

# **“He’s taken a Dive”: Cultural Comparisons of Elite Referee Responses to Reduced Player Behaviour in Association Football**

**Tom Webb & Richard Thelwell**

**Sport Business and Management: An International Journal**

## **Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to consider the cultural similarities and differences between elite referees concerning their preparation and performance in dealing with reduced player behaviour.

**Design:** Semi-structured interviews were employed to collect the data. The 37 participants from England, Spain and Italy were selected through the use of purposive sampling, and all were working in the field of refereeing as current elite level referees, ex-elite level referees, referee assessors, referee coaches, or managers and administrators from bodies that manage and train referees. Inductive content analysis was employed to generate themes from the raw data.

**Findings:** Referees have identified particular issues related specifically to player behaviour and also identified specific traits pertaining to players from certain countries. Furthermore, results demonstrate that referees have begun to alter their preparation and performance due to the pressure they perceive exists within Association Football and, more specifically, from the players themselves.

**Originality:** This study is the first to compare cross-cultural elite referee responses regarding their preparation and performance related to player behaviour.

**Key words:** Association Football, elite referees, cultural comparison, player behaviour, simulation.

**Paper type:** Research paper.

## **Introduction**

There is a body of work that has examined the existence of several factors concerning player behaviour in team sports, such as aggression in ice hockey and field hockey (Shapcott, Bloom, and Loughhead 2007). This research suggested that in an intensely competitive parent-created climate athletes may demonstrate poor sport behaviours in comparison with the behaviour of athletes whose parents create a climate of enjoyment in achievement and success (Lavoie and Stellino 2008). Research has also considered the influence of social variables and moral disengagement on prosocial and antisocial behaviours in field hockey and netball (Boardley and Kavussanu 2009) and in individual sports such as tennis (Casper 2006).

Research related to association football has specifically considered antisocial behaviour in soccer players and the negative implications that moral disengagement may have had (Boardley and Kavussanu, 2010; Bortoli, Messina, Zorba and Robazza, 2012; Kavussanu, 2006; Kavussanu, Seal and Phillips, 2006; Sage, Kavussanu and Duda, 2006; Tractlet et al, 2011) as well as the context of moral reasoning regarding why sports competitors break or bend the rules and the moral dilemmas that these athletes face during a game (Kavussanu, 2008; Kavussanu and Ntoumanis, 2003; Kavussanu and Roberts, 2001; Long, et al, 2006; Weiss and Smith, 2002).

Specifically related to the concept of sportspeople deceiving others, there has been previous research that has considered the use of deception by penalty takers in order to deceive the goalkeeper (Dicks, Buttonô and Davids, 2010). Additionally there is recent research which considers the situation that Association Football referees find themselves in when adjudging when simulation (simulation is the technical term for players diving) or fouls have occurred (Renden et al, 2014). Furthermore, work in the field of psychology has identified deceptive intentions with reference to simulation in association football, concluding that these deceptive intentions are to a degree manifest in players' behaviour (Morris and Lewis, 2010).

### ***Gamesmanship and Deception***

Acts of simulation ('diving') or the feigning of injury can be viewed through research which has identified certain traits such as specific player behaviour, moral reasoning and disengagement and also deception. Closely linked to the concept of deception is the notion of gamesmanship, or the attempt to gain competitive advantage.

This advantage can be achieved either by some manipulation of the rules that does not actually violate them, or by the psychological manipulation or unsettling of the opponent (or sometimes the referee), which can be achieved through intimidation, nondisclosure of information and outright deception (Howe, 2004).

Specific research has been conducted concerning the deliberate foul in sport, notably basketball and football. Studies of deliberate fouls in basketball focused on taking free throws as a means of interrupting the opposing team's possession, whilst in football the research considered the 'self-booking'. The 'self-booking' refers to a second yellow card intentionally being collected by a player in order to draw a red card to complete the penalty-card cycle and the subsequent suspension from the next fixture against a perceived 'minor rival', leaving the player available for a match that is considered more important or for the later stages of the tournament. The debate within the research centres on whether these actions contravene the spirit of the game and the principles of the laws by which the games should be played (Triviño, 2012). Playing by the rules and the issue of gamesmanship in sport has been deliberated further with consideration attributed to the enforcement of these rules by arbitrators (Berman, 2011).

The practice of 'cheating' or deliberate deception on the field of play can be categorised under the term of 'deviance'. Deviance can be defined as "...engaging in unfair conduct...and generally finding ways to avoid rules of the game" (Coakley and Pike, 2009, p. 198). Athletes are predisposed to interpreting rules very loosely during games and also creating informal norms which bend the official rules (Shields and Bredemeier, 1995). That is not to say that incidents of deception have increased necessarily. It is problematic comparing these incidents today to historical occurrences given the advancements in technology such as video replays and the amount of cameras now involved in a live sporting broadcast. These technological advancements do mean that incidents of deception are detected more easily, and also the reason for players committing these acts is considered different to incidents that occurred historically.

Some form of deception or recognised fraud has probably been evident in most professional sports, with money playing a corrupting role in this deception both on and off the pitch (Cashmore, 2005). In this regard sport is unique. Social institutions such as sports are concerned with the acquisition and distribution of external goods, such as wealth and fame, with the external goods viewed as common currency and something that is achievable in a multiplicity of ways (Kew, 1997), such as sponsorship deals and

product endorsement (Waddington and Murphy, 1992; Smart, 2005). As these rewards associated with onfield sporting success have increased, the emphasis placed on winning has also increased (Waddington and Murphy, 1992). Coupled with technological advancements, the pressure on referees has intensified, with their decisions often scrutinised at great length due to media perception of the critical nature of some of these decisions (Halsey, 2007).

### ***Culture and Cultural Comparisons***

This paper involves cultural comparisons through elite referee responses, thoughts and interpretations from England, Spain and Italy. Given the focus on culture it is pertinent to consider the study and application of cultural theory. In particular recognised theories such as Ronen and Shenkar's cultural country classification, Hofstede's dimensions of national culture and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's seven dimensions of culture are, where applicable, applied to the responses from referees from different countries. Additionally, sport and more specifically football related cultural theorem, such as those devised by Giulianotti and Robertson (2009 and 2004), are also utilised.

It is notoriously difficult to define 'culture'. However, a prominent definition discusses the notion of culture referring to "information capable of affecting individuals' behaviour that they acquire from other members of their species through teaching, imitation, and other forms of social transmission" (Richerson and Boyd, 2005, p. 8). The emphasis on the characteristic of culture is of relevance to those within particular societal groups, and is represented in people's minds as well as expressed in their behaviour and actions (Sperber and Hirschfeld, 2004). The features of culture include, amongst other elements, that culture is learned and therefore not inherited or biologically based but acquired through learning and experience; that culture is shared, and that people as members of a group, organization, or society share culture, and also that culture is transgenerational, and therefore cumulative and passed down from one generation to the next (Hodgetts, Luthans and Doh, 2003).

Hofstede argues that national culture is the collective programming of the human mind and he distinguishes one group or category of people from another. Hofstede has also demonstrated that cultural differences between nations are especially found at the deepest level, for example, on the value level and that nationality is

important with our thinking in part conditioned by national cultural factors, influenced by life experiences, the family, and later educational experiences in schools and organizations which differ across national boundaries (Hofstede, 1983). Moreover, these explicit and implicit values that personify a culture are conveyed to societal members through their contact with scripts, laws and most applicable here, customs, norms and organisational practices all shaped by inherent cultural values (Schwartz, 1999). With that in mind, the application of sporting rules and laws across national boundaries in any given sport are not only open to interpretation, but also subject to cultural influence. This influence is dependent on individuals, their interpretation of these laws and the influence of previous cultural factors which inherently differ from country to country. For the purposes of this research, these matters can be considered through the application of the laws of the game of association football by referees.

Figure 1 here

Figure 1, the different levels of culture, adapted from Hofstede, 1980.

Further cultural theory in the form of cultural country classification, related to attitudinal dimensions can also be applied to the present research (Ronen and Shenkar, 1985). The 'Latin European' cluster identified by Ronen and Shenkar includes Spain and Italy (Figure 2), and the countries grouped in this cluster demonstrate specific characteristics such as a high power distance, high uncertainty avoidance, and high variance in masculinity. Whereas those countries grouped in the 'Anglo' cluster, such as the United Kingdom, are believed to have low to medium scores on the power distance index, a low to medium score on the uncertainty avoidance index, and high scores on the individualism and masculinity indices. The clusters devised by Ronen and Shenkar are principally organised on certain cultural dimensions, namely, the measurement of work goals, values, needs, and job attitudes.

Figure 2 here

Figure 2, Clustering countries on attitudinal dimensions, adapted from Ronen and Shenkar (1985).

Relatable to sport generally, and more specifically association football and refereeing, are Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's (2012) definition of their 'universalism versus particularism' dimension. Universalism is the belief that ideas and practices can be applied everywhere without modification, where rules apply equally to the 'whole' regardless of relationships. Countries such as the UK are representative of this definition. Particularism, on the other hand is defined as the belief that circumstances dictate how ideas and practices should be applied, with the 'spirit of law' regarded as more important than the 'letter of law', and each circumstance and relationship dictated by the rules that people live by.

Due to an increasingly globalized world in which we live there is an increased interdependency between countries and people, with the cross-border flow of goods, money, and more importantly here events and decisions, in one country affecting another country in another part of the world. In effect, cultures differ in very specific ways; each culture has its own way of thinking, its own values and beliefs and therefore decisions made by individuals can be affected by these cultural traits (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997). There are significant cultural differences between nations and difficulties arise when cultural borders are crossed, ignoring cultural differences whilst trying to apply foreign principles derived from different cultural contexts (Trompenaars and Woolliams, 2003; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2004). That is not to say, however, that culture cannot change, rather that culture is stable, and although cultural value orientations can change, any change in itself is slow (Schwartz, 2006). Cultural change can also be applied to referees as a distinct group of people.

If we accept that it is possible for cultural groups to be influenced by values and beliefs and that these values and beliefs can affect thinking and decision making, then the application of rules and laws within association football can be affected by the country in which a particular match is taking place, or the competition that the referee is officiating. Therefore, it is possible that referee and player decision making is directly influenced by different values in other countries as well as the nature of the game of football played in different countries.

Giulianotti and Robertson (2009) have adapted some of these concepts specifically to association football. In particular Giulianotti and Robertson have identified the 'globewide nexus' of the particular and the universal which has given rise

to the ‘universalization of particularism’ and the ‘particularization of universalism’ as central concepts. In terms of importance when related to this research, the ‘universalization of particularism’ involves the extensive diffusion of the view that particularity, uniqueness, difference and otherness are limitless. The global nature of identities has intensified since the late nineteenth century, through national identity underpinned by international systems. Therefore, international tournaments, such as the World Cup and European competitions such as the Champions League, provide cultural arenas and the settings for interplay of national-societal particularities. Giulianotti and Robertson (2009) recognise that different national supporter groups are part of this process, however for the purposes of this research this can also be extended to referees, who are also exposed to national-societal particularities.

The ‘particularization of universalism’ meanwhile is characterized by forms of global standardization and integration that differentiates societies along objective lines (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009). Recent intensified social interconnectedness has accelerated the ‘particularization of universalism’. Specifically related to association football, this features the engagement of all institutions and actors within a world pyramid system. FIFA sits at the top of this pyramid and Giulianotti and Robertson (2004) argue that global standardization is “secured” through FIFA-endorsed football associations that have jurisdiction over national teams and implement the game’s rules and procedures. This is where referees are also implicated for the purposes of this research, through the application of standardized and uniform rules and laws through their on-field decision making, a principal aim of both UEFA (2012) and FIFA (2012).

The identification, explanation and analysis of the most applicable and relevant cultural theories allows this article to consider the application of these theories to the behaviour of players in different competitions, the application of rules and laws by referees from different countries and the relationship between referees and players in different countries and competitions.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

The 37 individuals for the research were selected through the use of purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method involving the selection and involvement

of a particular societal group or sample because of their unique position related to the research (Byrne, 2004; Schutt, 2009).

The participants were all from England, Spain and Italy. All participants were working in the field of refereeing as current elite level referees, ex-elite level referees, referee assessors, referee coaches, managers and administrators from bodies that manage and train referees and are associated to refereeing. The participants agreed to take part in this research following prior contact outlining the parameters of the research project, either verbally, or through a subject information sheet detailing the research focus and aims. Respondents were assured of anonymity when they were contacted and therefore pseudonyms are utilised to protect the identity of the respondents.

Table 1: Total number and breakdown of interview participants

Table 1 here

### ***Interview Guide***

Pilot interviews were initially conducted for the larger research study with Referee Development Officers at County Football Associations in England. These interviews informed the construction and formulation of the final interview schedule after preliminary analysis was conducted. A semi-structured approach was adopted where an identical set of questions was employed in a similar manner. This ensured that there was an element of structure to each of the interviews that was conducted; however, the ordering of the questions was dependent on the responses that were given by each participant, where issues raised were explored by the interviewer (the lead author). Discussions naturally varied during each interview, due to the semi structured nature of the interviews and the differing responses from the respondents.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face (24 interviews) and over the phone (13 interviews). The interviews were recorded in their entirety (no more than 75 minutes in duration with an average length of 45 minutes) and transcribed verbatim.

### ***Data Analysis***

Inductive content analysis was employed as a means of analysing the themes generated through the data gathered during the interview process. This approach was employed due to the large amount of data that was generated and to classify the common themes (Biddle et al, 2001). Content analysis affords the researcher a coherent manner of presenting data to colleagues for peer dissemination which, in turn, assists in verifying the data analysis process and give the research added ‘trustworthiness’ through the concept of ‘critical friends’ (Sparkes, 1995). Involving other researchers in the process can not only verify and inform the data collection and analysis that has already occurred but also assist the researcher in terms of support and suggestions that otherwise may not have been considered. In the case of this research two other academics were asked to perform roles in order to give triangulated consensus in the form of ‘critical friends’, a concept involving a process of dialogue with other researchers giving their interpretations related to critical feedback on results generated through the data analysis process (Faulkner and Sparkes, 1999).

After the initial higher and lower order themes had been identified, the transcribed interview quotations were read and re-read by two academics trained in qualitative research. Each researcher then viewed the higher and lower order themes and independently identified and verified the phrases, quotations and themes that they had been asked to consider. These themes and quotations were independently grouped, compared to the initial themes that had been generated and then placed into general dimensions above which no general meaning could be identified.

### **Results and Discussion**

The results derived from the data collection and analysis represent the collated interview responses from all 37 participants. The interview responses were related to respondents’ perceptions and experience of player behaviour and their thoughts regarding managing and dealing with players that are perceived to break the rules of the game. Following transcription of the interviews the collated responses were inductively placed into higher order themes and finally within a general dimension (Domestic and European Diversity). The findings of the general dimension are presented in figure 3, which is supported throughout the results and discussion by additional verbatim quotations from the interview transcripts.

Figure 3 here

Figure 3, General dimension pertaining to domestic and European diversity

### ***Cultural diversity and differences between leagues***

There are commonly held beliefs that the leagues in England, Spain and Italy are different. A view of the English leagues and football played by English teams is generally considered to be more physical, faster with fewer stoppages and also fewer interruptions from referees; the view of Italian football is that of a slower more tactical game in construction, with more technical fouls and a greater focus on defending; the generalised perception of Spanish football is of a game that is quicker than that found in Italy, but also very technical with a focus on player skill and flair.

A possible indicator of differences is the way the game is played or refereed in the different leagues under consideration. One measurement of this is the number of fouls per game and the number of yellow and red card issued. Analysis of differences between the leagues can be examined initially through statistics related to the number of fouls per game and the number of yellow and red cards issued by referees. Statistics released by the Premier League in 2013 indicate a markedly lower number of free kicks per game in England compared to other comparable leagues in Europe (Table 2). The average number of fouls per game has decreased since the 2005-2006 season from 28.6 to 22.5 per game in the 2012/2013 season, a 22% drop.

Table 2 here

Table 2, Number of fouls per game in the major European Leagues in the 2012/2013 season (Adapted from Jurejko, 2013).

Further analysis of the differences between the leagues can be undertaken through the consideration of the yellow and red card statistics. For example, the Premier League has shown a decrease in the total number of yellow cards since the 1998/99 season from 1403 yellow cards (3.69 yellow cards per match) to 1222 yellow cards (3.22 yellow cards per match) in the 2010/11 season. In comparison the red card rate has remained generally static in the same time period, with an average per match of 0.19

up until the 2011/12 season, where there has been a slight increase to an average red card count of 0.22 per match (Magowan, 2011). Furthermore, by 20<sup>th</sup> April 2013, in the 2012/13 season, there had been 38 red cards in the Premier League from 327 matches, which equates to a red card shown every 8.6 matches. Whereas, the Primera División, had red cards shown during the 2012/13 season every 2.6 matches, with 63% of the 121 red cards by 20<sup>th</sup> April 2013 as a result of accumulating two yellow cards (Moore, 2013). The disparities in fouls per game and the number of yellow and red cards that are issued in the leagues in England, Spain and Italy also shows a decrease in fouls per game and yellow and red cards across the leagues. However, it is the type and nature of the indiscretions, as well as the associated cultural reasons for this ‘deviant’ behaviour with which this research is concerned.

### ***Referees Changing Performance***

The differences between the leagues are supported by the responses from referees in England, Spain and Italy. Referees are aware that when they referee in European competition, their performance must change in order to recognise the differences expected by the players that are competing. For example Aaron (elite/ex-elite referee in England) identifies cultural differences as the principal reason for referees altering their performance “undoubtedly there are different cultures in different part of the worlds. One of the things that you have to look out for is what is required from you on that day...when you get a clash of cultures it is about how you can best tweak your performance to meet expectations”. Evidently referees are aware of how cultures can differ, and therefore change performance accordingly. Referees have identified that sometimes they can adjust their performances in order to better control and manage the players in a given country, as well as subscribing to a pre-conceived concept of the values of the domestic league within which they are officiating, something with which they are not always entirely comfortable;

“The only thing that slightly worries me, especially over here [in England], is the temptation to try and keep the game flowing and the foul count down, it does go a little bit far sometimes. There is probably a little bit too much speculative advantage, or advantage that actually isn’t advantage; its really to please the powers that be.” (Brett, management, training and administration in England).

This requirement to keep the game flowing in England is something which those involved with refereeing recognise as being different to other leagues. There is acknowledgment within refereeing and through the responses from referees in England, Spain and Italy that the leagues are inherently different. The variances between the Premier League in England and Serie A are described by Brian, an individual involved with the management, training and administration of elite referees in England;

“Take Italian football, it is a lot more technical than our game [in England], it is a lot more stop start...the English game is a lot about fluidity, more physical, but players accept the more physical nature of the game and players prefer to be managed rather than just having a card dictate them one way or another. So referees tend to operate in a way that the game wants to be played in that country.”

Brian believes that referees operate differently depending on the way football is played in a given country. One of the specific differences between other leagues and the Premier League in England is attributed to the acceptance of a more physical game, which is not the case in comparable leagues, “I think it is because we’ve got more tolerance in physical play than a lot of the countries.” (Ben, management, training and administration in England). In addition to this, referees from Italy have also recognised the difference in the approach to the game in England compared with other countries, “When I refereed in a country like Italy or Spain it is similar. In England there is a different behaviour and a different mentality and it is different football” (Josh, elite/ex elite referee in Italy). Josh intimates that he referees differently in countries such as England, classified as a part of the ‘Anglo’ cluster by Ronen and Shenkar (1985), principally due to the cultural differences he perceives as inherent through ‘behaviour’ and ‘mentality’.

### ***Societal Trends: Issues with Player Behaviour, Gamesmanship and Cultural Difference***

Referees in Spain have identified the behaviour of the players as a concern that is detrimental to their performance. An issue such as simulation, for example, is something which those in Spain see as a particular problem, “I think there is more simulation in the Spanish league than in European competitions” (George, elite/ex elite referee in Spain). Furthermore, there is the view that this is not the case in English

competition by virtue of an innate respect for the laws of the game, although there is also the understanding that simulation is increasing in England. Howard involved with the management, administration and training of elite referees in Spain, believes that this is predominantly as a result of the foreign influence on the game in England, and in particular the imported players that do not follow the rules;

“In England until now you have no problem with simulation because English players respect the law. But, when you began to have players going to play in England with another culture, you have a new problem. In England now you have a big problem with players falling.”

Spanish referees believe that players use simulation to try and deceive them and to gain an advantage, “the simulation is especially difficult for football and for referees....this is a problem of the culture and fair play of the players because they try to make the referee get confused and it is deliberate” (Howard, management, training and administration in Spain). Other referees in Spain have recognised that players train to be able to simulate and confuse the referee, “The situation is a problem, not just one player, it is one of the most difficult problems for us because there are players that are very good actors and I think they train during the week to confuse the referee. You have to know which players can do simulation” (Gary, elite/ex elite referee in Spain).

If these views are considered through aspects of cultural theory some of the responses can be linked to specific cultural traits. For example, the ‘neutral versus emotional’ dimension asserts that affective cultures such as Spain and Italy react immediately with non-verbal gestures and body signals, for example a player simulating or diving. Whereas the UK, or England for the purposes of this article, demonstrates a culture of more hidden emotions and control of feelings and actions (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997). This means that one would anticipate a perception from England, Spain and Italy that there is less of an issue with player behaviour generally in England and that this type of player behaviour is more acceptable culturally in countries such as Spain and Italy.

In order to explain this behaviour further specific reference can be made to aspects of cultural theory such as ‘power distance’ and ‘uncertainty avoidance’ Power distance is the extent to which the less powerful members of organisations and institutions accept that power is distributed unequally, and Latin countries and cultures

have been identified as having high scores on the Power Distance Index, whereas Anglo countries, for example, have a lower power distance. Therefore, in this arrangement players could be identified as individuals that are less powerful and perceive the referee as an authority figure and, as a consequence, see nothing wrong with attempting to balance this power distribution through deviant behavior and the deception of the match official (Hofstede, 1980; Ronen & Shankar, 1985).

Further reasoning towards reduced player behavior, and also referee responses to this behavior, can be related to the 'uncertainty avoidance' dimension. Cultures classified as possessing high uncertainty avoidance evidence that individuals within that particular culture are more likely to be emotional. Strong uncertainty avoidance is evidenced through traits such as higher stress, emotionality, anxiety and neuroticism. There is also an emotional need for rules, even if these rules are not obeyed. Players from Spain and Italy, therefore, can be perceived as more likely than players from Anglo countries, such as the UK, to potentially react irrationally on the pitch, challenge authority and behave anxiously and emotionally in certain situations or periods of the match, or when feeling particularly pressurised (Hofstede, 2011; Triandis, 1994).

To support this notion, as with the areas identified in Spain, simulation has been an area recognised as particularly problematic for Italian referees when officiating in Serie A, "it is different to England because the fans boo when there is simulation. In Italy you are clever when you get a penalty for simulation, it's incredible" (Josh, elite/ex elite referee in Italy). Referees are then blamed in Italy if they get the decision involving an incident of simulation wrong, and there is awareness amongst Italian referees that they are to blame for players cheating by not detecting it, "it's my fault, not the players that gain an advantage by cheating" (John, elite/ex elite referee in Italy). Both Josh and John confirm the acceptance of 'deviant' behaviour in Italian culture. Referees believe that this conduct is seen as 'clever', that deception of the match official is part of the game, and that referees are to blame if they do not detect this behaviour. Further issues arise when referees officiate outside their country and there are attempts to standardise referee decision making and performance irrespective the referees' country of origin.

### *Standardisation and referee performance*

The intimation that players deceive referees and that it is the referee's error if they do not detect the cheating that players are perceived to have committed, doubtless can influence referees' pre match preparation and method of dealing with certain players. This is confirmed by Arthur an elite/ex elite referee in England;

“I think sometimes people say that some players, their reputation goes before them. I'm sorry but in life as well as football that is what happens...we watch videos in far greater intensity than perhaps the fan watches SKY or Match of the Day. If there were players that went over diving and you had proven occurrences of diving, then it's a case of, not every time a player goes down it's a dive, but when you're approaching the penalty area you are very much aware of the need to get into a much better viewing position because this player has previous [form in terms of deception and diving].”

Although there is clearly recognition of a growing issue of simulation within the Premier League in England, referees from Italy and Spain believe, due to the issues such as simulation and technical foul counts, that it would be extremely difficult for English referees to officiate in Serie A for a period of time. The argument suggests that this is because English referees are not used to the behaviour of the players and the particular climate of football found domestically in Spain and Italy, “For an English referee it is the most difficult to referee in Italy because of the [physical] contact [between players] in Italy, there is much more than in England...one simple touch in Italy is a fall” (Joel, elite/ex elite referee in Italy). Referees intimate that this fair play ethos is more evident in English football, “...the football in England is more physical, but there is more respect between players. Like a rugby mentality” (James, elite/ex elite referee in Italy).

The difficulties that exist when officiating in different countries can be linked to the concept of universalism and particularism. The debate concerns whether universalism can be applied to referees effectively officiating in other countries with significantly different cultural traits. The UK is particularly high scoring on the universalism relationship, scoring higher than Italy and Spain.

The ‘universalization of particularism’ states that the concept of standardisation will be difficult if not impossible to achieve given the concepts of uniqueness, difference and otherness that are defined as part of this paradigm (Giulianotti and

Robertson, 2009). If we take this to be true, it means that the differences identified by referees from England, Spain and Italy in respect of the cultural variations between the three countries concerning the way that players behave cannot be resolved. It is also the case that referees are changing performance when officiating in European competition because it is seen as different to their domestic leagues. Therefore, the assertion that international and European tournaments provide arenas for the interplay of national-societal particularities (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009) is not accurate when applied to refereeing.

Refereeing does not fit into the theory that global standardization is achieved through FIFA-endorsed football associations having jurisdiction over national organisations (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2004). In refereeing the national referee associations in each of the countries are bound to implement the game's rules, procedures and laws of the game. Despite this, the responses from those involved with refereeing are contrary to this argument, suggesting standardization and uniformity are impractical to achieve with the cultural differences identified between England, Spain and Italy too deep rooted to overcome.

Therefore it seems that the 'particularization of universalism' applies more readily to refereeing when comparing different cultures and performances of match officials in England, Spain and Italy, given that it is characterized by elements of global standardization and integration, but that it also differentiates societies along objective lines (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009). In other words, despite a movement towards global standardization more generally, in refereeing at least, the differences evident between societies are still currently insurmountable.

### ***Difference in the application of rules across countries and in European competition***

Differences and issues related to standardization can be extended to referees attempting to apply laws, rules and their decisions in their own country and also in European football. Those within the Spanish system believe there are differences concerning the interpretation and application of rules in Spain as opposed to in England and in European competition, "...in England it is very normal that a player challenges the ball with a foot up, in Spain it is not possible, I think in Europe it is not possible, or in Italy. If you referee an English team you have to know that happens, so it is not

possible to give a red card” (Geoff, category 2a). There is evidently some comprehension that differences exist in the application of rules between leagues, with the example of the raised foot indicated here and reference to a change in referee performance, behaviour and the application of rules. Referees in Spain accept that officiating in a similar fashion across Europe is difficult to achieve, given the idiosyncrasies that exist, “...refereeing in the same way in all the countries 100% is very difficult” (Gary, category 2a).

Further differences in the application of rules and also decision making are demonstrated through something entitled ‘game management’. Referees in England employ ‘game management’ as an alternative to issuing yellow and red cards. ‘Game management’ is an overarching way of officiating that involves referees managing the game by speaking to the players and trying to use mediation before issuing yellow and red cards as a deterrent. ‘Game management’ is something that is encouraged in England, although the encouragement of ‘game management’ as an alternative to the use of yellow and red cards can also be seen to exacerbate the differences between officiating in different leagues, “there are different ways of refereeing in the different countries...but in England it is manage, manage, manage and in Spain it is yellow card, yellow card...it would be almost impossible for our [English] referees to go to Spain or Italy and referee there and for them to come over here and referee” (Bernard, category 1b). Furthermore, referees from England believe that, “...our referees that referee abroad referee differently than they do in this country...that can become a bit of a difficult balancing act when you referee abroad that’s for sure” (Adam, category 1a). As a consequence of different interpretations and expectations in other countries, when offences are committed by players, decisions are given that suggest English referees are operating differently in European and international competition.

Referees changing performance in distinctive competitions due to perceived cultural differences, and the altered behaviour of players in these competitions, can be contextualised when considered through the theories of Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997). With each culture having its own way of thinking, values and beliefs that affect decisions made by referees the cultural differences between nations and the difficulties that arise when cultural borders are crossed (Trompenaars and Wooliams, 2003; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2004) are exemplified by the responses from referees in England, Spain and Italy. Referees applying the laws of the game of

association football differently in different competitions, and in particular in European competitions such as the Champions League, demonstrates that their decisions are affected by perceived differences in values and beliefs in other countries and the way that the game of association football is played in those countries.

The belief within association football and refereeing is that any moves towards standardisation in the application of the laws of the game must start at home. The domestic approach to refereeing must be uniform before there can be further progress towards standardisation across European and international football. Bill, a referee coach from the managerial, administration and training category, believes that standardisation in Europe should be an aim, but that it is not something achievable with the current systems and referee performances in place in England particularly:

“...consistency starts with an individual referee refereeing the same way in the first minute of the game as he does in the 90<sup>th</sup> minute of a game...we then need to try and make him consistent with his colleagues at the level that he is officiating at and it's not until we have achieved all of that that I think we would be in a position to try and extend that beyond our boundaries.”

Bill, in the previous quote, believes that work is required in order to standardise further in England. Until this happens any standardisation in the consistency of decision-making and application of rules across national boundaries is impossible to achieve, an assertion that the theories of Trompenaars and Wooliams (2003) and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2004) support.

### **The Way Forward: Concluding Thoughts**

The most pressing issues highlighted through the interview process have been linked inextricably to player behaviour and the different application of rules by referees. Deceptive behaviour, the use of gamesmanship to gain advantage on the field of play and deceive the referee, and players training to deceive referees have been cited as widespread. The relevant literature supposes that this is an area not only within association football (Dicks, Button and Davids, 2010; Morris and Lewis, 2010; Renden et al. 2014), but also within sport more generally (Kavussanu, 2008; Kavussanu

and Ntoumanis, 2003; Kavussanu and Roberts, 2001; Long, et al, 2006; Weiss and Smith, 2002) and has intensified scrutiny of the problems that confront elite referees in the modern game of football.

The possible reasons behind this apparent deception have been considered here; namely, the cultural differences that referees, predominantly in Spain and Italy, believe exists between 'Latin' players and English players. Nevertheless, there are a great many players from other nationalities and certainly players that would be termed 'Latin' that play in the Premier League, and referees in Spain attribute this proliferation of overseas players as a predominant reason for the increase in player deception in England.

The notion that certain types of player behaviour are becoming more of an issue for referees in England due to the increase in player migration to the Premier League is something that can be linked to the idea of deterritorialization. Deterritorialization relates to the weakening of spatial connections, of cultural practices, identities, products, and communities and is strongly influenced by transnational migration and mediatisation (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2009). In respect of refereeing, and in particular the perceived increase in 'simulation' in England linked to the influx of different cultures and identities through transnational migration, historic cultural practices, such as the ethos of fair play, have been eroded as a by product of deterritorialization.

Despite this increase in simulation identified in England, referees in Spain and Italy recognise that issues with player behaviour, and simulation in particular, are more prevalent in their countries, principally due to accepted cultural norms and historic societal differences. One possible deterrent aimed at reducing the number of occasions that simulation takes place could be to further employ technology in order to assist referees with decision-making concerning players 'simulating' or 'diving'. This technology does not have to be utilised during a game, there could be retrospective punishment administered, even if the referee saw the incident during the game. Currently, if a referee deals with an incident during a match and makes a decision during the match, retrospective punishment cannot be considered by the FA as the referee is considered to have made their decision previously. A further discussion could centre on the introduction of the 'sin bin' for players that simulate and commit other comparable infringements.

This paper has sought to examine, explain and rationalise the responses of elite referees on the subject of player behaviour and the effect that player behaviour has on referee performance and decision making. In order to frame and contextualise these responses, cultural theory was consulted and applied to the interview responses where appropriate and applicable. This highlighted the difficulties faced by referees and organisations such as FIFA and UEFA when attempting to standardise refereeing across different cultures. Added to this are the player alterations to their behaviour in different competitions and countries, with deviant behaviour identified as more acceptable in some cultures than others. The application of cultural theory demonstrated that until cultural differences between countries in respect of refereeing are considered more carefully, any further moves towards standardisation would be inherently problematic.

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