

ФІЗИЧНА КУЛЬТУРА І СПОРТ

EVOLUTION OF COMPETITION MODELS IN EUROPEAN PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL: FROM ORIGINS TO THE MODERN ERA

ЕВОЛЮЦІЯ МОДЕЛЕЙ ЗМАГАНЬ В ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКОМУ ПРОФЕСІЙНОМУ ФУТБОЛІ: ВІД ВИТОКІВ ДО СУЧАСНОСТІ

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Abstracts

The development of any kind of sport is always closely interconnected with approaches to the planning and implementation of competitive practice, taking into account various factors that can influence it. Competitive practice in professional football in Europe has undergone significant changes since the beginning of the formation of the sport until today. Tracking the key components of competition models of different historical periods and the factors that determined them can provide a more thorough knowledge and understanding of the specifics of professional football today. **The purpose is** to identify and characterize the models of European professional football competitions in different periods of its development. **Material and methods.** To realize the goals of the work, were used materials from scientific and popular science sources of information, which highlighted important facts about the development of professional football in various European countries, in particular competitive practice in different historical periods, as well as modern sources of information that indicate the peculiarities of the functioning of modern systems of football competitions. The main scientific research method was modeling. **The results.** Key factors in the selection of groups and models were signs of the systematic nature of the phenomenon and prestige and status of specific competitions at different stages of the sport's development. The historical analysis of the development of competitive practice in European professional football made it possible to establish groups of entropic models (multipositional diffuse – 1862–1887); discrete-systematic models (single-positional local – 1888–1953); systematic models (single-positional Pan-European – 1954–1978; hierarchical Pan-European – 1979–2019; hierarchical Pan-European – from 2023 onward); dis-systematic-adapted models (hierarchical Pan-European – 2020–2021); re-systematic models (hierarchical Pan-European – 2022). **Conclusions.** The formation of the competition system in professional football in Europe was a rather long process, influenced by various economic, social, political, and other factors. Today, the resulting comprehensive competition system demonstrates high organizational and economic efficiency, as well as relative stability in the face of negative factors (for example, social crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, intra-organizational conflicts, etc.).

Key words: professional football, Europe, history, competition, model, factor.

Розвиток будь-якого виду спорту завжди тісно пов'язаний з підходами до планування та реалізації змагальної практики, враховуючи різноманітні чинники, що можуть на неї впливати. Змагальна практика у професійному футболі в Європі зазнала значних змін від початку становлення цього виду спорту і до сьогодні. Відстеження ключових компонентів моделей змагань різних історичних періодів та чинників, які їх зумовлювали, може забезпечити більш ґрунтовні знання та розумін-

ня специфіки професійного футболу сьогодення. **Мета** – виявити та охарактеризувати моделі змагань у європейському професійному футболі в різні періоди його розвитку. **Матеріали та методи.** Для реалізації цілей роботи використовувалися матеріали наукових та науково-популярних джерел інформації, які висвітлювали важливі факти щодо розвитку професійного футболу в різних країнах Європи, зокрема змагальної практики в різні історичні періоди, а також сучасні джерела, що вказують на особливості функціонування сучасних систем футбольних змагань. Основним науковим методом дослідження було моделювання. **Результати.** Ключовими чинниками виділення груп та моделей змагань були: системність явища та престижність, статусність конкретних змагань на різних етапах розвитку виду спорту. Історичний аналіз розвитку змагальної практики у європейському професійному футболі дозволив виділити групи моделей: ентропічні (мультипозиційна дифузна – 1862–1887); дискретно-системні моделі: (однопозиційна локальна – 1888–1953); системні моделі (однопозиційна Панєвропейська – 1954–1978; ієрархічна Панєвропейська – 1979–2019; ієрархічна Панєвропейська – від 2023 р.); десистемно-адаптовані моделі (ієрархічна Пан’європейська – 2020–2021); ресистемні моделі (ієрархічна Пан’європейська – 2022). **Висновки.** Формування системи змагань у професійному футболі в Європі було досить тривалим процесом, на який впливали різні економічні, соціальні, політичні та інші фактори. На сьогодні отримана повноцінна система змагань демонструє високу організаційну та економічну ефективність, а також відносну стабільність перед обличчям негативних чинників (до прикладу, соціальних суспільних криз, пандемії COVID-19, внутрішньоорганізаційних конфліктів тощо).

Ключові слова: професійний футбол, Європа, історія, змагання, модель, чинник.

Introduction. Observing the development of modern European football, its significant globalization should be noted [3]. Practice shows that there are more people willing to do this sport, and accordingly increase number of teams that reach the professional level. Football competition today impresses and attracts more and more spectators and fans to the football environment [6]. This contributes to the growth of profits of professional football organizations.

Researchers [12] indicate that the following organizations concentrate the greatest profits: English Premier League (England), Bundesliga (Germany), La Liga (Spain), Serie A (Italy), and Ligue 1 (France). About 60% of the total revenue (as of 2019/20 – €25.2 billion) in European football is received by these organizations [11].

Modern specialists who are engaged in researching football issues focus their attention on many aspects of its development. In particular, issues of the economic spectrum of clubs and leagues are widely covered [4; 8; 15; 18]. Career success factors in European professional football are considered quite widely [13]. Known attention is paid to the discussion of the club system in football, the features of cooperation between clubs and leagues [5; 11] etc.

The content analysis of scientific bases revealed the insufficient attention of specialists regarding the historical issues of the professional football

development. At the same time, the study of historical aspects allows to get a holistic understanding of the process or phenomenon. Therefore, it is also important to focus attention on the factors and key aspects of the evolution of football as a sport, in particular, its professional direction.

In Europe, professional football has come a long development path to the model that today is characterized by high organizational and economic efficiency. It should be noted that its own model of the development of the sport and, accordingly, the model of its competitions characterized each of the periods.

Material & methods. The main materials for the research were data from historical and modern sources regarding the features of competitive practice in professional football in Europe and the factors that determined and determine the specifics of its formation. Information from scientific publications published in the journals Scopus, Web of Science, current data from the Internet and specialized books was taken into account.

The key factor in the selection of manuscripts for processing was the correspondence of their content to the goals formulated for the research. In the vast majority, we paid attention to today’s relevant sources of information (published in the last decade), with the exception of certain fundamental scientific sources.

The methodology of conducting the research provided for the accumulation of relevant theoretical material regarding the research problem, its analysis, and the determination of key facts that allowed identifying and characterizing the model of competition in professional football.

Research methods: analysis and synthesis, historical method, systematic approach, theoretical interpretation and explanation, modeling.

Results and discussion. From the very beginning and throughout its evolution, football has consistently held the position of beloved sporting pursuit in Europe, garnering widespread popularity and appeal [8]. It has developed rather fast in comparison, for example, with golf and tennis. A characteristic feature lies in the fact that the popularity of football contributed to the quick formation of a coherent and coordinated system of competitions. Consequently, this boosted the profitability of football-developing organizations, emphasizing the professional trajectory of its evolution.

It turns out to be interesting and historically significant to trace the stages of the development of this sport in combination with establishing and justifying the functioning models of professional football competitions at each period.

Naturally, the development of any kind of sport is connected with the development of competitive practice. Focusing on the factor of the presence/absence of expressed components of the competition system at certain periods, we distinguished groups of models within professional football: entropic, discrete-systematic, systematic, desystematic-adaptive, and re-systematic.

Considering the organizational and prestigious factors, which involve focusing on key tournaments, we identified specific models.

Analyzing the history of the development of professional football, we tentatively highlight the first stage, which began in 1862 and lasted until 1887.

Football started its development in England at the beginning of the nineteenth century [14]. However, the first recorded fact about his professional direction dates back to 1862 when the first professional football club Notts County was cre-

ated. Notts County was the first football club that paid salaries to players. The year that marked a significant boost in the advancement of professional football was 1885 when the England Football Association officially named football a professional sport [19].

At this stage, football primarily developed in England, although it also saw development in many European and even some Asian countries.

Regarding competitive practices, this period was characterized by the arrangement of several tournaments, primarily in England, which lacked a systematic basis. Thus, in 1867, the Youdan Cup, the first official football tournament was held. Cromwell Cup was held the following year, and then some other competitions. It should be noted that in 1867, there was an attempt to organize a football tournament outside of England, specifically in Argentina. However, only British players took part in this tournament. In 1877–1878, the Welsh Cup was organized with exclusively British teams participating in it.

We observed that the organization of football tournaments during the period 1862–1887 was characterized by spontaneity, lack of thorough planning, and diversity. Therefore, we called the model of competitions available at that time an *Entropic Multipositional Diffuse* (Table 1).

It is also important to highlight that within this model and stage in general, joint tournaments for amateur and professional players were not officially held [19]. The teams hid the professionalism of that time, namely, payments to athletes were made secretly, although everyone knew about it. At the same time, officially, amateur and professional football developed separately. In the 1880s, there were facts of hiring the so-called “football specialists” (professors of football) in teams, which further contributed to the legalization of professional football in England in 1885 [10].

In 1888, the English Football League was created having united 12 professional teams. Following a similar pattern, football leagues later emerged in other European countries. Taking into account the events of this year, we consider the period of 1888–1915 to be the next stage of professional football development.

Table 1

Competition models of European professional football development in 1862–1887

Stage characteristic	Groups	Models	Key tournaments	Features of competition format	Sportsmen in competitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The first professional football club (1862, Notts County); – Holding of the first football tournament (Judan's Cup, Great Britain, 1867) – The first game between the amateur team Old Etonians and a team made up of English workers – Blackburn Olympic, which was victorious for the last one (1883) and attracted the attention to professional football – Legal basis for professional football in England (1885) 	Entropic	Multipositional Diffuse	Youdan Cup (1867) Cromwell Cup (1868, Great Britain) Welsh Cup (1877–1878, Great Britain) ect.	The teams played in 2 rounds: 1st – head-to-head matches (direct elimination of the losing team); 2nd – final (one entered the final automatically randomly, the other two played the semi-finals)	Amateurs and professionals played in various competitions 1880s – the facts of hiring “football specialists” (professors of football)

At this time, in addition to England, this sport was actively developing in Spain, Italy, and even India. Each of these countries started its national championship (India – 1888; Italy – 1898; Hungary – 1901; Spain – 1902). Nonetheless, England retained its status as a leading football nation, being primary in football development [5].

The foundation of national championships started in 1888. Each championship was characterized by clearly defined organization components and competition rules. However, there was a lack of clear international regulation and unification of national organizations with common football goals. Therefore, the model of this stage was also classified as a discrete-systematic model.

Taking into account the organizational and prestigious factors, the model of this period was specified as the *Single-position local Model*. Each national association organizing its championship was characterized by clearly defined interrelated components (frequency of holding matches, number of matches between teams, competition rules, method of determining the winner, etc.), which proves the existence of a complete system. However, there is still no expressed cooperation between national associations regarding the organization of club competitions and unification regarding the formats of their holding, which indicates certain partiality and imperfection in this competition system (Table 2).

It should be noted that there were some attempts to organize pan-European championships, in particular, there was the so-called “Challenge Cup” (1897–1911), which was held by the Austro-Hungarian Empire (only for the teams of Austria, Hungary, and Bohemia). Separate attempts to organize such competitions were also made in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. However, none of them had a systematic nature, only spontaneous attempts to unify football, and there is no reason to consider them significant.

The establishment of Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) – the world governing body of football – in 1904 was important at this stage. It became a landmark event in the history of this sport. Today, FIFA is the largest sports organization in the world. At the beginning of its activity, FIFA paid more attention to the development of football at the national level, rather than at the club level [2].

In the specified period, FIFA did not hold world-level tournaments in club football. Therefore, its influence at that time was significant, but not in the development of professional football. This organization was rather for controlling the unification of football rules and traditions in different countries.

In general, the football development from the first to the second stage was quite rapid. Football competitions were gaining popularity and the

Table 2

Competition models of European professional football development in 1888–1915

Stage characteristic	Groups	Models	Key tournaments	Features of competition format	Sportsmen in competitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Start of the first national championships (England, Spain, Italy, India, etc.). – 1888 – creation of the Professional Football League of England; – 1889 – creation of the Football Alliance of England; – 1892 – The Football League and the Alliance merged; – 1898 – the beginning of the Italian football championship; establishment of the Swiss Super League; – 1897 (until 1911) – the first pan-European tournament – the Challenge Cup; – 1901 – creation of a professional football league in Hungary (Nemzeti Bajnokság); – Establishment of FIFA (1904); – Intensification of professional football development in European countries. – 1921 – the foundation of a professional football league in Italy (Lega Nord – the prototype of the current Serie A); – 1929 – establishment of the Professional Football League of Spain (Primera División, today La Liga); – 1932 – the first season of the French professional league (today Ligue 1) – 1938 – the football tournament in Portugal (Taça de Portugal) was founded; – Attempts to hold pan-European tournaments (1927–1992 – Mitropa Cup; 1930 – the first attempt to open a tournament for European champion clubs, (Switzerland); – Increasing attendance at football tournaments in various countries; – 1949 – a tournament between South American football clubs (it became the starting point for launching similar competitions in Europe) – Increasing the number of countries organizing their football championships 	<p>D I S C R E T E – S Y S T E M A T I C</p>	<p>Single-position local</p>	<p>National championships of countries Mitropa Cup (1927)</p>	<p>1891 – nets were put on the goalposts and penalties were introduced. The teams played two matches against each other (home and away). The team with the best performance was the champion. With the increase in the number of teams, several divisions were formed, considering the level of their skill (using the example of English football). The team draws took place at different levels (divisions, leagues, etc.) of football organizations. The teams played two matches against each other (home and away). The team with the best performance was the champion. 1925 – the offside rule was changed (the number of players to keep the opponent on the field decreased from 3 to 2). Maintaining the format of national tournaments</p>	<p>Professional players took part in their club competitions and received a salary. Increasing the number of professional football players and strengthening their position in football (since 1920). A significant increase in the number of professional football players (as of 1950 – 92 teams in the national championship of England)</p>

number of football players and fans increased significantly from tournament to tournament.

1916–1919 were difficult years for football development on the Europe territory, in particular professional football. The events of the First World War forced the suspension of football life and tournaments [19]. Therefore, we do not highlight competition models in professional football

at this stage, but conditionally mark it as a period of “frozen football”.

Since 1920, football has returned to the European sports arena on a large scale. Its development was being intensified in such countries as Spain and Italy. In particular, in Italy, in 1921, the so-called Northern Football League (Lega Nord) was created, which was the prototype of

the modern Serie A. In Spain, in 1929, Primera Divisió (today La Liga) was organized. In France, the first season of the professional league (today Ligue 1) started in 1932 [17].

In most countries, the football calendar of competitions is expanding. National competitions continue to be a priority for clubs. At the same time, the football community did not stop trying to organize pan-European club competitions. In particular, the Mitropa Cup was organized in 1927 (held until 1992) in Central Europe. It was quite prestigious before the Second World War but lost its popularity after it. In addition, in 1930 there was an attempt to open a tournament for European champion clubs in Switzerland. These competitions received no due recognition at that time [17].

Thus, national competitions continue to be a priority for every football country in the period 1920–1938, which indicates the continued relevance of the National Championships Model, which remains a discrete-systematic.

Further, the Second World War forced the football environment to freeze its activities for the second time. From 1939 to 1945, most tournaments were not held; competitions were mostly organized spontaneously and were not systematic. Therefore, this is the second “stage of frozen football” in the history of professional football.

A new stage in the development of professional football began in 1946. Since then, the number of football events in the world, the football players and teams (in 1950 there were 92 teams in the national championship of England), and the number of fans of the football spectacle has significantly increased [9]. This contributed to the growth of income and the development of the commercial component of football in general. It is worth mentioning that in 1949 there was a tournament between football clubs in South America. It became quite successful both in terms of sports and commercial aspects. This tournament became the starting point for the organization of a similar competition on the territory of Europe later [7; 10].

Some competitions uniting clubs from different European countries were held in the

period 1946–1953. They are the Iberian Cup (1935–2005, a competition between Portuguese and Spanish clubs), and the Mitropa Cup (1927–1992, a competition between Central European clubs). However, a joint major competition that would unite the best clubs in Europe still did not exist.

Taking into account the football events in the competitive arena, we note that the stage of 1946–1953 was also characterized by the same National Championships Model of a discrete-systematic nature.

In the history of European football, 1954 was an important year of establishing the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA). This is an organization that united and continues to unite national European football organizations [6]. From this time, the countdown to the next historical stage in the development of professional football begins.

At the beginning of its existence, UEFA did not seek to unite national associations within the framework of pan-European club tournaments but was rather focused on the development of national team competitions [4; 5]. However, a year later, the idea of uniting the best European football teams in competitions was implemented and approved for the future. It should be noted that, according to historical facts, the message regarding the creation of such a tournament came from the editor of the French sports newspaper *L'Equipe* – Gabriel Ano. UEFA implemented it in 1955 when 16 European football teams played the European Champions Cup for the first time. It was not stipulated that the champions of their national championships should participate. Instead, importance was given to the popularity of the team, which the association nominated for participation [5].

Starting from 1955, another European tournament was founded. It was the Cup of Fairs held under the auspices of FIFA and timed to major fairs, that is, it was not the main event. However, it attracted increasing attention to football as a sport.

Thus, in 1955 two events of the all-European level in club football were introduced to the calendar of competitions. Later, other football

events appeared – Cup Winners’ Cup (1960), Intertoto Cup (1961), UEFA Cup (1971), and Super Cup (since 1972) [2]. All these competitions include a different number of teams, which grows from year to year, and accordingly differ in the format of the event, which changes quite often. For example, the number of teams in the European Champions Cup increased from 16 (1955) to 32 (1967), which led to an increase in the number of competition rounds (from 4 to 6), where teams played two matches for the right to continue participation in the tournament.

The presence of new important pan-European level tournaments, which are becoming more prestigious for European football teams along with national championships, give grounds to select a new competition model for the 1954–1978 stage – *Single-position Pan-European* (Table 3).

Considering a clear definition of the competition components, creating a single competition calendar, and competition organization agreement between the national associations of

European football under the patronage of FIFA/UEFA, it is possible to assert the existence of a competition system for this historical stage of football development. In addition, important adjustments were made to the competition rules during this period; they were still unified for all participants of European tournaments. Thus, in 1965, a rule clause was introduced regarding the possible substitution of players, first injured, and later for any reason [13]. In the 1965/66 season, an additional playoff round was introduced to the draw system in the event of equality of the teams’ results in the main rounds of the tournament (abolished in the 1969/1970 season).

In 1965, the “away goals” rule was introduced in the first two rounds (from the following season in all rounds, in which the team that scored more goals away from home gained the advantage).

Bringing club football to the pan-European level contributed to closer cooperation between national associations, and significantly increased the popularity of the sport, and, as a result, the profitability of organizations. The

Table 3

Competition models of European professional football development in 1954–1978

Stage characteristic	Groups	Models	Key tournaments	Features of competition format	Sportsmen in competitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Establishment of UEFA (1954); – The start of the first all-European tournament of the best national football clubs (1955); – 1963 – establishment of the Bundesliga (Germany) 	S Y S T E M A T I C	Single-position Pan-European	European Champions Cup (since 1955) Cup of fairs (1955–1971) Cup Winners’ Cup (1960) Intertoto Cup (1961) UEFA Cup (since 1971) Super Bowl (since 1972)	Constant increase in the number of teams (from 16 to 33), and changes in the competition format (from 4 to 6 rounds) in the Champions Cup; 1965 – introduction of player substitutions on the field; Implementation of the rule of drawing according to the playoff system provided the result is equal in the rounds (abolished in the 1969/70 season); 1965 – the “away goals” rule was introduced in the first two rounds (from the following season in all rounds, with the advantage going to the team that scored more goals away from home)	The increase in the value of the best professional football players’ contracts. The growth of competitive loads on football players

status of a professional footballer was also growing. The contracts of the best players were increasing in value. At the same time, the increase in the number of starts in the calendar of football competitions leads to an increase in the load on players, a decrease in the time for preparation, and an increase in the volume of competitive activities.

The next stage, which stands out in the history of professional football development lasts from 1979 to 1990. Its beginning is marked by the introduction of the UEFA coefficient system, which allows determining the rating of national associations and, accordingly, their clubs at the pan-European level. Within this UEFA system, there are three groups of coefficients: the coefficient of national teams, the association coefficient, and the club coefficient.

The association coefficient is used to determine the participants of key European football tournaments: the European Champions Cup (Champions League now), the UEFA Cup (Europa League now), etc. In turn, the club coefficient is used to seed teams in FIFA and UEFA competitions [6]. The creation and use of this coefficients system adjust the competition system. National associations receive quotas for the participation of their clubs in these and other tournaments. In addition, the round from which a team starts to take part in the tournament is determined.

It should be noted that the grid of participants of various rounds changed quite often. However, the scheme of determining the teams for participation was generally preserved.

The appearance of this component within the football competitions system indicates the beginning of the functioning of a new model of competitions – *Hierarchical Pan-European*. It is determined by the presence of all European tournaments that have a clear hierarchy, which is also marked by tournament categories (the European Champions Cup – a tournament of the first category, the UEFA Cup – a tournament of the second category, etc.). In 1979, a clear system of tournament participant formation was created. This also indicates a hierarchy in the system of football competitions (Table 4).

As for the competition format, it did not undergo significant changes in the 1970s and 1980s. There was a significant number of conflict situations in the football arena during this period. For example, mass fights started by fans of English clubs resulted in the disqualification of all English football teams from European competitions for 5 seasons (1985/86 – 1989/90) after the tragic death of people at a match between the Italian “Juventus” and the English “Liverpool” [6].

The next stage in the development of football began in 1991 and continued, in our opinion, until 2019. The format of the competition at this time underwent significant changes. Since 1991, a group round of competitions has been introduced into the structure of the Champions League in particular (before the Europa League in 2004). After the first and second qualifying rounds, the teams were divided into groups where they competed in a round-robin format (two games with each of the other teams in the group). The leaders of the two groups competed in the final round.

In addition, during 1990–2019, the competition format of European tournaments underwent constant updates. The number of rounds changed (for example, in 1992/93, a preliminary round was held for the teams of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia), the number of groups in the group round (in 1994/95 – increased to 4, 1997/98 – to 6; 1999/2000 – up to 8); the specifics of the draws (for example, in 1994, an additional semi-final was played once between the two best teams of groups A and B for reaching the finals).

In the 1994/95 season, the number of points for a victory was increased (from 2 to 3), which, to a large extent, had a significant impact on determining the performance of teams in tournaments.

This stage is marked by a multitude of changes that significantly impacted the dynamics of competition within the tournament. In 1996, the limit on the legionnaires’ number in teams was lifted (the Bosman case), which opened opportunities for clubs to sign contracts with a larger number of desired players. In addition, the significant expansion of UEFA (increasing the number of member associations) led to an increase in the

Table 4

Competition models of European professional football development in 1979–2019

Stage characteristic	Groups	Models	Key tournaments	Features of competition format	Sportsmen in competitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Implementation of the UEFA coefficient system for national associations and their clubs; – Dynamic growth in the number of football tournament fans and media interest; – 1985/86 – 1989/90 – English teams were disqualified from European tournaments; – Continuous updating of key tournament formats; – Constant growth of the number of national associations in the structure of UEFA; – Combining the Cup Winners’ Cup and the UEFA Cup into one tournament under the name of the last one (1999); – Scandals in professional football due to fixed matches; – 2014/15 – UEFA required all national associations and their clubs to comply with Financial Fair Play rules to participate in key European competitions. 	S Y S T E M A T I C	Hierarchical Pan-European	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> European Champions Cup UEFA Cup (1972) Cup Winners’ Cup Super Bowl Intertoto Cup UEFA Champions League (since 1992) Cup Winners’ Cup (until 1999) UEFA Cup (since 2009 – Europa League) Super Bowl World Club Championship (2000) Intertoto Cup (until 2008) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The tournament format undergoes minor changes concerning the number of participating teams. Changes in (increases/decreases) the number of qualifying rounds 1991 – the group stage of the Champions League was introduced (before the UEFA Cup in the 2004/2005 season); The presence of previous rounds for teams that had a lower rating; 1994/95 – increased points for a victory from 2 to 3 1997 – an increase in the groups of the group round of tournaments. 2009 – the so-called “way of champions” and “main way” of passing through tournament rounds were introduced to the format. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The increase in the value of the best professional football players’ contracts. The growth of competitive loads on football players. 1996 – the limit on the number of legionnaires in European clubs was lifted After 1999, the number of teams in the Europa League increased significantly (more than 140–160 teams), which increased the competition in these tournaments

number of participants in the Europa League (to 140, and later to 160 teams), which also had an impact on strengthening competition in these tournaments [9].

There were also characteristic changes in the competition format in the 2009/10 season when two conditional categories of participants were introduced to the scheme of participation in the Champions League (in 2018/19 – Europa League moving along the “champion’s way” and the “main way”. This approach allowed for differentiating the champion participants of their championships and those who took other places in their home tournaments into two groups. At the same time, before the group round, these two groups of teams did not meet each other.

In general, this stage is characterized by the greatest dynamics in the format of holding key European tournaments with previous historical stages. In our opinion, this is primarily due to closer cooperation between UEFA and mass media. In many aspects, it is the latter that set the requirement for the competition format to optimize this process as much as possible and make it convenient in terms of television. Because of the high expenses spent on television contracts, UEFA is forced to listen to television companies and make adjustments beneficial to them [1].

Since 1991, European club football has undergone significant changes in the format of holding tournaments, but the list of key ones has not changed significantly. The leading compe-

tion remained the European Champions Cup (today's Champions League), and the UEFA Cup (today's Europa League), which in 1999 was merged with the Winners' Cup. In 2000, the World Club Championship was also organized under the auspices of FIFA. Thus, in our opinion, the systematic tournament-hierarchical model of competitions continued to function in professional football.

A rather difficult stage of development in professional sports in general and professional football in particular fell in 2020–2021 (Table 5). This short stage in the functioning of sports took place under the influence of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic [1; 16]. It did not bypass the football environment, but still, these conditions did not have such a powerful impact on football tournaments. For instance, all matches of the Champions League and Europa League took place in full. The impact of the pandemic has been expressed in the increase in the duration of tournaments (for example, this season's Champions League competition lasted a year and two months), the reduction of the number of matches played between teams from two to one (on a neutral field) and the limitation of attendance of matches by spectators. However, it

entailed significant financial losses. A significant drop in revenues (from ticket sales, sponsors, and mass media) and total financial losses of professional football organizations (about \$7.91 billion) were tracked [8].

To avoid a large number of people in the maintenance of tournaments in the 2020/21 season, football used the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system in matches, starting from the 1/16 finals of the tournament.

In general, some other changes were also implemented this season. In 2021, UEFA approved the holding of the third European tournament – the Conference League (third level), which reduced the load on the Europa League and, accordingly, affected the change in the format of the last one. In particular, the participants in the lower part of the rating get from this time to the Conference League competition.

The competition model for this stage is characterized as stable and *Tournament-Hierarchical*. However, the above-defined negative impacts and their consequences indicate its transition to the group of desystematic-adaptive models.

Starting from 2022, the football world is gradually returning to the top of its development

Table 5

Competition models of European professional football development in 2020–2021

Stage characteristic	Groups	Models	Key tournaments	Features of competition format	Sportsmen in competitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 2021 – the organization of the third major European tournament, which included the clubs that occupied the lower part of the UEFA rating; – Tournaments are taking place in full despite the pandemic. However, they are stretched over time and there are restrictions on the attendance of matches; – Significant drop in income (from ticket sales, sponsors, mass media) and financial losses of professional football organizations (about \$7.91 billion). 	DIS-SYSTEMATIC-ADAPTED	Tournament-Hierarchical Model	UEFA Champions League League of Europe Conference League (from 2021) Super Bowl World Club Championship	2021 – the rule of “away goals” and the introduction of extra time (30 min) and penalties in case of a draw were abolished. The tournaments were transferred to the format of one-match meetings on a neutral field. A change in the format of the Europa League due to the appearance of a new tournament and, accordingly, a decrease in the number of teams. The start of the application of the video assistant referee (VAR) system in matches, starting from the 1/16 finals of the tournament.	2% increase in player salaries (up to \$13.45 billion)

(Table 6). The end of the pandemic contributed to the restoration of the competitions calendar and the format of their holding, the return of spectators to the stands of the football spectacle, and, accordingly, income from the main articles (sponsors, mass media, etc.) [16]. The key tournaments listed above remain, and the Super Cup and the Club World Cup have been added.

Because the list of competitions and their format remains following the previous stage, the competition model is preserved (*Tournament-Hierarchical*). Based on the processes that have influenced the internal content of the model (the gradual restoration of all processes within the competitive practice), we classified this competition model as re-systematic.

Since 2023 European professional football has actually completely restored the system of competitions, and therefore returned to the systematic tournament-hierarchical model of functioning. This competition model shows

high organizational and economic efficiency in the conditions created in the leading football countries of Europe.

In the 2024/25 season, there is a significant increase (over 20%) in the overall prize fund for the major European competitions compared to the 2023/24 season. The total prize funds for these tournaments are as follows:

- Champions League: €2.467 billion;
- Europa League: €565 million;
- Conference League: €235 million.

The key tournaments remain the ones listed above, with the addition of the UEFA Super Cup and the Club World Cup. At the same time, the format of the three main football competitions has changed. Specifically, a “Swiss system” has been introduced, replacing the group stage with a single league. In the current season, 36 teams participate in the main competitions of all tournaments. Each team plays six to eight matches against different opponents (six

Table 6

Competition models of European professional football development in 2022

Stage	Stage characteristic	Groups	Models	Key tournaments	Features of competition format	Sportsmen in competitions
2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Return of spectators to the stands – Gradual growth of football organizations’ income 	RE SYSTEMATIC	Tournament-Hierarchical Model	UEFA Champions League League of Europe Conference League (from 2021) Super Bowl World Club Championship	Tournaments resume the dates and format of holding (two matches between teams); Champions League – only 78 teams; main tournament: group round – 32 teams; playoffs – 16 teams. Europa League – only 57 teams; main tournament: group round – 32 teams divided into 8 groups; head-to-head matches – 16 teams (2nd and 3rd places in groups); playoffs – 16 teams (first numbers of groups + champions of head-to-head matches) League of conferences – a total of 184 teams; main tournament: group round – 32 teams divided into 8 groups; head-to-head matches – 16 teams (2nd and 3rd places in groups); playoffs – 16 teams (first numbers of groups + champions of head-to-head matches)	The growth of the prize fund of tournaments (as of 2023 Champions League – \$92.02 million; Europa League – \$24.83 million; Conference League – \$15.96 million)

in the Conference League, eight in the others), determined by a draw and rankings.

Until 2022, 16 teams advanced to the knockout stage. Now, the top eight automatically progress to this round, while teams finishing in 9th–24th places play additional matches to secure their spot in the knockout round. Officials believe that changing the competition format and unifying it across all three tournaments will allow more teams to have a chance to compete, increase competition and intrigue, and thus enhance the interest of fans, sponsors, and broadcasters. This, in turn, will contribute to growing UEFA's revenues.

However, there are certain risks:

1. The gap between clubs from different national associations may widen, as top clubs will have the opportunity to play more matches and therefore generate more revenue.

2. An increase in the number of matches could overload the calendar, negatively impacting the physical well-being of the athletes.

Nevertheless, such “experiments” by UEFA are justified and even necessary, as there is an increasing risk of the creation of a Super League, and the chances of it being formed are growing.

Meanwhile, football continues to develop within the framework of the *Tournament-hierarchical systematic* competition model, which remains economically beneficial for European.

The development of society, its political, social and economic spheres, mutual integration and cooperation between countries had a significant impact on the formation and development of European professional football.

In certain periods, respectively, under the influence of the mentioned factors, competition models were formed, which had their own characteristic features and showed tendencies towards constant improvement. Based on two factors – the presence/absence of the phenomenon's systematicity and the organizational-prestige factor (key competitions), we identified the following groups and within them the models themselves. Including: entropic: multipositional diffuse model – 1862–1887; discrete-systematic: model of national championships – 1888–1915,

1920–1938, 1946–1953; systematic: model of pan-European tournaments – 1954–1978; tournament-hierarchical model – 1979–2019, since second half of 2023; dis-systematic-adapted: tournament-hierarchical – 2020–2021; re-systematic: tournament-hierarchical – 2022; systematic: tournament-hierarchical – since 2023.

Today, we received a complete competition system that demonstrates high organizational and economic efficiency, as well as relative stability in the face of negative factors (for example, the COVID pandemic, etc.).

Conclusions. The formation of the competition system in professional football in Europe was a rather long process, influenced by various economic, social, political, and other factors. Today, the resulting comprehensive competition system demonstrates high organizational and economic efficiency, as well as relative stability in the face of negative factors (for example, social crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, intra-organizational conflicts, etc.).

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