

BOISKO BEZ GRANIC

THE PITCH WITHOUT BORDERS



DOES NATIONALISM AFFECT YOUNG BOYS INVOLVED IN FOOTBALL?

FOUR DUTCH EXCHANGE STUDENTS

We have to admit that we do not follow Polish football closely, and we do not attend matches, but based on we've seen and read on the news, football culture definitely has repercussions on the mentality of young boys. Those of them who attend matches with their fathers or alone are eyewitnesses to various acts of violence,

and this gives them the idea that such behavior is acceptable or even normal.

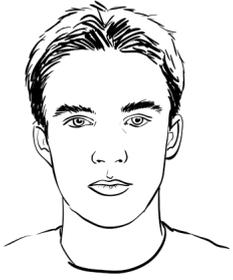
For this reason, we suppose that it is difficult for them to separate the sport from the ideology. Young minds are more susceptible to such influences, that is why, mentally speaking, outraged fans under the influence can cause considerable harm. Looking at the bigger picture, we think that nowadays, the presence of hate speech in football is not as frequent as it was a decade ago.

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HOW DOES NATIONALISM MANIFEST ITSELF IN POLISH FOOTBALL?

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I am not a huge fan of football myself, but I do have my views on the matter as my home is in the proximity of the stadium, and I often see supporters out in the streets. The Polish national team has a significant number of supporters, and understandably, it is more popular than any individual local club. There is a link between peoples' strong sense of national identity and their devotion to the national team, their love for the homeland turns into blind support for its football team. Naturally, it is easy to create a clear division based on this, and succumbing to the tribe mentality, embrace a specific, homogenous group as one's own and consider everyone outside of it as the 'enemy'.

In general, when a decisive match takes place, fans tend to be carried away by their emotions, and in case they lose, they choose to manifest their aggression by destroying half the city. Because of this type of behavior, football slowly became associated with the lower classes, and people seek to avoid discussing it altogether.



IS THERE ANY ACTION BEING TAKEN AGAINST NATIONALISM IN POLISH FOOTBALL?

"NEVER AGAIN", POLAND'S LARGEST ANTI-DISCRIMINATION ASSOCIATION, EST. 1996

Yes, definitely - we aim to document and publish hate crimes, racist and xenophobic incidents in Poland in the "Brown Book", the name of which was inspired by the history of anti-Nazi resistance.

We consider that the memory of the tragic past obligates us to take responsibility for words, especially in the age of the internet and its unlimited range.

Narrowing down our focus to sports, our list comprises examples of incidents in which football fans took part, amongst other acts, the unfurling of racist and xenophobic flags in stadiums, or shouting offensive slogans during football games.

Another one of our initiatives in this area was implementing the UEFA EURO 2012 'Respect Diversity' programme: we organized and carried out major educational and awareness-raising activities that took place before and during the European Football Championships in Poland and Ukraine (2012). This included training for personnel, cultural events and education programmes using the appeal of football to address discrimination. To conclude, we work to ensure that violent or hateful acts do not go unnoticed in Poland and Polish football.