

# **Part of the Game? An examination of racism in grass roots football**



**Centre for Leisure and Sport Research**

**LEEDS METROPOLITAN  
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**A report prepared for Kick It Out by the Centre for Leisure and Sport Research.**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research was commissioned by Kick It Out (KIO) and conducted in co-operation with West Riding County Football Association (WRCFA) to help KIO address one of its wider priorities: *to work within grassroots and amateur football to eradicate racism in 'parks' football*. It explores people's experiences of grassroots football and appraises the nature and extent of racism at this level.

The research was conducted between June 1999 and February 2000 by the Centre for Leisure and Sport Research at Leeds Metropolitan University.

The definition of racism offered in the MacPherson report was adopted in the research:

*'Racism' in general terms consists of conduct or words or practices which advantage or disadvantage people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. In its more subtle form, it is as damaging as in its overt form. (Macpherson, 1999: 6.4)*

This research focuses exclusively on 'grass-roots' football (by which we mean all organised football outside the FA Premiership and the Football League) and was undertaken in West Yorkshire, which comprises the metropolitan districts of Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield. This meant dealing with some areas with a significant black population and others that are largely white. Overall, the population of this area closely mirrors that of the population of England as a whole in its ethnic breakdown. We expect that the experiences uncovered by the research will generally be replicated around the country.

The study involved: the game's administrators in the shape of staff at the County FA, secretaries of the district associations and leagues, and local authority development officers and coach trainers; referees, referee trainers and the secretaries of the referees' societies; clubs in a county-wide survey of a sample of 564 club secretaries, and case studies of individual clubs; players (white, Asian and African-Caribbean); and spectators.

### THE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES

West Riding County FA has some 2,300 affiliated clubs: about 1600 open age 11-a-side, about 350 junior and about 600 small-sided / scratch teams (some clubs operate at more than one level) in 49 leagues and 42 other competitions. Recently the County FA has been getting involved in efforts to address racism in the game. Referees have been reminded that foul and abusive language is a disciplinary offence and that racist behaviour should be similarly treated.

However, no one on the WRCFA committees is African-Caribbean or Asian. The experience of the committees is limited in terms of the cultures, problems and aspirations of minority ethnic groups, and so they lack empathy. This causes a number of problems and one of the main consequences of this lack of representation is that black players know they will be met by all white faces at any disciplinary meeting. There is no direct evidence to suggest that procedures are unfair, but there is undoubtedly a perception among many black players that they are.

### THE LEAGUES

Half the league secretaries reported that 75% (or over) of teams in their league have no black players ('black' is used throughout here as a term to encompass both African-Caribbean and Asian players) and one in ten suggested there were no teams at all in their league with black players.

None of the league secretaries suggested that racism was non-existent in grass roots football, but almost all the league secretaries felt that abusing players because of the colour of their skin was unacceptable. However, one said that although we might expect that it should never be acceptable, being truthful he felt that it was 'part of the game' - the culture of football.

The main concern of the leagues is to ensure a firm structure for their clubs to play in, and their natural reaction may be to meet any difficulty with discipline and expulsion, which does not address the sports development agenda and sometimes creates a climate of mutual mistrust between them and the clubs.

## REFEREES

Only 2.4% of the referees are from minority ethnic groups, none of whom were represented on their respective committees. This shows little sign of improving as there are few black people doing the training courses.

Referees are aware of their duty and committed to notions of fairness, but are not very aware of what racism is about. They see or hear little racism (including black referees). The most common view was that *“the players are usually OK - the big problem is with the fans on the touchline”*. The referees, therefore, see the challenge to be to “keep it out” rather than “kick it out”.

It was suggested that the significance of what the referees do hear may vary depending upon the context; whether or not it is offensive was perceived to depend upon intent. There was however, a general acceptance of players using whatever means to gain an advantage by winding-up opponents.

There is evidence of transference of responsibility for racist incidents onto the shoulders of minority groups. Many of the referees recognised that African-Caribbean and Asian players feel unfairly treated and abused, but felt that to be misplaced or a misrepresentation. It was pointed out that ‘some players think it is because of their colour that they get sent off, but plenty of other players get sent off’.

## CLUBS

Postal survey questionnaires were returned from 253 club secretaries, 94 per cent of whom were white. The majority of club secretaries are still playing and this is particularly pronounced among black secretaries. Nearly three-quarters of the teams had less than 10 per cent black players whereas only two clubs had fewer than 10 per cent white players. 41 per cent of clubs had no black players at all.

Most club secretaries disagreed with the notion that black footballers are naturally talented, but when asked about any identifiable characteristics of African-Caribbean and Asian players, a substantial minority provided many attributes that made African-Caribbean players suitable for football and few that made them unsuitable; the reverse was the case for Asian players. African Caribbeans were portrayed as being strong and athletic with a general tendency to be taller and more muscular. Most of the negative characteristics were to do with psychological orientation: e.g. *tend to become frustrated when things aren't going their own way and tend to argue among themselves*. The few positive attributes applied to Asian players such as *skilful, good clever players* and a *general tendency to be agile and nippy* were complemented with identification of characteristics thought to limit them in playing football, most common of which were *bad temper, tend to give up too easily* and *don't get 'stuck in' enough*. These perceptions were supplemented by comments on their physical size and references to religion and cultural stereotypes.

Responses to questions about the extent of racism wavered. The vast majority believe that *‘too much is made of this black/white thing, in football everyone is the same’*, and the majority maintained that there were never any racist remarks from their players or supporters. At the same time, however, they were twice as likely to agree as disagree that ethnic minority players get picked on at some clubs. Seventy per cent think there is no more than a small amount of racism in grass roots football.

There is a general feeling that ‘winding-up’ is an acceptable part of the game (80% thinking it is acceptable or sometimes acceptable). Beyond that, however, most drew the line at racial abuse; only 12 per cent think that abuse because of the colour of a player’s skin is acceptable or sometimes acceptable.

## PLAYERS

Interviews with white players revealed their fathers and brothers as major influences on their playing careers. Most of the white players have had the support of parents and other relatives who were involved in the game in one guise or another. For them the link from school to community was, in the main,



seamless in that there was no problem in them finding a team or club to join either while they were still at school or after leaving.

African-Caribbean players spoke of barriers in gaining access to clubs and were less likely to have parental support at the start of their careers as few of their parents played regular football.

Contrary to stereotypes of Asian families the Asian players generally had been neither discouraged nor encouraged to play football. Our respondents, of course, were people who had come through to play for clubs and a consistent theme for them was that they had relatives who played and so had role models or support structures in place.

Many of the Asian players knew of other Asians who were playing solely among themselves in leagues or informal structures not affiliated to the FA because they had not been happy with the way they were treated on the pitch or from the sidelines. Wanting to stay away from intimidating environments, many players were playing at levels below their proper standard, which was seen as a waste of potential.

All the African-Caribbean and Asian players had experienced racism in physical and verbal forms as well as what they interpreted as institutional forms (e.g. differential treatment by officialdom). Players, referees, supporters, league officials, managers and coaches were all identified as people who have continually caused an element of racism to creep into their experience of football. As many as a half of the African-Caribbean players, though fewer Asian players, had suffered physical abuse that they put down to premeditated racist intent.

None of the white players interviewed had ever been subject to racism themselves. Where white players have experienced racism in the game it has been where they have witnessed African-Caribbean and Asian players being subjected by others to verbal abuse on the pitch, but white players generally do not recognise racism on the pitch.

Black players are generally of the view that racial incidents are not as frequent or aggressive as they were in the past, but believe that the underlying racism persists. Older people may display in-built racism through ignorance arising from the culture in which they grew up, whereas the racism among younger people may be evidenced by a smaller number, but be more calculating in its intention to hurt.

Players repeatedly suggested that racist incidents occur more frequently in the lower leagues where match day officials are fewer and as a result able to be less vigilant, players are less 'professional' in their approach to the game, supporters are not policed or stewarded. Abuse is more likely when playing away from home, especially when teams with African-Caribbean or Asian players are in matches located in specific rural or white working class, urban areas.

Although black players argue that racism is abhorrent and not to be tolerated, they do indeed tolerate it to a point by conceding that racism is 'part and parcel' of the game. They expect what has been regularly described as 'heat of the moment' exchanges to result in a racial epithet from white players to black players. More experienced players have said that they have learnt to stay on their game where racism is in evidence because it is one of the ways that white players will try to put black players off.

Referees were seen by most players as being the cause of many incidents on the pitch, due either to their inability to recognise racism or to being racist themselves. Three quarters of the African-Caribbean players and half the Asian players stated that referees play a crucial role in the way racism is manifest in a game, most commonly in the way players go unchallenged for racist behaviour.

When asked for suggestions of improvements they would like to see in the game, the African-Caribbean players most commonly spoke of focusing attention, time and resources on the youngsters in the game. In part, this would involve making more use of black coaches and involvement in the schools. However, local authorities bemoan the lack of suitably qualified people and are concerned at how few black people put themselves forward for the necessary courses.

## LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Not only do the local authorities seek to increase participation in football as part of their sports development policies, but they also provide the pitches on which the majority of grassroots football is played. As part of the county-wide anti-racism initiative the local authorities have worked in conjunction with KIO and the County FA to draw-up a racial equality charter which commits them to the elimination of racism in sport, the promotion of wider participation by ethnic minority communities and disciplinary action for those engaging in racist abuse or harassment.

## CONCLUSIONS

The research revealed a clear difference in perceptions of the nature and extent of racism in grass roots football. Non-recognition of a problem on the part of white players and officials may be because of a lack of racism in grass roots football. However, this is not the perception of black players, nor of many of the other white respondents. The research suggests that there is conflict between black players and the football authorities and with white players and spectators, to which much of the administration is seemingly oblivious. In contrast, even the white players playing alongside black players reported little experience of racism. The referees and administrators also indicated low levels of awareness of racism. In any case, the referees (white and black) argue that they are consistent in their application of the rules; the players, however, disagree and the black players tended to believe that in addition to missing things because of a lack of vigilance referees apply the rules differentially to their disadvantage.

Despite the confusion over what constitutes racist behaviour, the research team were left in no doubt that it does occur. Consequently, stronger measures are needed to address it. Clearly those deliberate provocations which represent malice or psychological tactics used to gain an unfair advantage should be countered immediately. Beyond that though the 'heat of the moment' exchanges need to be addressed and steps taken to promote black representation at all levels of the sport's administration. Hence the recommendations at the end of the report, summarised in the following table.

## SUMMARY OF MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

Action by:	FA	W R C F A	District FAs	L'gues	Clubs	Refs	Local Author- ities
⊗ League and county committees need a more representative membership to reflect the diversity of the clubs and should use powers of co-option if necessary to correct the imbalance.		❖	❖	❖			
⊗ The leagues and county must have more effective and speedier communication with clubs before disciplinary hearings.		❖		❖			
⊗ The FA might usefully specify timescales within which reports of racism will be acknowledged and acted upon.	❖						
⊗ Leagues and Counties need to make sure that all clubs appreciate that there is a standard tariff of penalties		❖		❖			
⊗ The football authorities need to address how they can dispel the notion that racism is 'part and parcel' of the experience of football for black players. This is all the harder in a culture in which there is general acceptance of 'winding-up' as a means of gaining a tactical advantage.	❖	❖	❖	❖			
⊗ League and County committees would benefit from having tailored racial equality training.	❖	❖	❖	❖			
⊗ There is a clear need for education and cultural awareness, but any campaigning needs to be designed to minimise the inevitable backlash. County FAs around the country and their affiliated leagues should be encouraged to carry reminders in their handbooks that racist behaviour will not be tolerated.		❖		❖			
⊗ Local authorities should work towards a position where it is agreed that action 'will' be taken against clubs or players who have been found to be engaging in racist abuse or harassment.							❖
⊗ A similar charter should be adopted by every local authority and county FA.	❖						❖
⊗ Training for referees needs to include more comprehensive awareness of 'race'-related issues to help them recognise the significance of what is happening at matches.			❖			❖	
⊗ Proactive measures to recruit and train black referees are needed.	❖	❖	❖			❖	
⊗ The FA should require a full complement of officials at all league and cup games.	❖	❖				❖	
⊗ The FA should fund a significant increase in the reward for referees.	❖						
⊗ Clubs should be required to provide someone to run the line for some matches not involving their team as a condition of their membership of the league.					❖		
⊗ Players need to be involved so that they recognise the part they have to play, aware that it is not just a problem 'the authorities' have to deal with. This initiative needs to include the responsibility the players and coaches/managers have to the referee.					❖		

Action by:	FA	W R C F A	District FAs	L'gues	Clubs	Refs	Local Author -ities
⊗ Consideration should be given to recording ethnicity through player registration, and Leagues and Counties must monitor for ethnicity especially where disciplinary action is taken to establish whether, as many black players believe, they suffer a disproportionate disciplinary burden.	❖	❖		❖			
⊗ WRCFA, the leagues and local authorities need to provide support that promotes sustainability of clubs.		❖		❖			❖
⊗ The leagues should provide, and require attendance at, user-friendly training courses in sports administration at the beginning of each season. They should be prepared to send in 'troubleshooters' at any stage should it become evident that a club is experiencing problems with administrative procedures.				❖	❖		
⊗ Independent specialists could be appointed by the FA (or advice provided by KIO or the CRE) to assist the leagues and counties in the interim before training begins.	❖						
⊗ WRCFA should extend their recent practice and nominate experienced, independent observers to conduct spot checks. If clubs are found to be breaking the County's code of practice by engaging in racist behaviour the observer's report needs to be attached to sanctions (e.g. fines, points deduction, barring from cup competitions).		❖					
⊗ WRCFA needs to have more 'open' meetings (e.g. around themes like pitch use and discipline) and draw in representatives of the leagues to build upon this initiative, review the progress of the campaign and establish better relationships in the future, and the FA should encourage other county associations that have not yet embarked on this route to do so.	❖	❖					
⊗ There is a clear need for education and cultural awareness, but any campaigning needs to be designed to minimise the inevitable backlash. The forthcoming 'West Riding Against Racism' poster needs to be made widely available by KIO and the County FAs around the country and their affiliated leagues should be encouraged to carry reminders in their handbooks that racist behaviour will not be tolerated. Similar messages should be carried on registration cards.	❖	❖		❖			
⊗ Campaigns need to integrate the different levels/constituents of the game - administration, clubs, local authorities - and draw in other institutions.	❖	❖	❖	❖	❖	❖	❖
⊗ Better relations need to be established between the clubs, leagues, districts and counties and the local authorities so that all 'own the problem'.		❖	❖	❖	❖		❖
⊗ The FA nationally should make funds available to its county associations specifically to ensure higher standards of racial equality.	❖						

## **Chapter 1**

### **Race, ethnicity and football**

The *Let's Kick Racism Out of Football* campaign (LKROOF) was formed in the 1993/4 season as a partnership between the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) and the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE). The campaign has been credited with getting racism acknowledged as a central issue in football. In 1997 a new organisation called Kick It Out (KIO) was formed to run the campaign with financial support from the PFA the Football Association (FA), the FA Premier League and the Football Trust. The campaigning slogan remains *Let's Kick Racism Out of Football* and the success of the campaign has had a knock on effect in initiating action in other sports. Following our own research (Long *et al.*, 1995), the Rugby Football League and the Commission for Racial Equality launched a 13-point Action Plan for clubs to adopt; and in Cricket, the England and Wales Cricket Board has been considering how to implement the recommendations of the report, *Racial Equality in Cricket* (ECB, 1999).

As a result of the extensive tour of the government task force's football roadshows, expectations were raised about commitment in the highest echelons of football to challenge one of the most damaging elements in the game. The roadshows served to demonstrate the current concern with racism in football and the position of this issue has been secured on the professional and political agenda. However, the government has been criticised for not enforcing action the Task Force suggested as necessary to address the problems they had identified.

Formed in 1987, Leeds Fans United Against Racism and Fascism was the first fans group formed specifically to fight racism. Since then, the past decade has seen a growing level of activity to address racism in professional football. Beyond the work of Kick it Out, important initiatives have been taken by Show Racism the Red Card, based in the North East, and Football Unites Racism Divides (FURD) in the Sheffield area. FURD is run by Sheffield Youth Service, and draws its strength from its understanding of the local context. Although its aim is to engage more people from ethnic minorities in the life of Sheffield United Football Club its programme of activities is extensive, running its own research projects, promoting plays and providing information and contacts. Responding to the challenge many individual clubs, like Leicester, Leeds and Charlton have launched their own schemes based on football development<sup>1</sup>. In part, this activity reflects how fashionable football is currently, celebrated as it is in the non-sporting media. It has once again become widely recognised as an integral and central part of British culture, something that excites passion, attracts allegiances, lies at the heart of many personal identities, and also causes division. Almost all the attention (research and practical projects) is directed to the professional game, yet there has been plenty of anecdotal evidence to suggest that racism is also an issue (perhaps a greater issue) outside the top flight. One player, discussing the difference between the professional and amateur games, has noted:

*When I first started playing [professional football] I had a lot of problems at certain clubs but it wasn't scary as there were thousands of people and you couldn't actually see their faces and the hate in their eyes. It wasn't as disturbing as seeing someone*

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<sup>1</sup> Clearly the effectiveness of programmes run by clubs varies, but people have also commended schemes at Preston, Exeter, Watford, Everton and Manchester United.

*right there who, if he manages to get over the barrier, you were not sure what he would do.*

(Leroy Rosenior, quoted in the Guardian 16/2/99, p24)

While this research was underway four players from Wanstead Holly were being prosecuted for an alleged racist attack on members of Bari FC during a match that left one player unconscious and resulted in charges of assault, aggravated assault and actual bodily harm. They were subsequently acquitted of all charges with the referee testifying that he had not heard any racist abuse.

Kick It Out has been extending its campaign beyond the professional clubs by working with local authorities and local football associations in Sheffield, Leicester and Middlesex, as well as West Yorkshire. In conjunction with those initiatives, this research was commissioned to help KIO address one of its wider priorities: *to work within grassroots and amateur football to eradicate racism in 'parks' football*. To that end we were asked to explore people's experiences of grassroots football and appraise the nature and extent of racism at this level. This has meant that administrators, match officials and spectators have all been involved in our research, as well as players.

Playing and running this level of football is central to many people's lifestyles, but its significance extends beyond that. Some top level players started their careers with the kind of club we are interested in here, including Ian Wright, Les Ferdinand and Dion Dublin. Even with top clubs developing their own academies, this remains a route into top flight football.

## **Race and Racism in Sport**

Racism is undoubtedly a sensitive issue and it is important to be clear what we are researching. We were mindful of the discussion in the Macpherson report of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry which noted that:

"Racism" in general terms consists of conduct or words or practices which advantage or disadvantage people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. In its more subtle form it is as damaging as in its overt form. (Macpherson, 1999: 6.4)

Racism arises from the belief that people can be divided into physical/genetic categories that make some superior to others, a belief that is then used to justify inequality. More recently racism has been recognised to extend beyond supposed biological superiority to encompass notions of cultural difference. As well as conscious discrimination and abuse there are instances where people do not realise they are disadvantaging people because of their ethnicity. This is variously referred to as everyday, subconscious or indirect racism. Sometimes this may become institutionalised:

Institutional racism has been defined as organisational structures, policies, processes and practices which result in ethnic minorities being treated unfairly and less equally, often without intention or knowledge. (CRE, 1999: para 3).

Collectively these racist beliefs result in the discriminatory action that constitutes racialism, though as can be seen from the quote in the Macpherson report, 'racism' has come to encompass these actions as well.

There have, of course, long been black players in British football (at the very start of the professional game Arthur Wharton was playing in goal for Preston North End). However, even in 1978 when Viv Anderson became the first black player to be capped for England, there were still relatively few black professional footballers. Since then the remarkable teams have become those which do not field black players: indeed, *Football Unites Racism Divides* has now put together a touring exhibition celebrating the contribution of black players. However, while African-Caribbean players are now well established Asian players are still notable by their absence<sup>2</sup>.

Burley and Fleming (1997) have noted how coaching 'folklore' in the 1980s fostered the 'flawed perception of the unintelligent black soccer player'. That perception was associated with populist images that constructed myths about black players as:

- not working hard in training
- not being any good once the pitches get muddy or the weather gets cold
- not having the 'bottle' to be defenders

Although there should by now have been enough examples of black players disproving such negative stereotypes, their influence lives on.

Even those black players who have 'made it' and gained celebrity status have had to endure racial abuse and survive prejudice (Hill, 1989). Holland (1995) has suggested, on the basis of his work at Newcastle United and Leeds United, that black players have to endure a 'double dose' of abuse. Not only did he find that they received overtly racist abuse, but they also received a disproportionate amount of general abuse. His measure of abuse from the crowd indicated that opposition black players were 80 times more burdened than a home player and 8 times more than their white team-mates. Perhaps even more worryingly, home black players received more abuse than opposing white players.

The most recent survey of Premier League fans conducted by the Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research asked whether they had heard racist comments directed at players during matches involving their club that (1998/9) season. There was considerable variation around the country from 11 per cent of fans at Wimbledon reporting abuse to 38 per cent at Everton. Overall these levels had changed little over the preceding two years despite the various campaigns, but the researchers concluded that the way in which the racism was expressed had changed - there now being less concerted chanting with most coming from individuals.

## **Language and Meanings**

In such a sensitive area we have to be careful with the use of language. 'Race' itself is a disputed term. Although used in everyday speech, many of those working in the field insist that it has no scientific credibility and only serves to obscure an understanding of people's

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<sup>2</sup> Some clubs have bought-in players from overseas: for example, Bury signed the captain of the Indian national side and Crystal Palace recruited Chinese players.

capabilities. However, the routine use of 'race' to mark difference and people's (mis)understandings of it lie at the heart of racism; hence the use of inverted commas to indicate the social meaning rather than earlier biological definitions. We recognise this argument, but having made the point we shall not continue to use the inverted commas to denote this.

Although not exclusively, our concern here is with those who can be distinguished by skin colour<sup>3</sup>, but the debate about the appropriate use of terms has been fraught. Terminology also changes with time. One referee commented: *I used to call them 'coloureds' - I think it's 'blacks' now or 'ethnics'*. The general principle we have adopted in this report is to use 'black' as an all-embracing term and then within that specify 'Asian' and 'African-Caribbean'. Having said that, it is hard to be consistent. While researching with those involved in football, we have tried to use whatever terminology has greatest currency with them. Hence, at various times in the project we also used: 'black and ethnic minorities'; 'black and Asian'; 'minority ethnic groups'; 'ethnic minorities'. It is important to recognise that the same words have different currencies in different contexts and when used by different people. It is also essential to recognise that terminology changes over time and there tends to be a lag in the universal adoption of terminology acceptable to all.

We also recognise the limitations of many of these words as labels for homogeneous categories. There are many ethnic divisions within the embracing term, 'Asian', even as they are represented in West Yorkshire. However, much to the exasperation of those so labelled the white population rarely make such distinctions. 'White' itself is a problematic term; crucially in West Yorkshire it encompasses the Irish, East Europeans and Jews.

Even in the less sensitive area of football terms we encountered difficulty in trying to find an appropriate descriptor for the level of football we were examining (all open age football affiliated to the FA in the area that is outside the Premier League and Nationwide Football League Divisions 1-3). Typically the football media refer to 'non-League' football, but for those playing in a Sunday *League* in the park that term may be taken to refer to recreational football outside any formal structure. 'Amateur' is now seen to be an outmoded term whose time has passed, and 'non-professional' might exclude many in the 'higher level' clubs. The term favoured by the County FA is 'grassroots football', but this might also be seen to exclude those playing at a higher standard - for others the term is associated with developing young players. In each of our interviews or surveys we tried to make it clear what our definitions included, and in our questionnaire for supporters we referred to 'this level of football' to identify the kind of football they were watching as being what we were interested in.

## **The Research**

Our current study is unusual in its exclusive focus on grassroots football. Just as the political and media attention is focused on the professional game, so is the research interest. Hence the focus of virtually all research on racism in football has been on the players, supporters and commentators of the professional game. Of the few exceptions to this two offered useful

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<sup>3</sup> This is not to deny the experiences of Jewish players and clubs or refugee teams; indeed comment will be made from time to time in the subsequent chapters. One of the players in a mixed race team assumed that his club had been chosen for inclusion in the study because of its Irish connections.



pointers. First, a study of amateur football in Marseille (France) found that clubs based in ethnic minority communities ‘reinforce the original culture rather than encouraging its adaptation to the values of the host society’, or more accurately, ‘expressing the district’s or the suburb’s culture... the club’s life is the district’s life’ (Mariottini, 1996: 135). Second, a case study of Highfield Rangers in Leicester (Williams, 1994) explored the cultural significance of Rangers as a black club. We have tried to capture a similar richness of detail by incorporating case studies in this research (chapter 6), albeit in less depth than Williams’ study.

While dealing with the structures established by the West Riding County FA (WRCFA) we covered the same geographical area, which extends beyond the local government boundaries to cover the old West Riding of Yorkshire (less the southern parts which constitute Sheffield & Hallamshire FA). However for subsequent survey work we focused on the current West Yorkshire comprising the metropolitan districts of Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield. This meant dealing with some areas with a significant black population and others that are largely white (this kind of local variation is repeated in many areas around the country). While Wakefield has relatively few people from ethnic minorities, Bradford has a much higher proportion (nearly 16%), and Leeds closely reflects the position in Britain as a whole. Although there has been some recent growth in numbers, most of these ethnic communities are now well-established in West Yorkshire.

It is African-Caribbeans who have come to be associated with participation in football, but in West Yorkshire they are outnumbered 5:1 by Asians. Asians are grouped together here, as they appear to be in the minds of most white British, but it is worth noting that those from Pakistani backgrounds are the most numerous. This contrasts with some of the other ‘Asian’ communities in Britain, like that in Leicester, which are dominated by Indians.

<b>Table 1: Estimates of the population of ethnic groups, 1991</b>							
	Bradford	Calderdale	Kirklees	Leeds	Wakefield	W Yorks	GB
	<i>percentage of the population</i>						
White	84.1	95.3	89.2	94.0	98.5	91.7	94.4
African-Caribbean (1)	1.2	0.2	1.8	1.6	0.1	1.2	1.7
Asian (2)	14.0	3.9	8.2	3.6	1.2	6.6	3.4
Other	0.6	0.2	0.6	0.6	0.1	0.5	0.5
Notes:							
1 = Black Caribbean, Black African, Black Other							
2 = Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Other Asian							
<i>Source: 1991 Census</i>							

It can be seen that West Yorkshire has a complex ethnic mix, and one that contributes considerably to its cultural identity. In that, it is no different from other parts of Britain and we therefore expect that the experiences of our respondents would be replicated around the country. This only serves to underline the significance of what is reported here.

It is perhaps not surprising that in much (most) of the previous research, concerned as it has been with the professional game, attention has focused on the crowd. However, despite the point made by Leroy Rosenior above, the make-up of grassroots football encourages a more expansive examination of the game. In our study we have involved: the game's administrators in the shape of staff at the County FA, secretaries of the district associations and leagues, and local authority development officers and coach trainers; referees, referee trainers and the secretaries of the referees' societies; clubs in a county-wide survey of a sample of 564 club secretaries, and case studies of individual clubs; players (white, Asian and African-Caribbean); and spectators. All this was accompanied by observation at a dozen or more games and interviews and discussions with other significant people around the game and local players, all set in the context of our review of the existing literature.

**Table 2: Main Components of the Research Study**

<i>Sector</i>	<i>Type of investigation</i>
District Associations	Postal questionnaire to secretaries of all 13 districts of WRCFA
Leagues	Postal questionnaire to all secretaries of 44 leagues and 42 other competitions
Local Government	Telephone survey of football development officers in the 5 local authorities and those running the coaching award schemes
Referees' Societies	Postal questionnaire to secretaries of all 13 Referees' Societies
Referees' Instructors	Telephone survey of sample of instructors who do basic level training (new entrants)
Referees	Three focus groups, one of which was purely for black referees. These involved 19 referees and were supplemented with telephone interviews.
Clubs (a)	Postal questionnaire to sample of 564 secretaries of clubs in 15 leagues (plus senior clubs and women's clubs) across the county, chosen to represent different levels/standards, Saturday/Sunday, 11-a-side/5-a-side.
Clubs (b)	Case studies of three clubs comprising predominantly black players - located in Leeds, Bradford and Kirklees
Players	In depth qualitative interviews with 34 players (plus informal interviews with others) at 11 clubs identified across all five districts - three predominantly Asian, three predominantly African Caribbean, and five mixed.
Spectators	Self-administered questionnaire of 151 at three locations - senior club, major cup match for local club, local authority park provision.

The various questionnaires that were used can be found in the Appendices.

## **The Structure of the Report**

Following this introduction the remainder of the report is structured around the main groups of people involved in the research, starting with those responsible for the administration and development of the game - those within the local authority, FA and league structures. Chapter 3 is then concerned with the referees who are literally in the middle of it all. The

next three chapters all involve the local clubs. Chapter 4 is based on what club secretaries report about their clubs and the grassroots football in which they are involved. The next chapter examines the experiences of individual Asian, African-Caribbean and white players at clubs competing at different levels, and also offers insights into their personal views. Chapter 6 then provides a more detailed account of three clubs chosen as case studies, focusing on their origins and development, composition and experience. Spectators are usually the forgotten component of grassroots football, but it is their views which provide the material for Chapter 7. We conclude by drawing together in a general discussion the main points emerging from each of these different sections of the game, and offer some recommendations for future action.

In presenting the findings of our research we have made extensive use of quotes from our respondents. These direct quotes appear in italics rather than between inverted commas.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Running Local Football: the background structures**

- Largely white establishment (all white at senior levels)
- Little formal record of cultural / ethnicity issues and participation
- Little link between levels to address problems/challenges
- High awareness of Let's Kick Racism Out of Football, but low recognition of racism in the grassroots game

At the outset we needed to make sure we were familiar with the composition and organisation of the game within the county, identify the key initiatives and discover the views of those responsible for running grassroots football. In doing this, it soon became clear to us that just as there are very few people from ethnic minorities involved in the running of the professional game, the same is true of grassroots football.

#### **West Riding County Football Association**

The **West Riding County Football Association** comprises affiliated clubs, districts and leagues. Leagues that are wholly (or almost entirely) in the area are affiliated to the County – if they cover several Districts they are not allocated to a District. In either case, there is the right of appeal to County FA against League decisions (there is no right of appeal to District FAs). Discipline is dealt with by the County FA in which the club is based (but if the league is affiliated to a different County, then there will be a joint disciplinary board from the two Counties). The other leagues that span several County FAs (e.g. Northern Counties East) do not come under the direct jurisdiction of any one County FA. The County in which the club is based (using a standard template issued by the FA) deals with discipline.

The Premiership, Football League, Conference and Northern Premier League (Unibond League) are all controlled directly by FA nationally (including discipline and appeals). The County FA does not have any control of these leagues or clubs in them (including discipline and appeals).

West Riding County FA has some 2,300 affiliated clubs: c. 1600 open age 11-a-side, c. 350 junior, and c. 600 small-sided / scratch teams (the numbers don't quite match because some clubs operate at more than one level). This puts it in the top half dozen County FAs which each have over 2000 clubs. At the time of the surveys these clubs played in 44 (now 49) leagues and 42 other competitions. To administer the volume of football that this represents the County FA has a system of standing committees and there are also 13 district associations and 13 referees' societies.

The County FA has been getting involved in efforts to address racism in the game and has welcomed the opportunity to work with Kick It Out and the local authorities. Referees have been reminded by the County FA that foul and abusive language is a disciplinary offence and that they should treat racist behaviour similarly. As part of the overall initiative

representatives of clubs with black players were invited to a meeting at county headquarters to 'tell it like it is', a move that was welcomed by the clubs as a first step. However, no one on the WRCFA committees is African-Caribbean or Asian, and club representatives at the meeting stressed how alienating this is, especially in dealing with disciplinary matters. The explanation from the County FA is that disciplinary issues are supposed to be blind to ethnicity.

## **District Associations**

Because of the size of the West Riding, the County FA devolves some of its administration to district associations. The District FAs are subject to the control of the County FA – e.g. appeals against decisions of the District can be made to the County whose decision is final. The Districts' main functions are to 'monitor' the leagues in their area (and to report to County FA in case of any concerns), run district cup competitions and to organise referee training courses. The members of the District FA are the clubs in that District and leagues that fall wholly (or almost wholly) within that District. Although operating in the same geographical area, Referee Societies are not considered to be a part of the District that they cover. It is possible that they might sometimes be represented on the management committee, but they are distinct and separate entities.

Like the County FA the district associations had no black and ethnic minority representation on their committees. Not surprisingly, they reported variations from one district to another in terms of representation of black and Asian players in teams. When asked whether or not there was scope for involving more black and ethnic minority players the response largely depended upon perceptions of the demographic composition of the 'district'. Those who felt there was no such scope said that there were few people from minority groups living locally. With one exception the other district associations did not accept the challenge themselves; it was not their role to encourage participation as they considered the onus rested with individuals and groups within the minority ethnic communities to take the initiative.

Most were opposed to the development of all-black leagues, but some felt that any playing of football was a good thing. More common though was the belief that integration is essential to good relations in both football and the community.

There was consensus that abuse because of the colour of skin is never acceptable. A small amount of racism was recognised in grassroots football, but it was felt to be no more extensive than that. There was no consensus as to whether this is better or worse than professional football. All said that a reported incident of racism would be referred to the County FA, though some of the secretaries said they would take action themselves by either requesting a report or instigating disciplinary proceedings.

Encouragingly all had heard of Let's Kick Racism Out Of Football. Those who said they did not know whether it was a good idea to extend this into grassroots football were concerned that such a campaign would be highlighting something that they feel is not a major problem.

What has been reported above, of course, only represents those who responded to the questionnaire. Beyond them there may be grounds for more concern. When telephoned about a non-return, one secretary commented:

*I put the form aside on the basis that we didn't have a council meeting, and I question why the county FA were sending it out to us really... Once you start going down this route [a campaign] it encourages some of them to jump on the bandwagon.*

The notion that tackling racism in football is somebody else's problem (in this case the County FA) at best represents an unwillingness to 'own' the issue. Having suggested that there was no need for concern over racism within local football, the same secretary went on to say:

*What I do experience from time to time is where you have a predominantly coloured team the spectators have a habit of running on the field etc... I wouldn't say it was to disrupt the game, but whether its a part of their natural behaviour or not I've no idea - but clubs have a duty to keep spectators off the field of play, and it can be quite intimidating.*

## **Local Leagues**

The County FA and the district associations reported no all-black leagues currently, though four of the League secretaries still said that they knew of one in their area. As far as we can establish there are no formally constituted leagues though there have been some in the past (e.g. the Asian league that used to run in Batley stopped in 1998/9). However, despite the insistence of the County FA that there are no unaffiliated competitions because they do not allow them, beyond the local league structure there are ad hoc competitions. For example, in Leeds the Ramgarhia Sikh Temple network regularly organises inter-area competitions, which involve Asian teams from two or more districts travelling from a range of locations in the UK.

Half the league secretaries reported that 75% (or over) of teams in their league have no black players and one in ten suggested there are no teams at all with black players. Although the majority recognised there was scope for getting more black and ethnic minority players into the game, there were still 15% who could see no such possibility (including some who have black representation on the committee). Two thirds of respondents clearly see it as the responsibility of the individual to get involved. In response to the question 'Is there scope for getting more black and ethnic minority players into football teams in your league?', one league secretary replied *yes*, but argued that what is required is for them *to meet the entry requirements as detailed in the constitution of the league. This refers to the standing of clubs in their administrative affairs and standard of ground and facilities* [939]. Williams (1994) has suggested that this represents a form of 'ethnic closure', at best a refusal to make joining easy. Only a minority of league secretaries felt there was any onus on 'football' to involve people from ethnic minorities, mainly through some form of advertising / publicity. Some offered positive suggestions; for example one observed the need for *better liaison between community leaders and league*, and another noted:

*We need to create situations where minority players feel comfortable and welcomed. This means work for both 'white' teams and black/Asian players. Both need to work at making mixed teams successful. Managers must take a very large responsibility.*

Only 14% of leagues have **anyone** on their Executive/Management Committee who is from black and ethnic minorities.

Two out of five believe all black / Asian leagues are a good idea for the development of football, but were typically still cautious about the wider social desirability of such a step (there were also concerns voiced that this might hinder the development of talented players). Those who opposed them did so mainly on the grounds that they encouraged segregation rather than integration. However, such responses were sometimes based on questionable assumptions. For example, one league secretary noted that he *played football in Leeds in the early sixties against a team of West Indian origin and they were never abused* - not the same version of events told by black players in Leeds.

Almost all felt that abusing players because of the colour of their skin was unacceptable, though two suggested that it is sometimes acceptable, and a third said that while we might expect that it should never be acceptable, being truthful he felt that it was 'part of the game' - the culture of football.

None of the respondents suggested that racism was non-existent in grassroots football. Once again the most common response was that there was a small amount, but a quarter thought it was considerable, and the remainder thought it was throughout (11%). One league secretary maintained that the worst incident in recent years had been sparked by a fight between an African-Caribbean player and an Asian player. Opinion was fairly evenly divided about whether racism is more or less extensive than in the Premier and Football Leagues.

Although the County FA is quite insistent that it is its job to deal with racial incidents, twenty per cent of respondents did not expect to refer racial incidents to the County FA, forty per cent would request a report and half would themselves instigate disciplinary procedures. Perhaps this is not what the County FA want to hear, but it does suggest a preparedness to act.

All had heard of LKROOF and, apart from a few who were unsure, thought a similar campaign in grassroots football would be a good idea. There were however reservations: e.g. most comments are just 'heat of the moment'; there is no point in trying to stop something that does not really exist; wariness of official initiatives.

## **Local Authorities**

Not only do the local authorities seek to increase participation in football as part of their sports development policies, but they also provide the pitches on which the majority of grassroots football is played. As part of the county-wide anti-racism initiative the local authorities have worked in conjunction with KIO and the County FA to draw-up a racial equality charter (see Appendix 1) which commits them to the elimination of racism in sport, the promotion of wider participation by ethnic minority communities and disciplinary action for those engaging in racist abuse or harassment. The formal disciplinary procedures will be instigated by the County FA, but the local authority may also withdraw the use of facilities.

None of the local authority officers were aware of any recent racial incidents. They do not have their own monitoring procedures, expecting racial incidents to be dealt with via

referees' reports. Football development officers reported problems getting hold of basic statistics concerning how many people from racial or ethnic groups are playing and in which leagues. Indeed, at this stage the local authorities have very little information about racial issues in football as they do no ethnic monitoring or auditing. Being dependent on others reporting racial incidents to them makes it hard for local authorities to enforce the sanctions referred to in the charter. In addition, the lack of ethnic monitoring of participation, facilities and harassment, across the county's authorities reinforces the notion that race and ethnicity is not as significant as the monitoring of human, financial and physical resources. As most of the local authorities have equal opportunities statements and policies they ought to be able to prove that they are indeed able to provide the 'best value' for all residents in their local communities.

Within some of the local authority areas, sometimes directly supported by them, are community projects and sports development initiatives designed to increase black participation. For example, in Kirklees the SPACE project has already received national attention (see Craig, 1997) as a project to which the District's work is contracted in order to make use of community workers with specialist expertise. Bradford has established SCAR, the Sports Campaign Against Racism, which involves influential coaches and managers as an anti-racist pressure group in the area.

In Leeds there is a Striker Award Scheme operating in one of its inner city schools to identify talent. At the beginning of the 1999/2000 season Leeds City Council held trials to put together a team to represent the city at an Asian footballing tournament in Glasgow. When the team disbanded on return from the tournament the sports development staff circulated all who had attended the trials to try to recruit them to coaching courses, though without success.

Some of the local authorities are reported to be still doing little to engage with disenfranchised communities in terms of assessing needs and reducing barriers. This must be a starting point for some of the authorities that clearly think about the development of the game for groups not well represented in mainstream sport in a different way from the communities that are already included. Some local authority representatives went further by suggesting that where historical constraints and barriers have been experienced locally there was a need for some groups to operate separately. This might allow a 'safe space' to be made available to them at a distance from the local authority.

In some areas independent soccer coaches have recognised a need and offered opportunities that the local authority is unable or unwilling to run. In one inner-city area a self-financing soccer school was set up without any official links to the football or sports development officers. This soccer school now has 600 youngsters on the books for evening coaching and recreational sessions and 300 school based youngsters. Here, the work to draw in African-Caribbean and Asian youngsters is occurring beyond the mainstream, in an environment in which the various arms of the local authority have been unable to co-ordinate action as part of a coherent approach. If local authorities identify this as a more productive approach than running such initiatives themselves they might usefully find ways of facilitating their wider development.

Sports development officers in the local authorities are also responsible for running the award schemes for football coaching. The main schemes are the Junior Team Managers Award, the FA Coaching Certificate (which has replaced the Preliminary Award) and the FA coaching



Licence (UEFA 'B'), which is the equivalent of an NVQ Level 2. In each of the local authorities these awards are run in conjunction with further education colleges to allow further education funding to be used to reduce the cost of the course. Along with travel problems involved in getting to the courses, cost is perceived by the co-ordinators as one of the main barriers to people enrolling. Moreover, it is seen to be a particularly strong disincentive to many African-Caribbean and Asian footballers.

Those who are successful in gaining the awards are then registered with the FA, though there is currently no ethnic monitoring within the system unless the colleges require it. Each of the co-ordinators reported only a very small percentage of participants coming from minority ethnic groups over the past year even though in Leeds there has not been an all-white course in the past two years. The Leeds co-ordinator was able to put together statistics for the three years from January 1997 to December 1999. These indicate that approximately four per cent of those involved at each of the three levels mentioned above were of African-Caribbean or Asian origin. This is clearly lower than the proportion of the population as a whole (see Table 1) and is especially marked when it is considered that these groups make up a higher proportion of the younger age groups likely to be involved in coach training. In Wakefield no African-Caribbeans or Asians have been involved in recent courses.

Although the courses are offered as a standard package with no alterations, some of the local authorities have been trying to work out how to involve more people from African-Caribbean and Asian groups. Bradford City Council has launched a sporting initiative in Manningham (a part of the city with a high proportion of residents from (mainly Asian) ethnic minorities) and in 1999 located one of its junior team manager courses there. All but two of the dozen who took part were Asian, but there has not yet been a Certificate course for them to move onto. Kirklees believed that targeting a single ethnic minority group for a course would make it financially unviable because of the small numbers that would be involved (only one certificate course was run last year with 12 people on it - two African-Caribbean, but none of them Asian). The co-ordinator insisted that anyone could come on the courses they do run; all are welcome.

Although there are some good initiatives, there is more that could be done to redress the problems experienced by black footballers, especially given the size of the local authorities and the ethnic populations involved. Proper linkages need to be put in place so that there are exit routes from the existing initiatives, allowing people to capitalise on hard won skills.

## Chapter 3

### The Men in Black: referees' views

- Referees aware of their duty and committed to notions of fairness, but not very aware of what racism is about.
- They see or hear little racism (including black referees) - the main problem is seen to come from the touchline rather than the players - "keep it out rather than kick it out".
- Evidence of transference of responsibility for racist incidents onto the shoulders of minority groups.
- African-Caribbeans replaced by Asians as 'the problem', exacerbated by language issues.
- Very few African-Caribbean or Asian referees, and they are still not going through the training programmes.

While we were doing our study of rugby league (Long *et al.*, 1995) we became aware that by not consulting match officials we had missed the views of those in an important part of the game. They are literally the men in the middle (female referees are still very rare and there were none among our respondents). In this study we involved the secretaries of referees' societies, trainers of referees and referees themselves. This suggested that the referees see themselves and football as being under attack on racial issues. One referee noted:

*The laws this year specifically mention racism anyway, so that's something every referee should know about. And we do have instructional classes at referee meetings.*

Another immediately insisted that they never covered it on the instructors' courses in his district. Perhaps the referees we interviewed were the more active ones, but they welcomed the support they were able to get by discussing complex issues in the referees' societies.

Although there are some 1400 registered referees in the 'county' there is much concern that this is too few to cover all the matches around the 86 (now 91) leagues and other competitions. This applies to referees generally, but is particularly pronounced for black referees. The figures supplied by the secretaries of the referees' societies indicate that only 2.4% of the referees are black, and none were represented on their committees.

Black or white, the referees were agreed that their role is quite clear: to be firm in enforcing the laws of the game. They were equally agreed that the best way of avoiding problems from the players is to be confident in making decisions and to assert authority early in the game (the players too noted how they could tell a good referee in the first 20 minutes of a game). Authority, and how it is viewed by different players, was seen by referees to be at the heart of relations on the pitch. This has particular significance in the current context as there were several comments from white respondents that black players lacked respect for authority.

## Problems on the pitch

Most of the secretaries of the referees' societies maintained that there was no difference in refereeing matches when there are players from ethnic minorities. The normal explanation was that there are no separate laws that apply to ethnicity, and the referee's job is to enforce the laws of the game. The same line was endorsed by the referees themselves. However, the secretary of one of the referees' societies did note that different things are (un)acceptable in different cultures, and another that on such occasions the referee had to be quick to act to respond to anything that might cause a flare-up. And one of his colleagues, himself a referee, who prided himself on his strict reputation reported that he had been asked to replace someone for a game where 'the authorities' knew there might be trouble.

### Referees' Own Assessment of the Extent of Racism

The initial response of referees was that there is little evidence of racism on the pitch, at least not that they hear.

However, they know that they will be 'tested' at some matches.

The major problems come from the touchlines.

Some players have suggested to referees that their decisions have been made on racial grounds.

There were recurring observations about problems with Asian teams/players.

The most common view was that *the players are usually OK - the big problem is with the fans on the touchline*. One referee was adamant:

*I think we've all had the incidents where there's been an accusation that a comment has been made, but I can honestly say that I have never heard a player racially abuse another player in all my years of refereeing<sup>4</sup>... I've heard comments from the touchline and I've had to go and have a word.*

It was also suggested that the significance of what is said may vary depending upon the context, whether or not it is offensive may depend upon intent. There was however, a general acceptance of players using whatever means to gain an advantage by winding-up opponents. At the same time, there was also some appreciation that it may be the abused player who is sent off for retaliating. Many of the referees recognised that African-Caribbean and Asian players feel unfairly treated and abused, but felt that to be misplaced or a misrepresentation. When their integrity is questioned referees feel aggrieved and resented those players who use the 'race card' to dispute their being penalised or disciplined. It was pointed out that plenty of players get sent off, but some players think it is because of their colour that they get sent off.

*I think if we thought about the colour of his skin before we sent a player off we'd be a very poor referee. But I think a younger referee, inexperienced, just passed his exam, and there's 11 guys out there one colour and 11 another, and there's people on the touchline shouting - he might just think, 'Oh dear, if I do this I'm going to have a*

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<sup>4</sup> One of the research team's observers noted, 'The games I saw were refereed most of the time from the centre circle so it's not surprising if the referee [not the one quoted here] heard nothing'.

*major incident'. I think we've all had incidents where we'd have preferred not to go back into the dressing room afterwards.*

One white referee insisted that his black friends were quite honest that:

*...some ethnic minorities have a chip on their shoulder and they think they've got to be treated differently from other people... [ ] has said openly to me that on the football field a lot of his lads do try to pull the wool over people's eyes... A lot of people cry wolf to get something.*

It is almost certain that some will attempt to exploit any situation to their own advantage. However, that should not blind people to the kinds of experience discussed in chapters 5 and 6 below.

The white respondents also suggested that the greatest tensions were between different Asian teams, though one referee did point out that there is no shortage of problems with white teams playing white teams. The white referees felt that most of the difficulties they experienced with ethnicity lay with Asian players, supporters and officials. They bemoaned their organisational failings and suggested this might explain why they are more evident in the looser structures of 5-a-side football. More disconcertingly one of the instructors quickly resorted to the 'chip on their shoulder' explanation of why he thought all-black teams were difficult to referee. This was a theme picked-up by some of the white referees in the focus groups and other interviews.

- *The Asian lads seem to have a chip on their shoulder. And I'm not imagining it because I've refereed them long enough to know that it wasn't just one or two games.*
- *They (Asians) don't accept authority. They question every decision - it seems to be their culture.*
- *Some of them don't know the rules - it's not their national game. But the Premier League managers don't know the rules either.*

On the other hand they were very protective of 'their' Asian teams when they seemed to get unfairly treated by a team from elsewhere (in Bradford teams from Liverpool were particularly reviled). It seems that representing Yorkshire, however unofficially, takes precedence.

The referees, like the players, found it unnerving if players spoke in another language. One referee tried to work out the consequences of this:

*We've also got to take some responsibility when we go on the field. If there's five guys over there talking and you've no idea what they're saying - they might just be talking about how blue the sky is, but you've no idea - you're going to be a bit on your guard with them. It's human nature and it's going to come across, not in your decision making, but in your body language and other things. It has to be. You don't think in your mind 'Oh, I'm going to be different because I don't understand what*

*they're saying', but you're going to react slightly different to them. It's an unconscious thing.*

However, he was clearly unsuccessful in convincing the others that opponents and referees, however unwittingly, may play a part in the misunderstandings and tensions.

Among the secretaries of the referees' societies, none thought that racism amounts to anything more than a small extent (one that it is non-existent) in the grassroots game. Yet two still think that it is more extensive than in the professional game. They typically protested that they had no way of knowing if referees' reports made reference to racism, though they tended to believe that it was unusual for this to happen, if at all.

### **Being a black referee<sup>5</sup>**

In the words of one of the referees, black referees are still 'a novelty'. Bob Purkiss, one of the CRE Commissioners (himself a black referee), has drawn attention to the increased tariff when 'the bastard in the black' is a 'black bastard!'. The high profile brings added responsibilities. The secretary of one referees' society noted: *Our only Asian referee has struggled to achieve an acceptable level/standard of refereeing, and this is now thought of as 'Asians are no good at refereeing'.*

The black referees we interviewed reported little racism directed at them, though they also admitted there were some places they did not like to go, places where fascist organisations make their presence felt. They were also aware of an undercurrent:

- *Now [ ] they're rough and ready - I'm not saying they're racist, but if you're going to get any hassle you're going to get it there. I introduced myself in the dressing room and as I left I heard one of them say, 'We're in for some fun today, lads', and that registered for me.*
- *The first two seasons I did it I can remember when you walk into the dressing room and they all see you - that initial look. They don't have to say nothing, you can see it on their faces. But when you've been doing it two, three and four years they get to know you, and then that initial friction that was there to start with is all blown over.*
- *When people say to me "Why do you do it?" really all they're saying is "You're black - you shouldn't be out there."*

The general feeling among black referees was that the racial composition made little difference to the nature of the challenge they had to face because in any case *for ninety minutes there's no friends in football*. One referee pointed out difficulties he sometimes had with black players who expected him to be sympathetic. On the basis of his own experiences he is expected to know what they have to put up with week after week, so for this one week they felt they deserved a correction factor in their favour. *But the game is football and I'm here to referee.*

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<sup>5</sup> One of the focus groups comprised African-Caribbean and Asian referees (a further African-Caribbean referee was involved in one of the other groups), and others offered views.

One of the referees clearly felt he had been mistreated by league and County when his decision had been over-ruled and he had subsequently been removed from the League's list with no explanation; something he took to be an indication of racism on their part. One of the white referees also reported that a referee had complained to him that he felt he was being treated differently (lack of promotion and the games he was appointed to) from other referees because he was Asian. However, the others were quite satisfied with the support they received from the referees' appointments secretary and the County FA.

One of the instructors reported that there had been nine assaults on local referees (it was unclear what the area was he was referring to), of which five had been on black referees - a majority of assaults on a small proportion of referees.

## **Recruitment**

As already mentioned, there are few black referees. This was no surprise to one of the white referees who wryly observed:

*We don't do it for the money, god help us. Someone black who thinks he's going to get abuse going out onto the field isn't going to do it for the pittance we get.*

The position in terms of numbers shows little sign of improving as there are few black people doing the training courses. Some trainers suggested there had been no African-Caribbeans or Asians on their courses. Others variously noted: *one in the past 12 years, to a fair trickle, and lads coming through, but not enough.* Of those who are coming through, one trainer conceded that *most are all right.*

One of the rationalisations offered by a trainer for the small number of black referees was that *West Indians, by their own admission, don't want to be on the side of authority - it's not in their nature.* Another trainer commented that *Black and Asian people must be made aware in advance of the problems they will face from players - everyone gets abuse as a referee, but a black or Asian ref will get more.* This may be an honest representation of what happens, but it does not make a good selling point. Certainly one of the trainers suggested that this message had got through to the black and Asian clubs who had told him that they felt they *would not be appreciated.* As the lack of role models is commonly cited as a reason for non-involvement, there was some concern that even the high profile of Uriah Rennie had failed to attract more black referees.

At a recent meeting to 'clear the air' between referees' representatives and 'leaders of black and Asian football', the latter wanted to know why there were so few black and Asian referees. The reported response of the Referees' Association was, *Please send us some.* Another instructor suggested that they had been *begging people to come forward.*

Although most secretaries, and indeed referees themselves, thought the organisations were doing as much as they could to engage people from ethnic minorities, there was a suggestion that they currently appeal to a very concentrated market rather than looking beyond the immediate environment to people who may not yet be associated with the game. That would require a more active promotion to black communities, and views were divided over the wisdom of such a targeted approach. However, the concern of one trainer that such courses

are wrong because they should be open to *all and sundry* seems to miss the point - quite apart from the fact that the course in question was not restricted, positive action has to be taken if the current under-representation is to be remedied. However, the black referees counselled caution:

*The last thing you want is either a Director from Lancaster Gate or a West Riding representative to say we want more black referee - you'll kill it.*

*What you don't want is the leagues going into a black area and saying 'come on, black referee...' because then you're not going in because you want to go in, you're going because you're forced to. The course is the easiest part of it, going out there and doing the job that's it... So if the black person is not really up for it and they get thrown in there - even if there's not racial abuse players appeal and the poor fellow is going to be so frightened he'll make a balls up of it and maybe cost a team the game. So he'll go and he'll tell his 20 mates, 'Give that up for a bad game'.*

Their view was that the solution has to lie with the clubs themselves. If they complain about decisions going against them each week on racial grounds they need to identify someone they think would make a good referee and encourage him to do the course. However, as suggested by the last quote, recruitment onto referee training courses is not the only problem. A course in Kirklees, designed to attract African-Caribbean and Asian people, managed to recruit 18, but only four finished, none of whom have taken-up refereeing.

## **Changes in involvement and integration**

The kinds of criticism levelled at Asians earlier in this chapter were typically levelled at African-Caribbean footballers in the past. This is not to suggest that it is no longer the case, but footballing success has gradually won respect; the current standing of a largely African Caribbean team in Leeds was compared favourably with their early difficult years. The white referees clearly wanted to see mixed teams rather than largely African-Caribbean or Asian teams, but saw integration as being difficult. One explained that going to a new club it might be difficult to break into the existing cliques and recognised that it might be harder for a black player than for a white one to be accepted, but insisted that *they've got to take the first step themselves*. Surely there is a role for the club captain to make sure that players do not feel left out in such circumstances. Despite these difficulties, one of the black referees noted that even in the areas they had been talking about not liking to go to, teams would now have a *token gesture of a black player*.

We were informed that in Bradford referees had eventually decided that they would not let Sikhs play in turbans for safety reasons *because it could get pulled and hurt his neck*. A decision reached despite the longstanding exemption that Sikhs wearing turbans have from legislation requiring the wearing of helmets on motorbikes. Elsewhere the dreadlocks of rastas had prompted similar deliberations. On the other hand one referee appeared to have the agreement of the others when he suggested that if there was a difficulty over the day of play for an ethnic minority team (e.g. because of a religious festival) *the league would bend over backwards to make sure they didn't have to play on that day*.

The general assessment was that in the professional game racism had declined since the 1960s and 1970s and certainly since the worst excesses in the late 1970s / early 1980s - *not cleaned out, but calmed down*. Part of this was attributed to the success of a growing number of players, but there was also some lukewarm acceptance of the role of Let's Kick Racism Out of Football and its part in heightening awareness. All the referees, secretaries and instructors had heard of LKROOF, but not all were persuaded that it would be a good idea to extend this into grassroots football, either because they feel the problem is non-existent or have reservations about the effectiveness of such campaigns.

- *You'll stir up more problems by saying let's kick racism out because we don't think we've got it. You may have it at the higher level...*
- *I don't think it's to be kicked out, but I think it should be kept out.*
- *It's not going to work if you ram it down our throats again and we're already adhering to that. The odd advert, like in the handbook, and a letter from the county to the leagues pointing out that we don't want any racism... I don't think that once a year does any harm. It focuses people's minds occasionally just to have a quiet think, cos it's an insidious thing that will creep in - it won't suddenly happen overnight.*



## Chapter 4

### Club Positions: secretaries' reports

- Only a third of clubs claimed to have done anything to encourage the involvement of black players, and most were opposed to the idea of all-Asian leagues.
- Twice as likely to agree as disagree that ethnic minority players get picked on at some clubs, but the majority maintained that there were never any racist remarks from their players or supporters
- The vast majority believe that too much is made of this black/white thing, in football everyone is the same.
- General acceptance that 'winding-up' is an acceptable part of the game, but only 12 per cent think that abuse because of the colour of a player's skin is acceptable or sometimes acceptable.
- 70% per cent think there is no more than a small amount of racism in grassroots football
- But tend to think racism is more extensive in grassroots football than in the professional game.
- Almost all had heard of Let's Kick Racism Out of Football; only 10 per cent of them did not think it was a good idea to extend it into grassroots football.

The postal survey described in Chapter 1 led to questionnaires being returned from 253 clubs. Many local league clubs are only loosely organised, so we were pleased with the scale of the response. 94 per cent of the secretaries are male and the same percentage is white. The majority of club secretaries are still playing and this is particularly pronounced among black secretaries. Whereas 74 per cent of the teams had ten per cent or fewer black players less than one per cent had fewer than ten per cent white players. 41 per cent of clubs had no black players at all (compared with only 1% entirely black, or even 90% black), and 80 per cent had no black member of their management/organising committee.

**Table 3: Black representation in clubs**

	Black players	Black committee members
	<i>percentage of clubs</i>	
10 per cent or less black	74	85
90 per cent or more black	1	2

*Source: CLSR Survey of club secretaries*

Because of the relatively informal structures referred to it is perhaps not surprising that only a third of clubs claimed to have done anything to encourage the involvement of black players. However, even those who did say they had done something either relied on informal measures and 'word of mouth' (49%) or stated that their club policy was to encourage black players (28%). Relatively few had taken any formal steps like approaches to junior football in areas with large black populations or running under 17 age events to encourage young white and black players. It should be remembered though that in the world of local league football informal measures may prove the most effective, dependent upon who carries the

message and how. For example, one secretary described how they *regularly use their junior members from ethnic minority groups to encourage their friends and relatives to join*. Like the district associations most clubs were opposed to the idea of all black leagues, believing that this is not the way to develop football among black groups. The general feeling was that integration rather than separation had to be the way forward.

Club secretaries were asked to respond to a number of statements about the involvement of various groups in football. The majority does not feel that overseas players are having a negative impact on football in this country (only one in five think they are).

They disagreed with the notion that black footballers are naturally talented, which might suggest that many of the earlier stereotypes are breaking down. However, when asked about any identifiable characteristics of African-Caribbean and Asian players, a different picture emerged from a substantial minority of club secretaries. They suggested many attributes that they thought made African-Caribbean players suitable for football and few that made them unsuitable; the reverse was the case for Asian players. African-Caribbeans were portrayed as being strong and athletic: e.g. *quick, strong, skilful with stamina; general tendency to be taller and more muscular*. Apart from *disliking the cold weather*, most of the negative characteristics were to do with psychological orientation: e.g. *tend to become frustrated when things aren't going their own way - they tend to argue among themselves; with an inferiority complex; and not as dedicated as other ethnic groups*. The few positive attributes applied to Asian players such as *skilful, good, clever players* and a *general tendency to be agile and nippy* were complemented with identification of characteristics thought to limit them in playing football, most common of which were *bad temper, can't resist retaliating and easily wound up, tend to give up too easily and don't get 'stuck in' enough*. These perceptions were supplemented by comments on their physical size and references to religion and cultural stereotypes.

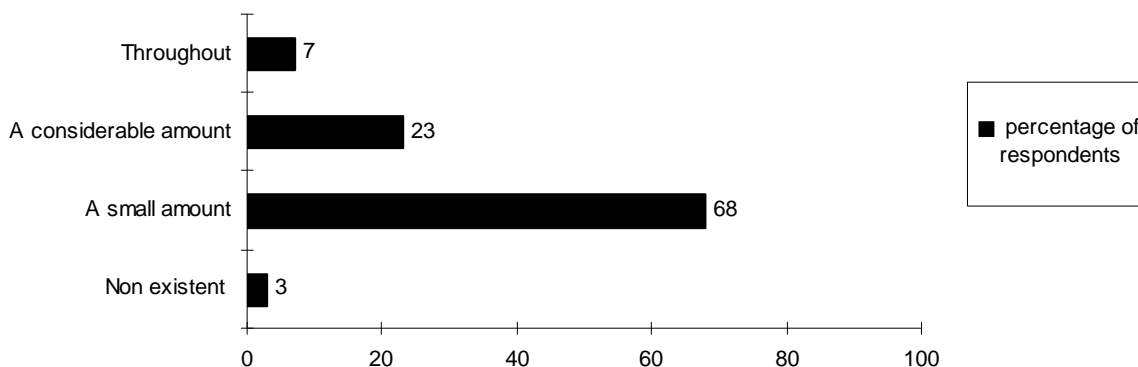
Responses to questions about the extent of racism wavered. The vast majority believe that 'too much is made of this black/white thing, in football everyone is the same', and the majority maintained that there were never any racist remarks from their players or supporters. At the same time, however, they were twice as likely to agree as disagree that ethnic minority players get picked on at some clubs. Seventy per cent think there is no more than a small amount of racism in grassroots football, but only three per cent suggested it is free of racism (Figure 1). Moreover, they compared it unfavourably with the professional game. Whereas 28 per cent thought it was worse (more extensive) in the grassroots game, 20 per cent thought it was worse in the professional game (Figure 2).

There is a general feeling that 'winding-up' is an acceptable part of the game (80% thinking it is acceptable or sometimes acceptable). Beyond that, however, most drew the line at racial abuse; only 12 per cent think that abuse because of the colour of a player's skin is acceptable or sometimes acceptable<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> This was in response to the question: *Most players at one time or another will receive abusive remarks from both players and spectators, but sometimes players get abuse because of the colour of their skin. Do you think this is: Acceptable as part of the game / Sometimes acceptable, when they play badly / Never acceptable.*

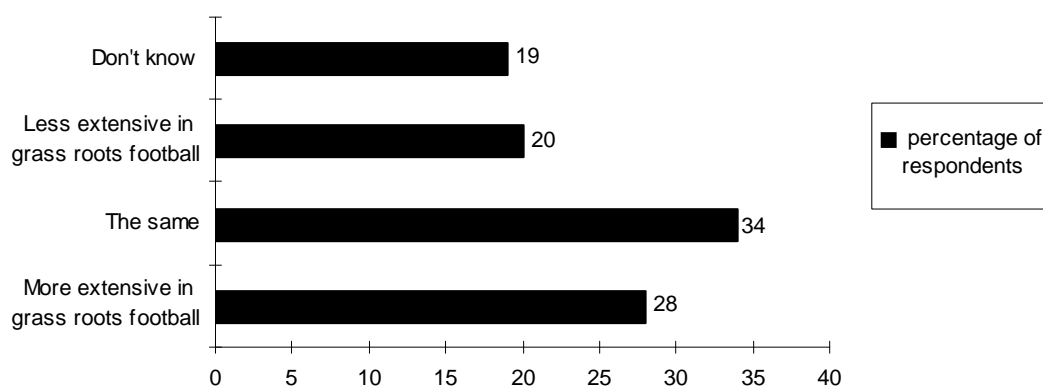
**Figure 1: Secretaries' views of how widespread racism is in grass roots football.**



*N.B. Figures do not sum to 100% because of 'rounding'.*

*Source: CLSR Survey of Club Secretaries.*

**Figure 2: Secretaries' views on the extent of racism in grass roots football compared with the Premier and Football Leagues.**



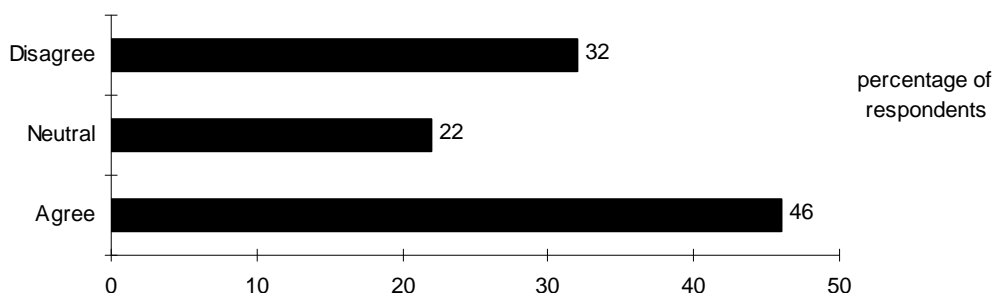
*N.B. Figures do not sum to 100% because of 'rounding'.*

*Source: CLSR Survey of Club Secretaries.*

As can be seen from Figure 3, there was a tendency to believe that referees took care of any racism on the pitch, but there were still a third who did not believe this.

Only 13 per cent had not heard of Let's Kick Racism Out of Football, though perhaps it should be a concern that among people so involved in football there should be even this number. Of those who had heard of LKROOF, only 10 per cent did not think it was a good idea to extend it into grassroots football. Of this 10 per cent most thought there was not a problem with racism in the grassroots game, with the remainder saying they doubted such a campaign would work, or that it would make matters worse.

**Figure 3: Secretaries' views of whether or not referees take care of racism on the pitch**



Source: CLSR Survey of Club Secretaries.

Some clubs are concerned primarily with winning, while others have a more social orientation. In our sample the clubs were equally divided between those with more of an emphasis on winning, those who placed the emphasis on the social side and those who saw them evenly balanced. Those who prioritise winning might be expected to make decisions on the basis of footballing ability rather than social relationships, and indeed they did prove more likely to have taken action to encourage the involvement of black players.

Although there was not a big difference, those concerned more with the social side were rather less tolerant of 'winding-up' than those who prioritised winning, but the least accepting of 'winding-up' were those trying to strike a balance between winning and the social dimension. However, there was no variation in (non) acceptance of racial abuse by those prioritising winning or the social dimension. Those who emphasised winning saw racism as being slightly more widespread and were slightly more likely to believe it is more extensive in the grassroots game than in the professional.

There was a wide spread of ages, from 18 to 65, but a concentration of almost two thirds aged between 25 and 44. Given the comments about changes within the game in the way people think about race, and suggestions that younger people are more open-minded, it was decided to examine whether different age groups responded differently to the attitudinal questions in the questionnaire.

The age group most likely to accommodate arguments of ethnic and racial difference were the oldest, those aged 50 and above. By comparison with the other age groups, it was more probable that they would dismiss racism as an insignificant part of the game. Further, they were the most likely to be satisfied with the actions of officials to deal with racism. At first sight this might lend support to the idea that it is 'a generational thing' and people are becoming more accepting of black players. However, the group closest to them in the views expressed were the youngest, those under 30.

Because there were relatively few black club secretaries it was difficult to identify whether there were any clear distinctions between their responses and those of their white counterparts. However, they were more likely to have done something to encourage ethnic minority players, and were more likely to disagree that overseas players are having a negative impact on football. Similarly they were more likely to agree that ethnic minority players get

picked on at some clubs, and to believe that there are never racist remarks from their team and supporters. Quite unlike the white secretaries, the majority disagreed with the suggestion that too much is made of black/white issues; it seems their experience tends to suggest that everybody is not equal in football. Related to that, the majority felt that referees do not take care of racism on the pitch and they also felt that racism is more widespread in grassroots football than do white secretaries. Interestingly, the black secretaries also indicated that their clubs were more likely to place winning above the social dimension.

There were only six women's clubs in our sample, but we thought it worth examining whether there appeared to be any difference in the views expressed by their secretaries (though half of them were male) to see if they were operating in a different culture. Overall the responses reflected those of the other clubs, though they were less likely to accept 'winding-up' as part of the game. They were more likely to believe that racism is less extensive in grassroots football, and this was reflected in their responses about whether or not there were racist remarks from their own club or ethnic minority players being picked-on at other clubs.

## **Chapter 5**

### **On the Pitch: players' experiences**

- All the African-Caribbean and Asian respondents have experienced physical and / or verbal racist abuse (many still do).
- White players generally do not recognise racism on the pitch.
- Black players perceive officials to be generally unable to recognise racism on or off the pitch.
- Most players see a need for action at the grassroots of sport to reduce the potential for racism in the game.
- Stereotypes persist, though not often attributed by white players to themselves.
- Let's Kick Racism Out of Football is widely known and generally positively regarded, though many are sceptical of what has been achieved. Black players keener than white players to see a grassroots version.

Interviews were conducted with players from 11 clubs around the county. The clubs chosen were either predominantly African-Caribbean (3), predominantly Asian (2) or mixed (6). The normal procedure was to interview the club captain and other 'experienced' players - experienced in terms of having 'been around' rather than necessarily in terms of age. This resulted in 11 interviews with African-Caribbean players, 10 with Asian players and 12 with white players. Additional views were provided by other players who wanted to have their say.

#### **Players Background / Careers**

Interviews with white players revealed their fathers and brothers as major influences on their playing careers. Most of the white players have had the support of parents and other relatives who were involved in the game in one guise or another. For them the link from school to community was, in the main, seamless in that there was no problem in them finding a team or club to join either while they were still at school or after leaving. White players identified no barriers that they had encountered in gaining access to a more structured league beyond the school system.

African-Caribbean players were less likely to have parental support at the start of their careers as few of their parents played regular football. Brothers, peers and, in particular, school PE staff were seen as bigger influences on career development and transition to a club. The PE staff were instrumental in supporting, motivating and arranging transport when needed. African-Caribbean players spoke of barriers in gaining access to clubs and scouts for representative junior and professional teams. Typically barriers were experienced in the form of not feeling welcomed into local clubs that were in the main white (it is not just past experiences, but current perceptions that represent barriers). Scouts from representative sides were reported as exercising a certain level of exclusion through the schools they chose to visit to identify talent. Even when African-Caribbean players are 'seen', the feeling persists that they have to be better than their white counterparts to get in, and once they do they have

to contend with racist language, name calling and ignorance. Football coaches were also less likely to visit inner city schools, in part because the schools lack the funding to bring the coaches in.

Contrary to stereotypes of Asian families the Asian players generally had been neither discouraged nor encouraged to play football. Families were portrayed as being ambivalent to the game, and like other parents priorities were set in terms of work and free time. Our respondents, of course, were people who had come through to play for clubs and a consistent theme for them was that they had relatives who played and so had role models or support structures in place.

Many of the Asian players knew of other Asians who were playing solely with/among themselves in leagues or informal structures not affiliated to the FA because they were not happy with the way they were treated on the pitch or from the sidelines. Wanting to stay away from intimidating environments, many players were playing at levels below their proper standard, which was seen as a waste of potential.

This reinforces the notion that football in the UK is a domain dominated by the practices of white males. The issues concerning access to clubs and a relatively unproblematic passage through the levels for white players is different from the experiences of African-Caribbean and Asian players.

## **Stereotypes**

In light of the discussion in Chapter 1 about the way in which different ethnic groups have been regarded in sport, we asked the individual players whether they thought there were any stereotypes in the game and to what extent they believed they were 'based in reality'. The white players (all from mixed teams) offered little by way of reflection on the characteristics of white players - it was apparently not an issue that had occurred to them - and were also hesitant to appear prejudiced or repeat stereotypes of other ethnic groups. One white player even said he had never heard any stereotypes before. African-Caribbean and Asian players had most to say on themselves and each other, and least to say on white stereotypes. Overall there was a general lack of stereotypes/traits identified in relation to white players. However, generally the white players were seen to be getting more out of the system / benefiting from the system (at the expense of others). A lack of perception of what constitutes the characteristics of white players (whiteness) may give an indication of the task ahead to get predominantly white institutions to reflect upon their own processes and practices.

### of African-Caribbean Players

#### *African-Caribbean on African-Caribbean*

The African-Caribbean players were aware of views held by others about themselves, at the same time as having reasonably clear views about themselves and other racial and ethnic groups. Some saw themselves in a positive light such as *more talented, fitter and faster*, and *more expressive*. One noted how others seemed to have a common perception that African-Caribbeans *tend to be fast and therefore get put up front*. He had arrived at this conclusion

because in teams he saw with just a few African-Caribbean players, those were the positions they occupied.

There were suggestions that the stereotypes in society had affected their experience of playing football. One described how he had to *play hard - something to prove*, while another described how *black players have to work harder just to please 'yu man'*, the man in this case being white managers. Another suggested that African-Caribbean players *need discipline / coaching into them at an early age*. One African-Caribbean player thought that *everyone [white players] is scared of black players, until 20 minutes into the game*. This player went on to state that white players did come to realise that African Caribbean players were just like any other. However, in this case the assumptions that people make concerning stereotypes appear to give African-Caribbean players an edge at the start of games. Pertinently one player recognised how it was *just other peoples attitudes* to his ethnicity that he had to contend with.

#### *Asian on African-Caribbean*

Asians made positive comments in respect of African-Caribbean players, in that they were often perceived as being *more enthusiastic* with *natural agility*. The Asian players identified no negative stereotypes of African-Caribbean players. However, one player said there were *no differences* [between the two groups], and another somewhat confusingly suggested that there was *no difference - except physical*.

#### *White on African-Caribbean*

Although three white players said there was *no difference* between the ethnic groups another three thought African-Caribbean players were *more athletic*. Only one White player identified a negative stereotype of African-Caribbean players; that there was sometimes an *attitude problem*, although this was qualified by making the same criticism of white players.

### of Asian Players

#### *Asian on Asian*

Like the African-Caribbean players, the Asian players offered views on other ethnic groups, but principally about themselves. Positive stereotypes of Asian players were that they *pass the ball more* and were simply *better*. There were some stereotypes that the Asian players identified which put them in a bad light, for example they are *smaller* and that they *physically lack it (but not skill wise)*. One older Asian player did suggest that the younger Asian players tended to be a bit *hot headed*. More generally, one player suggested that Asian talent was *stifled 'cos they're intimidated by other players*. Although one suggested that it feels like the *world is against them* two players did note that things were changing for the better. Only two comments were made about family and cultural constraints, one suggesting there was some *family pressures for career*, supported by another player stating that he received *no parental support* in playing football.



### *African-Caribbean on Asian*

African-Caribbean players held few stereotypes which showed Asian players in a positive light, with only one African-Caribbean noting that Asian players did tend to be *expressive*. More frequently comments were critical, some of which were based on perceived physical attributes while others were based on family constraints. Typical physique-based comments were that the Asian players tended to be *weaker* with one African-Caribbean player suggesting that Asians had *no footballing brain*. Another African-Caribbean player was not sure that Asian players were *good enough*. Many more comments were made on family/cultural stereotypes: *family and parental pressure constraints on them to enter business / academia* or on *their drive towards commerce*. Other African-Caribbean players suggested that Asian *families did not want them to mix with blacks*, and that football was *not a prominent sport in their community*. Another thought that it was *harder for them to be accepted*.

Here it seems that African-Caribbean players were just as uncritical in challenging stereotypes as other racial or ethnic groups. This does however give an indication of how stereotypes become part of the folklore of football and are accepted generally by players because that is what they have been told since they were youngsters.

### *White on Asian*

As already noted, three of the white players thought there was *no difference between the ethnic groups*. However, white players were more willing to offer stereotypes of Asian players than they had been for African-Caribbean players; for example, that they *don't mix*, they are *smaller and lighter* and are *hot headed*. Similar to the earlier comment from an African-Caribbean player, one white player said he thought that Asians *can't read the game properly - not like white or black people*. One White player did note that he thought that Asian players had *a harder time*.

### of White Players

#### *White on White*

Only one white player made a comment about other white players and he thought that there was sometimes an *attitude problem*. No other reference or stereotypes were made by white players on other white players. This inability to see 'whiteness' because it is all around them, in comparison to blackness, may offer some idea of why the white players struggled to note stereotypes of themselves but could of 'other', ethnically different players.

#### *African-Caribbean on White*

There were very few positive comments by African-Caribbean players on their white counterparts, though one emphasised having *no problem playing in a white team*. Another did suggest that white players were *more organised*, although the flip side of this was, as one African-Caribbean player noted, that white players tended to be *more rigid - see the national team*. Another thought that white players were *not as aggressive as blacks* and that it *takes a while to blend in because they [white players] are scared of preconceptions [of black players]*.

*Asian on White*

Three of the Asian players thought that there was *no difference* between them and white players. The comments that were made by other Asian players on white stereotypes were not physically based, but instead referred to the culture / structure of the game, particularly the rigidity of the English national team system. Although one Asian player thought white players were *more enthusiastic*, other Asian players thought that *white players were encouraged from the start* and that *whites get more breaks*.

## **Experience(s) of Racism**

All the Asian and African-Caribbean players recognised that they have been subject to racism at some point in their footballing career. The racism has been experienced in various ways, to different degrees and at different times in their playing careers, but all have felt its impact. Players, referees, supporters, league officials, managers and coaches were all identified as people who have continually caused an element of racism to creep into their experience of football.

In contrast, none of the white players we interviewed had ever been subject to racism themselves. Where white players had experienced racism in the game it had been where they witnessed African-Caribbean and Asian players being subjected by others to verbal abuse on the pitch. Contrary to the perceptions of the referees, one player commented on how *blacks get more harassment / abuse in a white team*. However, the closest a white player came to experiencing racism first hand was not directly related to the game but when his African-Caribbean team mate wound a window down to ask directions to a football ground and the man on the street said, *I can't tell you how to get there but I can tell you how to go back to where you came from!*

White players found it difficult to identify what was or was not a racist incident. For example, they were not aware of when a tackle or comment was a 'running issue' (based on an earlier racial incident) and what was not, unless it was made obvious through abuse. Two of the white players had never seen racism in the game or even knew of its presence which in itself is remarkable considering the experiences of the African-Caribbean and Asian players and the fact that all of the players were chosen because they were experienced footballers (and the white players were all from mixed teams).

For all of the players who experienced racism the main perpetrators were white, and in the main were either players or spectators. According to many players, racial differences, like physical differences such as hair colour, are there to be used as a 'wind-up' or as a way to put opponents off. One of the African-Caribbean players was disgusted at his white team mates who verbally abused opposing black players:

*I've had players from my side disrespecting my brothers, and I find that strange because by disrespecting my brothers you're disrespecting me. Sometimes you find that hard to stomach...it might be the first time but it won't be the last.* (African-Caribbean, club captain, semi-professional)

Many players have said that the racism now is not as bad as it was ten or fifteen years ago, though there are many players who have suffered racism in recent times with varying levels of frequency. Some players expect racism all of the time, while others are surprised when incidents occur. 'Frequency' of racism for some players is measured per game, whereas for others it is measured over the course of a season.

*Now it's better; it is less prevalent especially in Bradford. But out of town it's really bad... I've seen it when my son is playing. There is a high probability rate in some areas.* (African-Caribbean, captain)

*Less than two games out of every ten [racist abuse in the league].* (African-Caribbean, club captain)

As many as a half of the African-Caribbean players, though fewer Asian players, suffered physical abuse which they put down to premeditated racist intent. One of the Asian players gave an example of when he was set upon by a whole team (including substitutes), resulting in a broken nose. This player said of the frequency he experienced racism:

*Once every three or four games. Depends who you're playing and what standard. At a higher level there are fewer incidents.* (Asian player, Sunday League)

Players regularly supported the notion that racist incidents occur more frequently in the lower leagues due to some related characteristics of these games: match day officials are fewer and as a result less able to be vigilant; players are less 'professional' in their approach to the game; supporters are not policed or stewarded. Also, players who have suffered racism suggested that abuse is more likely when they play away from home. These points are exaggerated when teams with African-Caribbean or Asian players are in matches located in specific rural or white working class, urban areas. Indeed, players spoke about being able to calculate potential race-related problems where teams with a history of racist trouble play in these more notorious areas against teams which have one or more black players.

*Teams from Middleton and East End Park are where we have had problems. I don't get involved... Supporters at East End Park drink beer on the sideline and call us 'nigger'... we play and get off the pitch.* (African-Caribbean player)

## **Part of the Game?**

Although black players argue that racism is abhorrent and not to be tolerated, they do indeed tolerate it to a point by conceding that racism is 'part and parcel' of the game. They expect what has been regularly described as 'heat of the moment' exchanges to result in a racial epithet from white players to black players. More experienced players have said that they have learnt to stay on their game where racism is in evidence because it is one of the ways that white players will try to put black players off.

*In the early days racism in the league was bad. If you're good you'll definitely get it if you aren't you won't get it... Heard it from players, and supporters...nigger, wog, go back to your own country, been spat at... It's been physical as well as verbal '12 studs showing' at times, smacked in the ear... Was taken off after the 12 studs were*

*showing because of fear of harm. Players said 'well played'! yeh but look what you wo doin'.....Ahh it's all part of the game. (African-Caribbean player)*

Other abuse is designed to emphasise that other ethnic groups do not belong in Britain. The 'get back' theme may be modified to include some intended cultural reference: e.g. *make your chappatis elsewhere*. The question still remains, 'Why does it have to be part and parcel of the game?' This clearly forms part of a picture which illuminates the extent of racism in grassroots football. There is almost a casual (or resigned) acceptance that the game has the 'three Rs': rules, regulations and racism.

## **Officials**

Referees were seen by most players as being the cause of incidents on the pitch, due either to their inability to recognise racism or to being racist themselves. Three quarters of the African-Caribbean players and half the Asian players stated that referees play a crucial role in the way racism is manifest in a game, most commonly in the way players go unchallenged so that racism may be unwittingly assisted. Players reported that referees have ignored 'heat of the moment' and even regular racist verbal abuse throughout the course of games. This has resulted in black players becoming frustrated and past bad decisions being the root of other transgressions by players during games.

*I think they have to educate referees to pick it up. I think they ignore it. I have had incidents especially at that match in [ ] last year and where the word 'Paki' and 'go and wear your sari'... We actually said to the referee, 'look, you can actually hear this'. He said, 'I heard it but I didn't know which particular player said it'. This kept going on throughout the game, late tackles and racism. Not only from them, but from their fans as well. Because I had given someone a hard tackle they had called me homi and given me racist stuff on the side of the pitch. The referee said basically he has to live round there, I don't think that's good enough. (Asian Player)*

*... in terms of abuse, yes, we get loads of it when we play all white teams, mostly when we go away, from the spectators too and the referee he does nothing he turns a deaf ear all the time. (Asian player)*

Other players suggested that in their experience the matter had gone beyond the referee simply ignoring the racism around him, being racist himself. Players had different experiences of how the matter was then dealt with by officials. In the first occasion described below the League was seen to act appropriately, but in the latter inaction meant disillusionment:

*We had a West Indian lad playing with dreadlocks. The first thing he [referee] said to him was "You shouldn't be selling crack". That's out of order. To be fair to the League they got rid of him. (Asian player)*

*The referees do nothing... Half of them can sometimes be racist, so they will not pull anyone over for comment. We have turned up at a match, OK we were late, but the referee has said, 'Where have you come from? Islam and back? And those sorts of remark have got nothing to do with it. The referee was secretary of the league - we*

*complained about racist abuse, but when he gets to his desk he rips it up. How are we supposed to make complaints when we are not listened to? (Asian player)*

The WRCFA have an image among some of the players as being 'a racist institution'. This has arisen from a number of incidents which are either ongoing or have resulted in what was felt to be an unsatisfactory decision or lack of response. Some of the mixed and predominantly African-Caribbean or Asian teams have felt targeted by the WRCFA or a league which has resulted in an atmosphere of distrust and ill-feeling.

*A few years ago I was at a final and WRCFA officials were there and the crowd were coming out with racist taunts. I kicked the ball out and asked the ref what he was going to do and I asked him to sort out the touchline. He was reluctant to do it, but was asked to sort it out after the game. I was so frustrated that I wanted to pull the team off but you get into trouble and fined if you make a stand like that. At the end of the game the league official made some roundabout reference to racism instead of addressing it. That took the gloss off the game. (African-Caribbean player)*

There was a feeling among the African-Caribbean and Asian players that they are fined and banned disproportionately in comparison with their white counterparts. One player said with feeling:

*For my last ban the ref said I called him a white bastard (but I called him a fuckin' cheating and a fat bastard) and I wouldn't do that because my girl friend's white, my kids are white, my friends on the sidelines are white. So if you're going to ban me, ban me for the real reason! Dicanio got 11 weeks and my ban was for 18 weeks! But I sat through my ban, came back, played in a couple of games at the end of the season and now they won't let me play this season. The team's always under-strength because of things like this. I wrote them a letter but got no response. (African-Caribbean player)*

This particular player, having served his ban was not allowed to play for his team but was allowed to play for any other in the same league.

Opposing managers and coaches have also been cause for concern as they are often central to the discipline and respect that teams afford to the opposition. Where coaches and managers have lower standards concerning racist behaviour, or indeed if they use racism as part of the game plan, referees and players will find it difficult to avoid problems on the field.

*From mostly white teams - if it's in your nature you're still going to be racist even if you have a black person in your team... Even the coaches, managers and club secretaries... you hear it from everywhere. (Asian player)*

## **Spectators**

Over half of the black players had suffered racist abuse at the hands of supporters. This ranged from 'heat of the moment' name calling to more calculated, focused, verbal and physical intimidation. Again, the incidence of supporter abuse is heightened when the team with black players is playing away from home. Some of the black players reported occasions

when they had not used changing rooms, or left them, for fear of physical violence from supporters.

*When you go out the area you get white women! who're stood on the touch line and shout 'shut up you fuckin' monkey. Who do you think you are you fucking black bastard?' (African Caribbean player)*

### Players' Attitudes to the 'Kick It Out' Campaign

As can be seen from Table 4 most of the players from each ethnic group had heard of the 'Let's Kick Racism Out Of Football' campaign (more aware than the spectators, but less aware than club secretaries). However, Kick it Out may be disappointed that they had not all heard of an apparently high profile campaign.

<b>Table 4: Players' views on Let's Kick Racism Out Of Football</b>			
	Heard of	Impact on football	Extend to grassroots?
African-Caribbean	9/11	5 positive 2 minimal 2 none	8 yes 1 doubt benefit
Asian	7/10	4 positive 3 none	7 yes
White	9/12	4 positive 5 minimal	2 yes 7 doubt benefit
<i>Source: CLSR player interviews</i>			

Among those who had heard of the campaign, players disagreed about the value of the consequences. The balance was positive, but some were critical of what had been achieved and others felt the impact had been minimal at grassroots level. The white players suggested it had not had much of an impact because there was not really much to do. Because they minimised the problem in this way and questioned the necessity of any action, most of the white players did not support the idea of extending the campaign into grassroots football (only two of the white players were in favour of such an initiative). One felt that requiring referees to be more vigilant, even in attempting to combat 'foul and abusive language' was more likely to inflame issues on the pitch. Despite doubts about its likely effectiveness, the black players on the other hand wanted to see a grassroots campaign. The main point for them related to the need for proper structures to ensure the vigilance, discipline, and authority necessary to challenge racism.

One white player in a senior level team thought that if there were to be a campaign it would be of more use / relevance to those in the lower leagues due to the dearth of officials and stewards on duty when matches are being played.

## Improvements

When asked for suggestions of improvements they would like to see in the game, the African-Caribbean players most commonly spoke of focusing attention, time and resources on the youngsters in the game. In part this would involve making more use of black coaches and involvement in the schools, with specific references to the good practice of the SPACE project based in Kirklees (a project also commended by one of the white players). However, local authorities bemoan the lack of suitably qualified people and are concerned at how few people put themselves forward for the necessary courses. Working with young people generally in order to break down barriers was a popular theme, and it was felt that positive multi-cultural case studies should be used as exemplars. Suggestions for other proactive initiatives are summarised in Table 5 (N.B. lack of a mark to indicate a recurring theme does not indicate disagreement, merely that the measure was not specifically identified). The last column indicates the lack of awareness most white players had of the issues involved.

Improvement	Recurring theme	African-Caribbean	Asian	White
Use black coaches in schools - SPACE project in Kirklees cited as good practice	*	3		3
General educational work with young people - use positive multi-cultural exemplars	*	3	3	3
Educate supporters (and youngsters generally) - leaflets and programme notes	*	3	3	
Officials regularly observing conduct of games	*	3	3	
Better communication between administration and clubs	*	3		
More black players on committees	*	3	3	
Numerical comparison of white, African-Caribbean and Asian players cautioned and sent off to reveal any disparity		3		
More black referees (but none of the players could see themselves in that role) and cultural awareness training for all referees	*	3	3	
More integrated teams		3		
Scouts operating more widely		3		
Improved media coverage, coupled with better community links from professional clubs			3	

*Source: CLSR player interviews*

One player wanted to see a policy of 'zero tolerance' practised by the FA towards racial abuse, with any racist behaviour countered with appropriate punishment. This of course is now the official policy of the County FA, but it appears not yet to have reached some of the referees and players on the pitches. There was certainly general concern (from white players too) that 'culprits' should be identified and dealt with.

The white players had much less to contribute on what they envisaged would improve the situation.

Some of the African-Caribbean players emphasised that the problems of racism they faced in the game were not restricted to football, but need to be addressed at a wider societal level at the same time. However, it was the white players who were more likely to point to issues outside the game that needed attention. This seemed to be a function of some players' inability to reflect upon the dominant practices and processes within the footballing culture of their careers to date.

As one Asian player stressed any initiatives at the grassroots level need to be well organised in terms of being long term and sustainable.



## Chapter 6

### Like It Is: Case Studies of Clubs

#### Fforde Grene

- Fforde Grene, Leeds - Established 1971
- Successful Sunday League team, lack of finance halting further advancement into higher Saturday leagues.
- Racism is not as bad now as in the 1970s but still part of today's game.
- Referees seen as a problem due to their inability to spot racist incidents.

#### History and development

Based at the pub of the same name, the Fforde Grene football team was originally set up in 1971 by the son of the then landlord. After seven years the present management team took over and made them one of the most successful sides in Yorkshire. The team started out, as all new teams have to, at the lowest level and worked their way up to the Premier division of their league. As the club has grown more successful more players have wanted to play for them. Initially there were only three black players whereas now the team is predominantly African-Caribbean, which is not surprising given the surrounding population. However, they do emphasise that *You don't have to be black to play for us.*

The club have won every league and cup available to get to the position they are in now and cannot get any higher without changing their name and becoming a dedicated Saturday team.

*...would have to change our name to an area like 'Chapelton' or 'Roundhay' to get support. We need to get backing, our own ground. Pub teams can't get any higher. Saturday teams have more avenues to get through to, e.g. Northern Counties then Unibond ...*

Funding, or the lack of it, is a major reason for not playing on a Saturday as most of the club's best players turn out for other clubs across the county and get paid sums that the club in its present position could not stand. One of their concerns is that because they are not a well off club they are unable to pay their players so if they were to play on a Saturday they would lose many of their best players who already go out of the area to play for semi-professional clubs in Saturday leagues. An honest appraisal of what needed to happen for the club to play at a higher level involved: *our own ground with fencing, stand and other facilities where you can serve drinks and food.* The management and players feel that other clubs have a longer history and are more established, which is why they have managed to get the money for higher level facilities. However, they feel as though they are more organised now than when they first started.

The home pitch is on a local authority park half a mile from the pub and the second team pitch is two miles away. Two years ago new showers were built at the pub at a cost of £1000, and since then the club has been saving money by changing and showering there

rather than at the park. The landlord puts on food after each game to encourage players and spectators to give him a return on his outlay while the club management runs raffles and collects subs, and clichés are exchanged. Other support comes from the brewery (£1000 for kit) and William Hill (£300), and they are *always sending letters out for sponsorship*. The rest of the club's money comes from fundraising. Just like other clubs, subs each week cover charges for the referee, the pitch and other fees: *the lads pay to play...there are no superstars in this team*.

Because the players pay to play the management team occasionally takes pity on players who turn up late for the team meeting on Sunday morning because they went out the night before with their Saturday team. However they still argue that they take a 'professional' approach to the game and are viewed as such by their opposition who see them as *the Man Utd of Sunday League football*. This status means that: *Everybody in Leeds wants to beat the Fforde Grene, they up their game when they play us. There are no easy games for us*.

Things have changed for the older members of the club who used to be subject to racism every match. They now feel as though racism is not as prevalent as it used to be in the 1970s but they are certain that it is still in the game.

### **Profile of club and members**

The Fforde Grene has 60 registered members, aged from 16 to 38. The players in the club range from ex-professionals and semi-professionals to recreational members. There is no significant turnover of players as players are reluctant to go elsewhere: *Once the Fforde Grene is in your blood you don't want to go anywhere else*. However, a few years ago it was recognised that, like the Arsenal team of the nineties, the team was getting to the stage where they were all getting old together. As a result the club has recently set up a second team which is made up mainly of new, young players, and older players are fielded to 'bring them on'. It is hoped that the knowledge of the first teamers rubs off on the up-and-coming players.

One of the major reasons for the club's insistence on bringing in new blood is that *first and foremost we are about winning*. It was stressed that *the lads are very close and know each other very well, and they take that on to the pitch: The wanting to win has to be there otherwise it will be pointless*. The manager went on to say of the club's players:

*I've been in football since I was a kid and the Fforde Grene team spirit is the greatest team spirit I've seen in my life. Some people have been here for 20 years.*

It was agreed that there is a certain kudos in playing for the Fforde Grene. Local people know the players and regularly enquire about the progress of the teams. The players feel that the locals appreciate having a successful club on their doorstep because they enjoy being associated with winners.

*People know that when the spring comes - Feb/March - that they can have days out watching the Fforde Grene in quarter finals or more.*

However the Fforde Grene is seen as more than a few days out in the spring. The community focus of the club is seen as far superior to some more established Saturday teams in the area

who rarely encourage local players to join their clubs. Those other teams were not seen to be welcoming black players, thereby making it difficult for local black players to realise their potential. Tony plays for a Saturday team out of the area rather than going to more established local teams who do not endear themselves to the Chapeltown and Harehills locals due to their aloof nature and lack of vision regarding the black community:

*I'm club captain and when I've been upset by the manager's decisions and thought that I could play for someone else I've thought, 'Who else could I play for?' The feeling is that strong with most of the players. Players will stick out if they don't have this attitude. Players are upset if they don't get picked and that is how you want your players all the time.*

### **Successes and failures**

Most clubs were reported to be very friendly towards the Fforde Grene although there are a few clubs that traditionally give them a hard time because they do not particularly like them. The players maintain that they are *the club that people love to hate*. One noted:

*Probably people in high places don't want us to win again because they want to give other people a chance to win.*

At the time of the research the first team was joint top of the league and in the quarter finals of the Sandford Cup (the second team was also doing well in the cup). In recent years the club has won everything there is to be won. They have now been in the Premier division for nine years, during which time they have won it three years in a row; a bad season is when they might win only one trophy. The Fforde Grene have played three times at Leeds United's home, Elland Road, and have also played at Anfield when they got to the semi-final of the National Pub Cup which started off with 4000 teams from the whole of the UK.

Apart from losing that semi-final, one of the biggest disappointments to date is that more players have not signed professional terms with League clubs. Several players were expected to 'go professional', but it is commonly accepted here that it is very difficult for Sunday league players to 'get scouted'. However, there have been success stories: *It was only two years ago when Lutell was playing for the Fforde, and now he's playing for Bury!* Lutell James still comes back to watch 'the lads' on a Sunday; *he hasn't forgotten where he came from.*

### **Club legend**

Apart from the players who 'make it' into the ranks of the professionals, those who become club legends are the loyal servants. One of the players 'Charlie' is highly regarded because of his unstinting devotion to making the club tick behind the scenes, and is referred to in terms of endearment: *he is a character...he does things above and beyond the call of duty.*

'Bopper', one of the newer players, also appears in the annals of folklore due to being part of another team that: *got rushed at East End Park by ten guys with swords, baseball bats and hammers when I played for GN.* After a machete was drawn by an opposing spectator Bopper had to defend himself with the only thing he could, a crutch borrowed from another spectator who had a broken ankle. He then ran to phone for help but was refused use of a

telephone at two local houses. Although the team from East End Park is now more organised and less combative, Fforde Grene accept the inevitability of conflict in certain games when they play away. In response to racist incidents like these Bopper takes a pragmatic view, noting that *sometimes you react and sometimes you don't*. One occasion the Fforde Grene team did not react on the pitch was when an opposing goalkeeper put a house brick in his goal and threatened to throw it at the head of anyone who tried to score. This particular player was banned after the referee's report went to the county association.

For different reasons the tour to Wales also went into club folklore because they were *run out of Wales!* after members of the Welsh night club fraternity took a dislike to one member of the team who supposedly was not wearing the right type of trousers. It rapidly became clear that there was another, racial, agenda: *In Neath they would not make an exception... by the time we got back to Leeds everyone knew about it!*

### **Relationships with officialdom**

Referees are a source of concern for the Fforde Grene as they are seen to miss racist incidents on the pitch on a regular basis. In the club's eyes this lack of awareness often results in black players being booked because the referee only sees the retaliation.

*When you get to the county [FA] the referee has lost his hearing and his sight; he didn't hear the white player say nowt. It's happened time and time again.*

This 'oversight' has been a constant source of irritation for the players and something they hoped that the referees and league would do something about. Otherwise, the links with the league have improved immensely in recent years. Although there have been 'encounters' with the footballing authorities over the years, the manager argued:

*I always thought they were against me but over the last 5 or 6 years we have had a good rapport and they have helped us by suspending our fixtures when we played in the Carlsberg Cup and things like that.*

There were, nonetheless, some reservations about the average age and attitudes of the league committee members as most of them were seen as quite old and a minority were seen, to a certain extent, to be bigoted.

### **The Future**

As noted earlier, the biggest stumbling block for the club is that they lack the financial resources to take the 'next step' which would allow them to play at a higher level. They do not have their own facilities and they have players playing for other clubs on a Saturday. Without the money to pay them they would be operating with a much depleted squad; it is only by playing on Sundays that they can get such high quality players to play for them. The executive members at the club recognise this and are focused instead on staying at the top in their current league and cup environment. The future involves developing the second team players so that they can replenish the first team as more established members retire. In addition, they want to continue winning and to prove to professional clubs that they could be a possible feeder club for them if they were willing to invest the necessary finance to ensure the club's long term prosperity.



## Sikh Temple

- Sikh Temple, Huddersfield - established 1971.
- Team is seen as a league of nations - white, African-Caribbean and Asian (Sikh and Muslim).
- Typical grassroots Sunday League team - mixed success and a philosophy of 'we play to win, but like to socialise afterwards'.
- Observe some of the racist players of yesterday becoming the officials of today.

### History and development

*Anyone can overthrow us on the committee! It's not 'my club' or 'our club' - Sikh Temple is an independent name so if we do a bad job someone else can take over.*

Sikh Temple started in 1971 in the Huddersfield and District (Saturday) League as Punjabi United, one of six Asian and two African-Caribbean teams at that time. Slowly the other Asian teams gave up, with Sikh Temple the only one left apart from Black Stars (who still play on Saturday). The team was formed by a group of 15/16 year old friends who grew up together in Lockwood. The original members felt that the team had lasted so much longer (in comparison to many other grassroots teams that have folded) because *it were a group of us who grew up together and never left the club*. One of the original players admitted he would have felt 'the odd one out' in a white team and did not know of other teams he could join.

*I don't think you were made to feel that welcome. In them days there used to be loads of village teams, that's where we found more of the racism - the whole village used to turn out and watch the 'Paki team' as they used to call it. We used to have right battles in them days - to me there was more racists in them days - them days it used to be more open, now it's more hidden.*

He recalled that there were few rules in *them days* against abusive language, and went on to suggest that nowadays *they can't call you Paki in front of you, but it's still there*.

In 1976 they decided to form a second team to play on Sunday. As with the Saturday team the players were mostly Muslim/Hindi, although there were always African-Caribbean and white players in the teams. Just as now the Sunday team played 'out of' a local pub. The Saturday team (Punjab United) gave up in 1982 due to players' work commitments. They recalled how many of the younger players did not stay in the game as they were:

*getting a lot of stick from outside - that didn't encourage them. We never used to complain cos nobody used to listen. We didn't complain cos as far as we were concerned nothing was going to happen. We never knew there was the FA Council. Them days we used to have loads of fights cos of colour. The ref never sent anyone off. In the '70s and '80s I never saw anyone get sent off for calling someone a black or Paki bastard - it never happened really... It's still there - there's different ways now - it's more hidden but it's still there.*

Players are charged £2 per game to cover the cost of kit wash and insurance, but this is insufficient to cover other costs, so about ten years ago the team's management approached Sikh Temple for sponsorship. The Sikh Temple continues to contribute £800 p.a. Although there were no 'conditions' applied to the sponsorship there was the hope that with the sponsorship (and name) more young Sikh (and Asian generally) lads would be attracted to the club. At that stage there were some Sikhs playing in the second team, but few had managed to secure a regular place in the firsts.

Unlike many local teams there is no immediate problem with finance. However, a few years ago: *We were in debt - fines and everything else - so we went round the Asian community and did a fund-raising for £1000 and cleared the debt and bought some kit.* The raffle is successful in raising money with Diggsie fund-raising outside the club (e.g. at the Temple). They were wary of other potential sponsors: *If you change the name to a pub and you get a new landlord they might not want to continue to sponsor you.* This was said with some justification as the team had recently moved their 'home' because of a change of pub landlord. The new landlord said he was losing hundreds of pounds on a Sunday:

*But we don't think he was. I think he thought 'if I kick the blacks out of the pub I'll get more trade coming in'. All he did was provide us with some sandwiches - it didn't cost that much - we could have used the room upstairs, but he just wanted us out.*

Previously Sikh Temple played their home games on the estate where most of them lived. However, the 'away teams' did not like playing there, so they moved to another pitch some distance away. They maintain that for their part they are not 'scared' of going to other teams' home pitches, irrespective of their location and would: *big ourselves up for the matches.* Since the change of venue they have noticed that they do not get as many supporters. Calling the team Sikh Temple has never caused problems in having other Asian groups playing for them. The current team was described as *a league of nations now - white, black, half-cast, Muslims and Sikhs playing for us.* Players who sign for the club tend either to stay with them or drift out of the game completely.

### **Successes and failures**

The team has had considerable success, with a 'clean sweep' in the Sunday league five years ago when they won the Challenge Cup, the Championship (for 2 years in a row), Secretary of the Year, Best Sports Team, and 'the Charity'. A year later they were broken-up (see below).

*It's only three or four years since we were the sports team of the year - and two years later we were kicked out of the league.*

### **Relationships with officialdom**

Relationships with the administration of the game are strained. In part this is because Sikh Temple believe unrealistic expectations are placed upon teams:

*Our Sunday League Committee want a professional team, but we're amateurs, and they fine you for everything: late kick off, not marking the scorer's name, late team sheets, etc... The people on the committee used to run teams but now they don't, and I say 'If they're so good at telling us how to run the teams why don't they run one?'*

One of their major concerns is that some of *the players who were calling me a Paki bastard in the 1970s* are the referees and committee men of today, still carrying the same attitudes.

*Some referees have made it clear that they hate Sikh Temple - for whatever reason. What makes it worse is the committee, especially the Sunday league committee. In the West Riding it's the ref's word against the player's word (one on one) and they take the ref's side.*

The club recounted an incident that occurred in the pub after a game when someone started a fight with one of their players. They now regret not calling the police who would have arrested the instigator. Instead, the team were reported to the FA who expelled one of their players and the team was suspended. In another incident two of their players got banned for life because of what happened in the pub an hour after the game. The club were aggrieved because the FA chose to believe the referee rather than independent witnesses in the pub.

*Certain referees have said, 'I don't like Sikh Temple' and what we can't understand is why they are reffing us. Last year there were one ref who made it clear he didn't like Sikh Temple. After that game five or six of our players packed-up, with the general feeling of 'its bad enough trying to beat 11 men without trying to beat the ref'. It's not so bad if it's an isolated incident but when it happens week in week out...*

*The refs have been told to watch for certain players. Although they are on best behaviour it only takes one ref to cause us a problem - and the whole team suffers. If you take players off when there's a bad ref it would be hiding the problem - we would be admitting defeat.*

However, Sikh Temple feel that many of the referees are now better. This they attribute to the shortage of referees in their own area, which means that extra referees have been brought in from elsewhere in the county with no preconceptions of the club. There is a feeling among the team that clubs receive differential treatment, with 'favourable' treatment being shown to one in particular. The team in question is perceived as being able to do no wrong. Particular concern was expressed because a referee's wife recently reported an incident there when racist comments were heard, but no action was taken. This is attributed in part to their being a white team, one of whose organisers left to join 'the committee'.

They feel the league should be investigating where black teams have gone. Part of the problem was portrayed as a culture clash, a clash in which some referees feel threatened and resort to the book. As a result there have been suggestions of starting *our own Asian league* in the expectation that there would be sufficient interest for about ten teams. One of the expected benefits is that there would be more sympathetic refereeing: *If I was reffing their games it would be different to someone else cos I know it's part of their culture to shout and bawl a lot - and I'd let it go.*

The County FA was given credit for the meeting that was set-up to allow clubs to put their views to representatives of the FA. They also feel somewhat reassured that there appear to be more touchline visits now to assess how the matches are conducted. Just knowing that someone from the West Riding may be watching appears to them to have reduced the incidence of arbitrary or vindictive decisions.



*The best thing that's happened is that they are now coming to watch our games. I've been saying for years that the words in the report and what happens on the pitch are different, and now they realise, and they come to us now and say, 'You're right'.*

## **The future**

The people making up the core of the club are resigned to the team coming to an end when they are no longer involved. The cohesion given initially by having a group of players who grew up together is being lost and they are concerned that there are now groups within groups; it was noted that the younger players go to their own pub after the game. For Diggsie and the management team, running the club is a cherished hobby, but it was suggested that none of the younger players want the commitment of running a team and lack the financial skills to do so: *most players only worry about their boots and shin pads, and don't know what's going on behind, how to run the club.* Our research suggests that similar concerns are expressed in countless clubs around the county.

However, currently the biggest barrier to further success is seen to be a lack of younger players. They are concerned that by comparison with their own experience in the past there is little currently being done in schools. The lack of links and natural progression for players at 16-19, when they are too young / not strong enough to play in a district league, is seen to be responsible for the drift into 5-a-side. It is then difficult to attract them back to playing 11-a-side club football outside:

*They get used to playing with their mates indoors and don't want to come outside. The 5-a-side pitch at the temple is fully booked from Monday to Friday - there's less argument with the refs and so on.*

Because of this they believe that more work needs to be put into separate teams/leagues to provide youngsters with the opportunities and encouragement they need to enter and remain in 11-a-side football.

## **Heaton United**

- Heaton United, Bradford - established January 1996
- Chequered history - resigned in 1998 from a league they found to be 'racist'
- Everything going well in the new league.
- Enjoyment and competition are the key.

## **History and development**

A group of friends began training in early 1995 and formally set-up the club the next year. The players have all known each other for a long time - most live near each other and have grown up together. The club has had the same captain throughout and most of the players have remained the same. They won the championship in their first season and again the next season, but after two and a half years decided to leave the league in the middle of the season because of problems: *we were getting racist taunts and problems with the referees.* The next

season they joined a different league, changed their name and ground and now feel much more comfortable. They are also pleased with the astroturf facilities they have been able to negotiate for midweek training.

### **Players and club culture**

There is no charge for training, but players are charged £2 per match (£1 for substitutes) to pay for the referee at home games and contribute to club funds from away games. The club uses its reserves to pay fines in the first instance, which the player pays back in instalments. Collective team spirit is emphasised and players are expected to attend midweek training whether or not they have played / will play on a Saturday. With a squad of 34 and only fourteen able to play on a match day there is a lot of competition for places. This helps to ensure everyone turns up for training: *we have a lot of players and any of them will be only too happy to play*. Most of those not selected turn up to provide support at matches.

*Without this club the players would not have the chance to play competitive football....so I think the club means a lot to all the players. We play for each other - we play because we love football.*

*We have good fun - but we are a very competitive club. You know if you play to the best of your ability you tend to enjoy it even more. Everybody here plays to win either in training or during the game. Winning is part of enjoying it.*

Ages range from sixteen to thirty two. The club has retained most of its players; some have been lost when they have gone away to university, but they typically turn up to play with the club when they are back in Bradford. After the game players meet for *a bit of a laugh*. Living near each other most of them are 'mates' who would expect to go out together at the weekend.

Although it is a young club there are some players who have acquired particular significance. The first of those referred to below helps to fuel the belief that with the right breaks 'we could be up there'. The second refers to the complex relationships between standards of playing and refereeing and understanding of the game.

*We had one lad who said he'd been at Bradford City who let him go after three years. We signed him up and he got into the team, and then all of a sudden we realised he was rubbish. The next week he got dropped and then we never saw he again. If that was Bradford City's standards then they are shit!*

*We have a character, a striker who does not know what offside is. He hasn't got a clue. He thought offside was when you go past the keeper or somewhere. He does score a lot of goals though. He has been playing for the club since we started. He is a very good player, you know but I think he is a bit slow up there.*

However, the 'most valuable player' is in fact the club secretary. The importance of his role is generally recognised.

*Without him there would be no club...it's that simple. You get loads of managers, you get loads of players, but you don't get many people who are that dedicated. Sometimes they cannot get into the team, and yet they are always there for the club*

*...paying the fines, making sure everything is up to date, washing the kit, they're ready every week - always there with the nets and everything. But yet nobody even notices him most for the time. We have had the same secretary for the last five years and without him, man, we would not have a club.*

For his part the secretary insisted that he loved his role, insisting that as long as the club is still running he is prepared to continue.

### **Success, failure & the community**

The club has gone from strength to strength and won increasing recognition, losing only 14 out of the last 108 matches and just one in the last seventeen. Although they are only a young club they have always been able to find a sponsor (currently a firm of architects and before them a clothing company). They have also received support from the Prince's Trust and Bradford Council. The club has good relationships with each, appreciating the contributions and support they have received and making sure that every six months both the council and sponsors receive an audit to account for spending.

Heaton see themselves as a community club open to everybody in what is to them a small close-knit community. They now have a high profile in the area and attract a lot of interest from youngsters whom they expect to be able to accommodate, getting them involved in training initially with a view to playing for the team in a few years time. They note that there was no similar opportunity before the club was formed.

*Everybody wanted to play football, but nobody would do anything about it in the past. There was nobody there to give it enough time. Now we have a secretary and a coach and everything..... we have training every week and we have somebody to do the paper work and keep the club ticking.*

### **Relationships with officials, officialdom and other clubs**

Club members contrast their positive experience in their current league with extremely negative experiences in the league they first joined. In the current season they have had few disciplinary issues and consider the referees to be much better than they had previously witnessed.

*Much better. We have had no problem with them. We have had a few bookings and red cards but every team has that, but nothing to complain about. We have had yellow cards for 'heat of the moment' sort of things - nothing really major, just football related tackles and things.*

This season they have typically marked the referees at eight out of ten, even when *some of the decisions go against us*. They feel that in the other league, half the red and yellow cards they received were undeserved, perhaps not unusual for a football club, but it contrasts sharply with their current feelings. When they had had cause to complain about racism on the part of a referee (see chapter 5) they received no response despite a letter and phonecall, which they attributed to the referee in question being secretary of the league.

According to their analysis, part of the difference in experience is because of the composition of the respective leagues. In the first they were one of the only Asian teams among thirty, whereas they are now in a multi-cultural league. As one player noted: *Because there are players from different backgrounds in all the teams, we as a team get a lot less hassle than before.*

League meetings help to promote good relations with other local clubs. They are particularly close to one club, Rose Old Boys, who also play locally and sometimes share a pitch. Heaton have sometimes lent them kit or nets. Heaton feel it gives them an interest in watching a game if they are not playing themselves.

### **The future**

Heaton are very optimistic about the future and harbour ambitions that if they stay together they will in time be able to move up to the semi-professional leagues, as long as they are able to maintain their good financial position. They only have one team at the moment, but their plan is that promotion should be accompanied by setting-up junior teams. They have many young players who train with them and are confident they could recruit more, but currently there are no teams for them to play for.

Like many other teams they recognise the importance of their own fundraising, but are also planning charity matches to raise some money for a local cause as part of their efforts to give something back to the community.

## Chapter 7

### On the Touchline: spectators' experiences

- Spectators less tolerant of 'winding-up' than those in the game
- 44% had heard abuse directed at Black/Asian players, but this is lower than for other targets of abuse
- Little support for the idea that Asians are unsuited to football
- High awareness of national campaigns

By comparison with even the poorer attendances in the Nationwide League the games we were concerned with had few spectators. However, the referees and players have already indicated that the touchline is the source of much of the unpleasantness they have witnessed. Their views tended to complement the quote in the first chapter from Leroy Rosenior about the perceived threat from spectators in some circumstances. We conducted a questionnaire survey among spectators at a semi-professional club, a small ground and a local authority owned playing field in different parts of West Yorkshire. At the less formal matches most of the people on the touchline are associated with the club (substitutes, suspended or injured players and other friends and hangers on) and may be recruited to run the line while encouraging their own team.

Most of those involved in the survey were hardened supporters: 70 per cent had watched football at that level at least ten times over the past year, and a similar proportion had been watching for over five years (Table 6). Some were also keen spectators of professional football, though a third had not been to a professional game in the past year. Overall nearly three quarters of the supporters were with friends or family, but those in the park, though not playing themselves, were mainly with one of the teams. The majority (86%) were male - the same percentage as indicated in the 1998/9 FA Premier League National Fan Survey (Norman Chester Centre, 1999) - with quite an old age profile (36% aged 50 or over). Ten per cent of respondents in our sample were African-Caribbean, Asian or mixed race.

**Table 6: Frequency and length of time spectating at this level of football**

Occasions in past year	% respondents	Number of years	% respondents
1 - 4	19	Less than 1 year	5
5 - 9	11	1 - 5 years	25
10 or more	70	More than 5 years	70

*Source: CLSR Survey of Spectators*

The majority of spectators felt that players at this level are more relaxed in their approach to the game than professionals, but there were still almost 40 per cent who thought they took it just as seriously. There was a similar split in the perceptions of fair play with 59 per cent considering there to be more fair play at this level.

The spectators were less enthusiastic than the club secretaries about foreign footballers in the British game (see chapter 4); only just over a quarter feel that they improve it (Table 7)<sup>7</sup>. Respondents were then asked to turn their attention to the level of football they were watching at the time and say how important it is for clubs to have some local players (Table 8). A strong local orientation was evident; only eight per cent were prepared to say that the club should recruit good players from wherever they could.

**Table 7: Are spectators concerned about the number of foreign players in the professional game?**

	<i>percentage of respondents</i>
'No, they improve the standard'	27
'We are close to the limit for foreign players'	21
'Yes, foreign players limit opportunities for British players'	44
Don't know / unsure	8

*Source: CLSR Survey of Spectators*

**Table 8: The perceived importance of clubs at this level having local players**

	<i>percentage of respondents</i>
Vitally important	50
Good, but not that important	36
They should get good players from wherever they can	8
Don't know / unsure	6

*Source: CLSR Survey of Spectators*

Spectators were less tolerant of attempts to wind-up the opponents than the club secretaries (see chapter 4). Whereas 20 per cent of club secretaries believe 'winding-up' is never acceptable, 36 per cent of spectators (almost twice the proportion) found it never acceptable, while half the proportion (23% compared with 45% of secretaries) considered it acceptable as part of the game. However, when asked the same question about players being abused because of the colour of their skin, they responded similarly to the club secretaries, with just over ten per cent saying that it was acceptable or sometimes acceptable. This is also very similar to the 13 per cent of rugby league supporters in the 1995 study previously referred to.

Spectators were asked if they had heard abuse being shouted at football matches at this level and at whom it was directed. Levels of reported abuse appear generally high (Table 9). The main target of abuse is clearly the referee; 89 per cent reported hearing referees abused and 72 per cent said they were the most common target. It is interesting that abuse directed at black/Asian players had been heard by the smallest proportion of all. These responses may,

<sup>7</sup> The data in Tables 9 & 10 are derived from questions that we adapted from the FA Premier League National Fan Survey conducted by the Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research.

of course, indicate what are perceived to be ‘acceptable’ responses: it may be that referees are thought to be accepted as ‘fair game’, but abusing black people is recognised as part of a different agenda. Even this level of 44 per cent reporting that they had heard abuse directed at black players is greater than the highest level recorded at any Premiership ground (see chapter 1), though the question in that survey did specify ‘racism’ aimed at players.

**Table 9: The targets of abuse**

	Any	Most common
	<i>percentage of respondents</i>	
The referee	89	72
Club coaches/managers/etc	50	2
Black/Asian players	44	6
The other team generally	66	8
Players by their own supporters	51	1
Supporters of the other team	50	2

*N.B. Figures may not sum to 100% because of ‘rounding’.*  
*Source: CLSR Survey of Spectators*

A recent study took as its title the throw-away line: ‘Asians can’t play football’ and challenged its credibility (Bains & Patel, 1994). Few of our respondents suggested they were in agreement with this and almost three quarters disagreed (Table 10). For comparison we asked the same question about women and although respondents were less sure about this, a majority still disagreed with the proposition. Confusion was greatest in trying to assess whether black players are naturally gifted (a proposition that seems to be increasingly replacing the previous negative stereotypes).

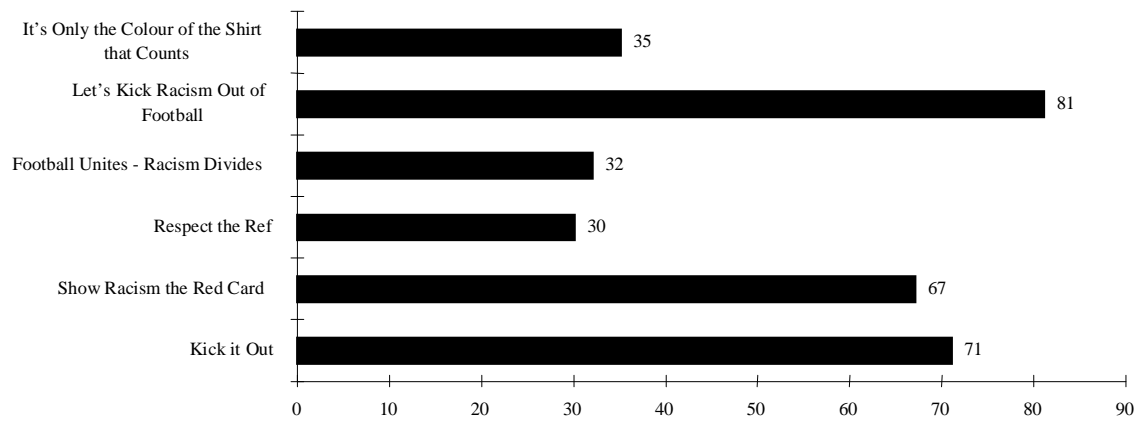
**Table 10: Attitudes towards different people’s suitability for football**

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
	<i>percentage of responses to each statement</i>		
Asians are unsuited to playing football	4	25	72
Women are unsuited to playing football	12	36	52
Black players tend to be naturally gifted	16	57	27

*N.B. Figures do not sum to 100% because of ‘rounding’.*  
*Source: CLSR Survey of Spectators*

We also asked the spectators which of a series of initiatives they had heard about (presented in the order in Figure 4). From this it would seem that *Kick it Out* is still better known through its campaigning name, *Let’s Kick Racism Out of Football*. *Show Racism the Red Card* also appears to have achieved high recognition, more than twice the level of *Football Unites - Racism Divides* which is based not far away in Sheffield. Although the fewest number of people had heard of *Respect the Ref*, 30 per cent awareness is quite high for an initiative that does not exist.

**Figure 4: Awareness of Campaigns**



Source: CLSR Survey of Spectators



## Chapter 8

### At the End of the Day: conclusions & recommendations

Although grassroots football plays an important role in many people's lives and in the development of football, it receives little attention from the media or policymakers and commands few resources. Beyond the senior clubs many teams come and go. As with most of the 'voluntary sector' there is dependence on relatively few people. Respondents reported a narrow skills base in terms of administrative know how, which is the source of much frustration and friction between clubs and officials. Agendas inevitably differ even between the different types of organisation playing a part in running the game. For example, as the governing body of the sport, the FA's position is between the sports development interests of local authorities and the leagues who are concerned to ensure a structure for their clubs to play. The natural reaction of the latter may be to meet any difficulty with discipline and expulsion, which may not address the sports development agenda and creates a climate of mutual mistrust.

- WRCFA, the leagues and local authorities need to provide support that promotes sustainability of clubs.
- The leagues should provide, and require attendance at, user-friendly training courses in sports administration at the beginning of each season. They should be prepared to send in 'troubleshooters' at any stage should it become evident that a club is experiencing problems with administrative procedures.

The research revealed a clear difference in perceptions of the nature and extent of racism in grassroots football. This is set in the context of limited appreciation of what the world is like and appears to be like from alternative perspectives. Non-recognition of a problem on the part of white players and officials (and our respondents might be expected to be generally more aware than non-respondents) may be because of a lack of racism in grassroots football. However, this is not the perception of black players, nor of many of the other white respondents. Our questionnaires and interviews suggest that there is conflict between black players and the football authorities and with white players and spectators, to which much of the administration is seemingly oblivious. All the African-Caribbean and Asian players had experienced racism in physical and verbal forms as well as what they interpreted as institutional forms (e.g. differential treatment by officialdom). In contrast, even the white players playing alongside black players reported little experience of racism. Unlike many of the white cricketers and rugby league players in our previous studies (*Long et al.*, 1995, 1997) the white footballers had little awareness of racism around them in grassroots football. The referees and administrators also indicated low levels of awareness of racism. In any case, the referees (white and black) argue that they are consistent in their application of the rules; the players, however, disagree and the black players tended to believe that in addition to missing things because of a lack of vigilance referees apply the rules differentially to their disadvantage.

- League and County committees would benefit from having tailored racial equality training.
- Training for referees needs to include more comprehensive awareness of 'race'-related issues to help them recognise the significance of what is happening at matches.

- Players need to be involved too so that they recognise the part they have to play, aware that it is not just a problem 'the authorities' have to deal with. This initiative needs to include the responsibility the players and coaches/managers have to the referee.
- Independent specialists could be appointed (or advice provided by KIO or the CRE) to assist the leagues and counties in the interim before training begins.

There is an absence of black representation beyond the players. Our research has demonstrated this in relation to the composition of county, district and league committees and even team management, and one of the referee instructors commented that in doing *a lot of speaking at dinners* he hardly ever sees a black face in the audience. The experience of the committees is limited in terms of the cultures, problems and aspirations of ethnic minorities, and so they lack empathy.

One of the consequences of this lack of representation is that at the moment black players know in advance that they will be met by nothing but white faces at any disciplinary meeting. Disciplinary hearings are naturally intimidating, but this contributes to a court martial atmosphere. Its significance might be best appreciated by considering the likely reaction of most white players similarly summoned to account for themselves before an all black committee. We have no direct evidence to suggest that procedures are unfair, but there is undoubtedly a perception among many black players that they are. No governing body of sport can operate without bureaucratic processes, but these need to be transparent so they can be seen to be fair.

- League and county committees need a more representative membership to reflect the diversity of the clubs and should use powers of co-optation if necessary to correct the imbalance.
- The leagues and county must have more effective and speedier communication with clubs before hearings.
- The FA might usefully specify timescales within which reports of racism will be acknowledged and acted upon.
- Leagues and Counties need to make sure that all clubs appreciate that there is a standard tariff of penalties

Black players are generally of the view that racial incidents are not as frequent or aggressive as they were in the past, but believe that the underlying racism persists. Older people may display in-built racism through ignorance arising from the culture in which they grew up, whereas the racism among younger people may be evidenced by a smaller number, but be more calculating in its intention to hurt. Certain geographical areas were identified by black players as representing high risk. These are also known to referees even though they play down the incidence of racism. Some of the players suggested that the amount of open racism experienced is less when playing with higher level teams.

For our case study teams, success has brought a measure of respect, but it may also mean that they are identified as the team to beat. This can heighten feelings of 'us and them' when

largely white teams face teams with several black players. Different views were expressed about whether racial problems are more likely when white teams are playing predominantly black teams or teams with one or two black players.

- WRCFA should extend their recent practice and nominate experienced, independent observers to conduct spot checks. If clubs are found to be breaking the County's code of practice by engaging in racist behaviour the observer's report needs to be attached to sanctions (e.g. fines, points deduction, barring from cup competitions).

There is a lot of confusion over what constitutes racist behaviour, and indeed black players react in different ways depending upon perceived intent. Although still indicative of racist views, abuse 'in the heat of the moment' may be shrugged aside by some black players, but their reaction is very different if it is seen to be part of deliberate provocation either out of malice or psychological tactics to gain an unfair advantage. Although there was some wariness of racial stereotypes, there is evidence that such images still emphasise notions of 'us and them'. Moreover, black teams and individual players may sometimes come to assume the characteristics racial stereotypes project for them.

The black players clearly want to be persuaded that somebody is listening to their concerns about their treatment. For this reason the meeting that WRCFA held for clubs with black players was welcomed. It was a chance for club representatives to meet the County FA outside punitive disciplinary structures, and the facilitating role played by KIO helped to ensure a productive outcome. The experience may have been uncomfortable for the County FA, but the rewards are there to be reaped - just the fact that they were prepared to do it was seen as a positive sign and respect was increased.

- WRCFA needs to follow-up this meeting with other 'open' meetings (e.g. around themes like pitch use and discipline) and draw in representatives of the league to build upon this initiative, review the progress of the campaign and establish better relationships in the future.
- The FA should encourage other county associations that have not yet embarked on this route to do so.

Clearly the football authorities need to address how they can dispel the notion that racism is 'part and parcel' of the experience of football for black players. This is all the harder in a culture in which there is general acceptance of 'winding-up' as a means of gaining a tactical advantage.

Although awareness of Kick It Out and the Let's Kick Racism Out of Football campaign is high, there was some doubt about its impact on football. Many white players and officials question whether there was much that needed changing anyway, and some black players are sceptical about whether any real change has occurred as a result of campaigning to date. However, there was still broad support for the extension of campaigning into grassroots football (apart from among the white players interviewed). Clearly the most important changes have to come from within individuals, but part of the significance of campaigns is that they lend confidence to those in the game who want to voice their distaste of racism, but might otherwise remain silent.

- There is a clear need for education and cultural awareness, but any campaigning needs to be designed to minimise the inevitable backlash. The forthcoming 'West Riding Against Racism' poster needs to be made widely available by KIO and the County FAs around the country and their affiliated leagues should be encouraged to carry reminders in their handbooks that racist behaviour will not be tolerated.
- Similar messages should be carried on registration cards.
- Campaigns need to integrate the different levels/constituents of the game - administration, clubs, local authorities - and draw in other institutions.
- Better relations need to be established between the clubs, leagues, districts and counties and the local authorities so that all 'own the problem'.
- WRCFA should plan to monitor the change in perceptions and the extent of racism in the county 18-24 months from the release of the report.

The charter (Appendix 1) that has been adopted by the local authorities in West Yorkshire, WRCFA, the Federation of Yorkshire Sport and the Yorkshire and Humberside Sports Forum helps in this process, but could be strengthened.

- Local authorities should work towards a position where it is agreed that action 'will' be taken (rather than 'may' be taken) against clubs or players who have been found to have been engaging in racist abuse or harassment.
- A similar charter should be adopted by every local authority and county FA.

Concern was expressed about the shortage of players and officials. To some extent the former is self-regulating in relation to the number of clubs, but should be a concern for the FA. The shortage of referees is more significant in the current context, and at lower levels it is most unusual to have neutral lining. Referees commonly insisted that they heard no racist abuse during games, yet the black players insisted that this is certainly not unusual. Without a full complement of officials it is indeed difficult to keep track of everything that goes on. (In the absence of linesmen, referees are inhibited from keeping up with the play in case of a long clearance which could leave them remote from the action. Therefore they tend to officiate from medium range, which makes it difficult to detect racially abusive comments.) Football has traditionally insisted that it is impossible to make such provision at grassroots level, yet other sports manage to do so.

- The FA should require a full complement of officials at all league and cup games.
- The FA should fund a significant increase in the reward for referees.
- Greater efforts need to be made to recruit and train black referees.
- Clubs should be required to provide someone to run the line for some matches not involving their team as a condition of their membership of the league.

It would clearly be foolish to suggest that there are no (predominantly) black teams with administrative shortcomings or no black players who warrant disciplinary action. However, it seems likely that the footballing authorities have subconsciously thrown up barriers because a few clubs or players who are genuine problems are seen to represent all (see also the quote about refereeing in chapter 3). A defensive reaction leads to stereotyping, such that many black players believe that unless they are 'squeaky clean' they will be picked out by referees and the opposition.

There is currently no ethnic monitoring so it is impossible to establish trends in participation. Many black players believe that they suffer a disproportionate disciplinary burden, but it would be impossible to establish whether or not this is the case because there is no comparative baseline data.

- Consideration should be given to recording ethnicity through player registration.
- League and county must monitor for ethnicity especially where disciplinary action is taken.

We believe that professional clubs should recognise the part they could play in ensuring the health of the game, particularly in their local area. They could play a proactive part by taking a long term lead at the forefront of the campaign to combat racism and establish closer ties by sending players to end of year award ceremonies.

Some of the recommendations above can be done with only minimal expenditure, but we recognise that there are more significant cost implications for some of the suggestions.

- The FA nationally should make funds available to its county associations specifically to ensure higher standards of racial equality.

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## **Appendix B: Questionnaires**

Postal survey to District Associations

Postal survey to Leagues and Other Competitions

Postal survey to Referees' Societies

Postal survey to club secretaries

Site survey, self-administered questionnaire for spectators

*Text of covering letter to District Associations, local leagues and referees associations from WRCFA*

Dear Secretary

You may already have heard that we are working with Leeds Metropolitan University on a project to examine the involvement of black, Asian and other ethnic minority players in football outside the Premier League and the Football League. We would therefore be grateful if you could respond to the enclosed questionnaire and return it in the envelope provided, direct to the researchers responsible for the project. We have agreed with the research team that all individual responses will be treated in confidence.

Although this is likely to arrive at a busy time of year for you the questionnaire should not take long to complete and will provide useful information to inform the project. Most of the questions require only ticked boxes or short answers. However, if there is more information that you want to pass on the research team would be keen to hear your views.

A response in the next two weeks would be much appreciated. If you need any further information, please do not hesitate to get in touch with the research team direct (phone Mel Welch on 283 2600 ext 3655).

Yours faithfully,

Roy Carter  
Secretary, West Riding County FA



## Minority Ethnic Groups and Football: District Associations

Many thanks for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. All responses will be treated in confidence unless otherwise formally agreed. We do not expect you to speak on behalf of the whole association - your personal opinions are perfectly appropriate.

If you feel that any of the standard responses offered in the questionnaire are inadequate, please feel free to write additional comments.

Please note - any reference to 'grass roots football' refers to all open-age football outside the Premier League and the Football League, irrespective of the financial status of players or clubs.

Which district association do you represent? \_\_\_\_\_

The first section is about the scale of involvement of black and ethnic minority footballers in the game. On the basis of your knowledge of the district, please could you estimate:

1. How many clubs are there in your district? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Approximately what percentage of clubs in the district fall in the two following categories:

• no black and ethnic minority players	%		• predominantly black & ethnic minority players	%
--	---	--	---	---

3a. Are there any people you would describe as being from black and ethnic minorities on the executive / management committee of the district association?

Yes 1 No 2

3b. Is there scope for getting more black and ethnic minority players into football teams in your district?

Yes 1 No 2

3c. If 'No', Why do you say that?  
If 'Yes', What would it take to do that?

4a. Are there any 'all-Asian' or African-Caribbean leagues in your district?

Yes 1 No 2

4b. Are such leagues helpful to the development of football generally?

Yes 1 No 2

4c. Why do you say that? Please explain.

5. Most players at one time or another will receive abusive remarks from both players and spectators, but sometimes players get abuse because of the colour of their skin. Do you think this is:

Acceptable / Just part of the game 1

Sometimes acceptable 2

Never acceptable 3

6. How widespread do you think racism is in 'grass roots football'?
- |                       |                            |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Non Existent          | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 |
| A Small Amount        | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 |
| A Considerable Amount | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| Throughout            | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 |

7. Do you think that racism in 'grass roots football' is more or less extensive than in the Premier and Football Leagues?
- |  |                            |
|--|----------------------------|
| More extensive in 'grass roots football' | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 |
| The same                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 |
| Less extensive in 'grass roots football' | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| Don't know                               | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 |

8. If the district association became aware of a racial incident how would it respond (please tick all that apply)
- |                                   |                            |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| None of our business              | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 |
| Request a report                  | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 |
| Issue a reprimand                 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| Instigate disciplinary procedures | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 |
| Refer it to the county FA         | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |

- 9a. Have you heard of the 'Let's Kick Racism Out of Football' campaign?
- |     |                            |    |                            |
|-----|----------------------------|----|----------------------------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | No | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 |
|-----|----------------------------|----|----------------------------|

- 9b. If 'Yes', do you think a campaign like 'Let's Kick Racism Out of Football' would be a good idea in 'grass roots football'?
- |     |                            |    |                            |            |                            |
|-----|----------------------------|----|----------------------------|------------|----------------------------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | No | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | Don't know | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
|-----|----------------------------|----|----------------------------|------------|----------------------------|

- 9c. Why do you say that?

10. We would be grateful for any suggestions of people or clubs we should be contacting directly for information about the involvement of black and ethnic minority players and officials in 'grass roots football'.

**Thank you for your time in completing this questionnaire. Please return the questionnaire in the prepaid envelope provided,**



LEEDS METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

*Centre for Leisure & Sport Research, Leeds Metropolitan University, Fairfax Hall, Beckett Park, Leeds LS6 3QS.*

## Minority Ethnic Groups and Football: Local Leagues

Many thanks for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. All responses will be treated in confidence unless otherwise formally agreed. We do not expect you to speak on behalf of the whole league - your personal opinions are perfectly appropriate.

If you feel that any of the standard responses offered in the questionnaire are inadequate, please feel free to write additional comments.

Please note - any reference to 'grass roots football' refers to all open-age football outside the Premier League and the Football League, irrespective of the financial status of players or clubs.

Which league do you represent? \_\_\_\_\_

The first section is about the scale of involvement of black and ethnic minority footballers in the game. On the basis of your knowledge of your league, please could you estimate:

1. How many clubs are there in your league? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Approximately what percentage of clubs in the league fall in the two following categories:

• no black and ethnic minority players	%		• predominantly black & ethnic minority players	%
--	---	--	---	---

3a. Are there any people you would describe as being from black and ethnic minorities on the league's executive / management committee?

Yes 1 No 2

3b. Is there scope for getting more black and ethnic minority players into football teams in your league?

Yes 1 No 2

3c. If 'No', Why do you say that?  
If 'Yes', What would it take to do that?

4a. Are there any 'all-Asian' or African-Caribbean leagues in your district?

Yes 1 No 2

4b. Are such leagues helpful to the development of football generally?

Yes 1 No 2

4c. Why do you say that? Please explain.

5. Most players at one time or another will receive abusive remarks from both players and spectators, but sometimes players get abuse because of the colour of their skin. Do you think this is:

Acceptable / Just part of the game 1  
Sometimes acceptable 2  
Never acceptable 3

6. How widespread do you think racism is in 'grass roots football'?
- |                       |                          |   |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Non Existent          | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1 |
| A Small Amount        | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 |
| A Considerable Amount | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 |
| Throughout            | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 |
7. Do you think that racism in 'grass roots football' is more or less extensive than in the Premier and Football Leagues?
- |  |                          |   |
|--|--------------------------|---|
| More extensive in 'grass roots football' | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1 |
| The same                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 |
| Less extensive in 'grass roots football' | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 |
| Don't know                               | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 |
8. If the league became aware of a racial incident how would it respond (tick all that apply)
- |                                   |                          |   |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| None of our business              | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1 |
| Request a report                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 |
| Issue a reprimand                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 |
| Instigate disciplinary procedures | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 |
| Refer it to the county FA         | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 |
- 9a. Have you heard of the 'Let's Kick Racism Out of Football' campaign?
- |     |                          |   |    |                          |   |
|-----|--------------------------|---|----|--------------------------|---|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1 | No | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 |
|-----|--------------------------|---|----|--------------------------|---|
- 9b. If 'Yes', do you think a campaign like 'Let's Kick Racism Out of Football' would be a good idea in 'grass roots football'?
- |     |                          |   |    |                          |   |            |                          |   |
|-----|--------------------------|---|----|--------------------------|---|------------|--------------------------|---|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1 | No | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 | Don't know | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 |
|-----|--------------------------|---|----|--------------------------|---|------------|--------------------------|---|
- 9c. Why do you say that?
10. We would be grateful for any suggestions of people or clubs we should be contacting directly for information about the involvement of black and ethnic minority players and officials in 'grass roots football'.

**Thank you for your time in completing this questionnaire. Please return the questionnaire in the prepaid envelope provided,**



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## Minority Ethnic Groups and Football: Referees' Societies

Many thanks for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. All responses will be treated in confidence unless otherwise formally agreed. We do not expect you to speak on behalf of the whole society - your personal opinions are perfectly appropriate.

If you feel that any of the standard responses offered in the questionnaire are inadequate, please feel free to write additional comments.

Please note - any reference to 'grass roots football' refers to all open-age football outside the Premier League and the Football League, irrespective of the financial status of players or clubs.

Which referees' society do you represent? \_\_\_\_\_

The first section is about the scale of involvement of those from black and ethnic minorities in football. On the basis of your knowledge of the society and the area it covers, please could you estimate:

1. How many referees are there in your society? (Please record in the table below.)
2. Approximately what percentage of those referees would you consider to be from minority ethnic groups? (Please record in the table below.)

Table for Q1 & 2

	Approximate number of referees	
	Total	From black and ethnic minorities
Class 1		
Class 2		
Class 3		

3. Are there any referees on the committee of the society from minority ethnic groups?  
Yes 1      No 2
- 3a. Is there scope for recruiting more people from minority ethnic groups in your district to be referees?  
Yes 1      No 2
- 3b. If 'No', Why do you say that?  
If 'Yes', What would it take to do that?
- 4a. Is there any difference in refereeing matches when there are players from minority ethnic groups?  
Yes 1      No 2
- 4b. Why do you say that? Please explain.
- 4c. If yes to 4a: Does this influence who is chosen to referee the match?  
Yes 1      No 2

5. Most players at one time or another will receive abusive remarks from both players and spectators, but sometimes players get abuse because of the colour of their skin. Do you think this is:

Acceptable / Just part of the game 1

Sometimes acceptable 2

Never acceptable 3

6. How widespread do you think racism is in 'grass roots football'?

Non Existent 1

A Small Amount 2

A Considerable Amount 3

Throughout 4

7. Do you think that racism in 'grass roots football' is more or less extensive than in the Premier and Football Leagues?

More extensive in 'grass roots football' 1

The same 2

Less extensive in 'grass roots football' 3

Don't know 4

8. Please could you estimate how many referees' reports for your society would have made reference to racial incidents last season? \_\_\_\_\_ out of \_\_\_\_\_

9a. Have you heard of the 'Let's Kick Racism Out of Football' campaign?

Yes 1 No 2

9b. If 'Yes', do you think a campaign like 'Let's Kick Racism Out of Football' would be a good idea in 'grass roots football'?

Yes 1 No 2 Don't know 3

9c. Why do you say that?

10. We would be grateful for any suggestions of people or clubs we should be contacting directly for information about the involvement of black and ethnic minority players and officials in 'grass roots football'.

**Thank you for your time in completing this questionnaire. Please return the questionnaire in the prepaid envelope provided,**



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Leeds LS6 3QS*

## *Text of covering letter to Clubs*

Dear Secretary

You may already have heard that we are working with Leeds Metropolitan University on a project to examine the involvement of black, Asian and other ethnic minority players in football outside the Premier League and the Football League. We would therefore be grateful if you could respond to the enclosed questionnaire and return it in the envelope provided, direct to the researchers responsible for the project. We have agreed with the research team that all individual responses will be treated in confidence.

As an incentive to encourage people to return the questionnaires we are offering the chance to be included in a prize draw to win free tickets for a match involving one of the local professional sides. If you would like to be included in the raffle for tickets, please complete the attached slip. This will be separated from your questionnaire once it reaches the office so that questionnaires will remain anonymous.

Although this is likely to arrive at a busy time of year for you the questionnaire should not take long to complete and will provide vital information for the project. Most of the questions require only ticked boxes or short answers. However, if there is more information that you want to pass on the research team would be keen to hear your views (phone Jon Dart on 0113 283 2600 ext 3566).

A response in the next two weeks would be much appreciated. If you need any further information, please do not hesitate to get in touch with the research team direct.

Yours faithfully,

Roy Carter  
Secretary, West Riding County FA