KU LEUVEN

SPM 128
Sport Policy & Management
INFOGRAPHIC

Racial stereotyping and discrimination in junior and professional football in Belgium

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Background

Racial discrimination and stereotyping are reported to be ubiquitous in football. For instance, scholars point to discrimination and positional stacking based on the belief of racial differences (e.g., Scheerder & Huyge, 2021). In the seasons 2019-2021, the Policy in Sports & Physical Activity Research Group of the KU Leuven conducted research on discrimination and racial stereotyping in junior and professional football in Belgium (for more background on the studies, see Huyge & Scheerder, 2021; Truyers et al., 2022). This SPM Infographic 128 presents the main findings of the aforementioned studies. Due to the high presence of players with an African background - players and/or parents with African nationality - in Belgian football, the comparison between African and non-African players will mainly be examined.

Methodology

Belgian junior football players and their parents were surveyed using an online questionnaire (N=2.169). The questions in the survey included socio-demographic characteristics, attitudes towards other identities, experiences with micro-aggression and coping mechanisms (Scheerder & Huyge, 2021).

Data collection in Belgian professional football consisted of the male and female first division. Through online desk research, players' (n=483) - active in the 2019-2020 season - positions, minutes played and migration background were compared by ethnic background (Truyers et al., 2022). Due to the low number of professional female players with a non-Belgian background, they are not included in the analyses.

Junior football in Belgium

All players under the age of 21 playing in a recognised junior team in Belgium

183.863 junior players in Belgium

♂ 171.271
♀ 12.592

37,3 %
of players experienced discrimination
during the last two seasons

causes of discrimination
according to discriminated players

1. Body (49,6 %)
2. Skin colour (30,7 %)
3. Ethnicity or culture (30,7 %)
4. Language (14,5 %)
5. Religion (13,4 %)
6. Sex (8,6%)

20,2%
of players indicate to discriminate others
during the last two seasons

Female players*, French-speaking* and players with sub-Saharan African background*
discriminate significantly less

Players with an African background are
in comparison with European players:



3,7 times* less likely to play as a goalkeeper



18,1 %* more likely to play as a attacker

	EU background	African background
Goalkeeper	11,1 % (98)	3,0 % (6)
Defender	31,3 % (276)	29,5 % (66)
Midfielder	29,6 % (261)	21,9 % (49)
Attacker	27,9 % (246)	46,0 % (103)

($Chi^2 = 36,0$; $df = 3$; $p < 0,001$)

Professional football in Belgium

First male and female division (Jupiler Pro League and Super League Vrouwenvoetbal)

483 first division players in Belgium ('19-'20)

♂ 385 (16 teams)
♀ 98 (6 teams)

Players (♂) with an African background
(in comparison with European players):

get substituted 22% more

are 5% more likely to receive a red card

are 19% more likely to start on the bench

play 17% less minutes

Players (♂) with an African background are
in comparison with European players:



5,4 times* less likely to play as a goalkeeper



26,8 %* more likely to play as a attacker

	EU background	African background
Goalkeeper	13,0 % (30)	2,4 % (3)
Defender	38,9 % (84)	21,3 % (27)
Midfielder	26,9 % (58)	29,1 % (37)
Attacker	20,4 % (44)	47,2 % (60)

($Chi^2 = 37,9$; $df = 3$; $p < 0,001$)

Note: * significant at the 0.05-level

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