

UEFA against the champions? An evaluation of the recent reform of the Champions League qualification

László Csató*

Institute for Computer Science and Control (SZTAKI)
Laboratory on Engineering and Management Intelligence, Research Group of Operations
Research and Decision Systems

Corvinus University of Budapest (BCE)
Department of Operations Research and Actuarial Sciences

Budapest, Hungary

8 May 2020

Abstract

The UEFA Champions League is the major football club tournament organised by the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA). It contains 32 teams, therefore the national champions of 43 lower-ranked UEFA associations have to play in the qualification in order to obtain a slot in the group stage.

In this talk, the impact of reforming the Champions Path of the qualifying system, effective from the 2018/19 season, is evaluated. We use Monte-Carlo simulations to quantify the probability of advancing to the Champions League under the old and the new designs, as well as to illuminate the effect of seeding and a change in the ranking of the associations. Only one club is found to benefit, but nine teams are shown to lose more than one million Euros in expected prize money. Our results reveal that the Champions League has moved farther from its original concept of being a league of champions.

Keywords: OR in sports; football; simulation; tournament design; UEFA Champions League

MSC classes: 62F07, 68U20

JEL classification number: C44, C63, Z20

The talk is based on the following paper:

- Csató, L.: UEFA against the champions? An evaluation of the recent reform of the Champions League qualification. <https://arxiv.org/abs/1912.02076>.

* E-mail: laszlo.csato@uni-corvinus.hu