PSEUDO-FANS – THE ANALYSIS OF THE PHENOMENON OF POLISH FOOTBALL HOOLIGANISM

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ABSTRACT
We have witnessed many intriguing social phenomena at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. Researchers of physical culture and sport, especially those interested in philosophical and social aspects of events, are likely to come across many surprising situations resulting from the dynamic development of social reality. Sport has undoubtedly become one of the factors that have a great influence on numerous social occurrences. From among various phenomena related to sport the author analyses the one which has riveted the attention of many people interested in sport – the stigmatization of contemporary sport by hooliganism. This problem may seem to concern mainly football (Am. soccer), but unfortunately it occurs in other disciplines as well. Although the phenomenon reaches the edges of sport and is still just within its margins, it appears necessary to conduct thorough research on it.

Key words: football, fans, pseudo-fans, hooliganism

Introduction

The paper is concerned with the introduction and analysis of a very important social phenomenon, which is football hooliganism. Several methods have been used to create this work. The basic one was, obviously, going to stadiums during football matches and actively observing various groups of recipients of sports spectacles. Talking with sportsmen, following the Internet forums and reading different publications on the subject completed the observations.

“Hooligans”, “fanatics”, “pseudo-fans” and “vandals” these are the words used interchangeably to describe certain (minor) part of sports audience, mainly the participants of football matches, speedway and ice-hockey [1–4].

Pseudo-fan (in Greek pseudo means a lie) is the pretense, an imitation which merely bears an exterior resemblance to a true fan. The fans differ from the pseudo-fans in the intentions with which they go to stadiums [5–8]. Pseudo-fans see themselves as representatives of clubs (cities, regions and even whole countries) standing side by side with real fans [9–10]. Their attachment to clubs’ colours and symbols is often on the verge of nationalism [11–16] and fanaticism similar to religious fundamentalism. Different groups of pseudo-fans fight each other using all possible methods. The aim of those clashes is to prove who is physically stronger, who dominates in a particular area and, thus, to show – paradoxically – whose club is better [17–19].

Football hooligans are mainly active in fights and acts of vandalism; however, their actions are often preceded by serious planning and therefore can be seen as logical [7, 20–22]. Hooligans constitute a well organised community with an elaborate structure [10, 23–24]. Different groups of fans of various football clubs have complex relationships with each other. Those relationships are based on three main elements: “friendship”, “hostility” and “agreement” (neutral relationships). Hooligans fight according to a particular “system”: to fight with fans of some clubs is simply obligatory, whereas the very same fans, at the same time, support fans of other clubs in their fights with their “enemies”. There are also fans towards which they remain indifferent. Some groups of fans make tac-tic alliances (so called “triads” [8]). One of the most important “triads” in Poland is Arka Gdynia, Cracovia Kraków and Lech Poznań.

During matches of Polish national football team a relative truce is in force; fans of particular clubs can wear their colours, however, they should not manifest them.
Apart from fighting their “everlasting” enemies, fighting the police is a must for every football hooligan. Sometimes fans who detest each other most join their forces to fight policemen. Supporting the police in their routine, preventive activities aimed at fans of the rival club is considered “unfair”, which means that it is seen as infringing the hooligans’ code of conduct. Such behaviour disqualifies any group of hooligans.

“Hooligans league” is a constantly updated ranking of scale and effectiveness of hooligans’ actions such as acts of vandalism, brawls or scuffles with the police.

Mass media and votes on the Internet forums are authorised sources of information about those actions. Hooligans supporting Arka Gdynia, Lech Poznań, Legia Warszawa, Cracovia Kraków and Śląsk Wrocław are considered the most radical ones.

Hooligans supporting different clubs often hunt for each other. The trouble moments occur on their way to matches. Hooligans supporting rival clubs organise “traps” for their enemies on railway tracks, access roads to stadiums or narrowest parts of city streets [10]. That is why police forces are often organised to accompany groups of fans who travel either by special trains or special buses.

Many pseudo-fans do not wear clubs’ scarves; neither will they go to matches. They take part in “tournaments” outside stadiums. The number of “competitors” on either side is the same. The fights are organised according to strict rules – either with “equipment” or without it. And thus, hooligans are equipped with baseball bats, knives, axes, machetes, chains, etc. [8, 25–29]. To win such a fight means to gain prestige; that is why the hooligans train beforehand or even organise sparring fights. They rent sports halls, hire martial arts instructors and test various methods and tactics. They often wear identical sports outfits with the same inscriptions on them. Arka Gdynia fans set up a rugby team and took the second place in Polish Rugby Championship. Before the 2006 World Cup in Germany, Polish pseudo-fans pitted themselves against German pseudo-fans to find out who “the true host” of the World Cup was.

Football hooligans constitute a well-organised lobby which is gradually gaining power in modern society. Their actions are not only restricted to football stadiums. They often get involved in social disputes including those not related to sport. The examples of their actions outside stadiums are numerous – the confrontation with antiglobalists during the economic summit in Warsaw, in 2004, the pacification of university students’ festival in Łódź, in 2004, crushing legal demonstrations in Kraków, Poznań and Warsaw, in 2004–2006, to name but a few. The most active fighters in the riots in Budapest during the 50th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution were pseudo-fans along with skinheads.

The most common stereotype about football hooligans is the belief that they come from social margin. Unfortunately, among hooligans who use sports events as a pretext for brawls are the members of all social groups. Junior high school students, secondary school students, university students, managers and even policemen take part in those disturbances. Sometimes hooligans accept professionally active sportsmen (e.g. martial arts experts) to increase their chances of winning the “tournament”. Igor Sypniewski, once a member of Polish national football team, has been repeatedly arrested for taking part in hooligans’ brawls.

Conclusions

The results of the activities of football hooligans have gradually become more dangerous for the hooligans themselves and more bothersome for the outsiders who simply want to enjoy sports events. Stadium hooligans from various backgrounds have caused a paradoxical situation. The audiences of sports competitions, being obviously their reactive recipients, have become such an important element of the competition that in extreme (but numerous) cases it is the audience that makes the event impossible. By causing problems during sports events, pseudo-fans force sports officials to take serious steps such as punishing the clubs by closing their stadiums and moving matches to different places. Thus, the real fans cannot participate in the events. Football hooligans have become the terrorists for contemporary sport.

References


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