Why the FA should abolish the 3PM blackout for all football games across England.

Introduction

In the 1960s Burnley chairperson Bob Lord convinced other Football League chairpersons that televising matches between 2:45 and 5:25 as it would not negatively affect attendances thought the football league. (Goal, 2022) Therefore, any football league game that is played at 3pm would not be shown in the UK but these games will still be streamed thought the rest of the world. In the 2020-2021 season this ban was lifted as fans could not attended these games. This led to clubs giving out codes to season ticket holders to use on websites like IFollow(this is a streaming platform run by each club from the Championship down to League 2), Premier league clubs followed this by allowing Sky Sports and BT sport to show 3pm kick off games on their respective channels. This was the first time since the 1960s that 3pm kick offs across England were shown on TV. (Mail Online, 2020)

What are the pros and cons of the 3pm blackout?

When it was first introduced the main argument behind the 3pm blackout was that “That is largely to encourage attendances at clubs who rely on gate receipts, rather than TV rights, for the majority of their income – and such clubs receive most of those ticket sales on a Saturday, rather than in their midweek games.” (iNews, 2021) However attendances throughout the football league are higher for games that are not shown on TV, for example Sheffield Wednesday vs Bristol Rovers was shown on TV and the attendance was 22,006 (Sky Sports, 2022) compared to Sheffield Wednesday vs Port Vale which was not shown on TV the attendance was 26,021 (Sky Sports, 2022). However, the differences in attendees could be due to many different things for example the number of away fans can make the attendances higher or lower, for example Port Vale brought over 3,000 away fans for this game which would boost the attendees for this match. Across the football league this is remarkably similar, in League two the match between Leyton Orient vs Stevenage had an attendance of 8,644 (Sky Sports, 2022) with an away crowd of 1,044 (Stevenage FC Twitter, 2022) this match was shown on TV. However, when Leyton Orient played Bradford city in a game that was not televised the attendance was 8,671 (Sky Sports, 2022) with 1,200 away fans (Bradford City, 2022). These statistics reveal that the reasoning behind the 3pm blackout no longer exists as attendances throughout the football league are higher when games are not shown on TV compared to when they are. However, the financial aspect of games being shown on tv for example the average price of a ticket for Manchester City is £70 (Manchester City) so over a 38-game season they will play 19 matches at their home ground (90 MIN,2022) so over the course of a season they earn £71,022,000 just though ticket sales. On top of this they will also receive “£79million from the domestic and overseas TV deals, with an extra facility fee depending on how many times they are broadcast. They then receive a £5.6million share of the Premier League’s combined commercial income.” (Planet Football). This data shows that for the big teams in the Premier League (the top league in England) that the money they will receive though TV deals and other commercial aspects are only slightly higher than the ticket sales they will receive every home game. This data will back up the idea that the 3pm blackout should remain due to clubs only earing a little bit more in from TV deals then tickets. However, “Major European leagues in France, Spain, Germany and Italy do not observe such a blackout, and there has been [sufficient evidence to prove](http://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=84316&pageIndex=0&doclang=EN&mode=lst&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=562153)that closed periods do not affect the outcome of lower league football match attendance.” (Goal,2022), this is the main point that people arguing for the 3pm blackout to be removed are arguing and attendees quoted earlier that even if the game is shown on TV the attendance is not affected in a negative way.

My thoughts on the 3pm blackout

Overall, I believe that the 3pm should be removed in the Premier League (the top league in England) and the Championship (the second division in England), I believe that these two leagues would be perfect to abolish the 3pm blackout due to them already having high ticket sale numbers and the majority of Premier League games already being shown across the world, therefore this would be a lot easier to show the games across the UK. If these two leagues were shown across the UK, it would also increase the popularity of the sport due to having the games being able to watch throughout the country instead of just at certain times. I believe that the blackout should stay in place for league one and two (the bottom two divisions in England) due to these teams being more dependent more on ticket sales then on TV rights and commercial revenue. Therefore, clubs in these two leagues need the money from ticket sales that they will generate for their home games over TV sales. This is a worry for clubs as they think that people will stay at home to watch their favourite team in the Premier League or Championship instead of going to their local team to watch them. However, stats that were presented earlier in this document give evidence that disprove the theory that fans will not go to games if they are shown on TV. So, I believe that the 3pm blackout should stay in place in EFL League one and two but be removed from the Championship. League one and Two games will should still be shown on tv for big games and the play offs gives exposure to these leagues and. On the streaming platform IFollow EFL league one and League two games are being shown across the rest of the world though this service but not 3pm games in England. Overall I feel like the games at 3pm shouldn’t be televised in my opinion in League one and two.

Are there any plans to abolish the 3pm blackout?

Different supporters' trusts have come out and expressed their feelings towards the 3pm blackout being removed for example “We need to fight this with everything we have, it will kill football as we know it,” (Mail Online,2022) this quote was taken from the supporter's trust talking about removing the 3pm blackout. Their feelings on the blackout and they reader of this article can clearly see their feelings towards the blackout, and they believe that it should be removed. However, Sky Sports are massively against removing the blackout as they believe it will reduce the value of their rights and feel like there program ‘Soccer Saturday’ (a show that sky sports do talking about all games in England on a Saturday) would have significantly reduced viewing numbers if the games were shown on their channels. (Mail Online,2022).

If the 3pm blackout was abolished who would show the games?

If the 3pm blackout was abolished “streaming services like Facebook, Netflix, Google, Apple and Amazon, as well as the current domestic rights holders Sky Sports and BT Sport” (the manc, 2022) would be fitting for the rights to show 3pm kick offs throughout England if they became available to air. Amazon, Sky and BT sport already show certain football games so they would be the favourites to take the rights, they are also the richest companies from that list that would want to show the games so they will probably take the rights as after all it is all down to money. The companies in that list that don’t really make sense are Netflix and Google due to them never showing live sport before or any type of live coverage. In my opinion Sky Sports, BT and amazon should get the rights to show the 3pm kick offs if they become available to air as they have already shown live games, so the foundations are there for this to happen. However, no changes will happen until the 2024 season when the TV rights for the EFL expire.

Conclusion

To conclude the 3pm blackout was introduced in the 1960s due to fear that showing games on tv during the times of 2:54-5:25 would affect the attendances at lower league football games (Goal,2022). However, stats and attendance numbers thought this document have shown that that is no longer the case. “The Bolton Wonders chief executive Neil Heart has insisted showing EFL games on a Saturday afternoon is a huge opportunity and would not reduce attendances.” (Mirror,2022) This shows that chief executives of some club's believe that removing the 3pm blackouts would not matter to attendances, due to attendance fears being the main reason why the 3pm blackout was introduced in the 1960s this comment by the Bolton Wonders chief executives comments show that the sport has changed thought the last 50 years that the attendees fear is no longer applicable due to games now having similar if not more fans at none televised games then at televised games.

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