

PE1319/XXX

Petitioners submission of 19 November 2019

The petitioners would ask you to circulate this letter to the Committee members.

The Public Petitions Committee may be aware of the latest revelation in respect of professional clubs treating young players as financial commodities with the exposure of the Billy Gilmour case, a young Scottish football player. Following an inquiry by FIFA, it was widely publicised in the media that football clubs were involved in mass rule breaches. The Times states that 150 breaches of football regulations were reported.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/billy-gilmour-involved-in-150-rule-breaches-that-contributed-to-chelsea-transfer-ban-f77jwp0gl>

Gilmour was subject of an illegal agreement between Rangers FC and Chelsea FC that has now been confirmed as a breach of the world governing body FIFA's regulations. The agreement restricted Gilmour's ability to play for Rangers FC in certain conditions or move to another club in order to protect Chelsea FC's future investment. Rangers FC were financially penalised as a result. It is important to note that Gilmour was only fifteen years old when the illegal agreement was reached.

Although the decision by FIFA referred to a particular illegal agreement, the decision leads us to shed light on the illegalities and injustices which persist in the three-year rolling registration rule. Gilmour was subject to a three-year registration with Rangers FC at the time of the subsequent agreement and reportedly, approximately £500,000 of compensation was later paid to free him from this registration. We would like to highlight that as clubs usually retain players at the end of the season and draw them into a three-year registration (normally by June), it is common for any players (born between June and December) to be thirteen, or fourteen years of age at the point of signing.

This leads us to conclude that the three-year registration process gives clubs full and absolute control over young players. There appears to be no compulsion to give consideration to the legal rights of the young player or their parents. The Gilmour case outlines that even when a player is held to a three-year registration, clubs have little regard for the wellbeing of the player and can still subject children to secret agreements and monetary based deals. This denies young players their basic human rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in order to guarantee that the clubs concerned can fully exploit the current compensation system in order to maximise a profit opportunity.

From the Gilmour case, it can also be asked:

1) If Rangers F.C were found to have breached FIFA rules, does it follow that they have also breached national rules, as enforced by the Scottish FA?

2) Were the Scottish FA or SPFL aware of this 'secret deal'? If so, did they intervene to ensure that the rights of the player were proactively upheld? If not, have the Scottish FA or SPFL now intervened, given that the illegality is widely publicised?

Considering the direct link between this lengthy age group registration and the phenomenal amount of money English Clubs are prepared to pay for our talented young players, it is now perfectly clear why the Scottish FA and SPFL member clubs

have resisted any changes to this current registration process. It is also why we highlighted this and the compensation system as the main issues in our Petition.

We submit that the decision of FIFA in the Gilmour case must be a catalyst for change to ensure that immediate action is taken to avoid other young players being subjected to malpractice of this nature. We insist that the Scottish FA abolish the three-year rolling registration and replace it with the same annual period of registration as age groups 11,12,13,14.

Likewise the current compensation system is clearly not fit for purpose and should be replaced immediately by a system that ensures that compensation is not owed before the age of sixteen years and only if a contract of employment is offered to the player. Only by enforcing these changes can Scotland ensure that every child in football has their human rights respected and can enjoy our national game without economic exploitation.