

Antonie, A., Adam, S., & Szerovay, M. (2022). Serving for state and industry by doing nothing but practice and play : Football shamateurism in East Germany, Hungary and Romania. In Book of Abstracts : 1st Nordic Football Conference : The Game Through Many Lenses, 11-12 May 2022, University of Jyväskylä, Finland (pp. 38). Jyväskylän yliopisto.

Serving for state and industry by doing nothing but practice and play: Football shamateurism in East Germany, Hungary and Romania

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This presentation aims at discussing the opportunities and limitations of football players in East Germany, Hungary and Romania in the period between the end of World War II (1945) and the collapse of the Eastern bloc (1989). Football served as an important propaganda tool for the communist regimes in Eastern Europe. Therefore, the political elites supported football players financially with sinecures in the military, police, and in commercial and industrial companies, as well as by releasing them for training and competitions in their associated clubs. Their status as "shamateurs" granted them privileges in socialist societies over common people but also limited their possibilities to develop professional careers as compared with their counterparts in the West. Drawing on scientific literature and documents, we discuss similarities and differences that footballers have experienced in their career development paths. We will show that all four types of shamateurism, as introduced by Dunning (1999) have occurred separately and in combination in the countries being subject to our study. We therefore contribute to the academic literature by discussing and further developing the concept of shamateurism. We will show that a one-fitsall approach in understanding football player careers in Eastern European countries during the communist period is ill-suited.

Keywords: capitalism, career paths, communism, Eastern Europe, shamateurism