

Summary of measures taken to prevent football violence

Introduction

In the years following the Second World War, the total spectator attendances each season in the top four divisions in England were around the 40 million mark. In Season 1985/86, following years of problems with hooliganism and immediately after the Bradford City Fire and the Heysel Stadium Disaster, attendances fell to an all-time low of just 16 million spectators in a season. Football stadia were regarded by the public as not very safe places to visit.

After Heysel, English clubs were excluded from European competition for a period of five years. The Government and Football had to act. The football authorities introduced membership-only areas in grounds and the football in the community scheme was started to build bridges between the clubs and their local communities and to promote better behaviour by spectators. However, the Government's plan was to introduce a 100% identity card system for all football fans wanting to attend matches. This was in the process of being developed when the Hillsborough Stadium Disaster occurred in April 1989; the ensuing Taylor Report persuaded the Government to shelve its plans for an ID card scheme due to concerns raised in the report about possible safety issues arising at the stadium turnstiles. Coming so soon after the Bradford Fire and the Heysel Disaster, the Hillsborough Disaster and the recommendations made in the Taylor Report changed the face of football grounds in this country.

Football stadia today are safe and welcoming places, offering good quality facilities to supporters. There are no pitch perimeter fences. All stadia in the top two divisions, and many in the lower divisions, are all-seated. Supporter violence inside stadia is very rare. Some confrontations between supporters do occasionally take place, but on a very limited scale and usually some way away from the stadium environment. Attendances are now back up to around 30 million per season.

There follows a summary of the main measures introduced to prevent violence and to improve the match day experience for football supporters. These measures have been developed over a period of time, as part of an ongoing collaboration between Football, Government and the Police.

National Legislation

The Government has introduced a series of legislative measures to combat hooliganism. The following types of behaviour have been made a criminal offence:

- Entering a stadium when drunk or in possession of alcohol
- Possession of a firework, flare or other pyrotechnical device
- Possession of alcohol on trains and/or coaches when travelling to a football match
- Throwing any object at or towards the pitch or spectator areas
- Entering the pitch without lawful excuse
- Indecent or racist chanting
- Ticket touting

Under the legislation, any person convicted of a football related offence can receive from the Courts a football banning order. This order prevents the offender from attending any football match at home or abroad for a minimum period of three years. Failure to observe this ban is itself a criminal offence.

The Government has established the Football Banning Orders Authority to maintain a register of all banned persons (at 9th November 2012 there were 2,750 persons on the register) and to liaise with

police forces to ensure that whenever the England team plays matches abroad banned persons are required to surrender their passport to their local police 5 days prior to an international match played overseas. This requirement can be extended by Parliament to 10 days prior to an international tournament. This is very powerful legislation and has proved to be the main cornerstone in the drive to reduce the risk of violence occurring in football.

Police

The Government established the UK Football Policing Unit which is jointly overseen by the Home Office and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). It brings together various strands of the football policing infrastructure, including policy and operational support for the ACPO football lead, co-ordinating the work of the national Football Intelligence Officer (FIO) network in England and Wales, management of the the Football Banning Orders Authority and the UK National Football Information Point (NFIP) dealing with the exchange of information concerning football matches with an international dimension. The UKFPU specialises in the monitoring of football related disorder and the collation, analysis and dissemination of intelligence to help prevent it.

Police forces across the country have developed a great deal of expertise in dealing with football-related disorder. ACPO has produced a best practice document with guidance on the policing of football matches. There are training courses for police match commanders and for football intelligence officers and there is an annual conference of match commanders which helps further to share best practice. Representatives of the football authorities meet regularly with ACPO and attend the annual conference.

Football intelligence officers are assigned to follow each football team at home and away matches, to gather intelligence and to “spot” any potential trouble-makers or ringleaders or banned offenders who may turn up at matches and to liaise and interact with football supporters. Football intelligence officers produce a report on each fixture which is logged by the UK Football Policing Unit and which is available to view by other football intelligence officers. In this way, an intelligence officer representing any football club is able to find out up to date information on the behavioural trends of the supporters of any team in the country. This information will be used as a basis for the risk assessment made ahead of each match.

The main focus of the policing operation at a football match is on maintaining public order. Where possible, the travel arrangements of the visiting team’s supporters are monitored. Supporters’ club coaches may be met by the police at a rendezvous point on the edge of the city and escorted to the stadium. The car and coach parking areas for the visiting fans will ideally be close to the stadium entrances for the visitors and police may supervise those areas before and after the match. Pedestrian routes from the train station to the stadium may also be monitored by police and, if necessary, groups of away fans may be escorted to the stadium by police.

Measures introduced by Football

The use of segregated areas, keeping the rival fan groups apart, has significantly reduced problems of spectator misbehaviour inside stadia. The introduction of CCTV cameras in all grounds has also been a major help in preventing violence, as film footage of offenders can be used as evidence in a court of law and can therefore lead to conviction and a football banning order. Most problems that do occur mainly happen outside or away from the football stadium.

Since the 1989 Hillsborough Stadium Disaster and the 1990 Taylor Report on football stadium safety, there has been a massive building and stadium improvement programme undertaken in this country. More than 30 new stadia and over 200 new stands have been constructed.

- possessing alcohol when entering the ground or in a part of the ground from which the event can be directly viewed;
- entering a part of the ground reserved for supporters of the opposing team.



Segregated areas of the stadium for home and away supporters have become a feature at all football grounds since the 1970's. These features have been designed into the new stadia and stands that have been built.

In most cases, the rival fan groups are separated not by steel fences, but by sterile areas created by fabric netting placed over rows of seats. If necessary, one of both sides of the netting could be reinforced by a line of stewards.

Most clubs in the Premier League play to full houses and most of their supporters are season-ticket holders. Clubs will ban any person who is arrested or ejected from a stadium and supporters are aware that they would risk losing their season ticket if they were to misbehave.

A number of football clubs have also introduced travel clubs for their away matches – clubs only issue tickets for an away match to supporters who are members of the travel club. Anyone who misbehaves risks losing their travel club membership and therefore the right to a ticket for an away match. Clearly, it is possible that any person who is not a member of the scheme could easily obtain and use a ticket bought by a friend who is a member unless the host club makes identity checks at the stadium entrances and unless the visiting club does the same at the visitors' entrances. In this case the visiting club would have to provide a team of stewards to travel to the away match and check the identity of the fans entering the visiting sector.

Finally, The Football Association has the power under its disciplinary rules to impose sanctions on a football club following misconduct by that club's supporters.

Liaison between Football and the local police

Before the start of each season, football liaises with the police, both at club and national level, to plan and review the fixture calendar. In collaboration with the police the national fixture programme for each day of the football season is prepared in such a way so as to limit where possible the crossing of the fans of various rival teams when travelling around the country to away matches by road or railway and to ensure the safest possible travel for supporters of every team.

Safety in the stadium is the responsibility of the club management. The role of the Police is to prevent crime and to maintain public order. However, to achieve a smooth operation requires both parties to work closely in partnership. A Statement of Intent signed by both parties sets out a joint understanding of the different roles of the club safety management team and stewards on the one hand and the police on the other.

Police will attend games at the invitation of the host club. Under the UK law football clubs have to pay for the costs of police officers deployed inside the stadium or on club property under a special services agreement.

As soon as the fixture list for each season has been published, the club and local police will meet to discuss the categorisation of each home match – each home match will be risk assessed and categorised according to that risk. Category CS (Club Security) means that the match will take place with the football club and its stewards providing the only security presence, with no police officers in attendance. Category A is a low risk game, B is medium risk, C is high risk and Category C IR (increased risk) means a very high risk game. A formula is agreed between the football club and the police before the start of each season setting out the numbers of police officers that will be deployed to the different categories of matches.

The match categories agreed at the start of the season can be reviewed as the season progresses. Further meetings between the club and the police are usually held two weeks and also 24/48 hours before each match and the latest intelligence from both police and the club safety officer will be discussed at those meetings, possibly leading to a revision of the match categorisation and an increase or decrease in the number of police officers to be deployed at the match.

Special measures for high-risk games

For high-risk games, the home club and its local police might consider an earlier kick-off to reduce the potential for alcohol consumption by spectators and to lessen the risk of violence. In England, football matches are traditionally played on a Saturday at 3 pm, but high-risk games can be brought forward to a 12 noon or 1 pm kick-off on the Saturday, or moved to the Sunday when the roads and the city centre are usually quieter.

For exceptionally high-risk games, the two clubs, in collaboration with the host club's police force can consider requiring the away fans to travel in an organised coach convoy to the match. In such cases the away supporters have to buy a voucher in advance of the game, which they can exchange for a match ticket on the coach. They will meet at their club's stadium and travel in a convoy of coaches, under police escort, to the other club's stadium and the tickets are only handed over in the coaches. Some clubs with fans who might live a long way away from their stadium have arranged a rendezvous point for supporters nearer to the home club's stadium, for example at a motorway service station.