show their interest in getting involved in football through mega sponsorship. What must be included is the influence of new breath in the league of these three countries with their attraction to start inviting world-class coaches and players to come and serve with local teams in their respective leagues.

4.5 CONCLUSION

In summary, the development of the football league in the three countries, Malaysia, England, and Japan, has shown excellent results and changes as soon as the revolution started in the 1990s. Although the gap between the Premier League and J-League 1 as the main league is wide compared to the Malaysian Super League in terms of influence, the trend shown in Malaysia can still be considered positive, especially during the early stages of the change toward professionalism. The state of the leagues in England, Japan, and Malaysia before making changes does not indicate a fertile future in the professional football industry. A similar trend is shown only from year to year; the momentum from the football league in England and Japan is far behind the Malaysian football league. The football leagues in England and Japan are the best examples to be used as a reference in improving the quality of football leagues in Malaysia and worldwide. What the Malaysian league needs is consistency and positivity from year to year. The original goals and vision must also be applied perfectly in the league.

¹⁰³ Reduan Abdullah, "Terkilan gelagat Tony Cottee," *Arena Bola Sepak*, September 1997, 50-51.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This thesis has provided a new and fresher narrative in discussing the history and development of the Malaysian football league from the semi-pro to the professional era, specifically from 1989 to 2011. Based on what has been seen, the Malaysian football league is still catching up with the current trend in the 1990s. There is a paradigm shift in the football scene in other Asian countries, and FAM's courage in facing the current challenges allows the Malaysian football league not to be far behind. The Malaysian League has undoubtedly had its ups and downs over the years, but it is still able to exist today. This demonstrates that the previously developed, methodically planned policy greatly impacted the growth of the football league.

Professionalism is a huge word in the world of football. Professional values take Malaysian football in a more advanced and competitive direction. Football is not new and strange in the Malaysian society and community. Football has been carried since the British colonial times and is now one of the best sports for the community. European countries have long-established professional leagues in their countries. In Asia, including Malaysia, the process was long and time-consuming until the 1990s, even though there is evidence that football was played decades before. The league in Malaysia went through the Semi-Pro League process for five years before creating a professional league in 1994. During that period, FAM also drew up important initiatives and paperwork to ensure the professional football league succeeded perfectly. The professionalism FAM emphasises involves not only player contracts but also touches on the governance policies of the league and competing teams. Throughout the study period from 1989 to 2011, the Malaysian football league experienced changes in system and league format as many as five times. Some critical aspects changed the country's football landscape, such as the corruption scandal in 1994, the participation of teams from foreign countries such as Singapore and Brunei, and the involvement of imported players in the competing teams.

Since the beginning of the semi-pro era in 1989, the Malaysian football league developments began to show significant changes in all aspects. Before the Malaysian

football scene enters a new phase, which is an essential point in development, it needs some crucial processes first. Rumours of starting a change were already heard in 1986, but the first step to organize began in 1988, with the organization of several seminars, papers, and visits to Europe. By 1994, FAM continued to take bold steps by making thorough preparations to form the first professional league to replace the role of the Semi-Pro League. It involves significant matters in developing a professional league body, such as an increase in the level of competition for each team, changes to the type of player contracts, the development and grassroots projects of the team, and the inclusion of significant sponsorships to the league. This critical and big change shows how serious FAM is in strengthening the core of national football. The evolution from the semi-pro to the professional era also impacted several entities such as the national team, clubs and competing teams, players, supporters, and even the media. Each receives different impacts, and each experiences specific changes in a period.

The comparison between the main league in Malaysia and two example countries, such as England and Japan, was done to see how far the development level and professionalism trend occurred in the early 1990s. These two countries were chosen for several reasons: having a specific relationship in football, having the best league level in the world, having gone through a similar revolution in the 1990s, having a unique football culture, and being very familiar with Malaysians in their football scene. The path to building a professional league in England, Japan, and Malaysia differs due to the different situations and atmospheres. When the trend of professionalism hit Asia even in the 1990s, the football league in England was more of a revolution in terms of commercial and marketing. Nevertheless, in comparing these three countries in some other aspects of professionalism, it clearly shows that there are certain similarities and differences, referring to seven significant aspects such as pressure before the establishment, issues and controversies before the start of the league competition, the structure of the league contested, team and club models, player contracts, sponsorships, and outdoor attractions. Although, at present, the Malaysian League is seen to be quite far behind if a comparison is to be made, the trend shown by the Malaysian League must be admitted to be a favourable rate at the beginning. However, it fails to show an equivalent improvement from year to year.

Ultimately, the principles of professionalism were successfully applied in the Malaysian football league in stages. The results of the efforts shown by FAM have

created significant changes in several important aspects of professionalism. Despite going through some dark series in football, there are also positive impacts and effects achieved by related parties. Although the Malaysian football league is seen to be far behind in many aspects of the major leagues in England and Japan, the success forged by FAM, especially in the early 1990s, should not be denied due to courage in facing risks and challenges.

5.1 FUTURE STUDY AND ACADEMIA

Any future study of Malaysian football will include more than just what has been written in this thesis. Although what has been mentioned in this thesis is seen as covering the entire matter related to the league, some aspects and things can be commented on in more depth and detail. The scope of Malaysian football is broader, with its development history dating back to the 19th century. For future reference, the narrative on Malaysian football history must be explained in detail in academic writing. Among the crucial ones are the development of football at a certain period, the involvement of every team that has ever competed, and specific issues in Malaysian football.

As has been written, this thesis discusses the development and professionalism of the Malaysian football league from 1989 to 2011. In the meantime, it cannot focus on only a specific development in a certain period. It also must be known that football was played earlier than the year the HMS Malaya Cup (Malaysia Cup) started, in 1921. According to Lim Peng Han, The Malay Football Association (MFA) was established in March 1909 with 36 affiliated clubs, 1100 registered players, and 4200 members. Serious work is needed to find and listen to a more detailed story about the development of football in the early 1900s. This is very important for us to explore in understanding the development of football from the early era when it was played.

Each competing team played a significant role in the development of football in Malaysia, starting from the establishment of the HMS Malaya Cup (Malaysia Cup) in 1921 until entering the professional era today. Almost every team that has existed since then still exists and actively competes in the Malaysian football league. That is not to mention the emergence of clubs not under the influence of the state association that began establishing a foothold in the Malaysian League in 1998. However, until now, only a few academic writings elaborate on the involvement of each team that has ever

competed. Although independent writers produce books, the concept must be more specific and require a more detailed and in-depth study.

Similarly, future studies must focus on specific issues in Malaysian football. In writing this thesis, several issues related to football development for the study period were raised, such as the 1994 corruption scandal, the role of imported players in the league, and others. It just should not stop here. For example, player welfare issues, such as their social and economic issues, should also be examined in a specific study. The problem of player salaries often repeats from the semi-pro to the professional era. This is one of the things that needs to be re-evaluated. Specific issues involving supporters, such as fan culture in each era, the stadium attendance problem, etc., can also be examined more deeply.

Future research findings must be disseminated within the academic community by publishing academic papers such as journal articles, conference papers, seminar papers, thesis papers, and other academic publications. This may unintentionally advance football research in a more cerebral manner. The parties concerned, particularly the ministries and specific organisations, must consider the promotion of Malaysian football as a by-product of regional history.

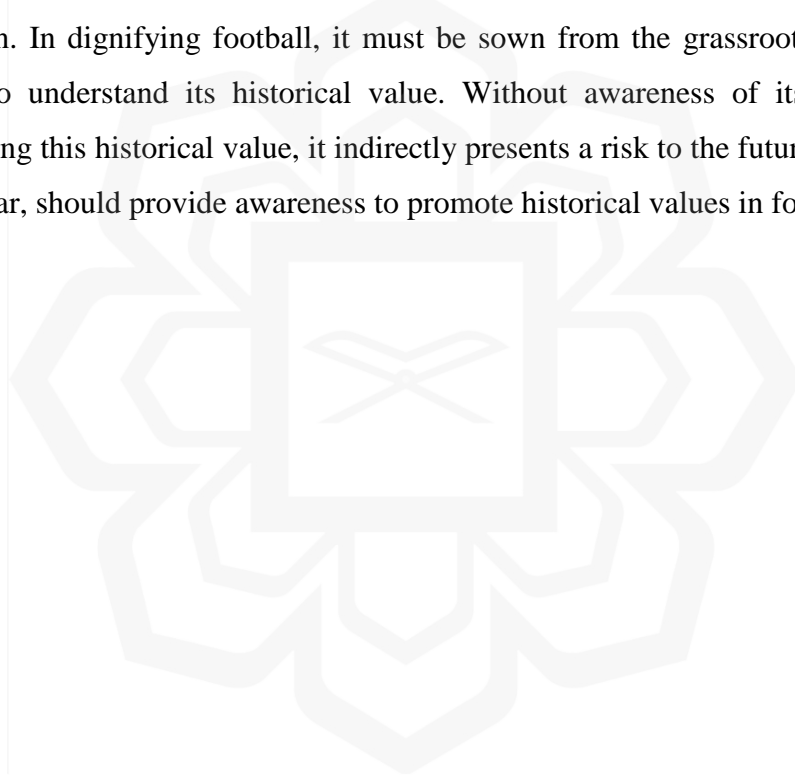
5.2 CONSERVATION, PRESERVATION, AND AWARENESS

In Malaysia, there are a lot of historical materials about Malaysian football that need to be studied. The issue is that public access to view some materials is quite tricky and limited. This is because the marginalized factor of football history contributes to the researcher's lack of interest in continuing to explore the material available for study. Important documents, reports, meeting minutes, physical materials, etc., must be better maintained and organized. Certain parties, such as the National Archives, National Museum, National Library, FAM, and FA states, must be more attentive to this issue. The old materials stored at the moment may not be necessary for the present period, but the situation may be different for the future.

In order to ensure the historical value of Malaysian football is not erased by the passage of time, essential studies need to be highlighted and carried out immediately. The research done by some researchers, whether it is already or is being carried out, is

still incomplete and sufficient. Some periods are still considered in the dark zone, where they are not fully unravelled in detail. The existing writing is still general. For example, the community still needs to be more knowledgeable about the history and origin of the club or team it supports. Therefore, support from the authorities involved, especially FAM and FA states, is necessary in addition to the direct involvement of educational institutions in Malaysia.

Community awareness is crucial to maintain interest in Malaysia's football heritage. Football cannot be seen as just a sport. It plays a huge role in the social life of the community. In addition, some make football an instrument and medium for politics in some places. This is because its influence on society always attracts people's attention. In dignifying football, it must be sown from the grassroots, and everyone needs to understand its historical value. Without awareness of its importance in preserving this historical value, it indirectly presents a risk to the future. The media, in particular, should provide awareness to promote historical values in football.



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