

Stadium Safety Management in England

Chris Whalley, Senior Manager, Stadia Safety and Security at The Football Association, comments on the transformation that has occurred in terms of stadium safety in England. In particular, he highlights how each football club now takes responsibility for the safety of all spectators entering its stadium.

English Premier League matches are broadcast all over the world. In all continents,



those fans with an interest in developments off the pitch as well as on it will have noticed the splendid all-seated stadia, the lack of pitch perimeter and segregation fences and, generally, a positive atmosphere among supporters inside the

stadia.

But it hasn't always been like this.

Just three decades ago, English football was still blighted by the problems of supporter violence, old stadia and what we can now recognise as a lack of any safety management culture within the stadia. Two major stadium disasters in the 1980's and a Government-led review of stadium safety brought about a programme of change which has seen the gradual transformation of English stadia and the introduction of a new system of stadium safety management.

Before examining these changes in more detail, it is helpful to look at some of the problems that led to the occurrence of these major stadium disasters.

Throughout the 1970's and 1980's, fighting between rival supporter groups was commonplace in English football stadia. From the early beginnings of football up to



the late 1960's there had been no separation of supporters in English football stadia – home and away supporters could enter any part of the stadium and generally they would stand side by side to watch the match. However, this friendly rivalry gradually turned more hostile and, after a young supporter was stabbed to death at a Second Division match in 1974,

segregation fences and separate sections for home and away supporters were introduced into English football stadia.

To prevent fans invading the pitch, steel fences were introduced at the front of the standing areas which were usually located behind each goal.



Now English stadia started to resemble prison camps – the spectator areas were literally designed to retain supporters within that area of the stadium.

The unfriendly facilities of the stadium environment and the fear of becoming caught up in violence drastically reduced the number of people attending matches. This, in turn, meant much less income for the football clubs – in those days there was little in the way of commercial, marketing or broadcasting revenue, so supporter attendances at the stadium were the main source of income for a football club. Also, the vast majority of the football clubs owned their stadium or held it on a long lease, meaning that they were responsible for the maintenance and improvement of the stadium. Reducing attendances meant that there was less money available for such purposes.

In 1985 a fire broke out during a match at the stadium of Bradford City FC, then in the Third Division.



The fire is believed to have been started by a spectator innocently dropping a lighted cigarette or match onto the wooden boards that supported the seats in the Main Stand. The cigarette or match fell through the boards into the void underneath the stand and set fire to a large amount of rubbish that had accumulated there over the

years. The fire quickly took hold and spread throughout the stand, which had to be evacuated. Most people managed to escape by moving forwards onto the concrete standing paddock in front of the seated stand and then onto the pitch. However, some people tried to leave by the exit gates at the back of the stand which were locked and unmanned. Those people were probably then trapped between the fire and the locked exit gates and were most likely overcome by the fumes from the fire. 56 persons perished in this disaster.

In 1989 a further tragedy occurred at Hillsborough Stadium in Sheffield.

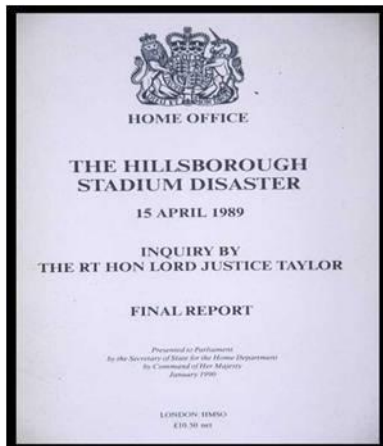


An exit gate was opened to relieve a large crush that had developed outside the turnstiles at one end of the stadium.



However, this then resulted in uncontrolled access to certain sections behind the goal. These sections were compartmentalised by radial barriers on either side and by a steel perimeter fence at the front.

Serious crushing occurred within these sections and 96 persons died; the barriers and the perimeter fence prevented any sideways or forward movement to escape the crush.



These two disasters highlighted various deficiencies in stadium safety and the management of spectators. The Government set up an inquiry and the report of that inquiry, by Lord Justice Taylor and published in January 1990, set out 76 recommendations for change.

The Taylor Report has become a watershed for English football; the transformation that we can see today is largely due to that report and its detailed review of all aspects of stadium safety.

Most, if not all, of the Taylor Report recommendations were incorporated into a revised version of the Government's Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds. Known more familiarly as the Green Guide (due to the colour of its cover), this has become the safety "bible" in the UK, setting out guidance on all aspects of stadium safety.

The Fifth Edition, published in 2008, includes guidance on every technical aspect of safety in sports stadia, with particular relevance to football stadia. There are separate chapters on stewarding, fire safety and first aid and medical provision.



Implementation of this guidance has been made obligatory for professional football in England, as it is a prime requirement of each club's stadium safety certificate (issued and monitored by the local government authority) that the stadium must comply with all aspects of the Green Guide.

The local authority is responsible for ensuring that the stadium complies with the guidance laid down in the "Green Guide" and has to carry out regular inspections of the stadium. The local authority also chairs a Safety Advisory Group, comprising club officials and representatives of the police, fire and ambulance services, which meets on a regular (usually monthly) basis. The Safety Advisory Group can also be called together at short notice to consider any issue arising out of a recent match or any special measures that are proposed for a forthcoming match.

As part of the safety certificate, each club is required to have:

- A designated Safety Officer, responsible for the safety management operation at the stadium on match days;
- Stewards trained to a nationally-recognised standard;
- A computerised turnstile counting system, recording each spectator admission through every turnstile and immediately registering same on a display monitor in the stadium control room. Through this method, the Safety Officer can see at any moment the exact number of spectators in each area of the ground. An alarm may sound on the monitor when an area reaches a specified percentage of its allowed capacity.
- Closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras covering key areas of the ground;
- A stadium control room with radio communications links to steward supervisors and police, CCTV display monitors, access to the public address system and a display monitor linked to the computerised turnstile counting system.

If the local authority is not entirely satisfied with the efficiency of any of the above items, it may reduce the capacity of the whole stadium or specific areas of the stadium accordingly.

In 1991 the Government also appointed a new body, the Football Licensing Authority (FLA), to oversee stadium safety in England and Wales, to monitor local authorities' oversight of spectator safety at international, Premiership and Football League grounds and for ensuring through a system of licensing that the grounds of clubs in the top two divisions became all seated. In 2011 the Sports Grounds Safety Authority (SGSA) was established to build on the success of the Football Licensing Authority and the critical role it had played in transforming spectator safety at football grounds in the UK over the last 20 years. The SGSA has a number of regional inspectors who are responsible for liaising with the clubs / local authorities in their area. The inspectors attend Safety Advisory Group meetings of the clubs in their area and visit matches at these clubs on a regular basis. The FLA / SGSA has also taken on responsibility for subsequent revisions of the Green Guide.

A principal recommendation of the Taylor Report was the move towards all-seated stadia and the Government duly passed legislation requiring all clubs in the top two divisions to play matches before spectators in seated accommodation only. This heralded a massive building and development programme in the UK.

As a general rule of thumb, it is considered that installing seats on a standing terrace would probably reduce the spectator capacity by half. So clubs now had to consider how best to change their standing areas into seats, without significant reduction of

their stadium capacity. In most cases, this could only be achieved by demolishing the old standing terrace and building a new seated stand. Some clubs decided to do this on their existing stadium site; others opted to sell their existing stadium (usually for housing development) and to build a new stadium elsewhere in the city.

In the two decades since publication of the Taylor Report, more than 30 new stadia have been built in England, along with some 200 new grandstands which have been built on existing stadium sites.

But if football clubs were suffering financially from falling attendances, how could they afford to fund such an extensive programme of stadium development?

In the first instance the UK Government lent a hand. In discussion with the football pools companies, the Government reduced the betting tax that it levied on the football pools. Monies accruing from this betting tax reduction were channelled into a special Trust Fund which clubs could draw on as pump-priming funding for any stadium development. Then, in 1992 the Premier League was formed and a link-up with Sky TV led to a significant increase in broadcasting revenue for the major football clubs in England.

But the re-development of stadia provided other commercial opportunities – it gave clubs not only the chance to provide improved facilities for spectators, but also to incorporate additional restaurant and hospitality facilities and even conference facilities, enabling the stadium to be used on more than just match days. Some stadia have also marketed the naming rights of the stadium itself or of the individual stands.

There are now some fabulous stadia in England, including the new Wembley Stadium (90,000 seats), Manchester United's Old Trafford (78,000 seats) and Arsenal's Emirates Stadium (60,000 seats).



But this programme of stadium development has not just affected the top of the game; it has extended throughout the 92 clubs in all four divisions of the country's major leagues: 69 clubs now have an all-seated stadium and 48 of those have a stadium with more than 20,000 seats.

But having stadia with excellent facilities is only one part of the equation; an even more important requirement is the ability to manage the safety of all spectators entering the stadia.

The two disasters in the 1980's and the ensuing Taylor Report highlighted the need for the football club to take responsibility for the safety management of its stadium. Prior to the Taylor Report, the police officers present in the stadium would have provided the only response to any incident; there were no trained stewards in those days and no-one at the football club with responsibility for stadium safety on match days. But all that now has changed. The Green Guide places the responsibility for safety on the stadium management.

As part of this new responsibility, every football club in the top four divisions in England has appointed a stadium safety officer and he or she is responsible for the safety of all spectators entering the stadium. To assist in this regard, the safety officer will also take responsibility for the recruitment and training of stewards; he/she will liaise with the local police and the local certifying authority and will also be responsible for ensuring that the stadium complies with UK safety legislation and the Green Guide.

In a lot of cases, the safety officer is a former police officer who may have been a football match police commander; but not in every case – there are safety officers from different backgrounds. The safety officers at the 92 clubs in England and Wales have formed their own association, called the Football Safety Officers' Association (FSOA), to share and promote best practice and this has now expanded to include safety officers from other sports and other countries. The FSOA has its own website (www.fsoa.org.uk) which has useful contact details and documents, a forum for exchange of views and a secure section for FSOA members to record statistics from their home matches, which can then be viewed by other FSOA members. The information entered about the conduct of the visiting supporters is particularly useful for other clubs when preparing their risk assessment for a match against that visiting team.

Football clubs are responsible for the training of their stewards, but The Football Association, Premier League and Football League, in conjunction with the FSOA and the SGSA, have since 1996 produced a stewards' training package to assist the clubs in the delivery of the training. In 2010 a new, multi-media training package entitled "On The Ball" was produced, including film footage from football matches.

In order to satisfy the requirements of both the stadium safety certificate and the Green Guide, stewards have to have, or be working towards, the Level 2 NVQ in spectator safety. The safety officer will arrange for all stewards at the stadium to be trained to that level and he/she will also oversee an assessment programme to ensure that the stewards can demonstrate competence in respect of the training that they have received.

The Green Guide states that the basic duties of stewards should be to enforce the management's safety policy, the requirements of the safety certificate and all ground regulations. The Green Guide lists 10 basic duties for stewards:

- a) to understand their general responsibilities towards the health and safety and welfare of all spectators, other stewards, ground staff and themselves;

- b) to carry out safety checks;



- c) to control or direct spectators who are entering or leaving the ground, to help achieve an even flow of people to and from the viewing areas;



- d) to assist in the safe operation of the ground, not to view the activity taking place;

- e) to staff entrances, exits and other strategic points; for example, segregation, perimeter and exit doors or gates which are not continuously secured in the open position while the ground is in use;



- f) to recognise crowd conditions so as to ensure the safe dispersal of spectators and the prevention of overcrowding, particularly on terraces or viewing slopes;

- g) to assist the emergency services as required;

- h) to provide basic emergency first aid;

- i) to respond to emergencies (such as the early stages of a fire); to raise the alarm and take the necessary immediate action;

- j) to undertake specific duties in an emergency or as directed by the safety officer or the appropriate emergency service officer.

On match days the safety officer will brief the stewards ahead of the game on issues relating to that event. Some of the larger stadia may use up to 1,000 stewards, medium sized stadia could use 500 or 600 stewards and even smaller stadia may have up to 100 stewards for a match.



With larger numbers of stewards, it is usual for the safety officer to brief the steward supervisors and then for the supervisors to brief their steward teams.

The briefing will usually follow a standard set of headings, with specific information about the day's event being given under each heading. After each

match a de-brief will usually be held; this enables the Safety Officer to get stewards' views of any issues that might have arisen during the event and to introduce any changes to procedures that might prepare the club better to deal with such issues in future.

All clubs in the top four divisions are issued with a standard set of Ground Regulations. These posters are displayed at the entrances to and inside the stadium.

The Ground Regulations make it clear that entrance to the ground is subject to acceptance by the visitor of these Ground Regulations. The Regulations specify the list of articles that cannot be brought into the stadium and they give the stewards the right to search any or all spectators. The following are expressly forbidden under the Ground Regulations:

- the throwing of any object;
- unauthorised entry onto the playing area;
- the use of racist, homophobic or foul and abusive language;
- persistent standing in a seated area;
- smoking in a non-smoking area (most stadia are completely non-smoking areas);
- attempting to enter the ground whilst drunk;
- possessing alcohol when entering the ground or in a part of the ground from which the event can be directly viewed.

Key to any match day safety operation is having a suitable stadium control room. This room will be the main operational centre on event days.

The room should be of a good size and have a good view of the spectator accommodation.

It will be equipped with monitors linked to the stadium's CCTV cameras and there will be radio and telephone communications to enable the stewards to speak to the control room and vice versa.



The stadium safety officer will usually be based in the control room on match days and he/she will usually work alongside the police match commander. The police will have their own radio communications system based in the control room, they can also access the stadium CCTV cameras and may also be able to link-in to local authority cameras around the stadium or to a camera on any police helicopter that may be used (usually only for bigger events).

The Fire and Ambulance Services, as well as the agency providing trained first aiders, will also be based in the control room. In this way, any major decisions affecting stadium safety can be taken from and managed within the stadium control room.

The stadium's fire and smoke detection system and all of the stadium's exit gates are operated from within the control room (although a steward is also posted on every exit gate throughout the event). The stadium PA announcer is usually based in a room adjacent to the control room and the control room has the ability to override the stadium PA in case of any emergency arising.

The safety officer and his/her team will have inspected the stadium 24 hours ahead of the event; they will carry out a further inspection early on the day of the match and the stewards will then be deployed to inspect all areas of the stadium prior to the gates opening to spectators. Before the stewards are stood down, they will also carry out a search of all areas of the stadium after the event.

The safety officer will also have developed a set of contingency plans and an emergency evacuation plan for the stadium. These plans will have been developed in conjunction with, and approved by, the emergency services and the local certifying authority. The plans will be kept in the control room, ready to be put into operation if needed. The plans will also be regularly revised and updated. Stewards will regularly be reminded of the club's emergency procedures and clubs will practise these with the stewards and emergency services on a regular basis. The safety officer will ensure that the stewards are reminded in the pre-match safety briefings of the coded warnings that are used at each stadium to alert the safety personnel to an emergency or a potential emergency situation that might be developing.

As can be seen, there is a tremendous amount of work that goes on behind the scenes, in terms of the planning, preparation and execution of a safety management operation at a football stadium in England. The provision of safe and comfortable facilities for spectators is having an additional benefit for football clubs: In Season 1985/86, just after the Bradford Fire Disaster, attendances in the top four divisions of English Football dropped to their lowest ever total of just 16 million spectators in a season. Nowadays around 30 million spectators pass through the turnstiles of our football stadia each season. Better and safer stadium facilities are encouraging more spectators to watch the game of football.

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