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Moral Damages in Football: A Legal Analysis of Liability, Prevention, and Remedies

1. Amir. Alaee Falahati¹ : Department of Private Law, UAE.C., Islamic Azad University, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
2. Reza. Partovizadeh Benam^{2*}: Department of Islamic Jurisprudence and Law, NT.C., Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran
3. Hossein. Mehrpour Mohammadabadi³: Department of Private Law, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran

*corresponding author's email: dr.partovizade@iau.ac.ir

ABSTRACT

The expansion of professional football as a commercial, social, and institutional phenomenon has increased the importance of legal protection against non-pecuniary harm. Moral damages in football may arise through defamation, humiliation, discrimination, harassment, threats, invasion of privacy, psychological abuse, reputational injury, and other violations of dignity and personality rights. Such harms may affect players, coaches, referees, spectators, club officials, and other stakeholders, while responsibility may extend beyond direct perpetrators to clubs, federations, leagues, stadium operators, media actors, and other organizations exercising control over the football environment. This article examines the legal foundations of moral damages in football and analyzes the principal conditions for establishing liability, including wrongful conduct, legally recognizable harm, causation, and fault. Particular attention is given to the interaction between general civil-liability principles and the specialized regulatory structure of football, including contractual duties, disciplinary rules, organizational responsibilities, and human-rights protections. The article also evaluates preventive measures capable of reducing moral harm, such as safeguarding systems, codes of conduct, anti-discrimination policies, privacy protections, responsible media practices, supporter education, and effective complaint procedures. In addition, it considers both monetary and non-monetary remedies, including compensation, apology, retraction, correction, injunctive relief, removal of harmful content, rehabilitation, and restoration of professional reputation. The analysis argues that moral damages should be recognized as an independent form of legally compensable injury and should not be restricted to cases involving financial or physical loss. At the same time, ordinary sporting pressures, legitimate criticism, disciplinary authority, and lawful competition should remain outside the scope of liability unless they cross the boundary into unlawful interference with protected interests. The article concludes that an integrated framework combining civil liability, institutional prevention, disciplinary regulation, and effective remedies provides the most appropriate legal response to moral harms in modern football.

Keywords: *Moral Damages; Football; Civil Liability; Non-Pecuniary Harm; Sports Law; Reputation; Privacy; Harassment; Prevention; Remedies*

Introduction

Football is no longer merely a recreational activity governed by the internal customs of sport. It has become a complex institutional environment in which contractual relations, employment relations, disciplinary authority, media exposure, commercial interests, public security, human rights, and personal dignity intersect. Professional players, coaches, referees, spectators, clubs, federations, sponsors, journalists, and digital-media users participate in a



network of relationships capable of producing not only financial or physical harm but also serious non-pecuniary injuries. These injuries may include humiliation, damage to reputation, invasion of privacy, emotional suffering, discriminatory treatment, psychological distress, loss of social standing, impairment of professional identity, and injury to dignity. The growing legal significance of such interests reflects the broader development of civil liability from a system primarily concerned with property loss toward one that also protects personality interests and other non-economic dimensions of human well-being. In civil-liability doctrine, compensation is increasingly connected with the protection of legitimate personal interests rather than being confined to measurable financial loss, an approach that is consistent with the broader theoretical foundations of liability discussed by Badini (1). Katouzian likewise treats civil liability as a mechanism through which unlawfully inflicted harm may generate an obligation of reparation even where the protected interest cannot be reduced to a purely economic asset (2). In football, this perspective is especially important because the reputational, psychological, and social consequences of misconduct may be more enduring than its immediate financial effects.

The professionalization and commercialization of football have increased the likelihood and visibility of moral harm. A player who is publicly accused of dishonesty, doping, disloyalty, or misconduct may suffer reputational damage before any formal adjudication is completed. A coach subjected to abusive treatment may experience psychological and professional consequences extending well beyond a particular match. A referee publicly attacked by club officials or supporters may face reputational degradation, threats, and severe emotional distress. Spectators can also suffer non-pecuniary injury through discriminatory exclusion, violence, humiliation, unsafe stadium management, or violations of personal dignity. Studies of sports sociology emphasize that sport constitutes a significant social institution capable of creating collective identities and patterns of inclusion and exclusion (3). The cultural environment surrounding football therefore affects the circumstances in which moral harm arises, particularly where rivalries, media polarization, gender restrictions, aggressive fan cultures, and institutional power imbalances intensify exposure to degrading conduct. Razavi and colleagues' focus on fan culture in Iranian professional football demonstrates that supporter behavior is not merely an incidental feature of matches but part of the institutional environment that shapes security, social interaction, and acceptable behavior within football spaces (4). Shani's work on the cultural measures affecting football-stadium security similarly indicates that prevention of harmful conduct requires attention to cultural and organizational conditions, rather than reliance exclusively on post-event punishment (5).

The concept of moral damage is particularly suitable for analyzing football because many legally significant injuries in sport do not easily fit within traditional categories of bodily injury or economic loss. A defamatory accusation may not immediately reduce a player's salary, but it can undermine professional reputation and social dignity. Unauthorized publication of private information about an athlete may not involve direct economic loss, yet it can seriously violate personal autonomy and family life. Moghami and Attaran's analysis of the conflict between media disclosure and the privacy of public figures illustrates the need to balance freedom of expression against the protection of private and family life (6). This tension is especially pronounced in football because athletes are simultaneously private individuals and highly visible public figures. Public interest in sport does not eliminate their entitlement to privacy, reputation, and personal dignity. The protection of private life under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights provides an important rights-based framework for evaluating interference with reputation, identity, personal autonomy, and private relationships (7). Similarly, the study of athletes' human rights

in regulatory contexts demonstrates that participation in competitive sport does not deprive athletes of fundamental rights merely because sporting institutions exercise disciplinary and regulatory authority over them (8).

The problem is complicated by the partially autonomous nature of sports regulation. Football is governed simultaneously by general law and by private or semi-private regulatory structures established by federations, leagues, clubs, and international sporting organizations. Contractual obligations between players and clubs, disciplinary rules governing misconduct, competition regulations, codes of ethics, and federation statutes all interact with national principles of civil liability. Asgharian and Sarboha's examination of football contracts under FIFA and Iranian Football Federation regulations demonstrates the importance of understanding football relationships through both general contractual doctrine and the specialized regulatory framework of the sport (9). The existence of such sporting regulations does not displace ordinary legal responsibility. Rather, it creates multiple layers of accountability. Conduct may simultaneously constitute a breach of contract, a disciplinary violation, a civil wrong, and, in more serious cases, a criminal offense. Baheri's treatment of general criminal law helps clarify that criminal liability serves functions distinct from civil compensation and should not be assumed to provide complete redress for the individual victim of harmful conduct (10). Accordingly, the imposition of sporting or criminal sanctions cannot automatically be treated as a substitute for civil reparation of moral harm.

Another reason for examining moral damages in football is the increasing recognition of institutional responsibility. Historically, harmful behavior in sports was often attributed exclusively to the immediate wrongdoer: a violent spectator, an insulting player, an abusive coach, or an intrusive journalist. Modern approaches to governance and organizational responsibility increasingly ask whether clubs, federations, competition organizers, and other institutions failed to prevent foreseeable harm. Madhushani and Perera connect responsible sports consumption with principles of good governance in sports federations, emphasizing the broader responsibility of governing institutions toward participants and stakeholders (11). Corporate social responsibility in sporting organizations similarly extends expectations beyond narrow financial performance toward ethical accountability, stakeholder welfare, and socially responsible management (12). Breitbarth and colleagues also demonstrate that social responsibility has become an important component of European sport-management research, reinforcing the view that sporting organizations operate within wider social and normative environments (13). These perspectives are directly relevant to moral damages because many forms of non-pecuniary harm can be reduced through responsible organizational policies, adequate supervision, transparent complaint procedures, cultural education, and effective disciplinary systems.

The protection of athletes from harassment and abuse is a particularly significant dimension of this institutional responsibility. Mountjoy and Verhagen emphasize the responsibility of sports medicine and the broader sporting community to protect athletes from harassment and abuse (14). Although their analysis is situated partly within the field of sports medicine, the principle has wider legal implications. Harassment and abuse can produce physical consequences, but they often cause serious moral and psychological harm, including fear, humiliation, anxiety, loss of confidence, and damage to personal dignity. Football organizations that ignore credible reports of harassment or maintain environments in which abusive conduct is tolerated may contribute to the continuation of such harm. The legal question therefore extends beyond the liability of the direct perpetrator to the responsibility of institutions that control the sporting environment and possess the capacity to prevent foreseeable injury.

Spectator conduct creates another important field of moral damage. Football violence has traditionally been analyzed through criminal law and public-security perspectives, yet its consequences can also generate civil claims.

Aghaei and Saffari's jurisprudential and criminological study of football spectator violence demonstrates the seriousness of supporter misconduct and its relationship with broader social and behavioral factors (15). Violence, threats, racial or gender-based insults, collective humiliation, and aggressive chanting can inflict psychological and dignitary harm on players, referees, other spectators, and targeted social groups. Restrictions on access to football stadiums can themselves raise questions of equal treatment and social inclusion. The research on women's attendance at stadiums shows that stadium access has become an important social, cultural, and legal issue in Iranian football (16). Media analysis of women's stadium attendance likewise demonstrates how the issue is shaped by public discourse, representation, and cultural conflict (17). These questions show that moral harm in football may arise not only from individual misconduct but also from policies, institutional practices, and exclusionary environments.

Media activity intensifies both the visibility and the persistence of moral injury. Traditional broadcasting, online journalism, social networks, fan pages, and instant digital communication can disseminate defamatory, humiliating, or private information within minutes. Mass media have a recognized capacity to shape sport-related perceptions and public engagement (18). In the context of liability, this influence means that inaccurate allegations or invasive reporting may have consequences far beyond the original audience. Globalization further expands this dynamic because sports culture and communication increasingly cross national boundaries (19). A defamatory accusation concerning a footballer can therefore become internationally accessible, while discriminatory incidents or disciplinary decisions can generate global reputational effects. The traditional territorial understanding of moral injury becomes increasingly inadequate when digital communications circulate through transnational networks.

The exceptional circumstances created by major disruptions to sport also reveal the vulnerability of rights and interests in football. The COVID-19 crisis significantly affected sporting competitions, contractual relations, regulatory decisions, and the organization of professional sport (20). Although pandemic-related disputes are not the central concern of this article, the experience demonstrates how rapidly institutional measures can affect athletes, clubs, spectators, and other stakeholders, and how decisions justified by organizational necessity may still create disputes concerning fairness, reputation, contractual treatment, exclusion, and dignity. Such circumstances reinforce the importance of a legal framework capable of distinguishing legitimate regulatory measures from conduct that produces unjustified non-pecuniary harm.

The objective of this article is to develop an integrated legal analysis of moral damages in football by examining the foundations of liability, the principal circumstances in which non-pecuniary harm arises, the allocation of responsibility among relevant actors, and the preventive and remedial mechanisms capable of protecting victims. The article treats moral damage as a distinct but flexible category encompassing violations of dignity, reputation, privacy, psychological integrity, emotional well-being, and related personality interests. It also considers the interaction between ordinary civil liability and the specialized regulatory structures of football. The central argument is that an effective system of legal protection must move beyond an exclusively reactive model of compensation. Liability rules should be combined with institutional prevention, responsible governance, disciplinary safeguards, victim-sensitive complaint procedures, and remedies capable of addressing the particular nature of non-economic injury. The analysis therefore seeks not only to determine when compensation should be awarded but also to clarify how football institutions can reduce the occurrence and severity of moral harm in the first place.

Conceptual and Legal Foundations of Moral Damages in Football

Moral damage may be understood as legally cognizable harm affecting interests that do not have an immediately measurable economic value. Whereas pecuniary loss can ordinarily be expressed through lost income, medical expenses, contractual value, repair costs, or diminution of property, moral harm concerns the non-economic dimensions of the person. It may arise from humiliation, emotional suffering, anxiety, loss of reputation, violation of privacy, impairment of dignity, discriminatory treatment, damage to social identity, or interference with personal and family life. The theoretical justification for compensating such injuries is closely connected with the broader function of civil liability. Badini's philosophical treatment of civil responsibility emphasizes that liability is not limited to mechanical restoration of financial balances but is grounded in normative considerations concerning responsibility for wrongful harm (1). Katouzian's analysis of non-contractual obligations likewise provides a doctrinal basis for understanding compensation as a response to legally protected injury rather than only economic deprivation (2). Within football, this means that the law must recognize injury to personality interests even when the claimant cannot demonstrate a direct reduction in income or property.

The concept requires careful distinction between moral harm and financial consequences arising from the same event. A footballer subjected to a false accusation of corruption may suffer immediate reputational humiliation as well as later economic consequences such as loss of sponsorship, transfer opportunities, or employment. The reputational injury constitutes a non-pecuniary interest in its own right, while the lost commercial opportunities may constitute separate economic damage. The two may coexist, but they should not be conceptually merged. This distinction is important because requiring proof of financial loss as a condition for recognizing reputational damage would leave many serious personality violations without an effective remedy. The purpose of damages also becomes relevant here. Nematollahi's comparative study of damages for breach of contract highlights the importance of identifying the function that compensation serves within a legal system (21). In the context of moral harm, compensation may perform restorative, recognitional, satisfaction-based, and deterrent functions even where exact mathematical equivalence between injury and monetary award is impossible.

Football provides a particularly fertile context for non-pecuniary harm because participation in professional sport is closely connected with public identity. A professional player's name, image, reputation, perceived integrity, and social standing are not merely private interests; they are integral to the athlete's professional existence. Nevertheless, their professional relevance does not convert them entirely into economic assets. An athlete who is falsely accused of intentionally losing a match, using prohibited substances, engaging in criminal conduct, or betraying a club may experience profound personal humiliation irrespective of subsequent financial consequences. The human-rights framework concerning privacy and personal identity supports the recognition of such interests. The European Court of Human Rights' guidance on Article 8 illustrates that private life is a broad concept capable of encompassing personal identity, reputation, autonomy, and relationships (7). This is particularly significant for athletes because intense public interest often creates pressure to treat every aspect of their lives as open to scrutiny, even though public visibility does not eliminate the legal boundary between legitimate reporting and unjustified intrusion.

Athletes' human rights also provide a conceptual foundation for limiting the authority of sports organizations. Sporting bodies possess extensive regulatory powers: they may impose disciplinary penalties, order suspensions, control eligibility, collect personal information, conduct testing, investigate misconduct, and publish decisions. Yet such powers must be exercised consistently with fundamental rights. Sloot and colleagues' study of athletes' human rights in the European legal framework concerning anti-doping regulation demonstrates the importance of balancing

regulatory objectives against privacy and other protected interests (8). The same principle applies to moral damages. A disciplinary investigation may be legitimate, but unnecessary disclosure of sensitive allegations before a final decision may produce reputational harm. Testing or monitoring measures may be justified, but invasive procedures that exceed what is necessary may interfere with dignity or privacy. Public sanctions may serve legitimate disciplinary purposes, but disproportionate or procedurally unfair measures can create additional moral injury.

The legal foundations of moral liability in football should also be understood in relation to contractual responsibility. Many football relationships are based on contracts, particularly those between clubs and players, coaches, technical staff, sponsors, broadcasters, and service providers. Asgharian and Sarboha show that football contracts are shaped by both ordinary legal principles and the specialized rules established by FIFA and the Iranian Football Federation (9). A breach of contract may generate moral harm where the manner of breach attacks dignity, reputation, or professional standing. For example, wrongful public termination accompanied by defamatory allegations may exceed the purely economic consequences of lost salary. Similarly, a club's failure to comply with contractual duties concerning player welfare may contribute to psychological harm. Nasiri and Saadat Mostafavi's comparative analysis of entire obligations in common law and Iranian law demonstrates the wider significance of determining the scope and performance of contractual duties (22). Applied to football, contractual analysis should therefore ask not only whether a financial obligation has been breached but also whether the contractual relationship created ancillary duties of good faith, protection, confidentiality, or respect capable of safeguarding non-economic interests.

Non-contractual liability remains equally important because many football-related injuries arise outside contractual relationships. Spectators generally have no employment relationship with players or referees; journalists may have no contract with the subjects of their reporting; supporters who insult or threaten athletes are not bound by professional contracts; and federations may exercise regulatory power over individuals without a conventional bilateral agreement. In such situations, general principles of civil responsibility become central. Katouzian's framework of non-contractual obligations is therefore especially relevant to determining whether wrongful conduct, causation, and legally protected harm justify an obligation to compensate (2). Badini's philosophical analysis further reinforces the proposition that liability should be evaluated in relation to the normative justification for assigning the consequences of wrongful conduct to the person or institution responsible for producing the harm (1).

Causation creates particular difficulties in claims for moral damages because psychological and reputational injuries can be influenced by multiple factors. A player may already be subject to intense public criticism before a defamatory statement occurs. A referee may experience anxiety from the general pressures of professional competition as well as from a specific campaign of threats. A spectator may suffer humiliation caused jointly by individual security personnel, discriminatory institutional policies, and hostile crowd behavior. The legal inquiry should therefore avoid demanding an unrealistically simple causal chain. The relevant question is whether the defendant's conduct materially contributed to the non-pecuniary injury within the applicable standard of legal causation. This does not eliminate the requirement of proof, but it recognizes the complexity of moral harm. The theoretical literature on civil liability supports treating causation as a normative as well as factual inquiry, particularly where multiple events contribute to the final injury (1).

Fault is another central element, but football presents situations in which responsibility may arise from both intentional and negligent conduct. Intentional insult, harassment, defamation, intimidation, discriminatory abuse,

and deliberate disclosure of private information provide relatively clear examples of wrongful behavior. More difficult cases involve institutional negligence. A club may not intend for a player to be harassed but may fail to respond to repeated complaints. Stadium organizers may not intend for discriminatory abuse to occur but may fail to adopt reasonable preventive measures despite known risks. Mountjoy and Verhagen's work on harassment and abuse in sport emphasizes the responsibility of sporting environments to protect athletes rather than treating abusive conduct as an unavoidable feature of competitive culture (14). This principle supports a broader conception of fault in which negligent failure to prevent foreseeable moral injury can be legally significant.

The social structure of football also complicates the idea of consent. Participants necessarily accept certain ordinary pressures associated with competitive sport. Players consent to lawful tackles, intense criticism of performance, legitimate disciplinary oversight, and ordinary competitive stress. Coaches accept public evaluation of tactical decisions, and referees must tolerate reasonable disagreement with their decisions. However, consent to participation in football cannot reasonably be interpreted as consent to racial abuse, sexual harassment, threats, defamatory accusations, disclosure of private information, degrading treatment, or institutional discrimination. The distinction is essential because sporting culture has sometimes normalized conduct that would be considered unacceptable in other workplaces or public environments. Naderian Jahromi's sociological perspective on sport helps explain how norms are socially produced within sporting communities (3). A practice may be culturally common without being legally justified.

The human-rights approach is particularly useful in drawing these boundaries. Respect for dignity and private life requires proportionality between legitimate sporting objectives and interference with individual interests. The European human-rights framework concerning Article 8 makes clear that protection of private life may need to be balanced against freedom of expression and other competing interests (7). Moghami and Attaran's analysis of celebrities' family privacy similarly identifies the need to balance media disclosure with freedom of expression rather than treating either interest as absolute (6). Footballers are paradigmatic public figures, but public status does not remove the need for such balancing. Reporting on match performance, disciplinary conduct, transfers, or matters genuinely relevant to public sporting activity may receive strong protection, while disclosure of intimate family information unrelated to sporting activity may lack equivalent justification.

Moral damages should also be distinguished from criminal punishment and sports discipline. Serious abusive behavior may satisfy the elements of a criminal offense, while the same conduct may violate federation rules and create civil liability. These mechanisms have different functions. Criminal law primarily protects public order and legally protected interests through punishment, a distinction reflected in the general principles described by Baheri (10). Sports disciplinary procedures protect the integrity and proper functioning of competition. Civil liability, by contrast, focuses more directly on the victim's injury and the obligation of reparation. A perpetrator may therefore face disciplinary suspension and criminal punishment while still owing compensation for the victim's moral harm. Conversely, conduct that falls below the threshold of criminal liability may still constitute a civil wrong or disciplinary violation.

The institutional dimension further expands the conceptual basis of liability. Sports organizations are not simply neutral platforms on which private actors interact. They establish rules, control facilities, employ staff, manage security, regulate communication, and influence organizational culture. Contemporary sport-management literature increasingly recognizes this broader social responsibility. Valeri treats corporate social responsibility as a significant issue for sports organizations (12), while Breitbarth and colleagues connect sport management with wider European

social-responsibility values (13). Madhushani and Perera similarly associate sports governance with socially responsible behavior and stakeholder expectations (11). These perspectives support the argument that moral-damage prevention should be regarded as part of institutional responsibility rather than an exceptional response to individual misconduct.

Football-specific culture also matters because moral harm can be collective as well as individual. Discriminatory chants against women, ethnic groups, nationalities, or minorities may target identifiable persons while simultaneously degrading broader social groups. Research concerning women's attendance at football stadiums demonstrates that football spaces can become sites of wider social disputes concerning inclusion and participation (16). Khatoun Barani's media analysis further shows that public representation of women's stadium attendance forms part of a broader discourse rather than a purely administrative question (17). In such contexts, moral harm may arise from exclusion, stigmatization, or degrading treatment even where no physical injury occurs.

Finally, the legal foundations of moral damages should reflect the particular characteristics of professional sport without creating a separate legal universe. Football requires specialized regulations, rapid disciplinary procedures, and recognition of competitive autonomy, but these features do not justify the abandonment of general principles of dignity, responsibility, fairness, and reparation. Sports-law development therefore requires integration between general legal doctrine and football-specific regulation. Yazdanpanah's study of barriers and strategies for the development of sports law highlights the importance of strengthening the legal infrastructure surrounding organized sport (23). Yousefi Sadeghlou's work directed toward sports-law education and public understanding similarly reflects the need for greater awareness of legal rights and responsibilities in sporting environments (24). A coherent doctrine of moral damages in football should therefore operate as part of this broader maturation of sports law.

Sources and Conditions of Liability for Moral Damages in Football

Liability for moral damages in football can arise from a wide variety of relationships, and the identity of the responsible party depends on the source of the harmful conduct, the legal duty involved, the degree of control exercised by relevant institutions, and the causal relationship between conduct and injury. The traditional starting point is the general structure of civil liability: legally wrongful conduct, the existence of compensable harm, a causal link, and, where required, fault. Katouzian's treatment of civil liability provides a doctrinal foundation for this analysis by emphasizing the responsibility that follows from unlawful interference with protected interests (2). Badini's philosophical account adds that liability is not merely a technical device for transferring loss but a normative judgment concerning who should bear the consequences of harmful conduct (1). In football, this judgment must be adapted to the multilayered organization of the sport, in which direct actors and institutional actors may both contribute to a single harmful event.

Players themselves may incur liability when their conduct exceeds the legitimate limits of sporting competition. Physical contact inherent in football does not ordinarily generate moral liability merely because it causes frustration or emotional disappointment. Competitive sport necessarily involves defeat, criticism, confrontation, and lawful physical contact. However, intentional humiliation, discriminatory insults, threats, targeted harassment, deliberately false accusations, or public disclosure of private information cannot be justified as ordinary sporting behavior. The legal boundary should be drawn between conduct functionally connected with legitimate competition and conduct that attacks personality interests independently of the game. The same distinction applies to coaches and technical staff. Coaching authority may justify demanding training, criticism of performance, and tactical discipline, but it does

not justify degradation, repeated humiliation, coercive abuse, or harassment. Mountjoy and Verhagen's emphasis on protecting athletes from harassment and abuse supports the proposition that professional sporting environments must distinguish legitimate performance management from conduct harmful to dignity and psychological integrity (14). Arjmand's discussion of coaching principles likewise reflects the structured responsibilities associated with the coaching role rather than an unlimited authority over athletes (25).

Clubs may bear direct or vicarious responsibility for moral harm caused within their organizational sphere. Direct liability may arise where club management itself publishes defamatory statements, wrongfully discloses private information, humiliates a player, discriminatorily excludes an individual, or deliberately undermines professional reputation. Vicarious or organizational liability may arise where employees or agents cause harm in circumstances sufficiently connected with their duties. A club may also be responsible for negligent failure to respond to known risks, particularly where it possesses the authority to prevent abuse. Modern approaches to institutional responsibility support this wider understanding. Valeri's work on social responsibility in sports organizations demonstrates that clubs and other sporting entities are increasingly expected to account for the broader social consequences of organizational behavior (12). Madhushani and Perera's analysis of governance in sports federations similarly indicates that good governance requires responsibility toward affected stakeholders rather than mere compliance with competitive rules (11).

Employment and contractual relations create additional grounds of responsibility. Professional football contracts regulate remuneration, sporting duties, disciplinary expectations, duration of employment, and other aspects of the player-club relationship. Asgharian and Sarboha demonstrate that football contracts must be interpreted in light of both general law and FIFA or federation regulations (9). A contractual breach may generate moral harm where it is accompanied by conduct damaging to reputation or dignity. Wrongful exclusion from training, public accusations of disloyalty, discriminatory treatment, humiliating dismissal procedures, or retaliatory disclosure of sensitive information may create injuries beyond lost income. Nematollahi's comparative analysis of damages for breach of contract is relevant because it raises the broader question of what interests compensation should protect when contractual obligations are violated (21). Nasiri and Saadat Mostafavi's analysis of contractual obligations further reinforces the importance of determining the complete scope of the promised performance and the legal consequences of defective or incomplete fulfillment (22).

Federations and leagues occupy a distinctive position because they exercise regulatory authority over participants. Their decisions can profoundly affect reputation, eligibility, livelihood, and professional standing. Disciplinary allegations involving match-fixing, corruption, doping, violence, or ethical misconduct are particularly sensitive because publication of the allegation itself may cause significant reputational damage. Sports regulators must therefore balance transparency with procedural fairness. The human-rights approach developed in the European sports context demonstrates that regulatory objectives do not eliminate individual rights (8). Where disciplinary bodies disclose unnecessary personal information, publish unsupported accusations, or impose sanctions without adequate procedural safeguards, questions of moral harm can arise. This does not mean that every overturned disciplinary decision automatically creates civil liability. Regulatory bodies must be free to investigate misconduct. Liability should instead depend on factors such as bad faith, negligence, procedural unfairness, disproportionality, unnecessary disclosure, or failure to comply with applicable legal duties.

The protection of privacy is especially important when federations, clubs, or medical personnel collect sensitive personal information. Athletes may be required to disclose health information, whereabouts, medical history, or

other personal data as part of participation in professional sport. The European legal framework concerning athletes' rights in anti-doping systems demonstrates that regulatory measures involving personal data and bodily integrity require careful legal justification (8). Article 8 principles similarly protect personal and family life from unjustified interference (7). Moral damage may therefore arise not only from publication of false information but also from disclosure of true information when the disclosure unjustifiably invades private life.

Media organizations and journalists represent another major source of potential liability. Football is unusually dependent on media exposure, and news concerning players or clubs can influence public opinion immediately. Iranpour Mobarakeh and colleagues illustrate the broader role played by mass media in shaping the sporting environment (18). Media attention can promote sport, but it can also magnify injury when inaccurate or invasive reporting occurs. Moghami and Attaran's work concerning celebrities' family privacy directly addresses the need to balance public communication against individual privacy (6). A footballer's public status may justify extensive reporting on professional performance and matters genuinely relevant to public sporting life, but it does not grant unrestricted access to family relationships, private medical information, intimate communications, or unrelated personal matters. Liability should therefore depend on factors such as public interest, truthfulness, proportionality, source reliability, the sensitivity of the information, and the extent of dissemination.

Social media intensifies these problems because responsibility is decentralized. Players, supporters, club officials, journalists, and anonymous users can distribute accusations or abusive content instantly. The globalized character of sport communication means that harmful content may circulate across jurisdictions (19). A defamatory post may be reproduced thousands of times, making the identification of causation and the measurement of harm difficult. Nevertheless, the legal principle remains that freedom of expression does not automatically protect false factual allegations, targeted harassment, unlawful disclosure of private information, or discriminatory abuse. The practical challenge lies in allocating responsibility among the original publisher, persons who knowingly amplify harmful content, platform operators where applicable, and organizations that fail to respond to abuse occurring through official channels.

Spectator misconduct represents one of the most visible sources of moral harm in football. Aghaei and Saffari's criminological analysis demonstrates that football spectator violence has causes and consequences extending beyond isolated individual aggression (15). Moral injury can accompany physical violence, but it may also exist independently through threats, racist chanting, gender-based abuse, humiliating collective slogans, intimidation, and targeted verbal attacks. Referees are particularly vulnerable because hostile crowd behavior may be directed at their competence, integrity, family, or personal safety. Players may likewise be targeted because of ethnicity, nationality, gender, religion, perceived loyalty, or performance. Such conduct should not be normalized as an unavoidable element of fan culture.

The responsibility of clubs and stadium operators for supporter misconduct depends on control, foreseeability, and preventive capacity. A club cannot realistically guarantee that no individual spectator will ever engage in wrongful behavior. However, where repeated patterns of violence or discriminatory chanting are known, failure to adopt reasonable security and preventive measures can become legally significant. Shani's research on cultural measures affecting stadium security indicates that effective safety policy involves more than policing and physical barriers (5). Razavi and colleagues likewise emphasize the importance of fan culture in the environment of professional football (4). These findings support the legal argument that reasonable prevention may include

education, clear codes of conduct, monitoring, sanctions, targeted exclusion of repeat offenders, trained security personnel, and institutional communication condemning abusive behavior.

Gender-related exclusion and discriminatory treatment raise additional questions of moral responsibility. Research concerning women's attendance at Iranian football stadiums demonstrates that stadium participation is closely linked to social inclusion and institutional policy (16). Khatoun Barani's media-content analysis confirms the public and cultural significance of the issue (17). Where access restrictions, security practices, or discriminatory treatment produce humiliation or unequal treatment, the resulting injury may have a non-pecuniary dimension. Liability in such cases may arise from individual discriminatory conduct or from institutional policies, depending on the applicable legal framework.

Football referees and disciplinary officials can also cause moral harm, although the threshold for liability should be carefully defined. Ordinary errors of judgment during a match should not create civil liability merely because they affect reputation or cause distress. Sporting autonomy requires officials to make decisions under pressure without constant fear of litigation. Liability should arise only where conduct is manifestly abusive, discriminatory, corrupt, malicious, or otherwise outside the legitimate exercise of sporting authority. The same caution applies to selection decisions by coaches, disciplinary decisions by clubs, and technical evaluations. Legal protection of dignity must not become a mechanism for converting every unfavorable professional decision into a damages claim.

Conversely, referees and officials can themselves be victims. Public accusations of corruption or deliberate bias may seriously damage professional standing. Club managers or prominent players have considerable communicative power, and irresponsible allegations may expose officials to mass harassment. In such circumstances, moral damage may include reputational injury, anxiety, fear for personal safety, and damage to family life. The scale of the audience should therefore be relevant to assessment of severity. An insult in a private dispute is not equivalent to a defamatory statement broadcast to millions of viewers.

Harassment and abuse within teams require particular attention because victims may be reluctant to complain. Hierarchical relationships can create dependence between young players and coaches, medical staff, senior players, or club officials. Mountjoy and Verhagen's call for stronger protection against harassment and abuse in sport highlights the institutional importance of safeguarding mechanisms (14). Moral damage in these situations may include shame, fear, loss of confidence, psychological distress, social withdrawal, and damage to sporting identity. Where organizations ignore complaints or retaliate against complainants, institutional responsibility may become more serious than the initial individual misconduct.

The conduct of medical and performance staff can likewise affect moral interests. Professional athletes may be placed under intense pressure concerning body composition, injury recovery, fitness, or medical disclosure. Coaching and training relationships require expertise and ethical responsibility rather than merely pursuit of competitive results (25). Publicly humiliating an athlete because of physical characteristics, disclosing medical information without justification, or pressuring participation despite psychological vulnerability can create non-pecuniary injury. The relevant legal duty should reflect both the professional relationship and the athlete's entitlement to dignity and informed treatment.

The extraordinary disruption caused by COVID-19 provides an illustration of how institutional decisions can produce disputes involving both economic and non-economic interests. Garcia-Garcia and colleagues document the broad impact of the pandemic on sport and sports law (20). Decisions concerning suspensions, exclusions, testing, isolation, contract termination, and access restrictions were often adopted under urgent conditions.

Although many were justified by public-health concerns, the experience demonstrates that legitimate organizational objectives can still affect reputation, privacy, dignity, and psychological well-being. The legal lesson is not that emergency measures necessarily generate liability but that proportionality, procedural fairness, and responsible communication remain important even under exceptional circumstances.

Criminal conduct may overlap with civil moral liability in cases of violence, threats, harassment, and serious insult. Baheri's analysis of general criminal law is relevant to distinguishing punishment from compensatory responsibility (10). A criminal conviction may provide evidence of wrongdoing, but the victim's civil claim concerns a separate question: whether the unlawful act caused compensable non-pecuniary injury. Similarly, disciplinary sanctions imposed by a federation may establish violation of sporting rules without automatically determining the amount of civil compensation. These different systems should interact but remain conceptually distinct.

Ultimately, allocation of liability in football should depend on the actual structure of responsibility surrounding the harm. Direct perpetrators should answer for intentional or negligent violations of protected interests. Employers and clubs may bear responsibility where the conduct is connected with organizational activity or where they negligently fail to prevent foreseeable harm. Federations may be liable when regulatory conduct unjustifiably infringes rights. Stadium operators may bear responsibility where security failures facilitate predictable abuse. Media actors may be liable for unlawful disclosure or defamatory publication. The central principle is that football's institutional complexity should not create a zone of diminished legal protection. Instead, responsibility should follow control, causation, duty, and the capacity to prevent harm.

Prevention and Remedies for Moral Damages in Football

An effective legal framework for moral damages in football should not be limited to compensation after injury occurs. Because psychological, reputational, and dignitary harms can be difficult to reverse completely, prevention is often more valuable than retrospective monetary relief. The institutional structure of football makes preventive governance particularly important. Clubs, federations, leagues, stadium operators, coaching bodies, medical teams, and media departments all have the capacity to reduce risk through rules, education, supervision, complaint mechanisms, and responsible communication. Contemporary governance literature increasingly places social responsibility within the ordinary duties of sporting institutions. Madhushani and Perera's analysis of responsible sports consumption and good governance indicates that sports federations should be understood as institutions accountable to a broad group of stakeholders (11). Valeri's treatment of corporate social responsibility in sports organizations similarly supports integrating ethical and social considerations into management rather than treating them as external concerns (12). Breitbarth and colleagues also emphasize the growing importance of social responsibility within European sport-management research (13). Prevention of moral harm should therefore be regarded as part of responsible sports governance.

The first preventive requirement is a clear institutional code of conduct that identifies unacceptable behavior. General prohibitions against "misconduct" may be too vague to protect victims effectively. Clubs and federations should expressly address discrimination, harassment, sexual abuse, bullying, retaliation, threats, defamatory communication, privacy violations, degrading treatment, and abusive online behavior. Such rules should apply not only to players but also to coaches, medical staff, executives, referees, volunteers, security personnel, and supporters where appropriate. The development of sports law requires clarity concerning the legal and regulatory obligations applicable to participants, a broader challenge reflected in Yazdanpanah's study of barriers to the

development of sports law (23). Educational initiatives aimed at improving legal awareness can also support compliance, an objective consistent with the sports-law educational orientation represented by Yousefi Sadeghlou (24).

Prevention should also include safeguarding structures capable of identifying abuse at an early stage. Mountjoy and Verhagen emphasize the responsibility of sports environments to protect athletes from harassment and abuse (14). This requires more than a formal policy document. Institutions should create confidential reporting procedures, independent complaint channels, anti-retaliation protections, trained safeguarding officers, and clear investigation protocols. Athletes who depend on coaches or clubs for selection and employment may reasonably fear professional consequences if they report misconduct. A preventive system must therefore reduce the power imbalance between complainant and alleged perpetrator.

Training is another essential preventive mechanism. Coaches, executives, security staff, and players should understand the distinction between legitimate sporting discipline and degrading treatment. Arjmand's work concerning coaching principles reflects the professional responsibilities associated with effective coaching practice (25). Training programs should address psychological safety, respectful communication, discrimination, privacy, responsible use of social media, and the legal consequences of harassment. Such programs are especially important in youth and academy environments, where young athletes may lack the experience or independence necessary to identify abusive conduct.

Stadium-related moral harm requires a combination of security and cultural measures. Shani's research emphasizes the significance of cultural strategies in strengthening football-stadium security (5). The implication is that security cannot be achieved solely through policing or surveillance. Supporter education, clear behavioral expectations, anti-discrimination campaigns, family-friendly environments, and visible enforcement of sanctions can contribute to changing norms. Razavi and colleagues similarly show the importance of developing fan culture within professional football (4). Where abusive chants or threats become normalized, individual sanctions may have limited effect unless institutions also challenge the collective culture that sustains the behavior.

The prevention of spectator violence should therefore integrate criminological understanding with institutional management. Aghaei and Saffari's analysis of football spectator violence demonstrates that aggressive behavior has broader social and cultural dimensions (15). Effective prevention may include better stadium design, controlled entry, identification of repeat offenders, proportionate exclusion orders, trained stewards, separation of high-risk supporter groups, responsible scheduling, and cooperation between clubs and public authorities. From the perspective of moral damage, these measures are important not only because they reduce physical violence but also because they reduce intimidation, fear, humiliation, and degrading treatment.

Gender inclusion should likewise form part of preventive policy. Research on women's attendance at football stadiums demonstrates the social importance of equal and safe participation (16). Media analysis of the same issue reveals that institutional practices surrounding stadium access are closely connected with public perception and cultural discourse (17). Preventive measures should therefore ensure that security arrangements, ticketing systems, stadium facilities, and staff conduct do not expose women or other groups to degrading or discriminatory treatment. Protection from moral harm should include the positive creation of an environment in which participation does not require acceptance of humiliation or hostility.

Media policy is another critical area of prevention. Clubs and federations frequently control powerful communication channels capable of shaping public opinion. Public accusations should not be made prematurely,

especially where disciplinary investigations remain incomplete. Communications staff should distinguish between necessary transparency and unnecessary reputational exposure. The tension between public interest and privacy analyzed by Moghami and Attaran is directly relevant here (6). Organizations should adopt internal protocols governing publication of allegations, disciplinary outcomes, medical information, and private details. The Article 8 framework also supports careful assessment of whether disclosure is necessary and proportionate (7).

Athletes should receive equivalent guidance concerning their own media conduct. Social-media posts by prominent players or coaches can expose colleagues, referees, or opponents to mass harassment. A single irresponsible accusation can trigger thousands of abusive responses. The global dissemination of sports communication described by Qiang means that digital statements can have consequences extending across jurisdictions and cultural contexts (19). Clubs should therefore include social-media responsibility within professional conduct policies. Such regulation should not suppress legitimate criticism but should discourage defamatory allegations, discriminatory language, threats, and disclosure of private information.

Privacy protection requires organizational controls over data collection and disclosure. Athletes' human-rights concerns in anti-doping regulation demonstrate that sports participation often requires extensive processing of sensitive personal information (8). Clubs and federations should limit access to medical, disciplinary, and personal data according to legitimate need. Confidential information should not be disclosed to journalists, supporters, sponsors, or unauthorized staff merely because the athlete is publicly known. The European human-rights approach to private life provides a strong basis for insisting that public visibility does not eliminate personal privacy (7).

Good contractual drafting can also contribute to prevention. Football contracts should clearly regulate confidentiality, public communication, termination procedures, dispute mechanisms, welfare obligations, and disciplinary processes. Asgharian and Sarboha demonstrate that football contracts function within the combined framework of ordinary law and federation regulations (9). Clear drafting can reduce ambiguity about the rights and responsibilities of clubs and players. Nasiri and Saadat Mostafavi's discussion of contractual obligations further demonstrates the importance of defining the full extent of promised performance (22). Contractual clauses cannot legitimately authorize abuse or waive fundamental personality rights, but they can create predictable procedures that reduce the likelihood of reputational and psychological harm.

When prevention fails, remedies should be tailored to the nature of moral injury. Monetary compensation remains important because it formally recognizes that the victim has suffered a legally significant wrong. Katouzian's civil-liability framework supports the compensatory function of liability in responding to unlawfully inflicted harm (2). Badini's theoretical analysis similarly supports the broader normative function of imposing responsibility on the party whose wrongful conduct produced injury (1). Nevertheless, money alone cannot restore reputation, erase humiliation, or eliminate emotional suffering. The remedy should therefore be understood as a form of legal satisfaction rather than exact economic equivalence.

Assessment of monetary compensation is necessarily difficult. Courts cannot objectively calculate the monetary value of humiliation or anxiety in the same way they calculate unpaid salary. Relevant factors should include the seriousness of the conduct, the duration of the harm, the size of the audience, the claimant's professional position, whether the conduct was intentional, whether the defendant apologized, whether the information remained publicly accessible, the vulnerability of the victim, and the extent of psychological consequences. Repeated or institutional abuse should ordinarily be treated more seriously than an isolated incident. Publication to a national or international audience should ordinarily justify a greater award than a private insult because the reputational effects are wider.

Non-monetary remedies may often be more directly responsive to the harm. Retraction of a false allegation can restore reputation more effectively than compensation alone. A public apology can acknowledge wrongdoing and provide symbolic satisfaction. Correction of official records may be necessary where an inaccurate disciplinary statement has damaged professional standing. Removal of unlawful online content may reduce continuing harm. Injunctions can prevent further disclosure of private information. A declaration that a claimant's rights were violated may itself have significant moral value. These remedies should not necessarily replace compensation; they may complement it.

The right to reply is particularly important in media-related cases. Where a club, federation, broadcaster, or journalist publishes damaging allegations, fairness may require providing the affected individual with a meaningful opportunity to respond. Mass media have a significant role in shaping public perceptions of sport (18). Because reputational harm often results from one-sided narratives, corrective communication can mitigate injury. The remedy should be timely, because a delayed correction may have little effect after the original accusation has circulated widely.

Disciplinary remedies within football also have preventive and symbolic value. Suspensions, fines, stadium bans, point deductions, mandatory training, and other sanctions may demonstrate that abusive conduct is inconsistent with sporting values. However, sports disciplinary sanctions should not automatically extinguish civil claims. A federation's decision to suspend a player for discriminatory abuse protects sporting integrity, while civil compensation addresses the victim's personal injury. Similarly, criminal punishment may coexist with civil remedies because criminal and civil responsibility serve different functions, as reflected in Baheri's general treatment of criminal law (10).

Remedial procedures themselves must be designed carefully. Victims of harassment or discrimination may suffer additional harm if required to repeat traumatic experiences unnecessarily or confront alleged perpetrators in intimidating settings. Complaint systems should therefore be accessible, confidential where appropriate, procedurally fair, and capable of protecting complainants from retaliation. Mountjoy and Verhagen's emphasis on athlete protection reinforces the need for victim-sensitive institutional procedures (14). Independent investigation is particularly important where senior officials or powerful coaches are accused.

Rehabilitation should also be recognized as a remedy in appropriate cases. Psychological support, counseling, professional reintegration, and assistance with reputation restoration may be necessary where moral harm affects an athlete's ability to continue participating in football. An injured player should not be expected simply to return to the same environment after serious harassment without institutional support. Clubs that contributed to the harm may reasonably be required to adopt corrective measures addressing the organizational conditions that allowed it to occur.

Institutional transparency can itself function as a preventive remedy. When federations publish anonymized information concerning disciplinary patterns, safeguarding complaints, and anti-discrimination measures, stakeholders can evaluate whether the organization takes moral harm seriously. Madhushani and Perera's emphasis on good governance supports transparent and accountable federation management (11). Valeri's work on social responsibility and reporting also suggests that public accountability should form part of responsible sports management (12). Transparency should nevertheless respect the privacy of complainants and avoid creating new reputational injury.

Emergency and exceptional situations require the same commitment to proportionality. The legal disruptions created by COVID-19 showed that sporting institutions may need to adopt rapid measures affecting participation, employment, health information, and access (20). Future emergencies should therefore be managed through procedures that minimize unnecessary reputational or psychological harm. Decisions should be explained, evidence-based, proportionate, and subject to review where they seriously affect individual rights.

The most effective model combines prevention, internal regulation, civil remedies, and broader legal accountability. Preventive governance reduces the occurrence of harm; disciplinary systems protect the integrity of sport; civil liability recognizes and compensates injury; criminal law responds to sufficiently serious public wrongs; and human-rights principles constrain excessive institutional power. None of these mechanisms is sufficient alone. Their integration is necessary because moral damages in football arise from the interaction of private conduct, organizational culture, public regulation, and mass communication.

Conclusion

Moral damages in football represent a significant but still insufficiently systematized field of legal responsibility. The modern football environment exposes participants to forms of injury that cannot be understood solely through economic loss or physical damage. Reputation, dignity, privacy, psychological integrity, equality, professional identity, and personal autonomy are all capable of being harmed through football-related conduct. Players may be injured by defamatory accusations, degrading treatment, harassment, discriminatory abuse, or unlawful disclosure of private information. Coaches, referees, and officials may suffer equivalent harms through public accusations, threats, and organized hostility. Spectators may experience humiliation, discrimination, violence, exclusion, or degrading treatment. These injuries are legally important precisely because the values affected are central to individual personality and social participation.

The analysis demonstrates that moral damage should be treated as an independent category of compensable injury rather than as a secondary consequence of financial or physical loss. Economic consequences may accompany reputational or psychological harm, but they do not define it. A footballer need not prove the loss of a sponsorship contract before the law can recognize that a false accusation has injured reputation. A spectator need not suffer bodily injury before discriminatory humiliation can become legally significant. A coach or referee need not lose employment before targeted harassment can amount to a serious violation of dignity. Recognition of these independent interests is essential to a coherent modern theory of sports liability.

Liability should nevertheless be carefully limited to avoid transforming every unpleasant feature of competitive sport into a legal claim. Football necessarily involves criticism, selection decisions, physical contact, disciplinary authority, competitive pressure, emotional disappointment, and public evaluation. These features are part of the legitimate structure of professional sport. Legal responsibility should arise when conduct crosses the boundary separating ordinary sporting interaction from unlawful interference with protected interests. Intentional humiliation, harassment, threats, discriminatory abuse, unjustified disclosure of private information, malicious allegations, and seriously negligent failure to prevent foreseeable harm fall on the liability side of that boundary. Ordinary tactical criticism, legitimate regulatory decisions, reasonable disciplinary measures, and good-faith reporting should not generate liability merely because they cause dissatisfaction.

The conditions of civil responsibility should continue to perform an important filtering function. The claimant should establish legally cognizable harm, wrongful conduct, and a sufficient causal connection between them.

Where fault is required, intentional or negligent conduct should be demonstrated. However, the proof requirements applied to moral harm should reflect its actual characteristics. Psychological distress and reputational injury do not always produce easily quantifiable evidence. The absence of direct financial loss should therefore not be mistaken for the absence of genuine harm. Courts and sporting dispute bodies should evaluate the circumstances as a whole, including the seriousness of the conduct, the vulnerability of the victim, the extent of publication, the duration of the injury, and its impact on personal and professional life.

A central finding of this analysis is that responsibility in football cannot be confined to direct perpetrators. Clubs, federations, leagues, and event organizers exercise substantial control over the environments in which harm occurs. Their authority creates corresponding responsibilities. An organization that knows of recurring harassment, discriminatory chanting, threats, or abusive coaching practices but fails to adopt reasonable preventive measures should not always be permitted to characterize the resulting harm as the isolated behavior of private individuals. Institutional liability becomes especially compelling where the organization possesses both knowledge of the risk and the practical capacity to reduce it.

The same principle applies to regulatory authorities. Federations and disciplinary bodies perform legitimate functions and must retain sufficient autonomy to investigate misconduct, preserve competition integrity, and enforce sporting rules. Yet regulatory autonomy does not justify unnecessary reputational harm, disproportionate disclosure of personal information, arbitrary decision-making, or disregard for procedural fairness. Sporting authority should be exercised in a manner compatible with dignity, privacy, and fundamental fairness. Individuals should not lose ordinary legal protection merely because they participate in a specialized regulatory system.

Football clubs likewise occupy a dual role as competitive organizations and employers. Their duties extend beyond payment of salaries and sporting management. They shape workplace culture, control access to facilities, employ coaching and medical staff, manage communications, and often possess significant influence over an athlete's career. This level of control makes preventive responsibility unavoidable. Clubs should therefore treat safeguarding, confidentiality, anti-discrimination measures, fair disciplinary procedures, and psychological welfare as core organizational responsibilities rather than optional ethical commitments.

Spectator conduct presents a similar need for institutional engagement. Football culture cannot be improved solely through punishment imposed after violent or abusive incidents. Stadium operators and clubs should combine security with long-term cultural measures. Persistent discriminatory chanting, threats, and humiliating behavior are not unavoidable features of passionate support. They are behaviors shaped by institutional tolerance, social norms, enforcement patterns, and supporter expectations. Where football authorities consistently communicate clear standards and impose proportionate consequences, they can reshape those norms.

The media dimension makes prevention even more important. The speed and permanence of digital communication can transform a single irresponsible allegation into global reputational injury. Clubs, federations, players, journalists, and supporters must therefore exercise greater care when publishing accusations or private information. Professional status justifies scrutiny but does not eliminate privacy. Public interest must be distinguished from curiosity, and legitimate criticism must be distinguished from defamation or humiliation. Internal communication policies and media training should become standard components of professional football governance.

Harassment and abuse require particularly strong safeguards because victims often operate within hierarchical systems. Young players, academy athletes, reserve players, injured athletes, and individuals dependent on

selection may fear retaliation if they complain. A legal system that recognizes moral damages but offers no safe route for reporting abuse provides incomplete protection. Effective prevention therefore requires independent complaint channels, confidential reporting options, anti-retaliation measures, trained safeguarding personnel, and external review where internal independence cannot be guaranteed.

Compensation remains an essential remedy, but the nature of moral injury means that money alone will often be inadequate. Courts and sports bodies should therefore use a combination of monetary and non-monetary remedies. Compensation can formally recognize the seriousness of the wrong and provide legal satisfaction. Retraction can correct false allegations. Apology can acknowledge responsibility. Injunctions can prevent further disclosure. Removal of digital content can reduce continuing reputational harm. Correction of disciplinary records can restore professional status. Psychological support and rehabilitation can assist victims whose ability to continue in sport has been affected.

Assessment of compensation should remain individualized. Fixed formulas are unlikely to reflect the diversity of football-related moral injuries. A private insult between two individuals differs substantially from a defamatory accusation broadcast internationally. An isolated careless statement differs from a sustained campaign of harassment. Unintentional disclosure differs from deliberate humiliation. The seriousness of the wrong, the defendant's conduct after the event, the scale of dissemination, the victim's vulnerability, the persistence of the consequences, and the possibility of restoring reputation should therefore influence the remedy.

Civil liability should also remain distinct from disciplinary and criminal processes. A single incident may justify several forms of response because each system serves a different purpose. Sporting discipline protects the integrity and values of competition. Criminal law addresses conduct sufficiently serious to engage public punishment. Civil liability focuses on the injury suffered by the victim and the obligation to repair it. The existence of one response should therefore not automatically exclude the others.

The broader policy implication is that moral-damage law should be integrated into sports governance rather than applied only after disputes reach courts. Clubs and federations should conduct risk assessments concerning harassment, discrimination, privacy, reputational harm, and spectator abuse. Contracts should define confidentiality and fair disciplinary procedures. Codes of conduct should apply across organizational hierarchies. Media policies should regulate premature publication of allegations. Safeguarding systems should be independent and accessible. Stadium management should combine physical security with cultural prevention. Education should target players, coaches, officials, supporters, and staff.

Such reforms would also contribute to the maturation of sports law. Football has become too economically powerful, socially influential, and institutionally complex to rely on informal assumptions that harmful conduct is simply part of sporting culture. The law should recognize the legitimate autonomy of sport while insisting that autonomy operates within the broader requirements of responsibility, dignity, equality, privacy, and fairness. This approach does not weaken competitive sport. It strengthens its legitimacy by ensuring that participation does not require individuals to surrender basic personal interests.

The central conclusion is therefore that moral damages in football should be addressed through an integrated framework of liability, prevention, and remedies. Liability identifies those responsible for unlawful injury. Prevention reduces the likelihood that injury will occur. Remedies respond to the distinctive consequences of non-pecuniary harm. A coherent system must combine all three. If football institutions adopt this approach, the law can protect individuals without interfering unnecessarily with legitimate sporting autonomy, while the sport itself can become

more accountable, safer, and more respectful of the people whose participation gives it social and professional value.

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All authors equally contributed to this study.

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Transparency of Data

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