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# Kick it Out!

## Paul Matz, Arsenal Independent Supporters' Association secretary reports

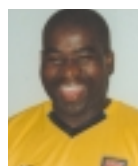
This year the Kick it Out national anti-racism week has been an important vehicle for Arsenal players, directors and fans to come together to say that racism is unacceptable, in the stands, on the pitch, or anywhere else where it shows its ugly head.



The week has been an opportunity to highlight that message and it could hardly be better timed, given recent events in Eindhoven and Bratislava.

Arsene Wenger has called for those guilty of racist abuse to be identified and banned from football grounds. Do Arsenal fans support this view? We went out and about to find out.

First up was IT consultant, Darren Richards, who describes himself as a 'fan since birth'. "I've never felt there was a racism problem at Highbury" says Darren, a second-generation West Indian and ticket registration scheme member. "I'm 100% Arsenal and I've always enjoyed my football here. But it's not the same everywhere and we shouldn't be complacent and think it's now only a problem on the continent. An amateur team in the Midlands nearly accepted shirt sponsorship from the British National Party recently, and I've certainly had dodgy experiences at away games."



Garry Lyle, a fan for over 10 years, and a teacher at a Stoke Newington school agrees: "At the semi-final last year I saw that

Middlesborough had lots of Asian fans. But it didn't stop the drunken racist abuse that my brother and I received as we left the ground. Being drunk isn't an excuse and it reminded me that I didn't always feel as comfortable going to matches as I do now."



Eddie Odaro, age 28, is a computer networks engineer, who's followed Arsenal home and abroad for 13 years. "Being spat at by a Leeds fan and having monkey noises made at me by a couple of West Brom idiots are two isolated incidents I can remember. I tend to just ignore that kind of thing and carry on supporting my team. What concerns me more is the abuse that Ashley Cole and Emile Heskey were subjected to in Slovakia. Having noises made at you by a couple of ignorant people is one thing, but when it's half a stadium, it's entirely different. I think the FA and UEFA should be doing a lot more to stop it happening."



Brian Walters, an Arsenal fan all his life, believes that the current crop of Highbury stars are role models for tens of thousands of youngsters. "The 'glass ceilings' and myths that used to exist... you know the kind of thing... black players are very skilful but can't tackle... they're no good in the winter months... these were the kind of statements you would even hear managers saying in the 1970's. That's all gone now, I'm pleased to say. With Junichi Inamoto, at Fulham, and Sun Jihai, at Man City, more barriers are being smashed. I would really like to see a successful Asian player in the Premiership. Almost as much as I want Arsenal to win the Champions League at Old Trafford!



"You still get some fans saying 'you frog this', 'you dago that'" says journalist William Kemble-Diaz, an Arsenal fan for more than 30 years, "but overall at Highbury the messages of anti-racism week are well-supported."



Jo Boggis, a clock-end season-ticket holder agrees. She welcomes the anti-racism week and says, "It's a chance for all football fans to show their support for kicking racism out. With the ugly scenes in Europe highlighting the problems it's a start in changing attitudes."



Sophie Goldspink, who travels home and away, week-in week-out, adds: "The only colour that matters is that of the players' shirts. Football is the people's game and we all lose if racism wins."



Roger Millington, another fan who travels all over the country to support Arsenal, adds his support: "Racism in football needs to be tackled. Ignore it, and it won't go away."



Soteris Charalambous wears his affinity on his sleeve. His e-mail address starts 'ArseneKnows' so it was no surprise to hear him supporting the manager's call for racists to be banned. "We need to highlight the racist abuse that seems very prevalent in some countries, and say it's unacceptable," he says. "But we also need to get our own house in order. It's all very well for the FA to get on their high horse, but it's more than embarrassing that our own fans routinely boo the national anthem of visiting nations."



French fan, Christophe Dupin arrived in England five years ago. "Because of my memories of 1980s hooliganism I thought that England was still a

country with a widespread racism problem in football stadiums" recalls Christoph. "But attending matches here quickly made me realise that reality was quite different. However, recent events in European football - as well as my own experience of attending some games in France - has shown me that this ugly cultural disease is far from eradicated. It is everybody's responsibility to make sure that racism becomes a thing of the past as soon as possible. I hope Arsenal and its wonderful multicultural squad can continue to show the way forward."

Effective and consistent action against anti-social and bigoted behaviour is something that many Arsenal fans want to see. "Anybody heard shouting racist abuse should be ejected", says season-ticket holder Demetrios Nicolau. "But it just doesn't happen except when the subject is the topic of the day. Anti-racism week is great but taking action when it's not fashionable is the real test. Photographic evidence is available and should be used. Monkey chants, nazi salutes still take place. The authorities should clamp down. Racism is unacceptable in any workplace and it should be at football."



Clock End season-ticket holder, Helen de Witt said she was pleased to support the week, and very rarely heard racist comments at Highbury. However, she was worried about the anti-semitism, which is still prevalent. "I'm proud that Arsenal welcomes fans from every background. Everyone should enjoy the entertainment at The Home of Football, and we're close to being the best off the pitch as well as on it. However, I do have concerns about the anti-Jewish chanting. I know it's all about goading Spurs, but it still upsets a lot of Arsenal fans."

As Helen points out the references to Spurs as 'the Yids' is a term which many supporters find deeply offensive, especially, of course, the thousands of Jewish Arsenal supporters.



We no longer hear the mass singing of obscene songs referring to the Holocaust in the stands any more. Isn't it about time we called it a day on the 'Y' word and this form of bigotry as well?



Last word to David Adeboyeke, a hospital doctor and season ticket holder. "I've been a fan for twenty-two years, and for at least the last 10 years racism hasn't been an issue at Highbury. But I still remember standing at the Clock End at a match against Liverpool. It was the first time I had taken a new girlfriend to a football match. John Barnes was having a great game and fans near me were screaming racist abuse at him. I didn't take any notice but my girlfriend burst into tears. It was the first and last football match she attended. Let's not go back to those days. Racism still exists; we should stamp it out for good. Well done Arsenal for prominently supporting Kick It Out week."

For more information about anti-racism work in football contact Kick It Out, Unit 3, 1-4 Christina Street, London EC2A 4PA. Telephone 020 7684 4884. Email info@kickitout.org

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