

Why football players choose family members as agents

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Another international transfer window for football players is ongoing and some agent's and intermediation companies are struggling with many difficulties to place their customers due to the pandemic crisis. In addition to accredited agents and intermediation companies and some renowned individual agents, a new phenomenon has emerged in recent years, which is the familiar agents.

Increasingly, players choose their family members to be their representatives. Players like Leonel Messi, Neymar, Harry Kane, Mauro Icardi, Eden Hazard or even Kylian Mbappé among many others are today represented by family or direct friends and not by football agents.

This movement is spreading to background players and not just in Europe. This is happening in the Gulf countries too. This phenomenon results from the serious fault of FIFA and the agents, now called intermediaries.

The main fault lies with FIFA, which since 2015 has ended up with licensed agents who are required to take periodic examinations (every five years) for which they have a lot to study such as principles of legal contracts, ethics in football, FIFA regulations, deontology, rules of minors transfers etc. The examination system allowed the filtering and selection of only really prepared people.

Now, for an initial fee (which varies from country to country), a clean criminal certificate and insurance, anyone can become an intermediary for footballers.

FIFA is thinking about returning to the previous mandatory licensing system with the inclusion of an exam, this time renewed every three years, as the flexibility it allowed in 2015 has become a disaster. Figures from 2019 say that agents earned a total of \$ 653.9 million, which is four times the amount raised in 2015, so FIFA now says that this market has to be severely regulated and cap the limits.

The fact that there has been a deregulation of the activity of football agents, has meant that many players do not recognize the ability of current intermediaries and, when in doubt, prefer to hand the task of representation to family members.

But that was not the only reason.

The agents are also very much to blame for this impersonation for the players' direct relatives. The £41 million received by Mino Raiola for negotiating the transfer of Paul Pogba for £89 million from Juventus to Manchester United in 2016 was criticized worldwide when news of it first broke. Intermediaries often take advantage of situations to charge exorbitant commissions that also frighten players who wonder why such high values. The most glaring cases are the commissions paid on contract renewals to keep the player in the same club.

We must not forget that the best football players are one-man companies. In many cases, they have become the central figure of a family business that employs fathers, mothers, siblings and friends and they wonder why they are not the ones to collect instead of being the agents so they often insist that they should be the family or close friends to represent them.

But that does not mean that they represent the interests of the athletes well, because family or direct friends tend to take things more personally and often think that there is nothing more to negotiate or improve in their contract. Official agents are much better prepared.

A balance between new regulatory rules on the part of FIFA is expected and recommended in the short term — be it at the level of agent licensing or the limit of fees cap — as well as greater wisdom on the part of intermediaries distinguishing commissions on different services provided.

With defined rules, there will certainly be space for everyone to live together.

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