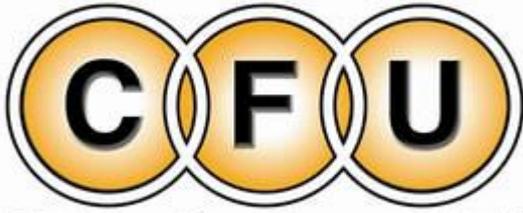


Cambridge Fans United



"Uniting Our Community"



AMBER NEWS

Special 'Nearly There!' Issue

April 2021



Opening Reflection,

“All right, but apart from the sanitation, the medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, a freshwater system and public health, what have the Romans (CFU) ever done for us?”

Life of Brian

Just over a week ago I was interviewed on Steve Jackson’s show on Radio Cambridge. I think it went quite well. Several people commented that they were surprised to hear just how many different things CFU were involved in. I was asked what CFU were about and my sons tell me that my answer was uncharacteristically long!



Apart from Coconuts, a branch of CFU which does a brilliant job of preserving the club’s history and staying in touch with former players, the CUFC Lottery has produced a lot of urgently needed money for the club and for local good causes. It would be great to see more of our members getting involved but, of course, all fans are welcome to join the scheme. I fervently hope that they will. It makes such a difference.

We are organising the vote for this season’s Player of the Year Award. There will only be one award this season. Will it be Paul Mullin, Wes or someone else? This season’s achievements have been such a team effort that it will be really difficult to single anyone out. Kyle Knoyle has often been our best player and the player we missed most, when he was injured, was Paul Digby.

I think the work I am proudest of are the various community initiatives CFU have been involved in. Standing out, for me, is establishing close links with the City’s mosque, an initiative which was very generously supported by Fans for Diversity. I am baffled that no one has ever tried to establish links before but I believe that, now we have made a start, our relationship will be a very fruitful one. We want all sections of our community to feel welcome and properly provided for in our stadium and we are working closely with the club to encourage and achieve this.



We look forward to working more closely with the Community Trust to meet as many previously neglected needs as possible.

We are planning to organise a football tournament for the homeless and we will be meeting with the Supporters’ Club to establish a better relationship with them and to enlist their support in creating a new Fanzone at the front of the ground.

We have also met with CUSP with the idea of supporting each other's role. I had hoped to print a statement of how they would define their role in this edition but, unfortunately, I have yet to receive it. It is our intention to support all fans' groups which are willing to work with us.

The future is bright; for the team, our manager, the club and CFU. Next time someone asks you, "What have CFU ever done for us?" You should have a few answers!

Andrew

CFU Press Release

Following several enquiries from excited fans, CFU representatives met with Cambridge United CEO, Ian Mather, last week. Since promotion has become more and more likely, fans have been asking how likely it is that fans will be allowed in against Grimsby Town for the last game of the season. Fans and season ticket holders



in particular have been very patient, loyal and understanding while the team have been playing so well in virtually empty stadiums. Sadly, unless there is an abrupt change in thinking by the Government and Public Health England, there is no possibility of fans being allowed in for the Grimsby game. Given their experience of hosting crowds earlier in the season, the club could make all the necessary arrangements with very little notice. However, as things stand, it won't happen. Other fans had asked whether there would be a celebration in the event of promotion or some way of rewarding fans for being so supportive during

the season. Ian confirmed that the club had been delighted with the patience of the fans and the way huge numbers had watched games on 'I Follow'. Fans are very much appreciated and recognised as some of the most passionate anywhere. The club will work on ideas for a celebration if promotion is achieved – though this will have to be done carefully and comply with Covid rules.

A number of other things were discussed, including the hugely successful visit to the mosque which will lead to a lasting and richly rewarding relationship. CFU are pleased to be helping the club in encouraging provision for a far greater diversity in our support. Disability groups, the elderly and



vulnerable, the unemployed and the mentally ill have different needs from the majority of fans and these needs must be addressed in order to attract as diverse a crowd as possible. It should not be forgotten that female fans, although far greater in number these days, are not always treated with the consideration they deserve. I am delighted to see the creation of the Amber Belles group on Facebook, which in time will raise issues which many of us may be aware of.

Casual misogyny is completely unacceptable. Indeed all kinds of oppression have no place anywhere in society, let alone in sport. CFU's position is very clear about abuse of any kind and racist abuse in particular. Insulting and intimidating behaviour on social media is disgusting, the more so because it is cowardly. Until we have created a safe environment for all individuals, CFU will always have work to do.

We look forward to working with the club and the Community Trust to create a more diverse club and a better, more humane community.

Andrew



Super League – Not on Our Watch

CFU has welcomed the announcement of the fan-led review in the football. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport secretary of state Oliver Dowden told the Commons that the recent European Super League proposals left the Government with no other option than to act. The Super League proposals were condemned by

politicians on all sides of the House and Labour's Jo Stevens MP, shadow secretary of state, has called for the review to show "real teeth" throughout the undertaking.



The review will be chaired by Tracey Crouch MP who was sports minister from 2015-17.

The Government's 2019 manifesto committed to a "fan led" review of football governance and the Football Supporters' Association (FSA) who are coordinating the Sustain the Game! campaign have also also welcome the announcement.

Malcolm Clarke, chair of the FSA said, "The FSA welcomes today's announcement of the launch of the fan-led review and looks forward to playing a full and central role in that. The anger from MPs on all sides of the Commons showed that a handful of billionaire owners have misjudged not only the mood of fans – but the mood of an entire nation. For years football has appeased these greedy vultures by feeding them bits of meat but all it has done is heighten their appetite and make them stronger. Now is the time to stop that."

Andrew Stephen, CFU Chair, said, " CFU welcome the fan led review. We all hope that it will deliver an outcome that benefits everyone in football and not just the so-called elite who believe football only revolves around them. CFU are right behind the club in opposing the outrageous proposals of the so called Big Six, which display contempt for the grass roots of our sport and a slavish devotion to profit unbecoming of those charged with the responsibility of running football clubs. Genuine football fans are identified by their



respect for each other and for rival clubs. Anyone proposing or supporting a European Super League fails to recognise or value this long tradition. There is already far too much greed in the game and this further step in that direction is a disgrace. If we allow this to happen, the long-term future of the game we love will be placed in jeopardy. This is a battle that everyone outside the top six knows must be won. Government also knows that, from this review, a tangible result needs to be found and, unlike previous reviews, it is not allowed to become another wasted opportunity."

The Ramblings of a Superstitious (?) Forker

Superstitions are rife in football. I've heard players, managers and even directors talk about irrational deep-seated beliefs in the magical effects of specific actions or rituals which, when



performed, bring good luck and positive results to one's team. Fans also have their superstitions. Ever read Nick Hornby's *Fever Pitch*? Mine started many years ago, in my early teenage years, when still living at home with my parents. The Saturday dinner eaten at lunch time, only posh people had dinner in the evening in those days, was often finished off with Angel Delight. I soon noticed that, when this happened Bill Cassidy, Tony Butcher and the other heroes

in white with amber and black trim would work their magic that afternoon and the mighty U's would continue on in their quest for Southern league glory. No Angel Delight always resulted in defeat, bad mood and me blaming my mother or cursing the Co-Op for not delivering.

Over the years my superstitions have changed from the route taken to the ground, favourite position on the terrace, lucky underpants, lucky replica shirt, and lucky turnstile to enter the ground. All of these served their purpose, some longer than others. As soon as one failed, I would look for another one and stick with it until that failed. Then, all of a sudden, I became superstitious about one thing only and this would stay with me forever, maybe. I became superstitious about not being superstitious. After all how could anything I do miles away have any effect on 11 totally unconnected individuals running around a football pitch?



Over twenty years ago I joined the matchday staff as a turnstile operator and soon after wards I became a CFU member. In the early years of this century relegation and administration hit



United hard and I found myself volunteering for extra matchday duties like stocking up the tea bars as well as helping with fund raising projects with CFU. Fast forward to last March when I retired from my full-time work and joined the small band of CFU volunteers helping Ian Darler and Mick Brown on cleaning, maintenance and painting jobs during the week. Then came Covid and Lockdown. I never really had a bucket list as such but

there were a few things I had in mind to spend my retirement doing, all of which are now out of the question, some never to return perhaps. Needless to say, repairing the divots on the

Abbey stadium pitch wasn't one of them! But as I am deemed to be in the "bubble" I was offered the opportunity. So, for about 2 and half hours, work I am able to watch all the home matches live.

Football in lockdown is very different and watching in an empty stadium, even after nearly a full season, seems unreal. To say it's like watching a local league match on a village playing field doesn't define it at all. It's more like watching actors performing a dress rehearsal in front of an empty theatre. All the right players are there making all the right moves, well sort of, but nobody is there to appreciate it or even moan about it. Some have given this as the reason for United's good form. So many people have said "the players are more relaxed", "they don't feel any pressure" and "they are not frightened to make mistakes". This maybe so, certainly for some players, but I'm not convinced it applies to all. Back in September I had



the opportunity to talk to two ex-players from fifty years ago. I asked them how they thought it would be playing in empty stadiums. They both said it would be awful and it goes against what you as a player build yourself up to. All week you train and practice your skills to perform in front of the paying audience and to play without a crowd would seem pointless. After all, all players are showmen and want to show off their skills to as many as

possible. Both the ex-players said that the crowd having a moan and getting at them didn't bother them that much. In fact sometimes it made them try harder, but maybe that's a generation thing?

In the early part of the season the one thing that I noticed most was that the voices of both players and managers can be heard very clearly, even when they are on the far side of the pitch. Obviously, I'm aware that a certain amount of banter goes on between the players and sometimes the referee. I have to say the language and abuse that can be heard came as quite a surprise to me. Don't get me wrong, I'm not a prude at all in fact I have been known to use what might be called industrial language myself. But is there really any need for players to question referee's decisions and opposition's tactics with F's and C's at the top of their voices? I must admit I never been a great fan of referees and some of the bizarre and inconsistent decisions they make but I am now beginning to have a little bit of sympathy for them. There really is no need for anyone to accept that level for abuse. I'm still trying to decide why it seems that most of the abuse comes from the away teams. Am I looking through amber tinted

glasses or are most visiting teams absolute hooligans who show no respect to anyone. For some reason it seemed worse in the early part of the season, Newport and Southend being the worst culprits. I really don't know how or why the Southend goalkeeper didn't get sent off or at least cautioned for his totally obscene rage at the referee as they were leaving the pitch side by side at half-time. The referees do have it in their own hands to do something about it They can book or send of players for foul and abusive language. But it has to come from all referees and be consistent.

Including Ian and Mick, there is a team of 5 or 6 divot repairers. We are each provided with our own PPE of hand gel, masks and gloves plus our own forks with our names on. We go out about 20 minutes before kick-off to repair any damage caused by the two teams warm ups. With two squads of sixteen plus coaches and both teams doing sprints and close ball control exercises in small areas most times this is worse than the damage caused by the match itself. We then do what we can in the half-time break which has the extra hazard of both teams' substitutes warming up. One has to keep one eye on stray footballs and also be careful not to stab a player with your fork.

The amount of time and effort Ian and Mick put into keeping the pitch up to standard or above standard, when compared to others, is amazing. Ian certainly



does look on the pitch as his baby. On matchdays he is up at the crack of dawn, sometimes after leaving close to midnight the day before. Quite often, especially in the period between October and December when we had torrential rain for about 7 consecutive matches, mostly during the match, we were still forking the pitch over two hours after the final whistle. Bad enough on a Saturday in spring but not much fun after an evening match in freezing cold December. I do think Ian's enthusiasm for producing a top quality playing surface has rubbed off on us. I have certainly developed an interest in groundsmanship and have picked up a few tips on lawn care.

The after match forking always goes much better after a United win. So the matches leading up to Christmas were practically arduous. Then came a turn of form and things got a lot easier. Maybe it was the weather maybe the team winning but the banter and all-round cheerfulness among the forkers made the job much more enjoyable. The reason for the change in form can be put down to several things. Managers, change of tactics and/or players, players' attitudes, ability of the opposition and luck have all been given as reasons. But I have my own personal theory. It's all down to a well known brand of cream of tomato soup!

On the day of the Leyton Orient match for some unknown reason I decided to have cream of tomato soup for lunch. To be honest this was a total whim and a blast back to my childhood. Always warming and welcoming, today it would be called a comfort food. But as United won,



the practice had to be repeated every Saturday. I even went to the extreme of bulk buying four cans at once. The Exeter City home match coincided with the last of these being consumed. So after the shock 4-1 home defeat what do I do? Well, for the Newport match the soup of the day was cream of chicken and mushroom. So do I stick with that or does it really make any difference to what happens miles away with 22 individuals on a top class football pitch? With the Stevenage home match looming and the likely hood that a win might just ensure promotion there really is no pressure. Not much!

Nigel Browne

CFU Corner

CFU are working hard at helping the football club become more diverse and inclusive. We want our football club to be at the Centre of the community in the city of Cambridge. We live in a multi-cultural city and want the Abbey Stadium to be welcoming place for everyone.

As a supporter trust we have recently set up and established a new community relationship on behalf of the football club, by approaching and welcoming to the club our neighbours at the Cambridge Central Mosque in Mill Road. Through Cambridge Fans United's contacts with Fans for Diversity, a national project organized by the Football Supporters' Association and Kick it out, we were able to lead the way, along with Charlton Athletic, in being one of the only EFL clubs to provide a number of gift packs in time for Ramadan, which begins on Monday April 12th and continues until the 12th May. The gifts included food items that can be used throughout the period, and some gifts from the football club, including club calendars and footballs which were provided by the Cambridge United Community Trust.



One thing the pandemic has taught us is that we need to look out for one another. It is important that we build closer relationships with everyone locally. Football provides a unique opportunity. It can unite people from all backgrounds. Both football clubs and Mosques during the past year have been responsible for doing so much good work throughout their communities. We should be working together and building on these foundations, supporting one another.

Shahida Rahman Trustee, Cambridge Central Mosque said; " We're delighted to welcome everyone involved in the project celebrating diversity in football. On behalf of the Mosque, I would like to thank

those involved for the generous Ramadan packs that were presented to us. We hope to continue and expand our relationship with Cambridge United Football Club and our local community, for projects that will benefit the youth, both boys and girls in the future”.

As a supporter’s organization it is hoped, on behalf of the football club and Community Trust, that we can help by building on these positive steps to engage more communities in such a diverse city and to engage more with our local communities, spreading the word about our football club and giving the



football club a more visual presence within the city through building relationships with people.

We were recently asked by many fans if we could ask the club about the possibility of the club being able to have another successful pilot scheme game for the last home game of the season versus Grimsby. We have chatted with Ian Mather at length. While the club would love to welcome fans back with

open arms the decision is ultimately out of their hand., The government are not allowing fans into stadiums in any capacity until the 17TH of May at the earliest. Hopefully with restrictions slowly being eased, and if the number of cases of the virus remain low, we can resume some normality soon, fingers crossed we will be watching the U’s in League 1 and the abbey will be rocking once more!

CFU will continue to talk with the football club and assist them in whatever capacity is needed to ensure that we can get fans back in the Abbey at the earliest opportunity. Please keep supporting the U’s and getting behind the team with buying your I follow match passes.

Finally ,on behalf of our members, CFU would like to offer our deepest sympathy to the Royal Family on the death of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. The Duke was a keen sportsman, and it should never be forgotten that his Award Scheme reached out to and included disability groups long before anyone ever mentioned the words inclusion or diversity. He understood that everyone’s challenges are different and that we can all experience achievement, meaningfully. Despite his illustrious position, he understood that everyone can and should be valued for what they offer. I am sure that he would have approved of what we are trying to do.



RIP, Sir.

CFU serving our fans and the community.

United In Endeavour

Ben Phillips & Andy Stephen

CUFC TTERY

A lot of work came to fruition during the past few weeks, one of these projects was seeing the scoreboards working. After nearly nine months of planning and waiting for them to be installed, having been delayed due to recent covid restrictions, it was great to see the new Scoreboards installed and operating in time for the match against Forest Green Rovers. It was the first time in nearly thirty years that the Abbey Stadium had had a working scoreboard. Not just one working scoreboard, but this time two - at either end of the ground. One above the disabled stand at the North End and one on the face of the Control Box, adjacent to the South Stand.

It was very much a learning exercise for our newly installed scoreboard operators. When the installers left, having fitted them, the boards were still in test mode and we didn't receive the operating instructions until the Friday afternoon before the match. This meant that everything had to be re-programmed and re-designed to get them working.

It was a magnificent achievement by everyone involved to get them ready in time for kick off.

However, during the past few weeks a lot more programming has been completed. We have been trying to get the correct fonts and backgrounds ready for today's match along with organising adverts and visuals to fit the screens. It may take a little while to get everything working 100 per cent to our satisfaction but with each match, we will see our knowledge grow and improvements and additions will be made as we go along.



One thing we have been told is that in future the clock is not allowed to show more than forty-five minutes for each half. It is probably a good idea because I was a nervous wreck waiting for the final whistle to be blown.

The Scoreboards were organised and paid for by the CUFC Lottery. We need to also to thank A R Aspinall & Son for paying for the clocks on them. This has been one of several projects undertaken by the group over the past year during the pandemic. The purchase of the tractor used by the ground team on non-matchdays to prepare the pitch, the provision of the grass seed and the additional hand driers which will be available for use when crowds return.

The CUFC Lottery is helping to improve the supporters experience and there are still many projects that still require to be done. Join the CUFC Lottery and help us complete them. You can also win money yourself in the weekly draws.

Entry costs just £2 per week.

The website is <https://www.cufclottery.co.uk/> to join or find out more about the lottery.



In my opinion one of the most underrated players during the late 1980's and early 1990's for Cambridge United was Tony Dennis.

Tony played over 100 times for the club.

He left the U's and went on to play for Chesterfield, Colchester United, Lincoln City.

Does anyone know where he is now and what he is doing?

Rumour has it the midfielder was last known to be living and working in the Derbyshire area.

Dave Matthew Jones

We at CFU are particularly proud of the Lottery which has provided so much for the club and for good causes. We can all help by joining! Ed

Did you know that behind the South Stand and over the wall to the right as you face the stand is a Community Allotment Garden run by the Cambridge Cyrenians ? Me neither!

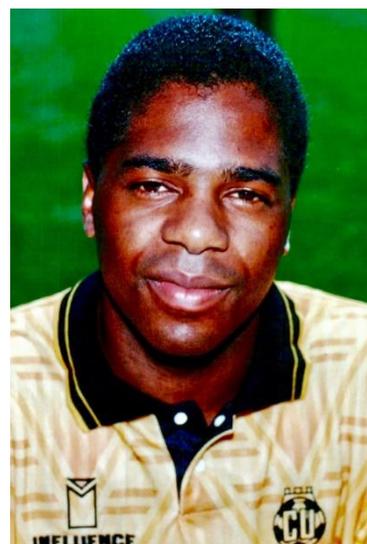
Nigel, Dave and I went to see what was going on and made a £100 donation on behalf of the CUFC Lottery to be spent on the latest project this voluntary group were undertaking:

The Cambridge Cyrenians Allotment Project works with local homeless people and runs on a therapeutic horticulture model across six full-sized allotment plots in the city.

It provides specific horticulture training, supported work experience and a safe social environment for some of the most disadvantaged people in the city.

Participants are encouraged to take away the fruit and vegetables they grow for their own consumption. The project team also get involved in selling a lot of produce on regular stalls at local community centres through the season and at Strawberry Fair and the Mill Road Winter Fair.

The project site covers 6 full sized allotment plots including: 2 plots for vegetable and fruit growing; 2 plots for a wildlife area with pond, a dwarf orchard and sculpture area; a fifth plot has a tool shed, an undercover work area, a large poly tunnel and the bike lock-up, with the



final plot mainly turned over to the bees and associated planting. Any spare gardening tools would be welcome as donations.

There will be a fuller article on the lottery website in due course.

Please see below two tribute messages that were put on the scoreboards; the NHS one will continue to be show

Stay safe.
CUFC Lottery Team

CAMBRIDGE UNITED COMMUNITY TRUST NEWS – APRIL 2021

FOREVER UNITED

Our Forever United project for Seniors has had great success, engaging 335 seniors in a whole host of different programmes.

Going back to March of last year, the need for support within our local seniors became a priority, recognising that this demographic group would be the most at risk. In the first three months we made over 1,200 wellbeing check-in calls to those over 65 and opening up a Community Careline where seniors could ring up for a chat or to request shopping or pharmacy delivery. Receiving funding from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) through the English Football League Trust's "Tackling Loneliness Together" we then developed our offer further.

In so-called "normal times" we would run seniors' lunches, afternoon teas & dementia sports cafés. Of course, we had to cease in-person events and in their place, we created an accessible online community to keep connected to our senior participants. We set up virtual afternoon teas to ensure that groups of seniors could continue to meet virtually providing technology to those that didn't have any alongside support with using such technology. Indeed, when Cambridge United matches started back up, a group regularly met up online to watch the games on iFollow. We also started to run 'garden-gate' visits where our Communities Manager, Simon, would visit seniors to have a catch-up at a safe distance.



Through the programme:

- We have helped reduce anxiety by 9%. (June 20 – January 21)
- Over half scored "significantly lower" in their feeling of isolation. (June 20 – January 21)
- 96% of participants felt the Forever United programme had made them feel more socially connected. (January 21).

United for Cambridge Sleepout Success

On Friday 26th March, more than 50 brave souls abandoned the luxury of their beds for one night as part of the United for Cambridge Virtual Sleepout in support of Wintercomfort for the Homeless and Cambridge United Community Trust...

In gardens, in sheds, under canvas, on floors and in the backs of vehicles people from across the city and beyond joined together (virtually) to raise awareness and funds for some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in the local community.



A programme of events was hosted live online throughout the evening including a virtual quiz, a raffle supported by local businesses and special guest appearances. A particular highlight of the event was the Bedtime Story Broadcast, when the two winning entries from a story writing competition - entered by primary and secondary aged children throughout the region - were read aloud by the ward-winning children's authors, Dan Freedman and Tom Palmer.

The amount raised so far through sponsorship and the raffle is just over £9,000 which will be divided equally between the two charities.

Melody Brooker Fundraising and Communications Manager of Wintercomfort who co-hosted and participated in the event with her family said, "What was a long, chilly and uncomfortable night for us all, is a nightly reality for far too many in our community. We are so grateful for the amazing support of those who took part in and donated to the sleepout and to our event partners Cambridge United Community Trust. The funds raised will help to continue Wintercomfort's life-changing support for rough sleepers and those at risk of homelessness in the city."



Simon Wall, Communities Manager at the Community Trust, said, "We were delighted to host our fourth sleepout. Naturally this year, with continuing uncertainty around Coronavirus Lockdown regulations, we held it virtually, inviting the local community to create their own Sleepout experience at home. In some ways, this meant more people could take part and we were delighted to see so many families join. We are incredibly humbled by the amount raised which will go towards our programmes with vulnerable young people in our city."

Simon Wall

Terrace Talk

Last month we held our first #TerraceTalk panel event hosted by Anwar Uddin (FSA Fans for Diversity lead) and Chris Paouros (FSA National Council). It's part of the wider #TerraceTalk campaign which is a supporter-led mental health campaign you can find out more about [here](https://thefsa.org.uk/news/terracetalk-fan-led-campaign-mental-health-campaign-launched/). <https://thefsa.org.uk/news/terracetalk-fan-led-campaign-mental-health-campaign-launched/>

Our thanks go to our panellists – check out the full video below:

- Hayley Jarvis – Head of sport at MIND
- Danny Mills – Dulwich Hamlet player/ Shout Out For Mental Health campaigner
- Gemma Oaten – Actress / SEED Patron
- Luke Chadwick – Ex-professional footballer and now a football coach

Watch the video <https://youtu.be/a-wrO4czJZo>

<https://thefsa.org.uk/news/terracetalk-fan-led-campaign-mental-health-campaign-launched/>

Dave Matthew Jones

New policing bill: Criminalising traditional fan behaviour?

Posted on 9th April 2021

There's been a lot of talk recently about the controversial Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill currently making its way through Parliament – here FSA caseworker Amanda Jacks discusses its potential impact on match-going fans...

A few years ago, a group of supporters got in touch. Could I help arrange a celebratory walk from their local pub to the stadium to mark their historic promotion?

Of course I would, it'll be a piece of cake. How wrong was I! Suffice to say I had to seek legal



advice from a specialist solicitor and assist the supporters in a fair bit of negotiation with the local police (who seemed determined to make this as difficult as possible) to ensure their plans came to fruition.

Among the (many) issues the police raised was grave concern about the “human rights of the old lady or the mum with her pushchair out shopping”.

Late in 2018, Greater Manchester Police announced that the marches European away fans take from the city centre to Old Trafford or the Etihad “had to stop” because: “The disruption to the wider travelling public is too great”.

Putting to one side the fact that people being able to shop or not or being stuck on a tram or in traffic isn't usually any concern to the police – what is very much their concern the College of Policing say is “human rights must sit at the heart of the conception, planning, implementation and control of every aspect of the operations of the police service.”

Thus in both these cases what the police should have done is consider how to balance the human rights of the supporters to exercise both their freedoms of expression and assembly with the rights of others.

It is, however, important to point out that these rights are not unqualified and police currently have the power to prevent such walks or processions if they believe that they will result in serious public disorder, serious damage to property or serious disruption to the life of the community.

The latter, is, of course much more subjective although I believe that there is a strong argument to say that part and parcel of city life is disruption for any number of reasons. It's something you soon learn to live with!

But en masse walks and processions aren't the only behaviour typical of being a football supporter. Large gatherings, singing and chanting in public, the occasional use of coloured smoke bombs away from stadiums as well as in them and the 'taking over' of large public spaces such as Trafalgar Square in London.



© Amanda Jacks

There is no doubt that such behaviour provokes any number of reactions from people from completely ignoring it to stopping to film the spectacle. It's also true to say that there will be some who find groups of football fans intimidating whatever they are doing. And this is why

we at the Football Supporters' Association have grave concerns about the proposed Policing, Sentencing and Courts Bill.

You may have heard about this bill or seen the numerous protests against it. Much of the coverage has talked about how the Bill, in its current form, will have a hugely negative impact on protest.

But why are we concerned about it? Well, obviously football fans protest as well, but as mentioned above they congregate in other ways too and unless the Bill is redrafted then we can see how easily the legislation will be used against fans on a match day.

For example (again, in its current format) the Bill creates a new offence consisting of intentionally or recklessly causing serious harm or a risk of serious harm to the public or a section of the public. On the face of it, nothing wrong with that, but delve deeper and you'll find that such harm includes "serious distress, serious annoyance, serious inconvenience or serious loss of amenity".

That is exceptionally broad and applicable in numerous circumstances such as fans congregating outside a pub, jumping around and singing, perhaps blocking access to a bus stop or spilling out into the road.

Annoyance is subjective and it isn't unreasonable to say that such behaviour may well be annoying to some or inconvenience them in some way.

The police already have powers of dispersal in a range of circumstances but it is deeply concerning to imagine that annoying or inconveniencing people could, effectively, become a criminal offence.

It's also all too clear to envisage football supporters being in line to become early and easy targets of this proposed new offence and very likely these offences becoming ones that could see football banning order applications on conviction. Imagine, a banning order just for being annoying. That is a seriously worrying notion.

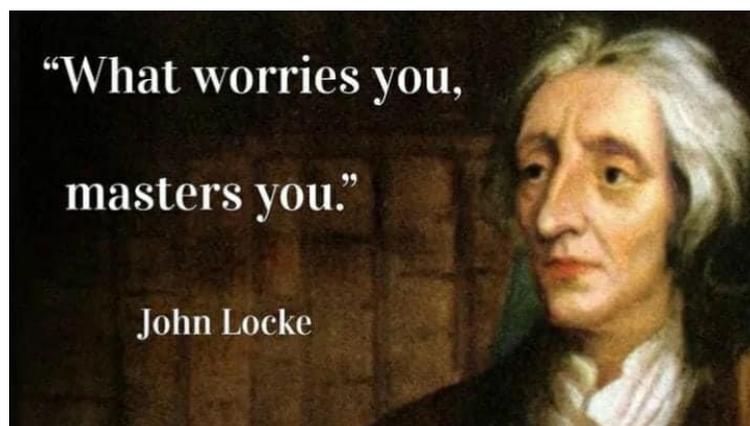
It has also been suggested that the Bill has such low thresholds – 'serious annoyance, disruption, unease (unease!) alarm' – that they could very easily interfere with the rights that currently exist that allow fans to walk in large groups from a pub or city centre to a stadium.

The police could say that they believe members of the public are or would be uneasy or alarmed by traditional fan behaviour and then feasibly curtail it and make it a criminal offence.

So, what are we doing about it? Thankfully, the Joint Committee on Human Rights has concerns about the Bill and is inviting submissions allowing people and organisations to articulate their own concerns ahead of the Bill proceeding through Parliament.

We will be submitting our own evidence soon and if there is anything you think we should consider including please do get in touch with us.

Many thanks to Lochlinn Parker of ITN Solicitors for his help with this piece.



Rex Brimicombe

100yearsofcoconuts was recently contacted by the family of .Rex Brimicombe MBE

Rex had been a supporter of the club for many years and the family have kindly donated two badges to the group to be displayed within the Coconuts museum sited in the Cambridge United Supporters Club



Colin Proctor who knew Rex for over fifty years gives his memories below

I first met Rex in the Supporters Club around 1967, he was a member of the S/C and lived in Ditton Walk.

When the VPC was formed in 1969 he was one of the original members joining the original of fourteen. I joined in 1970.

Rex served in the RAF for over 38 years and became a WO2 looking after the special functions that took place in his last 10 years of service.

He was with Douglas Barder for many years although not as a pilot. He was also present at a few very dignified functions attended by the Queen Mum.

Rex along with his wife Helga were members of the Joint Service Club in Barnwell Rd and was in charge of running same for many years.

When we went to Wembley for the 1990 play offs against Chesterfield, Rex purchased the football for £500 and it was hung in the Vice Presidents Club for many years.

Every November 11th, Rex would head the march of ex-servicemen parading at the Unknown Soldier in Hills Road





I travelled away watching Cambridge United with Rex for many years until his last two years but he still listened on the radio.

When Rex was unable to watch his club any longer. I would go sit with him and explain how we got on home and away.

Rex passed away on Monday 18th April 2016, aged 89 years

Colin Proctor

Sports support Covid certification (testing and vaccination) review as a credible option to enable full venues from 21 June onwards

We welcome the Government's commitment to securing a return of spectators to sporting events and the support all political parties and the devolved administrations have shown to returning sport at all levels throughout the pandemic.

This week's announcement by the Prime Minister that the Government's roadmap for easing the lockdown restrictions remains on course is very welcome news.

Sporting events can continue to plan for the return of small numbers of spectators from 17 May. At this stage of the process all spectators will need to follow social distancing requirements and attendance will be capped at a maximum of 25% of larger venue's



capacity. However this will still be insufficient to end sport's Covid financial crisis.

Looking ahead to June 21, we support the Government's ambition to secure the full return of fans, without restrictions if possible. Of necessity, this will depend upon the Government agreeing that it is safe to lessen or drop social distancing requirements.

How this can be achieved is being examined by the Events Research Programme (ERP) which is looking at a range of options, including the extent to which social distancing can be relaxed. This work is supported by all of the major sporting bodies.

All of our sports are committed to working closely with the ERP to explore all of the options that will allow us to swiftly return to full capacities. We also understand that further guidance will be issued by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Sports Grounds Safety Authority.

It is important that we have certainty as soon as possible on the form this guidance will take so we can plan efficiently and effectively with many big sporting events scheduled for late June and onwards.

The return of fans will give a huge boost to millions who enjoy a day out at a sporting event with their friends and families and be of great benefit to the economy. It is right that

every possible action is considered to secure this outcome as soon as possible, but only for as long as an unrestricted return is considered unsafe to fans, matchday staff and the wider public.

This includes investigating how a Covid certification arrangement could reduce and then safely remove the requirement for social distancing.

There are many issues to be addressed including how the technology would work and its



ease of use at major events, for both the attendees and the organisers.

All of our sports can see the benefit that a Covid certification process offers in getting more fans safely back to their sport as quickly as possible. We know that our stadia can only be fully filled with an assurance process.

This process must ensure that everyone can access stadia and must include arrangements that would verify a negative Covid test or an antibody test alongside vaccination

certification.

The final approach must not be discriminatory, should protect privacy, and have clear exit criteria.

We also reiterate that certification should not be a requirement for any form of participation in grassroots sport around the country.

Based on these principles, we support the review of the use of covid certification for major events. Any final decision on their application should follow an assessment of the evidence gathered in the forthcoming ERP trials.

We look forward to working with Government and all interested parties, including our stakeholders and fans, to deliver the great sporting summer the whole nation craves.

The AELTC, Wimbledon

English Football League (EFL)

England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB)

Football Association (The FA)

Lawn Tennis Association (LTA)

Premier League (PL)

Rugby Football League (RFL)

Rugby Football Union (RFU)

Scottish Professional Football League

Silverstone Circuit



CAMBRIDGE UNITED VS THE WEATHER



The recent Harrogate fog-fest made me think about the times I have watched Cambridge United over the past 50 odd years in really bad weather. Here are a few of my memories of United playing in the most extreme weather conditions.

RAIN

One decidedly soggy game that stands out for me was at home to Tranmere in 1990. It had been a very wet Christmas and the pitch was barely playable. At one point the Tranmere keeper tried to roll the ball to a full back. The ball held up in a puddle but rather than clear the danger the full back tried a return pass but the ball held up again, in the same puddle. Colin Baillie stepped in and chipped the keeper right in front of the NRE. The United pitch suffered a lot that year, this was arguably its worst day – or its best if you are Colin Baillie. United won the game 3-1.

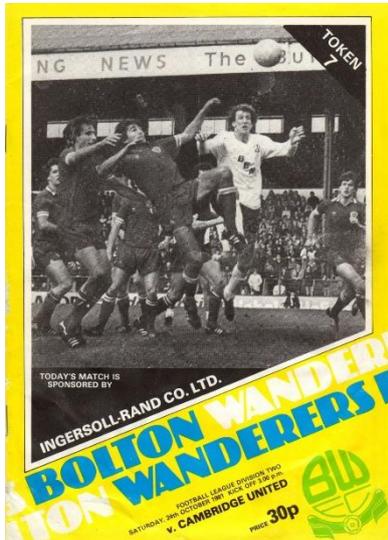


Watch the incident here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1TIDccPwG2Y>

The behind-closed-doors game against Newport County in October 2020 at the Abbey came close to being abandoned following a half time downpour. Not for the first time Ian Darler and his team came to the rescue, clearing the pitch of the worst of the standing water and the game survived. The U's went on to win 2-1, of course. There was one casualty that afternoon, however. The

persistent heavy rain revealed United's smart one-off 50th anniversary white shirts to be rather transparent when wet!

Players get paid to play in the rain. As fans it's quite the contrary, we sometimes fork out for the privilege of getting drenched. Two examples spring to mind,



both featuring notorious UTs – Uncovered Terraces. Bolton and Tranmere both, very kindly, used to reserve their expansive UTs for away fans. It rained non-stop at Burnden Park in October 1981. The nearest we could find to shelter was under the floodlight pylon. The utter soaking was worth it in the end, though, we won a cracker of a match 4-3, thus ending a run of 486 Division Two away games without a win. Something like that.

It was the same at Prenton Park in August 1992. The first game of the season, would you believe? Nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. Wet, wet, wet. My missus accompanied me to the Wirral that day, she had the right hump afterwards. She has kept her “waterproof” anorak from the day as a reminder not to believe anything it says on a label. To make matters worse we lost 2-0.

Watch the highlights here (you can see the rain dripping off the roof at one point): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xY4zE9yPDnI>

Relentless rain was the reason for one of the few occasions a United game was abandoned, at Barnsley in October 1982. Our Milk Cup tie was halted after an hour due to a waterlogged pitch with the game at 1-1. We lost the re-arranged game 2-1.

MUD

It's January 1980, United are at Chesham for a third round FA Cup tie, and it's a mud bath. I swear there were only four blades of grass on the entire pitch. United fans were allocated a grass bank behind one of the goals, but before long it was impossible to stand on it. U's fans spend just as much time slipping and sliding around as the players did that afternoon. I can't remember whether it was a United or Chesham attempt on goal at our end, but the ball was heading in until it stuck in the mud and the grateful keeper collected it. United won 2-0 and drew Villa in the next round as a reward.

WIND

A gale force wind can turn a football match into the proverbial game of two halves. Such was the case when United played at Stockport in March 1987. The wind was reported to have been gusting at 80mph. One end of the ground was even closed as part of the roof was considered dangerous. Playing with the wind United were 2-0 up at half time, but it was not enough. After the break Stockport scored three times to win 3-2. My friend Steve made the trip that evening but, delayed by road closures crossing the Pennines, he only got to Edgely Park at half time. D'oh.

Scunthorpe at the Abbey in October 1989 was similarly impacted by a mighty gale force wind. United played with the wind in the first half, attacking the NRE and scored four before half time. Worryingly Scunthorpe scored an "away" goal, against the wind, to make it 4-1 at half time.

That first half advantage proved sufficient, though, as United survived by conceding only two against the wind in the second half, ending up 5-3 winners.

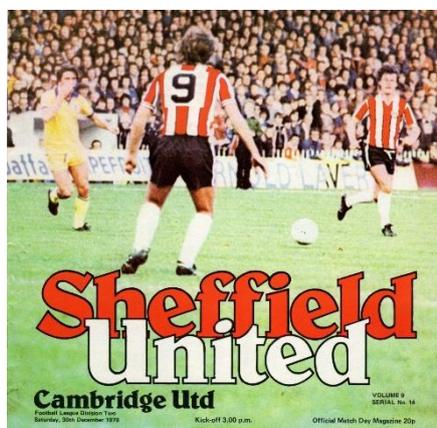
That first half included two of the most remarkable United goals ever seen at the Abbey, both scored from inside their own half - with the help of the gale. Take a bow Gary Clayton and Chris Leadbitter. I remember the latter's goal very clearly, viewed from the NRE: As Chris launched the ball into the stratosphere, we watched the Scunny keeper on his line peer skywards in sheer terror for what seemed like 10 minutes until the ball finally reappeared and dropped over his head and into the goal.

Watch the wind-assisted action here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNVXrJuv1HA>

FOG

Fog is the worst of all the match-threatening elements for fans, in my opinion. The ref will deem the match on if he can see both goals from the half-way line, but that means most fans in the ground will not stand a chance of witnessing at least half of the proceedings.



This was the case in another FA Cup third round tie at Doncaster in January 1982. We feared the worst travelling on the train up to Yorkshire from London as the mist turned to fog and then, as the Midlands became the North, into a bona fide pea souper! The game was given the go-ahead, to the dismay of the Us fans stood on a steep bank behind one of the goals. We could see nothing beyond the nearest point of the centre circle. Much of the game thus remains a mystery to us, save for the result – an ignominious 2-1 defeat. The programme Doncaster produced for the tie only rubbed salt into wounds, a single typed sheet wrapped around the programme intended for an earlier, postponed game against Walsall.

A candidate for the worst 40p I've ever spent.

Us fans won't need reminding of the heavy fog that descended on the Abbey at the recent game against Harrogate (January 2021), and got steadily worse as the game progressed. There were no fans at

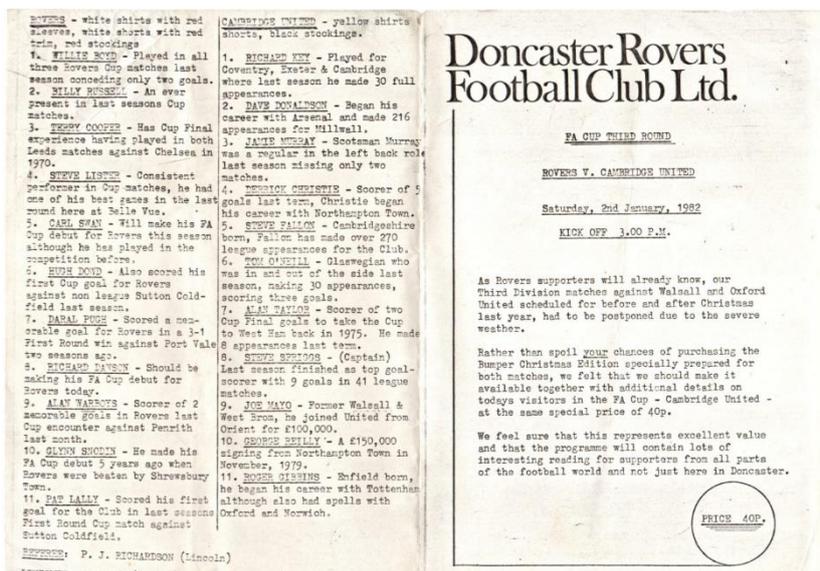
the Abbey so U's fans were watching on iFollow or listening to BBC Radio Cambs. Neither Mark Johnson or Doug Shulman had a clue who scored our equalizer! Joe Ironside, chaps. At one point Jeff Stelling on Sky Sports News was convinced the game would not be completed, and the Sky reporter at the game said that one United substitution could have involved Dion Dublin for all he could see. Luckily the fog seemed to lift a little after that goal so the game completed its course, United winning 2-1.

Try to watch the action through the gloom again here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5rAyrU_yRRQ

FROST AND ICE

Anyone who has followed the Us for any reasonable length of time will have surely been frozen to the bone at some point. A frozen pitch was the cause of the only United game I have attended to be abandoned. It was a top-of-the-table fixture versus Blackburn Rovers at the Abbey in December 1991. It was mightily cold when the game kicked off and during the first half from the main stand you could clearly see the pitch become whiter and whiter as the frost took



hold. It was not a great surprise that the match was abandoned at half time. There had been no goals.

Much more controversial was United's FA Cup match at Shrewsbury in January 1979, yet another third round tie. I was on one of six or seven United coaches to leave the Abbey that frosty morning, each of them with an eye on the weather and an ear to the radio as we travelled north – matches were being postponed left, right and centre. As it turned out Shrewsbury v Cambridge was one of only four ties that survived the freezing weather that afternoon and, probably as a result, the game was on Match of the Day. From the word go it was quite clear the game should never have started as the pitch was rock hard, frozen solid. We lost 3-1 on a skating rink not a football pitch. I've held a grudge against Shrewsbury ever since.

Most fans will have their own idea as to the coldest football ground in the UK. My candidates are Port Vale and Barnsley. I think my very coldest experience, though, was at Eastville, Bristol Rovers in February 1980. I bought a cup of tea at half time to warm up. I was nudged as I made my way back down the terrace. As the tea spilt, the scalding liquid initially burnt my hand but then, an instant later, I could feel it freezing. A numbing 0-0 draw didn't help.

SNOW

Snowy matches are all memorable, who doesn't love it when the orange ball makes an appearance? As I kid in the early 70s, I made a



snow-covered Subbuteo pitch out of an, ahem, "borrowed" white bed sheet. Snowy games are few and far between, sadly, and I can only recall a few watching United.

At Sheffield United in December 1978 the pitch must have had a good inch or two of lying snow. We came back from 2-0 down to lead 3-2 only to be denied the win by a very late equaliser. I remember Floyd Streete hitting the bar at our end with a 25-yard thunderbolt. It sent the snow that had settled on the crossbar flying into the air in a perfect arc, reflecting all the colours of the rainbow against the floodlights. The coach trip back down the A1 in a blizzard

was very hairy at times, we saw quite a few cars abandoned by the side of the road. The had snow stopped by the time we got to Boro and there was not a hint of snow in Cambridge, so the old boys supping in the Supporters Club couldn't understand what the fuss was about when we told the tale of a very eventful away game.

The following year we played West Ham at Upton Park on the Friday before Christmas. This was a local game for me as I worked close by, but getting to the game was still a nightmare, caused by heavy snow and problems on the underground. As a result, the attendance was a paltry 11,000. At half time I



remember the tannoy played Mike Oldfield's "In Dulci Jubilo" which managed to get what seemed like the whole ground dancing to keep warm. It even prompted a stalker! It was still playing, at the crowd's insistence, as the second half got underway. We lost 3-1.

Heavy snow on the M11 prevented me from reaching Grimsby in November 1980. We decided enough was enough when a car passed us in the fast lane facing the wrong direction before completing a 360 degree turn and sliding into a ditch! In the blizzard, halfway up the A1, the Supporters Club coach famously collected what was described as "a snow-bound yeti wearing a black and amber scarf"! It was in fact my friend Daron, hitching a lift to the game from university in Nottingham. The snow turned to rain in Grimsby so the game went ahead, although it was a mud bath by all accounts.

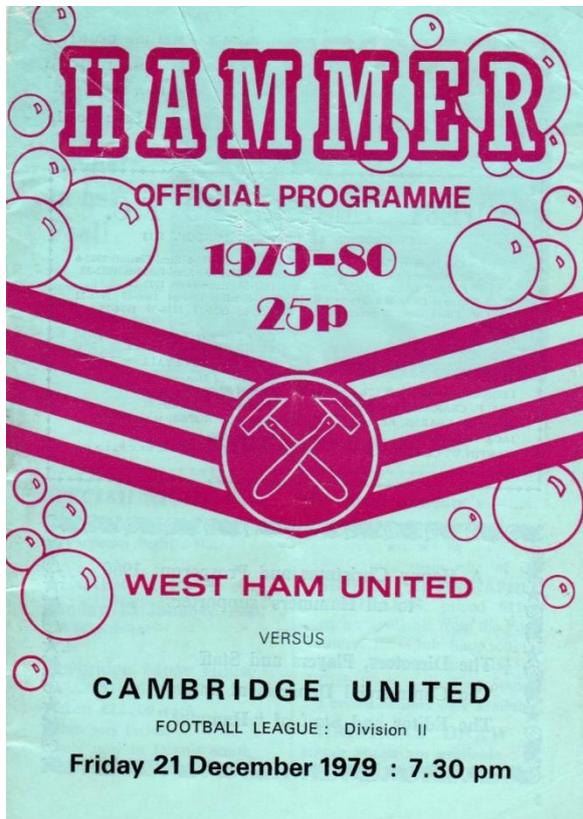
The club spent 16 hours clearing the Abbey of snow in February 1985 before a game against York, helped by an army of volunteer fans - and at least one of the players, Kevin Massey, I'm told. They wished they hadn't bothered, the Us were thumped 4-0. Kevin Massey didn't play, by the way!

HEAT

This is a rare one. There is, for me, only one possible candidate for the hottest conditions I have ever watched United. It was August 2003; England was in the grips of a heat wave. The first game of the season had the Us at Huddersfield.

The temperature climbed and climbed as we drove north. When we, reluctantly, got out of the air-conditioned car it was 36 big fat degrees. The game was pretty good, considering, and we got a creditable 2-2 draw thanks to goals from Dave Kitson and Dan Chillingworth. My main memory, though, was a United player (I think it was Stuart Bimson) receiving a bad cut to his head very early in the game,

but playing on, bandaged up and bloody Terry Butcher style. To do that under normal conditions would have been commendable. To do so in that heat was, frankly, heroic!



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These are games that went ahead, despite the weather conditions. Many more have been postponed of course, some very late in the day (hello Morecambe).

We all know that Ian Darler and his ground staff team take exceptionally good care of the Abbey pitch, so much

so that I can't remember when we last had a home league game called off - can you?

These are my memories of watching the Us in extreme weather conditions. What are yours?

Nigel Pearce
January 2021



“Life isn't, and has never been, a 2-0 home victory after a fish and chip lunch.”

Three minutes to go and you're 2-1 up in a semi-final. You look around and see all those thousands of faces contorted with fear and hope and worry. Everyone lost. Everything else gone out of their heads. Then the whistle blows and everyone goes spare. And just for those few minutes, you're at the centre of the whole world. And the fact that you care so much, that the noise you've made has been such a crucial part of it, is what makes it special. You've been as important as the players and if you hadn't been there, who'd have been bothered about football?

The great thing is, it comes round again and again. There's always another season. If you lose the Cup Final in May, there's the third round to look forward to in January. What's wrong with that? It's actually pretty comforting if you think about it.

But every now and then - not very often, but it happens - you catch a glimpse of a world that doesn't work like that. A world that doesn't stop in May and begin again in August. There's some stuff that just never comes back. And some stuff that just won't go away. And some stuff that you couldn't ignore even if you wanted to.



(Title and quote taken from Nick Hornby's Fever Pitch and the film based on the book).

I never thought much about mental health as a teenager. It felt like something quite distant. During a university exchange to America, a friendly, sociable and hugely-popular student in my halls of residence took his own life. It was a harrowing thing for us all to experience – partly because nobody saw it coming. I remember everyone's ashen faces as friends and neighbours spoke at a special memorial service. We all grew up a little that day.

Mental health is something that affects all of us. As football fans we've all been there when the ball hits the back of the net and the crowd erupts – but sometimes for us personally – it just doesn't quite feel the same as normal. Perhaps we've listened to yet another disappointing away defeat on the radio and just shrugged, because at the time, something more important is happening our lives. Or alternatively, maybe we've been feeling low, and a few drinks in the pub and a good home win has been just the tonic we needed.

But we keep coming back to football. I want to find out once and for all why we still keep going to matches or kick a ball around the park. I want to find out what football is doing to our brains. Why do we come back to our clubs year after year, even when it seems hopeless or irrational? Is football good or bad for our mental health? And for those who are suffering from mental health issues, is there a role for football in recovery and a brighter future?

Alan Pringle trained and worked in Glasgow as a mental health nurse. After relocating to Mansfield to work at Millbrook Mental Health Unit when it opened in 1987, Alan later moved into teaching and is now Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences at the University of Nottingham.

I also spoke to Alan's colleague at the University, Tim Carter. Tim also has a background as a mental health nurse and is an Assistant Professor. His main areas of expertise are the relationship between exercise and depression and common mental health issues. He has also been helping Nottingham Forest Community Trust with a new mental health initiative.

Alan talked about his background: "In 2004, I was running a day centre and we started men's groups which we thought were great. But nobody ever came. Getting men through the door into services was an absolute nightmare. So I ended up doing a lot of football-related stuff – about watching football, playing football and using football grounds as a place to base services."

His PhD looked at the impacts of supporting a club on the mental health of football fans. As part of his research he interviewed a number of supporters and he kindly shared his findings.



"In terms of watching football and mental health, my PhD was based on Mansfield Town fans. I was part of a phone-in and was listening to the experiences of all types of fans and wondered to myself what kept them supporting their team, standing in the rain, watching a 3-0 defeat.

"There was a series of in-depth interviews and I got volunteers to keep a diary of the season. They recorded what they were doing before, during and after games. There was a cross-section of supporters – a police officer, a lawyer, some unemployed lads and a couple who were ex-pit.

"What was surprising was the incredible similarities, regardless of their background. One of the things that came through was a sense of catharsis. The police officer and the lawyer were particularly interesting. They said they enjoyed having a break from dealing with all sorts of people and taking the uniform or suit off, and for 90 minutes, just getting rid of it all. Another told me he didn't get road rage during the football season!

"It was an explosive catharsis, but in a safe space where they could let go and no one could reach them. Rather than being a bad thing, they were saying it was a positive thing.

"The second thing was a sense of consistency in an ever-changing world. One lad said to me: 'When I was a kid I went to Stags, when I was married I went to Stags, when I was divorced I went to Stags. When the pit closed I went to Stags, when I remarried I went to Stags, when I was divorced again, I went to Stags! The only thing that's constant in my life is that I stand in the same bit of the ground and watch terrible football – and it's always been there for me. There's no player that's been there all those years. But I have.' I was picking up a sense of safety, a touchstone, in a world that had changed."

Alan also talked about the strong sense of connection across generations. He said: "Most grandsons don't want to hear from grandad what it was like to work down the pit. Grandad doesn't want to hear about the latest computer game. There was no shared language across the generations – apart from football.

"The currency was interesting. It wasn't about what job you had, but whether you were there the night when we beat West Ham 3-0. How many things can do that across generations?"

“It was also about having a point of conversation, regardless of whether your team is doing well. The key thing was the contact, the time in the pub before or after.

“So, there was this wonderful thread of catharsis, this thread of consistency as lives changed, and a thread of a shared starting point and language. And finally there was a sense of identity, that ‘this is me’ and I can say what I like about Mansfield Town. They were absolutely contemptuous of some of the big clubs! One woman I interviewed in the pub was covered in Mansfield Town tattoos. She told me it didn’t impact on her femininity, while her male friends told me she was one of the lads!”

Alan pointed out the benefits of going to a football club for those suffering from depression.

“For people suffering depression, going to a small club is brilliant. No one wants to talk to you about anything other than the trivialities of the game. Friends will ask how you are feeling, how you are sleeping or if you are taking your tablets. A professional will ask about your symptoms. At football you get none of that, but for getting back into society it’s great because you can be somebody without being questioned.”

As Nottingham Forest fans, we know that football doesn’t always make us feel good. In our interviews, Alan and Tim also pointed out some of the negative ways that football can affect life and impact other people.

Tim said: “The masculine environment that surrounds football is a huge challenge, but that’s all the more reason to do something about it. Men are expected to bottle it up, have a laugh with their mates, keep doing it and just ‘man up’ if they are struggling. That standard is far too high. It’s not sustainable.

“If this is the attitude at football grounds it could put some people off. If the environment isn’t safe then it’s a barrier to other people who might get something out of football. There’s a way of keeping that camaraderie without it being so masculine.



“That challenge is why it’s so important to get current and ex-players and managers to disclose their own mental health and show it is okay to talk about these things. We know it affects people like it did with Gary Speed but that’s after something drastic has happened. But if people can see their idols saying that despite all their money they are struggling, that’s really important.”

Alan remembered from his research: “Football is an expensive thing and there were instances in my research where money was being spent on football rather than kids’ clothes. And there were some who were so affected when their team lost, their wives and kids must’ve had a terrible time of it.

“When things are stacked against us we are looking for every moment of light we can find and you are hoping that football will be your ray of light. I remember being in a lift in the Queen’s Medical Centre shortly before Stags were relegated a few seasons ago. Even the voice in the lift said: ‘Going down.’ I thought even the lift was against us! It’s the curse of every fan. There can only be one champion.”

Although Alan values the social aspect of football, he does point out that sometimes social ground rules are set that aren't helpful to people having a tough time.

"There might be a group who are there to talk about football, not how they feel. Although we like to think it opens up friendships and you are physically with people, actually opportunities for meaningful conversations are rare. While it might be the case that football helps if you're depressed and you don't want to talk about your feelings, inversely, if you do, it's not really the forum for that. Football can cut it off. It's a paradox."

Alan isn't an avid social media user but has been shocked at some of the abuse and vitriol he has seen on platforms such as Twitter.

"There are some really positive mental health initiatives on social media, but I'd recommend being careful which sites you visit. Be selective who you engage with.

"Football isn't all wonderful, but what I have found on balance, is that there are substantially more good things than bad things that football does for our mental health. I'm not dismissing the negative things, but it's a balance thing."

Of course, playing football, like most exercise, is a great help to mental health. Tim explained that when someone is depressed there are actual biological symptoms. Sleep, appetite and energy levels can be massively affected.

Tim said: "Exercise, if done appropriately can target those three things. We know it can regulate and restore sleep, appetite and energy levels. But there are psychological aspects too. We are told to exercise all the time by the NHS. It's almost a religion. If someone with depression does a bit of exercise, it is universally valued. You know it will be received positively. Depression makes people want to stay in and do nothing, but going out running is a nice first step. Perhaps a team sport could follow later as they acquire the tools to start managing things.



"People suffering from depression also ruminate on things and think for hours about their actions. When you are swimming, running or playing football, it's difficult to do that. It's an hour away from mulling things over and doesn't have the drawbacks of alcohol or throwing yourself into work. This idea is called the distraction theory.

"Finally, other people exercise, so you naturally engage in conversations. It can also be done in a group where you don't have to talk about your mental health – just like watching football."

Alan worked with Nottinghamshire Healthcare Trust and Nottinghamshire FA who fund a service user football league. Alan helped the Trust work with Arnold Town to set up the *Positive Goals* league, which started as a tournament before developing into a league.

Alan remembered: “When it started, one of the main drivers was Bryn Gunn – a European Cup winner with Forest. To watch Bryn with these young lads with mental health problems was amazing. He was fantastic with them. He and Andy Muldoon (of Arnold Town) were instrumental in going into places like Rampton Secure Hospital and getting people playing football and getting the programme off the ground.

“Patients suffering from psychotic illnesses such as schizophrenia have chaotic lives, yet when they go onto the football pitch it all comes back to them. You are watching some talented lads. Some good players.”

The league is now administered by Notts County and continuing to flourish, with some of Alan’s former students running teams.



The final area which Alan and Tim talked about was the use of football grounds as a location for mental health initiatives and services.

Tim explained: “Football fans are captive audiences and target audiences. Many mental health awareness campaigns on television or on the bus get

watered down, but with football, attention is there and it affects everybody. You can get things on screens, season tickets and Twitter feeds where people are actively looking. It’s visual and present.”

Alan told me Notts County have run a portfolio of programmes for the last decade across a wide range of age-groups.

“Coaches are teaching primary school kids the basics of mental health but teaching it through football. So the kids are challenged to get the ball past someone and the coaches demonstrate how it is easier playing a one-two. It’s the same with life. We get through challenges better through friendships and the support of others.”

There is also a women’s group called *Right Minds* where they play a variety of sports and Ian Richardson, the ex-Notts player and manager, runs *On the Ball* where a football match is followed by a workshop – using the sport as a hook. Alan was involved in evaluating this programme after it had been set up.

“In these programmes the coaches do not have mental health backgrounds. You have to give them training and support and also spend a lot of time chasing grants and funding.”

Alan talked about the origins of his work setting up groups through Macclesfield Town. Men rarely enrolled themselves, so colleagues would hand flyers to women in nightclubs in an attempt to get their partners to attend programmes based around football examples and language.

“The programme went really well. Almost for a laugh we went to the biggest club in the country – Manchester United – and took the idea to them. We were really lucky. A guy at United said to us: ‘I guess most of the people who need help have depression or addiction? When I walked

out of a plane crash with my mates, I didn't get any help with it. I really struggled. I also watched my mate George drink himself to death. Count me in. I want to do this.' It was Bobby Charlton."

As the *It's a Goal* programme flourished and expanded to 16 clubs, Alan found that most high-profile people involved had a mental health story to tell. One he vividly remembers was Lou Marcari. They appeared together as part of the launch of the programme at Stoke City. Marcari's son Jonathan was on the books at Forest and in 1999, he took his own life at the age of 19.

Marcari said at the launch: "Every dad thinks their son will talk to them. I thought my son would talk to me. He didn't, he just killed himself."



Alan said: "Watching figures like Macari and Charlton genuinely touched by this helped a lot of people. It affects the rich and famous, no matter how wealthy they are."

But what about Nottingham Forest? Following the most recent takeover of the club, Tim was approached by Nottingham Forest Community Trust. Families had contacted the club suggesting that Forest could play a part in raising awareness of mental health. Tim said the feedback was that the new ownership was very keen to support this work.

Tim said: "Nottingham Forest Community Trust approached the Institute of Mental Health at the University of Nottingham and were put in touch with me. We wanted to find out what would be useful for the fans and then spread that into the community. We ran a focus group of 15 fans and explored some ideas.

"An awareness campaign will be launched soon around common mental health issues. The project includes things like awareness cards with season tickets – and then it will expand into the local community.

"I've delivered mental health workshops to Nottingham Forest Community Trust staff. I really get the impression they want to understand mental health and do things properly in the long term – not just because it's in fashion."

Through talking to Alan and Tim, it is clear that football can play a positive role in good mental health. As my interview with Alan came towards the end, we both agreed that there are parallels in how people should follow football clubs and how people need to deal with issues such as anxiety and depression. When things seem bleak, there is always next season and always a time when things will change for the better. What we want from football, we want from our lives – a better, more positive tomorrow. And through football we are making those key connections with friends, family, colleagues and even strangers that help us in a small way towards that.

"It's more about building blocks for resilience than treatment," said Alan. "It's about having friendships, connections, an outlet for catharsis and identity. These are things that might protect you against becoming unwell.

“Illnesses that are related to mood, such as anxiety and depression, are eminently treatable. They are related to something that has happened in somebody’s life. For example, if you have a bereavement, you’d expect a period of being absolutely flat and depressed. If you have support, friends, a job and a life, normally, you’d expect to come out the other end. If you don’t have that, then it stays under the surface and can affect your life and that’s the point when people often seek help. Medication will tackle symptoms but not the illness. But with help you can get through it.

Alan explained that as fans we might not always be able to help, but we can signpost others.

“It might be that we say: ‘This season you aren’t so much fun’ or ‘you seem a bit flat this afternoon’. This can signpost people to get help. It would be even better if we could have something at the grounds – pointers for people who need support.”

Tim said: “Men particularly aren’t good at showing emotion, but a football ground is a place where showing emotions is normal. Fans can hug each other, be sad, cry, or be anxious without being judged. While people are in this emotional space, maybe if they see something about talking about feelings, it would hit home a little bit more than, for example, on a bus where you aren’t in an emotional state.

“People with depression can feel alone, but at football clubs people are together. They chant and sing for 90 minutes. It’s real emotion experienced together. In day-to-day life, people aren’t sitting with each other any more. It’s texts, emails and emojis. The connections you make through football are absolutely vital.”

Talking to Alan and Tim about these hugely important issues just confirms that the scoreline, the manager, the performance of the goalkeeper or the league table position are almost incidental to the bigger picture. We should celebrate the catharsis, the connections, the identity and the shared language and experience which football brings to our lives. We should recognise the positive part it will play in our future.

Be there and look out for each other. See you at the City Ground soon.

Paul Severn



CFU Visit to the Cambridge Mosque



The mosque visit has gone down well & got CFU some positive exposure on behalf of the club.

Article here in the Cambridge university newspaper: <https://www.varsity.co.uk/sport/21228>

Also a small piece in the community section of Cambridge Independent today by Mark Taylor.

Will shortly be on the club's website too.

Keep up the good work & this is only the first small step on showing we are a diverse & inclusive community football club!

Ben Phillips



Hot off the Habbin

[programme articles]

Morecambe

“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together”.

The first time I went to a game in Morecambe, in 2007, I confess that I was much more interested in the town’s fortunate connection with Eric Morecambe and with its superbly restored Art Deco seafront hotel. It seemed to be full of derelict buildings, vague memories of a prosperous past and a very impressive and seriously underused railway station.

Since then, Morecambe has undergone a bit of a revival, the club has moved to a new ground and has become established in the Football League. Several years under long



serving former centre half Jim Bentley made them notoriously hard to beat, if not much fun to watch. We have come a long way too, since Charles Ademenio and Courtney Pitt terrorised defences in the Conference. Sadly, we weren’t able to be there to enjoy our 5-nil win at Morecambe earlier this season, a result which looks even more impressive, given Morecambe’s excellent results since then. They are challenging for promotion like us and, like us, must be looking forward to the season’s climax.

It’s a shame that Kevin Ellison has moved on, although he clearly enjoyed scoring against Morecambe a few weeks ago. He is a real character and had some hilarious banter with Habbin North over the years. Two years ago, the impressively bald Ellison told us that he was desperate for a haircut.

“And plastic surgery”, some unkind Habbinite shouted back. Football needs characters like him but there aren’t so many about.

We can anticipate a much tougher game at home. No doubt the Shrimps will have worked out that record goal scorer Paul Mullin and midfield wizard Wes Hoolahan are a threat to any defence. Kyle Knoyle, Jack Iredale and Hiram Boateng are in wonderful form. Who isn’t?! United produced some scintillating football in the first half at Carlisle and we could have been 3 up by the interval. We have a side which never gives up, as scoring right at the end of each half clearly shows. We are top of the league on

merit. It is no fluke. No opponents will be taken for granted but, at the top of our game, we are more than a match for any team, however much money they have spent. We haven't seen Harrison on the rampage for a while. I suspect the Friday will be his day.



Exeter City

“To achieve style, begin by affecting none”
EB White

I'm not sure that I will ever forgive the Grecians for the defeat they inflicted on us in the Wembley Playoff Final of 2008. No doubt the memory of a dire game was made



worse by the taunting of their fans after the game and by the fact they were promoted again the following season. We were so much better than them and yet Rob Edwards goal put them back into the league while we struggled in the conference for what seemed an eternity. Some managers talk about fine margins and this was a wonderful example of the concept. Defeat at Wembley always feels terrible but when we were there twice and won twice, all the pain went away. And we won the first ever playoff final at the real Wembley too. A day which I think will never be bettered in my career as a U's fan.

Exeter have long been associated with style, playing good football and, for twelve years, managed by the King of Cool, Paul Tisdale. They have played entertaining attacking football and have often unearthed outstanding players such as Ollie Watkins who has now played international

football. It can be done. Having spent three years in league one, Exeter have teased their fans by appearing in playoff finals in 2017, 2018 and 2020. Indeed, they are sitting on the edge of the playoffs this season. Talk to their fans about their chances and they are as pessimistic as they were in 2008. They were so convinced that they would lose that many of them chose to stay at home!

Exeter is a long way from anywhere and it's the place where you would expect to see our most loyal fans; Chris Vessey, Andy Weston and the late Keith Hood. It is a great place to stay and to be a tourist in, despite the language barrier. Many of the locals would not be out of place amongst the cast of Treasure Island but they are extremely friendly and knowledgeable about the game.

Anyway, it's our turn for glory this season. Now that we are able to put out our first choice team, we are a match for anyone. We are resilient too. We were so good in the early part of the game at Tranmere that I was stunned by the unexpectedness of their goal. I am almost as amazed by the fact that they still had 11 men on the pitch by the end. Paul Lewis seems devoid of sense and yet again weak refereeing meant that our superior skill was offset by a team keen to test the laws as well as his patience. It makes it harder for skilful teams to escape this league but I am sure that we will. The prophets of doom seem to have become very quiet now. We can't expect to win every game but we have a good chance of finishing as Champions. If we don't, it will have been a wonderful season anyway. Our team have shown just how much can be achieved by sticking together and working for each other. They are an example to us all. United in Endeavour.



Stevenage

“Football is the ballet of the masses.”
Dmitri Shostakovich

Odd as it may seem, our deadly rivals St. Evenage have a lot in common with us. We depend on the continued existence of real, and fair, competition and the endless opportunities to win things. Equally, both clubs are motivated by the constant jeopardy of a disastrous relegation which is the other side of the same coin. Like us, they respect their roots and their community. They treat their fans with respect, unlike noisy neighbours Spurs. The Big Six are united only in their willingness to treat their fans and the traditions they cherish with utter contempt.



I won't attempt to explain what football means to genuine fans. Sir Bobby Robson has already done that better than anyone else ever could. Rivals we may be but the grubby super league proposal is a timely reminder of everything that “ordinary” football clubs have in common. Whenever inadequate and egocentric owners

wreak havoc on clubs like Bury, Darlington, Blackpool, Coventry and all the others, we feel a sense of solidarity with all those other fans who have been deprived, however temporarily, of their right to dream. The Big Six don't care if clubs like ours go to the wall as long as their own wallets grow fatter.

Last night (Tuesday) a group of Cambridge fans rented a flat at Orient's ground so that they could cheer on the U's to victory. Mark Bonner, classy as always, went over to them at the end of the game to thank them for their passionate and boisterous support. He knows, as we all do, that our chosen clubs are a vital part of our lives, successful or not. This season has been wonderful for Cambridge fans, whatever happens during our last three games. During the awful year or so of the pandemic, our team's performances have been a ray of sunlight in almost unrelieved gloom. Any club owner who is happy to take that joy away from anyone doesn't deserve to be the custodian of a football club at any level. I would love to see the authorities strip them of that right.

Some years ago, after an away game at Stevenage, I was standing in the Gents next to a Stevenage fan. He asked me what I thought about the game. I had been in the Supporters' Club for some time and may have taken a glass, if not too. I launched into

a diatribe about how that cheat Adam Miller has dived to get a penalty. Of course, the



Stevenage fan turned out to be Adam's father. He laughed and we agreed that it had been a good game really. Later Adam Miller saw sense and came to play for us. I hope we win on Saturday. I think that 3 points would take us up but, in our league, all results are possible. Time to reclaim the people's game and to make it fairer for us all.

and finally....



“Perseverance, the secret of all triumphs.”
Victor Hugo

Life is full of disappointments and our home game against Stevenage was particularly hard to take, given all the hype and the weight of expectation. It's been a long season, we have a small squad and our last two away games took a lot out of the team. After all, the Big Six future reminded us all how much we value the principle of real competition. All teams have to lose sometimes and no one has a divine right to win. We have had setbacks before and come back strongly. We will again. When you're so nearly across the line, the tension can become unbearable. That is the doubtful joy experienced by all true fans.

CFU were asked about the possibility of fans going to the last home game of the season and also about the possibility of rewarding season holders who have had to miss going to games because of Covid restrictions. The answers to those questions can be found earlier in this newsletter. The point is, one of our functions is to pursue the legitimate concerns of fans which are put to us. Some fans have expressed

concerns on social media about the number of fans in the ground for the Stevenage game. They were obviously concerned by the thought that some may not have had the right to be there. Any suggestion of cronyism or breach of regulations is potentially



damaging but it is not for us to make judgements. We will however ask the question and rely on the club's desire for transparency. When we spoke to the club we were told that the EFL had modified its rules about who could be in the ground, roughly doubling the number of Directors and their guests. There was also a much greater Press presence than usual, as might be expected. The car park was much fuller than usual because of these factors. Some who normally park on the street didn't need to because they were able to park at the ground. Stevenage brought more vehicles as part of their Covid precautions.

I had hoped to include a final selection of Jonnoisms this month but it seems that he hasn't come up with anything very original for a while. Doug Shulman, ever the pessimist, had us beaten from the twentieth minute on Saturday as if he doesn't yet realise how good we are! I did enjoy Mark's comment at Orient following a home defender's lofted clearance, claiming, "that has come down with bits of the International Space Stadium on it!" Perhaps our beloved commentary team are more inspired when we win. We all are,

Despite the Covid restrictions, the odd disappointment and the uncertainty still facing us in the last two games, this has been a great season after years of low expectations. We must not forget that. Very few of us would have dreamed of getting into League One before this season began but we are almost there. That's the kind of excitement that the corporate owners will never understand.



Finally, not everything expressed in this newsletter is either my opinion or the official view of CFU. Every contributor is a fan and our contrasting opinions are an integral part of the fabric of the game we all love. I hope we love it more after Friday!

COYU's!

Andrew

Make a difference and join CFU.

Your opinions and contributions are always gratefully received: acstephen@hotmail.com

[Deadline for next newsletter- May 15th]

United in Endeavour

