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PRESS COVERAGE OF JAGIELLONIA BIAŁYSTOK FOOTBALL MATCHES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CORRUPTION SCANDAL RELATED TO THE 2003/2004 SEASON

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Relacje prasowe z meczów piłkarskich Jagiellonii Białystok w kontekście afery korupcyjnej związanej z sezonem 2003/2004

Streszczenie

Popularność piłki nożnej wpływa na rozwój patologicznych zjawisk, takich jak korupcja. Na początku XXI wieku w polskich rozgrywkach ligowych została zainicjowana jedna z największych afer korupcyjnych. Znaczący wkład w zdemaskowanie osób zamieszanych w dany proceder miała prasa. Głównym celem artykułu jest analiza relacji prasowych z meczów piłkarskich Jagiellonii Białystok w sezonie 2003/2004 w kontekście wykrycia nieuczciwej rywalizacji sportowej przez ówczesnych dziennikarzy. Badania zostały oparte na metodzie porównawczej i filologicznej. W przypadku historii społecznej czy sportu podejmują one tematykę nowatorską, dotychczas nieopracowaną. Analizę spotkań piłkarskich oparto na opisach z prasy codziennej o charakterze ogólnopolskim i lokalnym – „Przeglądu Sportowego” i „Kuriera Porannego”. Wzbogacono je o upublicznione informacje dotyczące szeroko pojętej afery korupcyjnej w sporcie pierwszej dekady XXI wieku. Wyniki analizy pierwszego z wymienionych periodyków wykazały wątpliwości w jedynie 2 z 16 spotkań (13%), natomiast w lokalnej prasie białostockiej statystyka ta była wyższa i wynosiła 6 z 16 (38%) konfrontacji. Rozważania doprowadziły do ukazania problemu dotyczącego identyfikowania korupcyjnych powiązań meczowych, szczególnie w prasie ogólnopolskiej, co pokazuje różnicę w zaangażowaniu dziennikarzy, często niezwiązanych z regionem. Potwierdza to dziennik lokalny, który osiągnął znacznie wyższy współczynnik zdemaskowanych zachowań korupcyjnych.

Słowa kluczowe: Jagiellonia Białystok, korupcja sportowa, piłka nożna, prasa.

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Abstract

The popularity of football impacts the development of pathological phenomena such as corruption. At the beginning of the 21st century, one of the biggest corruption “scandals” was initiated in Polish league games. Press made a significant contribution into the unmasking of those involved in this practice. The main aim of the article is to analyse press coverage of Jagiellonia Białystok football matches in the season of 2003/2004 in the context of detecting unfair sports competition by journalists of the time. The research was based on the comparative and philological methods. In case of social history or the history of sport, it undertakes a novel, previously unexplored subject matter. The analysis of football matches was based on the list of descriptions from national and local daily newspapers, i.e. “Przegląd Sportowy” and “Kurier Poranny”. It was enriched with publicised information regarding a broadly-understood corruption scandal in sport of the first decade of the 21st century. The results of the analysis pertaining to the first aforementioned title showed doubt about two out of 16 matches (13%), whereas in the local Białystok press this statistics was higher and equalled 6 out of 16 games (38%). Those considerations led to the demonstration of the problem concerning the identification of corrupt match connections, especially in national press, which shows the difference in engagement of journalists often unrelated to the region. It is confirmed by the local daily which achieved a much higher rate of unmasked corrupt behaviour.

Keywords: Jagiellonia Białystok, sports corruption, football, press.

Introduction

Corruption as a phenomenon is difficult to define due to its complexity, nature and scale. Nevertheless, in the majority of cases it is linked with the abuse of power at various levels, and the popularity of a given activity might even be proportional to the benefits achieved by those who engage in corruption.¹

Sport is a peculiar area of social activity, which combines high emotions, big money and a well-developed organisational structure. This mixture creates favourable conditions for corruption. This phenomenon encompasses various operating mechanisms, abusing entrusted power for private gain. The most frequent manifestations of corruption are doping, bribery, nepotism or embezzlement. These mechanisms often intertwine, creating complex structures, especially in highly de-centralised environments that are monitored insufficiently.²

Football as the most popular sports discipline in the world provides fertile ground for corruption due to massive financial flow and global reach. One of the most well-known corruption mechanisms is match fixing. This process consists in manipulating the results of sports competitions for financial gain most frequently related to betting shops. A key role in these operations is often played

¹ V. Tanzi, *Corruption Around the World: Causes, Consequences, Scope, and Cures*. IMF Staff Papers, “IMF Working Paper”, vol. 45(4), Washington 1998, pp. 559–594.

² R. Włoch, *Korupcja w środowisku sportowym. Przegląd literatury przedmiotu, badań empirycznych oraz dokumentów przygotowany na zlecenie Ministerstwa Sportu i Turystyki*, Wyd. Instytutu Ekspertyz Społeczno-Ekonomicznych, Rybnik 2014, pp. 10–14.

by criminal organisations which use players, referees and sports activists, offering them bribes or using threats.³ This mechanism is especially popular in sports disciplines where betting shops generate billions of dollars in turnover, such as tennis, basketball or football. “Calciopoli” affair in Italy is an example: the matches were fixed for the benefit of selected teams, which was linked with serious sanctions for the clubs and activists engaged in the scandal.⁴

At the beginning of the 21st century, one of the biggest corruption “scandals” was exposed in Polish league games. Many football clubs, referees, activists as well as representatives of the Polish Football Association were directly or indirectly engaged in the procedure. The situation received a lot of media attention, among all, due to the engagement of numerous socio-political and sports newspapers. Many press articles exposed corruption irregularities, and commented on the progress of the investigations that often lasted many years.

The scale of this whole phenomenon of corruption in the football environment and its complexity resulted in numerous court trials lasting many years. What is more, at that time, Polish jurisdiction was not clear on that matter yet, which is proven by the first legal mention of sports corruption that occurred in the Criminal Code (henceforth CC) in 2003.⁵

Lack of legal norms after the political transformation was a big problem in many areas of life, which led to the development of criminal organisations on the territory of Poland. However, sport was not a priority for the state authorities to develop jurisdiction in this area, which, in turn, resulted in the occurrence of pathological phenomena of a complex nature leading to the distortion of competition results.⁶ The amendment in the CC was to become the first “tool” of the state authorities used to indict those engaged in, among all, the aforementioned corruption affair in sport. As the statistics show, over 95%, i.e. 604 matches covered by the investigation⁷ were played after the introduction of the CC amendment, and only 5% (about 30 football games)⁸ before its introduction. It confirms the fact that the amendment was not accurate and efficient enough taking into account the complexity of the whole procedure. What is more, it creates an opportunity for judicial analysis of the activities of suspected entities,

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 10–16.

⁴ G. Rossi, D. Goossens, G. L. Di Tanna, F. Addesa, *Football team performance efficiency and effectiveness in a corruptive context: the Calciopoli case*, “European Sport Management Quarterly”, 19(5), London 2018, pp. 583–591.

⁵ Ustawa z dnia 6 czerwca 1997 r. – Kodeks karny (Dz.U. 2003 poz. 1061 ze zm.).

⁶ R. Włoch, *op. cit.*, pp. 8–12.

⁷ Own calculations based on the data from <https://pilkarskamafia.blogspot.com/2012/01/korupcja-w-polskim-futbolu-lista.html>, [accessed on 25.05.2024].

⁸ Own calculations based on the data from <https://pilkarskamafia.blogspot.com/2012/01/korupcja-w-polskim-futbolu-lista.html>, [accessed on 25.05.2024].

which, to a large extent, ultimately led to the indictment of many of those involved in the “affair”.⁹

Taking into account the popularity of football in Poland and the number of people convicted or indicted in the affair in question, inevitably the whole “affair” and its details enjoyed big press and TV coverage, including the media being engaged in the proceedings of court trials as well. What is more, sports journalists reported football matches in their newspapers and many of them, from the position of observers, could detect suspicious situations during the matches.

Methods, research goal and state of the art

The aim of this article is to analyse the press coverage of “Przegląd Sportowy” and “Kurier Poranny”, a local newspaper from Białystok, devoted to football matches of Jagiellonia Białystok in the season of 2003/2004, providing information on the aforesaid “affair” in the context of unfair sporting competition of a corruptive nature, described by journalists of the time, suggesting irregularities in match meetings. The publication was prepared mainly with the use of the comparative and philological methods. As for auxiliary materials, the publication uses publicly available analyses of court case files.¹⁰ Finally, the article compares journalists’ reports to show differences between the engagement of the describers and the nature of the periodical.

The research on corruption in Polish sport concerns mainly the period of time before the political transformation. Here, we can mention the work by R. Stefanik *Aspects of corruption in Szczecin football from 1945 to 1989*¹¹ or *In the Circles of the Polish People Republic’s Culture. Sport (W kręgu kultury PRL. Sport)* edited by Karolina Bittner, Dorota Skotarczak, issued in Poznań, in 2015.¹² However, this article focuses on the football season of 2003/2004, occurring in a different socio-political system in Poland, which is linked with many changes

⁹ Over 500 people were indicted, among them footballers, football clubs policymakers as well as referees. More information [In:] https://pilkarskamafia.blogspot.com/2011/08/lista-oskarzonych-o-korupcje-w-polskim_16.html, [accessed on 20.07.2024].

¹⁰ More information [In:] <https://pilkarskamafia.blogspot.com/>; http://pilkarskamafia.blogspot.com/2011/08/lista-oskarzonych-o-korupcje-w-polskim_16.html, [accessed on 25.05.2024].

¹¹ R. Stefanik, *Aspects of corruption in Szczecin football from 1945 to 1989*, [In:] L. Nowak, R. Urban (eds.) *Physical Culture in Poland between 1945 and 2009*, Wyd. University School of Physical Education in Poznań Faculty of Physical Culture in Gorzów WLKP. Polish Scientific Physical Education Association, Gorzów Wielkopolski 2010, pp. 199–209.

¹² J. Dulewicz, “Piłkarski poker”. *Nieprawidłowości w sporcie w ostatniej dekadzie PRL (na przykładzie piłki nożnej)*, [In:] K. Bitner, D. Skotarczak, (eds.), *W kręgu kultury PRL. Sport*, Wyd. Oddziału Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej w Poznaniu i Instytutu Historii Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, Poznań 2015, pp. 366–375.

in a given process. Scientific research in this area is scarce, especially the one concerning the corruption affair that took place at the beginning of the 21st century in Poland. Nevertheless, one should mention the publication by R. Włoch, *Corruption in the sports environment (Korupcja w środowisku sportowym)*¹³ prepared for the Ministry of Sports and Tourism, which mentions corruption mechanisms, and a set of studies on sports corruption in Polish reality. Thus, the subject matter covered in the article can be considered innovative.

Results and Discussion

The football club Jagiellonia Białystok, currently known under the name of Sportowa Spółka Akcyjna Jagiellonia Białystok, was established in 1920. With its yellow-red colours,¹⁴ it is the most recognisable football team on the pitches of Podlasie region. In the season in question, it played a difficult role of “the Polish second division newcomer”.¹⁵ In total, there were 18 teams playing in that division, and the system made “everyone play with everyone”, which was quite common in league games.

In the season of 2003/2004, Lech Rutkowski was the chairman of Jagiellonia, and Stanisław Bańkowski was chairman deputy.¹⁶ The position of the coach was occupied by Witold Mroziewski, who played this role several times in his lifetime.¹⁷

Analysing the club’s infrastructure, one should mention a stadium, which was quite small (it could accommodate 5000 spectators) and had no lighting.¹⁸ Taking into account the standards of this time and requirements that football clubs had to comply with, it posed a problem if the club got promoted to the first league. Artificial lighting was a must. A small number of seats was also a drawback as during many season matches the stadium was filled to the maximum of its capacity,¹⁹ and the interest in the games significantly exceeded the capacity of the said facility.

“Kurier Sport”, i.e. a supplement to “Kurier Poranny”, published an article before the beginning of the season, describing reality and expectations towards the club from Białystok in the context of the upcoming season.²⁰ One can discern

¹³ R. Włoch, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ *Oficjalna strona Jagielloni Białystok*, <https://jagiellonia.pl/oklubie/>, [accessed on 15.05.2021].

¹⁵ “Kurier Sport” 2003, no 110, pp. B–C.

¹⁶ “Skarb Kibica sezonu 2003/2004 – jesień” 2003, p. 130.

¹⁷ Mroziewski Witold, <https://www.transfermarkt.pl/witold-mroziewski/profil/trainer/16864>, [accessed on 15.05.2021].

¹⁸ “Skarb Kibica sezonu 2003/2004 – jesień” 2003, p. 130.

¹⁹ *Tabela II ligi polskiej sezonu 2003/2004*, <http://www.90minut.pl/liga/0/liga633.html>, [accessed on 15.05.2021].

²⁰ “Kurier Sport” 2003, no 110, pp. B–C.

a note of anxiety before the first round of matches as well as other second league games.²¹ The journalist heavily emphasises the role of the “newcomer”, trying to calm the players down before their debut. The author of the article made a thesis that based on the quality of the teams competing in the second league, their matches should be more interesting than those first league ones.²² It is a rather bold statement, not devoid of logical premises though. Ruch Chorzów, Cracovia Kraków, Łódz Sports Club (Łódzki Klub Sportowy – ŁKS) Łódź, Arka Gdynia or Pogoń Szczecin are class teams with a rich history, attracting many spectators. Piotrcovia Piotrków Trybunalski, which had taken over the tradition and name of Pogoń Szczecin,²³ was identified as the main contender to win the second division. Szczecin people actively participated in football corruption,²⁴ but journalists without that knowledge were already placing it on the first position in the league table.²⁵

In the season of 2003/2004, Jagiellonia played its first match with Radomsko Sports Club Radomsko, and the second one with Arka Gdynia, which was one of the main defendants in the whole corruption affair. The first round passed without major controversies noted in the press. It is worth concentrating more on the match with Gdynia team which had far a bigger budget in comparison with second league teams. In his articles, journalist Wojciech Konończuk mentions the amount of PLN 4 million and expensive transfers enriching the football staff.²⁶ The financial aspect may have been important in the corruption process which Arka Gdynia was convicted for in a lawsuit.²⁷

Arka was placed as a favourite, even considering its defeat to Zagłębie Lublin²⁸ in the previous round. The match with Jagiellonia ultimately ended in a scoreless draw, but according to the press, the team from Białystok was leading and was closer to victory. Moreover, the reporter of the game pointed out a big mistake of a referee who did not dictate a penalty kick,²⁹ which could have

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² “Kurier Sport” 2003, no 110, p. A.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ *Śledztwa w sprawie Pogoni Szczecin*, <https://pilkarskamafia.blogspot.com/2011/06/pogon-szczecin.html> [accessed on 20.12.2023]; Dawid P., *były prezes Pogoni Szczecin, został skazany za korupcję na trzy lata pobawienia wolności w zawieszeniu*, 18.10.2013, <https://gs24.pl/byly-prezes-pogoni-szczecin-skazany-za-korupcje/ar/5536084> [accessed on 28.12.2023]; T. Madejski, *Sąd wydał wyrok w sprawie korupcji w polskim futbolu. W tle kilkanaście meczów Pogoni*, 6.06.2019, <https://radioszczecin.pl/2,389921,sad-wydal-wyrok-w-sprawie-korupcji-w-polskim-fut>, [accessed on 28.12.2023].

²⁵ “Kurier Sport” 2003, no 110, p. A.

²⁶ “Kurier Poranny” 2003, no 188, p. 23.

²⁷ *Procesy sądowe w sprawie korupcji – Arka Gdynia*, <https://pilkarskamafia.blogspot.com/2011/05/arka-gdynia.html>, [accessed on 20.12.2023].

²⁸ “Przegląd Sportowy” 2003, no 188, p. 5.

²⁹ “Kurier Poranny” 2003, no 190, p. XVI.

given the win to the Białystok team. It was journalist Wojciech Konończuk from "Kurier Poranny", i.e. a local Białystok newspaper, who pointed out this mistake of the referee, whereas as for other press titles, there were no similar remarks addressed to the referee. However, it is worth emphasising that although the journalist pointed out the obvious mistake, he did not suggest any bribery.³⁰ The article in question leaves a certain impression of injustice that Jagiellonia suffered because of the referee's decision. At the same time, it is worth mentioning the fact that the reaction to the mistake of the leading referee might have been dampened in some way by the score – the club from Gdynia was placed as a favourite and the draw was considered a good result. On the other hand, Wojciech Konończuk pointed out the glaring shortcomings, which could also have been due to a more emotional attachment to the team, affecting the way he perceived the whole match and the referee's work.

The rounds before the Polish Cup were quite successful as far as the number of points gained by the Białystok team was concerned. Four wins and a draw placed the team at the head of the league. The wins with theoretically stronger teams, such as, among all, Zagłębie Lubin, Cracovia Kraków, made richer and favoured teams realise that there was an unexpected rival to the triumph in the league. The very series of successful games was an unexpected outcome for the experts, but they did not see any help of the third party in it. Only in the match with Ostrowiec, a journalist of "Przegląd Sportowy", Aleksander Limanin spotted what he thought was an obvious mistake of the referee,³¹ yet, similarly to the description of the previous matches, he did not imply any corruption. It can be concluded that at that stage of the season the press was more likely to think that these were typically human mistakes that had happened quite often in football in the past.

Four out of five matches (against Zagłębie Lubin, Błękitni Stargard Szczeciński, Piast Gliwice, Cracovia Kraków, Ostrowiec Works Sports Club (Klub Sportowy Zakładów Ostrowieckich – KSZO) Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski and Podbeskidzie Bielsko-Biała) for the most part were not portrayed as corrupt. An exception was a match against the club from Bielsko Biała,³² which was again reported by Wojciech Konończuk. However, looking at the coverage of the matches provided by the local Białystok newspaper, one cannot discern any suspicions regarding corruption. One can read a kind of pride in the achievements of Jagiellonia and its players as well as satisfaction of getting bolder and bolder in the league.³³ Other sports journalists, like e.g. Mariusz Klimaszewski, were also delighted with the

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ "Przegląd Sportowy" 2003, no 209, p. 8.

³² *Korupcja w polskim futbolu: lista ustawionych meczów*, <http://pilkarskamafia.blogspot.com/2012/01/korupcja-w-polskim-futbolu-lista.html>, [accessed on 25.05.2024].

³³ "Kurier Sport" 2003, no 117, p. D.

achievements of Białystok players and they did not suggest bribery in any way, though the match was classified by the prosecution as corruption-related from the side of the team from Podlasie.³⁴

Such a turn of events and the good shape of Białystok club might have somewhat worried the teams nominated before the season as favourites for the final triumph. Among all, Pogoń Szczecin was such a club. On September 16, 2003, Jagiellonia played with it a match in the Polish Cup, and, after a short period of time, a league match. Undoubtedly, confrontations on the season of 2003/2004 were accompanied by Pogoń Szczecin's significant corruption activity, and the majority of the matches played by this team was "fixed", similarly to the match with Jagiellonia Białystok which was in excellent shape at the beginning of the season.³⁵ The match in the Polish Cup (PC) became a foretaste of the league meeting. Analysing the press coverage reporting that rivalry, similarly like in other cases, it is hard to notice any remarks on the possibility of any dishonesty.

Jagiellonia matches against the team from the north-western part of the country were separated by a confrontation with the Mining Sports Club (Górnictwo Klub Sportowy – GKS) Bełchatów which is worth mentioning due to bitterness evident in the report by Wojciech Konończuk and Paweł Wołosik. One can quote such expressions as "a referee very favourable to the hosts [...]" or "Unfortunately, again a controversial decision was made by the referee and once again it was unfavourable for the visitors."³⁶ One-sidedness is detectable in the whole article and it can be easily concluded that the authors of this press coverage clearly implied that the referee of the match was biased in favour of the Bełchatów team. There are no such extreme words like "bribed" or "fixed", but the context of the article is somehow similar.³⁷ Still, one can have an impression that the journalists suggested certain dishonesty but most probably due to their professional approach they did not show it bluntly. Yet, we talk about the newspaper from Białystok, that is why it is worth looking at the coverage of that game in another daily. The report in "Przegląd Sportowy" by Żeliszław Żyżyński in no way suggested one-sidedness, much less made stronger accusations,³⁸ similarly to the text in "Gazeta Wyborcza".³⁹

Passing to the league match between Pogoń and Jagiellonia, it is worth remarking that a good performance in the league was a priority for the Szczecin

³⁴ *Śledztwo w sprawie – Jagiellonia Białystok*, <https://pilkarskamafia.blogspot.com/2011/05/jagiellonia-biaystok.html>, [accessed on 28.12.2023].

³⁵ *Korupcja w polskim futbolu: lista ustawionych meczów*, <http://pilkarskamafia.blogspot.com/2012/01/korupcja-w-polskim-futbolu-lista.html>, [accessed on 25.05.2024].

³⁶ "Kurier Sport" 2003, no 118, p. D.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ "Przegląd Sportowy" 2003, no 221, p. 8.

³⁹ "Gazeta Wyborcza Białystok" 2003, no 221, p. 16.

club. On the other hand, the team from Podlasie was in excellent shape at that time. Szczecin players could not afford one more defeat if they wanted to think about pursuing their goal, that is playing in the first league from the next season.⁴⁰

The game caused great controversy in the press. Beginning with the article by Mariusz Klimaszewski in "Przegląd Sportowy" one can discern criticism addressed towards the referee, who was described as "the worst actor of the show".⁴¹ The daily from Białystok described the whole situation more bluntly. Wojciech Konończuk, quoted various controversial situations in which the main referee made "many self-discrediting decisions".⁴² This turn of events caused riots among spectators disagreeing with the unfair conduct of the meeting. It should be stated that in this very match almost everyone noticed lack of the referee's objectivity, beginning with the press and finishing with the spectators. Only the victorious party, and in particular the coach of Pogoń, Bogusław Baniak, defended the referee's decision.⁴³ Nevertheless, the questionable decision of the referee did not escape the attention of sports newspaper reporters.

After the match with Pogoń, the press kept writing about the subjective judge in Białystok for a long time.⁴⁴ Consecutive matches passed without any controversy, but with quite unfavourable results for Jagiellonia. Thus, excuses were sought for the team's bad shape and the referee was blamed in a rather unambiguous way, "Indeed, one can get used to the fact that penalties in the second league are scored by Pogoń Szczecin, Szczakowianka, Cracovia or Bełchatów but not Jagiellonia."⁴⁵ The quote refers to the situation during the club's match with Szczakowianka Jaworzno, where, according to the reporter, two penalty kicks were not signalled for Jagiellonia. The disappointment with the results was an important factor in implying bias, nevertheless the words written were quite brave and they happened more and more often, which may have suggested to readers the use of corrupt practices.⁴⁶

The matches with Ceramika Opoczno and RKS Radomsko are worth analysing. These clubs were active in the area of corruption.⁴⁷ Journalists implied bias in a certain way, pointing out bad decisions to the referee. The statement of Wojciech Konończuk is worth quoting here: "Of all teams, Jagiellonia will not

⁴⁰ "Kurier Poranny" 2003, no 216, p. 19.

⁴¹ "Przegląd Sportowy" 2003, no 227, p. 8.

⁴² "Kurier Sport" 2003, no 119, p. D.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ "Kurier Sport" 2003, no 120, p. D.

⁴⁵ "Kurier Sport" 2003, no 123, p. D.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ *Jak mecze ustawiały: Ceramika Opoczno, Stasiak, KSZO Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski*, <https://pilkarskamafia.blogspot.com/2010/12/jak-mecze-ustawiaj-ceramika-opoczno.html>, [accessed on 29.12.2023]; *RKS Radomsko*, <https://pilkarskamafia.blogspot.com/2011/06/rks-radomsko.html>, [accessed on 29.12.2023].

score any goals from penalty kicks in the second league.”⁴⁸ Undoubtedly, this comment refers to the situation involving Paweł Sobolewski, player of Jagiellonia, who, according to the press, was fouled in the penalty area and his adversary received only a yellow card in this situation. “Przegląd Sportowy” with the words of its journalist, Mariusz Klimaszewski, also remarked an elbow strike eligible for punishing Ceramika’s player, but, as it was written, the referee “did not notice that”.⁴⁹ In the second match, the blame fell on a new goalkeeper, Łukasz Załuska, borrowed from Legia in the winter transfer window. He made glaring mistakes, largely leading to the defeat of Białystok team. The bribing of the goalkeeper was not implied, the press attributed his behaviour to his debut stage fright.⁵⁰ In this case it is known that the goalkeeper had nothing to do with match fixing, and it was the referee, who, by the way, did not arouse any suspicions of the press, was paid for biased refereeing. As it turns out, this information can be found in the testimony in the indictment of the so-called Gang Fryzjera.⁵¹

The second part of the season was characterised by Jagiellonia players’ poor shape, and the team’s morale was not good due to poor results. The situation was worsened by the match of the 23rd round of the second league, in which the team from Białystok confronted Cracovia Kraków. Przemysław Franczak of “Przegląd Sportowy” had no remarks concerning refereeing in the aforesaid game, contrary to Wojciech Konończuk, who pointed out lack of the referee’s reaction to the offside position of Cracow team’s players.⁵² A similar situation could be noticed after the match with Podbeskidzie Bielsko-Biała, where one of the articles read as follows, “The referee, Janusz Opazik, was anyway a good friend of the hosts.”⁵³ This is how Wojciech Konończuk commented on the defeat of “The Pride of Podlasie”. Thus, it can be considered that the suggestion regarding the referees’ one-sidedness and theoretically these two unfair matches⁵⁴ stirred up controversy, and unclear situations in a given confrontation were so preposterous that the reported used expressions rarely occurring in the previous comments.

The team from Białystok engaged in football corruption in the season in question to quite a small extent, they were more often at a disadvantage, yet not in every case. In the league competition of 2003/2004, Jagiellonia had many important matches that may have been crucial to secure their position in the

⁴⁸ “Kurier Sport” 2003, no 126, p. D.

⁴⁹ “Przegląd Sportowy” 2003, no 267, p. 10.

⁵⁰ “Przegląd Sportowy” 2004, no 63, p. 10.

⁵¹ *Akt oskarżenia ws. tzw. gangu Fryzjera. Wyjaśnienia b. sędziego Tomasza W.*, <http://pilkarskamafia.blogspot.com/2011/12/tomasz-w.html#more>, [accessed on 25.05.2021].

⁵² “Kurier Sport” 2004, no 144, p. F.

⁵³ “Kurier Poranny” 2004, no 102, p. XVI.

⁵⁴ *Korupcja w polskim futbolu: lista ustawionych meczów*, <http://pilkarskamafia.blogspot.com/2012/01/korupcja-w-polskim-futbolu-lista.html>, [accessed on 25.05.2024].

second division. One can mention here the matches with Piast Gliwice, GKS Bełchatów, Aluminium Konin and ŁKS Łódź.⁵⁵ On the other hand, many of these confrontations became an element of court trials, where Podlasie club also acted as a defendant. The corruption affair in Polish football generated many bizarre situations, e.g. “double-fixed matches”, i. e. both parties participating in a given match “fixed” its result. It was due to an uncertain league position of many teams that were as proud as “The Pride of Podlasie”. Undoubtedly, most mid-income teams resorted to corruption, mainly in crisis situations, to better their chances in the league or the cup.

The analysis of headlines and press clippings shows that most reports did not show any traces of dishonesty, and the results were not considered controversial. However, there was an interesting situation after the match with ŁKS, when journalists Sylwia Kowalczyk and Paweł Wołosik of “Kurier Poranny” claimed that the referee had deliberately overlooked the foul on a Jagellonia player in the penalty area.⁵⁶ Here, however, a rather telling article in “Dziennik Łódzki” (then commented in “Kurier Poranny” by Wojciech Konończuk) presented the situation clearly enough, accusing the yellow-reds of an attempt to bribe Lodz footballers. Działoszka Żuberek – midfielder of the Białystok club – was appointed to contact the opponents. It is interesting that the match result was fixed to be a draw and that was how it ended (0 : 0 in Lodz).⁵⁷ It is a fact that the meeting was “paid” to the referee both from the side of Jagiellonia and ŁKS. The referee received PLN 7,500.00 from the yellow-reds’ activists, and according to the testimony at the prosecutor’s office, these were not the players involved in match-fixing but the referee. What is more, the article describing the match did not mention any bribery from the side of Lodz, and the prosecutor’s office claimed the game was “fixed” by both teams competing in this match.⁵⁸

Analysing the press article, one may have an impression that Wojciech Konończuk defended the local team against the accusations of “Dziennik Łódzki”. There are cited remarks and arguments aiming at convincing the readers that these were merely insinuations and, as the author of the article states in the article’s title, *We don’t play fishy business here*, which undoubtedly refers to football corruption.

Analysing the press coverage of Jagiellonia Białystok matches, certain conclusions regarding a few aspects can be drawn. First of all, it should be shown to what extent these dailies were familiar with the fact that certain matches were subject to corruption. It is the aim of Table 1, where the teams that initiated match “fixing” are presented in bold print.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ “Kurier Sport” 2003, no 152, pp. F–G.

⁵⁷ “Kurier Poranny” 2004, no 116, p. 24.

⁵⁸ *Jak ustawiała mecze Jagiellonia Białystok*, <http://pilkarskamafia.blogspot.com/2010/09/jak-ustawiaa-mecze-jagiellonia-biaystok.html>, [accessed on 29.05.2021].

Table 1

Summary of corruption-linked matches with results of press coverage

Football matches	"Przegląd Sportowy"	"Kurier Poranny"	Outcome of court hearings
Arka Gdynia vs Jagiellonia Białystok 13.08.2003	No controversy	Detection of irregularities	No data available on the sentence
Jagiellonia Białystok vs Podbeskidzie Bielsko-Biała 13.09.2003	No controversy	No controversy	Proven corruption
Jagiellonia Białystok vs Pogoń Szczecin 16.09.2003 (PP)	No controversy	No controversy	No data available on the sentence
Jagiellonia Białystok vs Pogoń Szczecin 27.09.2003	Detection of irregularities	Detection of irregularities	Proven corruption
Aluminium Konin vs Jagiellonia Białystok 04.10.2003	No controversy	No controversy	Proven corruption
Jagiellonia Białystok vs Ceramika Opoczno 15.11.2003	Detection of irregularities	Detection of irregularities	Proven corruption
RKS Radomsko vs Jagiellonia Białystok 13.03.2004	No controversy	No controversy	Proven corruption
Jagiellonia Białystok vs Piast Gliwice 10.04.2004	No controversy	No controversy	Proven corruption
Cracovia – Jagiellonia Białystok 18.04.2004	No controversy	Detection of irregularities	No data available on the sentence
Podbeskidzie Bielsko-Biała vs Jagiellonia Białystok 29.04.2004	No controversy	Detection of irregularities	Proven corruption
Jagiellonia Białystok vs GKS Bełchatów 03.05.2004	No controversy	No controversy	Proven corruption
Pogoń Szczecin vs Jagiellonia Białystok 08.05.2004	No controversy	No controversy	Proven corruption
Jagiellonia Białystok vs Aluminium Konin 12.05.2004	No controversy	No controversy	Proven corruption
ŁKS Łódź vs Jagiellonia Białystok 15.05.2004	No controversy	Detection of irregularities	Proven corruption
Szczakowianka Jaworzno vs Jagiellonia Białystok 29.05.2004	No controversy	No controversy	Proven corruption

Text in bold: the party initiating corruption in a given football match

Source: Own research based on <http://pilkarskamafia.blogspot.com/2012/01/korupcja-w-polskim-futbolu-lista.html>, [accessed from 29.01.2021 to 30.05.2021].

In the season of 2003/2004. Jagiellonia took part in 16 matches covered by further investigation regarding the sports corruption, whereas press titles discovered irregularities in 6 of them, which gives us an estimate of 38% of unmasked meetings. In this context, it is worth mentioning the journalists of "Kurier Poranny", especially Wojciech Konończuk and Paweł Wołosik. The journalists of the Białystok daily altogether found controversies in all of them. They were mainly described in the sports supplement of this daily, i.e. "Kurier Sport".

Without any doubt, the provenance of the newspaper (regional Białystok daily) had a big impact on spotting potential corruption as more attention was devoted to reporting the local team's matches. What is more, the target group of such a newspaper were mainly inhabitants of Białystok and surrounding areas, which is why articles on Jagiellonia generated more demand. At the same time, one should also take into account emotional attachment to the region and, what follows, its team, which also played a significant role in assessing match situations. It is demonstrated by the very descriptions rich in numerous emotional expressions. It was particularly noticeable during the series of good results for Jagiellonia, but also while it kept losing one could read certain bitterness in between the lines.⁵⁹ Moreover, rather telling statements were used suggesting bias on the part of the referee. However, it is worth adding that many articles were also toned down though not devoid of certain suggestions, which showed possible awareness of the existence of corruption, where suggesting it openly in press could have been dangerous due to the network of connections of corrupted individuals with criminal groups.

It is worth mentioning one mistake of the daily from Białystok, when journalist Wojciech Konończuk accused the referee of lack of objectivity though the investigation did not cover the match in question.⁶⁰

Passing to the other daily, this time nationwide and targeted mainly to the sports environment, i.e. "Przegląd Sportowy", the statistical result concerning the detection of irregularities was clearly lower. There were only objections regarding 2 matches, which constituted only about 13% of all the meetings covered by the investigation in the season in question.

It is worth emphasising that the main reporting journalist was Mariusz Klimaszewski who pointed out these two most controversial games, furthermore manifesting a detached approach to his accusations. There were no noticeable emotions in his account, only the course of the match presented purely and clearly. Undoubtedly, it was due to the daily's position, which contrary to "Kurier Poranny" is a nationwide title.

⁵⁹ "Kurier Sport" 2003, no 123, p. D.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

Recapitulation

Recapitulating the analysis of press coverage of the matches played by the team from Białystok, we can state that journalists did not want to imply bribery openly, rarely using unambiguous expressions such as “a biased referee”. Such a tendency was noticed in the majority of football matches’ descriptions by “Przełąd Sportowy” and “Kurier Pranny”. However, paying attention to statistics, the difference between the dailies is significant, which shows that the engagement of the local press was much deeper than that of its nationwide counterpart, which was in some way connected with the former’s emotional character. Local dailies devoted much more coverage to their local teams, whereas nationwide dailies distributed this attention evenly or focused more on the Polish football elite. What is more, the very texts demonstrated a dose of indifference and lack of purely journalistic inquisitiveness. Yet, taking into account the engagement of some journalists of the Białystok daily, it could have also generated the issue of lack of objectivity, which was noticed in a few cases, and one confrontation was wrongly assessed. However, one can have an impression that mainly the journalists of the Białystok daily suggested irregularities more boldly, and in some obvious situations signalled the occurrence of inappropriate, and, in some cases, bizarre events during football matches, which they associated with unfair competition.

The subject matter in question does not allow for unequivocal demonstration of the occurrence of corruption based on the press coverage devoted to corruption. Nevertheless, the research reflects social awareness regarding the issue, and the article itself can constitute a starting point for further sociological studies, and also those analysing the whole corruption “affair” encompassing its legal, historical and sociological aspects.

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