

Manchester City must be expelled

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As The Guardian and every other newspaper in the UK, and many other countries around the world, [have reported this morning](#):

Manchester City have been found guilty of the vast majority of more than a hundred charges related to breaches of the Premier League's financial rules, throwing English football into turmoil.

The serial champions now face the possibility of being relegated from the Premier League, or expelled from the competition altogether, after a verdict in the biggest disciplinary case in the history of the sport was finally delivered.

I understand football. I understand the desire to win. I get the passion for the game. I began watching it at Portman Road in Ipswich in the early 1970s. I still have to check Ipswich Town's results, and they very slightly change my mood.

As a consequence, I also hate cheating. In my time, I have yelled, with many others, at a referee who I thought had overlooked a misdemeanour that I believed to be glaringly obvious. For a true fan, the sense of, and desire for, fair play runs deep in football, as it does in any sport.

At the same time, I understand neoliberalism. I also understand corruption. I understand that they go hand in hand.

I appreciate that, for those who own and run football clubs, financialisation, moneymaking, fan exploitation, and many of the more dubious sides of the modern economy, from the exploitation of intellectual property rights to the use of offshore, and, in some cases, questionable accounting, are as much a part of football as the offside rule.

Now we see the consequence. The charges over Manchester City, a club for whom I have had very little regard since the days of Francis Lee and Mike Summerbee, have been hanging over the club for years. The verdict has now been leaked, but it appears damning. 115 charges of financial irregularity were laid against the club, and it has

apparently been found guilty on 114 of these.

The question is, what happens now?

I stress, this really matters. It does, perhaps, matter much more than many people realise as yet. This is not just an issue for football. This is an issue about corruption, governance, fair play, competition in fair markets (which is an issue I referred to in [this morning's video](#), and which is particularly pertinent in the context of these reports), and whether a regulator, and maybe the government, is willing to uphold the demand that fair play, the rules of a competition, and so justice that represents open access for all, will be upheld, or whether monopoly abuse backed by major financial interests will be allowed to rule.

Manchester City have had an extraordinary decade or so. There is no question that they assembled an exceptional team of players under the guidance of an outstanding manager. I am not saying otherwise. But the way in which they did that matters. As a consequence of this apparent finding, all their Premier League titles, European success and cup wins now look to be profoundly tainted.

The consequence is that so do all the competitions in which they have taken part. That makes the whole of European football look under threat on the basis that no such thing as fair competition has taken place.

And let's also be clear. The players and the managers are also now under a cloud as a consequence of their association. The question will be asked is whether they knew about what was happening. They might not have done so, but none could have avoided knowing about the allegations that existed for many years. I am not suggesting wrongdoing on their part. I am questioning judgement.

For these reasons, and presuming that after this length of time Manchester City has no reasonable grounds for appeal, and that such an appeal can be dealt with very quickly if it is necessary, action must be taken if fair play is to be seen to be happening, not just in football, but in our economy. Corruption must carry a price.

That price must be a significant and a severe penalty must be applied.

What should that penalty be? Clearly, that is for others to decide, but what I do know is that a fine, or the deduction of some points, even if they guarantee relegation this year, will be utterly insufficient. They are the sort of penalties imposed when a club has to declare insolvency, but what is happening in this case is much more serious than that.

It would seem that Manchester City knowingly and deliberately, over an extended period of time, abused the rules of football. It might just as well have had a 12th or 13th player on the pitch at all times, so blatant does the issue appear to be. If so, for the sake of football, for the sake of sport, for the sake of competition and for the sake of holding neoliberal capitalism and all that goes with it to account, the penalty has to be

at an appropriate level. In this case that would appear to require relegation from the Football League. For the time being, this club needs to be playing in the Northern League, if they will have them, and there would be a question as to whether they will because they would very obviously distort competition there as much as they appear to have done anywhere else.

If there is one thing that I hope has characterised my work in all its iterations over many years, it has been a belief in honesty, sound ethics, good governance, and a distaste for anything that looks like cheating, dishonesty or outright corruption. My work on tax justice was dedicated to these issues. I believe that corruption, much of it based on neoliberal thinking, does much more than corrupt business. It corrupts the very essence of society.

There can be little doubt that the corruption of football in this country, which appears to have happened, is the clearest possible representation of how pervasive this corrosion of standards has been.

It is then not just because I support Ipswich Town, who are playing in the same league as Manchester City this year, that I now believe that the expulsion of Manchester City not just from the Premier League, but from the entire Football League at this point in time, is appropriate. A signal has to be sent out that corruption will not be tolerated. Nothing less than this will do.