

A Marketing Perspective on Rebuilding Football's Success

Haotian Yang *

Beijing NO.80 High School, Beijing, China

* Corresponding Author Email: counselingoffice@bj80.com

Abstract. In recent years, Beijing Guo'an Football Club (F.C.) has seen a significant deterioration in performance and fan involvement, indicative of a wider trend in Chinese football. During the money-driven era of soccer, Chinese football saw a significant influx of cash but ultimately faced financial strain and a decline in competitiveness, particularly during the COVID-19 epidemic. This study examines prospective solutions for Beijing Guo'an F.C. to tackle operational, management, and marketing difficulties. The analysis concentrates on the club's performance statistics from 2014 to 2024, indices of fan involvement, and the factors contributing to the deterioration of management decision-making. The investigation revealed three primary emphasis points: alterations in management, performance outcomes in significant matches, and the disconnection between clubs and viewers. To address the highlighted issues, the proposal outlines a strategy for improving the club while retaining the management through marketing modifications and operational enhancements. Furthermore, communication and community initiatives may reestablish the bond among supporters. The paper helped to revitalize Beijing Guo'an F.C. and may also serve as a reference for other Chinese football teams in the intensifying worldwide competition.

Keywords: Beijing Guo'an F.C.; Coach constantly; Relationship with Fan.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the development of the money-driven soccer era has led to unprecedented prosperity in Chinese football, which has led to many club sponsors investing a lot of money in the league, players, and club constructions. It has undoubtedly laid a positive foundation for the club's vigorous development. However, the emergence of the epidemic and the gradual decline of the Jinyuan era have led to the gradual decline of the football industry in China. Many well-known foreign players have gradually left the Chinese league, which has led to a decline in competitiveness. At the same time, the arrival of Covid-19 has also led to the suspension of many leagues, thus supporting the decline of Chinese football. As attention has waned, this phenomenon has led to a gradual decline in player standards and a decrease in investment in football. Beijing Guo'an F.C. is a famous club that formed in 1992, and it is one of the oldest and most successful football clubs in Chinese football [1]. The club is based in Beijing and plays its home matches at the Workers' Stadium, a historic venue in the city. They were the founding members of the Chinese A-League, which later evolved into the Chinese Super League (CSL). The club has been a strong competitor in the league, winning the Chinese Super League title in 2009, which marked the pinnacle of their domestic success. Additionally, they regularly participate in the Asian Championship, where they face off against powerful Asian teams. This club has also participated in the Chinese FA Cup, where they have won multiple titles, a testament to their success. Based on their flawless performance, Beijing Guo'an F.C. secured the 190th position in the all-around world club rankings in December 2020, with a score of 1545 [2]. However, based on the general environment of Chinese football, Beijing Guo'an F.C. gradually began to go downhill in the league ranking, which is unsatisfactory, and it is getting fewer and fewer champions.

Although there have been previous studies on Beijing Guo'an F.C., they have mainly been based on the relationship between a team's stock price and the team's performance. For example, Mao et al. find out that successful on-field performance led to a decline in stock prices [3]. Another study by Jiang and Bairner focuses on Chinese football fandom and the civic identities of Beijing Guo'an F.C.

and Shanghai Shenhua F.C. [4]. In this case, there is a research gap about Beijing Guo'an F.C.'s resurgence. How can Beijing Guo'an F.C. achieve a resurgence? Nowadays, there are few articles that study this field, and there is a research gap in this area. In order to fill this research gap in this aspect, this paper will study how Beijing Guo'an F.C. implements a marketing strategy to help it return to the top. This paper focuses on these aspects because it aims to explore and analyze the reasons behind Beijing Guo'an F.C.'s significant ranking decline in a short period of time, with the goal of identifying the shortcomings in its marketing strategy through research and proposing effective improvement suggestions. This research also aims to provide an in-depth analysis of Beijing Guo'an F.C.'s marketing strategy, not only to guide the team back to the top, but also to serve as a reference for other struggling clubs, including those in the CSL. This paper's research, through the combination of theory and practical cases, provides practical and theoretical support for Chinese football clubs to achieve brand remodeling and market share improvement in globalization and fierce market competition.

To bridge the gaps in the previous research, this article primarily outlines the gradual decline of Beijing Guo'an F.C. This paper will also investigate the reasons behind its decline. Finally, based on the analysis of the reasons, combined with the current situation and state of national security, reasonable opinions are given. The next step for Beijing Guo'an F.C. is to implement a marketing strategy to gradually return to the peak.

2. Case Description

Beijing Guo'an F.C. experienced notable fluctuations in its performance, marked by periods of strong contention for the Chinese Super League, also called the CSL title, interspersed with seasons of inconsistency from 2014 to 2024. From 2014 to 2017, Beijing Guo'an F.C. was a consistent force in the CSL, often finishing in the top three and contending for the title. Experienced domestic players and high-profile foreign signings bolstered the club's performance during this period. Especially in the 2014 season, Guo'an finished as the runner-up and narrowly missed the championship. However, despite their impressive league performances, the club has struggled to maintain consistency, especially in continental competitions such as the Asian Champions League. The frequent changes in the coaching staff led to shifts in playing styles, which affected the team's rhythm and cohesion on the field. The coach of Beijing Guo'an F.C. has changed 10 times during this period, and the change of coach would directly change the strategy of each game. In 2016, Beijing Guo'an F.C. invested the most money during this period, but they failed to achieve any positive results in any league. The administrators of Beijing Guo'an F.C. made a number of poor decisions during this period, which ultimately led to their defeat.

From 2018 to 2020, Beijing Guo'an F.C. has been a huge fluctuation. The 2018 season marked a resurgence for the team, with the team winning the FA Cup in China, picking up their first major trophy in nearly a decade. Coach Roger Schmidt attributed this success to his more consistent lineup, improved team chemistry, and effective tactical strategy. The following year, 2019, was arguably the peak of the era, with Guo'an finishing second in the Chinese Super League, just two points behind champions Guangzhou Evergrande. The team showed outstanding attacking ability and solid defense, but inconsistency in key matches once again cost them the title. Additionally, the subsequent Covid-19 injuries to key players significantly impacted the club's financial performance. Managerial instability also contributed to this decline, with Schmidt's departure triggering another period of adjustment that impeded the team's ability to consistently perform at a high level.

The most recent period, from 2021 to 2024, has been characterized by struggles both on and off the pitch. Beijing Guo'an F.C. not only needs to meet the requirements proposed by those famous players, but it also needs to address the problems caused by fans. From 2020 to 2024, Beijing's interaction with fans has declined significantly. Clubs' communication strategies have become increasingly fragmented, with less social media interaction and less fan activity. During this period, the team's inconsistent on-court performance further alienated supporters, leading to a decline in attendance and

online engagement. In addition, the lack of transparency in player transfers and internal management decisions has frustrated fans, who feel increasingly disconnected from the club. Despite being one of the most popular soccer teams in China, Beijing Guo'an F.C. has not prioritized fan engagement over the years, resulting in a noticeable loss of its loyal fan base and consequently, less support from these fans.

3. Analysis

3.1. Frequent Change in Coach and Players

Beijing Guo'an F.C.'s depressed state in the league is primarily due to the frequent head coach changes made by the team's management. Having to change coach 10 times means that players not only need to quickly adapt to different tactics but also to manage their relationship with the manager, which undoubtedly increases the pressure on the players and leads to lower performance. It can also lead to a lack of trust in the club and a desire to transact.

Public reports conservatively estimate Yilmaz, Augusto, and Ralph's transfer fee in 2016 to be 17 million euros, or about 127.5 million yuan, implying a total investment of about 500 million yuan for the Guo'an Club in the 2016 season [5]. In the 2015 season, Guo'an scored 56 points in the Chinese Super League and the Asian Championship, resulting in 16 wins, 8 draws, and 6 losses [5]. In 2015, Guo'an had only one league front, so they should improve performances. However, after 30 rounds of the Chinese Super League, Guo'an's points had dropped to 43, resulting in 11 wins, 10 draws, and 9 losses [5]. On the evening of November 26, 2015, Spanish coach Manzano announced on Weibo that he would no longer coach Beijing Guo'an F.C. next season [5]. Additionally, the arrival of a new coach can have immediate negative effects, even if they do bring some positive effects after a few games. However, a coach change that occurs 10 times in three years is unlikely to have the same positive effects. In fact, team performance, measured by the number of points awarded during the old coach's tenure, was higher than that of the new coach at 20 matches after the coaching change [6]. Furthermore, the mid-season coach change could potentially be a significant contributing factor to the team's poor performance in the CSL.

Many researchers have also mentioned that management stability plays an important role in team development. For example, Guerrero-Calderón and others have studied how the change of coach might affect the performance of players in the matches [7]. Their research shows that players developed significantly higher physical responses with the dismissal coach compared to the new coach in training [7]. However, despite the lack of significant results, the new coach demonstrated a trend of higher physical responses during the match. The new coach has a lower chance of winning compared to the dismissed coach [7]. Therefore, changing the coach at mid-season did not produce a positive effect in reversing a negative streak of results [7].

3.2. Lack of Success in Key Combat

Another reason why Beijing Guo'an F.C. is showing a depressed state in the league is because Beijing Guo'an F.C. lacks success in key combat.

The Chinese Super League began with 10 consecutive wins, setting the best start record in China's top professional league, and finally finished second with 70 points, setting a new record in the team's history. However, 2019 was also full of regrets: Guo'an missed out on the Chinese Super League title by two points and went out early in both the FA Cup and the AFC Champions League. In 2019, Beijing Guo'an F.C. had the biggest opportunity to win the CSL championship, but Beijing Guo'an F.C. lost several important games. Despite starting the season with 10 consecutive victories and setting a club record, Beijing Guo'an F.C. lost to the champion. On August 11, Beijing, China Guo'an defeated Guangzhou Evergrande 1:3, and on October 19, Beijing, China Guo'an defeated Shanghai SIPG 0:2. These two significant losses led Beijing Guo'an F.C. to lose control to the CSL champion.

During this period, Beijing Guo'an F.C. experienced changes in their coach and injuries to important players, leading to a decline in their competitive ability against other powerful teams. For example, in 2022, Manchester City played Aston Villa in a Premier League match that led directly to City's dominance in the title race, so winning this match would put them in possession of the Premier League title. Manchester City came from 2-0 down to win 3-2 against Aston Villa. This dramatic victory ensured that City secured the title by just one point over Liverpool, clinching their fourth title in five seasons. This game will have a positive effect on the whole team because it has secured the Premier League title, allowing them to play more freely and without pressure in the next games.

Therefore, winning crucial games not only helps a team climb the table but also enhances the team's performance in subsequent games.

3.3. Less Connection and Negative Attitude to Fans

Additionally, another factor contributing to Beijing Guo'an F.C.'s subpar performance in the CSL is a lack of connection and a hostile disposition towards supporters. Beijing Guo'an F.C., a prominent football team in China, has encountered criticism for its perceived disconnection and inadequate approach towards its supporters in recent years.

The club and its supporters have frequently encountered criticism for their inconsistent and uninspiring communication. During the 2022 season, Guo'an executed numerous critical choices, including player transfers and management alterations, without notifying or consulting the supporters. Supporters voiced their dissatisfaction on social media, indicating that the club's administration appeared disconnected from the community's expectations and issues.

Secondly, Guo'an's engagement with its fan base has been limited, particularly in comparison to other clubs in the Chinese Super League. They lack a robust commitment to their supporters, resulting in disagreements and diminished support.

In essence, Beijing Guo'an F.C.'s suboptimal rapport with its fans arises from inadequate communication, limited involvement, and decisions that have estranged followers. Vacant football stadiums exert a profound psychological effect, depriving players of the link with their spectators that often enhances performance levels considerably. Capture the sound of a home crowd motivating their fatigued and weary squad. Individual players might utilize the fervor of match-attending supporters to mitigate tiredness. A professional athlete can disregard pain and fatigue by concentrating on the crowd's clamor, encouragement, and support. This allows them to exceed conventional limitations. Supporters clearly influence players' performance, and Beijing Guo'an F.C.'s decline may be due to poor fan interactions and unfavorable altitude conditions.

4. Suggestion

4.1. Suggestion on Using a Single Coach Constantly

Between 2014 and 2017, the global football market experienced a high frequency of coach changes, especially in the top leagues and large clubs. During this period, football clubs generally faced severe performance pressure and commercialization influence, resulting in a significant increase in the frequency of coach changes. Major European leagues such as the Premier League, La Liga, Serie A, and Bundesliga have a high frequency of coach changes. From 2014 to 2017, Beijing Guo'an F.C., a traditionally strong team in the Chinese Super League, also faced the challenge of a coach replacement. They want to find someone who can combine suitable stature, young player cultivation, and steady takeover.

In this case, this paper thinks Beijing Guo'an F.C. should find a coach who meets the above requirements through scouts all over the world and then conduct an assessment to make sure the coach can really meet the needs. Also, Beijing Guo'an F.C. should provide a favorable enough contract to

help the coach stay in the club constantly and cultivate a favorable relationship between the coach and the club.

It is believed that the relationship between a leader and his subordinates significantly influences the performance of the employees. Positive relationships can shape into varied types of exchanges between a leader and his subordinates [8]. A positive relationship between superiors and subordinates can promote the performance of employees. If there is a positive relationship between the senior management, the manager, and the players, then they can all be fully committed to each other's work and make the club better and better.

4.2. Suggestion on Win Some Key Combats

Any elite athlete's ability to influence a crucial global game and lead a club to victory will significantly boost the players' freshness and encourage them to perform better in later leagues. For instance, in the 2018 CSL season, Guangzhou Evergrande F.C. faced Shanghai SIPG F.C. in a match that effectively served as the Chinese Super League title fight. Shanghai SIPG F.C. finally won this match by a score of 5:4, thus, there is only the possibility of a theoretical loss of the crown to Shanghai SIPG F.C. This key match's success brings a strong encouragement to all the players in Shanghai SIPG F.C., therefore, they perform significantly nicer in the later games. Beijing Guo'an F.C. is currently performing well in the league, ranking fourth in the CSL.

This paper suggests that Beijing Guo'an F.C. should continue to introduce big stars in the limited transfer window so that the coach can use more candidates in the key matches and can also integrate some youth teams into the first team. Beijing Guo'an F.C., for example, should invest in scouting so that they have more opportunities to bring in stronger players at lower prices and thus get better performances. Simultaneously, Beijing Guo'an F.C. should enhance the psychological training of its players, as some players may experience nervousness during crucial games, resulting in subpar performance. The team could implement psychological counseling to help these players overcome challenges and perform at their highest level against formidable opponents, ultimately contributing to the team's victory. From a global perspective, Beijing Guo'an F.C. must not only address issues within its own players, but also introduce more proficient players from various regions and countries to bolster their lineup.

4.3. Suggestion on Build Good Relationship with Fan

Most elite clubs, such as Real Madrid and Barcelona in La Liga and Manchester United and Chelsea in the English Premier League, maintain a positive relationship with their fans because they know that fans are vital to players' performance. They maintain strong relationships with fans on social media sites such as Twitter and Instagram, which could attract more loyal fans.

So far, Beijing Guo'an F.C. has mishandled many key issues, reducing fans' trust in the club and souring relations. Therefore, this paper suggests that the club should enhance its communication opportunities with fans. This could be achieved by creating more social platform accounts, which would allow fans to directly communicate with the club. The club should genuinely incorporate the fans' views into its operations, not only to gain their trust but also to enhance the club's performance. For instance, Beijing Guo'an F.C. could consider lowering the price of match tickets, thereby enabling a broader fan base to attend live matches. This would not only increase the club's goodwill but also serve as a gesture of apology to old fans who have voiced complaints about the club. This will not only increase the relationship between the fans and the club, but also win their applause so that the players can be more focused on the game. Philip and others' research, for instance, demonstrates that a large number of fans in the stadium positively impacts players [9]. One could interpret this as implying that the presence of soccer fans in the stadium facilitated social interactions among players who were in a good mood, leading them to express more status-related NVB, such as dominance, pride, and confidence [9].

In this context, this paper aims to investigate the positive impact that players can have on fans, particularly when there is a positive relationship between them. Building a good relationship with fans is therefore important for clubs. In summary, this paper concluded that maintaining a good relationship with fans could help players play well in games, get better performances, and win more games.

5. Summary

This paper conducts a study based on the recent poor performance and failed management of Beijing Guo'an F.C. and finds out how to make it return to the top. This article is based on research conducted on the marketing and internal management of Beijing Guo'an F.C., and it explores various methods and strategies that could help the team return to its former glory. Based on the analysis of Beijing Guo'an F.C.'s current problems on the court and the management of the management problems. Thus, there are three ways to help Beijing Guo'an F.C. get back to the top: first, use a stable coach. Second, win the key games, and third, build a positive relationship with the fans.

This article provides an analysis of real European players and some real club strategies. At the same time, the article proposes a future outlook to help Beijing Guo'an F.C. return to its peak, based on real performances and the most reasonable and possible policies. However, this paper believes the solution to this deficiency is to gain a deeper understanding of Chinese football and conduct field visits or interviews with club officials to gather authentic information, which will enable me to propose innovative and useful substantive suggestions.

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