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The ‘friendly’ derby? Examining the rivalry between supporters of Liverpool and Everton football clubs

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Abstract

This research explores the relationship between some fans from two English football clubs, Everton FC and Liverpool FC. This will be framed within an examination of the meaning of rivalry, underpinned by a review of key literature on social deconstruction, the meanings gauged from football fan experiences, and how these have been portrayed in the media. In examining the relationship between supporters, this paper reflects on interview and focus group data, pertaining to definitional issues, the perceived significance of the history of the two clubs and the key experiences that have shaped their rivalry. This investigation also explores views on the extent to which enmity or friendship exists between the clubs, the validity of media representation and the nature and legitimacy of related popular opinion. Respondents were also questioned about the wider implications of this rivalry and how this could inform an understanding of English football culture. This case study as presented could be judged to be representative of an undercurrent of tension in English football between supporters of different clubs and tension between several key components of the increasingly financially-driven football industry. The findings of this paper reject simplistic explanations and rationales for the nature of football rivalry, but argue that this complex phenomenon serves to shape identity and encourages collective attachment to particular views and modes of expression. Fans engage in symbolic gestures which demonstrate a connection to locality and the ethos of “their club”. The nature of such actions is often also informed by the values, attitudes and behaviour represented by those who support rival teams.

Introduction: football fans - hooligans or just rivals?

Soccer provides opportunities for thousands of spectators to collectively reaffirm their commitment to beliefs, values and myths that underlie their cultural identity. It allows people to make public declarations about what they stand for and what they stand against. It often reflects and reinforces national rivalries and age-old grievances that emanate from sources beyond the playing field (Sack and Suster, 2000: 306).
Football is, arguably, the most popular participation sport in the world. In addition to playing the game, watching elite level football has also become a hugely significant global pastime, largely due to the development of competitions and advancements in the broadcasting industry. Kuyper (1994: 1) argues that, “when a game matters to billions of people it ceases to be just a game. Football is never just football. It helps make wars and revolutions, and it fascinates mafias and dictators”. So intense is this fascination in the performance and achievement of competing club and national teams, that match attending supporters might also be considered to be participating in the spectacle that professional football has become. This contribution adopts forms such as songs, symbols and actions, which both reflect and inform the cultural make-up of fan identity and behaviour. Many authors have pointed to the advantages of such involvement, highlighting factors such as improvements in community relations, the expansion of commercial opportunities and increases in sports participation levels (Brimon, 2002). However, despite the popularity of football and the constructive benefits of participating in the game to various degrees, one can draw from a number of notable examples of what Freeman (2005: 71) terms as the “abuse of football”. The socially deconstructive aspect of the game needs to be addressed in order to reveal the potential limitations and dangers of football, which should be investigated and understood with an appreciation of the sport’s positive characteristics. The consistent failure to do so in much of the existing literature has led to a misrepresentation and misunderstanding of the nature and meaning of support for football.

With regards to the abuse of football, evidence suggests that organised versions of the game have been subjected to corruption at a number of levels. Freeman (2005: 1) argues that, “every day the football world shows how amoral it is”. Sugden and Tomlinson (2003: 12) claim that FIFA (football’s global governing body) serve as a key example, “Blatter [FIFA’s president] reels in the face of accusations of administrative malpractice, financial mismanagement and outright organisational deception and fraud”. However, despite the gravity of this accusation, according to these authors such exploitative practices typically involve limited numbers of people. A key example of the socially deconstructive application of football with wider reaching implications relates to the disorderly element of (usually) collective behaviour from people who watch professional football, either at club or international level; hooligans Psycho-social experience and characteristics and the nature and degree to which such individuals relate to given football and cultural identities are among the list of ingredients which contribute to violent behaviour from football fans (Gow and Rookwood, 2008). Widely considered a product of English fan culture, football hooliganism as this phenomenon has become known, has been prevalent in the UK (Redhead, 2007), as well as internationally for a
number of decades (Evans and Rowe 2002). From a British perspective, the most significant consequence of such behaviour occurred at the European Cup final in May 1985, where thirty-nine Juventus fans died at the Heysel stadium in Brussels following clashes with Liverpool supporters (Chisari, 2004).

Football hooliganism has been a consistent element of many British fan subcultures. Due to its occasionally severe consequences, the phenomenon has received widespread attention from a variety of circles, notably the media (Rookwood, 2009). Whilst the significance of this phenomenon has been overstated in certain contexts, the fact that injuries and even deaths have occurred as a result of hooliganism highlights this phenomenon is a key example of the abuse of football in the UK. Governmental response has seen policing methods revamped and fresh legislation developed to enable stiffer penalties to be introduced to both deter and penalize unruly behaviour from fans (Pearson, 2002). Football stadiums have also been refurbished and rebuilt as the game has undergone dramatic socio-economic restructuring. Such alterations have affected the cultural element of fandom, including violent supporter groups. However, despite considerable commitments to political, financial, architectural and organisational developments aimed at preventing it, incidents of hooliganism continue to occur in English football (Rookwood, 2009). This demonstrates an ongoing example of the collective engagement in social deconstruction through football, and represents a key example of the abuse of the game.

However, whilst the prevalence of hooliganism (in which a small minority of supporters typically engage) should not be questioned, the disproportionate media coverage of and legal response to English football disorder may have distorted an understanding of the nature, identity, motivation and behaviours associated with being and English football fan. As Poulton (2002: 122) argues, “hysterical headlines, emotive language, evocative imagery and graphic photographs, all help to frame the football fan-cum-hooligan as a member of the homogeneous group of drunken, tattooed, crop-headed oafs”. Although as Poulton (2002: 122) also notes, despite such stereotyping, “not all football fans are shaven-headed, beer-bellied, tattooed, drunk-and-disorderly young males”. Football disorder stemmed from existing and developing social rivalries (Rookwood, 2009), yet the manner in which fans relate to inter-club competition seems to have led increasingly to the term “rivalry” being both misrepresented and misunderstood within popular consciousness. Subsequently the word may have become synonymous with hooliganism, terms which are often unhelpfully employed interchangeably. Poulton (2002) argues for the possibility of and requirement for a clear distinction, claiming that a fan can be passionate and
engage fully in a rivalry without resorting to the disorderly or violent behaviour which she claims differentiates a fan from a hooligan.

In recognising the need for such a distinction, one only need look at the historical coverage of football by the media. The infrastructure of competitive football conceived in nineteenth century England was a model imitated by other nations, both in Europe and beyond. Many of the social and organisational practices and competition formats established in England during that period continue to represent the established order of the domestic and international game throughout the world (Rookwood and Buckley, 2007). The experience of regularly staged competitive inter- and intra-city matches informs the underlying principles of football fandom. In an era that predates hooliganism as a perceived social problem, behaviour that would today be considered disorderly was reported in quite different terms. Dunning, Murphy and Williams (1988: 11) comment that “high-spirited fans” going onto the pitch during the early-to-mid twentieth century was reported merely as an attempt to entertain the crowd or congratulate heroic players. Reported instances were not usually perceived to reflect a serious social problem. Press reaction was rarely one of condemnation but reflected a popular belief that such behaviour from the predominantly working-class crowds was a natural response to victory. Conduct of this nature was therefore not greeted with the exaggerated and sensationalised moral panic seen in connection modern football. The supposed self-controlled nature of English supporters was considered the antithesis of their Latin, continental and Celtic counterparts, who were expected to behave in a wild manner.

(Dunning et al., 1988: 98) claim that there was a slight undercurrent of apprehension in Britain, including references to alcohol and vandalism, but that disorder was generally perceived as exuberant rather than violent, and considered a source of amusement for those who witnessed it. English spectators were commonly perceived as “an improving people” and any negative press tended to relate to a supporter’s inability to exercise self-control or their failure to adhere to the ethics of sportsmanship (Holt, 1989). Importantly, such behaviour was deemed socially acceptable. Conversely, this form of conduct would invoke a dehumanising response from today’s media, with labels employed such as “animalistic, lunatic or barbaric” (Poulton, 2002: 126). However, the sensationalist reporting and disproportionate policing of modern fan conduct has increasingly led to many behaviours being (re)interpreted as disorderly. Rivalry is often viewed in this context as a representative term for competition between clubs and their supporters; yet its employment as a synonym for hooliganism serves as neither a helpful nor realistic basis to form an understanding of how and why supporters behave the way they do. This position could be considered an extension of Perryman’s (2002: 21) argument
that there is “an absence of almost any positive messages, images or information to encourage a more balanced sense” of football culture.

Given the complicated nature of fandom and the variations between individual cases of inter-club rivalries, providing a greater “sense of balance” is not a simple task. However, one can draw from particularly well known and significant historic rivalries (that have likely reflected and been impacted by similar rivalries) as case studies in order to shed more light upon this issue. This approach may be appropriate here, as “case studies are particularly well suited to new research areas or research areas for which the existing theory seems inadequate” (Eisenhardt, 1989: 548-9). Therefore this case-study examined a particular relationship that has been developing since the late eighteenth century. Fan culture, as any other culture, serves as a progressing creation of its members, not as a fixed entity or constrained static group, and as Burdsey and Chappell (1996) state, culture represents a constantly altering compilation of attitudes and practices, which develop according to contemporary conditions. The clubs involved in this study are Liverpool and Everton, who might be regarded as being among the most famous, successful and passionately supported clubs in the world. Their collective achievements render the city of Liverpool one of the most successful in English football (Richardson and Rookwood, 2008). The Merseyside “derby”, a term usually describing a local rivalry, is one of the oldest in football history and many key experiences and developments in football, including disasters, reports and triumphs that have shaped the English game, have involved or been a reflection of these clubs.

It is the purpose of this paper to provide a balanced account of how and why Liverpool and Everton fans experience, perceive, frame and explain the relationship between their clubs. Consequently, this investigation was based on the perspectives of experienced match-going supporters from both Liverpool and Everton, with data gathered via semi-structured interviews and focus groups. A number of authors including Pearson (1998) and Stott, Hutchison and Drury (2001) have utilised these methods in order to obtain authentic and accurate data from football fans, which was a good indicator for their employment in this research. Five supporters were interviewed and three focus groups were held with fans from both clubs, with five participants in each focus group. Each of the forty respondents were season-tickets holders who had attended a minimum of 50% of home and away matches during the last ten seasons (between August 1999 and May 2009). Supporters were asked to offer their opinions on the history of their club and its relationship with its rival; the significance of their experiences, events and developments that have shaped the rivalry; what explains the perceived enmity or friendship between the clubs; the validity of the related media representation; and the nature and legitimacy of popular
opinion on the rivalry. Respondents were also questioned on the wider implications of this rivalry and what it says, or does not say about English football culture. Their statements are discussed in the following section and are categorised relative to the club which the respondent supports (E. Everton, L. Liverpool) and whether it was offered during an interview (I) or a focus group (F), followed by a number to differentiate between different participants.

The ‘friendly’ derby? Football fandom and rivalry in Liverpool

The roots of both Everton and Liverpool Football Clubs derive from the St Domingo Methodist chapel team formed in 1878. As the club grew in stature it changed its name to Everton, after the district where most of the players lived. The club competed in the FA Cup (the world’s oldest national football competition) before being one of the twelve founders members of the English Football League in 1888. From 1884 Everton constructed and began to play their matches at Anfield stadium, winning the league title for the first time in 1891 and attracting crowds of up to 10,000 spectators (Kennedy, 2003). However, following a disagreement over the rent and a split at boardroom level the club moved less than a mile away to Mere Green Field in 1892. A new ground was constructed there and was named Goodison Park, after nearby Goodison Road (Graham, 1985). As a consequence of the managerial dispute former Everton director John Houlding formed Liverpool Football Club in the same year. The club adopted Anfield stadium as their home and chose a name “that would have city-wide appeal and thereby attract more supporters” (Lupson, 2008: 37). Although Liverpool’s first match attracted fewer than 200 supporters (with Everton playing on the same night in front of 12,000 fans), Liverpool’s popularity soon grew and the club eventually gained entry to the Football League, winning the league title in 1901, 1905 and 1906. As Liverpool became more established and “derby” games against Everton were contested more frequently, the rivalry between the two clubs developed. As Liverpool’s former Chief Executive Rick Parry stated, “whatever your allegiances, you can’t get away from the fact that there are historic links between the Reds and the Blues on Merseyside” (Lupson, 2008: 1). Similarly a participant in this work argued “the relationship between the clubs goes back to the nineteenth century. Everyone knows the history of Liverpool and Everton in this city” (LI1).

When the interviewees were questioned about their views on the rivalry between the two clubs, they offered context-bound opinions on what they understood the term rivalry to mean. The Oxford English Dictionary (2008) defines it as “keen competition for favour or success”. The Dictionary of Etymology (2005) (i.e. the derivation of words) states that the term derives from the Latin word rivalis, meaning “a competitor, especially in love”. The term does not refer to violent or
disorderly conduct. Therefore, in a football context it seems curious that the term rivalry has adopted such an understanding, (Poulton, 2002). However the term was most frequently used by participants to describe the correlation between competing clubs and their [competing] supporters, usually locally situated and in the same league. As one fan explained,

A rivalry is two teams that are fierce competitors, or hate each other, but that mostly comes from the fans. But it’s between individual clubs. You don’t join up with one club because you both hate another team. And everyone knows about rivalries in world football. There’s Barcelona - Real Madrid. Then there’s Boca Juniors - River Plate in Argentina and the Milan derby in Italy. In England there are loads of derbies and people will argue over what is the biggest one and what makes it a derby. It’s usually a local thing and when teams play each other a lot, like in the same league (EI1).

Another respondent stated, “in Spanish they call it el classico – the match between big teams. In England though the derby has always been the big game for local pride, the battle you have with teams from your area. So for us Everton is our derby. But it doesn’t mean they are our biggest rivals” (LI1). There was a possible distinction made therefore between local derbies, which were considered largely consistent, and rivalries that were spread across a wider geographical area. Another respondent argued “rivalries are usually local, in England especially. But they can be further apart. It depends what you stand for and who stands in the way of you, who represents what you hate or who you’re jealous of. It’s the us v you mentality” (LF3).

Mills (1959: 42-3) states that, “the process of constructing meaning or an identity for something is dependant on two principles; semantics (establishing what something is in itself) and syntax (establishing what it is not)”. By extension, in order to ascertain the identity of an Evertonian i.e. an Everton fan therefore, one must also recognise what being a Liverpudlian i.e. a Liverpool fan embodies, with a key element of understanding being an appreciation of how the two may be distinct from one another. As one supporter argued, “Liverpool fans have always tried to be different. And so have we, but not in the same way. They’ve got their flags and long songs, where as we’ve gone a different route. If we’re honest, we’ve done that to stand out from them” (EI2). Millwall is widely considered to be one of the most infamous clubs in Britain from a hooliganism point of view and their fans are often heard singing, “No one likes us, we don’t care”, almost as a club motto. During a recent match against Gillingham, the Millwall supporters sang, “No one hates you, no one cares”, mocking the club for not having a rival or an enemy and by extension that Gillingham FC may lack a social meaning or presence (Rookwood, 2009). Local rivalry and being disliked therefore are important components of fan identity - “fans
like to have rivalries because they like to get one-up on them. It’s part of being a fan having a team you don’t like”. Even professional players have echoed similar sentiments, such as Liverpool’s Jamie Carragher (2008: 36) who argues, “seeing clubs you don’t like suffer is all part of the tradition”.

Another question that participants were asked was in relation to how their club loyalties were forged. One supporter stated, “with most places it’s who’s the best team. You get people from down south supporting Man. United and Liverpool because of their success. Pretty much anywhere in England you find people supporting teams that aren’t local. But this city stands out. Everyone is either red or blue. Even the dogs have to pick a team” (EI3). Another stated, “in Liverpool it’s Liverpool or Everton, always will be. But how you choose between em? … depends on your first experiences. But it’s not where you live or religion or politics” (LF2). Lupson (2008: 7) argues that, “some have suggested that the passion of their supporters has sectarian roots, Everton allegedly being the Catholic club and Liverpool the protestant one. But this is quite wrong”. Similarly, another respondent pointed out,

Protestant or Catholic doesn’t matter and there’s no Tories as virtually everyone votes Labour or Lib Dem. Glasgow is split on religion, Manchester on where you live, but in Liverpool it’s not even on family. We’ve got three reds and three blues in ours. It partly goes on your mates and which club you see first. But you always pick one and you never change clubs (EI1).

Whilst respondents discussed the consistency of the direction of fan support, a number of participants noted that the relationship between the clubs was “changing all the time” (LF1). In Merseyside, Everton fans have coined the phrase “redshites” for Liverpool supporters, and the term “bitter blue” is often used by Liverpool fans to describe an Evertonian. These terms, used disdainfully by some respondents and almost affectionately by others were considered, “fairly recent developments really. It wasn’t like that in the ‘60s when I started going. It used to be called the friendly derby, but it changed in the ‘80s and more so in the ‘90s” (LF2). Another supporter argued,

Because the grounds are so close, we don’t play on the same day. My granddad would watch Everton one week and Liverpool the next. This was before people went to away games and you’d be quite used to seeing each other. And sitting in each other’s ends on derby day was fine. It’s changed now though” (EI3).

A number of relatively recent events have been perceived to help re-shape the rivalry between Liverpool FC and Everton FC and understanding this relationship requires a comparison with previous eras at the clubs. As one respondent stated,
“particularly looking back over the last twenty years, because it was fairly steady up until the ‘70s but changed totally in the ‘80s” (LF2). Kirkby (2007: 18) compares the current relationship to the past, discussing the 1977 FA Cup semi-final in Manchester between Liverpool and Everton,

Where both sets of fans sung “Merseyside, la la la”. It was a natural and genuine show of Scouse solidarity, a moment of pride that means more to me now than it did then because it captures the Liverpool I grew up in; in a time before “banter” was replaced by the word “bitter”.

In addition, Sampson (2007: 181) notes that in May 1985, Liverpool and Everton were both about to contest major European finals, and The End magazine celebrated the mutual joy with a half-red, half-blue edition entitled, “Liverpool’s Annual Bender”. Twenty years on and its hard to accept the enmity that now exists between Liverpool and Everton fans. One respondent argued, “there weren’t many problems between us until Heysel in ‘85. Heysel changed everything. Hillsborough had a big impact too, so did the fact we were both crap in the ‘90s. With Liverpool and Everton it’s really about the tragedies and the silverware, or the lack of it” (LI1). Furthermore,

The bitterness is from Heysel. We call them “murderers” because they killed Juve fans. But it’s not coz we’re arsed about them [Juventus], it’s coz they got English teams banned and we won the league in “85 and they stopped us getting into Europe. We’d never been in it but we could have won that European Cup. That bitterness has got worse and people’s obsession with it makes them angry. Liverpool winning it again in 2005 has only made it worse. Football means a lot in this city and when we’re not the best there’s a backlash. Liverpool with all their success is often where our backlash goes. I guess we need to release that bitterness together and the derby lets us do that (EI3).

The Heysel disaster was considered to have changed the attitudes of many supporters towards football violence in the city. As Allt (2004: 90) points out, “Liverpool had one ruthless, massive firm of young scallies, but from Heysel onwards… the young Road End firm would never be as angry, or as continually numerous”. The experience of the disaster altered the relationship between the Liverpool and Everton fans, for although Liverpool supporters became less predisposed to disorder, “Evertonian resentment started to border on pure hatred” (Reade, 2008: 156). However, as one Liverpool fan argued,

Liverpool were hurt by the European ban too. We won the league in ‘86, ‘88 and 1990 with brilliant teams and we would have won a couple more European Cups if it weren’t for the ban. But Everton had never been in it [European Cup] and we’d won four. It became their obsession and us denying them the chance to play in it
changed the derby and the general relationship between fans. But Hillsborough brought everything into perspective, especially in Liverpool (LI4).

The Hillsborough Disaster occurred at Sheffield Wednesday’s ground in April 1989 at the FA Cup semi-final between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest. It was abandoned six minutes into the game, as fans were being crushed to death behind the goal. Ninety-six Liverpool fans died in what remains the deadliest stadium-related disaster in British history and one of the worst in international football. One respondent discussed the tragedy in the context of Heysel, arguing that, “Heysel and Hillsborough both had problems with organisation. But Liverpool fans were partly to blame for Heysel. But Hillsborough was nothing to do with hooliganism and the fans weren’t at fault” (EF2). Ticher (1997: 20) substantiates this point, arguing that Hillsborough “exposed in the most vivid manner possible the complacent attitudes in football towards safety”, whilst Scraton (2004: 196) discusses that, “the Thatcherite obsession with “secure containment”, was resulting in the penning of fans, the acceptance of stadium neglect and the compromising of crowd safety”. The Taylor Report which followed the disaster served as a “sophisticated, sympathetic and creative intervention into the condition of the English Football League” (Taylor, 1991: 4). Many of the seventy-six recommendations made in the report, including all-seater facilities and safety improvements have helped to revolutionise the spectator experience. Resultant developments in crowd management and policing, hooliganism, legislation, representation and marketing strategies have also had an impact on football rivalries. This is particularly thought to be the case in Liverpool.

The derby went from being quite friendly to really tense after Heysel. We were the best teams in Europe and took the title off each other every year. But Hillsborough reminded us what’s important in life. It brought the city to its knees and blue and red rallied around. The rivalry took a step back and the city was united in grief. I’ll always remember the sea of blue and red scarves tied around Stanley Park the day after the game (EI3).

Following the tragedy Liverpool and Everton met in the FA Cup final and Sampson (2007: 182) claims that Everton were “the one team whose fans would respect the poignancy of the occasion”. Further, Lupson (2008: 9) stated that, “the sense of community expressed by both sets of supporters that day is an indication of the fundamental goodwill that exists between the majority of them”. Allt (2004: 337) claims that the attitudes of Liverpool supporters had been altered dramatically after the disasters,

The tragedies at Heysel and Hillsborough had made Liverpool’s supporters look at the bigger picture and see that football wasn’t the only thing in life and that fighting with other supporters seemed futile and a waste of time.
In terms of the perceived impact on the relationship between fans of both clubs, one participant in this research argued that, “Hillsborough brought us together after Heysel had driven a wedge between us. But then the ‘90s showed us that being starved of success can quickly change things” (EF2).

The 1990s both Liverpool FC and Everton FC had limited, even mediocre competition success compared to what they had been used to. According to one respondent this experience, “changed a lot of attitudes. Fans were used to success, Liverpool won everything in the ‘60s, ‘70s and ‘80s and Everton won things too and when you stop winning things, going the match changes and you look for things to blame” (EF1). It was suggested that circumstances; club developments, management decisions and player performances transpired against both clubs during this period, in what proved a barren spell. A single league title, FA Cup and League Cup victories represented the sum total of the Liverpool’s honours during the 1990s, whilst Everton’s FA Cup success in 1995 is the only trophy the club has secured since winning the championship in 1987. Following from Arsenal’s re-emergence under the guidance of Frenchman Arsene Wenger in the mid-1990s, Gerard Houllier was appointed as team manager by Liverpool FC who seemingly opted to follow a similar pattern of employing the skills of managers from overseas amidst a shifting climate for English football. Clubs attempted to capitalise on the expanding opportunities for income generation made available through the development of commercial and broadcasting contracts not to mention the growing manipulation of supporter loyalty. This together with alterations to European employment law saw the English game become a more attainable and attractive proposition for foreign players and managers and eventually owners. As one respondent (Liverpool fan) pointed out, “clubs switched on to how much money they could make in ripping fans off. I hate the word “industry” but that’s what footy’s become. Players earn too much… As English football improved, everyone wants to make money off it, sponsors, players, and now owners. Everton give us loads [i.e. lots of grief/belittle] for having American owners who have increased the [financial] debt of Liverpool” (LF2).

Gerald Houllier prioritised improvements for the team, by signing players from other clubs domestically and internationally, building on the core of those who had progressed through the Liverpool youth system. Liverpool won five trophies in 2001, a season that signalled the re-emergence of the club in English and European football. Four years later, the club won its fifth European Cup under the guidance of Houllier’s successor, Rafael Benitez. An Everton fan reported that during this period, “[Everton] weren’t enjoying the best of times. We’d put up with some really poor managers and Liverpool bought Barmby and Xavier (players) off us and started
winning things, which did our heads in” (EI5). This underlines another important element of the rivalry between the two clubs, namely the professional working relationship between them. As a Liverpool fan pointed out, “we’ve always shared players, which has probably helped the clubs get on in the long run. Not like us and United” (LF2). The transfer histories between these clubs substantiate this statement. Only eight players have ever moved directly between Liverpool and Manchester United, the last being Phil Chisnall in 1964, whereas thirty-three players have played for both Everton and Liverpool (the greatest number of transfers between Liverpool and any other club). Another respondent argued, “some derbies have had a bit more spice if a player has just moved between us but generally it’s helped. Loads have moved between Liverpool and Everton and loads more have played for both clubs but gone via another team. And boyhood fans have grown up and played for the other team and been heroes for them” (EI4).

Liverpool fans claim that the club’s re-establishment since the millennium has had a notable impact on Everton supporters and how supporters express their attitudes. For example, “Everton is a bitter club now. No title for twenty years when you’d won nine will do that to you. And the Heysel songs and other things get worse every year as we’ve got better and won things. They just sing about us” (LF2). Barrett (2007: 248) explains this as an attempt by Evertonians to divert,

...attention from the shortcomings of their own club… We see this ribbing for what is. It’s their way of diverting attention from the continual shortcomings of their own club by highlighting something they think will wind us up.

Reade (2008: 156) notes that Evertonians chant “murderers” at Liverpool fans during every derby. But it’s not the Heysel thirty-nine they’re protesting about, it’s the death of their own dream. In addition, a Liverpool fan pointed out,

Everton have always been different to us. We’ve got banners and songs with verses whereas they’re a bit more simple. They’re as passionate as us but just have less ways of showing it I suppose. But they stand out. In the ‘80s they were more racist than us. “Everton are white” became their motto, especially after we signed John Barnes in ‘87. They threw bananas at him for being black. But they’ve got well more black lads in their team now than we have (LI4).

The comprehensive efforts to reduce football violence seems to have impacted negatively upon the prevalence of other disorderly behaviours such as racism. Pearson (1999: 35) for example claims that, “when fans are correctly segregated, it can be argued that the simulated display of indecent and threatening behaviour and songs in fact replaces violence in the ground rather than leading to it, and this
appears to have become common knowledge to fans”. Samuel (2006: 72) is more damning of what he sees as a recent increase in “vicious conduct”,

The fear must be that football increasingly indulges vicious fanaticism. Slowly we are rejecting the concept that is at the centre of social order; personal responsibility. Grow up. Get a grip. You buy a ticket, not the right to quit the species for the day.

In discussing this topic, one fan claimed that, “there’s always been naughty songs at the match and it still goes on. It is a bit worse but there’s also less fighting now, so the songs stand out more. But it’s our game, and we’ll sing what we want” (LF3). In addition, “Liverpool are known for their songs and flags, and quite a few are about beating Everton. Everton have made a bit of a come back lately though and you see that in some of our flags” (LF2). Another respondent in the same focus group continued the conversation by offering some examples, “the year we won the European Cup they finished fourth and got into Europe, but they got knocked out in the qualifier. So we had a banner, “Two nights in August or one night in May”. Then we had one at the final saying “For those of you watching in blue and white [Everton’s colours] this is what a European Cup looks like” (LF2).

Despite arguing that the relationship between Liverpool supporters and their Evertonian counterparts has become increasingly strained, Everton supporters continue to respect the Hillsborough disaster, “we don’t tell jokes or sing or get bitter about Hillsborough. That would be the point of no return” (EI2). As one respondent noted, “we both know the limits when it comes to flags and songs and we both know where to draw the line. You can’t say that about every derby in the country” (LF1). Although many clubs were similarly sensitive about the disaster for many years, Liverpool and Everton supporters feel that this sensitivity is gradually eroding to the point where songs about the tragedy have become normalised at some matches. “Man United sing “You killed your own fans” and make crushing gestures at Anfield every year. Millwall were the first to have a majority do it, but Chelsea are like that now. We respect Everton because they don’t” (LI4). On this point of mutual respect a Liverpool fan commented,

When Michael Shields [a Liverpool fan wrongly sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment for assault at the 2005 European Cup final] went to prison, Everton sung “how wide is your arse” and were well out of order. They basically said, “he might be Scouse but he’s one of you”. But then there’s other times when they do the right thing. They had banners at the FA Cup semi this year against Man. United in memory of Hillsborough for Scouse solidarity. But we’ve done our bit too. When Rhys Jones was shot in Croxteth everyone was shocked at how an eleven-year old kid could get shot in our city. We played “Z-Cars” [the Everton anthem] at Anfield before a match as a mark of respect. That would never happen normally. When it comes to Scousers dying, Scousers stick by their own (LI2).
Shortly after Liverpool secured a quintet of trophies in 2001, Everton employed David Moyes as their new manager. According to one Everton fan, “Moyes has given us back respect. He’s not had money to spend but he’s one of the greats because he’s put us back on the map” (EF1). Although Moyes has not managed to win a trophy in his seven years in charge, he is considered to have had a huge impact at Everton, and notably in the context of their relationship with Liverpool (Prentice, 2007). He coined the term The People’s Club in his press conference when he became Everton manager in 2002. He claims that, “Everton is not a manufactured club; it’s a club that supporters are born into and bred through” (Moyes, 2007: 8). According to one Everton supporter, “that was a master stoke, as it had a pop at Liverpool too. The reds hated it, claiming they had said it first. We sing about their fans all being from Norway and all Scousers supporting Everton and they hate it. Moyes just gave us a motto that’s given us a bit more pride, a bit more identity” (EI1). In discussing this issue, a Liverpudlian respondent argued, “it was [Liverpool manager] Shankly who came up with that in the ‘60s. He said “we are the people” and would always give Everton stick, saying things like, “the best two teams in Merseyside are Liverpool and Liverpool reserves” and “if Everton were playing at the bottom of the garden, I’d pull the curtains” (LF3). Another respondent in the same focus group made the revealing comment that, “Moyes was clever in what he said though. It gave Everton a real lift and spiced up the rivalry” (LF3).

However, some respondents argued that Everton’s identity and recent resurgence has been undermined by the club’s attempts to move grounds.

Goodison is a dump now and Everton need to move grounds. We voted on it and most were in favour of going. But when we asked to move to Stanley Park [which separates the two stadiums] the council said no, saying it was public land. But then Liverpool asked and they got the green light off the council. Evertonians were fuming. We missed out on going to the Docks as well, so we’re having to move to Kirkby, which technically isn’t in Liverpool. It’s a sore point for most blues” (EI3).

Everton reached the FA Cup final in 2009, their first final appearance since 1995. Despite losing to Chelsea in the final, the cup run which involved a replay victory over Liverpool was considered significant in the context of Merseyside rivalry, as the following supporters argued,

Everton’s ground is a right dump and when they move to Kirkby they won’t be in Liverpool any more. So at the derby we sang “f*** off to Kirkby, the city’s all ours”. Then because people from Kirkby are all sock robbers, we took footy socks to the cup game there and threw them on the pitch. No one outside of Liverpool got it, which made it funnier. They knocked us out but that was the best derby in ages (LI1).
In discussing the same incident an Evertonian argued,

As much as we hate to admit it, the socks were funny. But we knocked them out and getting the final was a massive [achievement] because everyone all over the world watches it. And we sung “we’re off to Wembley the city’s all yours”. We nearly won it too, but on the way we beat Liverpool, Villa and Man. United. It was a real statement and we start singing more about us when we’re playing in cup finals and going away in Europe (EI4).

The “sock derby” as it became known was another example of what one fan describes as, “the Scouse way of being different. We both knew that only the Scousers would have understood it. But that’s what derbies are. That’s what rivalry is. It’s personal, between you and them. Using what you know matters to the other side to wind them up” (LF2).

Other respondents commented on how valid they perceived the media’s representation of the rivalry to be and the legitimacy of popular opinion. For example, “I think if it weren’t for David Moyes then the derby would have got a bit boring. Because Everton are a decent side and we’re both pushing to win things, the derby’s brilliant. [A match played by] Everton is still the game you look for first when the fixtures come out” (LF3). Another fan stated, “the media have labelled Liverpool v Manchester United, as the Derby” (EI1). However, as the following account from a Liverpool fan illustrates, this is considered to represent a misunderstanding of supporter culture.

Football’s all about money now and a lot of that comes from TV. The big games for TV are those between the best clubs. So the top four play each other and it’s a big deal. And they are for the fans, but the local game is more about the rivalry. The TV and the national papers miss the point (LF1).

An Everton fan commented upon the same issue claiming that, “the national press don’t give a true reflection but most local authors and reporters do. Fan books and books about the clubs and the local papers generally get it right. Apart from Scally that is. But then that was written by a lad from Wales” (EI2).

The author of the publication Scally is self-confessed hooligan Andy Nichols (2002: 66), who wrote this of the rivalry between Liverpool and Everton. “The fact is that the vast majority of fans from both clubs hate each other with a passion”. However, the respondents in this research do not concur, and consider this point to be a misrepresentation of opinion on Merseyside.

A lot has been said about the derby getting worse and it has, but it’s not as bad as some make out. We hate each other’s club but we don’t hate each other as people.
That’s the difference between our rivalry and a lot of others. Liverpool and Man. United don’t get on because they’re the most successful but also because Scousers and Mancs don’t get on. Rangers and Celtic hate each other because of sectarianism. There’s a social side to it. But most Liverpool and Everton fans would still rather beat each other than the Mancs but then they usually want to go for a pint after it. The older fellas keep us in check and that’s why it stays that way. Look at Rhys Jones and Hillsborough. Deep down Scousers are Scousers, blue or red (IE3).

**Conclusion**

There are many myths in the football world but the most outrageous is that Liverpool and Everton fans are all best mates, stand shoulder to shoulder in the Kop or Park end on derby day and, regardless of the result spend the night drinking together, cracking each other up with their Scouse wit (Nichols, 2002: 65).

Stone (2007) argues that football subcultures are not simply informed by attending live matches or the results and performances of the team, but reflect the extent to which related meanings influence the everyday life of members. Armstrong and Guilianotti (2001: 41) suggest that cultural identities are established through rivalries and opposition, and that most rivalries derive from prejudice, myth and conflicts, “the club provides a supporter not simply with an element of personal identity but a complex and living representation of the supporter’s public identity”. In relation to the rivalry between supporters of Liverpool and Everton and the identities forged by these fans, the respondents perceived this demographic and this relationship to have been misrepresented by the argument presented by Nichols which may be considered to be a typical example of, “things written about fans in this city which miss the point” (LI3). Previous examinations of Liverpudlian culture have been criticised for representing little more than idle speculation (Grant 2007). Beal (2007: viii) discusses the “stigmatization if not demonization” attached to Liverpool and its people by the media and within popular consciousness, which have functioned to blur our understanding. The relationship between Liverpool and Everton supporters is considered to be a significant rivalry in the context of British football. O’Brien (2004) views this relationship as an important albeit more peaceful football rivalry than others in Glasgow, London and Manchester and similar sentiments were echoed in this research. As one Everton fan pointed out, “Liverpool rivalry is important but every club has their own rival and sometimes it’s hard to generalise as to what makes fans think or act the way they do” (EF2). This statement both defends the case study approach adopted here but also uncovers a weakness of the research, as pointed out by one of the Liverpool fans, “you’re not going to learn everything about English football just by looking at Liverpool” (LI1).
Fans/respondents also commented upon some wider implications of this rivalry. It was argued that the Merseyside derby could be considered representative of a growing undercurrent of tension in English football, between the fans and a number of key participants in the increasingly financially-driven football “industry”. Professional players earn what fans consider extortionate salaries with the transfer system encouraging a scenario where most players “will happily kiss whatever club badge you stick in front of them” (Dodd, 2007: 157). The organisational and financial plight of Everton and Liverpool has also impacted upon the rivalry, as supporters react to different experiences of performance and executive (mis)management, and taunt their rivals for the same reason.

Rivalries shape identity and encourage collective attachment to particular views and modes of expression. This involves borrowing from both familiar and unfamiliar processes in order to send messages to another group of supporters, which are sometimes intended to be hidden from those considered outsiders to the rivalry. Evertonians sing about the Heysel disaster primarily because they feel the European ban halted their progress. They sing “justice for Heysel”, not on behalf of the victims’ families who felt Liverpool supporters were not properly punished (Chisari, 2004), but because they still crave the opportunity to succeed at the highest level. Something they feel they were unfairly denied. Fans engage in symbolic gestures which demonstrate an interaction with community and their club’s ethos. The nature of such actions is often also informed by the values, attitudes and behaviour of those who support rival teams. Importantly there appears to be some agreement between supporters in this respect. Frosdick and Marsh (2006: 412) discuss the Bedouin Syndrome in relation to football fandom, “where the enemy of my enemy is my friend, the friend of my enemy is my enemy”. However, it would appear that any suggestion that fans sense a connection with supporters of other teams based on a shared rivalry with a third party serves to oversimplify the nature of football rivalries. Fans clearly stated that any rivalry is primarily experienced exclusively by only two clubs.

Although there have been notable changes in the way Liverpool and Everton fans relate to each other, such developments have occurred with acceptance from the majority. Instances of conduct that deviate from accepted behavioural norms are responded to with forms of self-policing which occur within the boundaries of agreed and shared limits. This would explain why Everton fans sanction singing about Michael Shields but not about the Hillsborough tragedy and why Liverpool supporters will not engage in songs about Rhys Jones and respected the Everton anthem being played at Anfield after he was killed. The concern for some fans that a new generation of Evertonians who have never known the Pre-Heysel friendliness
will continue to push the boundaries of acceptable behaviour, appears at least in the
current climate to be constrained by this self-policing mechanism. Such apparatus is
applied because most supporters are still receptive to what Lupson (2008: 9) terms
the “fundamental goodwill” that exists between these two clubs. Bearing in mind
Burdsey and Chappell’s (1996) argument about culture serving as a progressing
creation of its members and representing a constantly altering compilation of
attitudes and practices which develop according to contemporary conditions, the
potential for such boundaries being stretched “beyond the accepted limits” should be
noted. Songs about the Hillsborough disaster serve as a most poignant example of
forgetting and ignorance almost to “the point of no return” (EI1). This suggests that
supporters are aware of the fragility of the relationship but are also mindful of the
rapidity of its transformation. A subsequent study in a decade’s time could
investigate this issue with considerable interest. Future work might also examine the
relative nature, rationale and significance of inter-city rivalries which may be
formed upon other or similar circumstances.

The media were considered by the respondents to have misrepresented crunch or
grudge matches, which fans claim have resulted in an expectation of crowd violence
in some contexts, together with disproportionate policing and media coverage.
Subsequently the word rivalry has unhelpfully been employed as a synonym for
hooliganism. This has helped lead to stringent attempts to reduce football violence,
with some arguing that other disorderly behaviours often effectively replace
hooliganism. However, as a consequence the intensity of these behaviours are
considered by some to have become more bitter and vicious, with such expression
becoming increasingly normalised or accepted. However, as Poulton (2002)
suggests, not all fans are hooligans and supporters can be passionate and engage
fully in a rivalry without resorting to the disorderly or violent behaviour which
differentiate a fan from a hooligan. Rivalry is not therefore definitively connected to
hooliganism. It is the extent to which football supporters are connected to one
another outside of football, or their commitment to refrain from violence, which
determines whether a rivalry becomes enmity. Clearly those rivalries shared between
clubs whose supporters identify with conflicting characteristics (related to factors
such as religion, locality or ethnicity and other social constructs) are likely to be
more hate-filled and violent than those who lack such ethno-religious and socio-
political distinctions. Football identities appear to be informed by a communal
commitment to certain norms along with a shared understanding of those who/that
are considered to conflict with those norms. For the broadcasters and those who
observe and write about football from the comfort of a couch, bar or press box rather
than in the stands, rivalry seems to be primarily related to the performance of a team.
However, for the match-going supporters it is as much about the “performance on
the terraces” demonstrated through the language of fandom that shapes a rivalry, friendly or otherwise.

References


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