

## Football fan behavior of the oldest club in the Czech Republic

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### Abstract

Football is a phenomenon of the last decades. Given the long history of spectator sports events consumption it is not a surprising fact that there have also been serious manifestations of spectator aggression. In this context, we realize that the rapid development of sport itself has brought problems and complicated relationships, especially at the professional level. The goal of this paper is to analyze the relationship between fans' verbal and other expression and their violent behavior at football stadiums in the Czech Republic. Primary data were collected by a questionnaire survey mainly at the Eden stadium and in part also on other first league football stadiums in 2015. A total of 172 respondents aged  $25.22 \pm 10.46$  years old participated in this pilot study, of which 141 were men aged  $25.00 \pm 9.41$  years old and 31 women aged  $25.27 \pm 10.50$  years old. All of the respondents were attending in a stand of home team supporters (end). According to the pilot study, each surveyed respondent of the Slavia end has some features of a supporter, hooligan and a fan. Furthermore, we found that expressions of racism are considered the most serious expression of violent behavior by 80.00% of the spectators. Almost 3/4 of the fans (70.30%) found the most serious activity demolishing stadium and other disturbances. Accurately 2/3 of the spectators marked physical aggression against rival fans in the stadium as a considerable problem. In our surveyed sample of respondents, we cannot distinguish individual visitors internally. Each surveyed respondent of the Slavia end has some features of a supporter, hooligan and a fan.

**Key Words:** aggression, football hooliganism, spectators, supporters.

### Introduction

Football is undoubtedly the most popular sport in the world, and subsequently an important aspect of popular culture. The need for professional clubs to operate as more of a business entity has never been greater. But football has a dark side (Dunning, 2012; Williams, 2013; Cashmore & Cleland, 2014). Frosdick & Marsh (2005) state that football fan behavior has been for many years a major cause for concern throughout Europe, especially in Germany, Netherlands, Italy and Belgium, as well as in the United Kingdom. Substantial disturbances at football matches have also been witnessed in the Czech Republic, Greece, Denmark, Austria and other countries in Eastern Europe. Veuthey & Freeburn (2015) point to the fact that although the term hooliganism refers to acts of violence or disturbances that might occur among sports spectators, the term is most often associated with football environment. Frosdick & Marsh (2005) said that violent and anti-social behavior amongst football fans is sometimes referred to as the British disease or English disease. In recent years, the issue of football hooliganism has become the subject of intense media, political and academic interest. Unfortunately, oftentimes ignorance and misunderstanding of football hooliganism determines preview on it. It is important to distinguish hooligans from other people who are interested only in football and watch football matches. In this context, it is possible to identify four major groups: inactive spectators, football fans, supporters, and hooligans:

a) *Inactive (objective) spectators*. In this group there are four subgroups: (1) irregular visitors of the football matches; frequently is a special type of fashion and snobbery, (2) fans of the other clubs, not teams that are currently playing a football match (3) observers, coaches or other football players from other clubs, and (4), women (especially older ages), who attend the match as the accompanying persons of her partners. W. Heitmeyer & P. Heitmeyer (1998) characterize this type of spectator "consumer-oriented fan". He sits in the stand or seeks a quiet spot on the terraces and wants to see a good football game. Mareš et al. (2004) states that he is a passive observer of the game he is not affected by the rivalry of the two teams, and thus the game looks absolutely neutral. He is not interested only in football matches but he visits other sports games and other sports. Oftentimes he is not identified with a particular club and does not wear its symbols, such as scarf, jersey, cap etc. The spectator is not always present at the football stadiums but the football match watches via the internet, television, etc.

b) *Classical football fans ("normal")*. These are the individuals who attend football games. They regularly have a relationship with their club, often due to the stadium is located relatively close to their residence. A fan has certain expectations for development of the match, identifies with the team and therefore takes its success, or lack of it, personally. Football is usually the only popular sport for football fan. Fans' identification is presented mainly by clothing, jerseys, club scarves, caps, T-shirts, flags, badges, etc. For the football fan has been characterized by division into "we" (supporters club) and "they" (fans of other clubs; Slepíčka, 1990). Football-oriented fan attends every match and decks out in his team's colors (W. Heitmeyer & P. Heitmeyer, 1998). These fans can be found mostly on the main grandstands, in some cases even be swayed by the loud cheering and support, sometimes with racist overtones. We note that in other manifestations of spectator violence, this group of spectators usually not involved, except for throw random objects on a pitch.

c) *Supporters (ultras)*. This is a highly homogeneous group of fans who strive for the most spectacular development of the match and while avoiding direct conflict, violence and vandalism. They are bearers of choreography in the game, for supporting use fireworks, banners, singing (Sekot, 2013). They greatly enjoy every game and are interested in a club life. During the match we can find them on the side stands behind the goals (ends), which are designed mostly for standing. Almost every fan is dressed to the club jersey, t-shirts or owns at least a scarf of his favorite team.

d) *Hooligans (rowdies)*. The term hooligan was coined in the 1890s as an alternative to ruffian. Now readily applied to the wild and unruly football fan of the 1960s, the term and the on-screen images of undisciplined toughs rekindled a Victorian-style moral panic vocalized by the Conservative Party and fanned by the press (Frosdick, March, 2005). Football hooligans come together in small groups consisting mostly young militantly oriented supporters. They come to football stadiums and their surroundings with the primary objective cause conflict or fight with other similar groups opposing team. These groups (gangs) have their own names, which are defined against unorganized groups and to other groups. Some of these parts are very well organized and do not unite only club rivalry and hatred of the enemy groups, but also political, racial, religious, national, regional or social motives. Hooligans, unlike fans often do not identify with a football club, but only with their group (Mareš et al., 2004).

### Material & methods

The goal of this paper is to analyze the relationship between fans' verbal and other expression and their violent behavior at football stadiums in the Czech Republic. Following the goal we set a research question and a null hypothesis. RQ: Which attitudes, expressions, and speeches are considered by football fans of Slavia Prague the most serious? H0: We suppose no significant statistic differences in examined parameters within the groups of fans, supporters, and hooligans.

Primary data were collected by a questionnaire survey mainly at the Eden stadium and other football stadiums in the Czech Republic in 2015. The pilot study is focused on the oldest football club (est. 1892) in the Czech Republic. The next reason for choosing this football club was finding that this stand of the stadium (end) is the most occupied by football fans and supporters. The stand of the stadium for the home supporters is called the end, with the capacity of 3.065 seats. It consists of 5 sectors with 25 seats in 28 rows each. The end is mostly filled up to 2/3, and sold out during matches with attractive away teams e.g. Sparta Prague, Plzeň, and Baník Ostrava. The respondents selection was based on carefully pre-defined factors; e.g. seats 1, 3, 5, 7 in the first row; seats 2, 4, 6, 8 in the second row etc. from all the rows. The respondents were informed about the pilot study and anonymity of the questionnaire. Once they answered the questionnaires, they received a small Slavia club badge each. They had also the opportunity to contact the interviewer on the email stated on the questionnaire list and inform themselves about the partial pilot study results. 210 questionnaires were randomized of the total 420 questionnaires. Some of them were answered incorrectly or incompletely, therefore they were not included in the survey.

A total of 172 respondents aged  $25.22 \pm 10.46$  years old participated in this pilot study, of which 141 were men aged  $25.00 \pm 9.41$  years old and 31 women aged  $25.27 \pm 10.50$  years old. All of the respondents were attending in the end. The respondent characteristics are following: 15 football spectators, 101 football fans, 45 supporters, and 11 hooligans take part in this pilot study. Most of the respondents were fans and supporters. Both groups choose this end to support home team and prepare choreography etc. The spectators prefer this end due to the cheapest tickets. Hooligans usually could be also found in this end. They are 35 altogether (11 examined). Hooligans mostly stand in the front rows. The questionnaire consisted of twenty-nine questions; some of them were scalable, where respondents rated on Likert scale (1-5) individual verbal and other expression and also their violent behavior speeches. The least serious activity was rated 1, the most significant activity received the highest grade, i.e. 5. This paper uses quantitative research, methods of analysis, mathematical and statistical methods. For the evaluation of the results was used Statistica program.

### Results

Football spectators have mostly high school education (40.00%) and primary school education (26.67%). Only 13.33% of the respondents graduated university. Football fans mostly achieved high education or graduated vocational school witch certificate of apprenticeship. Almost 15% of the fans (14.85%) state only

primary school education. This is influenced by the majority of the sample to be under aged. This could also be seen at the answer “I do not wish to express my opinion” (13.86%), as most of the fans were younger than 15. The questionnaires reported the age 12-13 years old. There is no possibility to finish the primary school at this age; therefore, the high value of this answer was reported. Almost half of the supporters (42.22%) passed their final at high school with maturita, other 22.22% of the supporters state primary school education and 1/5 of the supporters dispose of the university diploma. More than 1/3 of the hooligans (36.36%) finished only primary school, which is not the age problem, as e.g. by supporters. The average age of the hooligans reported was 25.18 years. On the other hand, nearly 1/5 of the hooligans graduated university. Therefore, we cannot state that hooligans come from a lower social class, that they did not receive a sufficient education, are unemployed etc. Some of the hooligans in the sample are still students; however, the sample consists of the managers as well (as described in Table 1).

Table 1: Characteristics of the respondents and their achieved education in percentage

	PS	VS	HS	C	U	ID
<b>spectators</b>	26.67	20.00	40.00	0.00	13.33	0.00
<b>fans</b>	14.85	21.78	35.64	0.99	12.87	13.86
<b>supporters</b>	22.22	11.11	42.22	2.22	20.00	2.22
<b>hooligans</b>	36.36	18.18	27.27	0.00	18.18	0.00

*Note.* PS – primary school, VS – vocational school (certificate of apprenticeship), HS – high school (maturita), C – college, U – university, ID – I do not wish to express my opinion

In our sample, majority of the respondents own the club symbols. There mostly belong a scarf, jersey, shorts, T-shirt, but also silicone wristbands, wallets, blankets, pajamas etc. 2/3 of the spectators owned one of the symbols, in this case a scarf. Fans and supporters showed almost the same results (over 97%). Surprisingly, each hooligan also owns a scarf, jersey or another from above mentioned objects. On the other hand, as the scientific literature dedicated to this topic states that this group intends to blend in with the crowd and mostly were branded black clothes e.g. Lonsdale, Umbro, and Thor Steinar etc. At the matches played at the rival’s location, hooligans are dominant there with symbols (54.55%). Supporters (57.43%) and fans (77.78%) sometimes take their symbols, in case they travel to the away matches on their own, they are afraid of the possible fights with the rival fans and there is a chance they lose their jerseys and scarves. Some respondents during the matches at the rival stadiums do not support their team in the end but they observe the match from the main tribune. However, some stadiums in the Czech Republic do not allow bringing the colors of the supported team in case you want to be watching the match from the main tribune.

The examined group of the respondents showed very different opinions to the pyrotechnics. 90.91% of the hooligans consider using pyrotechnics as the least serious problem, 71.11% of the supporters share the same opinion. These two groups use pyrotechnics in many cases and bring it to the stadiums. On the other hand, 2/5 of the spectators consider this as a very serious problem, mainly due to a possible danger of harm on other spectators in the end. Whistling was unanimously agreed as the least serious activity. This opinion is taken by hooligans (100%), then supporters (86.67%), fans (77.23%), and spectators (53.33%; as described in Table 2).

Table 2: Respondents’ expressions on firing of pyrotechnics and whistles

	firing of pyrotechnics					whistles				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
<b>spectators</b>	20.00	13.33	13.33	13.33	40.00	53.33	13.33	20.00	6.67	6.67
<b>fans</b>	41.58	17.82	20.79	1.98	17.82	77.23	8.91	10.89	1.98	0.99
<b>supporters</b>	71.11	17.78	4.44	4.44	2.22	86.67	8.89	2.22	2.22	0.00
<b>hooligans</b>	90.91	9.09	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

*Note.* 1 – the least serious expression, 5 – the most serious expression

As far as the vulgarity of the end and vulgar expressions usage, we reached approximately the same values. Such expressions are mostly addressed to the head of the Football Association of the Czech Republic and the head of referee committee; also to the referees and some players of the rival team, who react negatively on Slavia Prague. Vulgarisms are part of the behavior typical for hooligans and supporters (as described in Table 3).

Table 3: Respondents’ expressions on vulgar chanting

	vulgar chants in the stand					individual vulgar expression				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
<b>spectators</b>	20.00	6.67	26.67	6.67	40.00	20.00	13.33	13.33	20.00	33.33
<b>fans</b>	38.61	31.68	18.81	4.95	5.94	37.62	20.79	22.77	5.94	12.87
<b>supporters</b>	57.78	31.11	6.67	4.44	0.00	64.44	13.33	8.89	6.67	6.67
<b>hooligans</b>	90.91	9.09	0.00	0.00	0.00	81.82	9.09	0.00	0.00	9.09

Note. 1 – the least serious expression, 5 – the most serious expression

Accurately 2/3 of the spectators consider the physical aggression as the most severe on the stadium, by fans it was mentioned on 56.44% answers. Similar results could be noticed in physical aggression to the Police of the Czech Republic or security. These two groups intend to visit the football matches in order to enjoy the match or admire the players. On the other hand, the above mentioned activities are considered by the 81.82% hooligans as the least serious problems. Therefore we state that it is influenced by the intention of the hooligans to look for distant vacant areas or visit football matches in order to get a reason for fight. It is just a pure excuse for fighting (as described in Table 4).

Table 4: Respondents' expressions on physical aggression

	physical aggression against rival fans at the stadium					physical aggression against police and riot police				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
<b>spectators</b>	0.00	0.00	13.33	20.00	66.67	6.67	6.67	0.00	33.33	53.33
<b>fans</b>	6.93	3.96	16.83	15.84	56.44	11.88	9.90	18.81	11.88	47.52
<b>supporters</b>	20.00	8.89	24.44	17.78	28.89	26.67	8.89	20.00	22.22	22.22
<b>hooligans</b>	81.82	18.18	0.00	0.00	0.00	81.82	18.18	0.00	0.00	0.00

Note. 1 – the least serious expression, 5 – the most serious expression

Agreed hooligans fight behind outside the stadium was mentioned by 1/3 of the spectators as the most serious activity. What is more, 27.27% of the fans take this as a serious problem. Other 31.38% of the fans do not care about the fights, but they feel sorry that they are associated with the club. It is certain that all hooligans active in these fights do not consider this as a serious issue. On the other hand, if the rival fan wearing a scarf meets the hooligan, there is no reason for fear. Hooligan that is conscious about this culture would not fight. The true hooligans are highly disciplined in this field. Furthermore, 72.73% of the hooligans state that the stadium demolition and other riots do not belong to the serious problems. It is interesting, that the stadium demolition is mostly realized on the rival's stadium. 2/3 of the spectators consider it as the most severe activity. This opinion is supported by 70.30% of the fans. We expected higher values for the grade 5, especially by the spectators interested in the football match (as described in Table 5).

Table 5: Respondents' expressions on an arranged hooligan fight and demolishing stadium

	arranged hooligan fight outside the stadium					demolishing stadium and other riots				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
<b>spectators</b>	6.67	0.00	20.00	40.00	33.33	6.67	0.00	6.67	20.00	66.67
<b>fans</b>	31.68	12.87	15.84	11.88	27.72	0.99	2.97	7.92	17.82	70.30
<b>supporters</b>	60.00	6.67	6.67	6.67	20.00	11.11	8.89	13.33	24.44	42.22
<b>hooligans</b>	100.0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	72.73	9.09	0.00	0.00	18.18

Note. 1 – the least serious expression, 5 – the most serious expression

Almost 1/2 of the fans (43.56%) is persuaded that he objects throwing on the pitch is the most serious activity, which is declared also by 26.67% of the spectators and 24.44% supporters. Nearly 3/4 of the hooligans (72.73%) has a different opinion on this activity and do not find it as a problem. It is mostly common by the false verdict by the line referee or at the rival's goal celebration in front of the various kinds of audience. The football pitch is often covered by empty or full beer plastic cups, coins or even lighters. We should consider that the referee decision should catalyze the violent clash, even in the situation when they themselves do not behave in line with the football rules (as described in Table 6).

Table 6: Respondents' expressions on throwing the subject and expressions of racism

	throw in the subject on the pitch					expressions of racism				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
<b>spectators</b>	6.67	0.00	20.00	46.67	26.67	6.67	6.67	0.00	6.67	80.00
<b>fans</b>	7.92	9.90	24.75	13.86	43.56	9.90	7.92	15.84	13.86	52.48
<b>supporters</b>	15.56	17.78	22.22	20.00	24.44	20.00	22.22	11.11	20.00	26.67
<b>hooligans</b>	72.73	9.09	18.18	0.00	0.00	63.64	0.00	0.00	9.09	27.27

Note. 1 – the least serious expression, 5 – the most serious expression

Positively is this behavior perceived as wrong approach on one hand or as a provocation on the other hand. Running to the pitch did not reach such crucial values, which was influenced by the fact that most respondents already broke into the pitch. It happened during the historical proceed to Champions League in 2007, when fans and supporters celebrated this success on the pitch together with the players. The second option was the match with the Hajduk Split in 2014, when 15 minutes before the match finished. Hajduk fans broke into the pitch followed by the Slavia fans. Both groups greeted at the central circle and yelled together.

We focused on 3 out of 4 researched groups and compared supporters vs. hooligans and fans vs. supporters. We state that their decision was not influenced by the p-value. The minimum p-value that we had achieved was 0.3518 on the 5% significance level. The highest p-values were obtained by respondents with attitudes of owning

a club symbol (0.322500 and 0.261859) and whistles (0.257076 and 0.205641). The null hypothesis was not refused. It is caused by the fact that the mentioned groups are quite similar (as described in Table 7).

Table 7: The test criteria (p-values) on the 5% significance level

	supporters vs. hooligans		fans vs. supporters	
	p-value	decision	p-value	decision
owning a club symbol	0.322500	no influence	0.261859	no influence
wearing club symbols on home matches	0.150527	no influence	0.174263	no influence
wearing club symbols on away matches	0.156160	no influence	0.165492	no influence
firing of pyrotechnics	0.116629	no influence	0.152327	no influence
vulgar chants in the stand	0.083407	no influence	0.118272	no influence
individual vulgar expression	0.083407	no influence	0.118272	no influence
physical aggression against rival fans at the stadium	0.139768	no influence	0.009317	no influence
physical aggression against police and riot police	0.080269	no influence	0.007435	no influence
arranged hooligan fight outside the stadium	0.054239	no influence	0.111287	no influence
throw in the subject on the pitch	0.065914	no influence	0.001700	no influence
demolishing stadium and other riots	0.212563	no influence	0.031550	no influence
expressions of racism	0.109540	no influence	0.002272	no influence
whistles	0.257076	no influence	0.205641	no influence

### Discussion

We selected specific groups of visitors (supporters, hooligans, and fans). There are a lot of case studies and scientific manuscripts comparing of fans and spectators. That's why we were interested in these mentioned groups which are almost identical and they can differ in some situations. According to the pilot study, each surveyed respondent of the Slavia end has some features of a supporter, hooligan and a fan. We state that a fan takes part in the firing of pyrotechnics and expressions of racism; and not only hooligans fight with the riot police etc. Furthermore, we found that expressions of racism are considered the most serious expression of violent behavior by 80.00% of the spectators. Almost 3/4 of the fans (70.30%) found the most serious activity demolishing stadium and other disturbances. Clearly 66.67% of the spectators marked physical aggression against rival fans in the stadium as a considerable problem. Triggers for their behavior are mostly alcohol or other addictive substance or referee's mistake. Currently, the stadiums only sell non-alcoholic beer during derby or other risky matches (e.g. Baník Ostrava). Football clubs and organizers look at the classical fan and football supporter primarily as an economic factor. It is important to remember that they are also responsible for work with football fans.

### Conclusions

In our surveyed sample of respondents, we cannot distinguish individual visitors internally. As far as the supporters are concerned, there are many public myths and half-truth about this group. They are often referred to hooligans. Accordingly, to the results, we have to consider that the hooligans are interested also in the football as a sport, not only in hooligan fights. Hooligans had a detailed overview of Slavia record during several past seasons. They also reported a good knowledge in the team drafts considering present or previous players. Also, based on the results of the pilot study, we found that fans and supporters under 23 years old are more tolerant to negative social phenomena in the surroundings of the stadium. This confirms Slepíčka et al. (2010), who conducted research with the amount of 5.629 spectators.

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