



THE FSA. ANNUAL REVIEW 2019_2020



BY FANS FOR FANS

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FSA.

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The FSA's Annual Review 2019-20 has benefitted from the contributions of all FSA staff and volunteers, particularly those who give up their valuable time to sit on our National Council or get involved in FSA Networks. Thanks to Andrew and Jon from Solution Group for getting this over the line too. Lastly, the editor would like to pay special thanks to Lily and Daisy Brunskill for their help as his favourite assistant photo editors.

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ABOUT THE FSA.



Kevin Miles, Chief executive © PA Images



Malcolm Clarke, Chair © The FSA

Kevin Miles (FSA chief executive) and Malcolm Clarke (FSA chair) explain the background to an entirely unexpected and challenging year for football.

Football fans live their lives by the rhythm of the season and, if you'd asked us at the beginning of the 2019-20 season what the big areas of work might be, we'd probably have referenced VAR, the introduction of standing areas in some top-flight grounds, and Euro 2020.

Then along came COVID-19 - changing all our lives and the suppositions we had.

In place of the expected areas of fan activism came entirely new initiatives which really were, in some circumstances, a matter of life or death.

Back in March the NHS even asked us to reach out to our members to try and find volunteers to deliver medicines, drive patients to appointments, take people home from hospital, and check in on vulnerable members of their own community. Thousands of football fans responded and joined the ranks of those giving up time and energy to benefit the wider society.

This year also marked the fifth anniversary of Fans Supporting Foodbanks which was set up on Merseyside by Dave Kelly and Robbie Daniels of the Blue Union alongside Ian Byrne of Spirit of Shankly (now Ian Byrne MP!).

Its message had already spread across the country with fan groups nationwide using the model to support their local communities and, in 2020, it was needed more than ever. Scores of fan groups stepped up while football clubs

did their bit too donating food and money.

Many community-owned clubs needed a different type of support as the impact of COVID-19 threatened to overwhelm them. We were proud to provide detailed guidance for member clubs in relation to the furlough scheme, deferral of VAT/income tax payments, business rate holidays, the Business Interruption Loan Scheme, HR legal obligations, and a whole host of other information.

This isn't headline-grabbing campaign fodder, and it isn't work that anyone relishes doing in normal times - but it was absolutely vital to the long-term survival of many community-owned clubs and our staff in that area did a superb job turning it around so quickly.

Writing an introduction to any Annual Review, which is intended to be a



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document relevant for the next 12 months, always leaves the authors as hostages to fortune. Events are moving astonishingly quickly at the moment so that feels more true than ever before. As we write this in November 2020 a second lockdown has started and games are still going on at the elite level, although they are entirely behind-closed-doors. Grassroots football has ground to a halt again and government intervention is desperately needed to save many clubs. FA chairman Greg Clarke has resigned after a disastrous appearance in front of MPs.

While many supporters worry about the very survival of their clubs, the “big six” seem to see this as an opportunity to destroy the game’s structure and rebuild it to suit their needs - their needs being more money, more power, and more guarantees of future success at the expense of the competitive balance.

We will not stand for it.

Even battle-hardened football industry executives, Premier League owners outside the “big six”, and journalists balked at their sheer greed and nerve. The plans behind Project Big Picture would have destroyed our football culture and they were irreversible. A “sugar-coated cyanide pill” as we told the media.

But they have not gone away and the big clubs plot their next move. We cannot let a small handful of billionaire owners who don’t understand football culture dictate the future of clubs in our towns and cities across the country. The Government has to deliver on its manifesto commitment of a “fan-led review” and it has to deliver now. That review must deliver real change and it will almost certainly take legislation as football has shown time and again that it can’t regulate itself.

If the Government does not step up to the plate the big clubs will deliver their own revolution and the only goal will be to grab more cash and lock in their dominance forever, to the detriment of clubs small and large across the country.

That is something fans would never forget, and we will ensure that the collective voice of football supporters is heard loudly and clearly as we try to deliver a sustainable and competitive future for the game.

MEMBERSHIP

THERE ARE THREE CATEGORIES OF MEMBERSHIP FOR THE FSA AND THEY ARE ALL FREE:

JOIN THE FSA:
WWW.THEFSA.ORG.UK

INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP

Open to all fans.

AFFILIATE MEMBERSHIP

For supporters' groups who fulfil key criteria relating to their democratic nature, independence, finance, and diversity policy.

ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP

For entities such as regional or non-democratic fan groups, atmosphere collectives, and fanzines.

All tiers of membership are embedded in our structure, weighted towards affiliate members who receive more positions on our National Council and more votes at the AGM - five per group as opposed to one vote per individual member or associate group.

Policy is set at the AGM following democratic processes although the National Council can make interim policy.

NATIONAL COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES:

Chair	Malcolm Clarke
Vice chair	Tom Greatrex*
Associate organisations	Ally Simcock (Pint of Vale), David Michael (My Old Man Said)*, and Dave Tomlinson (Sandbach Travelling Alex)
Championship Network	Paul Corkrey (Cardiff City Supporters' Club), Roger Ellis (Sky Blues Trust), and Roger Titford (Supporters' Trust at Reading)
Community-owned Clubs Network	Neil Le Milliere (Exeter City), Tim Hillyer (AFC Wimbledon), and Nick Duckett (FC United of Manchester)
Fans for Diversity	Chris Paouros (Proud Lilywhites), Rodney Cyrus (Love Football Hate Racism), and Shin Aujla (Apna Albion)
Individual representatives	Christine Seddon*, Fiona McGee, Kristine Green, Martin O'Hara*, Peter Daykin, and Steve Powell*
League One and League Two Network	James Young (Robins Trust), Peter Leatham (Accrington Stanley Supporters' Trust), and Tony Wilkinson (Blackpool Supporters' Trust)
National Game Network	Richard Tomkins (Hereford United Supporters' Trust), Rob Street (Billericay Town Supporters' Society), and Tim Scott (Dulwich Hamlet Supporters' Trust)
Premier League Network	Dave Pennington (Manchester United Supporters' Trust), Kat Law (Tottenham Hotspur Supporters' Trust), and Steve Moulds (Foxes Trust)

FSA Board 2019-20: Ally Simcock*, Chris Paouros*, Dave Pennington*, Fiona McGee, Kristine Green, Malcolm Clarke, Martin O'Hara, Peter Daykin, Roger Ellis, Tim Hillyer, and Tom Greatrex.

Election process: Networks are responsible for electing their own representatives and those elections, which FSA affiliates vote in, took place in November 2020. Elections for the vice chair, associate and individual positions take place at the AGM. Nine members are elected from the NC to make up the board alongside the chair and vice chair.

**Denotes NC or Board representatives who served the FSA during 2019-20 and whose position is up for election at the 2020 AGM (or subsequent NC meetings for the Board).*



FSA Board: Nine members elected by the National Council plus the chair and vice chair

● Elected at AGM ● Selected by networks



SUSTAIN THE GAME!

SUSTAIN THE GAME!

In August 2020 we launched Sustain The Game! - a new campaign which brought together fans, pundits and politicians to call for urgent action from the authorities to protect our game.

The stresses and strains put on the sport by COVID-19 have brought the perilous finances of many clubs to the fore, but these are often long-standing problems which need to be fixed.

The Conservative Party's election-winning 2019 manifesto contained a pledge to a "fan-led review" of football governance and we have pressed the case for this during 2019-20.

Sustain The Game! has five core principles which we believe provide a huge stepping stone to better governance while remaining broad enough to start a discussion with the game's other stakeholders in any fan-led review.

Upon launch we received great support from Jamie Carragher, Henry Winter, Colin Murray, Amy Lawrence, Guy Mowbray, and FSA Commentator of the

Year Peter Drury, alongside hundreds of other supporters groups and politicians from across the political spectrum.

"Football occupies a special space in our society as clubs carry huge cultural and local economic importance. Sustain The Game! will demonstrate the need for urgent action as the very existence of many clubs is under threat. If we don't act now we might lose some forever," said FSA chief executive Kevin Mies.

"We call on everyone with an interest in the game, from clubs and leagues to players and managers, to come together and work in partnership to support Sustain The Game! The time for action isn't next week, next month, or next year - it's now."

This work is on-going and we are in constant discussions with the FA, EFL, National League, and Premier League on these issues, but we are now of the opinion that Government intervention is required to force change.

Backbench MPs agree with that analysis too, as politicians convened on

26th November 2020 for Clive Efford MP's Future of Football Governance debate - and unanimously called upon sports minister Nigel Huddleston to start the review.

That came days after MPs told Premier League and EFL football chiefs they were "on notice" to end the "current fiasco" regarding lower league funding and only a fortnight after FA chair Greg Clarke made such a mess of a Parliamentary committee appearance that he was forced to resign.

Following that Ian Mearns MP, chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Football Supporters to which the FSA is secretariat, wrote to Boris Johnson urging him to deliver on the fan-led review. "Football governance in England requires an urgent root and branch review," said Mearns.

The football authorities and the Government cannot sit back and watch - dozens of historic clubs are under immediate threat and could disappear altogether. They must act and act now.



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PROJECT BIG PICTURE:

Against this desperate backdrop billionaire clubs owners decided now would be a perfect time to wield their financial might and offer, as we called it, a “sugar-coated cyanide pill” to EFL clubs.

Their package offered temporary financial support but it would have been disastrous for the majority of professional football clubs - including those in the top-flight but outside the top six.

The richest, most powerful clubs will try and use their position to hoard wealth, reduce competition, and embed their position at the top of the game forever, if the Government does not step up with both financial

support for lower league clubs and a fan-led review.

As we said at the time, “supporters are open to new ideas but we don’t remember any fans making the argument that what football really needs is for more money and power to be handed to the billionaire owners of our biggest clubs.”

Project Big Picture would have forever restricted voting rights in the entire Premier League and EFL system to the same nine clubs and six of the clubs could pass any rule change.

To quote their proposals “money will be advanced to the EFL from increased future revenues” but “the EFL

irrevocably grants its broadcast rights to the EPL”. To translate - your money might not show up but even if it does, it’s ours.

Those six clubs could keep the media money and restructure league competitions as they saw fit - potentially ending relegation or cutting every last penny in payments to grassroots.

Half a dozen billionaire owners could have controlled the domestic game forever, and such is the financial desperation of many EFL clubs, they were willing to accept this.

Yet more evidence, adding to an ever-growing pile, that the Government must act.



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THE RETURN OF FANS TO GROUNDS

This issue is a moving target as nationwide COVID figures fluctuate and local lockdowns dictate what clubs may or may not be able to implement.

In November 2020 the Government announced a new three tier system - clubs in tier three areas will have to play behind-closed-doors while those in tier two are allowed 2,000 fans and clubs in tier three 4,000 (or 50% capacity, whichever is fewer).

No clubs in the Premier League, EFL, or WSL were in tier one at the time of the original announcement. While the readmission of fans is unlikely to generate revenue for bigger clubs, it could be a welcome income stream for clubs lower down the leagues and, we hope, represents the first step on the road back to some form of normality.

The Government's announcement came after sustained pressure from fans and the football authorities who felt that the sport had been treated differently

to other sectors, despite putting in place robust safety protocols to make sure fans could return safely.

As a result a petition calling for the return of fans received football's support and surpassed 200,000 signatories triggering a debate in Parliament which was attended by MPs supporting the FSA's position.

Damian Collins MP, vice chair of the APPG for Football Supporters, said that "football clubs have survived the first world war, the great depression, the second world war, and deindustrialisation. Are we going to let them die because of COVID, with the impact that would have on local communities?"

In addition to offering a great deal of support to our non-league members, such as professional financial and legal advice for those who run clubs, we have continued to lobby Government throughout this period for additional

funding, the safe return of fans, and a fan-led review.

This has included a number of calls with the secretary of state for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport, as well as the sports minister, and other influential figures within Parliament.

We have also highlighted many case studies at a variety of "return to game" test events from both a club perspective - with Maggie Murphy, general manager at Lewes FC, who put on the first elite women's game with fans - and with videos from many supporters showcasing positive experiences.

We'd like to thank Jo Bailey (West Ham United Women Supporters' Club), Gary Field (Canaries Trust), Middlesbrough Supporters Forum member Mark, and Dan from Boro fangroup the Twe12thman for all their work on videos which you can watch on our Youtube channel: bit.ly/TheFSA-Youtube



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EX-LIVERPOOL AND ENGLAND DEFENDER JAMIE CARRAGHER:

“The FSA’s Sustain The Game! campaign can play a massive role in protecting clubs throughout the game. This is a difficult time for the game but it’s also a chance to make real changes. Supporters have to be involved in that as well.”



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SUSTAIN THE GAME! PRINCIPLES:

Protect our clubs – football clubs are community assets and an important expression of individual and local identity, they deserve legal protection and urgent support to secure their future;

Transparency – everyone has a right to know who owns their club, and how clubs and the authorities operate. Owners are custodians of clubs on behalf of all of us;

Financial controls – fans want rules with real teeth which are independently enforced, clubs and leagues can’t be left to regulate themselves;

Strengthen the pyramid – football as a whole is wealthy, but we need a smarter and fairer use of the money in the game to encourage sustainability;

Supporter engagement – fans are the lifeblood of the game, they need a voice in their clubs and on all issues that affect them and their communities.

FURTHER READING:

We made a series of proposals to the FA including a new Code of Practice on the Stewardship of Football Clubs which sets out guidance for clubs and owners on a range of issues which have caused problems – name changes, playing colours and badges, stadium location, training facilities, failure to honour wages, and tax commitments. The code would also stop owners loading debt onto a club in order to finance its purchase.

The FA Council backed our proposals in October 2019.

Read more: bit.ly/FSA-Oct-19

CLUBS IN CRISIS

On 27th August 2019, former FA Cup winners Bury became the first club to be expelled from the EFL in over two decades. Not since Maidstone's liquidation in 1992 had a club failed to complete a season, and the loss of the 139 years of footballing history in the Lancashire town was keenly felt throughout the game.

The EFL had suspended each of Bury's first six fixtures of the 2019-20 season, awaiting evidence the club had sufficient funding to complete the campaign, but ultimately no proof of funding was forthcoming, and the EFL pulled the plug.

In any other year it would be shocking enough to lose one major team, and while Lancashire neighbours Bolton Wanderers, who were themselves in administration, were saved with an 11th-hour intervention and takeover in September 2019, there was more to come.

A year later, Macclesfield Town joined Bury as another casualty of the game's lack of robust regulation, with mounting debts forcing a winding up order to be served on the Silkmen in September 2020.

Players had gone on strike in November 2019 after failing to be paid, which resulted in the club putting out a full team of youth players in their FA Cup defeat by Kingstonian. They were also deducted points on three separate occasions for failure to pay wages, and being unable to fulfil League Two fixtures.

The case, which had started in January 2019 and been adjourned 12 times over the course of 18 months, ultimately brought to a close the club's 146 year history as the club's owner, Amar Alkadhi, ran out of time and money. With debts spiralling beyond £500,000 the National League side were wound up.

As if that wasn't enough, Wigan Athletic entered administration just four weeks after a takeover by new Hong Kong-based owners in June 2020, and were relegated to League One. Their future, at the time of writing, is far from certain.

We have worked with fan groups at all of these clubs, as well as groups at Charlton, Oldham and Basingstoke to name but a few, and will continue to advocate for improved governance of the game to prevent similar situations happening in the future.

WHAT THEY SAID

Tom Greatrex, vice-chair of the FSA:

"The impact of losing a club is huge – not just for the league but for supporters and the town itself, too. The protracted crisis around Bury and Bolton shows the regulatory regime is not fit for purpose and it has to be sorted out. It's time for the football authorities to be shaken out of their complacency and show serious engagement with [reform]."

James Frith MP (Labour):

"I'm angry. My head is in my hands. I feel Bury is the victim... and those left to pick up the pieces are the town and the community." He added Bury had been "the victim of a joint enterprise crime" by "an inadequate football administrator [and] a toxic and ignorant ownership of the football club – both current and previous".



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WARNING SIGNS

What are the signs that my club may become the next crisis club? Well, there are no set definitions, and many will use the 'I will know it when I see it' test, but here are some handy pointers to keep an eye out for.

When the owner starts ignoring the club's media team and treating the website as his own personal soapbox is a pretty good sign, but here are some other handy pointers to keep an eye out for before things reach that stage.

CHANGES AT COMPANIES HOUSE

Thankfully, a lot of the significant changes of the financial setup of a club will be reported via Companies House. Accounts need to be published here, and any additional directors or share capital that's injected are reported here too. Has a new mortgage or any new debt been placed on club assets?

EARLIER THAN USUAL TICKET SALES

Just about every club has an early bird discount with their season tickets, but if your renewal is hitting the doormat or inbox a month or two earlier than usual, ask yourself if it's necessarily good news. Could it be that the owner is trying to get as much money in as soon as possible to pay off creditors and make it to the end of the season?

DELAYED ACCOUNTS

Accounts are rarely delayed because the club's suits have asked for an extension to count up all the money they have on hand. Delayed accounts, along with delayed payments to suppliers, could be a sign that all is not well.

UNPAID WAGES

Delayed payments to club staff and players are a huge red flag. They are often explained away by bank glitches or transfers of assets not being cleared in time, but ask yourself how likely it is that there was a mistake with a process that has previously run every month without a problem?

SPOTTED SOME OR ALL OF THESE AT YOUR CLUB?

Then it's time to get prepared. We have produced guidance for fans of crisis clubs on the steps they can take to get themselves ready, should the worst happen. Read all about it here: bit.ly/crisis-clubs



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CONSUMER

RETURN OF FANS

As football restarted and lockdown eased, football clubs faced a unique challenge: who do they let into grounds when attendances are severely restricted?

Since August we've been facilitating dialogue between supporter groups and clubs to help manage that process, work headed up by Harpreet Roberston, former head of the FA's England Supporters' Club.

At many clubs demand outstrips availability leaving a whole host of questions: How do you administer those tickets? Do you consider away fan loyalty points? Season ticket purchase history? Matchday tickets? What about the vulnerable people who need to shield and can't take up a ticket if offered?

"What we're seeing is those clubs that are engaging in two-way dialogue with their fan groups are making the best decisions," Harpreet said. "Generally the clubs that have had more constructive relationships in place before COVID-19 hit have been handling the transition back to live football far, far better.

"The pandemic has been extremely difficult for everyone but the engaged clubs have sought advice and feedback – particularly when dealing with vulnerable fans and making sure they aren't penalised when fans are finally able to return to stadia."

Proactive clubs got out early in communicating with season ticket holders about where they stood and started the administrative work to dish out refunds. At Premier League level Newcastle United took the wooden spoon, not saying a word about refunds until almost the end of June – and only then after mounting public pressure.

Harpreet said: "Premier League clubs are generally making the right decisions, unfortunately there is a category of clubs that are still failing to engage with their supporters and as a result are making poor decisions."

Crystal Palace have also been under fire for their 2020-21 season ticket plans, which the club's Five Year Plan fanzine says "left many fans disillusioned".

Palace supporters say the scheme penalises those in at-risk groups and those who have to fully shield themselves from COVID-19. Five Year Plan argues the plans pressure those fans into buying a season ticket regardless of whether they can actually attend or not.

They are calling on the club to implement a similar system to Wolves, who have frozen all season tickets till 2021-22 and will operate a ballot system based on individual match tickets post-lockdown.

FANS AND CLUBS: HOW CAN THEY HELP?

"Regardless of the relationship in the past they need to have open and constructive dialogue now," Harpreet said. "If there's solid communication we're much more likely to see positive outcomes for both the club and supporters – ultimately we all want the same thing."

Reaching out to Supporter Liaison Officers (SLOs) or other contacts can be an important first step for supporters to get the ball rolling. It's important to be ready for the end of lockdown.

Harpreet says: "The main objective is to get supporters back into grounds in a safe way but there is not going to be a perfect solution or a one-size fits all answer for all clubs."



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NEWCASTLE UNITED: HEAD IN THE SAND

Back in the spring Newcastle United were the first Premier League club to enter the Government's furlough scheme and the last to come out as restrictions eased - causing major issues for fans seeking refunds.

Thousands of Newcastle United fans had paid out for games they couldn't attend as the Premier League kicked off behind closed doors leading Newcastle United Supporters Trust

(NUST) to make regular appeals to the club to "do right by fans".

NUST chair Alex Hurst said: "A conservative estimate of money the club currently has from fans would be around £7 million or more. That money should be in the pockets and homes of the people of the North East."

In late October the club relented and promised to administer refunds.



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RIGHT TO REFUND

As football restarted, a number of individual, associate, and affiliate FSA members reported to us that their clubs were still not offering refunds for games lost, offering streaming passes in their place, or are not delivering refunds in a timely manner.

The FSA sought legal advice from our partners at Gateley solicitors who confirmed that tickets sold for cancelled fixtures should be refunded in full for matchday tickets or on a pro-rata basis to season ticket holders

- advice we passed on to supporters around the country.

Gateley advises supporters to carefully read the terms and conditions on their matchday and season tickets, and if they have provisions for unfulfilled fixtures, to contact their club for a refund if they wish. If supporters need any further advice on pursuing refunds, both the FSA and Gateley can be contacted for further support.

Read more: bit.ly/fsa-gateley

FSA FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

Gateley **LEGAL**

Covid-19: Ticket Refunds

On 13 March 2020 the decision was taken by the Premier League, the Football League, the Football Association and the Women's Super League to suspend all matches due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Since then it has been unclear as to when supporters will be able to return to watch their beloved teams live in action.

This report has been compiled for some supporters who have been left in the unenviable position of having paid for season tickets or match tickets but have yet to be refunded. We have reviewed various queries from supporters and thought it would be helpful to produce this note, in conjunction with our retained lawyers Gateley, to provide some general guidance and points of note moving forward against the uncertainty of when Covid-19 will be behind us.

The right to a refund

The right to a refund (to the extent that it exists) derives from the terms and conditions ("T&Cs") which govern supporter season tickets and matchday tickets. Most clubs have separate T&Cs for each (i.e. season ticket T&Cs and matchday T&Cs). The specific T&Cs in relation to home and away matchday tickets also generally differ.

Season tickets

Most season ticket T&Cs contain provisions relating to abandonment, cancellations and matches played behind closed doors. Generally, the effect of such provisions is that a refund is available in those circumstances. The process for obtaining the refund should be set out (and in most cases) supporters will generally be able to recover a proportionate value of the cost of the season ticket to take account of the matches that they have been unable to attend. Most season ticket T&Cs exclude liability for wider consequential loss, such as accommodation and travel.

Home match tickets

Once again, the right to a refund is likely to exist and the process for obtaining such refund should be set out in the matchday T&Cs. Supporters should be careful to ensure that they comply with the set process including in relation to (a) timelines for applying for refunds, and (b) production of identification documentation. Again, consequential loss is generally not recoverable.

Away match tickets

The same comments apply in broad terms as for the home match tickets, however, the T&Cs may stipulate that the right to a refund is dependent on the mechanism by which the club has purchased or away allocation to the point needs checking. If games are cancelled or played behind closed doors on short notice, there is obviously scope for travel and accommodation costs to be greater (which, as with season tickets and home match tickets, would be unlikely to be recoverable).

POLITICS

The FSA's work in Westminster is often through the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) which has responsibility for most areas which concern fans, although we also liaise with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office when it comes to domestic fans travelling abroad following club or country.

Our political work cuts across many campaign areas, whether that's lobbying DCMS in favour of standing at football, or encouraging MPs to speak out in Parliament about clubs in crisis.

With everything that's gone on in the world in 2020 it can be easy to forget that a UK election took place in 2019, but it did, and it was a significant one as the Conservative Party won and, within their manifesto, lay a commitment to a "fan-led review" of football governance.

That is something we have been pushing hard for in discussions with the sports minister and DCMS, while we have also rallied our members to speak to the MPs about this subject via our Sustain The Game! campaign. We know this had an impact as the sports

minister told us that he had been stopped by many MPs to press him on this and the return of fans to games. We are also secretariat to the All Party Parliamentary Group for Football Supporters which aims "to represent the interests of match-going football fans and to support the aims and objectives of the Football Supporters' Association".

Gateshead MP Ian Mearns (Labour), a season ticket holder at Newcastle United's St James' Park, chairs the cross-party group which strengthens the voice of football fans in Parliament. He has written to the Premier League and sports minister in recent times on issues such as the #LetUsWatch campaign and the need for a comprehensive fan-led review of football governance.

In addition vice chair Damian Collins MP (Conservative) has been a long-time supporter of our aims when it comes to football governance reform. He has also been active in calling for government intervention to save lower league clubs forced to play behind-closed-doors.

"The Government itself needs to take responsibility or many already-embattled towns – often in areas of

the country which have suffered many hardships in recent decades – will lose their focal point," says Collins.

The emergence of Parliamentary petitions as a campaign tool was established as far back as 2011 when 156,218 signatories called for "full government disclosure and publication of all documents, discussions and reports relating to the 1989 Hillsborough disaster" which led to a government response and backbench debate. In 2018 a petition backing safe standing secured 112,025 backers before closing and progressed the campaign significantly.

A couple of significant petitions also emerged in 2020 with one to get fans back into football grounds, in line with cinemas and theatres, surpassing 200,000 signatures ahead of a scheduled Parliamentary debate in November. At the time of writing that debate has yet to occur but the UK has gone into a second lockdown period.

Wigan Athletic fans also used the platform to call for a review of the Owners and Directors Test, securing 31,024 signatories and raising the profile of their club's situation. Local MP Lisa Nandy also raised the issue with the Government.



melfoody on flickr (CC license)

FANS IN PARLIAMENT

As well as lobbying for fans in Parliament the APPG hosts its own events to help MPs and Peers better understand the fan issues of the day. One event on policing at games had to be cancelled when the COVID-19 crisis started but the latest event was held via Zoom.

Mass extinction event? The most important month in the history of club football (Tuesday 20th October 2020)

Football finance expert Kieran Maguire on where football has gone wrong in the past and what can be done to save it.

APPG AGM (5th February 2020)

FSA chief executive Kevin Miles gave a run down on the latest news relating to football governance, standing at the match, and more.

Club emergencies – How do we prevent more Burys? (4th September 2019)

FSA chief vice chair Tom Greatrex launched our comprehensive Improving the Regulation of Professional Football Clubs paper.

What is the future of lower league football? (9th January 2019)

Accrington Stanley owner Andy Holt spoke to MPs about EFL finance problems.

THE FANS' MANIFESTO

It feels like an age ago but ahead of 2019's General Election we launched our Fans' Manifesto and asked the political parties to commit to its principles:

Grassroots – Share the wealth: No local club or school team should have to endure crumbling infrastructure or lack of funds to encourage participation and develop tomorrow's star players. The FSA wants to see more of the wealth of football – and of those like agents and betting companies who live off it – used to support the base of the game.

Standing – Stand Up for Choice: We believe there are different mixes of stewarding approaches and standing technologies which clubs can use

to manage fans standing at football and it should be up to each club, in conjunction with its supporters and the local Safety Advisory Group, to develop appropriate stadium plans based on sound and rigorous risk assessment.

Transport – Flexible football rail tickets: Supporters travel the length and breadth of the country following their club, often at great expense, while working around last-minute changes to games due to TV demands or football schedule clashes. The introduction of an affordable and flexible rail ticket which is tied to a game, rather than a date, could reduce costs for fans and generate new revenue for train operators at times which are often outside peak hours.

Governance and regulation – Protect our pyramid and heritage: Football is our biggest cultural expression of community identity and no other country exhibits such depth of support for clubs from the top to the bottom of the pyramid, yet this heritage can be at the mercy of unscrupulous and incompetent owners.

Equality – No to discrimination: A commitment to diversity and inclusion underpins all of the FSA's activity and we oppose all forms of discrimination or violence in relation to football. To this end, the Football (Offences) Act should be extended so that it is not limited to 'racist or indecent chanting' but includes all protected characteristics from the Equality Act.



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TV HELL: A NEW TWIST

In previous years this chapter has been full of the misery that broadcast changes have inflicted on match-going fans.

From late changes to kick-off times, to Monday night away games 300 miles away, supporters' encounters with broadcasters have been fraught and adversarial - but come lockdown that dynamic changed fundamentally.

With the 2019-20 EFL and Premier League seasons resuming behind closed doors in June, TV became the only way fans could see their teams

and thankfully the leagues and clubs stepped up, providing access to those games on Sky Sports, BT Sport, the BBC, and streaming services such as Amazon Prime the EFL's iFollow.

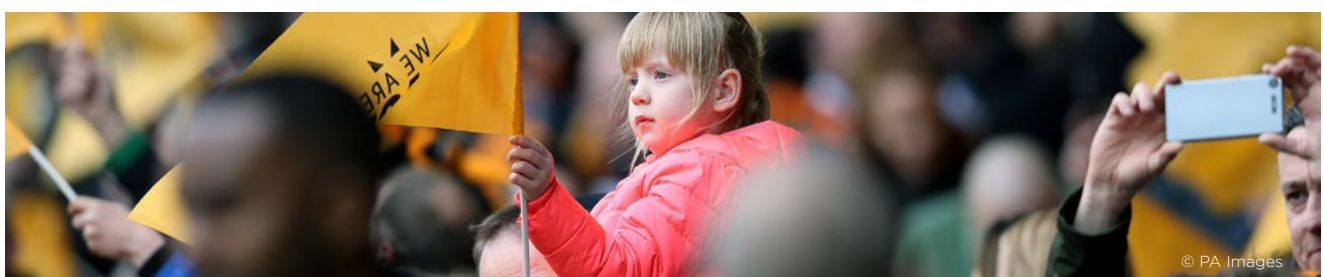
That goodwill didn't last however, when the Premier League revealed in August that the plentiful broadcasting arrangements of Project Restart would not be continuing for the start of the 2020-21 season, despite fans still being locked out of their grounds.

In August fans of Premier League clubs were set to be denied legal access to watch their team's Saturday 3pm

games and fan fury quickly spread as the FSA-led #LetUsWatch campaign took off. Fans all over the world could watch those games - except those in the UK, Saudi Arabia, and North Korea.

Rather than banners in the stands, the #LetUsWatch campaign saw fans take to social media to vent their anger - lobbying MPs, ministers, and the major broadcasters, before eventually forcing a U-turn by the Premier League.

Fan-power worked and supporters were once again able to see their teams play as the TV lockout was provisionally ended. A significant victory, and then...



© PA Images

ENTER PAY-PER-VIEW

It's unthinkable for die-hard supporters, who haven't missed a live match in years, to pass up the chance to watch their teams. But the Premier League, its clubs and broadcasters, once again failed to listen to fans, and conjured up what would become a staggeringly unpopular £14.95 price.

The new pay-per-view (PPV) model would initially cover games in October and early-November and would prove very costly for supporters of clubs who featured regularly in the Saturday 3pm slots. Add that to Sky Sports, BT Sports, and Amazon subscriptions and the costs could be truly eye-watering.

Thousands of fans chose to donate money to their local foodbanks instead of using PPV - a rough estimate is that

£500,000 was donated to good causes instead of being handed over to Sky Sports and BT Sport.

The Times reported that the average number of viewers for the first nine PPV games was 39,000. Some matches attracted fewer than 10,000 subscriptions, and none more than 100,000.

FSA chair Malcolm Clarke said: "Our members have expressed the view that they want the ability to watch their teams legally while they remain locked out of games with the COVID-19 restrictions in place.

"However, by donating hundreds of thousands to local foodbanks instead of paying the £15 fee for PPV over the

past week, supporters have shown just how unpopular PPV is in its current format and pricing.

"It needs urgent reconsideration from the Premier League, clubs, and broadcasters."

Eventually the backlash proved so loud that it even reached the ears of hitherto untouchable Premier League club owners, who agreed to scrap PPV in its current format.

We now wait to see the detail of what the Premier League and its broadcasters will offer supporters who remain locked out of grounds for the foreseeable future.



© PA Images

FA BLUNDERS OVER CUP RIGHTS

Back in January 2020 the FA broadcast 23 Cup games on Bet365's website and smartphone app as part of its international broadcast deal.

MPs took a dim view of the "bet-and-watch" streaming deal which provided the only legal means for many fans to see their team play in the third round. The deal highlighted the concerns many have about the influence of gambling in football.

The FA said it will "review this element of the media rights sales process ahead of tendering rights from the 2024-25 season".

Match-going fans also had to deal with more and more cup ties being moved to accommodate the wishes of the FA's international broadcasters. Only nine of the 32 third round games were in the traditional 3pm slot, inconveniencing fans everywhere.

FSA vice chair Tom Greatrex, also a fan representative on the FA Council, said: "This is a terrible consequence of the rights deal - it's another example of where getting revenue in and protecting the integrity of the Cup are misaligned."

WOMEN'S GAME

The big story from the Women's Network from the FSA's point of view has been one of growth.

Starting from a position in which we only had representation in the form of individual fans of women's teams, the recruitment and development of the network has formed a big part of the work of women's lead Deborah Dilworth over the past 18 months.

In the space of a season and a half, the network has expanded to 25 members, with representatives from ten of the 12 Women's Super League clubs and

15 further groups from teams in the Women's Championship and National League.

In some instances we have cultivated groups, in others helped to start them from scratch, but the growth in organised support in the women's game has been at breakneck pace.

We spoke to a couple of our new members, to see what becoming part of the FSA has meant to them, the support that we've been able to offer them, and their experience as organised supporter groups.





© PA Images



JO FROM LIVERPOOL WOMEN SUPPORTERS' CLUB:

"Being a new member of the FSA's women's network is really exciting for Liverpool Women Supporters' Club (LWSC). Women's football is growing steadily but still doesn't get the recognition and support that it deserves. Even now in 2020 there seems to be a large abundance of inequality and hurdles that both teams and supporters are continuously faced with.

"The FSA has been brilliant at aiding LWSC's initial communications with Liverpool FC Women, as well as giving us multiple opportunities to reach out collectively with other supporter groups to challenge the FA on issues common across women's leagues.

"On a personal level, being an FSA member has helped me further develop my knowledge, skills and confidence by taking part in their regular training and online sessions. Before lockdown you would never have seen me on a video chat, but now I'm enjoying doing regular interviews with journalists, podcasters and bloggers.

"The FSA are doing a fantastic job raising awareness both within and around the women's game. It's fantastic to see how much the women's network has grown since we joined in May, and I would urge anyone to look into signing up either with a supporters group or as an individual."



DAVE FROM THE WATFORD FC WOMEN SUPPORTERS GROUP:

"The Watford FC Women Supporters Group are delighted to be members of the FSA. It means a lot to us to be part of the women's fan movement.

"The FSA has put us in contact with other groups. The network meetings are fantastic, it's helping us put together our group with ideas from others.

There is lots we have learnt too, from conferences, how to deal with the media and the recent Black History Month discussion, which is making us speak with Watford FC Women about how we can help with their Black Lives Matter campaign at the moment.

"One of the main things being a member has given us is credibility, people see us as a proper fan group, even Watford FC mention we are members when they have put articles about us in the match programmes.

"We look forward to learning and getting involved a lot more in the future."

CONTACT US

Want to hear more about our work in the women's game or start your own supporters' group?

Email deborah.dilworth@thefsa.org.uk

The growing importance of the network and the work of its members was evident when, in November 2020, the Guardian featured this article by Suzy Wrack



FIXTURE CONGESTION

The idea of struggling to make an away fixture due to a late change is not alien to football fans. TV has such a massive sway with the schedules that fans are often loath to book travel before hearing confirmation from broadcasters when fixtures will take place, while the prospect of cup replays, Europa League fixtures or the good old British weather can all be a factor in rescheduling our lives at the last minute.

This past year has seen fixture clashes and late announcements cause problems for followers of the club game and the national team alike in the women's game.

On 22nd October last year the FA announced an upcoming England friendly away against the Czech Republic in České Budějovice. The problem? The game was taking place on 12th November, giving fans just over three weeks to rearrange their lives at the last minute if they intended on making the trip.



Against the backdrop of the record attendance for a women's game at Wembley for the fixture against Germany (it seems difficult to remember the prospect of 77,000 people gathering in one stadium), one England regular said: "I absolutely want to go to more away matches, but I know that myself and most of the other

regular away travelling supporters are becoming frustrated with the fact that they announce so late.

"It's sad really because we all know that the women's game needs to keep growing, but this prevents what could be a really fun little trip away to support our team with friends and family."

DOMESTIC CLASHES

For fans of both the men's and women's game, the fixture congestion caused by COVID-19 is throwing up new and unusual ways for fans to be disappointed by TV's power over the scheduling of fixtures.

Everton took on Manchester City in the Women's FA Cup Final on 1st November – a tournament that originally started its preliminary rounds on 18th August 2019 – and for ten-year-old Everton fan Anna Mallanaphy it should have been an exciting day on which she would cheer on her beloved

Toffees from the comfort of her sofa. Anna's problem, however, was that the Everton men's team's fixture against Newcastle United was rearranged by Sky Sports at short notice, and it clashed with the cup final.

We know that many fans of women's teams follow their male equivalents, and vice versa, and so this clash was particularly galling for Evertonians keen to watch both fixtures.

Sky's move would force them to choose between the two.

We highlighted the campaign of ten-year-old Anna, whose petition started with the permission of her parents, gathered more than 2,500 signatures in just a short couple of weeks.

"I don't know why the Everton men have to play at this time as there are lots of other times they could play. I am a fan of Everton and want to support both teams, but I am going to have to choose which team to watch on that day," she said. "This is the FA Cup Final, there would not be a fixture clash if it was the men's final so why should the women's game be different?"



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COVID-19

COVID-19 has impacted the women's game every bit as much as the men's, with crowds still prevented from returning to elite competitions in the 2020-21 season, beyond a couple of test events.

Ahead of the season members of the network came together to poll supporters, working alongside leading women's football magazine SheKicks, to see the views of what matchgoing fans wanted from their return to stadiums, and whether they felt safe in doing so.

The response from the almost 1,500 fans surveyed showed they were

mostly excited (67%) and optimistic (43%) about returning to games, while only one in four described themselves as apprehensive (23%).

Thankfully for the clubs, the headline figure showed that 78% of fans planned on returning within the first month of fans being allowed back into stadiums, while only 2% said they didn't think they would return at all in a post-COVID world.

The survey results showed that there was an appetite for supporters in the women's game to be properly

consulted on key decisions, with fans giving their feedback on preferred safety measures they would like to see in grounds, offering valuable information to clubs.

The FSA network is providing that route for supporters across the WSL, Championship, and below.

"It is vitally important to encourage this spirit of cooperation if the game is to recover from the effects of the public health emergency and to continue to grow in the future," said FSA women's lead Deborah Dilworth.

FSA AWARDS 2019

Liverpool centre-half Virgil Van Dijk was crowned the Men's Player of the Year at the 2019 FSA Awards in association with BeGambleAware.



On winning the award, Van Dijk said: "I want to thank everyone around the country for voting for me as the Player of the Year. I'm very grateful to get this trophy, it means a lot to me."

The Liverpool man held off stiff competition from Manchester City's Raheem Sterling, who finished runner-up, to become the fourth Liverpool player to scoop the award in seven years.

Arsenal's Dutch forward Vivianne Miedema won the Women's Player of the Year award, the third Arsenal player to do so since the award's

creation, succeeding her team-mate Beth Mead who won in 2018.

Sky Sports' Jamie Carragher took home the Pundit of the Year prize, pipping his colleague Gary Neville into second place, while other winners on the night included The Athletic, The Guardian and BT Sport's commentator Peter Drury.

The awards were held at the Tower of London on 16th December 2019, with 18 prizes dished out as a result of more than 340,000 votes cast by supporters. The FSA Awards are the largest fan-led awards in the country.



The full list of awards and winners from the 2019 FSA Awards in association with BeGambleAware are:

MEN'S PLAYER OF THE YEAR

VIRGIL VAN DIJK

(Liverpool)

NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

THE GUARDIAN

PODCAST OF THE YEAR

THAT PETER CROUCH PODCAST

WOMEN'S PLAYER OF THE YEAR

VIVIANNE MIEDEMA

(Arsenal)

FANZINE OF THE YEAR

UNITED WE STAND

(Manchester United)

COMMENTATOR OF THE YEAR

PETER DRURY

THE FANS FOR DIVERSITY AWARD

GOALDIGGERS FC

ONLINE MEDIA OF THE YEAR

THE ATHLETIC

PUNDIT OF THE YEAR

JAMIE CARRAGHER

SUPPORTER LIAISON OFFICER OF THE YEAR

DAVE MESSENGER

(Watford)

CLUB PODCAST OF THE YEAR

FULHAMISH

SUPPORTER ENGAGEMENT AWARD READING & THE SUPPORTERS' TRUST AT READING (STAR)

FAN MEDIA OF THE YEAR

THE ANFIELD WRAP

WRITER OF THE YEAR

RORY SMITH

RADIO SHOW OF THE YEAR

BBC FIVE LIVE'S 606

AWAY DAY OF THE YEAR

DONCASTER ROVERS

NATIONAL GAME COMMUNITY AWARD

DULWICH HAMLET

THE BEGAMBLEAWARE 'SAFE HANDS' AWARD

KASPER SCHMEICHEL

To see the full list of nominees, head to bit.ly/fsa-awards-2019

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A WORD FROM GAMBLEAWARE'S CEO

BeGambleAware.org[®]

The FSA and BeGambleAware have had an important partnership for two years now. By working together, we have been able to help inform football clubs and their supporters about the risks of impulsive gambling and to prevent gambling harms.

This year has been challenging for many reasons and COVID-19 continues to impact all our lives. A lack of football for most of the year has been challenging, but as sporting events begin to start again, it remains important that people are made aware of the risks of gambling and avoid those risky or impulsive bets.

Britain's largest safer gambling campaign Bet Regret is targeted at 18-34-year-old male sports bettors and is named after the sinking feeling you get the moment you make a bet without thinking it through. Bet Regret could strike at any time you place a bet, particularly when betting drunk, bored, or chasing losses.

This year, the campaign is encouraging sports bettors to 'Tap Out' of their betting apps, to pause and take some time out to reconsider the bet... to avoid the feeling of Bet Regret.



The ads and campaign are fronted by a memorable wrestler, who you might have seen on TV between September and October. As the football season continues, the 'Tap Out to avoid Bet Regret' campaign will continue and you may even catch a glimpse of David James or renowned WWE wrestlers Big Show and Kurt Angle, all of whom are enthusiastic supporters of the campaign.

This year, we want the action of tapping out of the betting app to become part of everyone's betting

routine, to help bettors to always remember this useful tip to avoid Bet Regret.

We look forward to continuing to work closely with the FSA over the 2020-21 season to help keep football fans safe from gambling harms and to encourage all bettors to 'Tap Out' for some time out before they place a bet.

Marc Etches,
CEO, GambleAware

SAFER GAMBLING HUB

In January 2020 we created a 'safer gambling hub' with assets for clubs to help them provide a safer gambling environment for their fans.

The digital hub hosted materials available for free download that were part of the Bet Regret campaign, helping to inform fans about the risks of impulsive betting.

These include posters to be used in stadiums, programme advertisements, digital LEDs and social media content featuring safer gambling ambassador David James, all aimed at educating football fans about safer gambling.

FSA deputy chief executive Dave Rose said: "We'll be helping fans across the country lobby their clubs on the issue and get the safer gambling message out there. Football clubs have a unique position in their communities – so this is something they need to take seriously."

FSA RESEARCH

In April, the Betting and Gaming Council (BGC) announced that the UK's biggest bookies would voluntarily halt all television and radio gaming advertising during the coronavirus lockdown.

BGC is the industry standards body which represents betting shops, online betting and gaming, bingo and casinos. Around half the gambling advertising on TV and radio comes from BGC members.

The fear, with many millions of people stuck inside for weeks on end, would be that that boredom would lead to increased problem gambling. But was that a fear well founded?

Ahead of the start of the 2020/21 season, we carried out research on behalf of GambleAware as part of our partnership, which suggested that fans who like to bet in-play would be 83% more likely to place an in-play bet

while they are watching a match live at home, than if they were watching it in a stadium.

With the Premier League and EFL seasons kicking-off behind closed doors, the survey found that of those who said they will bet more this season, 73% will do so because it's easier to bet at home than at the match, while 36% admitted that not being at the game could lead to them 'betting bored'.

The survey taken by just under 1,000 fans, followed the launch of the second phase of GambleAware's safer gambling campaign 'Bet Regret' which aims to help gamblers avoid impulsive and problematic gambling behaviour.

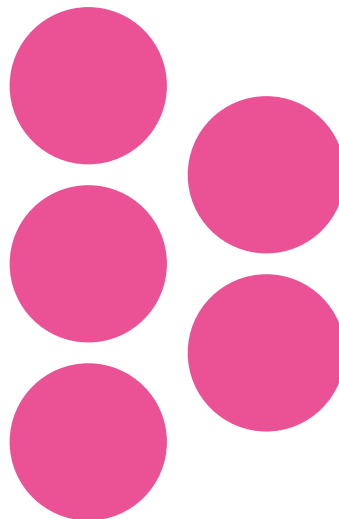
Football's relationship with gambling has received increased attention in recent years, with 27 of England's top 44 clubs kicking off the 2019-20 season featuring a betting logo on their shirt. Many more have at least one gambling partner.

BeGambleAware.org[®]

If you or anyone you know is concerned about their gambling, please contact the National Gambling Helpline on **0808 8020 133** or online at **www.begambleaware.org/ngts**



SUPPORTER ENGAGEMENT



A CASE STUDY - BUILDING BRIDGES: FAN ENGAGEMENT AT WEST HAM UNITED

The West Ham United diaspora is huge and the club's array of fan groups reflects that. The east London club is home to LGBT groups, fanzines, independent supporter associations, blogs, and websites with audiences of a size that would make some national newspapers green with envy.

That depth of supporter culture is something to be proud of but it can be a tricky field for a club to navigate - particularly for clubs such as West Ham United when looking to improve its relationship and dialogue with the fanbase at large.

We believe effective engagement between football clubs and their fans is hugely important and beneficial to all parties. For the 2018-19 season, West Ham United created their Official Supporters' Board (OSB) and views on its effectiveness vary tremendously.

However it was clear that some groups felt under-represented or even ignored. This split across the supporter base can be both difficult to manage and damaging.

We were approached by the club's Supporter Liaison Officer (SLO) and a number of the supporter groups, all highlighting similar concerns with the OSB but from different perspectives. As an organisation we are keen to offer our knowledge, expertise and in some way independence to help build effective engagement. So we took on the challenge early in 2020.

We began working with the SLO to determine how we could bring all the groups together and create an engagement model that the club would also buy into. There was nervousness from all sides and some fans questioned whether the FSA should be working with the club at all.

Our focus was to build an engagement model that would last, showing true collaboration between club staff and fans. Over many months of work and remote meetings we've reached a stage where the fan groups have built their own recommendation: an Independent Supporter Committee (ISC).

Independent is the vital word here: demonstrating to the fan base that this is supporter led, not club led. We hope to be in a position to hold the first formal ISC meeting in early 2021.

Ultimately, we're here to represent supporters but we can act in an independent and conciliatory manner between club and fans - this is why we've offered to stay closely involved with the ISC in its first year.

If the ISC is to succeed where previous engagement efforts at the club have failed, trust must be built and successful collaboration achieved.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to supporter engagement, different models have different benefits - and the ISC at West Ham United is just one example of how it can be done.

From Fans' Forums to Supporters' Boards the needs of each club and each set of supporters will vary wildly. If you would like advice in this area contact Ashley Brown: ashley.brown@thefsa.org.uk



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WHUISA sees effective supporter engagement, where there is genuine, open partnership working, and both sides can listen to each other with a shared view of wanting to provide the best experiences for supporters, as crucial for all.

Supporters are the lifeblood of their clubs, they are, unarguably, one of the principal stakeholders. Therefore there needs to be a mechanism whereby the voices of supporters can be heard and have an impact on how the club is run.

At West Ham United, it became apparent that the mechanism that was in place needed a significant change, a significant refocus. The FSA worked with the club's Supporter Liaison Officer, WHUISA, and other affiliated supporter groups, to bring this new supporter engagement construct potentially to fruition.

The critical role of the FSA as the broker in this work should not be underestimated as the independent oversight, experience and knowledge has been invaluable in enabling all to sit round the virtual table, agree, and plan for meaningful supporter engagement.

Sue Watson
Chair
West Ham United Independent
Supporters' Association

West Ham United has always focused fan engagement on understanding what is most important to supporters across all areas of our fan base, using their views to influence the club's strategy and decision-making.

We listened to our supporters' representative groups and it was clear there was a desire to evolve the approach to structured dialogue and consultation at West Ham United.

We believe the model for engagement has to be led by the supporters, and Ashley Brown at the FSA has been instrumental in helping us to achieve what we hope will prove to be a unique and strong communication process between the club and representative groups, for the benefit of all supporters across the fan base.

Ashley's advice and insight have been extremely valuable to all involved.

Jake Heath
Supporter Liaison Officer
West Ham United



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FANS FOR DIVERSITY

FANS FOR DIVERSITY: SIX YEARS OF PROGRESS

Despite all that's been going on, it's been another busy year for the Fans for Diversity campaign as we continue to grow and develop our work across all strands of diversity.

Since 2014, the campaign's work has expanded rapidly to cover all diversity strands so that fans from all walks of life feel confident coming to us for help with their initiatives.

"We're really pleased with how the campaign has grown over the last six years," Fans for Diversity campaign manager Anwar Uddin said.

"Particularly how it's broken out of the diversity bubble and reached the mainstream.

"That strength is reflected in how fan-led diversity groups dealt with the pandemic. It was so heartening to see a lot of that diversity work become digitally-led, with fans holding meetings online and even taking up esports. While we can't go to the match it's important to make sure we keep those networks and human connections alive. And our Fans for Diversity groups have put a lot of work in to make sure that happens."

Since its beginning, Fans for Diversity has helped establish more than 150 fan groups across the country. And last autumn, many of them were recognised at the inaugural Fans for Diversity awards, held at Amnesty International's headquarters in London.

The awards recognised outstanding work at all levels from Premier League to non-league, including the women's game, along with the Free Kick Award for individuals and groups not affiliated to a particular league.

FANS FOR DIVERSITY AWARDS - THE WINNERS

WOMEN'S GAME:

FESTIVAL OF FOOTBALL 2019

Goal Diggers FC

NON-LEAGUE:

JORDAN TYMS

Altrincham

LEAGUE 2:

LADY IMPS SUPPORTERS ASSOCIATION

Lincoln City

LEAGUE 1:

PROUD VALIANTS

Charlton Athletic

CHAMPIONSHIP

VILLANS TOGETHER

Aston Villa

PREMIER LEAGUE

PROUD HORNETS

Watford

FREE KICK

ALLIES IN ACCESS

West Midlands

Read more about the Fans for Diversity Awards in the campaign's annual report:

bit.ly/FFD-report

The Fans for Diversity award winners then formed the shortlist for the FSA's main awards show, which was held at the Tower of London in December, where London-based football collective Goal Diggers FC were crowned winners.

WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

We have a small grant fund to help with your ideas so if you would like to create an event, a project or start a supporter group please contact **anwar.uddin@thefsa.org.uk** or **maria.horner@thefsa.org.uk**

JACK LESLIE CAMPAIGN

The FSA backs the Jack Leslie campaign, a movement to get a pioneering black player recognised with a new statue outside Plymouth Argyle's Home Park. Initially, the fundraising target to get the statue built was £100,000 but that target was surpassed in no time at all - reaching £136,000 in just six weeks of crowdfunding.

A leading player for Argyle in the 1920s and 1930s, Jack made around 400 appearances for the Pilgrims and scored more than 100 goals. Despite this Jack's story remains relatively buried in English football's history.

“One of the nice aspects of this is that it will be the first football statue at Home Park”

As his goalscoring reputation grew, an England call-up beckoned and Jack should have been the first black player to represent the Three Lions. Cruelly, though, Jack's initial selection was rescinded - with the ins and outs of it remaining a mystery to this day.

Jack's own telling of the story is corroborated by evidence found in newspaper articles of the time. Leslie later said FA selectors came to have a look at him “not at me football but at me face.” Jack was never picked for England again.

Addressing that injustice of 1925 is one of the many driving forces behind the campaign to have Jack commemorated at Home Park. “One of the nice aspects of this is that it will be the first football statue at Home Park,” said campaign co-founder Greg Foxsmith.



The Box, Plymouth (SWIB Collection)

FANS FOR DIVERSITY BACKS INITIATIVE

With designs for the statue being submitted, and plans for an unveiling at the start of the 2020-21 season, Fans for Diversity has provided a grant to the campaign to develop educational resources and sessions.

Greg and co-founder Matt Tiller have been working alongside the Argyle Community Trust and other local organisations designing a programme

for young people to be rolled out early next year.

“What happened 100 years ago was wrong,” Greg says. “And though things have changed there are still issues to be challenged and you can use Jack's story as a gateway into that discussion - and young people really buy into it. They get it.”



Alena coaching in Bangladesh with Fans for Diversity's Anwar Uddin (© Anwar Uddin)

FOOTBALL VOICES: FANS CELEBRATE BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Throughout October's Black History Month we promoted some lesser-heard stories in football, hearing from black fans and coaches about their experiences in the game.

Our Fans for Diversity network was an obvious place to start, with Manchester United fan Rodney Cyrus, host of the On And Off The Pitch podcast telling us about his experiences.

"I've always been aware of being different at games, in terms of the colour of my skin, and there have been occasions when I've heard racist language," said Rodney. "Sometimes the person or the people around them acknowledge it and say 'sorry he doesn't mean you' or they just ignore it."

We also spoke to Alena Moulton, one of the few black women coaching in the women's game. "At the moment just 4% of coaches in the game are black women," she says.

"What questions are we asking to increase that number? Being female is one thing but being black is another. We have to make football accessible – if we think about accessibility in general you should start to get diversity. It's all about removing those barriers."

Black History Month also marked a new stage for the impressive Jack Leslie campaign, which is featured on page 31, and has received our support throughout the year.

Read more about Alena's story and other fans from diverse backgrounds featured in our #FootballVoices series: bit.ly/FootballVoices



© PA Images

FAN EDUCATION PROGRAMME

We've developed a ground-breaking fan education programme with Kick It Out that uses the principles of restorative justice in relation to fans and discriminatory behaviour.

Led by Kick It Out's fan education manager Alan Bush the programme delivers personal education sessions to supporters who have used discriminatory language at the match or directed abuse towards players or other fans on social media.

A Newcastle United regular home and away, Alan has 10 years' experience as an anti-social behaviour officer working in London in partnership with the Metropolitan Police, but it's his experience as a supporter that sets the work apart.

"We've worked with fans ranging from 12-years-old up to the mid-50s," Alan said. "And so far the overwhelming majority of supporters referred to the programme respond really well to it."

Our education programme offers an alternative to the traditional route of the criminal justice system where

suitable, and rather than automatically criminalising fans, it offers them a route to long-term behaviour change.

"The people that have been through the programme engage and buy into it because we 'get' football culture," Alan said. "Being fan-led gives us a way into potentially problematic supporters and educates them in an approachable way."

Referrals to the programme have already been made by numerous dedicated football officers from regional football policing units at the Metropolitan Police, West Midlands Police, Sussex, Surrey, and Hampshire as well as from football clubs in the Premier League, EFL, and the National League.

If you would like to know more about the programme contact Alan via abush@kickitout.org



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FANS FOR DIVERSITY MEETS E-SPORTS

Back in May as the COVID-19 lockdown stopped professional sport in its tracks, football joined the likes of F1 and cycling in using e-sports to fill the void.

This got the FSA's Anwar Uddin thinking, what could we do to help entertain and keep spirits up amongst our affiliates during the lockdown?

As Fans for Diversity campaign manager Anwar's in direct contact with a lot of fan groups so he had a chat with Sam Timms from Villa & Proud who came up with the idea to organise an online FIFA20 tournament.

Anwar instantly thought it was something which the FSA's supporters' groups would be interested in - and the #FansForDiversity #AlliesTogether tournament organised by the FSA and Villa and Proud was born.

#ALLIESTOGETHER

Within 24 hours, Sam and Anwar had pieced together a format, signed up 32 teams, set up a WhatsApp group for everyone to communicate, and created graphics to promote the event.

"There were all these groups from different backgrounds, all interacting with each other", says Sam. "We hadn't done anything like this before but we thought that the best way to bring a sense of realism was to do a live draw, ball numbers and everything, and build a sense of anticipation for the tournament over a few days, rather than doing it all in one day.

"What made it really unique was the fact that the supporter group you were attached to was the club you love whether you're a Leeds fan or Leyton Orient or Newport or whoever. The club is resting on your shoulders."

12-year-old Lucas Hufton was the eventual winner of the tournament - but if you suspected he was a gaming whizzkid brought in by Leeds United Supporters' Trust to grab the club's first silverware in more than a quarter of a century... you'd be wrong. Lucas is actually a season ticket holder whose mother Clair sits on the trust's board.

"I've only been playing FIFA for around five years, and never ever did I think I could win this," Lucas said. "I thought I'd go out in the first round as I was up against some really good players - but I love playing and I thought it was a chance to play some new people and be tested."

DIVERSITY IN NON-LEAGUE

The COVID-19 crisis has hit non-league football hard, but through all that volunteers have kept their fan groups and clubs going, while remaining positively committed to promoting diversity.

Pre-COVID we were delighted to support Non-League Day 2019 once again - collaborating with organisers to produce a special edition Fans for Diversity t-shirt which supporters across non-league football wore with pride. Hopefully Non-League Day will be back and bigger than ever in 2021.



© Aldershot Town

AROUND THE COUNTRY FANS FOR DIVERSITY PROJECTS

As always, Fans for Diversity activity is rich and varied, impossible to sum up in a few pages but below are just some of the highlights.



© PA Images

NOTTS COUNTY

Early in the spring the Fans for Diversity campaign worked closely with Notts County FC Official Supporters Association, the club, and its 'Football in the Community' organisation to provide a pre-match football session for fans centred on mental and physical well-being. It included the chance for participants to have their photo taken pitchside at Meadow Lane.

WREXHAM

At Wrexham we've brought together community board director Steve Lloyd and Disability Liaison Officer Kerry Evans with Lee Tiratira from the Ethnic Youth Support Team to develop a scheme engaging with minority communities.

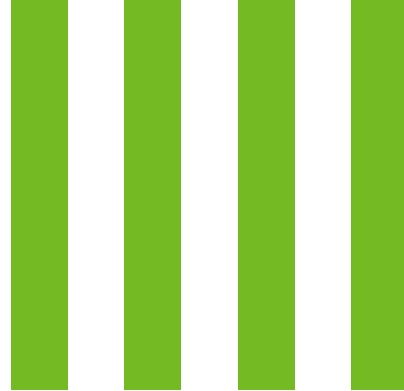
There will be an introduction pack about the club, gifts for young people, and a plan to get them to games when supporters can attend the Racecourse Ground.

NEWCASTLE TOWN

At Newcastle Town in the Northern Premier League an exciting project is getting underway to create a new hub at the ground. It will provide a comfortable chill out area where the new Youth Committee can meet and which will also be used to provide a catering point on matchdays. In a partnership with nearby Regent College, which provides specialist education for young people, the project will recruit volunteers who will have opportunities to gain qualifications and work experience in helping to run the cafe.

Other clubs and supporters we've engaged with: York City Supporters Trust, Boston United, Barmy Army (Manchester Utd Women supporters), Lincoln Disability supporting Lincoln City Women, Croydon, Worcester City, Highgate and Sporting Khalsa. Resources provided include T-shirts, pin badges, scarves, caps and air fresheners all in preparation for the return of fans which also gives our fans visibility in their everyday lives.

COMMUNITY- OWNED CLUBS



It's always pleasing to welcome a new club into community ownership, but all too often it's a case of fans having to pick up the pieces of a failed regime and starting afresh, in so-called phoenix clubs.

Perhaps the highest profile of our new fan-owned clubs this past eighteen months has been Bury AFC. You can read more about the demise of Bury FC in our Clubs in Crisis chapter (pages 12-13), but here we'd rather focus on the positives.

We spoke to Phil Young, chair of the new supporters trust, ahead of the new season.

It's fair to say that it's not always been plain sailing since the demise of Bury FC after 125 years of Football League membership. Phil puts many of the problems down to misinformation provided by those around the "old" club, but he was keen to focus on what lay ahead given that, in Bury supporters' case, it had been eighteen months since they had seen a team bearing the name enter the pitch.

"The FSA and the Manchester FA have been very helpful," Phil said. "And the

wider football community has also been hugely supportive as shirt sales have reached almost 2,000 - and membership has exceeded 1,100."

Phil admits that he would be "very disappointed" if the club didn't achieve promotion in its first season, such is his confidence in the squad that has been assembled by manager Andy Welsh, but that's not the main point of the fledgling club.

"I've been delighted at how the manager, players and volunteers have all bought into the idea of community ownership and a belief that the club will do things the right way," he says.

The next phase of the project off the pitch will see a renewed effort to return football to Gigg Lane, a realistic prospect, according to Phil, and then to build the community aspect of the club, with teams at all levels of the game and of all ages.

"We know we can run a sustainable football club", he tells us, and with the support of the local community in Bury those at the club can set out on their journey knowing that the dark days of August 2019 are behind them.



© Bury AFC

Since our last Annual Review we've also welcomed the following clubs into community ownership:

**Pilkington FC –
North West Counties League**

**Atherton Town –
Manchester League**

**Hull United –
Northern Counties East League**

**Camden and
Islington United –
Middlesex County League**



The Old Spotted Dog - © photog/Clapton CFC on Flickr

WELCOME HOME

Wimbledon's return to Plough Lane marks the end of an 18-year journey that stands as a symbol of supporter determination, commitment, and belief, that has been celebrated across the football world.

It took the club nine years to regain a place in the EFL and a further nine to get back to Merton, to a ground just a few hundred yards from their original home on Plough Lane.

After acquiring the site in 2013 it was a huge task to get the package together that could see it cleared and readied for the club's new stadium.

Planning permission was granted in 2015, and while inevitably the costs of the project spiralled, supporters of the club rejected suggestions of financial support which would have seen the supporter ownership stake diluted, and instead launched a bond scheme to raise the shortfall in funding.

Club director Ivor Heller said: "There have been many miracles but the big one is that the supporters got together to raise the money. That shows that fan ownership can work if you engage the supporters in the right way."

Across the capital, the ground that has been the spiritual home of Clapton fans for more than 130 years is now owned by those supporters.

After a long campaign to return supporter-owned Clapton Community FC to their roots at the Old Spotted Dog ground in Forest Gate, the club finally confirmed the purchase of the freehold in July.

Kevin Blowe, from the Old Spotted Dog Trust said: "For the first time ever, the oldest senior football ground in London is owned by a member-run, non-profit, community-focused football club."

"Finally having a ground of our own, owned by members, will offer long term stability for the club and also the chance to build lasting links with the local community."

"For the first time ever, the oldest senior football ground in London is owned by a member-run, non-profit, community-focused football club".

**Kevin Blowe,
from the Old Spotted Dog Trust**



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COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP AND COVID-19

While much of the attention on the interruption caused by COVID-19 was focused on the Premier League, Champions League, and European Championships, hundreds of clubs throughout non-league had seasons cut short.

In a world without broadcast deals and huge sponsorship packages, where clubs live a much more hand-to-mouth existence, the pandemic posed a very real existential threat to many of them.

Typically, non-league clubs rely almost exclusively on volunteers for much of their day-to-day operations, and unlike sides in the professional game they don't usually have experts in tax, finance and employment law at their clubs. In fact, almost all of them don't have club operations departments.

The initial period of lockdown was a time of great uncertainty for millions of people - staff and volunteers in non-league were no exceptions. That is why we engaged specialists in both financial and legal matters to produce for our member clubs a comprehensive range of guidance, which we kept updated as new announcements and revisions were made to the various government schemes and financial support packages that were available.

Our guides to the vagaries of the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, Bounce Back Loans, Job Retention Scheme, grant funding, insurance and other associated issues were not only of benefit to our member clubs, but were picked up and distributed by a number of leagues to all their clubs helping clubs make informed decisions about their financial obligations and helping to safeguard their future.

THE BENEFITS OF SUSTAINABLE OWNERSHIP

When asked in April "With no further revenue from football-related activities this season, until what point can your club continue before the lack of football becomes critical to the survival of the club?" only 36% of clubs in the North West Counties League believed they could survive until September.

Conversely, more than half (59%) of community owned clubs said they could weather the storm and make it to the start of the new season, showing the immediate benefits of the sustainability that comes with community ownership.

IT'S ALWAYS SUNNY IN... WREXHAM?

Supporters at fan-owned Wrexham AFC have voted to sell the football club to a consortium headed up by Hollywood actors Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney. The bid to buy the club from the trust has proved too tempting an offer for supporters to turn down.

The supporters' trust had recently announced improvements to the infrastructure underpinning the club, with a new training ground and support

from the Welsh Government to invest in the Racecourse Ground.

After a difficult time on the pitch in recent seasons supporters will hope that the promised investment of £2m into the running of the club, combined with the glitz and glamour brought by Reynolds and McElhenney, will attract further investment. The supporters' trust will continue and hopes to retain an influence in the way in which the club is run.



CHESTER FC

Chester FC have faced a number of challenges since the club was rescued by fans in 2010. The phoenix club, launched following the demise of Chester City, started life in the Northern Premier League, and three back to back promotions saw the club promoted to the top flight of the non-league game. After five years in the National League, however, the club was relegated back to National League North in 2018.

The club undertook a thorough review of its operations, consulting with supporters, and new strategic and financial plans were drawn up; supporters and sponsors got behind a fundraising campaign and the club's immediate issues were addressed.

The future of the club was placed on firmer ground.

The club's operational and financial planning was tested once more as a bid was received this year which

would have taken the club into private ownership. The takeover bid was seen by some as an opportunist attempt to take advantage of the problems caused by the pandemic.

The club board put forward a strong case for the continuation of supporter ownership. The private bidder attempted to use the local media to rally support for his takeover, but underestimated the strength of feeling among fans and the bid was firmly rejected. The benefits of the club ownership model were endorsed by the local MP Chris Matheson and fans recommitted themselves to the success of the club under supporter ownership.

Ultimately the strength of any club is marked by how it recovers from setbacks. Having overcome the biggest setback of all in losing their club, Chester fans have shown that they are determined to keep the future of the club in their own hands.





© PA Images

This year we teamed up with disability charity Level Playing Field (LPF) to help non-league clubs improve access and facilities for disabled fans, with the creation of a Disability Inclusion Charter. We were delighted to partner with both the National League, which required all its clubs to complete a disability access survey, and the Northern Premier League.

“At our level of the game football must be accessible to all parts of the community,” said Northern Premier League chairman Mark Harris. “So we fully support a programme of better education for clubs that will help them expand their support base and offer a better fan experience.”

Improving access is not just about projects like installing ramps and wheelchair lifts, though. LPF highlight the importance of football in the community and engaging with disabled fans and the wider community, arguing clubs can have a huge impact on peoples’ well-being when they are inclusive and accessible.

The FSA’s Maria Ryder said: “The overall picture looks very encouraging. Despite the financial challenges non-league clubs face there is clearly a lot of effort being made to address accessibility.

For full results, from positives on wheelchair user provision to negatives on audio descriptive commentary, see bit.ly/disability-survey

GETTING BACK IN THE GROUND

The appetite to return to games is clear – ahead of the season we partnered with the Non-League Paper to survey fans on their attitudes around returning to stadiums.

The majority of nearly 7,000 fans surveyed (77.2%) said they would return to the first game in a hypothetical October start date. A further 18% expected to be back within three months, while one in 20 (4.8%) said it would take more than six months for them to return, or potentially not at all.

The results, which included fans’ views on required safety measures at stadiums, were shared with the FA and leagues as part of a consultation process on the start of the 2020-21 season.

For more details, see bit.ly/non-league-results



James Boyes on flickr (CC license)

LET FANS IN

A mixture of patchwork local restrictions and lack of a uniform approach to dealing with COVID-19 threatens the future of non-league clubs, as additional measures brought in to quell the pandemic in different regions left an uneven playing field.

The National League is classed as elite sport and so faces the same restrictions as the Premier League and EFL in allowing fans to return.

Clubs at Step 3 and below, meanwhile, have been able to allow spectators, albeit in reduced numbers. There are limits in place of up to 30% of capacity determined by the level of club - 600 in Step 3, to 300 at Steps 5 and below. The approach hasn't been without problems, however:

- Three Northern Premier League clubs joined forces to write to the Government warning they face financial ruin if urgent measures are not taken. The limit on spectators left them facing huge shortfalls, as Scarborough Athletic, South Shields and FC United of Manchester each regularly attract more than 1,000 fans. "We understand that we are only a handful of clubs who have slipped between the cracks of elite and grassroots, but we feel abandoned. We are haemorrhaging

more in lost gate receipts, through no fault of our own, than 30 National League clubs who will all receive financial assistance."

- As the north east of England was placed into local restrictions in the autumn, the Durham and Northumberland FAs reduced capacities to 15%, even while other areas under the Government's Tier 3 restrictions faced no such limits. Six clubs wrote to the FA asking them to reconsider, as clubs in Cumbria and Yorkshire were unaffected. "How can it be fair for some clubs in the same division to have an opportunity to generate double the income of others? This enables those clubs to be in a stronger financial position and therefore enjoy a competitive advantage... The future of many Northern League clubs relies upon the current situation changing."
- The Manchester FA, upon entering Tier 3 restrictions, allowed games at Steps 3 to 6 to continue, but fans couldn't travel outside their local area. A fan could therefore travel from Wigan 30 miles east across Manchester to watch Stalybridge Celtic, but not five miles west to Skelmersdale United, in Lancashire, despite both areas being under Tier 3 restrictions.

FUNDING PROBLEMS

In October 2020 Chester wrote to the National League to ask for clarification on how the league's initial emergency financial support package was determined, following a deal with the National Lottery.

The fan-owned club, from the National League North, face missing out on tens of thousands in gate revenue while fans are still prohibited from returning to grounds.

The funding formula sees fan-owned Darlington, whose average crowd was almost 1,500, receive the same as Bradford Park Avenue whose average gate was 484.

While the aid package is "vital", they say it will not cover the matchday revenue the club has lost from behind closed doors matches.

They said: "Clubs were asked to submit a financial questionnaire to estimate lost revenue, but at no point have we been consulted about the formula that would be used and the lack of communication from the National League has been frustrating."

CASEWORK

CASEWORK

We all know trouble at the match is rare - but it can happen which is why we're always on hand to help supporters who find themselves in a spot of bother. We continue to offer advice and assistance to fans round the clock who feel they've been mistreated by their clubs, police or other authorities even in these behind-closed-doors times.

CONTACT

Contact the FSA's caseworker
Amanda Jacks:

Mobile:
07703 519555

Email:
amanda.jacks@thefsa.org.uk

NEUTRAL VENUES

As football returned after the spring lockdown, senior figures among football authorities and police floated the idea of playing out the remainder of the 2019-20 season not only behind closed doors but at neutral venues, too.

Despite widespread adherence to the lockdown, many speculated that football fans would break the public health measures and congregate at football grounds - with outdated rhetoric about football fans being untrustworthy once again coming to the fore.

FSA caseworker Amanda Jacks said: "The proposal was motivated by the idea that supporters would congregate in or around stadiums and that by holding games in neutral venues, this risk would be largely negated."

The initial neutral venues earmarked in the draft proposal grounds were Arsenal's Emirates, West Ham's London Stadium, Brighton's Amex and Southampton's St Mary's, Leicester

City's King Power Stadium, Aston Villa's ground and Manchester's Etihad and Old Trafford.

However, the Premier League clubs eventually voted down the idea with too many concerned with losing home advantage.

"Ultimately the plan did not come to fruition," Amanda says. "And all games were played in home stadiums but that doesn't negate the fact that the idea was mooted in the first place.

"The idea that fans would congregate was, yet again, a notion based not on evidence, rather prejudice.

"Even in the midst of a pandemic and all the accompanying trauma, supporters were not seen as responsible, law-abiding members of society but rather an 'other' for whom extraordinary measures had to be taken - a group of people that could not be trusted even when lock down compliance was overwhelming."



TIMES CHANGE (BUT NO CHANGE AT THE BAR)

As football geared up for the return of fans in late summer and early autumn, the EFL and clubs were looking to solutions to potential crowding on concourses at half time and how they could maintain COVID-secure standards throughout a given matchday.

One idea floated was to relax football's uniquely stringent alcohol restrictions

and allow fans to drink in sight of the pitch to prevent congestion building on the concourses before kick-off and at half-time. Despite being a popular idea amongst fans, clubs and leagues, senior policing figures in the country lobbied hard against it (eventually forcing the idea to be abandoned). Their latest intervention led many to call their role into question, with senior

commissioners and academics calling for Parliamentary inquiries into their operation.

Arfon Jones, the Police and Crime Commissioner for North Wales said: "Football fans are automatically tarred with being hooligans and the UKFPU are still trying to police the 1980s in 2020."



© Paul Corkrey

FACIAL RECOGNITION BATTLE RUMBLES ON

The use of live facial recognition on crowds at football matches by South Wales Police was unlawful, according to a ruling from the Court of Appeal earlier this year.

Last season, South Wales Police used facial recognition at a match between Cardiff City and Swansea City at the Liberty Stadium, leading to protests from supporters.

August's Court of Appeal ruling followed a legal challenge brought by Ed Bridges, 37, from Cardiff and was supported by civil rights group Liberty. The court upheld three of the five points raised in the appeal – it said

there was no clear guidance on where facial recognition could be used and who could be put on a watchlist.

In October 2019, Cardiff City supporters were fiercely critical of the technology's introduction at the match, which came despite supporters being assured previously that it would not be deployed. Restrictive "bubble"-style policing measures were already in place.

FSA Cymru's Paul Corkrey said: "Football supporters are tired of being used as guinea pigs to test out new technology and new powers. Subjecting thousands of law-abiding

citizens to facial recognition scanning without any consultation was out of order. This ruling should make the police think twice."

Questions remain over the technology, how South Wales Police use the data they gather, how they compile their lists of targets when scanning crowds, and its fallibility.

Amanda said: "We hope if facial recognition is ever deployed at football matches again, it is only after consultation with supporter organisations who have been persuaded it is an appropriate and proportionate use of this technology at an event with a very low risk of criminality."



© PA Images

If it wasn't for the consequences of a global pandemic we would have seen independent research into standing at football carried out at a number of clubs, including Spurs and Wolves, during the 2019-20 season.

With Wolves' installation of more than 5,000 rail seats in the south stand at Molineux and Spurs' seats with barriers we were confident that the data would accelerate reform of the all-seater legislation.

In February 2020 the Sports Ground Safety Authority (SGSA) reported that standing options – such as rail seats and seats with barriers – had improved safety in the top flight.

This followed a commitment in January 2020 by sports minister Nigel Adams that the Government was “keen to deliver” its pledge on allowing standing sections to be introduced in the top two divisions.

“Over a million people watch live football at a ground every week, and having spoken to fans across the country, I know that safe standing is an issue many feel passionately about.

“However it is imperative that football remains as safe as it has become over the past 25 years. Robust evidence that this change will provide equivalent or improved safety for supporters, will be absolutely paramount to this process,” said Adams.

All was set before COVID-19 swept the globe and, when football returned, it was largely behind-closed-doors with no opportunity to run the research without fans in the stands.

WHAT NEXT?

The SGSA has continued to consult supporters – earlier this year we helped them survey match-going fans at a number of clubs and spoke to hundreds of safety officers at their annual conference in September 2019.

We'll continue to make the case for different types of standing accommodation – rail seats, seats with barriers, existing licenced standing areas – being available as a menu of options for clubs and local safety advisory groups to consider.

The SGSA's ideas to engage both away fans and disabled fans, ensuring that standing areas are accessible for all sections of match-goers, are welcome too. Standing areas give supporters choice, improve atmospheres, and reduce tensions between stewards and fans.

More than ever clubs, politicians, and the authorities share those beliefs.



© PA Images

It is fair to say that 2020 did not turn out to be the year on the international scene that many of us had expected. As leagues around Europe were either suspended or declared null and void, UEFA were left with little alternative than to postpone their flagship tournament by a year. Euro 2020 is now set to begin on June 11th 2021.

England and Scotland had been in line to host games at the multi-national tournament, with the semi-finals and final due to take place at Wembley, and thousands of fans were left confused and wondering about refunds for travel plans and matches that would now not be taking place as planned.

FSA chief executive Kevin Miles described the decision at the time as “the only one UEFA could have taken”,

and while it hasn't been without its knock-on effects throughout the rest of the sport, the teams behind the FSA fans' embassies are now making their tentative preparations for next summer's tournament.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic wasn't just restricted to a more congested international fixture list in the autumn and delayed tournaments in the men's game, however.

The Women's European Championships, due to be hosted in England in 2021, were also postponed by a year, and the Olympic Games in Japan also fell foul of the pandemic and had to be pushed back.

Phil Neville's team had qualified as a result of England's World Cup 2019 performance, and retain strong medal hopes for the tournament which now begins on 21st July 2021.

AUTUMN INTERNATIONALS

Local COVID-19 restrictions have typically been more stringently applied in Wales than in England, with a national lockdown announced earlier in the autumn, affecting domestic as well as international fixtures.

This put paid to FSA Cymru's lobbying efforts with the Welsh FA for a limited return of fans for the autumn international fixtures, but they will continue to work with the authorities to return fans to Cardiff as soon as it is safe to do so.

Sadly, the fixture between England and Wales at Wembley which would ordinarily have been a great spectacle for supporters was also held behind closed doors, due the rise in COVID-19 cases in England over the autumn.



© PA Images

There are always a few stories that don't quite fit as neatly as we'd like into the chapters of the Annual Review but which are worth recapping, In Case You Missed It...

RAILWAYMEN TAKE OWNERSHIP STAKE

Led by the Railwaymen Supporters' Society, Crewe Alexandra's principal supporter group, fans raised £250,000 via community shares and took a 12.5% stake in the club. "The fact we have raised this money in just over three months is truly outstanding," said Railwaymen chair Mark Beavan in February 2020.

A LITTLE UNDERSTANDING

Back in January, the Official Accrington Stanley Supporters' Trust became the latest group to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with their club. MOUs help formalise the relationship between a fan group and their club, setting out how the club engages with its supporters, and we've helped many fan groups and clubs draft them.

FANS' VICTORY OVER POLICE MISUSE OF POWER

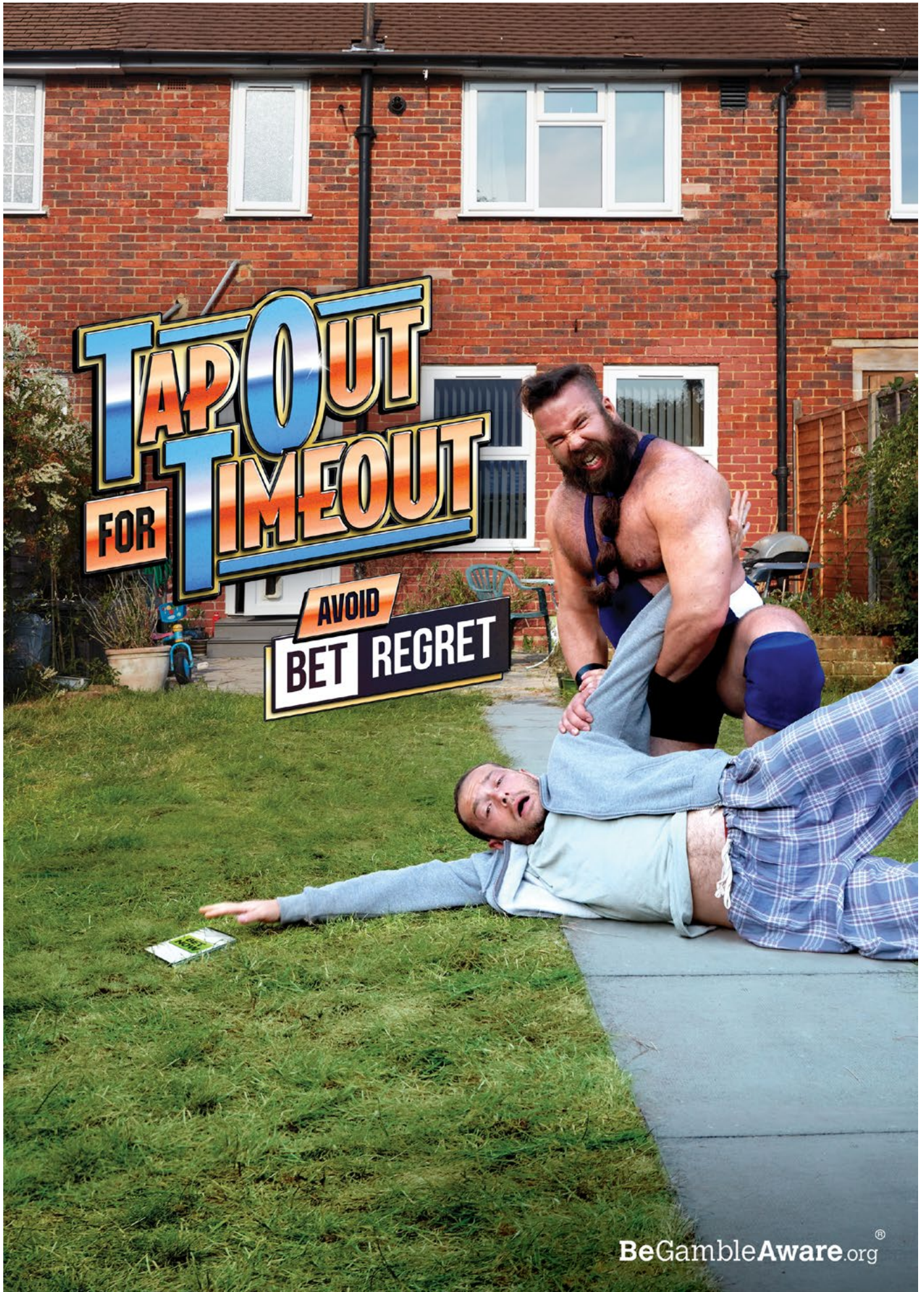
In September 2019 a group of 10 Bristol City fans won an out of court settlement from West Midlands Police over the alleged misuse of dispersal powers at a fixture in 2015. The Bristol City Supporters' Club and Trust said: "This sends a clear message to police forces up and down the country: do not misuse these dispersal powers! Fans simply will not stand for it."

FANS SECURE LEGAL PROTECTIONS FOR VALE PARK

Port Vale's stadium became the latest in a list of dozens of football grounds listed as an asset of community value (ACV) after an application from FSA affiliates the Port Vale Supporters' Club was accepted in November 2019. Malcolm Hirst from PVSC said: "The granting of ACV status to Vale Park is great news both for the fans and the club."

MILESTONES

A number of clubs celebrated milestones in their community ownership status this past year - Lewes hit ten years of fan ownership in July 2020, while Lincoln City marked 20 years of having fan representation on the board in October. We're sure there were many other anniversaries, so if your fan group has a story to tell, get in touch...



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