



The Community Ownership of Sport

Co-operatives UK Congress
SWALEC Stadium, Cardiff

Community Ownership of Sport

In the UK Spectator Sport of all kinds was once owned by its fans. Where business people were involved it was often out of a desire to return something to the community, and most people reckoned that a town football club was a money pit from which investors would never get a return.

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With the increased television coverage that started in 1938 and increased steadily from then on, football became more and more commercial. From the first formal deal in 1960 the price of the TV contracts rose to £2.6m per year in 1983 and to £11m per year by 1988. The price today is close to £1bn.

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Slowly ownership of football has been moved to the private sector and today has become in many cases a vehicle not for community benefit but for private land value speculation. Stadia that had been built at the edge of town after the First World War were slowly surrounded by new developments and became prime real estate

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Many sports grounds have been, and are still being turned into shopping malls with a sports stadium attached. Many clubs are now so focussed on TV rights they have forgotten the fans who turn out week after week to support them.

TV rights now account for far more income than gate receipts.

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Football is not unique in this drift to private ownership and commercialisation. Other spectator sports have followed suit, with increasing corporatisation in both codes of Rugby Football.

Now, Spectator Sport is returning to its roots and the pace of change is accelerating.

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At the same time, participative sport at the grass roots is getting better organised.

Today we are looking at how the two movements are growing, but also working towards each other.

From these two movements should re-emerge a completely joined up route from the amateur to the professional game.

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Speakers today:-

- Alex Bird – Co-operatives & Mutuels Wales (Chair)
- Mark Frost, Corporate Director, Sport Wales
- Ged Devlin – representing Supporters Direct
- Mark Evans, Merthyr Town Football Club
- John Strand, Merthyr Town Football Club
- Owen Smith MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Wales + Pontypridd RFC
- Tim Hartley, Chair, Cardiff City Supporters Trust