An overview of violence in stadiums

As mentioned before, there is a long history with violence inside football and inside football stadiums. The first reports of violence go back to 1660, where the there where the first attempts to control the sport in England and Scotland, where largely ineffective and bans were issued (Dunning 1986). Throughout the seventeenth-century we find reports of several hundred football players and fans destroying drainage and causing mayhem in the town and by the eighteenth-century, the game took on a more overt political significance (Marples 1954).

But the first reports of real ‘ hooliganism’ came from the 1960’s where 25 incidents of disorderly behaviour by spectators per season where reported to the FA (Football Association England). According to the Chester report of 1966, incidences of football violence doubled in the first five years of the 1960s compared to the previous 25 years (Carnibella 1996).

So from then supporter violence became a large problem, yet it escalated during the 80s. They began to form organized groups that became the hooligans of that club.

Members of such groups e. g. of the self-styled ‘ Inter City Firm’ at West Ham, the ‘ Service Crew’ at Leeds, and the comparable groups at clubs like Newcastle United and Chelsea often support extreme right wing, racist organizations such as the British Movement and the National Front. They have also developed quite sophisticated forms of organization and become nationally known. One of their main distinguishing marks is the fact that they do not travel to matches on ‘ football specials’ and official coaches but tend, instead, to use regular rail and coach services or cars and hired vans. They

also eschew the forms of dress the scarves and favours (and also the club banners) that still tend to be widely associated with football hooliganism in popular opinion. One of their main objectives in attending matches is to confront and fight opposing fans and to ‘ take their end’ (Dunning 2009).

They tried to prevent and counter this problem by increasing the measures inside the stadium. The visiting (or ‘ away’) fans were invariably herded into grounds via separate turnstiles and into areas where they were segregated from the home support. These isolationist operations were often emphasised by a line of police officers separating the home and away fans in a sort of “ no man’s land” and by the high metal fences which surrounded these fan pens, an attempt to prevent fans from spilling onto the football pitch itself. The police have also been commonly used at the turnstile. Traditionally, this has been a law-enforcement role, with the emphasis on preventing illegal entry into the ground, enforcing exclusion orders and searching supporters for weapons and other prohibited articles. (P. Harrison, 1974)

Unfortunately this didn’t prevent all the violence. The most notoriously violence initiated by English football hooligans was in Heysel stadium in Belgium in 1985 resulted in chaos and death of 39 persons. But it was not only with English football supporters. A lot of countries had these serious crowd violence and also in Argentina (1986, 74 death), Brazil(1982, 3 death) , Colombia(1982, 22 death), Peru (1964, 278 death), and USSR (1982, 69 death) where this large violence escalations (Williams et al. 1989). These are just a few examples of the big violence problems in football that leaded to death.

It is really only after 1985 (after the Heysel Stadium tragedy) that a concerted effort has been made to establish cross-border cooperation in Europe between both police forces and football authorities to combat football hooliganism. The impact of the Heysel Stadium tragedy was such that three major European bodies addressed the issue of football violence. Firstly, the Council of Europe adopted the European Convention on Spectator Violence and misbehaviour at Sports Events, which proposed that measures should be taken to prevent and punish violent behaviour in sport. Secondly, the European Council called on all member countries to deal with violence in and around sports stadia and, finally, The European Parliament proposed a number of different measures to combat football hooliganism (Carnibella 1996).

The final report was published in January 1990 and included praise from Lord Taylor regarding the response of clubs to the recommendations contained within the Interim report. The report emphasised the lack of communication between the fans and the football authorities, criticising, in particular, the lack of facilities for supporters at football grounds and the poor condition of football grounds. In total, the final report contained seventy-six recommendations, of which the main ones were:

These measures that were taken by the governments let to a decrease of violence inside the stadiums. In Italy the incidents related to league matches in Serie A and B decreased from 73 incidents in 686 matches (10, 6%) in 1990-91 to 23 incidents in 686 matches (3, 6%) in 1997-98 (Stadio/Corriere dello Sport).

But did these decreases in violence in stadium and related to the football matches lead to a decrease in football hooliganism?

The decreases in the number of incidents in Italy lead to the questions whether the hooliganism in football was declining. But Roversi noted that the real fall in violent incidents should not lead us to underestimate a shift of the incidents towards the minor football divisions and the high amount of violence occurring in stadiums in South Italy. Most importantly, we must not undervalue what appears as a brand new element in these last years, namely the very large number of incidents involving ultras (Italian hooligans) and police. The reference is not to episodes where the police intervene in order to prevent the fight between two rival factions, but to the direct fights between ultras and the police. Between February 1995 and the present day, there have been 28 such incidents out of a total of 82 recorded for the two top divisions alone. In other words, relations between ultras and police have notably worsened over the last few years (Roversi 2000).

These shift to lower league games was not the only shift that occurred in Italy. A significant increase in violence outside the stadium, including pitched battles between rival groups of fans in the streets; . ambushes. at railway stations, in car parks and bus-terminals; acts of petty theft and vandalism and frequent clashes with the police (Carnibella, 1996).

But not only in Italy has this shift of the incidents seemed to occur. Also in England there was is a large problem with violence in other places. The measures from the FA (English Football Association) and the governments apparatuses of social control have contributed greatly to a fundamental

spatial realignment of football hooliganism as the phenomenon has gradually moved from the central, core place (the football ground) towards more peripheral settings. In its most instrumental manifestation, fan

violence may be relocated to the purely functional, ‘ non-places’ of our supermodern societies, that have no symbolic relationship to the specific football games or the teams that contest them (Auge 1997).