

Are big clubs  
immune to  
revelations?  
Experiences  
from Football  
Leaks



# Example 1: Chelsea and the parent payments

---

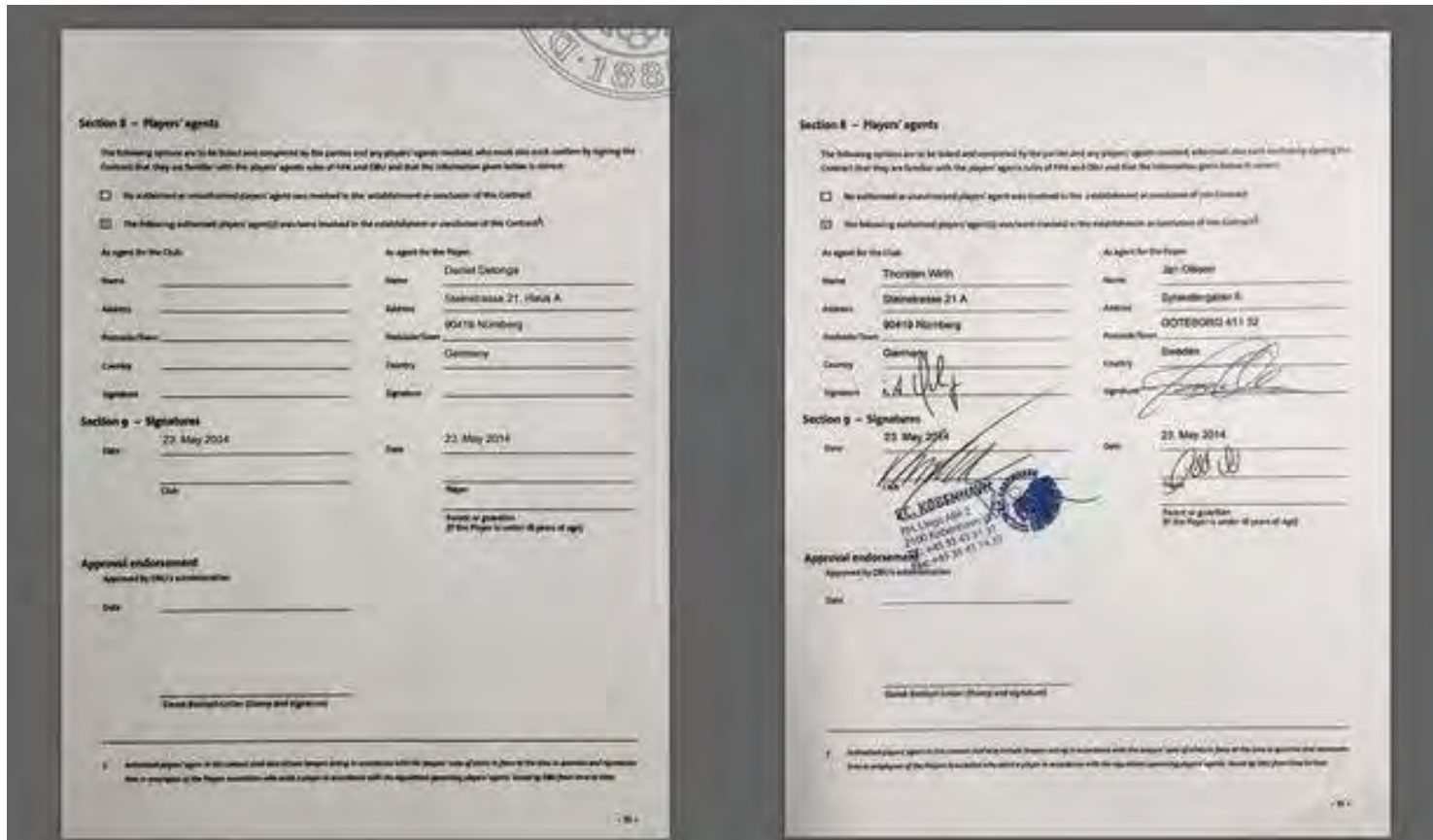
- **The story:** Big clubs pay parents fortunes in order to secure talented minors – Chelsea did that when signing Andreas Christensen in tough competition with Manchester City and other big clubs
- **The reaction:** “We do not comment on speculation concerning confidential contracts or player related matters” and “Listen, this is a story you’ve gotten from some Ukrainian or something. I have no comments on this matter whatsoever”
- **The consequence:** “Should we receive any substantiated material that suggests our rules may have been breached, we will of course investigate and have a track record of doing so”. Premier League





## Example 2: Man City and the African minors

- **The story:** In a secret contract Manchester City secured control over African players aged 10-21 at the Right to Dream academy in Ghana and the Danish club FC Nordsjaelland – behind the back of the players – which might breach regulations for minors, TPO and TPI
- **The reaction:** “We will not be providing any comment on out of context materials purportedly hacked or stolen from City Football Group and Manchester City personnel and associated people. The attempt to damage the Club’s reputation is organized and clear” – the Danish club reacted a lot harsher
- **The consequence:** Fifa, The FA and the Premier League all said they would look into matters



- **The story:** When the biggest club of Scandinavia signed Swedish international Per 'Pelle' Nilsson they arranged the agent payment in a way so the player didn't have to pay taxes – although it was illegal. It is a wide spread trick in Denmark and European football
- **The reaction:** FC Copenhagen said that the information didn't reflect the reality (although the documentation was very clear), that Politiken ignored knowledge, that Politiken manipulated a source and threatened to sue Politiken
- **The consequence:** "This is an issue that we know of and that we will look into in the near future". Tax authorities

Example 3: FC Copenhagen and massive the tax trick

# The pattern of big club reactions to revelations

- **Football Leaks 1 versus Football Leaks 2:** In the first series of articles in 2016 we received countless letters from lawyers of big clubs with threats of law suits. Der Spiegel were sued two times but won both cases. In the second series of articles in 2018 the big clubs didn't do this.
- **International versus national:** When a story was strong locally – for instance in Denmark – the reaction was really harsh but when it was about the biggest international clubs the reactions were short, simple statements
- **The theory of big clubs?** Their reactions send a clear signal. They have realized that it doesn't matter to threaten with lawsuits: We will publish anyway, and their business is not massively hurt no matter what. So it is better to "ignore" the story and try to let it die. Let lawyers work with the football authorities, not the media



# So are the big clubs immune? Not entirely

- **Club reactions:** They send the signal that they are somewhat immune
- **Sanctions:** They can, though, get sanctioned for wrong-doing after revelations and have been in some cases, although the authorities of the football world can seem rather weak and sometimes maybe even under the influence of big clubs
- **Fan reactions:** It is probably the worst for the big clubs when their fans react because that in the end can hurt their business more than Fifa, Uefa and the rest of the gang can



# Debate: What can we do with the big clubs?

- **Name:** Jeppe Laursen Brock
- **Job:** Investigative reporter at the sports desk of Danish daily, Politiken
- **E-mail:** jeppe.l.brock@pol.dk
- **Themes:** The dark side of football, doping, match fixing, abuse of power, spenditure of tax payer's money

