

“WE’RE NOT HOMOPHOBIC”[©]

A report by

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An investigation into football fans’ homophobia found on the internet medium over a 16 week period.

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SECTION 1

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We do not know because of the anonymity of the internet exactly who it is that is conducting the homophobia. Homophobic words are viewed as being 'soft' in forms of seriousness and abuse levels.

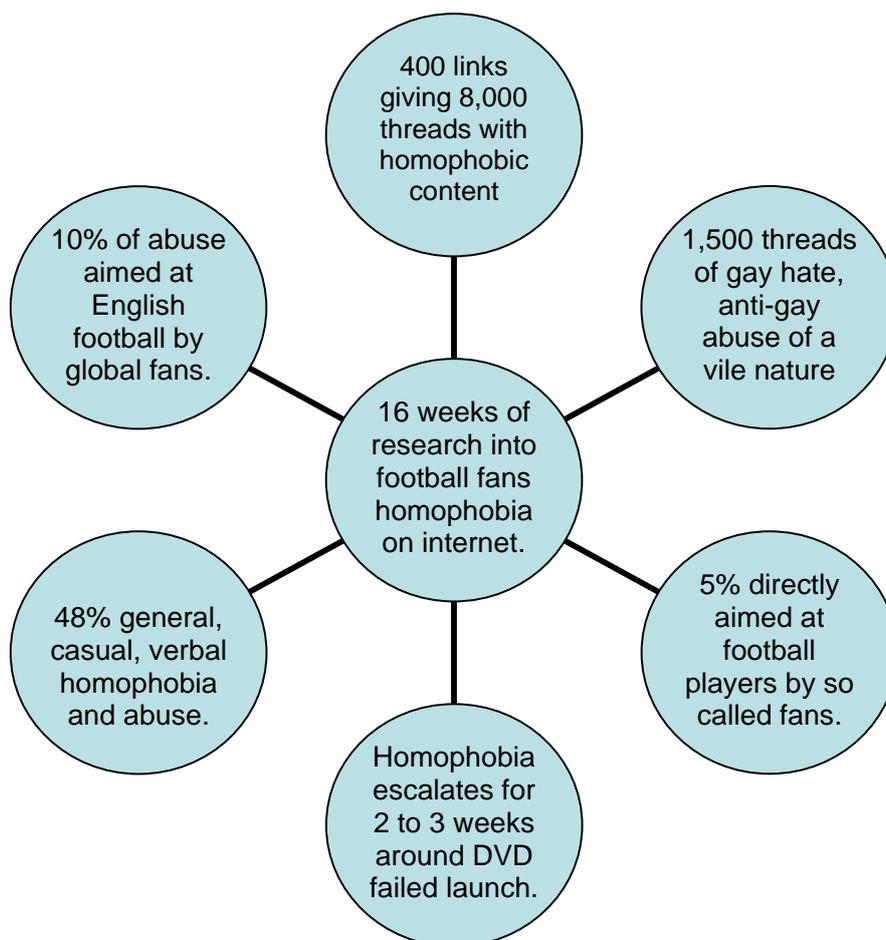
We can however see the content of what fans think about LGBT's and the roles they may have as part of our national game, some of which is general/casual (soft) homophobia while much of it is quite abusive, vile, and incitement to hatred.

This research was taken from football fans' message boards, blogs, websites, fans forums, over a 16 week time scale from February 3rd 2010 to May 26th 2010.

Of 400 links filtered to my computer, totalling 8,000 threads containing homophobic/ homophobia wording to strap lines and headings, no less than 1,500 of these contained gay hate or anti-gay abuse of a vile nature.

We can see that when LGBT issues are topical in the news that the amount of homophobia found on the internet escalates. In this research it was during the two weeks that the media highlighted the proposed anti-homophobia DVD created by the FA and Kick it Out.

This research is in reaction to certain academic research which has been produced in recent years by both professors and the like (including ex-players) who have surveyed only a handful of willing people from within the game (fans, players mangers etc) who felt there was no need to use evidence out there (i.e. on message boards and fans forums) but simply obtain a certain type of answer by specific wording of questions, and confidentially so.



SECTION 2

INTRODUCTION

Despite many legislative changes in the UK over the past 10-15 years, LGBT people (along with heterosexuals who are perceived to be LGBT) still encounter homophobic abuse or discrimination whether as players or supporters of football. Such abuse is not restricted to football grounds, but is also in evidence on web-based football fans' websites and blogs.

With the internet being so readily accessible to most people these days, there has been, over the past 3 or 4 years, (along with the ever increasing trend for fans to chant homophobic abuse whilst attending games) been a rise in anti-gay slurs and gay hate from the safety and anonymity of a computer keyboard. Some players, ex-players and managers are not exempt from this kind of action either.

Football is still perceived to be very much a masculine sport played by males, (despite recent figures in early 2010 stating that over 260,000 women play the game and 1.1 million girls), and stereotypical gay men do not fit this, with homophobia being endemic throughout both the professional and amateur structures.

This document offers a brief insight into the use of this medium as a vehicle for homophobia, and offers empirical examples found over a sixteen week period in the spring of 2010.

SECTION 3

METHODOLOGY

Over 8,000 threads and replies posted on some 400 internet mediums including official club websites, non-official club websites, through message boards, fans forums blogs etc were viewed over a 16 week time scale in 2010 by a researcher. These links were obtained from alerts that flagged up on a computer to filter through phrases of “homophobic football fans” and “homophobia in LGBT sport”.

The majority of the sites were UK based though others were international.

More than 1,500 of these postings contained language of the most vile nature with a homophobic (anti-gay) abuse and gay hate (expletives and suggestions of an excess ***** aimed at LGBT's) undercurrent culminating often in violent threats, and hate crime.

Some of the abuse was of what could be considered a more casual/general verbal form of homophobia/abuse, which often is considered to be nothing more than banter, or a bit of leg pulling.

Looking into the findings in a little more detail, we do not know for definite the age ranges of those who abuse through the internet because of the anonymity of it all, but with certain references from posters it seems to be as common a trend for the older football fan to be the ones who feel it necessary to be homophobic, much in the same way as things are at games we all attend as supporters. The average age of a football fans these days is much older than 20 years ago, many younger fans have had some education around LGBT issues and a number also have out LGBT friends and family who are given respect and acceptance. Sadly we can see how the 40-55 year old age group has grown up in a world where homophobia has gone unchallenged and it's frightening and worrying how quick the casual homophobia turns into the incitement to hatred with comments posted such as “HANG ALL FAGGOTS”.

SECTION 4

EXPLORATION OF THE FINDINGS

Over 400 links to online postings containing text which was believed to include homophobic content were examined, each of which had between 20 and 50 further links to them. From the approximately 8,000 threads which these links yielded, as many as 1,500 (19%) were considered to have homophobic (anti-gay or gay hate) content in them.

Some of the replies produced good debate, but then in turn anyone who was considered by others to be pro-gay saw themselves attacked with homophobic comments.

The incidence of homophobia rose significantly in the two-to-three week period around the cancellation of the launch of The Football Association and Kick It Out's anti-homophobia viral film (4th-18th February 2010) which was then in turn leaked onto the internet where thousands viewed it anyway.

About 5% of the 1,500 posts identified as containing homophobic abuse on the websites visited are aimed directly at football players themselves by apparent fans of the game.

After breaking things down more we find 10% of the total abuse is directed at the English leagues from North American website fans, and a similar amount is directed at English/European leagues and competition from the South American supporters of the game, who are under the impression that those who play the game from around this part of the world, how the game is played and the game of football itself is "gay". The term itself being seen as a negative. There are quite a number who refer to this perception, at first I thought it was just South Americans who were conscious of the fact that UK/ European laws now give more equality to LGBT's so in turn they see the countries as 'gay' and therefore football 'gay'. I looked at comments again and just believe gay is being used as a slur.

Around 48% of the comments can be termed as general or casual homophobia, (the two main ways of stating the more tame side of gay jibes or seen to be only jokey stuff) came in the form of what is often considered to be merely 'mickey taking' or 'banter' by most fans, and certainly not homophobic in origin. Again some of these same fans state they do not consider themselves to be

homophobic they are only having a laugh, but then also are concerned as to whether anyone LGBT should be allowed to coach.

On a local level at some UK professional clubs a number of football fans who have a reputation for, and are persistently being homophobic are not being dealt with, and in some cases ignored and therefore allowed to continue as such. These same fans then through the summer months take this attitude and actions towards an LGBT existence in sport with them as they watch cricket and rugby league. They post on certain websites, where they are then recognized by names or pictures on summer sports message boards, and they often are the same people who are known from football and they behave in the same way.

Many football fans who state they do not have any problems with anyone's sexual orientation are often confusing this terminology with sexual behaviour and sexual preference. An example of this type of ignorance can be found in the following comments after reference to sexual orientation, "I don't want 2 gays kissing on a football field", or, "I don't want any gay trying to cop off with me when I play", or "don't want to see any of the gays behind me in a tackle for instance and touching me up".

One of the first instances of homophobia found in the research was of the casual type when Arsenal fans posted comments on an Arsenal member's website about their own players in particular their goalkeeper Manuel Almunia and this comment arrived, "He's a faggot". Similarly casual in nature, a fan writes about rival BHA (Brighton) fans appearance on a Saturday morning football show, saying "How many poofs can you see on Soccer AM?"

Another football forum, uk.answers.yahoo.com had the following posts considered to be only 'gay jibes' and fair game: "I don't think teasing or taunting people who are gay counts as being homophobic. If people think being called gay is still an insult its shows how far behind the times they are."

As the weeks passed a video was posted on YouTube which had taken the original graphics from Kick It Out's film and had changed them to read "Kick Homos out of Football."

In March, Charlton fans (on going 2-0 down in a home game) persisted in homophobic chants aimed at both the opposing Brighton team and fans for two thirds of the match. This also continued after the game on public transport and had been widely reported.

This homophobia, experienced at the game itself, was also loud enough to be heard on local radio, and found on an internet forum which transcribed what was happening. Yet despite the homophobia being very public no attempt was made

by officials at the game to stop this, (according to both sets of fans who were unhappy with what was being chanted), and Charlton are supposed to have some of the best trained stewards and security as the FA used the club as their training area for the implementation of the new ground rules change and FA/GFSN Liaison Officers!

Some of the messages online showing homophobic content alluding to what had occurred at the game was of the following : “Fucking bummers; “I don’t know all these bummers in the away end, having a right racket”; “We forgot that you were queer”.

South coast Premier League club Portsmouth had over 20 pages of homophobic content on its website. [Note, Portsmouth is in administration and a number of fans from supporters groups took over the running of the shop, website and other things, and well basically running the club.] The site can be identified as ‘Fratton Faithful’. The website had dedicated threads to “Gay Week”, of which 5 of them encouraged you to post text, pictures, videos, etc of whatever you considered to be ‘gay’, and there were also a number of random posts which were removed as the content were found to contain homophobic abuse and gay hate. Unfortunately the moderators then reposted what had been stated, “THE ONLY GOOD GAY IS A DEAD GAY”, when they warned members about the ever increasing amount of homophobia on the ‘Fratton Faithfull’ site!!

Similarly, “North Stand Chat” message board, a Brighton and Hove Albion website, had a couple of dozen pages dedicated to discussion around gay footballers and football fans which followed patterns similar to those we have seen elsewhere where what was initially good debate degenerated into a voice for those wishing to attack the LGBT community. Many Brighton fans think their use of homophobic language is legitimized by the prevalence of homophobia directed towards them, due to the town’s sizeable LGBT population.

Some fans believe that the game is being socially engineered to an even more sanitized area as these fans believe that there is a government and PC brigade in football that only wants fans at games who sit quietly and clap politely like at a theatre perhaps, and that by banning songs aimed at LGBT’s means you can’t have a laugh and enjoy the game in a macho image and that it’s fine to make comments like those below.

- “He took his chances getting into a lift with those arsebandits.”
- “Homophobia is not a problem at football.”

- “Bloke in DVD looks like a good lad maybe we can get him to come to Palace with us.”
- “FFS leave our game alone, its only a bit of fun.”

Other comments continued in much the same vein and were left there for all to see and add further comment to and laugh at with no moderation. Below are a few examples.

- “I can remember the days when if there were no away fans to fight it was a regular thing to trash the nearest gay pub when they first started taking over Brighton, so why is the “does your boyfriend know you’re here” chant offensive to anyone?”
- “We have had managers in the past who have stated we don’t have poofers here.”
- “I don’t particularly like gays myself but I put up with ‘em.”
- “You appear to be suggesting that so called homophobia is a bad thing, Brighton is a town infested with puffs but everyone is accepting of this behavior.”
- “Why can’t we sing –we can see you holding hands? Fucking shirt lifters faggots.’
- “Should it not be does you’re boyfriend come in your ear?”

- “It must be great being gay and in the showers, just like being a straight bloke with access to a women’s changing area.”

Swindon Towns’ message board after discussion about an article by Pat Nevin had the following:

- “There must be more batty boys that play football that haven’t come out.”
- “There aren’t any gays in football, gays are rubbish at football.”
- “What’s the problem with homophobia it’s a bit of banter and no worse than calling a player fat or a wanker.”
- “Why do bummers feel the need to come out anyway?”
- “It’s not like Racism, a person’s skin color is normal and natural, homosexuality, is neither.”
- “Homosexuality is a disease or brain damage of some sort.”
- “All gays are fucking assholes.”
- “I’m not homophobic but I found out one of my team mates was gay and had showered with me I wouldn’t be pleased.”

Football fans also revealed in posts on their message boards, news articles highlighting what an ex-German manager had said- “there’s no place for gay footballers”. They laughed and joked about the content, and copied and pasted the comments below found on Vanguard an extremist news site.

- ”There’s no place anywhere for gays and lesbians.”
- “Can you imagine a bath of free flowing aids infected bodies, the only place they are fit for is in a camp for ‘the cure’ sort of like lepers”.
- “It’s likely there are fags in football, once footballers were real dudes and totally secure in their masculinity.”
- “Iran has the right approach to homosexuality.....” They then posted a picture of the two Iranian boys who were hanged a couple of years ago after being found to be homosexual.

At the end of a recent Manchester ‘derby’ game, two of United’s team celebrated a goal with a kiss. Within hours the internet was rife with homophobic hatred, not reserved for the two players in question by fans of the opposition team, but direct abuse towards anyone LGBT.

Team mates kissing after a goal is scored or a game won is hardly something new in the game, but as we have seen from earlier reports there is a growing trend that its perfectly acceptable within football to use ‘gay ‘and other homophobia as a negative to show weakness and something that is bad, not normal or unnatural. So this action, even from two self-proclaimed heterosexuals, mature and respected players, incensed some with internet access to ‘air’ their beliefs and bigotry.

After two short video clips were aired on the internet of the ‘kiss’ here is what followed.

CLIP 1. Comments that were made along with viewing the video 35%. Of which 40% were anti-gay or homophobic, and there were also a further 33% of comments made which made jokes about LGBT's.

CLIP 2. Comments that were made along with viewing the video 50%. Of which 45% were anti-gay or homophobic, and there were also a further 28% of comments made which made jokes about LGBT's.

Most of the comments posted were in English, after translating I found a good proportion of those comments to come from football fans globally as they were from were in Spanish or Portuguese [apparently coming from Mexican and Brazilian fans] and they aluded too the fact that both the English and European players did not appear masculine or play hard enough and were therefore considered to be 'GAY'. Dozens of comments stated how distressed fans were at the thought of their teams' players being GAY/FAGGOTS etc.

Here are a few of those remarks:

- "Homosexuality is the devils work. Kill all gays."
- "Fags- I would love to knock their fucking heads off. "
- "Gays, it's dirty, disgusting, sick"
- "Dam queers we have to kill all queers. "
- "Fucking scum of humanity stone them all to death."

The American sports broadcaster, ESPN, deleted many posts on its website not because of the homophobic content, but because a number of people complained about the picture of 'the KISS', or the video, stating how hurtful and disgusting the images of two men in this act was!

The 2009/10 season saw Rangers player Nacho Novo receive more than his usual share of the abuse from fans as he played his final few games north of the

border. Posting on his own website, which in turn was reposted on various other sites and fans forums, Novo himself believes there is a “complete apathy towards finding offenders, and this in turn only leads to a breed of confidence amongst this sort of person.”

The player’s reaction at a game when he finally snapped led to him being chastised, as fans were outraged at his reaction because they had children present. Yet they had been quite happy to have those children around whilst the homophobia and vile abuse was originally branded about towards Novo as he played.

Concerns were also expressed that after a number of homophobic taunts were aimed at him, such as, “Nacho Novo fucking Homo” and “Novo takes up the arse.” whenever he played at Parkhead and no action was ever seen to be taken by either Celtic FC, the Scottish premier League or any of football’s European/Global football governing bodies. It’s the intent as much as anything, but some fans and Novo himself don’t like it that the homophobic taunts were not investigated.

Novo posted on his own website and a number of fans initially agreed with what he was saying but then followed things up with what’s documented here:

- “The little poof has a point”
- “I agree with what the bent fucker says. Its time everyone got on with things so we can carry on singing Novo is a gay fucker.”
- “What’s homophobic about all this? It’s only a wind up. We sing all this and that’s it no one actually goes out and hurts anyone ‘cos they are gay do they?”
- “What bit of these chants dams homos anyway? If the whole ground is singing it they can’t be wrong surely.”
- “A 100% from Novo stating he’s not a fucking homo or a fag penis or a dago bum might help.”

Along with the fans forums etc there are also websites that have chants on them sent in by anyone who has recorded the audio or video at a game. Fans are encouraged to vote for the best ones, funniest ones, and this produces a league table. Inevitably, some of these videos are of a homophobic nature taken by fans amongst themselves. The website also allows you, at a cost, to be able to download your favourite homophobic chant e.g. Bradford City fans are asked to purchase for £1.50 "Does your boyfriend know you're here!"

There are also an ever increasing number of players, ex-players and managers teaming up as pundits etc. who are being homophobic. A Facebook posting of footage from a BBC website contained an interview by the BBC with Jason McAteer in which he was homophobic. This was subsequently removed by the BBC following a number of comments below the post suggested it was homophobia.

Towards the end of the research fans stated that the BBC Football League show which featured retired 'gay' basketball player John Amaechi was just the PC brigade looking to solve something that doesn't exist really! They were very much of the belief that what is chanted or said at matches by fans or players or coaches is not really homophobia, only banter, or a bit of fun. If you make an issue out of anything that happens during a game, you are taking away its macho male image that has always existed.

SECTION 5

QUOTES

At the same time as this research was carried out the BBC showed a TV documentary by Mark Chapman titled 'Sports Last Taboo.' Interviewed as part of this programme was Burnley FC captain Clarke Carlisle.

Mr. Chapman posed the following question, "If a player walks into the dressing room and the first thing he says is 'I AM GAY', how do you think the lads would react?" Carlisle answered, "It would be a shock. There would be an apprehension about it, It's understandable because it's an all male environment." Carlisle also questioned when speaking about heterosexual males being aroused by women in a shower area, "Would it be the same for a homosexual man because he would be in the environment with 20 athletic strapped lads and would it be the same for him?" "These are questions that would be asked and understandably so."

NOTE -(Does this allude to the fact that it is commonly thought, that in a group of heterosexual men in a shower area that they could never be aroused by other heterosexual men?)

Although originally aired and reported on CNN news channel on June 2008, the following content was taken from a clip of film circulated on a number of occasions during the time of the research, and came from an interview of ex-Chelsea and England star Graeme Le Saux with Don Riddel.

Le Saux: "I found myself isolated and ostracized from certain people, it was difficult for me to deal with."

"The dressing room culture at the time was and indeed today still is difficult to deal with."

"Before I knew it, we played a game at West Ham, the terraces started singing something particularly defamatory about me and I remember being you know really shocked that it had got to that level so quickly, I could see the potentiality of this getting out of control, and it did. The 'joke' had very quickly got out of hand."

SECTION 6

CONCLUSIONS

General, casual, verbal homophobia is possibly the most common form of homophobia, yet a number of people LGBT's or otherwise are reluctant or unsure of how to deal with it, report it, gather evidence etc to challenge this expression of hate towards a minority. Only twice throughout the research were postings commented on and highlighted in any way by an out LGBT person. A further two more comments were from fans who were friends of some one LGBT who disliked the comments but then seemed not to challenge them.

Something like the internet while very basic and simple is still a very hostile area for LGBT's and those perceived to be LGBT to be abused on. The limitations of this research show that both race and gender of the perpetrators of the abuse is generally unknown.

Casual homophobia feeds peer group pressure which can build up to verbal and physical abuse and harassment towards LGBT's and gives the impression that this behaviour is acceptable. Football needs then to try to nip things in the bud, through fans groups, fans forums, message boards and websites.

Many fans who attend games are of the understanding that as they have not experienced or witnessed any homophobia themselves it's not really a serious issue. Those who do hear comments or chants think it is only banter.

SECTION 7

RECOMMENDATIONS

Football clubs, authorities, etc have to change their attitudes towards LGBT's and be more inclusive. The LGBT community also has to take more responsibility towards communications, campaigning, and being supportive of others.

1. Everyone needs reminding that discrimination is illegal. Homophobia, homophobic abuse, and stereotyping, damages both LGBT's and Heterosexuals alike.
2. Football authorities, governments and police need to work together to try and find better ways of handling homophobic abuse in cyber space, as these areas of life also need to be inclusive and safe environments for LGBT's. This would hopefully have a knock-on effect at a match day experience, and perhaps perpetrators of both could be sanctioned.
3. As a community LGBT's seek positive affirmation of their lives. A better portrayal of LGBT's in football to the public will give a better understanding between homosexuals and heterosexuals. Once again football could be a big leader in this area.
4. A lack of reports [data], experiences [evidence], and knowledge around an LGBT community in football mean it is easy for the FA to ignore homophobia in the many forms it constitutes, and the issues around it can therefore remain hidden.
5. Perhaps an anonymous survey sent out to an LGBT community as to whether they feel safe to attend a match would assist things? There are a number of education issues to deal with, which can come partly from an

LGBT community to friends by stating that some of what is said is hurtful and wrong.

6. Much of the education can come in the form of an institutional education given by, schools, universities, the FA, Premier League, Football League, PFA, LMA, Refs Association, UEFA, FIFA, and all of the associated campaigning organisations aligned to these authorities. Likewise, clubs from grass roots to professional level can address an education programme to educate fans, players, managers/coaches, administrators and club officials.
7. Better, and or, mandatory monitoring of the homophobia and anti-gay abuse by clubs under the direction of the FA could help to ease some of the issues faced.

SECTION 8

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