

THE DIRTY DOZEN

A proposed breakaway elite league, the sacking of a top coach and feelings of disbelief at the perceived selfishness of a select few. These summarise the events surrounding the stormy start to the week of 19th April 2021. When Tottenham Hotspurs announced their acquiescence to join the proposed Super League, their star coach Jose Mourinho strongly disagreed and refused to lead the team out to training the following morning. He was promptly relieved of his duties for his stand. Then Tottenham's opponents, while training before the encounter, wore jerseys that read 'Football is for the fans' to voice their displeasure at the proposed Super League.

Twelve of Europe's elite soccer clubs chose to eventually form their own league, an idea that had quietly been simmering all the while being frowned upon by the footballing powers that be. Arsene Wenger, the legendary former Arsenal coach, had predicted the creation of this league a decade ago. The twelve teams in question are Barcelona, Real Madrid, Atletico Madrid from Spain, Juventus, AC Milan, Internazionale Milan from Italy, Liverpool, Manchester United, Arsenal, Tottenham Hotspurs, Chelsea and Manchester City from England. I dub them the Dirty Dozen. The Bavarian giants, Bayern Munich, who can match any of the Dirty Dozen in financial might or size of trophy cabinet, chose to hold their head up high and stay out of the murky waters of greed. Paris Saint Germaine, the French powerhouse, also chose to honourably sit out the formation of this Super League.

World football governing body, the Federation of International Football Association (FIFA) and Europe's equivalent, the Union of European Football Association (UEFA), denounced the Super League. This league will rival the European Champions League, a super league of sorts that encompasses all teams in UEFA affiliated countries and which, more importantly, ensures participation by merit and not select invitation. Chelsea went a step further and resigned from the European Clubs Association leaving their disgruntled fans in limbo. One wonders whether the club makes the fans or vice versa.

One banner held up by a disgruntled soccer fan read 'Created by the poor, stolen by the rich'. JP Morgan bank, which promised to finance the Super League, issued a statement stating it regretted its decision. The who is who of world football is quickly backing off this hot potato after having realized the implications of siding with the said Super League.

This Super League will bring on a huge dispute since the Dirty Dozen are members of UEFA and automatically sign up to submit to UEFA's jurisdiction. UEFA controls the European Champions League – the cashcow for the elite clubs in Europe. 'Earn it on

the pitch' read the t-shirts of many a fan in derision of the Dirty Dozen's efforts to exclude the less moneyed clubs from their newly formed Super League.

The reality of the situation is that the idea of the Super League was a long way coming. With Europe winning the last four World Cups on the trot (previously the trophy would oscillate between Europe and South America) and with fans world wide giving all their crazed attention to European club football (and justifiably so - European club football is top drawer stuff) it is clear that European football is where the big money in the sport is. Add to this the fact that this money is largely controlled by the Dirty Dozen and the rest of the footballing world had this coming. How many clubs outside Europe's elite can cough up 263 million Pounds to buy a player like PSG did for Neymar, the Brazilian talisman, or 94 Million Pounds like Real Madrid did for Cristiano Ronaldo, the Portuguese legend?

All said and done the Super League lasted only two days and met it's demise on the 21st of April 2021. What went wrong? You see, FIFA control world football and have to make sure everything done is *for the good of the game* – just as their slogan says. They threatened the Dirty Dozen with expulsion from all FIFA activities and FIFA related activities. This would mean expulsion from the prized jewel – the World Cup. This one tournament reigns in all errant members like the Dirty Dozen who are more than aware that they control an influentially large chunk of the money circulating in world football. If expelled from the largest single sporting event on the planet and by translation the largest amount of money in world football, the Dirty Dozen would most likely end up the losers. What with the lost world wide viewership and sponsorship deals from which all this money emanates.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) must have heaved a sigh of relief when the Super League imploded only 48 hours after it went live. The Dirty Dozen beat a hasty retreat after facing threats from FIFA, UEFA and their local footballing bodies. Only Madrid and Barcelona from Spain's La Liga were promised no punishment. This brings further insight to the problem – to punish the top two teams in Spain which bring in more money than all the other teams in La Liga combined (from viewership and sponsorship deals etc) would be suicidal. The problem that would have faced CAS (and that faces FIFA and UEFA) is that the Dirty Dozen have realized their financial might in world football and want to harness it to the full. If a dispute between the Dirty Dozen and FIFA / UEFA went to arbitration and the Dirty Dozen were found liable for scorning UEFA's jurisdiction, where would that leave them? CAS might have been forced to make an award that would force UEFA to expel the Dirty Dozen from their respective leagues in the process inadvertently clearing the way for the formation of the very Super League that was the source of the dispute....

As we all battle this pandemic globally, remember to always stay safe by following the guidelines given to us by the medical experts.

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