



Issues in the Management of Indonesian Professional Football Competitions: A Case Study of the Indonesian Liga 2

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ABSTRACT

The This article aims to uncover various cases and issues occurring within Liga 2. Based on the investigation conducted, problems arise both prior to and during the course of the competition. Poor regulations that frequently change mid-season, coupled with consistent violations by the parties responsible for upholding them including fundamental yet serious internal issues within PSSI constitute the core of the problem.

The Liga 2 competition involves numerous stakeholders and significant financial turnover; it holds the potential to produce high-quality professional clubs, talented players, and competent match officials. The necessary short-term solution is the improvement of the systems and regulations to be implemented in the league. These regulations must align with FIFA statutes and be supported by clear, firm legal enforcement against any violators, backed by the authority of the practitioners involved. Several instruments can serve as long-term solutions: a) Management, b) Broadcasting and sponsorship (Commercial), c) Applied sports science, d) Political and policy measures e) Athlete performance analysis systems.

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to improve the quality of Indonesian football, professional competitions have been organized for participation by professional clubs. To facilitate and ensure the success of these endeavors, PSSI, as the highest football federation in Indonesia, appointed PT Liga Indonesia Baru (PT LIB) as the operator for national football competitions. In this capacity, PT LIB manages the two tiers of professional football in Indonesia: Liga 1 and Liga 2. On April 15, 2017, PSSI launched Liga 1 (formerly known as the ISL), the top-tier football competition in Indonesia, followed by the second-tier competition, Liga 2.

Since its kick-off on April 19, 2017, several controversies and irregularities have characterized the preparation and execution of Liga 2. Previously known as the *Divisi Utama* (Premier Division) with 24 clubs, the current iteration of Liga 2 features 60 contestants. It could arguably be described as the professional football competition with the highest number of participants in the world. As reported on the website *offside.co.id* through its coordinator, Akmal Marhali, the #SOS (Save Our Soccer) movement questioned PSSI's decision to force a 60-club format. Their research suggested that many of these clubs were actually ineligible to compete based on the professional club licensing standards set by FIFA and the AFC. Ideally, professional football clubs worldwide should be legally structured and regulated in a manner that prioritizes sporting objectives over financial concerns (Union of European Football Associations [UEFA] in Ward et al., 2012: 3). Football clubs are essentially uncomplicated organizations: they exist to facilitate participation and the spectacle of organized football (Morrow & Hamil, in Ward et al., 2012: 3). In Liga 2, however, it appears that clubs were forced to participate in the competition regardless of their readiness.

Another striking irregularity is the significant gap in subsidies provided to Liga 1 versus Liga 2 contestants. According to *offside.co.id*, Liga 1 clubs received a subsidy of IDR 7.5 billion each and the opportunity to utilize "Marquee Players." In stark contrast to these substantial funds, Liga 2 clubs despite also being part of a professional competition do not hold shares in PT Liga Indonesia Baru (PT LIB) as the competition operator. Liga 2 participants receive a subsidy of no more than IDR 500 million per club to navigate an incredibly grueling competition. This financial disparity makes Liga 2 highly susceptible to various systemic problems.

The first major controversy emerged during the group division process, where PSSI split the 60 contestants into six groups of ten teams each. PSSI divided these groups based on regional proximity. However, because the number of participants varies greatly from one province to another, the distribution became lopsided. This imbalance became a source of instability and led to various issues. Further controversy arose when PSSI implemented highly unconventional promotion and degradation rules. Out of 60 contestants, only three clubs were planned for promotion to Liga 1. Most critically, the number of clubs slated for relegation to Liga 3 reached 36. PSSI took this drastic measure because they intended for the 2018 Liga 2 season to consist of only 24 participating clubs.

Among these various irregularities and controversies, the most concerning negative outcome is the practice of buying and selling club licenses. In Liga 2, at least five clubs were involved in such transactions: PS Bintang Jaya Asahan moved and rebranded as 757 Kepri Jaya FC; Villa 2000 became Celebest FC; Persebo Bondowoso became Sumsel Musi Banyuasin FC; Persires Rengat became Lampung Sakti FC; and Laga FC changed ownership to become Sragen United. According to FIFA statutes and regulations regarding professional club

licensing, PSSI must remember that clubs can only be traded through the sale of shares, not the sale of licenses. By allowing the sale of licenses, PSSI has effectively violated the rules of FIFA, the world's highest football governing body. Nevertheless, this issue escaped PSSI's oversight; even more embarrassingly, SOS discovered that these license-trading practices involved high-ranking PSSI officials acting as "brokers." The current situation and management of professional football in Indonesia's Liga 2 have prompted the author to analyze these issues in this article.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study method, focusing on the organization of the 2017 Indonesian Liga 2 competition. Data were obtained through a literature study of the official Liga 2 regulations (*2017 Liga 2 Regulations*), national legal documents (*Law No. 3 of 2005 concerning the National Sports System*), and secondary sources including scientific articles, online media reports, and academic publications regarding professional football governance in Indonesia and globally.

The analysis was conducted by examining the organizational structures of PSSI and PT Liga Indonesia Baru (LIB), regulatory systems, competition mechanisms, and the fulfillment of professional club requirements. The analytical technique is interpretative in nature, highlighting the discrepancies between formal regulations and actual practices in the field. A conceptual approach was also utilized, referencing sports regulation theory (Hancher & Moran, in Walters & Hamil, 2013) and UEFA's Financial Fair Play principles (Jemson, 2013).

RESULT

When The study's findings indicate that the management of the Indonesian Liga 2 competition faces various fundamental issues regarding regulation, management, and operational integrity.

Regulatory and Governance Issues

Liga 2 regulations frequently change mid-competition and do not fully adhere to FIFA statutes. PSSI and PT LIB, acting as operators, have failed to enforce their own established rules, particularly concerning club licensing and promotion-relegation mechanisms. Consequently, many clubs fail to meet the administrative and financial requirements necessary to be classified as professional entities.

Financial Disparity and Subsidies

There is a massive gap between the subsidies provided to Liga 1 clubs (IDR 7.5 billion) and those for Liga 2 clubs (only IDR 500 million), leaving many clubs struggling to cover operational costs and player salaries. This financial pressure has encouraged the practice of buying and selling club licenses a direct violation of FIFA regulations which has reportedly involved internal PSSI officials.

Competition and Match Structure Issues

The competition format involving 60 clubs is deemed unrealistic and creates an immense logistical burden. Furthermore, the extreme promotion and relegation rules (where 36 clubs are relegated and only 3 are promoted) exacerbate inequality and severely disrupt league stability.

Weak Club Management

Many clubs lack professional management systems, particularly in financial oversight, player contracts, and facilities. Instances of unpaid player salaries have even led to tragic outcomes, such as the death of foreign player Diego Mendieta, highlighting the profound lack of legal protection for professional players in Indonesia.

Lack of Legal Enforcement and Evaluation

PSSI has failed to demonstrate a strong commitment to disciplinary enforcement or internal evaluation. There are currently no audit systems or public evaluation mechanisms in place to measure the success or failure of the competition's implementation.

DISCUSSION

A. Regulation

The organizational and governance structure of global football is established hierarchically, meaning there is a pyramid system where national football federations within a continent are members of a continental-level international federation called a confederation for example, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) for countries in Asia. All continental confederations are, in turn, members of the world football governing body, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA). This hierarchical integration ensures that the football development system from elite levels to grassroots, and from the laws of the game to league organization is centralized within a single operational framework (Holt, 2007: 54). Consequently, PSSI, as the highest authority in national football, must ensure that the regulations serving as "guideposts" for domestic competitions are based on FIFA Statutes, which must be adhered to by all involved parties.

To understand a rule or regulation, one can apply Hancher and Moran's concept of 'regulatory space.' This concept views regulation as a division between public authority and private interests; furthermore, regulatory space refers to the environment inhabited by its many social actors (Hancher and Moran in Walters & Hamil, 2013: 741). To grasp the nature of this space, it is necessary to consider the relationships and interactions between key actors in the regulatory process, the resources utilized, and the distribution of those resources among different institutions. These relationships play a vital role in shaping the regulatory process, highlighting the importance of political processes involving contests for power, authority, and legitimacy among stakeholders such as commercial organizations, regulatory bodies, and governments (Walters & Hamil, 2013: 741).

The primary goal and benefit of establishing regulations are to preserve the values of sportsmanship in athletics, particularly in football. The most evident necessity for this arises when a player suffers a severe injury due to violence during a match. In August 2008, Ben

Collett, a young Manchester United player, was awarded £4.3 million in compensation by the High Court in his case against Middlesbrough FC and one of their players after suffering a double leg fracture that forced him to retire. (Chadwick & Hamil, 2010: 74). For the game, such awards are critical because injuries can devastate the immense earning power of top-tier professional players and the potential of youth players. In various European countries, football laws or regulations are also highly beneficial for governing the behavior of supporters (Chadwick & Hamil, 2010: 76). In Indonesia, a notable application of quality regulation was when PSSI prohibited clubs from using state budget (APBN) funds. According to Hilman (2016: 75):

"PSSI issued a regulation prohibiting football teams from using regional budget (APBD) funds for club operations. Because the costs of running a football club are so high, using such funds could disrupt regional finances and make the funds highly susceptible to misuse and criminal acts of corruption."

In the highly advanced contemporary football industry, such as in Europe, regulations focus more on the standard financial capabilities required for clubs to obtain a license to compete at national or confederation levels. In 2010, UEFA, the governing body for European football, introduced a regulation known as Financial Fair Play (FFP) in response to concerns over the financial stability of European football (Jemson, 2013: 3). Jemson further notes that the complex benefits of these regulations include: improving the economic and financial capabilities of clubs, increasing transparency and credibility, prioritizing the protection of creditors, ensuring that clubs settle their obligations with players, social/tax officials, and other clubs on time, introducing more discipline and rationality into club football finances, encouraging clubs to operate based on their own revenue, encouraging responsible spending for the long-term benefit of football, and protecting the long-term viability and sustainability of European club football.

B. Competition

In the process of football development and nurturing, it is essential to organize football competitions ranging from age-group levels to the professional level. According to Sulistiyono (2012: 124):

"Competition in football is a situation where there is a goal to be achieved by many individuals or teams, thereby motivating those individuals or teams to outperform others by increasing their individual or collective performance."

Sulistiyono further explains that since its inception, PSSI has yet to find a competition model that is truly suitable and appropriate for the potential possessed by the Indonesian nation. Thus far, PSSI has utilized three competition models to enhance Indonesian football potential: competitions for professional, semi-professional, and amateur clubs.

Football competitions significantly influence the achievements of the Indonesian National Team on the international stage, as these competitions provide the greatest opportunity for talented professional players to emerge. At the Asian level, we can observe how the Japanese professional football league (J-League) has successfully boosted the performance of the Japanese National Team. The J-League can be considered the foundation for the Japanese National Team's qualification for the last four World Cups, including reaching the knockout stages in two of those tournaments and winning the AFC Cup (Asian Cup) four

times (Dolles & Soderman, 2013: 703). We might conclude that the success story of the J-League represents a period of extraordinary football growth for Japan.

Competitions at the professional level specifically require professional management as they become increasingly complex. Professional competitions involve professional clubs, contracts for players and coaches, long competition durations or schedules, financial turnover reaching trillions of rupiah, broadcasting rights, and commercial sponsorships. However, in 2012, the AFC stated via its website (www.afc.com) that competitions and clubs in Indonesia had not yet reached a professional level. Based on their assessment, Indonesian clubs were not yet permitted to send representatives to compete in the AFC Champions League (Sulistiyono, 2012: 125).

For a professional competition involving many stakeholders and significant financial turnover, clear and binding regulations are necessary to ensure the competition runs smoothly and in accordance with applicable rules. According to Kristiyanto (2016: 447):

"Professional football competitions are governed by a set of universal rules. These rules originate from the FIFA legal system, consisting of FIFA statutes and all their derivatives; this is known as *lex sportiva*, which comprises the 'laws of the game' as *lex sportiva* and *lex sportiva* itself, enforced to ensure that professional football competitions in every country operate according to the established mechanisms."

Although Indonesian football competitions remain credible and the standard of competition between clubs remains high, many scandals still occur off the field (Dorsey & Sebastian, 2013: 616). Football athletes who choose to play in the Indonesian professional league have the opportunity to earn lucrative salaries; in fact, foreign players of increasing quality have come to Indonesia to play (Dorsey & Sebastian, 2013: 616). However, the issue of player salary arrears consistently arises at the end of the competition season. The reality remains that there are clubs that fail to pay player salaries. Therefore, PSSI, as the highest governing body in Indonesian football, must ensure that in drafting competition regulations, it adheres to and does not violate the rules established by FIFA as the highest football organization in the world.

1. Liga 2

Before being named Liga 2, the competition was better known as the *Divisi Utama* (Premier Division) in previous seasons. Liga 2 is the 2017 Indonesian professional football competition positioned below Liga 1 (Liga 2 Regulations, 2017: Article 2). To ensure the competition runs smoothly and adheres to PSSI and FIFA statutes, PSSI appointed PT Liga Indonesia Baru (LIB) a corporation established under the laws of the Republic of Indonesia and approved by the Ministry of Law and Human Rights as the competition operator (Liga 2 Regulations, 2017: Article 3).

In addition to its role as operator, PT LIB is tasked with several key obligations, including:

1. Supervising the preparations for Liga 2.
2. Executing decisions from the PSSI Executive Committee regarding the format and participants of Liga 2.
3. Establishing the Liga 2 match schedule.

4. Conducting administrative and factual verification of participating clubs during the preparation and implementation phases of the league.
5. Providing approval for the stadiums to be used in Liga 2.
6. Issuing recommendations to the Disciplinary Committee regarding disciplinary violations within Liga 2.
7. Determining match status in the event of delays, cancellations, or *force majeure* (Liga 2 Regulations, 2017: Article 3).

The participants of Liga 2 are determined by PSSI with consideration for sporting merit from the 2014 Liga Indonesia Premier Division, the results of the 2017 PSSI Annual Congress, and decisions made by the PSSI Executive Committee. While the Liga 2 regulations originally listed 61 clubs, the number was reduced to 60 after Persiwa Wamena withdrew before the competition commenced.

The competition system implemented for Liga 2 is divided into four distinct rounds: (a) Preliminary round (group stage), (b) Round of 16 and play-offs, (c) Quarter-finals, and (d) Knockout stage, which includes the semi-finals and the final (Liga 2 Regulations, 2017: Article 15). As previously detailed, out of the 60 participating teams, 36 clubs face relegation to Liga 3 (Liga Nusantara), while the clubs finishing in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place earn promotion to Liga 1 for the 2018 season.

2. Professional Football Club

Every professional football competition must be contested by professional football clubs. In this context, "professional" means that the club has truly fulfilled all requirements to participate in the competition. As explained in the introduction, many clubs participating in Liga 2 were, in reality, regulatory-ineligible. This occurred despite PSSI itself establishing the regulations for participant criteria. According to the Liga 2 Regulations (2017: Article 2): "A Club is a football club that has met the requirements set by LIB for participation in Liga 2 organized by LIB." The specific criteria for joining Liga 2 are detailed in Article 4 (Admission Criteria and Procedures) and Article 5 (Integrity).

There are seven (7) specific points that prospective Liga 2 clubs must fulfill according to Article 4 (2017):

- a) Possess the qualifications to participate in Liga 2.
- b) Complete and submit all documents and forms requested by LIB regarding legal, administrative, and financial aspects within the established deadlines.
- c) Complete the formal registration document in the form of a Participating Team Agreement, to be returned to LIB no later than April 17, 2017, via email and registered mail.
- d) Ensure that the original copy of the Participating Team Agreement is received by LIB before the deadline; failure to do so results in the cancellation of the club's participation status.
- e) Guarantee that every individual registered as an Official understands and complies with the provisions of the Participating Team Agreement.
- f) Comply with rules aimed at ensuring the integrity of Liga 2 as referred to in Article
- g) Provide written confirmation that the club, its players, and officials will comply with the Laws of the Game and respect the principles of fair play, regulations, directives, and decisions from LIB.

To safeguard and protect the integrity of Liga 2, participating clubs are prohibited from the following under Article 5 (2017):

- a) Becoming a member of another club participating in Liga 2.
- b) Being involved in the management, administration, and/or sporting performance capacity of another club in Liga 2.
- c) Being a majority shareholder or controlling the majority of voting rights in another club.
- d) Exerting influence in any way that determines the decision-making of another club.

Under these integrity regulations, clubs are required to participate in club development programs to protect the competitive balance of the league. Furthermore, all activities and parties related to betting and match-fixing are subject to sanctions under the Code of Discipline and Code of Ethics. Ironically, despite these well-crafted regulations, the reality on the ground showed they were not properly implemented. Many clubs failed to meet these requirements and eventually collapsed or withdrew mid-competition.

The failure of clubs to meet criteria is a "classic problem" rooted in weak management a fundamental requirement for any professional club. Effective management can mitigate issues like financial opacity and early exploitation, ultimately boosting Indonesia's tourism sector (Chadwick & Hamil in Andrew & Suryawan, 2015: 176). Professional football management is characterized by the creation of a sports industry, which requires attention to several factors:

"In the sports industry, several things need to be considered: facility management, event packaging, sports sales, sponsorship, communication, sports broadcasting, and sports media." (Masteraleksis et al., in Andrew & Suryawan, 2015: 177).

Furthermore, every professional club is obligated to have a representative stadium, understand banking/accounting/taxation to implement Financial Fair Play correctly, and possess minimum facilities to support player quality. Clubs should also secure sponsors from both public and private sectors, enroll players in BPJS (national insurance), and maintain official websites in both Indonesian and international languages. While these standards currently remain far from the reality of Indonesian clubs, they serve as a necessary benchmark for improvement.

Another recurring issue in Indonesian professional football is the failure to pay player salaries. The most tragic instance involved the foreign player Diego Mendieta, whose salary went unpaid by his club. He fell severely ill, was unable to return to his home country, and eventually passed away (Firdandhi et al., 2014). Beyond unpaid wages, issues include choosing inappropriate dispute resolution bodies and failing to cover medical expenses for player injuries.

This persistent problem exists because there are no Indonesian laws or regulations specifically governing employment agreements for professional players (Firdandhi et al., 2014). Additionally, PSSI often remains passive when clubs fail to settle their financial obligations to players, further undermining the professional ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

By its nature, sport implies an extraordinary difference when compared to competition between companies in other markets, influenced by both sports-specific regulations and structural aspects. Certain rules such as separate competitions for men and women, the laws of the game, the necessity for uncertainty of outcome, or limitations on the number of participants appear inherent to sport and are required for its organization. Consequently, these elements may, to a certain extent, be excluded from the application of standard treaty provisions, particularly in legal and regulatory arenas (Izquierdo, 2014: 353).

Professional football competitions hold significant importance for Indonesia, primarily in the objective of advancing national football and fostering hope for international achievements by the National Team. However, since the inception of these competitions, serious issues have consistently emerged. One of the primary causes of the problems in Indonesian football is the adverse impact of political and commercial manipulation; furthermore, we have yet to break free from the manipulative influence of external forces, specifically "dirty politics" itself (Dorsey & Sebastian, 2013: 629).

The case study examined in this article demonstrates that a multitude of problems exist within the Liga 2 competition, occurring from before the season begins until its conclusion. There are fundamental yet serious issues within Liga 2, namely poor regulations that frequently change mid-competition and the failure of involved parties who should be upholding these regulations to comply with them, even within the internal structure of PSSI. Although Liga 2 involves many stakeholders and significant financial turnover, with the potential to produce high-quality professional clubs, talented players, and competent match officials, these opportunities are wasted as the same problems recur every season.

RECOMMENDATION

Behind the poor management system of professional football competitions in Indonesia, there appears to have been no real evaluation that is subsequently published to the public. Such transparency is necessary so that improvements across all sectors can be pursued collectively.

Almost every season, the problems experienced by the Liga 2 competition remain largely the same. As the competition has entered the quarter-final round and is predicted to conclude before the 2018 New Year, one of the primary objectives of this article is to ensure that in the upcoming 2018 season, there will no longer be issues that could disrupt the progress and success of the league. Therefore, the author proposes a comprehensive evaluation as a strategic solution.

In the context of management, solutions can be implemented through both long-term and short-term approaches. In this regard, the parties with the greatest potential to effect improvement are practitioners and academics who care about the advancement of Indonesian football. The immediate short-term solution required is an improvement in the systems and regulations to be implemented in Liga 2. These regulations must comply with FIFA statutes and be supported by clear and firm legal enforcement against anyone who violates them, as the practitioners involved possess the authority to uphold these standards.

Based on a literature search regarding the quality improvement of professional football competitions, the author identified an international journal providing an evaluation instrument to assess competition performance. Several instruments can serve as long-term solutions: (a) management, (b) broadcasting and sponsorship (commercial), (c) applied sports science, (d) politics and policy, and (e) systems for analyzing athlete performance (Rattanapian et al., 2017: 1). Academics are well-positioned to address these evaluative sub-sectors by conducting formal evaluative research.

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