



# What makes a 'super club'? ... And are these the world's biggest?

By Roger Pielke Jr.

This edition of the Global Sports Salaries Survey has considered the salaries and social media followings of the clubs that comprise the world's major sports leagues, has considered success on the field of play and analysed the extent to which money, glory and popularity intersect. Can we use this same data to identify the world's "biggest" sports teams? Sure we can, at least to identify some of them, as laid out in the accompanying table.

But first let's point out what is obvious but often unrecognized: any league table is a function of the variables chosen to produce the rankings in the first place. On the field, court or pitch this works because we agree to the rules before the competition begins. Can we agree on the criteria used here, the primary ranking metric being 'fans' / 'followers' on social media? And have the data been collected accurately and fairly?

We could, of course, use other metrics, like total club revenues, or international broadcast audience, or media mentions. Using social media popularity has the advantage of expressing a truly global reach. This method of ranking has Barcelona at No1 and Real Madrid at No2, each

with almost 100 million social media fans. Sure, the fact that the Chennai Super Kings of the IPL appears as the 17th biggest team in the world is probably due to the fact that India has a population of 1.25 billion people. At the same time, Manchester United, 3rd on the list, has a social media following that is larger than the entire population of the United Kingdom; de facto we know their fanbase must be widespread.

Accepting there is some validity to ranking by social media, we may infer from the table:

**1:** Football (soccer) is the only truly global game, especially European football. And if there is a "global league" it is probably the UEFA Champions League. The 'Big 5' European football leagues each have clubs represented in the league table. The EPL, which might stake a claim to be the world's "biggest" league, can only claim so because of its biggest clubs, with the others as enablers of that global success.

**2:** Basketball is not a challenger to football in terms of the world's biggest global game, but it does

have a claim to being a truly global sport. The presence of the Lakers, Bulls, Heat and Celtics on this list indicate the global appeal of the NBA, a fact supported by the presence of some 100 non-US players from dozens of countries on NBA rosters at the start of the 2014 season.

**3:** Baseball has just one team on the list. The Yankees are arguably the only MLB team with a genuine global profile, in a sport played seriously mainly in North America, and pockets of Asia, and Central and South America.

**4:** Like baseball, cricket is far from being one of the world's biggest sports, despite the fact that IPL has four teams here. Obviously that is function the popularity of short-form cricket in India, but it does speak to the considerable potential for this (or similar) forms of cricket to command a large regional audience.

**5:** There are two NFL teams, the Cowboys and Patriots. One might argue that they did well to get onto the list at all given that virtually nobody outside the USA, Canada and Mexico watches NFL. A large majority of its total global audience is within the

USA's borders. In some respects, the Dallas Cowboys might be considered the US version of the Chennai Super Kings. However, the overwhelming presence of the NFL and its annual Super Bowl makes the NFL, at least for one week a year, more than just a niche domestic league.

So what else defines a super club, aside from aggregate 'popularity'? We could consider success in terms of trophies and titles, money in the coffers or fans through the turnstiles, all of which are fairly well correlated. Most of the teams on the list fare well in all three.

A more sophisticated version of this list might attempt to screen for the global dispersion of social media followings. This might have the effect of lowering the ranking of clubs in 'purely domestic' leagues like the NFL and IPL where the main interest is at home, and raising up the next tier of NBA and 'Big 5' football clubs.

But maybe the best indication might be to count club jerseys that you see on kids around the world. I'm lucky because I have a job that takes me around the world. And by the kid-jersey metric, I'd say this league table

of the world's "biggest" clubs is not so far off.

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TEAM	SUPER CLUB' RANK	SOCIAL 'FANS' TOTAL (M)	SPORT	LEAGUE	NATION	WAGE RANK GSSS 2015	AVG CROWD PER GAME
Barcelona	1	97		La Liga		4	71,929
Real Madrid	2	96		La Liga		2	71,391
Manchester United	3	69		EPL		5	75,206
Chelsea	4	47		EPL		7	41,482
Arsenal	5	38		EPL		9	60,013
Bayern Munich	6	30		Bundesliga		6	71,000
Liverpool	7	29		EPL		11	44,671
Milan	8	26		Serie A		31	39,874
LA Lakers	9	25		NBA		21	18,738
Manchester City	10	21		EPL		3	47,103
Paris Saint-Germain	11	20		Ligue 1		1	45,420
Chicago Bulls	12	19		NBA		19	21,344
Miami Heat	13	19		NBA		18	19,713
Juventus	14	19		Serie A		16	38,328
Borussia Dortmund	15	14		Bundesliga		33	80,297
Atletico Madrid	16	12		La Liga		37	46,376
Chennai Super Kings	17	12		IPL		27	27,000
Kolkata Knight Riders	18	12		IPL		30	25,143
Boston Celtics	19	10		NBA		22	17,594
New York Yankees	20	10		MLB		8	41,995
Mumbai Indians	21	10		IPL		28	26,714
Dallas Cowboys	22	9		NFL		175	90,070
Kings XI Punjab	23	8		IPL		32	25,000
Tottenham	24	8		EPL		20	35,808
New England Patriots	25	7		NFL		156	68,756