



Let's Kick Censorship Out of Football and why it matters by Mark Iddon

Racial insults and offensive behaviour (of players and fans) seem to have made news headlines on a regular basis recently. There are two stories which stand out - the **quenelle gesture** by **Nikolas Anelka** and the arrest and charging of Tottenham fans for chanting Yid at a football match.

The quenelle gesture by Anelka, the West Bromwich Albion striker, was a goal celebration that he said was anti establishment but was interpreted by the Football Association to be an anti-Semitic inverted Nazi salute.

Anelka was initially facing a ban of several matches and it later led to him being sacked due to him not being able to fulfil the conditions set by the club. It may be that he refused to apologise for the gesture being misinterpreted but indeed why should he apologise for something he didn't intend his actions to mean? The incident at Tottenham is bazaar because the term Yid, originally an abusive term for Jews, was appropriated by the Tottenham fans who have a large Jewish support base to refer to themselves as the Yid Army and chant Yid during the game. Some people including the comedian David Baddiel (who is Jewish) supported a campaign to have the term banned.

In Scotland laws have been passed to deal with offensive behaviour and language where some authorities have been concerned about displays of sectarianism or 'Scotland's shame' particularly in the rivalry between the Glasgow Celtic and Rangers which have fan bases with Irish Nationalist and Loyalist traditions respectively.

I'd like to try and get beneath the surface of these issues to look at the context of racism in football by asking a few questions.

1. Is racism a problem in football?
2. Are some people being a bit oversensitive?
3. Is the campaign group [Let's kick racism out of football](#) effective in addressing the perceived problem.
4. As someone who is opposed to racism, should I let the authorities get on with keeping racist and homophobic insults out of the stadium so that is a family friendly atmosphere on match day.

During the 1980's there did seem to be a problem with football hooligans to the point where football fans were deemed to be the '**enemy within**' and policing was stepped up a gear. Indeed standing terraces were converted to all-seater stadiums all in the name of health and safety following incidents such as Heysel (1985) and Hillsborough (1989). In those days football was seen as a slum sport in slum stadiums for slum people.

The [Let's kick racism out of football](#) was launched in 1993 by the **Commission for Racial Equality** (

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) in order to tackle all forms of discrimination and in 1997 widened it's objectives to include inequality and exclusion.

Much has changed over the last 20 years and we have seen the gentrification of football where politicians are all too willing to declare which team they support - although this may be more to do with trying to engage with the general public and suggest that they are just like everybody else. While there may be some who hold racist views there are few who admit as much in public even in groups such as the British National Party.

One difference that has taken place of the last two to three decades is the objectives of anti racist groups. Whereas in the past there would have been protests against the deportations of immigrants, or where authorities used racial stereotypes to deny opportunities. These days, the authorities are eager to take the moral high ground on the subject of racism, perhaps to make up for imperfections of the past. Football clubs have also been remarkably compliant in the '**kick it out**

' campaign in order to show that they are doing their level best to stamp out racism.

There is another aspect to this which is the need to remove anything deemed likely to cause offence. The presumption in this is that the authorities must act in order that no one is offended in case vulnerable people become upset. There is the presumption that people won't be able to stand up for themselves and are in need of protection.

I suggest that there isn't a problem with racism at football matches and there is no need for campaigns such as 'Kick it out', but the criminalising of people with prejudiced views prevents us from being able to deal with racial issues and holds us back from being strong minded individuals who can stand up for ourselves.