



Introduction

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Introduction

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In June 2012, a major conference on sport, race and ethnicity took place in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Aside from its academic content, the conference was significant on a number of levels. These included the context in which discussions took place, the fact that the meeting was staged on the eve of the first Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games in London for 50 years and also that it came at the close of the 2011/12 season in the English Premier League (EPL), which was defined in part by a series of high-profile incidents relating to the issue of race. Combined, these three factors created a rich academic backdrop in which matters of identity, marginalization, discrimination, racism and division predominated.¹ The articles contained within this collection emerge from a group of scholars who presented at the conference, and their work in turn reflects a range of contemporary issues pertaining to race and ethnicity across Europe, Africa and the USA.

Context

That the meeting took place in Northern Ireland was appropriate on a number of different levels. Since its establishment over 90 years ago, following the partition of Ireland, the country has been beset by internal conflict between revolutionary elements within Irish republicanism, functionaries of the British State and pockets of Ulster loyalists, the latter existing in the form of armed resistance against the threat posed to a pan-British identity by various shades of Irish nationalism. Over the course of the latter part of the twentieth century, this toxic mix of paramilitary violence and the battle between armed groups, such as the Irish Republican Army, and the security forces in Northern Ireland gave rise to an environment in which ordinary citizens living in that part of the UK became acutely aware of markers of division, identity and partisanship.

The question of separation in Northern Ireland has been shaped along ethno-sectarian lines, meaning that issues of national allegiance, as well as religious affiliation, combined to create a 'them' and 'us' society in which the majority Unionist or Protestant community and the minority Nationalist or Catholic population led out an uneasy relationship. Thus, many of the problems arising from inter-ethnic rivalries, sectarianism and discrimination were already well established in the minds of the people of Northern Ireland prior to their hosting of the 2012 conference. Yet the question of racism was something the hosts were considerably less well acquainted with and this drew an interesting response from observers who were left

wondering how the experiences of new arrivals into Northern Ireland, as an already deeply divided society, became further complicated when people from diverse ethnic backgrounds arrived in search of employment or simply to carve out a better standard of living for themselves. In short, what happens when a society that already is established along a series of identity fault lines becomes progressively challenged by the prospect of ever increasing levels of inward migration, with all the issues this development presents?

Backdrop

Beyond the question of geographical context, the season 2011/12 also represented something of a defining period in the EPL and its often difficult relationship with the issue of race. On 15 October 2011, Liverpool FC's home game against their fierce rivals from the north-east of England, Manchester United FC, ended in a 1-1 draw but it was the nature of the verbal exchange between the home team's Uruguayan striker Luis Sua' rez and United's France international Patrice Evra that was to overshadow much of the early part of that season, whilst its wider ramifications led to discussions around how ethnic minorities in general are regarded both within elite sport in Britain and indeed in a range of other professions as well. Only after a month of the most intense discussion surrounding the incident, within the corridors of power at the game's governing body – the Football Association (FA) – and indeed within the public sphere, did the FA formally charge Sua' rez with the use of abusive and insulting words and/or behaviour that included reference to Evra's ethnic origin, colour and/or race. In turn, a key pillar of Sua' rez's defence was that whilst he may have used language that in a given setting, such as the UK, could be regarded as improper and indeed racist, within his native country such language is often deployed in a jocular, even friendly, manner. Thus, whilst he may indeed have used the term 'negro' in his tempestuous exchange with Evra, it would be wrong to argue, his supporters would go on to claim, that his intention was to do so to provoke a response from the United player on account of his race. Notwithstanding the exact merits of his defence, following considerable deliberation, an Independent Regulatory Commission, which had been investigating the incident, informed the FA and Liverpool FC that it had found Sua' rez guilty of the offence of racially abusing Evra, banned him for eight games, levied a fine of £40, 000 and warned him as to his future conduct.²

The football industry and sections of society at large were still coming to terms with the fallout from the initial events at Liverpool's Anfield Road ground when just over a week later, on 23 October, an altercation between England international John Terry and QPR's Anton Ferdinand resulted in a Metropolitan Police investigation into an allegation that Ferdinand, brother of Terry's long-standing England colleague Rio Ferdinand, had been on the receiving end of a racially motivated outburst from the Chelsea captain. A subsequent police investigation, an obligation it must fulfil on the foot of a complaint made by a member of the public, resulted in a file being passed to the British legal system's Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) indicating that a criminal act had in fact taken place. On 21 December 2011, the CPS announced it would be bringing charges against Terry concerning his then alleged use of racially abusive language towards Ferdinand. In due course, Terry would be found 'not guilty' of the offence in a British Crown Court, which seemed to mean little when a parallel enquiry established by the FA arrived at quite the

opposite conclusion some weeks later and subsequently decided to ban the player. Just before this announcement was made, and no doubt sensing the prevailing mood, Terry declared his intention to retire from international duty with England. Shortly thereafter, amid a maelstrom of media attention, and an equally bizarre attempt at defending the former national team captain that embroiled him in criticism of his then employers, the FA, England's Italian-born manager, Fabio Capello, quickly followed Terry in bringing an end to his tenure as national team coach.

Together, these two incidents reveal much of the challenges facing football in Britain and indeed Europe today. The EPL is a lucrative environment in which to earn a living as a professional footballer and hence some of the world's best players, reflective of a diverse ethnic profile, have arrived into the country to join many of the league's best teams. This has required the football industry at large, its players and spectators, to quickly reflect upon what this means for their often long-standing views concerning minority populations, 'new arrivals' and the increasingly multi-cultural society in which they now reside. Sport plays a remarkably useful role in bringing to the fore debates around precisely these issues, namely multi-culturalism, accommodating new cultures and ways of life and reflecting upon the future coherency of a society where the default position is often to focus upon difference, to cast it in a pejorative light and thereby perpetuate separation rather than recognize the potential for growth, enlightenment and wider societal development.³

Collection

Thus, in the light of the race-related issues that defined the early part of the 2011/12 EPL season, it is appropriate that the opening article of this collection examines the degree to which racism and the under-representativeness of ethnic minorities within leadership roles in European football is a factor of an institutionalized approach around such matters demonstrated by the game's governing elite. Bradbury's insightful empirical work, drawn from a total of 20 in-depth semi-structured interviews with leading officials in the sport, concludes that such institutional racism has as its genesis an historical white hegemonic privilege located at the core of the decision-making processes directing the game.

Within Europe at present, despite the protestations of those who hold the merits of the British game dear, it is difficult to argue with the assertion that the powerbase of football is now to be found in Spain and, in the context of La Liga, the perennial battle between those erstwhile adversaries, Real Madrid and F.C. Barcelona. Indeed, it is the nature of this rivalry, and specifically its coverage throughout the popular media, that forms the basis of O'Brien's excellent examination of what he refers to as 'the consequences of (a) saturated intensity of this megaspectacle' upon representations of ethnicity and cultural identity. O'Brien argues that a considered appreciation of these issues go to the very core of how we understand issues of nationhood and identity within modern Spain.

It is this theme of football rivalry that is addressed in remarkable detail by Dmowski in his coverage of the geographical typology of these tensions within a European setting. Whilst his intention is largely to illustrate the full extent of the spread of these rivalries across Europe, thereby providing a valuable resource for scholars working in the field, equally he captures the true essence of football attachment – what he refers to as 'football identity' – in much of his writing. It is an

incredibly valuable portrayal of the breadth and depth of football's enduring capacity to invoke fierce and sustained partisanship amongst its committed followers.

As the conference referred to earlier was staged in Northern Ireland, it presented an excellent opportunity for scholars working on issues of race and ethnicity to bring forward their findings and of these the ethnographic work undertaken by Mauro stood apart for its remarkable detail and insight. Mauro, who spent over 18 months in the company of the Dublin club Insaka F.C., conveys the wider importance of the club as a symbolic form of resistance for migrant youth from diverse ethnic backgrounds. He speaks also to the importance coaches and other officials working with the young players, some of whom have been subject to racially motivated abuse in their everyday lives, attach to developing resilience and coping strategies that serve the players well as they seek to carve out a new life for themselves in Ireland.

One of the themes Mauro develops, that concerning the importance of providing avenues for informal play to encourage social interaction amongst an often disenfranchised youth, is more fully uncovered in the work of Ellis and Sharma, who examine the nature and structure of youth football opportunities in the USA against the burgeoning interest within published literature on social capital. It is the authors' detailed comparison between these developments in the context of the USA and the situation in the North African state of Ghana that represents one of the highlights of an otherwise excellent contribution.

It is important in a collection of this nature to consider the influence that the mediatization of sport continues to exercise upon issues of race and to this end the analysis of Van Sterkenburg on the effects experienced by viewers of the Dutch national team during the 2010 FIFA World Cup presents a very valuable insight into the ethnic breakdown of The Netherlands, perceptions of authenticity, affiliation and identity. In this regard, participation in a major international tournament offered a very timely opportunity for reflection and consideration of how the Dutch team 'spoke to' many underdeveloped views on relationships between groups of contrasting ethnic origins in the country.

Mention of the 2010 FIFA World Cup and Allen's timely reflection on the challenges leading up to and during the first ever tournament to be staged on the continent of Africa is drawn from a series of detailed interviews with some of the leading figures involved in the successful event held in South Africa. During the course of his detailed analysis, Allen considers the stereotypes and fears, many ill-founded, that surrounded the event and what its hosting meant for a society still overwritten by division and inequalities.

It is on this theme of inequality that the collection draws to a close with the contribution of Hassan and McCue and their comparison of the work being undertaken by the two governing bodies of football in Ireland, the Irish Football Association (IFA) and the Football Association of Ireland, around the issues of inclusion and integration for members of ethnic minorities living on the island. Amongst other important points of interest, they examine at length the IFA-sponsored World United F.C. initiative, which provides a useful platform for migrants, some of whom are asylum seekers or refugees, to come together and discuss matters of common concern in a country like Northern Ireland, which in a similar vein to South Africa, remains deeply divided despite very welcome moves towards non-violence and peace over the past two decades.

Notes

1. Garlan, Pal (Ar)
2. Go (Ar)
3. Ba (Ar)

Refer

- Back, (Ar)
- Garlan, Pal (Ar)
- Gouldi, Re (Ar)
- Van S (Ar)

Notes

1. Garland, Jon and Rowe, Michael, *Racism and Antiracism in Football* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001); Van Sterkenburg, Jacco, *Race, Ethnicity and the Sport Media* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011).
2. Goulding, Paul, Jones, Brian, and Smith, Denis, 'The Football Association and Luis Suarez: Reasons of the Regulatory Commission' (December 30, 2012) 2011.
3. Back, Les, Crabbe, Tim, and Solomos, John, *The Changing Face of Football: Racism, Identity and Multiculture in the English Game* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

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