

# United Colours of Football 4



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**Plus:** Vox Pops • England's Finest and some nice pics



# 'THE BALD ONES RULE HERE'

Everyone, it seems, is up in arms about Eastern Europe. In footballing circles it's become a place associated with racism - highlighted by the abuse meted out to England players and black players in the UEFA and Champions League.

The reasons are complex and will have a bigger impact on European football than anybody yet realises. Rafal Pankowski describes the situation in Poland.

Everywhere you look, the Polish media is full of stories on football hooliganism. It's discussed most days thanks to serious incidents in stadiums across Poland and the seeming hopelessness of our police in dealing with gangs of aggressive youths.

What the TV and press don't mention however, is the successful penetration of hooligan circles by a hardening racist ideology and by organised fascist groups.

No other area of life in Poland is as affected by racism and fascism as football. Attacks on Jews, 'foreigners' and people of colour are common. An anti-semitic subculture dominates football, with rival fans routinely abusing each other's clubs as 'Jewish' as a term of abuse. The display of Celtic crosses and other Nazi skinhead symbols has become commonplace.

Skinheads may seem like an outmoded idea in England but here they are alive and, quite literally, kicking. Many refer to their actions with pride - 'the bald ones rule here' is a common saying.

The issue was highlighted publicly not too long ago in Lodz, an industrial city with two big clubs, LKS and Widzew. Nazi graffiti, often combined with club badges was everywhere. Nobody seemed concerned about it until a shocked visitor from an international group of former Lodz inhabitants (most of

them survivors of the Lodz Ghetto), wrote an open letter to the authorities demanding to know what they intended to do about it.

Alerted to the fact that the city's international reputation was at stake, the authorities and the local media organised a clean up day.

In an act of defiance the same evening, Lodz Nazis showed their contempt for such initiatives. They daubed "Juden raus" and symbols of the fascist party, National Revival of Poland (NOP), on the home of a prominent anti-fascist.

Anti-Semitism is not the only form of prejudice widely expressed at football grounds. The problem of racism in football is increasingly affecting African players who have joined Polish clubs since the mid-1990s.

Frankline Mudoh, a Polish League footballer born in Cameroon, points out that in many teams players put pressure on the coach not to include black players in the team.

The Nigerian Emanuel Olisadebe became the first black member of the Polish national team in August 2000, after being granted Polish citizenship. Weeks before his international debut he was spat on by another player during a league game.



## 'THE BALD ONES RULE HERE' CONT

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 blasé 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.