



file 888

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

25 June 1984

Soccer Spectator Violence

Thank you for your letter of 19 June about soccer spectator violence which the Prime Minister has seen and noted.

David Barclay

Alan Davis, Esq.,  
Department of the Environment

ew



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My ref:

Your ref:

Prime Minister (4)

To note the Minister's response to your doubts about the "decline" in football hooliganism. (19 June 1984)

Dear David

SOCCER SPECTATOR VIOLENCE

Attached.

DMS  
25/6

Thank you for your letter of 31 May in which you asked for a note of our evidence to support the statement in my Secretary of State's minute of 30 May to the Prime Minister that "Though it is difficult to produce precise statistics our impression and that of the Football Association is that soccer violence in this country, particularly in and around the stadia themselves, is on the decline."

That impression was based, not primarily on such statistical evidence as there is - which we have collected together below - but on the views of those closely involved in these football problems that violence in our football grounds has reduced. This professional judgement, based on experience, is widely supported. But as we have improved our controls at home, we may in a sense have pushed the troubles abroad where offending fans have found it altogether easier to indulge their violent tendencies.

My Secretary of State recognises of course that the public perception may not be one of improved controls: but we must stress that the media regard incidents of hooliganism as news and regularly look out for them, at home or abroad, and exaggerate them. For example, the recent match in Brussels between Anderlecht and Tottenham Hotspur (which prompted the Cabinet discussion) brought headlines depicting riot and disturbance. But our Embassy in Brussels and the local authorities report an altogether calmer story. There were media reports of 200 arrests of English fans; in fact, 6 were arrested, whilst around 100 were detained temporarily as a precautionary measure. In particular, a major media story was that one England fan had been shot. This tragic incident had very little to do with football. The unfortunate victim was killed the night before the match in a bar brawl, over payment of the bill, in an area of Brussels where such incidents are commonplace (and thus our Embassy advises visitors not to go there).

The decline (or otherwise) in hooliganism in the UK cannot readily be backed by statistical evidence, for two main reasons:-

- a. football hooliganism is not a specific offence so that records of arrest are not kept. They would in any case be unreliable. It is often difficult to decide whether an arrest for disorderly behaviour near a football ground has anything to do with football; changes in numbers

of arrests could also be due to changes in policing;

b. records of incidents at matches are neither comprehensive nor consistent. They depend upon human judgements - by referees and clubs - as to whether incidents are worth reporting.

If a report is made, an FA Commission of Inquiry has to be held. This procedure at least is standard and provides, therefore, some guide to trends.

Over the past 6 seasons there has been a drop in the number of reports to the FA requiring investigation from 63 to 53. Charges have been pressed on 5 occasions, compared to 20 six years ago. But we have some reservations about developments in the FA's disciplinary procedure. Our impression is that the perceived reduction in violence in and around the stadia has been brought about by the precautions taken (some at the Government's instigation) by the clubs and the police. But one effect has been to move incidents outside the stadia to transport routes, as indicated by British Transport Police figures showing that arrests for public order offences on trains and stations increased by some 21% over the period 1977 to 1983. During the same period, the number of trains escorted by the BTP increased by 6%. Again we must express a reservation about the statistics; they cannot be related specifically to football and the British Transport Police have said that they improved their methods of collecting information (for train disorders) in 1982 and this may have enhanced the numbers of arrests recorded.

Yours ever

Alan

A H DAVIS  
Private Secretary