Show Racism The Red Card: Potential barriers to the effective implementation of the anti-racist message.

This discussion paper focuses on anti-racist groups associated with British Association football (soccer) and the barriers that they face in relation to effective implementation of the anti-racism message and aspirational cultural change. In order to address those issues (above) this essay draws on the educational charity Show Racism the Red Card (SRTRC) and their work to educate individuals in Great Britain through football. It takes an overview of the work of the charity, specifically focusing on three key areas relating to the group’s mission statement. Concluding comments are made on the current position of SRTRC in light of recent high profile racist incidents.

**Key words:** Show Racism the Red Card (SRTRC); anti-racist groups; role-models; education; institutional racism; cultural penetration.

**Introduction**

This discussion paper focuses on anti-racist groups associated with British Association football (soccer) and the barriers that they face in relation to effective implementation of the anti-racism message and aspirational cultural change. Using the educational charity SRTRC as the predominant example, the work sets out to critically appraise the effectiveness of its current strategy by focusing on key areas that relate to this groups mission statement. Before addressing such issues in more detail, it is first appropriate to briefly contextualize the position of British football in relation to racism, the development of anti-racist groups and current concerns about a more covert, institutional form of racism in contemporary football.

Racism, in the case of Great Britain (GB) has long been associated with rising immigration after world war two. It is argued that this was due, in part, to workforce shortages that saw many migrants arrive in search of prosperity - with immigration peaking in the 1960s and 1970s.¹ Consequently, Britain, after Empire, became defined by a new group of multicultural citizens and as a result of this cultural change, it is thought that racism began to gather momentum.² This extended into British football in the 1970’s with the emergence of high profile black players into the
traditionally white sphere of British football culture leading to a corresponding increase in overt football-related racism.³

Social unrest including high unemployment, the existence of right wing political groups, a virulent skinhead movement and leadership by the right-wing Thatcherite Conservative government created an increasingly hostile social position towards immigrants and black footballers.⁴ Racist chanting and abuse became a common occurrence inside football grounds and some players felt the position untenable and left the game.⁵ Richie Moran of Portsmouth Football Club, for example, experienced racist abuse first hand as his teams supporters shouted to him ‘It's OK mate, you're one of our niggers’, and with players unwilling to report incidents for fear of vilification and escalation of abuse, racism went unreported, hiding in plain sight.⁶

In England, the Football Association (FA) maintained their white middle-class rule with anti-racism campaigns only acquiring prominence when players expressed disgust at their treatment.⁷ Despite the Commission for Racial Equality launching ‘Let's Kick Racism Out of Football’ (now, Kick It Out) in 1993, power in football was rigidly maintained by the FA who concentrated on collective fan behavior rather than addressing the structures of power and the maintenance of hegemony within the sport.⁸ In this case the white-led FA continued to set the rules and standards to follow, negotiating change outwardly but maintaining an institutional ethos that was detrimental for racial equality.⁹ Thus, in an era that had witnessed the racist murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence in 1993 (unrelated to football) and the subsequent investigation and legislation that followed (Macpherson Report 1999; Race Relations [Amendment] Act 2000), public authorities and national institutions were under pressure to promote race equality and to be seen actively tackling this issue publically.¹⁰ Consequently, overt pressure and subsequent blanket institutional support of anti-racist rhetoric within GB has led some scholars to argue that GB football, much like other leading Great British institutions, has become ‘colour-blind’.¹¹

To say that football is colour-blind, relates to the widespread promotion of the idea that racism has been eradicated from the game. This attitude, in relation to football was compounded by the Bosman Ruling, a 1995 Europe Court of Justice decision on the free movement of labour that has had a profound effect on the transfer of football players within the European Union. Consequently the British League systems began to attract an influx of overseas footballers to apply there trade in GB. This gave life to
the perception that football in Britain was a multicultural space where equal opportunities thrived, but as Cleland and Cashmore\textsuperscript{12} illustrate, the foundations of institutional racism lay deeply entrenched and hence, colour-blind or meritocratic claims, they propose, only serve to allow racism to operate under the radar of football authorities and potentially, anti-racist groups. Upholding this logic, it has been suggested that the Football Task Force (created in 1997 by the political party, New Labour), with an objective to investigate whether the football industry were meeting there social obligations, failed to adequately address the issue of racism due in part, to the ‘whiteness’ of its structures - with one black member and no British Asian representatives.\textsuperscript{13}

Thus, although individual overt racist behaviour seems to have decreased in English football since the 1970s\textsuperscript{14}, colour-blind complacency within clubs and associated governing bodies of the sport remains a significant problem. Consequently, it was the failure to recognise racism as a societial and institutional issue that led to the formation of anti-racism organisations, arising from the desire of individuals to make a difference rather than from political or institutional influence.\textsuperscript{15} Anti-racist strategies have attempted to eliminate or modify racist beliefs and behaviours by addressing racism at individual, institutional and cultural levels.\textsuperscript{16} Yet, whilst this approach is admirable, recent research has brought into question the effectiveness of such anti-racist organisations. For example, Randhawa is heavily critical of the Kick It Out campaign, stating that in its 20 year history it has been satisfied with insignificant success and mediated rhetoric rather than achieving any positive, sustained change.\textsuperscript{17} Football fans have also expressed views regarding the impact that Kick It Out has had within football:

Much of the work done by organisations such as Kick It Out has not changed attitudes at source, and has driven racist opinion underground to an extent [White male aged 40-49]\textsuperscript{18}.

Furthermore, in this study, Cleland and Cashmore\textsuperscript{19} report that 79 per cent of participants (out of 1000 surveyed fans) believed that Kick It Out had only been partially effective in tackling racial inequality. In light of a great deal of skepticism into the effectiveness of anti-racism groups, in what follows, the educational charity Show Racism the Red Card (SRTRC) is critically assessed in terms of the viability of its strategy and underpinning philosophy for the successful implementation of the anti-racist message and aspirational long term cultural change.
About SRTRC

SRTRC was established in 1996 by Ged Grebby (originally an active member of ‘Youth against Racism in Europe’ which prepared and sent educational packs to schools) and was supported by former Newcastle United goalkeeper Shaka Hislop. Operating as an anti-racist charity its aim is to combat racism through education. Founded in North East England the organization has offices in a number of areas in England, it works across Scotland and Wales and has a staff compliment including education workers, sessional workers and 22 ex-professional footballers who work as role models that adhere to the following mission statement:

Show Racism the Red Card is an anti-racist educational charity. We aim to combat racism through enabling role models, who are predominately, but not exclusively footballers, to present an anti-racist message to young people and others.

The mission (above) is clear. SRTRC aims to combat racist views by providing educational resources and implementing workshops that are targeted at young people. The educational packs and workshops are further supported by the use of celebrity football players (past and present) to narrate the message and to add personal experience to a form of prejudice that is often faceless. In what follows three interrelated areas relating to the mission statement (above) are analyzed in order to assess the extent to which the desired outcomes of the charity are actually achievable. These three areas are: Education; Role Models; and, Institutional Racism.

Education

Our workshops are fully participatory and interactive, students take part in a range of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic activities designed to build empathy and understanding and to encourage discussion and critical thinking.

SRTRC aims to change perceptions in relation to race by providing educational resources (predominately for children) and running workshops and events. They believe that confronting the issue in schools is a key strategy for challenging racist beliefs, given that young people are still developing value systems during this early life stage. Emerging views that may hold racist connotations, it is thought, can be altered (via education) into acceptable non-racist behaviour and this is likely to
transfer into the everyday life of the programme participant. For example, in the educational teaching pack (provided by SRTRC); a teaching activity entitled ‘Escalation of Hate’, ‘demonstrates the relationship between different forms of racism and clearly illustrates that all behaviors (that is, behavior with racial connotations) have consequences, no matter how ‘harmless’ they may seem’. Outlining different extremes of racist behavior, this educational task presents a ‘pyramid of hate’ which sets out to explain how even the most seemingly trivial ‘prejudicial attitudes’ (e.g. accepting stereotypes, not challenging belittling jokes, scapegoating) can contribute to acts of prejudice (e.g. name calling, social exclusion, telling belittling jokes). Consequently, it is explained that this can escalate into to wider forms of discrimination, physical attacks and in the most extreme cases, genocide.25 Thus, the charity use broad-based interventions that address attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, whilst being careful not to single out characteristics to create increased inter-group tension.26 The resources provided by SRTRC for teaching purposes (i.e. like the example discussed above) advocate this broad-brush approach whilst trying to create an environment in which young people can comfortably and freely discuss issues. By incorporating fun fitness elements into sessions, SRTRC potentially negate the possibility that young people may be resistant to teachings by authority figures which may prevent effective learning.27

Whilst this considered approach and attitude to childhood training is admirable in principle, in reality it must overcome much more than the perceptions of the individual child. For instance, it is the influence of significant others that can impact heavily in terms of the personal development of the child, and in sociological writings there is much support for this assertion. Giddens for example, makes the theoretical point that those with ‘authoritative resources’ (often related to parents and peers) can heavily influence momentary and future actions of a child.28 Likewise, Bourdieu discusses the values, dispositions and practices of significant others that can be subsumed or modeled leading to the relative reproduction of previous generation ‘habitus’ (i.e. a structure of the mind acquired through the shared activities and experiences of everyday life).29

In either instance it is argued that what Willis30 terms ‘cultural penetration’ is likely to have a detrimental impact on short-term educational programmes, with long-term influencers such as parents and peers winning out in the influencing stakes. If formal education (from anti-racist groups) conflicts with the informal schooling (from parents and peers) then the former is likely to be insufficient to effect positive change to racist
beliefs in the life-view of the child. With this in mind, the effectiveness of anti-racism workshops, however well-meaning they may be for challenging perceptions and predispositions is ambiguous at best. This has been acknowledged by SRTRC in a report into the barriers to challenging racism and promoting race equality in England’s schools.

There was a propensity amongst respondents [teachers, head-teachers, lecturers and local authority employees] to look externally to parents as the main problem, whilst this may be a way of denying their own implication in this area, the influence of parents and other family members is also very powerful.

This must be an important consideration for SRTRC whose own adult education programme is minimal and aimed mainly at training teachers. Many perpetrators of racist acts in society and football in the 1980’s will now be parents and grandparents of school age children and as such, given the logic above, they are likely to exert influence via authoritative resources. Although children may receive and respond positively to the information given at workshops, this may be a temporary effect due to the entrenched beliefs that they encounter at home. An external audit of an SRTRC event showed the limited influence of such events:

‘When asked if they thought their parents/siblings/grandparents had listened to them almost all of the young people responded negatively’.

During their own research, SRTRC admit that adult influence is potentially powerful and yet the charity does not appear to be developing this area greatly, relying instead on individual schools to do so. Given that this intergenerational influence and apathy may lessen the effect of the anti-racism message in the long-term, it appears short sighted on behalf of SRTRC to not include, more fully, the adult influencers of the children attending sessions within their education programme. This, it could be argued would provide a greater coverage in terms of education and potentially effect change in older generations by providing the desired longevity for the anti-racism message by SRTRC. Supporting this notion, Pedersen et al found that many interventions designed to reduce stereotypes, racism and prejudice produced limited short-term effects and did not persist across time, as changing stereotypes and beliefs is ‘easier said than done’. Whilst change in habitus is possible, extensive retraining is often required rather than a one-off session as per the SRTRC model, which would be strengthened by adult support and encouragement.
Role Models

SRTRC …utilizes the high profile status of professional footballers as anti-racist role models…The campaign now involves hundreds of top footballers and managers.  

As an anti-racism charity SRTRC place a heavy reliance on the use of male footballing role models at workshops. The idea is based on a rather simple premise. That is to say that, contemporary and former professional football players will capture the attention of young people, and by drawing on personal experience of racism in football, they can impart personal knowledge to the group, not only relating to what happened them, but how the lives of significant others can be effected by racist acts and attitudes. This line of reasoning makes the assumption that attendees at SRTRC workshops will listen, empathize and share the experiences of high profile athletes that were previously only impersonally known to the participants through a one way mediated system of news generation. This idea is supported by previous research that has shown that celebrity athletes can be influential to children and furthermore, it is argued that athletes (in this case, football players) are particularly appealing as role models for two reasons. First, it is the recipe of ‘excellence’ of performance (extra-ordinary talent) and secondly, the perceived ‘ordinariness’ (e.g. the athlete may share a similar upbringing to the child) is thought to be inspiring to generations of children who take notice of and potentially model their behavior on celebrated athletes.  

SRTRC aims take advantage of this proposed position in order to tackle the issue of racism and in principle, the idea for the implementation of intimate discussions with celebrated athletes is a good one. However, some scholars would warn against the use celebrity football players as clean cut examples for children to model. They suggest that whilst sport and ‘sporting’ practice, idealistically at least, is often associated with positive muscular Christian value systems, it is important to note that athletes are not always virtuous and they cannot escape the masculine, often sexist, aggressive, competitive sub-culture that is privy to many other inequalities that reach beyond the issue of race. As Coakley states, rather than ‘under-conforming’ to the perceived societal norms of any given society or culture (an argument that is frequently used to explain deviant behavior in sport), sports stars are, in essence, ‘over-conformers’ who often express in their behavior the institutional value system of the sport played.
In relation to racism, it is clear that athletes involved in SRTRC are attempting to overturn institutional views of race, but they do not always address this issue in a manner that is appropriate of their ambassadorial role. Take as an example an incident involving SRTRC honorary patron and hall of fame member ‘Rio Ferdinand’. On August 17 - 2012 Ferdinand was fined by the FA for ‘improper conduct’ after using the social networking site ‘Twitter’ to refer to England International, Ashley Cole as a ‘choc ice’. This somewhat reckless term, it would seem, plays on a metaphor relating to the black and white nature of a choc ice (dark chocolate coating and ice-cream center). This concept has found use in popular discourse, and yet its assertions are largely unhelpful. To imply that Cole is black on the outside (i.e. visually) but white on the inside (i.e. holding attitudes that Ferdinand considers to be white) is to suggest that white values, attitudes and beliefs exist as a homogenous entity and that they stand in distinct contrast to alleged black values, attitudes and beliefs. Ferdinand is not the first to use such a simplistic, divisive analogy, but in any sense, it is damaging to the SRTRC strategy that aims to challenge widespread perceptions of racial difference.

This comment (by Ferdinand) was stimulated in relation to a criminal investigation (relating to an alleged racially-aggravated public order offence) into allegations of racist remarks on the football pitch made by Chelsea FC captain, John Terry, to Queens Park Rangers FC player Anton Ferdinand (brother to Rio Ferdinand) and the subsequent investigation by the FA independent regulatory commission. Whilst Terry was not charged with a criminal offence, partially helped by the testimony of team-mate Cole, the FA found that there were discrepancies in Cole’s initial statement to FA interviewers regarding what he heard Anton Ferdinand say to Terry. Rio Ferdinand, it seems had interpreted those events as evidence of a cover up, and expressed his views via the social media outlet ‘Twitter’, using a divisive race related metaphor (above). Whilst not penalized by the FA for using a racist comment, the vernacular used by Rio Ferdinand (i.e. the choc ice metaphor) demonstrates potential problems for a charity that relies on the football star as an ambassador for a cause that inevitably evokes emotive response.

In the age of social media it is probable that young men, like Rio Ferdinand, will post messages without forethought (or receiving advice prior to using instant messaging applications) and in turn this has the potential to damage the SRTRC message. Other recent incidents involving the use of social media and mobile phone text have also undermined the anti-racism lobby. Ex-footballer Paul Elliot, a former anti-racism
campaigner and Kick it Out trustee, resigned following text-based use of racist language - labeling ex-football player Richard Rufus a ‘nigger’. This was followed (though unrelated) with racist comments made on ‘Twitter’ by Hibernian striker Leigh Griffiths. Both incidents have brought condemnation from SRTRC who state that ‘Online racism is as serious as face-to face racism’. Regardless of the format of racism, the negative knock-on effect for SRTRC in terms of using footballers as role models, could hamper their delivery to young people who (following the logic of SRTRC’s educational teaching strategy) respect and aspire to emulate such players.

**Institutional Racism**

... ‘Institutional racism’... can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behavior which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, thoughtlessness and racial stereotyping which disadvantages minority ethnic people.

Whilst SRTRC mission statement is committed to combatting all forms of racism, covert, institutional racism was noted to be particularly problematic in contemporary football. It seems all too easy to suggest that racist attitudes are declining and that overt behaviours are no longer to be tolerated at football. Anti-racist groups are aware that they have had an effect on overt racist actions in football, but equally they are aware that the pressure created and filtered down through football culture has forced racist behaviours to change shape (rather than eradicating such actions entirely) and this can be manifest and evidenced in numerous ways. A recent investigation into racism at Millwall Football Club, for example, found that black players subjected to abuse were still unwilling to report or discuss it, and this led Football League chairman Greg Clarke to admit ‘if we have created an environment that doesn’t support black players in confronting this issue, we have done something terribly wrong’. Similar observations are made by Cleland and Cashmore in relation to newsprint quotations from ex professional football player and now Wigan Athletic chairman Dave Whelan who was quoted as saying ‘...the players that complain are a little bit out of order’. The authors also mention another quotation by FIFA president Sepp Blatter, when he suggests that any ‘racist abuse on the field should end with a handshake’. This shows little change from the 1980’s when players were expected to put up with abuse or leave the game altogether.

A cursory inspection of related news articles suggests that this is also an attitude reflected by some football fans. For instance, the BBC Sport website (October 22, 2012) and a ‘Sportsmail’ reporter for the Mail Online (October 18, 2012) published
journalistic reports in relation to a recent boycott lead by some black professional football players in relation to the annual wearing of t-shirts for the Kick It Out campaign ahead of Football League matches. Whilst some professionals chose to wear the t-shirt to promote a message of anti-racism, others did not, arguing that there has been a lack of action from anti-racist groups within the past year. Professional football player - Jason Roberts told the BBC ‘I won’t wear one [t-shirt]. I find it hard to wear a t-shirt after what happened last year’. Here Roberts is referring to what he perceives to be a lack of pressure from anti-racist groups and lenient punishments (from the FA) for the racist behavior of fellow professionals. Yet, although both articles (from the BBC and Mail Online) were sympathetic to the anti-racist cause and the stance taken by Roberts and others, the response to those news articles by the readership (football followers) was less compassionate:

Can a sport in the UK with this many black people really be racist? Can this country really be racist when ethnic minorities are queuing up to get in? (Paul, Chelmsford, UK).

Give it a rest and get on with what you’re paid to do. (Mazarron, Spain).

Only in football these “racism” stories are played over & over again (kuantan, Malaysia).

Roberts’ outrage seems very singularly focused. No criticism of Rio Ferdinand’s support of the term “choc-ice”. Equals zero credibility (Maximus Londinium, UK).

The scorn and denigration that Roberts receives for his stance against the establishment can be contrasted with readership attitudes towards ex-England international goal keeper David James who argues that there is no real racist issue in football. In a news article printed the Mail Online James states, ‘I struggle with the racist issue because I don’t see it. That’s not because I’ve got my head in the sand…I’m not going to fly anyone’s flag and join an organization that doesn’t need joining’. In relation to the issue of the minority of black football managers currently working in professional football, he argues, ‘if you want to go on a coaching course to become a manager, give yourself a chance. If you want to moan about not having a job, well not going on the course is probably why you haven’t got a job’. According to James, institutional racism is an illusion, and yet it is important to note that the essence of institutional racism depends on the maintenance of such attitudes. Moreover, if those colour-blind attitudes happen to be held by influential black
athletes (like James), the credibility of the argument (that racism does not exist in contemporary football) is reinforced. Irrespective of the arguments put forward by anti-racist group members, it is clear, in this instance, that the colour-blind observations of James were celebrated by the article readership:

Finally a voice of reason! I couldn't agree more that there hasn't been a racism issue in football for a long time now. The fires have been fueled by militant leaders of certain associations. Well done David James for being honest and speaking out! A breath of fresh air. (Desertboy, Dubai).

Well said David. You have articulated it perfectly. Probably upset a few people though, I’m sure. (Watchmen 1, London).

Such attitudes, arguably representative of institutional racism, have been reported at youth levels too, when Lusted found that racism was not acknowledged, and consequently incidents were dismissed as sporting “banter” during his review of County Football Association’s (CFA).\(^5^8\) The race debate and need for greater cultural awareness was re-ignited recently following on-field racist incident involving the Premiership footballer Luis Suarez (much like the John Terry case) found guilty of using abusive or offensive language referring to race or colour.\(^5^9\) These incidents have led the Professional Footballers Association (PFA) to propose cultural awareness training for players and overseas managers entering the English game.\(^6^0\) Although this is a positive solution to address issues within the game, the major concern in this case relates not only to the effect of role model behaviour on the younger generation of football supporters, but also to the protection of players (those accused of using racist language) by their clubs which has added to the negative press around the incidents. Clubs appearing to condone the actions of their players (in order to protect valuable assets), it is argued; continue the process of institutional racism within football.

**Concluding remarks**

Despite being praised for their work in the press and by parliamentary figures, it is difficult to quantify the actual effects of the work of SRTRC and other anti-racism groups. SRTRC-b states that the group worked with 28,000 young people and 1350 teachers in England between April 2011 and March 2012, yet there is no clear evidence of the long-term effectiveness of such a programme.\(^6^1\) Feedback conducted at education sessions records the short-term effect but does not take into account
outside influences (e.g. peer, parental, media, football role models) in the period post-training. It should be noted that the momentum of cultural penetration in relation to racist views is difficult to suppress, particularly during the course of one-off education sessions. Attitudes towards race and expressions through the medium of football are likely to continue to be intergenerational unless a more sustained approach to the educational programme can be achieved.

Thus, although SRTRC and their counterparts have spent many years raising the issue and educating children and teachers through schools in order to positively influence change, the success of the method applied (for the long term) is questionable. After all, if truly effective it could be expected that racist incidents in schools would be reduced to small numbers, yet there were still 87,000 reported racist incidents in schools in England and Wales between 2007-2011. Conversely, on the terraces, recent Government statistics reveal that arrests for racist or indecent chanting have decreased to 23 in season 2011/12 from 43 in the season 2010/11. Yet, however positive this may sound as a voice for political rhetoric and for those media headline writers that promote a colour-blind message; these figures confirm that racism still exists, especially in the Premier League where 15 of the 23 incidents occurred. Statistics, like those above are potentially compounded by the actions of high-profile professional football players. As role models to children and ambassadors to charities such as SRTRC, the impact of any spontaneous incident (between players) or indeed the reaction to racist acts (if articulated inappropriately) can be detrimental to the cause of anti-racist groups.

As anti-racist groups continue to try to re-educate society (with the goal to eradicate racism) they must overcome dominant ideological thought patterns. The task is greater still given additional difficulties of the current economic climate and a recent upsurge in popularity of far-right groups, echoing the conditions of 1980’s Britain. Under such circumstances a relatively small charity like SRTRC will find it difficult to secure funding, making it more difficult to effectively deliver the anti-racist message. Ironically perhaps, the successful media strategy of charities such as Kick It Out and SRTRC, combined with the omnipresent representation of multi-national players in the English Premier League, help to contribute towards colour-blind complacency, which in turn, has the potential to effect monies available for the development of future strategies that would build on and advance current works. This position was recently confirmed by a reduction of £64,000 grant funding from the Equality and Human Rights Commission in January 2013 that will impact on SRTRC. As such,
the charity will continue its work against discrimination of all types as long as they are able to sustain it financially but realistically it must also aim to educate and lobby the institutions involved in policing the sport and society for change and greater support in their fight. According to Robinson the FA admit that they could and should have done more to support the fight against racism in football, but whilst a tougher stance, with the support of FIFA, may help tackle racism in British and European football, a much greater campaign of education throughout society will be required to reduce racism beyond the football stands and school classrooms. This is, perhaps, a job too great for a small non policy-making, punitive charity to tackle.

Notes

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