'Black and whiters': The relative powerlessness of 'active' supporter organization mobility at English Premier League football clubs

This article examines the reaction by Newcastle United supporters to the resignation of Kevin Keegan as Newcastle United manager in September 2008. Unhappy at the ownership and management structure of the club following Keegan's departure, a series of supporter-led meetings took place that eventually led to the creation of Newcastle United Supporters' Club and Newcastle United Supporters' Trust. This article draws on a non-participant observation of these meetings and argues that although there are an increasing number of 'active' supporters throughout British football, ultimately it is the significance of 'passive' supporters who hamper the inclusion of supporters' organizations at higher level clubs. The article concludes by suggesting that clubs, irrespective of wealth and success, need to recognize the long-term value of supporters. Failure to do so can result in fan alienation and ultimately decline (as seen with the recent cases of Coventry City and Portsmouth).

Keywords: football; fans; management; supporter clubs; inclusion

Introduction

Over the last twenty years there have been many changes to English football. In this post-Hillsborough era, the most significant change has been the introduction of a Premier League in 1992 and its growing relationship with satellite television (most notably BSkyB). This global exposure has helped increase the number of sponsors and overseas investors and has ultimately changed the nature of supporters. The introduction of all-seater stadiums and increasing ticket prices to help pay for them, for example, created a more customer-centered approach by clubs who sought to encourage more affluent spectators from outside the traditional, local fan-base to attend matches.[1] Unhappy at the commercial changes impacting upon football fandom, a number of 'active' fans (defined as those fans who actively participate in the creation as well as exchange of information with other fans, clubs, supporter organizations, groups and the media) began seeking a greater sense of inclusion in the club-fan relationship. This has been helped by the growing media, in particular the Internet and the development of supporter-based websites that also allow fans to actively participate in discussions on message boards and other forums or blogs.

Whilst scholarly work has examined the politicized and active nature of fandom, limited work has actually looked at specific case studies of supporter resistance at English Premier League clubs.[2] Brown's article looked at the formation of a new club, FC United of Manchester, as a form of resistance to the takeover of Manchester United by the American-based Glazer family in 2005 and Williams recent article looked at the creation of a supporter group (Spirit of Shankly) at Liverpool in 2008 in response to the financial mismanagement of the club by Americans Tom Hicks and George Gillett.[3] Although not on a global scale as Liverpool or Manchester United, the focus of this article is on the response of supporters towards the English-based owner of Newcastle United, Mike Ashley, immediately after the

resignation of Kevin Keegan as Newcastle United manager in September 2008.[4] As Millward states, 'fan perspectives have often been underrepresented in football sociology' and this article aims to highlight the political purpose of a locally-created supporter organization at a club where local identity plays a significant role in the cultural practice of fandom for a number of supporters.[5]

During Keegan's eight-month tenure (he had previously managed the club between 1992 and 1997), the club had adopted a management structure where the transfer policy was the responsibility of a "football-related" executive director (Dennis Wise) and a "vice-president of player recruitment" (Tony Jimenez). Frustrated by his lack of input into player recruitment, Keegan resigned and was quoted as saying: 'It's my opinion that a manager must have the right to manage and that clubs should not impose upon any manager any player that he does not want'.[6] Almost immediately, an impromptu meeting was held by active Newcastle United fans. From this emotive gathering a further three meetings were held, and out of this emerged an organized fan group 'Newcastle United Supporters' Club' (NUSC) that subsequently led to 'Newcastle United Supporters' Trust' (NUST).

Thus, the purpose of this article is to examine the series of meetings that led to the creation of NUSC and NUST and provide a comparative analysis on the extent to which active participation leads to a greater form of supporter inclusion within top-level English football clubs. Despite the creation of NUSC and NUST, the article will argue that, for British club-supporter relations at least, only when clubs (usually those in the lower-leagues) face financial problems does supporter representation become an alternative that clubs are willing to engage with (such as with the recent examples of Northampton Town and Portsmouth). Although Newcastle United supporters were actively seeking greater levels of inclusion, the lack of supporter engagement across the club's wider and passive fan base (defined as those fans that do not actively engage with other fans, clubs, supporters organizations and the media) ultimately detracts from the impact supporter resistance like this can actually achieve. Those fans that want to buy shares in order to gain some form of inclusion have been seriously affected by the globalization and commodification of the Premier League where a significant financial outlay is required to have any chance of owning a controlling stake.

Background

Since the legalization of professionalism by the Football Association in 1885 and the need to charge fans an entrance fee to pay players' wages, fans have been a key stakeholder in the game. For 100 years, fans were often excluded by clubs despite many of them running into financial difficulty, where only public and private donations from supporters and the local community kept many of them in business.[7] As suggested by Cleland, fans watching football before the 1980s had two options in the form of a protest: (a) either 'vote with your feet' and stay away, or (b), join a post-match demonstration.[8] Rising hooliganism and dilapidated stadia led to attendances declining from 41.2 million in 1948 to 16.3 million in 1986, but there were other reasons why a large number of supporters stopped attending matches (such as increasing home ownership, more disposable income and an interest in other activities outside of football).[9]

Those fans that remained were critical to the survival of the game, but it was not until the 1980s that fans actually became more active in their involvement within football. At this time, football was a prominent feature of political arguments as evidence of the social decline of the United Kingdom (UK) and the disasters and violence that marred the sport did not help change this national image. The frequent reporting of acts of violence at football matches reached its nadir in May 1985 when, at the European Cup Final at Heysel, Brussels, the behavior of Liverpool fans caused the death of 39 Juventus fans.[10] The immediate reaction by the game's governing bodies was to ban English clubs from European competition and led to the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, to initially propose the use of ID cards for fans. This was the catalyst for some supporters to act upon this negative portrayal and initially led to the development of print fanzines where supporters had a platform to feel included by sharing their ideas and fears about the game.[11] The availability of what Crawford refers to as 'cultural texts' like this allowed fans to develop their own identities in the context of their football life (Nick Hornby's widely-acclaimed *Fever Pitch*; a book that tracked his life as an Arsenal supporter is a case in point) and this has only been advanced further with the introduction of the Internet and the opportunity to both create and/or contribute to club-specific blogs and websites.[12]

Cultural changes like this not surprisingly led to scholars creating typologies to explain modern fandom from the 1980s onwards. Most of this was based around the rise of the service sector after the UK went through a period of de-industrialization that led to a reduction in the industrial working classes and expanded the number of white-collar workers. This changing demographic of the workforce and growth in consumer society, for Redhead, led to 'participatory' or 'active' supporters that helped create and develop fanzines and supporter

organizations.[13] Outside of the active role played by supporters, Giulianotti argues that these societal changes created two classifications of fandom: 'traditional' (those who attend regularly and have emotional ties to a particular club) or 'consumer' (those who do not live near the ground and might follow a particular team via television or other forms of media).[14] This was a result of the commodification of football since 1992 and the creation of marketing and/or commercial departments at clubs where fans became referred to as consumers (rather than be seen purely as a 'traditional' fan). In fact, the use of fan dichotomies has been criticized by Williams, who argues that scholars have over-exaggerated the decline of traditional notions of fandom and underplayed the importance of continuity, place and community in their cultural and social practice.[15] Indeed, Gibbons and Dixon have suggested that traditional fan practice has been helped by new media as it allows football to be consumed through various means (such as everyday communication available via message boards and blogs on the Internet as well as the broadcasting and coverage given to football by television).[16] However, as suggested by Cleland, a significant number of passive fans remain and this is detrimental to the overall inclusion of supporter organizations and groups at some of the bigger English clubs.[17]

As well as the individual nature of resistance like those conducted by fanzine editors, a more collective resistance also emerged out of the way football fans were portrayed during the violent period of the 1980s. The creation of the Football Supporters' Association three months after the Heysel disaster in 1985 led the way in establishing more localized independent fan movements that sought opportunities for the closer involvement of fans in the decision-making process of football clubs.[18] This localized active supporter resistance escalated dramatically during the 1990s where the aforementioned changes to English football led to the formation of an Independent Supporters' Association (ISAs) at a number of clubs. For King and Nash, this was a direct result of the increasing tension many traditional supporters felt towards more affluent, newer 'consumer' ones, who it was argued did not attach the same social attachment towards 'their' club, but were willing to pay the increasing cost of tickets in order to watch Premier League football.[19]

Although ISAs continue to serve a valuable purpose, one of the biggest changes to the fan-club relationship came when the then Labour government established an initiative called *Supporters Direct* in 2000 that encouraged supporters to get involved in promoting corporate governance within the game.[20] With the aim of forging 'a new relationship between supporters, their clubs and the local community',[21] for those active supporters who wanted to become involved in the day-to-day running of a particular club, legal and practical assistance was available to establish a democratic Supporters' Trust where the acquisition of club shares

would allow supporter representation on the board of directors. The first prominent Supporters' Trust was at Northampton Town after the club fell into administration in 1992 and resulted in the Trust raising money and accruing enough shares to have supporter representation on the board of directors.[22] Highlighting the continued success of the Trust movement at lower-level clubs, the latest example of a successful Supporters' Trust is at Portsmouth. After becoming the first club in the history of the Premier League to enter administration in 2010, Portsmouth entered administration again in 2012 and remained this way for 14 months until Portsmouth Supporters' Trust raised £3 million in pledges (fans were asked to donate £1,000) and the administrator accepted this offer to take over the club in April 2013.[23]

In the majority of cases like this, the inclusion of Supporters' Trusts have been a success, but they often tell their own story – when a club falls into financial difficulty the onus is on the supporters to help rescue it.[24] Indeed, from what we have seen so far with Supporters' Trusts, they are more likely to have a significant impact at the lower-level of professional football than the top-level where major corporate finance is required to purchase a large number of shares.[25] Although there has been some success of supporter involvement at other clubs (such as Exeter City, AFC Wimbledon, Wrexham and Wycombe Wanderers), for the higher-level clubs commercialization has often taken precedence over the relationship with supporters, and as a result it is not surprising that there have been decisions that seek to exploit commercial revenues even further. The club under review in this article, Newcastle United, is one such example where some of its supporters have felt alienated. The offer to buy bonds to help pay for the post-Hillsborough ground redevelopments was meant to guarantee supporters the right to purchase a season ticket in their allocated seat every year. Despite over 7,000 supporters thinking this offer was indefinite, a section of them were contacted by the club in 1999 to highlight how a previously unmentioned contractual point actually allowed the club to build corporate hospitality boxes where their seat used to be.[26] Another striking example of alienation is the re-location by Wimbledon from Selhurst Park in London to Milton Keynes (a stadium located 56 miles away). This bitter dispute led to the establishment of a Supporters' Trust at Wimbledon who argued that 'their' club had been stolen from them and resulted in a new team, AFC Wimbledon, and a mass boycott of the re-named MK (Milton Keynes) Dons.

Perhaps the most high-profile example of supporter alienation, however, is the Glazer takeover at Manchester United in 2005. Already disgruntled at media giant BSkyB's failed takeover of the club for £643 million in 1998, the decision to sell the club to the American businessman, Malcolm Glazer, led to significant locally-based protests that culminated in the

creation of a new democratically-run football club, FC United of Manchester. The clear feeling of the importance of FC United of Manchester to its immediate community was stressed by the mission of the club to 'maintain or re-establish the community' and to be 'an example of how to bring football back to ordinary people'.[27] A more recent football-related social movement includes the 'Spirit of Shankly' group set up by Liverpool fans in 2008 in the wake of the financial mismanagement of the club by its then American owners, Tom Hicks and George Gillett, who had purchased the club in 2007 (it became clear that despite their denials, they too had adopted a Glazer-type leveraged buyout of the club) and had burdened the club with a large debt (reportedly over £400 million).[28]

Method

For geographical purposes, one of the authors attended the meetings immediately after the resignation of Kevin Keegan. Permission was given by the chair of these meetings to record the discussions taking place and this was further validated by the presence of the local media also recording the discussions taking place at every meeting. Throughout the meetings a non-participant observation was undertaken as it is an unobtrusive method that is unlikely to change the behavior of the participants.[29]

An initial meeting was called on…– **Kev need a bit of background in terms of time frame etc. Initial meeting, 1st public meeting – how many, date, where? 2nd Public Meeting: 04.02.09 - Venue:** The Irish Centre. Newcastle Upon Tyne 500m away from St, James Park. *Turnout: The Irish centre was packed out to capacity (not enough seats for all who attended approx 250-300). The demographic of the crowd was mixed. There was not a majority demographic in the room. There were children with parents, young men and women (20 and 30s) older men and women 40+. While there were more men than women, women were significantly represented in this crowd and they were active in all discussions.* **3rd public meeting – the Irish centre – Newcastle –date, numbers?**

Given the average attendance of Newcastle United is over 45,000, this article makes no claim to be representative of all the club's supporters; rather, it examines those that actively engaged in the meetings and the level of inclusion they ultimately gained. Despite the observation of a small percentage of the overall supporter base of Newcastle United, however, what the data does highlight is the active nature of some supporters and the resistance showed towards the management and governance of a well-supported Premier League club.

In analyzing the recorder discussions, both authors went through the data separately to examine for evidence of patterns, commonalities and differences across the responses taken

from each meeting (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Through this inductive approach, the open-ended data was broken down into larger theoretical categories and consistent themes then began to emerge. What shall be presented below is an analysis of the meetings, the eventual outcome of these meetings and a comparative analysis of the level of impact and inclusion of supporter organizations at higher-level clubs like the ones created at Newcastle United.

The Initial Meetings

There are many similarities with what was found through the observation of the Newcastle United supporters meetings and what Williams raises from the creation of the Spirit of Shankly fan group at Liverpool during 2008.[?] Both, for example, were attended by hundreds of supporters (mainly men, but by fans of all ages) where the social and cultural meaning of the club was paramount in the discussions that took place. In his analysis of supporter unrest at Liverpool, for example, Williams states how it was important for the locally-based Liverpool fans setting up Spirit of Shankly that it had 'cultural assimilation into the club's prized and acutely Scouse textures, cultures and traditions'.[?] This theme of local culture and community was also raised by numerous Newcastle United supporters across the meetings and resonates with what Nash and Brown, Crabbe and Mellor argue about the importance of 'place' in the cultural practice of fandom for supporters.[?] Summarizing the role of 'place' as an important part of fandom for local-based supporters, this reaction from two Newcastle United fans was similar to many others heard across all of the meetings:

> Ashley is destroying one of the greatest institutions of Newcastle. He is destroying Newcastle in effect. Everybody here bleeds Newcastle United, and Newcastle United is the city of Newcastle. When Newcastle United is on the rise, the city is on the rise. When Newcastle United is on the slump, the city is on the slump…This guy is a parasite. He is destroying this club and he is destroying the reputation of the city.

> I have always been staggered that a club Newcastle United's size hasn't had a supporters club for years. The one consistent thing at this club is great support. People care about the club. It is easy to support Manchester United because it is easy to support success, everybody can jump on success, but we support the club of our birth, the club that we've been told about, that we've learned about and we will do it from cradle to grave.

As suggested by Kennedy, supporters like this share a sense of 'moral ownership' of football clubs, but fans are more commercially aware as the financial nature of football becomes more significant in determining success.[?] For some fans, the tag of 'consumer' is no longer resisted like it once was by ISAs and other supporter organizations in the 1980s and 1990s. In the case of the meetings taking place at Newcastle United, a number of fans turned what was once has been perceived as a negative connotation into a positive one where it was used to actively fight

against the perception that Mike Ashley was destroying the club and its cultural identity to thousands of supporters. This was raised by the chairman of the Supporters' Club, Malcolm Shields, when he argued: 'The club needs to be interested in their fans, their customers, who pay for season tickets, pay for strips, buy programmes or whatever'. Although this was supported by other fans, the tag of 'customer' or 'consumer' did not sit well with all supporters, with this fan forcefully stating: 'People are fed up to the back teeth of being treated with contempt by the football club and treated as customers. We are not customers, we are supporters. If we were customers we would have left to get a better product". Another supporter concurred:

> The club belongs to us morally. It would not exist financially without us, it is actually in the interest of the club to be inclusive… it has got an emotional attachment, it is right in our souls, it is part of our identity, it is what we are, yet we are treated like customers. Actually we are treated worse that customers because there's a dimension because the owner knows we'll never support anyone else…Black and Whiters. It is our responsibility to campaign for that. We have got to try to make it happen and say let's have what is rightfully ours.

The English model of club ownership by one or a few individuals is not matched in some of the football heartlands of Europe. In Germany, for example, fans can become members of clubs, where a 50 per cent plus one rule applies to club ownership that prevents wealthy businessmen from taking control of German clubs.[?] Therefore, the need for fans like this one to argue: 'In getting representation we are not asking for the world, we are just asking for what's ours', does not apply to the established fan-club relationship that exists elsewhere. Although the traditional notion of local culture, community and place were significant themes across the meetings, the need for supporters to be collectively active was also overly expressed, as if to remind those present of the importance of the Supporters' Club in representing all Newcastle United supporters:

> It is not a talking shop, it is a very active group. I have got a lot of confidence that we can take matters forward… what we need to do is make demands of the club and start making that a little bit more, a testing arena for those at the club…Being active is the key.

Indeed, in the second meeting, Malcolm Shields felt the need to defend the progress the Supporters' Club had made in a short space of time:

> We have been accused about not being active enough, but we have had to set things up properly …We have done all that stuff now – we have got a website, a postal address, a bank account. People are joining daily, our numbers are rising. I think we gave out membership number 850 the other day and we are dealing with 6,000 emails declaring interest. While we won't please everyone there we are seeing from people like yourselves a certain consensus on what we all want.

The Outcome

Williams highlights how the early meetings of the Spirit of Shankly group that aimed to get rid of the then American owners, Tom Hicks and George Gillett was 'highly politically attuned' and proud 'local Supporters' Union, not a corporatized and bureaucratic Supporters' Trust'.[?] Adopting a different type of strategy, at the very first public meeting was a motion about whether the creation of NUSC should be set up as a Supporters' Trust and this was supported unanimously. Reminding supporters of the mission of NUSC, Malcolm Shields stated: 'Our main aim has always been and remains that we think there should be some form of board representation from a fan or fans. That is Newcastle United Supporters' Club's ultimate aim'. Indeed, establishing a Supporters' Trust at Newcastle United was deemed necessary in order to give the supporters a sense of credibility, with another committee member stating:

> The constitution we have adopted so far is based on the Supporters Trust. Obviously still Newcastle United Supporters' Club, but if you can constitute yourself under the Supporters' Trust banner with a long-term aim, then I think that would be a good idea for us going forward.

As with the aim of most Supporters' Trusts, NUST sought to 'strengthen the bonds between the clubs and the supporters' as well as 'to promote the full, accountable democratic and constructive involvement of supporters in the running and direction of the club, including the principle of supporter representation on the board'.[?] To try and encourage more supporters to actively become members, another committee member provided an overview of what they would be paying for should they choose to sign up:

> The view that I have always had is that the ultimate aim of any supporter organization is not just to protest, I do not want to be a member of just a protest group. What I want is to be involved in a supporters' organization that has a long-term aim for the benefit of supporters and Newcastle United. Whether it be liaising with Ashley or whomever. This means having our foot in the door through the acquisition of club shares.

Despite the short-term progress that had been made, some supporters took a more long-term view as to the role of the Supporters' Trust once it had been established: 'I think we've got to be pragmatic. We're not going to get rid of Ashley in the short-term'. Across the recent history of supporter groups, organizations, trusts and clubs, most have been created because of a short-term crisis at a particular club, but the longevity of them suggests some form of long-term focus, whether that be by acquiring shares or gaining some other form of inclusion at the respective club.

Initially the level of supporter unrest did have an immediate effect on Ashley, who put the club up for sale just 10 days after the resignation of Kevin Keegan: 'I have listened to you. You want me out. That is what I am now trying to do but it won't happen overnight and it may not happen at all if a buyer does not come in' (endnote1 - BBC). However, in December 2008 he took the club off the market after failing to find an acceptable buyer and stated how he was 'committing to the club as its owner' (endnote2 – BBC). Infuriating fans further by again putting the club on the market and taking it off during 2009, Ashley risked the wrath of fans by changing the historic stadium name of 'St James' Park' to his own company's 'sportsdirect.com @ St James' Park' until the end of the 2009/10 season for purely commercial reasons.

The future of supporter organizations

Despite the active role played by supporters since the mid-1990s, most supporters' organizations involved at clubs at the top-level of English football remain powerless in what they can actually achieve. The primary reason for this is the financial resource needed to purchase a number of shares that allows them some form of inclusion in club-related discussions. Although it has been widely reported how NUST are actively looking to buy shares in the club, at the time of writing they remain unsuccessful (endnote3 – BBC). To put this argument into some perspective, even though Manchester United Supporters' Trust (MUST) reportedly has 190,000 members, it has very little influence over the Glazers. As suggested by Herbert, although the Glazers are not loved by Manchester United supporters, 'there is a significant difference between that and outright insurrection. Winning has a habit of silencing a revolution'.[?] However, MUST remain actively involved in representing fans and this can be seen with a recent application to Trafford Council to list the name of the ground, Old Trafford, as an "asset of community value" in order to prevent the name of the ground being sold for commercial gain (like what temporarily happened at Newcastle United).[?]

Although a change of owner did occur at Liverpool, (through a forced sale of £300 million to Boston-based New England Sports Ventures (later becoming Fenway Sports Group) in October 2010), Williams states that it was down to the global economic crisis, rather than local supporter opposition.[?] Likewise, the lack of supporter inclusion and ultimate power in the club-fan relationship was also raised by Cleland in his analysis of supporter unrest towards the then Aston Villa chairman, Doug Ellis in 2002.[?] Despite supporters of Aston Villa becoming highly frustrated by the fact that they felt the club was not listening to them, it was only at annual shareholder meetings where the club would respond to questions. For those that

were non-shareholders, there was no opportunity to engage in any meaningful debate with senior club officials.

Feelings of powerlessness like this were also raised by Newcastle United supporters, with one supporter illustrating how a previous attempt at creating a Supporters' Trust at the club failed: **'**I was involved some years ago in the Supporters' Trust at Newcastle. The problem at the time was that unless you had a foot in the door, some type of foot such as shareholding, then the club would never listen to you. I think that's been proved throughout football'. Likewise, this supporter argued: 'On one hand we want rid [of Ashley], but on the other, no one is prepared to take on the club, so do we try to resurrect the relationship with Ashley, a marriage made in hell? What do we do, it is just a nightmare'.

A common point of discussion across the Newcastle United supporter meetings was the number of fans that called for an immediate short-term boycott of club merchandise and the purchasing of goods (such as beer and food) inside the stadium. 'The only power we have got is as consumers because that is how the club has processed us down the years, just to be people who buy things from them. Not people who are proper supporters or shareholders etc. We are just walking wallets milked with dosh', said one fan, whilst another argued:

> I am really concerned about the direction of this group. It is losing its way already. It's alright having a long-term aim (which I agree with), but we have a short-term crisis at this football club…so the boycott is not being observed 100% but what boycott ever is?

However, the practicality of *all* supporters adhering to this was quickly realized by more pragmatic supporters: 'I don't think we could get a boycott back on track no matter what we do. It's people's lives man! They go the game and they have their routines…It's what they have done for years'. Feelings like this outline some of the problems of trying to establish a supporters' organization at a club with a significant passive supporter base. Indeed, it was clear from the meetings that even those who deem themselves to be active, do not necessarily want to see change: 'Personally, I am not anti-Mike Ashley at all. In fact I am pro Ashley if anything. Now I support NUSC in what they are trying to do in terms of representing the fans but I think it's based on a minority group. I'm not sure that the majority of fans want Ashley out'. Similar views were also shared by this fan:

> If you are like me you are not going to allow a situation where you cannot go to the match. I could be in bed with the flu but will still get up to go to the match. I support that team out there. I support the shirt. I don't care who the players are, who the manager is, don't give a shite who owns the club. As long as they put a team out, I'll be there every home game and the majority of away games to cheer them on.

As identified by Williams, the key test for supporters' organizations lies when a sense of normality resumes.[?] Although Liverpool got new owners in 2010, Newcastle United has not. Tellingly, Williams states how the new owners of Liverpool have set up an Anfield supporters' committee, but that this 'risks being seen locally as a mechanism for managing consumer dissent more than one for advancing real supporter representation'.[?] There is no sense of inclusion like this at Newcastle United (however little it may be) and provides further evidence of the lack of power of supporter organizations at clubs at the higher level of English football.

Conclusion

This article has highlighted how the once passive nature of football fandom is increasingly becoming more active through the creation of supporter groups like the ones at Newcastle United in 2008. Developments of social movements like this since the early 1990s should remind clubs about the importance of maintaining a healthy and inclusive relationship with the growing number of active supporters involved at each club. As seen with the recent case of Portsmouth, failure to embrace supporters and include them in discussions can have disastrous consequences. A similar situation is now occurring at Coventry City, who entered administration in March 2013 (with debts reportedly of £60 million) after failing to recover from relegation from the Premier League in 2001. Not only has the club suffered financially as a result of this, but has also seen attendances drop by 50 per cent. Therefore, although on-the-field success ultimately influences the club-fan relationship, Cleland makes a pertinent point when he argues about 'the importance of maintaining a healthy relationship between a club and its supporters is imperative because any risk posed by non-attendance would threaten the very existence of any professional club' (2010: 549).

The term 'black and whiters' used by one Newcastle United supporter has application to the lack of involvement supporters have at the higher-level clubs. With significant numbers of supporters attending matches, it is a lot more difficult to generate membership and collective resistance in supporter organizations than at lower-league teams. As highlighted earlier, there is a marked difference in the importance of supporter organizations at the lower-level of professional football and the influence they can have on decision-making powers within these particular clubs. Of course, clubs at a lower-level have to rely on gate receipts a lot more than those in the Premier League, where television revenue remains a significant income stream for a number of clubs. Therefore, despite an increasing number of active supporters seeking to gain

better inclusion, the significance of passive supporters' remains and this is unlikely to change any time soon.

[1] King, *The End of the Terraces*; Nash, 'Contestation in modern English professional football'.
[2] See, for example, Cleland, 'From Active to Passive'; Haynes, *The Football Imagination*; Nash, 'Contestation in modern English professional football'; Redhead, *The Passion and the Fashion*, 5–6.
[3] Brown, 'Our Club, Our Rules'; Williams, 'Walking Alone Together the Liverpool Way'.
[4] Ashley began acquiring shares in the club in May 2007 with the initial purchasing of Sir John Hall's 41.6 per cent share. After acquiring Freddy Shepherd's 28 per cent share Ashley was allowed to take full ownership of the club in July 2007.
[5] Millward, 'We've All Got the Bug', 377.
[6] http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/football/teams/n/newcastle_united/7593683.stm (accessed 12 October, 2011).
[7] Walvin, *The People's Game*.
[6] Cleland, 'From Active to Passive'.
[7] Russell, *Football and the English*.
[8] See, for example, Haynes, *The Football Imagination*.
[9] Crawford, *Consuming Sport*, 19–52; Hornby, *'Fever Pitch'*.
[10] Redhead, *The Passion and the Fashion*,
[11] Ibid.
[12] Giulianotti, 'Supporters, Followers, Fans and Flanéurs'.
[13] Williams, 'Walking Alone Together the Liverpool Way'.
[14] Gibbons and Dixon, 'Surfs Up!'.
[15] Russell, *Football and the English*, 230; see also Jary et al. 'Football "Fanzines" and Football Culture', 581–98.
[16] Nash, 'Contestation in modern English professional football'
[17] Hamil et al., *The Changing Face of the Football Business*.
[18] Ibid, 7.
[19] Lomax, 'How Democracy Saved Northampton Town FC', 102–10.
[20] See: http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/football/22167299
[21] Holt et al. 'The State of the Game'.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Greenfield and Osborn, *Regulating Football*, 193–4.
[24] Brown, 'Our Club, Our Rules'.
[25] Williams, 'Walking Alone Together the Liverpool Way'.
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http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/news-and-comment/glazers-winning-the-battle-for-manchester-uniteds-finances-if-not-hearts-8590748.html (accessed 27 April, 2013)
http://www.fc-utd.co.uk/m_fixtures.php?year=2012&team=1 (accessed 25 April 2013)

[German example – this was helped by the reunification of Germany in 1990 when its football governance was reviewed. Here, the 50 per cent plus one model was confirmed (although Bayer Leverkusen and Wolfsburg were controlled by external companies) as the minimum required level of ownership (it can go up to 100 per cent).

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