

FOOTBALL DISCIPLINE AS A BAROMETER OF RACISM IN ENGLISH SPORT AND SOCIETY, 2004-2007: SPATIAL DIMENSIONS

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ABSTRACT: *In 1990 Glamser demonstrated a significant difference in the disciplinary treatment of Black and White soccer players in England. The current study builds on this observation to examine the extent to which the Football Association's antiracism programs have changed referee as well as fan behavior over the past several years. Analysis of data involving 421 players and over 10,500 matches – contested between 2003-04 and 2006-07 – indicates that a significant difference still exists in referees' treatment of London-based Black footballers as compared with their White teammates at non-London matches ($p=.004$). At away matches in other London stadia, the difference was not significant ($p=.200$). Given the concentration of England's Black population in the capital city, this suggests that it is fan reaction/overreaction to Black players' fouls and dissent that unconsciously influences referee behavior.*

Keywords: *racism, sport, home field advantage, referee discipline, match location*

INTRODUCTION

The governing bodies of international football (FIFA) and English football (The FA or Football Association) have certainly tried to address racism in sport – a “microcosm of society.” In April of 2006, FIFA expelled five Spanish fans from a Zaragoza stadium and fined each 600 Euros for monkey chants directed towards Cameroonian striker Samuel Eto'o. A second offense would cost 9000 Euros and offenders are now placed on the same “watch list” as football hooligans. FK ZETA, a Serbian team was threatened with the forfeit of their UEFA Cup match against Glasgow Rangers after their fans repeatedly verbally abused Demarcus Beasley, Glasgow's African American midfielder. The issue became moot when Rangers won, but FIFA's point was made (Blum, 2006). Racism remains an outgoing problem and football's national and international governing bodies are determined take drastic measures to “Kick It Out” of the beautiful game. “Kick It Out” is merely the latest slogan of the multimillion dollar initiative which began in earnest around 2000.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the progress of this well-meaning, and seemingly successful initiative. Beyond punishing the overtly racist behavior of a few dozen hooligans in the stands, how much difference has “Stand up to Racism”, “Kick It Out” and other manifestations of the English Football Association's program really made *on the pitch* – where it counts?

- 1) Do Black players at the highest level occupy “central positions”, defined as goalkeeper, central defense or central halfback?
- 2) Are Black footballers promoted to positions of authority as coaches, executives and referees of the Premier League?
- 3) Do predominantly White referees discipline Black players at a different rate than they do White players?

Certainly, eliminating boorish anti-social behavior in the stands is a noble goal. England, like the rest of Europe, is wrestling with unprecedented racial and ethnic issues. The relatively free movement of goods and labor associated with the creation and development of the European Union over the last 15 – 20 years has changed the continent's society just as it changed the post-WW II United States or South Africa in the 1980's, but there are still

significant adjustments to be made in the way Europeans think and act. (*Census of the UK*, 1991, and 2001; <http://census.ac.uk/Licence/Special/1991ewb.aspx>; <http://census.ac.uk/Licence/Special/2001ewb.aspx>) England is hardly immune. According to sociologists Agyeman and Spooner, “The [English] countryside is popularly perceived as a ‘white landscape’ predominantly inhabited by white people, hiding both the growing living presence and the increasing recreational participation of people of color. Thus, in the language of ‘white’ England, ethnicity is rarely an issue associated with the countryside” (Agyeman and Spooner 2007).

In the end, if Black footballers are treated differently than their white teammates on the field of play, no matter how unintentionally, the progress towards racial equality in the world’s most popular game is that much farther from reality. Questions 1 & 2 allow straightforward answers. Question 3 requires a detailed statistical analysis of referee disciplinary records over a series of four consecutive seasons in the English Premier League, the nation’s top professional division. Only London based clubs were examined because over 80% of England’s Black population lives in the greater London area and a fan/referee/player interaction model is key to this study. (*Census of the UK*, 1991 and 2001; <http://census.ac.uk/Licence/Special/1991ewb.aspx>; <http://census.ac.uk/Licence/Special/2001ewb.aspx>)

From the April 2002 “Heroes in Sport” Convention at the University of Helsinki - dedicated to eradicating “The Ugly Face of the Beautiful Game: Racism in English Football,” co-sponsored by the Renvall Institute for British and Irish Studies, to helping organize a 2004 conference in Israel to “develop strategies to combat racism in European football,” English authorities have been at the forefront of the movement. (www.helsinki.fi/hum/renvall; www.le.ac.uk/footballresearch/resources; www.thefa.com/thefa/internationalrelations) In 2008 the Social Issues Research Center in London launched a full scale study of the problem, entitled “Racism and Football Fans.” Pointing out that nearly 25% of England’s footballers are “Black,” the surveyors were surprised when only 1% of the fans surveyed at one Premier League stadium reported themselves as “nonwhite.” Certainly, one can argue that things have improved significantly since 1981 when Millwall supporters chanted gleefully after a tragic fire which left 13 Blacks dead at rival Deptford, “We all agree – Niggers burn better than petrol.” (www.sirc.org)

Moreover, antiracism laws contain loopholes easily exploited. The 1991 *Football (Offenses) Act* made racist chanting a crime, but *only in concert*. So if twenty individuals chant one-by-one, each might be acquitted as not acting in concert, but as numerous individuals. Each would only be charged with the lesser crime of using “obscene or foul language at football grounds.” The likelihood of enforcing such an ordinance (the 1986 *Public Order Act*) seems remote.

The most effective approach taken by the English F.A. has been to appeal directly to its member clubs to police its own fans. If Manchester United, Chelsea F.C. and Tottenham F.C. all made antiracism a priority, progress may more readily be made. Most importantly, would clubs be willing to sanction season-ticket holders for racist behaviors in the same manner they had sanctioned them for hooliganism a decade earlier? By suspending or even withdrawing the right to attend games bad behavior could be changed. It was really that simple. The 1993 “10 Point Action Plan” circulated by the Campaign for Racial Equality, The Professional Footballers Association, and The Football Supporters Association enjoyed the full support of the English F.A. Significantly; it addressed no on-the-pitch issues because it assumed there were none. Only one item addressed hiring, but it did not ensure recruitment or promotion of qualified Blacks to positions of real authority.

In 1994-95, 110,000 copies of *United Colours of the Game* were distributed free to fans on opening day. In a 1995 survey conducted by Garland, 84% of Fanzine editors surveyed responded that levels of racism at games had decreased over the past five years. Only 6% felt it had increased over the same interval. Fifty-seven percent of the editors felt the familiarity which accompanied the increased number of Black players in the British leagues was more responsible for the change than the F.A.’s “Kick Out Racism” initiative. Only a third of respondents felt that the initiatives were a major factor. However, all the survey-takers were aware of the program and said it did raise public consciousness. (www.sirc.org)

Has overt fan racism been totally driven from the U.K.? Most post 2004 stories involve Blacks on British teams harassed at non-English sites like Serbia or Spain (www.news.bbc.com.uk, 9/28/2007 & 1/29/2008). However, several Watford fans were banned from games for two years after making racist remarks as recently as late March 2008 (theoffside.com). So the problem is not yet solved, and hardly a completely foreign issue. Another interesting twist is the use of homophobia to mask racism and thus avoid prosecution under the 1991 *Football Act*. Newcastle’s Sol Campbell has been routinely serenaded with a vicious homophobic song by literally thousands of fans from his former club, Tottenham Hotspur, every time he returns to play there. This has gone on for several years, although there is no evidence that Campbell is even gay. Several White players have left Tottenham Hotspur to play for other English Premier League clubs and nothing like that has occurred. Several reporters blame racism. The 1991 law does not apply because even though the chanting/singing is done in unison, it is not specifically *racist*. (Sky Sports Report 10/2/2008)

ANALYSIS

Black Players in Central Positions

Non-white English footballers' recent struggles to earn time in central roles as goalkeeper, central defender, central midfielder in the top leagues – positions of responsibility, authority and intelligence – mirror the uphill battle of Blacks in America's pastime, baseball, through the late nineties. Baseball players faced similar controversies over the last quarter century. As recently as 1977 Blacks were terribly underrepresented in "central" positions (pitcher, catcher, infield) according to Medoff. He attributed this to "a deliberate exclusion of blacks from positions entailing responsibility, decision making, & outcome control" (p. 50) In 1991, Fields studied changes in racial discrimination through a lens of central baseball positions (catcher, shortstop, & second base) over the two previous decades. He concluded that Blacks first appeared at second base in the mid-1970's, then at shortstop between 1976 and 1986. Catchers, the most central position, were still yet to appear. Curry (1977) concluded that Blacks were overrepresented in the outfield and underrepresented in the infield, especially as shortstops and catchers. One possible reason would be racial stereotyping; Blacks were placed in positions requiring physical rather than intellectual ability. Relatively little has been written of this in British journals, scholarly or tabloid. Only Joseph A. Maguire (1988) has picked up on the centrality thesis. He suggests that many Englishmen feel Black players lack the essential intelligence, leadership and character to occupy central field positions this notion is only now beginning to crumble in England's top leagues. Using the English national team as a barometer, there was significant progress for Blacks from 1990 to 2006 in terms of participation and starting roles but not in terms of securing central positions.

In 1990, a World Cup year, the England team featured only three Black players, outside midfielder John Barnes and central defenders Des Walker and Paul Parker. Walker started all of England's seven matches; Barnes started five matches; Parker started six matches. (www.soccernet.espn.go.com) Although these three Blacks started, no other Blacks were featured on the roster. One can easily argue that less talented Whites were preferred over less talented Blacks to fill the bench. In 2006, another World Cup year, the only Black starter with a central role was defender Rio Ferdinand. Ashley Cole started at outside back, while Aaron Lennon substituted at outside midfielder and Sol Campbell substituted at central defender. David James earned his place as starting goalkeeper in 2008, but he was still a rarely used backup on the 2006 roster. Other black players, Theo Walcott, an outside winger, and Jermaine Jenas, a central midfielder, did not feature in the tournament. Neither Ferdinand nor Walcott were available for World Cup 2010 due to injury, but eight of the 23 squad members were Black, and seven started at least one match. Only Shawn Wright-Phillips did not feature. Outside defenders Cole and Johnson started all four matches, outside halfback Lennon started two, forwards Defoe and Heskey two each, and central defender King a single match. David James played the last 3 matches in goal. But only James and King play truly central positions (www.soccernet.espn.go.com). Overall, significantly more Black players were selected to the team between 1990 and 2006, a great advancement. The number of starters grew significantly by 2010, just four years later. However, by Maguire's reasoning little has changed in twenty years. The team now merely dresses a greater number of Black outside players – all denied "inside position." On the other hand, the captain of the national team from the summer of 2008 through his injury-riddled 2009-10 had been the team's only Black central defender, Rio Ferdinand. Ferdinand, when healthy, again sports the captain's armband in Euro 2012 qualifying matches. Clearly, progress is incremental and complex.

Leadership Positions in English Football

Similarly, progress has been especially slow in the recruiting, training and promotion of Blacks to leadership positions in English football. As of November 1, 2010, only one of the twenty Select Group EPL referees was Black and only one of forty-two Select Group assistant referees was even "non-white." In the personal biography of Uriah Rennie posted on refworld.com, the only Black among the EPL's working cites nine current and former English officials as mentors and role models. Significantly, all are White. Mohammed Matadar, a Lancashire-born Muslim of South Asian descent, was the only "non-white" among the 42 Select Group Assistant Referees. This ratio of non-White/White EPL officials has remained relatively constant since the English First Division was renamed the English Premier League in 1992-93. Mr. Rennie has been the only center referee of "colour" since 1999 and there have been no more than one or two South Asian assistants in a given season. No Blacks have permanently held any of the 42 assistant positions.

After a brilliant playing career and outstanding coaching resume with First Division MK Dons, Paul Ince became the first non-white EPL manager (Meikle June 23, 2008). His tenure at Blackburn lasted only a few months.

He was fired in December with his club in danger of relegation to a lower division (*London Guardian*, 12/16/08). Worse still, only 6 other Black managers, assistant managers and coaches were employed by any of the F.A.'s 92 professional clubs as of February 2009, despite Blacks accounting for 20% of the F.A.'s registered players. (Austin, 2007) Between the years 1990 and 2010, with the exception of 8 White Western European managers, a majority of managerial changes occurred from one U.K. White to another (www.premierleague.com). On February 24, 2012 long-time Asst. Manager Terry Connor became the EPL's second Black manager when he succeeded Mick McCarthy as Wolverhampton Wanderers head man – but only after 13 years at the club and only after “several higher profile” (White) candidates turned the job down (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/football/17152127>). The hiring record of America's top sports leagues looks enlightened by comparison.

Discipline and Race

In 1990, Glamser found a highly improbable disciplinary record for London-based Black players in the English First Division. Disciplined (cautioned with a yellow card) more often than their white teammates at home, Black players were a) much more likely to be “carded” at away games ($p=.04$) and disciplined much, much more likely at “out-of-town” away games ($p<.01$). Outside of London, Black players had a one in three chance of receiving a caution. White players had a one in twenty chance. At home, Blacks were subject to a one in forty chance; whites one in fifty. The current study undertakes a more systematic study of England's top league now known as Barclay's English Premier League. The purpose of the study is to examine the 8 London teams which spent at least one season of the 4 years under study in the EPL. Blacks and Whites will be compared. Three additional statistical approaches will consider other ethnicity models (English vs. Foreign, UK Black vs. White, and European vs. Non-European) to look for other forms of implicit discrimination.

Additional empirical evidence from all over Europe suggests that football referees can be influenced to favor the home team by the intensity of crowd support. Lefebvre and Passer (1974) used Belgian data to demonstrate that football teams received more yellow cards and conceded more penalty kicks at away matches than at home. Perhaps more aggressive play or extra time spent defending were factors, but referee bias was also likely. Nevill et al. (1996) concluded that in the U.K., penalties and red cards were given more freely against the away team. Moreover, the frequency of this “discipline gap” increased with crowd size, suggesting referee bias due to crowd noise as a likely explanation. This led Nevill et al. (2002) to analyze the decisions of qualified referees watching video recordings of games with and without crowd noise from the games they were watching. When assessing free-kicks, the referees favored the home team significantly more often when the supportive crowd noise was turned on. This endorsed Nevill et al.'s (1999) previous study with a smaller sample of players, coaches and referees watching games with and without sound. This, too, had also produced evidence of referee bias when crowd noise was involved. These studies suggest that an active, involved home crowd can subconsciously influence referee decisions (i.e., produce referee bias.) Buraimo et al. (2007); Dawson et al. (2007); Poulter (2007) and Johnston (2008) all draw similar conclusions after carefully controlling for a variety of confounding variables such as crowd size, region, distance from home, etc. There appears to be little doubt that home crowds exert some degree of conscious or unconscious influence on referee decision-making, thereby contributing to home advantage. Boyko, Boyko & Boyko (2007) quantified this advantage in EPL matches. Pollard (1986, 2002, 2005, 2006a, 2006b) offers seven factors contributing to a home field advantage that historically ranges between 62% and 75% throughout the various European federations: crowd support, travel fatigue, familiar playing conditions, territoriality, special playing tactics, psychological factors, and referee bias. Crowd support and referee bias are linked to a degree, but referee bias will remain the focus here.

Statistics were collected for London-based English football (soccer) clubs that played at least one full season in the Barclays Premier League during the 2003-04, 2004-05, 2005-06 and 2006-07 seasons. Only London clubs were considered because over 80% of England's Blacks (“Africans” and “Afro-Caribbeans” in the English vernacular) live in or around the capital. Thus, away matches for Black relevant statistics included disciplinary actions, including yellow and red cards assessed to each player for reckless, violent, or unsporting play. Yellow and red cards assessed to each player are readily available on several public websites associated with the English Football Association (FA) and the English Premier League (EPL). Multiple sites were consulted to assure accuracy. The race and nationality of each player was established via player photographs and biographies on team websites and the BPL site. All information is in the public domain, so no consent was required. That is, there were no actual human subjects. Whenever possible, games officiated by Uriah Rennie, the EPL's only Black referee were excluded from consideration. However, 2004-05 and 2005-06 data did not allow for consistent identification of the Center Referee of individual games. Data was entered into an Excel database, before between subjects ANOVAs were conducted with SPSS (v.15) statistics software.

RESULTS

Five analyses compared Blacks vs. Whites on the 38-game versions of TYC, HYC, NLAYC, and LAYC using a MANOVA (multivariate analysis of variance). Across all five variables, the effect is highly significant. Broken down to specific relationships in post-hoc tests, the differences are found in Home and Non-London Away matches. Curiously White footballers receive more cards per home game, but Blacks are issued more cards at Non-London Away matches. F-values for the three significant main effects ranged from 4.90 to 18.56; p-values ranged from $<.001$ to $.027$.

The next five questions (comparing location) were considered through a Mixed Model Analysis of Variance with Ethnicity as a between-subjects variable and location (Home/London/Non-London) as a within-subject variable. This analysis revealed that location matters a great deal, with home games lower than either type of away game. The more interesting question is the interaction effect contrasting the Black-White difference. This, too, was highly significant and seems to be carried by a remarkable disparity based on ethnicity in Non-London games vs. the other two conditions (with Blacks being carded more frequently than Whites). The final two questions, looking at discipline differential, were also handled with MANOVA. It showed a significantly bigger differential for Home vs. Non-London away for Blacks than Whites. Figure 1 provides a map of club locations that were included in the analysis.



Figure 1. Map of club locations. Moving West to East - Fulham, Chelsea, Arsenal, Crystal Palace, Tottenham, Millwall, Charlton, West Ham. Eight London-based fully professional football clubs spent at least one full season between 2003-04 and 2006-07 in the English Premier League. "London-based" was interpreted to mean "inside the M25 Beltway". Marginally commutable communities such as Reading were therefore excluded.

The entire process was repeated, using only UK players, and as expected, many of the same results materialized. However, few maintained statistical significance with the consequently smaller sample size (U.K. Blacks vs. U.K. Whites). Again Blacks were less frequently disciplined at home matches; $F(1,183) = 7.55, p = .007$. Of course, the White vs. Black differential (NLYC/38 games – HYC/ 38 games) is also marked; $F(1,183) = 4.40, p = .037$. Sample size prevents a significant difference from emerging in the NYLC/38 games variable.

A third statistical model was examined – U.K. vs. foreign players. No significant main effects emerged. Referee disciplinary behavior was rather evenhanded across home, and both types of away matches. F-values ranged from .192 to 2.89, and p- values ranged from .661 down to .068 – only marginal significance. This was apparently a “distinction without a difference.”

A fourth and final analytical model proposed that English referees would favor Europeans over Non-Europeans – Africans, Latin Americans, etc. This is exactly what happened. Non-European players (mostly non-Whites – except for a handful of Americans and Canadians) are treated more severely by EPL referees overall ($p = .048$), away ($p = .034$) and Non-London away ($p = .006$). In addition, their Non-London – Home match yellow card differential is substantially higher than that of Europeans ($p = .005$). Something of an Us vs. Them mentality on the part of the fans seems to involve more than just Black/White relations, but also European/Non-European relations. It is especially telling that these differentials occur most strikingly at away matches, particularly at those outside London, home to most ethnic and racial minorities. Table 1 provides a simplified breakdown of all statistical tests carried out.

Table 1. Four statistical models were employed to describe referee disciplinary behavior. All involved comparisons of players on the same London-based EPL teams, the top level of English football. 1. All Blacks were compared to all Whites. 2. UK-passport holding Blacks were compared to comparable Whites. 3. Foreign players were compared to UK-passport holding players (race-neutral). 4. European players were compared to Non-Europeans (primarily Africans, Latin Americans and Middle Easterners, save a handful of Australians, Canadians and Americans.)

Dependent (y) Variable	Blacks	Whites	Blacks (UK)	Whites (UK)
TYC/38 games	4.66(3.49) ^a	4.52(3.90) ^a	3.86(2.86) ^a	4.64(3.76) ^a
HYC/38 games	3.00(2.73)^a	3.85(4.37)^b	2.55(2.42) ^a	4.10(4.66) ^a
AYC/38 games	6.40(4.89) ^a	5.14(3.51) ^a	5.18(4.30) ^a	5.20(4.63) ^a
NLYC/38 games	6.84(5.68)^a	5.14(5.59)^b	5.57(4.73) ^a	5.44(5.42) ^a
LYC/38 games	5.19(7.42) ^a	4.98(8.48) ^a	4.16(6.75) ^a	4.48(7.98) ^a
NLYC-HYC/38 games	3.84(5.08)^a	1.29(6.13)^b	3.02(4.36)^a	1.33(6.17)^b
LAYC-HYC/38 games	2.19(7.08) ^a	1.13(8.54) ^a	1.62(6.91) ^a	0.37(8.16) ^a

	Foreign	UK	European	Non-European
TYC/38 games	4.87(4.00) ^a	4.28(3.41) ^a	4.43(3.71)^a	5.51(3.73)^b
HYC/38 games	3.58(3.54) ^a	3.58(3.54) ^a	3.42(3.75) ^a	3.98(3.54) ^a
AYC/38 games	6.15(5.91) ^a	5.17(4.46) ^a	5.42(5.20)^a	7.15(5.46)^b
NLYC/38 games	6.22(6.19) ^a	5.48(5.09) ^a	5.53(5.59)^a	7.82(5.93)^b
LYC/38 games	5.80(8.52) ^a	4.30(7.46) ^a	5.04(8.20) ^a	5.24(7.08) ^a
NLYC-HYC/38 games	.64(6.19) ^a	2.07(5.46) ^a	2.12(5.80)^a	3.85(5.91)^b
LAYC-HYC/38 games	2.22(8.22) ^a	0.89(7.66) ^a	1.62(8.11) ^a	1.27(7.09) ^a

Means with different superscripts / in boldface type differ at least at $p < .05$ level.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research is to identify a previously unrecognized problem so that men of good will can work together to eradicate a serious problem. Racism is insidious. As soon as one bars the door, racism slips through an open window. The English F.A. and the English Premier League are model organizations in many ways. Beyond their athletic and economic success is their philanthropic and humanitarian concern for others at home and abroad. Through programs in inner-city neighborhoods throughout England, but especially in the capital city, the League is attempting to spread the game to less fortunate children. A sizable number are racial minorities. The English football community has truly come together to combat racism. Mizruchi’s (1985) notion that crowds routinely

“intimidate” referees is overstated. Studies by Nevill et. al. (1996; 1999; 2002) supports a more appropriate model. An energetic, overzealous home crowd may influence an uncertain referee with a handful of calls. Racist crowds are likely to have the same effect. That may be enough No *Select Group* referee will last long if he is routinely intimidated or an out-and-out bigot. The F.A.’s and EPL’s sincerity is clear, but will racism topple as easily as hooliganism in the 1990’s? This does not mean that there are no lessons to be learned from American Sport and American Society. The Select Group of EPL referees is certainly a match for David Stern’s NBA Referees in professionalism and in integrity. They simply must make eradicating racism on the pitch a priority before true progress can be made. Training for EPL referees is extensive, but how much time is spent on anti-racism exercises? (See <http://www.thefa.com/TheFA/Refereeing> for training regimens.) Why not set up simulations like the ones the NBA has implemented for its officials? (See Price & Wolfers, 2007.) Why not adapt Nevil’s “crowd noise” methodology for training purposes (Nevill et. al. (1999; 2002)? If the playing field is not level, does it matter how quiet the grandstand remains? And to those who suggest that expunging racism from English sport is a Band-aid, a merely symbolic gesture, I contend that they do not understand the place of sports in English society. Such symbolism is indeed significant. Rio Ferdinand’s *well-deserved* 2010-11 captaincy of England’s national team was both legitimate and important. Two final words from American sports history should underscore just how important it is for the leadership of one’s national sport to make a sincere and effective effort to combat racism: “*Jackie Robinson.*”

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