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## **PERCEPTION OF THE SPORTS ENVIRONMENT AND MOTIVATION OF PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALLERS IN THE CAMEROONIAN CHAMPIONSHIPS.**

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### **Summary:**

The present study is entitled "Perception of professionalism, changes in the sports environment and motivation of elite footballers". The objective was to find out how footballers perceive the changes that football has undergone for almost a decade, and what impact this perception can have on their motivational behavior in competitive situations. The analysis, which was conducted during the 2018-2019 sports season with 137 elite footballers from the Cameroonian professional championships, highlighted a correlation between the perception of bonuses and salaries ( $r = -.33, p < .01$ ), team members and supporters ( $r = .65, p < .001$ ), promoting the image of the players and their club ( $r = .35, p < .01$ ), modern infrastructure and equipment ( $r = -.47, p < .01$ ) and the motivation of Cameroonian elite footballers. Thus, it appears from this study that the perception of the professionalization of football influences the motivation of elite players and encourages them to more professional engagement. What is more, this study also explains the main reasons why African footballers, especially Cameroonians, are finally positioning themselves on professional migration strategies.

**Key words:** Football, Professionalization, Motivation, Perception, Performance.

**Résumé** La présente étude s'intitule « Perception du professionnalisme, mutations de l'environnement sportif et motivation des footballeurs d'élite ». L'ob-

jectif était de savoir comment les footballeurs perçoivent les mutations que le football subit depuis bientôt une décennie, et quel impact cette perception peut avoir sur leur comportement motivationnel en situation compétitive. L'analyse, qui a été menée lors de la saison sportive 2018-2019 auprès de 137 footballeurs d'élite des championnats professionnels camerounais a permis de mettre en évidence une corrélation entre la perception des primes et salaires ( $r = -.33, p < .01$ ), des membres et supporters de l'équipe ( $r = .65, p < .001$ ), de la promotion de l'image des joueurs et de leur club ( $r = .35, p < .01$ ), des infrastructures et équipements modernes ( $r = -.47, p < .01$ ) et la motivation des footballeurs d'élite camerounais. Ainsi, il ressort de cette étude que la perception de la professionnalisation du football influence la motivation des joueurs d'élite et les incite à plus d'engagement professionnel. Bien plus, cette étude explique également des principales raisons pour lesquelles les footballeurs africains, notamment les Camerounais, se positionnent finalement sur des stratégies de migrations professionnelles.

**Mots clés :** Football, Professionnalisation, Motivation, Perception, Performance.

### **1. Introduction**

Today, the globalization of football has become a reality with in particular the practice of this sport on all five continents (Platini & Ernault, 2014). This sports discipline, like most popular sports, is practiced

both by amateurs (that is to say people who practice only for pleasure, without deriving any financial benefit), and by professionals. Professional football, on the other hand, is played by those who have adequate skills and who have made it a profession in its own right. In this vein, the professional is, according to article 39 of the general regulations of the Cameroon Football Federation (FECAFOOT, 2007), a non-amateur sportsman, that is to say "any player having obtained this quality either by the registration of a contract binding him to the club, or by decision of the federation". Thus, amateur football is a leisure activity while professional football is a paid and paid activity (Gaynard & Joly, 2013).

A priori, we can assume that, compared to amateur football, the Cameroonian professional environment or elsewhere offers suitable working conditions allowing athletes to achieve performance through the optimization of their motivation. Thus, since Cameroonian football has been undergoing profound change for more than a decade (Tinkeu, 2012; 2019), the challenge of this study is to show that the perception of the process of professionalization in progress is likely to influence motivation of Cameroonian footballers. We plan to highlight the impact that this perception could have on performance motivation and the desire to migrate in order to aspire to a better professional environment.

In the West, football has become a real industry. Not only does it attract all the best players in the world, but it also generates huge revenues; professionals are often even envious because their standard of living is generally higher than that of the average population: they are well paid, well housed, social security guaranteed, promotion of their image. In short, they are for the most part stars, all things that are effectively offered to them thanks to the working environment in which they evolve. In France for example, statistics from the French Football Federation show that out of the 14,731 clubs

registered, only 40 are professional with a total of 7,000 employees. It should also be noted that the market value of players is increasingly increasing with for example Kylian Mbappé (20 years old) whose value is estimated at 228 million Euros, or about 148 billion 200 million CFA francs and, at almost 33 years, that of Lionel Messi is around 150 million Euros or about 97 billion 500 million CFA francs (Poli, Besson and Ravenel, 2019). It can also be noted that with annual revenues of Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo and Neymar that go beyond 100 million Euros (around 65 billion CFA francs, footballers are considered as privileged.

Since the advent of football in Cameroon and until the beginning of the 21st century, football has always been amateur. According to Barraud (1997), Njoh -Lea, a former Cameroonian international, was the first professional player. But it was at the beginning of the 20th century that the foundations of professionalism were initiated by the A F C (Association of Cameroonian Footballers), which became SYNAFOC (National Union of Cameroonian Footballers). Inspired by the mode of management and organization of football in Western countries, David Mayebi, the very first president of the movement, and his associates, had developed a statute for the Cameroonian footballer in order to tropicalize professionalism.

The professionalization project was also boosted by FIFA which, in July 2006 through the slogan "Winning in Africa with Africa" from the World Cup in South Africa in 2010, took the opportunity to develop, but above all modernize football on this continent from pilot countries such as Ivory Coast, Senegal, Algeria, Ghana, Nigeria, but also Cameroon. The project had three main missions: to develop the game, to promote African football around the world and to build a better future for Africa. It refers to a vast movement to modernize football on the African continent through two components:

the training of technical and administrative managers, the organization and operation of the federation and all the leagues and structures attached to it. One of the components of this vast project is based on federal organization and functioning. On the proposal of FIFA, the number of clubs playing in the first division championship was reduced from sixteen to fourteen during the 2012-2013 sports season and, gradually, Cameroon managed to stabilize two professional championships that we have called "MTN Elite One" and "MTN Elite Two" and which are today called "Elite One" and "Elite Two". This new name also marks the end of the sponsorship contract with the mobile telephone company with the key a shortfall of approximately 1 billion CFA francs per sports season that FECAFOOT perceived since the beginning of the partnership on January 7, 2002. Despite enormous operational difficulties, they took place at 18 and 15 clubs respectively in the 2017-2018, 2018-2019 and current sports seasons.

Today, gradually, the professionalization of clubs is developing. The professional championships of Cameroon even record the return of certain players who have played in foreign championships. Despite this desire for development both by the public authorities and by the federation, the conditions of practice are still unsuitable for professionalism. Indeed, in Africa in general, apart from certain Maghreb countries and South Africa for example, football remains a springboard to sell abroad. Organizational and infrastructure problems are obstacles to the development of Cameroonian athletes. Anything that highlights the problem of the motivation of Cameroonian footballers: motivation to perform and motivation to evolve in a so-called "professional" environment, but whose working conditions just make footballers want to leave. These are the variables related to working conditions in particular that we plan to explore in this study.

Motivation is a "physiological and

psychological process responsible for triggering, maintaining and ceasing a behavior as well as the appetitive or aversive value conferred on the elements of the environment on which this behavior is exerted" (Bloch & al ., 1997). It can also be considered as a "cognitive-dynamic structure" (Nuttin, 2015) which regulates the internal and external forces which direct and direct behavior towards concrete preferential actions depending on the context. Several theoretical models can explain motivational behavior, among others the theory of needs (Maslow, 1970; 2004), the theory of life hygiene of Herzberg (1971), the theory of goals of accomplishment (Nicholls, 1980 ), the hierarchical model of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Vallerand, 1997; Vallerand & Losier, 1999), the theory of self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2002).

Among these models, the theory of self-determination is fundamentally based on the idea that the satisfaction or not of basic psychological needs guides motivational behavior and promotes the satisfaction and well-being of individuals. According to Herzberg (1959), two elements can be identified to explain job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. It is the factors of environment or hygiene which are related to working conditions. They can also be called extrinsic factors. There are also the rewarding factors which correspond to the higher needs of man and relate to his development; that's why they're said to be intrinsic.

As for Maslow (1970; 2004), he proceeds to the hierarchy of needs and considers that it is the satisfaction of a need that pushes the individual to seek or seek higher need.

Whether in Deci and Ryan, Herzberg or Maslow, what is highlighted in the theory of motivation is the dynamics specific to the individual in relation to his professional environment. This so-called personal dynamic is identified in the former by self-determination, in the latter by deepening

through work and in the latter by the call to self-realization.

Motivation is also considered as an external or internal energy which pushes an individual to act and channels his intentions, attitudes and actions, and since motivational states play a major role in the performance of the top athlete (Cox, 2005), it is a question in this study of examining elements linked to motivational states to show how they can be influenced by the perception that elite footballers have of their professional environment and have implications on the performance of Cameroonian elite. In other words, what can be the impact of this perception on their motivation to perform in an environment where the conditions of practice are not always optimal?

Thus, this study has the specific objectives of showing, on the one hand, that there is a significant link between the perception of bonuses and salaries and the motivation of elite footballers in the Cameroonian championship; on the other hand, that there is a significant link between public perception and the motivation of these elite footballers; that thereafter, there is a significant link between the perception of the image of the player and the club and the motivation of elite footballers and that finally, there is a significant link between the perception of modern infrastructures and equipment and the motivation elite footballers from the Cameroonian championship.

## **2.Method**

### **2.1.Participants**

The participants (n = 137) of this study, which was conducted in Cameroon during the 2018-2019 sports season, are all footballers playing in "Elite One" and "Elite Two" clubs, that is, first and second division of the Cameroonian championship. They have for the most part a status of international footballers in the lower categories of the national teams and their age varies between 17 and 27 years (M = 23.4, SD = 2.1). They

are all professional footballers, that is to say who benefit from a contractual status binding them with their respective clubs. This sample was obtained using a random sampling technique, that is, all elite footballers had an equal chance or the same probability of being selected. All participants were informed in advance of the objectives of our study and voluntarily agreed to participate in the investigation against the payment of 2000 CFA francs which represented taxi costs.

### **2.2. Data collection instruments**

The participants were subjected to a semi-directive questionnaire which we constructed in 7 parts. This questionnaire was constructed essentially from a 5-point Likert scale (absolutely false, false, I don't know, true, absolutely true). The first part of the questionnaire was devoted to information related to the identification of participants. The second part was related to the impact of the perception of the professional environment on motivation, the third, fourth and fifth parts, for their part, were focused on the impact of certain parameters of the professionalization process on motivation. This involved in particular having the opinion of footballers on the perception of bonuses and salaries, the impact of the public and supporters, promoting the image of the player and his team, the quality of infrastructure and equipment on the motivation of elite players. Part six was devoted to motivation itself. Finally, the last part focused on the external or intermediate variables of motivation (relationships with leaders, competition, the place of medals and trophies, group dynamics, etc.).

### **2.3. Data analysis procedures and techniques**

All the participants were approached by us and voluntarily agreed to submit to our exercise, namely, that of completing the survey questionnaire. Beforehand, a pre-survey was necessary to definitively validate our questionnaire. This pre-survey took

place with 10 footballers including 5 from "elite one" and 5 from "elite two" 2. This preliminary work enabled us on the one hand to verify the understanding of our items by our surveyed in relation to their level of education, but also to check whether the data proposed by them helped to analyze them statistically.

As far as the survey itself is concerned, a quiet and bright room, sheltered from noise, was fitted out for all respondents. A maximum of 30 minutes was scheduled for each of them. We brought them into the room in waves of 5 players and it was strictly forbidden to communicate.

With regard to data analysis, our study is correlational in nature because it highlights the relationship between the perception that elite players have of the professionalization of football in Cameroon and the motivation towards -in view of their professional activity, we proceeded to statistical processing thanks to the Bravais Pearson correlation test with a 95% confidence interval. These statistical methodologies allowed us to measure and describe the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables. The data was processed and analyzed using Statistica 7 software.

### **3. Results and discussion**

The descriptive analysis of the data enabled us to obtain the following first results:

It should be noted at the outset that for almost all of the participants in the survey, the motivation of Cameroonian footballers is very low. They perceive their professional environment as not very motivating because the infrastructures and sports equipments are very far from the standards perceived in the clubs of the Western or Maghreb countries. This is why they feel that their motivation is not optimal to be able to win trophies and medals. Regarding the impact of bonuses and salaries on their performance, even if about 6% of participants say

they do not play for money, 94% of elite Cameroonian footballers believe that these variables are crucial to boost their morale.

For the majority of them (72.5%), these forms of compensation are at the basis of their performance because they are likely to motivate their presence during training sessions and matches, boost their morale and bring them to provide more effort in training and during matches. Moreover, sometimes, they justify the absence from certain training sessions by the lack of financial means (salary and / or bonus) which can enable them to use a common means of transport for said cause.

On the other hand, the participants estimate at 82.5% that the presence of spectators during matches and training is essential because, as "twelfth player", they are a means of motivation which leads them to surpass themselves. Their absence can even, according to them, lead them to discouragement and inhibition of certain qualities. Spectators are therefore an integral part of the football spectacle environment. This is why they say 74.5% that it is essential for a team to have members and supporters. Unfortunately 77.4% of the participants affirm that their team does not develop any policy of mobilization of the members and the public around the trainings, even less the matches. Media coverage of the sports spectacle could also, according to Cameroonian footballers, constitute a means not only to sell the sports spectacle, but also a means of motivating the main players. 88.6% of footballers believe that matches and programs linked to their professional activity should, for example, be televised and sold in the press or other media in order to enhance their own image and that of the show. Still with regard to their image, almost all (99.3%) of them think that when footballers have their names mentioned on their shirts their passage in the media is for them a bonus, a real means of promoting of their image with the sports public.

Finally, this first part of the results

also shows that sports infrastructure and equipment are elements that can activate motivation among Cameroonian footballers. These include modern training stadiums, match stadiums, equipment, means of transport, team headquarters ... It emerges from the survey that out of the 33 professional Cameroonian clubs, only one club has its own infrastructure, ie less than 9% of participants, which seems to be a handicap to the development of athletes since these infrastructures are decisive for the practice of high-level sport insofar as they guarantee a quality show. Besides, all the participants affirm that these modern infrastructures are of capital importance for their motivation. These first results linked to the descriptive analysis were supplemented by the quantitative analysis relating to the verification of our research hypotheses. In this part in particular, the results show that there is a significant relationship between the perception of bonuses and salaries,  $r = -.33$ ,  $p < .01$ , between the perception of members and supporters of the team,  $r = .65$ ,  $p < .001$ , between the perception of the image of the players and the club,  $r = .35$ ,  $p < .01$  and between the perception of modern infrastructure and equipment,  $r = -.47$ ,  $p < .01$  and the motivation of elite Cameroonian footballers, with a 5% confidence margin.

The aim of this study was to analyze the perception of professionalism, changes in the sports environment and their impact on the motivation of Cameroonian footballers. Since the globalization of football resulting in the expansion of the migratory phenomenon of African and Cameroonian footballers in particular (Poli et al., 2018), it seems necessary to analyze the causes of the difficulties encountered by these elite Cameroonian footballers in an environment where their motivation seems problematic.

The data collected show, on the one hand, that Cameroonian footballers perceive their motivation as being very weak because of their professional environment which

does not allow this quality to be optimized. First, they perceive bonuses and salaries as well as infrastructure and equipment as undeniable elements which have an impact on their training and match performance. Thus, Referring to Maslow's theory of needs (1970, 2004), it can be assumed that it is difficult for Cameroonian footballers to properly express their talent in an environment where certain basic needs are not met.

Indeed, for high-level professional footballers, the expression of their talent can only manifest themselves if they have satisfied at least the first three levels of needs, namely physiological, security and social needs. However, given the working conditions in which they operate in Cameroon, footballers are unable to recover well from the efforts produced due in particular to food problems. The income does not guarantee financial stability allowing them to find housing or care with dignity, to have a certain autonomy which can also promote good relations with their colleagues or family members. Self-esteem needs are inherent needs of individuals that allow them to assess themselves or to be assessed by others.

These are the needs of consideration of reputation, of glory, of what one is, of what one has, of recognition by others, by society and by oneself. When an individual has a good self-esteem and self-esteem, he has a feeling of competence, a high level of self-confidence, but above all he feels free. The need for self-fulfillment is the highest need in an individual on the Maslow scale (1970). It is about valuing his talent in a particular field. In other words, it varies from one individual to another, because if for some the taste for studies, the permanent quest for knowledge constitute the guide of their life, for others it may be the taste for the beautiful, the desire to create, to invent new things. Among footballers, the need for accomplishment often translates into the desire to perform well in competition. There may also be the need to break records.

However, it is almost impossible in

the current Cameroonian "professional" environment to have good self-esteem and to fulfill oneself as a footballer. This is the reason why we observe an increase in the migratory movements of Cameroonian footballers in search of an environment favorable to the expression of their talent. Next, with regard to the impact of members, supporters and sympathizers, Cameroonian elite footballers believe that these parameters do not sufficiently encourage their motivation. According to him, the massive presence of supporters during training sessions and especially during matches is a major element that can help optimize their motivation. Since most of the teams are one-person, it is difficult to mobilize around a project that is not supported by a common identity. Besides, even the popular teams such as the Canon and the Thunder of Yaoundé, Racing of Bafoussam, Union and Dynamo of Douala, formerly considered as teams with thousands of supporters, can no longer mobilize because of internal fights which over the years, most of them have created fractions and divisions between members.

If it is admitted that football is a fan identity management strategy (Assolant, 2010), it is undeniable that the impact of these supporters on the motivation of the players is preponderant, just as they can favor territorial identities (Charbonnier & Smith, 2017). In fact, supporters represent the "twelfth man on the team" (Hourcade, 2002) insofar as they are able to bring their team to victory, especially during home matches (Wolfson, Wakelin, & Lewis, 2007). It is therefore important for team leaders to work on a mobilization policy and develop strategies to recruit supporters and supporters around their team.

Finally, everything happens as if the professional environment of elite footballers in Cameroon does not favor the optimization of their motivation to performance, hence the choice to prioritize looking for the path of professional migration in Europe or

in the Maghreb (Tinkeu, 2019). Regarding their motivations, the theory of self-determination (TAD), can allow us to apprehend the behavior of Cameroonian footballers. According to the proponents of this theory, motivation is based on 4 levers: external, introjected, identified and integrated regulations (Deci & Ryan, 1985; 1991; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991, Vallerand, 1997).

Intrinsic motivation contributes to the social and psychological well-being of the individual (Paquet, Carbonneau & Vallerand, 2016). It is the most self-determined form of motivation and manifests itself through reasons for involvement in the activity linked to knowledge (the desire to learn), to stimulation (the desire to experience pleasant sensations) or accomplishment (the desire to progress). But this form of motivation is dependent and must be based on the other levers of motivation, in particular outsourced regulation. It can therefore be assumed that if Cameroonian footballers so much want to leave and want to go massively to foreign championships, especially in the Maghreb and Europe, this would be explained by the fact that in the local championship, the working conditions as well as the treatment they are subject to do not guarantee them the possibility of investing optimally in the practice of football, with all the consequences that the absence of motivation may have on their ability to learn, progress, perform and finally have fun.

Finally, this work opens up avenues of reflection and perspectives. For example, we plan in future research to question the professional choices made and the motivational profiles of footballers in professional championships on the one hand, and on the other hand, in a comparative study, to analyze the motivational orientations of footballers, both professionals and amateurs.

## Conclusion

The aim of this study was to analyze the perception of professionalism, changes in the sports environment and their impact on the motivation of Cameroonian footballers. Since the globalization of football resulting in the expansion of the migratory phenomenon of African and Cameroonian footballers in particular (Poli & al., 2018), it seems necessary to analyze the causes of the difficulties encountered by these elite Cameroonian footballers in an environment where their motivation seems problematic. The hypotheses we have tested have all been confirmed. They show, in fact, that the professional environment of Cameroonian footballers does not guarantee the optimization of the performance of the latter as well as their full development. Thus, we can assume that if Cameroonian footballers show both the desire to leave and the will to go massively in foreign championships, especially in the Maghreb and in Europe, this is explained by the fact that in local professional championships, Especially in Elite one and Elite two, the working conditions and the treatment to which they are subject do not guarantee them the possibility of fully investing in the practice of football. This situation has negative consequences on their motivation, in this case intrinsic motivation, as well as on their ability to learn, to progress, to perform, and ultimately to enjoy. Finally, this work opens up avenues of reflection and perspectives. For example, we plan in future research to question the professional choices made and the motivational profiles of footballers in professional championships on the one hand, and on the other hand, in a comparative study, to analyze the motivational orientations of footballers, both professionals and amateurs.

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