The FSA 100 Years of Supporter Activism

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We would like to thank all FSA staff and volunteers who contributed to this publication, whether that’s in 2021 or the century which preceded it. We’re sure we’ll have forgotten to thank someone, and will certainly have missed loads of important stuff, so apologies in advance for that. Ahem. A special mention for James Young, whose contribution to the Fanzines chapter was invaluable. and Malcolm Clarke, whose Foreword opens this publication. That chapter also benefited from the historical knowledge of Graham Whitehead and Lionel Bird while Rogan Taylor’s influence is felt in many areas. From the staff team Debs and Richard basically wrote their chapters (thank you!) while Andy’s reputation as a Mancunian sage of the 90s grows. Oh, and hats off to Andrew and Jon from Solution Group for their efforts on the design side of things.

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**FOREWORD:**

**100 YEARS OF SUPPORTER ACTIVISM**

By Malcolm Clarke, Chair of The FSA

On 11th September 1920 the Midland Daily Telegraph reported that “Mr. L. Bennington, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Coventry City Supporters Club, made an excellent suggestion regarding the inter-affiliation of supporters clubs, in which there are great possibilities”.

Although Lewis Bennington, who was also the sports editor of the paper, had introduced the concept, Herbert Kendall did most of the legwork, visiting other supporters clubs to encourage them to join.

The result was that, in 1921, 16 clubs founded the National Federation of Football Supporters Clubs (NatFed). Herbert Kendall has a just claim to be regarded as the founder of our national movement.

The NatFed motto “to help not hinder” summed up the philosophy of supporters clubs for many years of being limited to raising money for their club but things began to change in the 1980s with the Heysel disaster, hooliganism and English clubs’ European ban.

Rogan Taylor and Peter Garrett started the Football Supporters’ Association (FSA) in Liverpool to present a positive image of fans. Unlike NatFed it had individual membership and led campaigns - such as the campaign against football ID cards.

The relationship between the FSA and NatFed was often cool with the latter questioning the need for another national organisation. Taylor and Garrett said they hadn’t heard of NatFed when they founded the FSA and claimed to have been turned away from a Midlands meeting when they tried to open discussions.

The late 1980s and 1990s saw the rise of Independent Supporters’ Associations (ISAs) which were club-based but completely independent of the club. They often arose out of specific issues - such as Fulham and QPR fighting a proposed merger, Chester and Brighton fans fighting to save their clubs from rogue owners, or Manchester United fans fighting the Murdoch buy-out. They often made skilled use of the media, football phone-ins and the newly developing internet.

The Hillsborough disaster in 1989 was of course a seminal moment. The Taylor Report introduced all-seater stadia, which it has taken us three decades to reverse, although it also saw the end of ID cards. Taylor was highly critical of the way the game was run and its treatment of supporters but recommendations on pricing and fan involvement were largely ignored.

Then came the FA-led Premier League breakaway, a widening wealth gap between clubs, massive TV income increases and more broadcasting platforms, threats to the survival of more clubs and the increasing importance of European competitions.

The Labour Party’s Charter for Football in 1995 called for more equitable pricing, supporters to have representation on football bodies and, significantly, that there should be a single national supporters’ organisation. Labour set up the Football Task Force when it came to power in 1997, with David Mellor as its chair. Both the FSA and the Nat Fed were on along with the football bodies.
The different parties could not see eye-to-eye on commercial issues although the Task Force did produce unanimous reports on racism, disability and football in the community. Another positive outcome was the establishment of Supporters Direct (SD) to promote the establishment of supporters’ trusts (who could own shares or the club itself). The late Brian Lomax, chair of SD, was a pioneer in the development of the trust concept at Northampton Town.

By the end of the century I was chair of the FSA and the need to unify the national supporters’ organisations was becoming increasingly clear to some of us. A “divide and rule” approach from some of the football authorities hindered us. The FSA was a head without a body and NatFed a body without a profile.

Mergers are always difficult but it was eventually achieved in 2002 with only one vote against at either conference. Thus was born the Football Supporters’ Federation (FSF). I pay tribute to Ian Todd, my opposite number at NatFed, for his role in this.

SD developed its role in the establishment of trusts and the community ownership of clubs, and we had a memorandum of understanding between the FSF and SD as mutually supportive partners. But the difference between the two organisations was not always clear to fans and we were fishing in the same pond by asking trusts to affiliate to two national organisations.

This led to discussions about another merger which, as many readers will know, was approved by the conferences of both organisations in 2018 to form the new FSA. We are now much better equipped to achieve the kind of real change in football which our members want.

As we do so, it is appropriate in our centenary year to recognise with gratitude Herbert Kendall and the contributions and achievements of all those who have followed him.

**UNMARKED GRAVE**

Coventry City fan Lionel Bird found Kendall’s unmarked grave and, in 2004, supporters clubs from all over the country assembled at St. Michael’s Church (Coventry) for a service to unveil a new headstone commemorating his achievements.

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**TIMELINE**

- 1921: The National Federation of Football Supporters Clubs (NatFed) is born
- 1985: The Football Supporters’ Association emerges (an ancestor to the current FSA)
- 1992: The first supporters’ trust is formed at Northampton Town - a key moment
- 2000: Supporters Direct (SD) is created to support the trust movement
- 2002: The Football Supporters’ Federation (FSF) is formed as NatFed and the FSA merge
- 2004: Supporters clubs from all over the country assembled at St. Michael’s Church (Coventry) for a service to unveil a new headstone commemorating Herbert Kendall’s achievements
- 2019: The (new) Football Supporters’ Association is established as the FSF and SD merge
Here at the FSA we believe the supporters' voice is more important than ever. But then again we would say that, wouldn’t we? Thankfully, we’re not alone, and there’s a growing awareness in the football community that fans bring unique insights to the table and must be heard...

“As the world becomes more polarised, the importance of our football clubs as places where fans, whoever they are, can come together to celebrate and commiserate together is ever more crucial.”
Chris Paouros (FA Council and FSA Board)

“Transport a fan from 1921 to the modern age and they’d be stunned at how much football has changed. But one thing that a fan like Herbert Kendall would recognise is the ongoing need for a national organisation which exists to protect the rights of supporters. He saw that in 1921 and, while the challenges might have changed, the need remains the same. I’ve been a player, pundit, coach and club co-owner, but during all those times I’ve always been a football fan, and there’s never been a more important time for supporters to work together and protect the best interests of the game. The European Super League showed just how quickly those interests can be threatened if fans don’t have a voice. So congratulations to the FSA and all its predecessor organisations for their great work - here’s to the next 100 years of supporter activism.”
Gary Neville (ex-Manchester United and England)

© Hannah Taylor - Chris Paouros - co-chair of Proud Lilywhites

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David Conn (The Guardian)

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Gary Neville (ex-Manchester United and England)
“By protesting successfully against the European Super League, fans showed what can be achieved when they unite to tackle an issue that threatens the game. The FSA was vital in voicing the fans’ collective anger at the ESL. The months of games behind closed doors also showed that the game is nothing without fans and why they deserve better treatment. Supporters face increasing challenges over ticket prices, changing kick-off times, distant owners, and the continued threat of a breakaway league. The FSA plays a crucial and ever-expanding role in standing up for fans,”

Henry Winter (The Times)

“There is no reason why football fans should be taken for a ride. The pandemic opened a window onto what football is like without supporters, and the view was not a pretty one. Yet no sooner had normality returned than we had the old issues such as over-priced tickets, kick-off times being altered at short notice and fans being refused a proper say in the running of their clubs. So the presence of the FSA remains as important as it has ever been,”

John Murray (BBC)

“Football without fans is nothing’ was a slogan that we all stood behind and the reality hit home over the pandemic when it felt like we were watching a different sport. The buzz and excitement this season has nothing to do with players or managers for me, but that the grounds are full and the atmosphere around the games is back. Fans have been sorely missed.”

Jamie Carragher (ex-Liverpool and England)

“A century on from the formation of the first fans’ group, 2021 has given us a pertinent reminder about how important the supporters’ voice is. Their absence from football grounds amid a global health crisis was keenly felt, and their presence was key in warding off a European Super League.”

Jamie Gardner (Press Association)

“It’s apt that it’s a century since the first national fans’ group was formed because there has never been a greater need for supporters to organise and unite. The game is getting away from us like never before. We cannot afford to let that happen. The FSA becomes more important by the day,”

Tony Evans (The Independent)

“A mindless minority continues to threaten the enjoyment of the vast majority. A virulent disease kept us away from our grounds. A sense of entitlement at certain clubs challenges the established order. But all stakeholders have to realise that football is nothing without the fans. The FSA understands that totally and fights for what is right. All true football lovers should be very grateful for that,”

Martin Tyler (Sky Sports)

“Women are involved in football at all levels and all areas now and the game needs to reflect that. So it’s great to see the FSA increasing and improving the support they offer to their female members, with one superb example being the creation of the ‘Free Lionesses’,”

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Traditionally, football clubs have been owned by local businessmen with minimal involvement from supporters, except perhaps in the very early days of the game in the UK in the late nineteenth century, as clubs sprang from factory teams, boys’ clubs and Sunday schools.

For most of us reading this, the local benefactor model is something that we will have grown up with and become used to as the way football clubs are run. The owner was the chairman, and fans’ involvement largely began and ended at the turnstiles on matchdays.

Nowadays you’re less likely to see the ‘local boy done good’ in charge of a club higher up the pyramid in favour of a speculator or wealthy owner from overseas, but the model remains much the same.

Any significant role in running the game has long been denied to fans by the historical manoeuvrings of both the football authorities and the clubs and owners themselves, leading to the ultimate breakdown in the relationship between those attending the game and those governing it.

In the aftermath of the Hillsborough disaster Lord Justice Taylor concluded in his report on the tragedy that fans were “the single and the most important asset the game possesses” but that “the relationship between football and its fans was in terminal decline. It had failed.”

FSA co-founder Rogan Taylor (1995): “Football fans have a historical and cultural right – and a right in common-sense justice – to take a real part in the running of the game.”

Fan activism had already begun when, in 1985, Charlton Athletic’s directors decided, against their supporters’ wishes, to close their home ground, The Valley. The involvement of supporters began to take on a whole new, political, dimension.

Supporters stood in local elections as the Valley Party in an attempt to force the local council to agree to their relocation back to their traditional home. As a result of fan protests the club finally returned in 1992. This fan involvement meant that, for the first time, a supporter was given a permanent place on the board of directors at the club.

Around the same time supporters of Brighton and Hove Albion took action against the directors Bill Archer, Greg Stanley and David Bellotti who had altered the Articles of Association of the club in order...
for them to sell the Goldstone Ground for profit, a breach of the Football Association’s Rule 34 preventing such actions.

After a long and bitter dispute that led to Brighton playing home games as far away as Gillingham, the owners were ousted and a new, supporter-led management under Dick Knight was eventually installed.

These early examples of fan involvement in the running of clubs gave a foretaste of the theme that would develop throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, as many clubs fell into administration with fans beginning to organise to help save, or totally reinvent, their clubs.

When the New Labour government formed in 1997, almost immediately the Football Task Force was set up which ultimately led to the establishment of Supporters Direct (SD) to replace the Football Trust.

The Trust had been the body responsible for allocating public money to the redevelopment of football grounds as a result of the Taylor Report. The “Third Way” of politics of which this was a part, sought to bring about social inclusion as one of its key tenets and the idea of mutualisation of football clubs was an important part of the philosophy.

The Football Task Force set out clear guidelines, indicating that a new Football Audit Commission should “promote best practice amongst clubs in consulting and working with supporters’ groups” and all clubs should “establish democratic forums through which all fans can be involved in decision-making”.

Most importantly, it emphasised that all clubs should “recognise and encourage as a collective body supporter trusts and supporter shareholder associations; this could involve promoting a representative from a trust, group or shareholders’ association onto the board in a director or observer capacity”.

It went on to suggest that clubs should provide financial support for such organisations as trusts or associations, consult with supporters on major decisions, have a board level meeting with supporters at least once a year and set up a system where there is a supporter liaison commission.

Andy Burnham, chair of SD, writing in the Guardian (2002): “Football needs to go back to its community roots. Clubs need to act less like companies and more like clubs - inclusive, democratic, not-for-profit. That, after all, is how it started.”

FOOTBALL TASK FORCE

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The first example of a successful supporters' trust taking over a club was in the days before the formation of SD itself, and with the involvement of future SD chief executive Brian Lomax, at Northampton Town in 1992.

This case demonstrated that, with the willing participation of a supportive community, fan ownership can work as a solution to misgovernance, taking the club from administration and forming a trust, liaising with the local council and finally achieving a supporter permanently on the club's board of directors.

The mission of SD, which was established in 2000, and remained until its merger with the FSF in 2018, was "to promote good governance in sport and enable the development of sustainable clubs based on supporters' involvement and community ownership".

What is community ownership? SD's definition stated that clubs needed "a minimum of 50% +1 of the voting rights of the club to be controlled collectively by a democratic entity which has an open and inclusive membership", with democratic processes (one member, one vote) and inclusive policies (no barriers to voting for all who are club supporters). Additionally, they stipulated that all clubs should be run on a sustainable model and all profits should be reinvested into the club.

The first supporter-owned club in England and Wales was subsequently set up at Enfield Town in 2001, which remains in community ownership to this date.

Alongside Enfield Town, the clubs making the most impact in terms of supporter activism and ownership have, arguably, been at AFC Wimbledon, FC United of Manchester and Portsmouth, with each situation a variation on a similar theme.

At AFC Wimbledon the FA’s decision to allow the original club to be moved over 60 miles north to Milton Keynes leading to the formation of MK Dons led to disgruntled supporters forming a club at the very lowest level of the football pyramid in 2002.

At Manchester United, the takeover of the club by the Glazer family from the US, using a controversial leveraged buyout that effectively made the club pay for the takeover, also led to the formation of a new club, FC United of Manchester in 2005, with clear democratic principles. Once again, they started at the lowest level of the football pyramid in England.

At Portsmouth we saw a familiar story where a succession of inappropriate owners led the club into administration, resulting in the eventual supporters’ trust takeover in 2013.
Whilst FC United have slipped back from their peak in the National League North in recent years and Portsmouth eventually returned to private ownership, in contrast, AFC Wimbledon and Exeter City, two of the oldest community-owned clubs, are going from strength to strength. AFC Wimbledon recently started playing once again on Plough Lane, a stone’s throw from their original home and the supporters’ trust at Exeter City have paid back in full loans taken out earlier in their history as a community-owned club.

Our contention is that community-owned clubs are much more likely to be “resilient” than privately-owned clubs, which have seen almost half their number in the top four divisions of English football enter administration at some point in the past 25 years.

It is clear that the privately-owned model in the EFL is struggling, with too many clubs continuing to enter administration or in some cases even ceasing to exist.

You need only look at Blackpool where fans boycotted matches to oust the unpopular Oyston family, the situation at Bury which led to the club being expelled from the league in 2019, or further problems at Bolton Wanderers, Macclesfield Town, Oldham Athletic and Wigan Athletic in recent seasons, to name but a few.

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THINGS ARE CHANGING

As we move into the third decade of community-owned clubs in England and Wales, a noticeable change is beginning to take place within the movement.

Where before clubs moved into community ownership almost exclusively as a result of a crisis, now club owners are making strategic decisions to move from private to community ownership.

The recent changes at clubs as diverse as Dunstable Town, Montpelier Villa and Camden and Islington United mark a significant, and welcome, development in the history of supporter ownership as the sport faces up to a post-COVID world.

If you would like to learn more about supporter ownership contact Richard Irving via richard.irving@thefsa.org.uk

Supporters Direct was formed in 2000 in the aftermath of New Labour’s election victory and the Football Task Force’s recommendations. Its goal was to help member supporter trusts get a foothold within their clubs, or even secure outright ownership, while improving football governance at a national level.

“What is the antidote to a decade of greed? The answer is already before us: supporter and community ownership of clubs. Quietly and almost unnoticed, football is Britain’s fastest-growing sector for cooperative and mutual ownership,” wrote its chair Andy Burnham in 2002.

In 2018 members voted for Supporters Direct and the Football Supporters’ Federation to merge into the organisation now known as the Football Supporters’ Association. Its legacy lives on within the FSA providing help and information to supporters’ trusts across England and Wales. Supporters Direct Scotland and Supporters Direct Europe also continue to promote fan ownership across the continent.
FOOTBALL’S DARKEST DAYS

Over the past century countless millions passed through the turnstiles to watch their teams play, and they arrived home safely without incident. Tragically, that isn’t always the case.

This chapter commemorates all fans who lost their lives inside football stadiums and looks at some of the biggest tragedies involving domestic clubs, which materially changed the way we watch football.

BURNDEN PARK (9TH MARCH 1946)

The Burnden Park disaster, the then home of Bolton Wanderers, was a crush that claimed the lives of 33 supporters. It’s estimated that the crowd for the FA Cup quarter-final tie against Stoke City was in excess of 85,000.

With no next to no crowd management in place, in a crumbling rudimentary stadium, overcrowding quickly escalated with fans spilling onto the pitch as the tragedy unfolded.

A locked gate was opened to relieve crowd pressure with catastrophic consequences as two barriers collapsed, crushing those underneath. The game was halted and then restarted with dead bodies on the touchline. Sir Stanley Matthews played and, in his biography, said he was sickened that the game was allowed to continue.

LEGACY

The disaster brought about the Moelwyn Hughes report, which recommended more rigorous control of crowd sizes. Burnden Park remained the worst stadium incident in Britain until the Ibrox disaster in 1971 at which 66 fans died.
It started with a spark in the corner of the Main Stand at Valley Parade, catching alight the rubbish under the wooden seats of a wooden stand. Within four minutes, the stand had been reduced to a burnt-out shell. Fifty-six people arrived for a game of football that day and did not go home. Two of the fatal casualties were supporters of Lincoln City, Bradford City’s opponents in its last game of the season and 11 were children. Hundreds more spectators were injured and thousands witnessed an event that many have described as “the worst day of their lives.” The impact was huge with the Lord Mayor saying the fire tore “the heart out of the city.”

The disaster led to improvements in the construction and safety of football grounds that, hopefully, ensure nothing like Bradford can happen again. But it is worth reflecting that our safety as football supporters today rests to some degree on the tragic events of 1985.

The number of casualties on that day had threatened to overwhelm the health services. Special emergency wards were set up. Surgeons and nurses were called in from far afield to cope with the injured. And many local people – whether City fans or not – came to sit with patients, or to bring them food and offer support.

Much of this activity was coordinated by a young doctor, David Sharpe, who began to develop innovative techniques for treating the burns victims. He went on to found and lead the Plastic Surgery and Burns Research Unit (PSBRU) at the University of Bradford. Professor Sharpe OBE remained active in the field until his retirement.

The existence of the PSBRU – often known as the Bradford Burns Unit – stands as a lasting memorial to the disaster. It depends entirely on public donations for its continued survival and fundraising by Bantams fans is often directed towards the PSBRU.

A little over two weeks after Bradford more horror unfolded ahead of the European Cup final between Juventus and Liverpool in Belgium, claiming the lives of 39 supporters. Many of the fatalities occurred when a wall, which Juventus fans were pressed against, collapsed in the shockingly-maintained ground. Gerry Clarkson, deputy chief of the London Fire Brigade, was sent by the British Government to investigate and he concluded that the deaths were “attributable very, very largely to the appalling state of [the] stadium.”

The tragedy resulted in all English football clubs being placed under an indefinite ban by UEFA from all European competitions (lifted in 1990–91). Fourteen Liverpool fans were found guilty of manslaughter while a local police commander and the head of the Belgian FA were also convicted of offences relating to Heysel.

Rogan Taylor, co-founder of the original FSA, said: “As a Liverpool fan, for me, and many thousands of others, it was acutely painful and heart-rending to witness. And our horror was mixed in with a profound sense of collective shame, as the world and its dog turned on our city.”

It was, to quote UEFA chief executive Lars-Christer Olsson in 2004, “the darkest hour in the history of the UEFA competitions.” The horrors of Heysel ushered in an era of change in European football - not just from the authorities and clubs, but fans too.

“The FSA was accidentally born out of the disaster,” Rogan says. “In the aftermath of Heysel, I sat at home in Liverpool wondering what it all meant.

“It became clear to me that there was a huge, unoccupied space in the unending national dialogue about football that needed to be filled by those who could effectively represent the mass of people who had a say in absolutely nothing.”

Rogan met like-minded Kopites and began to lay down the plans for a national supporters’ organisation that could represent fans at all levels. A first meeting was held and the FSA was formed - with Rogan becoming chair (reluctantly) and Peter Garrett as general secretary.

“We toured the country, holding meetings in pubs and clubs, presenting our case and inviting local fans, regardless of club allegiances, to organise regional FSA branches. We insisted that the issues which divided us for 90 minutes a few times a season were overwhelmed by those which united us,” says Rogan.
That death toll would rise to 97, with Andrew Devine becoming the 97th victim in July 2021. He was 22 at the time of the disaster and a coroner’s inquest ruled he died as a result of injuries he had battled for 32 years.

Despite fighting for justice for more than three decades, through investigations, inquests and various legal hearings the families of the Hillsborough dead have yet to see anyone held accountable.

Roy Bentham, Hillsborough survivor and former-Football Supporters’ Federation (FSF) National Council member, said he felt disappointed, despite the inquests exonerating Liverpool supporters years ago.

“My overriding feeling is an underwhelming one, unfortunately,” Roy told us. “We got the truth in 2012 with the Hillsborough Independent Panel report but we’ve never had justice for the establishment cover up – the appalling lies and smears that followed afterwards.”

Roy, who was pulled out of pen three in the Leppings Lane end as the disaster unfolded, attended the final day of the Hillsborough Inquests back in 2016 when the verdict of unlawful killing was delivered by the coroner.

What has kept the survivors and families campaigning all this time?

“I think it’s something which is in the city’s genes,” Roy said. “We’ve had a lot of struggles over the decades. None more so than the managed decline of the Thatcher government. The Hillsborough narrative fits right into that particular book.”

Roy spoke to football fans from around the country about the campaign for justice at the 2016 Supporters Summit, a national conference of fans organised by the FSF and Supporters Direct – his recollections earning a standing ovation from all attending.

He said: “The support from the whole of the football family, including supporters from the Premier League, the lower leagues, nationally and even internationally will always be remembered in this long road for justice. Everyone who’s ever helped in this struggle can take a bow.”

The Guardian’s award-winning journalist David Conn, who has covered the disaster and the long fight for justice, described Hillsborough as “a great betrayal” when the Crown Prosecution Service said it would drop all charges against one of the defendants in July 2021.

“The legal system that dragged bereaved families through 32 years of adversarial battles finally concluded its work in May,” Conn wrote. “The result is that nobody has been held accountable for 97 people dying, nor for the police campaign of lies designed to shift blame on to the victims.”
The Hillsborough disaster set in motion the transformation of the English footballing landscape as crumbling terraces, and severely out-dated safety standards, were thrown out ushering in the all-seater era.

“It shook the nation and it shook the world. And it shook English football to its very core,” Rogan told us on the 30th anniversary of the disaster.

Rogan argues that Heysel, Hillsborough and the expansion of satellite television created the modern football landscape that we know today.

“The experience of watching football for my generation, that started in the 1950s and 1960s has gone – it was a working class occasion,” he says.

“But one set of problems has been replaced with another: cost. You’re paying £500, £700 for a season ticket nowadays. £1,000 if you happen to follow a big team in London. Supporters are spending so much more of their income to support their teams than we did.”

There’s no doubt that the match-going football crowd is ageing, with the average age of Premier League season ticket holders now passing 40, and gentrification excluding many young people from grounds – but Rogan believes the game’s emotional core remains.

“if you look past the tourists taking selfies, you can still see it. You can still see that expression of working class identity if you go to Anfield, or Elland Road or Turf Moor – any club like that. Anfield is still Anfield.”
The mid-1980s were the nadir for English football in many ways as hooliganism stained its reputation while law-abiding matchgoers were treated like caged animals by grandstanding politicians.

But against that grim backdrop, and in the shadow of the Haysel and Hillsborough disasters, there was hope as supporters began to get organised and push for serious representation at a national level.

In the summer of 1988, despite resistance from the football authorities, Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative Government pulled together plans for a compulsory fan ID scheme for all 92 Football League clubs.

Home secretary Douglas Hurd said clubs would have to pay for a new computerised ID card scheme, initially estimated to cost £5 million. A lot of money for unproven technology.

Co-founder of the Football Supporters’ Association (FSA) in the 1980s, Rogan Taylor, said fans came together rapidly to fight the Government’s plans to impose the draconian ID card scheme on matchgoing fans. (See “Foreword” for more on the history of the FSA.)

“When Mrs Thatcher announced the Government would legislate to force all football fans to buy computer-reading ID cards to get into any match, the FSA organised a national campaign to fight it,” says Rogan.

“Nobody, not even most Tory MPs, except Mrs Thatcher and a small coterie of her mates thought this was a good idea. Nobody in football wanted it; the referees; the PFA; the FA; the Football League; the clubs; the fans. In fact, most sensible people saw it as a recipe for disaster.”

Rogan and others began organising supporters, attending meetings, dishing out flyers, getting in front of TV cameras and radio microphones, to speak out against the authoritarian plans.

“It was – for someone totally untrained in public presentation – an ordeal of fire. The FSA was in the House of Commons virtually every week from October 1988 onwards, to help fight the ID card legislation passing through its parliamentary process. Though nobody except a few wanted it, the process was inexorable.”

Supporters were starting to be heard as alliances across football and politics against the ID cards began to take shape - donations and funding for the FSA’s emerging campaign activity started to roll in.

“The FSA even received its first money from the game when the FA, the Football League, and Wembley Stadium responded to our requests for financial support to run the ‘Anti-ID Card’ campaign,” Rogan says.

“We hit the media; organised meetings all over the country, challenging local Tory MPs and others to join in the public debate. Most of them were so terrified of Thatcher they refused to turn up, though a notable few did. They knew it was indefensible.”
HILLSBOROUGH AND THE TAYLOR REPORT

In the aftermath of the Hillsborough disaster, Lord Taylor pulled together his report that would shape football for the next thirty years - but amongst all his radical recommendations, support for an ID card scheme could not be found.

Subsequently, Thatcher was forced to abandon the ID card scheme element of the Football Spectator Act at the end of the 80s and into the early 90s.

Labour leader Neil Kinnock criticised Thatcher over her “obsession” with the scheme while Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown put the boot in too, saying her sponsorship of the scheme “showed she could not tell the difference between fantasy and reality.”

Lord Taylor brought supporters into his evidence, and for the first time supporters had a voice at the top levels of power.

“Amongst all the horror and suffering of that time, one flicker of light emerged,” Rogan says. “For the first time in the long history of formal inquiries and reports into football disasters in Britain - on average, one a decade for 100 years - the fans themselves would be officially and properly represented on every single day of the process and the Government would have to pay to facilitate it.

“It was a kind of victory for organised supporters, bought at unimaginable cost.”

Hillsborough: Unanimous Verdict

“It was a modern protest organisation and it really came into its own leading the opposition to Thatcher’s ID card scheme and campaigning for justice in the aftermath of Hillsborough.”

Adam Brown, When Saturday Comes.
In the late 1980s and into the early 1990s, discontent among supporters was growing as the game became increasingly commercialised - all the while excluding fans from avenues of serious decision-making.

It was against this backdrop, and out of the burgeoning fanzine movement, that supporters started to get organised via independent supporters’ associations (ISAs) which began to spring up around the country.

And many of those persist to this day as independent, serious democratic voices for football fans.

Famously, IMUSA was central to the fightback against Rupert Murdoch’s failed takeover of Manchester United in the late-1990s. The group would go on to organise a shareholders buying group at Manchester United which forced the club to speak to supporters.

The United Against Murdoch campaign was a breakthrough moment in supporter activism, garnering international attention and showing that there was an alternative voice in football.

“Supporters were effectively disenfranchised,” Andy says. “Fans were excluded from pretty much all meaningful discussions with their clubs.

“All that existed were official supporter clubs - these were mostly undemocratic, unrepresentative. And were essentially glorified travel clubs that were run like personal fiefdoms.

“This pushed supporters to get organised in the late 80s and establish democratic ISAs.”

At IMUSA fans were coming together over a myriad of issues - such as ticket pricing, away ticket allocations, standing, the shifting focus on corporate fans - all issues which are still campaign areas to this day.
That network of ISAs would form the bedrock for the Football Supporters’ Federation (one of the forerunners to the current FSA) which was founded in 2002, to provide fans a single, unified voice on a national level.

With ISAs and FSF branches now established around the country, supporters had to be taken seriously within the game - and clubs started to recognise the legitimacy of democratic fan groups into the 2000s.

"By putting their rivalries aside, supporters created a unified voice that could not be ignored," Andy says.

Campaign innovations developed back during the birth of the ISA movement still serve supporters in the digital age as we celebrate 100 years of the supporter movement. The legacy lives on not only in the structure of many supporter groups, but also in the broad campaign methods utilised by fans to this day - leafleting, banners, fanzines, petitioning, media coverage and more. They all owe a debt to the activists of the early-ISA era.

Long may that continue.

"That initial wave of activity emerged out of the fanzine space," Andy says. "ISAs started to come together across the country and crucially started to learn from each other.

"The ID card campaign was significant for the fan movement - for the first time we had rival fans working together."

In the north west, ISAs from Bolton Wanderers, Everton, Leeds United, Liverpool, Manchester City and Manchester United, met formally - or as formally as meetings in pubs outside Bolton got - to establish links between democratic groups across clubs.

"It was an open secret in Manchester that this meeting was going to take place.

"It was a tense meeting, it had never been done before," Andy says. "But we were all focused on getting a better deal for football fans. It was unprecedented."

Into the 1990s, a network of ISAs exchanging information, campaign strategies and experiences began to flourish. On the south coast, the Brighton & Hove Albion ISA was central to the fight to save the club and the Goldstone ground in the late-90s.

Andy says: “You had Newcastle United ISA helping IMUSA and ISAs linking up with other fanzines - like Fly Me To The Moon (Middlesbrough) and Sex and Chocolate (Sunderland) - in the north east to raise awareness about issues impacting fans."

As awareness of supporter issues began to resonate on a national level Andy says the success of the ISAs could be judged by ill-conceived counter-campaigns coming from club executives.

"Clubs started trying to discredit the fan movement," Andy says. "At Chelsea we saw Ken Bates use the Chelsea Supporter Club branches as a PR channel."

"They were attempting to counter the message coming from independent, democratic fan groups."

Those attempts to discredit the work of ISAs did not get far, failing to capture the mood amongst matchgoing fans. Journalists too, tired of the anodyne PR coming from the clubs, began covering supporter issues. Even players showed up at ISA meetings.

RIVALRIES ASIDE

That network of ISAs would form the bedrock for the Football Supporters’ Federation (one of the forerunners to the current FSA) which was founded in 2002, to provide fans a single, unified voice on a national level.

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Long may that continue.
Images from left to right top row - BHAWFC fans and players (2021), Boro fans at Wembley (1997), Sutton United fans celebrate a famous win (1989), COVID and its merchandise (2021), Crawley Town fans celebrate (2019).


On Monday 5th December 1921, an FA ban was placed on the women’s game, one that lasted 50 years and was only lifted in July 1971.

The ban on women’s football had a severe impact as not only were generations of players lost, but it distorted views and allowed false opinions to fester around women’s ability to play the beautiful game. All-too-often those opinions still mar the game today.

But we are progressing, both domestically and internationally. We have professional players, and a level of sponsorship and broadcast deals that simply didn’t exist in decades past.

There have been a number of landmark moments in recent times and the supporters movement is not removed from this progress. It’s something to be celebrated.

Supporter activism kicked up a notch in 1921, with the formation of the National Federation of Football Supporters’ Clubs, the same year the women’s game was banned.

It’s a striking coincidence, a crossing of fates that has perhaps been overlooked by the game’s historians, but it had a huge impact upon supporters in the women’s game.

By the early 1920s women’s football had reached new heights of popularity with 67,000 turning up to watch the Cup final between Dick, Kerr Ladies and St Helens Ladies, although “only” 53,000 could fit into the ground.

As Gareth Thomas, writing on The Football History Boys points out, the numbers were “staggering” and blew out of the water many of the league attendances for men’s football at the time. “Everton, whose stadium was used, averaged 37,215 and fellow Scouse giants Liverpool 35,440,” writes Thomas.

This wasn’t a one-off, and attendances had proven strong in the previous decade as author and historian Gail Newsham tells us that 10,000 turned out to watch Dick, Kerr Ladies on Christmas Day 1917 at Preston North End’s Deepdale.

“Everyone wanted to see and they had been booked to play an average of two games a week all over the UK,” says Gail. “They played in excess of sixty games of football that year, while still working full time at the factory, and a staggering number of almost 900,000 people came to watch them.”

By 1920, the success of women’s football was continuing to grow. A series of games between England and France in Stockport, Manchester and at Chelsea’s Stamford Bridge all attracted gates of 10,000-plus.
Dick, Kerr Ladies continued to be a draw too with 35,000 turning up to watch them at Old Trafford in 1921. But they weren’t the only show in town, as women’s football thrived across the country with paying spectators flocking to watch games. In March 1921 around 15,000 fans turned up at Leeds Road to watch Atalanta Ladies against Bath.

This brief, potted history shows that vast numbers of spectators were enjoying the game prior to the ban, and its impact must have been devastating to players and supporters alike. Where did these fans go? Were generations of supporters lost because of the ban?

We think they were and that’s why all football institutions, the FSA included, must strive to improve things and make up for those countless lost supporters.

In recent times there’s been a real growth in interest in the women’s game, and this doesn’t just mean column inches and broadcast hours. It also means supporters at the match organising themselves into supporters’ groups.

At the 2020 FSA AGM we were proud to help facilitate that growth by formalising the Women’s Game Network within our structures and they’ve been busy in the period since, developing policy and building links with important figures such as Baroness Sue Campbell, the FA’s director of women’s football.

In 2021 Bristol City became the first club to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with its supporters’ trust which officially covered the women’s team, while the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Football Supporters, of which the FSA is the secretariat, held its first session on the women’s game too.

The impact that the ban had on supporters was monumental but don’t let anyone tell you that no-one likes or cares for women’s football. It couldn’t be further from the truth.

Football administrators tried to stamp out the fire of women’s football almost a century ago but, despite 50 years of darkness, it wasn’t extinguished. The flame is still alive thanks to the passion of its players and supporters. Let’s make sure the next century sees the women’s game given full support to achieve its true potential.

If you’d like to learn more, we’d thoroughly recommend these resources which were all used for this feature:

**Alice Broome**
Before the Ban: Women’s Football in Huddersfield During the Inter-War Years

**Barbara Jacob**
The Dick, Kerr’s Ladies

**Gail Newsham**
www.dickkerrladies.com

**Gareth Thomas**
www.thefootballhistoryboys.com

**Jim Keoghan**
Punk Football

**John Simkin**
The History of Women’s Football

EXTRA TIME

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We tread carefully in claiming that any football fanzine was “the first” - but the first which many supporters will have heard about was The End. It is in many ways the grandfather of the modern football fanzine.

Peter Hooton was a Kop regular and a player in the city’s legendary music scene - his band The Farm are still going to this day. And it was that Merseybeat mixture of football and music that came to embody a football fanzine culture that can be followed right through to the modern era.

“We all liked the same thing, but we didn’t really have a voice of our own or a way to express our identity. Football was at a real low point and I saw a generation that had things to say, but the mainstream media didn’t give us a voice.”

“I just wanted to make my mates laugh, that’s all it was really.”

The birth of The End came after a trip to Paris where Hooton managed to blag his way into being an unofficial part of The Clash’s European tour.

“Hooliganism was in the firing line but the tone was sarcasm and satire.

“A lot of people found it impenetrable and couldn’t work it out, but it was a bit of a cultural phenomenon - we would sell 5,000 copies per issue. It was read across the city.\"
and across the prisons and detention centres of Europe!

If it started as a snapshot of Scouse culture in the early 80s, by the middle of the decade, Hooton concedes that The End had become a football fanzine.

And it was an idea that had crossed borders to other fan groups and other clubs, each of whom had their own unofficial, sarcastic, satirical voice - one that had been previously unheard.

Suddenly every club, big or small, had a fanzine reflecting the culture of following football and the kind of humour and observations that were typical of the average, younger football fan.

It was a voice that prior to radio phone-ins, social media and podcasts, and in an era of slightly austere and mucky tabloid writing, gave fans their own route to being published.

By the time 1988 rolled around the crew from The End had reached the end of their natural cycle, and it was time for that next generation to come through.

And in the same way, technology and the way that the game has changed has also seen the way fan culture has changed.

Fanzines still exist, of course, and the FSA will always celebrate the printed fanzine, while the humour also lives on in memes to laugh at and podcasts to listen to. For good and bad.

“Social media has taken on the mantle, I suppose. It’s given that voice to people,” says Hooton. “Back when we started you had to use something like the End to make yourself heard, now social media does it, and without any editing or quality control.”

With Hooton’s blessing, Liverpool’s BOSS magazine picked up the torch locally. Originally reflecting football culture as well as writing about music, their focus has now shifted to putting on huge events for Liverpool fans across the city, and across Europe.

“It’s a great way of being proactive and generating that atmosphere in a big city and gives a focus to people who maybe haven’t got tickets,” says Hooton.

Pictures and video streams of those events now travel the world giving anyone with a mobile phone and an internet connection, a window into the world of following football. It’s multi-media, accessible, open to everyone, immediate and comes at very little cost.

So in the beginning there was The End but The End was only the beginning - and fan culture lives on in events, Twitter handles, memes, podcast... and hard copy fanzines. Long live the fanzine.
## CAN THE FANZINE SURVIVE?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fanzine Name</th>
<th>Club</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Bags of Sand (1874 Northwich)</td>
<td>Northwich</td>
<td>“We must hit the right notes as we have a readership per issue of roughly a third of our average home attendance - the manager and some players are amongst our regular readers. Vorsprung Durch Fanzines!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mudhutter (Wigan Athletic)</td>
<td>Wigan Athletic</td>
<td>“At the Mudhutter we’ve had record subs numbers this year, both print and digital, so we’re quietly optimistic as it stands. We’ve got as far as 72 issues, so it would be nice to see us reach three figures.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking Bull (Hereford)</td>
<td>Hereford</td>
<td>“During the lockdown we produced 13 free editions to entertain and stimulate. Unique.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4,000 Holes (Blackburn Rovers)</td>
<td>Blackburn Rovers</td>
<td>“It’s always been a challenge to keep it going and there have been some quiet spells but we were delighted to publish the landmark 100th edition recently. In the immediate future, there is definitely still enough interest to keep the hard copy format alive.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golden Pages (Watford)</td>
<td>Watford</td>
<td>“During the pandemic we were able to continue entirely with postal sales. However, our loyal readership have embraced the return of matchday sales and a fanzine’s rightful place is outside the ground as a big part of matchday.”</td>
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## WHY DO IT?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fanzine Name</th>
<th>Club</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Winning Isn’t Everything (Welling United)</td>
<td>Welling United</td>
<td>“Our purpose is to help spread the word about Welling United and to try to have a laugh while doing so.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View from the Allotment End</td>
<td>North Ferriby</td>
<td>“It’s a place where fans can get stuff off their chest, get creative, share experiences, and have a laugh. Maintaining our independence is key. We support the club in the good times, but are there to offer a challenge too.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barmy Article (MUWFC)</td>
<td>MUWFC</td>
<td>“We started in May this year because women’s football fans are screaming out for content and we believe we’re the only printed fanzine in women’s football. We would love to see others follow suit. The Barmy Article provides independent opinion beyond the 240 characters of Twitter.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh Football (all clubs)</td>
<td>All clubs</td>
<td>“We started 30 years ago because there was a dearth of coverage of Welsh domestic football and the national teams. We’re still going strong 233 editions later. Plenty has changed - digital didn’t kill off print, it actually enabled improvements in quality. In distribution, we’ve had to cope with the demise of club shops and sports book shops but social media has boosted marketing.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dial M For Merthyr (Merthyr Tydfil)</td>
<td>Merthyr Tydfil</td>
<td>Dial M For Merthyr was founded to promote Merthyrism as an alternative to the overplayed rivalry between Cardiff and Swansea. It was also an avenue to disprove the tired cliches and misrepresentation of our town. There’s still a place for slow journalism in football, a fanzine written with love and delivered by hand at the turnstiles.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
United We Stand  
(Manchester United)

“We’ve done UWS for 32 years now and consistently produced 10/11 issues per year. That’s not easy and you need a big team with a lot of energy behind you. You try getting a bunch of lads to sell a paper product in the rain outside Old Trafford.

“My (Andy Mitten) first ever interview was with a man called Alex Ferguson in 1991 – and I should have made so much more of it rather than tell him I had to go after an hour because my mates were waiting for me. He looked at me with surprise and amusement (we had recorded the interview on a giant red ghetto blaster) but we were only kids.

“Ed Woodward does little media but has twice given us one-on-one sit down interviews where we’ve put fan concerns to him, as did Jose Mourinho and, most recently, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer during lockdown.

“Slightly different was an interview with Scouse writer Kevin Sampson in 1999, before rival fans really did face to face stuff. Sampson’s a brilliant writer and he was so engaging I ended up staying in Liverpool for 24 hours. 90% of our readers loved it, 10% thought we were a disgrace for speaking to a Scouser.

“There have been sacrifices too. Fanzine sellers need to be outside the ground immediately after the match to catch the crowd. We drove to Selhurst Park for Wimbledon away in ’96, left a minute before the end and then heard a roar from the away section… Beckham had scored from the halfway line.

“We campaign, too. We were writing about why clubs should bring in safe standing in 1994 and campaigning against high ticket prices in 1991. That focus has shifted to ticket prices charged by European teams. The declining atmosphere at Old Trafford was covered in detail for 20 years until the club acknowledged the problem and started doing something about it.”

Smile A While  
(Huddersfield Town)

“It does worry me that fanzines could disappear like VHS, CDs and the NME. Fanzines are important as they are a traditional thing, just like the old turnstiles clicking or the pin badge sellers on match day, some things are always there and we relate to them subconsciously.

“Clubs should have a culture budget and fanzines could be sponsored a few times a year, this could give students and fans the opportunity to publish work for the first time. There needs to be some forward thinking to ensure that fanzines continue.”
ANTI-RACISM & DIVERSITY

FIGHT BACK BEGINS

In the late 1970s and into the 1980s, English football was infected with poisonous elements from the country’s most radical far right groups - groups that used hooliganism, disorder and an unwelcoming football landscape as a fertile recruiting ground.

Supporters began to stand up to the far fight as attempts to reclaim the matchday for ordinary people started to take shape. In the late 1970s, the Anti-Nazi League and its youth wing School Kids Against the Nazis (formed to oppose the National Front) used popular culture to fight discrimination - most notably through Rock Against Racism, and eventually turned to football, to spread the message too.

At Elland Road, Leeds Fans United Against Racism (LFUARAF) was established in ‘87 to show the world the National Front was not welcome in Leeds.

“The atmosphere at Elland Road was intolerable in 1987. Both the racism in the ground and the fascists peddling their filth outside,” LFUARAF told Libcom.org in 2012.

“The club’s response wasn’t great and we didn’t get any support for our campaign. We had to do all the running ourselves.”

LFUARAF started printing the Marching Altogether fanzine to counter the propaganda from far right elements but also covered the day-to-day issues that mattered to matchgoing fans.

“What we needed was a campaign run by football fans themselves and the fanzine was the best way for us to do this,” they said.

“The political message in the fanzine was strong but it wasn’t all about well-intentioned lefties telling people what to think. It was about people that cared passionately about football and Leeds United and wanted to give people the confidence to speak up.”

At Chelsea, the Chelsea ISA started to run stalls outside Stamford Bridge which put activists at risk - and in one shocking incident an anti-racism campaigner and ISA rep were slashed before a game.

Despite the threats posed, supporters remained resolute and continued to campaign against racism and fascism in and around football. This supporter activism provided the groundwork for nationwide work on reform and education, as well as a significant improvement in the game’s welcoming atmosphere.

To this day Show Racism The Red Card, which was established by activists at Newcastle United, continues to use football as an effective vehicle for educating young people about racism and radicalisation. Likewise, Kick It Out - which was established by black players in response to endemic racism at the match - continues to campaign across football promoting equality and inclusion.

© Libcom.org
Since 2014, a new wave of supporter organisations - from pride groups, anti-racism collectives to local Punjabi supporter clubs - have energised and diversified the fan movement.

With the help of the Fans for Diversity campaign, a partnership between Kick It Out and the FSA, we’ve helped supporters from typically under-represented communities get organised at club level and break down barriers to going to games.

The area that has seen the most growth has been within the LGBT community, with pride groups now representing fans at the majority of clubs in the professional game.

The presence of LGBT+ fans and supporter groups has seen remarkable growth thanks to the hard work of supporters promoting inclusion. Of course, the FSA and traditional fan groups have also played their part in that growth by continually helping newly created LGBT+ fan groups get off the ground, connecting them into existing networks and sharing campaign strategies.

“We’re really pleased with how the campaign has grown over the last seven years,” Fans for Diversity Campaign Manager Anwar Uddin said.

“Particularly how it’s broken out of the diversity bubble and reached the mainstream.

“There are now fan groups supported by fans for diversity in non-league football and every professional league.

“It’s been really rewarding to watch the fan groups we’ve supported from inception establish themselves and carry the diversity message into their fanbases.”

Besides LGBT+ groups, there has also been a wave of Punjabi and other Asian supporter groups sweeping English football over the last decade. The Bangla Bantams have made national news with their work at Bradford City, Punjabi Wolves Supporters and Punjabi Rams have added noise and colour to their teams’ away days, and Villans Together have helped Asian fans in Aston get into the matchgoing habit.

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Football policing has changed a lot over the decades - scenes of bobbies with sticks trying to herd vast mid-century crowds have gradually been replaced by more sophisticated policing operations.

That transformation hasn't been easy though. Supporters have had to push hard for more appropriate policing and seek redress when forces overstep the mark.

The decades immediately before and after World War II saw attendance records broken across the country, many of which remain unsurpassed today.

One such occasion was the famous 1923 FA Cup final between Bolton Wanderers and West Ham United - the very first fixture to be played at Wembley Stadium.

Vast crowds surged into Wembley before kick-off, far exceeding its official capacity of approximately 125,000. Reports estimated that up to 300,000 gained entrance and the terraces started overflowing, forcing fans onto the pitch.

In response, the authorities brought in mounted police to push the crowd back - including a famous grey horse named Billie - the image of which filled the newspapers and led to the “White Horse Final” name.

Eventually, 45 minutes after the game was due to start, things got underway as the police, thanks to appeals from the players, managed to control the crowd. Miraculously, the final played out without serious injury or death.

The investigation that followed led to immediate improvements at Wembley and other grounds including updated turnstiles, new gates and railings, large terraces partitioned into smaller sections and compulsory pre-purchase tickets for all future finals.

Police struggle with crowds at the famous “White Horse final” at Wembley in 1923.
The last Labour Government (1997-2010) oversaw an unprecedented expansion of police powers that would have serious consequences for matchgoing fans.

One such piece of legislation was section 27 of the Violent Crime Reduction Act, the claimed original purpose was to target individuals or small groups displaying drunken behaviour and to preemptively prevent disorder. However, well-behaved law-abiding fans found themselves on the wrong end of this new police power.

In 2008, Greater Manchester Police (GMP) used section 27 powers to round up more than 80 Stoke City fans prior to their club’s Premier League tie with Manchester United at Old Trafford that November.

Supporters who had done no wrong were detained for up to four hours and forcibly transported by the police back to Stoke-on-Trent on coaches, missing the game.

Deprived of toilet facilities on the coach the Potters were instructed to urinate into cups, which spilled over the floor of the bus so that they had to sit with urine sloshing around their feet for the 40-mile journey back.

Those fans contacted the then FSF for help in seeking redress and compensation for their treatment at the hands of GMP. The force eventually admitted unlawful use of the legislation against the fans and paid compensation to those in question.

Chair of the FSF at the time Malcolm Clarke said: “Police need to think very carefully in future before ever using this legislation inappropriately on football supporters ever again.

“This is an important victory for football fans everywhere – not just those at Stoke City. We were hearing more and more similar cases from fans across the country.”

To find out more about what policing was like and how fans were treated in the 20th century, see the chapters in this publication running through pages 12-17.

One of the most positive football stories over the last decade, a story largely ignored by the mainstream media, has been the steady and continuing decline of football-related arrests.

According to the last set of pre-pandemic Home Office statistics football-related arrests are now at record lows, with 3.3 arrests per 100,000 spectators - comparing favourably to other large-scale public events such as music festivals or street carnivals.

There were 1,381 football-related arrests recorded across the 2018-19 season, a 10% decrease on the previous year. Additionally, the number of active football banning orders also continues to fall, the current 1,771 banning orders in force representing a 3% decrease from the previous season.

Since 2010, this represents a reduction in football-related arrests of more than 50% (see graph) and supporters’ anecdotal experiences generally reflect what the data is telling us - disorder is extremely rare and football is a safe pastime.

FSA caseworker Amanda Jacks said: “While we can’t take full credit I think supporters should recognise their contribution to the fact that football policing is generally in a much better place than it was a decade ago.

“We now have regular dialogue between fans and police; the College of Policing guidance on football policing has had our input; we’ve attended sessions with dedicated football officers at the UK Football Policing Unit and arrests have come right down.

“There are independent football policing advisory groups, police will readily meet with fans’ groups so all round it’s a much better landscape.

“We even have some forces - especially West Midlands Police - taking a far more enlightened approach to problem fans with their behaviour courses.”

Footnotes:

To find out more about what policing was like and how fans were treated in the 20th century, see the chapters in this publication running through pages 12-17.
TWENTY’S PLENTY

The cost of attending matches is one of the issues that the FSA has campaigned on the longest, and for good reason. The rise in ticket prices well beyond the rate of inflation in the late 90s and early part of the 21st century meant the game quickly became unaffordable to large swaths of its fanbase. Ultimately, if you can’t afford to get into the game, then however important other issues around a matchday are, they’re a secondary concern.

Whilst home fans are often able to benefit from season ticket discounts, it’s away fans that bear the brunt. Away fans are also disproportionately responsible, in a positive sense, for the colour and atmosphere within grounds.

So that’s why back in 2013 we launched the Twenty’s Plenty campaign, arguing for a £20 cap on the price of a ticket for away fans at all levels, to recognise their contribution and keep the game a vibrant spectacle for all.

In 2016, after years of lobbying and pressure from fans across the country – often in the face of naysayers who said that a cap was impossible, and that supply and demand would rule the day – the Premier League announced a £30 cap for all away tickets. That cap has remained in place ever since, saving millions of pounds for matchgoing fans.

It’s hard to remember paying more than 60 quid for an away game, isn’t it?

Unfortunately, the Championship remains one of the most expensive divisions in the world for away supporters. We continue to work with our members to bring positive change throughout the EFL – putting the spotlight on the worst offenders, as well as doing our bit to highlight best practice, such as reciprocal deals or extending local promotions to visiting fans.

We’ve made steps in the right direction, but we won’t take our eye off the ball on the issue of affordable football.
EUROPE

It’s not just on these shores that we work to make football cheaper. Through our membership of Football Supporters Europe (FSE), we lobby UEFA to keep prices down.

Taking into account the even greater costs of travel for continental away games, pricing is a huge concern, with clubs demonstrating their willingness to fleece visiting supporters, charging prices in excess of €100, described by fan groups as an ‘elitist joke’.

After a great deal of lobbying and hard work by FSE and fan groups, UEFA announced a cap for fixtures in the 2019-20 season of €70 in the Champions League and €45 in the Europa League.

Major finals are exempt from the cap, which explains how Liverpool fans have gone from paying £15 for the cheapest Category D tickets in Istanbul in 2005, to £60 in their final against Spurs in Madrid just 14 years later. Category C prices have jumped even more starkly - from £32 to £154 - over the same period.

FSE’s executive director Ronan Evain said of the cap: “This represents progress, and we commend UEFA for their forward thinking. The cap will eliminate the most egregious cases of overpricing, but it is, in our opinion, still too high”.

Amen to that.

FA CUP FINAL

After ensuring that more tickets went into the hands of supporters - the FA increased ticket allocations by 7,000 on the back of fan campaigning in 2016 - we set about making it cheaper for fans to attend, too.

In 2019 the FA agreed a reduction in ticket prices for 3,000 tickets at the FA Cup final. 1,500 tickets in the lower band behind both goals (3,000 total) at Wembley Stadium were reduced from £115 to £70, a total saving for supporters in those areas of around £135,000.

This good news, however, came on the back of the previous season in which the FA was criticised for introducing inflation-busting price hikes without consulting supporters, and with a significant proportion of tickets still costing in excess of £100 for the showpiece.

The FA responded by meeting fans and increasing the concessionary saving on the most expensive tickets (from £10 to £25) and committed to not increasing the price of semi-final and final tickets beyond the rate of inflation until 2022 at the earliest.

Yet more small steps in the right direction, but there’s still plenty to be done for what remains one of the highest priced cup finals in world football.
How much money is enough? The concept of a European Super League (ESL) has been around forever but the idea that won’t die keeps resurfacing in various forms.

Originally mentioned as far back as 1968 by UEFA general secretary Hans Bangerter, which ultimately led to the creation of the UEFA Cup, the ESL has been regularly mooted by the rich and powerful since the late 1980s, as surging broadcast revenues and increased sponsorship incomes beam dollar signs straight into the eyeballs of club owners.

At every turn, strategic leaks of meetings and briefings to the press have resulted in concessions from UEFA to placate the continent’s biggest clubs, and to kick down the road the idea that they may one day break away.

The primary motivation behind it all, of course, is more money, and the plans in their various forms represent a massive threat to lower league finances, domestic cup competitions, and weekend football across the continent.

In 2021, however, the whispers and rumours became more real, with the announcement of The Super League, with 12 clubs signed up: AC Milan, Arsenal, Atlético Madrid, Barcelona, Chelsea, Inter Milan, Juventus, Liverpool, Manchester City, Manchester United, Real Madrid and Tottenham Hotspur.

The promise was of a 20-team league, although other major European clubs such as Bayern Munich, Borussia Dortmund and Paris St Germain publicly distanced themselves from the project.

The bungled launch – without a full complement of clubs, a broadcast partner, or seemingly a coherent media strategy – ultimately led to the project crumbling within three days, but not before some significant consequences.
The reaction of fans across England, and the rest of Europe, was white-hot anger.

Fans took the streets outside stadiums to protest, journalists flooded newspapers with anti-ESL columns, and questions were even raised in Parliament.

The immediate fallout saw prime minister Boris Johnson sit down in a virtual meeting with fan representatives to hear our arguments against the scheme, promising a “legislative bomb” to counteract the ESL.

It ultimately led to the UK Government kick-starting its promised Fan-led Review into Football Governance, giving supporters the chance to help shape a better future for the game and to prevent such breakaways in future.

Led by Tracey Crouch MP, the Fan-led Review held evidence sessions with all sides of the football industry, from leagues to clubs, managers to players, but crucially also the fans.

The FSA led evidence sessions with each of our supporter networks, and spoke with one voice on the need for better regulation and for a greater say in how the game was run.

It is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to establish independent regulation, and to stop the financial interests that are currently running the game from continuing to mark their own homework.

The interim report of the Fan-led Review panel in the summer of 2021 was incredibly positive and contains a number of key reforms, and we expect those recommendations to be in the final report, which is due for publication in November 2021.

First mooted at a meeting of Premier League shareholders in 2008, Game 39 proposed an extra round of league fixtures that would take place in various overseas cities. Fan protests stopped the idea in its tracks, although then-Premier League chief executive Richard Scudamore would return to the well over the coming years, insisting that overseas games were desirable and somehow inevitable.

Don’t think it could happen? In 1993 the Supercoppa Italiana – the Italian version of the Community Shield – was held overseas in Washington DC for the first time. In the 21st century, games have been played in New Jersey, Beijing, Shanghai, Doha, Riyadh and Jeddah, only returning to Italy in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2019 it took a Spanish court to step in and stop La Liga games being moved to Miami, while the idea of overseas games in the US market there is far from dead.

It only goes to show that this is no time for complacency, as other leagues have shown UK fans where their future might lie if they don’t stand up and fight for it.
Unlike during World War One, football was officially cancelled during the Second World War, with official notice coming on 8th September 1939 that matches were suspended until further notice just three games into the 1939-40 season.

The threat of air attack and the conscription of players and officials meant that football could not continue in its current form, although restrictions were relaxed in the autumn of 1939 for friendlies and other regional competitions to take place.

Crowds were initially limited to 8,000 in evacuation areas, and 15,000 elsewhere, as football unsurprisingly still played a very important part in people’s lives even during wartime.

A number of regional war-time leagues and cups replaced the Football League temporarily, with a mixture of established clubs and some factory and work teams taking part. Teams were restricted to travelling no more than 50 miles.

The first of these new competitions was the War Cup, introduced in April 1940 and played across the summer months. 42,399 fans saw West Ham United beat Blackburn Rovers at Wembley on 8th June to become its first champions.

As the Blitz began in September 1940 and the bombing campaign intensified, matches continued - large crowds would still be drawn to games and the matches were seen as vital not only for morale but for the fitness of both troops and civilians.

Not all clubs took part as so many footballers themselves signed up for active service in the armed forces. According to the Imperial War Museum some 80 professional footballers were killed during the war, with many more injured or captured as prisoners of war.

There were even unofficial international fixtures during the war - one Scotland v England fixture at Hampden in 1941 drew a crowd of 78,000 to see the visitors triumph 3-1, and after the end of the Blitz in 1941 crowds continued to rise.

The largest single crowd in wartime was for the 1945 final of the Southern Cup between Millwall and Chelsea, which drew 90,000 to Wembley.

Once life began to get back to normal after the war ended in 1945, attendances boomed. The Football League reintroduced its usual four division structure in 1946-47 and attendances topped out at a record 41 million spectators in the 1948-49 season.
The history of fans’ embassies dates back more than thirty years, when English and German supporters provided the first “by fans, for fans” service during Italia 90.

The concept is simple – supporters know best what other supporters need to know, and matchgoers prefer a fan-led service for its authenticity, confidentiality and understanding.

From those early beginnings the scope and stature of the fans’ embassy service has grown, and before long the game’s authorities began to see the benefits of having fan representation at the ground on matchdays.

Relationships developed within the FA and government, meaning we got better information for supporters while those in authority got a legitimate fan voice on live issues.

Supporter reps now travel to relevant venues in advance of each England and Wales away game, along with FA / FAW security staff and the UK police, gathering information and lobbying host authorities for the best treatment of visiting supporters.

Being part of these delegations means that fans’ concerns can be brought up with our hosts at the earliest opportunity, and can help prevent problems down the line.

Nonetheless, the FSA retains its independence, and we challenge our partners in this work whenever the interests of fans demand it.

Our Free Lions fanzine has been produced for more than 170 fixtures, along with major tournament guides for World Cups and European Championships since Portugal in 2004, with our colleagues at FSA Cymru producing the same for travelling Welsh supporters.

In 2019 we ran our first fans’ embassy at a women’s tournament, with Free Lionesses supporting England at the World Cup in France.

The Football Supporters’ Federation was instrumental in the formation of FSE in July 2008 – the continent-wide network of independent, representative and democratically organised supporter groups in Europe. It now represents fans’ groups in 48 of UEFA’s 55 territories.

Over the past decade or so, FSE has headed up a number of Europe-wide campaign activities on issues that matter to matchgoing fans, from standing and ticket pricing to policing and diversity. FSE is UEFA’s official “dialogue partner” on fan issues.

Through work with FSE we have helped create and organise fans’ embassy services in more than 20 different countries. UEFA recognises the value of fans’ embassies and has included them in the organisation plan of the Euros since 2008.
Despite the problems COVID brought, however, the Government stuck by its manifesto to deliver standing areas, and in September the Sports Ground Safety Authority (SGSA) announced that, from 1st January 2022, clubs in the top two tiers would be invited to apply to offer standing areas.

A LONG ROAD

While the current Stand Up For Choice moniker has seen this campaign over the line, it’s probably best known as the “Safe Standing Campaign”.

That campaign would not have been possible without the devotion of dozens of key volunteers over more than thirty years, as well as the wider support of many tens of thousands more who signed petitions, lobbied their MPs and held banners in grounds. It’s a victory for us all.

FSA chief executive Kevin Miles greeted the news by saying “This announcement is the result of prolonged and sustained campaigning by football fans – a victory for ordinary people with ordinary jobs who refused to accept the contention that standing could not be managed safely.

“It started in a pre-internet, pre-mobile phone world where running a campaign meant Sunday morning trips to social clubs in Altrincham, teleconferences, leafleting political gatherings in the rain and letter-writing; relentless letter-writing.”

WHAT NEXT?

It is now up to each club, in conjunction with its local Safety Advisory Group (SAG), to decide what facilities suit their needs. We believe that fans should be part of that process and represented on local SAGs.

There will be more work in future to ensure clubs and SAGs do what should be done but the recent success is a huge milestone. An achievement that many in football, politics and the police told us would never happen - but thanks to the efforts of fans, it has.

However, not all fans want or are able to stand at the match. Supporters standing in front of those who prefer to sit is a significant customer care issue, particularly away from home, which is why our campaign is called Stand Up For Choice.

Had we written this publication only a few months earlier, we would have spoken about slow and steady progress and growing hopes for government action.

In the 100 years leading up to the Taylor Report the majority of fans watched football from a standing position and, in the decades since, it has never gone away, despite the attempts of the authorities to introduce all-seater stadia.
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