

Referees' home bias in Greek non-professional soccer matches: The case of the Argolida Football Clubs Association.

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Abstract

The aim of the present study was to examine home team result, yellow cards, red cards and penalty kicks awarded for home and away teams. 968 non-professional A, B Division and Cup soccer matches from Argolida County during season 2008-09 were studied. Results showed that a weak home advantage exists and also that referees penalized home teams more often with yellow cards but less with red cards. Moreover, results presented that more penalty kicks were awarded for the home team. Nonetheless, no statistically significant differences were presented in the above results, except from home advantage. Previous studies had shown that referees are biased in favour of home team.

Key words: soccer, football, amateur, regional, referee, home advantage.

Introduction

Even though referees are employed to interpret the rules of soccer in an impartial way, they can exert considerable discretionary power, in particular when adding extra time, awarding penalties, allocating yellow or red cards. As a consequence, referees can have a very important influence on the final result of a soccer match (Sutter & Kocher, 2004).

Moreover, there is strong body of knowledge that the referee may be influenced to favour the home team by the intensity of crowd support. Nevill et al. (1996) observed that penalties and red cards appeared to be given more against the away team. Subsequently, Nevill et al. (2002) analyzed the decisions of qualified referees watching video recordings of games with and without the sound of the crowd. They found that when assessing free-kicks, the referees tended to favor the home team significantly more when the noise of crowd support was present.

We are not aware of any research in sport science literature which studied referee bias in any Greek national soccer division. Nonetheless, there are a few studies that have presented results for home advantage in Greek First National soccer Division (SuperLeague). Pollard (2006) calculated home advantage for the domestic leagues of all countries of Europe and South America. The results of all matches (n=1580) during 1998-2003 seasons from Greek A soccer Division presented home advantage 64.58%. Two recent researches studied home advantage in season 2006-07 and 2007-08 (Armatas et al., 2009a; 2009b respectively) and presented diminished percentages, 47.3% and 51.9% respectively.

Thus, the aim of the present study was to conduct the first study in referee bias in Greek non-professional soccer matches. In particular, we have examined home team result, yellow cards, red cards and penalty kicks awarded for home and away teams.

Methods

The sample consisted of 968 non-professional A, B Division and Cup soccer matches from Argolida (county) during season 2008-09. The aforementioned tournaments are conducted under the supervision of Argolida Football Clubs Association (Greece). Matches' data were obtained from Argolida Football Clubs Association. The obtained data were adapted and registered in order to correspond to our study. In particular, it was recorded the home advantage in tournaments (frequency of: win, draw, loss for home team) and yellow card, red card and penalty kick (successful) frequency for home team and away team.

All data were analyzed using the statistical package for PC SPSS 14.0. Non parametric chi-square analysis was used to determine the statistically significant differences and the level of significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Results

It was presented that home teams won 50.93% of matches, 14.15% of matches were draw and lost 34.92% of matches. Statistical analysis showed significant differences between “win” compared to “draw” and “loss” ($p < 0.05$, $\chi^2 = 5.23$ and $\chi^2 = 30.81$ respectively).

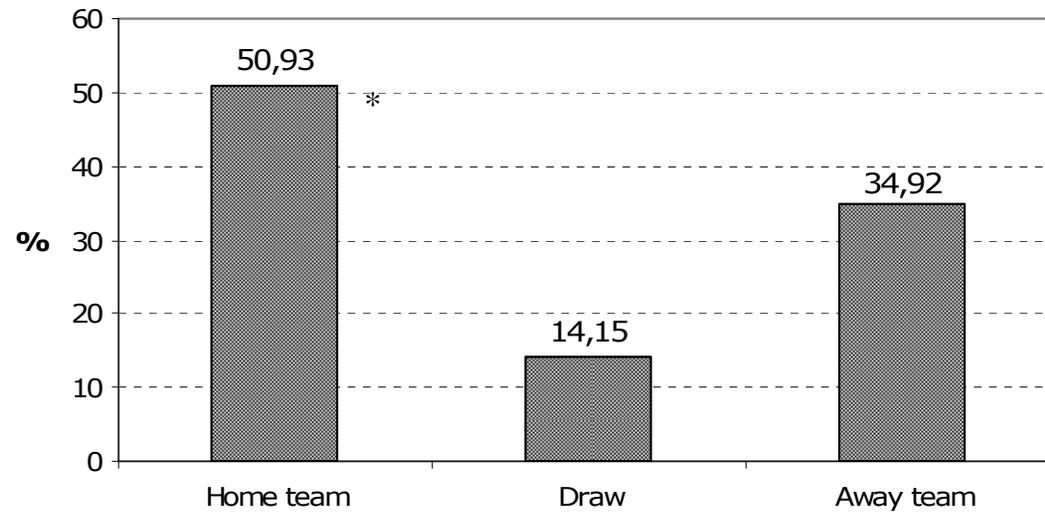


Figure 1. Home advantage: Frequency of wins, draws and losses for home team.

*: statistically significant difference of home wins compared to draws and losses.

Results indicate that home teams were penalized more often with yellow cards (51.75% vs. 48.25%) but less with red cards (43.56% vs. 56.44%). As far as penalty kicks are concerned, results presented that more penalty kicks were awarded for the home team. Nonetheless, no statistically significant differences were presented in the above results.

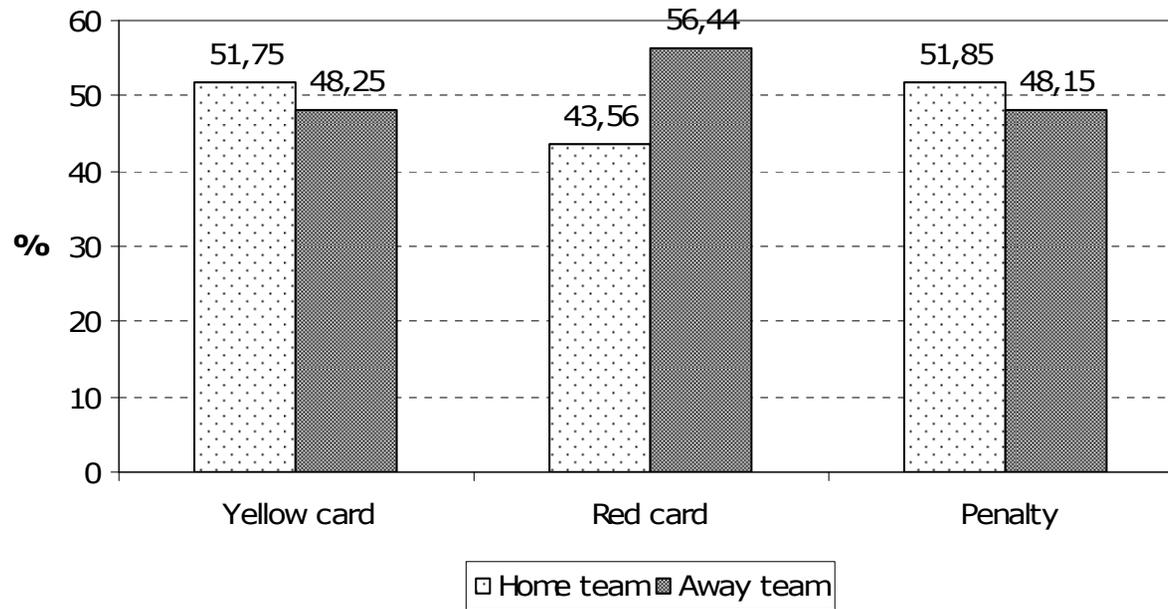


Figure 2. Frequency of yellow, red cards and penalty kicks for home and away team.

Discussion

To our knowledge, this is the first study that presented results from non-professional soccer matches as well as results about referee bias in Greece, which deems it practically impossible to compare results with other studies.

Courneya and Carron (1992) present home advantage figures, involving a quantitative synthesis of studies that have examined home advantage in major team sports in terms of the win percentage of decided games, reporting a 69% home advantage for soccer. Previous studies of home advantage in Greece presented dissimilar results. Pollard (2006) presented 64.58% for home wins while Armatas et al. (2009a; 2009b) lower percentages (47.3% and 51.9%). Apparently, there is a weak home advantage in our present results. Moreover, Nevill and Holder (1999) proposed five factors that differentially impact on teams competing at their own versus an opponent's venue. These include crowd factors, referee bias, learning/familiarity factors, travel factors and rule factors.

Referee decisions on penalties have been examined by Nevill et al. (1996) by counting the number of awarded penalties in English and Scottish football leagues, showing that home teams are awarded significantly more penalties than visiting teams. Sutter and Kocher, (2004) indicated a clear home bias of referees with regard to awarding penalties. Moreover, there is a great number of studies concluding that home teams were significantly less often penalized by yellow and red cards (Carmichael & Thomas, 2005; Dawson et al., 2007; Poulter, 2009).

To summarize, results presented that there is a weak home advantage in Greek non-professional soccer matches, while no significant differences presented between home and away teams, as far as yellow, red cards and penalties awarded. It seems that referees in non-professional matches in Greek lower divisions of Argolida are not biased. Still, more studies are needed in order to infer more objective conclusions.

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