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**Offsides:
Soccer Club Reactions
And
Fan Racism**

by Joshua Small

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Faculty Advisor: Leora Auslander
Preceptor: Yubing Sheng

Introduction

On a cold day in November of 2019, excitement was in the air as two teams in Italy's premier soccer league squared off for a chance to improve their seasons in Series A. Brescia and Verona might not be Italy's most premier teams, but the crowds have always passionately supported their clubs.¹ On this day, Brescia striker, Mario Balotelli was racially abused by the Verona crowd, as they made monkey chants toward him on the pitch. Balotelli, a Black Italian of Jewish descent, has unfortunately grown accustomed to hearing these chants and even has had banana peels thrown on the field in a racist act to degrade his humanity.

In response to this incident, Balotelli angrily kicked the soccer ball into the crowd. After the match, the Verona manager, Ivan Juric, was asked about the racism committed by his Verona fans and gave what should have been a surprising response. He said, "First of all, I want to say that in my opinion the lowest point a human being can reach is when you are a racist. But I think that today absolutely nothing happened. Nothing. I spoke to the fourth official as well and he confirmed there was no racism at all."² Reactions to racism by soccer coaches and leaders, such as from Juric, emphasize the ability for soccer clubs to reinforce future racism by their fans.

The study of racism has become increasingly popular in the past few years due to the increasing number of racist incidents throughout the world and the rise of populism. More specifically, the role of racism in different types of sports has received increased scholarship, as athletes and sports teams have attempted to use their platforms for the greater good by focusing on their relationship with fans and international organizations have become more involved. Even with this increased dedicated scholarship, soccer racism has continued and strengthened to

¹ Matias Grez, Aleks Klosok, and Darren Lewis, "Little Is Being Done': One Year on from Bulgaria, Football's Fight against Racism and Discrimination Is Only Just Beginning," CNN (2021 Cable News Network., November 12, 2020), <https://www.cnn.com/2020/10/14/football/racism-in-football-one-year-on-england-bulgaria-spt-intl/index.html>.

² *Mario Balotelli Convinced to Stay on Pitch after Racist Abuse at Verona*, Youtube (2021 Guardian News & Media Limited, 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mvdS15iIddU>.

therefore represent a gap in the scholarship on its specific mechanisms for how it functions between teams and fans to find solutions to this growing problem.

Soccer has represented a particularly interesting field of study due to its international popularity and diverse playing populations. As scholars, such as Peter Hogarth, have attempted to identify the relationship between sports and racism, they frequently turn to the media for shaping racist perspectives by emphasizing white dominance and racial physical characteristics. There are then others, such as Steven Bradbury, that blame institutional racism for targeting minorities in sports and the overall lack of diversity in coaching that have contributed to racist fan actions. Although there is no denying that these explanations for the persistence of racism in soccer have merit, they fall short of examining the full ability for soccer clubs to influence actions by their fans because of their broad approaches. In addition, the continued racism in soccer, even with scrutiny from scholars to solve the problem, leads to the need for a new analysis of soccer racism. This raises the question: How do European soccer clubs impact racist actions taken by their fans? My central argument is that reactions to racist events by soccer club teams through the denial and downplaying of a racism problem impact fans to continue racist practices.

Racism in soccer, such as the events that occurred in Italy, have been a part of the game for well over half a century. With the increasing popularity of extreme fandom of hooliganism in the 1960s and 1970s, racism has become a significant aspect of the soccer experience for not only fans and players, but coaches as well.³ Although there have been a variety of attempts to combat racism in soccer through individual team programs, organized nonprofits, government policies, and more, soccer players continue to experience racism in a variety of ways. While there have been some successes in combating racism in soccer, racism continues to be a problem and has even taken advantage of more modern technologies in social media. As conflict has

³ Eric Dunning, Patrick Murphy, and John Williams, *The Roots of Football Hooliganism: An Historical and Sociological Study*, (London; New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988), 17.

arguably been a vital part of soccer through its fierce competition since its inception, it has become easier for racism to appear simply as an aspect of the culture within the game. Today, soccer is the most popular sport in the world, with about 265 million participants playing in a variety of levels and venues, further emphasizing a need to solve racism in the sport.⁴ The number of racist occurrences in soccer settings has slowly been increasing each year since the start of the 21st century, with the English nonprofit, Kick it Out, reporting a 43% increase in 2018 alone.⁵ While there are a variety of reasons for these increases, the importance of these events goes beyond simply the athletic setting, as they have the potential to influence future events at soccer matches.

This study will then proceed in the following steps to answer the research question of the role of reactions by soccer club teams in impacting racism by fans. After discussing the relevance of this topic and giving the necessary literature background to understand researchers that have grappled with answering this question, this paper will switch to describing its argument and research design. With the background successfully outlined, this paper will dive into its main analysis of West Ham United, before finally concluding with final thoughts and future research to be conducted.

Relevance

This study will contribute to existing scholarship and lead to more equitable societies in multiple ways. First, as soccer is a sport played by hundreds of millions of individuals all over the world and in theory is supposed to be an inclusive game for all, it represents an environment where race should play little role. In reality, race impacts not only the experiences of players and soccer leaders, but fans as well. As soccer encompasses such a diverse range of individuals through its many opportunities of involvement, it is not surprising that large international

⁴ Gabriela Kruschewsky, "Wake Up, America: Here's Why Soccer Is The World's Best Sport," *Huff Post*, May 14, 2014, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/soccer-worlds-best-sport_n_5248061.

⁵ Sam Blum, "Why Racism Is on the Rise in Soccer Again," *GQ* (2021 Condé Nast, January 29, 2019), <https://www.gq.com/story/soccer-racism-on-the-rise>.

organizations, such as the United Nations and European Union, have taken an interest in using the sport to promote equality and end racism.⁶ As these institutions recognize the importance of working with soccer, emphasized by significant amounts of resources dedicated to using soccer for the greater good, it is even more pressing to understand how racism functions in soccer.

Second, although recent scholarship has dedicated more time to studying racism in soccer and has attempted to offer solutions, racism continues to be a problem in not only soccer, but most sports as well. As this existing scholarship has been unable to solve the problem of racism in the sport, a new type of research is needed to think about soccer racism in innovative ways in an attempt to finally end this problem. The study of soccer has many immediate implications, as policies could influence hundreds of millions of individuals around the world and create more tolerant societies. More specifically, this paper aims to understand how reactions to racist events by soccer clubs impact future fan expression.

This project will reveal important findings on the ability for soccer teams to represent institutions that impact not only soccer fans, but individuals that take less of an interest in soccer as well. While most soccer racism of course happens on the soccer pitch, whether between players or by fans, soccer racism can also occur outside the soccer domain on city streets, subway cars, or in another public place. In these cases, soccer racism does not only impact fans, but casual observers as well.

People sometimes question the relevance of sports as an academic field of study. The impact of sports goes far beyond performance on the field by the players and teams, as sports are

⁶ Andrea Sadecky, "FIFA and the United Nations Educating the Most Underprivileged Through Sport," United Nations (United Nations), accessed July 26, 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/fifa-and-united-nations-educating-most-underprivileged-through-sport>; Wilfried Lemke, "The Role of Sport in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals," United Nations (United Nations), accessed July 26, 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/role-sport-achieving-sustainable-development-goals>; Nathalie Vandystadt and Joseph Waldstein , "European Commission and UEFA Consolidate Cooperation," European Commission (European Commission , February 21, 2018).

now on the agenda of politicians, international organizations, and nonprofits. As sports have generated revenue and are covered by mainstream media outlets, they play a role in not only community identities, but in overall societal experiences as well. Therefore, individuals that ignore sports and deny their relevance in any form are turning their backs on a valuable field of study that has great implications.

Literature Review

The existing scholarship has proposed a variety of answers to how different elements of soccer impact fan racism. First, the study of hooliganism reveals the makeup of violent fan groups that at times commit racist acts at soccer matches.⁷ Hooliganism can be defined as an extreme form of fandom that drives fans to commit violent actions and traces its roots to 1960s English soccer.⁸ These studies have recently been dedicated to contemporary manifestations of racism at soccer matches, where to combat the problem of racism, scholars hope to connect the methods deployed by politicians, team leaders, and fans to promote inclusion to emphasize the most effective combination of policies to attack racism.⁹ These studies of hooliganism fall short of understanding the mechanisms that influence fan racist behavior because as hooliganism is a broader phenomenon, which includes racism and fan violence, greater attention is on political institutions and therefore represents a broader approach to understanding the importance of club teams.

Second, there exists extensive work on the implications of racism denial by soccer clubs, such as Les Back, Tim Crabbe, and John Solomos' scholarship. They have investigated the ability for soccer institutions, such as club teams, to deny the problem of racism in soccer and therefore allow it to continue.¹⁰ While they do not specifically mention this impact on soccer

⁷ Dunning, Murphy, and Williams, *The Roots of Football Hooliganism*, 182.

⁸ Dunning, Murphy, and Williams, *The Roots of Football Hooliganism*, 17.

⁹ Les Back, Tim Crabbe, and John Solomos, *The Changing Face of Football: Racism, Identity, and Multiculture in the English Game*, (Oxford, UK; New York, NY: Berg, 2001), 214 and 218.

¹⁰ Back, Crabbe, and Solomos, *The Changing Face of Football: Racism, Identity, and Multiculture in the English Game*, 183.

fans, they imply that the reluctance for soccer institutions to identify racism as a problem has allowed racism to continue among fans.¹¹ Although this relationship is at the heart of their argument, it falls short in multiple ways. First, their findings focus more specifically on denial of racism by soccer teams. By focusing more specifically on the reaction of denial by soccer teams, they do not fully understand how soccer club teams impact future fan actions at matches. Second, as they focus more on institutions through denial and less on fans, Back, Crabbe, and Solomos do not investigate the mechanisms that allow soccer club teams to impact fan reactions.¹² For this reason, this paper is required to investigate the relationship more fully between soccer club reactions and fan racism.

Third, the connection between sports teams and racism has involved the use of media in creating heavily stereotyped views of Black athletes. For example, Boulou Ebanda de B'be'ri and Peter Hogarth's "White America's Construction of Black Bodies," analyzes the role of the media in constructing Black sports stereotypes by examining a 2004 brawl that erupted during a National Basketball Association (NBA) game. They find that in sports like the NBA, the media portrays African Americans as, "dueling myths of African American male representation - criminal and hero," and therefore enforces white power by limiting Black expression.¹³ While de B'be'ri and Hogarth are successful in addressing the role of the media in constructing Black representation, they fall short of realizing that media opinions are heavily influenced by the team officials they cover. It may be true that the media has certain agency to construct racist stereotypes, more often though the behavior of authority in sports teams provides or restricts content for media reports. Studying media's role then only neglects the more fundamental source of influence on sports racism.

¹¹ Back, Crabbe, and Solomos, *The Changing Face of Football: Racism, Identity, and Multiculture in the English Game*, 164-165.

¹² Back, Crabbe, and Solomos, *The Changing Face of Football: Racism, Identity, and Multiculture in the English Game*, 166.

¹³ Boulou Ebanda de B'be'ri and Peter Hogarth, "White America's Construction of Black Bodies: The Case of Ron Artest as a Model of Covert Racial Ideology in the NBA's Discourse," *Journal of international and intercultural communication* 2, no. 2 (2009): 105.

Fourth, more specific literature has examined the role of soccer fans in spreading racist sentiment in Europe. Researcher, Mark Doidge's, "'If you jump up and down Balotelli dies': Racism and player abuse in Italian football," examines the ability for soccer to reaffirm racism by reaffirming community identities. As Mario Balotelli is a Black Italian of African descent, he is seen as a threat to white Italian citizenship due to his race. In response to this threat, white Italian fans from rival clubs take it upon themselves to racially abuse Balotelli, as Doidge writes, "In order to intimidate him, certain fans desecrate Balotelli's masculinity and ethnicity, defile him as a symbol, and attempt to undermine."¹⁴ Doidge therefore finds that European soccer impacts fan racism because of the ability for soccer to emphasize white identities with increasing migration in Europe. Racism therefore is a manifestation of the threats from an increasingly diverse Europe.¹⁵ While this answer has merit, it does not fully understand the connection between soccer teams and racism by fans because it cannot explain racism in soccer that does not target individuals, such as in many of the West Ham events in this study. In addition, as Doidge's study focuses on the connection between race and national citizenship, it cannot explain racism committed by fans towards non-European players, which is common in European soccer as well.

Fifth, literature has addressed soccer's continued connection to racism through institutional means. It focuses on the ability of soccer institutions to keep minority leaders outside of their ranks and therefore reinforce racist thought that can be passed off to fans. Scholars, such as Steven Bradbury, a Lecturer on Sport, Equality, and Diversity, find that although in interviews soccer officials blamed the lack of diversity in soccer leadership on broader social trends, soccer institutions work to keep minorities out of leadership positions to maintain white power and dominance.¹⁶ While this answer could explain reactions by soccer club

¹⁴ Mark Doidge, "'If You Jump up and down, Balotelli Dies': Racism and Player Abuse in Italian Football," *International review for the sociology of sport* 50, no. 3 (2015): 261.

¹⁵ Doidge, "'If You Jump up and down, Balotelli Dies': Racism and Player Abuse in Italian Football," 259.

¹⁶ Steven Bradbury, "Institutional Racism, Whiteness and the Under-Representation of Minorities in Leadership Positions in Football in Europe," *Soccer and society* 14, no. 3 (2013): 307.

teams that reinforce racism by denying racism to maintain white dominance through limiting minority leaders, this falls short of identifying how soccer club teams directly impact racist behavior by fans. In addition, there is a large difference between institutional racism behind closed doors and the more public racism by club teams during their reactions. This study is therefore required to identify how reactions to racist events by soccer club teams impact fan behavior.

Argument

This paper will fill the gap in the literature to address the ability for reactions to racist events by soccer teams to impact fan expression. I will thus argue that soccer club teams have the ability to influence fan actions in racism through reactions by soccer club teams to racist events in soccer settings. More specifically, the soccer club reactions of denial and the downplaying of racist events will lead to fans to act in similar racist manners in the future, while stronger commitments to recognizing the problem of racism in racist events will lead to fan behavior without racism in the future.

Specifically, my theoretical framework draws on two seminal works on racism and fan support of teams. First, my argument emphasizes that denial of racist behaviors by soccer club teams send permissive signals to the fans, which facilitates the continuation of racist behavior among fans. Philomena Essed's, *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory*, examines the racist experiences of Black women in the Netherlands and the United States.¹⁷ Through her research and interviews, she argues that although whites may recognize clear examples of racism and some may even challenge racism, the societal emphasis on racism denial allows racism to continue and undermine potential solutions.¹⁸ These same ideas can be applied

¹⁷ Essed Philomena, *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory*, (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1991, 283.

¹⁸ Philomena. *Understanding Everyday Racism*, 5-6, 175, and 296.

to the soccer club teams when they deny or reduce the threat of racism, as they therefore reinforce racist behavior in the soccer setting that can be passed onto fans.

Second, my argument demonstrates the ability for fans to continue racist behavior as a method of supporting their teams when given the opportunity. Daniel Wann, Jamie Hunter, Jacob Ryan, and Leigh Ann Wright's psychology paper, "Team Identification and Willingness to Consider Illegally Assisting Teams," builds on sports identity scholarship to identify a willingness of sports fans that identify highly with their teams to commit illegal acts in support of teams, especially when given the opportunity to perform those acts anonymously.¹⁹ They find that sports fans are willing to commit illegal acts in support of teams because of the need to demonstrate aid for the team and therefore reinforce their own identities.²⁰ For European soccer, this study can be applied to explain the ability for soccer club team reactions to influence fan racism because of the need for fans to support their teams at all costs and empower their own identities. This could of course include fan racial abuse to support team racism. As this psychology study finds fans are more likely to support their teams through illegal actions, such as racial abuse, when given the opportunity of anonymity, this holds even more truth in European soccer because of the various more hidden settings racial abuse can be found. It is therefore rather telling that the racist events in this study are all settings where fans can have increased anonymity, whether that be in a soccer stadium, a train car, or somewhere else.

Research Design

This project will represent a club team case study within England of multiple racist events. This case will be selected for three main reasons. First, England's top league, the Premier League, which is the center of this study, is representative of the top soccer leagues in France,

¹⁹ Daniel L Wann, Jamie L Hunter, Jacob A Ryan, and Leigh Ann Wright, "THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEAM IDENTIFICATION AND WILLINGNESS OF SPORT FANS TO CONSIDER ILLEGALLY ASSISTING THEIR TEAM," *Social behavior and personality* 29, no. 6 (2001): 534.

²⁰ Wann, Hunter, Ryan, and Wright, "THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEAM IDENTIFICATION AND WILLINGNESS OF SPORT FANS TO CONSIDER ILLEGALLY ASSISTING THEIR TEAM," 535.

Italy, Spain, and Germany for level of play. By understanding how soccer club teams interact with fan behavior through their reactions in England, the findings of this study can be applied more broadly to other European countries. Second, as England has one of the most competitive soccer leagues in the world, it has a greater diversity of players. This greater player diversity then represents greater potential for racist incidents. This is compared to lower soccer leagues in countries like Denmark and Greece, where players have less diverse backgrounds. This greater potential of racist events then makes reactions by soccer institutions more likely and easier to study. Third, as English soccer is covered by a variety of news outlets, there will be a great range of sources available to identify reactions to racism.

These cases will include soccer racism events from 2012 to present. 2012 will represent the first year of study due to increased soccer racism statistics available by the nonprofits, FARE Network and Kick it Out, to better identify racist events and reactions.²¹ This study will encompass events to the present to incorporate the most recent racist events and their reactions when possible.

In the years defined above, a team will be selected from England's Premier League that has a similar racial composition to the average team in the league. In order to fit this description, the team will have a racial composition consisting of close to 30% minority players, as found in a recent Fare Network report on professional English soccer demographics.²² It is important to control for player race in this case study to represent club team reactions that speak for a diverse team population.

Once a team has been selected, all of the team's in-person racist events will then be identified through FARE Network and Kick it Out. An important qualification here is the sole

²¹ "Incident Lists," FARE Network (FARE Network), accessed July 30, 2021, <https://www.farenet.org/get-involved/report-discrimination/incidents-lists/>; Kick it Out (The FA), accessed July 30, 2021, <https://www.kickitout.org/>.

²² "Report Finds Shockingly Low Levels of Ethnic Minorities in Coaching," FARE Network (FARE Network, November 14, 2014), <https://www.farenet.org/news/report-finds-shockingly-low-levels-minorities-coaching/>.

focus on in-person racist events. While soccer racism occurs rather frequently on the internet, in-person racist events are more public and therefore have greater impact. Reactions to the racist events will then be identified through local newspapers to understand how club managers, players, and team statements perceive the racist event in question. A reaction that denies or downplays racism will be measured as a reaction that denies the presence of racism or reduces its severity in events. On the other hand, reactions by these same teams that recognize the problem of racism will be measured when they clearly denounce the racism as a danger to the sport and society.

The team that therefore meets these criteria is West Ham United in London. West Ham had four events of racism during the time period of study, which occurred in 2012 against Tottenham, 2015 against Tottenham, 2017 against Tottenham and 2019 against Manchester United.

Concepts

This article will draw on the FARE Network's definition of racism to study its selected events. Fare Network defines racism through the UN's International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The UN then defines racism as, "any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life."²³ This definition will be further expanded to include anti-Semitism as well because of the history of marginalization towards the Jewish community as an ethnic group, which fits into the broader definition of

²³"Global Guide to Discriminatory Practices in Football," FARE Network (FARE, June 2018), https://farenet.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Global-guide-to-discriminatory-practices-in-football_2018_v5.pdf, 7; "International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination," United Nations Human Rights Office of High Commissioner (OHCHR 1996-2021), accessed July 21, 2021, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cerd.aspx>.

racism with “ethnic origin.” The FARE Network defines anti-Semitism through the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. The Alliance then defines anti-Semitism as, “a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”²⁴

For the case study of this paper, the original racist events will take the form of racism experienced by players and teams from opposing fans. In all the events, the racism will take the form of oral abuse. By attacking players and teams clearly based on race and ethnicity, these cases will meet the definitions by the FARE Network and therefore exemplify racism in English soccer. The reactions to these racist events that meet FARE Network’s definitions will then be used to emphasize the ability for soccer club teams to impact racism by their fans.

Although this paper will use FARE Network and Kick it Out to identify racist events involving West Ham to understand West Ham’s reactions, it is important to further examine where these events take place. The most common place for in-person racism in soccer takes place inside the soccer stadium, but as the fan match day experience goes beyond simply watching the match, the soccer setting must be expanded. For this reason, soccer racism can also include events on trains going to matches, in bars to watch the match, or in another public setting. In addition, soccer racism events could include events outside of match days, such as autograph signings for fans and community events. Any time club team players and personnel are in close proximity to fans, there is an opportunity for racism to unfortunately take place.

A more specific definition for this study will involve how the phrase “West Ham” is used. West Ham will represent an abbreviated name for the West Ham United Football club in England’s Premier League. Reactions from West Ham will then be interpreted as the

²⁴ “Working Definition of Antisemitism,” International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (Working Definition of Antisemitism), accessed May 21, 2021, <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antisemitism>; “Global Guide to Discriminatory Practices in Football,” 7.

representation of opinions held by players, coaches, and leaders of the West Ham team. As many times these reactions will be official statements from the team, and not all individuals state their opinions on racist events, this paper will operate under the assumption that these official statements constitute all opinions held by those affiliated with the team.

A Brief History of Racism in English Soccer

Racism in English soccer can trace its roots back to the soccer violence of the 1960s and 1970s when the first contemporary hooligan fan groups began to form.²⁵ It was then during the 1970s and 1980s that minority players, mostly from Africa and South America, began to have the opportunity to showcase their skills in the top divisions of English soccer.²⁶ Although English soccer traces its roots to the upper-classes of society, in the 20th century, the game shifted to become more representative of the working class. With a range of social classes and towns forming their own teams in the late 19th century all over England, supporters had ample time to build passionate forms of fan expression for their clubs and therefore potentially use racist behavior.²⁷

Beginning in the 1960s, English working-class supporters began to associate more greatly together with an important aim of expressing their deep appreciation for their teams.²⁸ As these clubs had grown to represent the local community as well, fans were showing their support for their local identities. As these fan groups were composed of individually passionate fans, it should come as no surprise that the fan groups, which would come to be known as hooligans, were even more rambunctious together. Racism therefore began to play a more prominent role in European soccer through the use of hooligans to demonstrate their support for their local soccer club. While there is no doubt that these fans were in fact racist, by spewing racist rhetoric

²⁵ Dunning, Murphy, and Williams, *The Roots of Football Hooliganism*, 174.

²⁶ Back, Crabbe, and Solomos, *The Changing Face of Football: Racism, Identity, and Multiculture in the English Game*, 202; Daniel Burdsey, *Race, Ethnicity, and Football: Persisting Debates and Emergent Issues*, 21.

²⁷ Dunning, Murphy, and Williams, *The Roots of Football Hooliganism*, 32.

²⁸ Dunning, Murphy, and Williams, *The Roots of Football Hooliganism*, 162 and 164-166.

through chants and posters, racism in hooliganism was part of a larger trend of soccer violence and disorderly conduct.²⁹

The Football Association (FA) of England, the governing body of soccer for all levels, and the English government recognized the growing threat of racism through hooliganism and thus implemented legislation to combat racism in soccer. Therefore, legislation such as the Football Offenses Act of 1991 and Football Disorder Act of 2000, were created to provide individual teams and authorities the power to punish fans that perform acts of racism.³⁰

Although hooliganism became more addressed in the 1990s, the threat of racism in the sport continued. Today, more is known on the specific statistics of racism in English soccer because of greater attention from nonprofits, most notably Kick it Out. Kick it Out was born in 1997 with the clear objective to, “cover all aspects of discrimination, inequality and exclusion.”³¹ Through this organization, although some soccer officials continued to deny the problem of racism in soccer, Kick it Out began to publish annual statistics on racist incidents in the soccer setting. Today, as populism has continued to play a significant role in mainstream society, Kick it Out has reported 581 incidents of discrimination in all levels of English soccer, with 65% of those incidents taking the form of racism in the most recent season.³² These numbers further emphasize the growing threat of racism in English soccer and the ineffectiveness of current solutions.

Today, racism in soccer takes a variety of forms. Although racism in soccer has increasingly moved into the digital space, where fans have taken to racially abusing players on social media, such as in England recently after losing the European Championship, in-person

²⁹ Back, Crabbe, and Solomos, *The Changing Face of Football: Racism, Identity, and Multiculture in the English Game*, 202; Daniel Burdsey, *Race, Ethnicity, and Football: Persisting Debates and Emergent Issues*, (New York: Routledge, 2011), 10.

³⁰ Back, Crabbe, and Solomos, *The Changing Face of Football: Racism, Identity, and Multiculture in the English Game*, 202; Burdsey, *Race, Ethnicity, and Football: Persisting Debates and Emergent Issues*, 224.

³¹ “ABOUT US,” Kick It Out (The FA), accessed May 4, 2021, <https://www.kickitout.org/about-us>.

³² “Annual Report 18/19,” Kick It Out (The FA), accessed June 16, 2021, <https://www.kickitout.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=29d7d2f3-9889-4cfb-9d91-cd299b10bbcc>.

racial abuse still takes the form of verbal abuse, banners, and the throwing of objects in a variety of soccer settings.³³ Although verbal abuse and banners are more common and take the form of racist sounds, slurs, and depictions, the throwing of objects can be further explained. In order to spread racial abuse, fans have taken to the throwing of bananas at Black players to degrade them to animals.³⁴ This is not only completely racist, but represents a danger to players on the field. While these types of in-person soccer racism might not represent the majority opinions of soccer fans, their public occurrences make them powerful and dangerous events.

West Ham United

West Ham United Football Club was founded in 1895 in East London as Thames Ironworks from a shipbuilding firm on the River Thames.³⁵ Although the team struggled in its first few years, it achieved great success in the 1960s and 1970s, as they won two FA cups and contributed key players to England's FIFA World Cup teams.³⁶ As West Ham traces its roots back to the working class industry of ship-building, its fans attempt to embody a similar type of toughness, which has led to violence and racism at matches, especially from its fan group, Inter City Firm (ICF). As the ICF grew its members, it hid typical hooligan identifiers, such as clothing, in order to more effectively attack rival fans and assert its dominance.³⁷ West Ham fan groups, such as the ICF, have grown to receive an intense reputation for their support of West Ham that has led to a history of violence.³⁸

³³ "Global Guide to Discriminatory Practices in Football."

³⁴ Lauren Frayer, "Spain Fines Team Of Racist, Banana-Throwing Fan, But Is It Enough," NPR (2021 npr, 2014), <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/05/09/310990212/spain-fines-team-of-racist-banana-throwing-fan-but-is-it-enough>.

³⁵ Brian Belton, *Founded on IRON: Thames Ironworks and the Origins of West Ham United*, (Stroud: Tempus, 2003), 9 and 11-12.

³⁶ "Club History," West Ham United (West Ham United Football Club, November 12, 2016), <https://www.whufc.com/club/history/club-history>.

³⁷ Dunning, Murphy, and Williams, *The Roots of Football Hooliganism* 179-180.

³⁸ Cass Pennant, *Congratulations You Have Just Met the ICF*, (London, England: John Black Publishing, 2002), 20-21.

2012

In November of 2012, during a 3-1 Tottenham victory over West Ham at Tottenham's home park of White Hart Lane, some visiting West Ham fans were heard making multiple anti-Semitic chants and noises. Towards the end of the match, when it became clear Tottenham would be victorious, West Ham fans began chanting, "Adolf Hitler, he's coming for you."³⁹

According to *The Telegraph*, of the 2000 to 3000 West Ham fans in the South Stand, hundreds were seen and heard chanting this anti-Semitic phrase.⁴⁰ These chants built upon earlier reports of West Ham fans hissing at Tottenham players and fans to emulate the sound of gas chambers during the Holocaust.⁴¹ In addition, there were allegations of fans committing the Nazi salute to complement their Hitler chants and hissing sounds.⁴² Although play was not stopped by officials, as is sometimes common when the crowd is clearly involved in racism, the FA and police were looking into all these matters further in an attempt to find and prosecute the criminals involved in the racist acts.⁴³

In response to the anti-Semitism committed by its own fans, West Ham released an official statement on its website saying:

West Ham United will take the strongest possible action against any of their supporters, including enforcing life bans from the club, that are found guilty of behaviour which is categorically not condoned by West Ham United. During the 46 games in the Championship last season, West Ham United

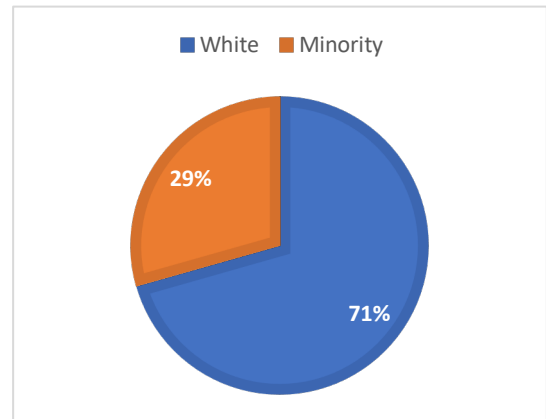


Figure 1. 2012 Roster Racial Composition. Source: "Tottenham Hot Spur 3-1 West Ham United."

³⁹ REUTERS, "FA INVESTIGATING WEST HAM 'HOLOCAUST' CHANTS, CLUB ISSUE LIFETIME BAN," Eurosport (Eurosport, a Discovery Company 202, November 26, 2012), https://www.eurosport.com/football/premier-league/2011-2012/fa-investigating-west-ham-holocaust-chants_sto3505971/story.shtml.

⁴⁰ *Spurs Suffer Racist Chanting at West Ham: Witness, Youtube* (Telegraph Media Group, 2012), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cz9I8enllow>.

⁴¹ REUTERS, "FA INVESTIGATING WEST HAM 'HOLOCAUST' CHANTS, CLUB ISSUE LIFETIME BAN."

⁴² Tom McGowan, "Football Grapples with Anti-Semitism Storm," *CNN*, November 27, 2012, <https://edition.cnn.com/2012/11/27/sport/football/tottenham-west-ham-jewish-football/index.html>.

⁴³ REUTERS, "FA INVESTIGATING WEST HAM 'HOLOCAUST' CHANTS, CLUB ISSUE LIFETIME BAN."

had zero arrests for racism or violence, so while we are surprised to see such reports today, we will examine any available evidence of such conduct thoroughly and take the appropriate action.⁴⁴

This official comment by West Ham emphasizes the team's unwillingness to accept the fact that racism and anti-Semitism are significant problems for the club in two main ways. First, although the team claims it is willing to ban fans for life, it leaves out the threat of legal action against its fans. By not using the full weight of the law to deter racism by its fans, West Ham implies that racism is only a small problem for its fans and that it could hold its fans accountable without outside resources. The inability to take legal measures against its fans is further emphasized through annual statistics compiled by the UK Home Office related to football-related arrests. The statistics find that during the 2012-2013 Premier League season, which would have included this event, West Ham only had nine fan arrests for racial abuse.⁴⁵ This number is even smaller when considering the hundreds of West Ham fans involved in anti-Semitism that day that could have faced legal punishments. The lack of punishment for fans demonstrates a West Ham policy that allows West Ham fans to easily spread racism during matches and therefore commit future racism.

Second, although the club claims that racism and anti-Semitism are not problems and this explains its surprise when seeing the events against Tottenham, in reality these events are common and should not be a surprise when considering the team's connection to radical and disruptive fans. Jacob Steinberg, a writer for *The Guardian*, writes of his experiences attending many West Ham matches over the years:

Antisemitism and racism have existed at West Ham for years. Before a play-off semi-final at Ipswich in 2004, I heard a chant of "Spurs are on their

⁴⁴ James Riach, "Police Receive Complaint into West Ham Fans' Alleged Antisemitic Abuse," *The Guardian*, November 26, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2012/nov/26/west-ham-fa-investigate-antisemitic-chants>; "FA INVESTIGATING WEST HAM 'HOLOCAUST' CHANTS, CLUB ISSUE LIFETIME BAN."

⁴⁵ "Statistics on Football-Related Arrests and Football Banning Orders Season 2012-13," Gov.uk (Crown copyright, 2013), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/248740/Football_Arrest_BO_Statistics_2012-13.pdf, 12.

way to Auschwitz, Hitler's gonna gas them again." No one did anything. There is a chant mocking Spurs fans for having no foreskins that ends with a cry of "Fucking Jew." People call Carlton Cole a black bastard. When Jermain Defoe missed a last-minute chance during a draw with Burnley in 2003, the person in front of me lost the plot, kicking the chair in front of him and screaming racial abuse. During a match against Everton in 2010, Cole missed a late sitter, prompting one fan to bellow that he was a "fucking nigger. " He's still there every week.⁴⁶

Steinberg's comments emphasize that West Ham United should have been more prepared to combat anti-Semitism due to the history of its fans, especially when considering West Ham was playing Tottenham with its connection to Jewish fans. In addition, while West Ham truthfully emphasizes that the team did not have any racist related arrests during the 2011 season, during the 2010 season they had an arrest related to racial abuse.⁴⁷ This fact, combined with West Ham's additional history of racist problems, represents a deliberate approach to denying the problem of racism within the club. By not recognizing racism as a problem for the club and then appearing surprised by the episode, West Ham set the precedent that anti-Semitic behavior was a rare problem that did not require solutions. By attempting to demonstrate the alleged rarity of West Ham anti-Semitism, West Ham reacts in a manner that minimizes the problem of racism among its fans and therefore encourages fans to act in continued racist ways without West Ham setting a precedent for punishing them.

West Ham's manager, Sam Allardyce, further demonstrated West Ham's minimization of racism by its fans. After the game, he said:

"I don't hear what the fans say or do when I'm concentrating as a manager on a game of football," he said. "They shouldn't be doing things like that, should they? But it's the least of my worries at the moment. "I never heard it so I don't know. What do you want me to say? If I didn't hear it, I can't

⁴⁶ Jacob Steinberg, "Antisemitic Chants Are Sickening – and West Ham Fans Must Show They Care," *The Guardian*, November 26, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/blog/2012/nov/26/west-ham-antisemitic-chants-sickening>.

⁴⁷ "STATISTICS ON FOOTBALL-RELATED ARRESTS & BANNING ORDERS SEASON 2010-11," Gov.uk (Crown Copyright, November 2011), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/118119/fbo-2010-11.pdf, 10.

condemn it. I'll make a comment after I've listened to what they've said. I don't want to be a political animal. I'm here to talk about football, not what fans are saying or singing.”⁴⁸

As an individual who has been involved in soccer for decades, Allardyce should understand that the game of soccer is not only played by people that love the game, but is played for fan entertainment as well. While the fans might not be the most important responsibility for the manager, as a main ambassador for the team, Allardyce should be aware of how the fans reflect negatively on the team. By refusing to take the small step of denouncing racism or saying it should not be allowed in the game, he sends the message that racism will not be punished and therefore encourages other racist events to occur. In fact, by saying, “They shouldn't be doing things like that, should they,” Allardyce reduces the problem of racism further for West Ham fans by establishing racist actions as simply “things.” By using this language, Allardyce makes racism appear as a basic part of the fan experience and further reduces the complexity of the issue. Although Allardyce claims he does not “want to be a political animal” in his comments, by not saying anything, his silence is a political statement in support of racism. This once again encourages fans that racism is a tolerated act and therefore is connected to future racist events committed by West Ham fans.

2015

On February 22, 2015, West Ham was once again squaring off against its rival Tottenham Hotspur FC in its most recent racist event since the 2012 event. As a classic match between teams within the same city, there was much

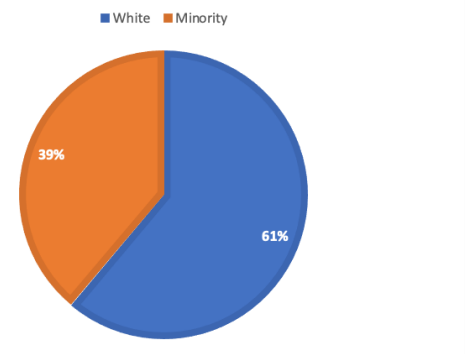


Figure 2. 2015 Roster Racial Composition. Source: “Tottenham Hotspur 2-2 West Ham United.”

⁴⁸ David Hytner, “Section of West Ham United Support Aim Antisemitic Abuse at Spurs Fans,” *The Guardian*, November 25, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2012/nov/25/west-ham-united-antisemitism-spurs>.

anticipation for the match. On that day, as West Ham fans made their way to White Hart Lane, the Tottenham Stadium, West Ham fans once again engaged in racist behavior through anti-Semitism.⁴⁹ As West Ham fans boarded a train for the stadium and then passed through the Jewish London neighborhood of Stamford Hill, multiple accounts reported and video evidence confirmed that a group of West Ham fans chanted, “I’ve got a foreskin, how about you? Fucking Jew.”⁵⁰ Although this racist event occurred before these fans arrived at the Tottenham stadium, the event clearly aligns with racism in the soccer setting because the actions of the fans were motivated by attendance at the match.

In response to more clear evidence that West Ham fans were guilty of racism through anti-Semitism, West Ham released an official statement saying, "If any individual is found to have behaved in an inappropriate way, the club's simple, zero-tolerance policy dictates that they will face the strongest possible action, including the option of a life ban from the Boleyn Ground."⁵¹ Although there is clear evidence that West Ham fans were guilty of racism, the club stopped short of fully expressing its disagreement with the actions of its fans. Instead of recognizing that its fans were guilty, West Ham leaves room for their innocence by heavily implying more information is needed through the opening line of the statement, "If any individual is found to have behaved in an inappropriate way." This reaction can then be characterized as a downplaying of racism to the 2015 event because West Ham refuses to clearly accuse its fans of racist behavior by allowing room for innocence. By allowing room for fan innocence, West Ham implies that it needs more information to investigate the matter further before more clearly denouncing its fans. Based on reviews of media reports after the event, West

⁴⁹ Ed Aarons, “West Ham: Zero-Tolerance If Fans Found Guilty of Antisemitic Singing on Train,” *The Guardian* (2021 Guardian News & Media Limited, February 23, 2015), <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2015/feb/23/kick-it-out-west-ham-fans-alleged-anti-semitic-song>; Joe Prince-Wright, “West Ham Fans Accused of Anti-Semitic Chants before Tottenham Hotspur Match,” *NBC Sports* (2021 NBC Universal, February 23, 2015), <https://soccer.nbcsports.com/2015/02/23/west-ham-fans-accused-of-anti-semitic-chants-before-tottenham-hotspur-match/>.

⁵⁰ Aarons, “West Ham: Zero-Tolerance If Fans Found Guilty of Antisemitic Singing on Train.”

⁵¹ “Anti-Semitic Chanting before West Ham Match Probed,” *BBC News* (2021 BBC, February 23, 2015), <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-31586198>.

Ham never publicly again brings up a reaction to this event and therefore further demonstrates its downplaying of the racism by its fans during this event.⁵²

This downplaying of racism is emphasized through West Ham simply characterizing its potential fan wrongdoing behavior as, “inappropriate.” By not clearly defining inappropriate behavior in its message, West Ham leaves room for a wide range of fan behavior, such as the hurling of objects onto the field, streaking through the pitch, racist behavior, or more. By adding fan racist behavior into this general category of “inappropriate” behavior, West Ham highlights that racist behavior is similar to more common behavior by fans at matches. Through the equation of racist fan behavior with other fan behaviors, West Ham once again downplays the severe problem of racism among its fans when there is ample evidence of the problem.

The downplaying of the racism to this event is further contextualized when considering the statement West Ham issued before the match. The statement read:

We would also like to remind all fans attending the match at White Hart Lane that they will be acting as ambassadors for West Ham United and their behaviour should reflect the values and standards of our club. Working with the Metropolitan Police, the club will continue to adopt a zero tolerance policy towards any form of discriminatory behaviour and any fan found to be acting inappropriately – including racist, antisemitic and homophobic behaviour – will be punished to the full extent of the law and banned from attending matches. We are rightly proud of our world-famous support home and away and we look forward to the famous Claret and Blue Army once again getting behind the team with all their heart and showing the world that following the Hammers means supporting with pride, passion and respect.⁵³

As explained in the 2012 racist event, West Ham in the past has falsely denied it has a racism problem among its fans. It is quite possible though that West Ham felt the need to issue this statement before the match due to the increased negative attention given to West Ham after the 2012 event. That being said, in this statement, West Ham clearly states that it has a zero-

⁵² BBC (2021 BBC, n.d.), <https://www.bbc.com/>; The Guardian (<https://www.theguardian.com/us>, n.d.), 2021 Guardian News & Media Limited; NBC Sports (<https://www.nbcsports.com/>, n.d.), 2021 NBC Universal.

⁵³ Aarons, “West Ham: Zero-Tolerance If Fans Found Guilty of Antisemitic Singing on Train.”

tolerance policy for inappropriate behaviors, such as racism and anti-Semitism, to ban fans that violate these guidelines. When looking back at how West Ham reacted to the anti-Semitism on the train in 2015, there is a clear downplaying of racism in its reaction for two main reasons. First, although West Ham defines inappropriate fan behavior in this warning message before the match, the lack of definition of this behavior in the reaction statement defuses the severity of the racist offense committed by the fans. Second, the warning message clearly states that West Ham's zero-tolerance policy results in potential legal consequences. Then when examining West Ham's 2015 reaction, there is an absence of legal consequences in its message to hold its own fans accountable. By not enforcing its own zero-tolerance policy for inappropriate fan behavior, West Ham reacts in a manner that downplays the racism committed by its own fans and therefore encourages future fan racism.

2017

On November 16, 2017, West Ham was put to the test once again, as its fans became the center of attention in the soccer world due to racial abuse. This time the event did not involve fans attending the game, but rather a West Ham fan abusing Korean Tottenham star, Son Heung-min, as he stopped for an autograph for a Tottenham fan.⁵⁴ *The Guardian* writes of the event that was recorded on social media, "In a video uploaded to social media, the man – who is off camera – asks Son if he can get him a copy of the new Planet of the Apes film. 'DVDs. You do DVDs. Good copies,' the man adds, before identifying himself as a West Ham supporter."⁵⁵ Although the West Ham fan's actions could appear less racially motivated than past

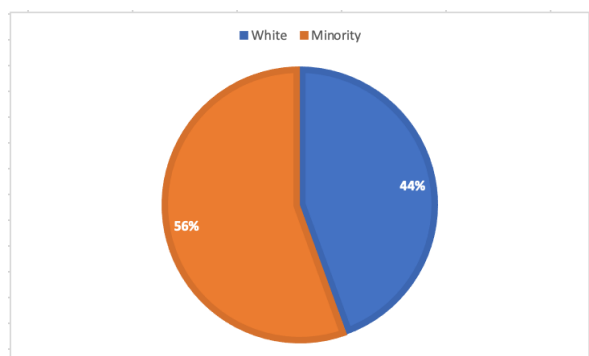


Figure 3. 2017 Roster Racial Composition. Source: "Tottenham Hotspur 3-2 West Ham United."

⁵⁴ "Twitter Clip Appears to Show Spurs Star Son Heung-Min Suffering Racist Abuse From West Ham 'Fan'," SI (2021 ABG-SI LLC, November 17, 2017), <https://www.si.com/soccer/2017/11/17/twitter-clip-appears-show-spurs-star-son-heung-min-suffering-racist-abuse-west-ham-fan>.

⁵⁵ Jacob Steinberg, "West Ham Fan Fined for Racially Abusing Tottenham's Son Heung-Min," *The Guardian* (2021 Guardian News & Media Limited, May 22, 2019), <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2019/may/22/west-ham-fan-fined-racially-abusing-son-heung-min-tottenham>; "Video Shows West Ham Fan Racially Abusing Tottenham

events analyzed in this paper so far, the reference to “DVD” has become a term for soccer fans to racially abuse Asian players, as the FA has led investigations to hold these fans accountable in the past.⁵⁶

To understand West Ham’s reaction to this event, it is first important to contextualize Tottenham’s reaction. Through a spokesperson, Tottenham reacted to the video by saying, “Racist behaviour is completely unacceptable and we hope that the individual is identified to the authorities and the necessary action taken.”⁵⁷ Tottenham’s reaction clearly emphasizes a team that recognizes the problem of racism and is not attempting to minimize its severity. While this could possibly be due to the need for Tottenham to stand up for its own players when faced with racial abuse, Tottenham has penalized its fans more aggressively when convicted of racial abuse.⁵⁸

The Tottenham reaction demonstrates another attempt by West Ham to minimize the problem of racism among its fans. In response to the racial abuse of Son Heung-min by a West Ham fan, West Ham reacted by saying through a spokesperson, “West Ham United have a zero-tolerance approach to any form of discrimination and unreservedly condemn the actions of the individual in this video.”⁵⁹ Although West Ham references its support of its zero-tolerance approach to racism as an inappropriate fan behavior, which includes a lifetime ban from West Ham matches and potential legal action, the man was given only a small fine from the Thames magistrates court and had the potential to attend future West Ham matches after completion of an

Star Son Heung-Min,” Yahoo!Sport (2021 Verizon Media, November 17, 2017), <https://au.sports.yahoo.com/west-ham-fan-racially-abuses-tottenham-star-son-heung-min-on-video-37917810.html>.

⁵⁶ David Hytner, “FA Set to Investigate Millwall Fans’ Racist Chants towards Son Heung-Min,” The Guardian (2021 Guardian News & Media Limited, March 12, 2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2017/mar/12/harry-kane-tottenham-hotspur-miss-season-ankle-injury-crutches>.

⁵⁷ “Video Shows West Ham Fan Racially Abusing Tottenham Star Son Heung-Min.”

⁵⁸ Simon Murphy, “Tottenham Fan Banned for Hurling Banana at Arsenal’s Aubameyang,” The Guardian (2021 Guardian News & Media Limited, December 18, 2018), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/18/tottenham-fan-fined-for-hurling-banana-skin-at-black-arsenal-player>.

⁵⁹ “Video Shows West Ham Fan Racially Abusing Tottenham Star Son Heung-Min.”

educational course.⁶⁰ While the West Ham zero-tolerance policy states that fans that violate the policy will be barred from future events, West Ham minimizes the problem of racism in this event by failing to apply its zero-tolerance policy fully once again. Although West Ham condemns this fan based on his actions, West Ham falls short of labeling this action as racism in its reaction. Similar to the 2015 event, where West Ham lumped racism in with other inappropriate fan actions, this same concept can be applied here by West Ham's resistance to identifying this event as racism. By failing to clearly label this West Ham fan as a racist, West Ham downplays racism among its fans in its reaction and demonstrates its unwillingness to hold future West Ham supporters accountable that clearly violate the zero-tolerance policy.

At the end of its reactionary statement on the abuse of Son Heung-min, West Ham further demonstrates willingness to minimize racism among its fans. The spokesperson goes on to say, "Anyone behaving in this manner is not representative of our club and its values, and anybody who witnesses discrimination or abuse such as this at West Ham are urged to contact us in confidence at supporterservices@westhamunited.co.uk."⁶¹ Although this is a step in the right direction because West Ham is willing to label the event as "discrimination or abuse," there was great potential for West Ham to identify this event as racism. By labeling this event as discrimination, but failing to single out racism as the specific form of discrimination in this case, West Ham creates a more vague definition of inappropriate fan behavior that does not single out racism as the main problem among its fans and further minimizes the threat of racism in West Ham supporters. This downplaying of racism then allows West Ham supporters to continue their racist actions with less direct attention from West Ham.

⁶⁰ Steinberg, "West Ham Fan Fined for Racially Abusing Tottenham's Son Heung-Min."

⁶¹ "Video Shows West Ham Fan Racially Abusing Tottenham Star Son Heung-Min."

2019

On April 13, 2019, West Ham was put to one last test in its reactions to racism. During this match, West Ham played an away match at Manchester United in its stadium, Old Trafford.⁶² As fans hurried to attend the match, a group of West Ham fans hopped on a train to attend the match all together. Videos then circulated on social media of these

West Ham fans singing anti-Semitic chants, that included the phrase “I’ve got a foreskin how bout you? Fucking Jew.”⁶³

Later that day, when footage began to spread more widely on the anti-Semitic event, West Ham issued an official reaction. The reaction read:

We are disgusted by the contents of the video circulating on social media this evening. We are taking immediate action to try to identify the offenders, whose details we will be handing over to the police and will be banned for life from London Stadium and from travelling with the club. West Ham United is unequivocal in its stance – there is no place for this kind of behaviour at our club. We do not want people like this associated with West Ham United. They are not welcome at our club, they are not welcome in civilised society.⁶⁴

Immediately there is a different tone in the reaction taken by West Ham during this event.

Although in the earlier events, West Ham was reluctant to explicitly identify its fans’ actions as wrong and even left room for their innocence to go against clear evidence of their guilt, in this

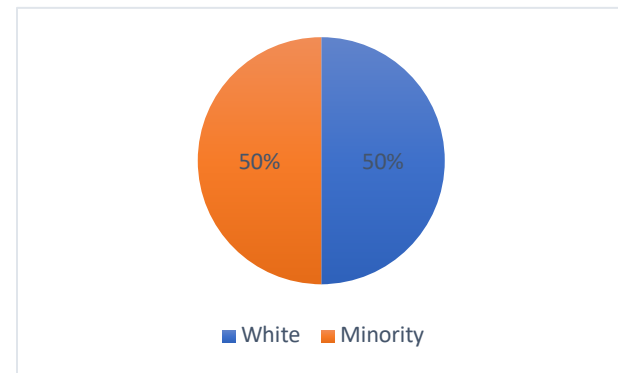


Figure 4. 2019 Roster Racial Composition. Source: “Manchester United 2-1 West Ham United.”

⁶² Tom Kershaw, “West Ham: Club ‘Disgusted’ by Video of Fans’ Antisemitic Chanting Aimed at Tottenham after Manchester United Match,” *Independent* (Independent Digital News & Media Ltd, April 14, 2019), <https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/premier-league/west-ham-fans-antisemitic-chant-tottenham-video-footage-train-statement-a8869001.html>.

⁶³ Kershaw, “West Ham: Club ‘Disgusted’ by Video of Fans’ Antisemitic Chanting Aimed at Tottenham after Manchester United Match;” “West Ham United Fans Sing Crude Antisemitic Song in Footage Captured by Daughter of Holocaust Survivor,” *World Jewish Congress* (2021 World Jewish Congress, April 13, 2019), <https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/news/west-ham-united-fans-sing-crude-antisemitic-song-in-footage-captured-by-daughter-of-holocaust-survivor-4-6-2019>.

⁶⁴ Press Association, “West Ham ‘Disgusted’ after Fans Are Filmed Chanting Antisemitic Abuse,” *The Guardian* (2021 Guardian News & Media Limited, April 13, 2019), <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2019/apr/13/west-ham-disgusted-after-fans-are-filmed-chanting-antisemitic-abuse>.

reaction, West Ham wastes no time in declaring these fans as detrimental to West Ham. One of the most important words in this statement therefore is “unequivocal,” because it represents a new uncompromising approach to identifying and punishing violators. While in earlier statements West Ham was ambiguous in how it would enforce its zero-tolerance policy, by using this word, West Ham reaffirms its new approach in stopping racism committed by its fans. It is then telling that West Ham directly states that these fans should not be members of the West Ham community in an attempt to distance themselves from their own racist fans. Although earlier West Ham was completely surprised by the racism of its fans, such as in the 2012 event, by separating itself from its racist fans, West Ham attempts to redefine what being a West Ham fan represents. This new definition of West Ham fandom sets a new standard for fan interaction and leaves no room for racism.

Although West Ham falls short of directly labeling this event as racism or anti-Semitism, by implicitly citing its zero-tolerance policy through the threats of legal action and lifetime bans, West Ham finally commits to stopping racism among its fanbase. This commitment therefore represents an ability for West Ham to recognize the problem of racism among its supporters and act in a manner that seeks to prevent future racist behavior. While West Ham has now recognized the threat of racism among its fanbase, by concluding with, “they are not welcome in civilised society,” West Ham positions racism as unwelcome in all settings of society. This is a significant connection for West Ham because this recognition is necessary for not only stopping racism in soccer, but in every context as well. By taking a firmer approach to punishing racist fans and recognizing the broader societal danger of racism in its reaction, it becomes easier for other West Ham fans to take notice of this new approach in stopping racism and therefore adjust action in the future.

Post 2019

Since the racist event on April 13, 2019, over 27 months have passed for West Ham without recording a racist incident, which includes anti-Semitic events as well. In addition, during this time period, West Ham has become more involved in national anti-racism campaigns in two main ways. First, in March of 2019, it announced to the public its commitment working with Kick it Out to partner in its “No Room for Racism” campaign, where West Ham “will make clear that racism is not acceptable in our competition or the wider sport. It will also celebrate diversity across the Premier League and our clubs, and recognise the significant contribution made by Kick It Out in tackling discrimination since they were formed 25 years ago.”⁶⁵ Through special uniforms, banners, balls, and more for the match, West Ham hopes to educate its fans on the problem of racism in the sport.⁶⁶ Second, from April 30 to May 3 of 2021, West Ham joined the national soccer boycott of social media to draw attention to racial abuse on social media.⁶⁷ As both these campaigns are geared towards educating the public on the problem of racism in the sport, it is easier for West Ham fans to understand their past racist actions and the potential punishments for supporting racism in the soccer context in the future.

Discussion

By examining the past four in-person racist events committed by West Ham fans, there are clear connections between how West Ham reacts to racist events and how West Ham fans behave at future soccer events. The West Ham cases demonstrate that soccer club teams have a high degree of influence over how their fans act in soccer settings based on reactions to in-person

⁶⁵ “West Ham Support Anti-Racism Campaigns,” West Ham United (West Ham United Football Club, March 28, 2019), <https://www.whufc.com/news/articles/2019/march/28-march/west-ham-support-anti-racism-campaigns>.

⁶⁶ “West Ham Support Anti-Racism Campaigns.”

⁶⁷ “West Ham United to Join Social Media Boycott in Opposition to Online Abuse,” West Ham United (West Ham United Football Club, April 24, 2021), <https://www.whufc.com/news/articles/2021/april/24-april/west-ham-united-join-social-media-boycott-opposition-online-abuse>.

soccer racist events. Please find a summary of the key findings for the West Ham case study below.

Date of Event	Reaction by West Ham towards racism	Future Fan Racism	Months Passed Until Next Racist Event
11/25/2012	Downplay/denial	Yes	27
2/22/2015	Downplay	Yes	33
11/16/2017	Downplay	Yes	17
4/13/2019	Acceptance	No	27 and counting without racist event

Figure 5. *Summary of Reactions by West Ham and Fan Racism.*

As emphasized by Figure 5, West Ham has had the opportunity to react to four in-person racist events since the start of 2012 and all of these events have involved racism committed by West Ham fans. When looking at the dates of these racist events, West Ham has averaged an in-person racist event close to every 26 months. Since the racist event that took place on April 13, 2019, as West Ham fans chanted anti-Semitic songs on the way to play Manchester United in an away match, over 27 months have passed without West Ham suffering an in-person racist event.

The West Ham case therefore illustrates that reactions to racist events by soccer club teams impact how their fans act during future matches. In the first three racist events, in 2012, 2015, and 2017, West Ham reacted to racism committed by its fans in a similar fashion, in which they denied the existence of racism or minimized its impact among its fans. In all these cases, while the racism was clearly confirmed by nonprofits that track racism in soccer and in media reports, West Ham's reactions to its fans did not change significantly. This downplaying of racism is further emphasized by observing West Ham's inability to fulfill its commitment to its zero-tolerance policy, where fans found guilty of racism should face legal action and receive bans from future soccer matches. By failing to actually enforce this policy, West Ham implied

that the actions by its fans do not fall under the zero-tolerance policy, and therefore can be interpreted as a minimization of racism by its fans.

When examining the West Ham racist events in 2012, 2015, 2017, and 2019, there is a clear connection between West Ham's reaction to the racist event and how West Ham fans continue to commit racist acts in the future. As West Ham refused to fully accept the problem of racism among its fans through repeated official statements by the team, West Ham fans found racism to be an acceptable form of appreciation for their team. Although racial abuse can lead to legal disciplinary action, as England has established legislation to prosecute violators through imprisonments and fines, West Ham fans were empowered to continue their racist support because of West Ham's reluctance to directly condemn racist action in soccer. Using Daniel Wann, Jamie Hunter, Jacob Ryan, and Leigh Ann Wright's findings on the motivation for fans to support their teams through illegal actions, adds greater support for the ability of West Ham reactions to influence fan racist action. As they find illegal actions are used by fans to demonstrate greater assistance for their teams, West Ham's downplaying of racism then represents an implicit support for racist actions and leads to West Ham supporters to continue performing racist actions, which has manifested itself in the events of this study. As these scholars emphasize that illegal actions are a method for fans to reaffirm their own identities by identifying with the team, West Ham has set a precedent for accepting racist fans and therefore including racist rhetoric in its identity. Racism has therefore represented a method for fans to identify with West Ham and has contributed to fan racism in various West Ham events.

In addition, Wann, Hunter, Ryan, and Wright find there is an increasing possibility of fans engaging in illegal activity when given the opportunity to perform these acts anonymously.⁶⁸ This helps to explain repeated racial abuse by West Ham fans as well because West Ham's reactions to their racism conceals their actions. By not aggressively seeking to

⁶⁸ Wann, Hunter, Ryan, and Wright, "THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEAM IDENTIFICATION AND WILLINGNESS OF SPORT FANS TO CONSIDER ILLEGALLY ASSISTING THEIR TEAM," 534.

identify fans that commit racist acts, and at times relying on fan tips to identify racist fans, West Ham encourages racism from its fans by aiding in their secrecy. This is further emphasized when considering the settings where racial soccer abuses have taken place for West Ham. As these events have largely taken place in packed soccer stadiums and train cars, it is more difficult to identify the specific perpetrators of racist fandom. This then allows an excuse for West Ham to avoid identifying its racist fans and for these actions to continue.

Further support is given for West Ham's downplaying of racism to incite future fan racism when considering studies on the connections between punishment and deterrence. In, "Deterrence in the Twenty-First Century," criminologist Daniel Nagin confirms that certain punishment is effective in deterring future action, as he writes:

Thus, I conclude, as have many prior reviews of deterrence research, that evidence in support of the deterrent effect of various measures of the certainty of punishment is far more convincing and consistent than for the severity of punishment...The evidence in support of certainty's deterrent effect pertains almost exclusively to apprehension probability.⁶⁹

Nagin demonstrates that although the severity of punishment does not deter future action, commitment to punishment has the opposite impact. In doing so, West Ham's inability to uphold its zero-tolerance policy and prosecute racist fans, does not represent a deterrent for stopping future racist action. As fans then have less incentive to change their actions, they are free to continue their racist actions with little fear of punishment.

During the racist event on April 13, 2019, where West Ham fans chanted anti-Semitic songs on their way to a Manchester United match, West Ham finally took a stronger approach to stopping racism among its fans. While West Ham refused to aggressively renounce racism in earlier events, during this reaction, West Ham went as far as to announce that these fans do not represent West Ham and should not be members of the community. As West Ham has now

⁶⁹ Daniel S. Nagin, "Deterrence in the Twenty-First Century," *Crime and Justice* 42, no. 1 (2013): 201-202.

attempted to rebrand its identity and distance itself from racism, Wann, Hunter, Ryan, and Wright’s findings play less of a role because West Ham fans no longer need to reaffirm their identities through the illegal actions of racial abuse. Instead, West Ham fans can choose to support their team in healthier forms, without needing to conform to the West Ham identity through racist actions.

This stronger approach to stopping racism has caused West Ham fans to stop in-person racial abuse. As explained above, this change in behavior from the fans is a result of West Ham reacting more strongly to racist events. Since the racist event in 2019, over 27 months have passed without West Ham having an in-person racist event. This time frame of over 27 months is a sufficient amount of time to judge fan behavior because since 2012, West Ham has had an in-person racist event approximately every 26 months. While this therefore demonstrates that over 27 months without a racist event is enough time to judge the impact of West Ham taking a stronger stance on fan racism during reactions, there is even greater support to reinforce the significance.

It is not a coincidence that only 17 months passed between the 2017 racist event and 2019 racist event, the shortest timespan in the selected years of this study. Those 17 months between racist events support the overall increase in racism in English professional football, as demonstrated in Figure 6 below.

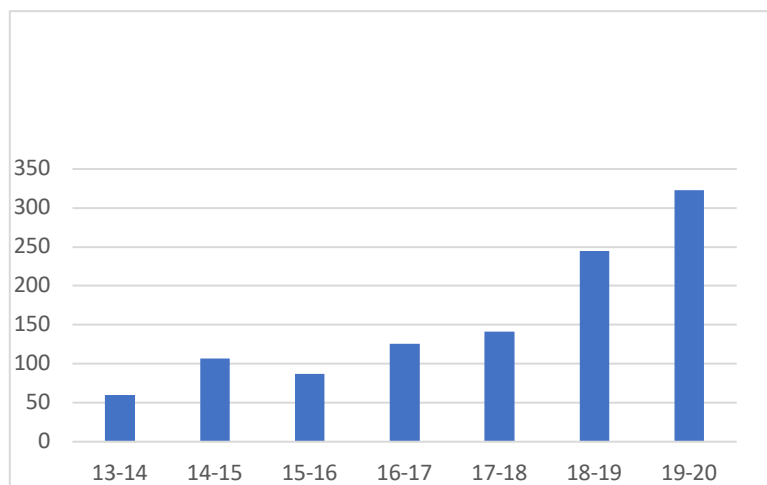


Figure 6. *Number of Racist Events in English Professional Football.* Source: “REPORTING STATISTICS.”

As Figure 6 shows, racism in English professional football has been increasing since the 2015-2016 season, therefore manifesting itself in the shorter timespan between racist events at West Ham. When considering the rise in racist events in English soccer, it would be expected for West Ham to see another racist event after 2019 at some point on the road to the present. More specifically, due to the rise in racist events, it would be expected for West Ham to have another racist event less than 17 months after the 2019 event. The relevance of the lack of racism by West Ham fans after the 2019 reaction is further emphasized by the increasing number of racist crimes reported by the English police in the last several years, as demonstrated in Figure 7 below.

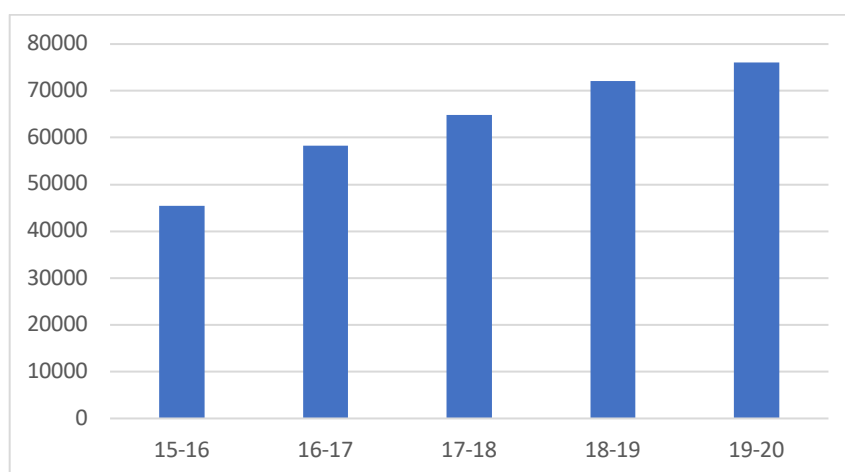


Figure 7. *Number of Racist Crimes Recorded by Police in England/Wales.*
Source: "Hate Crime, England and Wales, 2019 to 2020."

The combination of the increasing number of racist crimes in England with the increasing number of racist events in English professional soccer, leads to an increasing likelihood that West Ham should have experienced another racist event between 2019 and the present to support these trends.

The lack of West Ham fan racism since 2019, to go against general racist trends, must therefore be attributed to the change in reaction from West Ham towards racist events. This, combined with the previous West Ham racist events in 2012, 2015, and 2017, have established

that West Ham fans are receptive to how their team reacts to racist events. Nagin's confirmation on certain punishment deterring future action further supports this claim because as West Ham is more committed to enforcing its zero-tolerance policy and therefore prosecuting racist fans, West Ham racist fans have motivation to change their behaviors. In other words, this study has shown that reactions to racist events by European soccer teams is dangerous because of the ability to influence future racist events, as the West Ham case has shown a willingness for fans to match their team's attitude toward racism.

Although this study has highlighted the dangers of European soccer clubs in denying racism by inciting future racist abuse by fans, the ability for West Ham to take a stronger stance on racism and for its fans to follow suit, represents the great potential soccer club teams have to influence their fans for the good of society. As soccer clubs have great influence over their fanbases, it is their responsibility to use that platform to make all fans aware of the dangers of racism in the sport. While others might say understanding racism in soccer is too small a topic to create more equitable societies, when considering the hundreds of millions of individuals involved in soccer all over the world, this topic has the ability to have a global impact. This topic has major implications for the ability for all sports to have an impact on their fans because of the strong connection fans share with their teams. The past few years have demonstrated that when sports cross into the realm of politics, such as with the NBA in Black Lives Matter, fans take note and can be influenced. By more broadly understanding the connection between sports and fans, there is great hope that soccer and all sports could be used to solve the growing problem of racism in societies all over the world.

Future Study

Although this paper has successfully emphasized the ability for soccer club teams to impact fan actions, it can be used as a starting point for future research. First, greater research can be used to identify the specific types of matches that lend themselves to racial abuse from

fans. As most of the racist events in this study involved Tottenham as an opponent to West Ham, rival teams, there seems to be a greater likelihood of racism occurring during matches that involve rivals. Although this can be expected when considering that fans behave differently when matches have more at stake, future scholarship can examine the implications of racism during rivalry matches. As West Ham's other racist event occurred against Manchester United, a large and historic club, this future study could examine how past soccer club history impacts fan racism.

Second, greater scholarship can examine different avenues used to express racism by soccer fans. Although this study focused itself on in-person racist events, soccer racism on social media has become an increasingly significant problem, with many professional soccer leagues in England recently coming together to boycott social media and draw attention to the problem.⁷⁰ Most recently, Black players on England's European Championship team received racist comments on social media after these players missed potential game winning penalty kicks during the shootout. Future research can therefore examine how reactions from soccer club teams impact the recurrence of fan racism on social media. As racism on social media is receiving greater attention, it is even more important to understand this problem and identify potential solutions.

Conclusion

The findings of this study have two greater implications for soccer and sports more generally. First, the ability for soccer club teams in England to promote racism among their fans leads to soccer club teams having the potential to undermine the democratic value of tolerance on a national scale. Although England recently left the European Union (EU) and the EU has specific language in place to protect the tolerance of its citizens through the EU Charter of

⁷⁰ Jesus Jiménez and Andrew Das, "English Soccer Will Boycott Social Media to Protest Online Abuse," *The New York Times*, April 24, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/24/sports/soccer/soccer-racism-boycott.html>.

Fundamental Rights, England continues to have much in common with the EU due to a commitment to protecting tolerance in democracy.⁷¹ The potential for soccer club teams to lead to increased racism from their fans could then impact intolerant perspectives more broadly in society and therefore undermine tolerance. Although increased scholarship has addressed the role of populist parties in spreading anti-democratic values, as shown by this project, racism in soccer has a huge impact and must be addressed. While soccer can be mobilized in the hope of creating more equitable societies, it also has the potential to undermine tolerance by allowing the spread of racism. As racism has been allowed to fester unaddressed in soccer for years, it is even more dangerous for creating intolerant perspectives, as racial abuse in the soccer context can easily leak into other parts of society.

Second, as West Ham was allowed to minimize racism for years with little significant reaction from soccer institutions or politicians, it speaks more largely to the frequency that sports have been abused by authorities. Headlines over the years have emphasized these abuses of sports. A doctor for olympic gymnasts convicted of sexual abuse.⁷² American football players allowed to play after domestic abuse.⁷³ The FIFA World Cup awarded to Qatar due to corruption.⁷⁴ Tennis players accused of throwing matches for money.⁷⁵ These show only a few of the number of scandals to rock different sports authorities over the years. Although this paper has centered itself around soccer, it speaks more broadly for the ability of sports to transcend authority in a variety of ways. Sports that generate significant amounts of revenue, normally professional sports for men, have frequently fallen victim to corruption from organization

⁷¹ "CHARTER OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION," EUR-Lex (European Commission, October 26, 2012), CHARTER OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION.

⁷² Juliet Macur, "Gymnasts' Abusers 'Were Buds and Protected Each Other,'" *The New York Times*, February 26, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/26/sports/olympics/geddert-nassar-gymnastics-abuse.html>.

⁷³ Ken Belson, "Ravens' Rice Draws 2-Game Suspension From Goodell," *The New York Times*, June 24, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/25/sports/football/ray-rice-draws-2-game-suspension-from-nfl.html>.

⁷⁴ Kevin Draper and Tariq Panja, "U.S. Says FIFA Officials Were Bribed to Award World Cups to Russia and Qatar," *The New York Times*, April 6, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/sports/soccer/qatar-and-russia-bribery-world-cup-fifa.html>.

⁷⁵ Douglas Robson, "Men's Tennis Wants to Crack Down on Tanking. But What, Exactly, Is Tanking?," *The New York Times*, November 16, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/20/sports/tennis/mens-tennis-wants-to-crack-down-on-tanking-but-what-exactly-is-tanking.html>.

leaders, as they look to take advantage of others and profit personally. While there have been calls to reform sports in order to hold them more accountable, unfortunately sports have easily been mobilized for abusive purposes. Just as West Ham in this paper chose to disregard humanity and the threat of racism without serious backlash from society, other sports allow similar actions to occur.

Although the ability for sports to easily be mobilized for abuse symbolizes the sheer power of sports in today's world, it more importantly reveals ignorance within society. It is a positive first step for some organizations and individuals to call upon sports leaders to be held more accountable, but the fact that sports continue to be abused in significant numbers demonstrates that a large percentage of the population care less how sports institutions act, and more about the product on the field. While sports can be used to better society, at this point, the main function of sports as entertainment leads to problems like racism to be ignored as long as sports continue to lead to profits. Although many things have to change to reform sports, there is hope as politicians, nonprofits, and average fans increasingly call upon their teams to hold themselves to higher standards. There is hope that with greater scholarship dedicated to studying sports issues, such as racism in soccer, that one day sports can be used to bring society closer together.

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Appendix

Jääskeläinen (white) ⁷⁶	O'brien ⁷⁷ (white)	Tomkins (white) ⁷⁸	Reid (minority) ⁷⁹
McCartney (white) ⁸⁰	Maiga (minority) ⁸¹	Jarvis (white) ⁸²	Diame (minority) ⁸³
O'Neil (white) ⁸⁴	Noble (white) ⁸⁵	Nolan (white) ⁸⁶	Cole (minority) ⁸⁷
Carroll (white) ⁸⁸	Spiegel (white) ⁸⁹	Collins (white) ⁹⁰	Demel (minority) ⁹¹
Moncur (white) ⁹²		For Figure 1	2012 Roster ⁹³

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Adrian (white) ⁹⁴	Jenkinson (white) ⁹⁵	Tomkins (white) ⁹⁶	Reid (minority) ⁹⁷
Cresswell (white) ⁹⁸	Noble (white) ⁹⁹	Cole (minority) ¹⁰⁰	Collins (white) ¹⁰¹
Song (minority) ¹⁰²	Kouyaté (minority) ¹⁰³	Downing (white) ¹⁰⁴	Sakho (minority) ¹⁰⁵
Valencia (minority) ¹⁰⁶	Jarvis (white) ¹⁰⁷	Nolan (white) ¹⁰⁸	O'brien (white) ¹⁰⁹
Demel (minority) ¹¹⁰	Jääskeläinen (white) ¹¹¹	For Figure 2	2015 Roster ¹¹²

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Adrian (white) ¹¹³	Payet (minority) ¹¹⁴	Ayew (minority) ¹¹⁵	Reid (minority) ¹¹⁶
Cresswell (white) ¹¹⁷	Obiang (minority) ¹¹⁸	Lanzini (white) ¹¹⁹	Collins (white) ¹²⁰
Antonio (minority) ¹²¹	Ogbonna (minority) ¹²²	Kouyaté (minority) ¹²³	Sakho (minority) ¹²⁴
Randolph (white) ¹²⁵	Nordtveit (white) ¹²⁶	Feghouli (white) ¹²⁷	Zaza (white) ¹²⁸
Fletcher (minority) ¹²⁹	Fernandes (minority) ¹³⁰	For Figure 3	2017 Roster ¹³¹

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Adrian (white) ¹³²	Hernández Balcázar (minority) ¹³³	Snodgrass (white) ¹³⁴	Noble (white) ¹³⁵
Anderson (white) ¹³⁶	Rice (white) ¹³⁷	Lanzini (white) ¹³⁸	Masuaku (minority) ¹³⁹
Balbuena (minority) ¹⁴⁰	Ogbonna (minority) ¹⁴¹	Zabaleta (minority) ¹⁴²	Fabiański (white) ¹⁴³
Obiang (minority) ¹⁴⁴	Diop (minority) ¹⁴⁵	Fredericks (white) ¹⁴⁶	Antonio (minority) ¹⁴⁷
Holland (white) ¹⁴⁸	Diangana (minority) ¹⁴⁹	For Figure 4	2019 Roster ¹⁵⁰

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