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No. 140 | July-August 2014

THE FIGHT AGAINST RACISM IN EUROPEAN FOOTBALL

Since 2010, UEFA has supported a series of academic research projects related to football through its Research Grant Programme. In the first of a new series summarising different research projects funded by the programme, Mark Doidge presents his research.

When the banana landed on the turf, Dani Alves nonchalantly picked it up and took a bite, before proceeding to take the corner. The Brazilian's actions quickly went viral, as players from around the world showed their solidarity and photographed themselves eating bananas. This simple response demonstrated the futility of the abuse. It also showed that players were willing to take a stand. Unfortunately, many players are continuing to experience racism in football matches across Europe. This may involve politically motivated announcements by fan groups – such as the Landsrona group's demands that FC Zenit St Petersburg sign only players from Slavic and Scandinavian nations. It may also involve emotional responses in the stadium, like the bananas thrown at Alves or the ritualistic 'monkey chants' directed at Mario Balotelli in Italy and Jozy Altidore in the Netherlands. It was the actions of Kevin-Prince Boateng, AC Milan's Ghanaian midfielder, who walked off the pitch after being targeted by Pro Patria fans in January 2013, which inspired this research.

Football fans become the focus in these situations; the sport in general and *all* fans are seen as the problem. Aside from the fact that



Borussia Dortmund's first-team coach, Jürgen Klopp, has got on board the anti-racism campaign initiated by the club's supporters

football fans are a heterogeneous group, this overlooks the hard work that many groups of fans are undertaking. The aim of this research was to understand how fans are challenging racism from the bottom up. Organisations like FARE, Italy's UISP and Never Again in Poland are working hard on campaigns highlighting the harmful effects of racism. These organisations are vital to communicate a clear message across Europe.

The supporters' tackle

Other fan organisations have also found ways of tackling racism and xenophobia in the stadium. Fan projects in Germany work with fans and the authorities in order to tackle various types of anti-social behaviour associated with football. These act as a social space where fans can mix safely. They also run courses to educate fans about the impact of violence, racism and extreme politics. This idea has been developed in Poland with Kibice Razem. It is early days in Poland, but these forms of fan engagement can potentially establish a dialogue with fans and help to challenge certain kinds of behaviour.

Football clubs are vital to the success of these campaigns and projects. Borussia Dortmund are a model club in this respect. They actively challenge racism and political extremism and support their fan project through educational initiatives. Young fans attend sessions at the stadium, which clearly links the message with the club. Attendees also get a stadium tour and potentially the chance to see their favourite players. Jürgen Klopp, Dortmund's head coach, and other star players actively endorse these sessions, and this helps to reinforce the message communicated to fans.

One of Dortmund's groups of ultras, The Unity, proposed organising a trip to Auschwitz so that young fans could see the dangers of discrimination. The fan project helped to organise this and tied it in with a larger educational initiative. The football club also provided the team bus, so that fans clearly understood the importance of these activities.

Racism is a continual battle. Football merely reflects wider society, and the challenge for the sport is a tough one. However, like no other activity, football also provides a space in which to bring people together, and thanks to the hard work of fan projects, Kibice Razem, ultras and organisations like UISP and Never Again, we can slowly challenge some of these actions. ●

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