

The Trend of Competitive Balance in Iran Football Premier League: A Survey of 1995-2009 Seasons

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Abstract. Competitive balance refers to the balance in sport capabilities of teams. The more competitive balance is among teams comprising league, the harder predicting the games is and finally resulting in more attractive league. The purpose of this study was to investigate changes of competitive balance in Iran pro league from 1995 to 2009. Data were secondary derived from the final tables of 1995-2009. Data analysis was based on C5ICB index. For easier analysis, the findings (C5ICB) of research had been presented as 3 five year periods; first five years (1995-1999): 128, second five years (2000-2004): 131, third five years (2005-2009): 129.6. It had the most balance in first five years. C5ICB demonstrated least balance in second five years. High competitive balance resulted in sever competition leads to high quality of league and better function of teams. Today bipolar condition of Iranian football (clubs of Piroozi and Esteqlal) has changed. Football is not Tehran-oriented in Iran anymore and developed in cities such as Isfahan, Kerman and Tabriz.

Keywords: Competitive Balance, Football Premier League, Five-Club Concentration Ratio (C5), C5 Index of Competitive Balance (C5ICB)

1. Introduction

Football industry has allocated approximately 3% of world trade and exchange to itself [1]. In recent decades, football has changed to industry costing billions dollars so that according to Football Federation, there are more than 200 million footballers all over the world [2]. The world is unimaginable without football; members of FIFA (207 countries) are more than UN (192 countries). In most countries, this federation is the greatest sport federation. Football has allocated the most TV broadcast to itself. Considering holding 2002 World Cup in Asia and 2010 World Cup in Africa, it is supposed people's attention and interest to football is increasing [3]. Appeal of football match depends on several factors such as playing quality, performance of teams, facilities of gym and especially competitive balance. Competitive balance means uncertainty of predicting results. Fans' interest and demanding to watch matches will be increased if clubs have same situation. Unpredictability creates more attractiveness.

Therefore, sport organizations try to create some rules and limitations to maximize ambiguity of results in competitions. In a league, if some teams have more power, the league will lose its appeal for being predictable. The more competitive balance is among teams comprising league, the harder predicting competitions is, leading to more appeal. In a balanced league, each team has equal chance to win therefore; all teams can win championship of league [4].

Uncertainty or ambiguity of football results has presented into several kinds. Szymanski (2003) examined competitive balance based on 3 kinds; a) match uncertainty which referred to the uncertainty about the result of a special match (between two teams) b) season uncertainty which referred to uncertainty about the matches of a season c) championship uncertainty which referred to the dominance of a limited number of teams over the league in consecutive seasons [5]. Cairns, Jennett, and Sloane (1986) have divided competitive balance into 4 kinds [6]. Mostly, version of 3 kinds is examined. Increasing attention and presence of fans resulted in more competitions may seem undesirable for some teams especially ones having high probability of success [7]. If the result is predictable, appeal of competition will be decreased. Committees holding football leagues must create conditions to increase competitive balance in their leagues [8]. Sport leagues need some specific competitive balance to survive. If competitive balance is reduced in a

league, spectators attending stadium and TV viewers will be decreased in longitude term.

There have been several researches in competitive balance early. Goossens (2006) measured competitive balance in European leagues; competitive balance has been decreased in Belgium and England (relative increasing of linear graph), not considerably increased in Germany and France but increased in Portugal [9].

Michie and Oughton (2005) examined leagues of England, Italy, Germany, France and Spain. Competitive balance has been fixed in England for 40 years (1984-1987) but then decreased considerably. There is no clear trend in France but since 1992, it has been increased some. It has been declined considerably in series A of Italy since 1992. At the end of 2004, Italian league had the highest imbalance among 5 European superior leagues. It has been increased lower in Germany but in general, decreased in recently 10 years [10].

Quirk and Fort (1992) examined football league in Netherland. Competitive balance has been decreased considerably in second half of 60's and increased in first half of 70's. Then, it has no clear approach. Moreover, they measured competitive balance in 5 American professional leagues (American League (AL), National League (NL), National Basketball American (NBA), National Hockey League (NHL) and National Football League (NFL)). There was no considerable competitive balance among them [11]. Hann, Koning and VanWitteloostuijn (2007) found decrease of competitive balance in England. It was the same in Belgium and Netherland based on weak documents. Also, they found no clear approach in Germany, France, Italy and Spain [12]. Competitive balance had been declined in AL but it increased in NL from 1999 to 1975 [13]. Mizak, Neral, and Stair (2007) showed competitive balance had been decreased considerably in Major League Baseball (MLB) especially in American league since 1990. The least competitive balance has been in Eastern Association of American league during 1998 to 2003 [14].

Zimbalist (2002) observed NBA was the highest imbalanced among 5 American professional leagues. Moreover, Competitive balance has been gradually developed in MLB during 1903 to 1950 [15]. There are several researches about famous leagues in world. This study examined trend of competitive balance in Iran Pro League (1995-2009).

2. Method

This research was descriptive-analytic; the data were secondary and collected from valid documents and football league tables of Iran. Two economical indexes were used to analyze the data; concentration ratio (C5) and C5 Index of Competitive balance (C5ICB). These are mathematical models. They were used in several research ([4], [10], [16], [17], [18], [19], [20], [21], [22], [23]) to measure competitive balances of several leagues. In a perfectly balanced league, C5ICB equals 100. It is never lower than 100. The more C5ICB is, the less competitive balance league has. Increase of C5ICB means decrease of competitive balance [10].

Iranian football league composed of 12 teams in 2000, 14 teams in 1999, 2001, 2002 and 2003, 15 teams in 1997, 16 teams in 1995, 1996, 1998, 2004, 2005 and 2006 and 18 teams in 2007, 2008 and 2009. Number of teams affects C5. Even in a perfectly balanced league, changing number of teams affects C5. Therefore, C5ICB is a valid instrument.

$$C5 \text{ Ratio} = \frac{\text{Total points won by the top five clubs}}{\text{Total numbers of points won by all clubs}}$$

$$C5ICB = \left[\frac{C5}{5/N} \right] * 100$$

Where, N is the number of teams in the league.

3. Results

Table 1 presents amount of C5 and C5ICB in recent 15 seasons of Iran (1995-2009).

Table 1. Amount of C5 and C5ICB during 1995 to 2009

Year	C5	C5ICB
1995	0.384	123
1996	0.394	126
1997	0.423	127
1998	0.415	133
1999	0.466	131
2000	0.532	128
2001	0.465	130
2002	0.446	125
2003	0.474	133
2004	0.433	139
2005	0.412	132
2006	0.417	133
2007	0.333	120
2008	0.369	133
2009	0.359	130

Figure 1 shows C5 has being increased during 1995 to 1999 but then had a descending trend.

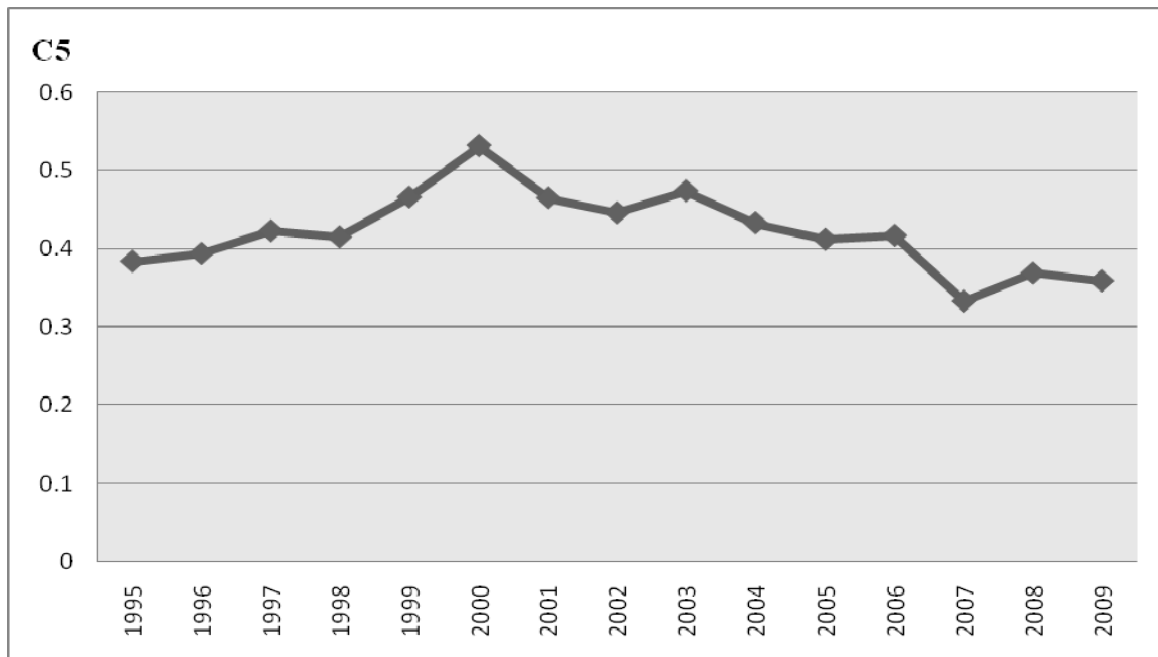


Fig. 1: C5 in Iranian football league

Figure 2 shows C5ICB has being increased during 1995 to 1998, decreased during 1998 to 2002, increased during 2002 to 2004 and decreased since 2004. C5ICB was the highest in 2004 and lowest in 2007.

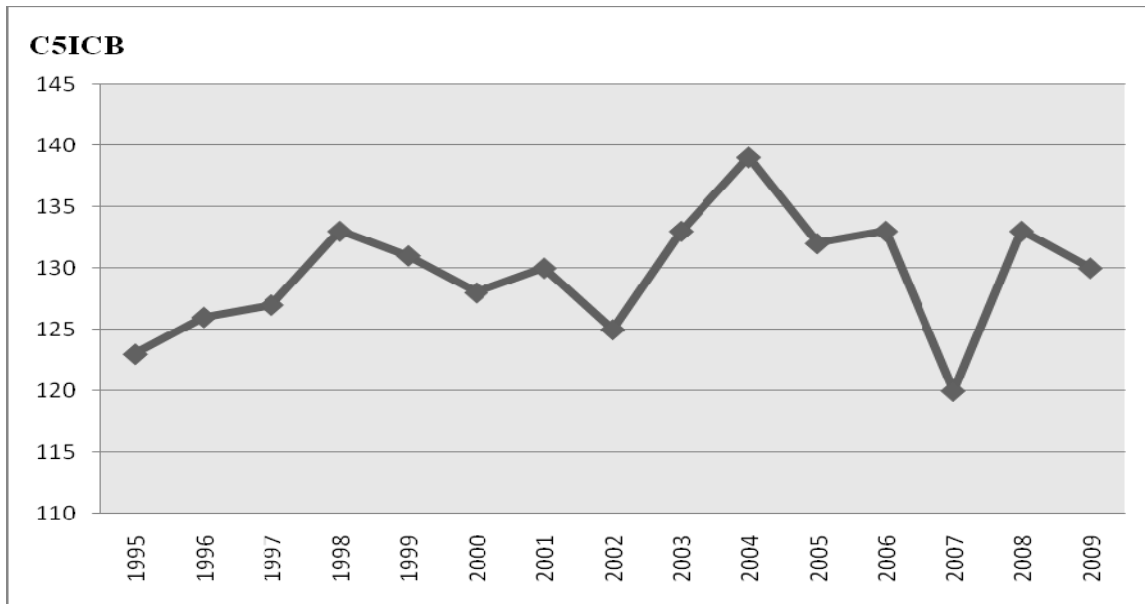


Fig. 2: C5ICB in Iranian football league

The results of C5ICB were presented as 5-year mean in figure 3. It was 128 in first 5 years (1995-1999), 131 in second five years (2000-2004) and 129.60 in third five years (2005-2009).

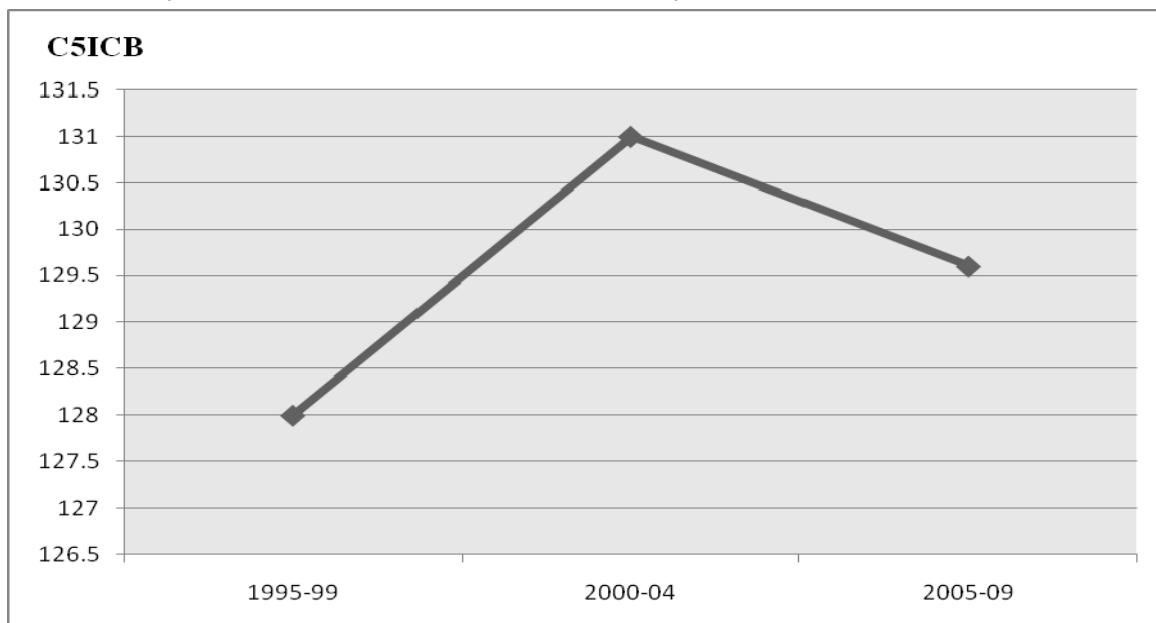


Fig. 3: C5ICB in five-year average in Iranian football league

4. Discussion

C5 has been increased during 1995 to 1999 (competitive balance being decreased) and then decreased (competitive balance being increased). It is considerable that number of teams has been varied in league (i.e., league composed of 12 teams in season 2000-2001 and 18 teams in season 2007-2008). Number of teams affects C5 but not C5ICB. Therefore, C5ICB is a more valid instrument.

C5ICB has been increased during 1995 to 1998, decreased during 1998 to 2002, increased during 2002 to 2004 and then decreased. It has been more competitive balance during 1995 to 1999 (first 5-year mean). The less C5ICB is, the more competitive balance. It means more and closer competition among teams. The more competitive balance leads to more appeal in competitions and finally develops the qualitative level of league. A high level league can support national team better than low level. Taking part in world cup at the end of this period was one of high competitive balanced consequences. It was one of the golden periods in Iranian football. Simultaneously, Iranian footballers attended famous leagues such as Bondes leaga.

Second 5-year mean of C5ICB showed decrease of competitive balance. It has been the lowest competitive balance during 2000 to 2004; season 2004-2005 was the lowest in recent 15 years. In this period, Iranian football did not succeed in club and national level. Recent 5-year mean of C5ICB shows competitive balance has been increased in comparison with last 5-year mean. In recent five seasons, 4 teams could win championship of league. Two teams from Isfahan, one from Kerman and one from Tehran attended competitions of season 2009-2010 in Asian champion league. It confirms that bipolar condition of Iranian football (clubs of Piroozi and Esteghlal), Tehran-oriented, has changed and being developed in cities such as Isfahan, Kerman and Tabriz. All these cities are industrial and have faculties. Income of faculties must be partly devoted to sport maintaining all clubs but they only support some clubs. During these years, support of governmental sectors have positively affected sport clubs and disappeared bipolar and traditional conditions of Iranian football; increasing level of league resulted in better quality of football. However, it is effective in short term; some clubs do not benefit from such financial supports so can not compete with others. These teams are like Esteghlal-e-Ahvaz, Abomoslem, Payam-e-Khorasan, Shirin Faraz-e-Kermanshah.

Football clubs can afford their income by competitive balance. The more balance is the more appealing competitions are; resulted in more welcome by attendance clubs and TV broadcast. However, football clubs have no suitable income through TV broadcast in Iran; competitive balance is just a potential income leading to more appeal not more income. In more countries, private sector is in responsible of football clubs and sponsorship and TV broadcast are prominent resources of their income. In Iran, it is difficult to conduct football clubs in private; they do not benefit from TV broadcast as one of the major income resources so cannot afford their expenses. Professionalism is independence of clubs. If industrial or other governmental sector devotes funding to football clubs, it shall be given coherently to organization of league to be distributed desirably among clubs; the clubs can use financial resources belonging to them. It is considerable for lack of researches in this field, it is impossible to compare this research with others.

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