

# Keeping Possession:

Ownership trends in English Premier League football



## Introduction

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The English Premier League (EPL) is fast approaching the end of its third decade, having begun in 1992.

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The first decade saw an influx of foreign players who changed the way the game was played. Instead of England's best players going to play in Europe (Kevin Keegan, Gary Lineker, Glenn Hoddle), Europe's best players started to come to play in England (Eric Cantona, Gianfranco Zola, Dennis Bergkamp). On Boxing Day in 1999, Chelsea became the first English club to field an entire team of foreign nationals.

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The 2000s saw the arrival of the overseas manager. Arsène Wenger, Ruud Gullit and Gérard Houllier had arrived in the 1990s, followed in the 2000s by José Mourinho, Rafael Benitez, Sven-Göran Eriksson, Claudio Ranieri and Luiz Felipe Scolari. They combined with the overseas players to make the EPL a melting pot of new tactics and new formations and delivered a brand of exciting football which went beyond the EPL's wildest dreams to a global audience whose national leagues could not compete.

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The global audience brought the global money. The 2010s have seen the rise of the overseas owners, bringing new markets and new commercial revenues and complete transformations of some clubs – Sheikh Mansour at Manchester City, Fenway Sports Group at Liverpool, King Power at Leicester – none of whom were anywhere near winning the EPL before being acquired by wealthy overseas investors. The 2010s saw the influx of wealthy overseas investors on a scale unprecedented in any other league or sport, as highlighted by the “league table” below and the analysis of ownership of each EPL club set out in the [Annex](#) to this report.

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12 of the original 22 EPL teams from 1992 are still in the EPL. They have all changed hands at least once since then, and will continue to change hands throughout the 2020s. This report explores the change from British to foreign ownership, as well as analysing the different types of owner we now see in the EPL. We analyse the ownership trends that we have identified, we examine why owners have invested in the EPL as opposed to other European leagues and we suggest how these trends can be used to predict what the next decade might bring for EPL clubs.

# The Ownership Table

| Current league standing | Club                    | Majority owner(s)*  | Type of owner(s)*                   | Nationality of owner(s)* | Year of acquisition of club |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1.                      | Liverpool               | Fenway Sports Group   | Private equity                      | US                       | 2010                        |
| 2.                      | Manchester City         | Abu Dhabi United Group for Development & Investment                   | Private equity                      | UAE                      | 2008                        |
| 3.                      | Leicester City          | King Power International Company Ltd                                  | Corporate                           | Thailand                 | 2010                        |
| 4.                      | Chelsea                 | Roman Abramovich  | Individual                          | Russia                   | 2003                        |
| 5.                      | Manchester United       | Glazer family   | Corporate                           | US                       | 2005                        |
| 6.                      | Wolverhampton Wanderers | Fosun International Limited   | Corporate                           | China                    | 2016                        |
| 7.                      | Sheffield United        | Abdullah bin Mosa'ad bin Abdulaziz Al Saud                            | Individual                          | Saudi Arabia             | 2018                        |
| 8.                      | Tottenham Hotspur       | ENIC International Limited  | Corporate                           | UK                       | 2001                        |
| 9.                      | Arsenal                 | Kroenke Sports & Entertainment UK INC                                 | Corporate                           | US                       | 2018                        |
| 10.                     | Burnley                 | Michael Garlick and John Banaszekiewicz                               | Local owners                        | UK                       | 2012                        |
| 11.                     | Crystal Palace          | Harris Blitzer Sports & Entertainment and Stephen Parish              | Private equity                      | US and UK                | 2015                        |
| 12.                     | Everton                 | Farhad Moshiri  | Individual                          | Iran                     | 2016                        |
| 13.                     | Newcastle United        | Mike Ashley   | Corporate                           | UK                       | 2007                        |
| 14.                     | Southampton             | Gao Jisheng, Gao Jingna and Katharina Liebherr                        | Individual                          | China and Switzerland    | 2017                        |
| 15.                     | Brighton & Hove Albion  | Anthony Bloom   | Local owner                         | UK                       | 2009                        |
| 16.                     | West Ham United         | David Sullivan, David Gold and GSO Capital Partners (J. Albert Smith) | Individual investors and hedge fund | UK and US                | 2017                        |
| 17.                     | Watford                 | Gino Pozzo  | Individual                          | Italy                    | 2012                        |
| 18.                     | AFC Bournemouth         | Maxim Demin   | Individual                          | Russia                   | 2019                        |
| 19.                     | Aston Villa             | Wes Edens and Nassef Sawiris  | Private equity                      | US and Egypt             | 2018                        |
| 20.                     | Norwich City            | Michael Wynn-Jones and Delia Smith                                    | Local owners                        | UK                       | 1997                        |

\*see Annex for further details

# Who is buying the English Premier League?

In 2000, all current EPL clubs were domestically owned. In 2020, three-quarters have foreign owners. The pie charts below reflect the nationality of the owners of EPL clubs in 2020 against the nationality of the owners of these clubs in 2010 and 2000.

## Nationality of owners in the EPL in 2020



- UK
- Russia
- Other Europe
- US
- Africa
- Middle East
- Asia Pacific

## Nationality of owners in 2010



- UK
- US
- Russia
- Middle East
- Other Europe

## Nationality of owners in 2000



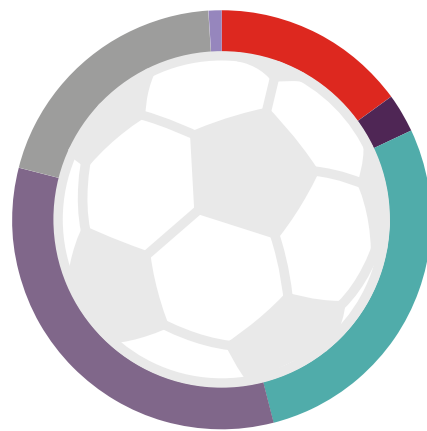
- UK

Ownership has become a means to several ends, including bringing publicity to some very wealthy owners. Two reasons perhaps stand out:

- Under-exploited commercial opportunities meant that EPL clubs were seen as comparatively cheap by US investors given the EPL's global appeal. British owners were generally not capitalising on their clubs' global recognition, and US investors knew how to make the most of the opportunity. For years, many clubs just had a shirt sponsor and some local advertising around the pitch – now Manchester United, for example, has over 50 commercial partners and sponsors.
- Less obviously initially, but the increase in global awareness or status of something (a person, a brand, a country) brought about just by the association of an owner with an EPL club has clearly also held some attraction.

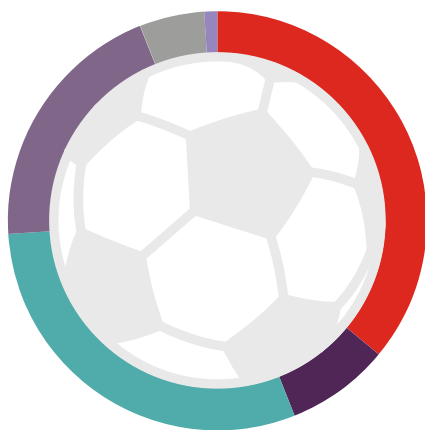
Private equity (PE) funds, sovereign wealth funds, hedge funds and other international and domestic corporates have all been used as vehicles to move into the EPL. The pie charts below reflect the types of investors within the EPL today against the types of owners of these clubs in 2010 and 2000 respectively.

### Types of owners in the EPL in 2020



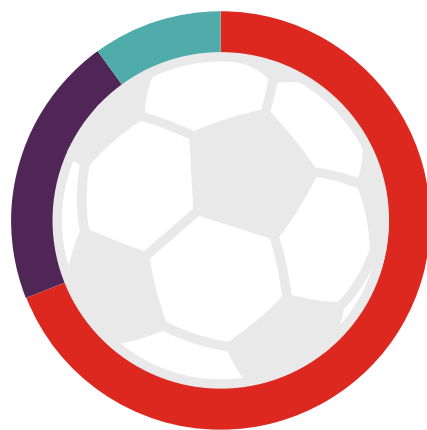
- |                        |                        |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| ● Local owners         | ● Corporate investors  |
| ● Public companies     | ● Private equity firms |
| ● Individual investors | ● Hedge funds          |

### Types of owners in 2010



- |                        |                        |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| ● Local owners         | ● Corporate investors  |
| ● Public companies     | ● Private equity firms |
| ● Individual investors | ● Hedge funds          |

### Types of owners in 2000



- |                    |                        |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| ● Local owners     | ● Individual investors |
| ● Public companies |                        |

## Keeping Possession:

### Ownership trends in English Premier League football

There have been a number of PE investors and, in particular, US PE investors that have acquired EPL clubs in the past decade. This includes Fortress Investment Group's co-ownership of Aston Villa<sup>1</sup>, Fenway Sports Group LLC's (formerly known as New England Sports Ventures) ownership of Liverpool<sup>2</sup> and Harris Blitz Sports & Entertainment's ownership of Crystal Palace<sup>3</sup>. Outside of the EPL, Jason Leven and Steve Kaplan own Swansea City, John Berylson owns Millwall and the Tornante Company owns Portsmouth, all of whom are investors falling under the PE bracket.<sup>4</sup>

China Media Capital, a Chinese consortium, invested in City Football Group Limited (the holding company that administers football clubs including Manchester City) in 2015<sup>5</sup> and, more recently, Silver Lake, a Silicon Valley PE firm, also bought a stake in the company in November 2019.<sup>6</sup> The ultimate majority shareholder of Manchester City, however, remains Abu Dhabi United Group For Development & Investment, a private equity company owned by Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who is also the Deputy Prime Minister of the UAE. A consortium of investors backed by Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund are reportedly also close to acquiring Newcastle United.

Within the hedge fund sector, J. Albert "Tripp" Smith, an executive director of The Blackstone Group and co-founder of its hedge fund and credit investment arm, GSO Capital Partners, purchased a 10% stake in West Ham United in September 2017.<sup>7</sup> The club's majority owners, however, are still the UK's David Sullivan and David Gold, who hold a combined 86.2% stake in WH Holding Limited.<sup>8</sup>

There has also been a huge increase in the past ten years of individual investors and other corporate vehicles holding ownership interests in EPL clubs. For instance, Stan Kroenke's sports and entertainment company completed its takeover of Arsenal in 2018,<sup>9</sup> whilst Russian petrochemicals trader Maxim Demin acquired the remaining 25% stake held by US PE firm Peak6 Investments in Bournemouth to gain full ownership of the club in 2019.<sup>10</sup> Wolverhampton Wanderers were also taken over by a Chinese conglomerate and investment company, Fosun International Limited, led by Guo Guangchang in July 2016.<sup>11</sup>

"Local owners", however, do still exist at some clubs. At Burnley, for example, John Banaszkiwicz, Terrence Crabb, Brendan Flood, Michael Garlick, Clive Holt, Barry Kilby and Brian Nelson not only hold shares in the club, but also form the club's directorship.<sup>12</sup> The owner/directors are all locally born supporters of the club and, based on the most recently filed accounts, receive no remuneration.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, lifelong fan Michael Wynn-Jones also owns a majority of shares in Norwich City, along with his wife Delia Smith; however, the club is organised as an unlisted public company and a good proportion of the shareholding is represented by local supporters of the club.<sup>14</sup>

Other clubs, particularly those with a large, global fan base, have sought to maximise their earning potential by becoming public companies. Most notably, Manchester United underwent an IPO in August 2012 and is listed on the New York Stock Exchange.<sup>15</sup> As of April 2020, Manchester United plc trades with only the Glazer family holding 10% or more of its shares.<sup>16</sup> Although now a non-quoted public company, Arsenal Holdings plc also traded on the NEX exchange until September 2018.<sup>17</sup>

# What ownership trends have we identified?

The types and origins of owners of EPL clubs have changed drastically since the turn of the millennium and this section of the report analyses the trends that we have identified in this period.

1. **Reduction in “local owners” and public companies:** in 2000, the vast majority of EPL clubs were either owned or controlled by local owners through private or public companies with limited share trades. By 2020, however, these ownership types account for less than 25% of the ownership interests in EPL clubs.

Although the owners of some clubs (such as Burnley, Brighton and Norwich City) remain local and are supporters of the clubs themselves, there has clearly been a shift in mindset during the last twenty years from football clubs often being owned by someone within the local community, to becoming an asset like any other that can be bought and sold, with ownership dissociated from geography. Consequently, there has been a marked reduction in “local owners” over the past twenty years.

2. **Inbound investment:** linked to this, the increased investment from Asia into EPL clubs largely reflects the growing trend of foreign investment into UK infrastructure assets in the 2010s. Much of the UK’s gas, water and electricity suppliers, prime real estate and transport links are owned by consortiums of overseas investors and the EPL is no different. Football clubs are now seen as tradeable assets, just as any other business is, and this helps to explain the increase of foreign owners within the EPL over the past ten years.
3. **Private equity ownership:** revenue for EPL clubs has increased enormously during the past twenty years, largely due to increasing broadcasting rights, commercial partnerships and transfer fees. EPL clubs now have huge amounts of income and, in many cases, huge outgoings too. Prospective owners may see the increased revenues, and the subsequent increased value, of EPL clubs as an opportunity to benefit themselves. This motive perhaps best aligns itself with the characteristics of PE acquisitions, which could explain the increase in PE ownership (and particularly US PE ownership) of EPL clubs in the past ten years. However, a successful exit by a PE house is still awaited, although not for want of offers in some cases.
4. **Country marketing:** some owners, however, seem to have less interest in using EPL clubs as a vehicle to profit financially, and instead these investments have arguably become almost a marketing strategy adopted by nations (particularly in the Middle East). The first example of this was Manchester City’s takeover in 2008, whilst Newcastle United’s proposed takeover by Saudi Arabia’s sovereign wealth fund appears close to completion too. In this context,

it can be argued that ownership of EPL clubs has become a 21st century way for nations to promote themselves to the rest of the world and generate new investment back into their own markets.

5. **“Trophy asset” ownership:** ownership of an elite football club can also be considered a “trophy asset” EPL clubs are highly visible assets and, due to the increasing standing of the EPL globally, owners themselves can enjoy increased status, fame and security by owning an EPL club. Indeed, such is the rising value of the EPL generally, that many business owners have sought to realise their investments by promoting their own companies via ownership of clubs. The Srivaddhanaprabha family, for instance, have heavily promoted their business King Power International Group through their ownership of Leicester City, even renaming the club’s stadium to the King Power Stadium.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Mike Ashley has attempted to promote his retail businesses, namely Sports Direct, through his ownership of Newcastle United. He also renamed the club’s stadium from St. James’ Park to the Sports Direct Arena, albeit temporarily, in 2011.<sup>19</sup>
6. **Multi-club ownership:** finally, the multi-club ownership model is another recent trend that has emerged. In order to guarantee the integrity of domestic competitions, common ownership of clubs within the same countries is often prohibited. However, from a global perspective, these regulations have not prevented owners expanding internationally through acquisitions to create a portfolio of clubs. The Pozzo family, which currently owns Watford, for example, also owns Udinese Calcio and used to own Granada CF. On an even larger scale, City Football Group, as well as owning Manchester City, has ownership interests in clubs in New York, Melbourne, Yokohama, Montevideo, Girona, Chengdu and Mumbai.<sup>20</sup> This enables owners to expand their clubs’ brands, raise their clubs’ international profiles, gain unique access and exposure to different markets (e.g. India), and benefit from the operational synergies that will inevitably arise from owning multiple clubs, including use of the loan system and internal transfers. Multi-club ownership perhaps became an even more attractive proposition in 2017, when both RB Leipzig and Red Bull Salzburg (two members of the Red Bull club network) qualified for the UEFA Champions League. In this instance, UEFA was satisfied that the two clubs were suitably independent from the Red Bull corporation and sufficiently distinct from one another to both be admitted to the competition, which sets a precedent for two clubs with the same common ownership to compete in European competitions together, provided that certain criteria are met.<sup>21</sup>

## Why not invest in Europe's other "big 5" leagues?

Although the rise in foreign ownership is by no means limited to the EPL, the other "big 5" European leagues have not seen the same scale of overseas investment. This section of the report analyses the level of foreign ownership in each league and why this might be the case.

### Italy and France

In both Italy and France, the majority of teams remain domestically owned, although there has been some increase in foreign ownership in recent years. In Italy, Chinese investor Zhang Jindong, US businessman James Pallotta and US hedge fund Elliot Management own majority stakes in Inter Milan, Roma and AC Milan respectively.<sup>22 23 24</sup> Similarly, in France, PSG, Monaco and OGC Nice have recently been acquired by the State of Qatar (through its shareholding organisation Qatar Sports Investments), Russian investor Dmitry Rybolovlev and UK investor Sir Jim Ratcliffe.<sup>25 26 27</sup>

Despite this, foreign owners in both Italy and France remain a minority. This is largely due to the fact that Serie A and Ligue 1 clubs do not see the same levels of interest and revenue as EPL clubs. A recent UEFA report found that the combined revenues of the twenty EPL clubs in the 2017/18 season was €5.4 billion, compared to €2.3 billion for Serie A clubs and €1.7 billion for Ligue 1 clubs.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, whilst Italian football dominated much of the 1990s and early 2000s, the EPL has overtaken it in terms of popularity to become the most-watched sports league in the world, which inevitably brings both increased status and business opportunities for potential investors.

### Spain and Germany

Spanish and German clubs account for six of the last seven UEFA Champions League winners and the status of Real Madrid, Barcelona and Bayern Munich as "super-clubs" is beyond question. Despite this, La Liga and the Bundesliga have also not experienced the same level of foreign ownership as we have in England.

The two biggest clubs in Spain (and arguably the world) – Real Madrid and Barcelona – are organised as *socios*. These clubs grant its members (usually fans) voting rights on certain matters (primarily a right to vote on the election of a president and board of directors). Athletic Bilbao and CA Osasuna are also organised as *socios*. There has been some increase in foreign ownership in Spain recently, with Singaporean billionaire Peter Lim buying a controlling stake in Valencia<sup>29</sup> and Israeli billionaire Idan Ofer acquiring a stake in Atletico Madrid,<sup>30</sup> although the majority of clubs remain domestically owned.

Similarly, German clubs have traditionally been owned by their fans – Bayern Munich, for instance, has over 290,000 members.<sup>31</sup> Football clubs in Germany were historically not-for-profit organisations (until 1998, private ownership of any kind was prohibited<sup>32</sup>) and Bundesliga rules today still require a majority of voting rights in every club to be held by the club itself through its "50+1 rule."<sup>33</sup> Recently, however, clubs have encouraged some external investment, although such investment still largely comes from within Germany. Bayern Munich's ownership structure, for instance, now allows 25% of shares to be owned by external investors (currently adidas, Audi and Allianz),<sup>34</sup> whilst over 40% of Borussia Dortmund's shares are owned by external investors such as Puma.<sup>35</sup>

There is an exemption from the 50+1 rule for investors who have had an interest in a club for more than twenty years, which Bayer Leverkusen and VfL Wolfsburg benefit from,<sup>36</sup> whilst its effectiveness has been brought into question in recent years following the rapid rise of RB Leipzig.<sup>37</sup> Despite this, Hannover 96's proposal to amend the 50+1 rule in 2009 was overwhelmingly rejected, with 32 out of 36 clubs voting against the proposal, three clubs abstaining and only Hannover 96 themselves voting in favour.<sup>38</sup>

It certainly seems that, culturally, there is a large amount of resistance to external ownership and investment in football clubs in both Germany and Spain,<sup>39</sup> which has not necessarily been the case in the EPL. In fact, ownership changes in the EPL are often seen positively by the fan bases of EPL clubs, who hope that the new ownership brings with it a wave of investment to fund the acquisition of new players and secure on-field success. The fan ownership models that are common in Spain and Germany also discourage foreign investment. Shares in these clubs are not traded on secondary markets and, whilst there is no equivalent to the 50+1 rule in Spain, a large base of members inevitably affects the privacy of deal negotiation and prolongs stake building, which can obstruct external investment altogether.



## Conclusion and projections going forward

The EPL has certainly seen huge financial growth over the last decade. Some owners saw money to be made and the immense potential of EPL clubs as business opportunities, whilst others perhaps saw a vehicle for their own ambitions.

The growth of overseas ownership and external investment is certainly showing no signs of slowing down, but what the next decade will look like in terms of the ownership of EPL clubs generally is less clear. We can, however, certainly make some projections based on the trends we have identified:

### COVID-19

In the immediate term, the impact of COVID-19 on the EPL, and the global game generally, will be closely monitored by all stakeholders. These are unprecedented times – it is the first time in post-war history that there has been an enforced, prolonged break in the global football calendar, which begs the question: will there be any lessons learnt, or material changes suggested, as a result? Football, as a sport, has thus far avoided any revolution of sorts, and its rules have evolved on a piecemeal basis over a number of years (the introduction of VAR being an exception to this), but how football resumes normal service post-COVID-19 will be interesting to see. Four specific issues that may impact the EPL are:

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#### Atmosphere:

How will attendance figures be affected once football games are back being played in front of live audiences? Will fans be more reluctant to attend in person, instead preferring to follow from afar, or will fan numbers in the EPL return to “normal”? Matches are generally oversubscribed, certainly for the big clubs, and so we don't see the crowds disappearing, but government restrictions on mass gatherings will see games played with no atmosphere, which will not have the same attraction for the global audience – the sight of the packed stadium and the passionate support are a big part of the EPL package. It is not the gate receipts that matter to the clubs, it is the numbers of people watching on television which ultimately keeps the broadcasters happy. Games, particularly European games, may see home support only for the short and medium term.

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#### Financial stability:

The vast majority of EPL clubs pay out most of their revenues in player and manager salaries and transfer fees. The financially sustainable football club model remains elusive and few clubs have cash reserves to sustain them through any crisis. Wealthier clubs are reliant on the business success and generosity of their owners; weaker clubs rely on the “trickle-down” effect of transfer fees and the equality approach in the

sharing of broadcasting revenues. If support from the owner is more important than support from the fans, then sustainability will remain elusive in the EPL. The EPL also has to work out how it can play out the remainder of the season over the summer, rather than face the financial consequences of handing back broadcast money for unplayed games.

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#### eSports:

The big beneficiary of the lockdown has been eSports and it can be argued that the EPL teams have been slow to respond to the rise of eSports. eSports seems to have replaced the void left by traditional sports during the lockdown and it is unrivalled in its ability to connect with younger fans. Whilst we do not anticipate an acquisition of a smaller EPL club by an eSports franchise in the near future, eventually this appears likely, as its popularity continues to grow and eSports teams are learning how to connect with younger fans in a way which will eventually shake up the way conventional sport is followed.

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#### Community and social action:

EPL clubs have long been noted for action in the local community. Many of them have rebuilt or redeveloped their stadiums and generally had a beneficial impact on the surrounding local areas. In the last few years, clubs have provided for food banks and offered other social support to their communities and local charities and this has been as much driven by the players as the owners. During COVID-19, many EPL clubs have chosen not to take advantage of the UK government's furlough scheme for employees and players have been deferring wages and raising money for the NHS, which has demonstrated an enlightened understanding and has been well received. In early April, as governing bodies publicly debated with clubs and players about wage cuts, it seemed that EPL clubs were about to replace bankers as the UK's pantomime villains. Having narrowly avoided that, EPL clubs now face the difficult decision about when to restart. Hopefully this will happen in a positive way and remind the world what it has missed. Clubs that stay strong in their communities and work with, rather than against, society will flourish.

## **Beyond COVID-19**

Football is now undoubtedly part of “big business” and this trend seems irreversible. As a result, we expect to see transactions involving ownership of football clubs continue to increase, and the value of EPL clubs continue to rise (on the assumption that the game remains popular with a global audience and value of broadcasting rights continues to increase as well).

## **Short periods of ownership are likely to continue**

The success or failure of investment into an EPL club is so intrinsically linked to performances on the pitch and, in particular, the ever-present threat of relegation to the Championship. Accordingly, for so long as this relegation/promotion dynamic exists (compared say, to the closed nature of certain US sports leagues), these assets will continue to change hands as current owners either decide they need to realise their investment or cannot continue to fund the club and prospective owners decide to acquire a club opportunistically, with promotion to the EPL and qualification to European competitions often central to the investment strategy.

## **Where will the new wave of owners come from?**

We expect to see the country marketing strategy continue in the short term (with news of Newcastle’s potential takeover dominating the sporting press in the UK over the past few weeks), but we do not anticipate this trend continuing further into the 2020s. Potential buyers of this type are few and far between – outside of the Middle East, which countries will support the acquisition of a football club by their nation and where will those clubs sit in their nations’ pecking order when the oil price is so low, or demand falls? The success of this model is unproven anyway. Whilst ownership in the EPL brings global awareness and Manchester City’s success on the pitch has brought positive attention to the UAE, UEFA’s Financial Fair Play Regulations (FFP) can also bring increased scrutiny. Where, then, will the next generation of owners come from?

## **Media owners**

We can see broadcasters themselves trying to acquire ownership interests in EPL clubs in the 2020s. The manner in which we consume media has changed dramatically in the last five to ten years and it can be argued that football has not yet properly caught up. Concepts such as the “3pm blackout” are completely alien to a younger generation of supporter that expects immediate access to media at the touch of a button. New broadcasters such as Netflix and Amazon are starting to identify this and have had success with box set series such as *The Test, All or Nothing, Drive to Survive* and *Sunderland ‘Til I Die*, which give unprecedented access to fans interested in what goes on behind closed doors. Indeed, the way in which football clubs’ media operations are carried out seems to have changed in recent years from a sponsorship model towards one more focused on content creation, distribution and fan engagement. We could see this taken even further in the future, with broadcasters buying stakes in clubs and starting to broadcast their own content. Perhaps a broadcaster could even acquire a club and then create a regular, “fly-on-the-wall” series, with weekly episodes that provide complete coverage across changing rooms, training sessions and pre-season friendlies/tournaments. Paying members could perhaps even have a say in next week’s line-up and whether it’s going to be a false nine or a target man against Chelsea.

## **Stakeholders in the game may also start to have more of a say over who acquires an interest in EPL clubs**

This is a dynamic that is already apparent on the continent through the fan ownership model, but we may start to see governing bodies, fans, broadcasters and other clubs (and even fans of other clubs) become more active in expressing support or disdain for owners in England too. The current press reporting over the Newcastle takeover is an immediate case in point, with beIN Sports and Amnesty International both seeking to influence the EPL and the EPL’s takeover approval process. Fans have never quite let go of the idea that owners are really stewards of something – and that the clubs themselves really belong to their fans and their communities – most clubs are over 100 years old and will still be competing long after the current crop of owners have moved on. Fan-led pushback to EPL clubs using the UK government’s furlough scheme for employees shows that owners do not have the unrestricted power that usually comes with the ownership of a company and fan power is not to be underestimated: the “Ashley out” campaign, for instance, has marred Mike Ashley’s time at Newcastle.

## UEFA's Financial Fair Play Regulations

FFP was brought in at the start of the 2011/12 season and the operation of FFP has not been without its criticism. FFP was designed to make football clubs financially sustainable so that clubs did not rely too heavily on the generosity of their owner – in short, you cannot buy a team and fill it with expensive players using the owner's money. At the time that FFP was brought in, levelling the playing field and addressing the financial gulf between clubs was clearly a key factor, however, in practice, one of its criticisms is that it appears to have created a big club status quo (with smaller clubs restricted in their ability to invest to reach the level of the "big" clubs). It has been announced recently that FFP may be relaxed during the current exceptional circumstances due to the outbreak of COVID-19,<sup>40</sup> and whether it survives in its current format at all remains to be seen, but prospective investors will closely monitor any changes that are made. At this stage, it is unlikely that football in the EPL, or indeed elsewhere in Europe, would implement a salary cap or player transfer cap as other sports have, but any changes of this nature would inevitably impact ownership and transaction volume.

## Brexit

Brexit, understandably, is not currently front page news in the UK printed press. However, Brexit will inevitably impact the EPL because of the restrictions on the free movement of players into the UK. The manner in which the future relationship between the UK and EU is negotiated will be closely monitored by all stakeholders in the game. Some fans hanker for a return to the old days, with community owned clubs or a fans-led ownership model like that in Spain and Germany, but that is one trend that is not foreseeable at this moment.

## Competition

Finally, the competition is coming. The EPL's success was started by its attraction of Europe's top players and has been sustained by the top players from South America and Africa, but other leagues are catching up. The MLS, for instance, has finally cracked league soccer in the US, China has its own Super League and India has begun its own soccer version of the IPL, which has done so much to change the way the world plays cricket. These leagues are not founded on a century of social and community tradition and perhaps have the advantage that they can adapt the game to whatever they want it to be. At some point, it appears likely that the MLS will become a rival destination for South American players. How long before a chunk of the global audience chooses New York City v Inter Miami rather than Liverpool v Manchester City? If the world starts to watch other versions of the EPL in other continents, what will the EPL do next?



# Annex - Ownership details of English Premier League clubs

## Arsenal

### Ultimate owner:

Kroenke Sports & Entertainment UK INC

### Incorporated:

Colorado (US)

### Shareholder(s):

Stanley Kroenke (100%) (US)

### Type of investor:

Corporate - American sports and entertainment holding company that invests in stadiums, sports teams, media channels and real estate

### Directors:

Sir Chips Keswick, Ken Friar, Lord Harris of Peckham, Stan Kroenke, Josh Kroenke

**Revenue for 2018/19:  
£395.6 million**

### UK subsidiary:

Arsenal Holdings Limited (04250459)

## Aston Villa

### Ultimate owner:

NSWE SCS

### Incorporated:

Luxembourg

### Shareholder(s):

Wes Edens (US); Nassef Sawiris (Egypt)

### Type of investor:

Private equity

### Directors:

Wes Edens, Nassef Sawiris, Christian Purslow

**Revenue for 2018/19:  
£54.2 million**

### UK subsidiary:

NSWE UK Limited (10176070)

## AFC Bournemouth

### Ultimate owner:

AFCB Enterprises Limited

### Incorporated:

British Virgin Islands

### Shareholder(s):

Maxim Victorovich Demin and family (100%) (Russia)

### Type of investor:

Individual investor

### Directors:

Jeff Mostyn, Neill Blake, Nick Rothwell, Rico Seitz

**Revenue for 2018/19:  
£131.1 million**

### UK subsidiary:

AFC Bournemouth Limited (06632170)

## Brighton & Hove Albion

### Ultimate owner:

Brighton & Hove Albion Holdings Limited (02849319)

### Incorporated:

United Kingdom

### Shareholder(s):

Anthony Bloom (93.7%) (UK); various shareholders (6.3%)

### Type of investor:

Local owner

### Directors:

Robert Comer, Paul Barber, Anthony Bloom, Raymond Bloom, Derek Chapman, Adam Franks, Peter Godfrey, David Jones, Martin Perry, Marc Sugarman, Michelle Walder

**Revenue for 2018/19:  
£143.4 million**

### UK subsidiary:

Brighton & Hove Albion Football Club, Limited (The) (00081077)

## Burnley

### Ultimate owner:

Burnley FC Holdings Limited (08335231)

### Incorporated:

United Kingdom

### Shareholder(s):

Michael Lee Garlick - management consultant company/property development (49.24%) (UK); John William Banaszkiwicz - founder of Freight Investor Services (28.2%) (UK); others hold 22.56% of the shareholdings (including Terrence Crabb, Clive Holt, Barry Kilby, Brendan Flood, Brian Nelson (all UK))

### Type of investor:

Local owners

### Directors:

John Banaszkiwicz, Terrence Crabb, Brendan Flood, Michael Garlick, Clive Holt, Barry Kilby, Brian Nelson

**Revenue for 2018/19:  
£137.8 million**

### UK subsidiary:

Burnley Football & Athletic Company, Limited (The) (00054222)

## Crystal Palace

### Ultimate owner:

Palace Holdco UK Limited (09898364)

### Incorporated:

United Kingdom

### Shareholder(s):

Palace Holdco LP (98.2% of A ordinary shares and preference shares, respectively) (US); Palace Parallel Holdco LLC (1.8% of A ordinary shares and preference shares, respectively) (US); Stephen Browett - Chairman of Farr Vintners (17.86% of B ordinary shares) (UK); Jeremy Hosking - private equity investor (17.86% of B ordinary shares) (UK); Stephen Parish - private investor (64.28% of B ordinary shares) (UK)

### Type of investor:

Private equity

### Directors:

David Blitzler, Joshua Harris, Stephen Parish

**Revenue for 2018/19:  
£150.3 million**

### UK subsidiary:

CPFC Limited (07270793)

## Chelsea

### Ultimate owner:

Fordstam Limited (04784127)

### Incorporated:

United Kingdom

### Shareholder(s):

Roman Abramovich (100%) (Russia)

### Type of investor:

Individual investor

### Directors:

Eugene Tenenbaum, Marina Granovskaia, Guy Laurence, Bruce Buck

**Revenue for 2018/19:  
£446.7 million**

### UK subsidiary:

Chelsea FC plc (02536231)

## Everton

### Ultimate owner:

Everton Football Club Company Limited (00036624)

### Incorporated:

United Kingdom

### Shareholder(s):

Farhad Moshiri through Blue Heaven Holdings Limited - investor in steel and energy companies (77.23%) (Iran); Bill Kenwright - West End theatre producer (5%) (UK); other investors (17.77%)

### Type of investor:

Individual investor / local owners

### Directors:

Professor Denise Barrett-Baxendale, Martinus "Marcel" Brands, Bill Kenwright, Alexander Ryazantsev

**Revenue for 2018/19:  
£187.7 million**

### UK subsidiary:

N/A

## Leicester City

### Ultimate owner:

King Power International Company Ltd

### Incorporated:

Thailand

### Shareholder(s):

Aiyawatt Srivaddhanaprabha (55%); Voramas Srivaddhanaprabha (10%); Apichet Srivaddhanaprabha (10%); Aroonroong Srivaddhanaprabha (10%); Aimon Srivaddhanaprabha (15%) (all Thailand)

### Type of investor:

Corporate - King Power is a travel retail group specialising in duty-free goods

### Directors:

Aiyawatt Srivaddhanaprabha, Apichet Srivaddhanaprabha, Susan Whelan, Simon Capper, John Rudkin, Andrew Neville, Mags Mernagh, Kevin Barclay, Anthony Herlihy, Liam Dolan-Barr, Dan Barnett, Shilai Liu

**Revenue for 2018/19:  
£178.4 million**

### UK subsidiary:

Leicester City Football Club Limited (04593477)

## Manchester City

### Ultimate owner:

City Football Group Limited (08355862)

### Incorporated:

United Kingdom

### Shareholder(s):

Abu Dhabi United Group For Development & Investment (75.12%) (United Arab Emirates); China Media Capital (12.36%) (China); Silver Lake Partners (10.42%) (US); Vega FZ, LLC (2.1%)

### Type of investor:

Private equity

### Directors:

Abdulla Al Khouri, Mohamed Al Mazrouei, Khaldoon Al Mubarak, Egon Durban, Alberto Galassi, Ruigang Li, John Macbeath, Martin Edelman, Simon Pearce

**Revenue for 2018/19:  
£535 million**

### UK subsidiary:

Manchester City Football Club Limited (00040946)

## Liverpool

### Ultimate owner:

Fenway Sports Group (legally organised as NESV I, LLC)

### Incorporated:

Delaware (US)

### Shareholder(s):

The only investors holding more than a 10% interest are John Henry, Tom Werner and Mike Gordon (all US)

### Type of investor:

Private equity

### Directors:

John Henry, Tom Werner, Mike Gordon, Peter Moore, Michael Egan, Kenneth Dalglish, Andy Hughes, Gregory Morris, Edward Weiss

**Revenue for 2018/19:  
£533 million**

### UK subsidiary:

UKSV Holdings Company Limited (07393872)

## Manchester United

### Ultimate owner:

Manchester United plc

### Incorporated:

Cayman Islands, Grand Cayman

### Shareholder(s):

The Glazer family (c.77%) (US); shareholders of Manchester United plc on the New York Stock Exchange (c.23%)

### Type of investor:

Corporate - the Glazer family owns sports teams (most notably, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers of the NFL) and real estate; shareholders of Manchester United plc on the New York Stock Exchange

### Directors:

Avram, Joel, Kevin, Bryan and Edward Glazer, Edward Woodward, Richard Arnold, Cliff Baty, Darcie Glazer Kassewitz, Robert Leitao, Manu Sawhney, John Hooks

**Revenue for 2018/19:  
£627 million**

### UK subsidiary:

Red Football Holdings limited (08155501)

## Newcastle United

### Ultimate owner:

MASH Holdings Limited (06861426)

### Incorporated:

United Kingdom

### Shareholder(s):

Mike Ashley (100%) (UK)

### Type of investor:

Corporate - principle activities are the operation of the football club, retailing and wholesale distribution of sports and leisure clothing, licensing of group brands and other investment activities

### Directors:

Mike Ashley and Lee Charnley

**Revenue for 2018/19:  
£178 million**

### UK subsidiary:

Newcastle United Limited (02529667)

## Sheffield United

### Ultimate owner:

Blades Leisure Limited (06963761) (owned by UTB LLC and UTB 2018 LLC)

### Incorporated:

United Kingdom

### Shareholder(s):

Abdullah bin Mosa'ad bin Abdulaziz Al Saud (100%) (Saudi Arabia)

### Type of investor:

Corporate - focuses on professional footballing activities of the club and the operation of sports stadiums. Other interests of the group include stewarding services and commercial gym operations

### Directors:

Joseph Giansiracusa, Jan Van Winckel, H.H. Prince Musa'ad bin Khalid Al Saud, Princess Reem Bint Abdullah Al Saud, Abdullah Alghamdi

**Revenue for 2018/19:  
£20.8 million**

### UK subsidiary:

The Sheffield United Football Club Limited (00061564)

## Norwich City

### Ultimate owner:

Norwich City Football Club plc (00154044)

### Incorporated:

United Kingdom

### Shareholder(s):

Michael Wynn-Jones and Delia Smith (53% of ordinary shares and 19% of B preference shares) (UK); Michael Foulger (13% of ordinary shares) (UK); Trustees of BPP Pension Fund (12% of B preference shares); various other local shareholders of ordinary shares, A preference shares and B preference shares in the club

### Type of investor:

Local owners

### Directors:

Michael Foulger, Stephan Phillips, Delia Smith, Thomas Smith, Edward Wynn-Jones

**Revenue for 2018/19:  
£61.6 million**

### UK subsidiary:

N/A

## Southampton

### Ultimate owner:

Lander Sports Investment Co. Limited

### Incorporated:

Hong Kong

### Shareholder(s):

Gao Jisheng and Gao Jingna (c.80%) (China); Katharina Liebherr (c.20%) (Switzerland)

### Type of investor:

Individual investors

### Directors:

Gao Jingna, Gao Jisheng, Katharina Liebherr, Martin Semmens, Shao Xu

**Revenue for 2018/19:  
£149.6 million**

### UK subsidiary:

St Mary's Football Group Limited (06951765)

## Tottenham Hotspur

### Ultimate owner:

Tottenham Hotspur Limited (01706358)

### Incorporated:

United Kingdom

### Shareholder(s):

ENIC International Limited (85.55%) (Joe Lewis (UK) owns 70.6% of ENIC International Limited; Daniel Levy and family (UK) are potential beneficiaries of discretionary trust which ultimately owns 29.4% of the share capital of ENIC International Limited); other investors (14.45%)

### Type of investor:

Corporate - ENIC Group (which owns ENIC International Limited) is a UK investment company that holds sports, media and leisure businesses.

### Directors:

Daniel Levy, Matthew Collecott, Donna-Maria Cullen, Rebecca Caplehorn, Ron Robson

**Revenue for 2018/19:  
£460.7 million**

### UK subsidiary:

N/A

## West Ham United

### Ultimate owner:

WH Holding Limited (05993863)

### Incorporated:

United Kingdom

### Shareholder(s):

David Sullivan (51.1%) (UK); David Gold (35.1%) (UK); J. Albert Smith (10%) (US); other investors (3.8%)

### Type of investor:

Individual investors / hedge fund

### Directors:

Karren Brady, David Gold, Daniel Harris, Andrew Mollett, J. Albert Smith, David Sullivan, Tara Warren

**Revenue for 2018/19:  
£190.7 million**

### UK subsidiary:

West Ham United Football Club Limited (00066516)

## Watford

### Ultimate owner:

Hornets Management SARL

### Incorporated:

Luxembourg

### Shareholder(s):

Gino Pozzo (Italy)

### Type of investor:

Family business that holds ownership interests in Watford and Udinese Calcio

### Directors:

Scott Duxbury, David Fransen, Stuart Timperley

**Revenue for 2018/19:  
£147.6 million**

### UK subsidiary:

Watford Association Football Club Limited (The) (00104194)

## Wolverhampton Wanderers

### Ultimate owner:

Fosun International Limited

### Incorporated:

Hong Kong

### Shareholder(s):

Guo Guangchang, Wang Qunbin and Liang Xinjun between them indirectly own the majority shareholding in the club (all China)

### Type of investor:

Corporate - Chinese conglomerate and investment company

### Directors:

Yu Shi, John Gough, John Bowater

**Revenue for 2018/19:  
£172 million**

### UK subsidiary:

Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club (1986) Limited (01989823)



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## Keeping Possession:

### Ownership trends in English Premier League football

## Endnotes

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