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STRATEGY FORMULATION PLANNING FOR ADMINISTRATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL IN THAILAND

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Abstract: This paper aims at studying the current scenario of professional football in Thailand, the problems and setbacks faced by the management, and the emergence of professional football careers in Thailand, with a look at the strategy formulation plan for administration and development of this career drafted during the period 2017-2021. This study utilized the qualitative method with in-depth interviews as data collection technique, with 26 key informants related to professional football development. The findings reported an increase in the number of professional football teams and professional footballers in Thailand, while professional coaching and management were enhanced at the same time. Some setbacks impeding the development of professional football included lack of concrete development strategies, inadequate financial support, bureaucratic style of management and non-utilization of sport science and technology.

Keywords: Professional Football, Strategic Plan.

I. INTRODUCTION

Football has been a popular sport among Thai people since its introduction in Thailand in 1897 [1]. The current trend of football has been influencing interests of more men across different ages, and even among women. Despite records of unlikely successful performance of the national football team at international matches during the past years, there has been a period called the time of 'restoring the trust' during 2013-2014 of the national football teams, in which transparency of their administration has been emphasized and revealed to public. It is notable that football as a sport has gradually become popular from local to national level. This popularity has extended into other areas of interest, for instance education. Football has now been included as a course in curriculums from kindergarten to degree level, while being played as a university and school sport traditionally held each year. Moreover, the sport is also viewed as a business opportunity on which the government is placing great importance for policy and strategy formulation for further development [2]. This study aimed to study the current situation of professional football team in Thailand, problems and setbacks of the management and the development of professional football career in Thailand, and the strategy formulation plan for administration and development of this career during 2017-2021.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Football Association of Thailand is the governing body; it has been conducting professional football matches since 1996. The 2014 AFF Championship, sponsored by Suzuki was held during November 22-December 20. This international football tournament consisted of national teams of member nations of the ASEAN Football Federation (AFF). Eight teams faced off during the quarterfinals for the Asian winner. Two teams were selected to compete with six teams with higher scores, which included Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. Thailand debuted in international football in 1974 and has been playing for the last 40 years now. The most impressive performance by the Thai national football team so far was during the World Cup 2002 when it advanced to the Round of 16.

The heart of this sport is team spirit, since it is a team sport, requiring each player's aptitude and contribution for glory. New patterns and techniques of playing have been developed, which require individual players to maximize their skills, physical fitness and capabilities. However, it must be pointed out that the management of football matches in Thailand has met with failure while laying out systematic planning of the matches with lack of clear vision. In spite of 18 years in professional football development, the national football association has not been able to truly make its mark in the professional arena internationally. Despite strict rules and regulations, with punishment system thrown in, there haven't been concrete strategies that could assist in directing the game to the professional stage. Some of the major setbacks seen here include gambling, partisan behavior and unfair judges.

Currently, there are both public and private agencies working both directly and indirectly in association with the development of football profession. The main public organizations include Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Sports Authority of Thailand, Department of Physical Education and Institute of Physical Education. Other organizations indirectly involved in the developmental activity include Ministry of Education, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Public Health, The Prime Minister's Office, Royal Thai Police and Bureau of...
the Budget. Some other agencies taking charge of facilitation and public services, and publicity are police stations, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, Provincial and Sub-District Administration Organizations and Town Municipality, other private companies and press. Other groups associated with professional football development are clubs and associations active in the country, some of which include various football clubs and the Asian Football Confederation or AFC [3]. Among the abovementioned, the cooperation of various agencies of the public sector is to an extent critical in directing the vision of the national football professional development through its effective and clear management and administration for further public policy formulation and public services. An early sign of inefficient found in the national administration in this aspect involves absence of integration across different related agencies and desertion of specific strategies.

III. DETAILS EXPERIMENTAL

3.1. Materials and Procedures
The study utilized the qualitative method through in-depth interviews with 26 key informants related to football professionally. These informants included management board taking charge of football matches, Thai Football League managers, football coaches, professional football players and football fans. The collected data was analyzed and discussed along with the literature from secondary sources.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Current Situation of Professional Football Team in Thailand
The study found that football as a profession was set as a degree curriculum at universities in Thailand, and partially as a physical health subject and activity taught in primary and secondary schools. Local authorities have also been promoting football as a recreational activity to unite various communities and as part of youth campaigns against drug abuse in three age groups, namely between 6-11 year olds, 12-22 year olds and 22-60 year olds. Public promotions motivating people to play football in daily life and as a profession and to watch football matches have also been carried out. The finding also revealed that football had increasingly become a popular profession with attractive paychecks for not just football players, but people involved with the sport outside the field as well. Skills of football players and coaches, football play standard, team play and off-field goal scoring skills have also been levied in accordance with the Asian Football Confederation. Finally, professional football teams are at present mostly financially supported by large private companies, which in turn influences the players to improve their skills and capabilities just for rewards.

4.2. Problems and Setbacks of the Management and the Development of Professional Football Career in Thailand
The study found that there was still shortage of skillful and professional human resources associated with football in Thailand. Also, power and authority in football management depend mostly on the Football Association of Thailand, whereas the actual management has been carried out mostly in ways that emphasize on profit seeking, thereby portraying an image of conflict of interests. Sports science has not been properly applied in improving the basic skills of football players, neither has team and unity building been emphasized really. Another setback is the fact that strategic development has not been concretely advocated by public agencies in encouraging the profession to be successful, even though there have been academic studies continuously delivered by universities. The situation seems to impede long-term developmental planning. Socially given, international football culture has not still been well cultivated and understood among Thai audiences, which from time to time, can be seen in the form of fights among football fans. Financially, the Thai professional football leagues have been faced with inadequate financial support and restrictions concerning regulations of Thai bureaucracy, resulting in an inconvenience of spending budget. Other setbacks include lack of professional experience of international football leagues and strong public relations and communication on the international stage.

4.3. Strategy Formulation Plan for Administration and Development of Professional Football Career in Thailand
The recommended strategies during 2017-2021 can be planned into 3 phases in an integrated manner: one-year urgent plan, a 3-year plan and a 5-year plan, with the vision aiming at presenting professional football on the world stage. The missions to be accomplished include hiring and developing professional football coaches with international experience in accordance with the AFC and FIFA standards, preparation of football clubs and associations for professional football for business purpose, and stronger and effective marketing and public relations. Through these missions, the three strategic plans will be delivered. The first strategy as one-year urgent plan concerns education of professional football by opening a curriculum in which professional football is taught in accordance with the international methods and techniques. Outstanding football players may be encouraged with scholarships as a reward for studying in the area of professional football, and can become a coach with an A license. Youth must be educated in sport culture and ethics, so that they will be interested in forming...
their own football team. This can be promoted as One Province One Team.

The second strategic plan, the 3-year plan would stress unsustainable business development of professional football clubs and associations. Recommended strategies include development of facilities and infrastructure that support football match and training, strategic marketing, tax reduction or exemption for football players and professional personnel with recognized and outstanding performance, merchandizing through different channels, for instance football souvenirs, and arranging matches between host and visiting teams to promote tourism.

The last strategic plan involves promoting and public relations for Thai professional football for international recognition, set within a five-year term. Some strategies include PR activities to be made through different channels of international audiences, setting concrete coaching strategies, rules and regulations for international standard and professional achievement, involving football fans through communication for more understanding of football culture, cooperation across different public and private organizations in supporting the Thai football clubs and associations to experience international football matches.

The findings of this study conveyed that football is today recognized as a lucrative profession with appropriate payment. The skills and techniques of football coaches and players have gradually been developed in accordance with the AFC standards. The findings agreed with the study of Hall and Szyanski [4] examining potential of football as a profession with business profitability. The findings of this current study also concurred with the study of Nonthachai Santibut [5] who studied about football development models, addressing the potential of football not only as a sport but also as a business. The studies of Charnwit Pholcheewin et al. [6] investigating success factors for the football development, and of Sitti Rattanarasri [7] examining football profession in Thailand, also addressed similar limitations and obstacles found in this study. Financial limitation was found to be a common finding of the studies concerning football profession development in Thailand. For instance, the study of Anupoth Sukhonpanit revealed that the main factors that stand as an obstacle in football team training for the 5th Thailand league football match concerned inadequacy as well as irregularity in financial support [8].

The finding related to public relations and marketing for football profession coincided with the findings unveiled in the study of marketing strategy of football TV programs in Thailand. It found that the 4P marketing mix was highly required in order to be successful as a sport business.

CONCLUSIONS

Some suggestions for concerned public organizations were made as follows:

1. Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Sports Authority of Thailand, Institute of Physical Education, Football Association of Thailand, and other related organizations should carry out research and development, in particular those concerning professional standards and ethics of football players and related personnel, and strategy development of football profession.

2. Educational institutes involved third parties should integrate the sport with degree curriculums and certificate courses. Additionally, various academies and training centers can also be established.

3. Foundations can also be set up in order to provide social welfare and support in other areas for football players and involved people.

4. Future studies can be extended to football team development in communities from sub-district to district and provincial level, and development of One Province One Team strategy.

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