RONNY BLASCHKE

Football and Racism

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pitch

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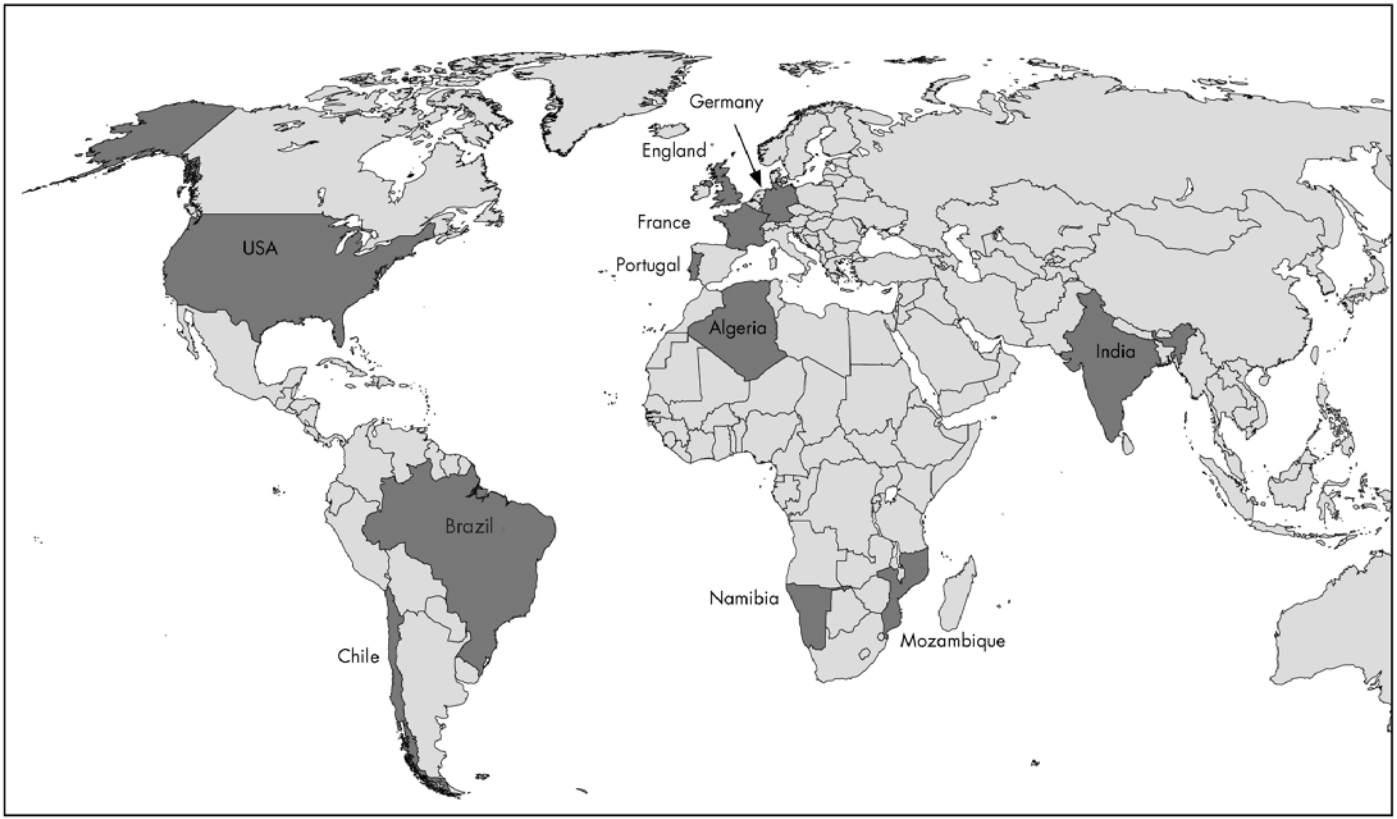
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The Legacy of Windrush

Almost half a million people from the Caribbean helped rebuild Britain after the Second World War. Racism was part of their everyday lives, whether they were looking for accommodation, using healthcare services or going to the stadium. Among the children and grandchildren of those immigrants, footballers of Jamaican origin rose to become role models. But as soon as they failed or made political statements, the affection of many fans turned to rejection. But players, activists and fans are taking a stand against racism.

IN MAY 2018, Raheem Sterling caused a minor hysteria. A photo showed him smiling at the England training camp. On his right calf was a tattoo of an assault rifle. For years, the tabloid media have been critical of Sterling's behaviour, but from their perspective, he had gone too far. *The Sun*, which reports on violent crime daily, had anti-violence activists railing against Sterling: his tattoo was 'disgusting', 'sick'. He should cover it up with another motif or resign from the national team.

Raheem Sterling, then with Manchester City, had to justify himself, yet again. On Instagram, he recalled his childhood in Jamaica, where he grew up. When he was two years old, his father was murdered. 'I made a promise to myself I would never touch a gun in my lifetime,' Sterling wrote,

pointing out the 'deeper meaning' of his tattoo. 'I shoot with my right foot.' The result: goals.

Raheem Sterling is a prominent example of how much the media contributes to the spread of stereotypes. Sterling was often portrayed as a player who had no interest in school but who now lives in luxury as a professional. A rich immigrant kid who even bought his mother a house. For a long time, Sterling more or less tolerated this, but in 2018 he spoke out on the website The Players' Tribune. He described how he came to London with his mother at the age of five: 'If anybody deserves to be happy, it's my mum. She came to this country with nothing and put herself through school cleaning bathrooms and changing bed sheets, and now she's the director of a nursing home. And her son plays for England.'

Raheem Sterling, who joined Chelsea in 2022, is one of the most respected players in England. He was the captain of the national team several times. And he gets involved in debates. After the murder of George Floyd in 2020, he gave nuanced interviews about the Black Lives Matter movement. Sterling participates in several fundraising campaigns.

And he holds up a mirror to the media. Tosin Adarabioyo and Phil Foden, Sterling's former team-mates in Manchester, each bought their mothers a house. When a white player does it, Sterling argued, it's considered a sense of duty. When a Black player does it, it's considered financial recklessness.

In most cases, however, Sterling avoids political controversy. That doesn't mean he is apolitical. On social media, he posts photos of his trips to Jamaica, of friends and beaches, of landscapes and food. Millions of immigrants in the UK can identify with these images. They don't want to be reduced to their problems; they don't want to be perceived as a danger. And so Raheem Sterling is considered to be one of the greatest heroes among the descendants of the Windrush generation.

Help from Overseas

Windrush? This term has become synonymous with migration to the UK, with its achievements but also its setbacks. On 22 June 1948, the ship HMT *Empire Windrush* docked in Tilbury, near London. Almost 500 people disembarked, most of them from Jamaica. The photos from that time show men and women in fine attire, many smiling and looking confident.

Like other areas of the Caribbean, Jamaica was part of the Empire at the time. Its inhabitants also held British citizenship and were allowed to reside in the UK. The country was suffering from the consequences of the Second World War. The infrastructure had been largely destroyed, the health system was in ruins and the government was distributing food rations.

During this phase, London asked people from overseas for help in rebuilding the country. The passengers of the *Windrush* accepted the invitation. They sold their property in Jamaica and wanted to start a new life in Britain. With their university degrees, they aspired to ambitious tasks, for example in the new National Health Service (NHS). In this way, immigration also helped to modernise Britain. By 1970, almost half a million people had come from the Caribbean, mainly from Jamaica, Barbados, or Trinidad and Tobago. Their early migration is often referred to as the 'Windrush Generation'. Their children and grandchildren continue to shape Britain today – and the legacy of Windrush is particularly visible in English football.

But the optimism of the immigrants was dampened early on. Many of them experienced racism in the labour market and when looking for accommodation. They often had to work hard to afford costs of living in the cities. From the mid-1950s, the economy improved. The government made immigration more difficult and made it easier to expel people. Fascist groups gained momentum and attacked members of

the Windrush generation. From 1962, anyone without a passport issued in the UK had to apply for a permanent work permit. Further laws cemented the hierarchy between the white majority and the non-white minorities.

Many families of the Windrush generation did not want their children to play football for fear of being attacked. Paul Mortimer, who grew up in the London district of Shepherd's Bush, also felt this. His parents came to England from the Caribbean in the 1950s. They spent six months looking for work and an affordable apartment. 'My mother experienced a lot of racism, so she wanted to protect me even more,' says Mortimer in a video interview. 'She looked out of the window in the evenings, waiting for me to come home.'

At the age of nine or ten, he learnt which streets he should avoid. Right-wing hooligans hunted Black youths in the neighbourhood. After school, Mortimer preferred a football ground surrounded by a wall. As soon as neo-Nazis stormed the pitch, he jumped over the wall and had a head start. 'We ran for our lives. That was just normal.'

Mortimer is now in his mid-50s. In recent years, he has given a lot of thought to how racism might have shaped his character and behaviour. Probably the most important stage of his football career was with Charlton Athletic at the end of the 1980s. Once, recalls Mortimer, he was humiliated by a team-mate on the pitch with the N-word. In the catacombs, he stormed towards the culprit, and a fight broke out. The coach was reluctant to defend Mortimer, instead asking him, 'Did you perhaps overreact?'

These are incidents that other Black footballers from the 1970s and 1980s also describe. The white majority in the clubs made them feel that they shared the blame for racism. 'Even though I was often the only Black person in the room who felt rejection, I often tried to be polite,' says Mortimer. 'But that also increased the feeling of loneliness and isolation.'

Petrol Bombs and Razor Blades

From the late 1970s, unemployment and inflation in Britain rose. Traditional industries such as shipbuilding were on the verge of collapse. Many Britons feared the loss of their prosperity. They took out their frustration on Black people. And state authorities fuelled this hostility: in the summer of 1976, more than 150,000 people of Caribbean origin celebrated their traditional carnival in the London district of Notting Hill. The police intimidated guests and arrested young Black men. The participants were no longer willing to put up with this. Riots broke out, leaving more than 400 people injured. Similar riots occurred time and again in the following years.

And some politicians had been fuelling this sentiment for years. At a meeting of Conservative politicians in Birmingham, Enoch Powell, a member of parliament, railed against 'mass migration'. Powell picked up on conversations with frustrated voters and said, among other things, 'In this country in 15 or 20 years' time the Black man will have the whip hand over the white man.' His tirade went down in history as the 'Rivers of Blood speech'.

Words like these pushed the discourse to the right. In the 1976 local elections in Leicester, the far-right National Front received 20 per cent of the vote. A year later, they received almost 18 per cent in the London city council elections. Conservative prime minister Margaret Thatcher tapped into the mood, saying in a 1978 TV interview about the growing number of immigrants, 'Now, that is an awful lot and I think it means that people are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture.' According to Thatcher, it was no wonder that people would react with hostility to this. She won the general election in 1979 convincingly.

In this climate the National Front wanted to recruit young, strong men in football. Right-wing politicians handed out

leaflets near stadiums and demanded that clubs expel Black members. The right-wing magazine *Bulldog* kept a table of the 'most racist fans'. In the mid-70s, only around 50 Black players were playing in the top division. Players like Cyrille Regis and Brendon Batson had to endure monkey chants. Laurie Cunningham was attacked in his flat with a petrol bomb. Paul Canoville, the first Black player for Chelsea FC, received death threats. Strangers sent him razor blades in an envelope.

They couldn't count on support, reports Viv Anderson, the first Black player to play for England. During a game with his club Nottingham Forest in Carlisle, spectators once again threw apples, pears and bananas at him. Anderson was shocked and retreated in fear to the bench. His manager Brian Clough told him that he had to tune out the hatred: 'Go back out there and get me two pears and a banana.'

The first Black stars of English football rarely voiced criticism in public, because they knew that factory workers or domestic servants fared even worse. As celebrities, they were welcomed in nightclubs, but some of their Black friends had to stay out.

The Windrush generation had not yet found a voice in media, politics and football. On 18 January 1981, 13 Black teenagers who had previously been at a party died in a flat fire in the London district of New Cross. Weeks later, 20,000 people demonstrated against what they saw as the police's inadequate investigation into the incident. Their motto: '13 Dead, Nothing Said'. Over the next 30 years, activists repeatedly called for new investigations. An arson attack could not be proven, but it could not be completely ruled out either. This fire was another trauma for people of colour. And so their trust in the state declined.

Racism was rarely discussed in the 1980s, not even in the sports media, writes author Calum Jacobs in his brilliant book *A New Formation*, subtitled 'How Black Footballers Shaped the Modern Game'. In it, Jacobs analyses how

tabloid media spread racist stereotypes. They often described football for players of Caribbean origin as a rare chance to escape poverty and ultimately prison. Some media outlets apparently believed that the growing presence of Black footballers was the cause of more discrimination. Racists in the stands were dismissed as uneducated eccentrics from the working class, while the structures of the football industry went unmentioned.

If Black players had spoken out publicly against racism at the time, they would have been criticised and censured in the media, Calum Jacobs assumes. This reporting 'instructed Black footballers to maintain a defensive and apolitical position, which forced them to keep their private selves and public selves separate'.

In 1984, England's team travelled to South America for international matches. Dozens of fans travelled on the same plane as the players, including right-wing supporters of the National Front. 'They were treated as normal England supporters,' writes John Barnes, who grew up in Jamaica and was a member of the national team at the time, in his biography. 'We were told to just ignore them and not let it get to us, which it didn't.' The media barely reported on it. In 1988, Ruud Gullit was subjected to monkey chants during a game between the Netherlands and England. BBC commentator John Motson called it 'good-natured barracking'. What a downplay.

In the 1980s, racism was seen as a footnote in the English stadium disasters. In May 1985, a fire at a Bradford City home match had killed 56 people. Two weeks later, before the 1985 European Cup Final between Liverpool and Juventus FC at Brussels' Heysel Stadium, a stampede killed 39 people. There were also riots in and around the stadiums, with many people injured. Also in 1985, serious riots broke out during an FA Cup match between Luton Town and Millwall. Forty-seven people were injured. Under pressure from politicians, standing

room was abolished and more fences and surveillance cameras were installed. The Football Supporters' Association (FSA), a network of fans for fans, was founded to increase prevention. But the many headlines covered the racism.

British society changed in the 1990s. At least in the metropolitan areas, people of colour took on leadership roles. Bill Morris, who grew up in Jamaica, took over the Transport and General Workers' Union in 1992, becoming the first Black general secretary of a trade union. The most important parties, companies and football clubs were still a long way from such a step, but something was happening. Players of Caribbean origin were no longer a minority in the leagues. Fans published appeals against racism in their stadium programmes. Far-right groups gradually stopped recruiting in the areas around the stadiums.

However, structural racism remained accepted. Ron Noades, then chairman of Crystal Palace, described Black players in a TV interview as great athletes, but he added, 'The Black players at this club lend the side a lot of skill and flair, but you also need white players in there to balance things up and give the team some brains and some common sense.' Conservative politician Norman Tebbit wanted to accept immigrants as British only if they would support the England team over that of their country of origin in cricket.

In the early 1990s, the idea took hold that racism could not be reduced by the warnings of a few players alone. A bill entitled the 'Football Offences Act' also included preventive measures against discrimination. In April 1993, the Black student Stephen Lawrence was stabbed to death at a bus stop in London. The murder triggered intense discussion in football as well. The clubs and associations, which had long resisted prevention, now accepted the founding of a campaign against racism. 'Let's Kick Racism out of Football', an initiative launched by activists and the players' union, was later renamed 'Kick It Out'.

First Initiatives against Racism

There was nothing comparable to it in Europe yet. Kick It Out initially received only limited funding and concentrated on campaigns. The most important sports media, which had been in the hands of white men for generations, rarely reported on it. Instead, they gave the impression that racism was a danger of the past. As proof, they referred to national players of Caribbean origin at the time, to Sol Campbell, Ian Wright, Andy Cole or Rio Ferdinand. Paul Ince was the first Black captain of the England team in the 1993 match against the USA. Children of the Windrush generation now shaped English football. They became sporting and social leaders, but only a few dared to make political comments.

To learn more about this early and rare activism of the 1990s, it is worth meeting Shaka Hislop. I meet him in June 2022 at a trade union building in London. In a large hall, the organisation Show Racism the Red Card is celebrating its 25th birthday. Players, coaches and educators are deep in conversation, and the atmosphere is relaxed, like a family gathering. Shaka Hislop greets almost every guest with a handshake. He apologises when he has to interrupt a conversation for a TV interview. Hislop can quickly get to the point in speeches and he can listen patiently afterwards. That's another reason why he is the main ambassador for Show Racism the Red Card.

In our interview, Hislop talks less about himself and more about the people who inspired him. His father, who grew up in Trinidad and Tobago, moved to London in the 1950s in search of a better job. Caribbean immigrants were harassed in their daily lives and feared arbitrary searches and arrests. Hislop's father was once arrested for no reason. He was not willing to accept this and sued the Metropolitan Police. His father received compensation and invested this money in his law studies.

Family experiences like these have played a role in the commitment of footballers. Hislop, born in 1969 in the

London borough of Hackney, played as a goalkeeper from the mid-1990s for Newcastle, West Ham and Portsmouth, among others. He was one of the first professionals to give detailed interviews about racism.

Hislop wants to talk about everyday slurs as well. Once, he was at the petrol station with his car. From a distance, a group of youths made racist remarks. They came closer and recognised him as one of their favourite players – and asked him for an autograph. 'That hurt me a lot,' says Hislop. 'Nevertheless, I don't want to be seen only as a victim. We have to strengthen our educational projects. I myself learned almost nothing about British colonialism at school.'

As a result, many people in Britain today associate the Caribbean states primarily with poverty, exoticism and the origin of talented footballers. But they know little about the past: for more than 400 years, raw materials and riches were transported from Latin America to Europe via the Caribbean islands. During the transatlantic slave trade, millions of people were abducted from West Africa and taken to the Caribbean. Thanks to sugar production, Britain profited greatly from the Caribbean.

Even the colloquial name is rarely questioned. Many refer to the Caribbean islands in the Atlantic as the 'West Indies'. Why? Christopher Columbus, as was assumed in the 15th century, had 'discovered' the islands on his sea route to India. For almost a hundred years now, the 'West Indies' have had their own cricket team, a selection of players from Caribbean countries. Another little-known fact is that thousands of men from the Caribbean fought for Britain against the Nazis.

Hislop acquired most of this knowledge after school. He knows that he has to repeat his messages to the younger generation again and again. He has given hundreds of interviews and recorded video messages. Show Racism the Red Card goes into schools and youth centres with workshops. Using football as an example, the coaches and social workers

also educate about Windrush. Hislop played one international match for England's under-21s, for the country in which he grew up. But then he decided to play for the senior team of Trinidad and Tobago, the country of his ancestors. So Hislop took part in the 2006 World Cup in Germany. 'Our issues are complicated,' he says. 'Twenty years ago, I hoped that we would be much further ahead today.'

Less Noisy, but Still There

Three steps forward, two steps back. That was the case 20 years ago, and it is still the case today. In the new millennium, politicians and football have invested more energy and money in studies and projects. A law passed in 2001 now makes racist chanting in stadiums a criminal offence. A survey by the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) suggested that 58 per cent of non-white professionals have experienced racism at least once.

But it was also the beginning of big scandals. In October 2004, the then-Spanish team coach Luis Aragonés discriminated against the French striker Thierry Henry, who was playing for Arsenal at the time. English media and officials demanded an apology, but Aragonés instead made a speech about British colonialism. The English team announced a message against racism for their game in Madrid in November 2004, but then their Black players were subjected to monkey chants by thousands of spectators.

The Guardian commented, 'The abuse, the worst example of racism at an England match in decades, was greeted with disgust and disbelief in the UK, which is acknowledged as leading the way in European football in the battle against racism.' John Barnes, who had played for Watford and Liverpool, among others, was not willing to let the matter rest. In an interview, he said, 'Please don't let us all believe that we are much better in this country. They may be less vocal, but there are still many racists in English football.'

John Barnes wanted to look beyond headlines. In 2006, the Home Office published figures that point to deeply rooted racism. Black people were six times more likely to be stopped by the police than white people. They were three times more likely to be arrested. And in prison, 24 per cent of the inmates were Black, but they only made up three per cent of the population. According to the 2011 census, five per cent of white people in the UK were unemployed – compared to 13 per cent of Black people.

In football, little research had been done into the causes of unequal treatment, and scandalisation dominated instead. In October 2011, Luis Suárez of Liverpool FC discriminated against his opponent Patrice Evra of Manchester United during a game. Suárez claimed that he had used the Spanish word 'negro' in a friendly manner. He was suspended for eight games and presented himself as a victim of a conspiracy. He received support from Liverpool fans and his native Uruguay. Many media outlets focused on the anger of the perpetrator, and less on the consequences for the victim. At the next game between Liverpool and Manchester United in 2012, Suárez refused to shake hands with the Frenchman Evra. Again, there was little talk about the core of racism.

During the same period, another case eclipsed all the talk. In October 2011, John Terry of Chelsea discriminated against his opponent Anton Ferdinand of Queens Park Rangers. Two months later, he was charged by the public prosecutor with making racist comments. Terry rejected the accusations and was supported by his club. The FA, which had often spoken out against racism with general messages, avoided taking a clear position in this specific case. After all, Terry had been the respected captain of the England team up to that point.

In the months following, there were TV discussions and front pages about the incident. Ashley Cole, also at Chelsea at the time, was suspected of trying to exonerate his team-mate Terry with false statements. Cole, whose father was

from Barbados, was seen as a traitor by many in the Black community. Public pressure continued to grow and so Terry resigned from the national team. He was acquitted in court, but the football association fined him. Terry accepted and apologised.

The Fight for More Diversity

'These heated discussions have set us back years,' says Leon Mann, shaking his head in annoyance. 'We are still feeling the consequences today.' When it comes to anti-racism in football, few people are as well connected as Mann. He had also worked for Kick It Out for a while. In 2012, when the furore surrounding Terry was at its height, Kick It Out had 13 employees. The annual budget was around £650,000, which included funding from the FA and the Premier League. This dependency apparently led to Kick It Out being rather reluctant to get involved in the Terry discussion.

Kick It Out had built up a network over the years, and the campaigns were accepted. But the clubs hardly took time for their photo requests and workshops, says Mann – 'If at all, we got ten minutes with a player. In, take a picture, and out.' After the controversy surrounding Terry, a number of Black players no longer wanted to work with Kick It Out. They missed solidarity at the crucial moment.

Mann is now working independently, initially as a sports journalist and now as a consultant for diversity issues. He suggested the Soho Hotel in central London for our interview. It is a café with warm colours and a considerable noise level. A few years ago, Mann and other Black colleagues launched a network in this hotel. 'You can't get anywhere with outrage and criticism alone,' says Mann. 'We wanted to shed more positive light on Black role models.'

In the first step, the founding members exchanged contacts and their network of Black journalists, players and managers grew. Together with Fare network, formerly

known as Football Against Racism in Europe, and Steven Bradbury from Loughborough University, they collected facts: in 92 professional clubs, almost 30 per cent of the players were Black. By contrast, only 3.4 per cent of the 552 head coaches, assistants and youth leaders were Black or belonged to another minority. In leadership of the FA and the clubs, this proportion was less than one per cent. Even today, Mann is asked again and again where he used to play professionally. 'Even as a child, people told me not to waste my time with books,' he says. 'Black people are seen as strong athletes, but much less so as managers and journalists.'

Mann can describe the consequences of colonialism for football in general, but also for his family. His grandfather had been a respected railway executive in Jamaica. He wore a suit and took care that his shirts didn't have wrinkles. His grandfather came to England in the 1950s. He tried it for a while, but couldn't come to terms with the racism and returned to Jamaica.

For Mann, growing up in London 30 years later was easier, but not easy enough. As a young footballer, he was discriminated against. Opponents wanted to touch his hair or mockingly referred to him as Tiger Woods. After graduating, Mann went to Kenya for a few months and later worked for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in London. He organised hundreds of workshops against racism and sent thousands of emails. He gave interviews, attended receptions, persuaded partners. Their network in English football now has the title 'Football Black List'.

Leon Mann has learnt that he can't attract the attention of the boardrooms with drastic criticism and moral superiority alone. He bases his arguments on figures and wants to show that football can only win with more diversity, economically as well. 'It's not enough to put friendly messages for diversity on websites,' he says. 'The clubs should go out into the communities.'

For years, activists had perceived the term 'Black' as a pejorative term. Nowadays, being Black is confidently placed centre stage. 'Black is Beautiful', 'Black Power', 'Black Lives Matter'. Mann and the Football Black List also organise celebrations and discussions. The focus is on the successes of personalities in football. They are community gatherings designed to express confidence and a positive view of the future.

In 2021, Mann received the MBE. The BE in this alienates him because it stands for British Empire. 'But this award is also for my family,' he says. 'My parents and grandparents gave me opportunities that they themselves did not have.'

'The Debate Is Going Round in Circles'

In London, around 40 per cent of the population is non-white; in Birmingham, it's 50 per cent; and in Manchester, 35 per cent. But this diversity is not reflected in the stadiums. The crowd is overwhelmingly white. There are many reasons for this: the hooliganism and open racism of the 1970s and 1980s may be a footnote for many white people, but for immigrants this trauma is very much present. They know the stories of their parents and grandparents, who were on the lookout for potential danger around the stadium.

'For decades, white men decided who could play. And even in the stands, football was considered a refuge for the white working class,' explains sports sociologist Stefan Lawrence of Birmingham Newman University. 'These norms are crumbling, but many fans want everything to stay as it always was.' This includes beer and the masculinity, customs that alienate and exclude a number of groups in society. Lawrence says, 'I grew up in a white working-class family. I knew who to call for tickets. I knew which pubs to avoid on match days.' Gradually, fans with a migrant biography are joining forces, for example the 'Punjabi Wolves' at Wolverhampton Wanderers.

In this homogeneous environment, there is a lack of awareness of stereotypes, write journalists Ryan Conway and Carl Anka in an article for The Athletic. They also shed light on an aspect that is rarely mentioned: in 2017, Manchester United fans sang about the supposedly large penis of their striker Romelu Lukaku. In 2019, Liverpool supporters displayed a photo montage of their striker Divock Origi with an oversized penis.

In both cases, the fans apparently wanted to express admiration for Black bodies, but they were perpetuating a myth that dehumanised them. As early as 1903, a physician in Baltimore, William Lee Howard, claimed that 'Black men have large penises to rape white women'. Many stewards in the stadiums are not sufficiently sensitised to issues like this.

Anyone who wants to raise awareness of these indignities is sometimes labelled as 'woke' or 'politically correct'. And this in a society that has been polarised for years by the failed independence referendum in Scotland in 2014, by the Brexit vote in 2016 and by the controversial policies of prime minister Boris Johnson, among others. As education secretary, the Conservative Michael Gove wanted to change the way history was taught. In his view, the achievements of the British Empire should play a more important role, rather than the exploitation and racism. In 2013, the Home Office launched a campaign to intimidate 'illegal immigrants'. Vans drove around the country with the message: 'In the UK illegally? Go home or face arrest.'

After the murder of George Floyd in 2020, the Black Lives Matter movement also gained strength in the UK. In Bristol, demonstrators pushed a statue of former slave trader Edward Colston into the harbour water. Tommy Robinson, founder of the far-right English Defence League, wanted to mobilise football fans to protect other statues. During Manchester City's home game against Burnley, fans unfurled a banner above the Etihad Stadium that read 'White Lives Matter'. In

other stadiums, fans sometimes whistled when their players went down on their knees as a sign against racism. Chants such as 'All Lives Matter' or 'Black Lives Matter is racist' were also heard, as a supposed defence of the white working class.

These reactions are not surprising. While racist chants by thousands of spectators in stadiums may be a thing of the past, racist incidents in football are repeatedly in the spotlight. Many former players are frustrated. Stan Collymore, who played three internationals for England in the mid-1990s, declined an interview request from the morning show *Good Morning Britain*. He wrote on Twitter, 'Let's get the token Black on to talk about racism, but let's not call him to talk about a sport he played for 20 years. No thanks @GMB, my race isn't a 2 min bit before you give someone from Geordie Shore an hour to show you their new nails.'

Campaign for Diverse Media

So how could the debate move to the next level? Journalist Drew Christie is the chair of an organisation that probably only exists in England: Black Collective of Media in Sport (BCOMS). Christie and his fellow campaigners want to use their network to make the potential and success of Black media professionals visible. In 2017, the National Council for the Training of Journalists, one of the essential training organisations, stated that only one per cent of journalists in the UK were Black. BCOMS researched the figures for sport at the time: only two of the English reporters covering the 2016 European Football Championship were Black. There has never been a Black sports editor on a national newspaper. And the Black experts employed by TV stations were usually footballers themselves.

Drew Christie says that, in journalism, what matters is contacts, a network that he himself did not have for a long time. His parents came to England from Jamaica in the 1960s, working as taxi driver and in healthcare. Media didn't play

a big role, but Christie knew early on that he wanted to be a sports reporter. He studied political science in his hometown of London. He applied to major media but received rejection after rejection. He says that he got a job at the BBC through a series of coincidences. It was a dream come true, but the reality was less dream-like.

'I never experienced open racism in the office,' Christie reports. 'But often I was the only Black person in the room. I felt that I couldn't express myself fully, I felt limited.' Christie had the impression that he had to work twice as hard as his white colleagues to be accepted. And that he was criticised harder for mistakes. In 2012, he moved to Abu Dhabi to join Media & Sport 360, an international and diverse team with a Black manager. 'I felt more valued than I did in England,' he says. He stayed there for six years.

Christie emphasises that racism and classism are intertwined in the media. Many young people from low-income families, who in England are disproportionately often Black, have no relatives or acquaintances who work for newspapers or TV stations. They have to earn money during their holidays and have no time for unpaid internships. The aim of the Black Collective of Media in Sport is to break down these boundaries.

Christie and his colleagues, including Leon Mann, are putting a lot of effort into exchanges with sports editorial offices. BCOMS has brought media professionals together at conferences. They also approach publishers of tabloid newspapers that sometimes carry nationalist headlines against immigrants. 'We are aware of this and have thought long and hard about such collaborations,' says Christie. 'But if we really want to change the system, we need to sit down at the table with everyone.'

BCOMS now has access to almost all management levels, where it is calling for more diversity in media. However, strategies for middle management are still lacking. BCOMS

regularly organises a 'masterclass', a series of workshops where young Black journalists can learn from experienced colleagues. This is often followed by an internship or an employment.

With a more diverse staff, sports reporting would probably change. And that is necessary, as a study from the 2019/20 season suggests. Researchers from Denmark and the UK analysed the TV commentary of 80 matches in England, Spain, Italy and France. Some of the results: when commentators talked about intelligence and work ethic, more than 60 per cent of their praise was directed at 'players with lighter skin tone'. When it came to power, however, they were 6.59 times more likely to talk about a 'player with darker skin tone'. With this bias, the commentators promote the prejudice that Black footballers are 'naturally athletic', the study says. A racist stereotype.

Hardly Any Black Coaches

It's a paradox. In football, hundreds of descendants of the Windrush generation have achieved a status that would have been denied them in politics or business. Black professionals shape popular culture, are featured on fashion magazines and are successful advertising figures. Their taste in music influences millions of people. And some use this fame for political causes: Tyrone Mings, the Aston Villa defender, had to spend time in a homeless shelter with his family as a child. As a professional, he raised funds and took part in demonstrations against racism. Marcus Rashford of Manchester United campaigned for free school lunches. Alisha Hosannah, partner of long-time Watford captain Troy Deeney, designed the Black Lives Matter logo for the Premier League jerseys.

However, author Calum Jacobs points out that the description of Black footballers often focuses on problematic youth. There is a widespread notion that Black people, through their tough everyday lives, are particularly qualified to act as

moralisers and educators, Jacobs argues in his book *A New Formation*. Players like Sterling or Rashford are discriminated against when they miss an important penalty for England. But when they show empathy for the common good, they are seen as heroes next door. 'This takes the complexity out of the individual,' writes Jacobs. 'This allows white society to withdraw from the fight against racism and outsource this responsibility to the magical Black role model.' But the structures in management and business offices remain in place.

Paul Elliott also knows that there is still a long way to go before football is free of discrimination. But that doesn't stop him from passionately talking about his ideas. Elliott had his most successful years as a professional in the 1980s, playing for Charlton Athletic, Luton Town and Aston Villa, among others. He has heard monkey chants, cleared bananas off the pitch and he has hidden from neo-Nazis. Elliott believes that today, 40 years later, it still needs to be thoroughly addressed: on the one hand, to illustrate the positive change in the stadiums to this day; on the other hand, to make the traumas of the Windrush generation understandable. 'When my team-mates humiliated me, the team just laughed it off,' says Elliott. 'And if I wanted to defend myself against racism, it was interpreted as a lack of teamwork. I was considered a troublemaker.'

Elliott had agreed to a 30-minute video call for this book, but as he talks, he seems to forget the time. Behind him on the wall, you can see two newspaper front pages. They show Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King, two historical figures who made a great impression on Elliott. They stood up for their goals even though they seemed hopeless in their time. Elliott had to end his career in 1994 due to a serious knee injury, when he was only 30 years old. Would he have liked to become a coach? 'That was not possible for people like me,' he says. 'We could have dreamt of it, but it would not have made sense.'

On the pitches of the top leagues, the descendants of the Windrush generation are successful, but only a few make it into the coaching staff. And if they do, they only get one chance, maybe two. John Barnes, who played 586 professional games, was appointed head coach of Celtic in 1999. He had a respectable win rate, but after a series of poor games, he was dismissed the following year.

Eight years later, Barnes became national coach of Jamaica for a short period, but he no longer received offers from top clubs. Paul Ince, 609 professional matches, and Chris Powell, 667 matches, didn't get much time to correct mistakes as coaches either. Chris Hughton was one of the few Black managers to establish himself, working for almost three years at Norwich City and five years at Brighton & Hove Albion.

Elliott wants to change that. After his career, he got involved with Kick It Out. At his old club Charlton Athletic, he initiated a network for fans and members from the Windrush generation. He is on the road a lot, meeting with officials. He keeps hearing that there are supposedly no Black candidates as coaches. He then reports on everyday racism, on the traumas, the resistance. You have to start much earlier, Elliott says – 'Even youth players should be given the impression that they can become coaches 20 years later.'

Even though Paul Elliott was unable to become a coach, he still has influence on the game. He was elected to the governing bodies of the FA early on and was usually one of the few Black representatives. Friends asked him why he would put up with this. Critics said he was being used as a token. Elliott contributed specific ideas. Once, he withdrew from the FA because of a dispute. But after a period of reflection, he was back on board. He is now the chair of the Inclusion Advisory Board. This body is to develop diversity programmes. It is difficult for an outsider to judge how serious these really are.

For generations, white men at the top of football recruited other white men. But there is another way. For example, with

the 'Rooney Rule', named after Dan Rooney, the former owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers in American football. Since 2003, NFL clubs have been required to invite ethnic-minority candidates to interview for coaching positions.

'Qualified Black coaches should be invited for interviews,' says Elliott. 'This is the only way to provide role models for young Black people who did not feel confident about pursuing a coaching career.' The English Football League, the operation below the Premier League, adapted a version of the Rooney Rule and made it mandatory for all 72 EFL clubs in 2019.

It appears that the introduction of this measure since then has increased diversity in the football academies, where there are formal hiring processes. On the first-team level, the effect seems limited. This is because the search for managers there is rather informal and less transparent. This is probably why the introduction of the Rooney Rule in the Premier League is unrealistic for the time being.

Referees Raise Their Voices

So boundaries remain at the top. For decades, there have been individuals fighting against racism: former players like Elliott, reporters like Christie or campaigners like Mann. They have ensured that individuals are better coordinated and that the power circles of English football can no longer ignore them. But there are areas that are still lagging far behind.

It's a Saturday at Aston Villa's stadium in Birmingham. In the large VIP area, more than 100 men and women are sitting at massive wooden tables. Many of them are wearing black sports clothes with light-green stripes, emblazoned with the logo of the FA. This is the kick-off event for the BAME Referee Support Group. BAME is an umbrella term for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic. In Birmingham, Black referees want to develop a strategy to gain more influence. They have travelled from across the country for the event.

The meeting is supposed to symbolise a new beginning, but frustration and helplessness are audible. At the front of the room, a screen has been set up. A short film presents figures that seem incredible: in more than 130 years, at the time, only eight Black and Asian referees have been active in English professional football. Of the 28,000 referees currently working in all professional and amateur leagues, only seven per cent belong to ethnic minorities.

Bar stools are positioned in front of the screen. In roundtable discussions, referees from different generations talk about their daily lives: about aggressive spectators in the countryside who throw beer bottles; about groundsmen who don't want to call the police; about coaches who wipe their hands after greeting a Black person. As time goes on, the mood in the room becomes more relaxed. You notice that the referees rarely feel heard with their concerns. Framed photos of colleagues are displayed on the walls. They show Black and Asian referees who have made it far, but never to the top.

Ashley Hickson-Lovence, in his mid-30s, also wanted to reach the top. At the age of 12, he realised that his talent was not enough for a career as a footballer. But he remained loyal to the sport. His role model: Uriah Rennie, who was the only Black referee in the Premier League until his retirement in 2008. Hickson-Lovence could identify with Rennie. Both had ancestors in the Caribbean, both experienced racism in their English hometowns of Sheffield and Norwich respectively, and both did not want to be reduced to the role of the victim.

Hickson-Lovence had his first game as a referee at the age of 16 in Hackney Marshes, a huge park with dozens of football pitches in north-east London. 'I was very nervous,' he says on the stage at Villa Park. 'I was afraid of making a mistake. Unfortunately, there was no support.' Some listeners in the room nod. Hickson-Lovence is referring to the 'observers', those who evaluate the performance of the referees and decide whether they will be promoted to a higher league. The

observers are often white, retired men. 'Some of them made comments about my hair,' says Hickson-Lovence. 'Others came up to me without saying hello and criticised me for my mistakes.' Some referees in the room have similar stories to tell. And one term keeps coming up: 'unconscious bias'.

Ashley Hickson-Lovence felt his self-confidence wane. After 11 years as a referee, he had his last game in 2019 because he no longer wanted to expose himself to the pressure. He works as an author now. In a novel, he has linked the biography of Rennie with fictional elements and his own experiences. The title: *Your Show*. He met Rennie several times for his research. Hickson-Lovence presents his book at festivals. He reads a passage at the Villa Park in Birmingham, too. The applause is long. Hickson-Lovence also wears black sports clothes. He is now an 'observer' at matches himself. He wants to motivate young referees and not discourage them.

And something is changing, slowly. In December 2023, Sam Allison became only the second Black referee in Premier League history, the first since Rennie. The BAME Referee Support Group wants to ensure that more follow soon.

As a guest, I sit in amazement in the audience at Villa Park. The discussions are inspiring, critical and nuanced. The referees who talk about their biographies in front of the screen could fill entire books. And one wonders why so few of them appear in the mainstream media. After several weeks of research, one insight prevails: in no other European country do minorities in football make such an effort to organise themselves as in the UK. It just seems that the majority of society is unaware of this.

'Cultural Barriers': Problems in Women's Football

This is also evident elsewhere. The summer of 2022 will go down in history for English football. At the European Women's Championship, English footballers storm to victory. Television stations report record viewing figures, and front

pages show female players. Political and cultural figures talk about emancipation. Events about women in football take place across the country.

This was also the case at the National Football Museum in Manchester. At the time, a special exhibition on the upper floor tells the stories of historically influential female footballers. A long, narrow banner catches the eye, with the words 'Lily Parr made space'. In the 1910s, Parr was one of the players who attracted crowds of more than 50,000. The FA banned organised women's football in 1921 to ensure the men's game had full attention. It was not until the 1970s that structures were supported again.

The conference at the museum in Manchester addresses the issue of years of discrimination against women. At the 2007 World Cup in China, six Black players were part of the England team; at the European Championship in 2022, there were three: Jessica Carter, Nikita Parris and Demi Stokes, and none of them played a defining role. This contrasts with men's football. At the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, 11 Black players were part of the England team. How can these differences be explained?

Fern Whelan thinks about this question very often. She has been working for the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) since the beginning of 2022 and wants to increase diversity in girls' and women's football. In preparation for her new job, she looked at her old team photos. Whether at school or in youth football, she was usually the only Black player in the picture. 'At the time, I thought it was normal and I didn't question it,' says Whelan, who played three internationals for England a decade ago. 'Today the situation is different, today we have a stronger voice.'

When Whelan established herself as a player at Liverpool and then Everton, the structures were not as professional as they are today. But the women's teams were quite diverse. When the Women's Super League was launched in 2011,

the women's game adopted some of the support models from the men's Premier League. Talent camps were established in suburbs or rural areas. Low-income families are less able to afford to send their children to a football centre. Clubs in the girls' game rarely offer a transport service.

Added to this are 'cultural barriers', as Eartha Pond puts it. The sports teacher had played professionally herself, for clubs including Chelsea, Everton and Tottenham. She is now involved in the community council in London's district of Queen's Park and advises the FA on the advancement of women. 'The clubs and associations should talk to the families carefully,' she says. 'It's not a given that parents from Black communities will let their children stay somewhere else for several weeks.'

The exhibition at the museum also honours Hope Powell, among others. The former player was frequently subjected to racism in the 1980s. Undeterred, Powell took over as England manager in 1998. She remained in the position for 15 years and inspired many girls to take up football. However, things haven't gone well since.

In 2017, national player Eniola Aluko went public with accusations against Mark Sampson. She claimed that Hope Powell's successor as manager had racially insulted her. This was followed by a heated debate in the media, football and the judiciary. Aluko, as a victim, did not feel supported by the FA and temporarily withdrew from social media due to the abuse she received. Long-standing international Anita Asante commented in *The Guardian*, 'We've been so used to an environment of silence where people daren't speak up. For Eni to break that mould will hopefully create a shift that will give others confidence to speak out if anything comes up like this again.'

But why should football be more open and tolerant than other areas of life? Why should football break down racist structures if politicians do not take the lead?

We could take the 'Windrush scandal' as an example. Between 1948 and 1970, about half a million people from the Caribbean immigrated to Britain. At that time, the labour shortage eased. And the government curbed migration from former colonies. For a long time, the Home Office failed to issue the necessary residence papers. Many immigrants did not want to undergo the process of naturalisation. They had built up livelihoods, raised children, paid their taxes. They shaped society – including football.

In May 2010, after 13 years of Labour rule, the Conservatives returned to power. Home Secretary Theresa May, who later became prime minister, fostered an increasingly hostile environment for immigrants. Companies, banks and health authorities would place more emphasis on identity checks. Many descendants of the Windrush generation who grew up in England but could not provide the necessary papers lost their homes or jobs. Many of them were deported. After a public outcry, the government apologised in 2018 and announced compensation in some cases. But in the polarising years following Brexit, many Britons felt the strategy was justified.

At the Grassroots Level, There Is a Lack of Willingness to Take Action

Ivan Liburd can tell us about the impact of these policies. The social worker and football coach lives in Leicester. He knows the pitches in the area better than almost anyone else. He could talk for hours about the racism at the grassroots level, about aggressive parents at youth matches or frightened referees. Instead, he makes suggestions. 'We need stronger sanctions,' he says. 'Racism in football should not be reported to the FA first, but to the police.'

It is easy to tell from Liburd's comments that his trust in the local FA is limited. And that may also have something to do with his personal history. His parents immigrated from

the Caribbean island of Saint Kitts in the 1960s. They took on several jobs to give their son a good education. Liburd has fond memories of his youth in the 1980s, of the growing anti-racism movement, but also of police violence against demonstrators in those suburbs that right-wing politicians referred to as 'ghettos'.

Ivan Liburd was a decent footballer, but he was more interested in being a socially conscious coach. Alongside his graphic design studies, he coached various teams and was involved in prevention. With a few colleagues, he founded the BAME Football Forum. BAME stands for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic. 'There are a lot of anti-discrimination campaigns in English football, but most of them focus on the top level,' says Liburd. 'At the grassroots level, where the careers begin, almost nothing was happening.'

Together with researchers from the University of Leicester, they launched a study with 222 respondents in the area, half of them white. At least three quarters of the respondents had experienced racism at least once in the context of local football. However, only six per cent reported incidents to the police. 'Many bystanders apparently lack the knowledge or willingness to act,' concludes Liburd. 'Others have no trust in the institutions because they have been ignored multiple times.'

Often, evidence is not documented by clubs and referees. And weeks, sometimes months, can pass before the cases are heard in the sports courts.

Of course, Ivan Liburd calls for longer bans for racism. He would like to see a variety of committees, detailed documentation, and better cooperation between associations and social institutions. But he also calls for better maintenance of football pitches. Why? 'The pitch would be available for longer in the winter,' he says. 'Young players could be active for longer and enjoy a sense of community. This is an important step for their social participation.'

The interviews, such as the one with Liburd, still resonate with me. I spent almost four weeks travelling around England for research. I looked for symbols of football's Black history as well. They exist, but they are not too obvious: in the Black Cultural Archives in the Brixton district of London, a magazine cover honours Viv Anderson, England's first Black international. In the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool, a picture shows Howard Gayle, the first Black player for Liverpool FC. And in West Bromwich a statue pays tribute to the 'Three Degrees', Brendon Batson, Laurie Cunningham and Cyrille Regis. It stands in an inhospitable shopping centre.

There are signs that English football is preparing a bigger stage for its Black players. In June 2023, for the 75th anniversary of the Windrush arrival, influential footballers from the past and present gathered for a celebration at Wembley. And in the summer of 2028, the UK and Ireland will jointly host the European Championships.

History has taught that British society is not becoming more tolerant in a linear fashion. Racist attitudes, which are widespread, keep breaking out. Sometimes in a brutal way: in the summer of 2024, there were far-right riots against refugees and immigrants in several cities. In response, many more people took to the streets and demonstrated in favour of diversity and against racism. This spiral of good and bad news will continue. But football could play a bigger role in ensuring that the good news prevails.