

Extended Essay

English B

Hooliganism— A British Disease?

*To what extent is British media picturing a correct image of football hooligans
and what consequences does this image bring about?*

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Abstract

This essay provides a critical investigation of media coverage on football hooliganism. My research question is as follows; *To what extent is British media picturing a correct image of football hooligans and what consequences does this image bring about?* In order to answer this question I have chosen to narrow down my research into few subtopics. The role of media in a historical perspective has been dealt with, as have, media's nature of amplification and de-amplification. A case study of the European Championship 2000 in Belgium has been examined as well as the degree of hooliganism in Great Britain. The main sources for this investigation have been Steve Frosdick and Peter Marshes book *'Football Hooliganism'* and the work by Emma Poulton, *'English Media Representation of Football-related Disorder: 'Brutal, Short-hand and Simplifying'?* Various articles from the British media have been examined as well.

Throughout my research, the coverage of football hooliganism has generally been displayed in a sensational and exaggerated manner. This excessive attention to hooliganism has created a moral panic. Intriguingly enough, the perception that hooliganism is a growing phenomenon is denied in this essay. However, the hooligan problem has also been underplayed by media when the need has been present. This was evident when FA had bids to host the World Cup 2006, then media consciously underplayed incidents that occurred. Furthermore, the disproportional attention to hooligans, in relation to the well behaving supporters, has tarnished the reputation, not only for the hooligans but also for the supporters who are worthy the definition supporter. Thus, the ones who bear the guilt are not only the misbehaving hooligan but also, and perhaps to a higher degree, the media.

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Introduction

Football has always played a significant role in my life, this I share with many others. Great Britain probably has the most famous supporters in the world. However, they are not only famous for their forceful and enriching songs, although they sing louder than any other group of fans. The English supporters are notorious because they have a tendency of being more violent and more misbehaving than other fans. This unpleasant reputation comes from the deviant group within the English supporters, known as the hooligans. However, the reputation does not only belong to the hooligans, it belongs to all English supporters.

The behavior of the hooligans is to me unreasonable. However, it is unfair and simplistic to say that they bear the total guilt of the reputation that ruins the joy for the other well behaving English fans, as media usually claims. I think it is more likely that the perception of English fans as misbehaving and violent is mainly generated by the sensationalistic and amplifying nature of media that solely focus on the deviant behavior of the hooligans, also known as the “*British Disease*”.

In this essay I have investigated how the British media has dealt with football hooliganism. My research question is as follows; *To what extent is British media picturing a correct image of football hooligans and what consequences does this image bring about?* To answer my research question I have concentrated on a few sub-topics. Firstly, I have looked at the role of media from a historical perspective. Secondly, I have gone more in depth and analyzed the amplifying and de-amplifying nature of media. Further, the extent of hooliganism has been dealt with as well as I have tried to determine what a hooligan usually is like and if this is coherent with the media version. Finally, I have examined a case study of the Charleroi riots during the European Championship in Belgium.

In order to answer my research question I have used Steve Frosdick and Peter Marshes “*Football Hooliganism*”, which provides a critical overview of football hooliganism. Steve Frosdick has an international reputation as an expert in stadium and arena security. He is now the director of IWI Associates Ltd and has an MSc in strategic risk management. Additionally, he is a founder member of the Football Safety Officers’ Association.¹ Peter

¹ Frosdick, Steve, Marsh, Peter, 2005, *Football Hooliganism*, Willan Publishing, p.xii

Marsh is a chartered psychologist and is the director of the Social Issues Research Center and of MCM Research Ltd. He earned his BA in psychology and doctorate at the College University, Oxford.²

Further, I have made an interview with John Williams, who is director of the Sir Norman Chester Center for Football Research. I have also used the works by Emma Poulton “*English Media Representation of Football-related Disorder: ‘Brutal, Short-hand and simplifying?’*” which was published in Sport in Society in March 2005 and “*Tears, tantrums and tattoos: framing the hooligan*”, which was published in “*Hooligan Wars, Causes and effects of football hooliganism*”, edited by mark Perryman in 2001. Finally, I have examined articles and headlines from various English newspapers.

² Frosdick, Steve, p.xi

The Role of Media through History

The recording on football matches has for a long period been a part of football. Press boxes were first installed at football stadiums in the 1890's but records of football matches go further back in history. Reports of football disorder have been traced back before the First World War, but then reports were made from a much more objective point of view compared to the reports media provide presently.³

*“Loughborough had much the best of matters and the Gainsborough goal survived several attacks in a remarkable manner, the coming with the score: Loughborough, none Gainsborough, none. The referee's decision had caused considerable dissatisfaction, especially that disallowing a goal to Loughborough in the first half, and at the close of the game he met with a very unfavourable reception, a section of the crowd hustling him and it was stated that he was struck (Leister Daily Mercury, 3 April 1899)”*⁴

However, during the interwar period the style of reporting began to change. As space in newspapers was given to advertisement, the ‘newsworthiness’ of the stories written in the newspapers had to be considered.⁵ During this time the press pacified the view of the spectators as being calm and ordered, which is in stark contrast to the contemporary situation. To achieve this they chose not to report events that occurred. However, at the same time, some concern began to creep into the reports. This continued a decade after the Second World War.⁶ This is the time in football history which is called football's hey-day: the time of big, enthusiastic and well behaved football supporters.⁷

It is in the mid-1950's where we find the root of the present style to report football violence. This was a time when there was a widespread public fear of increased juvenile crime and youth violence.⁸ Thus, the press began to report more and more stories of this nature; hence football stadiums were an obvious place to report from.⁹ Still, some reporters tried to

³ Frosdick, p.114

⁴ *Leister Daily Mercury, 3 April 1899*

⁵ Frosdick, p.114

⁶ *Ibid*, p.114

⁷ *Ibid*, p.114

⁸ *Ibid*, p.114

⁹ *Ibid*, p.115

downplay the problem, but others frequently referred to a minority group of hooligans that caused great disorder among the spectators. With the approaching World Cup in England in the mid-1960's the press expressed terrible warnings of how hooligans would ruin the tournament. The tournament passed without any disastrous incidents but the moral panic still continued to increase.¹⁰

The moral panic led to a demand for tougher treatment to battle the hooliganism. Among the tabloid headlines demands were harsh; "*Smash these thugs*"¹¹, "*Thump and be thumped*"¹², "*Cage the animals*"¹³ and "*Birch 'em!*"¹⁴. Some of these demands were actually quite prophetic, since cages for supporters have been implemented at several stadiums.

Media Amplification

The importance of media in western society is immense. Being the greatest supplier of information and news, media impact on the attitudes of ordinary citizens is huge. The role of media as the main provider of information has sharpened the competition between media companies. To outnumber the sales of the competitor, especially within tabloid and broadsheet newspapers, finding means to attract customers to their own newspaper becomes crucial. To do this, media often exaggerate the news to make them more newsworthy. The fact that many newspaper readers do not have any experience of football hooliganism, the exaggerated picture, provided by media, becomes the truth for many. Thus, public unrest is created.¹⁵

Media amplification has been widely studied before. The main body of work has been that of Stuart Hall (1978). Hall developed a theory called the "*amplification spiral*". His theory suggests that exaggerated coverage of a problem has the effect of worsening it. He suggests that if the society comes to believe that a phenomenon is threatening and increasing it can lead to a public panic about the phenomenon. This threatening often causes demands for tougher control. Increased control creates a situation of confrontation. This confrontation

¹⁰ Ibid, p.115

¹¹ Sun, 4 October, 1976

¹² Daily Express, November, 1976

¹³ Daily Mirror, 21 April, 1976

¹⁴ Daily Mirror, 30 August, 1976

¹⁵ Frosdick, p.115

attracts more people into the deviant behavior than where originally involved in it, which is caused by media's coverage that warningly anticipate that next week's confrontation will be bigger, more dramatic, so will the coverage, so will the public outcry and the pressure for yet more control.¹⁶

Football hooliganism reached its peak during the 70's and 80's and has since then diminished. Then it is very intriguing to see such an increase of attention for this issue. Now, more than ever, hooliganism is highlighted. *"It is a common belief that football hooliganism in England and Wales, so rampant during the Seventies and Eighties, has all but disappeared. But the first programme in the series, "No one likes us" rapidly destroys that myth."*¹⁷ BBC has one program a week dealing with the hooligan problem. On the homepage of the hooligan section various article treats the hooligan problem. Hooligans are referred to as "thugs" and they cause "mayhem"¹⁸ This kind of reporting is consistent with the theory that media has an amplifying effect. Recently, films as *"The Football Factory"* and *"The Green Street Hooligans"* have been made, which indicates that an increasingly attention to the problem has been given, even though the peak of hooliganism was reached long ago.

Another obvious problem of media coverage is the fact that the hooligans themselves read and watch the news. An example of this we can find in the 1967 trial of a Chelsea fan that had been charged with carrying a razor. To his defence, he said that he had read in the newspaper that the rival fans would cause problem, which made him decide to carry the razor.¹⁹ This predictive style of reporting is, as mentioned above, causing unrest and acts as a self-fulfilling prophecy. If the newspaper the hooligan read had not projected the rival fans to cause havoc, the Chelsea fan would not have brought his razor and no arrest had been conducted. This style of predictive writing has been very frequent before big tournaments, such as the World Cup and the European Championship.

During the build up of the World Cup in Italy in 1990, the English national press anticipated grave deeds to be done by the English fans. *The Sun* quoted anonymous English fans saying

¹⁶ Frostdick, p.116

¹⁷ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/hooligans/1959520.stm>, Thursday, 2 May, 2002, 17:19 GMT 18:19 UK, 20.34 19.10.06

¹⁸ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/hooligans/1959561.stm>, Thursday, 2 May, 2002, 17:18 GMT 18:18 UK, 20.42, 19.10.06

¹⁹ Frostdick, p.116

that there was going to be a “*bloodbath- someone is going to get killed*”²⁰ Furthermore, *The Mirror* stated that Sardinians were arming themselves for the Englishmen’s arrival who was aiming to cause havoc on the island.²¹ This anticipation made journalists flood the tournament and virtually search for trouble. Thus, competition developed between the different newspapers to report as much hooligan disorder as possible. As a consequence reporters picked up the smallest of incidents to report. It has also been claimed that journalists paid English fans to pose for English photographers.²²

Furthermore, media serves as the primary definer of football hooliganism by providing impressions, explanations and comments from their personal view. Alternatively, media also serves as the secondary definer of the problem, by quoting and headlining the definitions from others, such as politicians, magistrates, the police, football governing bodies and other public figures. Hall who recognizes media as both primary and secondary definers of football hooliganism confirms this. He argues that both these kinds of primary and secondary definers have the guilt for the problem being seen and misunderstood by the public.²³ Despite this, media does not always provide a detailed description, or indeed not all the facts.²⁴

Additionally, media tends to fail to distinguish whether the incident was pre-planned or spontaneous and the number of people involved is often ignored. Factors, such as provocation from local hooligans and mistreatment by the police, which can lead to a defensive reaction of siege mentality, can be ignored. On the other hand, the location where the incident occurred can be included in the reports, as can also whether aggressive verbal abuse, threatening, physical injury, or widespread fighting, damage and casualties occurred.²⁵

In this way football related disorder is being perceived as an ongoing and problematic phenomenon, due the misleading nature of media. The reporting has the effect of increasing the apparent social problem at certain times, especially when affiliated with big tournaments, by ignoring the real nature of the problem.²⁶

²⁰ The Sun, 31 May, 1990

²¹ The Mirror, 27 May, 1990

²² Frosdick, p.116

²³ Poulton Emma, *Sport in Society*, Vol.8, No. 1, March 2005, p.31

²⁴ Ibid, p.31

²⁵ Ibid, p.32

²⁶ Ibid, p.32

Media De-amplification

This amplifying effect of media reporting is sometimes contrasted by its opposite, i.e. a de-amplifying effect. This seems to occur when hooliganism is dealt with on a national basis and when the perception abroad of British supporters are at stake. This was frequently occurring after the Heysel tragedy in 1985. This tragedy caused the death of 39 people due to a hooligan riot one and a half hours before kick-off of the European Cup final between Liverpool and Juventus. The riot caused a brick wall to fall over and kill many, mostly Italian, fans. After this incident all English teams were banned from all European tournaments. To enhance the chances for an English football clubs to re-enter the European tournaments media consciously under-played the hooligan problem.²⁷ By de-amplifying the problem media has contributed to the fact that the domestic hooligan disorder does not undermine bids from FA to host major international tournaments, especially the World Cup 2006.²⁸

In addition, the fact that football related violence has moved away from its original site, the stadium, to locations that are out of reach for media reporting, eye witnesses and close-circuit television have contributed to demonstrate the failure of media to report the disturbance within the nation, that actually occur on a weekly basis.²⁹

²⁷ Poulton, p.30

²⁸ Ibid, p.30

²⁹ Poulton, p 29f

The European Championship 2000, Charleroi

The European Championship 2000 in Belgium hosted the infamous riot in Charleroi between mainly English and German hooligans. Long before the start of the tournament fears concerning riots involving English hooligans were expressed in media. The media had predictions about the likelihood of potential riots to occur between hooligan groups that were displayed in media. This was done by showing the police preparations of the hosting country, focusing on the measures in preventing and also dealing with potential outbreaks. This style of predictive reporting was the manifest of many newspapers and documentaries prior to the European Championship 2000, where they more often than not exaggerated the potential problems of outbreaks, rather than underplaying them.³⁰ Just before the kick-off of the European Championship 2000 *The Sun* warned alarmingly for eventual trouble in Belgium, by presenting the headline; “*Countdown to Another Nightmare*”³¹. They alleged that an army of 1000 English fans was heading for European Championship 2000 to cause “*bloodshed*”.³²

As media predicted, riots occurred during the European Championship 2000. Most of them were reported from Charleroi, where mainly English and German fans thought each other. With the previous fear of trouble, the Belgian police had developed an arrest policy known as “administrative detention”, which meant that there really was no need for an offence to occur to get arrested. This produced arrests of people that did not commit any crime.³³

The general message from the media regarding the riots in Charleroi was in accordance with the headlines previously presented in this essay, namely that it was extravagant and sensationally horrific. However, I found an article from the *Guardian* giving a different recollection of the case. The author of the article claimed that the violence was more or less a product of media and police attention. “*In Brussels, the Belgian police and the TV crews got what they wanted. Violence. Only the telly had the pictures of the Belgian police firing tear gas into pubs and arresting everyone inside, they had their story.*”³⁴ The article continues saying that most people got arrested for practically just having a beer. “*The real story of the*

³⁰ Perry, Mark, Emma Poulton, *Tears, Tantrums and Tattoos: framing the Hooligan* Mainstream Publishing company, 2001, Edinburgh p.124

³¹ The Sun, 8 June 2000, p.1

³² Ibid, p.1

³³ Poulton, p.29

³⁴ Guardian, 26 June, 2000, p.32

fans just having a quiet drink, being held for 10 ours and sent home without their luggage would have to wait for the inside pages of the posh paper a few days later or the Nicky Campbell show on '5 Live'.³⁵

Following, the article reveals that the police let German gangs into the square filled with English supporters and the world's media to record and report the brawls. The article also claims that no chairs were cleared and strong beer was available for the fans to consume. The conditions were virtually perfect for the inevitable to appear, "*the rest is history*"³⁶. However, the scale of violence was not as immense as media portrayed it to be. Neither was it in proportion to the measures used to fight the disturbance, namely tear gas and water cannons. The *Guardian* article stated that the violence only scored 3 in a scale where the maximum is 10.³⁷

Additionally, a result of the attention given by media to the misdemeanors-behaving supporters is the black label that has been put on British fans in general. Supporters that are in fact behaving in a proper way are being unjustly categorized as misbehaving hooligans. No attention at all was given to the German and English fans who were enjoying themselves in a friendly atmosphere in the hundreds of bars around the main square.³⁸

As a result of the riots in Charleroi, the '*Football Disorder Act*' was implemented for tougher control.

Who Are The Hooligans?

I have understood that there is no real homogenous stereotype of a hooligan, but there is data available to see some common pattern. Most evidence indicates that most hooligans are in their late teens or early twenties; some leaders can however be older. Furthermore, they tend to work with lower class works, manual or lower clerical occupations or, to a lesser degree, unemployed or working in the grey sector. They also tend to come from a working class

³⁵ Guardian, 26 June, 2000, p.32

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid

background. Further, they are almost exclusively male.³⁹ However, hooligans are far from being stupid.⁴⁰ This is clearly shown in the strategically organized fights often performed by hooligans. Thus, a more suitable definition of hooligans would be that they are street smart, strategic and entertaining, as well as violent when it is called for.⁴¹

The picture that media supply is however very different. “*Shaven-headed, beer-bellied, tattooed, drunk and disorderly young males*”⁴² are the features of a hooligan most common in media coverage.⁴³ Hooligans are actually put out of the social context altogether. Journalists usually compare hooligans with animals, or refer to them as morons or sub-human creatures.⁴⁴ “*GRUNT GRUNT GRUNT*”⁴⁵ was the front-page banner headline during European Championship 2000, which, according to the *Mirror*, was Neanderthal for “*just behave, your mindless, pathetic excuses for Englishmen*”⁴⁶. It continued stating that, “*that’s the only language these idiots understand*”⁴⁷.

In portraying football hooliganisms media coverage often include editorial techniques that use highly sensational and exaggerated headlines, bold type letters and warlike imaginary.

This hooligan stereotype is contradicted by the fact that some of those arrested during riots have proven, in some cases, to be just as likely well dressed, middle aged, middle-class professionals and lack all the mandatory tattoos and shaven heads.⁴⁸ During the European Championship 2000 in Belgium, arrests were made in Charleroi in contact with the meeting between England and Germany. Among the people arrested some revealed to be barristers and engineers. This caused considerable problems for reporters and journalists as they try to create an image of a homogenous hooligan. Thus, hooligans with respectable occupations and a high degree of education are incongruent with this image.⁴⁹

³⁹ Frosdick, p.84

⁴⁰ Poulton, p.29

⁴¹ Interview with John Williams, 10.29.06

⁴² Poulton, p.28

⁴³ Ibid, p.28

⁴⁴ Interview with John Williams

⁴⁵ *Mirror*, 20 June, 2000, p.1

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Poulton, p.29

⁴⁹ Poulton, p.28

How Extensive Is Hooliganism?

As I have mentioned before, the excessive coverage of hooliganism, might create a perception that hooliganism is an immense problem. Therefore I have decided to look a little more in detail to determine how extensive football hooliganism really is.

Firstly, I want to stress that figures of hooliganism are hard to appreciate, since the definition of hooliganism is quite vague. Do we include drunkenness, verbal abuse and misdemeanor or do we only include violations of the law? Furthermore, the shift of location, as mentioned before, makes it hard to report all violation.

As we see in table 1.1, the correlation between division and arrest rates are significant, higher division results in higher arrest rates. In table 1.1 it is obvious that the arrest rates fluctuate a little, but there is however a noticeable decrease. However, these figures only represent the arrests that have been made for domestic league matches and not for international tournaments.

Table 1.1 Attendances and arrests for football offences in league matches

	2000/1		2001/2		2002/3		2003/4	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total attendance	26,030,167	-	27,756,977	-	28,346,386	-	29,197,510	-
Total Arrests	3,391	100	2,977	100	3,355	100	3,010	100
1.1 Premiership	1,623	48	1,192	40	1,460	44	1,137	38
1.2 Division One	816	24	929	31	945	28	489	28
1.3 Division Two	601	18	595	20	641	19	616	20
1.4 Division Three	351	10	261	9	309	9	408	14
Arrest Rate	1 in 7,676	-	1 in 9,324	-	1 in 8,449	-	1 in 9,700	-

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As mentioned previously, football hooliganism had its peak in the 1970s' and 1980s'. In 1976 the hooligan arrest rate in Scotland was 0.028 per cent, an average of four arrests per match.⁵¹ If we compare this figure with other criminal violations in Scotland at the same time we will receive some picture of how extensive the problem really was. In 1977 the number of arrests

⁵⁰ Frosdick, p.35

⁵¹ Frosdick, p.39

for assaults and breaches of peace at leisure activities on Saturday nights outnumber by far the number of football related arrest rates. In 1988, 11 years later, a decrease in arrests at stadiums in Scotland was noted to 0.017 per cent. Furthermore, they represent only a thirteenth of the arrests for driving under the influence of alcohol.⁵²

Just by looking at these figures one might think that football hooliganism really is not that big a problem. However, it is important to remember that not all violations at a venue can be reported, thus the arrest rates do not give a proper image of the extent, merely indications.

⁵² Ibid, p.59

Conclusion

To conclude this essay I will repeat the research question and try to answer it from here; *To what extent is British media picturing a correct image of hooligans and what consequences does that image bring about?*

The image of a football hooligan that media provide is a person that is a synonym of an animal, sub-human and a moron, rather than human. This picture is mainly produced through the headlines and warlike imaginary displayed on the newspaper banners. However, the fact that some hooligans have proved out to be barristers and engineers contradicts this stereotype.

Furthermore, the effects from the reporting of hooliganism are indeed many. If we compare the article from 3 April 1899, mentioned in the beginning of the essay, with articles and headlines provided by the contemporary media, there is an obvious contrast. First, the tone is different, much more objective in the article from 1899. The very witty front page banners such as, “GRUNT GRUNT GRUNT”, very much reflect a subjective point of view regarding the hooligan behavior. Second, the fact that most people obtain their only experience of football hooliganism through the media, makes it a public fear, since the reports are made in a sensational and amplifying manner.

The most important variable in the amplifying problem is, I believe, the predictive style of reporting. As seen from the Charleroi case study, media anticipated riots that later occurred. However, it occurred in a more or less set manner where the fans were to some extent provoked to start fighting and media was ready to write their sensational head lines. Because of the anticipation that media set out before the tournament, the following reports after the riots attain higher credibility and is often written in a ‘told-you-so’ tone. Furthermore, the predictive style of reporting can also worsen the situation. This is shown in the trial of the West Ham supporter who had armed himself with a razor with the fear that the rival supporters were going to cause trouble, which he had read in the newspaper.

Moreover, the amplifying nature of media might suggest that the phenomenon is more extensive than it really is. This is achieved when media fails to provide a complete picture of certain incidents or any explanation. Even though media has failed to perform a satisfactory picture of hooliganism, the problem has been recognized by the authorities. The “*Football*

Disorder Act” is an evidence of this, as well as the cages that have been installed at several stadiums.

Furthermore, the reporting of hooliganism is not proportional to the actual problem. When media amplify the problem they are blowing the problem of all proportions. On the other hand, they are successfully under reporting the phenomenon when the situation calls for it.

Conclusively, the British media proves to be very powerful in determining the public and authority perception of hooliganism, even though media fails to provide a true picture of the hooligan and the problems surrounding the hooligans. Finally, I believe this essay has posed a few new questions. Evident from the essay is that media has an immense power to determine what the public knows. Media sometimes misuses this power, since their constant goal is to gain readers. So, can we really rely on that the information provided by media is the truth and not merely a tool used to outnumber their rivals? If not, do we really know anything beside what we have experienced ourselves? Furthermore, it would be interesting to know if the reporters have any pressure to deliver sensational reports. Would this pressure then be connected to maximize profits? Since the tabloids do not rely on subscriptions they are totally dependent on their newspaper banners. Thus, they are forced to present news with greatest chance of attracting costumers. Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate the attitudes the editorial rooms at the different newspapers and which instructions reporters receive before they start writing their story.

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