What Is Your Fair Share of What Someone Else Has Earned?

At ten, I scanned the soccer field for my teammate—deep blue jersey, number 17—but he was gone. A standout player, he vanished because his family couldn't afford the travel fees. Months later, a less skilled player with wealthier parents took his spot. That moment forced me to question fairness: not who worked hardest, but who got to play.

A "fair share" of what someone else has earned isn't their trophy or paycheck. It's the chance to compete on an equal starting line, unblocked by money or circumstance. Fairness demands access to opportunity, not a slice of another's reward.

I. What Does "Earning" Mean?

In a meritocratic ideal, effort equals reward: train hard, play well, earn your spot. Yet American youth soccer often rewards wealth over talent. Club fees and tournaments cost families $883 annually on average, pricing out low-income players (Aspen Institute, 2023). Talented kids go unseen because scouts don't visit their fields.

John Rawls' framework in *A Theory of Justice* (1971, Chapter II, Section 13) argues inequalities are fair only if they benefit the least advantaged. His "difference principle" suggests that if systemic barriers—like soccer's pay-to-play model—prevent competition, the winner's "earnings" reflect luck, not merit. Robert Nozick's framework in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (1974, Chapter 7) counters that fairness means respecting individual earnings without interference, viewing redistribution as unjust. I align with Rawls: if access is unequal, as when wealth buys spots on elite teams, "earning" becomes privilege, not effort. Rawls' framework prioritizes enabling competition for all, ensuring talent, not wealth, determines outcomes. Nozick, however, would argue that redistributing opportunities (e.g., forcing teams to fund poorer players) infringes on the freedom of those who've earned their spots. Yet, without access, "earnings" reward systemic bias, not merit alone. Michael Sandel's framework in *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* (2009, Chapter 6) adds that fairness depends on moral context, supporting my view that access shapes merit. Without a chance to compete, are rewards truly earned, or do we owe others the opportunity to try?

II. Widening the Field

Last summer in Amsterdam, I trained at Ajax's de Toekomst with players from Brazil, Nigeria, and local Dutch communities. Their skill proved talent thrives when given a chance. Dean, a

South African from Young Bafana, dazzled with precise strikes, yet scouts rarely reach his hometown—not for lack of talent, but due to geography. In 2023, only 24.1% of U.S. kids from households earning under $25,000 played soccer regularly, compared to 40.2% from homes over $100,000 (Aspen Institute, 2023), hiding players like Dean.

Inspired by Football Beyond Borders, I founded Common Pitch, a platform connecting under-resourced players with coaches and scouts. Last month, we shared a rural Brazilian player's goal with a scout; he's now trialing at Grêmio. A girl from rural India recently joined a local academy after we shared her defensive highlights. Since launching, Common Pitch has connected 50+ players from underserved regions to scouts, with 10 securing trials. By sharing performance data online, we're democratizing exposure, ensuring talent, not wealth, earns recognition. My vision is a community-backed network of clubs, unlike elite groups like City Football Group, providing training guides and video analysis to level the field. A fair share is the chance to compete, not a cut of someone else's medal.

III. Fairness as Duty: A Military Lens

My aspiration to attend West Point and serve as a U.S. military officer frames fairness as duty, not dollars. In the military, no soldier succeeds alone—teams thrive through shared training and tools. A soldier without proper gear or preparation weakens the unit, just as a soccer player without boots or coaching weakens the team. Immanuel Kant's framework in *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785, Section I) emphasizes doing right over personal gain. Fairness means ensuring everyone has the means to contribute—boots for players, training for soldiers—not taking another's rank or trophy. In military terms, my "fair share" isn't another's rank but the training to earn my own, mirroring soccer's need for open fields to compete.

IV. Counterargument: Redistribution as Fairness

Some argue a fair share means redistributing earnings, like through taxes or affirmative action, to balance inequalities. In soccer, this might mean giving my teammate's spot to a less skilled player for "equity." Peter Singer's framework in *Practical Ethics* (2011, Chapter 8) supports this, arguing redistribution maximizes collective well-being. Singer might argue that redistributing soccer spots or wealth ensures more players benefit, maximizing societal good. However, this overlooks the injustice of barring talent due to cost, as seen in my teammate's exclusion. Access, not redistribution, addresses the root unfairness without penalizing earned success. Egalitarians could claim equal outcomes ensure fairness. But handing out spots or earnings punishes success and ignores the root issue: my teammate left not for lack of skill, but because he couldn't afford to stay. Thomas Piketty's framework in *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2014, Chapters 7–8) shows wealth compounds advantages—like elite coaching or tech access (43% of U.S. households under $30,000 lack broadband, Pew Research Center, 2021)—but redistribution only patches gaps. True fairness lies in access to training and scouts, not rigging the score.

V. The Starting Line Matters

We often judge fairness at the finish line: who won, who earned what. But if one runner starts 30 meters back, the result reflects the setup, not effort. In soccer, wealth buys private coaches and travel teams, advantages Piketty shows widen over generations. My fair share isn't another's trophy or rank—it's my chance to earn my own, free from barriers others dodge. I think of my teammate's empty spot. His talent deserved better.

Through Common Pitch, I'm building open fields. We recently connected a Kenyan player with a local coach, sparking his first trial. My West Point goal reflects this: fairness means equipping everyone to contribute. My fair share of another's earnings is nothing—I claim only the right to compete, unhindered by fences others never face. Fairness isn't what you take; it's the starting line you build.

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