

## British Soccer and Its Fans

Redhead, Steve. *The Passion and the Fashion: Football Fandom in the New Europe*. Aldershot, England: Avebury, 1993. Pp. x, 205. Notes, index. 12.95 (sterling).

Hayes, Richard. *The Football Imagination: The Rise of Football Fanzine Culture*. Aldershot, England: Avebury, 1995. Pp. xii, 180. Index. 12.95 (sterling).

The culture of the soccer terraces<sup>1</sup> in Britain is changing. Commentators are now as likely to refer to the soulless atmosphere at soccer matches as they are to violence and disorder. This does not mean that soccer hooliganism—as it has been labeled for the past thirty years—has somehow disappeared. It is manifestly on the rise in countries such as Holland and Italy, and especially in the now united Germany where it has strong associations with the neo-Nazi right. It is probably marginalized in countries like Scotland and more recently in England, but public disorder around professional soccer<sup>2</sup> has deep historical roots in such heavily masculinized national cultures.

Nevertheless, the soccer crowd—and moreover soccer fandom in general—is undergoing a significant change which reflects wider shifts in class, gender, affordability and popular culture. On the one hand there is a greater degree of active participation, and even democratization<sup>3</sup> amongst fans. This process is evident in the rapid growth of fan magazines (fanzines), the rise of independent supporters' associations, the increasing role for soccer in other art forms such as video, film, television, music and theatre, and the mixing of soccer's working-class culture with the higher-class arts such as opera and classical music. A contradictory process is also detectable; the redefinition of soccer for an allegedly passive respectable audience sitting in either executive boxes,<sup>4</sup> all-seater stadia or in armchairs at home watching the game on television.

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1. Prior to a Thatcher government report prepared by Lord Justice Taylor in late 1989, there was no such thing as an all-seater stadium in Britain. All grounds had "terraces" which were stepped concrete banking with crash barriers. Grounds at venues such as Charlton Athletic, Aston Villa, Chelsea, Manchester City and others could hold in excess of 82,000 spectators most of whom would stand out in the open. Today with seating Charlton holds only 13,000. Even larger was Hampden Park in Glasgow which regularly held in excess of 130,000 fans. In May, 1995 its capacity was 34,000.

2. It must be noted that crowd disorder is not a product of the modern times. Full-scale riots were not uncommon in the 1890s particularly in Scotland.

3. The rise of the "Independent" Supporters Clubs around the country is in marked contrast to the "Official" Supporters Clubs which were approved by the clubs, as they caused no problems by asking awkward questions and slavishly toed the party line as well as providing clubs with regular healthy donations. On the other hand, the "Independent" groups represented the fans' wishes, demanded policy explanations from the Board and always publicized the annual accounts.

4. The growth of executive boxes at grounds has alienated the loyal club fans who see their occupation by non-supporters from, normally, senior white-collar industries as an intrusion into their place of sport worship. Not only that, but a number of instances are now being chronicled of "corporate Hooliganism," a phenomenon which does not involve the authorities and is kept quiet by the clubs concerned.

The study of soccer fans and their culture in Britain and subsequently Europe has kept a number of sociologists in employment in England for the past dozen years or more. Their words are taken by the local media as being wisdom beyond reproach with regular appearances on radio and television. In newspapers and magazines, in journals and on speaking platforms. Yet never do their increasingly establishment views find favor with the publications that really matter: the fanzines. Not only that, but the fans themselves<sup>5</sup> are now openly abusive of the studies allegedly written and published in their name.

In his review<sup>6</sup> of Rogan Taylor's book *Football and Its Fans: Supporters and Their Relations with the Game*, David Andrews falls for a story in the text while being half a world away from the actual facts. He wrote that "Taylor occupies a unique place in the history of English football . . ." in being "instrumental in setting up the Football Supporter's Association (FSA). The goal of this progressive addition to football culture was to reclaim the game for the ordinary football supporter by challenging the condescending, neglectful and dismissive mismanagement of football by its controlling hierarchy" (p. 91).

The reality is that after an initial burst of enthusiasm in 1985, the FSA went dormant until revived at intervals by the very bodies it was allegedly set up to oppose. In the 1994/95 soccer season in England just over twenty million spectators<sup>7</sup> paid to watch matches in the top four leagues: another eleven million<sup>8</sup> saw games at the semi-professional level, yet the last meeting of the FSA for which minutes are available recorded an attendance of just twenty-four. On the other side of the coin, Taylor's former colleagues at Leicester University acknowledge that the fan's own outlet, the fanzine, sold "over three million copies".<sup>9</sup>

The study of soccer fans and hooliganism in particular has been the lifeblood of the Sir Norman Chester Centre<sup>10</sup> for Football Research (NCCFR) at Leicester University since 1987. With an ongoing supply of funding from such establishment bodies ranging from The Football Trust to the Home Office<sup>11</sup> the reports issued are accepted by the correct authorities but rejected outright by the people they are written about: the fans.

5. The book review sections in fanzines are a fascinating source of "terrace comment." The dislike of NCCFR publications is a general opinion with follow-up letters and articles appearing in subsequent issues.

6. *Journal of Sport History*, 21:1 (Spring 1994): 91–94. Do not confuse Rogan Taylor with Lord Justice Taylor.

7. *Football League Bulletin*, No. 44, May 1995.

8. *Non-League Digest*, No. 44, May 1995.

9. *The Best of Football Fanzines*, edited by John Robinson, Grimsby, England. 52. nd.

10. Sir Norman Chester is a former deputy chairman of the Football Trust, and was the instigator of the granting of ongoing funding to the Department of Sociology at the University of Leicester—by the Trust—in order for them to study crowd behavior.

11. The Home Office in 1991 gave a grant for a sergeant of the Lancashire police force who was based in Preston to attend Leicester University for three years to conduct an in-depth survey (for his PhD) into the policing at football matches and to investigate the large number of complaints emanating from football fans. The resulting report gave many fanzines a field day "Outrageous lies" (*Cross Roades* #65). "Is this meant to be a sick joke?" (*Wise Men Say* #18) and "I was at the match at the time and saw the incident concerned. This report is just a typical whitewash by the police to save their own skins." (*The Gashead* #6) were just three of a number of opinions given in fanzines.

Andrews, in his review, went on to say that "Taylor then goes on to demonstrate how even when organized into a national federation, football supporters failed to gel into any sort of coherent body that could seriously challenge the hegemony of the game's administrators. All this created a chasm between the interests of administrators and supporters which was merely widened by the reactionary responses to the minority hooligan element" (p. 92.) Muhammad Ali used to say: "I am the greatest," and people believed him. Taylor says his piece and is also believed. The fact is that by totally ignoring the FSA there are now a number of fans' representatives on the Boards of top English clubs, nearly all of whom came through the fanzine movement.<sup>12</sup>

In his review, Andrews also looked at *Football With Attitude* by Steve Redhead and hit the nail on the head when describing the fans that Redhead had studied as "a more active, oppositional generation of football consumers than those described by Taylor" (p. 93). This is an important point for Redhead and his team, at Manchester Metropolitan University's Institute for Popular Culture (IPC), for they are beholden to nobody.

In *The Passion and the Fashion*, Redhead and his fellow contributors show their feel for the views and aspirations of the soccer fans. Their conclusions are nearly always a complete opposite from those emanating from Leicester University. Let it not be misunderstood: the fans and the fanzine movement is a strong sub-culture in British society. Age matters little for the true supporter of the game whose fanaticism ranges from being a Groundhopper<sup>13</sup> through to classification as a hooligan.

Redhead and his team are able to identify the scare tactics used over recent years by the British media to frighten various authorities into submission. They quote the director of the NCCFR, John Williams, after a minor pitch invasion in 1991 at an end-of-season match between (then) third division teams Birmingham and Stoke. Williams said that "hooliganism occurs in cycles and there is a danger that the Birmingham incident may be the start of another period of problems."<sup>14</sup> Redhead retorts to this, saying, "The problem with this argument is the failure to recognize that what is cyclical is the media reporting of such phenomena as 'football hooliganism,' a social problem, moreover, which has no precise legal definition and remains more or less historical (and often hysterical) mass media construction."<sup>15</sup>

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13. The most prominent of these are Dave Wallace, editor of *King Of The Kippax* (on the Board at Manchester City), Steve Clarke, *Voice Of The Valley* (Charlton Athletic), and Mick Cunningham, *Not The 8502* (Bournemouth).

14. A Groundhopper is a soccer fan whose main aim is to watch as many matches in a season from as many different grounds as possible. The record for a season (July 1993–May 1994) was set by Keith Evemy, a retired businessman, with 413. It is quite regular for a Groundhopper to exceed 250 games in a season. They have their own publications, one of which is described in *The Passion and the Fashion*, p. 45, as "... a magazine aimed at the thousands of middle-aged men who rediscover childhood hobbies once their marriages have ground to a standstill."

14. *Ibid.*, 2.

15. *Ibid.*, 3.

What the NCCFR will not tell, but the IPC will, is the response by the establishment's authority—the police—to soccer fans in general. Given a virtual *carte blanche* by the Thatcher government to treat all soccer fans as potential hooligans, the policing authorities went about their task in a way unimaginable to popular culture's past generations. The current "Criminal Justice Act"<sup>16</sup> which is freely used by the police at sporting events allows them to arrest on sight anyone about whom "they have reasonable suspicion might be intending to cause a problem."<sup>17</sup> Can any law in an alleged civilized society be so blatantly biased? And yet it has only ever been used at sporting events.

*The Passion and the Fashion* deals with eyewitness accounts of police violence particularly in Richard Haynes' chapter "Marching on Together."<sup>18</sup> It is here that I must reveal my own research, as for the past five years I have been studying fandom and its writings, and have attended well over five hundred games of various hues deliberately looking for trouble. I found it in many instances but not from the expected sources. At least 80 percent of any trouble started with the police and in all cases they finished it off as well. My examples are minor compared to Redhead *et al.* but appalling all the same.<sup>19</sup>

Chapter five, also by Haynes, is called "Every Man a Football Artist: Football Writing and Masculinity." In it he takes the NCCFR to task and, in particular, *Football and Its Fans*. He argues against Taylor saying that "better research into football has occurred in conjunction with the explosion of football fanzines and assorted literature relating to football" (p. 59). Haynes further emphasizes his point by stating that "fanzines have helped to create a new 'structure of feeling' among fans, moving towards a positive image away from that of fans as 'hooligans,' and countering the misrepresentation and lack of authenticity that has been prevalent between the popular press and its audience" (p. 59).<sup>20</sup> Once again this shows the total difference between the NCCFR and IPC: establishment versus working class.

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16. An Act of Parliament which came into effect on 1 April 1995.

17. This quote is from the leaflet handed out to fans at many soccer matches around Britain and sponsored by a group known as THE COALITION AGAINST THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE ACT. Surprisingly, this group is not fan based but is a collective of well-known responsible firms of solicitors who are concerned at the loss of civil liberties caused by this Act. Their offices are as far apart as London, Manchester, Leeds, Edinburgh and Glasgow. From the time the Act gained Royal Assent, virtually every single fanzine, in each issue, has run two-page warnings about the Act and given contact telephone numbers for assistance.

18. *Ibid.*, 13–77.

19. From personal experience I have seen the police do the following at soccer grounds in England:

(i) Give a beating to a pregnant woman outside Highbury (Arsenal FC) because she complained about damage police had done to her car.

(ii) A mounted policeman at Twerton Park (Bristol Rovers FC) mixing horse faeces into a fan's food and then trying to make him eat it.

(iii) Three policemen, during a match at St. Andrews (Birmingham City FC), standing in front of an elderly spectator, blocking his view completely. When he complained, he was forcibly carried out of the ground.

However, these and other instances are inconsequential compared to Redhead *et al.* Add to this the fact that the tabloid newspaper *The Sun* often misrepresents such events and is continually being reported to the regulatory body, The Press Complaints Commission. Its worst excesses (Liverpool, 1985) have led to wholesale boycotts of the newspaper in Northern urban conurbations.

20. *Ibid.*, 59.

The remaining chapters relate like-minded studies from Scotland, Italy, and France, and are worthy contributions to a better understanding of fandom. But what Redhead and company have done is to bring to much wider attention the fact that fans of all ages are just that: fans.

Richard Haynes then went about his chosen task in trying to gauge the views of the soccer fans by analyzing the opinions of all issues of 98 fanzines—most of which were British—out of some 2,150 known titles. The result is *The Football Imagination* which, the author argues, “is a broader approach to the fans’ study of the game of football . . . than the predominantly sociological view of supporters as ‘football hooligans’.”<sup>21</sup>

This work is, it can be argued, much more on the right track than other well publicized material. Haynes starts with a look at the more recent past—which, it appears, shows no terrace culture prior to 1970. Although this date may well be a good starting point, it must not be forgotten that non-obsequious soccer publications existed back many generations, some of which even today would be considered *risqué*. He demolishes the “Leicester school of thought”<sup>22</sup> in a manner so detailed, but simple, that those seeking to flog to death the concept of “young people together at soccer matches equals violence”<sup>23</sup> would surely have to give thought to revising their concepts.

Arguing that “the emergence of fanzines is a new radical football faction,”<sup>24</sup> Haynes makes use of the editorial from the first edition of *Off the Ball*, published in 1986, which puts into sharp focus the probable real reason for the emergence of this movement as “the ironic subversion of Thatcherite enterprise culture.” The mid-1980s was a time in which the various strands of popular culture—literature, music, fashion and soccer—threaded together in harmony to cry out at the great injustices being acted out in an Orwellian manner each night on their television screens. Haynes then goes for the *cri de coeur*: “The politics of this destructive decade of the 1980s is crucial to an understanding of the changing nature of the football terrace and the subsequent rise of football fanzines. Thatcherism was an attempt to clear the way for a new hegemony, based on financial independence, enterprise culture and a shifting state policy that moved away from consent towards coercion.”<sup>25</sup> It had nothing whatsoever to do with the much hyped “hooligan element.” A cynic could argue that at this time the true “hooligans” were on the trading floors in the City of London, as later events have subsequently shown.

Now getting into his theme, Haynes starts his excellent analysis by stating what has been obvious to fans these past fifteen years but not recognized by outsiders. “The early to mid-1980s saw continual repressive and authoritarian discourses engaged on popular culture. Football fans increasingly became

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21. *The Football Imagination*, 4.

22. *Ibid.*, 12.

23. *Ibid.*, 17.

24. *Ibid.*, 21.

25. *Ibid.*, 46.

subject to authoritarian measures in an attempt by the state to control unruly behavior, images of violence being fueled by the sensationalism of the press who continually instigated ‘moral panics’ about events occurring within football fan culture they could not begin to grasp.”<sup>26</sup> Not wishing to appear alone in this view, the author goes on to give many examples of the exasperations expressed from the terraces. Even the columnist “Attila”<sup>27</sup> was angered enough to write after attending a match “for our loyalty we get treated like criminals, herded around like cattle and abused by ‘respectable citizens’ . . . politicians use us as scapegoats and the police as guinea-pigs for their latest crowd control techniques . . . and then they make the clubs we support pay for the privilege” (p. 49).

Haynes continues in this vein, building up the reasons why the fans individually and collectively decided that their recourse was the old adage that “the pen is mightier than the sword.” One of the first of many fanzine editors, Adrian Goldberg,<sup>28</sup> wrote in his opening editorial:<sup>29</sup> “We won’t be treated like idiots any more . . . who are sick of being portrayed as morons in the press.” He continued—and this sums up the mood of the time: “For the true football fan this is really the time for action. If directors of clubs are too frightened of the big boys, or too shocked to react, then we are not” (p. 50).

This rallying cry for a call to arms (pens?) was heard around not only England, but most of Europe. Before Goldberg—and Mike Ticher who started *When Saturday Comes* (WSC)—there were just a handful of single club fanzines, the best of which, *City Gent* (Bradford City), is now edited by a luminary of The British Library. Growth begat growth and the subsequent explosion caught many unawares. Sellers were hounded outside stadia by police forces, worried that the contents of journals would incite violence; editors were sued by football clubs under the slightest pretext; printing firms were warned by the police that they could be shut down under laws relating to the production of obscene publications: all this just because the fans wanted to have their voices heard.

A new culture was being born although much of it is still ‘underground’ ten or so years later. For those who forged ahead the acceptance point came when the owner of London’s largest sporting bookshop,<sup>30</sup> John Gausted, encouraged editors to let him stock their fanzines. Business boomed and even now Gausted says: “Despite the pressure fanzines exert on space, our commitment to stocking them has never wavered.” Other outlets followed Gausted’s example particularly similar sporting outlets and independent record shops. Haynes spent a considerable time collecting a rich oral history of this growth, quoting some remarkable stories. However, it is clear that he used only a fraction of this information and much remains for possible future use.

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26. *Ibid.*, 46.

27. *Ibid.*, 49.

28. *Off The Ball*, a general (i.e. non-club) fanzine which ran for sixteen editions from 1986 to 1989. Godgerg, along with a number of other former fanzine editors, is now a radio commentator of some repute.

29. *Ibid.*, 50.

30. *Sportspages*, 94–96 Charing Cross Road, London.

The authorities became confused by this acceptance. In January 1988 there were 22 fanzines in the WSC listing of like titles. A year later it was 215; in January 1992 it was over 600. Many titles did not reach the list so that in 1995 the three largest collections<sup>31</sup> in Britain could identify in excess of 2,150 titles with issues running from a solitary effort through to 136 (*Fly Me To The Moon*: Middlesbrough F.C.) and 118 (*The Oatcake*: Stoke City F.C.) respectively. Both of which, incidentally, are still going strong.

In the face of such a powerful onslaught, some clubs became concerned " . . . at the investigative work of fanzines . . ." (p. 63)<sup>32</sup> without realizing that it was their own staff, players and occasionally managers who were the main sources of such information. It is now accepted that stories the newspapers will not touch may well be read in the fanzines. One of the major topics regularly appearing in fanzines concerns the police and their excessive behavior towards football fans. The now notorious West Midlands Police Force<sup>33</sup> have only been brought to account because of continual fanzine pressure which the national media subsequently rehashed as their own work.

Haynes moves towards his conclusions by examining how fanzines have now reached a level of acceptance by many clubs. Some have even offered places on their Boards to fanzine editors; others get editors to prepare the official matchday programmes (ironically the very publications fanzines were originally set up to oppose), while other clubs have offered fanzine editors well-paid positions within their administration, so stifling dissent.<sup>34</sup> In one extreme case, a bankrupt Football League club's directors all resigned with the officially appointed administrators asking the local fanzine editor and supporters club chairman to reform the board!<sup>35</sup>

In summing up, Haynes states: "Fanzines have become a firmly established part of football subculture . . . [they] are a novel, irreverent gaze upon the world of football contributing to a wider oral tradition of talking about the game. The affective alliances between fans and the game belies the manner in which they are frequently mistreated by the football authorities, the clubs and the police" (p. 152).

I could not have put it better myself.

Association of Sports Historians  
London, England

Chris Harte

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31. The three largest collections are held by *The Association of Sports Historians* in London; *Scottish Zinescene* in Edinburgh and *AFN Distribution* in South Wales.

32. *The Football Imagination*, 63.

33. The West Midlands Police Force is based in Britain's second largest city, Birmingham. Away from soccer, its reputation for corruption was so notorious that the Thatcher government had to take action to disband large sections of it and to prosecute numerous officers.

34. This was a clever move by a number of Football League club chairmen. Some fanzine editors could not resist going to work for the club to which they were devoted. Others refused, and wrote about their offers. These included Tony Willis of *Two-One Up* (Arsenal FC), George Craig of *No One Likes Us* (Millwall FC), Rick Everitt of *Voice of Valley* (Charlton Athletic FC), Craig Young of *No Idle Talk* (Heart of Midlothian FC) and Gary Firmager of *Over Land and Sea* (West Ham United FC).

35. Northampton Town Football Club, in 1993.