

# MATCH OF TODAY

rounding women's alcohol consumption, combined with concern for physical health and appearance, appear to be relevant in the illicit drugs arena. The stigma women feel regarding loss of self control in relation to excessive drunkenness is mirrored in illicit drug use. Thus we may find that whilst young women's drug use during the 1990s reaches equal lifetime prevalence with men, it will remain less excessive.

Academics, service providers and the media continue to emphasise the 'problematic' for drugs users in the 1990s, (and there clearly are criminal, health, education and employment implications), again focusing the spotlight of social concern on working class young men. Less research and attention has been paid to the new users, however, and the issue of self-perceived 'unproblematic' drug use for young women (and those from 'middle-class' socio-economic backgrounds), these weekend users who still maintain their weekday careers. Many of these young women see themselves as active participants rather than passive victims (of themselves, men or wider society) in a new drug scene, where their occasional or regular use of illicit drugs is seen as an integral part of their social world.

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## Men, women and the 'new football'

Writing recently in *The Guardian* the paper's football correspondent, David Lacey, recalled a photograph from *Charles Buchan's Football Monthly* of November 1952, an image which he argued 'sums up an age'. In it a small boy dressed in full home kit watches intently from a folded seat in front of small terrace railings. Behind him stand adults who could be his mother, father and grandfather. Another child is being passed over the railings for a better view. The picture caption reads: "They are typical of the millions who watch football each week stirred by its drama, their hopes rising and falling with the ebb and flow of excitement".

This Arcadian scene of cross-generational fan harmony is taken from Hillsborough, Sheffield, where 37 years later, 96 Liverpool supporters died, crushed in a penned enclosure, arguably towards the end of a period of quite different traditions of active football support. Recent football oral histories show that you don't need to swallow wholesale the 'golden age' valedictions to the 1950s to see that unsegregated and unfenced football stadiums crammed with 60, 70 or even 80,000 spectators and 'monitored' by fewer than the number of policeman who, in the 1980s, took charge of football crowds *one quarter* the size, were then rough *but* reasonable places for working people to take their kids. But, as we all know, times, and football, changed.

## The fan as hooligan

From the late 1960s onwards, televised coverage of English football, increasingly desperately tried to reflect the 'family values' which the commercial arm of the game so craved; remember all those half-time *Match of the Day* shots of bright-eyed kids in bobble hats and scarves amiably perched on terrace walls or peering through fences?

By this time, however, such images had begun to hide more than they revealed; most fans knew that behind the TV gloss could frequently be heard the not-too distant rumble of testosterone warfare. If on-screen was a slightly tacky warm glow, off it in too many places was likely to reveal the malevolence and violence associated with the struggle for honour and status in defence of local 'neighbourhood nationalisms' among 'The Lads'. It was very much football's 'Age of the Hooligan'.

By the late 1980s away match travel to, and facilities at, many major English grounds were a bit of a nightmare to all but those 'in the know' or young men in search of, in Nick Hornby's words, "a quick way to fill a previously empty trolley in the masculinity supermarket". The routine threats and assaults, the racism and ugly sexism of many young, male fans, and the police indifference or brutality towards almost all visiting supporters went largely unreported and unremarked upon. Only the real spectaculars - often involving the violent racism of the English abroad - disturbed what seemed to be quite widely held assumptions *within* spectator cultures about the *context* in which major matches should - and could - be staged. When more public debates about football spectating *did* occur they did so largely and 'naturally' through the 'fan as hooligan' prism.

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### After Hillsborough

The Hillsborough disaster changed some of this. At the level of the *personal* the tragedy had the effect of displacing, or at least disrupting, prevailing media notions in England of 'football fans as morons/beasts', substituting instead discourses focused through a sense of 'family' and



'belonging'. The victims of Hillsborough were revealed not as hooligans but rather as 'ordinary' people, men *and* women, with homes, jobs and relatives, drawn from 'ordinary' backgrounds. The public mourning in Liverpool and that which joined football fans from around the world, suggested nothing less than a deepfelt *family* loss which was experienced by the international 'community' of football followers. As Rogan Taylor argued, "Hooliganism was the word that many, perhaps most, people associated with foot-

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ball fans before the Hillsborough disaster. Fans were always seen as the perpetrators; never the *victims* of violence”.

Taylor's progressive, liberal agenda for the future of the sport also promised real change. Central to this vision was the need for dramatic 'improvements' in stadium facilities, including the controversial substitution of seats for terracing. Is there a more compelling sight in Yorkshire than the extraordinary blue swooping roofs of the new publicly-subsidised Kirklees Stadium in Huddersfield? Such developments were also at least *connectable* to the aesthetic/erotic production values around the staging and televising of Italia '90, the World Cup Finals of that year. Here we had stadiums as sumptuous postmodern palaces; football and the opera; the emergence of African football; players less as brutal defenders of blood and soil patriotism and more as sleek and graceful athletes; Gazza's patriotic and so 'manly' tears, we even had the national *team* playing with *brio* and skill and winning the tournament fair play award. As everyone now knows 28 million in Britain watched England's semi-final swan song on TV, *half* of them women.

## The 'business' of football

Since Italia '90 something of a cultural struggle has ensued over the shape of English football's new 'marketised' future. Supporters' organisations have complained, contrarily, about the middle class meddling of Taylor; about the loss of the "right to be uncomfortable" at football citing the importance of "discomfort, dirt and exposure to the elements" to the full spectating experience. Much has been made too, about the alleged loss of 'atmosphere' at some stadiums and the associated rise of a new marketing ethos within the sport which promotes 'entertainment' over the 'authentic' footballing

experience. Others, still, point to the exploitative and relentless focus on *consumption* at top clubs as match ticket prices rise, food outlets proliferate and club stores grow in size: what, *shopping?* - at football?

There is something to all these concerns, of course. The 'modern' ethics of business are also apparent in the new corruption cases which dog the game, though to suggest corruption in football is *itself* new is to do some considerable violence to the sport's history. There *is* some cynical exploitation of parents and kids in the sale of club kits - though most of the business here is actually in the sale of *adult* shirts. And, some stadiums do lack the atmospheric edge of old. But it is also hard to avoid the conclusion that some fan objections to recent changes in the game are themselves reactionary and strongly gendered. The recent retro concern with reviving, via the sale of books, videos and shirts, the 'pre-commercial' football cultures of the 1970s, for example, has little to say about the macho deprivations - "Toilets? Piss on the back wall!" - and the violence which also came, and was widely celebrated as part of that particular match day package.

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## Family values

Today's major stadiums *are* safer and less violent than those even five years ago. Indeed, as crowds have continued to rise and as perimeter fences have given way to surveillance cameras and new catch-all offences for hooliganism, match arrests, and the size of police commit-

ments to football have steadily *declined*. Lacking very much in the way of 'successes' elsewhere in combating crime, the police say surprisingly little about football, choosing instead to use recent incidents in London and Dublin - themselves a major story when set *against* recent trends - to imply *nothing* has changed. Far from it. Fan surveys conducted between 1992 and 1994 give strong support to the view that hooliganism at

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football has been declining. They also suggest that one in five fans at some major English grounds are now female (hence, in part, the accusations from some men that the 'atmosphere' at football is changing). At some major venues, too, up to one third of all fans attend matches with their children, many brought in, no doubt, by the game's new approach to spectator comfort and promotion. In fact, the experienced German player, Jurgen Klinsmann (playing spells in Germany, France and Italy), recently commented that he has never played in a country where the game attracts so *many* young fans.

None of this should be taken to imply, of course, that young Englishmen have been drained of the urge to fight at football and elsewhere. (Indeed, recent events may promote a new cycle of football violence). Nor should it imply some simple environmental determinism of the 'treat 'em like animals they'll behave like animals' school. But it does suggest that issues of context, access and definition - the media *did* lose interest in reporting hooliganism in the 1990s - are important at least in prescribing the settings for public violence by men. It suggests that opening up previously 'closed' venues to more women, children and 'families' can help to reshape behavioural norms in collective situations. Complaints from 'traditional' male fans about the game's new 'terra cotta armies' are couched in terms which imply the *class* roots of the sport have been betrayed by the advent of a new affluent audience for the game seduced less by the sport than by its branded duvets and cuddly toys. (It is clear that football's marketing men are in search of certain types of family - the poor need not apply). But aren't these also *really* complaints that football culture in England over the past few years has been unacceptably - and positively - *feminised*?

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**Arrests and Attendances at Football League (1984-85-1991/92) matches and FA Premier League and Football League Matches (1992/93)**

