

‘Football fans and anti-discrimination’

The Football Supporters Federation (FSF) along with “Kick It Out” (KIO) hosted an open forum called "Football fans and anti-discrimination" to discuss diversity in football. The "Fans for Diversity" initiative challenges discrimination in all its forms, such as racism, homophobia, sexism, or attitudes towards disabled supporters.

The meeting mainly discussed racism as part of Football Against Racism Europe’s (FARE) Football People action weeks, which see thousands of anti-racist activities and initiatives take place across Europe.

Guest speakers on the night were:

Panel	Role	Football Interests
Anwar Uddin	FSF’s Diversity and Campaigns Manager	West Ham United fan
Billy Grant	Member of the FSF’s National Council	Brentford fan and Beesotted/Footballfancam writer and videoblogger
Carrie Dunn	Freelance journalist	Luton Town fan
Mark Doidge	Lecturer of Sociology and Sport at the University of Brighton	Plymouth Argyle fan
Pavinder Samra	Member of the Punjabi Rams	Derby County
Troy Townsend	Kick It Out’s Education and Development Manager	Spurs fan

The meeting began with *Troy* giving a little insight in to how the meeting would unfold and introducing the guest speakers.

Anwar followed up telling the room that it began with a small select group discussing racism in football, how a light bulb moment led to opening it up to all supporters by way of an open forum. He also welcomed Brighton and Hove Albion’s Craig Mackail-Smith to the meeting.

This is the first of a series of forums to take place at different venues around the country with the structure having guest speakers explaining how clubs are tackling racism both on and off the terraces.

After the introductions, *Pavinder Samra* took the floor to explain how The "Punjabi Rams" follow the fortunes of Derby County Football Club.

This was particularly interesting because Derby has a large Punjabi community, which initially settled in the streets surrounding the Baseball Ground. Early Punjabi immigrants worked at the Foundry overlooking the old Derby ground. However, very few Punjabis would attend football games as families were fearful of trouble on the terraces.

This soon changed and some of our older members have been fortunate enough to witness the Championship winning teams of the 70s.

One of the aims is to encourage more Punjabis to support their local team and experience the atmosphere of their local teams rather than following one that they have no geographical connection with and can only watch on their TV.

Although they are the "Punjabi Rams", you do not have to be Punjabi to be a member. They are an open group, welcoming anyone who wants to join in following Derby County, be it home or away. As the fans who have met us over the course of last season will testify, we are more than happy to share a drink or have a good singsong with anyone. This has helped integrate fans on the terraces and in the communities. This was very interesting as it is similar to St Andrews and the local community: we don't see many Asians at our games.... Why?

Mark Doidge, an Argyle fan, made a point that Plymouth is not the most ethnically diverse city but this creates its own issues when Racism is mentioned in Plymouth. They face a different problem. "Racism, we don't have that problem down here". That is probably the same with all fans: no one wants to admit to there being a problem.

Anwar followed this from a professional footballer's viewpoint stating that personally, he was not affected by racism, mainly because no one was very sure of what country he was from. He was the first Asian professional footballer and the first British Asian to captain a football club in the top four divisions.

However, he had heard racist remarks in various dressing rooms and more from teammates but this was mainly due to a lack of understanding and ignorance of cultures and religions than blatant intent on racism. How, as a young player, he had to deal with it and that there was not the help or education around as there is today.

Billy Grant has travelled the world watching England as well as his own team Brentford. Billy is a character who has plenty of tales to tell but it was Tuesday night that he fell victim to a racist attack by a fellow supporter who head-butted him. The good news is that the offender was charged and dealt with in court, while the club have issued a life-time ban.

Billy went on to talk how different cultures approach racism with fond memories from Tokyo where the authorities after being warned about widespread violence and racism. How the Tokyo police encouraged local bars to have women in them that surprisingly changed the supporter's mentality and led to supporters dancing in the streets instead of fighting.

This led to *Carrie Dunn* drawing on her experiences from a women's viewpoint. She has encountered experiences whereby girls have a girlie time on the terraces meaning they refuse to go with their boyfriends or partners but also how boys refuse to allow their girlfriends on the terraces with them. She also went on to talk how different countries encourage women to become involved.

After trouble at Turkish football club Fenerbahce's ground, only women and children were allowed to attend the club's game against Manisapor on September 21. After unruly behaviour by fans at a previous match, the Turkish FA ruled that there would be no fans allowed at the next two games. However, they decided to open the turnstiles to women and children only, free. A crowd of 41,000 turned up and not a man in sight.

Carrie also made a note of mentioning how “Soccer” in the USA has encouraged women to their games and how they are becoming involved within their clubs.

The evening went onto an open floor with a questions and answers session. This mainly looked at how we can change things in English football and one of the main thorns is within the game itself. The FA and clubs need to address the issues along with legislation from government, but respective governments are scared to get involved with the running of our beautiful game.

The discussions looked at the German club St. Pauli and how their fans regard themselves as anti-racist, anti-fascist, anti-homophobic and anti-sexist. The organisation has adopted an outspoken stance against racism, fascism, sexism, and homophobia and has embodied this position in its constitution. The club also prides itself on having the largest number of female fans in all of German football.

This is a case where a united supporters group can influence change if done correctly. In 2002 the fans protested against adverts for a men’s magazine to be removed from around the ground on sexist grounds. They also arrange trips to Auschwitz and other ex-German concentration camps for young supporters as an education against racism not only in sport but communities in general.

The evening ended with a consensus that behaviours are changing and have come a long way but there is no room for complacency and there is still a long way to go.

You can read more on the FSF website at the following link <http://www.fsf.org.uk/latest-news/view/supporters-to-discuss-discrimination-at-fans-for-diversity-event>

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Blues Trust