

THE ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT STATE OF NEFTCHI FOOTBALL CLUB AND WAYS TO IMPROVE CLUB MANAGEMENT

U.Z. Malikzade

Azerbaijan Sports Academy

ulvi.malikzada2023@sport.edu.az, orcid.org/0009-0008-8884-7826

Nəşr tarixi

Qəbul edilib: 14 oktyabr 2024

Dərc olunub: 25 dekabr 2024

© 2022 ADBTİA Bütün hüquqlar qorunur

Annotation. This paper presents an analysis of current problems which one of the historically most important football teams in Azerbaijan, Neftchi Football Club, is experiencing, and consequently, searches for ways to solve them in its management and performance. Despite its bright history and established reputation, Neftchi has been struggling in the last years, achieving only incomplete success on both domestic and international scenes. Mismanagement, poor decision-making, breakdowns in communication, and misguided transfer of players and coaches have been identified as some of the important problems. This study also looks into sponsorship and financial mismanagement as a factor for poor performance. By identifying best practices that have been observed in the management of football clubs elsewhere, and by drawing lessons from both the successes of the past and the current challenges, this study comes up with actionable recommendations on how such a club could be managed to restore its competitive level and return to its previous status among leading names in Azerbaijani football.

Keywords: *Neftchi Football Club, sports management, club performance, player transfers, sponsorship challenges, financial management, organizational improvement.*

Introduction. Football, deemed the most popular sport worldwide, continues its rapid evolution. Azerbaijan is no exception to this global trend, with football reigning as the nation's most beloved sport and steadily gaining more enthusiasts. Across the globe, each country boasts its own renowned football clubs, rep-

resenting their nation both in prestigious European matches and domestic leagues. Azerbaijan proudly contributes to this tradition with its own roster of clubs, including the likes of Karabakh Football Club, Neftchi Football Club, Sabah Football Club, among others. However, while football's development is a universal trend, its pace varies from one nation to another. For instance, countries like England, Spain, Italy, and France stand out for the remarkable progress football has made within their borders. The clubs hailing from these nations consistently demonstrate their prowess on the European stage, earning them the distinction of playing football at the highest echelons of the sport.

In Azerbaijan, football's ascent mirrors the country's growing passion for the sport. With each passing year, more resources are invested, infrastructure is enhanced, and talent is nurtured, contributing to the sport's flourishing ecosystem. The popularity of football transcends age, gender, and social divides, serving as a unifying force that brings communities together in support of their favorite teams and players. Yet, while Azerbaijan's football landscape continues to evolve, there are disparities in development across different regions and communities. In some areas, access to quality training facilities and coaching may be limited, hindering the full potential of aspiring athletes. Addressing these disparities requires concerted efforts from various stakeholders, including government bodies, sports federations, and grassroots organizations, to ensure that football development is inclusive and equitable.

Meanwhile, powerhouse football nations like England, Spain, Italy, and France stand as paragons of success, with their clubs dominating European competitions and setting the standard for excellence in football. The rich

history, robust infrastructure, and intense competition within their leagues contribute to the continuous advancement of football in these countries, making them formidable opponents on the global stage.

In essence, football's journey is a testament to its universal appeal and capacity to inspire. Whether in Azerbaijan or across the globe, the sport continues to captivate hearts, drive innovation, and transcend boundaries, enriching lives and shaping communities along the way. Currently, Azerbaijan has two world-famous main clubs: Karabakh football club and Neftchi football club.

Karabakh club is more developed than Neftchi club, but Neftchi club is a more established club. So Neftchi has been representing Azerbaijan since the USSR period [5]. Neftchi is the first team to make Azerbaijan's name known in the international arena in football. "Neftchi" played its first official match on May 24, 1937. This was also the team's first match. In the 1/64 final of the USSR Cup, the team called "Neftyannik" of that time defeated Yerevan's "Dynamo" 1:0 in the match watched by 5,000 fans at the "Dynamo" stadium in Baku. This historical victory made all Azerbaijani people proud [6].

Neftchi Football Club experienced many important agreements and developments between 1992 and 2013. Here are some important points:

1. Independence: Neftchi became an independent club in 1992 following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Before that it was known as Neftchi football club and was part of the Soviet football system.
2. Domestic Success: During this period, Neftçi achieved domestic success in the Azerbaijan Premier League, winning many league championships and domestic cups. They were one of the most successful clubs in Azerbaijani football.
3. European Competitions: Neftchi has participated in European competitions such as the UEFA Champions League and UEFA Europa League and achieved varying degrees of success in these competitions. Important matches and experien-

ces came from these international tournaments.

4. Player Transfers: Neftchi dealt with player transfers by both signing contracts and selling players. These deals contributed to the team's performance and financial stability. Some of the important players who played for Neftchi during this period include Gurban Gurbanov and Rashad Sadygov.
5. Stadium Development: The club has made progress in improving its stadium facilities to meet international standards during this time.

Novelty of research. The limited number of studies on Azerbaijani football, particularly the absence of comprehensive analyses focusing on individual clubs like Neftchi, underscores the need for further research in this area. Neftchi Football Club stands as a cornerstone of Azerbaijani football, embodying the nation's sporting heritage and aspirations. As one of the most esteemed clubs in Azerbaijan, Neftchi's journey and current standing serve as a microcosm of the broader evolution of football within the country. Delving into a detailed study of Neftchi Football Club presents an exciting opportunity to explore various facets of the club's history, structure, performance, and impact on Azerbaijani football. By scrutinizing its trajectory, from its inception to its present-day operations, researchers can uncover invaluable insights into the factors that have shaped the club's identity and success. Moreover, examining the challenges and opportunities faced by Neftchi offers a nuanced understanding of the broader landscape of Azerbaijani football, including issues related to governance, finance, talent development, and fan engagement. Through rigorous analysis and empirical research, scholars can contribute not only to the academic discourse surrounding football studies but also to the practical advancement of the sport within Azerbaijan.

The novelty of this research topic lies in its potential to fill a significant gap in the existing literature on Azerbaijani football, providing scholars, policymakers, and football

stakeholders with valuable knowledge and actionable recommendations. By addressing key questions about Neftchi Football Club's role, dynamics, and future prospects, researchers can contribute to the ongoing dialogue on sports development and identity in Azerbaijan.

Current problems of Neftchi Football Club.

1. Choosing the wrong people in the management of Neftchi Football Club. This problem does not cover only "Neftchi" club. In general, the leaders of many Azerbaijani clubs are not chosen properly. The main point to note here is:

First, ask them "what is football?" a question should be asked. If they answer the question correctly, then you can consider hiring them. People who know the world of football and understand football should be brought to the football club. The managers of the current Neftchi football club are businessmen. They manage the "Neftchi" football club as a company. In fact, this should not be the case. They have to prioritize the success of the club. But what is important for them is more income. In this case, problems arise in the club and the results are bad [1].

2. Mismanagement in Neftchi football club. *Football is a results business.*

Popular press would have it that you are never more than six games away from the sack, no matter how good your previous record has been. Performance in football is clear, measurable and the results – league tables, reports, ranking of players and manager are extremely public [1]. This ranking and the use of league tables is now increasingly widespread in sectors as broad ranging as education, consumer businesses, financial institutions and commerce [1].

That is, no matter how good the past management of the club was, the important thing is not the past, but the present results.

There are a number of important problems in the internal management of "Neftchi" football club. They are divided into 3 parts:

1. *Money management*
2. *Making decisions*

3. Communication problem

1) Money management

Neftchi football club receives money from the state. More precisely, "SOCAR", one of the largest oil companies in the world, is the owner and main sponsor of Neftchi [5]. Too much money makes it difficult to distribute it properly. For example, foreign players and coaches are overpaid. A football player who is paid so much while not playing a quality game is not trying to play well [9].

2) Making decisions

Decisions are made in chaos. There is no single leader within the team. For this reason, decisions are not fully analyzed. In general, when something negative happens in the club (the team loses, etc.), everyone blames each other. No one takes the blame. Normally, this should not be the case. When there is a problem, the decision of the team and a leader must take the blame [8].

3) Communication problem

Communication is the most important factor in all fields. It is the same in football. The internal communication of "Neftchi" football club is problematic. The main reason for this is the frequent change of employees and managers. Coaches have an important say among the players in the club. However, since coaches change frequently in the "Neftchi" football club, conflicts arise here. This forms the basis of common communication problems [8].

3. Wrong transfers made in Neftchi football club (coach and players). One of the main conditions for the development and better results of football clubs is to make the right transfers. However, the transfers of football players and coaches of the "Neftchi" football club in recent years are not encouraging at all.

In the current situation, the results obtained from football player transfers are very low. Their in-game results are low. They cannot contribute to the game. The main reason for this is that players are transferred without proper analysis [9]. Another problem is that the players either cannot adapt to the club or are dissatisfied with the club management.

This problem is not only related to football. If the employee in any field is dissatisfied with the management, it will not be possible to succeed there.

Coach transfers are the same, either they cannot adapt to the club or they are dissatisfied with the club management. In fact, coaches should be given more authority, but this is not observed in "Neftchi" football club.

It is no coincidence that the head coach has changed 5 times in the last 5 years. This is one of the clearest proofs that the club's transfer policy is wrong [8].

Suggestions for solutions to problems.

First of all, you need to choose the right club leaders. This is the most important factor. Instead of people who have no football experience and have only worked in bigger jobs (CEO of a company, etc.), people who have football experience in the past and have achieved successful results should be brought to this position. If "Neftchi" football club replaces its current managers with people who are more connected to football and who know football better, who can apply sports management in practice (this can be people who have worked in both foreign clubs and domestic clubs), this will largely solve more than half of the club's problems. will solve it.

Another issue is improving intra-club communication and having a single leader within the "Neftchi" club. In general, the most important key to good management is good communication [8]. When there is proper communication, people become closer and more sincere with each other. This, in turn, greatly supports the progress of things. Choosing a leader is also very important. Because the leader must protect the club during negative situations and take all the burden on himself. Currently, there is such an example in Azerbaijan. The leading person in the "Garabagh" football club is the head coach Gurban Gurbanov. During any negative situations, he takes all the blame and manages the situation like a true sports manager [8]. Of course, the main issue is not only to take the blame. A leader must also be a great source of motivation. We can show the "Barcelona" football club from

world football as an example. At the start of the 2022/2023 season, Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez sat his players down and told them they had to win the La Liga title [2].

"With this squad, the league cannot escape us," he said in August, as revealed in a recent documentary. "We have to blow this league away, blow it away. Every game is a war; we have to give everything. We are privileged to be at Barca. We have to die on the pitch. With this squad, we have to win trophies, above all the league ... are you ready to be a family?" [2]. If there is such a person in the Neftchi football club, then things will start to go well.

Finally, the last issue is bringing the necessary players and coaches to the "Neftchi" football club. The players brought in should be both financially sound and have good playing technique. Finding such players is very difficult, but not impossible. It's just that the club's player transfer managers have to put in a lot of effort. Another such example can be shown from the "Garabagh" football club. They transferred a football player named "Kady Borges" from a club not known in the world. But the player has developed very well since his arrival and has given the club a lot of good. If we take an example of a club from Europe in recent history, it will undoubtedly be the Spanish football club "Barcelona". FC Barcelona is one of the biggest clubs in the world, but sometimes big clubs can be mismanaged. From 2017 to 2019, the club made many wrong transfers and spent a lot of money on it. Just because of these mistakes, the club was heading towards bankruptcy. But in reality, Barca have not invested their money wisely since 2015 [3]. Barcelona had become the first team in world sport to hit €1 billion in revenue in 2019, but a former executive, who wishes not to be named to protect business relationships, explained that wage obligations ate into those revenues [4]. However, after the change of management, the situation of the club changed for the better and the Barcelona football club began to develop again.

As mentioned, the coach is one of the most important figures in the club and is more

of a leader. For this reason, this person should not be replaced often and should wait until he adapts to the team. That is, instead of changing the coach often, the coach should be given more time. In addition, when choosing a coach, you need to carefully look at past performance and properly analyze it. Coaches who were not successful at their former clubs or who did not have a good relationship with the players even if they were successful, should not be hired.

If all the listed points are fulfilled correctly, it is inevitable that "Neftchi" football club will get out of the current situation.

REFERENCES

1. **Bridgewater S.** *Football management*, 2010. [URL].
2. **Marsden S., Llorens M.** *How Barcelona won LaLiga: Xavi's management, transfer successes, and a great defence*, 2023. Retrieved from [URL].
3. **Fraser D., Mayo M.** *How Barcelona blew £940m on transfers in five years*, 2020. Retrieved from [URL].
4. **Crafton A., Ballus P.** *Investigation: Barcelona's financial crisis and what the rest of football thinks of it*, 2022. Retrieved from [URL].
5. *History of "Neftchi"*. (n.d.). Neftchimedia.az. Retrieved from [URL].
6. *USSR Cup 1949*. (1949, October 25). Torpedo (Moskva) – Neftyanik (Baku). fcdynamo.ru. Retrieved from [URL].
7. *Apasport.az*. (2016, July 23). 149 "thugs" of a prize - DRAFT. Retrieved from [URL].
8. **Mallett C., Rynne S.** *Dynamic social networks in high performance football coaching*, 2012. Retrieved from [URL].
9. **Szymanski S., Smith R.** *The English football industry: Profit, performance, and industrial structure*, 2006. Retrieved from [URL].

NEFTÇİ FUTBOL KLUBUNUN MÖVCUD VƏZİYYƏTİNİN TƏHLİLİ VƏ KLUB İDARƏETMƏSİNİN TƏKMİLLƏŞDİRİLMƏ YOLLARI

Ü.Z. Məlikzadə

Azərbaycan İdman Akademiyası

ulvi.malikzada2023@sport.edu.az, orcid.org/0009-0008-8884-7826

Annotasiya. Bu məqalə Azərbaycanın tarixi baxımdan ən önəmli futbol komandalarından biri olan Neftçi Futbol Klubunun hazırkı problemlərini təhlil edir və nəticə etibarilə idarəetmə və performans sahəsində bu problemlərin həlli yollarını axtarır. Parlaq tarixinə və möhkəm reputasiyasına baxmayaraq, Neftçi son illərdə həm daxili, həm də beynəlxalq arenada tam uğur qazana bilməyib. Yanlış idarəetmə, zəif qərar qəbuletmə, ünsiyyətdə problemlər, eləcə də oyunçu və məşqçilərin səhv transferi əsas problemlərdən biri kimi müəyyən edilmişdir. Araşdırma eyni zamanda zəif performansın səbəbi olaraq sponsorluq və ma-

liyyə idarəetməsindəki çatışmazlıqları da nəzərdən keçirir. Futbol klublarının idarəçiliyində beynəlxalq səviyyədə müşahidə edilən ən yaxşı təcrübələri müəyyən etməklə, keçmiş uğurlardan və mövcud çağırışlardan öyrənməklə, bu araşdırma klubun rəqabət qabiliyyətini bərpa etməsi və Azərbaycan futbolunun aparıcı adlarından biri kimi əvvəlki statusuna qayıtması üçün həyata keçirilə bilən tövsiyələr təqdim edir.

Açar sözlər: *Neftçi Futbol Klubu, idman idarəetməsi, klub performansı, oyunçu transferləri, sponsorluq problemləri, maliyyə idarəetməsi, təşkilati təkmilləşmə.*

АНАЛИЗ ТЕКУЩЕГО СОСТОЯНИЯ ФУТБОЛЬНОГО КЛУБА "НЕФТЧИ" И ПУТИ УЛУЧШЕНИЯ УПРАВЛЕНИЯ КЛУБОМ

У.З. Маликзаде

Академия Спорта Азербайджана

ulvi.malikzada2023@sport.edu.az, orcid.org/0009-0008-8884-7826

Аннотация. В данной работе проводится анализ текущих проблем, с которыми сталкивается один из исторически самых важных футбольных клубов Азербайджана – ФК "Нефтчи". Кроме того, в исследовании рассматриваются возможные пути их решения в области управления и повышения производительности клуба. Несмотря на яркую историю и прочную репутацию, ФК "Нефтчи" испытывает трудности в последние годы, добиваясь лишь частичных успехов как на внутренней, так и на международной аренах. Неправильное управление, слабое принятие решений, сбои в коммуникации, а также неудачные трансферы игроков и тренеров были определены как основные проблемы. В исследовании также рассматриваются вопросы спонсорства и

финансового управления как факторы, влияющие на слабую производительность клуба. Путём выявления лучших практик, наблюдаемых в управлении футбольными клубами в других странах, а также извлекая уроки из прошлых успехов и текущих вызовов, данное исследование предлагает конкретные рекомендации по управлению клубом для восстановления его конкурентоспособности и возвращения к прежнему статусу одного из ведущих клубов азербайджанского футбола.

Ключевое слово: *футбольный клуб "Нефтчи", спортивный менеджмент, производительность клуба, трансферы игроков, проблемы спонсорства, финансовое управление, организационное улучшение.*