



“No Room for Racism”: Racism in English Football

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Abstract. In today's society, people's pursuit of equality is becoming more and more intense. At the same time, an important part of equality - racism - has received more and more attention. As the number one sport in the world, football has a wide influence in many areas at any time. There are a large number of players of different races in football, and attitudes towards non-white players, especially black players, on and off the pitch expose racism. The relevant institutions and all races of society have made efforts to combat racism to varying degrees. Social media, as a new thing in recent years, has led the development of racism in a new direction. Social media can both reinforce racial discrimination, and its fair use can solve racial problems. However, it now appears that social media has accelerated the spread of racial and conveyed bad social values. There is still a need for rational use of social media to reduce discrimination and develop anti-racism activities. This article takes Britain, the birthplace of modern football as an example to analyze the racism in the football and the influence of social media on it. Catering to the mainstream of the world, Britain has taken a number of measures to suppress racism. For instance, a kneeling ceremony was held before the game. The phenomenon of football racism continues to occur, especially in the era of social media, and the racist remarks on the Internet are endless, and even more and more violent, becoming a serious social problem and affecting the healthy development of football. At the same time, by studying the complexity of racism, new methods such as social media, policy making, education and other methods are employed to address racism in football.

Keywords: English football, racism, social media.

1 Introduction

1.1 Racism and Football Racism

Generally speaking, racism can be understood as discrimination or hostility towards a particular group. In this case, human characteristics such as skin color and ancestry are unequally divided by race. It is a self-centered attitude of believing that the group to which one belongs is superior to others. According to 2003 California Newsreel, in

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the popular mind of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the identification of Jews with the devil and witchcraft was perhaps the first sign of a racist worldview.¹ We can also feel racism in the work of Aristotle thousands of years ago. The ancient Greek philosopher, in discussing slavery, referred to the Greeks as free men and other non-Greeks as barbarians, who should also be slaves. The exact time when racism appeared is difficult to define, but the term racism became widespread at the end of the nineteenth century. It was the era when the great powers carved up Africa, and a large number of African human resources were plundered to Europe and the United States. These people were traded as slaves. Later, as black slavery was established at the legal level, black slaves were seen by whites as inferior in social status, which made racial discrimination increasingly entrenched. The formation of racism is also linked to scientific progress. The development of scientific theories in Darwin's biology and the advancement of production technology made Europeans feel the dominance and superiority of leading the world. Racial discrimination affects the normal social order and brings a large number of social problems. After the emergence of racism, over time there was an increasing awareness of the importance of addressing it. Some efforts have been made, but racial discrimination has not been effectively addressed to this day.

Football originated in China and was originally called Cuju. Modern football developed in England. Football was already very popular in medieval England, but because football always kicked into the windows of residents. The King of England issued four football bans in the 14th and 17th centuries, but the unique charm of football has survived to this day.² In the nineteenth century, football gradually became popular and formalized. Now, football is deservedly the number one sport in the world. Due to the wide influence of football, football has been dubbed by many people as "the war of modern society" or "war without gunsmoke". Many of the problems that arise in football have also evolved into international issues. One important element in football issues is racism. Football was originally a European sport, and as he expanded into the world, people of different races participated in the sport. Countless non-European football lovers are eager to land on the continent where football originated. More and more black players are popping up in European football, while some racially prejudiced people disagree. The intensification of racial discrimination in the world of football exacerbates racial discrimination and also promotes anti-racism activities.

1.2 Racism in Football Under Social Media

In the new century, social media has changed dramatically. Originally social media was used only for communication between individuals, but it has now permeated all aspects of social life. It is a commercial field, a place for information exchange and sharing, and a platform for people to communicate without having to be physically present. Social media is now an important part of social life. According to statistics, about 62.3% of the world's population uses social media, and people meet more online than in real life.³

Most of the world's football clubs or national teams have official accounts such as Instagram or Twitter. The football clubs use the social media to do publicity of the club and the players and expand their influence. The internet strengthens the bond between the team and the fans effectively. The social platform also promotes the popularity of football. Because social media has the ability to spread information quickly, theoretically it can be used to conduct anti-racism campaigns well; however, this is not the case. What happened is that racism in the football was intensified on some official websites. The civilian nature of social media provides individuals with opportunities for mass communication, but the quality of information is uneven, the speed of emotional rendering is fast, and the direction of public opinion is difficult to control and guide. This has led to an increase in acts of racial discrimination and increased racism in society: black players are not only discriminated against on the pitch but also verbally abused online. Social media is now in a state of order and disorder, difficult to predict and control in advance, so racists are more rampant. The anonymity of social media is one of the reasons for its massive use, and a person can have multiple IDs to spread information, which facilitates the exchange of information and also reduces the quality of information. This has allowed false and offensive information about racism to flourish. While attempts have been made to punish racial speech, the scope and intensity of the punishment have been relatively low to stop it.

2 English Football and Racism

2.1 Players and the Development of English Football

The United Kingdom is the birthplace of modern football. The Football Association was founded in 1863 as the first national football association in the world.⁴ In the early 19th century, there were no standard rules for the game of football, and the rules of the game were different in each region, and even violent conflicts often occurred. In order to solve these problems, the English Football Association was established, which formulated the standard rules of the football game, and then promoted the development of English football. The continent of Europe has a soil of racism. Many black players come from slums like Brazil in South America or in Africa, and their excellent skills attract scouts in Europe, where high salaries allow blacks to support their families. In recent years, the number of black players has grown rapidly, and more talented players have emerged than before, including top players like Mbappe and Bellingham. This phenomenon is inextricably linked to the massive migration flows in Africa. In the eighties and nineties of the twentieth century, a large number of young African adults were smuggled to Europe and settled in developed countries in Western Europe. Most of the best black players now are descendants of the immigrant wave. They enjoyed an advanced football education that their forebears did not have. Additionally, blacks have an excellent talent for physical fitness. These are important factors in the emergence of more and more good black players. But their appearance compressed the living environment of local players, and the colonial period caused some Europeans to have a prejudice against black people, which made

racism stronger. Black players make up a large proportion of today's football while discrimination against them still occurs now and then.

2.2 Racial Discrimination of Black Players

Racism is a long-standing problem plaguing English football, dating back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Walter Tull is a typical example in the early racism of English football. Walter Tull was born on 28 April 1888 and joined Tottenham Hotspur in 1899. His performance was recognized by most, but Tull was racially taunted by the crowd in a game against Bristol City on 9th October 1909. The better performance could not get the same appreciation. English government and related institutions have made great efforts, but it is hard to say they dealt with the discrimination successfully. According to Kick It Out, reports of discriminatory behaviors in 2022-2023 season represents a 65.1% rise on the previous reason.⁵ Discrimination based on race accounts for almost half of these reports. When English famous football player Raheem Sterling was asked if racism was entrenched in Britain in an interview on 2020, he answered in the affirmative.⁶ He said that many people in football just take racism as a joke. When people mention the color of skin, someone may criticize this behavior, but his friends will tell him it is just a joke. This humor has become the norm. Racism manifests itself in many ways, not only in verbal abuse of players, but also in the difficulties of promotion for non-white referee, small numbers of black officials in football and so on.

2.3 English Football's Anti-racism Policy

Both the FA and the relevant legislature have taken a number of measures to combat racism. Since June 2020, players and referees have had a brief kneeling ceremony to express protest against racism and support for black people.⁷ On December 26, 2022, the official social media of the Premier League also published an article against racism. "Taking the knee is bigger than football. Racism has no place in football or anywhere."⁸ This ceremony sounds like a great progress, while the actual effectiveness is hard to judge. Some native citizens do not agree that severe racism is surrounding around them. Some blacks think that it is a kind of hypocritical formalism. Before the 2021 Crystal Palace match against West Brom, Crystal Palace player Zaha did not kneel on one knee to protest racial discrimination like other players but stood with a serious expression behind his hands behind his back. He stated that the ceremony was meaningless, people had a lot of things to do, such as providing students with related education and restricting discrimination behavior. The FA made this declaration on its official Twitter: "The FA condemns racial discrimination against players – we stand with people from all walks of life in football against any form of racial discrimination. This is unacceptable at any level of society. We will continue to work with the government and social media platforms in upcoming competitions to eliminate all elements of racial discrimination from our sport." The UK has enacted legislation on racial behaviour, such as the Football Offences Act 1991, which criminalizes racially motivated slogans in matches.⁹ The FA's Rules of the Pitch describe the serious con-

sequences of breaking the rules. Britain's efforts should be commended, while there is still lots of work needed. It is supposed to question the real effect--if the government just go skirting the rules and said more than what they actually did.

2.4 A Typical Example of Racism in Football

The feud between Suarez and Evra is a particularly well-known and controversial case of racial discrimination. On 15 October 2011, in Manchester United's Premier League match with Liverpool, Luis Suarez was accused of using racist rhetoric against Manchester United left-back Patrice Evra. It is reported that Suarez called Evra nigger. Suarez was fined £40,000 and suspended for eight games. The FA's regulatory committee issued a 115-page report on the occasion.¹⁰ Shockingly, Suarez did not think he was using insults, but rather friendly reconciliation. This was considered unacceptable and sparked a fierce clash between the players. After the controversy, the club even wore T-shirts supporting Suarez during the match. In a match in which they met afterward; Suarez even refused to shake hands with Evra. Although Evra said there was no conflict between the two, he was found to have liked Suarez's tearful photos on social media - Uruguay did not qualify for the World Cup in Qatar due to goal difference, and Suarez broke down emotionally and cried. Evra never forgave Suarez and was resentful of Suarez's uncaring attitude. Even to this day, Suarez still insists he is not guilty. This confirmed that his prejudice against blacks from the heart. It is hard to remove.

2.5 Status, Characteristics and Problems of Racial Discrimination in English Football

Nowadays, the anti-racism campaign in the UK is becoming more and more enthusiastic and has gained widespread recognition in society. But the problem is that they are only superficial, and hypocritical formalism neither causes racists to change their views nor discourage people from making racial statements. Anti-racism in the UK has always been a formality and cannot be eradicated. In many cases, the punishment system for racism is still lax, and the education and public opinion guidance is still insufficient, just like the excessive indulgence and protection of young people in the UK. Liverpool, as an important member of the Premier League and English football, did not make a corresponding apology and punish the personnel involved immediately after the racist act, but favored its own players. Even though the Premier League appears to be the European league with the most formal anti-racism, it has not put anti-racism into practice. Britain's lack of education for its children and citizens at its roots has transformed their hearts. Or it should be strengthened to prevent racists from rampant. Performing in society is empty and useless. To reduce racism, British should translate forms into action and develop anti-racism in a targeted manner.

3 Football Racism Under Social Media

3.1 The Impact of Social Media on the Issue of Racial Discrimination in Football

Social media has become essential to our lives, it makes easier to express ideas and communicate with people from all over the world. Most netizens think that there is a lower threshold to write in the social software than the traditional posts. Due to its timeliness and breadth, social platforms should be effective to deal with racism. However, the social media accelerate the spread of racism since only a small cost is required for people to do such unfriendly behaviors.

Racist abuse in Britain has appeared before the rise of the social media. In 1993, there was a campaign called “Kick it Out” set up. They took action to weaken racism. However, the discrimination events in Britain are still rising. For instance, Brentford striker Ivan Toney is targeted by sickening racist abuse on Instagram as he shares a screenshot of a message where he's called a 'black c***' after scoring two in his side's Premier League win over Brighton.¹¹ It was not the first time for him to be abused. Social media accelerates the effect of racism in this way. Racial remarks on social media can also cause a lot of harm to many players, causing them to feel angry and frustrated, and affecting their normal lives. On October 8th, 2014, Jeffrey, vice president of FIFA. Webb made a statement while attending a meeting in London on the 8th. He said that there has always been a problem of racism in British football.¹² Webb used the example of former Chelsea assistant coach Eddie Newton to illustrate his point at the meeting. In 2012, Newton served as an assistant coach to assist Italian marshal Di Matteo to lead Chelsea to the Champions League. It is believed that despite Newton's excellent ability, he failed to get a higher management position because of his skin color. A British "Guardian" in 2021 reported that a recent investigation report submitted to the English Football Association (FA) has found that racism in English football is serious, including African and Asian referees, including ethnic minority referees face discrimination and difficulty in promotion.¹³ In recent years, anti-racism activities and the outstanding performance of black players and the economic benefits they bring have reduced abuse, but the discrimination in the hearts of racists has gradually changed and is reflected in coaches, referees, commentators, etc., and the scolding of black players still exists, and racism is developing in an obscure and subtle direction.

3.2 Racial Discrimination in Social Media, Related Issues, and Policies

Racist abuse is rife on social media. The Joint Committee on the Draft Online Safety Bill received joint documentary evidence from a number of football bodies, including the Football Association (FA) and the Premier League, which states that "online discriminatory abuse against footballers and others in the game is on the rise".¹⁴ The evidence also expressed disappointment that social media companies were not doing more to address the issue. Related agencies made some efforts to reduce discrimination. In February 2021, football authorities, including the FA, Premier League and an-

ti-racism charity Kick It Out, issued an open letter to Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey and Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg calling on them to do more to address online racist abuse. The letter said "basic protections" should be provided online for victims of abuse. Some believe the club itself has not done enough to address the discrimination problem on social media.¹⁵ In a 2021 YouGov survey, only a quarter of UK minority fans (27%) were impressed by the club's efforts to tackle racism. In the same survey, only 20% of British football followers felt that fans themselves had done enough to address racism in football.¹⁶

3.3 A typical Example of Racism Inf Football under Social Media

An example of social media aggravating racial discrimination occurred in the summer of 2021. In the Euro 2020 final against Italy, Marcus Rashford, 23, Jadon Sancho, 21 and Bukayo Saka, 19, missed penalties in the penalty shootout as England fell defeated eventually, became the target of the wave of insults. Sancho and Rashford came off the bench specifically for the penalty shoot-out. These three black players were targeted with racists abuse including banana and monkey emojis and racial slurs after the game. Some extreme racists suppressed their inner dissatisfaction because of the outstanding contributions of black players to the team, and such poor performances in this case ignited their anger. For some radical football fans, they abuse players who don't play well, regardless of the color of their skin. Therefore, not to mention people of color are strongly attacked online because of their race. The investigation conducted by Channel 4 found that within hours after the final, British netizens posted nearly 2,000 abusive tweets on social media targeting Rashford, Sancho, Saka, and even Sterling, of which 167 were considered "high-risk" racial abuse.¹⁷The comments sparked a police investigation and widespread condemnation, though commentators accused some government ministers of hypocrisy for refusing to support the anti-racism stance the players made explicit during the Euros. Social platforms like Twitter and Facebook said that they took action immediately to restrict the racial comments. But a large amount of content was set to be visible for only a few hours, and many users did not delete text even after being reported. Racial rhetoric on social media has been condemned by most people in public.

The community responded quickly to this. "Three lads who were brilliant all summer had the courage to step up & take a pen when the stakes were high," England captain Harry Kane wrote on Twitter.¹⁸ England manager Gareth Southgate called such racist behaviour unforgivable. He expressed his support for his players and took responsibility for the defeat: it took on a lot of pressure to replace two inexperienced young players at the last minute. Southgate believes England is moving towards a more tolerant and understanding society, and that black people will be a big part of that.¹⁹ "This England team deserve to be lauded as heroes, not racially abused on social media," Prime Minister Boris Johnson wrote on Twitter. "Those responsible for this appalling abuse should be ashamed of themselves."²⁰At the same time, the Mayor of London has also called on social media companies to do more to hold those who post hatefully online accountable. "Racism is absolutely not allowed in football or anywhere else," he said. According to a review of what happened after the final, out-

lined by the social media company in a blog post, as of July 14 (three days after the final), 2,087 racist tweets had been deleted, the vast majority of them by Twitter's automated tools used to detect abuse.²¹ The Football Association, the governing body of English football, urged the UK government to take action to legislate to criminalize online harassment. Police have also said they have noticed a high level of offensive and racist remarks against players on social media, will not tolerate such behaviour and will investigate.²² We can see the positive side of anti-racism, but many people have been accused of hypocrisy in their statements, and the civic class has shown more discrimination than public figures, and most people do not identify with the status of blacks in their hearts.

3.4 The Characteristics and Complexity of Anti-racism in Football Under Social Media

The problem of racism in social media is complex. The condemnation and punishment of negative speech by social classes shows anti-racism values. However, as punishments have become more sophisticated, discriminatory discourse continues to recur. This shows that racism is deeply entrenched in the UK, and that social media has also brought about the erosion while development of racism. Nowadays, most teams and football authorities have social media accounts and are active. We should admit that many official social media outlets publish anti-racism-related content, which has a positive impact on the goal of eliminating racial discrimination. However, the performance of the public as the main body of Internet users reinforces the concept of race. In the age of social media, the incident of racist abuse is easier to become news, to become hot topic. The impact of event spread much faster and more severe than before. Their speech is freer, more extensive, and more influential than official accounts. In this way, racist rhetoric plays a more important role in the rendering of social mores. Now that society is getting busier, the casual nature of language makes social norms less rigid than they used to be. Tackling racism in social media remains a daunting task. In order to maximize the strengths and avoid the weaknesses, software developers and related institutions need to make certain restrictions on racist speech, play a normative role, and make positive anti-racist speech mainstream.

4 Conclusion

4.1 The Complexity and Necessity of Anti-racism in Football in the Age of Social Media

There is still a long way to eliminate racial discrimination. Even though the English Premier League often claims that there should be no room for racism, racism is a long-standing problem, which will be difficult or even impossible to achieve complete elimination. The social media offers both opportunities to address racial discrimination in football and also adds to the pitfalls, determining on people's decision. Football is an integral part of British life and there is no doubt that there will be a lot of discussion

about football and racism in football online. The efficiency and pervasiveness of social media has brought racial issues deeper into people's lives, so that the network environment can be an important part of the social environment, making it all the more necessary to eliminate discrimination and achieve equality. The casual nature of language on the Internet makes racists or people who just joke about black players' skin color unaware of the magnitude of the problem. The discrimination problem in football is compounded by popular contempt.

4.2 Advice on Fighting Against the Racism in Football in the Age of Social Media

Racism is deeply ingrained in the minds of many citizens. No matter what happens, they are biased against black players. As a result, policymakers must be determined, and bold—the solution cannot be elastic but be with strong execution. As we have repeatedly mentioned before, racism is perpetuated. We can imagine how hard it will be to change the minds of people who have formed their own way of thinking and understanding. While striving to change the status quo, we must place our hopes on the younger generation and have a planning of the further future. In view of the previous efforts and practical results of States to eliminate racism, we can realize the hypocrisy and formalism which used to exist in English football are necessarily to be avoided. To achieve our goal of eliminating racism, the previous problems cannot occur anymore.

First, the cost of making mistakes should be increased—tougher penalties should be imposed on internet users who abuse black players and spread racial rhetoric. As the Football Association, clubs and other management parties must not be biased towards any player and must be treated equally. and strengthen punitive measures to serve as a warning and curb the spread of racism. Adopting policies can put more pressure on racists.

Second, social media developers need to increase audits. For development technology, racist words and memes can be removed. It's a way to control by reminding you when you post racist words, removing them after they are used, and even banning racist logins. It's also supposed to make a blacklist to restrict racists' logins.

What the most important is that education of young people should be at the forefront of the task of combating racism. Young people should be taught to respect every black player, every black man, and ignore the color of his skin. Controlling the narrative, creating an anti-racist culture, and forming a cultural orientation in society address the deep-seated roots of racism.

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