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Young Asian Males: social exclusion and social injustice in British professional football?

Summary

The disproportionately low number of Asian Heritage professional soccer players in Britain is a matter that has been increasingly noted within the game. Indeed, comparisons are now being made between players of Afro-Caribbean Heritage 'breaking in' thirty five years ago and the current lack of Asian Heritage players. Through use of questionnaires, this research focuses on the perceptions of Youth/Community Development officers at UK professional football clubs and Asian Heritage males who are involved in playing the game. Comparisons are drawn in particular with the Bains and Patel report (1996) which remains probably the most significant discussion of the issue from the last decade. Findings suggest that there are some encouraging signs of progress in some clubs and that the two groups share views on certain barriers to Asian Heritage players entering professional soccer. However, they remain very polarised in important respects, not least concerning the prevalence and impact of racism .

Introduction

At the time of writing, in the wake of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, the matter of institutional racism is to the fore. As defined in the Inquiry's report, this is '*The collective failure...to provide an appropriate and professional service...through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping*' (Macpherson Report, 1999, p.321). Also, social inclusion is high on the agenda of 'New Labour' (e.g. Social Exclusion Unit, 1998; Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). A raft of initiatives aimed at addressing social disadvantage attest to this. They include New Deal for Communities (community regeneration) and actions in the field of education such as Education Action Zones, Excellence in Cities and Surestart. Certainly, both poverty and ethnicity have been major factors which have adversely affected educational attainment and entry into the job market. In terms of ethnicity, '*...the evidence shows a clear pattern of continuous under achievement for certain ethnic groups which starts in early education, continues through further and higher education, and persists in the labour market*' (Pathak, 2000, p.1). In particular, only about half of Bangladeshi and Pakistani adults are economically active and these groups have poverty rates four times those of whites (Berthoud, 1998). Now, as regards the entry of young men into soccer as an occupation, poverty has not generally acted as a barrier, but ethnicity certainly has. A commonly held view within the early sport and race literature, is that sport is either neutral, transcending conflicts between races (Brohm, 1978) or, indeed, leads to a position where '*racial barriers are undermined and eventually broken down*' (Thompson, 1964, p.13). However, other writers have suggested that sport has been glorified as an ideal model of race relations (e.g. McPherson, 1989) and that it sometimes serves to maintain and even exacerbate ethnic boundaries (e.g., Allison, 1982).

Research into Asian Heritage participation in sport generally, though, and certainly in football, is not extensive. This has been commented on by researchers such as Fleming (1993), though since 1993 several studies have emerged. Rather, the great majority of the research on race and sport, including football, has been concerned with Afro-Caribbean Heritage males. Despite the fact that there was a significant migration of this group into the UK in the 1950s, during the 1960s the number of black professional footballers was minimal. Although by the 1978-79 season Viv Anderson had become the first black player to be selected for the full England team, as Hill (1989) points out it was not until the 1980s that one could identify significant numbers of black footballers. Currently, though, around 20-25 per cent of UK professional players are of Afro-Caribbean heritage. This prompted Hodgson (1996) to pose the question: '*Why...is it that the last ethnic group that, so it was once believed, could not kick it – the 'Afro-Caribbeans' – now represent 20 per cent of England's 2,000 professional players, while a large minority provides nobody?*' (Hodgson, 1996, p.32).

The progress of Afro-Caribbean Heritage players was made despite the existence of some powerful barriers to entry into the hitherto white domain of football. Chief amongst these, it has been alleged, have been institutional racism from the 'football community', including clubs, leagues and affiliated associations and organizations, racism on the part of fans and a lack of support from the football governing bodies. The Football Association was accused of adopting a 'colour blind' policy which only succeeded in escalating the problem (Hill, 1989; Back *et al.*, 1996). Throughout the 1980s, terrace racism was at its height, with organized groups such as the National Front and Combat 18 recruiting football fans. One of the most graphic illustrations of racism from this period, directed at Afro-Caribbean players, was a photograph of John Barnes back heeling a banana off the pitch, whilst one of the most appalling sounds was that of 'monkey chants.' More recently, other incidents have been

chronicled by Moran (2000) in his account of the part racism had to play in his decision to quit playing the game, commenting: '*...that I felt I had to stop playing the game that I had loved...because of this racism, is a terrible indictment of the football industry*' (Moran, 2000, p. 190). If the 'football community' was implementing policies for this sort of behaviour to be overcome then they had very little effect. It was claimed that: '*Although overt racism inside football clubs was beginning to decline, on the terraces, it still remained a problem. Also, black supporters continued to be a rarity at stadia across the country...These two negative aspects were, during the seventies and much of the eighties, consistently overlooked by football clubs, the game's authority and also by the British government.* (Sir Norman Chester Football Research Centre, 1995)

Do these same barriers apply to Asian Heritage footballers today?

Football racism and violence have decreased considerably during the 1990s, partly perhaps because of the introduction of appropriate legislation such as the Football Offences Act (1991) which made racist chanting unlawful. However, racist chanting has not completely disappeared and much of the current abuse is linked to Asians: '*Most Asians are still intimidated. We go there to watch these white and black players and they'd start singing "I'd rather be a nigger than a Paki". It doesn't exactly make you feel welcome*' (Brown, 1995, p.14). Many Asian Heritage fans, then, understandably remain disillusioned by such a state of affairs and are reluctant to attend professional games. Pinto *et al.* (1997) found that only one per cent of Sheffield United fans were of a minority ethnic background. Holland (1992) ascertained that 35 per cent of the Asian Heritage residents of Burnden in Bolton, where the original Bolton Wanderers ground was sited and where many Asian families live, stated that

they had encountered racial harassment on the streets by fans and that 90 per cent of them actually stayed indoors on match days because of it.

In more recent years there is little doubt that the professional football community has begun to acknowledge the potential hurt and damage that can be caused by racism. This is evidenced by the widespread take-up by clubs of the ‘Let’s Kick Racism Out of Football’ and ‘Kick it Out’ campaigns. However, some argue that such initiatives are superficial and fail to address the core problem: *‘Some people think that racism has gone away...They’ve put up their banners, they’ve put it in the programme, they think that they have done their bit, but it hasn’t gone away’* (Ousley, 1995, p.26). One of the key findings from the, ‘Asians Can’t Play Football’ report reinforces this: *‘Institutionalised racism plays a large part in reducing prospects for footballing recruits from Asian communities. Traditional methods of player recruitment “naturally” discriminate against Asian players, but claims of clubs to be “colour blind” in this respect actually serve to protect them from accusations of bias’* (Bains and Patel, 1996, p.5). Back *et al.* (1996) add: *‘It is difficult for the issue of racism to be addressed institutionally. It can often be painful and difficult for principally white football administrators and professionals to open up the issues of imbalance with regard to the representation of minorities within the professional structure of football clubs and its related institutions’* (Back *et al.* 1996, p.59).

Although racism can be seen, then, as a possible barrier for Asian Heritage players, as it had been for Afro-Caribbeans, it is often presumed that just as the latter successfully broke into the game, so too will Asian Heritage footballers. However, the literature suggests that these players have additional challenges to overcome. First, researchers have suggested that a lack of role models has been a key factor in explaining the low profile of Asian Heritage

sportsmen and women. Fleming (1993) found that the South Asian youngsters he studied seldom identified with South Asian sports stars and that although there was some awareness of cricketers such as Imran Khan, there was no wish to emulate them. He argued that this could be linked to the fact that the majority of Asians in this country are considered to be of a lower socio-economic group and as such are ‘socially disadvantaged’. Therefore, how could they identify with ‘aristocratic’ sportmen? Carrington and Williams (1988) argued that the absence of role models serves to confirm the view apparently held by many Asian Heritage parents, that sport and physical education are just ‘playing around’. Thus, parents are less likely to encourage their sons to play football. A lack of role models might also negatively influence the youngsters themselves in to believing that, if there are no Asian Heritage role models in sports such as football, then no Asian Heritage people are good enough to play. As Jayant, aged 16, comments: ‘*There’s some things that we just aren’t any good at: football, boxing, rugby – the harsh games. I suppose it’s ‘cos we just aren’t made the right way*’ (in Fleming, 1993, p.32). Interestingly, though, with the exception of football, there are Asian Heritage role models in these ‘harsh games’; for example, Prince Naseem in boxing, Ikram Butt in rugby and several UK international weightlifters.

Second, whilst Afro-Caribbeans have been considered to have the physique, talent and natural ability to succeed in football (Hill, 1989), several writers have suggested that the clubs’ perceptions of Asian Heritage players in this respect are generally negative. Thus, Bains and Patel (1996) claimed that 86 per cent of the club officials they questioned thought that Asian footballers were either ‘definitely’ or ‘possibly less’ talented than players drawn from other groups. Similarly, Adia argued that, ‘*professional football clubs perceive Asian footballers as physically and culturally unsuited to playing the game professionally as well as being less talented than players from other ethnic groups*’ (Adia, 1996, p.14). Others have

suggested that such stereotypes often stem from the school context. Williams (1989), for example, stated that the Asian pupil is typically seen as physically frail, lacking in stamina and likely to underachieve in physical education, a perception which might be an inhibiting factor in young Asians participating in football - a crucial point given that the majority of football talent is observed and encouraged in boys aged between eleven and sixteen.

Third, following on from the above, it is possible that Asian youngsters have received little encouragement at school. For many, their sporting ambitions are formulated at school through their physical education lessons and extra-curricular sporting activities. However, it has been claimed that these are often negative experiences. Fleming (1993) goes so far as to suggest that '*What they consider to be physical violence directed against them is often legitimised through sport*' (Fleming, 1993, p.35), whilst Bains and Patel argued that P.E. teachers '*are not always supportive in sport of Asian children as is the situation with white or black children, and that this can hinder the progress and ambitions of those Asian boys who aspire to the highest possible level of football*' (Bains and Patel, 1996, p.23). Where there is support it is claimed that it is usually in relation to engagement in sports other than football.

Fourth, whilst it seems that Afro-Caribbean youngsters receive family support in attempting to become professional footballers - usually linked to the perceptions of those families that sport is an option to take in relation to social mobility and the advancement of social status (Coakley, 1998) - several studies have suggested that Asian families may effectively discourage their children from participating in sport (Carrington *et al*, 1987; Fleming, 1993; McGuire, 1993; Jarvie, 1995). Several reasons have been advanced for this: the prioritisation of career pathways in professions such as medicine and law (Bhandari, 1991); the low esteem afforded sport given the perception that it requires negligible intellectual capacity (Fleming,

1993); the fear of racial attacks if children participate in sport (Leeds Community Relations Council, 1987); perceptions that Physical Education in schools displays disrespect for religious beliefs and that sport is associated with bribery, drugs, alcohol, violence and hooliganism (McGuire, 1993). However, there is also evidence to suggest that greater family support regarding entry into football might slowly be changing: '*You have to remember that most first generation Asians come from poor backgrounds and their priority was to make a living. They steered their children towards professions like law or medicine because they believed that was where the money was. I think people are re-evaluating their opinions'*' (Lunat, in Hodgson, 1996, p.32). Some emerging Asian Heritage footballers have, in fact, put their progress in the game down to good parental support (Knapp, 1997).

Fifth, although there are significant cultural and religious differences within the Asian communities in the UK, the impact of culture and religion on the progress of Asian Heritage youngsters in football has to be considered. Researchers such as Fleming (1993) have suggested that many Asians will only consider engaging in sport after religious and cultural commitments have been fulfilled. Indeed, others argue that it is religious and cultural considerations that influence the perceptions that some, though not all, Asian groups have of sport and of their participation in it (Parry and Parry, 1991). However, Asian Heritage males do participate in organised football (Giulianotti and Williams, 1994; Bains and Patel, 1996; OMBC, 1996). Many are playing in all-Asian teams and leagues, an estimated 300 teams across Britain, and a conservative figure is of tens of thousands playing the game at some level:

No matter where you go in the United Kingdom where there is an Asian community you are very likely to find an Asian football team. In

areas where there is a high settlement of Asian people you will find many Asian football teams. The rate of participation by young Asians in football is extremely high. Asians are running regular tournaments for themselves with teams from across the country participating in them. (OMBC, 1996)

The fact is, it seems, that for Asian Heritage players, all-Asian teams and leagues feel ‘more comfortable’. However, it is alleged by some that these players are ignored by the professional clubs, who see them as marginal to mainstream football suggesting that ‘...that such initiatives are divisive and that they serve to marginalise Asian footballers from mainstream footballing activity’ (Bains and Patel, 1996, p.35.) It was also discovered that many Asian players who did move on to ‘mainstream’ leagues, including those at semi-professional level, tended to return to the ‘comfort zone’ of their own teams and leagues. In relation to the matter of culture, it is also interesting to note that of the few Asian Heritage players who have progressed through to professional football, most are either of mixed heritage, for example Anglo-Indian, or have been brought up by white adoptive parents.

Finally, it has been argued that there has been a lack of support for Asian players from the clubs and the football governing bodies. Bains and Patel (1996) found that 83 per cent of the Asian Heritage players they studied, as opposed to 22 per cent of football club officials, claimed that the absence of Asians from professional football is due to a lack of opportunity, not least because the clubs do not watch Asian players enough. Brown (1995) suggests that ‘*It’s not that Asians have accidentally slipped the net, more that the net’s got huge holes in strategic places*’ (Brown, 1995, p.16). Moreover, although the Football Association pledged that it would ‘try to ensure that people from ethnic minority backgrounds have an equal

chance to take part in the running of the game as coaches, managers, match officials and administrators' (quoted in CRE, 1993, p.4), British born minority ethnic group members involved in the game are almost exclusively of Afro-Caribbean heritage.

Research design and methodology

The main aim of this study was to identify the major barriers faced by Asian Heritage males regarding entry into professional football. This was done by exploring the different perspectives of the professional football clubs and of Asian Heritage males themselves. A questionnaire was distributed to all 92 English clubs, to be completed by either the youth development officer or the community development officer, as the people with most first hand knowledge and experience of recruiting young players. Questionnaires were also given to a sample of young Asian Heritage males in the Greater Manchester region, the great majority of whom played amateur league football. 36 clubs (39 per cent) responded to the questionnaire in its entirety, another 12 (13 per cent) responding in part. 40 questionnaires (66 per cent response rate) were completed by the Asian Heritage males.

The questionnaire was designed following guidelines by both Blaxter *et al.* (1996) and Thomas and Nelson (1996). It was designed to ensure that it would provide the necessary information, that it would be acceptable for use by the respondents and that it would be relatively easy to analyse and interpret. The use of Likert scales was considered to be the most productive method of capturing much of the information, requiring respondents to indicate strength of agreement or disagreement with given statements (strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, strongly disagree.) These closed questions were used to ascertain factual knowledge while some questions presented the respondents with categories of which they had

to select one that was accurate to their circumstances or their opinion. Open ended questions were used alongside the category questions in order to allow respondents to explain why they selected a particular category.

The first part of the questionnaire required respondents to provide factual information about themselves or about their club. The second part asked them to consider the barriers preventing Asian Heritage males playing professional football, as identified through the literature review, and to rank these in order of influence. The third part of the questionnaire contained 35 Likert type statements related to barriers. The final part asked for more factual information (football clubs only) to determine whether clubs had an equal opportunities policy and whether they had implemented antiracism initiatives. It also asked all respondents to judge how long it would take before we see a professional Asian Heritage player in this country, and for one to represent England, inviting reasons for their answer.

Research Findings

The significance of cultural factors

From the results of this study it is clear that youth/community development officers at the professional clubs believed that cultural factors, particularly parental attitudes and influences, represented the main barrier to talented Asian Heritage players making a breakthrough into the professional game. 71 per cent of them agreed that, at some level, cultural factors acted as a barrier with 21 per cent strongly agreeing. Of the Asian Heritage males questioned in this study, 45 per cent agreed and 12.5 per cent strongly agreed that there are certain cultural constraints and restrictions which may hold back their progress. Overall then, the Asian

Heritage players themselves did not see these cultural factors as quite the barrier that the clubs perceived.

These figures can be compared with those of Bains and Patel (1996). They found that 50 per cent of the professional clubs surveyed attributed the absence of Asian Heritage players from professional football to cultural reasons. However, they proceeded to argue that clubs actually judged a youngster's ability on his cultural heritage and that football clubs had no real understanding of Asian culture. Their report concluded: '*Institutional racism plays a large part in reducing prospects for footballing recruits from Asian communities*' (Bains and Patel, 1996, p.5). Though our data indicates a difference (but not to a significant level) in the beliefs of Asian Heritage males and the clubs regarding cultural factors acting as a barrier to entry in to professional soccer, we would be reluctant to argue that this implies a lack of awareness of Asian culture on the part of the clubs. Nor would we argue that such a lack of awareness in any case necessarily implies the existence of institutional racism.

However, it might be argued that, by the clubs' continued perceptions that cultural factors represent one of the main barriers to Asian Heritage participation in professional football, they are placing the onus of responsibility very firmly onto the group itself – there being, possibly, a view that, 'professional football can only accommodate you if you change certain aspects of your culture.' If this were the case – and our data is not sufficient to claim that it is or that it is not – then allegations of institutional racism would be difficult to refute. Certainly, such claims were made by a small number of our respondents. As one of those who plays in an all-Asian amateur team put it: '*The FA are racist, the local FA are racist, referees are racist, league officials are racist, other footballers are racist. Is it any wonder that Asian players set up their own teams and leagues?*'

Parental Attitudes and Influence

When asked to specify the nature of cultural constraints in relation to parental attitudes and influence, 26 per cent of the football clubs strongly agreed and 50 per cent agreed that Asian parents serve to discourage their sons away from the professional game. Some clubs commented further on this perceived barrier when they had opportunity to do so at the end of the questionnaire. Thus: '*Through my experience growing up and playing...there were quite a few Asian players with talent, spotted for local professional clubs but who couldn't commit because of religious beliefs and parental influences* (Club 26). Indeed, Bains and Patel (1996) found that 92 per cent of their club respondents thought that white parents offered greater levels of support and encouragement than did Asian parents. However, only 20 per cent of the Asian Heritage males questioned in this study regarded parental attitudes and influence as a significant barrier to Asian Heritage players making a breakthrough into professional football.

These differences in perceptions are not easily explained. The young men in question are second and third generation British born Asians and, therefore, their experience of 'Asian' and 'British' cultures are different to elders in their families. Madood (1997) stated that members of minority groups born and raised in Britain have a changed sense of 'Britishness', including '*...younger South Asians, who, compared to their elders, are less likely to speak to family members in a South Asian language, regularly attend a place of worship or have an arranged marriage. Hence a new conception of ethnic identity has emerged*' (Madood, 1997, p.36). This may be a cultural shift that some clubs have failed to recognize. In fact, when asked to say just how parental discouragement of Asian Heritage youngsters occurred, about half of the club respondents said that they were unsure. The fact is that we need to know

whether this discouragement does actually occur. Clearly we cannot just assume that it happens and plan for the group's needs on that basis. Asian Heritage boys are not progressing through into careers in sport generally (McGuire and Collins, 1998) let alone professional football. However, whether they are actively being discouraged from the professional game by parents remains open to speculation. A number of our questionnaire responses indicate that at some, albeit few, clubs there is a view that it is not worth bothering trying to recruit Asian Heritage boys because their parents will discourage them from attending training sessions. However, the following quote from one club shows the progress being made in places: '*Clubs are being made more aware of the situation and Asian families are understanding football more*' (Club 38). This awareness may be occurring as a result of various Football Association antiracist initiatives but also by the far reaching educational programme which the Professional Footballers Association is now committed to implementing in every club: the Adidas Football Scholarship. Moreover, several clubs are making encouraging progress aimed at introducing Asian Heritage youngsters to training schemes and centres of excellence. Thus: '*Here...we have young Asian players attending the centre of excellence who have attended football in the community soccer courses*' (Club 4) and '*We held our first Asian soccer school this year. We are looking hard to get a good Asian player*' (Club 39).

All-Asian Football Leagues

It has sometimes been suggested, anecdotally, that problems occur through the proliferation of all-Asian football teams and leagues, many of which are now of a high standard. In their report, Bains and Patel (1996) discussed two main schools of thought on the issue. The first is that all-Asian teams and leagues are divisive, serving to marginalize Asian footballers

through effectively steering them away from mainstream footballing activity. The other view is that these teams and leagues demonstrate qualities said to be inherent in Asian communities, those of self-preservation and community solidarity.

In the present study, 60 per cent of the youth/community development officers disagreed with the statement that all-Asian teams and leagues are a good idea. One commented further: '*Asian leagues – good idea if it increases participation, bad idea if it prolongs separatism*' (Club 3). Now, whether or not they are a good idea from the point of view of either the clubs or the Asian Heritage males, the data from our sample of the latter indicates that the majority (84 per cent) believed that racism encountered within the game causes them to establish these teams and leagues, though the data also indicates that Asian Heritage players form all-Asian teams to express their ethnic identity.

Lack of Physique

Bains and Patel (1996) found that 69 per cent of professional club officials thought that Asian footballers were physically inferior to those from other groups. They further stated that it was the strong opinion of more than one youth team coach that physiological differences were holding back the entry of Asian Heritage professional footballers. However, from the results of this study, the great majority of the club respondents now disagree with the notion that a 'lack of powerful physique' acts as a barrier to the professional game (with 40 per cent strongly disagreeing). A fairly typical comment was, '*[height, weight, strength] is not a valid reason as there are small lightweight players, playing at all levels throughout the professional game*' (Club 23). However, most of the Asian Heritage males believed that their physiques did still represent a major barrier to their progress into the professional game (70

per cent of the respondents agreed and 18 per cent of them strongly agreed). This figure is now higher than in Bains and Patel's research, so why these Asian Heritage males appear to perceive the issue of physique to now be so important may, in itself, be worthy of further research.

Lack of Opportunity?

Bains and Patel (1996) found that only 22 per cent of club officials believed the absence of Asians from professional football was due to a lack of opportunity. The figure for the present study is somewhat higher, at 34 per cent. One respondent, for example, stated that: '*The talent is there, it's just opportunity and feeling comfortable*' (Club 44). However, other respondents believed that the opportunity was there, but that Asian Heritage players are just not seizing it: '*Opportunity may exist but are Asians geared towards taking the opportunity?*' (Club 3). Indeed, 52 per cent of the football clubs believed that Asian Heritage players are given the same opportunities as others. Given that the others, however, are either unsure or confident of the fact that they are not, it could be viewed as encouraging that many clubs are recognizing that this has been an issue for Asian Heritage players. Certainly, some clubs have acted in terms of addressing the matter of providing greater opportunities for Asian Heritage players and they instanced examples in the open ended sections of the questionnaire.

However, the perceptions of Asian Heritage males in our study were that they did lack opportunity (40 per cent strongly agreed and 50 per cent agreed) with this view. This is very much in line with the findings of Bains and Patel (1996) who discovered that 83.5 per cent of their Asian Heritage respondents believed that this was the case. This would seem, then, to represent one issue that many clubs still need to address. Some clubs may have improved

access and opportunity in their own area, but overall it is worrying that Asians still do not perceive the pathway into the professional game to be a just and fair one.

Lack of Role Models

All the young men in our survey felt that the lack of role models was a barrier to Asian Heritage males progressing in the game. One, who plays football regularly, commented: '*Currently there are no role models. This makes it even more important that football clubs take Asian players seriously*'. Moreover, a lack of role models was seen by many of the clubs' respondents as a significant barrier to the development of Asian Heritage footballers (29 per cent 'strongly agreed' and 54 per cent 'agreed' that this was so.) There were though, for them, signs that the situation was improving: '*In the next few years there may be a small number of Asians graduating into football. However, if these become successful the situation could snowball*' (Club 29) and '*[Asian heritage players] are following a similar pattern to Afro-Caribbean development – isolated role models followed by a gradual increase in participation at all levels*' (Club 35). Thus, there now seems to be increased awareness, or hope, within the game that, as for Afro-Caribbean players in years gone by, the role model problem will diminish as soon as the first group of Asian Heritage players turn professional.

Institutional Racism

The matter of institutional racism has been touched on earlier. One only needs to read the Macpherson Report (1999) to realise that it is not an issue confined to the world of professional soccer, but few observers would dispute its existence in that world. Bains and Patel (1996) asked their respondents: 'Have you experienced racism in football?' 64.6 per

cent said ‘yes regularly’, 16 per cent said ‘sometimes’ and only 19.3 per cent said ‘never’. 79.2 per cent stated that if professional football clubs wanted to attract more Asian support then they needed to stamp out racism, though only 14 per cent stated that racism put them off professional football. In this study, over half of the youth development officers disagreed that institutional racism is a barrier to Asian Heritage players entering professional football (40 per cent disagreed and 18 per cent strongly disagreed). Only 26 per cent agreed that there was institutional racism and that it was operating as a barrier. Typical comments were that: ‘...if *he’s good enough he will get his chance*’ (Club 25) and ‘*talent will always come through*’ (Club 15). However, over 90 per cent of the Asian Heritage respondents saw both institutional racism and the existence of racist supporters as being barriers to entry into the professional game.

This finding about perceived racism suggests that the football community cannot afford to relax in its drive to eradicate racism. It might also suggest that this is one minority ethnic group deserving of a targeted approach in terms of both playing and watching the game. Of course, the ‘Let’s Kick Racism out of Football’ campaign (superseded by the ‘Kick it Out’ campaign) has been running for a number of years now, football clubs have been actively involved in implementing some of its strategies and the findings in this study show that 87 per cent of the clubs who responded have had, or still maintain, links with the campaign. However, some clubs stated that although they have had links with the campaign they do not think it is successful: ‘*The campaign is a bit wishy, weak – nothing much on the ground, more politically correct rather than changing grass roots*’ (Club 3).

How long will it be before we see a regular flow of Asian Heritage players into professional football?

Bains and Patel (1996) ascertained that 28.6 per cent of their football club respondents thought it would be five to ten years before there was a regular flow of Asian Heritage players into the professional game. This corresponds to this present study where 24 per cent of the youth/community development officers believed that it will take two to five years before the progress of Asian Heritage players is fully underway. However, almost half thought it will take between six and ten years. Thus, '*due to the lack of apprentices (Asian) now at professional clubs it's going to take at least six to ten years to come through the ranks*' (Club 26). This sort of estimation is hardly encouraging, especially from those within the game who are in a good position to judge. There is anecdotal evidence that certain clubs have potential Asian Heritage players progressing through their ranks and it is becoming common knowledge within the game as to where the breakthrough is most likely to occur: generally, at clubs who have Asian communities nearby and where proactive steps have been taken to attract the boys. However, this isolated progress can mask the wider picture. The majority of clubs are still nowhere near having talented Asian Heritage boys come through their ranks in any significant numbers.

As to the question 'How long will it be before we see an Asian Heritage player represent England?' 69 per cent of club officials believed it would be anywhere between six to 20 years, with a small number estimating as many as 30 years. Thus, '*I feel it will take six to ten years for regular Asian players in league football and another ten to 15 years for enough players to be able to reach international level*' (Club 14). These findings are similar to those of Bains and Patel (1996). Again, then, this anticipated timespan is highly pessimistic and certainly confounds the prediction of some soccer pundits who, early in the last decade,

forecast an Asian heritage player to be in England's squad by the time of the 2002 World Cup in Asia.

Conclusion

From the evidence of this study it would seem that, overall, there have been some encouraging steps taken since the Bains and Patel report (1996) which painted a very pessimistic picture of Asian Heritage progress into the national game. Antiracist initiatives have generally been well supported by clubs and many are increasingly proactive in their attempts to support talented Asian Heritage youngsters. However, this is not yet generally applicable. Indeed, some clubs still appear to be apportioning 'blame' onto the group themselves. Moreover, as this study shows, the perceptions of Asian Heritage males and those of the professional football clubs are still, on some (though not all) key issues, polarised. This is particularly the case regarding the existence and impact of institutional racism and a (consequent) lack of opportunity for Asian Heritage youngsters to enter the professional game.

Given the small scale nature of our study, we do not find ourselves in a strong position to offer judgements on the actual extent of racism in professional soccer and on its impact regarding the entry of Asian Heritage players. It would seem to be overly simplistic, however, to conclude that it is racism alone that is affecting that entry. Afro-Caribbeans found 'success' when racism was more obvious and unchallenged and without the sorts of initiatives that exist today that promote the inclusion of ethnic minority groups in soccer. It does seem that in the case of Asian Heritage males that there is a multiplicity and complexity of factors at play. Nevertheless, it would seem urgent that soccer bodies and the clubs

themselves recognise and address the perceptions of the Asian communities on the matter of racism. At the same time, whilst there is undoubtedly greater scope for them to engage in ‘inclusive’ initiatives, perhaps there is also scope for the Asian communities themselves to acknowledge and respond to such initiatives.

Certainly, this significant UK minority ethnic group needs to be central to any antiracist initiatives and the potential of Asian Heritage players needs to be developed through appropriate strategies. There is evidence within this study to suggest that they want to, and could, respond positively: *‘The interest is there, the talent is there. It only remains for the Asian community, the footballing authorities and the professional clubs to work together to harness that talent and give young Asians the chance to become professional football players’* (OMBC, 1996). Key ways forward might be for:

- more clubs to create specific opportunities for Asian Heritage youngsters in terms of attending ‘Football in the Community’ courses and thence the clubs’ Youth Academies and Schools of Excellence
- more clubs to regularly send scouts to watch all-Asian amateur teams, including those playing in all-Asian leagues
- the amateur and professional administrations, the Professional Footballers Association and the clubs themselves, to take steps to enhance the cultural awareness of players and club officials - not least in terms of becoming more knowledgeable about the defining features of British born Asian families so as to avoid the adoption of stereotypical views of Asian Heritage players. One very positive recommendation of the Macpherson Report (1999) is

to amend the National Curriculum so that schools embrace cultural diversity more fully and that racist incidents are also recorded. Through this education it is hoped that prejudice and discrimination will be reduced. As the world of professional soccer continues to commit itself to providing high quality educational opportunities for young players in the academies and schools of excellence, it would seem appropriate that an increased focus on cultural awareness becomes part of that provision. Indeed, the increasing multicultural nature of the British game demands this.

- the amateur and professional administrations, and the clubs themselves, to accept that racism persists; to clarify their antiracist policies; and to extend their antiracist strategies - indeed, the legislation arising out of, and the spirit of, the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report demands more movement on this front
- the professional administrations to urge and support those clubs which have established excellent links with Asian communities in their localities, to engage in a dissemination programme designed to impact upon the thinking and strategies of other clubs yet to make adequate contact with the community
- the professional administrations, the clubs and the Professional Footballers' Association to develop strategies aimed at inducting and retaining those young Asian Heritage players who do break into the professional game; these might draw upon the experience of schemes in further and higher education institutions, aimed at students who have been recruited from traditionally under represented groups

- Asian communities to consider ways in which they themselves might both better respond to initiatives established by soccer bodies and the clubs, and promote other initiatives.

We conclude by returning to the early part of this paper where we made reference to institutional racism and to the social inclusion agenda. In a discussion of race and racism, Richardson (2000) outlines a number of disadvantages of the inclusion discourse. They include the fact that it focuses on marginality and boundaries, policy measures being designed either to enable the excluded to cross a boundary or to move the boundary. However, as Richardson points out, '*if a focus on the margins and boundaries means that there is no change...in society's principal power-relationships and hierarchies, the benefits of inclusion may be slight*' (Richardson, 2000 pp.71-2). Also, social inclusion does not necessarily embrace the notion of cultural inclusion. Consequently, Richardson argues that '*...the price of [social] inclusion for many individuals will be too high*' (Richardson, 2000 p.72). Thus, members of minority ethnic groups might not wish to enter certain jobs or professions '*if the occupational culture is inimical to their interests and perspectives and does not recognise their experience and identity, for example, their firsthand knowledge of racism*' (Richardson, 2000 p.72). What is necessary, then, is to go beyond the notion of social inclusion, to 'marry' this with the concept of cultural inclusion and, indeed, with those of social justice and social equality. We hope that this paper has gone some way in pointing to the need to move in this direction as regards the world, and the institution, of professional soccer.

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