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## When Refereeing Turns Ugly: Investigating Fans Response to the Spectre of Bias Officiating in Ghana Football

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### **Abstract:**

*Football is a game of universal appeal. In the middle of the field is the referee who officiate the game guided by rules and regulations. The fallibility of humans means referees at times make questionable decisions leading to what has become topical as referee bias. This study investigated the issue of referee bias and fans response to the phenomenon using qualitative approaches. We reviewed relevant literature from scholarly articles and on referee bias and identified some void in responses to referee bias on the part of fans. We collated data using semi structured interviews by posing open ended questions. A small sample size comprising nine participants was chosen for the study. We found that participants believe referee bias is widespread in Ghana Football. Fans respond angrily to acts of bias officiating with violent behavior ensuing. We also discovered that some fans are dissuaded from attending football matches because of referee bias. We recommend that referees should be trained and re-trained to minimize referee bias whilst sanctioning referees who persists in bias officiating. Security should also be beefed up to give referees some protective cover and also possibly engage in crowd control.*

**Keywords:** Referee, bias, home, advantage, officiate, participants, responses

### **1. Introduction**

Football is a sports discipline that has assumed universal dimension. Referees in football adjudicate the game in the spirit of fair play. However, there are times when their decision making has been put under the spotlight because some of their judgments have been called to question by football connoisseurs. Such errors of judgments have often sparked anger amongst teeming followers of the game with fans accusing referees of bias. This has spurred scholars into numerous studies on referee bias using empirical data to prove the occurrence of flaws and biases in referees' decisions during matches (Boyko, Boyko & Boyko, 2007; Buraimo, Forrest, & Simmons, 2010; Dawson, Dobson, Goddard, & Wilson, 2007; Nevill, Newell & Gale, 1996; Rickman & Witt, 2008).

According to Smith, Tomaso, Farris, and Cordero (2001), bias occurs when a decision is over or under inflated relative to an act. Bias arises when there is a pattern of distortion due to certain motives or limitations of cognitive appreciation or collection of both factors (Fisk & Taylor, 1991). Bias flows from shortcomings of human mental processes but can also be deliberate attempt to make decisions that finds favor with a reference group much to the disadvantage and chagrin of another group. Biases represent deviations from rational decision making (Arnott, 2006). Human beings are susceptible to passing bias verdicts due to innate factors or external pressures (Anders & Rothoff, 2014; Croskerry, Singhal, & Mamede, 2013). Football is a competitive sport and can be played at frenetic pace and high intensity with the referee at the centre expected to make decisions on fouls, off sides, goals, penalties and cards on the spur of the moment (Poolton, Siu & Masters, 2011). This requires the use of intuition in decisions which is normally characterized by heuristics. The arguments made against introducing video technology to assists referees in decision making in part is explained by the tendency to slow the game as the video assistant referee is awaited. Consequently, referees make decisions in the heat of action during play to get the game flowing by way of heuristics and cognitive psychologists have attested to this mode of decision making (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). The work of the referee in a competitive match which is usually characterized by charged atmospheres in stadiums is by every stretch of logic an arduous task. Crosskery et al., (2013) disclosed that the decision-making process of referees is complicated because a plethora of factors such as referees experience, composure, stakes in terms of outcome, social pressure and stadium ambience all play on the referees' judgments. With an ever-growing critical press scrutiny and pressure from ardent football fans, the burden of getting referee's calls right first time is vital. Yet empirical evidence using data relating to time added on after regulation play has shown patterns of referee bias in matches especially by giving home sides some degree of

advantage over visiting opponents apparently due to crowd influence (Boyko et al., 2007; Page & Page, 2010). These studies have however left gaps by not capturing fans response to the incidence of bias officiating. Literature on the topical issue of referee bias has left a void on the effect of fans and their responses because where a service is mired in controversy, customers respond because they normally perceive the service as tainted (Buraimo, Migali, & Simmons, 2014). The core objective of this study is to examine fans response to referee bias. Most studies on referee bias have relied on empirical data covering goals scored during time added on, penalties, yellow and red cards. However, African Football Federations such as Ghana Football Association hardly keep records of match statistics such as red cards, yellow cards and penalties and attendance numbers for public consumption (Transparency International, 2006; Schlenker, & Lobell, 2010). In the absence of such vital statistics, the need to gather and analyze fans response about the canker of referee bias becomes imperative. On one hand, there is the proposition that fans pressure can result in referee bias for home teams (Page & Page, 2010). Will that scenario then provide impetus for fans to throng to the stadiums in order to give their favorite teams an advantage via referee bias? This is a question that has escaped the attention of scholars in this field. This work seeks to find answers to this important question because fans attendance can boost the chances of a team's victory and as Anders and Rotthoff (2014) observe, a team's chances of clinching victory in a match is boosted by Nine percent when there is an increase of one percent fans attendance. Therefore, to achieve the core objective of this research, we will examine whether referee bias impacts on match day attendance by inspiring fans to attend in their bid to secure home advantage through referee bias. What about away fans? Will they be deterred from attending by the gloomy prospect of referee bias against their visiting team? Or will they be energized to travel and attend in a bold attempt to neutralize the home crowd influence on referees? These are relevant questions this study will seek answers to in pursuing the attainment of the main objective of investigating football fans response to referee bias.

Ghana football has had its fair share of referee bias. In a titanic clash between Kumasi Asante Kotoko and Accra Hearts of Oak in the top flight in Ghana, the match ended one goal apiece but a star player of Accra Hearts of Oak granted an interview in which he appeared to be critical of the referee saying that the referee by his decisions had sided with the home team Asante Kotoko by awarding what he thought to be a dubious penalty and expressed regret that this has been the bane of Ghana football from reaching glorious heights. These were the words of the player "We didn't lose concentration and stamina at any point in the game, only that they came up tops after getting the equalizer, and I think the referee was also with them. I can say this without blinking because you could see the penalty he awarded them, a very poor call from him."

The player continued "He intentionally decided to let Kotoko back in the game. It's bad for Ghana football if we want our game to reach the level we crave for. A game of this magnitude needs a fair officiating but today we didn't get one" (Ghanaweb, 2017). Is this symptomatic of referee bias in Ghana or sour grapes by the player and what is the side of the story of fans that throng to the stadium in the expectation that referees will be fair in their judgment to ensure that the better side emerges victorious? This study will find out by exploring the thought of fans on referee bias and their response to this football controversy. In another development, a Club Chairman revealed in an interview that referee bias is widespread in Ghana because some club officials have been able to influence the appointment of referees in their desperate search to obtain favorable match outcomes through referee bias (Ghanaweb, 2017). As if this is not enough, in a match played on Wednesday, August 24, 2017 between Kotoko and Nea Salamina, the referee caused consternation when he awarded a questionable penalty in favor of Kumasi Asante Kotoko in the 94<sup>th</sup> minute. Even the coach of Kumasi Asante Kotoko, despite securing victory through the penalty was unenthused. In a post match interview, the Kotoko Coach, Steve Pollach was uncharitable in his remarks about the referee's output (Ghanaweb, 2017). The coach fired: "Look, I am not going to hold brief for the referee. I am always honest when it comes to penalties and I will say this. No. It is not a penalty in my eyes. For me, I was embarrassed. I wanted to win the match but not in this way. That is all I have to say." On the evidence of such damning revelations and remarks, it is important to obtain fans response to acts of referee bias because fans are critical stakeholders in football (Zagnoli, & Radicchi, 2010).

Referee bias continues to stir interest amongst scholars and various football stakeholders such as fans, coaches and football authorities because of its impact on match outcomes (Smith et al., 2001). Whilst human beings have shown immense ability and effectiveness in making decisions under variety of settings including structured and complicated environments, they occasionally exhibit some frailties and fallibilities because of environmental and personal influences which can have far reaching consequences on interested parties (Tversky, & Kahneman, 1974; Zsombok, Beach, & Klein, G., 1992). Football is not like cricket where high scores emerge. In football, low scores hold sway and a referee is therefore capable of influencing a score line if even by a single goal thereby making referees' critical factors in football (Plessner & Haar, 2006).

## **2. Literature Review**

In this segment, we focus our attention on fans categorization, home advantage and discrimination related to referee bias.

### **2.1. Fan Categorization**

Fans exhibit confounding traits and values (Shank, 2002; Westerbeek & Smith, 2008). Some fans are regular followers of the game and spend considerable time scanning information on football on internet and print media such as newspapers. Others are however irregular in attendance and seldom engage in information search on football and although they find happiness in football, they display less affiliation to the sport (Redden & Steiner, 2000; Wann, Melnick, Russell & Pease, 2001). Fans therefore do not portray the same attributes. Indeed, fans exhibit heterogeneous characteristics and this is manifests in their attendance and spending patterns (Shilbury, Quick & Westerbeek, 1998). Many fan typologies have assumed a dualistic form. Boyle and Haynes (2000) categorized fans of English football as traditional fans and modern fans. Traditional fans, in their view are those literally born into football. They are engrossed in the game on and off the field and show emotions in their club affiliation. The traditional fan is therefore an ardent

follower and zealot of football. Modern fans are however, subdued in their interest in football and eschew emotions in their analysis of game. They follow football for the thrills and entertainment. We take the position that modern fans may not groan over referee bias and whilst watching football matches live at the stadium, they may desist from exerting pressure on referees which can trigger bias officiating. Writing about fans in French football, Quick (2000) leveraged on the dualistic approach to fans typology by categorizing fans into rational and irrational. Rational fans follow the game on the margins by displaying occasional attendance and hardly travel away to watch football. However, irrational fans are regular attendees to matches, associate with their team and bask in reflected glories of their teams. These fans classifications are important in football administration and marketing. Fans categorization assists Sports Marketers to effectively segment their fans market in their attempts to understand the consumption habit of each segment for value creation to scale up fans attendance (Shilbury et al., 1998). We also espouse the view that different fans will respond to incidence of referee bias in disparate ways and this study will delve into fans perception and response to referee bias in football in Ghana.

Overall stadium environment, crowd density (Boyko et al., 2007), referee's temperament and experience (Nevill, Balmer, & Williams, 2002), distractions from fans boos and jeers, financial incentives and security are influential in the decision-making process of referee. Consequently, Crosskerry et al., (2013) described referee decision making as an intricate process influenced by host of factors such as stadium architecture, intelligence, safety, affective conditions, remuneration and cognitive burden as the match progresses. Masters and Maxwell (2008) designed a framework referred to Theory of Reinvestment to explain why the influence of personal attributes and temperaments in shaping decision making of referees. Using the theory of Reinvestment, they espoused the view that relying on conscious and defined processes in decision making in situations of high intensity is not the most ideal because it does not show quick thinking. Referees are humans and therefore in making decisions on the field of play, they are going to be susceptible to some level of subjective judgments. Therefore, eliminating referee bias completely appears to be a daunting task which is why despite the era of professionalism, improved training and better service conditions for professional referees in Europe, the scepter of referee bias has been looming (Frank & Gilovich, 1988; Plessner & Haar, 2006; Ste-Marie & Valiquette, 1996). This situation has triggered incessant calls for video technology to be instituted for the game of football in all competitive encounters and across critical decisions such as penalty awards, goals, off side, red cards and yellow cards. There has been partial response to these calls with the English Football Authority using goal line technology in the English Premiership. This partial response has not abated the loud calls for the technology to be stretched to include other critical areas of decision making by referees.

The referee's work is a hectic one which requires athleticism, quick thinking and composed temperament. In an empirical study of European Football Championship in 2000, it was revealed that a referee makes an average of 137 calls in the heat of a football match covering award of corner kicks, penalties, throw ins, word caution, red cards, yellow cards, goals and off sides (Helsen & Bultynck, 2004). To get these decisions right is always going to be a distant prospect ((Oudejans et al., 2000).) but getting it wrong also comes with enormous consequences such wrongfully giving a player the marching off orders for alleged simulation which never was or indeed awarding a penalty kick which is converted as a result of simulation. Such decisions leave football fans in a state of anguish but ardent fans at the other side that benefitted from the referee's decision may rejoice and celebrate. However as observed in the case of the Asante Kotoko Coach, he appeared sullen because he thought his team benefitted from an undeserved penalty. Will fans express such disquiet in the face such referee bias that turns to favor their team as the coach has shown? Or it is only the team that feels hard done by the referee that will respond angrily? This work is geared towards discovering qualitative responses to this jigsaw.

Football referees have discretionary powers in their judgments. A case in point has to do with whether a free kick or penalty kick awarded should be accompanied with a caution of a yellow card or a red card. This emerged in the Spanish Super Cup (August, 2017) in a match between Barcelona Football Club and Real Madrid at Camp Nou in which Cristiano Ronaldo was shown a second yellow card for allegedly diving culminating into a red card. Replays of the episode have only intensified the controversy, inconsistency and bias often associated with referee's decisions on such momentous occasions to favor home teams especially when the home side is trailing by one goal deficit (Dawson, Dobson, Goddard, & Wilson, 2007; Buraimo, Forrest & Simmons, 2007, Boyko, Boyko & Boyko, 2007). The referee's discretionary authority also covers time added on after regulation time. To ensure that stoppages for injuries and other incidents are catered for, referees are allowed to make up for time lost during open play due to infringements and delays. Literature on referee bias is inundated with how referees add more time when the home team is trailing by a lean margin of a goal (Scoppa, 2008) but when the visiting team is down by a deficit of a goal, time added on is often marginal (Garicano et al., 2005; Sutter & Cochera, 2004; Sutter & Kocher, 2004)). In addition, booking players of away teams at the least offence also plays into given home teams the upper hand in the contest. This tendency by referees to take decision that favors home sides has now come under the popular description of home team advantage.

## 2.2. Home Advantage and Referee Bias

Referee bias has been cited as playing a role in giving home teams an edge over visiting teams (Pollard, 2006a). Some theories such as Error Management Concept has been devised to explain referee bias that largely benefits home team (Haselton, & Nettle, 2006). The Error Management Theory stipulates that when a circumstance stimulates a situation where an error of judgment with dire ramifications is inevitable, humans tend to opt for the error that will have an extenuating effect. Thus, a referee when faced with a critical decision on whether a goal scored should be ruled off side or a tackle should be penalized with a card or ignored, the referee is likely to choose the option that attenuates the risk of incurring the wrath of the home crowd (Poolton, et al., 2011). Home team advantage can be expressed in numerical terms. Overall, home advantage in organized football is computed as the total number of points accumulated on home turfs expressed as a percentage of total aggregate points obtained both at home and away (Seckin & Pollard, 2007). To quantify home advantage for a single team, the total points bagged playing on home ground is expressed as a

percentage of total points obtained by that team. Referees decisions against visiting teams are fraught with penalizing the away team with caution via yellow cards, red cards and penalties which inures to the advantage of home teams (Boyko et al., 2007; Downward & Jones, 2007; Nevill, Newell, & Gale, 1996). By punishing visiting teams' players with red cards, it reduces the number of players for the visiting teams which leaves them with a numerical disadvantage. The effect is that the home team begins to enjoy both a numerical and psychological advantage to score goals and to chalk up victory over the away team. In a study of Dutch Professional league, Ridder, Cramer, and Hopstaken (1994) discovered an increased opportunity on the side of the team that has the numerical advantage to score more goals. However, they found no evidence of dwindling scoring opportunities on the other side playing with one man down. In another research that utilized data from 41 seasons in the German Bundesliga, Bar- Eli, Tenenbaum, and Geister (2006), revealed that the penalized team playing with a player deficit chances of scoring was significantly diminished whilst considerably increasing the scoring prospects of the team with a superior numerical advantage. These findings were corroborated by Vercer, Kopriva and Ichiba (2008) when they concluded that, a team playing with a numerical disadvantage due to a red card suffers from deep slump in opportunities to score by 67 percent. On the contrary, the scoring prospects of the opponent playing with greater number of players increases by over 100 percent. It is worth noting that other factors such as crowd size (Dohmen, 2008), familiarity with local turf and travelling time (Oberhofer, Philippovich, & Winner, 2009), away team lackadaisical performance (Koyama & Reade, 2009) all contribute to home team advantage and it is therefore not justified to put referee bias as the sole factor in home team advantage (Johnstone, 2008). In spite of these factors, Boyko et al., (2007) posited that referee bias is the most significant factor underpinning home advantage in football (Glamser, 1990; Nevill, Newell, Gale, 1996; Nevill, Balmer, & Williams, 1999; Nevill, Balmer, & Williams, 2002).

### 2.3. Discrimination

There has been a glut of studies on the influence of discrimination on referee bias in baseball and basketball in the United States of America (Parsons, Sulaeman, Yates, & Hamermesh, 2011; Price, Remer & Stone, 2009; Price & Wolfers, 2010). With football in particular, referee bias linked to discrimination on grounds of ethnicity and racism has now come under intense scrutiny in academia (Chu, Nadarajah, Afuecheta, Chan, & Xu, 2013). We will try to determine whether ethnicity can precipitate referee bias in Ghana. This is against the backdrop of a former national star and club official who protested the appointment of a referee from the Volta Region of Ghana to officiate a match involving arch rivals Asante Kotoko and Hearts of Oak citing ethnic concerns (Ghanaweb, 2005). This protest from the club official sparked national outrage against the effusions of the official. However, the furore failed to generate research interest in Ghana. Are there traces of ethnic connections in referee bias as alleged by the former national star and club official? An empirical test will assist us discover answers to this subject from a less emotional and neutral point of view. Black persons are mostly associated with aggressive demeanors than White individuals in hostile environments (Harrison & Esqueda, 2001) and are deemed to be more menacing in their communication and behavior ((Correll, Wittenbrink, Park, Judd, & Goyle, 2011; Ogawa, 1971). These prejudices are likely to affect match day officials in their evaluation and judgments in football (Chu et al., 2013). Besides, Black players are also perceived to have more physical exertions (Rhode & Butler, 1975; Stone et al., 1997) which can prompt exaggerated impressions of their displays such as tackles and physical maneuverings which will make them amenable to yellow and red cards. Gallo, Grund and Reade, (2013) established that non- White players in the English Premier League stood the ominous chance of being booked 15% more than their White counterparts after controlling other factors such as match characteristics and teams involved. In their scholarly endeavor, Gallo et al (2013) analyzed over one million match events in the English Premiership focusing on referees' line of decisions and ascertained that White referees flashed more yellow cards on non-White players. They found no evidence that non-White players engaged in more physical play than White players. Using video games showing Black and White players in active play, it was realized that fouls will be called when a Black player tackled a white player (Wagner-Egger, Gygax & Ribordy, 2012). Chu et al, (2013) in their study on racism in English football concluded that minority and non- White players suffer from bias decisions on fouls awarded and yellow cards from White referees.

Football is a contact sport and the level of athleticism exhibited by players as they jostle for the ball and try to undo the opponents make referees rely on grey cues to make decisions. The color of a player's uniform has been found to influence referee judgments. Teams wearing red usually attract favors from referees (Hill & Barton, 2005) but some scholars disagree arguing that red color boosts visibility of the player and does not impinge on referee decisions (Rowe, Harris, & Roberts, 2005). Another proposition is that players smarting under black uniform often get penalized in contact encounters (Tiryaki, 2005). Hagemann, Strauss and Leibing (2008) maintained that colors affect the psyche of referees and can instigate bias evaluations in identical situations. A team's reputation also influences referees' judgment. Consequently, referee's decisions favor more traditional clubs with hefty followers and massive attendees at the stadium (Jones, Paull, & Erskine, 2002).

### 3. Materials and Methods

In undertaking this study, we engaged in perusal of relevant literature review across the entire duration of the research which culminated into accessing and scrutinizing some of the current incidences of referee bias in Ghana football (Chenail, Cooper, & Desir, 2010). We scanned media reports and scholarly works on referee bias in order to make this study relevant to the times. This study is anchored on qualitative techniques using small sample of participants (Trotter, 2012). Consequently, we selected nine participants for this study. We deemed this small sample quite appropriate because our purpose is not to generalize and replicate findings of this study but to obtain deeper understanding of fans perceptions and response to referee bias using interactive and participatory processes in this research endeavor (Frisby, 2005; Seidman, 2006). Football as a sport discipline is underpinned by participation and thought processes that promote interaction and competition (Brustad, 2009). Therefore, we selected participants from identified football parks and stadia

in line with the proposition that qualitative samples in spheres such as sports can be plausibly selected in settings where fans converge to follow the game and where they can express their experiences in a voracious way (Trotter, 2012). Four participants were selected from Parks where competitive football was played and arrangements put in place to conduct the interview at the same venue before kick-off of the next competitive match. The parks are usually home to First Division Football where fans stand in close proximity to the Park to watch matches. We provided different codes for participants from parks and stadiums to determine whether they display observable differences in their responses. The four participants from parks were coded P1, P2, P3 and P4. The rest of the five respondents were selected at various stadia where premier league and first division league matches are hosted. Three participants were selected from the Accra Sports Stadium, whilst two participants were recruited from Tamale Sports Stadium. These stadiums are modern in architecture with seats, scoreboards, dressing rooms and parking lots. Those fans selected from the stadium were coded S1, S2, S3, S4 and S5. The difference in weight is because the stadium attracts more fans in terms of crowd size. We then made suitable arrangements to conduct the interview the following week hours before the commencement of the next match. Subsequently, we joined each participant at the stands and observe his reactions on referee decisions when match proceedings were underway. We recorded such reactions in our journal and used such data to pose questions after the final whistle for further insights based on real life at the stadium (Yin, 2003). In our quest to delve deep down the thoughts and perceptions of participants about referee bias, we conducted semi structured interviews to collect data using open ended questions outlined in our interviewer guide (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, Yin, 2003). The semi structured nature of the interview allowed the researchers to engage in flexible questioning based on emerging relevant themes whilst the use of open ended questions allowed us to probe areas of interest which hitherto were not envisaged but which opened fresh vistas for deeper comprehension of fans response to referee bias. Thus, flexibility was allowed for respondents to express themselves in so far as it led to discovery of relevant ideas (Keegan et al., 2009). The interview was deemed complete at saturation point when the participant provides no new further insights and this was noticed by the researchers at a point when in responding to different questions, no new themes emerged from participant's responses and in some occasion's repetitions of responses became evident (Schensul & LeCompte, 2010). In conducting the research, we also relied on observational data collected from the actions of fans during the interviews. Such observations were scripted by the researchers and participants were made to respond to such observations which to a large extent added an appreciable degree of reliability to the data collected (Stake, 2005). All interviews were audio taped with the expressed consent of the participants after the initial rapport that we created with each of them during recruitment and just before the interviews commenced. This healthy atmosphere created was made possible following our introduction of the purpose of the research and how it fits into the wider picture of factoring their views into outcomes that will widen the frontiers of knowledge on this subject and the strategies that can be effectual in injecting fairer officiating (Scott, Wishart & Bowyer, 2006). Data gathered was transcribed verbatim. The transcribed data was then read by the researchers as a first step towards data analysis before embarking on second reading in which common themes were highlighted and given codes for purposes of analysis that will display disparate themes (Farber, 2006). Each theme was then subjected to inductive and thematic analysis to ensure that buzzing statements and quotes from respondents were enshrined in the analysis with emerging sub themes highlighted for purposes of in-depth and robust analytic effort (Strauss, & Corbin, 2007). Once the analysis was completed, five of the participants who had earlier on agreed to have an interim brief in the spirit of feedback and reciprocity were met individually by the researchers and the findings shared with them. This exercise also tested reliability of data and boosted the authenticity of the findings (Lewis & Porter, 2004).

#### 4. Discussions

The participants stated that they were all football fans and attend football matches. Those at the parks with the exception of P2 are habitual attendees to both competitive and non-competitive football games played at the parks. P1 revealed that he spends his evenings at the parks every day and gets disappointed if no game is taking place. S4 was the most traditional of the fans when he stated, "I start my day watching TV football highlights and then listen to football news on radio. In fact, I eat football." S2 was however a modern fan and in his words "I don't enjoy Ghana football but I attend few matches just to know what's happening."

On referee bias, participants were unanimous in their belief that referee bias is endemic in Ghana football. To the participants, referee bias in Ghana has been part of the game for decades. Explaining further, P4 declared that referee's will continue to engage in bias officiating because security is almost non-existent at the parks during matches and as fans scream at the referee each time he whistles, he is gripped by fear leading to bias to appease the home crowd. Not every participant agreed with this view. S5 pointed that security arrangements at stadiums were robust and provides safety for referees "but what do we see? I tell you, referee bias is not only endemic but it's an epidemic in football". But S3 who also believes referee bias was pervasive however believed that the subject of referee bias was over blown and intimated that fans inadequacies of the rules of the game may account for loud cry about referee bias. In the exposition of P1, referees are bias in their decisions saying there are times you find some decisions beyond comprehension. "I don't need to be an expert to know this. Our referees are not seen handling matches during tournaments outside. Why? When they go there, they do their favoritism there." It is worth stating that a Ghanaian referee was banned by FIFA for reasons of unethical behavior. This study however has its sights on referee bias and not unethical behavior of referees which is an aggravated offence anyway. The conspicuous absence of referees from Ghana officiating in international football tournaments has been a topical issue in Ghana. S4 in his responses disclosed that comparatively, referee bias is more pronounced in matches at the parks than at stadiums. In his view, the prying eyes of the media covering matches at the stadiums during matches with live radio commentary has served as a disincentive to wanton acts of bias officiating. He however conceded that some bias refereeing occurs at the stadiums. All participants without equivocation cited situations where referee bias was on display but one that stood out was provided by P3 when he narrated an incredible show of referee bias involving a first division match. The home side was trailing a lone goal. Regulation time was up and

the referee in an apparent attempt to favor the home side over bloated the injury time. He stressed that the match witnessed no major incidents to warrant the time added on of over 15 minutes but as the home side piled incessant pressure in their desperate search for an equalizer, the visiting team caught them on the break and counter attacked with their sights on goal, the visiting striker dribbled past the keeper and scored. The referee strangely whistled for an offside positioning rather. Not even the home fans were enthused, quipped P3. He made it clear that the first division matches are bedeviled with referee bias on a scale that he thinks does not allow worthy champions to emerge for promotion into the elite Ghana premier league.

On the question of what has been their response to referee bias in football, P2 was of the view that there is nothing more agonizing than to lose a match knowing too well that the referee masterminded the defeat. He said “Now small teams don’t win the big clubs because the referees support big clubs to win. So why should I go and pay at the stadium? No.” He said with a grim face. In response to why he was passionate on this issue although he appears to be a casual fan, he revealed that he has adopted this subdued posture towards football in Ghana because referees are not fair adding that; “referees can give you hypertension if you are not careful.” The researchers then got a sense of why he is not a keen fan of football. All the participants emphasized that they don’t travel to watch matches because referees favor home teams and therefore it was not worth the effort of traveling to see you team suffer from referee bias. Six of the participants concurred to being affiliated to some teams in Ghana. We were interested in knowing how they react when bias officiating goes their way. With the exemption of P4, the rest of the respondents hinted of having no regrets when their teams benefit from questionable referee decision rationalizing that their teams are usually adversely affected by doubtful referee decisions when they play away from. Indeed, P3, PP4, S1, S2, S4 AND S5 stressed that as attendees, they bay at referees when the going gets tough during matches in an attempt to influence decisions in their favor. Their actions during matches as we observed showed that they react to most decisions that does not go in their favor. Are fans therefore part of the problem of referee bias? We then made the point that fans should then not complain about referee bias because they are not helping matters. The participants objected. In their view, referee bias is a canker that needs to be controlled saying that as professionals; referees need to maintain their composure even in the face of baying crowds. S2 declared that at time “you feel discouraged to attend some matches or travel to watch them because you know referees will not handle it well.” He explained saying that it is obvious that the referee will favor the home team or the big club whichever is applicable and convenient. We realized that fall in fans attendance at matches and low number of travelling fans is a direct response to spiraling referee bias in Ghana football. According to P1, P2, P4, and all participants drawn from the stadium, fans response to referee bias on some occasions takes violent turn. The fans recalled a number of ugly scenes that erupted on the back of referee bias such as brawls, damage to seats and pelting of referees with water bottles. Some of the participants attributed the May 9, 2001 disaster to have been fans response to referee bias that turned fatal when the Police attempted to control the crowd leading to over 100 fans dead. The views of participants such as S1, S2 and S5 on the May 9 disaster were different arguing that the fans who protested the referee’s decision on that fateful day were rather bitter losers. On whether ethnicity of referees could influence referee bias, all the respondents suggested that they are yet to find palpable evidence of referee bias based on ethnicity of players.

## 5. Conclusions

In this study, we examined referee bias and determined fans response to episodes of referee bias. Existing literature is saturated with empirical evidence of referee bias using match statistics on penalties, time allowed for stoppages, yellow and red cards. We moved in a critical direction through drawing fans into the fray by determining what their responses were in connection with referee bias. We have established that the downswing in attendees at football matches in stadiums draws some of its roots from referee bias. Most often, teams playing away from home bear the scars of wounds from referee bias and this has dampened the scale of fans travelling to watch matches. Besides, some fans quail at attending some matches at their home grounds when the visiting time is a big club. These conclusions are quite seminal because extant literature has failed to capture these vital standpoints. It does mean that as part of measures to improve fans attendance, incidences of referee bias should be minimized through training of referees and punishing referees who are found to persist in bias officiating. Another poignant conclusion in this research is fans violent responses to referee bias. Whilst it is a rarity in Europe to link football violence to referee bias (Giulianotti & Armstrong, 2002; King, 1995, 2001; Stott & Reicher, 1998), it is a case in Ghana that referee bias spark violent responses from fans at the stadium. This elevates the subject of minimizing referee bias to the barest minimum in order to avoid violence during games. Security should also be arranged at football parks during competitive matches to provide security for referees and deter crowds from emotional behavior, as in previous studies, we discovered fans exerting pressure by whistling and yelling at referees which triggers bias decisions in favor of home teams (e.g. Boyko et al., 2007; Goumas, 2012). We also detected football fans belief in referee bias is so pervasive that even correct calls by referees will be tagged awful. Our observations of fans emotional reactions on some decisions draw us to the conclusion that most fans reaction to referee’s decisions is fraught with error. Our point is that referees cannot be faulted for any major decision such as those on penalties and red cards. This calls for education. Football authorities should latch on every opportunity to educate fans on the rules of the game. We concede that referee bias is a complicated subject induced by multiple factors (Larrick, 2004) and calls for a concerted effort to prune it. This study suffers from its diminutive sample size which limits the opportunities for replication of its findings. Therefore, future research should leverage on bigger sample sizes in order to promote replication and generalizability of findings.

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