United Colours of Football 4

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Miah is all too aware of the various 'Asians in football' campaigns and initiatives that have bounced into being. With his club's ascendance, and the emergence of a smattering of Asian professional players, led by Michael Chopra and local Tower Hamlets boy Anwar Uddin, Miah believes "the time has come for Asian footballers".

Although lots of Asian youngsters now get picked up by the pro clubs' academies, Miah still believes there's "something going wrong" at that level. "Pro clubs have got to change their thinking," he says. "Bangladeshi's are of a relatively small build and we'll probably be the smallest team in the Kent League, but watch us, we'll be one of the most skillful and the quickest."

Indeed, Bengal has players of some pedigree, including two who were on Arsenal's books for seven years, another who was at Burnley, plus a handful who have played in the Rymans league and for pro teams in Bangladesh.

Sporting Bengal is more than just a team though. It also trains members to become coaches so they can work with local Asian kids. "One of our main aims is to produce a player who will break through into professional levels," he says. "It won't happen overnight so we've got to start encouraging kids from a young age."

Having a first team that plays with the big boys will certainly help, even if Kent has had to stretch its boundary northwards across the Thames to fit them in. The club's also had to make a few adjustments — six yards have been added to the 104 yard pitch at Mile End Stadium, for example, and some of the changing facilities have been upgraded — all generously paid for by the local authority.

As for the Kent League's indigenous football community, it seems keen to welcome the latest sign of the coming of Asian football. "I think it'll give their league a boost," says Miah. "The interest has already gone up and clubs are anticipating a rise in crowds. We're a marketable product."

Next stop: The Rymans!
The quality of Polish football is now rather poor compared with the glory days of the 1970s and early 1980s, and the numbers attending games have dwindled. Because of that, it is much easier for an extremist minority to dominate our terraces.

The lust for violence and the frustration of young, predominantly working class, youths involved in football hooliganism, is easily channelled by fascist activists who provide them with a sense of purpose.

Hooligan leaders are open about what they believe. As one told a fanzine recently, "Fascism is not a nasty idea. National socialism is a necessary means of purifying the ranks of groups of gypsies, punks and negroes".

A well known club with a big fascist presence is Legia Warszawa. The enormous banner of a hooligan gang 'White Legion', sporting nazi symbols, can be seen at every game. One of the leading members of the gang, is serving a 9-year jail sentence for brutally murdering a teenage boy simply because of his 'alternative' dress style.

Surprisingly, given our country's history, the NOP fascist party encounters few obstacles to organising football hooligans into "national-revolutionary" cadres. The government's attitude is blase and riddled with hypocrisy.

Eastern Europe is a very different set of nations, with very differing cultures. Many places are still riven with internal tensions and are struggling with the transition to a free market. To refer to us as one place is a mistake.

Football is one of the few arenas in which we can compete with the west. Our countries have sides playing in all European competitions, if only until January. The racism we have seen thus far will undoubtedly continue until the problem is challenged at home.

More frighteningly, as we become wealthier places, with more people able to follow club sides abroad, the violence we see in domestic football may make a presence internationally. The disruption to European football will be a depressing step back.

Yet it's not all as grim as it might seem. Some progress is being made. A campaign 'Let's Kick Racism Out of the Stadium' launched by the anti-fascist Never Again and supported by people like Emmanuel Olisadebe and many forward-thinking fans has had success at smaller clubs like Orkan Sochaczew and Wkra Zuromin. The Polish FA recently gave some recognition to the problem by working with Never Again.

We've a long way to go but the positives are embodied in individuals like Olisadebe who became a national hero after scoring three goals in his first two international outings, and almost single-handedly got us qualification for the World Cup in Japan and Korea.