

RACISM, FOOTBALL AND THE GAME'S PROBLEM

INTRODUCTION

In recent days, weeks and months, newspapers, radio stations, television programmes, sports and chat shows, social media and other mediums have been reporting and debating the question of racist incidents in football: the England International match against Montenegro on the 25th March 2019 highlighted the racist language and abuse experienced by black English players, in particular Danny Rose and Raheem Sterling. The critics, newspapers, politicians, managers and many linked to the game in England rightly criticised what had happened and asked for punishment for the perpetrators.

But let us not forget, racist chanting and abuse in particular have been very prevalent in the domestic game this year. Racist chants to England International Raheem Sterling, to Liverpool's Egyptian International Mohamed Salah, chanting in Edinburgh derbies to Millwall fans racist and derogatory remarks about the Pakistani community; it is suggested by many that racism is back on the rise in the game. The truth is, that racism has always been there and nothing has changed. The racist chants may have reared their ugly head again: they may be vocal and loud in the stadia and on the terraces, but the game has a bigger problem. That of discrimination and lack of opportunities. The racism and discrimination within the clubs, structure and game itself which ensure that the opportunities for non-white personnel are limited has been and is still there.

This two-part series of articles written by **Yasin Patel** looks at the question of "racism in football". This first article outlines the arguments as to why discrimination and racism is "alive and kicking" in the game. How it is to be found in all areas of the game. That as the national game, it is something that must be faced, challenged and tackled. From the grassroots to the top of the professional game. From the coaching and staffing structures within clubs to the boardrooms.

The second part of this series of articles suggests how the face of football must change and the various methods and initiatives that may be incorporated into the game by the governing body, the clubs, owners and those involved within the game.

As these articles will stress, if the disease of racism is to be truly tackled, then it must be done in a holistic way: on and off the pitch; in committees, their structures and make-up: in employment procedures, advertising and methods of recruitment.

BLACK REPRESENTATION ON THE PITCH

At the beginning of the 2017-2018 season, 25% of the players playing in English football's four professional leagues was black.¹

Up to the 18th November 2018, 89 footballers from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds had represented England. Viv Anderson, labelled "the first black player to play for England"

¹ Marca.com

in November 1978 was the catalyst for the opportunities that have followed for black professional footballers. Since then, just under 1 in 4 players who have made their debut for England has been from a black and minority ethnic background.²

Given the statistics above, one could say that in terms of players, the English game is the “United Nations” with players from many backgrounds, countries, religions and social backgrounds. A cosmopolitan mix and fusion that educates, teaches and promotes the power and beauty of diversity and other cultures.

And so, it almost comes as a shock to many in society about how Raheem Sterling was allegedly subject to racist taunts in Manchester City’s game at Stamford Bridge against Chelsea recently. How Mohamad Salah was to hear racist and anti-Islamic taunts at the London Stadium in West Ham United’s game against Liverpool. Why? As there is no racism in football anymore. That this problem has been eradicated and the racists banned.

Such thinking is naïve and blinkered. Although there are fewer incidents of racism at black and ethnic minority players on the football pitch, they still exist. It is however, the lack of diversity and representation of black and minority ethnic communities within the game as a whole that emphasises the lack of equal opportunities for the non-white communities.

To highlight the arguments one can dissect the many areas of football and see how diverse and full of equal opportunities is our national game. In order to do this, we can look at all of the following, and look at the true representative figures within their headings. The list (in no particular order of importance):

- i) Black and Asian representation in the game
- ii) Black and Asian representation in management and directorships
- iii) Coaching structures, staffing and personnel
- iv) Boardroom, recruitment policies and employment practices
- v) The make-up of the governing body and the running of the game
- vi) Terraces and crowd behaviour
- vii) Asians in football
- viii) Media coverage

WHERE ARE BLACK AND ASIAN PERSONNEL REPRESENTED?

There is black and Asian representation in football. The statistics about black footballers have already been mentioned above. In terms of stewarding at matches, there are many from the ethnic minorities that are employed on match days both within the stadia, and outside.

In catering and kitchen staff, again the ethnic minorities are well represented. Whether they are serving the drinks at the sales booths or serving food in the lounges: on the whole, the staffing can be seen.

² England Football Online – 18 November 2018

However, apart from that, the rest is depressing reading. Alternatively, to see the real picture within the game, just go and see the reality for yourself.

Stewards, yes many are black and Asian: but these are either through external agencies or the clubs have offered small or minor positions. One wonders how many of the Head stewards at any of the clubs in the leading divisions within the United Kingdom are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

Similarly, in the area of catering, many staff are employed by external companies or are on match-day contracts. How many professional clubs employ people from black and minority ethnic communities in their workforce.

However, apart from the above two sectors, the representation is depressingly low.

WHAT DO THE CLUBS AND THE GAME?

Kick It Out, the campaigning body for equality within football has been campaigning for over 25 years to challenge discrimination within the game. Through their educational work in the community and campaigning as well as 'Anti-Racism week of action and more the group has highlighted many issues within the game and has done a great deal to tackle discrimination. However, looking at the recent examples of racism in the grounds and those experienced by players pushes one to ask the question: have they done enough? An organisation that is funded by the game's governing bodies cannot truly be fully critical of the authorities. Therefore, has *Kick It Out* itself been handicapped from highlighting the true extent of discrimination within the game? Are they able to be truly objective in their analysis and critique of the Premier League, the Football Association ("FA") and the Professional Footballer's Association ("PFA")?

MANAGEMENT

There are 7 black managers in the 4 divisions within England. How can it be that where the statistics highlight a large majority of black players who play the game, in terms of the Management, there are so few? It is because very few black managers are interviewed, let alone given the job.

And how about Assistant managers, senior coaches and Directors of Football? What are the statistics there? The numbers of non-white managers and their assistants within the game are minimal. It is no wonder that the England Manager, Gareth Southgate is a great supporter of incorporating the "Rooney Rule". It would require the League sides and teams to interview ethnic-minority candidates for head coaching and senior football operation jobs.

BOARDROOMS

It is because the likes of Manchester City, Leicester City, Blackburn Rovers and Cardiff City to name a few are owned from investors from Asia, the Far East and the Middle East that their boardrooms are even culturally diverse. How many other football clubs have people from black and minority ethnic communities in their boardroom, main committee or executive committee? And what proportion or percentage of the chief executive's (or vice), chairman, or other senior personnel that advise and sit within the highest eschelons of the clubs are non-white? I expect, the proportion to be less than 5%.

REFEREES & LINESMEN

The officials in the game there are plenty. In each match there are referees, assistant referees, linesmen/women and so on. How many of these officials are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds? Can you name a single official from them? You then ask yourself what efforts are made by the FA and the grassroots bodies to recruit people from the specific cultural backgrounds? If there are any, based upon the evidence before us, they are not very successful. One wonders what extra efforts are made to recruit professionals from these backgrounds and in addition, how many non-white organisations are allowed to run the courses so as to recruit and train the officials.

GROUNDS & STEWARDING

Despite there being more women, black and Asian football supporters and diversity in playing personnel on the pitch, racism within the terraces is still prevalent and visible. What is done about the verbal abuse by the clubs? What action is taken to punish the perpetrators? To investigate the homophobic and racist language. How many prosecutions have been conducted to punish the perpetrators? And what of evictions from the ground? How many complaints have been made? How many investigated? What statistical data has been compiled by the clubs and the football authorities? My suspicion is that the answers to those questions is "very low". I am confident in saying that the conviction levels for acts of racism will be even lower.

FA

And what of the governing body? How many FA representatives are from the Black and Minority Ethnic Communities? What of the staffing at FA Headquarters and in particular the more senior positions? And the County FA's? Despite the reforms in May 2017, the representation of black and minority ethnic communities in County FA's is disgracefully low. As was said by *Kick It Out* in 2017, the reforms were a 'sham'. And what of the staffing within the County FA's and at the FA Headquarters? What percentage of the senior positions are from black and minority ethnic communities? The lack of figures and breakdown in ethnicity is probably due to the shamelessly low numbers of non-white figures in the positions.

ASIANS IN FOOTBALL

Where are Asians in football? Where are the players, managers and coaches from the Asian communities? Is it the national games explanation to us all that there are no Asians good enough to play the game at the highest level? In the 1970's up to the 1990's it was said of the Asian population that they were not represented in professional football because; of their religion, their diet, their small size, they concentrated upon education instead of football, they played cricket and not football, their parents stopped them, they were not able to come to practice, their parents did not support them and so forth. These scapegoats veiled the true racism and bigotry stopping Asians coming into the game.

And in 2019, where have we got to? Has a single British Asian player played in the Premiership? What real efforts have been made by football scouts to find the potential Asian player to grace the community and bring a huge audience to the club's fortunes? What football programmes are being backed by clubs to work with the Asian communities? In purely business and marketing terms, the potential is enormous. Imagine a superstar of Indian origin, Patel (not this Yasin mind you), playing for a team in the Premiership or one of the larger Championship teams. Their exposure to the Indian population in the UK would increase but look at the market of billions in the Indian sub-continent? The shirt sales, broadcasting of games, sponsors, advertising and more. It would be mind blowing. The only reason that Asian footballers are not gracing our game is because the bigotry and discrimination that stems from the coaching structures to the scouting systems is such, that the door is not opened to them. Similarly, what Asian coaches are working in any high positions within the game? This is a truly shameful failure in our game and the racism in this area must be eradicated.

AGENTS, LAWYERS AND REPRESENTATIVES

It is argued that there are a number of black agents representing playing personnel and teams: where it is the case, it is because players have chosen them: it is not the game itself that has recruited them.

A more realistic test would be to ask what number of black and ethnic minority lawyers are either instructed or employed by the national game or the clubs? What about other professionals? Accountants, doctors, physiotherapists, psychologists, dieticians etc.

And the number of black and ethnic minority firms that represent the game and or other key decision makers?

My guess is that like all the other topics discussed in this article, the answer will be very few.

CONCLUSION

Recognition of discrimination and racism in its many forms is an important first step in tackling the problem. To have an anti-racism policy is not enough: one must be proactive in being fair and just to all, not just as a lip service. This should be second-nature for every organisation. Good policies and governance are essential: from the very top of the national

game and its governing bodies all the way through to the coaching at grassroots level. This is fundamental if we are to tackle the obvious discrimination that exists in ALL elements of the national game. One can criticise the chants at an international match in Montenegro. But who is going to criticise and eradicate the obvious racism in football within our country and the glass ceilings that exist in limiting opportunities for the black and ethnic minorities? As the reality is, racism is prevalent in all aspects of football within the United Kingdom.